



## Report

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The University of Manchester

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**Building and maintaining a multilingual  
repertoire in Manchester by African  
international students**

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## **1. Research Questions And Methods**

As was discussed in the proposal of this research project, Manchester is a prime example of a multilingual city. In particular, the University of Manchester receives students from an average of 150 countries each year (Matras & Robertson, 2015). Due to the huge influence the university has on the city's multilingual population, we decided to carry out a study on how African International students build and maintain their language repertoire while studying in Manchester. Throughout this research, we are going to investigate how African languages are preserved and their ability to cohabit with other more dominant languages such as English, the accessibility that the city offers to these International students and the attitudes of African students towards their languages.

According to previous studies in this field, we have come to learn that people choose the language they feel more comfortable with depending on who they are addressing or the location of interaction (Matras, 2009). In this project, we are going to analyse how African International students carry out this mapping of languages onto specific domains. Secondly, Heine (1977) relates the horizontal and vertical communication with the academic and daily domains of language. Concluding that only by equalising both languages importance, the horizontal communication will influence the vertical communication. Regarding this theory, we are going to investigate if Manchester and its university have promoted horizontal communication and have been able to create a multilingual atmosphere by designing places where people can share and maintain their identities, in particular for African immigrants. Thirdly, Ouane & Glanz (2011) discovered that there is a general negative attitude towards African languages and that this has strengthened the use of languages of non-African origin. In relation to this point, we are going to study how this perception of the languages influences everyday decisions like when parents have to choose their children's school. Finally, Park (2013) mentioned that there is a positive correlation between the development of heritage language and maintenance of cultural identity.

In relation to the fieldwork plan, we decided to adopt an ethnographic approach to focus on the everyday language use and experience of individuals. From this reason, we conducted semi-structured interviews of around one hour long. The questionnaire was divided into 5 sections: on domains, growing up, education, identity, and attitudes. Some of the questions were extracted from the research conducted by Van de Walt (2013) and the rest were inspired by the literature referenced above. We altered some of the questions from the initial fieldwork plan due to bias in the wording causing them to suggest a certain opinion; the final draft can be seen in the appendix section. Finally, the three participants were recruited through our personal contacts.

## 2. Findings – Discussion

### 2.1. Participants Profiles<sup>1</sup>

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Languages</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Where lived</b>	<b>Native language</b>	<b>Current residence/ how long?</b>
1. <i>Mustafa</i>	Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Japanese	20	Male	Egypt	Arabic <b>Second language:</b> English	Manchester for three years
2. <i>Farah</i>	Arabic and English	23	Female	Libya	Arabic <b>Second language:</b> English	5 <sup>th</sup> year in the UK, 4 <sup>th</sup> year in Manchester
3. <i>Kaj</i>	Luganda and English	21	Male	Uganda	Luganda <b>Second language:</b> English	Manchester for two years

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms.

## 2.2. Language Background And Domains

We discussed the languages they use within each domain. A summary of these results is displayed on the tables below:

### Language Use in Childhood

	<i>Mustaf</i>	<i>Farah</i>	<i>Kaj</i>
<b>With Family</b>	Arabic	Arabic	Luganda/English
<b>At University</b>	English	English	English
<b>With Friends</b>	Mostly English	Mostly English	Mostly English
<b>Reading</b>	English = Arabic	Arabic	English
<b>Thinking</b>	Arabic/English	English = Arabic	Luganda/English

### Language Use at Present

	<i>Mustafa</i>	<i>Farah</i>	<i>Kaj</i>
<b>Primarily</b>	Arabic	English/Arabic*	Luganda
<b>With Family</b>	Arabic	Arabic	Luganda/English
<b>At School</b>	English	English/Arabic*	English
<b>With Friends</b>	Arabic	English/Arabic*	Luganda
<b>Reading</b>	English = Arabic	English/Arabic	English
<b>Thinking</b>	Arabic		Luganda

A/B: A used over B; A = B: Equal usage A and B

\*In Farah's case, she experienced growing up in both countries, and her primary language changed as she moved from England to Libya, where her primary language became Arabic.

Discussing which language they consider their “main” language, all of them said their parental language, even Farah who grew up in England until the age of 6. When talking about their parent’s influence on their language use, a common trend was a focus on speaking the parent’s language at any opportunity but pushed to learn English outside of the home; two of the participants went to international or English-speaking schools.

