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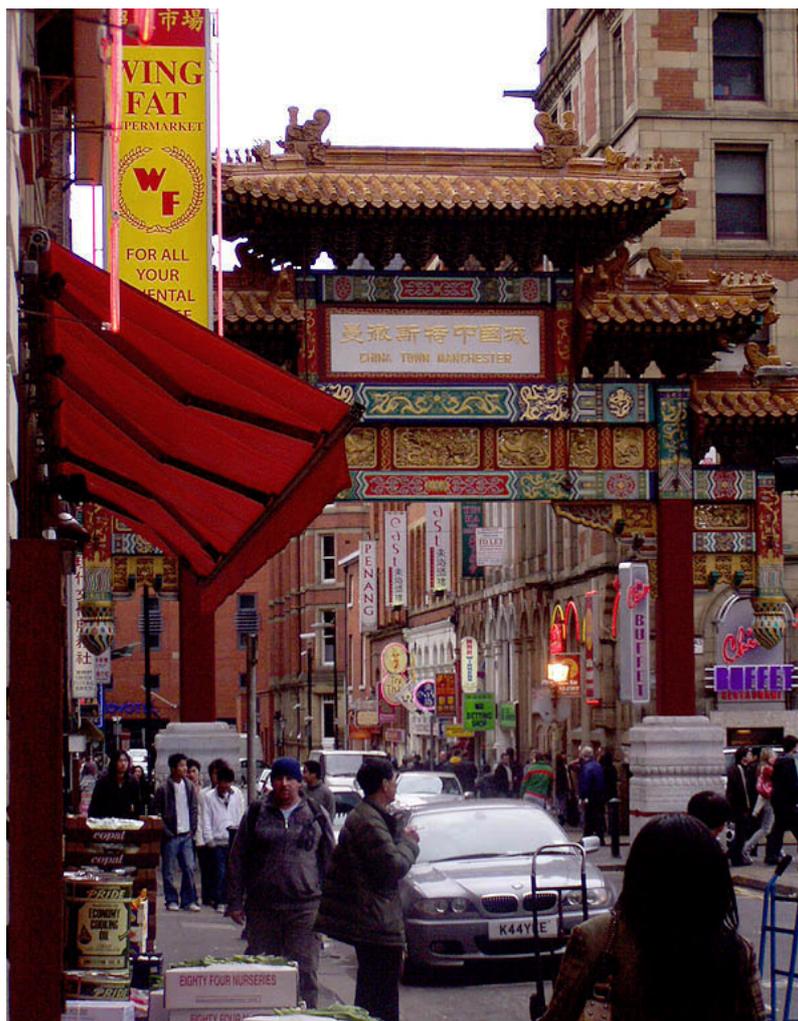
Multilingualism in Manchester's Chinatown

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Chinatown, Manchester

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Introduction

We chose to conduct our study in Manchester's Chinatown, primarily as it is an area which has witnessed a rapid influx of Chinese residents over recent decades. As a result of this increase, businesses and commerce have flourished in the area in order to meet inhabitants' economic and cultural requirements. Manchester's Chinatown is said to be the second largest in England; according to the 2001 census, out of 247,403 Chinese citizens in Britain, 26,887 lived in the North West of England, with some terming it the region's '*Chinese Village*' (Lo, 2009:1). The location of Manchester's Chinatown was also significant to our study as its central position means that it is easily accessible to the public and tourists flocking from Manchester's city centre. Our preliminary research suggests that Cantonese is the main dialect spoken in the community however the number of speakers of Mandarin has increased over the past decade as more have come to the United Kingdom for work and study. A distinctive dialect of Cantonese, Hakka, and Mandarin are the most popular after Cantonese.

