

# **Dreams and Realities:**

## **Developing Countries and the English Language**

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Paper 10

Language and migration: The social and economic benefits of learning English in Pakistan

by Tony Capstick

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# Language and migration: The social and economic benefits of learning English in Pakistan

Tony Capstick

## Introduction

In this chapter I contrast the educational experiences of four learners of English in Pakistan, all of whom were hoping to migrate to the UK in the near future. This constitutes part of a wider study of language testing legislation for migrants in the UK. Based on semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, I look at these learners' opportunities to learn English alongside the larger socio-political context in Mirpur (a city in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, AJK), in AJK itself (a state which is administered by but is not formally part of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan), in Pakistan more broadly and in the UK. Following Julia Menard-Wright's work with adult ESL Latina immigrants in California (Menard-Wright 2005), I situate the four Mirpuri learners' experiences of studying English within the social and economic history of immigration from AJK. The reason for choosing this approach is that migration continues to be responsible for not only dramatic social changes in Mirpur but also some of the most striking economic changes in the contemporary world (Ballard 2008). This is revealed through an investigation of the impact of remittances on the local Mirpuri economy throughout the various stages of migration from the area. Whereas Ballard was concerned with the migration of peasant farmers from northern Pakistan who migrated to Britain and the Middle East during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, this chapter investigates the increasing role which English language proficiency plays in chain migration at the end of the first decade of the 21st century. By tracing access to English language courses and tests, this study demonstrates how English contributes to transnational family life at a time when the West is experiencing a tightening of the relationship between language, immigration, citizenship and national security (Cooke and Simpson 2008). Interviews carried out in Mirpur weeks before the introduction of language testing legislation for migrants wishing to settle in the UK highlight the current dilemma:

*The response to post-colonialism and globalisation by governments – in the UK and elsewhere – is sometimes contradictory: they must attract inward investment by offering skilled low-wage labour while also appealing to certain sections of the electorate by being seen to be ‘tough’ on asylum and immigration.*

**(Cooke and Simpson 2008:8)**

The introduction of language testing legislation for migrants is a result of this contradiction and has begun to represent the kind of immigration controls which Werbner has argued:

*strike at the very roots of British Pakistanis’ deepest loyalties: to close kinsmen, dependents and in relation to unquestionable family obligations*

**(Werbner 2008:6)**

thereby denying members of transnational families the right to marry by choice. Government limits on immigration from outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and investment in the training and recruitment of UK workers have led to English language proficiency being linked to issues of employment, welfare, cohesion and ‘integration’.

## **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework which underpins this study draws from research on transnational migration and the economy and, more specifically, the nexus of marriage, migration, kinship and gender. The role of language here is analysed alongside social anthropologists’ work investigating the relationship between migration and the development of economies with specific reference to the experience of migrants from Pakistan.

### **Relationship between migration and the development of local and national economies**

In his study of migration and the local economy in Mirpur, Ballard has argued that it is migrants’ remittances that have had the greatest impact on Mirpuri society given the many millions of pounds that have been remitted to the area over the last 60 years. But this has not led to significant economic development of what is a predominantly agricultural area. Rather, Ballard argues that after the building boom of prestigious houses in Mirpur by migrants in the UK in the 1970s, there was little interest in investing in agriculture due to the lack of status associated with the sector, low prices and little development of infrastructure by the state. The result has been that Mirpur is now heavily dependent on the remittances, a condition which Ballard argues:

*is primarily a consequence of the way in which Pakistan’s whole economy is structured. It is no fault of the Mirpuris themselves that agriculture has been rendered completely unprofitable as a result of central pricing policies, nor that the Government of Pakistan has done next to nothing to mobilise local resources, nor even to provide the infrastructural facilities around which migrants could more profitably and productively invest savings. (Ballard 2008:36)*

The remittances, however, are not only of great importance in Mirpur but also contribute significantly to the national economy. Gazdar (2003) found that remittances from international Pakistani migrants constitute the single largest source of foreign exchange earnings for the country, where an estimated USD2.4 billion (GBP1.54 billion) – four per cent of the country's GNP – is currently remitted annually by international migrants (Mansuri 2006). On a global scale, these contributions sent home by the 70 million migrant workers from developing countries around the world have been estimated at USD192 billion (GBP123 billion) in 2007 – the equivalent to four times the total amount of official aid received by developing countries (UNDP 2009 quoted by Coleman 2010a).

### **Experience of migrants in the UK**

Given the significance of the above in the household finances of Mirpuris, the status of transnational marriages means that they are an important commodity in Pakistan. It is not uncommon for young British Pakistanis to marry into Mirpuri families, particularly if their parents have rural origins and have not excelled in the British school system (Harriss and Shaw 2008). In a previous study, Shaw argued that for these young British men and women, transnational marriage allows for a diversification of assets through the consolidation of links to properties in Pakistan as well as the UK (Shaw 2000). Moreover, transnational marriage enhances the reputation of the kin group by demonstrating solidarity and by providing British parents with opportunities to import tradition and religion into the marriages of 'culturally confused' British Pakistani families.

Katherine Charsley's work here is particularly relevant for an understanding of the case studies in this chapter as she draws on the experiences of the 'imported husband' who is unable to assert his authority when settled in the UK due to conflicts with his father-in-law. Language here plays a key role as husbands are further emasculated by experiencing a reduction in their economic status as a result of poor English while their Pakistani qualifications and employment experience go unrecognised in the UK (Charsley 2005). Harriss and Shaw argue that the gender relations in the marriages of Pakistani women marrying British-born husbands are significantly different from those in marriages with local Pakistani husbands (Harris and Shaw 2008). While transnational marriage provides opportunities to raise the status of women within their Mirpuri family, their status in the family home in the UK will still require negotiation. Understanding gender relations and the transnational context in this way provides for a more thorough understanding of the decisions being made by the four respondents in each of the case studies presented here.

