

A Descriptive Analysis of Languages in the New York City Subway

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Abstract

This paper describes and analyzes the languages observed in the New York City subway system. The observation took place on the number 7 train and its surrounding neighborhoods. This study reports on the prevalence of certain languages and their uses. From the results, it is found that although the neighborhoods' languages are quite diverse, the languages used in advertising on the train are almost completely monolingual. The dominance of the English advertisements displays English for status purposes on the 7 train, while ethnic languages preserve their identities and cultures by the use of languages both visually and verbally in the communities.

Introduction

New York City's subway system transports half a million passengers, along hundreds of miles of city tracks, for an average of forty-five minutes each day.¹⁾ The Metropolitan Transit Authority's (MTA) New York City subway serves four boroughs of New York City: Bronx, Manhattan, Queens and Brooklyn. Within these boroughs, one can find language concentrations where it is possible to conduct everyday business completely in a language other than English.

The number 7 train, which runs from Flushing, Queens, to Times Square, Manhattan, is famous for the diverse passengers it serves. The number 7 train route travels through neighborhoods with visibly different language concentrations.

The research group including the writer of this paper studied the languages in the New York City subway to find out if they represent the population that uses it, and if this reflects the value assigned to the languages not represented. From the results, it is found that although the neighborhoods' languages are quite diverse, the languages used in advertising on the train are almost completely monolingual. It is apparent that there are two different language uses in and around the 7 train's route. English serves for business purposes, while ethnic languages preserve their identities and cultures by the use of languages both visibly and audibly in the communities. The dominance of the English advertisements displays the English-only American image and it does not match the diverse linguistic communities of the 7 train riders.

As the language used to communicate with communities can be a value indicator for that language and its culture, this study analyzes the languages in the New York City subway system to

understand how it affects the value of other languages in society.

The language situation of New York City

New York City is one of the most multilingual cities in the world (Garcia and Fishman, 2001). New York City's subway system carries a multitude of languages of half a million passengers for an average of 45 minutes per rider every day.

The number 7 train, which runs from Flushing in Queens to Times Square in Manhattan, is famous for the diverse passengers it serves and a variety of languages observed in the neighborhoods. Members of the ethnic communities preserve their identities and cultures by using their languages both visually and verbally, and they seem to be able to conduct everyday lives through their languages in their communities. In these circumstances, is the subway a monolingual carriage in a city of multilingualism?

In the United States, there have never been official languages acknowledged at the federal level. However, there has been recognition and acceptance of English monolingualism as a nation. English has been considered almost as the official language. At the state level, each state has its official language policies and choices of official languages are up to individual state decisions. Currently, 30 out of 50 states in the United States have acknowledged English as their official languages (U.S. English).

The New York State government has not acknowledged any official languages at the state level. According to Garcia (2001), two distinct language policies are in place in New York City. One is *a policy of promotion*; that is, private businesses have recognized the need for LOTE (Languages Other Than English) use to sell to the international or ethnic community in New York. The other is *a multilingual policy of tolerance during the transition to English stage*; that is, government uses LOTE only to enable monolingual LOTE speakers to participate in the government services, court proceedings or education during their transition period to become bilingual English and LOTEs.

English language monolingualism continues to be the sociolinguistic aim in New York City, as in the rest of the U.S. society. It is still the case that bilingualism is relegated to the home, the ethnic communities and its institutions in a city of multilingualism. Garcia (2001) states:

Scholars have paid well-deserved attention to the city's immigrants, its foreign-born population, its multiethnic character. Other scholars have studied the city's economy and trade. Linguistics and sociolinguistics have studied English in New York. But little has been said about the city's multilingualism and the way in which Languages Other than English (LOTE) have always been used in city life. (p.3)

It is also pointed out by Shoji (2009) that little has been generally said about not only the way in which other minority groups have been recognized and accepted as part of the members of the

society by the dominant group, but also how it reflects language accommodations and language policies for those who do not belong to the dominant language group in a multilingual situation.

