LINGUISTIC CHOICES IN THE CONTEMPORARY CITY

Postmodern Individuals in Urban Communicative Settings

Edited by Dick Smakman, Jiří Nekvapil and Kapitolina Fedorova

ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY

Linguistic Choices in the Contemporary City

Linguistic Choices in the Contemporary City focuses on how individuals navigate conversation in highly diversified contexts and provides a broad overview of state of the art research in urban sociolinguistics across the globe. Bearing in mind the impact of international travel and migration, the book accounts for the shifting contemporary studies to the workings of language choices in places where people with many different backgrounds meet and exchange ideas. It specifically addresses how people handle language use challenges in a broad range of settings to present themselves positively and meet their information and identity goals.

While a speaker's experience runs like a thread through this volume, the linguistic, cultural and situational focus is as broad as possible. It runs from the language choices of Chinese immigrants to Beijing and Finnish immigrants to Japan to the use of the local lingua franca by motor taxi drivers in Ngaoundéré, Cameroon, and how Hungarian students in their dorm rooms express views on political correctness uninhibitedly. As it turns out, language play, improvisation, humour, lies, as well as highly marked subconscious pronunciation choices, are natural parts of the discourses, and this volume provides numerous and extensive examples of these techniques. For each of the settings discussed, the perspective is taken of personalised linguistic and extra-linguistic styles in tackling communicative challenges. This way, a picture is drawn of how postmodern individuals in extremely different cultural and situational circumstances turn out to have strikingly similar human behaviours and intentions.

Linguistic Choices in the Contemporary City is of interest to all those who follow theoretical and methodological developments in this field. It will be of use for upper level students in the fields of Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, Linguistic Anthropology and related fields in which urban communicative settings are the focus.

Dick Smakman is an Assistant Professor at the Leiden University Centre for Linguistics in the Netherlands. He specialises in the sociolinguistics and sociophonetics of both first-language use and second language acquisition and use.

Jiří Nekvapil is an Associate Professor at Charles University in Prague. His specific research interests lie in the issues of language interaction, Language Management Theory, language diversity in multinational companies and the ethnomethodologically based analysis of media discourse.

Kapitolina Fedorova is a Professor of Russian Studies at Tallinn University in Estonia. Her research interests include language contacts, intercultural communication, migration and border studies, and register variation in everyday communication.

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1 Introducing city people and their communicative challenges

D. Smakman, J. Nekvapil and K. Fedorova

1.1 Rationale behind this volume

Cities have always been an important focus in Sociolinguistics – from the study of the way people in Buenos Aires (Guitarte 1955), Tokyo (Sibata 1958) or New York (Labov 1966) speak to more recent studies into language use in Copenhagen (Holmberg 1991), Mannheim (Kallmeyer 1994), Tripoli (Pereira 2007) or South African townships (Brookes 2014). While a common interest was to highlight class-related linguistic patterns in big cities, more contemporary studies tend to focus on the language of and between individuals in places where people with many different backgrounds meet and communicate. Indeed, recent research has focussed specifically on high levels of diversity in cities nowadays and has moved away from the group approach to a more inter-individual and even intra-individual approach.

This volume addresses the theme of communication in the city in a broad way in one sense and in a very narrow way in another. The broad approach lies in the idea that communication (not language) is chosen as the theme, so that multiple communication tools are included as a focus. Although it can be qualified as sociolinguistic, and mainly focussed on language, this book takes a broader approach by acknowledging that there is no strict dividing line between the linguistic and non-linguistic, because communication might be in body movement, rituals and how objects are treated (Goodwin 2018; Pennycook 2018). Moving around the cities, people simultaneously make use of different communication channels: they look around and see street signs and advertisements in many colors and with every kind of images; they talk to strangers and text their friends on their smartphones; they listen to the noise and to the music of the city life. The specificity of the volume lies in the interest in individuals, specifically modern individuals. The idea behind the book is that interacting and co-operating individuals are increasingly less categorisable and are, in fact, in search of their own unique place in a generally diverse and often confusing societal urban structure. This leads to highly personalised styles and modes of communication. Narrow – or micro-level – approaches to such interactions within urban space make more sense than broad-scale surveys leaving individuals out of the picture. Methodologically,