### **'Sense of agency'**

Given that the emphasis in this chapter is on the socio-cultural aspects of language testing for migrants, the study draws on the concept of 'agency' as described by the linguistic anthropologist Laura Ahearn where 'agency refers to the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act' (Ahearn 2001:112). Put another way, 'agency' in this study refers to 'how an individual takes control over some aspect of his or her life' (Cooke and Simpson 2008:13). 'Action' is central to both definitions, but what is particularly important to the transnational context is that:

*within different cultures, human beings and the material world might exhibit capacities for action quite different from those we customarily attribute to them. (Pickering 1995:245)*

I use the term agency therefore to focus not only on the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act in relation to language learning and migration but in order to emphasise how that sense of agency will differ in Pakistan and the UK.

## **Context**

The context of this study is described by looking, first, at the economy of the United Kingdom and the history of its reliance on migrant labour over the last 60 years. Next, background information on Pakistan is provided with reference to its current geopolitical significance alongside indicators of the poverty which fuels much of the current unrest. Understanding education and the economy in Pakistan and the AJK region in this way then provides the context for a description of the history of Pakistani, especially Mirpuri, migration to the UK. In order to understand the dramatic changes taking place in how language is becoming central to these historical patterns of migration, a final section explains recent UK policy and the role of English language proficiency in immigration controls.

### **The UK economy and its reliance on migrant labour**

The UK's economy became increasingly reliant on migrant labour from the 1950s onwards. Mike Raco argues that government policy focused on the promotion of international immigration as a means of balancing immigration with emigration from the UK, thereby providing the foundations for the modernisation of the British economy. Shortages were particularly acute in 'essential' sectors such as agriculture, coal mining, textiles, construction, foundry work, health services and international domestic service. To meet the labour shortage which the country was facing and to encourage immigration from the Commonwealth, the UK government passed the 1948 British Nationality Act, which essentially established an open borders policy between the UK and Commonwealth countries (Raco 2007). However, following the introduction of micro-chip technology in the 1980s, a large manual labour force was no longer a prerequisite of industrial production, hence there was a reduction in migratory flows, particularly under the Conservative governments of the 1970s and 1980s and a shift in the kinds of migrants looking to settle in Britain. It is these current flows of migration that this chapter seeks to investigate given that the effects of earlier movements will remain with us (Ballard 2008).

The stricter controls of the 1980s gave way to what became known as managed migration from 1997 onwards under the Labour governments of Tony Blair. Layton-Henry (2004) argues that the strong economy that Labour inherited from the Conservatives in 1997 allowed for a re-evaluation of immigration policy which saw skilled and unskilled workers welcomed to the UK as part of New Labour's initial commitment to more open borders. However, this government became increasingly inclined towards immigration controls and was planning to introduce language testing for migrants in 2011. The new Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government then brought forward the language testing of migrants to 2010 soon after its election in May of that year. This shift in immigration policy sees the

welcoming of skilled workers from inside the European Economic Area, rather than low-skilled workers and their spouses from poor areas of the Commonwealth who were once encouraged to settle.

### **Basic facts about Pakistan in general and AJK in particular**

At the time this study was carried out, Pakistan was continuing to receive considerable attention from across the world due to increased militancy in its tribal areas and the US-led war against the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan. Alongside this a debate about 'radical' versus 'moderate' Islam in a country which is still known as one of the US's closest allies in the 'war on terror' continued. Western imperialism has a long history in the region, modern-day Pakistan having been carved out of British India in 1947. Since this time, the country has grown rapidly, with a population of 185 million (UNDP 2010). But in terms of development, the country ranks as 125 out of 169 countries, whilst 23 per cent of the population live on less than USD1.25 (PKR106, GBP0.81) a day (UNDP 2010). Pakistan has one of the lowest figures for public expenditure on education at only 2.9 per cent of GDP yet one of the highest figures for military expenditure at 2.6 per cent of GDP (UNDP 2010). These and other key development indicators can be seen in Appendix 2 at the end of this volume. The geopolitical consequences of Pakistan's strategic importance in the region can be seen alongside the poverty indicators, which mark it out as one of the most vulnerable in the region. This vulnerability is compounded by the high level of division between the language of schooling and the languages of the home. As we shall see in the following section, the increasing instability in the country has been attributed to this disjuncture between home languages and the languages of education.

Also of significance for this study, major gender disparities in Pakistan are revealed in the difference between male and female earning capacity where attitudes across socio-economic groups in Pakistan see less value in educating girls than boys, since girls will not be able to earn as much as boys even if they are educated (Coleman 2010b). This is reflected in participation rates for schooling in Pakistan. According to the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the net primary enrolment rate for boys in Pakistan is 73 per cent whereas for girls the figure is closer to 59 per cent. These figures drop to 36 per cent of boys and 28 per cent of girls participating in secondary schooling. By the time students reach higher education, only six per cent of boys and five per cent of girls remain in education (DfID n.d.).