Seen from that perspective, this study concerns the ways in which English or Languages Other Than English (LOTE) have been used in public space of a multilingual city by studying the print and spoken languages of the New York City subway, on the number 7 train. As Backhaus (2007) claims, by studying language on signs in public space (not necessarily languages on signs, in our case), it may provide valuable insights into the linguistic situation of a given place, including common patterns of language use, language policies, prevalent language images/attitudes, power relations between different linguistic groups among others, as well as language accommodations for minority groups there.

The previous discussion has drawn attention to the need for research on the ways in which English or LOTE have been used in public space of a multilingual city. This study analyzes the languages in the New York City subway to answer the following research questions: 1) Do the languages in the subway represent the population of the riders that use them? and 2) Do the languages in the subway reflect the value assigned to the languages not represented? The next section will illustrate the methodology used for this study.

Methodology

The research group chose the number 7-train route as it is widely known to travel through very diverse neighborhoods. We felt it would provide a wide range of data in language both print and spoken. We chose six areas to do the neighborhood observations.

The areas observed (see the 7 train route on MTA subway map below)

Flushing

Junction Blvd (Elmherst/Corona)

74th & Roosevelt (Jackson Heights)

Woodside

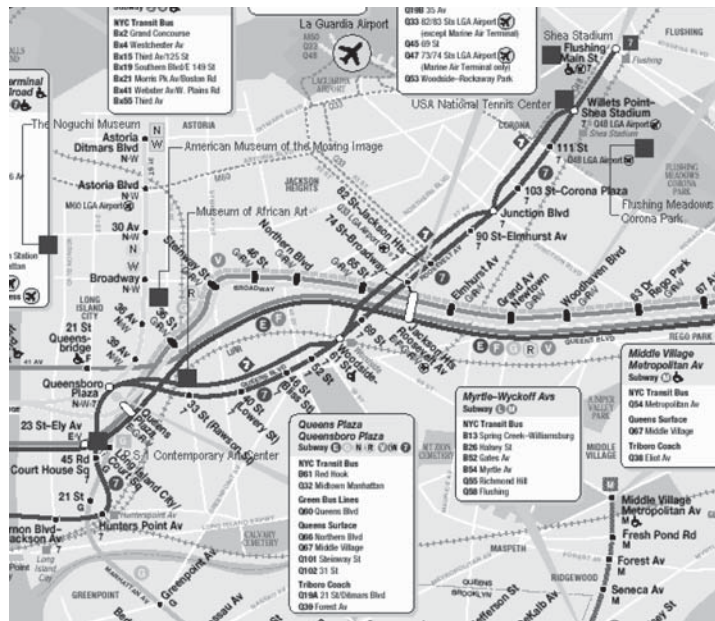
Queensboro Plaza

Times Square (Midtown)

MTA subway map: the 7 train route runs from Flushing to Times Square



The 7 train route in Queens



Source: Adapted from MTA home page (<http://www.mta.info/index.html>)

We chose to observe the languages in the following situations.

Print

1. On the trains. This included advertising, MTA advertising and MTA information (schedule changes, safety signs).
2. On the station platforms. This included advertising, MTA advertising and MTA information (schedule changes, subway card vending machines)
3. Observed in a one-neighborhood-block radius of station platforms. This included store signs, print materials being sold, advertising,.,
4. Passenger print. This included newspapers, books, magazines

Spoken

1. Spoken by passengers on train
2. Spoken by pedestrians and residents in a one-neighborhood-block radius of station platforms.

We chose these situations because we believe that the pedestrians and residents of the neighborhood one block from the train are most likely to use the train for transportation. We believe the businesses closest to the train station sell their services and products to the residents of the neighborhood and train users and so would cater to their needs. We believe the language passengers read printed materials in would likely be the language they speak and use frequently in (domain) situations.

Subjects: We did not interact with the participants except to correctly identify which language was being spoken or read. We observed passengers on trains and residents of the neighborhood. The data most relevant to us was the language not the gender or age of the observed users of the languages.

Settings: Subway – Inside trains, at station level where information booths and card vending machines were located. One block radius of train station.