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identities are no more conceptualised as fixed social categories useful for characterisation of linguistic details abstracted from complex semiotic behaviour. Due to the increased movement and contact of people, within the boundaries of states or transnationally, identities have become hybrid and less stable, which shifts the scholar's attention to their dynamic production and management in talk-in-interaction.

This book aims to demonstrate a sociolinguistics of mobile semiotic resources, both in and across particular interactions taking place in multiple territories worldwide. To gain a better insight into communicative factors, this book zooms in on the individual and how they treat the communicative commodities at hand in their daily lives within specific settings, amongst which shops, trains, skating ranges, youth hangouts, etc. Rather than addressing abstract group behaviour and the correlations between linguistic/communicative and social/situational factors, this book focusses on interacting and co-operating individuals with different life trajectories in a diverse urban context, and their language choices. It asks the question why people communicate the way they do in highly diverse public-space contexts. In such contexts, the individual is confronted on a daily basis with their communicative repertoire and skills and makes choices based on changes in context: interlocutor, setting, speaker intentions, identity, emotional moves and many more. Metaphorically speaking, the individual asks themselves: 'What do I want to achieve; amusement, money, food, a job, friendship, confrontation, love, attention, reassurance, or perhaps, identity expression?' That same individual needs to adjust to changes in interlocutor and social setting, and the urban communicator is therefore typically a flexible and innovative forerunner in post-modern language use and management (Neustupný 2006), which is characterised by the strongly self-conscious use and management of communicative tools from the past adjusted to and mixed with more contemporary ones. This typically leads to an amalgamation of styles and genres including codes; an almost artistic mixing of all the communicatively relevant resources and strategies that are available into a personalised set of communicative habits, which rejects conventions and focuses on the interacting and co-operating social actor and their practical and symbolical needs. This everyday creativity connects to an enhanced sensitivity to the use of language, such as noting and evaluating linguistic phenomena, and, as a result, frequent metalinguistic activities evident in the communicative behaviour of the individual managing his or her language (Nekvapil and Sherman 2015). This book tries to fathom individual agency and the resultant choices in various cities across the globe and draw conclusions on how individuals in such varied places share certain behaviours and management strategies, which then may be interpreted as being the result of modern globalising tendencies – the roles they play, the social categories they assume turn by turn, their sensitivity to these roles and categories, including their self- and other-perceived position in the flow of communicative behaviours.

In line with the concept of 'globalising sociolinguistics'(Smakman and Heinrich 2015, 2018), this book tries to give a central role to authors, places,

approaches and theories that stem from outside the Anglo-western realm of sociolinguistic influence. Combined with research from within this realm, an insightful picture may be painted of the postmodern individual in the city and how they share habits and motivations with their equivalents in another urban context geographically far removed from them. It is true that in the global village of today's world similar processes can be found all over the globe – the same way as fast food and mass market franchises. However, being diverse does not necessarily mean the same for a German city and a small Russian border town, or for an expat living in Japan and a taxi driver in Cameroon, which this volume will demonstrate. Changing focus helps to refrain from generalisations and preconceptions based on one's own experiences and expectations, and to find better ways to deal with such diversities within diversities. The focus on postmodern individuals communicating in urban settings shouldn't prevent us from acknowledging that the contemporary globalised world also comprises features 'not so postmodern'– in other words, modern or even traditional – and the co-existence of the postmodern and modern may generate important research areas in present-day sociolinguistics.

