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# The city as multilingual utopia

Creating decolonial spaces for language in an urban setting

**Abstract:** In this paper I examine how multilingual spaces emerge within institutions across a number of sectors in the city. Drawing on their repertoires of linguistic resources actors (institutional agents and clients) assume agency to change practice and forge ideological justifications for new practice routines. Repertoires of linguistic resources comprise not just linguistic forms but also experiences and encounters in the multilingual city and the ability to find creative solutions drawing on multimodal resources. The ideological stances that accompany practice and reflection on multilingual spaces represent notions of pluralism and transnational identities. They embrace symbols of belonging to a variety of places and practice communities. In this way the city as an organic network of de-centralised institutions accommodates practices and ideologies that differ from the prevailing one-language nation-state position. It develops its own city language narrative. That narrative is supported and in part shaped by a university-based research project – Multilingual Manchester – which introduced a new epistemology into the study of urban multilingualism, many of its elements echoing the decoloniality agenda. There is, however, a risk that the activist agenda might become unsustainable as the neoliberal corporate university environment adopts ‘diversity’ as a commodity and defaults to a stance that is shaped by colonial legacies.

**Keywords:** decoloniality, multilingualism, neoliberalism, language policy

## 1 Introduction: Linguaphobic nation, multilingual city

Speaking in September 2016 at the first Conservative Party Conference after the referendum in which UK voters decided by a narrow margin to leave the European Union, British Prime Minister Theresa May said that Britain’s success on the

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global stage was guaranteed because “our language is the language of the world”<sup>1</sup>.<sup>2</sup> Just a few weeks before he succeeded her as Conservative prime minister in July 2019 Boris Johnson declared that there were “too many parts of the country” where immigrants “did not speak English as their first language”<sup>3</sup>. These statements demonstrate two aspects of a colonial legacy: the aspiration to maintain global hegemony for the benefit of the homeland and its prosperity and the view of immigrants as a market commodity brought in to help build the homeland while refusing to accept that their mobility has created a multilingual reality in that very place.<sup>4</sup>

Paradoxically a similar premise appears in some public statements by academics, who seek to promote interest in other languages in a bid to counteract the decline of enrolment in language subjects and the consequent closure of university language departments. After the 2016 EU referendum statements began to foreground even more intensely the benefits of learning languages as a way of protecting British interests in international trade, diplomacy and security.<sup>5</sup> A recent study even purports to be able to calculate the monetary value of investment in language learning for Britain’s GDP<sup>6</sup>. Such interventions have been targeting policymakers committed to the proposition that releasing the UK from the constraints of the EU will unleash its economic and diplomatic potential. They often conclude with the phrase “now more than ever” suggesting that learning languages has become more necessary and urgent in the wake of Britain’s voluntary renunciation of its unrestricted access to European markets (cf. Kelly 2018). Some have suggested that the study of foreign languages contributes to British ‘soft power’<sup>7</sup> – understood as a way to dominate others with minimal use of **power** – while others have gone as far as to argue that it should be part of a political programme of ‘progressive patriotism’<sup>8</sup>, a concept that has since been criticised as

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1 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-37563510>

2 All websites cited were last accessed in November 2022.

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jul/05/johnson-pledges-to-make-all-immigrants-learn-english>

4 For ‘the case against linguaphobia’ see <https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/posts/2016/09/the-case-against-linguaphobia/>

5 And see already British Academy report ‘Lost for Words’ from 2013: [https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/199/British\\_Academy\\_report\\_Lost\\_for\\_words\\_report.pdf](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/199/British_Academy_report_Lost_for_words_report.pdf)

6 [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1814-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1814-1.html)

7 See Cambridge University conference report on ‘The value of languages’ from 2016. <https://www.publicpolicy.cam.ac.uk/system/files/documents/value-of-languages.pdf>

8 See <http://projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/cross-language-dynamics/cultural-diplomacy-linguistic-diversity-and-the-softening-of-power-towards-a-progressive-patriotism/index.html>

associated with a covert form of white supremacy (cf. Bhattacharyya et al. 2021: 68ff.).<sup>9</sup>

Statements in support of languages in this context have focused primarily on the study of Western European languages – coined ‘Modern Foreign Languages’ (MFL) – with some attention given to Mandarin Chinese and recently also to Arabic (cf. McLelland 2017). The languages of (other) immigrant populations – labelled ‘Community Languages’ in British public discourse – tend to receive only marginal attention if any.<sup>10</sup> They are taught almost exclusively outside of mainstream school curricula and, with the exception of Chinese and Arabic, they are given practically no space in the country’s higher education programmes. In July 2020 the British Academy along with the British Council and three other leading academic organisations published a proposal for a ‘National Languages Strategy’<sup>11</sup>. Its recommendations focus exclusively on investment in language skills in an effort to reverse the decline in enrolment in language subjects, which, the paper argues, will help “strengthen our relationships across the world”. They hardly address domestic multilingualism, regulation of interpreting and translation services, accessibility of services, the importance of multilingualism for intergenerational relations and wellbeing or its role in cultural production. In fact the word ‘multilingual’ appears in the 25-page document just seven times, five of which are citations of the titles of other documents and projects.

Language policy in the UK is an aggregate of several different strands<sup>12</sup>. The devolved governments in Wales and Scotland have policies to protect and promote their indigenous regional languages (Welsh, Gaelic and Scots, respectively) while in Northern Ireland political power sharing stalled in 2018 in part due to controversies around proposals for an Irish Language Act. Education policies regulate the position of ‘Modern Foreign Languages’ in the school curriculum along with a limited offer of accredited extra-curricular examinations in other languages. Beyond the education system Britain’s language policy often assumes a

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<sup>9</sup> See also <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/step-aside-progressive-patriotism-intergalactic-humanism-has-arrived/>

<sup>10</sup> An exception is the Times Education Commission report from June 2022 which called to “encourage pupils who speak English as a second language to gain a qualification in their native tongue”, and the efforts of Baroness Jean Coussins on behalf of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Languages to acknowledge the language skills of young people with migration background.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/2597/Towards-a-national-languages-strategy-july-2020\\_R0FHmzB.pdf](https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/2597/Towards-a-national-languages-strategy-july-2020_R0FHmzB.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> For an overview of policy in English as a subject of teaching see Rampton et al. (2020).

gatekeeping function. The government relies on language analysis for the determination of origin (LADO) to verify claims for political asylum of applicants from certain countries (cf. Patrick 2012; Matras 2018b). Citizenship language tests link naturalisation to English proficiency (measures to support the instruction of English as additional or other language are devolved to local authorities). In 2011 a question on language was introduced into the national Census. It asks 'What is your main language?' but only gives respondents a choice between English (or Welsh) and indicating a single language linked to a self-assessment of their proficiency in English. There is no indication that the data are used to plan accessibility or language provisions. Only some government departments issue translations of selective information into immigrant languages. This tends to be limited to domains in which immigrant populations are deemed to pose a potential risk to themselves and to the most vulnerable members of their own communities in connection with practices such as forced or arranged marriage, female genital mutilation and religious extremism, while no multilingual information is available, for example, on immigration or citizenship procedures. After the outbreak of the Covid pandemic in 2020 government agencies were slow to produce guidance notes in immigrant languages relying instead on voluntary sector initiatives.<sup>13</sup> Concern for the wellbeing and safety of minority communities thus does not seem to be a key factor guiding translation policy at national level. On the whole it would not be inaccurate to say that language policy in the UK (with the exception of support for regional languages in the devolved nations) aims to ensure compliance and cultural uniformity while equipping an elite minority with skills to promote British interests abroad.

In this contribution I examine attitudes to multilingualism in a major UK city through the lens of decoloniality debates. I draw on arguments and insights from the fields of cultural and heritage studies, diaspora studies, urban studies and critical sociolinguistics, exploring links between notions of superdiversity, civic identity, linguistic repertoires, plurilingualism, translanguaging and linguistic citizenship. I show how everyday experiences and encounters with multilingualism shape actors' ideologies and in some cases prompt them to adopt practical solutions and strategies in response to the multilingual reality around them. I discuss how these practices have opened up multilingual spaces within a number of institutions in the city. Having gathered my observations in the context of an ambitious outreach programme launched as part of a university project that

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<sup>13</sup> [https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/growth\\_inclusion/2020/05/a-tale-of-cities-local-diasporas-hold-a-key-to-strengthening-international-outreach/](https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/growth_inclusion/2020/05/a-tale-of-cities-local-diasporas-hold-a-key-to-strengthening-international-outreach/)

aimed to develop a new epistemology for participatory research on urban multilingualism I conclude with a critical reflection on the concept of the ‘civic university’ as a catalyst for social change.

My principal argument is that the city as a site of cross-cultural and multilingual encounters is challenged to provide its own responses to multilingualism. It does that in order to meet its statutory commitment to equality of access to services and in order to maintain a workable level of community cohesion where different population sectors partake in key economic, social and political activities. The one-nation-one-language rhetoric loses much of its purpose and utility in the local constituency where in some districts more than half of the population is of immigrant or minority background and maintains distinct traditions and community-specific social and economic networks. Rather than rally behind nationalistic slogans or engage in overt confrontation with national policy by challenging it head-on, the city develops an alternative ideology: a civic identity narrative that embraces local diversity which it uses to brand itself as an entity that is open to the world.

When referring to ‘the city’ I address not just the agencies of local government: it is instead an organic network of institutions in a variety of sectors and the various individual actors that participate in them in the roles of agents and clients. The city language narrative embraces multilingualism and legitimises local practices that respond to the needs of the multilingual reality. It helps empower actors, encouraging them to reflect on their personal experiences and their own repertoires of multilingual practice routines and to draw upon them to find local solutions to practical challenges. I identify four dimensions in which these reflections take shape in the city: facilitating *access* to services, promoting *heritage*, cultivating and harnessing *skills*, and the overarching dimension of *celebration* that incorporates personal encounters and experiences into a display of togetherness around the theme of multilingualism (cf. Matras 2017b).

For actors of minority language background, multilingual practices and ideologies constitute what Brubaker (2005) calls a ‘diasporic stance,’ one that sets them apart from the majority population that is the primary target of neo-colonial, nationalist rallying. The city language narrative embraces these manifestations of diasporic identity. They become an emblem around which local constituents are mobilised to adopt a sense of co-ownership of measures for local support and outreach, which are becoming ever more devolved and de-centralised as austerity forces local government to downsize. This involves delegating a sense of agency: the right to subvert established routines and to introduce new ways of doing things and new solutions to problems. It forges an ideology of civic belonging that implicitly if not overtly challenges the colonial and neo-colonial

positions propagated at national level – those that advocate linguistic and cultural uniformity and which have a place for foreign languages only as a way of strengthening the nation's hegemonic position in the world. This constellation of agency, ownership, local responses at civic level and pluralism of practice routines can be regarded as a decolonial enterprise, notwithstanding the absence of an overtly formulated statement of aims that brands it as such.

## **2 Conceptual anchoring: Decoloniality, diasporas, and urban multilingualism**

Discussions around decolonising cultural policy, research and the education curriculum have been flourishing since the late 1990s, with a trajectory targeting the symbolic decolonising of public spaces gaining momentum post-2020 through the Black Lives Matters movement. Decoloniality seeks to undo what is perceived as Western hegemony over knowledge and, deriving from it, the shaping and legitimisation of practice deemed culturally oppressive. Following Said (1978), Stuart Hall (1992) regards the West as a historical concept that emerged in the Enlightenment and is used for comparison among societies. It forges a binary distinction between the Self and the Other giving rise to a discourse representation that oversimplifies difference. At the heart of the decolonising agenda is the view that there are privileged narratives that dominate at the expense of other perspectives and which are the direct outcome of historical power relations between nations and the economic divisions that these power relations create and perpetuate (cf. Mignolo 2011). For Smith ([1999] 2021) decolonising means redefining privileges. That includes doing away with the representation of indigenous cultures through the prism of Western cultural norms and challenging the concept that the Other must accommodate to the norms of the colonial power.

### **2.1 The university setting**

Universities are regarded in the context of this discussion as sites in which colonial knowledge is produced and perpetuated. This is partly expressed through the division among disciplines, which reproduces pre-defined epistemologies (cf. Bhabra et al. 2018). Holmwood (2018) points out that the rise of the neoliberal university and the view of higher education as the responsibility of individuals rather than a social right limits the space available for new and critical knowledge

production yet further. Similarly, Lorenz (2012) argues that as the societal relevance of universities is defined more and more in terms of its economic relevance to business and industry, Neoliberal Public Management principles produce an environment in which research becomes a commodity. The mass production of knowledge to satisfy league tables and rankings is then accompanied by managerial regimes of permanent control, which Lorenz compares to the power of the Party in Communist regimes. Neary (2020) critiques contemporary concepts of the ‘civic university’ and ‘university social responsibility’ as merely serving that same neoliberal marketing agenda. He calls for an “intellectual insurgency” where genuine civic engagement relies on progressive social movements and political struggles. For Mignolo and Walsh (2018) decoloniality is linked to civil resistance and social movements as well as to the recognition of cultural diversity and the idea of a plurinational state. Critiquing Modernity as the basis of an ontological classification that postulates entities, they see the purpose of decoloniality as introducing a different epistemology, one that foregrounds the experience of relations – or Relationality – and which entails breaking away from established discipline boundaries that shape and create knowledge. Smith ([1999] 2021: 261) however notes that in an environment in which research is increasingly measured in order to assess the researcher’s performance, those who choose to research with and fight for marginalised communities often find themselves in the margins of their own institutions and disciplines.

Since 2018 several UK universities have released statements of intent around decolonising the curriculum promising to use the university space to critique colonial legacies and the notion that Western knowledge is universal and superior and to include other philosophies and knowledge systems. At the time of writing no comprehensive information is available about the implementation of such declarations of intent in UK higher education. Attempts to implement strategic models of decolonial teaching and research in other parts of the world have so far taken a variety of shapes. Auto-ethnographic essays by scholars of non-Western and ethnic minority backgrounds adopt the notion of decolonising as a personal strategy to navigate intercultural encounters and power relations in the Western academic environment (e.g. Joseph 2008; Bhattacharya 2016; Batac 2022). That includes tackling interpersonal styles of communication as well as dominant epistemological stances that deem certain scholarly agendas to be unworthy or fail to take into account research mobility and the transnational identities of those involved in it. For Luke and Heynen (2021) decolonising the university entails using the university as a site for political engagement and anti-racist activism outside the university as well as a teaching and learning platform to critique

colonial history and include disadvantaged and racially marginalised populations. Woldeyes and Offord (2018) describe how the teaching of human rights can be turned into a practical engagement space, moving beyond mere juridical aspects of human rights law and shifting the focus to responding to the voices of those who seek justice and articulate demands for social change. For Pidgeon (2016) taking the commitment to inclusivity beyond “tokenised checklist responses” requires system transformations that allow participants to ‘indigenise’ the academy by embracing what is referred to as “indigenous knowledges and ways of being”. Such structural changes range from the inclusion of indigenous people in leadership positions and advisory committees to the drafting of Aboriginal strategic plans and policies, setting up Aboriginal student services, taking into consideration cultural expectations when drafting ethics protocols for research with Aboriginal communities and the internationalisation of indigenous movements to strengthen exchange and broaden perspectives. Brear and Tsoetsi (2021) discuss an example of structural transformation of research ethics protocols showing how researchers can obtain informed consent by engaging communities verbally and in their own language and without the conventional constraints on confidentiality of personal data, though such accommodation necessarily disrupts procedural norms giving rise to friction with university administrations.