Data Collection

Field Data

We created four spreadsheets. 1. Train postings – advertising, MTA information. 2. Train print – newspapers, books. 3. Platforms – MTA vending machines, MTA schedule changes, 4. Neighbourhood – spoken, store signs, advertising. Because of the constant movement of passengers and pedestrians, we created these sheets to allow for the quick and most accurate observations of any observed language. We broke each spreadsheet into kinds of print (advertising, MTA information, vending machine information, store signs) and then further into language categories. Monolingual, bilingual, partly bilingual – a small part of print was in one other

language (e.g. Se Habla Espanol), and partly multilingual – a small part of print was in more than one language (e.g. Aprende Ingles, (French)). Each language was coded by the first letter of that language (English – E) and we recorded the language code under these language categories as collected. We also included an area for quick description for further detail as needed. We recorded each train car number and the time the data was being collected in the trains, on platforms and in the neighborhood.

We began our observations on a weekday morning heading out to Flushing at 8 am. We first recorded data as a group for two trains to coordinate how we wrote our observations and then continued in pairs. The data collected in the initial group is included in our sample. Each pair had a camera, two digital, two 35mm. Photos were taken of signs and postings that were of a different language than English. Photos of advertising that was representative were also taken.

We rode the train from Flushing into Manhattan at 9am. We wanted our train print data to represent the daily commute of riders on a weekday morning. We believed more passengers would ride and read on a weekday than on a weekend. We worked in pairs and one person recorded the posted print and the other the languages being read and spoken by the passengers, either took pictures of the desired print. On average we collected data for three train cars before we changed trains. We changed trains three times and on each new train we boarded, we repeated the process again in our same pairs. We felt we could collect a better sample of data by observing several trains on different schedules rather than staying on one train and observing that entire train. We believe that for each train we observed, we managed to record data for more than half of the cars.

On our second leg to Flushing we completed our neighborhood and platform observations. We again stayed in our pairs on the train still recording the print until we exited the trains at our planned stops. We observed in one group the languages of the platform with one person recording the findings. Upon leaving the station out to the neighborhood we went back into our pairs and observed one block in a chosen direction of that station exit. The exception being Queensboro plaza - the layout of the neighborhood was so that we split into two groups and each took one side of the street and Junction Plaza – our group was smaller and so we observed the three blocks as one group. We do not believe these changes relate to the data collected.

Due to train maintenance and repair, on the weekends available to the researchers, the 7 train only provided service from Flushing/Main Street to 84th Street/Roosevelt Ave. Because of this no weekend observations were done. On the weekdays available to researchers, Manhattan bound trains were not making all stops from 10am to 3pm. This prevented us from collecting data that represented the train's passengers at each stop between these times. We collected the bulk of our data on Manhattan bound trains beginning at 9am.

Census Data

The 7 train route was compared to a zip code map and broken into the zip codes that it traveled through. We chose six areas in which to do the neighborhood observations based on prior

knowledge of these neighborhoods. Using the US Census Bureau data (2000) we recorded the data of languages used by each neighborhood or zip code in which these six stations were situated. This information was compiled in custom two-way tables by using the Infoshare service. A table was created with languages spoken, means of transportation used for work and broken down by the following sub borough areas.

Flushing

Junction Blvd (Elmherst/Corona)

74th & Roosevelt (Jackson Heights)

Woodside

Queensboro Plaza

Times Square (Midtown)

*A table was created for Queensboro Plaza using languages spoken only. A neighborhood option was not available.

Data Analysis

The data was recorded into spreadsheets and the platform and neighborhood sheets were combined into one. For the analysis there are three sheets. 1. Train info – newspapers, books, spoken, 2. Neighborhood & platform info – spoken, advertising, MTA info, 3. Train posting – advertising, MTA information.

The train information sheet was sorted by category – newspaper, books, spoken, other. Each category was further sorted into language category – monolingual, bilingual, partly bilingual and partly multilingual. These language categories were then again further sorted by language code.

The train posting sheet was sorted by car number, then further sorted by posting type – advertising, MTA information, then further sorted by language category and then again sorted by language code. The neighborhood sheet was sorted by station/neighborhood, then sorted by category, then by language category and then by language.