1.2 The chapters

Part I of this volume is called *Innovative language uses* and describes such uses in urban contexts, and oftentimes involving the use of more than one language to get messages across. Urban communicative situations are known to be important places of linguistic innovation, both when it comes to changes to a broader language norm and to the upcoming forces through street-level use, where intuitive mixing of languages is practiced commonly. Massey (2005) described cities as 'peculiarly large, intense and heterogeneous constellations of trajectories, demanding of complex negotiation' (154). The dynamism of modern lifestyles, in which communication takes place in various languages with various types of speakers and is often not restricted to one language, results in interesting and often highly systematic language choices by ordinary speakers. In such superdiverse situations, linguistic resources are often freely borrowed from, resulting in heavy code-mixing and the rise of new systems, some of which could be referred to as languages in their own right. This first part illustrates how innovative language choices are not merely practical in nature but in the process naturally hold much identity expression.

The chapter by Iezzi, first of all, in a lively – and often confronting – manner describes how migrants find their way in a situation that they are not prepared for and in which the stakes are high and information communication may be life-changing. It illustrates the plight of Pakistani migrants in Italy in a small urban society that is culturally and linguistically foreign to them. Without documents or financial resources, linguistic resources are the main tool of these '*profughi*', immigrants, towards communication and persuasion of authorities. In-depth observations of discourse show how these migrants mix language

resources to demonstrate their willingness to integrate into the new society and positively contribute to this new environment.

The chapter by Radke on multilingualism among German-Namibians in computer-mediated communication asks the question what the similarities and the differences are between rural and urban language practices in multilingual societies when speakers meet virtually in CMC while at the same time meeting each other face to face on occasion. The chapter describes the interconnection of urban and rural areas through 'rich networks of people, goods, and ideas' that have been common in history. CMC provides a platform for the urban and rural to meet in order to maintain both types of networks. This lays bare the multilingual practices that urban and rural individuals partake of. The outcome of such communication is in this chapter captured through the unique linguistic repertoire of the German-Namibians. This repertoire includes German, Afrikaans, English, indigenous Namibian languages and a non-standard variety of German commonly referred to as Namdeutsch. The chapter shows that multilingualism among German-Namibians is a trans-urban phenomenon fulfilling a wide range of pragmatic purposes but is also stylised in many cases.

A final example of language innovation and of diffuse language systems and solutions for communicative obstacles is the situation in Ngaoundéré, as described by Beyer. In this city in Cameroon, the linguistic innovations by motorcycle taxi drivers are outlined through network analysis. The chapter suggests that while identity construction seems to be mostly associated with social settings in the Global North it is also found in the Global South. In the end, these taxi drivers follow well-known mechanisms of simplification and reduction that are typical of urban linguistic settings worldwide. An important and highly useful contribution of this chapter is methodological, making the observation that urban contexts, especially those that hold languages that are not standardised in the European sense of the word, need to be analysed differently and that special attention should be paid to data collection methods. To demonstrate one way of going about this, Ego-Centred-Networks (ECN) are presented for the specific group of speakers under investigation.

Papers focusing on identity-work of various kinds have been collected in Part II; *Competing identities*. Here the authors, in multiple and divergent connections and contexts, deal with identity as a situated accomplishment. They examine competing ethnic and non-ethnic identifications, demonstrate how constructing social identities is tied to the operation of political or language ideologies, and address the mutual forming of city identity and language identity, approaching them not only as the work of urban people, but also of the researchers investigating language life in the city.

Lehto's chapter focuses on urban immigrants – Finns in Japan living in metropolitan areas. Through discourse analysis, her study demonstrates how identities are managed in talk of Finns in Japan who depict their multilingual lives. The author examines the identities of Japan Finns from two perspectives: firstly, she focuses on the reported language choices that they took in various domains; secondly, she pays attention to the categories and category-tied features that

they choose to describe languages and their speakers during the research interview. As expected, the informants perceive Japanese as the language of the surrounding society, and hence important, while Finnish is seen as an index of heritage and the country of origin. The study reveals, however, that English works as a marker of identity as well. It connects the informants to the group of foreigners, which in the context of Japan may be more valued by them than being a Finn.

