



## Report

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# **The Linguistic Landscape of Werneth, Oldham**

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## 1 Introduction

Previous research on the Linguistic Landscape (hereby referred to as LL) helped in shaping our own research in determining our methods, research questions and analysis of data.

Backhaus's (2006) study emphasised the importance of distinguishing official and non-official signs and considering the different languages found of both types. The study also underlined power relations between different languages and the effect of this type of hierarchy. O'Connell et al (2014) and Barni and Bagna's (2015) research emphasised the importance of both quantitative and qualitative methods in collecting data as both the figures and the details to back them up is needed for an accurate representation of results. Barni and Bagna (2015) also highlighted the importance of extralinguistic factors on signs such as the use of images, colours and symbols. Gaiser and Matras's (2016) focus on the authors' motivations for language choice such as emblematic or communicative reasons. Matras and Robertson's (2015) research highlighted the use of different languages in Manchester by looking in the different areas of the city as well as identifying their usage in different contexts, like how language is used within different public sectors.

Based on these ideas from previous research, we decided on the following research questions:

- What languages are spoken in the area?
- How representative are multilingual signs of the languages spoken in the area?
- What are the motivations for language choice?

Oldham was chosen partly because it has not been thoroughly researched before, and also because of the large proportion of foreign languages spoken in the area, shown in the 2011 Census (Office for National Statistics, 2011). With this data, it was easier to predict what languages were most common in which areas. Oldham Council Web Maps (2019) was also particularly useful when deciding the specific boundaries of our fieldwork. Originally, three areas of Oldham were going to be covered, based on which had the highest proportion of languages other than English. However, it became apparent that covering one area in greater detail was sufficient and would allow us to collect in-depth qualitative data to gain a greater understanding of the LL and the motivations for language choice, while still addressing the question of how representative multilingual signage is, just in a more localised area.

In order to collect the primary data, the application LinguaSnapp was used to take photos of the signs and record details such as which language was most dominant on the sign as well as its purpose, function and English translation. In addition, where possible, an informal conversation with someone employed at each establishment took place which provided an opportunity to investigate our research questions.

During our interviews, we followed a list of pre-determined questions, deviating where necessary if the interviewee disclosed additional information. We treated each encounter more like a conversation than an interview so that the people we talked to would feel more relaxed and, hopefully, supply more comprehensive and accurate information. We also made sure to note down their responses after the interview had finished, again to create a more natural encounter and not put them under pressure.

Firstly, we introduced ourselves as university students doing a survey of languages in Oldham and asked if they would be willing to answer some questions, letting them know that they did not have to take part if they didn't want to. If met with confusion, we explained our research goals in a little more detail, taking care not to influence their responses in any way by giving