Brooks et al. (2022) address a more wholesale approach to the decolonising of a programme of studies drawing an interim assessment of Romani studies at the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest. According to the authors the programme prioritised hiring staff of Romani background and engaging in advocacy and critique of what was seen as traditional methods of research in the field. Those were deemed to have neglected to articulate the Romani perspective. In particular, the programme’s content is said to have moved away from that of a predecessor summer course in Romani studies. The authors maintain that that course had focused on the Roma as an “impoverished underclass” and sought solutions for their “economic integration”. They state that the new, successor programme shifted the focus to discrimination, segregation and inequalities as well as studying the Romani political movement and forms of Roma resistance as a way of empowering Romani students. In fact the earlier Romani studies summer school programme at CEU did engage with Romani advocacy and gave Romani activists a regular platform. What Brooks et al. (2022) promote as an alternative, ‘critical’ model is one that gives Romani people a voice by being able to showcase a faculty group that is composed entirely of people who identify as Roma and so can be seen as representing Romani interests (cf. Stewart 2017; Matras 2017a). Nonetheless, the analogy drawn between the Romani people as a non-territorial



minority in Europe and colonised nations is pertinent in demonstrating how decoloniality relates to values and methods of engagement that challenge power relations and cultural Eurocentrism. It is not confined to a pre-defined set of historical settings associated specifically with European overseas colonial expansionism.

## 2.2 Decoloniality and language

Decoloniality approaches are thus concerned with a number of issues including

- a) re-defining the beneficiaries of research,
- b) shifting the focus from reproducing what is considered to be Eurocentric knowledge to content that seeks to empower those who have been disadvantaged by historical colonialism and the ideologies that it produced,
- c) incorporating an advocacy agenda into research, teaching and learning that aims to be directly responsive to the needs of participants outside of academia, particularly those considered to be ‘colonised subjects’, and
- d) working beyond academic discipline boundaries toward internationalising a movement to mobilise for a change in power relations.

These are accompanied by an effort to bring about structural transformations within institutions: greater inclusivity of personnel and more diversity of procedures and norms of interaction. In some cases they may even seek to ensure that all or most staff on a programme of studies identify as members of the populations that are being studied. That approach is based on the view that academic programmes and disciplines constitute instruments of power and representation of interests. In this way decoloniality seeks to create new forms of knowledge by diversifying styles and the content of learning as well as using the academic space for activism to bring about social change. That very experience offers an opportunity to derive new knowledge through reflection on the decolonial project itself, which in turn enriches the enquiry agenda.

Applications of the decoloniality paradigm to language have involved a critique of the notion of languages as fixed and self-contained systems and the adoption instead of a view of language as practice that takes on fluid and hybrid forms. Veronelli (2015) regards the coloniality of language as the construction of hierarchies among languages. The latter are associated with the racialisation of speakers of languages considered to be inferior: coloniality links language to civilisation, writing, grammar and knowledge and thus treats it as a representation of power. The decolonial paradigm replaces this view of language by the notion of ‘linguaging’ as a communal act, an activity that is attached to the materiality

of everyday life, forging and negotiating relations. Stroud (2001, 2008, 2018) introduces the concept of ‘linguistic citizenship’ to capture the idea that language is a site of political and economic struggle and that debates around language should serve to give political voice and agency. Linguistic citizenship entails a critique of the ‘essentialising’ links between language and identity promoting instead awareness and respect for diversity and difference. Stroud and Kerfoot (2021) discuss how acts of linguistic citizenship can resist the hegemony of colonial languages. They understand citizenship as a set of interwoven acts of engagement that make subjects and their claims visible and audible, lending legitimacy to political actorhood. Such acts of language are performed outside the institutional status quo in order to create alternative relationships with Others, engage with voices on the margin and create conditions for transformative agency. Using marginalised languages in new spaces as tools to make audible neglected subjectivities can constitute a decolonial act of citizenship, rethinking and engaging new knowledge and reclaiming public space. Heugh (2022) links linguistic citizenship directly to decolonial epistemologies describing how the inclusion of indigenous voices in research and policy drafting serves to counteract historical practices of erasure and to question ownership of knowledge.

### 2.3 Language, community and dynamic repertoires

These ideas of language are connected to an emerging paradigm that reconsiders links between language, place and identity. It seeks to re-conceptualise language by taking account of the layered and dynamically changing configurations brought about by postcolonial mobility and globalisation. In many respects this direction of ‘critical sociolinguistics’ follows a path set by critical theory and cultural studies. It involves the appreciation of ‘diaspora’ as an alternative to constructivist notions of ‘identity’. Stuart Hall (1990) refers to diaspora as an act of ‘positioning’ amidst a ‘creolisation’ of features. Anderson’s (1983) notion of ‘imagined communities’ and Brubaker’s (2004) position on ‘ethnicity without groups’ highlight ‘community’ as a category of practice rather than a collectivity that implies sameness. The dissolution of the link between culture and territoriality is regarded as a key feature of globalisation (cf. Tomlinson 1999) allowing individuals to partake in practices independently of location and across different dimensions, coined ‘ethnoscapes’ in Appadurai’s (1992) influential work. In the paradigm of ‘transnationalism’ (Panayi 2010) diasporas are understood as forming what Werbner (2002) calls ‘communities of co-responsibility’ that act beyond locations and maintain a distinctive life within the host countries, particularly in cities (cf. Cohen 2008).

Vertovec's (2007) concept of 'superdiversity' has been influential in capturing the complexity and dynamism of relations between groups especially in cities, where diasporas exhibit multiple forms of local and global participation. It has been argued that the presence of economically active diasporas with transnational links allows cities to capitalise on a 'diversity dividend' (cf. Glick Schiller 2010; Syrett and Sepulveda 2011) with 'diversity' replacing multiculturalism as a policy paradigm by including the dimension of profitability of difference (Schiller 2015). Urban diversity has been argued to facilitate equality as cities are in a position to support the welfare and development of citizens irrespective of origin (White 2018). Much attention has been given to cities as spaces of cultural convergence. Gilroy (2004) speaks of 'conviviality' as a bottom-up process in urban areas, which can defend multiculturalism against what he calls "revivalist colonialist accounts", while Suzanne Hall (2012) discusses how conviviality is expressed through direct encounters requiring a critical analytical approach to 'community'. Such approach is offered by Blokland (2017) who defines urban communities as spaces of public familiarity in which people congregate around shared narratives of belonging.

Post-colonial, critical sociolinguistics connects to these notions of globalisation and the central role of cities as spaces in which diaspora communities are constantly redefining themselves through a plurality of encounters. Mac Giolla Chríost (2007) and Heller (2010) consider processes of identity formation in cities as 'post-national': they give rise to language policy and planning activities that are best characterised as reciprocal action in an eco-system of different actors rather than under the influence of constitutional prescriptivism. This echoes theorising in urban studies around the ideas of the 'right to the city' (e.g. Purcell 2013, following Lefebvre 1968) where inhabitants engage in meaningful networking to achieve aims that cannot be provided by the state, and notions of 'urban conviviality' (Douglass 2008) where participatory planning takes on an approach to governance that embraces inclusivity and multiculturalism. Case study descriptions of such processes around multilingual policy and practice in UK cities are offered by Matras and Robertson (2015) for city-based actors in Manchester and by Cadier and Mar-Molinero (2012) for a number of institutions and smaller outlets in Southampton.

Blommaert and Rampton (2011) and Blommaert (2010, 2013) address the wider methodological implications of superdiversity (see also Arnaut et al. 2016; Arnaut et al. 2017) calling to move away from the postulation of static correlations between linguistic variables and extra-linguistic descriptors and instead to explore communicative contexts through the lens of linguistic ethnography (cf. also Redder et al. 2013; Stevenson 2017). This has theoretical implications for the study

of multilingual practices. Rampton (1995) discusses ‘crossing’ of boundaries as users adopt linguistic features that are associated with others’ origins (see also Wiese and Kerswill 2022). Jørgensen (2008) calls for a focus on the fluidity of ‘features’ approaching users’ linguistic resources as a wholesale repertoire rather than sets of discrete languages (see also Matras 2009 [2020] for a view of language change in multilingual settings as the product of pragmatic repertoire management and re-shaping of practice routines). Blommaert and Backus (2013) and Busch (2012) define repertoires in multilingual urban settings as consisting not just of language skills but also of experiences of encounters with language. This idea of fluidity of language resources and their flexible deployment by users is captured by concepts such as ‘translanguaging’ (Li Wei 2018b) and ‘metrolingualism’ (Pennycook and Otsuji 2015). It also features in descriptions of pedagogical practice in multilingual settings as explicitly embracing the complexity and fluidity of linguistic resources rather than adhering strictly to prescriptivist notions of language (García and Li Wei 2014; Blackledge and Creese 2010).

## 2.4 An agenda for social change

A sociolinguistic agenda that is decolonial in the sense of some of the works referred to above is presented at least as an aspiration in the introductory remarks to a collection of articles compiled by Creese and Blackledge (2018). Emphasising the need to recognise the new conditions that are created by global migrations and population change, they flag preoccupation with language and superdiversity as an “ideology” that is “equipped to critique forces of discrimination” (Creese and Blackledge 2018: xxiii) and call for an analytical and conceptual framework that requires academic researchers to “communicate effectively with those who can make a difference to policy and practice” and to forge alliances across disciplines in order to “contribute to the creation of more equal societies” (Creese and Blackledge 2018: xxvii).

In the following sections I discuss discourse representations and practices around multilingualism in several sectors and institutions in the city, drawing on the example of Manchester. I show how they present alternative ideologies to nation-state narratives around language and identity, particularly those that have gathered momentum in the public debate in the UK since the Brexit referendum. I show how actors feel empowered to engage in practices that build on their individual repertoires of experiences and exposure to multilingualism in the city, how such practices can constitute emerging micro-level policy changes, and how they are accompanied by an overarching city language narrative that is shaped and broadcast through celebratory events. A contributor to that narrative was the

Multilingual Manchester project, which I founded at the University of Manchester in 2010 and led until I left that institution in 2020. I show how the programme piloted a new epistemology that addressed key elements of the decoloniality agenda. I conclude by briefly addressing the potential contradictions of a civic engagement model that pursues a decolonial agenda while situated within a neo-liberal higher education environment. As a result of historical circumstances, Eurocentric norms, values and approaches to knowledge prevail in that environment. When nationalist positions such as the association of languages with ‘soft power’ compete with the decolonial project over material resources and the authority to determine the content of public messages, there is a risk that the decolonial project might run out of favour with the corporate management structure. Civic engagement for social justice and equality might then have to yield to the commodification of diversity for the sake of corporate branding.

### **3 The setting: Manchester’s multilingualism**

Manchester has a current population of over half a million. In the 2021 Census some 18 per cent of residents stated that they had a ‘main language’ other than English – twice the national average. Even this figure probably underestimates the number of multilingual households. For one there was lack of clarity as to whether the term ‘main language’ represents personal preference, proficiency, or frequency of use (cf. Matras and Robertson 2015). In addition, respondents who would attribute the same or similar importance to English as they do to another language did not have the opportunity to indicate this on the census form. That puts the likely proportion of households that use languages other than or in addition to English at anywhere between 30–40 per cent, or roughly 150,000–200,000 of the city’s residents. This figure does not include the many residents who have acquired foreign language skills through formal studies or periods of residence abroad. Annual school census data since 2012 indicate that between 30–40 per cent of pupils have a ‘first language’ other than English. In five of the city’s thirty-two wards (administrative units with an average population of around 16,000) more than 60 per cent of children speak a language other than English in the home and in another eight the figure is higher than 40 per cent. In over twenty Manchester schools pupils who have a first language other than English make up more than 70 per cent of the school population. Around forty-five Manchester schools identify more than thirty different first languages that are spoken among their pupils. The most frequent are Urdu, Arabic, Somali, Panjabi, Bengali, Polish, French, Yoruba, Portuguese, Chinese, Pashto and Kurdish.

Again the figures are likely to under-report multilingualism as they tend not to take into account children who speak English at home with one parent and another language with another parent. The realistic proportion of pupils with a multilingual background is probably upwards of 50 per cent.

Statistics on the number of languages spoken in the city also vary. The 2021 Census named around 90 individual ‘main languages’ that were reported by respondents and grouped additional languages by region of origin. The annual School Census tends to report upwards of 150 different languages as pupils’ ‘first languages’. Interpreter requests in the health care sector show regular demand for around 120 languages. Many languages remain under-reported since they are regional or minority languages in the countries of origin or are used primarily for oral communication with family and friends, often alongside English. They are therefore not typically identified by speakers as their preferred ‘main language’ or as the principal ‘first language’ of school pupils. Nor do they figure in the list of languages for interpreting requests, either because their speakers also know English or because they ask for interpreters in a third language (often the state language of the country of origin). This is the case for many African languages, for regional varieties of various South Asian and East Asian languages, for non-territorial minority languages such as Romani and Yiddish, and for non-written languages such as Caribbean Creoles and West African Pidgins. Languages that are closely related are sometimes grouped together in the statistics under a single heading. That is the case, for example, for Potwari and Mirpuri, for Kurmanji, Bahdini and Sorani (Kurdish varieties), for various Chinese languages and sometimes even for unrelated languages such as English Romanes and Shelta (both referred to as ‘Gypsy languages’).

Languages other than English with large numbers of speakers in Manchester include Urdu, Arabic, Chinese, Polish, Panjabi, Spanish, Bengali, Somali, Italian, Persian and Kurdish. French and Portuguese are widespread among communities of both African and European origins. Greater Manchester has the country’s highest speaker concentrations outside of London for a number of languages including Yiddish, Somali, Kurdish, and Romani. There are long established speaker communities of languages from different parts of the world including African languages such as Yoruba, Shona, Akan, Nigerian Pidgin English, Hausa, Swahili and Tigrinya, Caribbean languages such as Jamaican Patwa, eastern European languages such as Slovak, Czech, Lithuanian, Latvian, Ukrainian, Romanian and Hungarian, western European languages including German, Spanish and Greek, West Asian languages including Turkish, Armenian, Dari and Pashto, South Asian languages such as Gujarati, Telugu, Malayalam and Tamil and regional languages such as Sylheti and Pahari, and East Asian languages including

Korean, Vietnamese, Malay and Thai. Various languages are used by Manchester residents for liturgical purposes and religious study, among them Classical Arabic, Sanskrit, Biblical Hebrew, Biblical Greek, Armenian and Panjabi. Around 265 Manchester residents declared British Sign language (BSL) to be their ‘main language’ on the 2021 Census. Altogether around 16,000 persons or 3.3 per cent of the city’s total population declared in 2011<sup>14</sup> that they had low or very low proficiency in English, with higher percentages (over 5 per cent) in some areas of the city. Around 10 per cent of households declared that they had no member who had English as their ‘main language’, that figure rising to up to 20 per cent in some districts.

Over fifty languages are represented in the city’s public spaces on signs of local businesses and cultural and religious institutions, adverts and noticeboards, landmarks, parks, health and safety notices and on websites that are managed by Manchester residents and local commercial and cultural organisations (Gaiser and Matras 2016b). The most frequently encountered languages on public signage are Arabic and Chinese, followed by Polish, Urdu, Bengali, Kurdish, Somali, Persian, Romanian, Russian, Lithuanian, Hindi, Gujarati and Vietnamese, as well as, particularly in cultural and religious institutions, Hebrew, Ukrainian and Panjabi.

The city hosts a variety of language provisions.<sup>15</sup> Manchester libraries stock over 25,000 titles in more than twenty languages other than English with a high volume of stock for Urdu and Chinese as well as for Polish, Bengali, Arabic and Vietnamese. Public services maintain provisions for interpreting and translations. The city council’s translation and interpreting service M-Four Translations has around eleven contracted staff and around 200 freelance vendors who respond annually to over 12,000 requests for interpreting and translation in more than 70 different languages. Central Manchester Hospitals, now also known as Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT), maintain an in-house translation and interpreting department with around ten full-time and additional ten part-time staff who are supported by external contractors. Together they respond to around 50,000 annual face-to-face and telephone requests for interpreting in around 100 different languages. Other hospitals and the city’s emergency services rely on a number of local contractors for interpreting and translation who often draw on the language skills of local residents. Manchester’s GP (General

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<sup>14</sup> The breakdown on English proficiency by ‘main language’ for the 2021 census is not yet available at the time of writing.

