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Chinatown by Numbers: Defining an ethnic space by empirical linguistic landscape

Abstract

This article explores the potential of the LL to evaluate ethnically-defined spaces. Focusing on the area referred to as ‘Chinatown’ in central Liverpool, it examines the relationships between space, representation, and identity. Interviews with actors and passers-by indicate that the location and definition of Chinatown are interpreted inconsistently. As the article argues, however, the LL contains useful information for locating and qualifying the ethnic space. Scrutinizing both interview data and an empirical corpus of all the texts visible in the space, the article aims to define the borders of Chinatown, and the expression of ethnic identity therein. Whilst testifying to the commodification of aesthetic ideals and symbolic imagery, the LL simultaneously reveals an in-group community representative of authentic Chineseness. Exploring the dynamics of linguistic exclusion and accommodation, the data indicate not only that the identity of Chinatown is multi-layered, but also that its borders are subjective and not definable spatially.

Keywords: Chinatown; Quantitative Approaches; Ethnoscape; Ethnolinguistic Vitality

1. Introduction

On the periphery of Liverpool city centre lies an area commonly known as the city’s Chinatown. Situated between the main shopping district and St Luke’s Church, a great deal of semiotic aggregates suggest that the identity of the place is indeed Chinese: Chinese restaurants, Chinese shops, and Chinese supermarkets are complemented by Chinese stylings on lamp posts, pavement bollards, and the enormous Liverpool Imperial Arch. In addition to the architecture and the styles and colours of various objects, the presence of Chinese texts also saturates the LL. This is in stark contrast to the rest of the city, in which English is ubiquitous and dominant.

Liverpool's Chinatown is the result of historical and continuing migration from China to Liverpool, a city in the north west of England in which the Chinese are the largest ethno-national minority group (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Characterized for generations by a small ethnic community resident on the fringes of the city centre, Chinatown is currently enjoying a period of financial development due to the growing numbers of Chinese exchange students enrolled at the University of Liverpool and the efforts of various municipal bodies to preserve the city's Chinese identity. As such, the space can be understood as part of a 'transnational turn' (Vertovec, 2009) in the city, supported by its burgeoning tourist trade and the concomitant commodification of services, products, and languages (Heller, 2003), as well as various financial and infrastructural outcomes of the 2008 European Capital of Culture award and the 2016-2017 *New Chinatown* regeneration project (Culture Liverpool, 2015). However, although Chinatown is often discussed in the general context of central Liverpool, its exact geographic position is not easily definable. Whilst it is possible to locate an ethnic space according to the demographics of its residents (Barni & Bagna, 2010; Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2012, 2015), there are no data available relating exclusively to Chinatown. The most appropriate designation is represented by the census survey area *Liverpool 037B*, though this is only partially representative of Chinatown, as it includes unrelated nearby areas and excludes a number of its streets.¹ It is notable, however, that the ethnolinguistic makeup of *Liverpool 037B* is far from hegemonic, as fewer than 14% of the population identified as Chinese during the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics, 2011). Whilst statistics do little to determine the boundaries of Chinatown, official and popular interpretations offer little further insight. On the one hand, presence of Chinese-English bilingual street signs on eleven streets around the Imperial Arch suggests a purposeful demarcation by Liverpool City Council. On the other hand, data from these streets and interviews

¹ The 2011 national census data is organized geographically according to Output Area, composed of combined co-ordinate references for each address recorded. *Liverpool 037B* covers the smallest output area representing Chinatown as it is discussed in this article; though *Liverpool 033B* denotes some of the streets as well. This highlights the difficulties of assigning geographic co-ordinates to an officially unrecognized space, and hence the challenge of accurately describing Liverpool's Chinatown in terms of ethnic demography (data available at www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk).

with city residents indicate a variety of interpretations of where the space begins and ends, challenging the boundaries marked by the street signs. Moreover, it is not immediately clear whether the visible texts in businesses, restaurants, and on walls and lamp posts determine the presence of a linguistic community, or merely the symbolic presentation of a Chinese ideal. Despite the general agreement that Chinatown exists in Liverpool, therefore, its location and identity are not easily qualifiable.

Recent scholarship has stressed the significance of the LL in analyzing the expression of ethnic identity (Isleem, 2015; Lanza & Woldemariam, 2015). This article argues that the LL is central to the construction of ethnic identity and, despite competing understandings of Chinatown's location, that the LL constitutes at least one dimension through which to map the ethnoscape. This aligns with related investigations into spatial mapping of languages through the geo-locating of LL artefacts (Barni & Bagna, 2009; Matras & Robertson, 2015).² Building on these developing approaches, this article discusses the potential for revealing linguistic hotspots in a given area, and thereby the location (or locations) of Chinatown itself. In addition, it seeks to qualify the expression(s) of Chinese identity in these places, both in terms of the linguistic vitality of the ethnic group and the experiences and perceptions of the general population. Its aims are therefore twofold: first, to examine the places in which Chineseness is expressed, and to qualify the multimodal artefacts that construct and maintain Chinatown's identity as a transnational, ethnic, and diasporic space; and second, to explore the potential of this to quantify Chinese identity in the LL, comparing the results with interview responses addressing the same questions. The article begins with a discussion about ethnic spaces and the expression of authenticity. The following section examines how these issues have been tackled in the LL, particularly by quantitative methods. Following the outlining of the research questions and methodology, the data are discussed in section four. The article concludes with several observations

² See also the *LinguaSnapp* smartphone app under development in the 'Multilingual Manchester' research cluster at the University of Manchester, UK ([www. http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/](http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/)).

of how ethnic spaces may be structurally analysed, and how this study might inform research in the LL more broadly.

2. Authentic symbolism and the commodification of ethnoscapes

Ever since Appadurai (1990) introduced the term ‘ethnoscape’, there has been a marked scholarly interest in defining this type of place. Various alternative terms have been suggested, such as ‘ghettos’ (Lin, 1998), ‘ethnoburbs’ (Li, 1998), and ‘ethnic precincts’ (Collins, 2007), though Guan's (2002) ‘ethnic enclaves’ is perhaps the description which best captures the delimited nature of this phenomenon. Much of this work explores the ethnic (re)modelling of space by various actors, focusing on the contribution of individuals to a shared discourse of ethnic identity. As such, the physical location of ethnoscapes and their boundaries within the city are often taken for granted, or not considered worthy of attention. In the field of LL, there are only a small number of publications which focus on this phenomenon. Among them are Leeman & Modan (2009), who report on the commodification of Chinese as an ornament of commercial success, concluding that the space is detached from its original ethnic identity. Elsewhere, Lou (2010) explores the presentation of marginalized linguistic identity and the relationship(s) of the language and its users to the majority group(s). More recently, Lanza & Woldemariam (2015) consider ethnolinguistic identity in the space known as ‘little Ethiopia’ in Washington, DC, offering various observations on language contact and the co-existence of ethnolinguistic groups. These studies contribute to a wider body of LL work concerning the languages of diasporas and minority groups, often with specific reference to ethnically-defined zones (c.f. Barni & Vedovelli, 2012; Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2012; Malinowski, 2009; Vandenbroucke, 2015). Many of the spaces scrutinized in these works are characterized by what Christiansen, Petito, & Tonra (2000) refer to as ‘fuzzy’ borders. In other words, although ethnic enclaves are widely considered to be a part of the city, the points at which they begin and end are not apparent.

