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Central to the perspective is that these languages are deployed in specific contexts of urban space, and are implicated in activities germane to those spaces: languages emerge in the inter-relationship between multitasking and linguistic resources, the intricate patterning of movement, activity and semiotic resources. As the authors explain: "[...] Language does not just happen against an urban backdrop, it is part of the city, the barber shop, the market garden, the networks of buying and selling. [...] Language activities produce time and space" (p. 33).

The book is rich in variations and adumbrations of these themes: the ordinariness of language mixing, the imbrication of language and the urban setting, the creativity of speakers, the common rhythms of language and city life. Three main notions are introduced: metrolingual multitasking, spatial repertoires and metrolingua francas.

Lest the mood be considered too celebratory, one chapter focuses on the frictions caused by multilingualism and by the constraints imposed on language use. "Social spaces are shaped by speech, by what can and cannot be said in particular venues, by how things are said and by the way they are heard" (p. 85). But generally speaking, the mood of the book is upbeat. Part of the emphasis on ‘ordinary’ language comes with the choice of sites like markets, restaurants, etc. and its populations of ‘ordinary’ people – the workers who make these sites function. This focus adds political clout to the idea of metrolingualism. At the same time, however, the authors ask a pertinent question: why is multilingualism not a value, why is it not valued? (p. 169).

I was surprised not to see any references to the pioneering work of Louis-Jean Calvet on urban sociolinguistics and particularly marketplaces. And the editors did not catch the faulty: “language hales” (p. 148).

The authors conclude by emphasizing the fact that the book has been a ‘writing together,’ an interwoven text, a work in progress. As a text that tries to capture the elusive, ephemeral, transitory life of words in the city, it will surely stimulate discussion in cultural geography, sociolinguistics... and translation studies.

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