Book Review

The Multilingual City: Vitality, Conflict, and Change, Edited by Lid King & Lorna Carson (2006), Multilingual Matters, ISBN-13 978-1-78309-477-6

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1. Introduction

This is an ambitious book that takes Babel as a starting point, surveys urban history from antiquity to the present, reflects on research from cities on three continents, sprinkles in literary references from Percy Shelley, Amara Lakhous, and Monica Ali, and ends with Pentecost, all in 200 pages. This book, written by seven different authors and edited by Lid King and Lorna Carson, is a product of the Languages in Urban Communities-Integration and Diversity for Europe (LUCIDE) project/network of 18 European, Canadian, and Australian cities, which focuses on multilingualism in education, the public and private spheres, economic life, and the urban space. The project's website (www.urbanlanguages.eu) provides more details about annual progress, methodology, and practical outcomes than the book, which is part project summary, part theoretical argument about urban interpretation, and part future vision about the key issue—exploring 'multilingual vitality' across these urban contexts.

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2. Introduction and Chapter 1: Languages and Cities in Historical and Sociolingual Perspective

The introduction and chapter 1 function as an extended orientation to the book. The editors' introduction distinguishes between societal (multilingual) versus individual (plurilingual) language capacity and focuses on five areas interwoven into city life —public sphere, education, economic life, private life, and urban 'cityscape'.

Chapter 1 by Itesh Sachdev and Sarah Cartwright offer a historical perspective on languages and the city from antiquity to the 21st century, arguing that multilingualism had been an urban reality for millennia but that the rise of the nation state disrupted this through "ideological monolingualism" (p. 21; see also Anderson, 2006). However, the spread of globalization after the Cold War has reversed some of this trend, leading to a renewed focus on the sociolinguistics of the city (Blommaert, 2010; Vertovec, 2007). Short profiles of all 18 LUCIDE cities are offered, organized by those with multilingual historicities, cities built on immigration, cities new to multilingualism, and border and bilingual cities.

3. Chapter 2: Reading Cities

Chapters 2 and 3 form the theoretical and methodological core of the book. The introduction had raised the notion of "networked new identity spaces" (p. 5), and this image of a network raises a critical point—what metaphors, texts, and interpretative frameworks can help explore a city's various meanings? Chapter 2 by Lorna Carson, influenced by the study of geosemiotics (Scollon & Scollon, 2003), explores the location and position of a city bench as an example of urban interpretation. This bench, which faces away from the road and once had a pleasant view of the beach, now faces a stone sea wall that blocks a less pleasant view of land that had been taken from the beach to build an industrial area. As such, the park bench indexes a longer history of urban and global change that is available for analysis. The chapter underlines that all items have indexicality —they point to a range of issues including history, political agreements, and popular culture —but also cautions the reader that "some examples of multilingualism

can be incidental rather than indexical" (Carson, 2016, p. 50). Carson offers the telling example of a Dublin public swimming pool announcement produced only in Russian, reminding people of the illegality of public alcohol consumption but more importantly indexing the laws, cultural norms, and ideologies of the wider society that produced the message (p. 69).

4. Chapter 3: Cities as Webs of Interactions

Chapter 3 by Maria Stoicheva builds on the image of a city by exploring how individual perceptions of language interact with urban identities. A significant challenge here is that many people "often assume a stable point of view, a world of places, boundaries, and territories rooted in time and bounded in space" (p. 87). This point, certainly reinforced by chapter 1's discussion of nationalism, relates directly to language and identity in that people's connections to their city, language, and identity are deeply felt through the intersections of place, the individual mind, and social connection through language. When these feelings are expressed within an environment with monolingual norms, issues of status and prestige may conflict with the multilingual reality of a city. As a consequence, certain groups—linguistic minorities, migrants, students, and tourists—may somehow be seen as outside or irrelevant to the city even if they are essential to urban economic and cultural vitality, exemplified by powerful counterexamples including city festivals, popular immigrant neighborhoods, and the arts.

