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# *Multilingual literacies, identities and ideologies: exploring chain migration from Pakistan to the UK*

Book

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background to the thesis

This study is the result of work I have carried out as a researcher, teacher trainer and language adviser in Pakistan and the UK. It emerged from several research projects which I was involved in from 2008 to 2013. Initially I investigated language and literacy in the lives of a Pakistani family in north Manchester. Taking the opportunity to extend this study by travelling to Pakistan with them for three months in 2009, I then decided to stay in Pakistan for twelve months to work at the British Council. During that time I travelled across the country for work and formally carried out a small-scale study of English language learning for prospective migrants from Azad Kashmir. In this study, I contrasted the educational experiences of four English language learners and their access to English, Urdu and Mirpuri Punjabi. The reason for choosing this approach was to begin exploring the role of language and literacy in the chain migration which has developed between this part of Azad Kashmir and the northwest of England. By tracing access to English language courses and tests, the study demonstrated that English contributes to family life at a time when the West is experiencing a tightening of the relationship between language, immigration, citizenship and national security (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Cooke and Simpson 2008). Since the '9/11' attacks in the US, there has been increased scrutiny of Muslims entering the UK and a conflation of English language proficiency with social integration. The aim for the PhD study was to extend this small-scale research by exploring the role of all the languages and literacies in Mirpuri migrants' repertoires and what roles these play in the chain migration between Mirpur and northwest England.

The initial two stages of the PhD were then followed by a countrywide research project conducted for the British Council, which I coordinated from Islamabad, which explored language and education in Pakistan. This involved generating recommendations for the Government of Pakistan and a process of public scrutiny through policy dialogues, conference presentations, ministerial level

discussions and interactions with the public which took place during October 2010 and February 2011, culminating in *Language and Education in Pakistan: Recommendations for Policy and Practice* (Coleman and Capstick 2012). Findings related to the language in education situation in Pakistan are included in Chapter 4 of this thesis as they form part of the social, political and economic context of this study. From this vantage point I began the main study of my PhD in May 2011 by working with a key informant from the 2011 study and developing a research project which explored the roles of language and literacy in his and his family's migrations.

Thus the data for this PhD were collected in four phases, though it was only in the first, second and fourth phases where I consider my role to be that of a university researcher rather than an employee of a non-governmental organisation.

## 1.2 Background to Pakistan

This section deals briefly with facts about Pakistan which are presented by governmental and non-governmental agencies as a way of capturing two of its enduring characteristics on the international stage: security and poverty. From 2008 to 2013 when this study was carried out, Pakistan was in the news across the world due to increased militancy and the US-led war against the Taliban in the northwest of the country. Azad Kashmir, a disputed territory also in the north of Pakistan, has its own security issues (Puri 2010) which emerged at the time of independence from Britain and which are explored in this thesis. Hence the portrayal of both country and territory is often dominated by political and military issues. Furthermore, Western imperialism has a long history in the region, Pakistan having been carved out of British India in 1947, since which time the population has grown dramatically. Moreover, migration to Britain has also increased dramatically due to the colonial ties which bound the cheap labour of towns like Mirpur to the industrial heartlands of England. In terms of development, however, Pakistan has one of the lowest figures in the world for public expenditure on education at only 2.9% of GDP (UNDP 2010), a statistic

which is often quoted as an indication of poverty in the country. Hence many Mirpuris leave school having been unable to access literacy in Urdu, the national language, or English, the official language, which then makes their goal of migrating to Britain more challenging. At the same time, they are more determined as England is seen as a land of opportunity. Conversely, the British government no longer requires cheap labour from South Asia and is gradually moving towards tighter controls on migration from non-European Economic Area countries. Five months after the start of my data collection in Mirpur, in November 2010, the British government introduced English language testing for migrants. This had immediate consequences for the participants in this study, their language learning and their literacy practices, as individuals turn to their family, friends and wider communities in order to access the literacies that they need to migrate. These are the literacies that they need for filling in visa forms as well as those for maintaining ties with their families and friends before and after migration.