Through our study we were primarily interested in investigating which languages were the most preferential and most frequently used when communicating with customers and within businesses in Chinatown. We also aimed to find out whether the influx of tourists and English speaking customers to the area has affected the languages used in Chinatown. The growth of Chinatowns around the UK has had a large impact on cities up and down the country; however numerous studies have struggled to spatially classify this data. Analysing our data we were able to see that a large amount of our participants, were employed mostly based around the Chinese catering community. The popularity of Chinese food within Britain has meant that in many areas of the country Chinese residential areas are not closely enclosed; a trait which is often associated with ethnic minority groups. However an exception to this is perhaps Manchester's Chinatown community, although many of the people we interviewed lived within Manchester's city centre, Chinatown itself was not the sole centre of the Chinese community.

Research questions and Methodology

The overall aim of our study was to investigate how language is used in businesses in Manchester's Chinatown. Through our study we aimed to provide answers to the following questions;

- What is the most preferential language used when communicating with customers and within businesses in Chinatown?

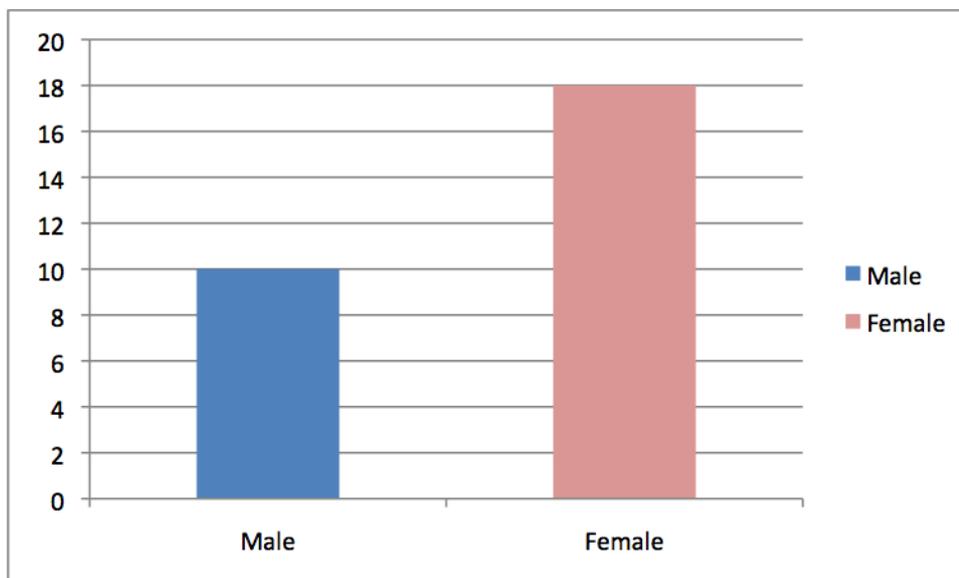
- Which languages are used primarily for carrying out oral transactions and the labelling of products?
- How do dialects interact within the community?

As part of our preliminary research we initially visited the area and took note of the languages used for shop fronts and signage. We then carried out a pre-study which involved a short questionnaire about language use that we asked to ten businesses in Manchester's Chinatown. Upon analysing our preliminary questionnaire we found that Chinatown is host to immigrants from Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Korea and Laos and the main languages used in businesses were Cantonese, the dialect Hakka, Mandarin and Vietnamese.

Our pre-study provided us with a great deal of useful information we would not have otherwise come across in our research. For example one of the participants we approached was a speaker of a dialect of Cantonese called Hakka. We also discovered that the people we approached in Chinatown nearly all spoke Mandarin despite Cantonese being more widespread in usage. These findings enabled us to tailor our final questionnaire to the responses we received. Based on our findings from the preliminary research survey, we compiled a lengthier questionnaire in order to gain a deeper insight into the variety of languages spoken in businesses. (See appendix #3). We decided that the most efficient way to gain a strong sample of qualitative data was to ask a pre-formulated questionnaire to a range of businesses in the Chinatown area. We found that the most successful way to elicit relevant data was to ask the questionnaire in person to business owners or members of staff. In this way we were able to not only obtain answers to the questions listed on our questionnaire, it also allowed us to gain extra knowledge about the participant such as background information and relevant stories about language use. From our preliminary study we found that the best time to approach businesses was mid morning as they were at their quietest around that time.

