

# लपतललंगुवत MANCHESTER

Report

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**A Comparison of language use within the business  
communities of Chinatown and the Curry Mile**

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# **A Comparison of language use within the business communities of Chinatown and the Curry Mile**

We chose to conduct a study on the use of language and language policy in the Curry Mile (in Rusholme) and Chinatown (in Manchester city centre). We found from our research that the Asian community is very prominent in Manchester, with Pakistani being the largest. The Chinese community has also seen a surge in growth in recent years, and both communities are fairly new. Whilst the Curry Mile is larger than Chinatown, both communities have infrastructures built around them, which consist of many varieties of business that meet their cultural needs and provide a concentrated area for their culture.

We also felt that the geographical location of each would be of interest, because each community can be described as a microcosm, in that they cater for all their cultural needs in the same place. The Curry Mile is very close to the Universities and is surrounded by student residential areas. Chinatown is almost in the town centre, and we wondered whether this affects language use. We wanted to find out how language use catered for their own communities and also tourists and other ethnic groups in Manchester, and which group they felt was more important to target in their use of language. The diverse range of businesses we selected would help us to determine whether more generic businesses, such as restaurants, had different language policies than more specialist businesses. Does language use make the communities more introverted? We chose to focus on a range of different businesses to satisfy this purpose, and following preliminary research in each area, we found that there were very varied types of business in each.

We wished to determine not only how the geographical location and possible onset of tourists/students affected language use, but also how languages helped to preserve the culture of the areas, along with cultural specific shops.

We decided that the best way of successfully getting the information we needed was to ask business owners to complete a questionnaire about the languages they use with customers. We also decided to look at printed material, such as menus, papers, and leaflets. Lastly, we

decided to conduct surveys of both shop signs and websites of the businesses to see what languages they were in.

In the Curry Mile, we predicted that the area would be more culturally diverse than Chinatown, in that it would cater for other ethnic groups as well. Of all the businesses that completed our questionnaire, only two stated that staff used solely English with their customers. The two businesses that spoke English as their main language to customers were the Shere Khan restaurant and the Sangams restaurant and takeaway. We believe this result to be significant, as the main tourist attraction for non-locals or other ethnic groups visiting the Curry Mile is likely to be the catering industry, in other words, the restaurants and takeaways. Shere Khan is a chain of Indian restaurants, which is also a significant result as a chain of businesses is more likely to speak English than a native language. Sangams restaurant is one of the best reviewed restaurants in the Curry Mile, and we noticed that it was recommended on several websites on visiting Manchester, so therefore it is more likely to use English as its main language. Sangams also has an adjacent takeaway, which is on the corner of Wilmslow Road. It is a few yards from the University of Manchester halls of residence on Victoria Park- Hulme Hall, Dalton Ellis, and Saint Gabriels Hall, and it is often visited by students following nights out in Manchester. This is another determining factor for its priority language being English. It is important to note that our questionnaire and range of businesses altered significantly on the Curry Mile when we came to conduct our study. We thought that a questionnaire format would be the best way to research the points that interested us quickly and efficiently in a busy environment. It would also provide a lot of detail without much conversation, as some shop owners and workers were not fluent in English and found it hard to understand our questioning.

Our original questionnaire had 11 questions and we were aware at the time of compiling our methodology that this was ambitious. We conducted our survey on the Curry Mile on a weekday, believing this would be the least busy period, and would allow enough time for us to ask businesses our questions. However, the Curry Mile was still fairly busy with local customers, and we used Rolex Books as a prototype for administering our questionnaire, as this appeared to be the least busy of all our listed businesses. The owner was prepared to talk to us, and we asked him our most important question first, which was what languages do you mainly communicate with customers in? We managed to ask him this question, along with; what languages do you produce printed materials in?

However, while collecting results within the businesses, through the questionnaire process, we found our initial eleven questions were impractical as the businesses we approached were constantly busy due to their prime locations. Because of this, we edited the questions to ones we thought were most important and specific to our project, mainly the questions relating to the signage and customer interaction. Some of the interviewees offered extra information relating to the languages spoken among staff and their language selection process. So we decided to cut our questions down to the following: what languages do you speak to customers in, what languages do you produce printed material in, and what languages do you use on your shop signs. We originally began with 15 businesses in the Curry Mile. However, many factors meant we had to cut this down.

