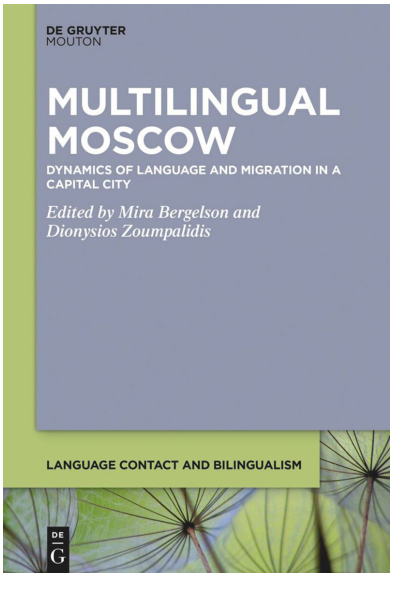
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Reviews and Annotation
Рецензии и анотации

LINGUISTIC AND SEMIOTIC SUPERDIVERSITY IN MOSCOW

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Mira Bergelson and Dionysios Zoumpalidis (eds.):
Multilingual Moscow. Dynamics of Language and Migration in a Capital City.
Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2024. xi + 188 pp. ISBN: 9783110751116.



Abstract. The book review, Multilingual Moscow: Dynamics of Language and Migration in a Capital City, edited by Mira Bergelson and Dionysios Zumpalidis, offers a comprehensive overview of the complex linguistic landscape of Moscow, a megalopolis characterized by intense migration and cultural diversity. The book brings together several empirical studies on the use of language, its content,

and politics in both public and private spheres. The review examines articles on various topics, including language practice in education, internal migration, family language policy among minority groups. The book **"**Multilingual Moscow**…"** is considered a unique example of urban multilingualism, shaped by the influence of socio-political history and contemporary global trends. Multilingualism is studied from various perspectives, including how people perceive and interpret the concept of multilingualism. The author emphasizes that insufficient attention is paid to the environment, but multilingualism is analyzed and described quite reasonably as a pluralistic phenomenon. The author of the review emphasizes that in future research, it would be advisable to include semiotics as an essential factor in research on multilingualism, paving the way for future interdisciplinary work in the fields of sociolinguistics, semiotics, and urban studies.

Keywords: multilingualism; semiotics; language coexistence; semiotics of language; Multilingualism in Moscow; language in urban space

When I received the current book and leafed through it, the question of the semiotic orientation of multilingualism immediately came to my mind. Both aspects, multilingualism and semiotics, can be combined very well and projected onto the reality of Moscow, the largest city in Russia. A basic idea for this assumption was laid down in the numerous studies by Claudia Maria Riehl. She published a comprehensive introduction to multilingualism research (2014), which is still relevant today. In other words, the author emphasizes that different languages coexist in the same space. Therefore, the speakers in this specific space have to work with the respective languages and their different intentions, and even if they do not speak one of them, they are confronted with all of them. This aspect represents a direct intersection with semiotics. On the one hand, there are those speakers who are proficient in, say, both local languages and can, therefore, use a wide-ranging repertoire as a linguistic orientation.

On the other hand, monolinguals do not have access to this multidimensional semiotic concept, even though they use the space under the same conditions. The Armenian semiotician Suren Zolyan has addressed this issue, as well as numerous others. His embedding of the topic in a sociolinguistic context is groundbreaking because, for him, multilingualism is closely tied to social interaction. He mentions instruments such as the interrelation between sociolinguistics, social semiotics, and the semiotics of culture (cf. Zolyan, 2019). Moreover, he later speaks of a grammatical code (and thus the structure of a language) being fixed, as it consists, according to Zolyan, of an alphabet, vocabulary, and its meaning, rules for combining words, and context-sensitive grammar (Zolyan, 2021). This constellation must, therefore, generally be thought of twice in the context of multilingualism so that we can now set out and better evaluate the present book on Moscow with this background in mind.

Let us start with the first paper (Andrei A. Kibrik, Ekaterina Demintseva, and Dionysios Zoumpalidis: Language policy dynamics in metropolitan Moscow,

Education and Linguistic Landscape, pp. 7 – 23). It addresses aspects related to language use in both educational and public spheres. Data are presented on the various languages that can be observed in the Russian capital city, for example, English alongside Russian or some languages from Central Asia (p. 20). The connections between language skills and the use of languages in space are also discussed. In principle, we are dealing here with a tradition that has become increasingly popular in language research in recent years. For example, linguistic landscape studies have been conducted on various cities in Germany (cf. Blahak, 2023), but this topic is also becoming increasingly crucial in Slavic studies. This is evidenced not only by previous studies carried out in Russia (Kirilina/Kuptsova, 2019) but also in smaller countries such as Slovenia (Šabec, 2022) and Montenegro (Henzelmann, 2022). The volume's second contribution, by Yuri Koryakov and Julia Mazurova (Internal migration and language maintenance in Moscow, pp. 25 – 46), is ultimately closely linked to the topic of language use, which current migration trends in Moscow, the capital of the Russian Federation, can explain. Then, a third article presents several educational projects and organizations that aim to facilitate the handling of different languages on the spot (Vlada Baranova, Kapitolina Fedorova, and Anna Ter-Saakova: Multidirectional initiatives in micro-level language planning: Educational projects for migrants in Moscow, pp. 47 – 65). Indeed, many migrants come to Moscow who already have a strong command of Russian, as they are regularly confronted with it in their home countries (as is the case here in Armenia).

