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## Language Ideologies at Work: Examining the Linguistic Landscape in Public Spaces of Coventry, England



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### Abstract

The rise of global migration has significantly changed how multilingualism in urban areas is studied. As such, the field of linguistic landscaping (LL) has been rapidly shifting its focus beyond LL signs to understand the semiotic construction of cityscapes and how multilingual communities share them (see Chik, Benson, & Moloney, 2019). In some cities, however, monolingualism is still preserved as a central identity throughout public spaces. This paper considers the relationship between micro-level language ideologies and the semiotic construction of space through an examination of the linguistic landscape in public spaces in the city of Coventry, UK. Despite official recognition of the high degree of ethnic and linguistic diversity within the city, English is dominant on public and private signage. This paper draws on signage data collected from two central public spaces in Coventry city centre as part of the MultiDiv summer school held at the University of Warwick in 2019. The analysis looks at the relationship between the geographical locations of the signs in selected sites and the languages displayed on them. Coventry Central Library is examined as a case study to show how micro-level language ideologies are manifested in a public place in relation to the spatial location of different categories of language signage. The study finds that English-only signs are more prominent in the city's public spaces while signs displaying English mixed with one or more community languages are pushed to the periphery. These findings contribute to the body of literature on LL in urban areas and public spaces (Shohamy, 2010) and support recent research that calls for new cosmopolitan approaches in examining language presence, use, and acts in urban public spaces (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013; Roeder & Walden, 2016; Da Costa Cabral & Martin-Jones, 2017; Edmond, 2017; Hatoss, 2019).

**Keywords:** LL signs, linguistic landscape, language use ideologies, multilingual, peripheries

### Introduction

The rise of global migration has significantly changed how multilingualism in urban areas is studied. As such, the field of linguistic landscape (LL) has been rapidly shifting its focus beyond LL signs to

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understand the semiotic construction of cityscapes and how multilingual communities share them (see Chik, Benson, & Moloney, 2019). Within this field, one particular issue of concern is the relationship between the cityscape and central and peripheral languages within the community, particularly in terms of how the semiotic construction of material space represents the broader cultural and linguistic diversity within highly diverse urban areas (Pietikäinen & Kelly-Holmes, 2013). This issue is germane to the important question of the relationship between multiculturalism and multilingualism, as there can be contradictions between espoused multicultural policies and the relatively monolingual construction of material spaces in urban areas (Chik *et al.*, 2019). In this sense, the semiotic landscape can reflect an ideology in which multiculturalism is expected to be subsumed and constrained within the framework of the dominant language (Edmond, 2017, pp. 16-17). Thus, centre and periphery relations shape and are shaped by the particular ways in which languages are distributed within public spaces that are key to social life and the language ideologies that sustain this status quo.

This paper considers the relationship between micro-level language ideologies and the semiotic construction of space through an examination of the linguistic landscape in public spaces in the city of Coventry, UK. This paper draws on signage data collected from two central public spaces in Coventry city centre as part of the MultiDiv summer school held at the University of Warwick in 2019. The analysis looks at the relationship between the geographical locations of the signs in selected sites and the languages displayed on them. Coventry Central Library is examined as a case study to show how micro-level language ideologies are manifested in a public place in relation to the spatial location of different categories of language signage.

### **Context: The City of Coventry**

Coventry is located in central England and, at the time the 2011 census data was collected, home to 366,800 residents, of which 33% represents ethnic minorities (Coventry City Council, 2019). The relatively high percentage of minority residents should come as no surprise since the city has a long history of attracting international migration, which has led to its present diverse social fabric. Specifically, between the two world wars, Coventry witnessed a large-scale boom in the motor and ancillary industries, which attracted workers from within the UK and immigrant labour from outside it (Thoms & Donnelly, 2018). Kuper (1954) reports that by 1961 over 13% of the population in Coventry was born outside England and Wales. A total of 10,615 (3.4%) residents were not born in the British Isles. Included in that number were 4,285 migrants from the British Commonwealth states of India, Pakistan, and the West Indies. Migration from these states has created a large South Asian ethnic population in the UK today (Sissons, 2019).

Immigration into Coventry has continued in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well. Global immigration, largely from the Middle East and Africa, increased due to wars, persecution, violence and other political and economic stresses in the migrants' countries of origin (Migration and Its Impact on Cities, 2017). Through the UK government's Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS), for example, approximately 590 Syrian refugees were re-settled in Coventry in 2019 (Citizens UK, 2019), further increasing the diversity of Coventry (Sissons, 2019). Recent years have also seen an increase in migrants from parts of the world less represented by general migration to the UK, such as those from East Asia, a group which has been steadily growing over the years. It was estimated in 2011 that the East Asian/East Asian British community represented 16.3% of Coventry's total population (Ibid.). Similarly, African, Caribbean and Afro-British groups have been growing in numbers. Finally, Caucasian migrants to Coventry from central and eastern Europe numbered 15,385 (Sissons, 2019).

