

The Multilingual City – Vitality, Conflict and Change
(edited by Lid King and Lorna Carson)
Multilingual Matters 2016

REVIEW

CercleS participated in the *LUCIDE* (Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe) consortium as an Associate partner and disseminator, so it is only appropriate that a review of the resulting publication, *The Multilingual City*, should come from us and be posted on our website. The LUCIDE project is an outcome of the LETPP project (Languages in Europe, Theory Policy Practice) funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme in 2010.

The Multilingual City is a thought-provoking text that focusses on the “city-zen”, from immigrant through to tourist, in multilingual citizen communities of the twenty-first century. The authors take ethnolinguistic vitality as a key notion and extend its original applicability to individual languages and speech communities as an indicator of their long-term viability, to comprehend in this volume “the complex interrelationships between languages and speakers: visibility and demographic features, status, and aspects which support or control societal multilingualism”(page 24). Moreover, the focal point of the volume is not so much on the constantly shifting number of languages that can be traced at any one moment, but on how the many languages that can be seen and heard in a city interrelate (or even do not interrelate), whether their use is encouraged at all by the “host” city, and consequently, whether and how they may be learned in a formal or informal environment, as well as simply used in the daily lives of its citizens.

In the introductory chapter to the volume, editors Lid King and Lorna Carson clearly state the aim of the project in presenting multilingualism as a resource in the urban landscape that is to be cultivated in the light of *Unity in Diversity*. However, far from being just a celebratory text highlighting where multilingualism has clearly made its mark. Indeed, far from simply raising the issue of where it is purposely lacking due to a negative attitude of the other, *The Multilingual City* perceptively includes descriptions of the inhabitants of the multilingual urban landscape whose languages are hidden from view. It is a text centred around the notion of awareness-raising, noticing and a consideration of the other:

“Our common point of departure is that multilingualism in its many forms is a resource to be cultivated, rather than a deficit to be addressed or a hurdle to be cleared. However, the data of the LUCIDE consortium suggest that in each of the cities investigated, some languages are much less visible than others [...]. And while the authors of the LUCIDE City Reports describe, in various ways, accepted attitudes to what can be described as prestigious versions of multilingualism, typically comprising a constellation of powerful world languages, they also share vivid stories from speakers whose languages are hidden, unrecognised or stigmatized.”
(page 25)

The specific areas investigated by the Lucide Consortium, as outlined on the project website (<http://www.urbanlanguages.eu/>) comprise:

- **Education** - language learning and language support
- **The public sphere** - how the city supports democratic engagement
- **Economic life** – the benefits of multilingualism and the requirements
- **The private sphere** – how people behave and interrelate and celebrate
- **The urban space** – the appearance and sounds of the city

In point of fact, the characteristic features running throughout the various chapters are documented in the City Reports that support and corroborate the *LUCIDE* team's findings. The voice and attitude of the people interviewed are heard and listened to throughout, whatever their role and relation to the overall survey of the multilingual landscape of which they are permanently or temporarily a part, and whether or not they respond favourably to the integration of the multilingual citizen into the educational, professional working or social environment.

The Multilingual City thus sets out to give a comprehensive overview of the current state of the current linguistic landscape both in Europe and in Australia and Canada from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, in a total of 18 "Lucide" cities, 13 in Europe and 5 in Australia and Canada.

The interweaving of the City Reports throughout the text illustrate and complement the findings of the *LUCIDE* survey, or as the editors affirm, the Reports are used "as a way of sharing stories about some specific aspects of multilingual city life". The contributors of the various chapters embrace the theme of multilingualism from their various academic disciplines (applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology, philosophy, education, language teaching, policy), to create an interlocking perspective on the vitality of the multilingual city. The brief summaries below taken from the Introduction reflect the outcomes of the research into the original areas of investigation outlined above:

Chapter 1 explores some of the historical aspects of multilingual cities, where linguistic diversity was regarded as a norm. Against this backdrop, the authors provide an overview of the data from the *LUCIDE* City Reports, framed in this chapter by the notion of the vitality of multilingualism. This construct can be understood as the conditions within which both individual and societal multilingualism can thrive and flourish in an urban setting, particularly in terms of demography, status, institutional support and control. In **Chapter 2** we explore some of the physical evidence of multilingualism – indeed the new varieties that seem to be emerging in cities as a result of close language contact. The written languages visible in a city are all indicators of its diverse speech communities and visitors. However, it is important to note that most city dwellers do not pay much attention to the languages they see and hear around them, and the chapter argues that the languages we see (or do not see) reflect the power and social relations in a city – inclusion or exclusion, solidarity and belonging. **Chapter 3** moves on from the sights and sounds of the multilingual city to the image and representations of the city, including how people position themselves vis-à-vis the urban multilingual environment in terms of affiliation and new identities. It offers thoughts on how we can read city multilingualism in relation to the shifting identities of 'city-zens'. **Chapter 4** focuses on language policies and the politics of multilingualism, especially in terms of how civic institutions respond to the challenges of governing increasingly multilingual urban communities. The reality of urban multilingualism is shaped by a variety of political and institutional instruments from above as well as by activism and initiatives from below. This chapter explores the public use and status of languages, including policies designed to facilitate language learning and maintain languages as well as the use of public service translation and interpreting. In **Chapter 5**, we turn to the specific case of multilingualism and education. While many policies designed to respond to multilingualism are determined by national or regional governments, cities often have a direct impact on the provision of public education. The chapter addresses key dimensions of language education from the perspective of plurilingual repertoires, taking into account the languages of schooling, home languages and foreign language learning. The **concluding chapter** provides a recapitulation of the book's key themes, and explores the possible future of the multilingual city."

The *Multilingual City* thus offers us as language educators precious input for future research into linguistic and cultural diversities throughout Europe and further afield. It is a call for action to all those who have a say in some way in the linguistic landscape, in particular the decision-makers in the language policy of their city and resulting language planning or lack of it, and it is an example of how to enhance integration and foster the reciprocal recognition of the self and the other.

I invite members of CercleS and anyone interested in any aspect of multilingualism and intercultural competence to read *The Multilingual City*. It is a highly readable text – as explained above, it offers a clear and coherent presentation of the vitality of the urban landscape, with authors not only frequently cross-referencing to each other's contributions but also commenting on their findings in the light of previous scholarly literature. Its chapters are relevant to our current research into intercultural competence relating to "the other's gaze " and the extent to which "the other" accepts or is accepted into the environment in which he/she chooses to live, the way in which he/she perceives the host environment. Likewise it is equally pertinent to the self's gaze of the other.

My own reading of *The Multilingual City* has stimulated me further into looking, listening and learning from the multilingual environment in which I myself live; it has prompted me to persist in developing awareness-raising activities in my own teaching to make my students more curious about the environment around them at home and when they travel abroad; and it has reminded me to encourage CercleS members and other colleagues, language educators, language policy makers to continue in the fostering of a multilingual and pluricultural community, as noted in all its realities in this volume.

Gillian Mansfield