
RECENZE

Marián Sloboda, Petteri Laihonen & Anastassia Zabrodszkaja (eds.): Sociolinguistic Transition in Former Eastern Bloc Countries: Two Decades after the Regime Change. Frankfurt am Main, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Warszawa, Wien: Peter Lang, 2016. 494 pp. Prague Papers on Language, Society and Interaction 4.

It is somewhat surprising that the linguistically and politically highly diverse post-socialist world has received little attention in international academic circles. This book is one of only few other publications. Most notably, the volume by Pavlenko (2008) addressed sociolinguistic developments in ex-Soviet republics. Marten et al. (2015) compare case studies in the European Union and the Russian Federation. Individual articles and collections have also been published on different regions with a narrower focus (e.g. Lazdiņa & Marten 2019 on the Baltic states).

There are two major expectations to the book. On the one hand, the reader hopes for an overview of sociolinguistic situations and developments in Eastern Europe and Central and Northern Asia since the end of the socialist era. On the other hand, the book promises to show other, less Western strands of research and explain specifically post-socialist academic traditions.

The introductory chapter discusses a theoretical conceptualization of the term “transition”, as in the title, as opposed to “transformation”. The former implies less teleological determination – and the chapters in the book show clearly that, at least from a sociolinguistic point of view, the post-socialist countries have certainly not followed a single model. This diversity of approaches applies also to nationalism – in many countries, nationalism has emerged as a counter-tendency to proclaimed internationalism and a lack of political freedom during socialism, with different ways of post-socialist nation-building dominating the politics of language. This rather positive approach to nationalism, both reflected in the language regimes of many post-Socialist countries and supported by larger linguistic circles, is a major contradiction to common beliefs in the West, even though nationalist discourses have gained ground in many Western countries recently. Interestingly, the editors interpret the prevalence of nationalist attitudes within academic circles as a continuation of hierarchical and authority-oriented thinking in the socialist intellectual tradition.

In addition to the discussion of “transition”, the introductory chapter focuses on questioning the concept of “superdiversity” which has become en vogue in international sociolinguistics. In contrast, rather different sociolinguistic patterns have evolved in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: migration from the global South is a relatively new phenomenon; English is on the rise but is less wide-spread than elsewhere; Russian continues to exist as a second lingua franca in addition to English; many countries have a vivid multi-ethnic population; and not least, the sense of “minority” takes very differ-

ent forms in all countries, with e.g. monolingual Russian speakers in some post-Soviet countries requiring policies to ensure competence in the state language. It should be noted that there are occasional somewhat irritating statements about the socialist past, e.g. that “‘instruction in the native language’ of the historical minorities [...] was in line with the communists’ nationality policy” (p. 15). Such a statement can be considered controversial – if we think about the dominance of Russian in the Soviet Union as the language used to spread official ideology, alongside which other languages could flourish only in certain niches (a tradition that continues in Russia today with ethnic Russians being often monolingual, while other ethnicities are bi- or multilingual). Also, a country such as Poland, which practically denied the existence of minorities throughout communist times, certainly does not fit these generalizations. In this sense, some of the assumptions made in the introduction such as the “monolingual turn” in the region, as postulated by Pavlenko (2013: 266), might have been discussed more critically, since they hold true only for some countries and groups, whereas for large groups of e.g. L1 speakers of Russian, it is an entirely new phenomenon to become multilingual. Also, even if official nation-building policies support official monolingualism, individual multilingualism in many countries of the region, in particular smaller ones, is much higher than in many bigger countries in the West. In total, however, such statements show how difficult it is to make summarizing remarks about the entire region and how important it is to take discussions further.

Following the introduction, the chapters reporting on different case studies cover a diverse range of approaches and countries/regions. They have been categorized into five sections which are somewhat representative of the post-socialist world: Russia, East Central Europe, the Baltic states, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. Section I starts with a chapter by Ekaterina Gruzdeva on minorities on the island of Sakhalin in Russia’s Far East. This region is highly interesting and not well known internationally. Unfortunately, however, this chapter reads more like a research report than an analytical article – it is rather descriptive, with little theory and contextualisation, and there are some statistical contradictions. There is no overview of languages, language practices and policies in the Russian Federation. Also, some of the statements would need to be explained better – e.g. that southern Sakhalin was “included into the realm of the Soviet Union” (p. 34), excluding any word about the political controversy about this “inclusion”. Other claims remain unsupported, e.g. that the indigenous “communities in general are concerned with the fate of their languages” (p. 41). Yet, the chapter remains an interesting example of how small language communities develop in times of economic and political change and how this change results in language shift, but also in (albeit often weak and methodologically inadequate) language maintenance policies.