With this ethnic diversity comes a diversity of languages. According to the Office for National Statistics' NOMIS (2014), there are currently 99 languages spoken in Coventry. Furthermore, 50 first

languages are widely spoken in Coventry including English, Panjabi, Polish, Urdu, Romanian and Bengali. This rise in the migrant population is also seen by many as contributing to the economic health of Coventry (Sissons, 2019). The migrant population is believed to have helped the city become one of the fastest-growing economic areas in the United Kingdom in the past ten years (Griffith & Mackela, 2018).

Thus, the long history of migration into Coventry since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Stephens, 1969) is perhaps contributing to the perception that Coventry is becoming a more cosmopolitan, vibrant city. Recently Coventry was awarded the “UK’s City of Culture in 2021” title for its interest in all aspects and facets cultural life. Although the title is usually commemorative of artistic and musical interests in general (for more details on the award, see <https://coventry2021.co.uk/>), the fact that Coventry is open to events from all its communities at large indexes a cultural inclusion beyond the artistic levels. Such a title opens the door for thinking of Coventry as a place where diverse cultures can thrive. According to the official 2011 Census numbers cited above, Coventry shows the dynamics of a multicultural city. However, when it comes to the acceptance of multilingualism in the city, the reality is more complex. To understand the status of multilingualism in Coventry, it is first necessary to quickly review the language policy of the UK.

### **Overview of Language Policy in the UK**

As of 2020, there is no official language policy to guide educational institutions in England. However, the 2014 framework document of the national curriculum in England states that English is the medium of communication in schools and that English should also be taught as a subject in its own right. The framework further states that pupils in Key Stages 2, 3, and 4 will be given the option to study modern foreign languages (Department of Education, 2014, p. 8). After a consultation in 2016, a selection of community or minority languages, Panjabi, Portuguese, and Japanese, were added to the list of languages that schools in England may offer. The UK is not alone in not having a language policy. Germany is an example of another country where there is no language policy despite increasing immigration. However, German is the default language of all public schools. In fact, there is a growing concern in Germany about the benefits of offering community languages to pupils (Adler & Beyer, 2018). The German majority considers these languages as obstacles to integration and a threat to national identity (Extra & Gorter, 2008).

Although there is no official enforcement of language policy, English is the de facto medium of communication in England. The emphasis on English acquisition is also indexed by the English-only programmes offered in state-supported and private institutions that teach English to immigrants. For example, Coventry Central Library offers ESOL classes, English Conversation Hour, “RhymeTimes” in English for children, as well as numerous resources for learning English such as books, CDs and DVDs. While this push to learn English is positively regarded by immigrants who perceive it as great help in their attempt to adapt to a new life in the UK, it also indicates a dominant monolingual ideology. If English is the main medium of communication, what happens to the other community languages in Coventry? How and where do they coexist—or not—with English and other languages? A walking tour of Coventry city centre where public spaces are noticeably shared by diverse multi-ethnic communities makes clear that it is home to a wide variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. An observer can hear numerous languages spoken by passers, sellers and shoppers in these public spaces, making such spaces a reflection of a social artefact (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991) constructed by these diverse groups. And yet, the LL signs that are visible in Coventry city centre do not speak to this ethnic diversity. The lack of linguistic diversity on signs therefore contradicts the assertion that Coventry’s long history of international immigration has changed its cultural identity and its LL. Such a discrepancy between the reality of international immigration into Coventry and relative absence of

linguistic artefacts in the city centre warrants an investigation of the relationship between languages and public space.

The relationship between language and place is not new. Sociolinguistic work on speech communities, which goes back to the work of Gumperz (1964, 1968) and Labov (1972), has already shown ways in which language indexes and constructs boundaries between majority and minority communities. However, this paper is particularly concerned with “peripheral” areas in Coventry where community or minority languages are “clustered” together and have been seen in subordinate standings to English, as it will be shown later. The central versus peripheral position of communities based on the languages they speak is again not new. Stroud and Mpendukana (2009), for example, cite Scollon and Scollon (2003, p. 120) to support their readings of the politics of language use that is manifested in peripheral normativity in South Africa. More on the central-peripheral theme will be presented in the next section where the literature on the LL field is briefly reviewed.

### The Evolving Field of Linguistic Landscape

The field of linguistic landscape is rapidly developing in its foci and research methods. The infancy LL studies were confined to quantifying LL signage in public spaces and asking questions about language presence and vitality (e.g., Yasuo, 1972; Rosenbaum, Nadel, Cooper, & Fisherman, 1977). Spolsky and Cooper’s *The Languages of Jerusalem* (1991) then further developed the field by investigating how government policies can determine which languages appear and the manner of their appearance. It was not, however, until Landry and Bourhis’s *Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality* (1997) that the LL field developed an interest in the LL’s relationship with ethnolinguistic vivacity, identity, and attitudes towards languages. Landry and Bourhis see LL signs not only as indicators of information, but also as “symbolic markers” that imply power relations and the relative standing of languages in the shared public space (Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, & Barni, 2010). While these early studies are fundamental to the field, Shohamy *et al.* (2010) argue that the first study ignores LL dynamics, and the latter overlooks the complexity of the LL and the several actors involved in its construction.