Describing Chinatown in Singapore, Henderson (2000: 532) posits that genuine artefacts of ethnic identity are becoming increasingly uncommon, as commercial Chinatowns constitute ‘a world of simulacra...that deals in images and idealized representations’. In a similar vein, Cook (2013) compares ‘community’ language use, aimed at fellow Chinese readers, with ‘atmospheric’ use, which is intended to index a non-specific sense of Chineseness to out-group visitors to the space. There are established lines of inquiry into the dynamics of authenticity and representation in a variety of scholarly fields, including political sociology (Collins, 2010), psychology (Phinney & Ong, 2007), and anthropology (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992). This article contributes to the limited but growing interest in this discussion in the LL, where the expression of identity in a site defined by ethnicity has yet to be explored in any great detail (but see Blackwood, Lanza, & Woldemariam, 2016). The article argues that the LL offers a uniquely-accurate opportunity to determine the contents, qualities, distribution, and impact of ethnic identity. It provides a framework for assessing the fields of use of Chinese, with a view to demarcating the contextual and geographic boundaries of the ethnic space.

3. LL: A Methodological Battleground

Following the empirical surveys of the so-called ‘first wave’ (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2015: 177), much of the LL work carried out over the last five years exhibits a preference for qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. This has seen a general departure from ‘counting signs’ (Blackwood, 2015) towards more focussed analyses of smaller numbers of objects. Whilst such an approach undoubtedly captures the superdiverse details exhibited in parts of the LL, it does not permit a comparative evaluation of multiple data within this. As such, the relationships between languages throughout the space — their comparative distribution, their varied use in multiple contexts, and their concentration in specific places or types of place — are not experimentally quantifiable. On the one hand, there is evidence that empirical surveys illuminate important trends in the LL (Barni & Bagna,

2015; Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2015; Blackwood & Tufi, 2015); on the other, there is a growing feeling that the quantitative arm of the field is too reliant on generalist categories, which only scratch the surface of the diverse complexities that construct the LL (Blommaert & Maly, 2014: 3; Laihonen, 2015: 195; Weber & Horner, 2012: 179). Amongst the volatile debates surrounding this methodological question, this article aims to demonstrate the value of amalgamating both approaches. Whilst only an empirical survey can inform justifiable comparisons of items throughout the LL, only detailed (qualitative) classifications can achieve this to any significant detail. In addition, interview data complement the sign corpus, indicating popular interpretations of the construction of Chinatown and of its position in the city. This article contributes to the discussions at recent LL workshops to combine the detail of the qualitative and ethnographic approaches with the statistical granularity of the quantitative one. As the following section makes clear, the physical characteristics of signs, empirical data about their discourses, and reader interpretations of their meanings are scrutinized simultaneously in order to give a scientifically justifiable overview of the language situation in the LL.

4. Research Questions and Methodology

The article poses the following research questions:

- 1) Can the LL be used to define the spatial boundaries of Chinatown?
- 2) How is Chinese identity expressed in the LL?
- 3) Are there factors beyond language which construct the location and identity of Chinatown?

The first research question concerns the spatial positioning of Chinatown as indicated by the LL. The point of departure for this is that the top-down definition of Chinatown — the eleven streets with bilingual street signs — is contested by a variety of bottom-up interpretations. This question explores

the potential of the LL to reveal both the geographic space(s) of Chinatown, and the contextual place(s) in which it finds expression.

The second research question deals with the ways in which Chineseness is conveyed in Chinatown. Specific fields are highlighted both by interviewees and by the sign data, which comment on the construction of identity in certain situations, associations, and contexts.

The third question asks whether there are other factors beyond text which contribute to the interpretation of Chineseness. This concerns the construction of in- and out-group discourses, the authentic and performative dimensions of expression, and the multimodal aspects of the LL that bring additional meaning to written texts and the languages they represent. Working together, these factors shed light on the ways in which Chinatown is constructed, identified, and perceived by LL actors and participants in Liverpool.

The data take the form of interviews and sign surveys of visible objects in the LL. The interviews were carried out in two formats: as 20-minute structured oral interviews of ten business owners and employees; and a written questionnaire (including unstructured verbal discussions) carried out with 30 passers-by around the city centre. The structured interviews were conducted in English, Mandarin, and Cantonese inside establishments situated on the eleven survey streets. Beyond the capability to understand basic English, there were no parameters driving the selection of respondents to the passer-by surveys. The questionnaires were distributed in the central commercial area of Church Street and the Liverpool ONE shopping and leisure complex, and the south and central campuses of the University of Liverpool. The aim was to collect general sample data based on a range of opinions and experiences of inhabitants and visitors to the city. The intention was to achieve a degree of comparison with those who operate within Chinatown itself; it does not claim to be representative of city-centre shoppers or university students or employees at large.

The sign survey was quantitative, recording data in a series of systems classifying languages, materiality, authorship, the type of place in which items were found, and the field or subject matter of the text. To date, much quantitative work in the LL is based on small sets of variables, often limited to top-down/bottom-up authorship and languages contained, occasionally including a simple typology of usage scenarios (see Gorter (2013) for an overview). In what might be considered the prototype for many of these studies, Spolsky & Cooper (1991) articulated the shortcomings of this approach: namely that the desire to facilitate data collection by limiting survey categories has the result of generalizing the data. Bearing in mind recent debates about the polysemy of objects and their meanings (Jaworski, 2015; Leeman & Modan, 2009), this article advocates a holistic quantification of as many aspects of the LL as operationally possible. Avoiding the vagaries and simplifications caused by pre-designated sampling criteria, I propose that the survey criteria be determined by the data, according to the variation visible in the LL. This level of granularity has been encouraged in the qualitative arm of the field (Coupland & Garrett, 2010; Kallen, 2010; Leeman & Modan, 2009), though it has yet to be applied quantitatively. Rather, a fallback to the qualitative suggests that the complexity of variation in the LL is not easily adapted into an empirical model (Blackwood, 2015). It is reasonable to suggest however that the empirical approach goes further to categorizing the ‘fuzzy data’ (Schauber & Spolsky, 1986: 8) encountered in the LL. Each of the eight systems used in this study contain between 4 and 70 variables, offering the potential for over 2 million classifications for each sign. The systems are detailed in table 1:

Table 1. 8 systems for classifying signs

System	Description	Example Gradients ³
Language(s)	Languages contained on the item	English, Chinese, French, Italian
Multilingualism	Inter-relatedness of texts (c.f. (Reh, 2004)	Replicating (identical content), Unrelated (unconnected content), Intersecting (more content in one or more languages)
Communicative Function	Pragmatic role performed by the text	Establishment name, information, instruction, advertisement, slogan
Locus	Spatial location of item or its carrier	Wall, window, post, self-supporting, door, object
Materiality	Materials with which item is constructed	Permanent, professionally printed, home printed, hand-written
Authorship Domain	Class of author/body responsible for text	International chain, domestic chain, independent, individual, collaboration, municipal, national
Context Frame	Type of place in which item is displayed	Shop, restaurant, residence, building site, business, external, bus stop
Field	Associated discourse of the text	Food & drink, traffic, security, finance, sport, travel, place-naming

An important feature of this methodology is the sheer number of signs that are recorded. Every visible piece of written information on the eleven streets was categorized — a total of 3066 items. Whilst ‘sign’ refers to physical objects that are defined spatially and materially, this analysis focusses on ‘items’ which are determined by the *communicative function* of the text. As such, signs containing more than one communicative function were categorized separately, exemplified in figure 1.

³ The number of variables recorded in each system: Language: 12; Multilingualism: 3; Communicative Function: 8; Locus: 6; Materiality: 4; Authorship Domain: 7; Context Frame: 19; Fields: 70.