Chapter 2 by Héctor Alòs i Font analyses factors contributing to linguistic assimilation and the decline of Chuvash. This is an example of a language which enjoys official support as the titular language of one republic of the Russian Federation. The chapter explains how the tradition of asymmetrical bilingualism from the Soviet Union continues: According to the 2010 census, only 4% of ethnic Russians in the Republic of Chuvashia claim knowledge of Chuvash; at the same time, there is a strong divide between

rural and urban areas with regard to inter-generational language transmission among ethnic Chuvash. The chapter highlights the contradictions in language policies, with Russian re-centralisation in contrast to regional and local language policies supporting languages other than Russian. The author argues that existing regional policies strengthen patterns of diglossia; there is little devotion to usage policies that benefit Chuvash, resulting in Chuvash not spreading to high-prestige domains and only limited use e.g. in social media.

Nina Dobrushina's chapter then reports on the Republic of Daghestan, based on interviews dealing not only with current and previous language practices, but also – methodologically interestingly – the respondents' parents and grand-parents. The chapter thus provides insight into patterns of language use in a region where individual multilingualism is slowly eroding due to the increasing role of Russian for any communication outside one's closest circles: whereas intergenerational transmission of family languages is more or less intact in villages, migration to the cities favours language shift, and competence in more languages – e.g. in languages of neighbouring villages or *lingua francae* used in local centres – is replaced by Russian. The chapter argues that the transition to post-Soviet ideologies and practices had little influence on language shift, but that the replacement of other languages by Russian already started in the 20th century.

The second part of the book discusses case studies from Central and Southeastern Europe, namely the former East Germany, Poland, Czechia, Romania and Serbia. The chapter by Verena Mezger focuses on new multilingualism in the former GDR, i.e. the increasing role of Polish in bilingual families. The chapter is quite innovative in that there has been little research on this topic. Unfortunately, however, some claims are unsupported, and there is rather little contextualisation and theoretical discussion of discourses on languages and other aspects of the sociolinguistic transition in East Germany, of which the examples discussed are only a small aspect. This is truly a shame, since the topic – not least in the context of multilingualism in Germany – would deserve more attention.

The chapter by Krzysztof Przygoński discusses the spread of English in Poland. It takes the “transition” aspect seriously by focusing on the replacement of Russian by English. The author summarizes that English is widely demanded for international communication and by many employers, which stands in contradiction to competence generally not being very high. However, there are also some rather doubtful statements, in particular with regard to the structural influence of English on Polish. Whereas there is little doubt that English has left lexical traces in contemporary Polish, and that anglicisms are used by many Poles to show their affiliation to English-speaking culture, the author's argumentation that Polish culture has been highly Englishized rather voices often-heard myths about the “endangerment” of a national culture by foreign elements and is, therefore, little convincing.

Marián Sloboda's account of super-diversity in Czechia is among the book's best chapters. By combining a macro and a micro perspective as well as historical and contemporary developments, the author explains the dynamics of one of the linguistically most diverse societies in East Central Europe and, in this way, provides the overview which the reader expects of the chapters in the book. Both changes with regard to tradi-

tional minorities and in educational policies are discussed, but also languages which usually gain little attention, such as Korean, Chinese or Vietnamese in Czechia. The chapter discusses a range of micro-level examples, e.g. from the linguistic landscape, but also reactions to this new diversity. Sloboda concludes that there is an interesting contradiction between diversity-friendly official policies and more nationalist unofficial discourses.

The chapter by Attila Benő and János Péntek discusses the situation of Hungarian in Romania. It is based on an analysis of official documents, discourses and ideologies by the Romanian state and the majority population. It provides a detailed account of the situation of Hungarian speakers and the often hostile attitudes by the Romanian state – whose practices are partly in strong contradiction to existing laws. However, the chapter would have benefitted if the readers also heard voices opposed to the authors' views. For example, it would have been interesting to read comments on policies by which the Romanian state tries to ensure sufficient knowledge of the main language of society for all citizens for integration and societal participation, and on nationalist tendencies from Hungary which try to influence policies regarding ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries. Many of the conclusions are arguably true, but a number of political claims are unsupported. In addition, the question of transition is hardly approached, with little reference made to policies in previous eras, and the chapter also suffers from focusing on one linguistic group in such a diverse country as Romania.