Since then, academic interest from the perspective of sociolinguistics has exponentially increased the body of LL research beyond LL signs (Backhaus, 2006, p. 53). Scollon and Scollon (2003) investigate the extralinguistic political and economic influences not only on the meaning of the sign but also on its physical location in the LL. Their geosemiotic framework has since been useful to study the social meanings of the “material placement” of the LL signs in public spaces. Mac-Giolla Chriost (2007) examines the social practices necessary to negotiate being in urban cities. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) look at the social construction of the LLs through the placement of signs on items. Signs have also been seen as markers of individual and collective identities in the LLs (Barni & Bagna, 2010; Ben-Rafael, 2009; Dixson, 2015). The association between languages and identities is further explained by the manner in which the visibility of a language in the LL “promotes or demotes not only the languages, but also the ethnic groups tied to those languages” (Dixson, 2015, p. 1). Barni and Bagna (2010) maintain that the LL can reflect the identity of an entire language community, socio-political relationships between languages, economic signs imploring consumers, or offer, in some way, information to the reader.

In the same vein, Spolsky (2009) suggests that the order of displaying languages on an LL sign and the font size used for different languages on a single sign can indicate the relative power and status of languages in a geographical area. Dagenais *et al.* (2009, p. 254) note that the LL presents information about the populations and “signals what languages are prominent and valued in public and private spaces and indexes the social positioning of people who identify with particular languages.” Gorter

and Cenoz (2008) investigate the economic value attached to the language(s) displayed on signs and suggest that they do not only involve the sign makers and/or shop owners but also the potential consumers passing by on the street.

With respect to LL research methods and approaches, the terminological divergences related to the “object” of LL studies are thoroughly addressed in Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht (2006) and more recently in Rodriguez (2013). Ben-Rafael *et al.* (2006) observe that sign, text, image, sign/text and LL items have been used haphazardly to examine language visibility and vitality in public spaces. Rodriguez (2013) addresses this issue by focusing on defining the LL unit of analysis in the investigation of the dominantly monolingual Almeria in Spain. Rodriguez explains that knowing how to quantify the texts in terms of the occurrence and use of languages results in more accurate reporting about the presence of languages in the LL. Dismissing the focus on the LL as a reflection of language policies, ethnolinguistic vitality and confrontation, and linguistic globalization, he argues that the LL offers “subliminal readings” about concealed social and cultural issues, and how these readings mirror the populations of the area and their histories (p. 110). Along the same methodological lines, Blommaert (2013) suggests combining observation and description to investigate LL signs. Leeman and Modan (2010) propose a contextualized, interdisciplinary approach that includes the linguistic and spatial contexts necessary to study LL signs. A contextualized approach to LL signs does not only entail the interpretation of the extralinguistic and linguistic environments where signs appear but also the inclusion of sociolinguistic factors that have shaped the production of the signs.

The audience that interacts with the signs in the LL has also been addressed in LL studies. Beside the contexts in which LL signs evolve, Huebner (2009) also includes the passers who interact with the signs, the genre, function and the purpose of the signs. Dagenais *et al.* (2009) contend that the perception and reading of LL signs can be related to socio-political positionings in that it depends on a person’s social status and how they see themselves associated with them.

In recent decades, the increasing global immigration and its impact on multilingual signs in urban cities have also been the focus of recent LL studies (e.g., Chik *et al.*, 2019; Edmond, 2017). Leung and Wu (2012) discusses how business owners in the Chinatown of Philadelphia in the USA use many Chinese languages to implore the Chinese Mandarin speaking customers and many other speakers of Chinese local languages. By doing so, the owners have simultaneously created both global and local identities in the LL. Troyer, Cáceda, and Giménez Eguívar (2015) observes that despite the large Hispanic community in the small American town of Independence, Oregon, Spanish was surprisingly scarce in the LL. The analysis of LL signs and interviews with the residents suggests that the Hispanic community deliberately avoids the use of Spanish due to the rising anti-Spanish discourse in the USA. In contrast, Roeder and Walden (2016) studies how recent Hispanic communities have begun to create separate spaces throughout Charlotte, North Carolina. The increasing Spanish-language signage indicates the community’s association with Central America and Spanish-speaking residents might fear that they are perceived as not belonging to the local culture.

Most relevant to this paper are the studies that look at the theme of central-peripheral language relations in public spaces. Pietikäinen and Kelly-Holmes (2013) contend that linguistic minority spaces are usually constructed from the centre as linguistically and culturally homogeneous. However, such relations can also be internally constructed in this way to obtain certain rights and economic benefits. The centre-periphery relationship between linguistically marked majority and minority places is therefore always shifting, continuously re-negotiating and is mutually constitutive. Da Costa Cabral and Martin-Jones (2017) observe that the construction of centre-periphery relations is, at some time, reinforced by political and economic processes. They add that such relations are also constructed discursively with language and culture being the symbols of nation-states or of multinational groups.

