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Using the school setting to map community languages: a pilot study in Manchester, England

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ABSTRACT

Recording the home languages of schoolchildren has long been acknowledged as a useful way of mapping community multilingualism. However, the need to process large quantities of data on many different languages has meant that in order to assess the vitality of community languages, researchers have had to rely on schoolchildren's self-reported language preference and proficiency. Moreover, large scale data collection among minors poses ethical and data protection issues. We describe a pilot study carried out in Manchester, England, in which a method was tested to record home language proficiency based on rapid, anonymous speech acts. These were correlated with respondents' self-reported exposure to their home languages. The results indicate that different factors can play a role in language maintenance in different communities, and that home language maintenance does not have an adverse effect on proficiency in the majority language.

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1. Mapping multilingualism in the school setting

As cities become more ethnically diverse and globalisation leads to population changes that are ever more rapid and dynamic, local authorities, and public services need data to be able to track the changing profiles of local communities. Languages are an important indicator of such profiles, and schools in areas where populations are of mixed backgrounds offer a relatively convenient setting in which to gather data on languages. Simpson (1997) flags how data collection on the 'first language' of schoolchildren can support what he calls 'ethnic and race demography' – a continuous assessment of immigration trends and the pace of social inclusion of immigrants that can serve as a tool for population forecasts and as a way of informing policy responses in the area of equal opportunities. In a briefing for local authorities in the UK, VonAhn et al. (2011) point out that a survey of the languages of schoolchildren can help local authorities to plan provisions for translation and English language support, identify the need and potential for language skills in business and service provision, and understand the implications for identity construction. They describe how data on languages were not collected consistently in UK schools until a model question was introduced in 2007, which then became mandatory in the following year. Schools have since been asked to report on pupils' 'first language', defined as the language to which the child was exposed during early development and

subsequently in the home or in the community. Schools are provided with a list of languages (initially 322, with annual updates) to choose from.

VonAhn et al. (2011) also list a series of limitations of the School Census, pointing out that schools are not obliged to use the same language codes and that input errors may occur due to typos. Our own attempts to collect data from the School Census in the Greater Manchester area (which includes ten different local authorities) in 2013–2014 showed that there were significant differences in the way local authorities kept records. Only some identified individual schools and so it was not always possible to localise languages. One local authority did not use language codes and simply recorded a distinction between English and ‘not English’. Where full datasets have been obtained, as in the city of Manchester, they have proven to be useful in order to contextualise other datasets on community languages such as data on interpreter requests, library acquisitions by language, and national Census data, and thereby to assess trends as well as the reliability of data collection methods (cf. Matras & Robertson, 2015).

The difficulties in obtaining full datasets may be taken as an indication that authorities do not always fully appreciate the potential of data on multilingualism. Various studies argue that the educational experience of children of migrant background remains by and large framed in relation to the ultimate goal of monolingualism (cf. Evans & Hornberger, 2005; Lomax & Suni, 2011; Puskás, 2012). Monolingual ideologies mean that institutional practices often clash with schoolchildren’s multilingual reality (cf. Basu, 2011; Blackledge & Creese, 2010; García & Li, 2013; Gogolin, 2002; Li, 2013). Indeed, the purpose of language surveys among schoolchildren is often to identify the need for additional instruction in the majority language (cf. Goldenberg & Rutherford-Quach, 2012). By contrast, Eversley et al. (2010) emphasise the potential of surveys to raise practitioners’ awareness of language diversity. They present a comparison of School Census data for London Boroughs from 1998/1999 and 2008, mapping locations and providing explanations on the languages. But they also note that listing first languages does not offer any information about language skills or about the relation between multilingualism and educational attainment.