Findings and Discussion

Posted text inside subway cars

	Only English	Only Spanish	English with another language
Commercial Advertising	198	3	15
MTA Information	55	16	
MTA Advertising	14		
Total (%)	267(88.7)	19(6.3)	15(5)

All train safety signs such as “do not lean on doors”, “no smoking,” “do not pull emergency brake” were in English for all trains. MTA advertising included ads for Poetry in Motion as well as

Transit Museum info. MTA information included subway service changes, new service, terrorist warnings and panhandling info.

98.6% of all commercial advertising was printed entirely in English or with minimal foreign language. Of the advertisements containing another language other than English, they either were for a language school to learn English or contained one phrase, for example, “se habla espanol.” 1.4% of commercial advertising was in Spanish entirely. MTA information was printed in Spanish and English with 77.5% in the latter. There was no language other than English for the above defined MTA advertising.

The US census data (2000) for Queens showed for those reporting they used the subway for transportation to work, English is the most spoken language with 125,572 speakers. Spanish is second with 86,723 recorded. The third is Chinese with 28,336 speakers. If an advertisement is to reach the maximum number of potential consumers in a train the most effective language to use is English. The second is Spanish and the third is Chinese.

We were unable to determine if the number 7 trains are used solely for this route or if they are sometimes interchangeable with other lines. If so, this could affect which languages the advertisements are produced in. If the train is used for another line where the language concentrations are different, the advertisements would be most effective in the most populous language in New York City, English. Among the six neighborhoods we observed and recorded information for, English, Spanish and Chinese are consistently the most spoken languages in all six, but the order varies with the area. The train travels from Flushing where the most observed language is Chinese, to Times Square, where the most observed language is English. MTA information print was translated into Spanish as well but the English postings were more numerous. There were no other languages posted inside the trains during our observations.

Languages observed in use by subway riders

	English	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	Hindi	Punjabi	Russian	Polish	English & Hebrew	English & Spanish
Books	24	6	2		1	1			1	
Newspapers	38	13	11	3			1			
Magazines	6	2						1		
Spoken	23	6	1			1				1
Other Reading Materials	9	3		2						
Total (%)	100(64.1)	30(19.2)	14(8.9)	5(3.2)	1(0.6)	2(1.2)	1(0.6)	1(0.6)	1(0.6)	1(0.6)

Other reading materials included pamphlets, bible, flyer, etc.

This data recorded in the trains reflect the languages most prevalent in the observed stations and neighborhoods. English is observed more than the other languages combined. As mentioned above, the US census data (2000) reports the top three languages spoken by those who use the subway for transportation to work are English, Spanish and Chinese. Our findings support this data

as shown in the table above.

Languages observed on station platforms and one block neighborhood radius

Times Square

	English	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	Turkish	Japanese	Bilingual
Advertising	28	2					
MTA Information	8	2	1				
MTA Vending	1	1	1			1	
Read. Mat. Sold	20	3	1				3It.&E 3Por&E
Store Signs							1 T& E
Spoken	3					1	1 S& E
Total (%)	60(74.1)	8(9.9)	3(3.7)			2(2.5)	8(9.9)

Times Square, the last stop on the 7 train in Manhattan, is located in Midtown. It is a tourist destination for many who come to the city. Full of large advertisements, taking up whole building sides, newspapers stands on many corners, restaurants with their posted menus and signs, and a variety of retail and service stores, Times Square displays a plethora of print.

At Times Square, we found English represented more than all the other languages combined in the subway stop and the one block radius of the seven stop. Outside, on 43rd street, we observed one store information sign in Turkish, while the same store only used English on menu. Even at the Spanish American Institute, English was only displayed on the building signs. Menus, including the Turkish grill, for various international foods were written only in English. The large advertisements around Times Square were exclusively in English. A ticker tape news update was displayed only in English. At the newsstand, one block west of the subway stop, a variety of printed materials were sold. Most of the printed material was in English, but we also noted three newspapers in Spanish and one in Chinese. Also interesting at the newsstand were bilingual fashion magazines written in Italian/English and Portuguese/English. Around the area, while many conversations heard were in English, at a Card store, a clerk was heard conversing in Spanish with a fellow co-worker and in English to a customer. The owner of the Turkish grill also spoke in Turkish to another gentleman who came to the door.