Such relations are dynamically driven by the ideas that people in a particular place, region or country have the dominant power relations to point out who is in charge or not (cf. Giddens, 1984; Hannerz, 1989; Thissen, 2018).

Thus, in the face of all these epistemological controversies, this paper seeks to offer an understanding of where community languages appear in the public spaces in Coventry and whether the locations of such languages reflect a language ideology, which is expressed by the central and peripheral standings of languages and eventually the communities that speak them. The following section presents simple definitions required for understanding both methodology and how the data was analysed.

## Research Method

A quantitative method was first used to count the LL signs found in the fast-food stalls area, Coventry Market (described below), and Coventry Central Library. Then, a qualitative analysis was adopted to find a correlation between signs and their geographical location in the LL. The objective was to see whether multilingualism in Coventry is reflected in the selected public spaces and whether language-related ideologies can be recognized in the public spaces. After establishing the trend in the surrounding space of the city centre, the study homes in on Coventry Central Library as a case study to explore its physical design and the layout of its diverse resources in relation to their locations in this micro-level, publicly funded institution. The signs collected from all three sites and the results from exploring how the library design and resources are presented to the public are then put together to show whether there is an implicit central versus peripheral language ideology at work in Coventry to maintain its English monolingual ideology.

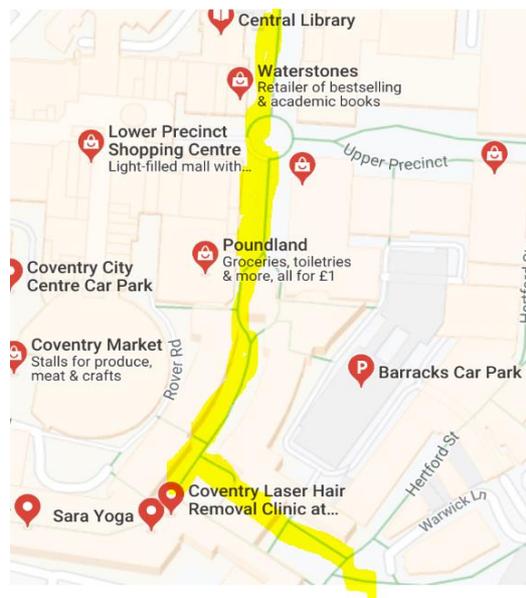
With respect to coding the signage data, the official and nonofficial sign categorization system (Ben-Rafael *et al.*, 2006) was used. This system depends on the type of connections which can be drawn from the signage status and location. For example, signs issued by the library, street signs, general announcements of public interests on flyers, public notices are considered official because they are created by a publicly funded institution. Examples of official or public signs include, etc. Nonofficial signs are those created by third-party groups and private businesses, shops, restaurants, food stalls, etc., and individuals who offer services and supplies to the public at large. The final signage categorization thus resulted in 82 official and 102 nonofficial signs, which were further sub-divided into monolingual, bilingual, and multilingual categories, depending on how many languages appeared on each sign.

As a point of reference, the terms “sign” and “signage” refer to items in the LL where texts appear on signs to offer information and to signify the sociolinguistic identity of certain groups in some urban region (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Furthermore, monolingual signs display only one language, bilingual signs display two and multilingual signs display three or more languages. Instances where a community language appears in transliteration is counted as a bilingual sign. In addition to signs, this study uses observations documented from the three research sites during the MultiDiv field trip in 2019 (see next section). As for limitations, the signage used in this study is only a small random sampling of numerous signs displayed throughout downtown Coventry. The data and also site limitation have precluded an alternative method to examine the three research sites as complementary and equally important to answer the research question. The current method involves examining the food stalls area and the market as supplementary pre-data for the library as the case study. Thus, the data are only used to show the dominance of English in the research sites and where community languages stand in relation to that. The following section briefly explains the MultiDiv research, the sites where it took place, and the data collected from the sites.

### MultiDiv research, sites, and data

The MultiDiv research was conducted during the 2019 Sprinter Summer School at the University of Warwick. Four research groups, each comprising five students from various academic levels and backgrounds from the University of Warwick and Monash University, were asked to investigate two to three public spaces in Coventry to determine whether multilingualism is evident in the city by looking at its LL. For the purposes of this study, multiculturalism is the conflict-free interaction of different ethnic communities without “assimilation” or “domination” of any one culture over another, and in a way that each culture preserves its own identity (Rascon, 2019, p. 53). Similarly, multilingualism could simply refer to a city’s “multiple separate bilingual (or even monolingual) communities” (Chik *et al.*, p. 6).

Thus, one research group photographed the LL signs in three public spaces, documented observations about the LL with respect to where the signs appeared, how they were written, why they were used and by whom, and the order in which languages appeared on some signs. The MultiDiv student research teams also conducted unstructured interviews with passers at the research site, the library staff, library visitors, vendors and mongers. The teams concluded by designating Coventry a multiculturally monolingual city.