Quantitative surveys of schoolchildren’s home languages have also been used to obtain a measure of language vitality. The Multilingual Cities project (also referred to as the Babylon Project, after the lead institute at Tilburg University) developed a method that was used to collect data among 160,000 pupils in six European cities (Göteborg, Hamburg, Brussels, Lyon, and Madrid; cf. Extra & Yağmur, 2011; Extra, Yağmur, & Van der Avoird, 2004a; Fürstenau, Gogolin, & Yağmur, 2003), and was subsequently extended to schools in additional cities, including Essen (Chlosta, Ostermann, & Schroeder, 2003) and Vienna (Brizic & Hufnagl, 2011). Respondents were asked to self-report language proficiency (the extent to which they understood the language reported on), language choice (how commonly the language was spoken with the mother), language dominance (whether the language reported on was spoken best), and language preference. A statistical analysis of the results gave an index of language vitality. Chlosta et al. (2003) also asked respondents to assess their overall school performance and to report on special tuition for German at school and on additional language tuition outside of school. The results of these surveys generally show that more recent immigrant languages have a higher vitality index. There is, however, almost invariably a decline in the use of the home language

across generations and a preference among schoolchildren to use the majority language with their peers as well as with older siblings (cf. Extra, Yağmur, & Van der Avoird, 2004b).

These surveys rely exclusively on self-reported proficiency in both the home and the majority language.¹ Park, Tsai, Liu, and Lau (2012) describe a longitudinal method that combines an assessment of parental attitudes to the home language with a measure of proficiency based on widely recognised and extensive language assessment scales that consist of vocabulary tests and story retelling. This method is obviously constrained by the need to survey languages one at a time, and so there are logistical obstacles in trying to adapt it to multilingual settings. Thus, while most surveys of multilingual settings do try to record language dominance and preference based on self-reports, a systematic method to evaluate how exposure to the home language through media, home literacy, and supplementary instruction impacts on proficiency is still missing.

In the following we discuss a method that was piloted in Manchester, England, in 2013–2014, which tries to fill this gap by applying the Labovian principle of using observations on rapid and anonymous speech acts to test language proficiency. These observations are correlated with self-reported information on language use in the home and in the community. The aim of the method is to improve the accuracy of information on home languages, to offer new insights into patterns of home language maintenance, and to provide a tool to raise awareness of language diversity within the school setting that relies on active participation of pupils.

2. Setting and method

Manchester's linguistic tapestry has been woven by generations of immigrants since the second half of the nineteenth century, when Manchester thrived as an industrial hub. Migrant workers, EU citizens and refugees are among the numerous groups who have continued to arrive after the decline of industry in the late twentieth century. The city is now home to well over 150 languages, of which the largest are Urdu, Arabic, Somali, Panjabi, Chinese, Bengali, and Polish. Some 17% of Manchester's residents declared having a 'main language other than English' in the 2011 national Census, but we assume that the ambiguity of the question led many respondents to under-report multilingualism (see Matras & Robertson, 2015; Gopal & Matras, 2013). Based on School Census data, we estimate that at least 40% of schoolchildren in Manchester are multilingual.² Around 1500 pupils enter into the city's schools as international new arrivals every year, from a total school population of around 80,000. In discussions with a number of Manchester schools that have a large population of pupils with English as Additional Language we established that the existing practice around the School Census often leads to instances of mislabelling or under-reporting of languages. The pre-set form also restricts the number of possible entries per pupil, giving no consideration to multilingual households. As Eversley et al. (2010) note, it also fails to record information on language skills and domains of language use. We identified interest among school staff to obtain a more accurate picture of their pupils' home languages. Teachers were also interested in an objective measure of the extent to which home language maintenance might influence proficiency in English. Parents, too, reportedly wanted to know whether home language maintenance might interfere with children's school performance. We did not come across any strong evidence or arguments from either group, teachers, or parents, that anticipated that

home language maintenance would necessarily have an adverse effect on proficiency in English. However, in casual conversations interest in the connection between home language maintenance and English proficiency was expressed, and it was our impression that individuals in both groups had been wondering whether bilingualism might put pupils at a learning disadvantage, and sought reassurance on the issue.

The School Language Survey engages pupils in short one-on-one interviews in which they are asked directly about their knowledge and use of languages other than English. This contrasts with the normal procedure of collecting data for the official School Census, which is carried out by staff, normally without direct consultation with the children, and which is motivated by the desire to anticipate potential learning obstacles. Our method sought to eliminate this rather negative approach to home languages and instead to engage children with the idea that home languages are valuable skills, increasing their self-confidence and promoting the esteem of multilingualism. The presence of a research team in the school over a period of several days provided an opportunity to promote language diversity as a topic of conversation. Direct interviews sent a signal to children that outsiders take an interest in their language skills. They also allowed the research team to verify some of the details provided by the pupils about their languages and patterns of language use through follow up questions.