Inside the subway stop, we also saw English as the dominant language. Several advertisements displayed Broadway shows, all in English, as well as for products. We did find two advertisements in Spanish one for international money transfer services and another for a beer company. The newspaper stand inside the stop had newspapers in Chinese, Spanish, and English.

At the MTA machine, English, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese were the languages one can use to obtain a metro card. Information signs, indicating a change in a train route, were also in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese. Interesting here is the use of Japanese instead of Korean, which

we saw at the other stops on the 7 train. The census data (2000 Census) indicates that of the recorded residents of Midtown, Chelsea, and Clinton (areas around Times Square) more Japanese speakers (419 people) used the subway as a means of transportation to work than Korean speakers (156). However, there were more French speakers (including Patois and Cajun) who lived in the area and used the subway to go to work (812) than Japanese speakers. French was not a language represented by the MTA's machine. German (446), Italian (514), and Tagalog (328) were also spoken by a significant number of commuters who used the subway in the area, but were not represented by the MTA.

One possible explanation for the use of Japanese on the MTA's signs and machines, is the significance of tourism. Although we do not have data about the tourism to Times Square in relation to speakers of various languages, we may assume that many Japanese-speaking tourists use the subway at Times Square and are therefore represented by the MTA. Also the bilingual fashion magazines might also be due to tourism.

Why English is so pronounced in the Times Square area could be due to its development and identity. Times Square, although explored by tourists all around the world, shows America's glitz and glory. Since English is part of the American identity, businesses must adhere to the norm. Also in Manhattan, and in the Midtown/Chelsea/Clinton area, we see the majority of residents being English speakers (84, 549 people) (2000 Census).

Queensboro Plaza

	English	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	Italian	Bilingual
Advertising	1	2		1		
MTA Information	2	1	1	1		
MTA Vending	1	1	1	1		
Newspapers Sold	1	3	1	1	1	
Store Signs	24					
Spoken		1		1		1 E&S
Other						1 E&S
Total (%)	29(60.4)	8(16.6)	3(6.2)	5(10.4)	1(2.0)	2(4.1)

Queensboro Plaza, a major stop on the 7 line, is also an area of multilingual diversity. However, as seen from our data above, English continues to be the predominant means of communication in the neighborhood, especially in regards to store signs.

According to the 2000 census, Spanish speakers make up the second largest language group in the zip code for the Queensboro Plaza station. One hairdresser's store boasted of being authorized as a Notary Republic, in both English and Spanish, legitimizing its right to sign legal document papers. The second bilingual sign, in the "other" category, belonged to a pay phone in the

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neighborhood.

Woodside

	English	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	Bilingual	German	Hindi	Italian	Polish	Galeic	Romanian	Russian	Urdu
Advertising	4				1 E&S								
MTA Information	3	1	1										
MTA Vending	1	1	1	1									
Newspapers Sold	3	2	2	2		1	1	2	1		1	1	1
Store Signs	24			2	3E&S 3K&E 1P,E,&K					2	1		
Spoken	2	1		1	1K&E		1						1
Total (%)	37 (50.6)	4 (5.4)	4 (5.4)	6 (8.2)	9 (12.3)	1 (1.3)	2 (2.7)	2 (2.7)	1 (1.3)	2 (2.7)	2 (2.7)	1 (1.3)	2 (2.7)

The Woodside area was the most linguistically diverse community that we found on our journey. According to the U.S. census (2000), 2/3 of its population in this area consists of non-English speakers. Of the 36,000 people whose means of transportation to work is by subway, about 11,000 are English-only speakers, while another 11,000 belong to the Spanish-speaking population. The last 14,000 are split amongst Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Tagalog, and other various LOTE.

In the community, however, we found 46% of the advertisements, MTA information, and store signs to be in English. The only medium of communication which spoke of its diversity was in the number of newspapers sold in different languages. The fact that Urdu, Italian, Arabic, and Romanian (amongst other) newspapers are available in this area attests to the kind of population that lives here. The two Gaelic store signs belonged to a bakery and a pub, while the trilingual English/Korean/Portuguese sign belonged to a dentist. The four English and Spanish bilingual signs belonged to a grocery store, dentist, Western Union office, and a bakery, respectively. The Korean and English signs belonged to a real estate, herbal store, and cell phone store. Given these clues, one may speculate about the racial make-up of the customers and clients who frequent these businesses, and which languages they speak.

