

# लपतौलिंग्वा MANCHESTER

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# **How Minority Languages are represented in Manchester's Cinema Industry**

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## **Introduction**

With immigration levels increasing across the country, our society is adapting to an influx of different cultures and languages. Whilst there are an abundance of ongoing studies into the effects of these changes on the languages supported in schools, businesses and other public institutions, the cinema, as a media domain, has been comparatively neglected and so we have chosen to investigate this area, focussing specifically on Manchester.

This project will analyse the impact of these changes on Manchester's cinema as a business; are they encouraging and accommodating multilingualism or are they ignoring this new audience? Considering demographics from the census statistics along with qualitative attitudinal data from interviews of cinema go-ers and cinema staff, we will suggest that although cinemas in Manchester are consistently showing increasing numbers of foreign language films, their motives for doing so vary.

## **Literature review**

We are focussing on the cinema in Manchester, a public media domain which, unlike other organisations such as educational institutions, is under no control or language policy from the government or local councils. Despite this, it still may be influenced by the policies put in place in Britain or, more closely, Manchester.

Language policy and planning can be on a macro-level (i.e. national), perhaps to decrease societal multilingualism in the country by creating an official language to which prestige is attached. Conversely, a government can introduce policies which are more inclusive of minority languages and promote language maintenance, as with the Scottish government who made compulsory a 'literacy hour' for all, including Gaelic (Ager 2001).

The UK can be called a 'mosaic' society, (Ager 2001), meaning this country is much more accepting of other languages and dialects which differ from the standard. The British Government state that "languages contribute to the cultural and linguistic richness of our society" (provided by a government language policy document), however there is no specific language policy in this country which is suggested to be because English has such a dominant role globally (Ager 2001).

While commonly just associated with government bodies and education, businesses too can be involved in language policy according to Spolsky (2004), who continues by saying that language policy can exist without it

being put into place by a government or local authorities, an institution can

decide what languages they promote and publish in, i.e. the cinema, and

that the real examples of language policy are more likely to be found in these domains

Edwards(2004) suggests that the influx of immigration creates a niche market, which these mainstream businesses can target, meeting more specific language needs of these minorities. Evidence of the importance of these emerging markets is a study by Fishman (cited in Ager 2001) showing the decline of the US minority language press between 1910 and 1960, a period in which immigration to the country was at a low. In addition to this, information shows that the popularity of multilingual theatre is currently increasing, as is the prestige of films in languages other than English, Edwards also states. Media is clearly an up-and-coming popular domain for minority languages across the world.

Demographics of the areas must be taken into account of course, whatever the motivation for representing minority languages. These include religious views, political background, country of origin and of course the languages most likely to be spoken (Spolsky 2004).