Figure 1. Multiple items on one sign



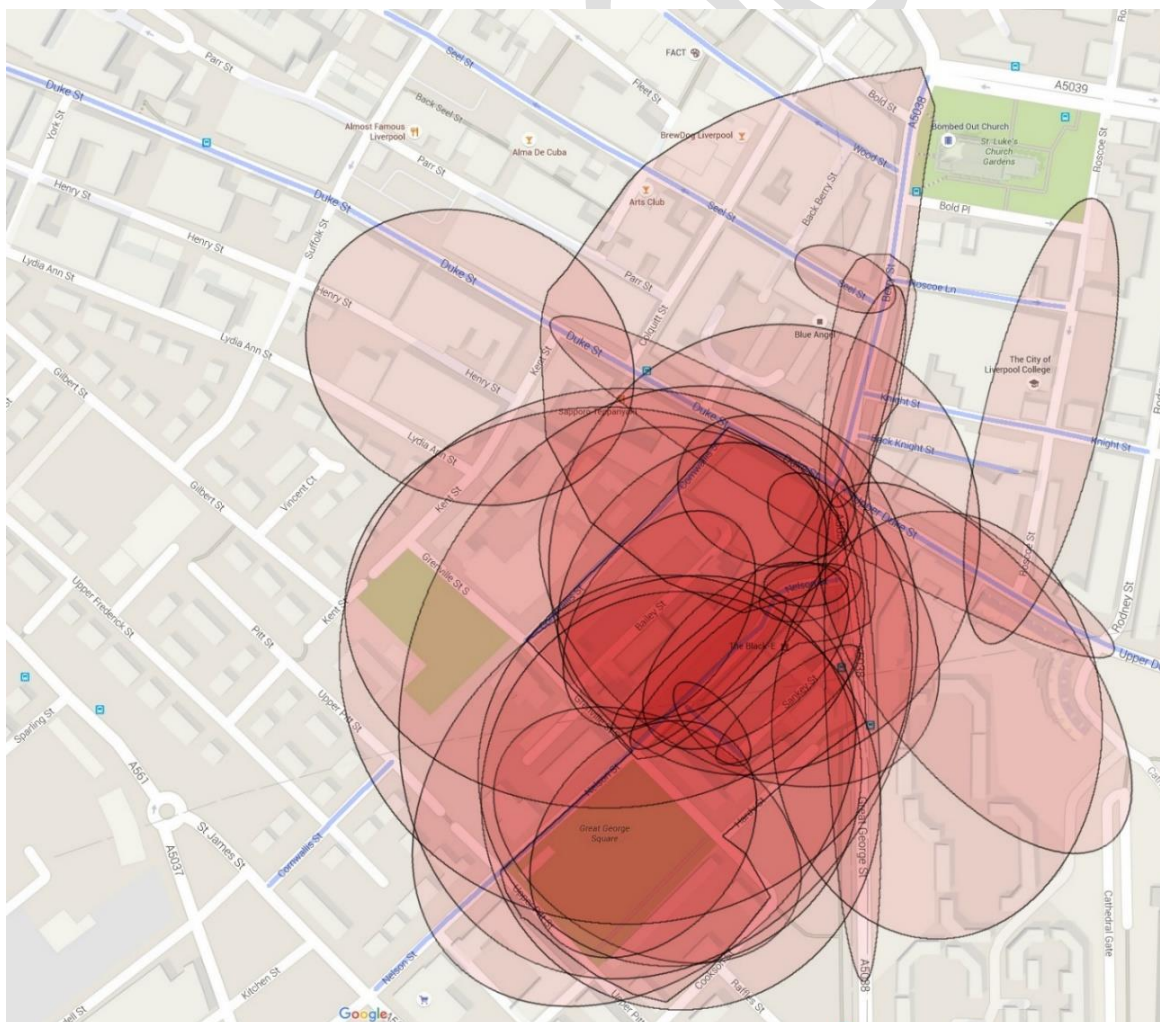
This sign contains four items: a bilingual information sign (the musical instrument 扬琴 | Yang Qin); the trademarks 'Augmented Orchestra', 'First Take', and 'Pagoda', and instructions concerning a related smart phone application. Rather than focusing on the spatial definition of signs, this approach defines items according to the pragmatic functions which they perform. This permits a nuanced understanding of the practices and actions which construct Chinatown, and allows analytical generalizations about language use to be corpus-based, avoiding impressionistic estimations built on generic classifications. This non-essentialist approach reveals recognizable patterns of and deviations from normative language use in specific fields. In terms of the present study, this permits the identification of the uses of Chinese by certain actors in certain places, contexts, and in dealing with certain subjects.

5. The Data

5.1 The Location of Chinatown

The responses to both the structured interviews and the passer-by questionnaires indicate that Chinatown is generally considered to be centred around the Imperial Arch on Nelson Street. Participants were presented with an adapted map of the area, and were asked to circle the area(s) which they considered to be part of Chinatown. A gradient representation of the responses is shown in figure 2, with the 11 council-nominated streets indicated in blue:

Figure 2. Heatmap: respondents' location of Chinatown streets



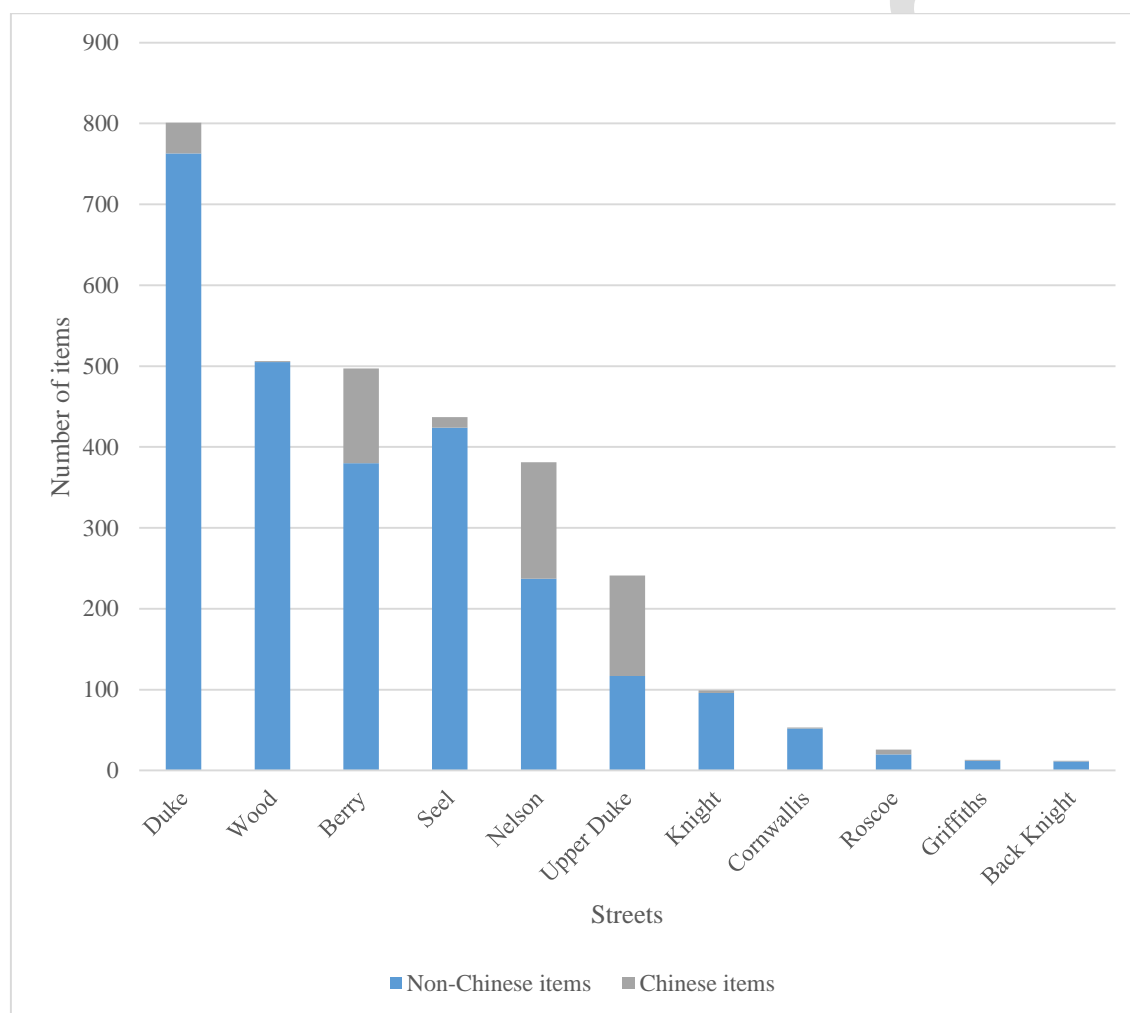
A discrepancy is immediately visible between the city council's eleven nominated streets and the participants' responses. Large portions of several of the streets with bilingual street signs were not considered part of Chinatown at all. Knight Street, Back Knight Street, and Roscoe Lane were indicated by fewer than 10% of the respondents,⁴ and the majority of Wood Street, Seel Street, Duke Street, and the southern portion of Cornwallis Street were not selected by any respondent.

