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**STUDYING  
THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF CITIES.  
CONSIDERATIONS AND METHODS**

**Communication in urban contexts**

More so than the countryside, cities have traditionally been the sources of much language variation and change. This trend is nowadays progressing, due to globalisation, and this has led to a type of extreme variation in urban contexts that is sometimes qualified as ‘superdiverse’ [Vertovec 2007]. In a globalising world, with increasing social and geographical mobilities, the urban individual, with their highly versatile skills and specific motivations, chooses their own customized path in life. This individual is confronted more often than before with the effects of the way they communicate (because it deviates from the style of those around them) and may feel the need to express identity more. Modern-day sociolinguists try to capture these individualised communicative choices. Vertovec’s ‘superdiversity’ is often mentioned in this context and refers to the fact that nowadays levels of diversity in certain places (especially urban ones) are higher than ever before; culturally, ethnically, and in many other ways (and communicatively as a result).

This article reviews ways to study communication in modern, superdiverse contexts. Communication in an urban context poses a serious challenge to researchers. Not only does it involve more than momentarily occurring communicative acts, it also involves a kind of fluidity that seems less predictable. To study it, one would need to know about old and new ways of looking at variation. One also needs to know what to study, and this requires knowledge of the public space and all the stakeholders that have an interest in maintaining it.

### **Old and modern approaches**

City research has traditionally involved studying groups and correlations. William Labov [1966] was able to walk into department stores and find a type of speech that could be predicted, and his successful research sparked more research that leaned on similar principles. An important premise underlying such research is that socio-cultural setting is basically fixed and predictable, so that groups can be defined using set characteristics. These groups are socially and geographically not overly mobile. The other premise is that the communicative choices of these groups can be correlated with society and with social space within society, and therefore the communication one encounters at different points in time in a certain place with certain people can be measured. The focus in such research, typically, is production, and much less attention is paid to the interpretation of language utterances through evaluation and perception. This was true in the early stages of mainstream, western sociolinguistics, which started in the mid-1960s. The investigations were typically highly controlled and of a short duration; short, spontaneous utterances were considered vital.

Such research is still very popular nowadays, because it is considered inevitable, practical, and necessary. However, generalisations are a common negative output of such research, as illustrated by the comment “If it is an oversimplification to speak about ‘Moroccan women’, then it is also too simple to speak about ‘North African women’ without acknowledging the diversity in their situations and positions” (126) by the Egyptian researcher Bassiouney [2015]. This observation illustrates that the language of individuals is not automatically a reflection of the language of a group. Group assumptions to some degree still work, but they work less well than before.

Late-modern perspectives on communication tend to view language as part of a larger picture of communication, in which linguistic resources are amongst the tools used to play a role. Urban research, like other sociolinguistic research, more often than not involves the study of what content or any other message we want to send out and which communicative devices we have available to send out that message. Communication is seen as contextually situated and highly speaker-dependent. Within that frame of thought, there may be agreement between the communicative choices of groups that share characteristics, but these are of secondary interest if these same people will make different

choices in different situations. This new way of looking at communication and signs is particularly relevant for the city. The perspective of communication in the city is one of dynamic fluidity.

### **Premises**

An important premise in contemporary urban communication research is that relatively many people are socially and geographically mobile and that the population is culturally and linguistically varied. If they want to communicate in the typically highly diverse urban setting they are in, then they need to make an effort before smooth and efficient communication takes place. People must 'get along' when they meet, despite the fact that they all have different belief systems, different behavioural norms, different communication rituals, and different linguistic practices. The intentions of interlocutors in such settings can be related to identity but there are also practical purposes, politeness purposes, and the basic human need for social confirmation. This can be assumed to lead to language choices, i.e., inter-/intra-speaker variation. The outcome is, what could be called a 'linguistic pool', which Nettle [1999] defined as "[a]ll the different bits of linguistic structure that are found in human languages. The atomic elements in the pool [...] are not languages but linguistic items" (5). This could be viewed even more broadly, perhaps as a 'communicative pool', so as to include the abundance of tools, both linguistic and non-linguistic, through which individuals in cities interconnect.

### **The public space**

Before asking ourselves the question how to research the public space, let's determine what the public space is exactly, and how its shape comes to existence. Public space is open and accessible to people. It includes roads, pavements, public squares, parks, beaches, government buildings like public libraries and town halls, and, for instance, highly visible privately owned buildings. It is built and regulated by the government and by the civil society, which refers to non-governmental organisations and institutions that manifest the interests and will of citizens [Cohen 1994]. The public space is regulated by rules, laws and penalties. Failure to regulate it results in social segregation, so the public space cannot be left to its own devices and regulate itself.