The pilot took place in two primary and two secondary schools. At all four schools, percentages of pupils with English as an Additional Language were higher than the national average (18.7% for primary and 14.3% for secondary), ranging between 41.6% and 94.0%. In total, 531 children were surveyed, aged between 7 and 12, who were identified by school staff as speaking home languages other than English. Eighteen research assistants collected the data using printed forms for notes and later coding them onto spreadsheets for analysis.³

Surveys like the Multilingual Cities project (Brizić & Hufnagl, 2011; Extra et al., 2004a) contain personal information on the respondents and the research teams therefore required written participation consent from parents. Our survey was designed to bypass the need for individual parental consent by avoiding collection of personal data or audio recording (which might allow recognition and identification of individuals). Instead we relied on notes taken by research assistants on the basis of verbal interviews under the supervision of school staff, a procedure for which blanket parental consent was obtained in the form of an information letter sent to parents by the school ahead of the survey, offering parents the opportunity to opt out. Numerical codes were used to identify participating pupils, which allowed us to compare the survey results with the individual records of 'first language' kept by the school. On that basis, we were able to assess the overall accuracy of school records without compromising anonymity. These results were handed over to the schools, which were then able to update pupils' personal files.

The survey has two parts: an overview of the child's language repertoire and patterns of language use, and an assessment of the child's proficiency in the relevant languages. For the first part we recorded the child's age, the countries in which the child had previously lived, and age of arrival in the UK, where relevant. The child was then asked which languages they speak, in turn, to their mother, father, grandparents, other adults and siblings, as well as, separately, which languages these family members use to address the child. This distinction between active and passive use of languages offers insights into

code switching and language preference within the home. The child was then asked about exposure to languages (addressing, in turn, each of the languages named by the child). We asked whether the child reads at home, is read to at home, watches television, goes to the cinema, or takes part in activities outside the school curriculum such as clubs or supplementary schools. For each activity, we asked which languages the child uses. If the respondent reported being able to write in another language, we asked for a written sample of a few words. The child was also asked about any recent visits to other countries and the language that the child spoke there in order to obtain an idea about exposure to another language environment.

The second part of the survey is the proficiency assessment. It targeted those languages other than English that the child reported using in the home and was willing to use in the assessment. The challenge was to rely on rapid, anonymous speech acts in languages that were not necessarily familiar to members of the research team, in order to allow us to collect a large amount of data without the need to carry out and archive audio recordings and to have them evaluated by speakers of the numerous languages that would be encountered in the school. We set a number of communicative tasks, anticipating a complexity continuum that would mirror language proficiency. The research assistants were instructed to understand the rationale of the survey in its entirety: They were provided with background about the languages that they were likely to encounter and especially about the lesser-known languages, which were more likely to give rise to uncertainties in labelling. This included information on the overall sociolinguistic profile of these languages (e.g. whether they were commonly used in writing or media in the regions of origin as well as in Manchester), their writing system and in some cases particular sounds. They also received explanations pertaining to the rationale of the task continuum in relation to the communicative tasks that pupils were asked to perform, and instructions on how to assess fluency on the basis of the child's apparent degree of confidence and lack of hesitation in responding to the tasks. Instructors from among the research leaders accompanied the assistants in the first series of tasks to ensure maximum uniformity in judging respondents' degree of fluency on the task continuum in particular, and to ensure the same standard of detail in the recording of other information.

Four tasks were selected to represent different degrees of communicative complexity. At the lower end of the complexity continuum, we asked respondents to name body parts, eliciting a sample of basic vocabulary with the help of situational visual aids, and to count from 1 to 10, eliciting a formulaic routine that is abstract rather than supported by visual stimuli. At the higher end of the continuum, we asked respondents to name family relations, gauging their ability to reconstruct interaction in the family setting on the basis of single words, and to describe a daily routine, eliciting a sample of connected speech. The interaction between the researchers and the respondents was in English, and the tasks were provided in English, with respondents being asked to carry them out both in English and in the home languages that they identified as being part of their repertoire. None of the tasks involved translation; if the child was uncertain about the nature of the task, an explanation was provided. For each task, the research assistants assigned a score on a scale from 1 to 3, with 3 indicating that the child responded 'immediately and fluently', 2 indicating that the response was 'slow and hesitant', and 1 indicating the absence of a response. The combination of the four tasks yielded a maximum proficiency score of 12. The tasks were repeated for each language that the pupil named as

being part of their oral repertoire, including English – the latter in order to obtain a measure of the relation between proficiency in the home language and in English, and of the correlation between proficiency in English and age of arrival in the UK.