Our method was to approach businesses in Chinatown and explain to the manager or member of staff the aim of our study and ask politely whether they felt comfortable participating. More often than not the answer was yes which enabled us to gain some insightful information from a wide range of businesses such as restaurants, supermarkets, bakeries, and gift and textile shops. We decided to keep the interview style similar to the preliminary questionnaire as the informal and narrative approach provided us with both the statistical information we required and further insightful information relevant to our study. We conducted our study over a two day period with the aim of acquiring thirty-five completed questionnaires. Spreading it over two days also gave us the opportunity to ask a wider range of people visiting Chinatown on either day. However while carrying out our research we found that our original aim of thirty-five to be too ambitious as our narrative style questionnaire proved to be exceptionally time consuming, therefore we cut the number of

samples down to twenty-eight. When examining the results of our preliminary questionnaire we found that we needed to be more specific with the types of people we asked therefore we asked our questionnaire to 10 men and 18 women in order to produce a fair result (see graph below).



Through our questionnaire we wanted to find out if the influx of Chinese people to the area in recent years has affected language and whether newer migrants use language differently. In order to obtain this information we first asked the participants about the languages they speak and whether they speak a specific dialect of the language. We then further questioned the participant about whether they felt their accent had changed since moving to the United Kingdom (unless of course they were born here). In order to further our research and gain a more accurate representation of the languages used in the area we decided to ask passers-by in the street in Chinatown questions about language use. We were interested in whether they worked in Chinatown and if so what job they did, and what languages they speak when they are at work and when they are customers in Chinatown. We decided to approach passers-by in groups of two in order to make us more approachable. This provided us with some interesting results.

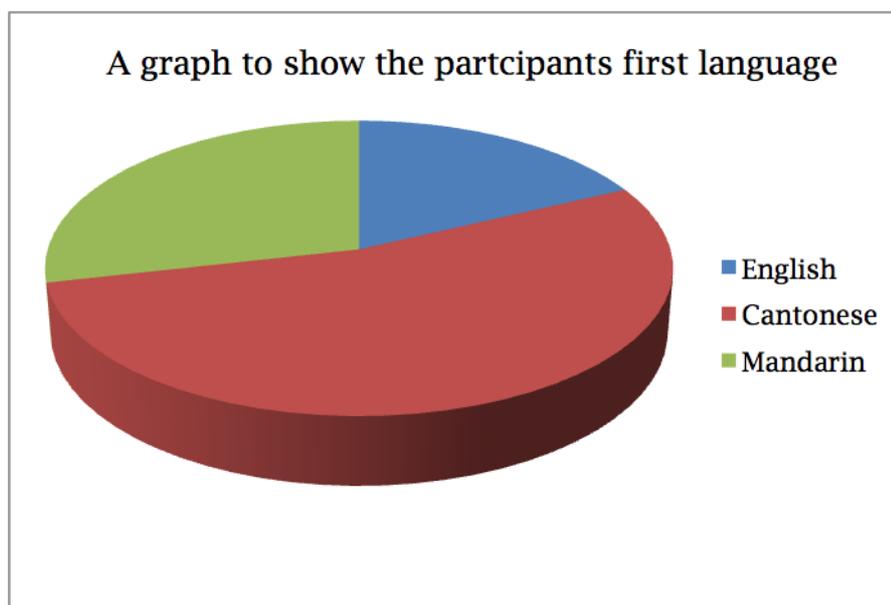
In addition we used an observational method to elicit relevant data. We used a digital camera to take photos of signage and advertisements in the area (see appendix). Also to avoid the problem of the 'observer's paradox' we took observed language around us and took note of the languages used in particular between Chinese and non-Chinese customers and ourselves. According to Chung (2008) the evasive nature of the Chinese population within the UK, along with their attitudes towards government assistance and their strong sense of ethnic identity means that they are often labelled an *'invisible community.'* Within Chung's research, it was also expressed that recent studies into Chinese culture have been

heavily criticised for their lack of interpretation into host society and discrimination to immigrant community when conducting such fieldwork. It is therefore of high importance to our research that we produce a sample that is fair, reliable and representative.