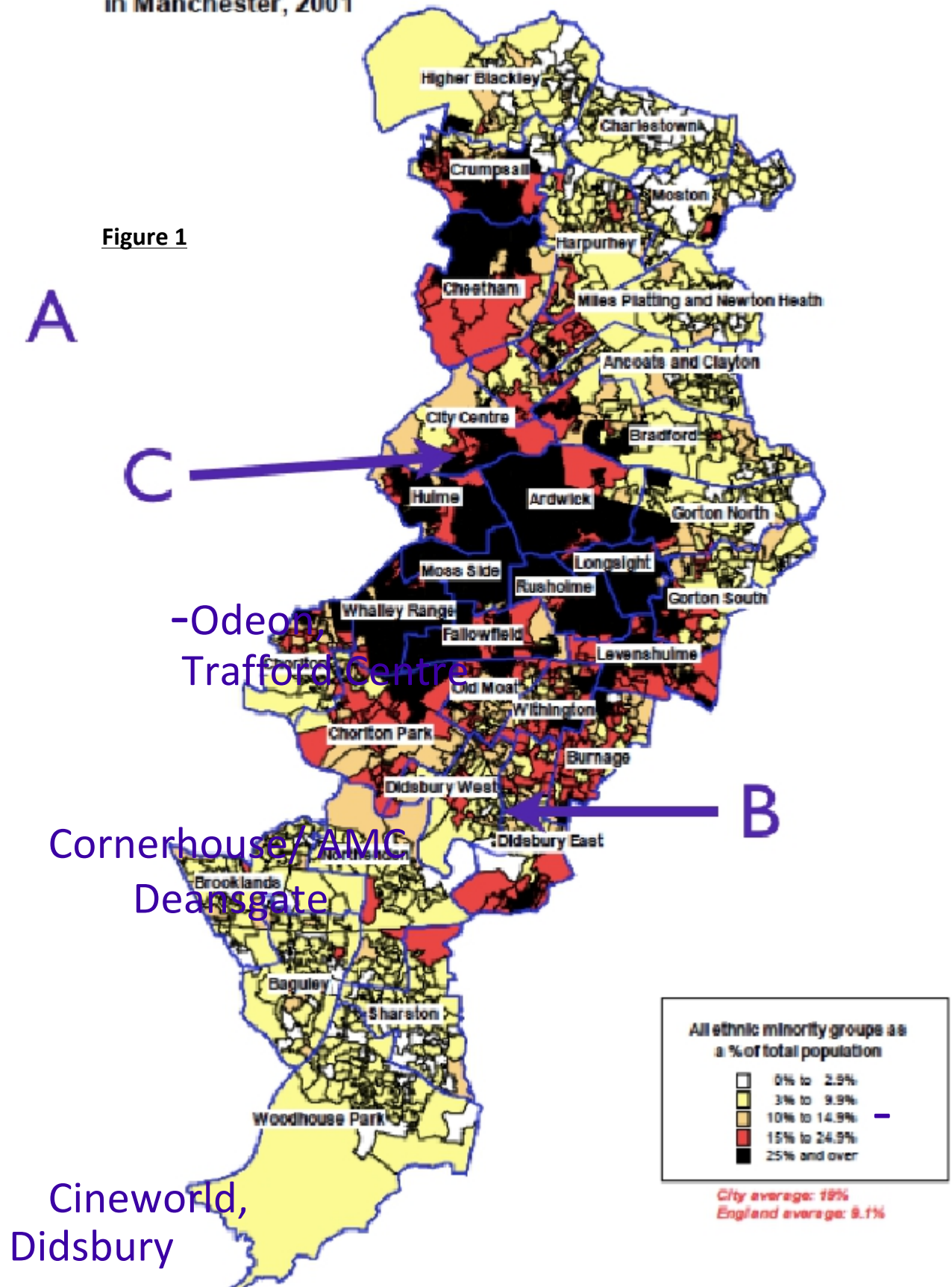
### **Method**

Our primary elicitation method for this project involved using short interviews to ask individually tailored questions to a small sample of cinema go-ers. As described by Schleef and Meyerhoff (2010), eliciting data in this way allows the collection of attitudinal and more qualitative data which will form the basis of our discussion.

We initially picked three cinemas which differ in their accessibility, the ethnic diversity of the surrounding area and the type of business they're run as (e.g. chain, charity etc.).

The first cinema we considered was The Odeon, Trafford Centre as it is a part of a much larger chain, is in a shopping centre which has an extremely high footfall and is accessible to the whole of the North West. Secondly we focussed on Cineworld in Didsbury, an area with a low level of cultural diversity (See Figure 1). The cinema is again part of a chain, albeit a smaller one than the Odeon, but despite its proximity to a major bus route, the area is six miles outside of the city centre and so less accessible to a majority of Manchester. Finally we selected the Cornerhouse; an independent, charity based cinema located in the city centre. However, the Cornerhouse were unwilling to partake in most of our study and so we extended our research to include the AMC cinema in Deansgate. We made the decision to choose the AMC rather than the Odeon at Printworks as we had already conducted research at an Odeon cinema and were keen to provide as varied results as possible whilst still staying close to the city centre.

**Map 1: Ethnic minority groups as a % of total population in Manchester, 2001**



Before visiting each cinema, we contacted managerial staff to arrange an appropriate time for us to visit. On arrival we provided staff members with a project information sheet as well as two staff questionnaires which we politely asked them to complete in their own time.