On the other hand, there are, of course, also people who are not affected by this phenomenon because they either rarely are in contact with the Russian language or come from countries outside the post-Soviet area (such as China, Mongolia, or Africa). It is a responsible task to react to these tendencies in the school system. It is, therefore, logical to address this topic separately (so do Dionysios Zoumpalidis, Olga Siniova, Margarita Burdygina, Arina Afanasieva, and Pavel Alizade: Language practices at the micro-level: The case of a multicultural school in Moscow, pp. 67 – 86).

We will now examine the other studies, which have a different focus. They are concerned with the question of which languages dominate in the domestic environment. The scope is on various ethnic groups. I will briefly summarize the contents of these texts, as they share a very similar structure. The papers in question are numbers 5 to 7, namely Mira Bergelson, Michael Grabarnik, and Pavel Ali-Zade: Narratives of linguistic adaptation: Values of multilingual Moscow residents (pp. 87 – 116), Madina Kade and Dionysios Zoumpalidis: Family language policy in the Circassian community in Moscow (pp. 117 – 132), and Marina V. Kutsaeva: The Mari community of Moscow: Ethnic language maintenance in urban settings (pp. 133 – 153). Thematically, these three papers are closely related and evaluate the framework conditions under which diverse languages can be maintained in the

domestic context. The focus is on language skills, perceptions, and challenges of people who have a mother tongue other than Russian.

Nevertheless, they are mainly confronted with the Russian language in everyday life. It is worthwhile to read these studies to understand how multilingual structures currently function in the Russian capital and what this implies for interethnic coexistence. It is pleasing that multilingualism is viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity, but where does semiotics fit into these approaches?

Although the synchronous perspectives dominate in this book, which is, of course, due to the research question, it is all the more interesting that the scope is also directed towards some historical developments. This concerns the German-speaking community in the city (cf. Daria Ryazantseva and Mira Bergelson, "Russian Germans as an ethno-linguistic community: Historical development and current state of the youth age group in Moscow," pp. 155 – 171). We know that the Russian Germans actually lived much further south and east of Moscow and that some of them still reside there today, as well as in St. Petersburg (p. 156). While the German language has a significant tradition in Russia, the Russian Germans were compelled to abandon their mother tongue in favor of Russian due to the unfolding events of the 20th century (p. 161). We need to keep in mind that this background is to be explained by political repression, as German was a crucial cultural language in the past, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. Of course, the French were even more of a driving force behind the development of cultural innovations and achievements in Europe and beyond (cf. Henzelmann 2019). However, unlike French, German has an extensive group of native speakers in several countries across the continent. In Russia, these people lived in very compact settlements. Finally, the book under review is rounded off with a comprehensive outlook (Mira Bergelson, Yuri Koryakov, and Dionysios Zoumpalidis: Concluding remarks and the future of the Languages of Moscow, pp. 173 – 181). This outlook encompasses significant global trends and emerging challenges in the digital age.

Moscow is a vibrant, pulsating, and dynamic metropolis that is unique in Europe, if not worldwide. Numerous nationalities and diverse ethnic groups coexist peacefully here. Understanding their heterogeneous linguistic needs is not only a demanding task but also an urgent one. Some relevant aspects related to this task are addressed with great depth in the book, such as the question of domestic language in families of different ethnic groups or educational elements. In contrast, the description of language diversity in the public sphere is relatively under-researched. As a reader, I would have appreciated this topic being handled with more detail. Semiotic aspects related to the perception of multilingual environments, migration processes, and the interpretation of associated signs, for example, definitely deserve more attention. In this context, I would like to refer to the studies by S. Zolyan (2019, 2021), who repeatedly emphasizes the relevance of semiotic parameters in social interaction. Regrettably, semiotics is not even mentioned in the book, although it is

a central matter of our perception and interpretation in a multilingual environment. On a positive note, multilingualism is described as a pluralistic phenomenon. In future studies, it would make sense to include semiotics as a relevant factor. This will undoubtedly enrich both disciplines, namely, semiotics and research on multilingualism[1]. It is good that this volume has taken a step forward on the road to new horizons. We learn from the book that significant work has been done on the city of Moscow, and yet, multilingualism in the Russian capital remains largely unexplored.

NOTES

1. In this context, it is worth mentioning a study where authors analyze multilingualism using the example of two regions: Southeastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. See in detail: Simyan & Dragan 2025, pp. 95 – 106.

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