## **Regulating communication in the public space**

The public space is not usually planned in detail, nor is its development fully conscious. In practice, it is mainly constructed/improved through communicative actions and practices and the reactions they evoke. Different users of the space have different communicative norms. These circumstances may lead to smooth communication but they can also bring about conflict and misunderstanding, because different types of communicative assumptions and habits meet. Some public-space participants are more individualist in their communication, while others are more group-oriented, for instance, and differences exist in politeness actions. The resultant problems (misunderstandings) are solved by intervention of the public or government. So, one could say that the public space is the product of communication between stakeholders. In European cities, these are: the city authorities planning and governing the space, city residents, and non-residents [Habermas 1991].

The pillars that shape public life are the government, the economy, and 'civil society'. Civil society is the non-governmental yet public side of society that is relevant in the study of the public space. The study of civil society provides insight into the ways in which economic and governmental policies influence social life in communal (urban) spaces, and how members of the public perceive this influence.

The stakeholders need to decide to implement more, fewer or different regulations. In this respect, one could take into consideration the concept of the 'shared space'. Originally a Dutch concept, this principle is currently being implemented in many places in and outside the Netherlands (amongst others, the United Kingdom and Austria). It is mainly associated with traffic. The idea is that fewer signs and instructions, rather than more or improved ones, leads to users paying more attention to each other's movements and (mobility) interests. This is one way to view the public space; one could introduce more or fewer regulations, and the question is which of the two has the best outcome. In the Netherlands, the principle of shared space has led to fewer accidents. Different stakeholders (cars, bikes, pedestrians) enter the public space (a square, for instance), and in the public space the stakeholders are not given any instructions at all. The result is that they pay more attention to the situation and negotiate passage, by driving and walking carefully and making eye contact with each other. This could be translated to human discourse and communication in the public space; fewer rules might lead to less

conflict. This, however, does not solve the issue of newcomers entering the public space and being lost for information. One wonders whether they should be left to their own devices and negotiate their way towards finding the information they need. This type of question does not seem to have been posed very often in research so far.

### **Research foci for studying the urban public space**

#### *1. Liminality*

The term ‘liminality’ stems from sociological/anthropological realms and is associated with Turner [1969]. It refers to the middle stage of a ritual. Liminality captures a certain disorientation that non-residents experience. For the public space, liminality could be used to refer to the transitional stage between ‘alien’ and ‘resident’, which is a common feeling that newcomers and non-residents experience [Kádár 2017].

#### *2. Language regimes*

Another useful focus is ‘language regimes’, as explained in Coumas [2008]. This principle refers to the relation between actual language use, attitudes towards this use, and the management of language in public spaces (language policies). Understanding this helps us comprehend how attitudes may lead to action. The government may also ignore such attitudes and build and restructure the public space on its own terms and in accordance with a fixed ideology. The question, then, is what motivates those reconstructing the public space.

#### *3. Rituals*

The third useful focus discussed here is that of rituals. These are interactional phenomena through which people maintain what they perceive as the moral order of things, in the form of communal interactional practices. Sometimes, rituals clash; automatic reactions and all kinds of communicative habits/assumptions take over primary communication. The study of rituals can reveal how people work out and maintain interpersonal relationships in complex urban settings [Kádár 2017]. Labov [1972] was one of the first to study ritual practices in urban settings, when he studied what is sometimes referred to as African American Vernacular English.

#### *4. Political correctness*

A fourth relevant topic of interest in studying the public space is whether and how political correctness works in places that are becoming more diverse. This correctness is often considered an essential tool to keep racism at bay. It helps stakeholders control or decrease verbal aggression against newcomers. Ordinary users may view political correctness differently from each other. In critical discourse analysis, it is generally seen as positive, as it prevents people from expressing social tensions. On the other hand, some consider such behavioural correctness as something of the political elite mainly. Political correctness is an understudied phenomenon in language and communication studies. It is part of how a culture communicates with/about newcomers.

### **Studying the urban public space**

When studying the public space, specific aspects can be looked at or taken into consideration. An important question is how the available communicative resources are distributed across each city. How are these resources allocated between the various stakeholders? Sociolinguistically, one wants to know what the patterns of language use are. Are there ‘urban styles’, is there conventional codeswitching, what creatively mixed language use can we find, which registers exist, and, more generally, what are the elements in the communicative pool that speakers borrow from? What can be understood as communicative norms in the various social settings in the public space? How transient or permanent are the sociolinguistic patterns that we observe? What do our findings tell us about the role of new populations in urban spaces in broader globalisation contexts? What conflicts exist in the present language regimes for the various stakeholders? How can these conflicts be avoided?

Ways to study all this should involve a mixture of techniques, and not only linguistic or sociolinguistic principles should underlie these. Sociological, anthropological, ethnographic, and psychological techniques may be combined in order to capture not only linguistic patterns but also the nature of human behaviour in groups. It should be noted that ethical and practical challenges present themselves when combining disciplines and digging for natural language data.

### **Basic tools**

Observation seems the most obvious approach to make sure that language users are captured in their most natural habitat. Picture-taking and making recordings, and even filming are obvious candidates as practical tools to register the language and other behaviour that constitutes interpersonal communication. Picture-taking is useful for studying the public and private linguistic signature (Linguistic Landscape) of the public space. Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders as well as surveys can be used as tools to study attitudes, reactions to language choices by others.