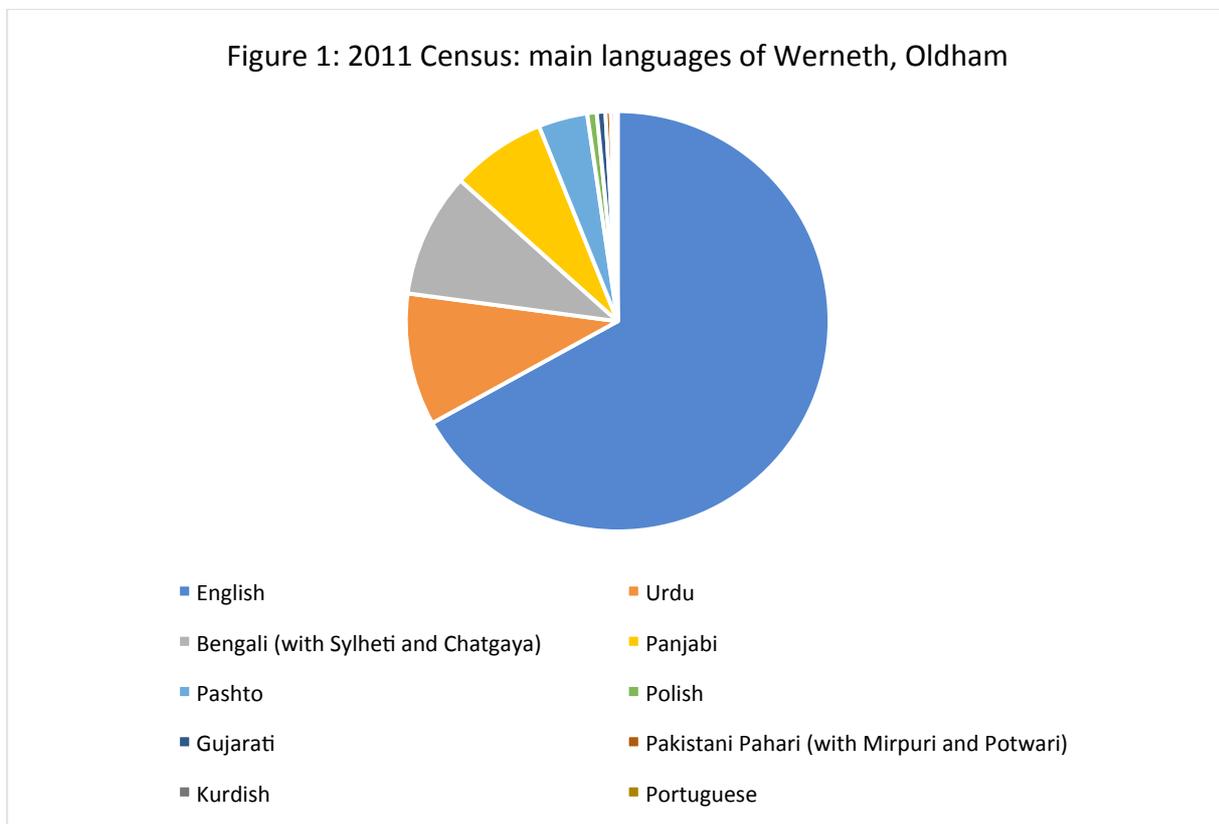
information that was too complex and perhaps leading shop owners to over-complicate their responses.

First we asked them what language was on the sign and what it meant. Then, we asked whether themselves spoke the language on the sign and whether any of their customers spoke it. We then asked them why they chose to include the language on the sign, giving us insight into their motivations for language choice.

Unfortunately, some of the places we went to were closed during our fieldwork, so further investigation would be needed in the future to gain further insight into the LL. Nevertheless, we found friends and family who could help translate the signs, and proposed some of our own intuitions on the motivations for language choice.

## 2 Quantitative findings

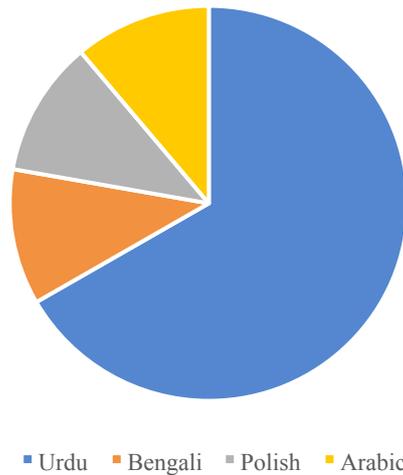
The ten most commonly-spoken main languages according to the 2011 Census in Werneth are shown in Figure 1. See appendix for a full list of languages.



The most commonly-spoken main language other than English is Urdu, making up just over 9.8% of all languages in the area. Bengali is also widely spoken, with 9.2% of the population. Other commonly-spoken languages are Panjabi (7%), Pashto (3.6%), Polish (0.6%) and Gujarati (0.6%). See appendix for a full list of languages.

The quantitative findings from our fieldwork are shown in the Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Languages of multilingual signs in Werneth, Oldham



Urdu was the most common language we found, appearing on six out of the nine signs we looked at. There were three Arabic signs, but we classed these as one single sign because they were all close together and communicated one message collectively. There was also one Bengali sign and one Polish sign.