5. Chapter 4: Language Policy and Social Services

Building on this point, chapters 4 and 5, by Peter Skrandries and David Little respectively, will be key reading for those interested in urban multilingual politics or educational practice. Chapter 4 explores how governments are working in multilingual contexts to ensure equitable access to services. This is especially important for minority languages that may not be recognized as official national or protected languages. Absent policies of absolute exclusion and repression of linguistic minorities, the chapter presents a policy continuum of "tolerance" to "promotion" (pp. 121-134).

Thus, the chapter discusses how government services such as hospitals or courts develop from a situation of "neglect" and "muddling through" (p. 131) where translation is done by friends or family to one where professional, accurate, and ethical translation is a reality for all language groups. For example, Language Services Toronto provides support for 170 languages, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

6. Chapter 5: Educational Planning and Language

Education planning, the topic of chapter 5, raises the important issue of how schools and related institutions can support or suppress linguistic diversity. The LUCIDE cities, to their credit, seem to have largely forsaken sink-or-swim or subtractive educational policies, favoring programs supporting the local multilingual context. Many of these programs will be familiar to readers of bilingual education (e.g., Baker 2011; Garcia 2008), including indigenous language or two-way immersion programs. However, as with the management of public services, a central challenge is how to provide an equitable education for multiple linguistic minorities. The sine qua non here is that that students' home languages must be part of their educational experience, whether for ethical, theoretical, cognitive, or pedagogical reasons (pp. 160-168). Bilingual education for these groups would be ideal, but the challenge of working productively with hundreds of language groups from geographically dispersed and mobile populations is a technical and human resource challenge, even without raising the thorny political debate. Thus, the chapter promotes 'functional multilingual learning' as an alternative (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2013), where students' home languages are brought into the classroom and developed although the ultimate direction is the national or school language. In addition, the chapter advocates for learner autonomy and the fostering (especially with public funds) of a wide network of community language learning opportunities. Throughout, the European goal of being a multilingual society with plurilingual citizens is present even if the local realities for many learners may be uncertain or unsatisfactory.

7. Chapter 6: The Future of the Multilingual City

The final chapter by Lid King summarizes and advances the work of the LUCIDE group. The key conclusions point out that linguistic diversity is itself diverse, multilingualism has different forms, some languages are more visible than others, and people have different interpretations of multilingualism. This highlights that multilingualism is under threat but that this can be changed through politics and politics that might include further research about multilingual cities, new policies to promote multilingualism, especially in education, and generally promoting a positive message about a city's diversity.

8. Concluding Remarks

Those interested in urban life and language will find much to digest in this book in dialogue with other works (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook & Otsuji, 2015), and several important threads connect the book's chapters. The first is the issue of language status. The authors clearly understand that language hierarchies exist, creating situations ripe for discrimination and oppression. The national European/Canadian/Australian languages may sit at the upper levels of status, but the authors also reflect on the power of English as a global language, the role of tourist languages, and the power of communities to maintain and promote their language and cultures. This is an uneasy field in many ways, and the various terms that the book employs about languages and their speakers—prestige/privileged/plebian, valued/non-valued, settled/temporary, and so on reveals the fact that these are current and important issues being debated in post-modern and post-colonial spaces.

The second point stresses that maintaining and developing multilingual vitality is political and requires creativity and investment. The book reminds us that there are many actors such at Nigel Farage invested in nationalistic or assimilationist worldviews and policies that are a barrier to many aspects of multilingual vitality. However, the counterexamples offered highlight how networks of technology, community organization, and public investment can creatively and positively impact multilingual citizens.

Although a weakness of the book is its focus on Europe, Canada, and Australia, readers from a wider audience will certainly see analogous situations in their own contexts. Researchers will be able to draw on the theoretical and methodological approaches to urban sociolinguistics. Urban policy planners or activists can use the book to assess their own city's multilingual vitality and suggest avenues for development. Educational practitioners may draw inspiration from creative and principled ways to work with multilingual classrooms. Throughout, those devoted to promoting diversity and multilingualism will be challenged, reassured, and emboldened by the book's content.

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