Languages that were not identified as being spoken, but were acquired for example for liturgical purposes (most notably Arabic in the Muslim South Asian community) were recorded as part of the repertoire and in the form of a writing sample, but were not assessed for proficiency. In addition to the survey questions, interviewers were free to elicit additional details that might support the data analysis. For example, children who appeared to be uncertain about the name of their language were asked to produce additional, easily verifiable vocabulary such as greetings, numerals and nouns representing concrete objects, which could then be used off-site to try to identify the language.

3. Language identification and patterns of language use

In total, 48 home languages other than English were recorded. The top 15, used by over 88.5% of the pupils surveyed, were Urdu (168), Somali (60), Arabic (50), Bengali (48), Panjabi (33), Romani (28), Czech (13), Romanian (11), Pashto (11), Polish (11), Yoruba (10), Swahili (8), Albanian (7), Bravanese (6), and Portuguese (6). Some pupils had difficulties identifying their languages. Chlosta et al. (2003, p. 46, pp. 62–63) report that pupils are often unaware of the precise name for the language and refer instead to the country or region, using labels such as ‘Afghan’ or ‘African’. Brizić and Hufnagl (2011, p. 29) similarly report on labelling based on the country or continent, especially ‘Indian’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Iranian’, and ‘African’. We found that pupils sometimes identified their home language as, for example, ‘Muslim’, ‘Pakistani’, or ‘Nigerian’. Occasionally, pupils failed to distinguish between two separate languages that are both spoken in the home, the most notable example being Urdu and Panjabi. Romani is a pertinent example of a language which children often struggled to label, or chose not to report. Romani speaking pupils usually assume that outsiders are entirely unaware of the language, and cite instead the majority language of their country of origin – in the case of the pupils surveyed, Romanian or Czech. Since teachers and other non-Roma are generally unaware of Romani, children are not exposed to conversations about the language, and so they are not familiar with its English name ‘Romani’. The similarity of the language name to ‘Romanian’ (despite the absence of any historical connection) adds to the confusion.

For 30% of the pupils the language identified as their principal home language differed from the one indicated on their school records. Among the top 15 languages in the sample, we found high percentages of disagreement with school records for the languages that we recorded as Bravanese (100%), Romanian (91%), Swahili (75%), Czech (46%), Panjabi (42%), Yoruba (40%), and Pashto (27%). For a small number of pupils who participated in our survey (37 in total), mostly speakers of Urdu, the schools had no record of a home language other than English. Children whose home language was Yoruba were often recorded as English speakers, while those who spoke Bravanese were all recorded as Somali speakers.

As noted above, the general picture reported in other studies is that home language use among immigrant groups declines across generations: the home language is used most frequently with grandparents (Brizić & Hufnagl, 2011), more often with parents than with siblings, and more often with mothers than with fathers (cf. Extra et al.,

2004b). The age split is partly contradicted by the slight tendency for home languages to be spoken more often with younger than with older siblings (Extra et al., 2004b). This is easily explained by the preference to use the home language in the family environment. Communication with older siblings can be assumed to follow or at least to be strongly influenced by the pattern of communication with peers. All studies concur that children overwhelmingly tend to opt for the majority language when communicating with friends (e.g. Chlosta et al., 2003, p. 57).

In our survey, 79% of children reported speaking at least some English with their siblings, 46% reported that they spoke some English with their father and 44% with their mother. At the same time, 80% reported that they actively used a language other than English with their mothers, 75% with fathers, and 46% with siblings. Home language use is thus more frequent with mothers than with fathers, and, as expected, with parents than siblings. But the figures also indicate that children generally acknowledge the use of more than one language in the home with both parents and siblings.