**Figure 1** Map of the research site in Coventry city centre

Regarding the site investigated for LL signs, it is the commercial, pedestrian zone in Coventry city centre that is usually populated by people from a variety of backgrounds. It included Coventry Central Library, Coventry Market, and the fast-food stalls area in the vicinity of the library and the market. The criteria for selecting this site were the presence of a publicly funded entity (the library) and a marketplace (food stalls and Coventry market) that exhibits high pedestrian traffic throughout the day. Figure 1 shows the L-shape site where LL signs were photographed using our smartphones. The next section presents the signage data in terms of per language and status.

### The Data

The signage data analysis counted 184 LL signs found in the library, the food stalls area and Coventry market. Of these signs, 63% were English-only monolingual signs, including 60 official and 56 nonofficial signs, 58 bilingual signs that make up 32% of the total signs, and 10 multilingual signs that

represented 5.4% of the signs. The study did not find any monolingual signs in a language other than English. English-mixed with Chinese signs represented the dominant bilingual language combination. Table 1 below shows official and nonofficial LL signs in Coventry's LL sub-grouped based on the number of languages on the signs.

**Table 1** *Official and nonofficial LL signs*

Number of Languages on Sign	Language Description	Official Signs	Nonofficial Signs	Total
Monolingual	Total monolingual English-only signs	60	56	116 (63%)
Bilingual	English + languages from East Asia (Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai, Korean)	5	26	31(16.8%)
	English + Arabic	2	2	4 (2.2%)
	English + Indian languages (Hindi, Panjabi, Urdu)	6	7	13 (7.1%)
	English + European languages (German, French, Polish, Dutch, Albanian)	4	6	10 (5.4%)
	Total bilingual (English + another language)	17	41	58 (31.5%)
Multilingual	Total multilingual signs (English mixed with two or more languages on one sign)	5	5	10 (5.4%)
	Total bilingual and multilingual signs	22	46	68 (36.9%)
Total LL Signs		82	102	184

The next two sections provide thorough descriptions of the fast-food stalls area and Coventry Market beyond the LL signs to include the geographical locations of the stalls and market, as well as offer observations about the two sites' customers.

### The fast-food stalls area

Within a one-minute walking distance from the library entrance and slightly away from a major commercial area known as the upper and lower precinct is the area of fast-food establishments. The precise address where these stalls are located is 5 Market Way. They are placed adjacent to one another and display signs with a variety of languages including English. They offer ethnic foods from the Mediterranean region and the Middle East (Lebanese, Syrian, Iraq, Palestine), Asia (predominantly Chinese), Europe (Germany, Poland), and they are vibrant with activity throughout the day. There are a few tables and chairs in front of most stalls. Most customers, however, purchase take-a-way items and leave the area. The food stalls are located slightly off course from the main commercial shops and on a pedestrian path to Coventry Market. They are in short situated parallel to one end of a rectangular, heavily trafficked footpath and against closed, vacant buildings.

With respect to the official and nonofficial LL signs found in the area of the food stalls, they are either English-only or a mix of English and one or more community language(s) signs. There is no sign where a community language appears alone. The community languages on the mixed signs include

Polish, Chinese, Arabic, German, Gujarati and Urdu. Figure 2 on the right is an example of a food stall sign where “Bon Appétit” is written in eleven languages as a gesture of welcoming all diverse cultures.



**Figure 2** *A multilingual sign on a food stall*

Regarding the public space where the food stalls are located, it is laid out in such a way that indexes implicit ideologies toward community languages. One end of this rectangular food stalls area exactly faces the centre of the city centre where there is a round water fountain interconnecting four routes of shopping streets. People usually sit down at or stand around the water fountain, typically to eat food they purchase from the stalls or to socialize. From the library side towards the fountain, the only visible food stalls are: Soft Ice Cream and Delicious Fresh Drinks. All the remaining stalls that offer ethnic foods are lined up behind both stalls all the way to the end of the area and in parallel with a narrow footpath leading to Coventry Market.

To an observer walking through the city centre, the city’s ethnic diversity is not visible and English signs seem to be dominant despite the businesses being run by and for diverse communities. The function of signs in English is evident as engaging consumers requires using all available resources. This includes the language of the majority and at the same time the commodification of difference when “other” cuisine, provide a taste of exotic difference.

One might think that the entire area of the food stalls is geographically segregated from the city centre perhaps because of the high cost of space renting in the main buildings in the centre. This might well be the case. But the layout of the stalls—starting with two displaying English-only signs—and placing all other ethnically marked stalls behind indicate there is a strong push for English-only in the centre and for placing “others” that might be a threat to the English-only identity in the margin. More on this will be unpacked in the discussion section. I share in the next section the observations about Coventry Market to compare with the food stalls area.