All of the participants agreed that they primarily use their native tongues when addressing their families, especially their parents. With friends, there is a leaning towards English being used as the majority of their friends are native English speakers, but participants said that they would use their native language with friends who speak their mother tongue.

Kaj discussed how the language he uses with his parent’s depends on what language they initiate the conversation in, as he will use whatever language they choose. When he is initiating the conversation, his primary choice is always Luganda as, in his opinion, English has a reputation of being more “rude” than Luganda. However, Kaj does not feel that specific topics of conversation have languages mapped onto them, the preferred language of the addressee is deemed more dominant than the topic of conversation.

Code-switching was mentioned by both Kaj and Farah regarding communication with their siblings, with English being the majority language with native language terms added. Mustafa did not mention code-switching.

Since all participants are equally comfortable reading in either language, it seems more that personal preference affects language choice when it comes to which language to read in rather than linguistic skill.

Interaction setting often dictates the use of English over their mother tongue, especially being students at an English university. Farah is the exception to this case, as growing up in both countries, she was taught through English while in Britain and then her school in Libya was taught through Arabic, so the country setting over-ruled the “school” domain.

### **2.3. Education**

Regarding the use of languages within university, we find that the three participants prefer to use English in academic situations. Generally, they don’t encounter difficulties when learning languages or doing homework, Farah is the only one who mentions having needed help during first year. She also refers a strategy she uses when she gets stuck:

When I can’t write an essay, I change the question to Arabic, and I start to write in Arabic. It’s like I switch my brain around?

This makes Farah the only one who really uses translation as a tool.

<b>Question</b>	<i>Mustafa</i>	<i>Farah</i>	<i>Kaj</i>
<b>Academic Writing</b>	English	English	English
<b>Translation while studying</b>	Arabic to English primarily	English to Arabic	No
<b>Extra courses taken</b>	No	No	No
<b>Difficulties with learning the language (English)</b>	No	No	No
<b>Difficulties with homework</b>	No	“Maybe in first year”	No
<b>UOM resources offered in native language</b>	Arabic teacher	Central library’s foreign book section	“Doesn’t think so”

The language they use when studying in all three cases is also English, we can conclude from this that it depends on the context: in the academic situations, they use English, but when dealing with more casual things, such as making jokes, they tend to use their native languages. However, Kaj points out that he does think in his native language within academic environments at some points, but this situation is changing with time.

When it comes to evaluating the resources offered in their native language by the university, two of the three interviewees evaluate them positively. Farah mentions the existence of a section of books written in foreign languages within the central bookstore. But she also points out that this section, particularly the Arabic one, could be larger, given that Manchester has the largest community of people from Libya outside the country. Mustafa evaluates it positively too, mentioning that he taught Arabic within the university and the collection of resources offered by the university library. With the exception of Kaj who does not think there would be any resources in Luganda, but has never checked.

#### **2.4. Maintaining Cultural Identity**

All participants seem to be conscious about maintaining their cultural and linguistic identity although the approaches taken vary from person to person. Both Arabic speakers engage in activities related to their culture and languages; Mustafa mentioned teaching at the international society, joining the Arab and Egyptian societies, going to the curry mile, and talking with his Arabic friends as examples, and Farah raised going to the city library, teaching Arabic and doing translating projects.

Instead of participating in activities, Kaj mentioned his parents' expectation on him to maintain Ugandan culture. He feels this way because he is the eldest and only boy in the family member, in addition to the fact that his family lives in the UK.

One of the reasons that they maintain their identity and language might be because they all have strong connection with communities and people that speak their first languages. As they spent their childhood in a country in which their native language is widely used, they maintain close relationship with friends and family there. All three participants mentioned they contact their friends and family in their first language on daily basis. With the development in communication technology, they are still exposed to their first language in everyday life despite the fact that they are in an Anglophonic country.

Although they all chose Manchester mainly for academic reasons, Mustafa and Farah remarked that they appreciate its cultural and linguistic diversity. In fact, Mustafa pointed out that this was one of the reasons why he chose Manchester. He remembered checking if there was an Arab or Egyptian society before applying. He said that

I didn't want to be all alone or feel homesick. I wouldn't have known that, I had not really travelled abroad on my own, but just in case [...]

Both Arabic speakers mentioned that they enjoy hearing Arabic on the street.