On average, around 75% of children reported use of the home language with both parents, while for most of the top languages, between 10% and 15% reported using the home language only with their mother. Exclusive use of the language with fathers was limited to Panjabi (17%), Bengali (15%), Arabic (12%), and Urdu (10%). Noticeable deviations were found for Panjabi, where 43% reported using the language exclusively with the mother, and for Romani, where, by contrast, 97% reported using the language with both parents. For Panjabi, we see the combined effect of diglossia and strict gender roles among the parent generation of immigrants, where Panjabi as a family language is spoken more consistently by the mothers, while the fathers, who have more frequent community interaction outside the family, tend to use Urdu. In the case of Romani, tight-knit community identity revolves around the extended family and so it favours language loyalty.

Language vitality is found to correlate with the time of immigration. All children reporting any use of Romani, Romanian, Czech, and Polish said that they spoke these languages with their siblings consistently. These are all populations of new arrivals from recent EU accession countries. Relatively high use of the home language with siblings was also reported for Pashto (74%), Arabic (68%), and Somali (50%), all communities that include a high proportion of new arrivals, often refugees. Of the larger languages in the sample, Urdu and Panjabi, the most established immigrant languages in Manchester, were the least likely of the larger languages to be spoken with a sibling – 34% and 21% respectively. Spanish and Italian were both spoken more frequently with siblings than with either parent. The home language reported by these children was mainly Urdu, but they had lived in other European countries prior to their arrival in the UK; the secondary languages acquired there were maintained with the siblings, but not used with the parents.

Most pupils (76%) reported the use of two or more languages other than English with close family members on a regular basis. The numbers differ for individual communities, but there are several reasons for the high average: First, the sample includes a large number of pupils of regional or ethnic minority background, such as Panjabi speakers from Pakistan, Romani speakers from Romania, and Bravanese speakers from Somalia. Brizić and Hufnagl (2011) discuss such cases of ‘imported’ multilingualism and conclude that the family language is better maintained when it is the national (state) language of the origin country. But in our case, the recent arrival of some of the populations,

coupled with very strong family ties and the presence in Manchester of extended family structures often favour the maintenance of more than one family language.

For some children, the presence of multiple languages testifies to a history of repeated migrations. The children's preference for the majority language of a country in which the family had previously resided shows how siblings first adopt a peer-language, then continue to use it as a siblings-language after the move to the UK. Another factor is the use of (liturgical) Arabic among Muslims of South Asian and African background. Arabic was the most frequently recorded second home language among speakers of Swahili, Bengali, Somali, and Urdu, while Urdu was the most frequently recorded second home language among speakers of Panjabi, Pashto, and Spanish (the latter spoken by immigrants of Pakistani background who arrived via Spain) and Romanian the primary additional language of speakers of Romani. All this illustrates how the majority of children experience multilingualism as a dynamic situation where different languages form part of a complex repertoire and may be selected for different functions and purposes.

4. Proficiency across tasks and language use

We had anticipated a hierarchy of scores (on the scale 1–3) based on the communicative complexity of tasks. The results show an average score for body parts of 2.60, for numbers 2.74, for the family description 2.50, and for the daily routine description 2.52. The two-way split between easier and more complex tasks was thus confirmed. On the simpler side of the continuum, it appears that many children found the formulaic routine of counting from 1 to 10 to be easier to produce than naming body parts. The results for the two tasks at the complex end differed only slightly.

The overall average proficiency score for all surveyed children in home language 1 (the language identified by the children first, or as the primary home language) was 10.3, confirming that proficiency levels were generally high. [Table 1](#) shows the distribution of proficiency scores, overall and by task, across languages, for the top 15 languages reported in the survey. Languages for which the average proficiency score was comparatively low include Urdu, Panjabi, Yoruba, and Swahili. Urdu represents a far larger pool of respondents, which increases the likelihood of variation in the sample. Speakers of Urdu and

Table 1. Average proficiency scores, overall and by language task, for the top 15 languages.