In their chapter, Bodó, Turai and Szabó seek to reveal local meanings and categories of political correctness in a contemporary East-Central European context, specifically, among university students in Hungary. Instead of focusing on the public sphere, the chapter examines individual understandings of political correctness. Dealing with everyday talk of students in Budapest, the capital city of Hungary, the authors demonstrate that individuals perceive political correctness as a constraint originated from an external (mainly Western) authority, and they negotiate this mode of expression in their ordinary talk. Drawing on the concepts of voice and enregisterment, the authors argue that political correctness in the metadiscourse among Hungarian students is assigned to the Other. Critiquing this political correctness contributes to individual self- and other-constructions by questioning Western modernist projects. Stances to political correctness serve as a means to work on individual and group identities. It should be mentioned that the chapter contains extracts of conversations the language of which may be offensive for those who belong to the groups concerned, such as black people and some ethnic groups.

The identity issue needn't apply only to humans, but also, for example, animals, toys, things, theories, institutions, languages or cities. Smakman's chapter on the 'Haarlem legend' clarifies how Haarlem, a Dutch town situated close to Amsterdam, is popularly associated with 'good' Dutch, that is, the national language norm in the Netherlands. This legend has been shaped and reproduced through continuous identity work both of Haarlem's residents and other Dutch people taking place in the course of more than one century. The author gives both historical and current reasons that maintain the popularity of the legend in the Netherlands. He shows that, as a 'totalizing vision' (Irvine and Gal 2000), it is resisting numerous counter-arguments based both on common-sense and scientific discourse. He concludes suggesting that vitality of the myth of the distinctive linguistic status of Haarlem may be sustained by the desire of post-modern individuals to find a stable norm to face the ever increasing diversity of present-day language life.

In his chapter, Nekvapil reports on the large body of sociolinguistic knowledge justifying his claim that the city of Hradec Králové may be 'the best researched town in the Czech Republic'. He draws attention to the research paradigms involved and seeks to present the conducted research as a coherent whole, addressing the issue to what degree the agenda of present-day sociolinguistics can profit from the sociolinguistic agenda of the past. In his methodologically oriented paper, city identity proves to be neither stable nor self-evident. Nekvapil demonstrates the ways city identity is constructed

through various semiotic resources by various social actors living in the town. Moreover, he deals with how city identity works in the research design of the researchers – some fully acknowledge it and put it in focus of their research, some push it to the background while some even hide and mask the city identity, pursuing research with a more general super-local aspiration.

Part III of the book, titled *Multilingual strategies*, is, probably, closest to what was usually meant when talking about language choices and strategies employed by people to communicate in different situations, starting from pioneering works of Joshua Fishman (1965) and Susan Gal (1979). In multilingual settings, speakers can choose between different languages, varieties, registers, or individual language items, depending on what seems more appropriate for them in a given situation. Their choices, however, are neither free from societal constrains, nor, on the other hand, totally determined by them. Global processes of language maintenance, shift or language revival occur in countless everyday interactions when people give preference to one code over another, or use them both alongside each other.

Birnie's chapter on the use of Gaelic and English in Stornoway – the largest town in Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the only region of Scotland where a majority of the population self-reported to be able to speak Gaelic – reveals exactly those complicated relations between individual strategies and societal norms. In the course of a unique multimodal study, the author has collected ethnographic data in a selection of public spaces in the town to evaluate how, when and by whom Gaelic is used in this community. Unsurprisingly, she finds that English is a default language for most public spaces despite rather strong positions of Gaelic in in-group communication. However, not all public places are totally dominated by English. Aiming to reverse the language shift, some Scottish organisations actively promote the use of Gaelic among their employees, and in such places – where speaking Gaelic has become a linguistic norm – it could be also used for communication with the members of the public.