### 3 Qualitative findings and discussion

#### *Khyber Kebabs*

A sign used on the front of this takeaway used both English and Urdu. The shop wasn't open so we were unable to speak with the owner/employees. However, knowing people who read and speak Urdu provided us with a translation. The sign simply translated to, 'Khyber Kebabs,' and we discovered that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a province in Pakistan. Although the takeaway wasn't open, we speculate that the Urdu writing serves as an emblematic function, designed to appeal to customers and instil a sense of authenticity to the world-food establishment. Equally, we feel it could have been the case that the owner wanted to pay homage to their home-country or ancestral home. It is also possible that the sign serves as a direct translation for those who are native speakers of Urdu and do not have a full grasp of the English language. Gaiser and Matras (2016) found that a sign is often put in place for a specific purpose. In this instance, it would be conceivable that the sign was used to reflect one's belonging to a particular heritage or community or demonstrate authenticity as well as make the establishment more accessible to different communities.

#### *Manchester Superstore*

We found a private Urdu advertisement for a religious event and faith gathering. The shop assistant said that he spoke Urdu and so did the majority of his customers, and that one member of staff also spoke Arabic. He said that a lot of the customers were also Muslims and the multilingual signs around the store were placed there by religious institutions, as they knew that there would be regular customers from a Muslim background. The sign translated as 'Miraj Shareef (Holy month of Islam) event on the 30th of March'. Matras and Robertson (2015), found Urdu to be the most common language used in multilingual signage other than English and the

usage of the language on this sign supports their findings. This shows that Urdu is embedded deep within the Oldham community as the sign is written purely in Urdu, indicating a clear communicative function.

Another Urdu sign at the *Manchester Superstore* translated as 'a Quran recitation event taking place on 21st March' which was in honour of the New Zealand terror attacks. The use of Urdu as well as English shows a complementary relationship between the two (the two languages are giving different content) in some cases and also shows a duplicating relationship in the sense that 'Quran recitation' appeared in both English and Arabic. This sign indicates a communicative in the sense that it provides information for an event, and an emblematic purpose in the sense that it's trying to engage with the Urdu-speaking Muslim community and bring them together in solidarity for an unfortunate event that has taken place. This supports Backhaus's (2006) study which states that solidarity is a huge contributor to multilingual signage as the purpose is to unify communities and give them a stable connection to their religion and culture.

A third sign in Manchester Superstore showed more Urdu with some information in English. The Urdu translates as "a gathering that will happen at the time of the Asr prayers on the 7th April in the Medina Mosque and Islamic Centre'. It also indicates that there will be 'famous Naat/Qawaali singers' at the event and 'a separation of men and women.' Given the fact that many of the customers are Urdu speakers, and that the supermarket specialises in eastern foodstuffs, we thought it reasonable to state that the poster acted as a directly communicative resource aimed at the Urdu-speaking language community in Werneth. Although we cannot say for certain whether there is any emblematic function of the language on the poster, as Barni & Bagna (2015) argue, it is also important to consider any extralinguistic factors. The image of the mosque may be seen as emblematic of the Islamic faith, and can therefore be said to 'attract emotional identification' (Matras Robertson, 2015) of the Islamic community and thus any Urdu-speaking Muslims in Werneth.

#### *Ayaan butchers and groceries*

Here we found an Urdu advertisement for a book being sold in the shop. The shop owner said that both he and many of his customers speak Urdu. He couldn't read the language, but a translation provided by an Urdu speaker confirmed that the sign displayed the title of the book - 'Hair, Rain Clouds and Night' as well as the author - 'Anwar Jamal Farooqi'. In this instance, it is likely that the sign is used to target the Urdu-speaking community specifically. O'Connell, Whitaker, Tilley and Hurlock (2014) carried out research into whether signs in certain areas were commercial or community-based. This sign is perhaps used for both, as it is selling a product, but it is also giving people access to media in their native language, bringing people together who share the same first language. It is likely that it serves as purely communicative purpose, as it does not appear to be trying to appeal to anyone other than the intended audience.