Findings

In our final questionnaire (see appendix #3) we surveyed twenty eight participants in Chinatown, asking appropriate questions from a devised list of sixteen questions. Nearly all participants worked in Chinatown in various businesses ranging from restaurants to supermarkets. All of our participants were of Chinese origin, however as mentioned previously the majority asserted their home as Hong Kong, further enforcing the popular attitude of Hong Kong being a separate political and geographical entity from the China. Answers came from multiple generations, with ages ranging from 18 to 55.

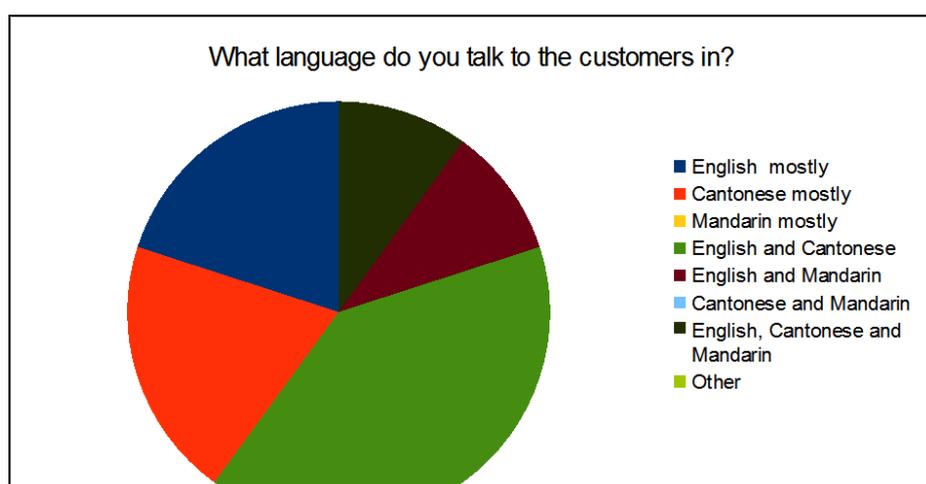
Overall, the results we found were very similar to our predictions, partially a result of experience and knowledge gained through our preliminary questionnaire. From the surveyed participants at least, Cantonese is the most widely spoken language in business transactions in Chinatown. While Mandarin definitely has a presence, the frequency of its usage is far lower. (See graph below)



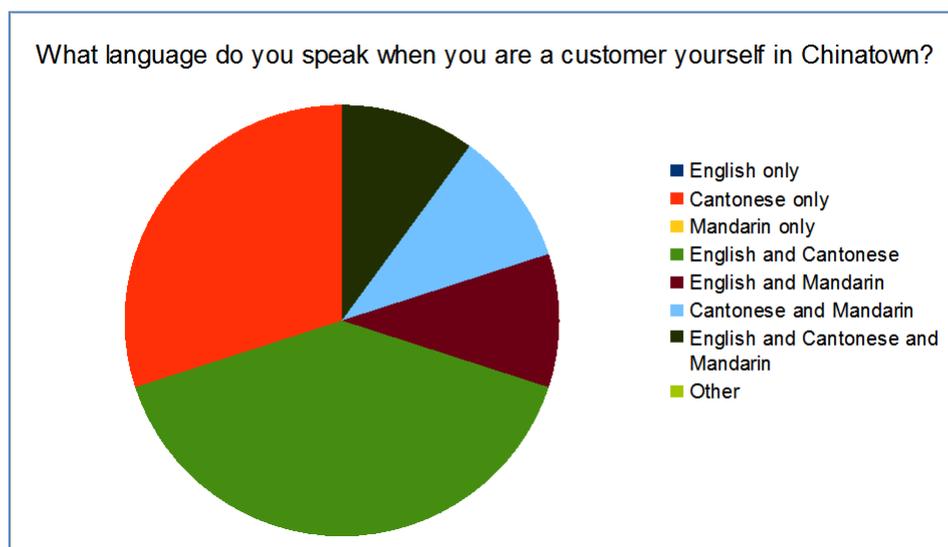
With English being ever more widespread amongst younger generations, there seems to be growing emphasis from older generations to sustain the usage of Cantonese; firstly for practical reasons, as communication with visiting relatives and family elders who are not as proficient in English, while secondly as a way of maintaining a deep cultural link to their native country. Though this was predicted, it came as a surprise when we analysed our results that all English-born participants were entirely fluent in both Cantonese and English.