Firstly, some shops were just too busy to enable us to ask our questionnaire. Businesses which were more likely to have appointments, or be utilised during the day such as Sabiha's Hairdressers, and Riaz Travel were too busy with clients and were unable to talk to us. We felt that restaurants would be an important factor in our research, but they were closed during the day. So we had to repeat our trip to the Curry Mile on a weekend in the evening, to make sure we got a result. We did not feel that we had enough businesses from our original list being able to talk to us, so we added some other businesses, which were able to talk to us in the Curry Mile, making therefore our sample more legitimate. We also had to factor in that some business owners, in more specialised shops, were not fluent in English and we had to make sure they understood the answers we required. For example, the owner of Parineeta Sari's required an assistant to translate our questions. Some business owners had more time to talk to us and we decided to note down any extra information that they may have. The owner of Middle East Mini Market was very helpful, and explained that he spoke both English and Kurdish (a western Asian language) to customers. He also explained the theme of signs above the door or in the window, which we had seen in many shops. He informed us that many shops have 'Welcome' in another language as this draws customers into the shop, along with cultural items displayed in the window. He also felt that it was important, for example with the food menus (as shown in figure 5 - a sign in the window of Al Madina takeaway), that both English and Asian languages are shown, as the community is built up around local customs, and languages help to preserve this. We can conclude that languages are important in relation to the cultural elements, sold in the shop. For example, Sanam Sweet shop sells Indian and Pakistani sweets, and the sign outside, as shown in figure 6, corresponds to this and keeps the community alive.

Hamers and Blanc write in their 2000 book, *'Bilinguality and Bilingualism'* that 'Social, cultural or ethnolinguistic groups are perceived as more distinct from each other if they differ on a large number of distinctive features, such as language, race characteristics, religion and social status'. This seems to apply truthfully to our research, as the community surrounding the Curry Mile consists of differing nationalities and religions and there seems to be enough similar characteristics between each differing group to allow relatively easy integration. This may help to explain the diversity of languages used in the Curry Mile.

When researching the shop signs evident in the area, we tallied the numbers of non-English languages used compared them to the number that used solely English. We found this to be a quick and very efficient method to get a good idea of the languages used in the area. It also allowed us to evaluate which languages were more prominent in multi-cultural areas, especially in the Curry Mile.

Despite many businesses being multilingual, we found that the majority of signs in the Curry Mile were solely in English, as seen in Table 2. We did this survey on every business in the Curry Mile, in order to get a general picture of multilingualism in the area. 100 businesses had their shop signs just in English. Only 30 businesses had signs in English and another language, with these languages being Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi and Kurdish, languages we had encountered in our questionnaire results. However, we noticed that a western influence is beginning to appear on the Curry Mile. We only asked our questionnaire in cultural specific places in order to get a feel of different languages used on the Curry Mile, aside from English.

We noticed that there are several American style ice-cream shops, which have opened in the Curry Mile recently, and that there is even some evidence of European languages being used. For example, figure 7 shows a Moroccan style spa, which had recently opened in the area, with a French name, figure 8 shows an Asian takeaway shop which says 'welcome' in both French and Chinese, and one shop owner even advertised something in Italian. This suggests that whilst the Asian community holds the biggest influence in the Curry Mile, it does cater for other ethnic groups, and the fact that the majority of its literature and shop signage is in English, and most of the business owners and staff speak English, show that it is vital for it to attract tourists and students. This is further emphasised by the fact that literature seems to be

sold in both English and Asian languages in relatively equal measure. This suggests that it is important to cater for all communities in the Curry Mile, allowing tourists to experience the Asian culture for themselves and in their own language.

While investigating the websites of the businesses in both the Curry Mile and in China town, in relation to which languages they used, we found some very interesting results. One website, for the Chinese Arts Centre, offered translation into over 30 languages, including Spanish and Ukrainian. This method also had issues though, with a number of the businesses and organisations not having websites at all. The only business in the Curry Mile which had a website was the takeaway Abdul's. We believe this had a website because it is a chain and has franchises in cities other than Manchester, also having just released an online ordering service. This being a chain, only produced its website in English.

We decided to also investigate the literature produced and sold within each establishment. This included newspapers and leaflets. The content of these also helped provide us with insight into the cultural makeup of the area, if they were religious in content for example.