<sup>15</sup> See ‘MLM Digest’: <https://www.kratylos.org/~raphael/multilingual/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MLMDigest.pdf>

Practice) clinics register upwards of 15,000 interpreting requests annually. Languages with a high demand for interpreting services are generally those that are most widespread in the city, including Urdu, Panjabi, Arabic, Polish, Bengali, Persian, Kurdish, Cantonese, and Somali, as well as Romanian.<sup>16</sup>

A large number of weekend (supplementary) schools operated by part-time staff who are often volunteers offer children and young people instruction in speaking and writing skills in a variety of languages (see below). It is estimated that upwards of 5,000 children from the Greater Manchester area are enrolled in such programmes.

## 4 The Multilingual Manchester project

Multilingual Manchester<sup>17</sup> (MLM) emerged in the academic year 2009–2010 and developed into a new model for high impact and participatory research (for introductory overviews see Matras and Robertson 2017 and Matras 2018a). Its initial objective was to create an overarching and sustainable framework that would offer opportunities to archive the digital outcomes of a series of research projects in languages and linguistics in the absence of dedicated institutional resources to continue to maintain such outputs. The pilot shift to digital submission of undergraduate student coursework in that same year offered an opportunity to archive student work for a new course unit on Societal Multilingualism in which students were directed to explore multilingual needs and provisions in the city. This followed a series of postgraduate research projects that since 2005 had looked at various aspects of the city's multilingualism including city council language provisions (Donakey 2007) and multilingual communities and families (Lo 2007; Osman 2006). From these and other similar works we drew inspiration to encourage local students with various language backgrounds to explore communities to which they had an attachment, and use introspection opportunities to develop new insights, all on the one hand, while on the other hand to open up opportunities for immersion in multilingual communities for those students who had hardly had such opportunities. The project was formally inaugurated in October 2010 in the shape of a website that archived student research on local multilingualism and which soon attracted interest from local institutions including

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<sup>16</sup> For an overview and sources of data see various MLM publications: <http://kratylos.org/~raphael/multilingual/publications/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>, also archived on <https://archive.org> and <https://kratylos.org>



the National Health Service (NHS), schools, community groups and the local authority seeking information and data to guide their own provisions.

## 4.1 A changing higher education environment

In the same year a new coalition government led by the Conservative party introduced a significant increase in student tuition fees. For humanities subjects this amounted to a threefold increase to around £9,000 per year. Public statements defended the move by linking university degrees to earning potential, a rationale that was soon to become embedded into university league tables, which captured the reported earnings of graduates within several months of graduation as a measure of the quality of their programmes of study. By 2012 pressure on universities grew to also demonstrate a ‘return’ on government investment in research in the form of ‘demonstrable impact on society, economy and policy’ and to show ‘value for money’ in the form of a unique ‘student experience’ and employability prospects. This was incorporated structurally into the national evaluation of universities in 2014 in the form of so-called ‘impact case studies’. Scores were linked to financial rewards.

As we reported (Matras and Robertson 2017) the University of Manchester adopted in response a ‘social responsibility’ agenda. Managers entrusted with delivering on that agenda were on the search for university activities that could be flagged as ‘making a difference’ to society. It was in this context that MLM first received recognition within the institution. In 2013 modest resources were provided for a temporary position to support public engagement activities, particularly the running of a student volunteer scheme. Further resources were secured through small grants from a variety of external sources to address specific problems such as language provisions in the health care sector, the application of insights from multilingualism in judicial procedures, supporting so-called ‘new arrivals’ and lesser-known communities such as the Roma, exploring interdisciplinary approaches to superdiversity and running a series of events with public service providers and local authority agencies on the challenges of addressing the needs of multilingual communities. An interactive exhibition on the city’s multilingualism was piloted at a histories festival at the local museum in early 2012 and was subsequently expanded and displayed at schools, hospitals, seminars and workshops and community events. Undergraduate student research continued to be published on the website<sup>18</sup> making original contributions

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18 See <https://www.kratylos.org/~raphael/multilingual/reports/index.html>

to describing language use in local communities and neighbourhoods, first-hand surveys of multilingualism among school pupils, examining multilingual library resources and digital platforms, and more.

A major game changer was the setting up of a student volunteer scheme, the first of its kind in the university hosted at the level of a local programme unit. The first activity was launched at Central Manchester Hospitals in 2013. University students accompanied hospital interpreters to interview patients who did not speak English about their hospital experience and coded the information in a database. The hospital was able to fill a gap that existed in covering the full diversity of its client population when responding to its duty to evaluate patient experience. The volunteer scheme was then expanded to support a variety of organisations including schools seeking information on pupils' language backgrounds, the local police force seeking feedback on communications with victims of crime, speech and language therapists seeking information on language diversity and multilingual upbringing, and community organisations offering English language learning support to refugees and new arrivals.

## **4.2 A new non-linear model of teaching, research and impact**

By 2013 a model had emerged that involved students and junior researchers in interaction with key local institutions across several sectors. Students carried out research to identify needs and volunteered in various sectors to respond to some of those needs. The objective was to promote awareness of and engagement with multilingualism within the local community and to use the university as a space to bring together practitioners and clients of key service providers. The terms 'knowledge transfer' and 'knowledge exchange' adopted in the university environment to denote interaction with non-academics and stakeholders outside the university took on a new practical meaning for MLM: A permanent dialogue was set up involving representatives of different sectors within the university (research staff at different levels, undergraduate and research students and support staff) and external partners and participants to create new forms of knowledge driven by a need to find practical responses to immediate challenges. We described the model as 'non-linear' (Matras and Robertson 2017) since it did not involve the mere 'transfer' of knowledge from the university to external audiences. Instead it acted on prompts from outside the university to engage with problems and develop solutions, reflecting critically on the partnerships and exchange modalities themselves, and then returned to the external partners with proposals for solutions to those problems. Of key importance was the fact that the various part-

ners who engaged in the process retained ownership of their contributions: University students owned their research developed under guidance and through access to research sites; host institutions owned the objectives and deliverables of student volunteer engagement and of co-produced research and public events; and the stability of partnerships based on such revolving ownerships opened up unique opportunities for the research team to develop insights of its own.

By 2020 the MLM activity portfolio included a dedicated undergraduate course unit on the city's multilingualism; it was the first and only lecture from the School of Arts, Histories and Cultures to be opened to students of all university programmes. It had created the largest online archive of research on multilingualism in a given city and the largest archive of undergraduate student research, with around 150 reports authored by over 500 students. It included the first local student volunteer scheme in which around 200 students from various programmes across the university enrolled every year to work. It developed a package of interactive exhibits on languages and multilingualism that were deployed at events and festivals, public libraries, hospitals and schools, and a series of videos that showcased the project's activities and events and provided guidance for multilingual families and an introduction to the city's languages and language practices.

During its lifetime MLM hosted well over two-dozen workshops and conferences bringing together international academics from a variety of disciplines (linguistics, translation and interpreting studies, education, sociology, anthropology, history, modern languages, international relations, general practice and more) with local practitioners from communities, local government and public service providers. It pioneered the public celebration of multilingualism in the form of Language Days – local festivals with stalls, performances, language tutorials, lectures and panel discussions around the theme of languages. These were first piloted in one of the city's neighbourhoods as 'Levenshulme Language Day'<sup>19</sup>, prompting the adoption in 2018 of UNESCO International Mother Language Day on 21 February as an official, annual city council celebration. MLM researchers co-produced reports with public service providers including the National Health Service, the police and the city council with recommendations for provisions for interpreting and translation, and for written communication with clients and English as second or other language (ESOL). These were accompanied by a number of direct policy interventions including an initiative to amend the question on languages in the national census, interventions in city council scru-

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19 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOfhRbxeHWI>

tiny committees on behalf of language supplementary schools and local community groups and the drafting of a City Language Strategy for the city council. The project set up a support platform for the city's language supplementary schools that held regular networking and training events for staff and discussions with policy makers about the public image of supplementary schools and recognition of their contribution to society.

### 4.3 Innovating concepts, networks and resources

MLM also championed the development of digital resources. *LinguaSnapp*<sup>20</sup> was the University of Manchester's very first smartphone application and the first to offer a crowd-sourcing tool to document multilingual signage (linguistic landscapes) by uploading annotated images along with GPS location data to an interactive database and online map. Localised versions of the app have been produced for Jerusalem, Melbourne, St Petersburg, Hamburg, Birmingham and Tallinn. Another online resource, the Multilingual Manchester Data Tool, stores and maps different datasets on languages in Manchester from a variety of sources including the national census, the school census, data on interpreting and translation in the health care sector and more, accompanied by profiles of individual languages and language profiles of city districts (wards). Associated with MLM were also a number of online databases documenting dialects of three of the city's community languages – Romani, Kurdish, and Arabic. These formed the basis for the University of Manchester's first commercial consultancy enterprise in the arts and cultures 'MLM-Analysis' – a forensic linguistic service. It provided expert support mainly to immigration and asylum lawyers representing appellants whose applications for asylum had been rejected by the UK government based on language analyses carried out by government contractors. Counter-expertise reports by MLM-Analysis submitted to the courts helped determine the outcome of over two-dozen court decisions with the courts following the recommendations of each and every report (cf. Matras 2021). The service incorporated contributions from native speaker postgraduate students in linguistics offering paid part-time training in the practical application of linguistic analysis, supporting potential career paths of people of minority language background.

MLM also made a contribution to the internationalisation of research and public engagement. It partnered with a number of university-based projects that replicated key components of the model and embraced a number of its research

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.linguasnapp.manchester.ac.uk/>

methods and research technologies. The programme served directly as a model and inspiration for projects that combined teaching, research and public engagement at the universities of Graz, Queen Mary and Metropolitan University (London), Melbourne, Sydney, Bremen, Hamburg, Oxford, Higher School for Economics (Moscow) and others. At a conference in early 2019 attended by many international partners a manifesto was published calling for the formation for a ‘Multilingual Cities Movement’ as a way of organising collaborative public engagement with academics, students, practitioners and officials to protect and promote multilingualism. The very framing of the initiative as a ‘Movement’ pointed to the aspiration for research and teaching to have a mobilising momentum in an effort to bring about social and policy change.

While not directly situated in a setting where historical colonialism impacted the lives of an indigenous population, MLM can nevertheless claim to have incorporated key aspects of the decoloniality agenda:<sup>21</sup> It sought to re-define the beneficiaries of research placing a focus on local diaspora communities which require support to access key services, protect cultural heritage, obtain recognition of their multilingualism and find a voice as citizens. Branding the city around its multilingualism and language diversity through public celebrations and work with practitioners it aimed to empower actors – practitioners, students and city residents – to draw on their multilingual experience in day-to-day institutional practice. The project adopted an advocacy agenda through direct interventions with local and national government proposing solutions to policy dilemmas around language provisions in interpreting, data collection and sharing and promoting good practice. Its participatory model was thus much more than what Schiller (2016) describes as ‘research in return’, where the researcher contributes analysis in return for access to an observation opportunity. Instead MLM tailored the very agenda of research activities to the need to find practical policy solutions.

Working across discipline boundaries MLM developed an international outlook aspiring not just to create new forms of knowledge but also to mobilise for change in policy and practice. By involving students as both researchers and active contributors to social change in the local community and integrating a body of staff and students from different subject areas and from different backgrounds it created new and diverse styles and content of learning. In various articles and opinion blog posts we directly challenged the colonial ‘English-first’ narrative as

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<sup>21</sup> As de Sousa Santos (2012: 51) comments, treating the terms North and South metaphorically: “a South... also exists in the global North, in the form of excluded, silenced and marginalized populations”.

well as the one put forward by academics who advocated selective language learning as a way to strengthen British power and global dominance while paying little or no attention to the domestic needs of the UK as a multilingual society. We also called for an open and equal form of civic partnership.

In the following sections I provide snapshots from some of these activities showing how the research helped document the voices of actors and their experiences around multilingualism bringing to the fore reflection as well as innovative practices and prompting the formulation of needs, solutions and ideologies of multilingualism.

## 5 Access: The institutional agenda for equality

In the health care sector language provisions are vital for accessibility, managing risks and ensuring the quality of service. They are also seen as a way of avoiding over-reliance on emergency services (cf. Bischoff and Hudelson 2010; Bührig et al. 2012; Ngai et al. 2016; Schuster et al. 2016). The latter consideration prompted the local National Health Service in Manchester in 2015 to approach MLM and commission a study on the accessibility of primary care and preventive care to patients who rely on interpreting (Gaiser and Matras 2016a). This collaboration built on a relationship that had been developing since 2010. Following the publication of student reports on Manchester's languages on the MLM website we were approached by the NHS to help prioritise languages for an online video health care information campaign 'Choose Well Manchester'. The student volunteer scheme began to work at Central Manchester Hospitals (CMFT)<sup>22</sup> in early 2013. The relationship was further strengthened through regular participation of staff from local hospital trusts and the service's Clinical Commissioning Groups in a series of consultations on language provisions that MLM hosted since 2012. For this particular study we were given access to data on interpreter requests at Central Manchester Hospitals and in GP practices for the period between 2013–2016. We also carried out semi-structured interviews and focus group conversations with health care professionals and interpreters and with patients representing different communities about their experience of accessing healthcare and their engagement with language provisions. We found no evidence to suggest that lack of adequate interpreter provisions was driving patients with lower levels of English to turn to

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<sup>22</sup> At the time 'Central Manchester Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust', since re-named 'Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust' (MFT).

emergency or other hospital services rather than to primary care. Our findings did suggest however that patients with limited English proficiency often encountered difficulties in communicating with administrative staff, causing potential obstacles for registration and booking appointments. While in the hospital environment guidelines were applied strictly to ensure that interpreter-mediated communication was carried out by registered professionals, in GP practices a more lax approach was generally adopted often relying on casual interpreting by patients' friends or family members without full awareness of the risks (Gaiser and Matras 2016a).

## 5.1 Interpreting provisions in the health care sector

Our research suggested that Manchester's interpreting provisions, particularly those managed by CMFT were among the most comprehensive of any documented health care system. The reliance on language provisions is derived from the NHS's commitment to ensure equal access to its services. In the absence of national legislation on language (apart from the Welsh Language Act) NHS policy documents usually reference national and international frameworks such as the Equality Act 2010, the Human Rights Act 1998, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950, and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2005. Individual hospital trusts have their own policy documents on provision and use of language services. While principles tend to overlap, implementation guidelines sometimes differ. At CMFT internal guidelines placed the responsibility to book an interpreter on staff if they felt that the patient's knowledge of English was insufficient to communicate effectively with clinical staff even if the patient or their family felt otherwise. By contrast guidelines issued at the time by the University Hospitals of South Manchester stated that patients should decide whether an interpreter was needed. Micro-level policy thus varied across individual institutions even within the same sector.