The context of schooling in Pakistan is particularly complex given the variety of non-governmental schools which operate in both urban and rural areas. Good quality English medium schools serve the country's small wealthy elite. Meanwhile, lower quality private schools also claim to provide English medium instruction but with very limited success. The military provides good schooling through to tertiary level while schools operated by charitable organisations also provide primary and secondary schooling in Pakistan on a large scale, particularly in AJK. An Islamic education – sometimes supplemented with the state curriculum – is provided by networks of madaris (madrasahs) across the country. Some of these also teach English as a subject.

However, the majority of school children who make it into school attend Urdu medium government schools. For example, data derived from the National

Education Census of 2005 and analysed for a review of teacher education in the AJK region (Coleman 2010c), shows that 35 per cent of pupils study in private schools; this indicates that the government education system is able to accommodate only 65 per cent of the demand for schooling in AJK. (Incidentally, the situation regarding language of instruction in state schools is changing. The Federal Government and some provincial ministries of education, notably Punjab, are moving towards English as the medium of instruction for mathematics and science at the primary level.)

Prior to Partition in 1947, the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir agreed to join India after initial attempts at independence. Within a matter of months India and Pakistan were at war over the territory and a 1949 ceasefire left approximately two-fifths of the former state in the control of Pakistan (adapted from Coleman 2010c). AJK has its own legislative assembly with a prime minister and a president. The territory consists of eight districts, with a total population of about 3.3 million (Rensch 1992). Mirpur district is the fourth smallest district in AJK with a population of 371,000, though the town of Mirpur has the largest population of any urban area.

The education context in AJK is very similar to that in Pakistan. According to the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Council, in 2006 there were 5,866 government schools in AJK (AJK Council 2010). In Pakistan in general, 44 per cent of teachers have no post-school qualification; 37 per cent hold a Primary Teaching Certificate or a Certificate of Teaching and only 19 per cent of teachers hold higher qualifications including diplomas, Bachelors and Masters degrees (Pre-STEP 2010:6 and MOE 2005). Though these statistics cover Pakistan as a whole, they provide an indication of the quality of teacher education across the country, including AJK, and the context within which the four respondents from the case studies went to school.

### **History of Mirpuri migration to the UK**

Azad Kashmiris are often subsumed within the label Pakistanis in the migration literature, although they are in fact numerically dominant among people of Pakistani origin in the UK (Kalra 2008). Harriss and Shaw (2008) have defined three phases of migration from Pakistan: male labour migration, family reunion and marriage migration. The initial migrants in the chain were linked by family membership and consisted mainly of single men looking for the promise of higher wages. The 'pioneer' male labour migrants later married or called over their wives and children to the UK; this represented:

*a shift in orientation towards Britain as a place of temporary residence, where they would work and earn money for their families back home, to one in which they are sufficiently rooted to settle. (Harris and Shaw 2008:119)*

As a result of immigration controls in the 1970s, this second phase gave way to a third phase – known as marriage migration – in which spouses and dependent children became some of the few remaining groups eligible for entry to the UK. This phase remains in force today, although with some modifications. The largest component of migration from Pakistan during the third phase has been young second- or third-generation British Pakistanis who marry 'back home' – i.e. in Mirpur – and who, on their return to Britain, bring brides or bridegrooms, particularly cousins, with them (Shaw 2000).

Harriss and Shaw (2008) argue that since the 1970s, government controls on family immigration have increasingly tightened the grip on transnational marriage. An example is the primary purpose rule which was in place in the UK from 1980 to 1997. This ruled that marriage should not be for the purposes of economic migration. Given that this rule appeared specifically designed to discourage immigration from South Asia through marriage – and was thus discriminatory – it was abolished in 1997 by the New Labour government. Since this time, the number of husbands gaining visas to Britain has increased to the extent that there have been almost equal numbers of male and female migrant spouses in recent years (Home Office 2001).

### **Recent UK government policy regarding language and immigration**

The period of managed migration overseen by the Labour government was dramatically cut short within weeks of the election of the Conservative–Liberal coalition government in May 2010. Immigration was clearly put back at the top of the political agenda by the new Home Secretary in an early interview with the BBC:

*I believe being able to speak English should be a prerequisite for anyone who wants to settle here. The new English requirement for spouses will help promote integration, remove cultural barriers and protect public services. (Casciani 2010)*

Here the Home Secretary refers to legislation that was eventually introduced in November 2010 that requires spouses of UK citizens to be able to demonstrate English proficiency by having passed an approved English language test before applying for their visa. The argument about the protection of public services is not new and can be traced back to similar arguments over competition for scarce resources such as those Ballard (1996) identified behind the racial polarisation of the 1980s, then, as now, often most acute during periods of economic recession. However, Home Office figures collected over the previous ten years reveal that the pressure put on public services by ‘ethnic minorities’ continues to be something of a myth in the UK. Between 1999 and 2000, migrants contributed approximately GBP31.2 billion (USD48.30 billion) in taxes and consumed an estimated GBP28.2 billion (USD43.6 billion) in benefits ‘resulting in a net contribution of GBP2.4 billion [USD3.72 billion] to the economy’ (Layton-Henry 2004).