In Chinatown, we believed that the community would be more introverted than the Curry Mile because it is a less touristy area, and is not near a residential or student populated area. This theory proved to be correct, as we found that in all the businesses we asked they spoke both English and Chinese, and no other languages were used. We also found that business owners in Chinatown were much more unwilling to speak to us than in the Curry Mile, and that, in many cases, their English was very limited. This meant that, similarly to the Curry Mile, we had to reduce the amount of businesses that would take part in our study. We enquired in the Modern Chinese Cultural Services, to provide us with information with regards to the language policy in Chinatown, as we felt they might be a bit more prepared to talk to us. They told us that Traditional Chinese was spoken to customers along with English, and that signs were mostly written in simplified Chinese, as seen in Table 5. We found the majority of shop signs were written in both English and Chinese. We also found that literature was also mostly bilingual in English and Chinese. Figure 9 shows a menu from a Chinese restaurant, and it displays its food in both English and Chinese, something that is in stark contrast to restaurants on the Curry Mile, which advertise and speak mainly English. This suggests that even the restaurant industry in Chinatown is much less tourist-oriented than the Curry Mile. We also found that businesses which are chains, such as BetFred, had a

Chinese sign underneath it to say what it was, as shown in figure 10, which is in contrast to chain businesses in the Curry Mile.

We also found it interesting that Chinatown advertises activities for local Chinese people. For example, figures 11 and 12 show adverts for the Wai Ying Chinese Women's Society, and shows the times in Chinese characters. This supports our theory that Chinatown, as a community, is more introverted than the Curry Mile and does not provide a lot for tourists or other ethnic groups. We also found that Chinatown had a lot more cultur-specific shops than the Curry Mile, with shop signs and literature associated with these all being in Chinese. For example, in the Hang Won Hong Chinese supermarket, as shown in figure 13, all products had names and weights in Chinese and specialised Chinese ingredients were sold. Newspaper sellers sold Chinese newspapers on the streets, and in addition to this, we found many leaflets were only printed in Chinese. Although we collected less information from Chinatown, we felt this was a significant result, as it proved our hypothesis was correct. This suggests that Chinatown caters much less for tourists, students, and other ethnic groups, and its businesses are aimed mainly towards the local Chinese community. This is reflected in the fact that its literature is mainly produced in Chinese, and shop signs were almost all in English and Chinese. Restaurants, on the other hand, in the Curry Mile areas catered towards many ethnic groups, by producing menus in both Chinese and English., possibly due to the fact that they are a popular tourist attraction.

Once the results were collected we correlated the results into tables. This has allowed us to efficiently show the language patterns in both geographical locations. We also decided to include the specific languages found in each domain, as this would clearly represent all the nationalities that reside in that specific area.

Throughout this Project we have found that the makeup of the larger community greatly affects language use.

Dr Laura Dominguez, from the University of Southampton, has conducted research on language attrition in monolingual and bilingual settings. She hypothesises that a new linguistic environment will modify the speakers' first language. She used a case study of Cuban migrants to Miami, who use Spanish as their first language, in order to see how their first language use is affected. This is comparable to our research, as the Curry Mile and

Chinatown are very settled communities in Manchester with a settled infrastructure, and we wanted to see how their cultural influences, i.e. businesses, shops and services, affected first language and multilingualism. First language use in Chinatown is much more prominent as they appear to use English less than in the Curry Mile.

We eventually found what we suspected at the start of this process, that the Curry Mile is a much more diverse area as it encompasses a wider variety of cultures and nationalities. Linguistically this has led to the multilingualism of individual businesses, which cater to most of the different language speakers, instead of the development of one encompassing language.