CMFT set up a face-to-face interpreting service in 1989. At the time of our observations it operated a tiered system: Its in-house interpreting department comprised managerial and administrative staff as well as nine in-house permanent staff who handled face-to-face interpreting, of whom seven provided services for more than one language. Ten so-called 'bank staff' supported the in-house team but were not contracted to a fixed number of hours. Between them, permanent and bank staff handled nineteen different languages and sub-varieties including Urdu/Hindi, Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Panjabi/Mirpuri, Bengali/Sylheti, Polish, Persian/Dari, Somali, Bravanese/Swahili, Gujarati, and

Kurdish, covering around 20 per cent of all interpreting jobs during the observation period. To support high demand and cover additional languages CMFT contracted two private agencies that engaged part-time free-lance face-to-face interpreters and two additional companies to provide telephone interpreting. These contractors usually recruited among a population of first-generation immigrants. For telephone interpreting, free-lance staff were recruited from all across the country and even abroad. The telephone service was usually used for brief interactions such as confirmation of appointments rather than clinical sessions. This planning approach was anchored in local knowledge and monitoring of data collected via the digital booking system. Core staff covered the most frequently needed languages. Coverage of languages that were less frequently in demand ('rare languages' in the internal jargon) was outsourced. This meant that quality monitoring for some languages (around 80 per cent of languages for which interpreting was requested) and for some types of interaction was less strict and sometimes non-existent. The tiered system was thus also a system that instituted a hierarchy among languages as well as a prioritisation of quality assurance while at the same time allowing the hospital to cover an impressive range of languages. This still seems to be an exceptional setup not reported on within or outside the UK. But it is also noteworthy as a case of bottom-up or micro level language policy embedding first-hand knowledge and experience of the multilingual setting rather than scripted directives or legislation on language rights to maintain an effective albeit differentiated system.

In contrast to the hospital environment Manchester's GP practices relied exclusively on external providers for face-to-face and telephone interpreting. Procurement was at the time of the study arranged centrally by an organisation called 'Manchester Integrated Care Gateway' on behalf of the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups. Some practices preferred the instant telephone interpretation service to save administration time and the effort required to pre-book face-to-face interpreters. While patients were not expected to bring their own interpreter GPs often relied on family members or friends and tended not to insist on booking a professional interpreter to replace them.

Overall, individuals in a variety of roles were involved in making decisions on how to respond to patients' language needs. In the hospital setting clinical staff and managers relied on their encounters with patients to assess needs while the Patient Experience Director assumed responsibility for the in-house delivery of the service and the Procurement Director was responsible for external contractors. The contractors in turn relied on free-lance staff who were in effect sub-contractors engaged based on their self-reported experience rather than a formal vetting of qualifications. At GP surgeries and in some hospital environments patients



had a say about the need for interpreting. There were thus many opportunities for a range of participants to assume proactive roles in the process and to co-manage or shape the organisation of individual encounters.

## 5.2 Agency and policy enactment through local practice

In Matras, Tipton and Gaiser (2023) we draw on testimonials to show how the ability of actors (health care professionals or institutional agents, and patients or clients) to take decisions relies on local knowledge and personal experiences gained in the multilingual urban setting. That experience constitutes a resource that informs and empowers them in institutional contexts. In activating that resource, actors assume agency, which in the case of practitioners contributes in effect to policy enactment within their institution (cf. Hornberger et al. 2018, Johnson and Johnson 2015). Interviews with patients and practitioners illustrate how such experiences are processed and how actions are explained and justified: A patient who is an Urdu speaker described how sometimes she would go on her own but preferred to take one of her daughters with her to help communicate since she could only speak basic English. But she found collecting from the pharmacy an easy process as there was a worker there with whom she was familiar and who spoke Urdu. She reported that at the Accident and Emergency service the waiting process was long and she relied on her daughter to help with communication. The daughter of a Mirpuri speaker described how her mother's doctor speaks Panjabi and understands Urdu, which is similar to her mother tongue, so she can communicate with him, but someone usually goes with her. But when her mother went to the hospital she described it as 'a must' for someone to go with her. A patient who is a Romanian Romani speaker reported that her GP left it to her discretion whether she needed translation for Romanian, but also accepted when she preferred to use her phone to look up translations.

The testimonials demonstrated that patients were aware and made use of a range of options to overcome potential language barriers: direct communication, professional translation, reliance on family members and on technical support. In some settings they felt empowered to make choices among those options. These choices were often complementary, made in response to different types of institutional settings. Among the considerations were the local knowledge and awareness of the language skills of particular institutional agents (practitioners). Navigating access to the service and its various outlets thus involved a mapping of the multilingual repertoires and resources of local actors and those present in routine encounters.

A similar picture emerged from the testimonials of institutional agents or practitioners. An optician reported that when translators were not there it was very difficult to communicate. But the same optician also acted as a casual translator for her mother, who was not fluent in English. She reported how very few notices were written in her native language, and while those were helpful, she didn't have anyone there to help interpret her questions. A GP told us that she could "cover all ground" when it came to South Asian languages, and had some familiarity with African languages. After seeing many patients from Romania, she said she started picking up words. Another GP offered explanations about various languages used by patients: "There is three Kurdish languages. There is Kurmanji, Sorani, and Badini. There is two Farsi languages, Afghani and Persian. There is two types of Chinese, Mandarin and Cantonese". We see how personal multilingual experiences intertwine with and inform practice approaches in professional, institutional roles and how the institutional experience serves to develop and expand personal views and knowledge about languages.

The local multilingual setting is mapped and recognised in order to serve as a guide to shape practice (Matras, Tipton and Gaiser 2023). Actors assume what various authors define as 'agency' (cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998, Ahearn 2001, Liddicoat and Taylor-Leach 2020): They feel empowered to take decisions at key decision nodes in communicative interactions in institutional settings: compartmentalising settings and types of encounter, selecting among different options to manage them, enriching provisions and sometimes overriding scripted procedures at their own discretion. They do so drawing on local knowledge and their own history of encounters in the multilingual city. Such knowledge can be said to represent the linguistic repertoires in the broader sense of experiences, as described by Busch (2012) and by Blommaert and Backus (2013): The multilingual urban setting is a source of knowledge about language practices, provisions, options for support and about language itself. This adds a new dimension to observations on the manner in which professionals draw on their own individual language skills (e.g. Cadier and Mar-Molinero 2012; Keshet and Popper-Giveon 2019; Gaibrois 2019). The engagement of researchers with actors (patients and practitioners) for the sake of identifying needs and possible solutions helps to bring such experiences to the fore.

## 6 Multilingualism as heritage

Museums and other cultural institutions have the remit to produce and strengthen identity narratives in addition to being custodians of general knowledge. As Deumert (2018) notes heritage is the outcome of a process of choosing inheritance. Local multiculturalism is not typically regarded as part of that inheritance. Presentation of cultural diversity through exhibits typically offers snapshots of overseas communities that are not or no longer easily accessible. In this context ‘translation’ refers not just to the transfer of content from one language into another but also to the process of interpretation in cross-cultural comparison (Sturge 2007; Silverman 2015). Multilingualism has been addressed in the museum setting as a way of ensuring accessibility and broadening audiences (Martin and Jennings 2015). Noting that the motivation to reach wider audiences often has commercial motivations for the museum as a creative industry, Liao (2018) offers a typology of functions according to which text translation in museums can be informative (giving guidance to visitors), interactive (making visitors feel welcome), political (reinforcing an ideological commitment to inclusivity), social-inclusive (increasing awareness of multilingualism) and exhibitivite (displaying translation as an object) (see also Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen 2016). Others have noted the position of the museum as a space that can offer opportunities to engage audiences with multilingualism by embedding multilingual practices into its mission statement (Garibay et al. 2015; Soto Huerta and Huerta Migus 2015). Neather (2012) problematises the notion of professional translation and shows how the museum can offer a space in which multilingual community stakeholders can interact with curators. Different forms of expertise are negotiated to co-produce translation and to transform the museum into a community of practice in which both professional expertise and community identities can be interrogated.

### 6.1 The idea of a ‘Multilingual Museum’

Since 2015 MLM had been approaching Manchester Museum to promote a multilingual agenda. In 2018 the museum announced an inclusivity policy. Highlights involved re-opening plans for a new South Asia Gallery to consultation with local stakeholders as well as the symbolic repatriation of artefacts from the museum’s collections and their return to Aboriginal communities in Australia. These and

other actions were branded in public as ‘indigenising’ and ‘decolonising’.<sup>23</sup> In late 2018 a comprehensive collaboration plan was developed that included plans to hold events on multilingualism at the museum, carry out museum tours in heritage languages for pupils of language supplementary schools, introduce language taster sessions for museum staff as a way of supporting staff consolidation and wellbeing and more. As the museum launched its refurbishment programme its renewal banner with the motto ‘hello future’ was translated into 50 languages. In February 2020 the museum hosted an evening event organised by MLM to launch UNESCO International Language Day celebrations.

In the spring of 2020, as the museum closed its doors to visitors due to the Covid outbreak, it set up a digital platform offering online access to exhibits from its collection. This was taken up as an opportunity to set up a multilingual platform, branded ‘The Multilingual Museum’. The idea of the platform was to offer a space in which audiences could engage with objects (displayed as digital images accompanied by an English interpretation) in a language of their choice. To that end we introduced the concept of ‘storied translation’<sup>24</sup>, defined as a range of approaches from more literal translations to looser texts including reflections on the objects themselves and on various translation options. It was to be inclusive of a wide range of language forms such as regional dialects and family language repertoires.

## 6.2 Experiences of ‘storied translation’

We understood storied translation as dynamic, fluid, imaginative and a product of individual agency and creativity. It embraced multilingualism as a repertoire of linguistic features rather than a juxtaposition of named languages with strict boundaries. Rather than produce a single definitive translation the goal of the platform was to promote engagement with the museum and its collections. It invited multiple translations of the same object to appear side-by-side even into the same language, as text, audio or visuals. Language was regarded as heritage in its own right. We assumed that the translation process would engage individuals with various levels of language proficiency as well as individuals with various degrees of experience in writing their own spoken language (as some languages

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.museum.manchester.ac.uk/about/thetideofchange/>; <https://natsca.blog/2021/01/06/decolonising-manchester-museums-mineral-collection-a-call-to-action/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://mmhellofuture.wordpress.com/2021/03/12/the-multilingual-museum/>;  
<https://mmhellofuture.wordpress.com/2021/09/30/a-story-of-storied-translation/>

were regional or minority languages that are not frequently written). The process would serve different functions. It would help make some artefacts accessible to new audiences. It would also offer a space for interactive learning and doing about language and culture and an opportunity to showcase the city's language diversity and to connect different generations and community members around discussions about language.

While the online platform was open to all through a simple registration process targeted efforts were made to approach language supplementary schools and mainstream secondary schools. These put together collaborative contributions to the platform as part of classroom activities. The team also approached individuals and families who made voluntary contributions. The process was documented in the form of recorded interviews about contributors' experiences. A Romanian speaker who worked at a nursing home remarked:

Some of my colleagues were saying that while doing this they learnt many new words in English. We also compared words in our languages at work, they were saying how some words are so long in a language and then we started asking so how do you say that in your language and how do you say that in yours. This actually took over our lives. It was impressive... One of the ladies was saying that it would be good for her to do something with her grandchild who is learning English in school. She said they could be then learning together, the grandchild would be learning her language and she could learn more English ... Now that I know how involved Manchester Museum are and how much they care about us, it will be such a pleasure to go [there].

A Somali speaker, born in France, who is a law graduate, said:

I found some words difficult since I did not study in Somali in school and so I wasn't familiar with some of the words like 'circus' and 'zoological'. So I just used English words. ... Once I really got started I was using Google Translate for some words I wasn't familiar with and my knowledge of grammar and sentence structure in Somali to make it work. ... I wanted my native language to be represented. I wanted people to be familiar with written Somali because there aren't many Somali books out there.

A Luganda speaker who is a trained health care professional, said:

To see something like this where there is an interest in my language is exciting. ... We didn't know some of the English terms and so we looked them up online. We also checked some terms in Luganda online. ... I whatsapped my sister in Uganda to check some words. ... Some terms were harder to translate, like 'springtime', for example. We don't have four seasons like here ... So for 'springtime' we kept the English word 'spring'. We also kept the English word for 'science' as we use the English term in our language. ... It was also an opportunity to teach the children how to reflect on our language. ... Having all these languages at the museum, and your own language there, makes you feel included. It shows value for different backgrounds.

### And a Romani (Romanes) speaker from Romania reported:

My daughter was proud to see her language at the museum and know she had done this. It was also important for her to discover ways of spelling and writing in Romanes. She had to create her own way of writing in Romanes ... I wanted her to feel proud knowing that her language is known by other people and used by other people. I wanted to show her that non-Roma also want to see our language represented next to other languages ... We never learnt how to write in Romanes. My daughter used letters from Romanian and English to write it the way she pronounces it. I noticed that sometimes she used 'sh' from English and sometimes 'ş' from Romanian.

Several themes emerge from these testimonials: First, contributors report on feeling proud and empowered to be supporting a major and prestigious local institution in the city. They feel that the presence of their language on the museum's platform is a token of recognition and valorisation of their culture and identity. They feel that it is symbolic of the recognition of their contribution to the city's social and cultural fabric. One might say that they view the incorporation of their language contribution as an institutional act of recognition of their local citizenship, i.e. their belonging to a local civic identity collective. One of the interviewees even acknowledges that this recognition will motivate her to grant the museum recognition in return by visiting more often. This demonstrates how reaching out to audiences to be active contributors (rather than using in-house translation) can widen participation.

Second, the testimonials show how the task opened up opportunities for a dedicated intergenerational dialogue around language heritage (a notion of the family's past, memories, particular traditions that are shared with co-ethnics in the local diaspora, as well as a continuing affinity to their place of origin through family and other connections). Indeed in one of the interviews we learn how the activity prompted a dialogue within the work place among colleagues of different backgrounds where the theme of language and the motivation to complete a language-based task turned into an opportunity to strengthen inter-personal bonds and to develop a local collective identity – a micro-level practice community – around multilingualism.

Third, the task motivates and empowers contributors to act creatively in regard to the design of their own language outputs. Most contributors reported to have aspired to stay as close to the original content of the English model test. Their creativity is identified mainly in regard to the choice of lexical terminology

and, in the case of minoritised<sup>25</sup> and regional languages, in the choice of orthography. Some language users have had little or no schooling in their family language and they possess no writing routine in that language. They turn to their overall repertoire of linguistic resources in order to set or improvise parameters that allow them to introduce a new practice routine into the set of practices for which they have so far used their family language. On the whole they feel empowered to embrace variation in form as well as to take an integrative approach to their language resources. They employ words and writing conventions from the set of features that they have at their disposal rather than aspire to set strict and consistent boundaries between named languages. The symbolism of making a choice in favour of a particular named language identified as the ‘target’ (and representing family heritage, memory and historical belonging) does not stand in contradiction to embracing a multiplicity of forms and features including those that are associated with other named languages. This is what others have referred to as ‘translanguaging’ or ‘metrolingualism’. But here the principle guides the completion of a pre-set task broadly speaking within an institutional framework (or the expectations and parameters set by an institution) involving writing rather than oral conversation.

### 6.3 Co-curating language

We can look at the Multilingual Museum experience both from the perspective of the hosting institution and from that of the contributors. As a cultural institution Manchester Museum can boast another activity as part of its declared postcolonial portfolio, though in this case decoloniality would refer not to the relations with former overseas colonies but to the domestic multiculturalism that has come about in the aftermath of colonialism and often as a result of postcolonial displacement. The local, domestic post-colonialism is a pledge towards inclusivity. For the neoliberal cultural institution inclusivity is part of a business model to widen participation and attain better value on investment.

In terms of cultural policy the Multilingual Museum breaks the traditional mode of displaying ‘foreign’ cultures as primarily overseas exhibits<sup>26</sup> as well as

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<sup>25</sup> I adopt this term here as it seems appropriate for languages such as Luganda, which are not necessarily spoken by a numerical minority but have the socio-political status of a minority language in a given state or region.

<sup>26</sup> At the time of writing Manchester Museum is preparing to open new galleries devoted to South Asia and China, both of which also represent the cultures of local migrant communities of significant size.

the traditional format of displaying ‘cultures’ as discrete entities that are separated from one another. Instead it recognises language as heritage; it embraces the notion of pluralism as a heritage experience, i.e. an inherited memory and package of practice in its own right.