### **Coventry Market**

Further past the area of the fast-food stalls, there is a narrow way leading to the entrance of the circular Coventry Market, which is precisely located on 14 Market Way. The entrance of the market is on the research site pathway, but the actual marketplace is slightly off that path. Here Coventry’s ethnic diversity is on full display beyond LL signs. The market is an arcade consisting of numerous stands in the middle offering fresh international produce, meats and fish. It also has shops for items such as fabric, clothes, kitchenware and artisan shops. The fresh market mongers mainly come from South Asia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Algeria and Poland. The physical location of Coventry Market is relatively far from the main, busy shopping area and on the periphery of the city centre.

The LL signs displayed in the market are official and nonofficial. The official signs are created by Coventry's local authorities, such as the world clocks (Figure 3) and public announcements about how to use the market space and keep it clean. Such signs are in English-only. An exception to this is the world clocks sign that shows the times in eleven different time zones and also the English transliterations of the word "welcome" in eleven languages. More on interpreting this sign in the discussion section later on.



**Figure 3** Clocks showing the local times in eleven different countries

The nonofficial English-only and mixed languages signs are abundant in the market. However, most bilingual signs present general information about a product in English and a community language, and then offer culture-specific messages in the foreign language. For example, the sign in Figure 4 presents the name of the product in English and Chinese, and then adds some "ingroup" information between parenthesis. The parenthesized information simply translates into "not negotiable [price]," and it is message to Chinese customers not to negotiate a lower price, which is customary in the produce markets in many regions in China.

Apart from the LL signs found in the market space, it seems that the market is marked by the segregation of ethnic communities. Chinese customers appear to buy only from marked Chinese stands. Middle Eastern customers shop from stalls that are operated by sellers from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Non-minority customers, it is observed, appear to shop predominantly from non-minority vendors. However, customers from all backgrounds line up in front of the only two fishmonger shops operated by Afghani and Pakistani workers.



**Figure 4** English-Chinese sign in Coventry Market

In this market a different relationship between place and language is noted. While the majority language, English, is certainly legitimised as the official language as noted in health and safety signs,

community languages also have legitimate presence here. Therefore, to unpack the relationship between language and place, it is important to zoom in on specific cases to show the dynamic coexistence between languages.

The focus thus far has been to give accounts of and share observations about where LL signs appear in selected public spaces in Coventry city centre. English appears dominant in the material space, both in the fast-food stalls area and the market (e.g. stalls serving English food placed in a prominent position, majority of English-only signs). Community languages are however clustered in the peripheries of both places (e.g. stalls offering ethnic foods placed in a marginal position, multilingual signs are few, and monolingual signs of languages other than English do not exist). The next section presents Coventry Central Library as a case study to further support the statement that there are implicit ideologies at work in Coventry's public spaces with regard to multilingualism. The goal is to compare the observations recorded from the two sites with those documented during MultiDiv linguistic landscaping conducted in 2019.

### **Coventry Central Library: A Case Study**

Coventry Central Library is located on Smithford Way in the heart of the city centre. Upon entering the library, one cannot help but notice the heavy traffic and diversity of library visitors. The library consists of two floors. The first floor is a spacious, round level with numerous bookcases on wheels. On the far edges of the space are several offices, a copy room, and a Multi-Faith and Quiet Contemplation Room. There are also hardly noticeable wood structures against the floor edges, and they are stacked with foreign newspapers. In the centre of the first floor, there are numerous English resources including those geared toward second-language learners and newcomers to England. Examples of second-language learning materials consist of books, CDs and DVDs on ESOL. Examples of materials meant to introduce newcomers to the host culture include books, such as *Life in the UK Handbook* and *The British Way of Life*. Countless other resources in English are available and are considered helpful for migrant communities.

In addition to English-only resources and materials, the first floor comprises several tables assigned for activities to help newly arrived migrants learn English, such as the English Conversation Hour table, Conversation Cafes and the ESOL class table. Several bookcases are aligned to create a small enclosed space for children's RhymeTimes and StoryTime, both are activities delivered only in English, yet they feature themes, games and artworks from around the world.

The centre of the library's first floor is thus officially assigned to the learning and practice of English and for resources in English only. Yet, in addition to the tables that are used for English learning activities, migrant library visitors gather unofficially at other tables in groups of four to six, and, according to informal conversations with such groups, they use the space to create an atmosphere where they communicate in their first languages and share all things related to their cultures. Such tables are therefore usually language-and culture-specific, according to observations recorded during the MultiDiv field trip in June 2019.

The second floor of the library is divided into three sections. One large section contains desktop computers for the public to use. A second large section has large and small desks and chairs where visitors can read a book or use their own laptops. The relatively smallest section on the second floor, labelled the World Language Zone, has materials in foreign languages. The bookcases in this area are organized by language and are labelled bilingually first in English and then in the language of the materials. The zone also has a corner assigned for refugee project resources, and, according to a library staff, it is available only for Syrian refugees. These resources include books in Arabic and translated

literature for Syrian refugee children. The library staff mentioned during the field trip that the Syrian refugee collection was put together in the last couple of years to accommodate the Syrian families who entered the UK after the most recent unrest in Syria.