It is the aim of this study from this point onwards to explore these literacies of migration by looking at their roles in migration from Mirpur to Lancashire in the northwest of England.

## 1.3 Research interests

In this section I briefly set out my research interests and the reasons for choosing this study. I have been interested in language in education since I started work as a teacher in 1994, as the medium of instruction in the classroom, and all the other languages that are used alongside it, influence how some students have access to literacy while others do not. Working in countries such as Pakistan, where this medium of instruction can be very different to the languages used at home, meant that I then became curious about the relationship between home and school and how this influenced access to literacy. Moreover, I grew up in a part of Lancashire (UK), where many Pakistani migrants from poor parts of Pakistan have settled and, during my lifetime, I have witnessed the politicization of issues related to immigration and integration in

my home county. While working in Pakistan, these interests coalesced into my questioning the power relations which prevented access to dominant languages such as Urdu and English and how this lack of access was then compounded when Pakistanis migrated to the UK where English is the dominant language and literacy. From these initial interests, I developed a research proposal which I submitted to Lancaster University and the ESRC which linked literacy, language and power through the analysis of dominant and vernacular literacies in migration. This proposal was accepted and in 2008 I began a full-time PhD in the Linguistics Department (LAEL) at Lancaster. In the following section I set out how the research interests outlined above are related to my critical project.

## 1.4 My critical project

In *Discourse and power in a multilingual world* (2005), Blackledge explores the connection between the violent disturbances on the streets of northern towns in 2001 and the introduction of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act at the end of 2002. Part of the legislation included a requirement for the spouses of British citizens to demonstrate proficiency in English when applying for British citizenship. Through his analysis of complex chains of discourse, Blackledge was able to show that political actors argued that the violence on the streets was caused by some Asian residents' inability to speak English. These findings are foundational to my own study for two reasons.

The first is that Blackledge's analysis of policymaking on language, immigration and citizenship frames my own study, as the core of this PhD is an investigation of how families cope with immigration bureaucracy when spouses wish to live together in England. The second reason for taking up Blackledge's work is his application of the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) of CDA, drawing extensively from Reisgl and Wodak (2001), as a theory and methodology for understanding the relations between discourse and social practices. I aim to do that in this study too, through my analysis of literacy as a social practice as well as in my critical enterprise. By critical enterprise I mean the way in which I 'make the implicit explicit' in the analysis of discourse, following Chilton et al. who

suggest that this means ‘making explicit the implicit relationship between discourse, power and ideology, challenging surface meanings, and not taking anything for granted’ (2010: 491). Chilton, following Wodak (1989), also highlights a further aspect of the critical enterprise which I use to orient my study, that of being reflexively self-critical. This is also captured in Heller’s critical sociolinguistics which she defines as ‘informed and situated social practice, one which can account for what we see, but which also knows why we see what we do, and what it means to tell the story’ (2011:6). What I take from Heller here is that, as a researcher researching discourses, my critical project must include a critical examination of my own discourses. I see this as part of the way that ethnographers think about reflexivity when addressing the ways the researcher and the conditions of the study affect knowledge production in the field, and my awareness of this. In light of this, I explore my own research journey in Chapter 3 through a reflexive account of how my positionings impact on the production of research (McCorkel and Myers 2003). In the following section I describe the research aim and questions on which my critical project rests.

## 1.5 Research Aim and Research Questions

It is on the basis of the initial research findings and orientations described in the sections above that I formulated the following research aim: to understand the literacies and languages related to migration and what these tell us about how migrants make use of all of their language resources in a range of institutional and non-institutional settings.

Based on this aim I formulated the following research questions:

1. What literacies are available in Mirpur and how do prospective migrants access English and Urdu for migration?

2. How do Mirpuri migrants to the UK and their families use literacy mediation when dealing with the dominant literacies of migration?
3. What language and literacy practices do Mirpuri migrants, their families and friends choose to stay in touch online and how do they justify these language and literacy choices?
4. How can the Discourse Historical Approach in Critical Discourse Studies be combined with New Literacy Studies to explore the multilingual literacy practices of migrants?

# Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

## 2.1 Introduction