In August 2010 the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) announced that, from 29 November that year, partners of migrants would be required to take and pass an English language test:

*The minimum standard that applicants will need to meet is in speaking and listening at level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference<sup>1</sup>. The list of approved tests and providers includes some tests above A1 level – this is because we will also accept tests in speaking and listening, or in speaking and listening with additional skills such as reading or writing, that are taken at a higher level with an approved test provider. (UKBA 2010)*

However, in Pakistan – as in many other countries – speaking and listening are rarely practised or assessed in state sector schooling. In response to the move towards English language testing for non-EU migrants applying under the UKBA Points-based System, Dr Nick Saville, Director of Research at Cambridge ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) identified two measures as prerequisites



for testing for migrants. Firstly, he emphasised the importance of procedures for monitoring test outcomes which ensure that the test does not lead to discrimination; and secondly, he identified the need for a clear purpose for the test with clarity on how the purpose influences the level, content, administration and use of results (Saville 2009). At the time of writing, neither of these is in place for the UKBA list of approved tests. Given that there is still a distinct lack of empirical evidence to back up the appropriate use of the UKBA tests for the purpose of migration (Charles Alderson, email communication 09 July 2010), it would seem that there is still a great deal of basic validation work to be carried out.

## **Methodology and data collection**

It is within this context that the four respondents in this study were preparing for their visa applications and would, if successful, migrate to the UK to join their wives and husbands already living there. These narratives illustrate each participant's perspective on how their English language learning has been influenced by their families' messages about marriage and migration, as well as UK immigration policies and language planning.

Throughout the data collection period (June to November 2010) I observed several classes at two language schools in Mirpur town. The courses at the first school fall into two types. The first is the 'IELTS class' which prepares learners for the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) administered by the British Council and one of the few of the UKBA's approved tests available in Pakistan. The second is the 'Spoken English' course which is specifically aimed at young men and women with low levels of education wishing to migrate. Research was also carried out at a second private language school in the town which offers a more diverse range of English language courses and information and communications technology (ICT) courses. The majority of interviews were held with students of the 'Spoken English' class in the first school. However, interviews with a learner from the second school are also included in the analysis which follows. This particular respondent's interviews provide a vivid account of the role of English in migrants' lives. They also provide an alternative picture of how fluency in English leads to increased opportunities for migration.

Given that little research exists on Pakistani migrants' pre-departure English language learning, the aims of this part of the study were (i) to identify the factors which influence access to English in Mirpur for migrants and (ii) in the light of the Mirpur case studies, to investigate the assumptions about language learning that are being made in the recent language testing legislation.

## **The case studies**

### **Seema**

At the time of the interview Seema was 20 years old and lived with her two brothers and two sisters (all of whom were still at school) and her mother, a housewife. Before his death, Seema's father had encouraged his daughter to agree to marry the son of a friend of his in the UK as he had wanted to 'join the two families'; the father was keen for her to settle in the UK, though none of Seema's siblings had plans to migrate.

Seema reported that she spoke Urdu, Pahari, Punjabi and a little English. All of her interview responses were given in Urdu apart from a few words in English. Although she was very much at beginner level at the time of the interviews, during the final interview her teacher revealed that Seema had shown ‘amazing improvement though she is the least educated in the class’. Previously she had studied English at private school for one month. She left government school at the age of 18 when she was in Class 7 but without taking the Class 7 exam.

Throughout the data collection period, Seema attended English classes for two hours every morning. She planned to continue studying for a total of two months or possibly longer. She explained that she was learning English because she was planning to join her husband there after their marriage in Mirpur in February 2011.

Seema said that she was planning to have the nikah ceremony (signing of the Islamic marriage contract) in February 2011 and that she would apply for the visa after that. She had no plans to take an English language test before making the application and indeed by the time of my final meeting with her she was still unaware that under the new legislation she would need to pass a language test. In our final interview she said that the only information which she had been given by her family-to-be in the UK was that she would need English in order to be ‘comfortable’ there.

Seema did not know yet whether she would work outside the home or be a housewife in the UK; she would make a decision after arriving there. She wanted to see the country before deciding which role was preferable, although she added that all her female relations in the UK were housewives.

When Seema was asked directly about how her migration might help her family in Mirpur she responded by asking, ‘How am I able to help them?’ She explained that her brothers support the family. Furthermore, since her father’s death a cousin in the UK had also been sending a sum of money each month to Seema’s family. When asked whether her future husband would be able to provide financial support for the family in Mirpur she explained that they would have to wait to see; at the time of the research he was training to become a teacher. (The interpreter interjected at this point in the interview to add that generally speaking it was not possible to predict what the nature of the ‘co-operation’ between the individual families would be before migration took place.) Finally, Seema said that she had no plans to return to Pakistan after migrating to the UK; however, she was determined that she would use Urdu with her children because this is the language that they would need when visiting relatives in Pakistan.

### **Bushra**

Bushra was studying English ‘for a visa’ as she had been told by her husband, who was living in the UK but whom she had married in Mirpur, that there would be a new visa rule in 2010 which would mean she would need to learn English. Bushra was aware that she would need to take a test. However, she did not yet know when she would be leaving for the UK and so, at the time of the interviews, she had not begun the visa application process. Bushra’s father’s brother, mother’s brother and her own brother and sister lived in the north of England, but her plan was to join her husband in London where he worked as a taxi driver.

Like Seema, Bushra had left school at the end of Class 7, although unlike Seema she had passed the Class 7 examination with the second highest score in the school that year. Since leaving school she had neither worked nor studied. She thought that she would like to study English in the UK but she had no plans to work. Bushra said that she could not see how she would be able to help her family financially once she was in London, as it was the responsibility of her father and brothers in Mirpur to do that. Finally, she claimed that she wished to stay in England for the rest of her life, because her life must be where her husband is.

### **Salman**

Salman, aged 23, planned not to leave Mirpur for at least another two years because he wished to learn English slowly rather than ‘waste two years there [in England] with no knowledge.’ Salman had left school when he was in Class 6 because he did not want to study and he started work at a young age. At the time of the interviews, he was running a shop and driving a van. His UK-born spouse had recently completed her studies and was looking for work in the UK. Salman said that he would be going to the UK for the sake of his mother and father; he was planning to earn money there and would send it back to his parents.