As for the future prospect, Mustafa is planning to work in another place, possibly in Europe. He does not think he will go back to Egypt; not because he does not want to but because his field of study is not developed there. Farah said she was not sure, but for the time being, she would stay in Manchester for a short period. Kaj will stay in the UK, though he would go back to Uganda consistently, he will not live there. Also, he made an interesting point that if, in the future, he has a non-Ugandan partner he would not use Luganda, though he would like his children to speak it. This is because he thinks that children have to have multiple sources to learn a language.

In relation to the connection between language and identity, Kaj remarked that speaking Luganda feels like being back in Uganda. Farah is learning Amazigh, which is an indigenous language of North Africa (Hayward, 2000). She addressed how it is under-represented and the importance of promoting it as it is part of Libyan culture. Mustafa told us that, as an Egyptian, he feels happy to find people speaking in Arabic and maintaining their language.

## **2.5. Attitudes Towards Languages Spoken**

When analyzing the participants' attitudes towards the languages, some interesting similarities and differences arise. In the three countries, English plays an important role; nonetheless, it is perceived differently depending on the area. In Egypt, for example, people have a very basic knowledge of English because there is a positive



attitude towards the native languages and thus, the Arabic dialect remains the primary language of communication. On the other hand, in Libya, there seems to be a more positive perception of things that come from Europe; this is why English has more prestige and is more valued than the African languages. This is confirmed when Farah explained that due to the anti-western sentiment in Libya, there was a double attitude towards the languages. Before the regime changed, when anti-western discourse was prominent, the prestige of English existed but was not perceived. After 2011, when the regime changed, the prestige of English became more explicit. Thus, some indigenous dialects are not recognized or left aside like the case of Amazigh.

When they were asked about their schools. Though, as we have said, there is a positive attitude towards the African languages in Egypt, for Mustafa's parents, English was important, and they chose an international school; that was also because the education offered there is considered to be better. The subjects were taught in English; nevertheless, Arabic remained the language spoken with friends. Similarly, the feeling towards major languages made Farah's parents choose a school where English was offered. Kaj explained that, as Ugandan people tend to perceive things imported from Europe positively, schools that teach English are considered to be of a higher quality. Nonetheless, his parents chose his school based on the fact that they were academically 'superior'.

Lastly, participants were asked about their preferences regarding both languages and if they found any advantage in being able to speak an African language. For Mustafa "both languages come naturally"; however, he prefers Arabic as it is 'much more expressive, much more beautiful'; also he feels that, mastering Arabic, is an advantage especially when it comes to job opportunities and when, "you are working abroad". In a similar way, Farah explained that Arabic is more beautiful and poetic and claimed that she can express herself better; however, when it comes to expressing emotions or swearing, she feels more comfortable doing it in English as she considers it less impactful. In addition, for Kaj, Luganda is the language that comes more naturally, and for him, it has personal advantages like for example "maintaining identity".

### **3. Conclusions**

Referring back to the previously mentioned literature, the similarities between our participants agree with some of Matras' (2009) cues that determine the language used in a certain domain. All participants describe using the language is mutually understood between them and the person addressed, this confirms Matras' point that differentiation by addressee is a cue for which language to use from a multilingual repertoire. Our data suggests that addressee is the most dominant cue for language selection, as Farah and Kaj will speak to their siblings in English, even in the home setting, where the primary language is their native tongues. The participants didn't

give substantial information on whether interaction setting influences their language choice, however, this could be circumstantial as Manchester is a primarily English-speaking city. Spaces in which they can use their native tongues are limited and are often created specifically for the use of the language, such as the Arabic classes Farah and Muhammed help teach within the international society.

Analyzing the data and applying it to the theory of Heine (1977), we recognize that the general tendency is to use their native language for horizontal communication outside of academic fields, while in the latter English is used. The three interviewees seem to be losing the opportunity to use their native languages in vertical communication, possibly influenced by the fact they are taught through English and therefore the increasing difficulty of the content they have studied, the limited resources about this content in their native languages provided by the university limits the opportunity to learn in their first language.

The possible way for horizontal communication to influence vertical communication, are the resources offered by the university, which are valued positively by most of the interviewees. The students' use of these resources is given the final responsibility of developing the multilingual ecosystem which the University of Manchester benefits from, enriched by languages and cultures other than English, falls directly on the multilingual students themselves. Leaving the university with a single role to follow, offering and improving these services for students who wish to use them.