74th & Roosevelt (Jackson Heights)

	English only	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	Hindi	Bangladeshi	English & Urdu	English & Spanish	English & Korean	English & Chinese	English, Chinese, Korean, Spanish
Advertising	2	2		1				1	1	1	2
MTA Information	1	1	1	1	1						
MTA Vending	1	1	1	1							
Newspapers/ Reading Materials/ Products Sold/ Available		1			1	1					
Store Signs	8	6	2	1			3	6	5		
Spoken		3	1		4					1	
Total (%)	12(19)	14(22.9)	5(8.1)	4(6.5)	5(8.1)	1(1.6)	3(4.9)	7(11.4)	6(9.8)	2(3.2)	2(3.2)

The area around 74th and Roosevelt is oftentimes referred to as Jackson Heights. This is yet another part of Queens bustling with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Many people recognize it for its South Asian community – with many Indians, Bangladeshi and Pakistanis calling it home. Although all the other areas we observed, including Flushing, Junction Boulevard and Woodside, had a larger population of South Asians, Jackson Heights is more famous because of its commercial district with South Asian jewelry, clothes and music stores, restaurants, and Bollywood movie rentals. Additionally, compared to the other areas studied, Jackson Heights markedly has the greatest number of Spanish speakers. Spanish speakers constitute more than 50 percent of the whole Jackson Heights population with approximately 94,000 people. Other than speakers of South Asian languages (mainly, Hindi and Urdu) and Spanish, a significant number of Chinese, Tagalog, Greek, French, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, and Italian speakers live in this area as well.

Overall, the four major non-English languages we saw and heard around Jackson Heights were Spanish, Chinese, Korean, and the South Asian languages (Hindu, Urdu, and Bangladeshi). Considering the fact that English and Spanish were the two dominant languages spoken by its population, the information collected inside and outside the subway evidently reflects this. Most of the monolingual advertisements were either in English or Spanish, the bilingual advertisements were in English with another language, such as Spanish, Korean, or Chinese, and the multilingual advertisements were in a combination of these four languages (English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean) as well.

Again, English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean were the only four languages used for store signs around the neighborhood, mostly in either English and Spanish or the combination of the two. An example of the prevalent use of Spanish can be found in an all-purpose store, in which monolingual Spanish advertisements of various drugs were densely posted on the wall next to the entrance. This same store also had a greeting card section labeled in Spanish only (i.e. “Tarjetas De Felicitacion”). In addition, one of the major banks in this neighborhood had an information bulletin with all-Spanish signs put up, although the bank manager informed us that the employees were capable of providing services in several languages, including English, Spanish, Hindi, Urdu, Bangladeshi, and Chinese. The ATM machines also provided diverse languages.

Although posted texts, including advertisements, MTA information posters, and store signs, in South Asian languages were not found, they were manifested in the interactive or selectable domain, such as personal reading materials and verbal communication. Interestingly, most of the store signs in the crowded South Asian commercial district in Jackson Heights were almost all only in English, despite the fact that many of the people were speaking languages other than English (Hindi and Urdu). Out of all the tightly packed store signs in the neighborhood, we only found a couple of store signs in Urdu together with English translations. We also noticed in one of the stores we visited that all the sports and fashion magazines were in English whereas the religious magazines were in other South Asian languages. This characteristic may be seen as what Clyne (1998) calls a community of diglossia, where functional distribution between two languages or

distinct language varieties is apparent. While the South Asian people working in this area communicated with each other mainly in their mother tongue, clearly the lingua franca of commercial interaction was English. The two languages were not competing against each other but rather had different roles in the community. According to Ager's (2001) theory, this may be language planning, where unofficial influence is exercised by individuals and communities – “the ways in which organized communities, united by religious, ethnic or political ties, consciously attempt to influence the languages their members use” (p.5). The area we observed was clearly a shopping district and English was the chosen language for signs and advertisement.