Equally ground breaking for the institution is the invitation to community members (targeting individuals as well as schools and for the first time also community-run supplementary schools) to engage with the museum creatively by contributing content. It is also an invitation to contribute to the curation of a new form of heritage, through the flexibility in choice of form and multi-modality and the inclusion of reflections on the process itself. Traditionally the museum has recruited volunteers for pre-set support tasks involving its own collections and not as co-curators of content.

From the perspective of the contributors the opportunity to partake in this initiative strengthens a feeling of belonging as well as a new feeling of being a collective constituted around the local experience of multilingualism. This brings about an element of a distinct civic identity and communality; they are bound together by a feeling of responsibility and co-ownership of a platform that is hosted by one of the city’s most prestigious institutions. As we saw from the testimonials, the prompt coming from an institution allows participants to open new multilingual spaces at their places of work and even at home, engaging in new conversations and in creative design around multilingualism, enriching existing practices and introducing new ones.

## 7 From heritage to skills

The offer of foreign languages at England’s secondary schools has been declining since the early 2000s. As a result, enrolment has equally been declining both in secondary schools and in higher education. This has been the subject of numerous reports produced by and for academies, research councils and government<sup>27</sup>. They show a dramatic drop of around 50 per cent in the uptake of languages in general, particularly French and German, in the decade between 2000 and 2010, accompanied by a gradual rise in the uptake of Spanish (cf. also McLelland 2017: 33) and for community languages, in particular Arabic, Chinese and Polish. Burnage Academy for boys is a secondary school in what is considered a deprived

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27 E.g. House of Commons briefing on Language Teaching in Schools from January 2020 <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7388/CBP-7388.pdf>



area of Manchester. In the 2020 school census 82 per cent of pupils in the school were recorded as having a home language other than English, with Urdu (40%), Bengali (13%), Arabic (9%) and Panjabi (7.5%) topping the list followed by Pashto, Somali, Italian, Kurdish, Persian, and Spanish. Those who identified Italian and Spanish were mainly of South Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds and had lived in Italy and Spain before migrating on to the UK. Altogether thirty languages were recorded in the school among ca. 860 pupils.

The school has a Modern Languages department that employs at the time of writing five staff members and which offers classes in French (taught by three members of staff) and Urdu (taught by two) to GCSE level specifications (General Qualification of Secondary Education), the lower of two secondary school qualification levels. It is one of just four secondary schools in the city that offer Urdu as an exam subject, the others being two state schools for girls and one independent school run by an Islamic education trust. The school also hosts afternoon and evening classes through which pupils can prepare to take GCSE exams in other languages, particularly Arabic and Italian, led by teachers who are brought in from outside the school. The offer changes from year to year according to demand but the school maintains it as part of a commitment to recognising students' knowledge of heritage languages as a valuable skill and as a way of showing high achievement rates by promoting subjects in which pupils can perform well at examinations.

French is taught mainly by teachers who are non-native speakers to pupils who are non-native speakers. Lessons follow the scripted curriculum that is set by the examination board, which also produces the teaching materials and offers teacher training. Lessons cover primarily preparation for the examination format. By contrast Urdu is taught by teachers who are native speakers to pupils who have had at least some exposure to the language at home. They include pupils whose home languages are Panjabi and related varieties (e.g. Potwari and Mirpuri) as well as speakers of Pashto and Bengali. Urdu lessons draw on materials prepared by the teachers or obtained from a variety of sources including books from Pakistan and audio-visual materials. They are much more interactive than the French classes, relying considerably on pupils' own language experiences.

## 7.1 Valorising language experiences: Multilingual Streets

MLM's engagement with the school began in 2016 in the form of class visits to the university for dedicated sessions around the LinguaSnapp online platform of images of multilingual signs. Participants aged 12–13 were given an induction to the use of online databases, filtering images of multilingual signs by language, outlet

and location. They discussed the implications of a linguistically diverse locality. Pupils took particular interest in exploring signs in languages with which they were familiar as well as exploring the presence of multilingual signs in their own neighbourhood. Through this collaboration the school was prompted to join an initiative to train ‘young interpreters’ giving interested students the opportunity to use their language skills to support school open days and parents’ evenings. These activities were then showcased at a public event on multilingualism and language diversity hosted by MLM at Manchester Cathedral in 2019. The objective was to turn home language skills into a source of pride and confidence.

In the spring of 2019 we launched the Multilingual Streets activity. The school classified the activity as part of its citizenship and social engagement curriculum strand. Its aim was to offer pupils opportunities to explore institutions and areas of the city outside their immediate neighbourhood. The visit day started with a session in a university teaching room. We used as stimuli photos of multilingual signs, the *LinguaSnapp* online map and bespoke worksheets. We encouraged pupils to look at more photos and answer questions about languages they can identify, the reasons that signs might display different languages and what that might tell us about the way we use languages. The discussion raised issues such as the value of languages for identifying the background of shop owners and connecting them with customers of similar backgrounds as well as the visual representation of languages – the sharing of scripts across different languages (which makes some signs accessible to readers even if they did not know the language of the sign) and the difference between spoken language and writing systems.

The workbook also included guiding questions for the second stage: the walk around a multilingual neighbourhood in the vicinity of the university campus. The objective was to transfer the reflection from the earlier session into observations based on street experience. Working in groups of 4–5 the young people were prompted to identify signs in different languages, to take photos or draw pictures of them and to record a short meta-data inventory to accompany each sign stating the languages and script and the outlet to which the sign was attached. For the next session the group moved to the nearby Whitworth Art Gallery. Surrounded by art displays they were provided with a kit of materials for cutting and pasting paper in different colours and were asked to create an artwork poster based on their workbook and street observations. In this way observations were transferred into a multi-modal visual representation using scripts, colour and material shapes to identify themes that appeared to the participants as salient.

In the final activity stage the groups were filmed on video showing and discussing their posters. This offered a 2–3 minute discursive engagement that typically contained the elements of description, explanation and justification

through which different sources of knowledge were drawn upon, activated and integrated. In this way the filming rendered an interpretation of observations, conveyed through art, through the lens of pre-formed pieces of knowledge and ideologies by means of narrating the experience and reasoning. It constituted the final ‘output’. This method of blending observation, artwork and presentation to represent experiences of multilingualism is anchored in a series of works that bring together active pedagogy with multilingualism research (cf. Busch 2015, 2018; Purkardhofer 2016; Bradley 2017; Bradley et al. 2018; Purkardhofer and Flubacher 2022). Its art-based multimodal component drew on earlier work described by Bradley and Atkinson (2020) about the use of bricolage techniques with young people to explore the multilingual city landscape.<sup>28</sup>

## 7.2 Knowledge resources and ideologies

Multilingual Streets was carried out with Burnage Academy pupils on four separate days involving altogether 155 Year 9 pupils aged 12–13. Observations were collected in the form of notes taken by the researchers on pupils’ responses to the preparatory session, pupils’ workbooks, their selection of images, themes and material for the artwork and the filmed performances which were later transcribed and annotated.

In one of those a group reported on how they used their mobile phones to find translations of the word ‘hello’ into various languages. In the extract below they portray the notion of plurality of cultures associated with the city picking up the term ‘communities’. They also connect to the school’s annual celebration of European Day of Languages (one of its posters issued by the Council of Europe shows ‘hello’ in different languages). The experience of observations and discussions on the day is matched through the artwork to relevant knowledge and experienced gained in the institutional context of the school, where the ideology of pluralism is forged through celebratory events:

Boy 1: We worked as a group to capture the many communities within Manchester. As we can see (*gestures to poster*), we’ve used ‘hello’ in all different languages to show how many cultures are within Manchester

Boy 2: We took inspiration from the European Day of Languages ...

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<sup>28</sup> See [https://issuu.com/jessicamarybradley/docs/mls\\_burnage\\_final\\_issuu](https://issuu.com/jessicamarybradley/docs/mls_burnage_final_issuu)

In the next extract the group members relate directly to the street observations and convey how they chose the contrast and plurality of colours to represent diversity. The saliency of the latter as an ideological concept is expressed through repetition of the keyword ‘diverse’ and the construction of a plural form ‘diversities’ – in effect a double reinforcement of the notion of plurality. When explaining the distribution of colours the narrative contrasts the concept of plurality with that of isolation and discrimination, taking sides while juxtaposing ideologies. Boy 2 reinforces this through an explicit expression of pride and appraisal for the pluralism of the locality:

Boy 1: The white represents Manchester and this (*points to black tape around the white area*) represents every-everywhere else. The orange represents all the different language diversities inside of Manchester which shows that this is a very diverse place compared to other places. As we see we see different languages as we walked around town looking at it. (...) There’s black scribbles here well not actually scribbles but in fact they are different em shops and buildings I would explain that how it’s like proper and spread out. Not all languages are in one place being isolated and discriminated in fact it’s all spread out, that’s why these oranges are spread out across the whole thing.

Boy 2: And it shows how like Manchester is a more diverse place and is really good for people who come from other countries. That’s it.

The next extract illustrates how the taught experience of language diversity is interpreted as an ideological stance. That in turn is associated with another ideological stance acquired in the school setting which equally has diversity and pluralism as its salient theme: The pupils report how they connected language plurality with what they learned from teachers about the LGBT community and how they chose to represent language diversity through colours in a similar way to the display of colours on the LGBT flag. The keywords ‘different’ and ‘multi’ represent the saliency of plurality while the choice of colours for the ‘language flag’ is explained through the association of colours with various national flags with which the pupils are familiar through their personal experience and family history (hence the mention of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Italy):

Boy 1: So basically we drew we drew this flag (*points to flag on poster*) because we were inspired when today morning, we have to go outside and look at all the different shops and they were all in different languages, so we (...)

and uh (...) And then the teachers talk about the uh LGBT flag so we thought why not doing a multi- (...) multi-language flag

Boy 2: And LGBT (*points to poster*) has different colours in it so we got we got that idea but used it in a different way, put random colours in different places, which made it look very (...) vibrant

Boy 1: 'Cause different lang- 'cause different flags have different colours so like make it colourful and everything

Boy 2: So for example, red (*points to colour on poster*) and green uh technically stand for Bangladesh

Boy 1: Or it could stand for Italy

Boy 2: Pakistan

Boy 1: Different countries

In the final extract the speaker is explaining a poster inspired by the image of a local restaurant front that displays the outlet name and menu highlights in English and Arabic. On the poster itself the boys inserted the name of the outlet in English along with word 'halal' in Arabic script. They also added the word 'Bangla' in Bengali script along with a colour combination based on the Bangladeshi flag, although the outlet itself does not contain any Bengali writing or imagery. The boys are thus responding to the task by connecting to a real outlet encountered during the street observation while at the same time adjusting it to convey their own personal knowledge gained in the family setting. As justification for that adaptation the speaker reverts to the ideological stance that the city as a whole is multicultural:

Um (...) our poster shows how multicultural Manchester really is. Um, this particular culture is Bangladesh and Bengali is (*points to Bengali writing on poster*) um some Bengali words and (*points to flag*) that's the flag ... Um it also has Arabic [0.18 inaudible] It says [0.20 inaudible] here and (*laughs*) (...) yeah (...) The shop's name the takeaway's name is Al Bukhari and it's in a very busy part of Manchester and it's also (...) a very like (...) um multicultural place a whole as a whole.

The performance on camera to an imaginary audience prompts the pupils to engage in a speech event that serves several functions and combines several different actions of speech: It is a *description* of an artefact (the poster) accompanied by an *explanation* of the choice of objects depicted and the choice of materials used to represent them. It also offers a *justification* for the choice of themes, which in turn is anchored in an ideological stance. The recurring theme is that of plurality, conveyed by the keywords 'diverse', 'multicultural' and similar, and this appears to be what the pupils perceive as most salient from the content that was communicated by their instructors on the day. The pupils also appear to associate

successful completion of the task with active embracing of an ideological stance. In doing so they create a synthesis of various sources of knowledge. As in the school learning routine they draw on the day's workshop discussion and the observations they were instructed to record. But they also incorporate elements of knowledge acquired through other school activities that are deemed relevant to the theme of plurality as well as their own personal knowledge and experience, in particular elements of their own multilingual repertoires.

As a method of engagement this shows how guided observation and recording of observations can valorise personal knowledge and experience, which comes to the fore in the form of a performance. From the school's perspective the activity offers an educational experience that helps pupils attach value to their personal knowledge and experience as a marketable skill. That skill can be used to obtain formal qualifications and so it can be deployed as career boosting capital. But it can also help pupils build confidence as equal members of the local civic community with rights and obligations – an explicit goal of the citizenship curriculum. All this is achieved by bringing a group of students out of their everyday environment and into a place that they have not previously visited prompting them to observe and reflect on that environment through a familiar lens. The school documented the activity through a permanent display within the school building of text and images including a 'zine' produced by artist Louise Atkinson based on the collages that the pupils created on the day. It became in this way a permanent multilingual space in the physical sense, and symbolic and an acknowledgement of the multilingual spaces that pupils experience in their daily lives and which are often excluded from the institutional environment of schools.

The engagement strategy pursued through Multilingual Streets was to create a setting that is equipped to accommodate a university-external audience for a bespoke activity. This contributes to breaking down barriers between the university as an institution and a population that is otherwise unlikely to connect with it. However, the direct and short term marketing value in terms of potential student recruitment (which is normally the target behind such visit days to the university) remains questionable both in light of the age group involved and their educational background (only some pupils from this school continue to acquire the higher secondary school qualification that is a prerequisite for admission to university). The value to the university must therefore be measured in a different way. Bradley et al. (2018) suggest that collaborative arts-based research can allow voices to be audible. This captures a key ambition of the decoloniality agenda to use the higher education environment as a platform for those who have been marginalised. Activities like Multilingual Streets could be seen as a contribution to long-term capacity building in citizenship. The university's stake in this activity

is not to strengthen its own capacity but instead to act as a responsible contributor to the civic community around it.

McLelland (2017: 201) discusses how lobbying in favour of teaching languages in British schools has partly been driven by a consideration of social equity, aspiring to make available to all pupils offers that had earlier only been made in private sector schools. A further lobbying rationale cited as gaining momentum is one that regards languages as skills and attributes an economic value to language learning, arguing that it is necessary to facilitate trade and economic growth (cf. Holmes 2018; and see above). The importance of language learning is attributed to the individual's set of skills and the opportunity to draw on those skills for economic prosperity.

The dimension of citizenship and belonging is rarely addressed; it is not mentioned in McLelland's (2017) overview or in the contributions to a collection by Kelly (2018). Identity is more widely discussed in connection with community-based supplementary (or complementary) schools that teach the languages of diaspora communities outside the mainstream state curriculum. Blackledge and Creese (2010) observe that while teachers often reproduce and promote ideologies of nationalism in relation to the origin countries as part of the intergenerational transmission of community languages, pupils sometimes question these ideologies and act to 'disinvent the national' (Blackledge and Creese 2010: 194). Huang (2020) argues that heteroglossic awareness penetrates ideological stances rendering a 'stratified ideological ecology' where the value of the Standard language of the origin country is recognised but also contested in regard to certain contexts of interaction. In Matras et al. (2022) we showed how supplementary school staff justify new ideological dispositions that embrace multilingual repertoires relying on juxtapositions of types of language practices on the axes of time and space: In the Here and Now of the diaspora reality it is seen as legitimate, practical and sometimes vital to recognise linguistic variation actively.