After presenting a detailed description of the physical materials and layout of the library, the rest of this section will describe the types of LL signs recorded in the library and where they appear. The description and location of the LL signs are important to the theme of central-peripheral language ideologies noted in Coventry.

The space of the library is enriched with official LL signs that are predominantly in English and are displayed everywhere in the first-floor space to label the English-language resources and English-related activities mentioned earlier. Examples of such signs are library announcements and flyers of public interest, RhymeTimes and StoryTime brochures, etc. However, only a few signs are indicative of other cultures or linguistic diversity.

For example, an eye-catching sign displayed near the margins of the floor centre might at first glance send a message of cultural inclusion and integration of ethnic communities. The sign, Figure 5, is a portrait of three men from different ethnicities sitting on a long bench and reading books with English titles. The men do not seem to be in a library space. The grass under their feet indicates that they are in a park. More on interpreting this sign is in the discussion section below. Close to the library entrance is a revolving display structure where third-party vendors post bilingual flyers and advertise their services. One bilingual flyer that stood out from others was an English-Chinese flyer advertising free Chinese classes for children offered inside the library space every Saturday.



**Figure 5** A sign in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the library

Similarly, there are two official signs of public announcements that appeared both in English and Chinese on the first floor. A RhymeTimes sign in English and Chinese is printed on a small-size paper that was taped on the library community announcement board. The other sign (Figure 6) also in English and Chinese is a book group club advertisement taped on the side of a two-sided bookcase. These two bilingual signs are not found in the centre of the first floor where English resources and English-only signs are placed. Rather, these signs are almost unnoticeable by visitors because of the size of the papers, the font size, the place where they are posted next several other English-only community announcements on the board, as well as the location of the community board and the bookcase on the peripheries of the first floor. Against that same side of the first floor, there are a few nonofficial, mixed-language brochures on rotating display racks. Also on the farthest margin of the first floor are newspapers in Gujarati, Urdu and Panjabi. These papers are sorted into a pigeon-hole-like structure and are labelled in English only.



**Figure 6** *English-Chinese sign*

On the second floor of the library shelves of foreign language books are labelled first in English and then in their language. The World Language Zone signs, furthermore, are not distinctively marked to attract the library visitors and there are no foreign-language signs on the first floor that would alert the limited-English speaking visitors to the existence of foreign resources on the second floor.

A careful look at the placement of books and LL signs in the library suggests that the material space of the library still privileges English resources and pushes to the peripheries foreign language materials, a theme that will be further explored in the discussion below. Even though the library is committed to supporting migrants and refugees, as manifested in their ESOL and other relevant activities, a closer look shows that dominant language ideologies are still perpetuated in the material space through the placement of multilingual resources. A similar tendency is noted in the geographical location of the LL signs and ethnically marked businesses outside the library in the city centre of Coventry. In the next section, the sign data analysis is presented to show the extent of multilingualism in Coventry.

## Discussion

Bilingual signs, displaying English and another minority language, make up to 31.05 % of all collected signs whereas multilingual signs, which have English mixed with two or more community languages, represent 5.4%. Although English-only monolingual signs are the most dominant in the research site (63%), the presence of mixed signs (36.9) in the public space suggests that multilingualism is dynamic in Coventry. The fact that 68 out of 184 signs found in the LL use community languages mixed with English suggests a general trend of multilingualism in Coventry. The discrepancies between the LL signs found in Coventry's public spaces and the City Council census data supports this suggestion. However, diversity on LL signs seems to be, as the data analysis shows, on private, nonofficial signs and not on public signage. This finding is in line with Backhaus (2006) and Landry and Bourhis (1997), and it further supports the observation that publicly funded institutions do not always reflect the existing multilingualism. However, language diversity on private signs does not in the least reflect the range of the languages spoken in Coventry even if it indicates multilingualism and that multilingualism is on the rise. The use of public space in the city centre and the layout of resources city's library appear to privilege English in the centre and relegate other languages to the periphery with the effect, intentional or not, of maintaining an English-only monolingual identity.

The shared public spaces selected for this study—the library, the food stalls and Coventry Market—have been turned into, to use de Saint-Georges’ (2004) idea, places constructed through language ideologies that are based on deeper socio-cultural beliefs. The physical design of the library and the whereabouts of its LL signs and its English-related activities place English in the centre while assigning a peripheral status to other community languages. In support of this observation is not only the physical location of bilingual and multilingual signs on the peripheries of the library. The English resources on the first floor are organized on large bookcases all around whereas limited bilingual signs are stacked further out, precisely on smaller and crammed display structures and community boards where materials are regularly changing.

The library displays an apparent effort to create an inclusive environment, as manifested in the sign of three men that is found slightly off the centre of the library’s first floor. Despite the library’s gesture of inclusion—evident in the diversity of the library visitors’ backgrounds noted during MultiDiv in 2019 and mentioned in the description section above—the design and layout of its resources, however, manifest deep ideologies with underlying monolingual ideals in all its material space.