Contrary to the official demarcation of Chinatown, the interview data indicate that the central section of Berry Street between Duke Street and Nelson Street and the length of Nelson Street constitute the principal location of Chinatown. Considering the concentration of circled zones as well as the intensity of colour, figure 2 indicates the following: (1) the majority of Nelson street was identified by 80% of the participants, who also included the section of Berry Street with the Arch at its head (not marked on the map); (2) 70% of the respondents included Bailey Street and Sankey Street, and about half the respondents included the northern-most section of Cornwallis Street and the Upper Duke/Duke/Great George/Berry crossroads; (3) sections of Duke Street, Upper Duke Street, Knight Street, and Roscoe Lane in proximity to Berry Street were indicated by 10-30% of the respondents. Peripheral zones to these areas were selected by fewer than 10% of the respondents. It is important to note that the mapping technique gives only an indication of the opinions about the location of Chinatown. Some respondents elected to nominate whole streets in a generic way, whereas others circled specific sections of streets. This yields data that are not relatable to any great degree, nor accurately comparative to the sign data which contrasts the eleven streets more evenly. At the same time, however, it is clear that the majority of respondents consider Chinatown to be centered on Nelson Street, and the section of Berry Street in close proximity to Nelson and the Imperial Arch.

⁴ All percentages given in this analysis are rounded to the nearest 1%.

This hypothesis is supported by the sign data, where 58% (261 items) of Chinese texts were recorded on these two streets. Moreover, the proportion of Chinese signs to other languages on these streets is very high, illustrated by table 2:

Table 2. Chinese/non-Chinese items by street



Although mentioned by fewer of the respondents, Upper Duke Street contained more Chinese items (124) than Berry Street (117). Additionally, the proportion of Chinese to non-Chinese items was higher here than on any of the other eleven streets, since over half (52%) of the street's

communications contained Chinese. There were noticeable instances of Chinese also on Duke Street (38) and Seel Street (13), and to a lesser extent on Roscoe Lane (6) and Knight Street (3). Each of the remaining streets (Back Knight, Cornwallis, Griffiths, and Wood) featured only one Chinese item: the bilingual street signs erected by Liverpool City Council. These accounted for less than 1% of the items on these four streets. Their potential negligibility is correlated by the interview data, where fewer than 10% of respondents nominated these streets. This indicates that the street signs are not sufficient toponymic markers (Kostanski, 2009) of Chinese identity, despite their official designation as place-namers. Moreover, the LL reveals that only the street signs closest to Berry Street and Nelson Street contain Chinese; whereas those further along and at the other end of the streets are written in English only. The higher proportion of English-only counterparts both marginalizes the bilingual signs and undermines their impact. This not only places Chinese on the symbolic periphery of official agency (Kelly-Holmes & Pietikäinen, 2013), but also indicates a centre-periphery juxtaposition on the streets themselves, which exhibit a dual identity of Chinese/English at one end, and English-only at the other. It may be argued, therefore, that these street signs indicate an official border around Chinatown that is not expressed in terms of streets, but rather in terms of the presence and then absence of official Chinese markers. Further, the emplacement of the signs, all of which are visible at the intersections with Berry Street and Nelson Street, indicate that they are designed to be viewed from within Chinatown itself, to give an impression of a wider Chinese surround. Whilst this renders the borders fuzzy and subjective (Christiansen et al., 2000), it also suggests the purposeful construction of an imagined Chinese space, manufactured not by the streets themselves, but by the perspective one has of them when looking outward from the Nelson—Berry axis.

Returning to the distribution of Chinese items, the LL indicates a clear discrepancy between the Nelson—Berry axis and Upper Duke Street. Whilst items are spread out along the lengths of the former, through a number of establishments, the items on Upper Duke Street all appear in one establishment, the *Hondo* Chinese supermarket. This street does not feature many publicly accessible

buildings (businesses, shops, cafés, etc.), and so *Hondo* houses most of the visible information on the street. In addition to the many signs around the main entrance and inside the small doorway, the supermarket exhibits two large noticeboards, on which 149 items were recorded. 82% (122) of these featured Chinese, dealing with a variety of subjects. The impact of these signs and others on identity construction in Chinatown is discussed in the next section.

5.2 Chineseness of Chinatown

During the interview stage of the data collection, five phenomena were repeatedly referred to as markers of Chinatown: architecture, notably the Chinese Arch (100% of respondents), the street signs (73% of respondents), and the lion plinths on Berry Street (12% of respondents); restaurants (95%); supermarkets (47%); inhabitants, frequently referred to as ‘the people’ (45%); and historical migration (34%). The suggestion that the Imperial Arch might be the principal marker of identity is uncontroversial (c.f. Leeman & Modan, 2009: 346), given its size and role at the centre of Chinese New Year celebrations, and the private and official international collaboration which took place to transport it from Shanghai to Liverpool, where it was installed as the largest multiple span arch outside China (Visit Liverpool, 2016). It is similarly unsurprising that restaurants were the second most cited factor, given that they are recurrently identified as archetypal sites of identity commodification in cities (Jordan & Collins, 2012; Shaw & Bagwell, 2012; Zukin, 1992, 1998). This is supported by the sign data, which indicate that over a quarter (114 items) of the Chinese units in the corpus were recorded in restaurants, primarily on Berry Street (53 items in 6 restaurants), Nelson Street (36 items in 8 restaurants), and Seel Street (10 items in 2 restaurants). 45% of these were establishment names, 37% were texts on menus, offers, and deals, 14% were establishment descriptions and adverts, and the remaining 4% a handful of slogans and trademarks.