Regarding his feelings about going to the UK, Salman mentioned two things. Firstly, England was where his wife was (and so by implication he had no alternative but to go there). Secondly, in order to change his life for the better, he would need to leave Mirpur. His plan was to settle in the UK; he had already ‘spent a lot on this purpose’ and would need to recoup the expenditure by working once he arrived there. His plan was to take the UK driving test and become a taxi driver, but he was willing to do ‘anything’ if that plan did not succeed. Salman added that he had also spent a lot of money – as much as 50,000 Pakistan Rupees (approximately GBP382, USD590) – on his marriage nikah. This money had come partly from the grocery store which he ran and partly from his father who worked as a driver in Dubai.

### **Usman**

Usman’s father was a member of the Pakistan armed forces and so Usman himself had been educated through the medium of English in schools operated by the military; this was the case in each of the three cities in which his family had lived as he was growing up. As a result, Usman was fluent in English and, unlike the three previous respondents, the interviews with him were all in English. Earlier in 2010 Usman had passed the IELTS test with a score of Band 6<sup>2</sup>. Although IELTS Band 6 is well above the Council of Europe’s A1 level, as required by UKBA, Usman was rather disappointed with his result. He attributed this to the fact that he had been entered for the ‘academic’ version of IELTS rather than the ‘general training’ version.

Usman had recently married a ‘British girl’ whom he speaks to in English. His brother-in-law had already explained to him the forthcoming legislation on language testing for spouses wanting to enter the UK. Usman demonstrated a clear sense of agency when he described how he had found out more about the language requirements for migration and the visa application procedure by checking a blog on the internet.

Usman was planning to leave for the UK before mid-January 2011 (two months after my last interview with him), which was when his wife was due to give birth to

their first child. It was during this final interview that Usman described his desire to become a police officer in the UK. This decision was probably influenced by his father's role in the military; Usman himself had tried to join the Pakistani military but had been rejected. Usman also reported that he had been doing well at university in Mirpur but had dropped out in order to migrate to the UK.

## Discussion

A number of important issues arise from these case studies. The first is that there are certain significant similarities and differences between the experiences of the four individuals, an examination of which provides the opportunity to move towards understanding recent UK policy changes in light of these experiences. By drawing on the earlier theoretical discussion of the relationship between migration and the economy, the case studies will then be used to analyse several assumptions that lie at the heart of language planning for migrants.

### Similarities and differences between the four cases

Fifteen respondents were interviewed over the course of three months. Four have been selected for presentation and analysis here because they are in different ways representative of the thousands of migrants who leave Mirpur for the UK each year. However, the differences between these four narratives also serve to reveal the complexity and variety of factors that influence migrants' and their families' decisions about moving to the UK. The most striking difference here lies in the very different approaches adopted by the two men and the two women in planning their moves. Regardless of socio-economic background and education, both men had clearly defined roles for themselves as economic migrants, settling in the UK to enhance their own employment opportunities while at the same time sharing with their families back in Mirpur some of the financial rewards which they would reap by working abroad. On the other hand, Seema was unsure whether she would work after arriving in Britain while Bushra was sure that she would not work. This raises questions about the role of English for learners who are not necessarily looking to work, particularly in light of the fact that English language courses in the public sector in the UK generally have employment-related curricula and state funding for such courses is often linked to assessment based on the enhanced employability of students (Cooke and Simpson 2008).

A closer look reveals that despite the initial similarity between Bushra and Seema there is also a significant difference between them. Bushra wants to continue to learn English but she does not wish to work; she therefore requires an English language programme with a different curriculum from the employment-related courses which are available. Seema, on the other hand, has not ruled out the possibility of working but she has no plan to continue studying English. Given that Bushra excelled at school but dropped out of school at the end of Class 7, we can see how significant the learning opportunities of an English course might be for her new life in the UK. The sense of agency which Bushra demonstrates here may not be linked to English for employment, but it provides an alternative rationale for ensuring that recent migrants have access to English courses as these may be their only means of continuing their education.

Another major difference between the four respondents is the role which education has played in their lives. Looking at their experiences inside and outside formal schooling as children and young adults and the way in which education has shaped and influenced decisions about their futures in the UK helps us to develop a more nuanced understanding of the role which education plays for them. For example, Salman left school while still quite young (Class 6) yet he demonstrates a strong will to work. It is quite likely that only access to English classes in the UK will help him to achieve his objectives, since he has no formal qualifications and he is vulnerable to the challenges faced by ‘imported husbands’.

Usman is much less likely to face such challenges because he already knows English well and is confident that this will help him to achieve his plans to become a policeman. English quite clearly offers opportunities for social mobility in his case. Usman’s education background is markedly different from the other three respondents and is representative of not only military families in Pakistan but also the majority of middle class families who choose private English medium schooling for their children. Usman’s case reveals the huge disparity in Pakistan between those families (or their employers) who can afford this type of schooling and the majority who have no option but to send their children to Urdu medium schools. Graduates of English medium schools will gain access to a range of job opportunities in Pakistan, including the civil service and most white collar jobs. Not only does the gate-keeping role of English provide Usman with access to higher education in Pakistan but it will possibly also provide him with employment opportunities in the police force in the UK should his visa application be successful.