The three men sign, for example, shows evidently different ethnicities. The men are reading books that are prominently marked by the large font type in English on the title covers. The English titles of these books sharply contradict the men’s ethnic appearances. One possible interpretation of the sign might be that people can find interests in one another’s cultures. However, another immediate interpretation—particularly for those coming from underrepresented ethnicities—could well be the emphasis on English as the medium of communication. This sign therefore can be read as an attempt to include but also raises questions on how the communities’ own linguistic capital can be empowered when it does not correspond to a majority language. The conflicting pressures between attempts to include and support non-English communities, while at the same time challenge the broader dominant monolingual ideologies are evident. The second point that could be raised about this sign is its physical location in the library. It is placed on the margins of the centre of the first floor which is designated for English-only resources. The placement of the sign there supports the interpretation above and indicates that the key to being in the “centre” is the adoption and use of English only.

Similarly, the English-only tendency is dominant outside the library. The shops, cafes, restaurants, businesses, etc. that are directly located in the vicinity of the library display English-only signs. Diverse LL signs only appear the farthest one moves from the library which is central to this space. LL signs showing English mixed with Polish, German, Arabic, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi and Chinese appear in the food stalls area. The presence of these LL signs within Coventry’s LL suggests the perceived peripheral position of community language speakers and the standing of their languages and communities in relation to the “English” in the centre. This linguistic diversity then abruptly disappears along the path to Coventry Market where it profusely re-appears on the market product signs. Coventry Market, as mentioned earlier, is off the city centre—precisely on the peripheries of the main commercial area.

At this point I cite Shohamy and Gorter’s (2009) observation that language is not used arbitrarily and randomly in public spaces such as the food stalls area and Coventry Market and in publicly funded places such as the library. There is an implicit language ideology to help increase English learning and speaking and to maintain its central standing as the language of the majority in relation to the migrants’ community languages. Although the current political climate in the UK and perhaps in most western nation-states—the rise of nationalism and anti-immigrant discourses—makes inferences about subtle language ideologies planned from above possible, other explanations should not be ruled out. However, the dominance of English on signs in the centre of public spaces in Coventry and the

ideological placement of the LL signs that display English mixed with one or more community languages on the peripheries of Coventry are undeniable.

In summary, it is clear that the lack of linguistic diversity in Coventry's LL—the shared public spaces in the city centre selected for this study—is not an indication of monolingualism so much as it points towards indirect ideologies toward multilingualism. On an official level, there seems to be a relentless push for adopting English as the lingua franca so that migrants might prosper in Coventry. This sounds reasonable for practical day-to-day living in a shared public place. However, the use of English as the most practical lingua franca would not rule out true multilingualism as an attribute to Coventry's communities. The signage analysis suggests that the city on an official level strongly privileges monolingualism and does not foster the multilingual tapestry of the population. Coventry Central Library, as a case study representing a publicly funded institution, works towards an inclusive and supportive environment for migrants and refugees; yet its material space reflects often dominant language attitudes and ideologies. The library is perhaps merely one microcosm of a tendency that might be studied in other areas of activity. It is possible that community languages and cultures are officially promoted, but in effect pushed toward the peripheries, which has already created an issue of social and spatial segregations. The newcomers to Coventry are perhaps considered a transient population (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010) whose interests are best served by facilitating their access to the majority language. This is unquestionably important; access to the majority language is critical for access to resources (Angouri *et al.*, 2018), however the relationship between multilingualism and challenging the monolingual norm remains complex and asymmetrical.

### Conclusion

In this paper, I have used the food stalls area and Coventry Market as supplementary pre-data for the main case study, Coventry Central Library. My objective has been to show the ideological relationship between language and the physical space in a city known for its multilingual communities. English is consciously learned and used for intercommunication between all different subgroups in Coventry. However, the promotion of English as the most practical medium of communication does not obscure an accurate representation of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Coventry and cannot be interpreted as a commitment to monolingualism. The increasing presence of signs displaying English mixed with languages spoken by East Asian communities in Coventry's LL suggests that multilingualism is on the rise and the presence of a vibrant and growing East Asian community. The free Chinese language classes flyers found in the library may indicate that the Chinese-speaking community is taking steps to teach, maintain and pass Chinese to future generations. Although similar flyers from other communities were not seen in the library, there are social centres and community schools in Coventry that teach minority languages. Examples of these include the Igbo Community in Coventry and the Indian Community Centre Association in Foleshill. Thus, community language speakers continue to find creative ways to maintain their native languages and pass them on to their children (Chik *et al.*, 2019), even when those languages are pushed to the peripheries of LLs. This is the case everywhere, including places that strive to be open and inclusive. What this paper has attempted to show is the complex and multifaceted relationship between a city's different places and the languages that constitute its ecosystem. Multilingual practices are always subject to ideologies that circulate in society; accordingly, no one institution or city can be truly multilingual for as long as monolingualism is encouraged. A political commitment to the significance of linguistic capital for societal growth is a condition and pre-requisite for truly multilingual, open cities to all.

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