Jelena Timotijević's chapter on Serbia is highly theory-laden (almost too much); it takes a heavily "critical" discourse analysis stance, and surprisingly even Marx and Engels have been quoted. On the one hand, the chapter is very rich in providing a detailed overview of the politics of language in Serbia throughout the 20th century and regarding changes in the new millennium. On the other hand, the chapter provides too much detail regarding general discourses on nationalism, to the detriment of the rather short section on language-related issues in the narrower sense. Yet the chapter shows convincingly how language in Serbia is and has been politicized. It also aims at deconstructing some myths regarding the "suppressed" varieties within Yugoslavia; its main point is that several centres of standardized language existed and that individuals were rather free in using the varieties of their choice, with nationalist policies separating languages for more general political reasons.

Four chapters are devoted to the Baltic states. Birute Klaas-Lang first provides an overview of language laws in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, focusing on higher education. In this, it is remarkable how different the rules are in these countries. The chapter suffers, however, from a rather descriptive approach and the fact that the author seems to have much better insight into Estonia than into the other countries. Also, it is difficult to agree to the perceived threat English might pose to the national languages – after all, universities in the Baltic states are all highly multilingual with a continuing dominance of the national languages, and only in some areas, such as the language of PhD dissertations, is English starting to gain more influence. Also, the chapter concentrates on the transition towards English, but tells very little about the changing roles of Russian in Baltic societies.

The chapter by Meilutė Ramonienė and Loreta Vilkienė is, in contrast, once again very close to the main aim of the book and as such one of the best in the collection: the sociolinguistic transition of Lithuania is explained by discussing survey data on the competence and use of Lithuanian, Russian, English and other languages among different ethnic groups. The authors argue that political transition has led to an increase in the value of Lithuanian, with competence in Lithuanian today being high among all ethnic groups, including ethnic Russians and Poles. Competence in English has increased, and English is associated with a good education, higher incomes and the younger generation. At the same time, use of Russian also continues to be widespread. While state ideologies have replaced Russian with English during the transition towards Europe, Russian is still of high relevance for communication within the post-Soviet world and in the workplace.

The book stays in Lithuania with the chapter by Brigita Sėguis. It focuses on language practices, in particular language alternation, among ethnic Poles in Lithuania. It is a useful addition to the previous chapter, in particular regarding its overview of the Polish community in Lithuania. The author concludes that Polish-Russian code-switching is very common, with Russian keeping its structural specifics, whereas Polish-Lithuanian code-switching is limited to specific lexical items and integrated into Polish structures. The chapter is the most structurally linguistic in the volume and the transition aspect is mentioned only marginally. Yet the data are interesting and, in this sense, this chapter is a valuable contribution to understanding contemporary language practices in the post-socialist realm.

Finally, Kadri Koreinik provides a different insight into the ecolinguistic composition of the Baltics by focusing on the regional language of Võru in South Estonia. The chapter carefully relates to the introduction of the book by taking up the discussion of transition vs. transformation. In addition, it focuses on centre-periphery dynamics. It thus provides an excellent mix of methodologies, summarizing language attitudes and practices in South-Eastern rural Estonia.

The next section covers different aspects of multilingualism in Ukraine as an example of a post-Soviet state oriented towards the West which has thus far not joined the EU. The relevance of the chapters suffers slightly from the rapid political developments in Ukraine since the Maidan revolution and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Yet, this is unavoidable given the ongoing transformation, and this critique is certainly not meant to question the value of the chapters. First, the chapter by István Csernicškó and Viktória Ferenc takes, once again, a micro-perspective of a Hungarian-speaking minority, this time relating to Transcarpathia. The authors provide a solid overview of languages and ethnicities in the region based on (albeit not critically discussed) census data, as well as of the transition in Ukrainian language policy. They identify four phases since 1990 – a period of “cautious tolerance” (until 1994), soft (until 2004) and powerful Ukrainisation (until 2010), and territorial bilingualism (until 2014). Based on methodologically interesting experiments, e.g. by making phone calls to public bodies, the authors conclude that the Ukrainian laws are rather favourable towards smaller minorities. At the time of writing, they were at least partly respected by the authorities. However, a further

discussion of bottom-up practices and policies and views by members of the Hungarian minority itself would have made the chapter more valuable.