By identifying similarities and differences between the four respondents, the diversity of their needs in learning English has become clear; this has been done particularly in relation to their ability to find, take and pass a test which meets standards of fairness and reliability (Saville 2009). These case studies reveal the importance of taking language, education, employment and immigration status into account when considering testing for migrants. The following discussion covers the issues that are currently referred to by the UK government as reasons for introducing language testing for migrants: speaking English in order to integrate and to find work. Seema’s opportunities to learn English are viewed alongside the language in education context in Mirpur and how this positions learners who wish to learn to speak English. Bushra’s desire to continue to learn English in the UK is examined as a central theme in the debate around language and cohesion. The notion of the ‘imported husband’ with low levels of English is explored through the barriers to employment and education that Salman may face should his English not improve before departure, as well as the effect that this may have on any children he has in the UK. Finally, Usman’s decisions about employment and education both before and after departure are examined in relation to the English he has learned in Pakistan.

### **Analysis of recent UK policy in the light of the case studies**

Seema, who dropped out of school at the end of Class 7, revealed in interviews that she speaks to her husband in the UK in Urdu and Punjabi, that she would speak to her children in the UK in Urdu, that their grandparents would speak to them in Pahari and that she does not feel a need to learn any more English once she has

settled in the UK. These languages are in addition to the Arabic that she uses to read the Koran. (Seema was the only respondent who mentioned this as a regular activity.) What these comments on language highlight is the multilingual repertoire which Seema employs across the different domains of her life and which will hold significant influence over how she learns English. Though no detailed language profile for AJK has been carried out, in his review of teacher education in the region Coleman (2010c) found that the language continuum of Potwari, Pahari and Mirpuri is complicated given that Mirpuri speakers often refer to their language as Pahari. Furthermore:

*since Pahari is the language of the majority of Kashmiris and since Kashmiris constitute the majority of the Pakistan-origin community in the UK, there must therefore be approximately one million Pahari speakers in the UK. This would make Pahari the most widely used language in the UK after English.*

**(Coleman 2010c:5, quoting Ali n.d.)**

As well as revealing how little is known about the languages of AJK and the gaps in our knowledge of the languages spoken in the UK, Coleman's observations indicate how central language is to education. Although Pakistan wishes to move to English medium instruction in its primary schools, the respondents in Coleman's AJK study acknowledged that even in the teaching of English the languages used are mostly Urdu and Pahari. Given that 'there is little specialist teacher education for English language teachers across the country in the state sector' (Coleman 2010c:10) and little English is used in the classroom, it is not unlikely that learners would struggle to reach the A1 target of the UKBA. Not only does the lack of mother tongue education have profound implications for how learning more generally takes place (see Cummins 1981, 2000, UNESCO 2003), but it also creates obstacles to the way in which foreign languages are learned. These barriers, therefore, to quality English language teaching that learners like Seema face are ignored both in the level that the UKBA has identified and the style of tests that are available in Pakistan. IELTS, which is available in Pakistan, does not test at the lower levels of proficiency. Moreover, the UKBA tests aim to assess listening and speaking competence but this does not take into account the fact that little listening and speaking practice is provided for learners of English in government schools in AJK. This demonstrates the difficulty in achieving the Home Secretary's desire that 'being able to speak English should be a prerequisite for anyone who wants to settle here' (Casciani 2010).

Seema's account of dropping out early from school and her low educational attainment highlight the generally high school dropout rate among girls in Pakistan and the fact that girls in AJK are less likely to be schooled than boys:

*In AJK, then, it can be said that, after the age of nine, participation in education is a minority activity. In particular for girls after the age of 12, going to school is an extremely unusual activity undertaken by fewer than one in ten.*

**(Coleman 2010c:17)**

Poor participation rates in education can often be attributed to the lack of mother tongue education and this certainly seems to be the case in Pakistan in general and in AJK in particular. A Save the Children report argues:

*Large-scale analysis of participation in education is showing that whether or not a child is taught in their first language, or mother tongue, often has a strong effect on whether or not a child attends school, particularly in rural areas. The language used to deliver the school curriculum pulls down the educational performance of many of those who do not use it at home, particularly those who do not have regular access to it outside school. (Pinnock 2009:8)*

It is within this context that Seema is expected to learn English from teachers who have had no English language teacher training and in classes that do not provide opportunities to practise speaking the language. Moreover, Seema is also expected to pass an approved test, such as IELTS, which, according to Professor Charles Alderson (who was responsible for the design of IELTS), was never validated for migration purposes and is not appropriate for testing at the lower levels of English (personal correspondence 2010).

### **English to ‘integrate’**

As we have seen, Bushra felt that she would like to continue learning English in the UK even though she had no plan to work once she had settled there. The legislation regarding language testing for migrants has been justified in terms of the need for ‘integration’; in this context, Bushra’s aim to continue learning English is significant. In 2008, a study carried out for the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) interviewed women of Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Somali origin who were resident in Britain. It was found that a significant number of women only began to consider learning for themselves after their children had grown up. Moreover, the women in the study illustrated a strong sense of cohesion within their own community:

*The vast majority of women described strong bonds and links in their communities. They valued these strong communities, supported neighbours and helped each other with childcare. Few were active citizens outside their own community primarily because of language, low confidence and lack of information. (Ward and Spacey 2008:3)*

It would appear, then, that proficiency in English would help these women to overcome the barriers to cohesion (language, confidence and access to information) beyond their immediate community and there is thus a strong argument for the provision of English classes to aid ‘integration’. Moreover, education and work outside the home play an important role in changing the balance of gender relations which women experience after they arrive in the UK, enabled by the kind of practical support which they receive from the strong bonds and cohesion with their communities (Harris and Shaw 2008). However, though the issue of language for cohesion is often identified in the national press as a means to ‘integrate’, Sheila Rosenberg reminds us that the issue of women’s contribution to cohesion remains under-researched. Although the Ward and Spacey (2008) study for NIACE demonstrates that English language proficiency can bring individual benefits such as a feeling of empowerment, Rosenberg argues emphatically that:

*A glib generalisation which links women and language to successful settlement and community cohesion ignores the history of all the previous groups who have settled and thrived, despite the fact that women at home have often not learned a great deal of English. Such a generalisation makes some unpleasant stereotypical assumptions about gender and culture, ignores class and poverty as powerful determinants and does not begin to recognise the wider social and political factors influencing attitudes and actions among our communities.*

**(Rosenberg 2009:43)**

Here, unequal access to education and English in the home country can be compounded if women are not provided with opportunities to learn in the UK. At the same time we have to recognise that understanding English alone does not ensure community cohesion. However, there is evidence from a consultation carried out by the UK's Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DBIS) that those who access learning generally (including learning English) do reap wider benefits both in terms of individual development and from social engagement (DBIS 2010). The DBIS report found that social and civic engagement increased with learning; individuals also enjoyed better health as well as increased social inclusion. Given that Bushra clearly wanted to continue learning English in the UK, it could be argued that, initially, this may in fact be the only type of learning she engages in, thereby linking learning (English) to the benefits of social and civic engagement.

However, a direct connection between English proficiency and cohesion continues to be challenged, as was recognised in a consultation report produced by the government's Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS):

*Some felt that there was not necessarily an automatic link between ESOL and community cohesion and that ESOL is not necessarily a solution on its own: i.e., increased language skills implying that people can play a fuller part in society but this doesn't mean that they will value or believe the same things. (DIUS 2009:7)*

Moreover, Rosenberg claims that:

*it must also be acknowledged that if settling and thriving are to be used as tests, then it is true that some of the members of certain ESOL communities have not done so well, especially if we use levels of employment and education as measures of success. But as ethnic, gender and social class monitoring carried out first by the ILEA [Inner London Education Authority], now widely practised, demonstrates, such failures are also true of long-term settled English-speaking groups, particularly white working class boys. (Rosenberg 2009:42)*

The integration argument, then, is far from clear cut. Nevertheless, it provides English language teachers with an opportunity to contribute to the debate (through research projects with learners and their families) as to whether social cohesion increases in tandem with language proficiency.

### **English and the family**

As we have seen in the previous section, cohesion has a direct link with employment. Thandi (2008) has argued that high unemployment and a widening earnings gap is a result of certain ethnic groups being disadvantaged in the British



labour market, which in turn has a negative effect on economic opportunities and social mobility for these groups. Thandi argues that there are specific factors of labour market achievement for Pakistani men in the UK, one of the most striking being that they are over-represented in some sectors. As we saw earlier, the first wave of migrants came to the UK from Mirpur to work in specific 'essential' sectors. Today, Pakistani men are still over-represented in textiles/clothing and taxi driving. Of Pakistani male employees and self-employees, 12 per cent are taxi drivers compared with the national average of one per cent. Thandi claims that this data illustrates the point that most British Asians are disproportionately concentrated not only in declining sectors but also sectors with large labour turnover which are low paid. It is this environment that Salman is preparing to enter as a taxi driver.

Thandi's analysis looks at the structural characteristics of the labour markets in which Pakistanis operate in order to shed light on British Asian labour market disadvantage. On the supply side of the labour market he demonstrates that different British Asian communities have:

*different endowments of human capital – level of education, skills, language fluency and so on. Research reveals that differences in labour market outcomes are linked to educational qualifications. (Thandi 2008:219)*

Thandi's analysis, however, does not go further in helping us to understand the link between language fluency and success in the labour market. However, the work of Tahir Abbas with Pakistani and Azad Kashmiri groups in Birmingham does explore the link between language and educational attainment. Abbas argues that these groups 'lead excluded lives, existing near or at the bottom of local area economic and social contexts' since 'the fact that one in eight of working Pakistani men in Britain is a taxi driver ... indicates the marginal nature of these communities' (Abbas 2008:288). This research from the late 1990s looked at the educational achievement of South Asians in Birmingham. By working with eight secondary schools, some of which were populated almost entirely by Pakistani-heritage children, Abbas found that:

*achievement was strongly related to social class (measured by both occupational positions and educational levels of parents) and to the effect of schools per se. (Abbas 2008:289)*

Moreover, Abbas' research found that:

*for many Pakistanis in education it was parents who did not possess formal education and tended to have a limited comprehension of the English language and the education system itself who were least able to assist their children. (Abbas 2008:290)*

As Pakistani children attended inner city schools areas in the UK, which are known to have lower outcomes of educational achievement than those in other parts of the country, Abbas argued that:

*It is the combination of adverse home and school factors which negatively impact upon Pakistanis and provide the main reasons for relative educational*

*underachievement. Indeed, South Asian children with parents who are not just motivated but educated too, combined with learning in stronger schools, are the main reasons why other South Asian groups achieve above Pakistanis.*

**(Abbas 2008:290)**

It can be concluded, then, that taking part in learning activities – and learning English in particular – has positive benefits for community engagement. But the children of Pakistani adults – like Salman – who access English language courses in the UK also benefit because motivated parents who engage with their children's school work and home work are likely to have a positive impact on the educational attainment of those children. In the light of Abbas' findings, schools and education authorities have an opportunity to provide compensatory English language provision for those children whose parents are not proficient users of English.