	Number of children	Overall	Body parts	Numbers	Family	Daily routine
Urdu	168	9.85	2.43	2.79	2.35	2.37
Somali	60	10.58	2.72	2.72	2.57	2.58
Arabic	50	11.42	2.82	2.96	2.84	2.80
Bengali	48	10.29	2.60	2.58	2.50	2.60
Panjabi	33	9.48	2.48	2.55	2.24	2.21
Romani	28	11.46	2.96	3	2.92	2.92
Czech	13	12	3	3	3	3
Pashto	11	9.91	2.64	2.64	2.18	2.45
Polish	11	12	3	3	3	3
Romanian	11	11.27	3	3	2.55	2.72
Yoruba	10	6.67	1.89	1.56	1.56	1.67
Swahili	8	8.67	2.17	2.5	2	2
Albanian	7	10.43	2.43	2.71	2.57	2.57
Bravanese	6	11.33	2.83	2.50	3	3
Portuguese	6	11	2.83	3	2.50	2.67

Punjabi tend to belong to an established immigrant population and the lower proficiency scores may represent the trend toward language shift in the younger generation. Conversely, speakers of Czech and Polish have above-average (indeed, maximum) scores across all tasks. Most of these children arrived in the UK within the last four years, usually aged eight or above. Their proficiency is thus bolstered by recent residence in a monolingual environment where the home language is spoken, and by experience of education in this language.

Children who reported using their home language with parents had a higher overall proficiency score, with an average of 10.64, while pupils who do not use the language with parents had an average proficiency of 7.29. Pupils who use their home language with both parents score on average 10.83 on the proficiency test, while those who use the language only with the mother show 10.33 (close to the overall average) and those who use it only with the father had 9.41. Use of the home language with siblings correlates with high proficiency scores. Children who report using the home language with brothers and sisters score, on average, 11.21 on the proficiency test, compared to the average score of 9.57 for those who do not. Irrespective of family usage patterns, scores for the more 'simplex' tasks (body parts and numbers) are consistently higher than those for the more 'complex' tasks (family members and daily routine). The daily routine score is particularly low, at 1.55, among children who do not use their home language with parents.

5. Exposure to language, and language proficiency

Proficiency scores were compared with self-reported exposure to literacy and media (films and television) in the home language and attendance in community-run after-school clubs or supplementary schools that use the home language (or one of the home languages). 51.8% of children who reported that they actively read in their home language also reported being read to in this language, while 38.9% of those who are being read to also reported active reading. Children who reported reading in the home language had an average overall proficiency score of 11.16, while those who did not report reading (including those who are being read to) showed an average overall proficiency of 10.08. Those who reported being read to had an overall score of 10.89, while those who were not read to had on average 9.84. Literacy thus generally has a positive effect, albeit in a mild way, on home language proficiency.

Average proficiency scores also differ across languages, and language communities differ in the extent of children's exposure to literacy and in the presence of home language media and supplementary instruction (Table 2). Proficiency scores that are higher than the overall average of 10.3 were found among the top 15 languages for Somali, Arabic, Romani, Czech, Polish, Romanian, Albanian, Bravanese, and Portuguese. Of these, a significantly higher than average exposure to reading (both active and passive) was found for Arabic, Czech, Polish, Romanian, and Portuguese as well as partly for Albanian (active reading). For the same languages, pupils also reported above-average exposure to television and (with the exception of Albanian and Portuguese) to films. Only Arabic speakers reported significant exposure to supplementary education in the home language (58%, compared with an average of 21.2%). With 11.42, Arabic shows one of the highest average proficiency scores. By contrast, Romani and Bravanese show comparatively high proficiency scores (11.46 and 11.33 respectively) without evidence of any significant

Table 2. Overall proficiency score and exposure to media in the home language, by language (top 15 languages).

	Number of children	Overall proficiency score	Television? (%)	Reading in language? (%)	Being read to in language? (%)	Films? (%)	Clubs or supplementary schools? (%)
<i>Overall</i>	531	10.3	45.9	24.3	33.7	23.4	21.2
Urdu	168	9.85	40.5	20.8	25.6	29.8	25.0
Somali	60	10.58	21.7	13.3	28.3	8.3	26.7
Arabic	50	11.42	78.0	46.0	58.0	30.0	58.0
Bengali	48	10.29	31.3	12.5	31.3	10.4	25.0
Panjabi	33	9.48	33.3	9.1	24.2	24.2	27.3
Romani	28	11.46	3.6	14.3	3.6	3.6	3.6
Czech	13	12	76.9	38.5	61.5	61.5	0.0
Pashto	11	9.91	18.2	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Polish	11	12	90.9	63.6	72.7	54.5	18.2
Romanian	11	11.27	100.0	63.6	63.6	45.5	9.1
Yoruba	10	6.67	20.0	0.0	0.0	20.0	0.0
Swahili	8	8.67	0.0	14.3	42.9	0.0	0.0
Albanian	7	10.43	71.4	42.9	28.6	0.0	28.6
Bravanese	6	11.33	16.7	16.7	33.3	0.0	0.0
Portuguese	6	11	66.7	33.3	66.7	16.7	0.0