Junction Blvd

	English	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	English & Spanish
Advertising					
MTA Information	2	2	1	1	
MTA Vending	1	1	1	1	
Newspapers/Reading Materials/Products Sold/ Available	1	1	1		1
Store Signs	6	7			8
Spoken		2			
Total (%)	10 (27.1)	13 (35.1)	3 (8.1)	2 (5.4)	9 (24.3)

At Junction Blvd, inside the subway, we found that travel information relating to timetable and ticketing was available in Spanish, English, Chinese, and Korean. However, other information such as newspapers, reading materials and products sold were not available in these four languages, but in either Spanish or English. Outside the subway, we found that all store signs were written either in Spanish or English, or the combination of the two. Spanish was the only spoken language recorded.

The 2000 Census indicates that Spanish or Spanish Creole is the most widely used language in the neighborhood. Our findings reflect this as well, with Spanish, including bilingual English and Spanish, making up 59 % of our language data.

As language plays a significant part in determining culture and identity, it can be determined from the data that Spanish or Spanish Creole speakers in the neighborhood value their mother tongue. We can see this reflected in the neighborhood and their choice of language through our observations.

Also from our data, we find that languages inside the subway station match the neighborhood population according to the 2000 Census data. The top five languages are Spanish or Spanish Creole (35,366), English (24,689), Chinese (9,596), Hindi (3,956), and Korean (2,383). Apart from Hindi, these languages are represented inside the subway station.

One of the main reasons why Hindi or the other Indian languages are not commonly used in business advertising is because English generally occupies that domain. In India, Hindi and

English are the two official languages. However, English has been “indigenized functionally, pragmatically, and grammatically in India. It is used in creative literature and publications of economic and academic value for dissemination of information. It is used in high-level business and industrial sectors” (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004, p179). Given this domain, it is reasonable to say that this is most likely the reason why we did not see many store signs written in Hindi, Urdu, Pakistani or any other variants of the Indian language. If business is usually conducted in English in India, then we can safely assume that business-owners in New York are still able to reach the Indian population, even if advertisements and store signs are written solely in English.

Main Street (Flushing)

	English	Spanish	Chinese	Korean	C&E	K&C	F&E	More than 3 lang.
Advertising								
MTA Information	1	1	1	1				
MTA Vending	1	1	1	1				
Newspapers Sold	1	1	1	1				
Store Signs Spoken		1	11		8	2	1	4
Total (%)	3(7.1%)	3(7.1%)	18(42.9%)	3(7.1%)	8(19.1%)	2(4.8%)	1(2.4%)	4(9.5%)

In Flushing, the four main languages (English, Spanish, Chinese and Korean) are evenly used in MTA services. Chinese is the dominant language seen and heard on the street. The total ratio of Chinese being used (42.9%) further increases to 67% when combined with store signs partially in Chinese (C&E and K&C). Compared to other stations, English is the least seen or heard in Flushing. The result corresponds to the census data (2000), in which Chinese is the top language used on subway/railroad and on the street.

There are different ways to interpret the significance of Chinese language in Flushing. One way is that Chinese in Flushing are preserving their culture by the usage of the language- both visually and verbally. As Kaplan and Baldauf (1997, pp.3-4) state, “...language planning is an attempt by someone to modify the linguistic behaviour of some community for some reason. The reasons are complex, [but one of the ideas is]...that a community can be assisted in preserving its culture by preserving its language.”

The significance of Chinese language in Flushing reflects peoples' effort to preserve their own identity. As Tabouret-Keller (1998) states, “Language acts are acts of identity” (p.315), and he further concludes:

“Members of a group who feel their cultural and political identity threatened are likely to

make particularly assertive claims about the social importance of maintaining or resurrecting *their language*. We see here that identification is served by the name of a language that fulfills the symbolic function of representation, at both the social and individual levels, where it represents not only affiliation with a community or group, but all kinds of allegiance: to a religion, a political leader, an ideology". (pp. 318-319)

Further discussion

Language as identity

The printed and spoken languages in and around the 7 train's route represent how visible and audible communication is used in society. In the observed areas, this society is broken up into 1) linguistically different neighborhoods and 2) a body of people who are unified by their use of a common transportation.