An interesting subject arose in the answers of every multilingual participant was that of code-switching, classified by Meyerhoff as *'the alterations between varieties, or codes, across sentences or clause boundaries'* (2009: 287). We were unsure of exactly how common this feature might have been, due to uncertainties of how strictly guarded the usage of Cantonese in households is, for example. However, code-switching is extremely widespread. We observed that code switching tended to occur when the interviewee were speaking to us as well as talking to others. Meyerhoff (2009) identifies that code switching occurs because *'in some contexts one variety will serve their needs better than another'*. Several participants, interestingly all female, explicitly emphasised how often they incorporate it into their daily speech, often using Cantonese nouns with English verbs and vice versa. One participant stated *"There are often concepts, moods or feelings I can express using Cantonese but cannot translate into English as there is no corresponding word"*, suggesting that both languages are used in tandem to incorporate idioms from their mother language along with grammatical structures *and speech conventions from their second language*. Another participant answered *"Sometimes I think in English and talk in Cantonese, and vice versa, which mixes the languages together quite a bit."* This suggests that the importance of both Cantonese and English is great in the communities of Chinatown, as efforts are made to use both.

When communicating with managers of restaurants in particular, we found that emphasis was placed on ease and speed of usage when choosing which language to communicate with employees in. One manager revealed that she had little knowledge of Mandarin at all, while a Mandarin-speaking chef knew little Cantonese. This led to almost exclusive communication in English, which both participants had a fluent grasp of due to the amount of time they had spent living in the country. The concept that two people from the same 'area' of the world cannot communicate in their native languages, despite them being spoken in such a close proximity to each other in China, is particularly interesting, especially as they could only communicate in the language of the country where they were both currently living and working. The graph below displays our findings for the languages used when communicating with customers in Chinatown.



We then asked the participants of our questionnaire which language they found they spoke most frequently as a customer in Chinatown (see graph below). Evidently the majority of interviewees spoke a mixture of English and Cantonese, similarly to chart above. This therefore exemplifies that the most frequently used languages we found from conducting our study are English and Cantonese.



Previous studies have proven *'language is at the heart of management'* and is *'directly linked to the exercise of power and control over production and workforce'* (Bayley & Schechter, 2003), providing evidence that language is one of the most important aspects of ensuring a business such as a multilingual restaurant is ran efficiently and successfully. Another participant holding a managerial position revealed, despite being born to first-generation parents from Hong Kong in Oldham, her first requirement to converse fluently in Cantonese was when she was chosen to manage her parents' restaurant and communicate with several Cantonese speakers. Providing an opposite side of the coin to the earlier suggestion that many parents actively encourage the usage of Cantonese, this participant's parents had learnt English themselves and chose to speak in only English to their children for "fear that they would not survive at school in England". In this instance, priorities stemming from sustained connection with Chinese culture, heritage and family were placed below those of perceived ease of living in the United Kingdom.