Another chapter dealing with a community undergoing language shift, Strandberg and Gooskens's chapter on the use of Swedish in Finland, takes a somewhat different approach. It focuses on the changes resulting from urbanisation of historically Swedish-speaking coastal regions and the increase in bilingualism among their population. Finland-Swedes have traditionally held a strong linguistically anchored ethnic identity, but Finland-Swedish features in their speech are frequently stigmatised, due to being considered non-standard Swedish. There are evidences that (near-)native bilingualism may influence both vowel production and perception in Finland-Swedish. The chapter provides an overview of how regular the use of and switching between Finnish and Finland-Swedish encourages bilingual speakers to make adjustments to their Swedish as well as developing their new bilingual awareness.

The next chapter – Liskovets and Fedorova's longitudinal study of language use and speakers' attitudes in the Belarusian capital of Minsk – reveals a rather paradoxical situation: being an official state language of Belarus, Belarusian in

Minsk can be seen as a minority language although there are some evidences of its gaining more power recently, especially since for many citizens it has become the symbol of opposition to a politically oppressive regime. In most everyday situations, people use Russian or the so-called 'Trasyanka' variety, a mixed vernacular resulting from contacts between two closely related Slavonic languages, Russian and Belarusian. The chapter focuses on the use of this variety, which, due to its dubious status and low prestige, has become an instrument of social stigmatisation of its speakers. In the eyes of many Minsk citizens, Trasyanka is a corrupted version of either Russian or Belarusian, and thus, confronted by two strictly normative language ideologies, even speakers of this variety themselves see it as an objectionable phenomenon due to disappear in the near future.

The last chapter in this section – Dovalil's study on intercultural communication in the city of Prague – deals with communication strategies used in interactions between the local people working in tourist services, particularly cafés and restaurants, and foreign tourists. Based on ethnographic data structured along the analytical categories of Language Management Theory (Fairbrother, Nekvapil and Sloboda 2018), the research concentrates on how the Czech speakers and their foreign customers manage language, communicative and socio-cultural problems taking place in their encounters. The results show that both foreign tourists and the Czech staff predominantly use English as a lingua franca to fulfil basic communication functions in mutual interactions. In some situations, though, they resort to other languages (German, Russian, Czech, Slovak) and, importantly, to electronic devices. Such devices help to solve manifold difficulties in interactions by taking advantage of the written medium, thus making communication both transmodal and translingual.

Part IV of this volume, called *Linguistic landscapes*, may look like a step aside from individuals and towards a more 'impersonal' approach to sociolinguistic data. In fact, however, it pursues the same theme of linguistic choices made by individuals but with the focus on written use of languages in urban public spaces. Essentially, the studies in this part follow the tenets of Ethnographic Linguistic Landscape Analysis (Blommaert and Maly 2015) going beyond mere observations on language use on the public signs placed around the city and revealing more profound conclusions about the people who write and read the signs.

The first chapter by Fedorova and Baranova deals with the representation of foreign languages in the linguistic landscapes of the twin border cities of Ivangorod and Narva on the Russian-Estonian border. The authors focus on language ideologies and their impact on local communication practices. They find that both Russia and Estonia adhere to quite a strict monolingual policy, not favouring diversity in public language use. Narva, populated mostly by Russian speakers, reveals an evident mismatch between official language policy and actual communication patterns. The diversity of its linguistic landscape is created mainly by private actors, with businesses playing a major role. On the other hand, Ivangorod, despite being a border city, looks almost like an outpost of monolingualism. Both city officials and business actors totally avoid

using Estonian. In the rare cases when they go beyond the strict one-language policy, they resort to English and not the language of the neighbouring country.