A discrepancy between the interview data and the sign data, therefore, is that restaurants are not the most prolific displayers of Chinese in Chinatown. Chinese texts were more numerous in supermarkets (132 items), shared between only two establishments: *Hondo* on Upper Duke Street and *Chung Wah* on Nelson Street. The 19 Chinese restaurants in Chinatown are not only more numerous, but also spread out on seven streets across the space. That respondents consider restaurants more obvious markers of identity thus suggests that Chinatown is defined more commonly on the meso-level rather than the micro-level (Leeman & Modan, 2010) — that is to say, according to the complete interpretation of establishments as single artefacts, rather than the individual texts contained within them. Beyond restaurants and supermarkets, the sign data highlighted significant instances of Chinese in other context frames. 44 items (10%) were found in shops, 41 (9%) in institutions, and 36 (8%) in other businesses. The most prominent actor in this category is the *BonBon Bakery* on Berry Street, in which the majority (71%; 12 items) of texts contained Chinese. In terms of businesses, both the *Pine Court Housing Association* and *Kingham & Co.* accountants display large and prominent Chinese texts, indicating the names of the business, the services available inside, and notices about local events, many of which appear only in Chinese (figure 3).

Figure 3. Chinese monolingual signs in the business context frame



Given the wide interpretation of Nelson Street as the heart of Chinatown, it is remarkable that the respondents did not include businesses as identity markers. Despite the clear visibility of the above texts in close proximity to the Imperial Arch, and the duplicity of Chinese signs in various shops, institutions, and a hair salon, restaurants are clearly the most important and powerful constructors of identity.

Beyond establishments, respondents also qualified Chinese identity in terms of external monuments and architecture, people, and food. The LL illuminates these discourses further, as well as reporting on several others. Food and Drink, for example, describes 128 Chinese items (29%) recorded in the corpus. Architectural discourses are relatable to the texts found on lamp posts, and the lion plinths on Berry Street. In addition, trends were visible in the fields of travel (54 items; 12%), wellbeing (43 items; 10%), and money and finance (18 items; 4%). It is possible to draw a correlation between the travel and finance fields and the references in the interviews to 'people'. The travel items in particular indicate that historical migration, as described by 18% of the respondents, is ongoing and

contemporary. As Kallen (2010) argues, travel is linked not only to temporary movement, but also to emigration and the long-term embedding of ethnic minorities. Table 3 outlines the fields of Chinese use in the LL.

Table 3. Fields of Chinese

Field	Number of items	Proportion of Chinese items
Food and Drink	128	28.6%
Travel	54	12.1%
Property	50	11.2
Wellbeing	43	9.6%
Commemoration	21	4.7%
Place naming	21	4.7%
Education	20	4.5%
Finance	18	4%
Health	14	3.1%
Employment	14	3.1%
Other	64	14.4%

Considering the empirical data more closely, monolingual Chinese items are particularly prevalent in the fields of wellbeing and finance. A number of these appear in *Kingham & Co.*, which features 12 Chinese signs, only one of which includes English. Elsewhere, *Ching Wah Travel*, which fits the eclectic description of café, restaurant, and travel agent, features monolingual Chinese advertisements for the international currency exchange service *Western Union*, as well as home-printed information

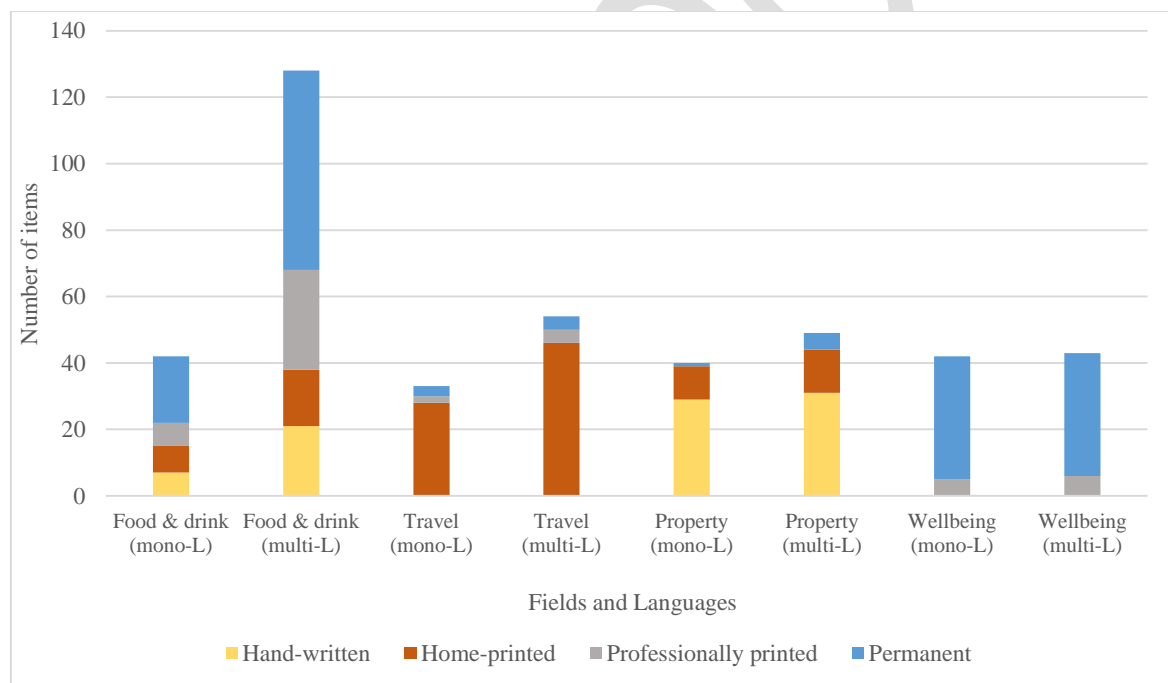
signs detailing the services on offer inside. Equally, the majority of the 43 wellbeing signs are written entirely in Chinese, with one exception a translated slogan ('New Page to Life'), written on a pamphlet advertising psychological counselling on the *Hondo* noticeboard. The monolingual wellbeing signs appear engraved on lamp posts or in the base of the lion plinths, on ornate mobiles hanging outside shops and in windows, and on colourful posters displayed at the entrances to cafés and restaurants. The appearance of such texts in these locations is at once indexical of Chinese language users and symbolic of values and practices associated with Chinese and the diaspora (Lou, 2010). In terms of the present study, these items represent an important aspect of Chinatown's monolingual identity, where communication with the out-group is evidently not deemed necessary or desired. The impact of this is discussed in more detail below; at this stage it is important simply to note that the relationship between Chinese and English is analyzable not only at the meso level, as proportional throughout the LL, but also on a micro level, as different items in specific places are variously multilingual. Whilst individual items do not define the space as a whole, the presence of monolingual Chinese artefacts in a broadly monolingual English space further reinforces Chinatown's multilayered multilingual identity.

5.3 Extra-linguistic Chineseness

We have thus far discussed Chinese identity in terms of multilingualism, location in the LL, and contribution to certain discursive fields. In addition, there are important meanings conveyed in other visual aspects of the LL, which are multimodal, material, and complementary to written language (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001). This article contributes to the recent calls to incorporate these modes into LL analysis (Bever, 2014; Shohamy & Ben-Rafael, 2015; Shohamy, 2015). Throughout Chinatown, a material meta-discourse informs us not only about authors and the intended purpose of signs, but also about processes of in- and out-group accommodation and representations of authenticity. A particular feature of the methodology was the separation of permanent signs (Scollon

& Scollon, 2003) from non-permanent varieties, such as hand-written, home-printed, and professionally printed items. This approach permits empirical analyses of the links commonly drawn between identity, meaning, and authorship, relating them to the longevity of the item and the intentions behind and impact of the messages it conveys (Cook, 2015; Jaworski, 2015; McLaughlin, 2015). It also allows for a cross-referential analysis of materiality against fields in different languages. Considering the most common fields of Chinese (table 3 above), the most frequent materialities of Chinese items are cross-referenced in table 4.