In the neighborhoods that the 7 train serves – Queensboro, Woodside, Jackson Heights, Junction Blvd (Elmherst/Corona), and Flushing among others – a variety of languages represent the identities of their respective residents. Ager (2001, p.14) states, "Language is an essential component for smaller national groups, in that it enables the group to maintain daily communication, to express its wishes and desires, and reflects the nature of its world view." The residents of Flushing, for example, continue to use Chinese to relate to their environment, and other members of the community. They are able to bank, order food, and chat at the bakery in the language of their origin. This is also seen for the Hispanic, Korean, Punjabi, and other linguistic groups found in the communities along the 7 train's route. Members of the communities hold onto their ethnic identities, made up of practices, values and beliefs, through language. From the findings, it can be said that what Ager calls 'language as identity' is practiced in these communities.

Language as image

On the train and its platforms, we see a different linguistic phenomenon. English's dominance shows the use of language in another way. While some of the residents of the various linguistic communities bring their speech and print on the train, the dominance of the English advertisements does not match this diversity. Here language has been planned for image purposes:

Image is correctly defined as the reflection of identity and as an intended projection of that identity. Individuals, companies, and countries (try to) manipulate their image in order to generate themselves the most favourable possible external opinion on what and who they are. Marketing, advertising and sales promotion depend on adapting the image while keeping the identity. The whole concept of added value depends less on actually creating worth and much more on creating an impression of worth, so that fashion decrees much higher prices for one shape of dress than for another even though both cost the same to make. (Ager, 2001, pp.74-

75)

The advertisements are creating the image of an American identity through use of English. Products, services, and information are advertised by companies in English to promote their own prestige. English is the language of dominance in most domains of American society, especially in government, commerce, and education. The advertisements display English for status purposes in the 7 train. They do not attend to the majority of the people who ride the Flushing line, that is, those who do not use English as their primary language of communication.

The language uses in the New York City subway; on the 7 train

The data findings have showed that the MTA poses yet another use of language. As the MTA makes language accommodations for 7 train riders in Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Japanese (at Times Square), the Authority is representing language as integration (Ager, 2001). They take into account how language can help people to adapt to a new environment. By using the different languages on the Metro Card machine and service change postings, the MTA helps those literate in Chinese, Korean, and Spanish integrate into New York City's transportation system. The MTA can be seen as providing a bridge between the English only American image and the identities of the linguistic communities of the 7 train.

The MTA invites interaction through advertising, information postings and vending sales. The information intended to inform, such as schedule changes and new services, was posted by the MTA in four languages at all sample stations. Also provided in four languages were the vending sales. The information intended to influence or persuade, such as advertising, was provided only in English. As discussed above, advertising is created to reach as many potential consumers as possible. The most spoken language in Queens is English and hence this 'paid-for' information, which is not necessary for using the subway, was in English.

Conclusion

The purpose of the research was to observe the languages in the subway system and understand how they affect the value of other languages in NY. We looked at the print as the subway's voice, what it is saying and to whom it is speaking and in what language.

In conclusion, there are two kinds of information for riders – one that must be interacted with and another that you do not need to. For information that affects the riders with respect to their travel needs the MTA does a good job of accommodating them. For needs other than travel no information is available in the top four languages in any station or on any train observed.

In terms of the language of the advertisements in the subway, English is almost solely the chosen language for business purposes. This is attributed to the observation that English is closely

associated with the status image that it is the language of dominance in most domains of American society, in government, commerce, and education. Thus, products, services, and information are advertised by companies in English to promote their own prestige. In this respect, the advertisement languages do not reflect the diversity of the people who ride the Flushing line.

The language used to communicate with communities can be a value indicator for that language and its culture. The posted subway language is indirect but still asks the reader to interact – read it. We ask if this interaction or form of communication to the value of the languages out there. It should be reasonable to say that the language in subways is an evaluator of language and its value in society.

Notes

- 1) MTA statistics

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Internet-based Resources:

MTA Home Page <http://www.mta.info/index.html>

United States Census 2000 <http://www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html>

U.S. English <http://www.us-english.org/>