The next chapter, written by the same two authors, takes us up to the North, alongside the Russian border, where there is Vyborg, a small city situated very close to the border with Finland. In the 1990s, the town was quite popular among Finnish tourists but nowadays tourism is in decline, and the city's economy is in a rather poor state. In their research, the authors find that the use of languages other than Russian, especially in public places, is often limited and emblematic, both in official and in commercial signs. In some cases, Finnish is literally even erased from some signs in the city centre. However, local business actors use some Finnish in their commercial signs and advertisements. In the absence of official support to multilingualism, individuals responsible for creating commercial signs become principal actors in the changing of a monolingual façade, challenging gradually deepening patterns of language attitudes and monolingual ideology in general.

The third chapter, by van Meurs, Planken and Lasarzewski, goes further in studying individuals' agency in constructing meaning via linguistic landscape. Specifically, the chapter investigates the motivations underlying business naming practices. This is done through interviews with business owners in the city of Mainz, Germany. A qualitative analysis shows that these reasons can be classified as relating to presentation of self; theory of good reason (i.e., to create an effect on potential customers); properties of name (such as its 'good' sound or brevity); links between business name and products sold; trends in naming; references to owners' or family members' names; and references to the location of businesses. The authors suggest that each business owner's specific reasons for choosing a business name are a matter of individual agency which allows us to see the urban spaces as populated and signed by acting individuals rather than abstract social or ethnic groups.

Part V, *Global processes and sound change*, deals with a combination of the sociologically broad and the linguistically narrow, namely the phonetic. Global changes effectuate a growing interest in the city and spreading city norms. In the end, these developments inevitably bring about linguistic change, through choices – conscious and subconscious – that individuals make. An interesting area that deals with the conscious and subconscious is subtle pronunciation variation. A speaker may find herself changing her vowels and consonants, or others point out that she does (because she wasn't aware), and after awareness has settled, pronunciation choices become more pertinent. The final three chapters of this volume describe these low-level changes that often go from too small to notice, to noticeable and marked, and, finally, to noticeable and unmarked.

The chapter by Hu and Smakman discusses the tendencies of immigrants to Beijing adopting the salient and marked Beijing postvocalic /r/, even if their own dialect does not contain such an /r/. This radical pronunciation change by individuals is considered socially acceptable despite its salience. The chapter reminds us that studying a phoneme in a specific phonological context cannot be done without taking into consideration linguistic aspects. In other words,

simply counting the occurrences of the phoneme in question and describing its acoustic features is not sufficient in the way that it was when Labov (1966) did his New York study. The Beijing results show a clear power struggle between the de-rhoticisation tendencies due to the influx of non-rhotic speakers and the official promotion of standard Chinese, which does not have this prominent feature.

The choice between /q/ versus /g/ and the option to affricate /t/ in the Arabic as spoken in the city of Temara, Morocco, is the next illustration of change at the semi-conscious pronunciation level. In this chapter, Falchetta explains how Temara men under 39 relatively often show innovative tendencies in these respects. The author links these linguistic choices to the evolution of the urban environment surrounding the younger informants. Older and younger generations Temareses have been raised in very different social and material contexts. However, Falchetta suggests that a relatively conservative stance is assumed by both older and some younger interviewees towards modernisation and that discourses may contribute to widening the gap between the evolution of social and linguistic habits, on the one hand, and the people's attitudes towards them, on the other.

Mitsova et al. explain how a language norm, namely unvocalised /l/, is promoted as a reality and a norm by ordinary Bulgarian speakers when asked about it. But these same speakers in their answers to this question do not systematically use the phoneme in question. Instead, vocalised /l/ is more or less a default unwritten norm, i.e. it is widespread in all social layers. This final chapter of the volume shows how individual speakers are struggling to find their way between proclaimed and real-life norms but find the proclaiming more important than the actual usage; they do not practice what they preach. Rather than viewing reality as it is, they prefer to say that they meet the norm.