Table 4. Monolingual and multilingual items by materiality and field.



The data indicate that a significant proportion of Chinese items are produced with non-permanent materials, and deal with a range of subjects aimed at local readers: job advertisements, travel information, sales of businesses and goods, *inter alia* (see figure 4). This material discourse provides

data to quantify the ethnographic description of ‘people’ as markers of identity. Specifically, hand-written monolingual Chinese texts that are discursively local index the presence of Chinese writers who communicate exclusively to Chinese readers. Additionally, the removal, overlaying, and modification (torn off phone numbers, box-ticking, etc.) of the signs indexes a frequent reader engagement, indicating that the signs’ role in the language group is significant. This bidirectional communication is explainable both by Goffman’s (1963, 1981) self-presentation theory and Spolsky & Cooper’s (1991) gradient conditions, and may be assumed as directly indicative of the presence of language users. This adds weight to the interpretation of Chinatown as an authentically Chinese space, legitimized by the presence of so-called ‘real’ Chinese people, places, and artefacts (Wang, 1999). Moreover, the tendency for Chinese ephemeral signs to be monolingual (62% versus 38% containing English or other languages) indicates an exclusivity in which non-Chinese readers cannot share.

Figure 4. Noticeboard signs



Figure 5. Multilayered Chinese discourse

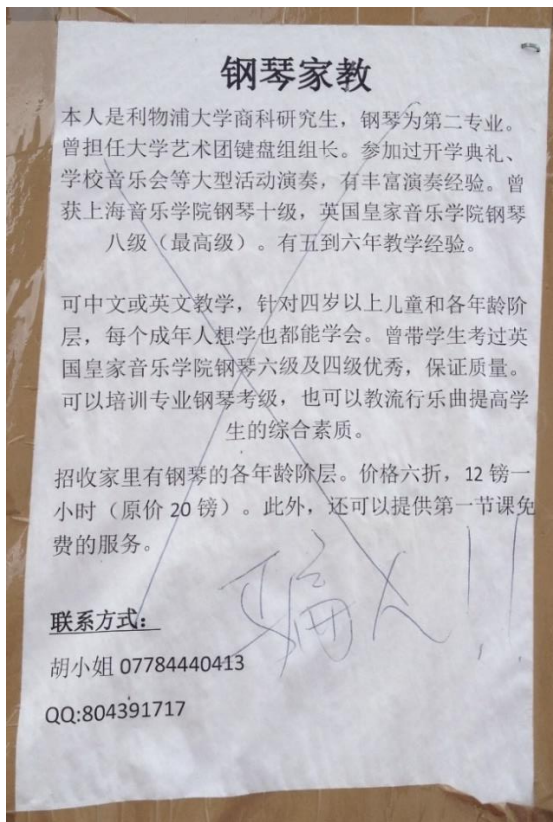


Figure 5 illustrates a multilayered expression of community multilingualism, where an advert offering private piano tuition has been scrawled over with the text ‘骗子!’ (English: ‘Liar!’). Whilst we cannot speculate on the details of this interaction, it is unlikely that the two texts are authored by the same person, and along with the differing materialities ((1) non-professional home printed sign and (2) hand-written text in biro), the sign evidences an exchange which is situated, monolingual, and recent. As illustrated also by the examples in figure 4, the materiality both of the signs themselves and the methods of inscription characterize these items as both personal and local, as well as transient and non-permanent. These communications are part of a fluid and dynamic LL, modified as much temporally as it is spatially.

Cook (2013) argues that these characteristics describe a ‘community multilingualism’ that is legitimately representative of a language group. Whether or not this implies pragmatic or symbolic authenticity is debatable (Magini, Miller, & Kim, 2011), though the impact of these signs is evidenced by the interview data, in which the manager of *Hondo* underlined the referential importance of such items for the Chinese community, in particular the signage on the Chinatown Community Noticeboard under the Imperial Arch and the noticeboard in the *Hondo* supermarket:

This [the noticeboards] is where the Chinese gather when they need to do something. Such as when they have a problem; food, what they need; dinner, what they like. In many aspects it is oriented for [the] Chinese. If people are looking for employment, instead of [the] Job Centre they come here. Or a place to live. Some can go to the internet; but the majority will just come here, looking for a place to live, rent a house, rent a room.

The Hondo manager’s assertion that Chinese people are the intended beneficiaries of the LL depicts the space as a site of exclusivity: both as one of otherness from the perspective of the non-Chinese majority, and as a site of ethnic authenticity representing the Chinese minority (Klein & Zitcer, 2012). Despite viewing Chinatown at large as a space constructed by and for the Chinese, however, *Hondo*’s manager emphasized that he did not consider it exclusive. Elsewhere, however, the contrary was argued:

HWA: *Could Chinatown be construed as unwelcoming to non-Chinese?*

Kingham & Co. Manager: *I think so. Just around the Arch it is predominantly Chinese businesses. Unless people have come for an evening meal, they will not find anything that will relate to them in any sense.*

HWA: *Relate in terms of...?*

KCM: *I guess that maybe it [Chinatown] needs more of a mix of businesses. So if local people could see that there is a Starbucks, for example, or one of those coffee shops, maybe they would feel at home.*

Chinese identity is thus projected not only in terms of the hegemony of Chinese-run businesses, but also by the notable absence of conspicuously non-Chinese establishments and, therefore, by the lack of inclusion for non-Chinese people. Additionally, the manager of the Berry Street restaurant *Mei*

Mei drew a direct comparison between the semiotic landscape of Chinatown and the exclusivity of its identity:

HWA: *So these visual features exclude non-Chinese or make them feel unwelcome?*

MMM: *Yeah. It doesn't try to, but "Chinatown" [indicates quotation] is a sign for every Chinese coming in, so they know that they can find other Chinese people, restaurants, supermarkets, whatever. So the aim of Chinatown is basically to get everyone in.*