We encountered instances of bilingual paraphernalia across Chinatown. Image (a) was taken from a notice board in the foyer of Oriental World, a Chinese arts and craft shop on Nicholas Street. It advertises the requirement for a cashier, while the only request is that applicants are fluent in both Cantonese and English. This clearly signifies the strong desire for an employee who can communicate with a thriving Cantonese-speaking population as

well as any customers who may be native English speakers. Commerce is available in Chinatown from both Chinese immigrants and English customers, which is why employers and business owners specifically recruit multilingual employees.

Image (b), taken from the same notice board, states a requirement for a waitress. In contrast to the previous advert, it does not request multilingual capabilities yet provides the text itself in both English and Cantonese. This is particularly interesting as a desire for a multilingual employee is not made explicit, however in order to reach a wider market the notice is available in two languages. It is possible that a request for an English speaker is made in the Cantonese notice, however as we are not familiar with Cantonese this is difficult to ascertain. Image (c) displays a notice board at the Manchester Wai Yin Chinese Womens' Society featuring advertisements in exclusively Chinese languages, both Cantonese and Mandarin. This suggests that the subject matter of the notices may be relevant only to the Chinese population of Manchester; for example health services or advice specifically targeted to Chinese people living in the United Kingdom.

Image (d) shows the layout and content of a price tag in the Wing Yip Chinese supermarket. The tag, like one in a British supermarket, displays the price and weight, however gives the description of the product in both English and Cantonese. This again is an example of the services available in Chinatown which are specifically tailored to cater to both the local Chinese and English populations. By providing the product details in English primarily, it is encouraging English customers to shop there as they are not disconnected from the shopping experience. Equally, by providing the Cantonese it is a clear signal to Chinese customers that they are just as welcome in the supermarket and that their custom is valued. The prominence of both Cantonese and English, as well as Mandarin, in so much of the text in Chinatown suggests an audience who use both languages in their day to day lives. By featuring the same messages in both languages, it also makes services far more accessible to monolingual speakers, perhaps a tactic employed to ensure custom is not turned away. By suggesting that both Cantonese and Mandarin are valued in Chinatown, it is clearly important that native Chinese inhabitants and patrons of Chinatown do not feel disenfranchised from such a major link to their home country.

The results of our study suggested that the Chinese community has a high self employment rate and many people work in the catering industry. We found that a significant number of the interviewees we spoke to either owned their own business or worked in the family owner restaurant. We also discovered that a number of people we approached in the area were students at the University of Manchester. Lo (2009) identifies the community as having a *“high rate of people getting high level qualifications”*.

Literature review

According to Matras (2009) it is a common trait in communities such as Manchester's Chinatown to maintain strong ties to their linguistic and cultural identity when migrating to a new area. When migrants move to a new country, they are often overwhelmed by heavy influences now forced into their life; this is often the case seen with migrants who move to Western countries. The phenomena proposed by Matras known as '*diasporas*' represents the occurrence of groups of people gathering with other similar individuals forming communities. Creese (2007: 5) proposed the idea that many Cantonese speakers migrated to the UK because they wanted a better quality of life and to no longer carry their representation as '*peasants*'. Their intention to provide their blood line with more opportunities and a better lifestyle meant that this migration was key to their future success. Within our study we thought initially of requiring the socio-economic status of our participants; however after considerations of how this would be interpreted within a questionnaire situation we did not find it of suitable and thought it would perhaps jeopardise the success of our study. Instead here we chose to analyse our participants based on their occupation (if known.) Comparing our results with the 2001 UK Census showed that 71% of the Chinese population worked in either a hotel or restaurant (Creese 2007: 5).