## APPENDIX

Table 1- Languages used when speaking to customers on Curry Mile

| Customer Language just English | Customer Language English with another language | Customer Language Urdu | Customer Language Hindi | Customer Language Kurdish | Customer Language Punjabi | Customer Language Arabic |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2                              | 12  | 5                      | 3                       | 1                         | 2                         | 1                        |

Table 2- Languages used on shop signs on the Curry Mile

| Shop signs only in English | Shop signs in English with another language | Second language as Urdu | Second language as Hindi | Second language as Kurdish | Second language as Punjabi | Second language as Arabic |
|----------------------------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 100                        | 30  | 19                      | 5                        | 4                          | 2                          | 0                         |

Table 3- Languages in which literature is produced and sold on the Curry Mile

| Literature produced and sold only in English | Literature produced and sold in English and another language | Second language as Urdu | Second language as Hindi | Second language as Kurdish | Second language as Punjabi | Second language as Arabic |
|--|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 8  | 5  | 3                       | 2                        | 0                          | 0                          | 0                         |

Table 4- Languages spoken to customers in Chinatown

| Customer Language just English | Customer Language English with another language | Second language as Chinese |
|--------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| 0                              | 5   | 5                          |

Table 5- Languages used on shop signs in Chinatown

| Shop signs only in English | Shop signs in English and another language. | Second Language as Simplified Chinese | Second Language as Other Chinese |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 6                          | 23  | 14                                    | 9                                |

Table 6- Languages

languages in which literature is produced and sold in Chinatown

| Literature produced solely in English | Literature produced in English with another language | Second language as Chinese | Literature produced solely in Chinese |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2                                     | 6  | 6                          | 7                                     |

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8





Figure 11



**Wai Yin**  
Chinese Women Society  
Serving the community since 1988

| Wai Yin Opening Hours 慧妍社開放時間 |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Monday - Thursday:<br>星期一至星期四 | 9:30am - 5:30pm<br>上午九時半至下午五時半                                |
| Friday:<br>星期五                | *Closed to public, by appointment only<br>休息 (不對外開放, 只接見預約人士) |
| Saturday - Sunday:<br>星期六及星期日 | 9:30am - 5:00pm<br>上午九時半至下午五時正                                |

\* If you have any enquiries, please contact our staff on 0161 237 5908 during our opening hours or leave a message on the voicemail, and we will get contact you as soon as possible.  
如有任何查詢, 請於辦公時間致電 0161 237 5908 與我們同事聯絡或於我們電話留言, 我們會盡快回覆。

We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.  
不便之處, 敬請原諒。

Figure 12

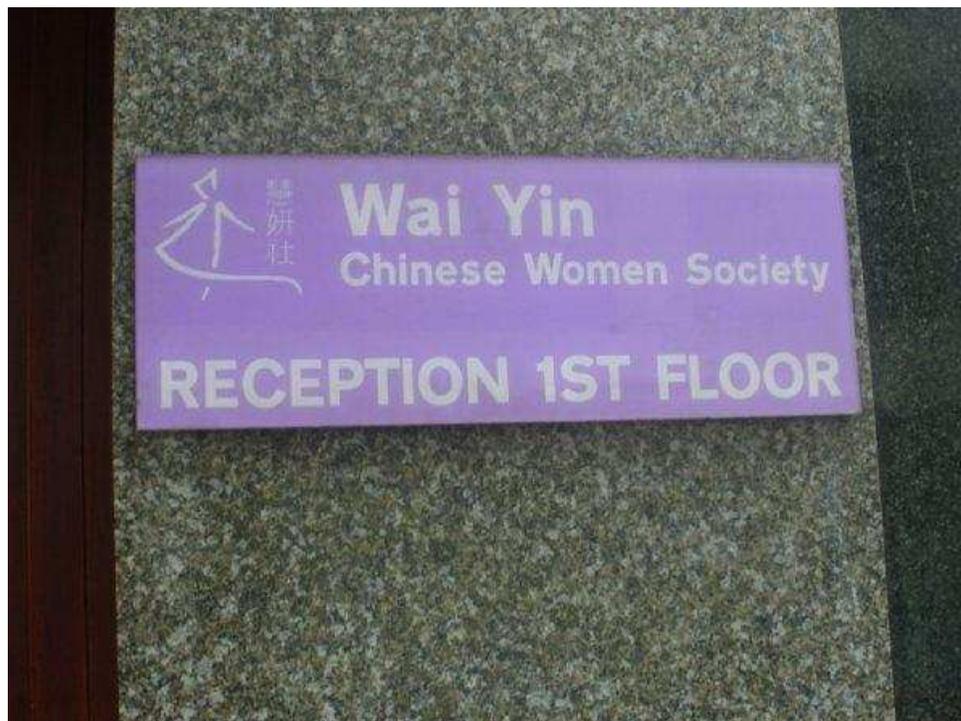


Figure 13



## **Bibliography**

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