institutional support. For Romani in particular, literacy and media in the language are practically non-existent.⁴ In these cases, tight-knit family structures apparently have a favourable effect on language loyalty. Lower proficiency scores are found for Pashto, Yoruba, and Swahili, corresponding to a lack of engagement with media and institutions outside the home. In the case of Panjabi, and to some extent Urdu, we find a lower than average proficiency level despite some exposure to media, home literacy, and supplementary schools. This is a reflection of the long-established status of the community and the fact that most children interviewed were second or even third generation immigrants. Moreover, supplementary school education in the Muslim South Asian community often relies on Urdu as an oral medium, but literacy instruction focuses on liturgical Arabic.

Results for individual languages are thus connected to the specific history of settlement as much as to the particular cultures of communities. Extra and Yağmur (2011, p. 1181), comparing results for the six sites of the Multilingual Cities project, put Romani at the very top of the list for the Language Vitality Index, with a score of 70, but they place Urdu in second position, with a score of 68. The first of the two findings agrees with our results for proficiency, which show Romani in the top position, but proficiency in Urdu is lower than average in our study despite the fact that Urdu is Manchester's largest community language (cf. Matras & Robertson, 2015) and that it is strongly represented in home media, in oral use in supplementary schools and community centres, and in the city's linguistic landscape.

6. Proficiency in home languages and English, and age of arrival

Around 25% of children who arrived in the UK at a younger age (between the ages of one and four) show proficiency scores in home language 1 that are below the overall average of 10.3. Among this group we also find the lowest proportion of children with the maximum proficiency score of 12. At the other end of the spectrum, among children who reported their age of arrival as 8, 10 or 11, over 80% of children show a score of 12 for home language 1. Speakers of Urdu and Panjabi were largely born in the UK

(71% and 93% respectively); they show a slightly lower overall proficiency – 9.85 and 9.48, respectively. Speakers of Somali, Romanian, Romani, Polish, and Czech – languages for which the majority of respondents were born outside of the UK – generally achieved higher than average home language 1 proficiency scores (see Table 2).

The ability to speak multiple home languages was found not to have any significant effect on a child's performance in English: Only 43 of the 531 respondents scored below the maximum of 12 on the English proficiency test. Overall, then, proficiency in English was higher than proficiency in the home language. This is the case even for those children who were born outside of the UK. We were able to correlate country of birth or country of previous residence with English proficiency scores for altogether 526 pupils. Of these, 256 reported that they previously lived or were born abroad. Among this group, the average English proficiency score was 11.71, while among the 260 children who had not lived outside of the UK the average was 11.82. The difference is thus rather insignificant, and can be easily explained through the fact that even those who had lived abroad arrived in the UK at a very young age. Given the simplicity of the task, we are only able to assess very basic communicative skills. Nonetheless, the generally high level of English can be taken as an indication of strong linguistic integration of those who were not UK born.

There is, however, some correlation between age of arrival in the UK and English proficiency. All children who arrived in the UK before the pre-school age of four, and over 90% of those who arrived in the UK at an age younger than six, obtained the maximum proficiency score of 12 in English. Somewhat lower scores were found among children who arrived in the UK aged 7 or above, while for the groups of pupils who were 9, 10 or 11 on arrival, only between 55% and 70% achieved the maximum score, with up to 27% scoring lower than 10. Given that most children interviewed were aged 12 or younger, the group of pupils with lower English proficiency thus consists invariably of recent arrivals.