### 7.3 Language supplementary schools as a diasporic stance

Well over fifty supplementary schools operate in the Manchester area catering for a diverse range of languages that include Chinese, Arabic, Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, Finnish, Bengali, Panjabi, French, Greek, German, Farsi, Kurdish, Armenian, Czech, Turkish, Lithuanian, Greek, Amharic, Uyghur, Tamil, Japanese, Somali, and more. Madrasahs offer instruction in Quranic Arabic often through the medium of Urdu and Yeshivas and 'Sems' (Jewish religious schools for boys and girls, respectively) teach Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew often through the me-

dium of Yiddish. MLM's engagement with supplementary schools began soon after the project was launched. Supplementary school staff members were invited to attend networking events and contribute information to a Digest report and video about the city's multilingualism<sup>29</sup>. In early 2017 we launched a Support Platform that offered regular networking and training events to supplementary school staff including workshops on how to address regional and dialect variation. Statements and scenes from supplementary schools were featured in a number of MLM video productions<sup>30</sup> and the project hosted end of year celebrations for schools and invited local politicians to attend. In a number of events and conferences we gave supplementary school staff a platform together with international academics and representatives of public services and the local authority. Supplementary schools were invited to take part in Language Day celebrations and to contribute to the Multilingual Museum platform. We published a number of research and policy reports on supplementary schools and initiated an event hosted by Afzal Khan, Member of Parliament for Manchester-Gorton, at the Houses of Parliament in 2019 which featured contributions from Manchester's supplementary schools and from supplementary school staff and pupils from other parts of the country. In late November 2018 we were invited to attend a meeting of Manchester City Council's Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to make recommendations in regard to a possible municipal policy on supplementary schools and some recommendations were included in a draft City Language Strategy that we compiled by invitation of the City Council in the summer of 2018.

The local authority's statutory responsibility around supplementary schools is limited to monitoring safeguarding issues – from the adequacy of infrastructure through to ascertaining child protection provisions such as background checks on staff. The relevant children's services unit is also entrusted with supporting the delivery of the government's Prevent Strategy launched in 2011, which means maintaining a level of alertness toward any indications of radicalisation and extremism. This targets in particular establishments that serve the Muslim population. Staff members at supplementary schools generally feel unease in respect of visits by the city council's children's services unit and regard them as a form of surveillance while on the other hand they are keen to enjoy any benefits that cooperation and good relations with the local authority might bring. That ambivalence is at the heart of the relationship between the local government and supplementary schools. Government authorities do not intervene with or

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmTDzsPrBp8>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.kratylos.org/~raphael/multilingual/manchester-arabic-school/index.html>



support language supplementary schools and there are few government statements that relate to them. In March 2019 the government published an ‘Integrated Communities Strategy’<sup>31</sup> in which it acknowledged that respondents to a survey noted “the value of supplementary schools in improving educational attainment” though the government responded to that by expressing concern about safeguarding and the risk of “harmful practices” (p. 14–15).

In 2019–2020 we carried out a questionnaire and interview-based survey speaking to 32 staff members in 24 different supplementary schools that teach altogether 21 different languages (cf. Matras et al. 2022) and we collected questionnaire responses from over 120 parents associated with 11 schools with the purpose of documenting parents’ motivations to send children to supplementary schools and staff experiences and attitudes to challenges, relationships with external organisations, classroom practices and more. Asked about their motivation to send children to the supplementary schools 91 per cent of respondents answered ‘to understand family and cultural heritage better’ while only 40 per cent stated that they wanted their children to attain a further UK qualification based on their language skills. Asked more specifically about the language skills that are most important for their children to develop at supplementary schools over 80 per cent identified reading, writing and understanding conversation, while only 38 per cent named obtaining a formal qualification. Just under half of respondents indicated that their children intend to take a GCSE qualification in the language. The sample thus tends to show some hesitation in regard to expectations for the skills aspect of heritage languages, which might be interpreted in light of the fact that supplementary schools operate on the fringe of the education system and lack the formal recognition that is normally associated with skills qualifications. However, the following statement from the head teacher of one of the Chinese schools indicates that attitudes are shifting at least in regard to languages that are more seen as having global economic value:

Some parents, they think that it is very important for their children to understand their heritage and all that, but I’d say for most of the parents the qualification is the most important thing and [the most] useful thing. It helps when you apply to university.

Families equally see a benefit in supplementary schools for languages that are offered at mainstream schools, such as French, as expressed by a teacher from a school that caters to the Cameroonian community:

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31 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/777160/Integrated\\_Communities\\_Strategy\\_Government\\_Response.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/777160/Integrated_Communities_Strategy_Government_Response.pdf)

Yeah, I have some children who have been attending the lessons for several years and the best thing about it is that they choose French at school and they do their GCSEs in French.

For other languages staff members tend to confirm that the principal motivation is related to heritage and maintaining a community support network, as the following statements from the head teachers of the Armenian and Polish schools demonstrate:

First of all they want to learn, that children learn Armenian, and then they want to keep the Armenian community close together, and learn Armenian culture, and that's it.

When we first started it was as I said previously to maintain the Polish language with a view of going back to Poland ... From 2004 it changed again because we had the new economic immigration from Poland ... so we became a support mechanism basically ... there was quite a significant amount of bullying going on of the children in the mainstream school, ... So we were there to support the children, support the parents.

Beyond the view of language as a practical skill for communication with family relations and friends, partaking in language lessons and maintaining a dedicated institution to provide them is seen as a form of resilience, one that provides and promotes confidence and strengthens a sense of belonging in the diaspora setting.

The testimonials also suggest that supplementary schools contribute to forging a new ideological stance to language and through that also to the diasporic reality of 'community' as one that brings together people of different backgrounds. This is particularly apparent in the Arabic speaking community that includes populations from different countries in which Standard Arabic is the official language but different vernaculars are spoken. For pupils these vernaculars constitute their spoken home languages. They bring them into the supplementary school environment, prompting recognition of dialect variation in the institutional setting, something that is absent from the educational system in Arab countries, as describes by a teacher from one of the Arabic schools:

I mean, I have a lot of variety in my class, like people from all different backgrounds, they speak different dialects and sometimes I don't understand a word myself, so I ask them to explain more, you know. I feel like this would help communication between me and the students, because you know, they would think about another word, another way to say this word which I can't understand, so that would really help them learning I think.

Active engagement in the classroom with regional variation is also reported from other supplementary schools (Matras et al. 2022), such as the head teacher of the German school:

We have Standard German as the main language, but sometimes we do bring this into play and we have one child, he only spoke Swiss German ... The mother of this boy came in and she did Swiss and I did Bavarian,... and we said 'yes, this is what we are fluent speakers of', another language – nearly – because the grammar is different, the vocabulary.

This indicates that supplementary schools are offering what Li Wei (2018a) describes as a 'translinguaging space', one in which exhaustive use of the multilingual repertoire is accepted and supported; that, despite the fact that the mission statement of supplementary schools is to promote and support particular languages that are associated with the national heritage of particular diaspora communities. The reality is one of accommodation to the local multilingual setting using classroom engagement with language as a new action routine through which a novel, complex and integrated sense of belonging to a pluralistic community is forged. While the ideology that questions monolingual language norms has been described for the supplementary school setting more widely (Huang 2020, Blackledge and Creese 2010, and others), MLM's engagement with the schools contributed directly to valorising ideologies of pluralism. In partnership with other researchers we held a series of conferences and training workshops with supplementary school staff on language variation. Their aim was to sensitise teachers to issues of language variation and help them gain confidence in addressing vernacular and regional language forms in the classroom. Our observations and conversations with staff informed a policy report that called for more consideration to be given to non-standard varieties (Matras and Karatsareas 2020).

## 7.4 Local citizenship as pluralism

The sense of pluralism emerges from the testimonials also in regard to regional languages of the countries of origin as well as the reality of families of mixed backgrounds as a feature of the diaspora setting, as described by the head teacher of the Persian (Farsi) school and by a teacher from the Russian school:

Yeah, in fact this gentleman we tell you the little one is speaking 3–4 [languages], because the dialect of the father and the dialect of the mother is a Kurd but then of course the national language is Persian, Iranian or Farsi that's why they bring them here – but they are quite proud that the kids can speak the other languages.

You can see a lot of backgrounds, like a Pakistani dad and a Lithuanian mum, but the Lithuanian mum decided to carry on with the Russian language, because parents come – my mum just arrived yesterday – so she speaks Russian with my kids, so it is very important to carry on with the language. But a lot of people are actually going to Arabic school and continue to go to Russian school as well. So if family are supportive ... so we are happy too.

Skills are normally regarded as the ability and confidence to use knowledge effectively and readily in order to execute performance. Most policy reports on languages in the UK from recent years use the collocation ‘language skills’ without offering a specific breakdown of the element of knowledge that is cited, implying that the default understanding of skill is proficiency in the use of language structures and the ability to follow and produce texts and conversation. McLelland (2017: 48ff.) discusses how language attitudes in Britain are a legacy of the late medieval and Enlightenment periods where the nobility learned languages as an emblem of cultivated fashion but also as practical knowledge to support foreign travel while the middle classes learned languages to support their profession. In 2021 the Silenced Voices report published by the think tank ‘Global Future’<sup>32</sup> addressed what it called the “secret bias against community languages that is holding back students and the UK” and made an emphatic case for supporting the teaching of community languages. It pointed out the effect of the Covid lockdown in 2020 on attainment of qualifications reporting that in 2020 there was a 41 per cent drop in the uptake of A-level (higher secondary school qualifications) for community languages and a 28 per cent drop in GCSE qualifications due to the lack of accessibility of supplementary school learning facilities. It calculated that this led to 12,000 fewer qualifications than in the year before, which damaged young people’s chances of gaining entry to university and to well-paid jobs. The report repeated familiar arguments about the need for investment in skills for the benefit of the economy in general and for international trade post-Brexit; but it also pointed out that in the case of young people of migrant and ethnic minority background, recognising their home language skills could serve as an instrument of social mobility.

The attitudes expressed by supplementary school staff members and the evidence from ‘performances’ by secondary school pupils from Burnage Academy indicate that the study of heritage languages can be used as knowledge – a skill – to understand the complexity of society and promote adaptability by embracing

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32 <https://ourglobalfuture.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/global-future-silenced-voices-report.pdf>

values of pluralism. It is a cultivation of heritage not necessarily just in the form of assessed language proficiency but as what Deumert (2018) describes as an “array of features”.

Conscious exploration of the multilingual reality that is present particularly in ‘global cities’ offers a pathway to build confidence and assertiveness when acting in a pluralistic society, not just economic gain or measurable personal capital. Here it is necessary to embrace a definition of ‘global cities’ that goes beyond Sassen’s (1991) widely cited understanding of an international economic centre, accepting instead that captured by of the notion of the ‘worlding’ of cities as a “nexus of transnational ideas” (Ong 2011: 4) with an emphasis on a wider set of relations that follow a vision of ‘being in the world’. Müller (2021) applies the ‘worlding’ concept to a critique of linguistic privilege suggesting an “opening up of knowledge production to the world” (Müller 2021: 1454). This reminds us of Pratt’s (1991) notion of ‘contact zones’ as spaces where cultures come into contact, often with unequal power relations. In such spaces community must be viewed as horizontal cooperation across cultures rather than a hierarchical identification with an idealised notion of homogeneity. This instigates reflection on the multilingual environment and on multilingual experiences and encounters. It offers an opportunity to explore the disconnect between language and place, and between language and pre-defined ‘community’ boundaries. It prompts instead acceptance of variation and multiple belongings.

Such experiences build knowledge that can be drawn upon to negotiate the pluralistic reality. Language skills seen from this perspective are not just about attaining qualifications and having the proficiency to use the structures of a given language. They are about the ability to take a differentiated approach to heritage and a confident and informed – ‘skilled’ – approach to one’s own position in a diverse urban community. They help build civic identity or local citizenship. It is a perspective that foregrounds the benefits of language learning, language cultivation and multilingual awareness for individuals and their community and thus for society as a whole rather than primarily for the state’s economy and national security. Instead of being driven by the quest for ‘soft power’ – essentially the ambition to control others without having to use force – multilingual awareness is about developing skills to interact and exchange outside and beyond a hierarchical, hegemonic structure.

## 8 Celebration: building a belonging

Since the early 2000s various Manchester schools have been putting on events to mark the Council of Europe's European Day of Languages. They are usually organised by the schools' modern languages departments to encourage and showcase the teaching of French, German, Spanish and sometimes other languages. Some schools use the occasion to encourage pupils with home languages other than English to contribute by showcasing their own languages. For example, an event that I attended at a secondary school in 2019 included performances by pupils taking Spanish and German reading out lines and acting out a sketch, and one by a group of children of Romanian background who put on an act entitled 'Romania has got talent' (mimicking a famous British television show) in Romanian. For many years Manchester Metropolitan University has been running a city-wide annual event in local schools called Mother Tongue Other Tongue that features a poetry competition where pupils are encouraged to use their home or heritage languages. The Council of Europe brands European Day of Languages as a 'celebration of language diversity'. MLM adopted the notion of 'celebration' on a few occasions when partnering with other organisations. For example, in the spring of 2019 we organised a 'Celebration of faith and language diversity' at Manchester Cathedral which, following the template of church ceremonies included readings from scriptures in different languages and musical and dance performances as well as an exhibition (of books and scriptures in different languages). The event also included workshops featuring Burnage Academy young interpreters' experience, deaf people's use of sign language, personal language biographies, conversations on the benefits of bilingualism and on language and scriptures.

### 8.1 Language days

The first city-wide public event pitched as a celebration of Manchester's language diversity was Levenshulme Language Day, organised by MLM in October 2015. Levenshulme is a residential ward with a mixed population of lower and middle-income families. It includes a sizeable population of South Asian and Eastern European backgrounds and a growing number of White professionals. It is a city council priority regeneration and development area due to its geographical proximity to the universities and city centre. MLM had a good relationship with the

elected city councillors who represented the ward as well as with the ward coordinator, a city council officer. The idea was to use the location and contacts to make a public statement about the city's multilingualism. Community groups, artists, and supplementary schools were invited to make contributions in the form of stalls, music and dance performances, language taster sessions, workshops and films. They were able to reclaim public spaces to perform and showcase their languages and cultural heritage.

The event took place on a Saturday across three venues in close proximity to one another: the Saturday neighbourhood market, a community centre and a youth centre located on the district's high street. Local politicians were invited and used the occasion for photo opportunities, widely circulated on social media. Ahead of the event the city council used its weekly column 'Be Proud' in the local newspaper *Manchester Evening News* to print a text that MLM staff composed but was attributed to the Deputy Leader of the City Council, carrying her picture. It presented the event as a joint initiative of MLM and the city council and referred to Manchester's language diversity as one of the city's unique assets. Several months later, in February 2016, the Deputy Leader attended the launch event of *LinguaSnapp* at the University. In her speech at the event she mentioned how languages can be a bridge to bring people together and how they offer opportunities for the city's economy.<sup>33</sup> The speech had been prepared by the city council's Equality team based on briefings that MLM provided.

## 8.2 A city language narrative

By this point the city council had adopted an explicit position on the city's multilingualism that was informed by MLM research and the positions drafted by the project. Research and recommendations were forming the basis of an emerging policy approach. We continued to work with the elected councillors for Levenshulme and in late 2016 we drafted together with them a resolution to the city council's assembly calling for the adoption of UNESCO International Mother Language Day as an official, annual city event. For technical and procedural reasons that resolution could not be put on the assembly's agenda but it was widely circulated. In February 2017 MLM organised the first official event to mark UNESCO International Mother Language Day in Manchester in the form of a panel discus-

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<sup>33</sup> <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Speech-23rd-Feb-2016.pdf>

sion held at the Central Library in the city centre. The panel included practitioners from several city council departments as well as the Lord Mayor and the Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills. The latter two, representing the city's leadership, read out statements prepared by MLM, and by MLM via the council's Equality team, respectively. These statements were then published on the MLM website<sup>34</sup> documenting an emerging city council policy direction on languages, scripted largely by the project and made public through events instigated and hosted by the project.