Despite having initially planned to interview cinema go-ers who were leaving specific language films, this proved to be problematic as potential interviewees were unwilling to give up their own time when leaving the cinema. We also felt that by limiting our interviewees in this way, we would simultaneously limit our results. To combat this, we instead chose to target people who were waiting to go into the cinema, regardless of the film they were going to see. Not only did this overcome the original issues, it also gave us a much more varied set of results than we would have obtained from only those who were seeing a specific film.

We conducted our interviews in the form of a flow chart (see appendix). By using this flowchart, we were able to ask a small number of maximally relevant questions so as to cause minimal inconvenience to interviewees. We were able to keep interview times short by working in pairs with one group member asking questions whilst the other transcribed responses. We provided each participant with a unique number, along with a project information sheet, which would allow them to contact us and withdraw their contribution at any point should they wish to do so.

By combining the responses from these interviews with those from staff questionnaires, we were able to obtain the results shown below.

## **Results**

### **Didsbury**

After gathering data from seven cinema go-ers, we found six out of seven participants only spoke English, and had lived in Manchester for at least ten years. One participant spoke English as their native language and spoke both English and Ghanan at home, also being fluent in Thai, Chinese and Finnish. By gathering qualitative data this allowed us to expand on our questionnaire and meant that the participant felt comfortable giving extra information. They told us that they often see films in other languages, but not in Manchester as they did not realise that they were readily available, however they said that they would see films in other languages if they were available in Manchester.

#### **Staff questionnaire results:**

From the staff questionnaires we established that the most popular film that month had been 'Avengers Assemble', and that 'Head hunters' is the most recent foreign film that had been shown. The staff felt that English is the most represented language within film at the cinema, and that the foreign films that were shown were

not popular here, however if a film got a particularly good review then that would attract more people. From staff responses we were also able to establish Italian Operas were the most popular foreign language film. As well as being subtitled in English, the trailers and advertisements for these films were shown in English too. We found out that foreign films shown here were usually attended by regular cinema go-ers, regardless of whether they spoke the language it was being shown in or not. We were also informed that the staff have always received positive feedback about the variety of films they show and they personally felt that the cinema caters for all. However, as the staff we questioned were not in a managerial position, they seemed unsure or unaware of any diversity policies which may have been put in place by the cinema to promote foreign language films.

### **Odeon cinema within the Trafford centre**

From the eight responses we collected, we found that 50% of participants spoke languages other than English, whilst 37.5% did not consider English to be their native language. Most of the participants had lived in Manchester for the majority of their lives and visit the cinema once a month on average. The languages spoken within our research group included Egyptian Arabic, Arabic, French and Urdu, with two participants speaking Urdu fluently. One of the Urdu speaking participants was particularly helpful, providing us with extra information. From them, we learned that they would regularly watch Urdu films at home because they felt as though Urdu films are not shown at the cinema. Another participant informed us that Hindi films are available weekly at the Odeon, subtitled in English, although many words within the films are spoken in English. We went on to discover that Hindi films can be understood by many speakers of other languages such as Urdu, and Gujarati, ultimately widening the target audience.

One participant who was a native speaker of Arabic felt that Arabic films are not very well represented within Manchester cinema, although they expressed that even if they were shown, they would not be interested in seeing them.

The cinema listings at this cinema did not include all of the foreign language films available and we only learned of their existence when told by staff or from internet listings.

### **Staff questionnaire:**

From the staff questionnaires at this cinema, we established that 'Hunger games' had been the most popular film that month. Foreign films currently being shown include; 'Monsieur Lazhar', 'Vicky Donor', with a foreign film called 'Cafe de flore' being introduced in the near future. The staff explained that Bollywood films are shown regularly, and despite the popularity of French films increasing, Bollywood films still tend to attract the biggest audiences. The languages that Bollywood films are shown in varies, but if not shown in English they are most likely to be shown in Urdu, commonly with English subtitles. Staff felt that the people attending these minority language films were most likely to be members of the corresponding

language community. The staff were unaware of any diversity policies that the cinema may have, and told us that they have never received any negative feedback about the range of films they show, nor the way they present them.