7. Discussion and conclusions

We have shown that rapid speech acts elicited as part of a controlled set of communicative tasks can be used to assess home language proficiency in a large and diverse sample of pupils. The method relied on differences in the complexity of the tasks, and on the ability of trained research assistants who did not necessarily have knowledge of the languages to discern the degree of fluency in the responses without the need for audio recording or translation. Such a method might give rise to potential concerns around the subjectivity of the evaluation. However, the reliability of the method is confirmed both by the high degree of consistency in the distribution of proficiency scores, which matches the expected complexity continuum, and by the fact that the proficiency scores obtained can be linked to factors that are known from other studies to facilitate language vitality, such as recent immigration, use of the language with parents and siblings, and formal instruction in the language, thus confirming general predictions.

The method has also proved useful as a tool to gather information about the profile of community languages. For a start, we were able to identify gaps and inaccuracies in school records, especially in regard to ethnic and regional minority languages. This in turn offers insights into the level of practitioners' awareness of community languages and by implication of the ethnic and cultural background of pupils, especially those of minority background such as the Roma or Bravanese. Thanks to the first-hand approach to data

collection, schools' catchment areas are also easily recognisable. This provides a more accurate picture of the spatial distribution of languages and, linked with proficiency scores, it also offers insights into the role of spatial and residential clustering in supporting the vitality of community languages.

The reliability of a first-hand measure of language proficiency offers a new angle from which to assess factors that have so far been identified as relevant to language vitality primarily on the basis of self-reported proficiency, dominance or language preference. Our pilot confirms that recent arrival and extensive use of the home language with parents and especially with siblings have a positive impact on language maintenance. It also confirms the tendency for language shift to manifest itself in the first instance in communication among siblings; this observation is reinforced by the reported use among siblings of the national languages of interim migration countries.

Our findings also offer a differentiated picture of home language diglossia and the persistence in many cases of home languages that are minority languages alongside those that have national language status. We also see a differentiated impact of exposure to media and home literacy as well as to supplementary schools; these are important indicators of home language maintenance in some communities, but not in others. As alluded to above, the two contrasting example that stand out are Arabic, on one side of the continuum, and Romani, on the other. For Arabic, there is a very high level of participation in supplementary school activities and exposure to media, and it is clear from the conversations with respondents, and from our general observations in the community outside of this particular experiment (e.g. Fathi Osman, 2011), that knowledge of the home language is tightly associated with proficiency or at least acquaintance with its written and standard form and not just with the diverse vernaculars. For Romani, by contrast, cultural identity is predicated primarily on kinship, and using the home language is, in the relevant community of Roma migrants from Romania, the primary symbol of loyalty to the kinship group (cf. Matras, Leggio, Constantin, Tanase, & Sutac, 2015), and this is what motivates and sustains the use of the home language.

Finally, the pilot confirms that home language maintenance has no adverse affect on oral proficiency in the majority language English, and it shows that lower performance in English is linked exclusively to recent arrival in the UK. If expanded to include an assessment of both oral and written performance across a wider range of communicative tasks, the method could be developed into a key instrument to inform parents and practitioners of the realistic merits of multilingualism and to dispel myths about its potential risks. We might then be in a better position to identify precisely what achievement difficulties need to be tackled, and how they might relate more specifically to the particular register of academic English.

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Notes

1. In the following we will use the term 'home language(s)' to refer to those languages to which schoolchildren are exposed primarily in the home or family setting (including the community setting and in community institutions such as supplementary schools). This overlaps with what some studies described as 'heritage' or 'community' language. Note that the School Census in the UK uses the term 'first language'.
2. The School Census for 2013 indicates 34% of school pupils in Manchester as having 'English as Additional Language', with the top six languages being, in this order, Urdu, Arabic, Somali, Panjabi, Bengali, and Polish. This figure does not take into consideration those who come from bilingual homes and who are not expected to have any English language support needs.
3. For a full overview of the data and a discussion of case studies by language see our report on 'Mapping Community Language Skills: The School Language Survey in Manchester', from December 2013: <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/SchoolLanguageSurvey.pdf>
4. One single child (representing 3.6%) who consistently reported media and literacy exposure to Romani is assumed to have been referring to an organised visit of Romani schoolchildren to the University of Manchester, where they were introduced to audio-visual materials in Romani.

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