This emerging policy narrative included a reference to the number of languages spoken in the city. In a university press release accompanying the publication of census data on languages in January 2013 I was quoted as saying that at least 153 languages were identified in the city (the census had only listed around 70). That figure was based on the latest school census for Manchester which surveyed pupils' reported 'first languages'. A number was included mainly because the university's media relations officer, a former political activist who became enthusiastically engaged with MLM, was of the opinion that citing a number would lend the press statement the news-item edge that it required to obtain media attention. The statement was cited by the BBC<sup>35</sup> as well as other media outlets. Then, in the spring of 2013 we engaged a group of assistants and final year students to carry out a survey of language provisions in Manchester. The outcome was a report entitled 'Multilingual Manchester: A Digest'<sup>36</sup>. The launch of the report in August 2013 at a public meeting with stakeholders from a variety of service providers was accompanied by another University press release<sup>37</sup> that carried the headline 'Manchester is Britain's City of Languages'. It reported that we estimated that there could be up to 200 languages spoken by long-term residents in the Greater Manchester area. Thanks to the proactive work of the media relations officer the story was featured in *The Independent* newspaper with the headline "200 languages: Manchester revealed as most linguistically diverse city in Western Europe"<sup>38</sup>. Several other daily newspapers also carried the story. In March 2015, the UK's Association of Chief Police Officers launched the #WeStandTogether campaign to promote solidarity among groups of different faiths and cul-

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<sup>34</sup> <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/living-in-a-city-of-languages/>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-21278437>

<sup>36</sup> <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/MLMDigest.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/manchester-is-britains-city-of-languages/>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/200-languages-manchester-revealed-as-most-linguistically-diverse-city-in-western-europe-8760225.html>



tures. The initiative was a response to the rise of far-right extremist attacks targeting in particular Muslim communities in the aftermath of a wave of terrorist attacks by individual Muslim extremists across Europe. At the launch event Manchester's Chief of Police referred to Manchester as a city of 200 languages. The statement was repeated many times on social media and became emblematic of the campaign's ethos and objectives to bring together people of various backgrounds and to acknowledge and safeguard the city's multicultural fabric.

In May 2017 a suicide bomber attacked a music event at Manchester Arena, killing 22 people. The fact that the attacker, of Libyan background, was raised in Manchester added to the shock of what was one of Britain's worst terrorist attacks. The city united in expressions of grief, which quickly embraced the motto of cross-community and inter-faith solidarity. The Guardian newspaper's report on the day following the attack<sup>39</sup> cited in its second paragraph the fact that "200 languages are spoken in Manchester". In the online edition it inserted a hyperlink to the University of Manchester press release from August 2013. The message about the city's language diversity was repeated many times on social media as residents linked to the article and to the original University press release. In October 2017, MLM held its second Levenshulme Language Day. This time local politicians coordinated their visit to the event and broadcast it widely on social media. They connected the theme of multilingualism to their commitment to support local community groups and community cohesion in general. In 2018 the city council's Libraries department decided to adopt UNESCO International Mother Language Day (IMLD) as a regular annual event. It invited MLM to participate in a planning group for activities across the city. The template for that year's activities largely replicated the format of Levenshulme Language Days: interactive stalls at three neighbourhood library venues across the city targeted families, as the day (21 February) typically falls during a school mid-term holiday week. At our initiative the day was uniquely branded 'International Mother (and Father) Language Day' in order to prompt critical reflection on the ambiguity of the term 'mother tongue' and to equally acknowledge and encourage the contribution of male parents to the transmission of home and heritage languages.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/may/23/i-heart-manchester-thousands-gather-at-attack-vigil>

### 8.3 Performing multilingualism

In the spring of 2018 the city council's Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills commissioned a local poet to write a 'multilingual poem' celebrating the city. It was called 'Made in Manchester' and was launched as a crowd-sourcing project with the aim of prompting residents to add their own lines in their own home languages. Schools were invited to make contributions but the response rate was relatively low. MLM was approached to support the project and a student assistant collected around half of the fifty contributions to the first batch. Some of the contributions from schoolchildren were documented in a video released in the spring of 2019<sup>40</sup>. It was accompanied by an artwork that featured notes with schoolchildren's writings in numerous languages and a digital exhibit of the multilingual lines along with translations, both displayed at the Central Library foyer. The poem featured Fulani, Swahili, Somali, German, Italian, Cantonese, Albanian, Hindi, Latvian, Twi, Irish, Yiddish, Arabic and other languages. It used a crowd-sourced artistic performance and multi-modal promotion to make a public statement of belonging: it uses multilingualism as an emblem of belonging to the city and flags the participation of multiple co-creators as a symbol of plurality and democracy. Its emphasis is on contributors' emotional attachment to languages rather than on skills, qualifications or 'high culture'. In that respect it contrasts with a production released a year later, in June 2019, by the Creative Multilingualism project at Oxford University. That project commissioned a composer, a musical director and professional musicians to create a song 'We are children of the world'.<sup>41</sup> A children's choir performed the song in Arabic, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Swahili and Urdu. The producers decided to include the languages spoken by children in the city's schools rather than the modern languages subjects that are taught in those schools and pitched a connection between language diversity and universality. The Manchester poem on the other hand addressed belonging to the locality. It kept the contribution of professional artists to a minimum and maximised the number of contributors featured in the video in the form of individuals reading out lines that they had written themselves. It combined diversity with individuality and the branding of a local civic identity, aspiring in that way to have a mobilising and rallying effect.

In 2018 a consortium of Manchester City Council, the University of Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University successfully submitted a bid for the

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<sup>40</sup> <https://literacytrust.org.uk/news/made-manchester-manchester-launches-multilingual-community-poem/>

<sup>41</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=32HSJ-plqY8>

city to become recognised as a UNESCO City of Literature. The bid drew heavily on MLM's activities and highlighted the city's multilingualism as a unique feature promising to build cultural engagement around it. The consortium launched Manchester City of Literature run by a board of trustees and funded by the three organisations, which then took over the organisation of UNESCO International Mother Language Day. The branding of the day reverted to the official UNESCO format and the unique Manchester title (with reference to the 'fathers') was withdrawn. As in the previous year, IMLD 2019 featured interactive stalls at several neighbourhood libraries including a larger festival-like exhibition of stalls and performances at the Central Library. Following the template of Levenshulme Language Day they were run by community groups and supplementary schools. The event was supported by the MLM public engagement team and student volunteers.

Coinciding with the IMLD 2019 events was a conference hosted by MLM and devoted to 'university public engagement with multilingualism'. It brought together academics and local practitioners, public service representatives and city council officers. For IMLD 2020 MLM organised an opening evening event at Manchester Museum which included around twenty stalls and activities, and a further daytime festival-like event at the Central Library. Other institutions also embraced IMLD celebrations. At Central Manchester Hospitals a Language Day briefing and information event was held for clinical and support staff organised by the Equality & Diversity Unit during a lunch hour with short presentations from the Interpreting unit including demonstrations of phrases from some of the more common languages of hospital patients.

In the following year (February 2021) events were held online due to the Covid outbreak. Manchester City of Literature, by now a registered charity organisation with several paid staff, took the lead again and hired a public relations firm to promote and market the series of online events. An online platform was created documenting the history of Language Day and IMLD celebrations in Manchester, featuring some of the activities going back to Levenshulme Language Day 2015.<sup>42</sup> Promotion of the various online events once again highlighted the figure of "200 languages" and the claim that the city was "one of the most linguistically diverse in the UK" or indeed "in Europe". A city language narrative had emerged by this point: the iteration of declarations of recognition of the city's multilingualism as a distinctive and defining feature.

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42 <https://www.manchestercityofliterature.com/project/international-mother-language-day/a-virtual-tour-of-manchesters-language-celebrations/>

The narrative's credibility continued to draw on its acknowledged provenance in academic research. Its active propagation was now embedded into an institutional context, allocated institutional resources and adopted as an institutional practice implemented by institutional agents as part of a scripted action plan. IMLD 2022 took on a hybrid format though most events were held online. On the occasion Manchester City of Literature appointed three 'multilingual poets' to work for a year across local schools and other venues to encourage creative writing and performances and discussions about heritage languages.

## 8.4 The interactive grassroots experience

A salient feature of the various Language Day and IMLD events that took place in the city until 2021 was their reliance on grassroots contributions. Participating groups usually presented stalls and posters (some also offering performances) in which they disseminated information about their organisation and their language. For example, at the 2020 event a local Amazigh initiative presented a talk and slide show about the geographical distribution of Tamazight and related languages, the Armenian supplementary school displayed kits to learn some of the letters of the Armenian alphabet, one of the Arabic schools offered instruction in calligraphy and a Pakistani cultural centre created a poster on the 'languages of Pakistan' drawing attention exceptionally to that country's multilingualism.

Over the years MLM had created an extensive portfolio of interactive exhibits on multilingualism. They included a 'language map' of Manchester where visitors were invited to write down the names of languages they use on a card and pin it to a location on the city map or write down words in their languages and attach them to a bunting banner. This kind of activities prompted contributions from visitors. They resulted in a public display of personal statements representing plurality. They also triggered conversations between parents and children around the choice of words and how to represent them in writing. Often, families with parents of mixed backgrounds deliberated on which languages to choose and in the case of regional languages and dialects, how to represent them in writing. The spontaneity attested through segments such as *como stass* for Spanish 'como estas' testifies to the way in which young visitors in particular felt empowered to represent their linguistic repertoire without feeling bound by institutional knowledge and norms, relying instead on their own personal knowledge. Many parents, speakers of regional and minoritised languages such as African languages, Azeri from Iran, Romani, and others reported feeling heartened by the opportunity to convey to their children at a public venue a sense of confidence in their heritage languages. The occasion thus contributed to a feeling of linguistic

empowerment and confidence in elements of heritage and identity that are rarely acknowledged in public or institutional settings.

MLM's exhibit portfolio also included a board with pictures of animals. It invited visitors to write down and attach cards with the sounds associated with those animals in their languages. This exercise was particularly symbolic of notions of universality and plurality since animal sounds are usually regarded as onomatopoeitic imitations. Yet in reality when compared across languages they show symbolic representations that are culture specific and at the same time often playful. The animal sounds activity thus addresses the core of 'linguageness' and structural diversity pitched at the simplest and most intuitive common denominator.

Another unique activity was a stall co-curated by MLM and local Romani community activists. It gave information about the Romani language including a word-match game constructed to help identify inherited Indo-Aryan vocabulary and its similarities to present-day South Asian languages that are widely spoken in Manchester and Greek-derived loanwords with universal familiarity such as *drom* 'road' and *foro* 'town'. Visitors' most frequent questions at the stall were 'What the country is Romani spoken in?' and 'How it is written'. Both required answers that were intrinsically pluralistic, since Romani is a geographically dispersed minority language and since it has no uniform written Standard. The Romani stall served to interrogate and critique some of the most common (colonial) notions about language: its association with a nation-state territory and a standard writing system.

MLM's 'multilingual shop' presented small items purchased in shops across the city with labels in different languages and invited visitors to identify the languages and the areas within the city where those items might be on sale, prompting reflection on the geographical distribution of languages in the city. At some venues the shop was accompanied by a computer display of the LinguaSnapp online platform on which visitors could search for signs in different languages around the city.

## 8.5 Celebration as stepping stone to policy

The history of language day events in Manchester offers an opportunity to reflect on the connection between public celebration and linguistic citizenship as the

inclusion of new voices in public discussions, empowerment and the use of language as a site to negotiate relations (cf. Stroud 2001, 2008)<sup>43</sup>. Celebrations are widely regarded as a way of upholding the social order and building a sense of shared belonging. Discussing peasant societies Wolf (1966: 7ff., 98) describes how ceremonials consist of public performances in which participants act out social relations and offer a public exhibition of their ideal model of such relations. Ceremonials are so essential to the social order that they are allocated a portion of the production surplus, which Wolf calls ‘ceremonial expenditures’. Rappaport (1999: 115ff.) dwells on the communicative functions of celebrations as performative action. Rituals serve to deem a condition or to change it. They often have a perlocutionary function, as the ritual performance brings a commitment or a state into effect. Celebration is thus a communicative event that aims to bring about a certain social order. Manning (1983) considers celebrations as cultural performances and therefore symbolic action, and points out their participatory element as well as their use for ideological instrumentation. For Rusu and Kantola (2016) celebrations support the temporal framing of activities, imposing a cyclical pattern but also disrupting and suspending daily life while bringing about a sense of togetherness. Festivals are seen as community feasts cast through joyful events with the participation of the community but they can also be ideological instruments to boost status quo. Societies usually reserve special places for celebration, which are transformed during celebrations into festive locations.

Many of these features are recognisable in the language celebrations of Levenshulme Language Days and IMLD in Manchester. They are recurring annual or bi-annual events, often claiming spaces such as Levenshulme Market, Central Library and Manchester Museum. The wider dispersion of additional events at local neighbourhood libraries and community centres further strengthen the participatory aspect. They are performative actions where participants put their language resources on display, showcasing diverse backgrounds while demonstrating a common belonging to the locality. They convey the social order message around acceptance of plurality and sharing local space. They also convey an ideological commitment to equality and a message of togetherness. That is used to boost a sense of belonging to the city and confidence in its institutions including its community organisations. This is in line with Manchester City Council’s key policy theme of many years of de-centralising services, particularly advice and support services, and relying on community initiatives to deliver them. The cele-

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<sup>43</sup> See also [https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/growth\\_inclusion/2021/02/celebration-public-policy-international-mother-language-day-as-civic-identity-badge/](https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/growth_inclusion/2021/02/celebration-public-policy-international-mother-language-day-as-civic-identity-badge/)

brations are also perlocutionary acts: By stating that Manchester is a ‘city of languages’ it becomes a city of languages in the minds of audiences, participants and observers.

Finally, the celebrations are entertaining events but also learning opportunities: intellectual curiosity is triggered and harnessed through interactive exhibits, discussion forums and presentations. These offer an educational experience, equally a contributor to recognising and accepting the social order of plurality. From the linguistic citizenship perspective language celebrations offer individuals, families and organisations opportunities to perform their own heritage and reclaim public spaces. They become an integral and indeed a defining part of the emerging, collective city language narrative. The iteration of such practice in the form of regular events supports the emergence of a performative collective: a community of participants that meet regularly to enact the celebration ritual and become united around its ideological message. This offers participants the opportunity to feel as co-owners of the civic brand and to regard their contribution to it as essential and formative.

Consistent with Stroud’s (2001, 2008) view of language as a site of political and economic struggles, the Manchester experience shows a direct pathway from reclaiming public space for celebration to the instigation of political interventions. In the spring of 2018 the city council’s Executive Member for Culture, Leisure and Skills invited MLM to draft a City Language Strategy. It was emphasised in conversations with city council officials that this would be a ‘city’ rather than a ‘council’ strategy. It would avoid listing targets and deliverables that the local authority would be held accountable for. Instead it was to draw up principles based on which the local authority would lead a network of local institutions and actors. This was in line with the observation on the non-centralised, network-based provisions and policy for language described for Manchester by Matras and Robertson (2015). City council officers then held a series of consultations based on the draft Strategy with representatives of key public services providers. This resulted in the adoption by the council’s Communities and Equalities Scrutiny Committee of a report on ‘Manchester’s Language Diversity’<sup>44</sup> that outlined work carried out “at local level”. Following our draft Strategy document it linked multilingualism to the declared objectives of the city’s existing development strategy on supporting sustainability and diversity, home grown talent, unlocking the potential of communities and ensuring equity and connectivity. The report also flagged the work of MLM to raise awareness of multilingualism using the term

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44 <https://democracy.manchester.gov.uk/documents/s9767/Manchesters%20Language%20Diversity.pdf>

‘celebrate’ multiple times in connection with language diversity and multilingualism.