### **AMC cinema – Deansgate**

From the eight results we collected, we found that the majority of our participant's were students, attracted to the cinema for its discounted ticket prices. 80 % of the cinema go-ers we interviewed were native speakers of English. One participant was a native speaker of Chinese and felt that Chinese films were not well represented in Manchester but would go and see them if they were more readily available. Being a student, we were informed that they receive emails from the Cornerhouse Cinema via the University on discounted prices for Chinese films. Another participant was a native speaker of Welsh, expressing that they felt Welsh films were not well represented in Manchester as they had never seen an advertisement for a Welsh film. However, at the same time, this participant explained that they understood why this was the case, believing the Welsh population in Manchester is not substantial enough to make a Welsh film worthwhile for the cinema. A final participant who spoke French as their second language, went to the cinema as regularly as possible to see films in this language, however felt the only place they could do this was the Cornerhouse.

### **Staff questionnaires:**

After undertaking staff questionnaires, we were informed that American Pie had been extremely popular that week. While looking at listings we could not see any foreign films that were currently being shown, however the staff informed us that subtitled Bollywood films are shown in the summer months. Again, the staff seemed unsure of any policies.

### **Cornerhouse – City centre**

Despite the Cornerhouse being renowned in Manchester for the variety of foreign language films shown there, we found that while carrying out our research, the staff were uncooperative and the policies of the cinema prevented us from gaining any information from their cinema go-ers, as we had in the other cinemas. Therefore, we only were able to gain information through one staff questionnaire, which limited our results drastically for this cinema. We were told that the most popular film recently had been 'Marley', but that there were numerous foreign films being shown daily, which could be seen clearly in the cinema listings. We were informed that the most popular of these were French films, in particular French comedy and that foreign films were very popular at the cinema in general, attracting frequent cinema go-ers. The Guardian was also shown to be a key influence on the types of people who would see the films, due to their weekly reviews in their paper.



## Discussion

Considering these results, in conjunction with the relevant literature, has enabled us to draw conclusions regarding our initial focus of how minority languages are represented in Manchester's cinema industry. Overall we can see that there are a wide variety of languages represented by Manchester cinema, ranging from Italian operas and French comedies to minority language films such as Bollywood blockbusters.

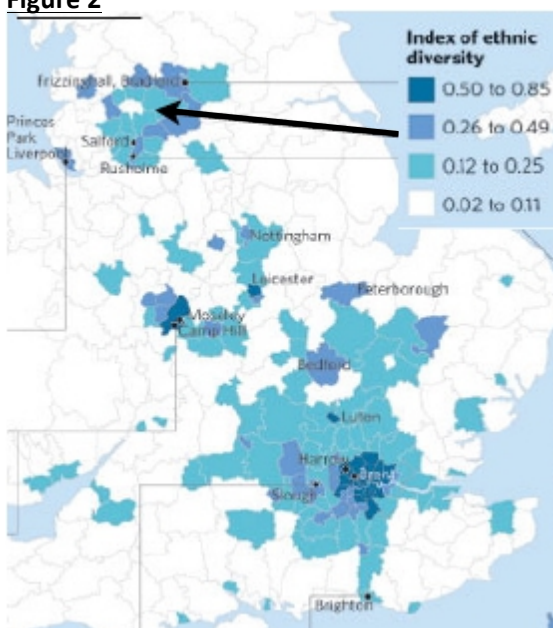
Our main consideration when looking at these results was to establish the motives behind each cinema's decision to show these films. First considering if and how subtitles are used, only the Odeon, Trafford Centre showed any of its foreign language films without subtitles and admitted that most were shown with them. From these findings, we are able to conclude that these films are accompanied by English subtitles to attract as wide an audience as possible rather than just speakers of the relevant languages. This point is reinforced by the information that the trailers and advertisements accompanying these films are also shown in English. Whilst conducting our research, a large proportion of cinema go-ers who were attending foreign language films visited as a family group, the younger generations of whom might not necessarily speak the relevant language and therefore the subtitles would enable them to understand the film.

However, after studying previous literature, we have found that children of minority language families are often reluctant to watch films in their family's heritage language, instead showing preference for English films which are considered to be more modern and include more current issues (Edwards: 2004). This was also reflected by a response from an interviewee who,

despite speaking Arabic as her native language, stated that she would not choose to see a film in this language at the cinema, due to the stigma which can be attached to these 'out of touch, old-fashioned' minority language films. Another point which arose from this discussion was that perhaps cinema go-ers, who represent a minority language would still be inclined to see an English film as this would enable them to feel more integrated into western society.