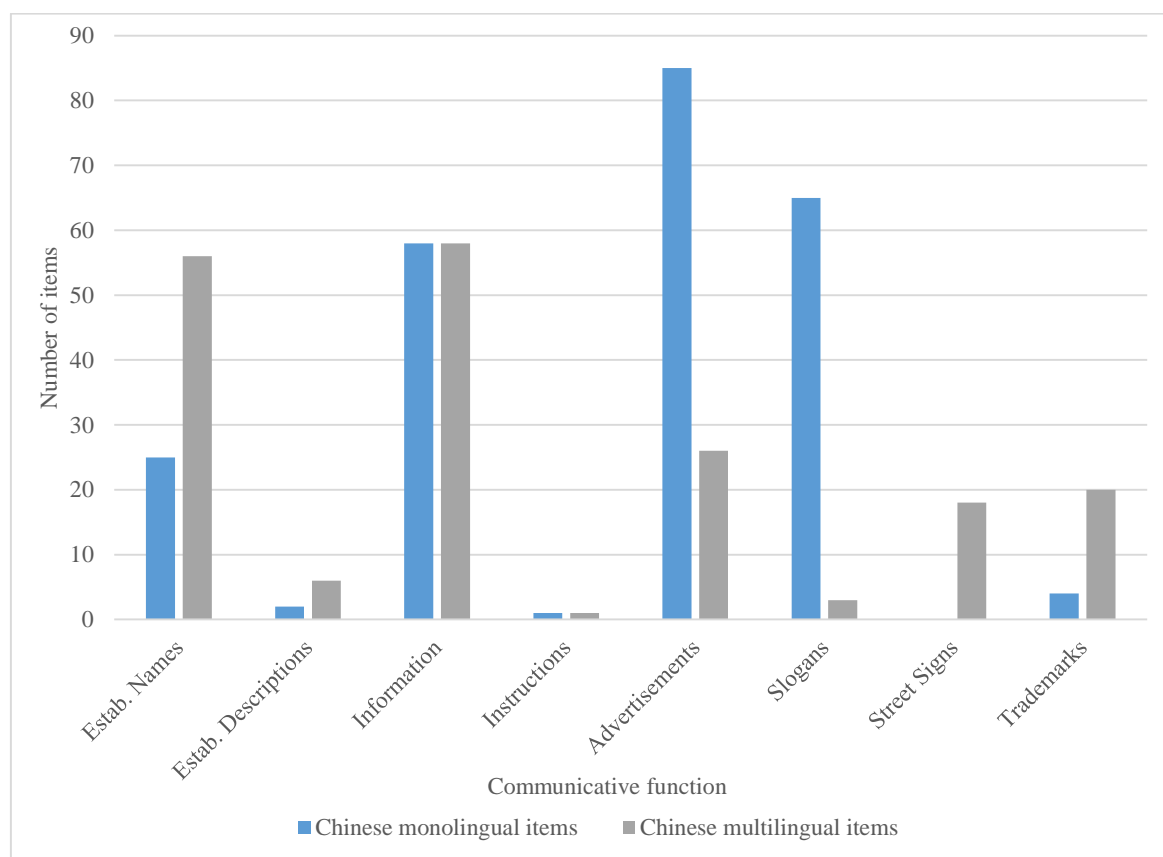
HWA: *But only the Chinese?*

MMM: *Yes. I think everywhere in the world Chinatowns do this.*

The sign data demonstrate a significant degree of exclusion, particularly at the micro-level on which the majority of Chinese items omit English and communicate only through Chinese characters. Such a marked absence of the majority language is a clear indicator not only of the vitality of the minority ethnic group, but also of its exclusion of other languages. Across the corpus of 448 items featuring Chinese, over half (54%; 240 items) are monolingual, written only in simplified or traditional Chinese characters.⁵ Table 5 illustrates the numerical difference between mono- and multilingual Chinese items in different communicative functions.

⁵ Distinguishing between simplified and traditional Chinese scripts was not part of this analysis.

Table 5. Mono- and Multilingual Chinese signs by communicative function



Within this sub-corpus of Chinese signs, monolingual items dominate slogans and advertisements. These were recorded in the fields of wellbeing (42 items; 18%), the buying and selling of property (40 items; 17%), food (34 items; 14%), and travel (33 items; 14%). In terms of places, monolingual Chinese items were recorded predominantly on noticeboards (89 items; 37%), restaurants (36 items; 15%), institutions (the *Pagoda* youth centre, the *See Yep Chinese Association*, *Liverpool Chinese Gospel Church*, and the *Opera for Chinatown*, *inter alia*: 32 items; 13%), and in the external frame (lamp posts, the lion plinths, and the large gold text reading ‘Chinatown’ on the Imperial Arch: 34 items; 14%).

Figure 6. Examples of monolingual signs



It is interesting to note that although restaurants displayed more monolingual signs than any other type of establishment, almost twice as many signs feature Chinese alongside English (70 items). These are accounted for mostly by bilingual restaurant names (34 items), which feature both Chinese characters and Pinyin transpositions (or at least Latin-script representations thereof). Considering the signage more closely, however, it is notable that information texts are more commonly monolingual Chinese (23 items) than bilingual (15 items). English-only items are overwhelmingly numerous in this category (133 items); though it remains the case that the use of Chinese is markedly characterized by monolingualism, with English (and other languages) a rarity, in most cases omitted completely. It is also useful to consider the impact of these items in terms of linguistic exclusion. Among these monolingual Chinese restaurant items were eight menus, six special offers, five customer reviews, and four slogans. Whilst Chinese-language customer testimonies are explainable in terms of the desire to construct a packaged experience of authenticity (Henderson, 2000: 531), the Chinese special offers and menus undoubtedly signify deliberate exclusion of non-Chinese readers. Except for the *Jumbo*

City restaurant which exhibited one special offer in English, the rest of the special offers in Chinatown were written only in Chinese, all displayed in the window of the *New China* restaurant. Whilst one of *New China*'s waiters avoided the question of exclusivity, the restaurant manager refused to be interviewed on the grounds that she lacked proficiency in English (in spite of the presence of an interpreter). Along with the indications of the special offer signs, these reactions suggest that, at least in *New China*, there is little inclination to support the identity of Chinatown as inclusive towards non-Chinese users. Beyond these examples, however, it must be stated that the majority of restaurant signage demonstrated no obvious strategy to omit English.

The multilingual situation in restaurants contrasts with the noticeboard frame, where the monolingual/bilingual relationship is reversed (89 Chinese-only items compared with 41 English-Chinese items). These 89 items of exclusivity are textual embodiments of community multilingualism (Cook, 2013), in which communication is possible only through Chinese proficiency. These noticeboards only account for three or four metres' worth of space in Chinatown at large, yet the high frequency of signs, particularly the Chinese-only texts, render them the most concentrated and exclusory frame in the LL. This supports the interview data identification of Chineseness with 'people': over 90% of these signs are hand-written or word processed; and only 9 items bore hallmarks of professional printing and mass distribution.

The Chinatown Community Noticeboard and the *Hondo* noticeboards therefore exemplify entire dimensions of exclusively Chinese discourses, which exist in spite of the non-Chinese surround. This is expressed in terms of the ephemeral and amateur materials used to manufacture over 90% of the items; but it is also instilled by the discourses of the signs. The items associate Chinese with accommodation advertisements (21 items; 23.6%), travel (19 items; 21.3%), and the sale of fast-food establishments (15 items; 16.9%), with part-time jobs, education, and health, and selling of household items (furniture, electricals, and white goods) also notable. All these fields are part of a broader

discourse of sharing, exchanging, buying, and selling to which non-Chinese readers are not granted access.

6. Discussion: Inclusion, Performance, Authenticity

Bearing in mind the theories of authentic ethnic representation discussed by Appadurai (1990, 1997), Fainstein (2001), Henderson (2000), Shaw (2007), and others, two hypotheses emerge from the data: first, the perceived legitimacy of Chinatown is reliant on the diffusion of authentic Chineseness; and second, its survival in a predominantly non-Chinese surround is reciprocally reliant on its capacity to cater to non-Chinese norms and tastes. Hence, whilst the noticeboards testify to a tangible in-group, defined by users of Chinese who exclude illegitimate out-group members, much of the LL indicates the necessity to communicate with the out-group, in order to boost the social and economic profile of Chinatown. This inclusion operates on multiple levels, ranging from Latin script restaurant names and English descriptions of business services to the explicit invitation to non-Chinese people to participate in social and sporting activities (figure 7).