1.3 Covid/Corona

Contributions to this volume are based on the presentations given at the *Globalising Sociolinguistics* conference held at the University of Leiden in December 2018, and their first drafts were submitted in the second half of 2019. Thus, in principle, the contributions to this volume reflect the linguistic or social situation as it was before the outbreak of the global Corona virus pandemic. So, it may be appropriate to pose the question whether or to what extent this pandemic may have changed the findings of the pre-pandemic research. Of course, an answer along these lines should be formulated on the basis of proper empirical research. Nevertheless, we would like to dare a few remarks based on general linguistic evidence and our knowledge of the research sites that we observe more or less continuously.

Obviously, some linguistic phenomena resist rapid social changes more and some less. For example, the sound phenomena in the linguistic behavior of the individuals that the authors addressed in the last part of this volume can hardly be expected to change during such a short period. On the other hand,

change in communicative patterns might be pervasive. This could be observed, for example, in Prague, from where foreign tourists almost disappeared, and, as a result, for more than one year the communicative and management strategies addressed in Dovalil's chapter were suspended, and it remains to be seen how the situation will evolve. Or we could ask to what extent linguistic landscape has changed during the pandemic. This is closely connected to the economic measures of individual countries and their different attitudes to privately owned businesses such as shops, restaurants or cafes, that is, businesses that contribute a lot to the semiotic appearance of the city streets. The government of the Czech Republic supported private businesses on a vast scale, so most of them have survived. The linguistic landscape of Hradec Králové, examined in Nekvapil's chapter, has changed in some details but these are rather due to a usual dynamic of linguistic landscape in the market economy than to the Corona virus pandemic, and have not changed values of the 'perception scale of the representation of individual languages in the linguistic landscape of Hradec Králové' worked out on the pre-pandemic data collected in the city.

In the city of Haarlem, as for another example, change is not likely to have taken place, as the city is visited mainly by locals and long-time inhabitants of the Netherlands. Smakman's contribution presented a city that is not at the centre of attention and would like to remain in that position. What is true is that this city's centre was visited less than before during the pandemic, so intercultural contact as well as similar-culture contact will have been less than before. It is unlikely that this will have had an effect, and it is also unlikely that the city has changed its linguistic or other landscape in any serious way, except for the signs related to Corona.

The impact of Corona restrictions on border cities such as Narva and Ivangorod, as examined by Fedorova and Baranova, was rather severe. The constant flow of people and goods through the border literally stopped in March 2020, barring the city dwellers and their important economic resources. Deserted border check-points and closed shops, cafes, and car insurance agencies became a new reality. Even the sign showing the distance to the Estonian capital in Ivangorod was demolished, or simply fell down and is now placed on the ground near the bus station, looking as a sad symbol of the new world where destinations cannot be reached anymore.

At the same time, there are some evidences that while physical spaces became empty and their linguistic diversity may decline due to the lack of tourism and all the new difficulties migrants had to face, digital communication and virtual linguistic landscapes flourished. Unable to interact face-to-face, people more and more resorted to CMC of all possible kinds – texting and voice and video calls became a primary routine. Struggling to survive, shops and restaurants had to develop online ordering and delivery services, and adding options to use different languages helped to embrace a wider audience.

It seems interesting, in other words, to research how anonymous cities and well-known cities recover linguistically from the pandemic, because the pandemic is often said to have changed people's general outlook on life and living.

An important motivation behind this volume is bringing to the surface sociolinguistic situations in lesser known places. Such areas are receiving much attention but not the attention they deserve on the basis of their population size and general sociolinguistic uniqueness (Smakman 2015). Somehow, the corona situation emphasises the lack of urgency felt when it comes to lesser known areas, or areas lower on the Human Development Index (http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi). For as this volume is being finalised, 'the West' has started to report triumphantly on having conquered the virus, and these reports are followed by reports on large places like India and South America, where the virus is peaking. This reporting on some non-Western areas illustrates once again how these areas are commonly treated as by-the-way rather than points of first concern. We would be happy if this volume became a small step in another direction, to a more open-minded, equal and inclusive approach in studies on languages, people and places.

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