Regarding the maintenance of language and cultural identity, the data supports the point made by Park (2013), that there is a positive correlation between heritage language proficiency and the maintenance of ethnic identity. This is seen in Kaj's remark saying that speaking the language is a reminder of his identity as a Ugandan. Park (2013) also mentioned that parental involvement and home environment is one of the main elements that promotes maintenance of languages and culture. It is supported by Kaj discussing his parents' expectation on him to maintain the language and culture with his future children. In regard to this, we can speculate that both Arabic speakers engage more in activities related to their languages and culture because, unlike Kaj, they are away from their families and trying to compensate. Additionally, another factor why they engage in these activities could be because there are more opportunities and support for the Arabic language than for Luganda, as Arabic is seen as a major language.

The city of Manchester itself is one of the factors that helps students maintain their culture and language. Participants mentioned how they liked the diversity in Manchester. The Arabic participants also mentioned the opportunity to use their language in public and private sectors. Diversity offered by university and the city

creates the atmosphere of inclusion of language diversity and therefore has a positive influence on their identity maintenance.

Regarding the attitudes towards the language, the data we collected agrees with UNESCO's explanation; the idea that as a result of marginalization suffered by the African languages, some minority languages have been discriminated against and termed as 'dialects' or 'vernacular', as is the case of Amazigh, as Farah explained. The data also confirms Ouane & Glanz's idea (2011) that 'deep-rooted negative prejudice' have been developed in the minds of many Africans towards their own languages. The strong opposition coming from the political elites against the use of indigenous African languages is observed in the schools, where the ones that teach the English language are considered to be 'superior' or of a 'higher quality'.

Related to this, according to Magwa (2015), the attitudes towards the languages in each country influences how parents choose their children's school, and, in these three cases, we have observed that this is true. The three participants' parents took into account how English was taught in the schools, so that their children could have more job opportunities in the future. Also, in the three countries, the schools which offer English were considered to be 'better quality'.

On the other hand, both Mustafa and Farah expressed that their mother tongues are "more beautiful, poetic and expressive" and the three participants feel that there are different advantages in being able to speak an African language. They perceive it as a sign of belonging to a community and a way of maintaining their identity when they are outside their home country. The referenced literature does not cover this point. The positive attitude towards their mother tongues shown by the three participants could be due to the fact that they are immigrants currently living abroad, in the UK, when the previously mentioned sources were based on native speakers living in the countries in which their native language is the vernacular. Thus, wider research would be needed in order to draw verifiable conclusions on this point.

Word Count: 2998

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## 5. Appendix

### I. FINAL INTERVIEW/QUESTIONNAIRE

About the language background:

- Name, age, country of origin, language they speak, what do they study, how long have you been in Manchester/the UK
- What language do you consider as your first and which one as your second language?
- Which language do you use ... ?

... at home

... in academic situations

... at university

... with friends

- The language you speak in a certain situation, what do you think it depends on?
- Do you think your language use is somehow different from the way people speak in the country of origin?

About growing up:

- What language did you primarily use in your childhood?
- Can you talk about ... ?
- familie's use of language
- language use in school
- language use among friends
- language when reading
- language when thinking
- What do you think is your parent's influence on the use of your language?
- What language do you associate with media eg. TV, Internet?

About education:

- When writing academically in what language do you think? Do you use your own dialect, or do you prefer English?
- Do you translate while you are studying?

- Did you have any difficulty related to language?
- Do you take or have taken any extra courses on English?
- Have you ever needed any help with homework in terms of the language?
- Are there any resources available in your language?

About maintaining cultural identity:

- If (x language) is maintained in the first generation (i.e., the parents) is the second generation (i.e., the children) going to maintain (x language)? What are the factors that can help the second generation to preserve (x language)?
- Why did you choose Manchester?
- Which are your prospect to the future? Will you stay in the UK or you are planning to go back to your country?

About Attitudes towards both languages

- Were you able to practice your mother tongue in the school or just the official/foreign language was taught?
- Did your parents choose the school you went to based on the languages that were offered? Was your mother tongue a priority?
- Is your mother language valued in your country or, the other case, there is a general negative attitude towards it?
- With which language do you feel more comfortable when speaking? Which are your attitudes towards English? Do you prefer it rather than your mother tongue? If so, why? Do you see any advantage in being able to speak an African language?
- When do you use your mother tongue? Do you continue speaking it while you are here, in Manchester?
- Did you move to the UK to continue your studies because you found it easier with the English language?
- Which is the language used in the media in your home country? If it is English instead of your mother tongue, what do you think this is due to?