#### *Ross Street Masjid*

A banner advertising a charity was displayed on the side of a mosque. Though predominantly written in English, a small section of Urdu was used at the bottom of the sign which translates as 'charity'. It is likely that the small use of Urdu is used in a communicative manner to include those who may not use English as a first language. The fact that Urdu was selected as the only other language to be used would imply that it is the most likely to be understood by members of the

community after English. It could also be said that the sign has an emblematic function too due to the fact that charity is one of the five pillars of Islam.

### *Shahjalal Mosque and Islamic Centre*

There were four signs on the front of the *Shahjalal Mosque and Islamic Centre* that featured Arabic and Bengali. The centre was closed at the time of our fieldwork but we manage to translate the phrases afterwards.

The Bengali sign was the same meaning as the English phrase above it: 'Shahjalal Mosque and Islamic Centre.' We discovered that the owners are Bangladeshi (Mosque Directory, 2019), so it is likely that it was put there because they speak it themselves, but also because of the large number of other Bengali speakers in the area. The census data show that the third most commonly-spoken main language in Werneth is Bengali, so it is likely that the owners put the sign there because they knew it would serve a purpose for a lot of the local population. The presence of this sign provides support for Gaiser & Matras (2015), who found that language choice can reinforce the presence of a particular language community. The sign looked fairly new, so putting the sign there is likely to reinforce the well-established Bengali-speaking community that have been migrating to Oldham since the 60s (Bangla Stories, 2019).

The three Arabic signs were religious sayings that translate as 'Oh Allah,' 'Oh Muhammad,' and 'There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of God.' The use of Arabic is presumably written because it is the language used in Islamic prayers and texts. While Bengali is a language that is used only within a particular speech community, Arabic is used by many different communities, and serves as a lingua franca for the Islamic faith. The Arabic signs could have been put there by the owners as a sign of inclusion to all Muslim speech communities, not just the Bengali-speaking Muslims.

### *Coppice News*

Outside a newsagent, a Polish sign was used to advertise Lycamobile. The sign translates to "Poland, Landline + Mobile, to activate send an SMS with ACT SAVE to the number 2525." The shopkeeper was an Urdu speaker and said she doesn't speak the language but has some Polish customers. She said the sign was provided by Lycamobile, a mobile network that provide low-cost international calls and their target market is mainly immigrants with families that live abroad (Lycamobile, 2019). This shows that the sign was placed there for communicative purposes, specifically targeting one language community and making them aware of the resources available around them. This type of sign is referred to by Backhaus (2006) as a non-official sign, and supports his findings that the use of foreign languages on non-official signs is driven by the desire to create a universal atmosphere yet still have a connection with their home countries. This means that the use of the sign in a store whereby some Polish people reside signifies a desire to show community spirit as well as support for a maintained connection to their backgrounds.

The signs from *Khyber Kebabs*, *Manchester Superstore*, *Ayaan Butchers and Groceries* and *Ross Street Masjid* are all in Urdu, which is the second most commonly spoken language in Werneth and made up six of the nine signs we found. This shows that the multilingual signage in the area is fairly representative of the population, and is what we expected to find prior to our fieldwork.

However, we found surprisingly few Bengali signs, given that it is spoken by 9.2% of the population, almost as much as Urdu at 9.8%. This could be because Urdu is perhaps more

commonly known than Bengali, as Urdu is a more dominant language in South Asia, particularly among Muslims. A lot of Bengali speakers may know some Urdu, but Urdu speakers are less likely to know Bengali. Therefore, the use of Urdu signage is likely to be more inclusive to a larger population than Bengali signage would. This provides support for Backhaus' (2006) idea about power relations between languages, as Urdu evidently has more dominance in the LL.