Within our study we found that Manchester accommodated and provided numerous links for the Chinese community; these varied from two Chinese churches with congregations English, Mandarin and Cantonese, to Chinese radio stations. However Edwards (2001:253) suggests that English is often used as an instrument of social control and cohesion and that often the language reinforces the notion of superiority and the unnecessary need to learn any other languages. Analysing the numerous sources of data from our study (appendix), including bilingual signage, web links to Chinese TV and radio, and job adverts for bilingual jobs, it is clearly evident that the media has a large influence upon the multilingualism experienced within Chinatown. Within Myers-Scotton, (2006) they stated that it is not possible to purely suggest that one factor predicts language maintenance or shifts; instead suggested that it entirely depends on the hierarchy among the community. During our study we also felt it of importance for our own attitudes about language not to interfere with our research.

Conclusion

Our results show that the main languages within Chinatown Manchester are English, Cantonese and Mandarin; their importance is evident to the success of the thriving community. Through our research we were able to examine the importance of media and literacy services; in particular the use of bilingual signage (see appendix #1). Within our

research we also discovered that code-switching was a large factor in the everyday lives of Cantonese and Mandarin speakers. Often working alongside each other meant that speakers had to switch their speech perhaps in between all three languages of English, Cantonese and Mandarin depending on who they were conversing with.

If our study was to be done again, considering we had more time and perhaps funding we would provide a more in depth study. Analysing our research the two days in which we collected our data on generally occurred first thing in the morning, limiting the amount of people within our study. If we were to do the study again we would try to gain a more representative sample, visiting Chinatown at different parts of the day and importantly at a weekend when the area is at its busiest. Overall our results show that the study was successful as we gained a representative sample of different ages, occupations and languages. It is apparent that Cantonese and Mandarin are key parts of the everyday life in Chinatown and we predict that this shall continue.

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Appendix #1: Bilingual signage



Image (a)



Image (b)

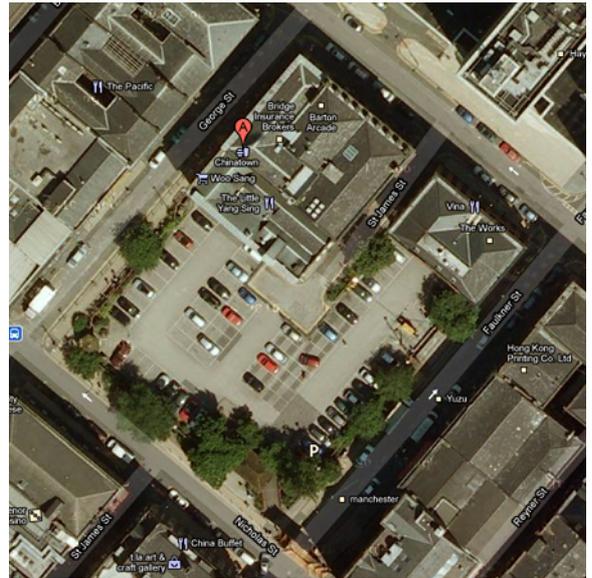


Image (c)



Image (d)

Appendix #2: Map of Manchester's Chinatown



Appendix #3: Questionnaire

1. What country were you born in?
2. What is your first language? (What other languages do you speak)
3. Do you speak a specific dialect of your language?
4. If you weren't born in this country, what country did you learn your language(s) in?
5. Are you ever aware of switching between languages in one single conversation?
(Code-switching)
6. Do you work in Chinatown? (Only if it is not obvious that they do)
7. What do you do?
8. In what language do you speak to customers?
9. In what language do you speak to your colleagues?
10. What language do you speak when you are a customer yourself in Chinatown?
11. In what languages do you produce printed materials for your business in? (menus, cheques etc)
12. Are you male or female? (obvious)
13. Do you speak a specific dialect of your language?
14. Has your accent changed in any way since moving to the United Kingdom? (Only ask if they weren't born here)
15. Does gender affect your role in the community here in Chinatown?
16. Are you aware of any of the services Manchester City Council provides for non-native English speakers?