The city council also supported an approach to the Office for National Statistics in 2018 suggesting an amendment to the question on languages in preparation of the 2021 Census. A letter drafted by MLM was signed by the city council’s Chief Executive. It said that “researchers have expressed some concerns that the question ‘What is your main language?’ may not have allowed the census to collect all relevant data”<sup>45</sup>. It argued that a slight amendment to the census question could help map languages more accurately and that this would be helpful to the city council as it would “greatly improve our ability to assess the outreach potential of community based initiatives such as supplementary schools and advice and support groups that target particular language-based communities”. It added that a change would also help the council and key public services assess requirements for interpreting and translation and survey the pool of language skills as an important asset on which the city draws for growth and development. The amendment that we had proposed to the government was to allow the listing of more than one ‘main language’.<sup>46</sup> The step was to my knowledge a rare example of a university project taking on the role of an advocacy and lobbying group and acting via a major local authority. While the government did not accept a change to the wording, it invited us to help re-draft the guidance notes. These were changed to advise users that when thinking about ‘main language’ they should think of the one other than English that is ‘most natural’, which could be ‘the language used at home’.<sup>47</sup>

The experience shows how the local authority took a stance that is opposed to that of the national government on an issue surrounding language, identity and the implications for public policy and public services. Afzal Khan, Labour MP for Manchester-Gorton, also supported the initiative and raised the matter in the House of Commons. In 2019 he hosted a public consultation at the Houses of Parliament on ‘Recognising our citizens’ many languages’, organised by MLM in partnership with the National Resource Centre for Supplementary Education, the Speak for the Future charity and the British Academy. In March and April 2020

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<sup>45</sup> <http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/MCCLetter.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> See [https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/growth\\_inclusion/2019/04/improving-the-census-question-on-language-could-help-repair-community-relations-and-britains-international-image-post-brexit/](https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/growth_inclusion/2019/04/improving-the-census-question-on-language-could-help-repair-community-relations-and-britains-international-image-post-brexit/);

<http://projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/cross-language-dynamics/what-is-your-main-language-in-order-to-engage-with-policy-modern-linguists-need-a-vision-for-society/>

<sup>47</sup> See discussion as part of REF 2021 Impact Case Study: <https://yaronmatras.files.wordpress.com/2022/07/impact-4-2021.pdf>



he repeatedly challenged the government on the absence of translation of Covid guidance into community languages. The iteration and gradual institutionalisation of celebrations around multilingualism provided a mandate to key political actors in Manchester toward recognising multilingualism as a public policy issue and making representations that challenged national policy. A pathway was established from the local to the national.

As a result of these developments Manchester became widely regarded in circles of academic experts, practitioners and policymakers as a leading hub in the drafting of policy on domestic multilingualism. At the international conference hosted by MLM in February 2019 delegates decided to draft a Manifesto that called for the formation of a Multilingual Cities Movement<sup>48</sup>. The text was published on the MLM website in May 2019 along with a list of the first batch of signatories representing both individuals and organisations. It called for academics, practitioners, students and officials to build sustainable collaborations. It identified cities as sites where languages, plurality and difference are accepted. It alluded to complex linguistic repertoires and pointed out that language difference can be seen as a source of insecurity and conflict but also as connection and enrichment. It explained the use of the term ‘Movement’ as an ambition to create an umbrella of diverse models and initiatives and called for the formation of a networking platform “based in and around universities” that are committed to the principles outlined in the manifesto. The manifesto enshrined the idea that university projects should a) engage non-academics in the development of knowledge and outreach, b) serve as sites that actively initiate and lead advocacy work for social and political change, and c) seek to internationalise their exchange and mobilisation efforts. At the same time it chose not to address arguments that many UK academic bodies embraced when lobbying for more resources for language teaching and learning, namely the role of language in creating wealth and protecting national security. The message was instead explicitly internationalist and humanistic.

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48 <https://yaronmatras.files.wordpress.com/2022/07/call-for-a-multilingual-cities-movement.pdf>

## 9 Conclusion and outlook

In Matras (2017b) I introduced a provisional typology of the domains of supplementary practice brought about through the city's engagement with its multilingual reality, referring to the dimensions of access, heritage and skills. To those I have now added the domain of celebration. In Manchester a number of institutions acknowledge an obligation to ensure equal access to public services by maintaining provisions for interpreting and translation. Interpreter-mediated communication in public services constitutes a communicative practice in its own right rather than mere duplication of institutional interaction in other languages (cf. Tipton and Furnamek 2016). Recognition of the multilingual reality in interaction between practitioners and clients also opens up spaces for individual creativity and agency subverting routines and giving rise to new practices (cf. Matras et al. 2023).

The cultivation of heritage is the mission statement and principal purpose of dozens of language supplementary schools that operate in Manchester. As their name suggests they provide a service that enriches existing provisions and offers participants an institutional framework that engages them in a distinct practice. A new dimension of practice is also added to the portfolio of major cultural institutions like the museum once they decide to dedicate spaces to develop multilingual exhibits and engage multilingual audiences. The crossover of heritage and skills was demonstrated for supplementary schools and mainstream schools that teach home or heritage languages. Turning heritage to skills often requires a dedicated institutional pathway, one that can produce qualifications that become part of an individual's formally recognised personal capital. Alternatively, it is embedded into a pedagogical approach that seeks to harness personal knowledge in order to build confidence and assertiveness. Celebrations introduce new practices backed by an overarching narrative of local belonging that embraces heritage cultivation, harnessing of skills and provisions of access measures.

The multilingual reality thus gives rise to new practices that make language difference and language identity an object and an objective in its own right. These practices empower actors to draw on a variety of knowledge resources including linguistic features, experiences, impressions and encounters as well as digital literacy and inter-personal resources. They are accompanied by an ideological discourse of communality that helps define the city and its citizenship.

This echoes Rehbein's (2013) discussion of what he gently calls a 'utopia' of multilingualism. Rehbein proposes that global migrations give rise to new communicative functions. The linguistic changes they bring about are therefore not

only quantitative but qualitative. They require responses that aim not just to ensure smooth cooperation and coherence of existing structures but which take account of the complex situations that bring about new communicative action structures. These involve the potential deployment of multilingualism across a patchwork of multilingual spaces spread through society. Urbanisation means that such domains are no longer separated but co-exist in fluctuating spaces that constitute interactive contact zones.

Rehbein sees the multiplicity of languages in a society (for which he uses the term “community languages”) as knowledge resources. Institutions are micro-spaces of multilingualism. They are challenged to integrate different knowledge resources into the various determinants of institutional talk including the social justification of the institution, the structure of sequences of talk within the institutional setting and relations between groups of agents and clients with diverse types of knowledge. Rehbein notes how monolingual ideology stands in the way of recognising and facilitating such change in institutional settings. He concludes by suggesting that research institutions can play an important part in counteracting nationalistic ideologies that are averse to multilingualism by creating models of multilingual practice and internationalisation and facilitating cross-sector spaces that work as a ‘movement’ to promote multilingualism.

A number of multilingual institutional practices, actions and multilingual spaces discussed in this paper are the direct product of the intervention of a university-based research project: The creation of a city language narrative and a platform to develop and promote it in the form of public celebrations; introduction of a dedicated multilingual practice into the agenda of a major cultural institution; creation of school activities that prompt reflection on personal multilingual knowledge and experience; networking and developing of a collective agenda giving a voice to supplementary schools; monitoring of language access provisions in a key public service provider (Central Manchester Hospitals); mobilisation of key actors in the city in support of language policy reforms at national level and the formulation and articulation of a policy direction on multilingualism at local level; and the initiative to internationalise exchange with a view toward mobilising actors on a larger scale in the form of a call for a Multilingual Cities Movement.

At various levels these initiatives have created new opportunities for agency, or for reflection on agency: The involvement of researchers helped valorise the experience of actors and turn it into a collective ideology articulated through expressions of belonging to the civic community. Rymes (2020) uses the term ‘citizen’ to denote the non-expert who claims the right to articulate opinion and experience-based expertise, but also to denote the subject or local inhabitant. She

regards ‘citizen sociolinguistics’ as the acknowledgement of the linguistic expertise of members of the community. Contrasting with action that is organised and systematic, citizenship ‘acts’ are seen as ‘momentary ruptures’ that reveal assumptions about languages (Rymes 2020: 170). In our discussion they can be seen as acts of assertiveness anchored in a reflection about multilingual experience that position actors in what Brubaker (2005) calls a ‘diasporic stance’. Through celebrations and the emergence of a city language narrative, multilingual practices become for some actors and institutions a part of the foundation of the urban community. In Blokland’s (2017) terms, the city’s multilingualism is acknowledged as part of its public familiarity and contributes to a shared sense of belonging.

The decoloniality paradigm emerged in order to lend intellectual resilience to indigenous populations that were disenfranchised economically and spiritually by European colonialism. As an intellectual paradigm it has opened up a new lens through which to discuss and understand cross-cultural encounters, particularly those that are embedded into asymmetrical power relations. Bhabha (1994), Stuart Hall (1990) and Spivak (1990, 1999) all emphasise the transnational character of culture and the need for the postcolonial perspective to enable agency and representation of the diasporic in the historical context of postcolonial displacement. As such the paradigm is applicable in principle to the question of culture and agency in a Western metropolis. The position of language as a particularly tangible representation of culture is indisputable.

A university-based project devoted to multilingualism can adopt and implement key elements of the decolonial paradigm in various ways: It can re-define the beneficiaries of research to include language users, practitioners and policy-makers. It can lend a voice to populations that are in the margins of power. It can create new forms of knowledge through exchange with stakeholders. It can break down traditional barriers among academic disciplines. It can adopt an agenda to bring about social and political change and counteract discrimination; and it can try to reclaim public space to challenge colonial discourses of what Bhabha (1994: 94) calls ‘fixity’ or the ideological construction of Otherness. It can also internationalise its work to create a mobilising momentum.

In Matras and Robertson (2017: 10–11) we identified a number of risks facing the model. First, the university is limited in the extent to which it can empower actors in other institutions. Consequently a university project cannot always meet the expectations of external stakeholders, particularly those relating to the sustainability of practical support. Within the university itself we mentioned uncertainties as the project is “caught up in volatile processes of prioritisation and internal competition for resources”. We concluded by saying: “The major challenge

remains the need to reconcile continuity and stability, which is a pre-requisite for the reputational capital on which the partnerships rest, with the institution's ability to maintain its practical commitment to the civic university vision". Rampton et al. (2018: 77–78) acknowledge MLM as a "spectacular model" of promoting sociolinguistic citizenship. At the same time they decry the absence of government support for such projects in the UK. They point out the need to rely on short term funding and considerable tactical energy and ingenuity to use university spaces to forge alliances with external stakeholders. They also comment on how the conditions that opened up opportunities – the drive to show impact and to score points on the student experience and employability metrics – pose a risk that makes the long term commitment volatile.

As described above, since the early 2000s a trend emerged to portray language learning as serving national interests in trade, security and diplomacy – coined 'soft power', implying the power to dominate others with minimal use of force. That trend took on a new momentum in late 2016 following the Brexit decision. Some researchers embraced those positions within the Open World Research Initiative (OWRI), a four-year scheme funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Key figures in OWRI campaigned for the government to appoint a 'Chief Linguist' who would coordinate the teaching of languages among departments with an emphasis on the benefits to civil servants, foreign policy and security. In the conversations with officials the emerging idea was to accommodate the Chief Linguist within GCHQ, the country's spy agency, rather than in the departments for Education, Culture, or Communities, for example. The initiative was launched in November 2018 at an event at the Houses of Parliament hosted by Stephen Kinnock MP, who soon after the referendum expressed his opinion that "uncontrolled immigration can lead to racism".<sup>49</sup>

MLM was one of OWRI's dedicated research strands and it received some of its funding from that scheme.<sup>50</sup> Yet our call to add support of community languages to the prospective remit of the Chief Linguist was actively resisted, as were requests to devote space on the OWRI platform to positions articulated within MLM which emphasised bottom-up multilingualism as an issue of human rights, pluralism and citizenship and which called for a domestic language policy. There was also reluctance among some to support our efforts to call publicly for a

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/sep/19/cure-divided-britain-managed-immigration-work-permits>

<sup>50</sup> For an optimistic view at the beginning of the scheme's lifetime see: <http://projects.alc.manchester.ac.uk/cross-language-dynamics/open-world-research-aesthetics-practicalities-crossing-boundaries/>

change to the wording of the census question on language, with key actors within OWRI adopting the position that one should not “antagonise civil servants” but instead wait to be called upon if and when one’s expertise was needed. At the same time attempts were made to flag MLM as a potential contributor to enhancing post-Brexit trade with India and to counteracting “extremism and radicalisation”, usually understood as referring to certain ideologies among Muslim populations – both of which we declined. Some of these disagreements might be seen to revolve around what Gilroy (2004) called “revivalist colonialist accounts”. They also reflected different understandings of academic freedom and the freedom to adopt advocacy agendas as opposed to the corporate privilege to control such agendas.

As these debates intensified MLM’s activities came to a halt. The Covid outbreak brought about limitations on outreach work, a tightening of resources and discontinuation of staff positions. The student volunteer scheme came to an end, as did a number of external partnerships. The MLM web page was re-cast as a ‘legacy site’ and its narrative transposed into the past tense. Various activities are no longer showcased, among them the ‘Call for a Multilingual Cities Movement’, the report on the event at the Houses of Parliament on ‘Recognising our citizens’ many languages’ hosted by the multilingual Member of Parliament from Manchester Afzal Khan, and my blog post ‘Do Modern Languages include Community Languages? A plea for a domestic language policy agenda’.<sup>51</sup> The dialect databases that supported appeals in asylum cases are no longer accessible on the university’s website, either.

Elements of the city language narrative are likely to stay. But inevitably not all those involved will embrace wholesale the values that guided MLM. As Rehbein (2013) notes, ‘multilingualism’ implies active recourse to a repertoire of multiple languages (in society in general and in institutional contexts). By contrast, ‘linguistic diversity’ represents difference including functional specialisations and hierarchical ordering. Schiller (2015, 2016) describes how ‘diversity’ is employed as a “neoliberal catchword” to increase productivity while avoiding recognition of the rights of population groups to maintain distinctive cultural practices. Campbell and Hwa (2015) even warn of the dangers of objectifying communities as part of a public engagement agenda.

Whether an experiment like MLM can be replicated will depend on the general direction in which the sector will move. Some voices are sceptical. Neary (2020) has suggested that higher education institutions that function as corporate

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<sup>51</sup> Now archived here: <https://yaronmatras.files.wordpress.com/2022/03/ymatras-do-modern-languages-include-community-languages.pdf>

enterprises use concepts like ‘civic university’ and ‘social responsibility’ merely as reputational devices. Others have described the neoliberal university as one that exercises “thought control” (Lorenz 2012) and as a “ruthless corporation” where institutional racism remains unchanged and unchallenged (Sian 2019: 186) and is addressed only through mechanistic procedures to show a balanced demography for reputational purposes (Beattie 2013). Some suggest that in such an environment there is a permanent risk that decoloniality initiatives linked to civil resistance and social movements are erased (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) and replaced by “tokenised checklist responses” (Pidgeon 2016). In the extreme, there is a risk that the “intellectual insurgency” that Neary (2020) calls for is harshly suppressed; that as Sian (2019: 32ff.) describes, those challenging “liberal racism” are viewed as “troublemakers” who deliberately disrupt the social order; and that, as Smith ([1999] 2021: 261) warns, those persons become marginalised who choose to research with and fight for marginalised communities.

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