There was one Polish sign, which makes sense given that there is a reasonable Polish-speaking population of 0.6%. Although this is not a large proportion, Polish is the most common non-UK nationality in the country (Office for National Statistics, 2017), so this sign is perhaps more representative of the UK as a whole, rather than a specific area. Also, given that it was put there by a multinational company, their advertising is likely to be on a national scale rather than targeting a particular group of local residents.

The presence of Arabic is somewhat anomalous on the surface. We can see from the census data that only 0.1% of the population speak Arabic as a main language, while we did not find any signs in more commonly-spoken languages such as Panjabi (7%) and Pashto (3.6%). However, when we consider Arabic as a lingua franca, we can see that much more people are likely to use it than the census data suggests, as the question 'What is your main language?' does not account for the use of second languages like Arabic being used for religious purposes. This shows that perhaps the presence of Arabic signage is representative of the population, but it doesn't appear that way because the census data is not comprehensive.

#### **4 Conclusions**

The results of our research reflect the census data that shows that Urdu is the most commonly-spoken language in Werneth. We also found signs in other commonly-spoken languages like Bengali, Polish and Arabic. All of the signs displayed in our fieldwork are non-official, showing that multilingual signage in Werneth's LL is most commonly created by local communities rather than the authorities.

Overall, although our sample was small, it proved to be fairly representative of the local population, even when some widely-spoken languages, such as Arabic, are not reflected in the census data. There are some languages that are commonly-spoken that we did not see evidence of, but our predictions that Urdu would be well-represented proved to be true.

We have seen a range of different motivations for language choice in our fieldwork. Signs can have both emblematic and communicative purposes, shown through both linguistic context, and extralinguistic information. While some signs convey a symbolic meaning, others are used to give information about events that would be of interest to the multilingual community through the use of their language. We have seen language choice as a movement of solidarity between language communities, and multilingual signs used simply as advertising or information.

In future, it would be interesting to investigate how Werneth compares with other local areas as well as Greater Manchester as a whole, to have a more representative sample and a deeper understanding of multilingualism in the wider LL.

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Khyber Kebabs



'Khyber Kebabs'



1. Urdu (top): 'Miraj Shareef event on 30th March'
2. Urdu (bottom): 'Quran recitation on 21st March'



3. Urdu: 'A gathering that will happen at the time of Asr prayers on the 7th April in Madina Mosque and Islamic Centre. There will be Naat/Qawaali singers (famous) and there will be separation between the men and the women at the event.'

Ross Street Masjid



Urdu: 'Charity'



Urdu: 'Hair, Rain Clouds and Night,' 'The poet Anwar Jamal Farooqi.'

Shahjalal Islamic Centre



Arabic: (top left): Ya Allah 'Oh Allah,' (top centre): La ilaha illallah Muhammad ur rasool Allah. 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammed is the messenger of God,' (top right): Ya Muhammad 'Oh Muhammad.'

Bengali: Śāhajālāla masajida ēbarā isalāmika kēndra 'Shahjalal mosque and Islamic centre'



Polska, Stacjonarne + Komórkowe, Aby aktywować wyślij SMS o treści ACT SAVE na numer 2525  
'Poland, Landline + Mobile. 'To active send an SMS with ACT SAVE to the number 2525

*2011 Census: main languages of Werneth, Oldham*

Total	11,585
English	7,500
Urdu	1,139
Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	1,072
Panjabi	813
Pashto	420
Polish	81
Gujarati	74
Pakistani Pahari (with Mirpuri and Potwari)	46
Kurdish	36
Portuguese	21
Persian	15
Slovak	15
French	14
British Sign Language	13
Arabic	12
Ukrainian	10
Cantonese Chinese	8
Italian	8
Malayalam	8
Somali	8
Dutch	7
Hindi	7
Latvian	7
Lithuanian	7
Spanish	7
Tamil	7
German	6
Luganda	6
Shona	5
Tigrinya	5
Other	209