Figure 7. Tai Chi and Table Tennis Club



There is a tendency, throughout much of the scholarship relating to ethnoscapes, to consider symbolic or emblematic signs as referential opposites to authentic representation. It is frequently argued, for example, that the rise of globalization is diminishing ‘objective authenticity’ (Henderson, 2000: 532), replacing it with commodified language objects for the sake of the ‘experience economy’ (Jaworski, 2015: 76; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The LL indicates that Chinatown’s ethnic identity in some respects is commodified and performative: Latin script restaurant names, the spatial-symbolic associations of street signs, and the stereotypical wellbeing messages on lamp posts are all potential markers of non-Chinese actors adopting a Chinese identity for commercial ends. In other respects, however, the LL appears to represent the interests of authentic Chinese actors, indicated by the in-group monolingual discourse on noticeboards and in the windows of some businesses. However, whilst Cook (2013), Shaw (2007), and others theorize that the two sides of this opposition are mutually exclusive, the LL suggests that they might function simultaneously on individual objects. The *Mei Mei* restaurant, for example, depicts an emblematic use of a ‘generic’ (Lou, 2010) Chinese-looking construction. Whilst

Chinese readers will understand ‘美味’ (Pinyin: ‘měi wèi’; English: ‘yummy yummy’) from the Chinese characters printed above the adjacent window pane (not pictured here), the Latin script replaces the [w] with a second [m]. According to the restaurant’s manager, this is in order to achieve an ‘English-sounding’ alliteration. To borrow Cook’s (2013) terms, this sign at once performs a ‘community’ function to the in-group, through a specific meaning, and an ‘atmospheric’ one to the out-group, achieved by phonetic means. The addition of ‘Chinese Restaurant’ in English indicates that the restaurant’s management welcomes out-group members. This sign and others like it therefore have a meaningful impact on the question of accommodation, because they initiate the assumption that it is the Chinese who determine whether non-Chinese are included, and not the reverse. This leads us to consider that, despite the frequent and common use of English, Chinese businesses are the principal stakeholders in constructing the identity of Chinatown.

Figure 8. Mei Mei restaurant front



The processes of exclusion and inclusion are also contributed to by non-Chinese actors. Whilst Chinatown’s identity is clearly determined by self-identifying Chinese institutions like *Mei Mei*, there are pockets of non-Chinese spaces which reciprocate this practice. The use of Chinese on street signs, lion plinths, lamp posts, and the Imperial Arch for instance indicates the intention of Liverpool City Council to accommodate, engage with, and represent the Chinese linguistic community. A similar policy is detectable in the non-official domain represented by the *St James Health Centre*, the large entrance sign of which indicates opening hours and contact information in both Chinese and English,

as well as privileging Chinese in the ‘new patients welcome’ part of the sign, which reads ‘欢迎临近居民和学生注册’ (English: ‘residents and students living nearby are welcome to register here’):

Figure 9. St James Health Centre



7. Conclusion

The data discussed in this study indicate that the identity of Liverpool's Chinatown is bi-dimensional. In one regard, it is an in-group space with entire Chinese-only discourses, practices, and rituals, contributed to by a host of independent actors as well as by Liverpool City Council. In another regard, Chinatown simultaneously fulfils a bi-directional process of accommodation, in which some actors

make Chinese accessible to English readers, and others English to Chinese readers, either through translation or transcription. Whilst it has been argued that no Chinatown can be authentic in itself (Fainstein, 2001; Klein & Zitcer, 2012), the noticeboards in Liverpool's Chinatown at least demonstrate authenticity alongside the aestheticized expression of cultural tourism, represented by the accessible otherness of the Arch, restaurants, and bilingual texts. Together, these processes exemplify Shaw's (2007: 55) description of a 'mixed-use neighbourhood'.

The starting point for assessing the boundaries of Chinatown was the bilingual nomination of eleven streets by Liverpool City Council. However, both the sign corpus and the interview data indicate that the street signs are not directly representative of Chinatown as it is constructed and interpreted by its participants. On Back Knight Street, Cornwallis Street, Griffiths Street, and Wood Street, the street signs were the only instances of Chinese writing. On Wood Street and Duke Street, there were more instances of French and Italian than Chinese, suggesting that any interpretation of the streets' multilingualism might be more occupied with European languages rather than Chinese. Whilst the street signs are nevertheless indicators of the official desire to recognize the Chinese identity within Liverpoolian society, several respondents insisted that they do not consider street signs relevant to the question of identity, precisely because they are official. Other respondents insisted that street signs were only relevant for those who do not know the space, and therefore that they are meaningful identity markers solely for newcomers. Along with the frequent identification of restaurants, inhabitants, and businesses as principal markers of Chinatown, this suggests that the identity of the space is widely considered determinable only by non-official actors.

Whilst the exact location of Chinatown is not conclusive in the interview data, the sign data permits us to map the distribution of Chinese not only in spatial terms, but also according to the discourses with which it is associated. The LL reveals concentrations of Chinese expression on Nelson Street and Berry Street, but also in specific businesses, restaurants, and on noticeboards. Whilst the suffix -*town* implies a geographical location, the data illustrates that Chinatown is in fact realized through

associations with objects, histories, activities, and rituals, experienced and consumed by the passerby. In the interviews these phenomena are fundamentally reduced ('people', 'restaurants', 'supermarkets', 'architecture', 'food', etc.). The sign data, however, offer a more nuanced assessment, not only uncovering alternative frames in which Chinese expression is found, but also contextualizing these descriptions in terms of the textual and material expression of identity. Understanding this dimension of the LL further is possible through the analysis of multimodal data. Accordingly, the LL indicates that the in-group identity of Chinatown is defined by the extra-textual discourse of ephemerality. Whilst materially permanent items tend to be bilingual and constructed in frames associated with emblematic commodification, hand-written and home-printed texts on public noticeboards indicate the prestige of Chinese monolingualism in contexts associated with low-cost production intended for a local readership. This indexes phenomena related to travel and immigration, commonly associated with ethnoscares (Appadurai, 1990); though also depicts a tangible Chinese community, not reliant on engagement with the out-group, which embodies the frameworks of authenticity and legitimacy which signal the existence of a genuine ethnic space (Henderson, 2000; Pang, 2012; Shaw, 2007).

The methodological goal of this article has been to explore some of the ways in which the LL can make a useful contribution to the analysis of ethnic identity. If one accepts Portugali's (1996) notion that passers-by build a subjective 'cognitive map' of meaning in the LL based on the signs they see, then it follows that the analysis of individual items is inseparable from that of the wider space. In other words, and as has been argued elsewhere (c.f. Scollon & Scollon (2003) on emplacement and place semiotics), the meaning of the specific is relative to that of the general. The proposed method of capturing this relativity in the sign data is to collect all the written items in the survey area, demarcated by the street signs as the official designation of Chinatown. Whilst the cognitive maps of the respondents evidently goes beyond the 3066 items in Chinatown, it is posited that the empirical recording of data at least allows for statistically-relevant comparisons of sign distribution, and an

accurate assessment of the weighting (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006) of certain characteristics within the space observed. This is an important criterion for meaningful quantitative analysis, and in this study demonstrates the potential for empirical data to inform statistically-justifiable generalizations. In this study, this permits detailed qualitative analyses of Chinese identity to be cross-referenced between the classification systems, such as the language-materiality-field comparison detailed in table 4. More broadly, it indicates that empirical LL data has the potential to inform a variety of research interests in other cognate areas, refuting suggestions that quantitative lines of inquiry are meeting their limits (Blommaert, 2013: 2-3; Laihonon, 2015: 195). Rather, it is hoped that the continuing development of methodological approaches to quantifying LLs will encourage future progression, and illuminate further the complex relationship between identity and visibility in contemporary spaces.

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