Despite this, results showed that the audiences of foreign language films at the Odeon, Trafford Centre largely consisted of speakers of the languages the films were shown in, with Bollywood films attracting the largest audiences. This is most likely because,

**Figure 2**



as shown by Figure 2, Manchester and its surrounding areas form a pocket of ethnicity to which the Trafford Centre is easily accessible and could be considered a tourist attraction.

Conversely, Italian Operas were the most popular type of foreign language films at the Cineworld in Didsbury with minority language films being comparatively under represented. Census data correlates to our findings, showing that Didsbury is an area of low ethnic diversity and hence there would be a lack of demand for these films, leaving us to find another explanation for the popularity of Italian Operas. Didsbury, as an area, is relatively wealthy and its residents are generally considered to be 'middle class'. Recent research has also shown an increase in the popularity of foreign theatre (Edwards:2004) which, when combined with the general perception that the theatre is popular amongst the middle class, could explain the popularity of Italian Operas in this area.

From the minimal response we were able to obtain from the Cornerhouse, it was possible to deduce that they considered French Comedy to be the most popular foreign language films being shown currently, whilst films were also shown in languages such as Swedish and Finnish; findings which again show no correlation with the population statistics of Manchester as a whole. We believe that this reflects the Cornerhouse's desire to maintain an alternative fan base as opposed to conforming to mainstream demands. This could also explain their reluctance to contribute to research despite their substantial role in the support and promotion of minority language films. In keeping with this, the staff openly admitted that most of their promotions were targeted at restricted audiences such as international students and Guardian readers, a newspaper heavily associated with the middle class.

A number of participants expressed an interest in seeing such films, were they aware of their existence suggesting that cinemas do not sufficiently promote the minority language films that they show. Proof of this is evident in the fact that, despite the Odeon, Trafford Centre showing the most foreign language films of the cinemas we considered, many of these were not shown in the public listings and we only learned of their existence from cinema staff - a finding for which we are unable to draw a reasonable explanation.

All of these findings lead us to believe that each cinema has different motives behind their film choices. The Odeon, Trafford Centre show a narrow range of minority language films specifically catering for Manchester's vast Asian community, outwardly suggesting that they are aiming to cater for multi-lingualism in Manchester. However, as we know that Odeon is the country's biggest cinema chain, we are aware that their motivations are most likely profit based with the intent to attract as many people as possible and consequently maximise profit.

This also seems to be the case in the Cineworld, Didsbury cinema as the area's low ethnic diversity leads to a lack of demand for such films and therefore showing them would not be worthwhile for the cinema, with production costs outweighing profit.

The AMC cinema in Deansgate again follows this pattern, stating that they only show such films at the times they deem them to be most popular, suggesting their motives are purely profit based. It could also be considered that, due to the cinema's close proximity to the Cornerhouse, the area's demand for minority language films is already fulfilled.

The Cornerhouse cinema however, follows a different structure. With its status as a charity meaning that profit isn't necessarily a priority, they seem to take a more pretentious approach to film selection which isn't necessarily orientated around popularity or language. Whilst it may seem that this cinema is the most likely to follow a language policy of those considered, it does appear that film choice is based mainly on artistic merit as opposed to the areas population demographic.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst we can see that minority languages are represented in Manchester cinema to a certain extent, none of the cinemas that we have considered explicitly follow any language policies. Although there is evidence of other media forms starting to become more multi-lingual, for example there are now forty or more multi-lingual newspapers across the UK (Edwards:2004), it is more difficult to see such a trend in cinema as film choice is so subjective. Because of this, cinemas approach the topic of multi-lingualism in a variety of ways, with some exploiting the niche market for profit whilst some barely acknowledge its existence.

However, none of the cinemas investigated accurately reflected and represented the variety and magnitude of languages spoken in Manchester; there is no evidence to suggest that multi-lingualism in Manchester cinemas is either increasing or decreasing. Further quantitative research into specific ticket sales would need to be conducted in order to establish reliable results regarding the popularity of these minority language films. We were unable to conduct this research due to a lack of co-operation from higher managerial staff at the cinemas as well as further time and resource restraints.

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