In the following chapter, Olga Ivanova provides detailed insight into the linguistic situation of Kyiv, where both Russian and Ukrainian are widely used. There is some repetition of the previous chapter concerning official rules regarding languages in Ukraine, but in total it is a good addition. Based on linguistic landscape research and a survey, the author shows how both major languages have clear and stable functions, strengthened by both official rules and public discourses: There has indeed been a sociolinguistic transition – official language policies have led to a “rearrangement of functionality” – with Ukrainian being more visible in the public sphere and more dominant in formal situations, and the presence of Russian having increased in informal domains. The key concept here is “habitual language” – Russian is more frequently used in bottom-up practices than Ukrainian, which many respondents consider their mother tongue, though claiming to use Russian as their main language of communication.

The last section of the book consists of three chapters on Kazakhstan as an example of a post-Soviet country in Central Asia. Sholpan Zharkynbekova’s and Damira Akyanova’s main aim is to analyse language use among students, but they also provide an overview of demographic changes since the 1990s: the numbers of ethnic Kazakhs and other Turkic language speakers have increased, not least due to immigration from other former Soviet republics, whereas the number of ethnic Russians and other Slavic groups has declined. Similar to the Baltic states, Soviet-era Kazakhstan was also characterized by asymmetrical bilingualism; these patterns of language competence are slowly changing as a result of official language policies. Today, three languages play an important role in language policy discourses and practices: Russian continues to be the main language of interethnic communication, Kazakh is increasing in functions (in particular in more formal domains) and in competence in the younger generation, and English is a main target of top-down language acquisition policies. The other languages of Kazakhstan, i.e. the large number of minority languages, however, are used rarely. The following chapter by (again) Sholpan Zharkynbekova and Aliya Aimoldina describes how English is spreading and, based on a large-scale survey, reports that its importance is widely accepted, at least by younger generations. The different functions of Kazakh, Russian and English are also reflected in the final chapter by Maganat Shegebayev who analysed self-reported practices in companies in Kazakhstan: According to the research, Russian is still strongest in everyday communication, whereas Kazakh is increasing in communication with customers and in formal documents, and English is added for communication with countries outside the post-Soviet realm and as such is starting to replace Russian in some contexts.

The three chapters on Kazakhstan suffer somewhat from being too descriptive and based on government reports; a better data analysis and qualitative additions would have rendered the chapters even more valuable. The authors should also have considered that respondents’ claims do not always correspond to actual behaviour or that top-down policies do not necessarily imply that language practices are really changing. Yet, it is interesting to read about Kazakhstan as an example of strong state-oriented policies

and discourses, and in total the chapters provide interesting insight into a country which tends to be overlooked even among those interested in the post-Soviet world.

In total, the book's main value lies in providing insight into countries, situations and processes in a part of the world still under-represented in global sociolinguistics. However, some critical aspects should be mentioned. A major setback of the volume is that not all chapters are equally thorough in their methodological and theoretical backgrounds. Whereas some chapters meet highest international quality standards, others are less convincing. This is not to say that different academic traditions should not be respected – quite the contrary, the methodological diversity is part of providing insight into the sociolinguistic realities in the region. A concluding chapter which discusses similarities and tendencies, but also takes a contrastive view, would allow the reader to gain an overview without reading every chapter in detail. Also, some interpretations of ongoing sociolinguistic changes would facilitate the theoretical contextualisation and provide possible prognoses for future paths of languages in the post-socialist world.

These shortcomings and desiderata do not, however, reduce the value of the volume. The countries gathered are – by and large – representative of the different political paths taken, and as a collection of case studies and methodological approaches, the volume is highly stimulating. Not least because of the lack of exchanges between academics and perspectives between the post-socialist world and a larger English-reading audience, the current volume is a highly valuable addition to the publications on sociolinguistics in Eastern Europe and Central and Northern Asia, and as such deserves to receive widespread attention.

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