

Multilingual Literacies, Identities and Ideologies

Tony Capstick

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Exploring Chain Migration from Pakistan
to the UK

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For my mother and father—Theresa and Vincent Capstick

Preface

This volume draws on a four-year ethnographic study of a Mirpuri family's migrations, as seen through the lens of New Literacy Studies. This means understanding literacy as a social practice, applied in different contexts to meet different purposes, in this case for the purposes of migration. This focus meant exploring many different activities involving reading and writing in the everyday lives of migrants and relating these to those individuals' migrations embedded in the histories of specific Pakistani communities, their literacies and their migration trajectories, as well as the development of immigration policies in the UK. Taking an ethnographic perspective implied taking part in many of these activities in addition to observing them and asking about them in interviews. This generated a range of data from many different community locations in Mirpur and Hillington.¹ These data were analysed by combining New Literacy Studies with Sociolinguistics and Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). What this meant was that the insider perspective that is so central to NLS was integrated with CDS's critical perspective on society and the social problems related to literacy and migration, as well as with detailed and systematic text and genre analysis. The central concern was how Mirpuri migrants gained access to the dominant literacies of migration at a time

¹Hillington is the fictional name given to a town in the north west of England. Research participants' names have also been changed to preserve anonymity.

when the UK government was increasingly moving towards a more textually mediated immigration regime. The study looked at what literacies were drawn on as prospective migrants and their families engaged with the bureaucracies of immigration when, for example, filling in visa application forms. However, the scope of this study went beyond an analysis of the texts of immigration and explored the literacy practices that link texts with institutions, social structures and discourses about migration.

The findings show that these literacy practices are part of the broader language practices that multilingual migrants from Mirpur draw on in their everyday lives, that English is only one of many resources in their repertoires, and that in order to understand how migrants build ties with those around them, all the languages that they use must be considered.

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