### **Migration to the UK and family responsibilities in Mirpur**

As we saw, for Usman migration to the UK is the alternative to a career in the Pakistan military. We also noted that Usman had left his BSc programme in IT during the fifth semester to marry and migrate to the UK where his new wife lives. Rather than look at Usman's English language education, this final sub-section investigates the way in which Usman understands his forthcoming migration in terms of family responsibilities and the employment opportunities that English provides him with outside of Mirpur.

Usman met his fiancée for the first time in Mirpur in April 2010 when she arrived from the UK to marry him. The nikah was held five days after her arrival in AJK and she returned to the UK a month later. Usman planned to join his wife in the UK before she was due to give birth to their first child in January 2011. This case neatly illustrates the process of arranging transnational marriages through what Mooney (2006) calls 'transmigrant kin networks' which continue to offer a means to economic migration and citizenship abroad.

Usman's account also demonstrates an ideology of responsibility felt towards his family. He explained how, once settled in the UK, he would need to help support his family back in Mirpur. His family in Mirpur consisted of two brothers and one sister while his father, who ran a shop, was not doing very well financially. Usman felt that, after putting aside funds for his living expenses and savings in the UK, he would be able to send some money to his family in Mirpur each month. He added:

*They are not totally expecting me to send something but I am, will, 'cause they are doing good for their, you can say, for their own sake, their own livelihood, but there are some things, you know, my dad took some er, er, credit from the bank so we have to pay in your language we can say 200 pounds [USD311, PKR27,000] every month, it's due so we have to pay it, we have to find that money every month, so at least I'm gonna help with that one, at least.*

When asked whether his siblings would migrate, Usman revealed a great deal about the economic reasons behind migrating to the UK. He suggested first that his brother who plans to become a doctor would not need to migrate whereas he felt the need to arrange a marriage in the UK for his second brother:

*one of my younger brothers he is, er, he will become a doctor because he is, you know, very bright, very bright, and he's choose the biology subjects and he's gonna be a doctor so obviously he's not gonna go over there but, er, one of my, the brother who is next to me, so he's a ... I think I'm gonna find him a, I'm gonna find a girl, somebody to, you know, somebody you know to marry her and he will inshallah [God willing] come there.*

It is clear that for Usman there was no need for the 'bright' brother to migrate because working as a doctor in Pakistan guarantees financial security. Given that Usman had dropped out of university in order to migrate, it seems that the family in general and Usman in particular perceived there to be greater economic benefits – and possibly greater social standing – in migration rather than graduation. As with Seema and Bushra, but for very different reasons, there was considerable risk in Usman's decision to become an 'imported husband' (Charsley 2005). For Salman the risk was even greater because while also planning to become an 'imported husband' he lacked the social capital which being competent in English would have given him. English will protect Usman from the downward economic mobility that Salman may face. Usman's IELTS Band 6 score will be crucial for him, not only in obtaining a visa but also in enhancing his opportunities to join the police in the UK. This seems to indicate that it will be men from urban areas in AJK who have already had substantial access to English and who have enjoyed good educational opportunities who will find it easier to join their spouses in the UK, in comparison with poorer candidates and particularly female candidates from rural areas.

## Conclusions

The language learning histories, educational backgrounds and future plans of a small group of prospective migrants to the UK from Mirpur demonstrate the complexities of learning English to a level that allows them to join their families in the UK. The unprecedented gate-keeping role that English has acquired in the UK's immigration controls assumes that English can be fairly and reliably tested in contexts such as Mirpur. As we have seen, ideologies of obligation and responsibility towards kin 'emerge as utterly central to the experience of migration between Britain and Pakistan' (Harriss and Shaw 2008:106). The extended kinship networks which have been identified in this study demonstrate how overseas communities must find the means with which to study English and also gain access to certain approved tests, so that those family obligations can be fulfilled. The same challenges face transnational communities who merely wish to choose whom to marry and where to live. Simpson (2010) describes this as linguicism, discrimination against people on grounds of the language they speak or do not speak. He argues that this type of discrimination contravenes Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states:

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other national or social origin, property, birth or other status.*  
**(UN 1948)**

Furthermore, Simpson suggests that the home language is also protected by Article 16(3) which recognises the family as 'the natural and fundamental unit of society' which is entitled to protection by society and the State' (UN 1948).

In addition to this threat to family life, language is also an organising principle in national life. In 1971, when East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) broke away from West Pakistan, language was a central component of the unrest which divided the different political interests in the country. Today, language continues to play a significant role in the construction of a national identity in Pakistan, where the official language of Urdu, spoken as a mother tongue by approximately seven per cent per cent of the country, is used as the medium of instruction in government schools (Rahman 2002). A growing body of evidence suggests that in linguistically diverse countries such as Pakistan, where a national or international language is used for schooling, a significant proportion of children are out of school owing to the mismatch between the language of the home and the language of school. Pinnock (2009) has argued that the 'high linguistic fractionalisation' in Pakistan leads to long-term political, social and economic instability and divisions along linguistic and ethnic lines. The challenges of access to English and international tests that prospective migrants face must be seen, then, within a context of broader threats that national language policy poses to the social and economic prosperity of an increasingly unstable part of the world.

## Notes

1. Common European Reference Levels were developed by the Council of Europe to describe standards at successive stages of language learning. A1 is a basic speaker who can understand and use everyday expressions and phrases and can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to help.
2. Band 6 describes a competent user who has a generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. He or she can use and understand fairly complex language and can understand detailed reasoning.

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