### **Ethnographic fieldwork**

Ethnographic approaches constitute both a theory and a methodology. Ethnography is the study of people in a cultural context. Methodologically, it refers to unintrusive researcher participation in daily activities. Peoples and cultures are observed, including their customs, rituals, and mutual differences. It is a useful way to learn more about the ‘social lives’ [Levon 2013] of members within a community. Blommaert [2007] viewed ethnography as a theory that leans on two principles. The first one is ‘Language ecology’, which refers to all social events, of which language is one, that are connected to other events (amongst others, historically, spatially, and temporally). These social events have many meanings; like ritual, identity-related, and practical meanings. The other principle is that knowledge of these social actions is by default subjective. Ethnographic fieldwork not only registers objectively what goes on and who are the agents, it also lays bare how the participants themselves interpret these events. The researcher needs to place the social events in a structured and independent social reality. The complete linguistic and non-linguistic situation is described, including social and cultural belief systems and practices. The personalities of participants are part of the explanation of communicative choices. The researcher tries to go from the ‘etic’ (outsider’s) view to the ‘emic’ (insider’s) viewpoint. The methodology is not pre-determined very strictly, as the situation (local customs, practical realities) determines the methodology. The situation will present relevant aspects or new variables to study. The context that induces certain communicative choices is studied as well as these choices themselves. Traditionally, this type of research is associated

with the study of primitive tribes and minority cultures. New possibilities, however, are to study modern communities of practice this way as well as, for instance, communication amongst shopkeepers, skaters, sports fans, people in an old-people's home, the homeless, or colleagues. Speech communities can also be studied; their inter-/intra-cultural communication, social networks, multi-cultural families, and neighbourhoods, and it could include tribe, class, and caste.

### **Street Use Survey**

A Street Use Survey [Altuna, Basurto 2013; Droogsmā, Smakman due 2019; Smakman, Heinrich 2018] describes the current linguistic state of affairs (the languages generally used) in a certain geographical or social space. It is based on observation (eavesdropping) as a tool to determine the language in a particular neighbourhood or town. This tool focusses on places where language is produced, the individuals producing the language, and the times when it is produced. The focus is not style or register, or any other linguistic aspect but merely the language or languages spoken. Patterns of usage are captured: which people speak which language in which social settings and with which interlocutors? The observations are relatively loose yet systematic, and they are done in busy streets, shops, and other places where person-to-person communication can be observed inconspicuously. The observations are repetitive and short; at specific times of the day in specific places. They could be done on certain days of the week, in several places in the city, and a Street Use Survey could be done for years on end. The observer uses a form with boxes to tick. They walk towards a conversation taking place — pretending to be playing with their phone —, eaves-drop, walk away, and type in the results in the form on their mobile telephone.

### **Choosing a city**

For research in the urban public space, a certain city needs to be chosen. History of the city, for one, is an important characteristic. A main distinction is between an old and a new city. Examples of new cities/towns are: Brasilia (the capital of Brazil), the Dutch town of Dronten (a result of sea-draining), the British city of Milton Keynes (built around a small village to house London commuters and other populations) and the Norwegian new town of Høyanger (one of the first industrial towns

in Norway). New dialects form in such new cities [Giles, Coupland 1991; Kerswill, Williams 1992; Omdal 1977]. In older cities, the continuing development of existing dialects can be studied. Interactions between old and incoming communicative habits can be studied in both new and old cities. In old cities, changes since the start of extreme globalisation and diversification (in, say, the past 30 years) can be studied. It is common for the city centres of old cities nowadays to be revamped into a 'touricised' city. This leads to a situation where there are two cities in one; the new-dialect city and the old-dialect city. This is worthy of investigation too.

Another distinction that can be made is between city types; for instance, whether the city in question has a monolingual or multilingual self-image. Although Amsterdam historically had a predominantly monolingual self-image, while a city like Venice had a more multilingual self-image, today's situation in these two places is different. Due to demographic and economic changes, and due to tourism, both have become multilingual nowadays. Amsterdam has a dualist population structure that characterises world cities. It has a highly educated global workforce, strong service industries, and a thinning traditional middle-class. There is, what could be called, 'considerable' tourism in Amsterdam. Amsterdammers live in the city centre, and tourists have not en masse taken over the city centre houses yet. Venice is very different. It has undergone extreme gentrification, including renovation of deteriorated urban neighbourhoods by means of the influx of money from affluent residents. Tourism can be qualified as 'extreme'. Few native Venetians (born and raised on the peninsula) are left, and on the connected islands original inhabitants are hard to find, while only a small number of newcomers actually live and work there. Cities can be categorised by a system of such features and qualifications, and the communication patterns in various city types can be compared.

The changes in cities need attention in such a qualification. When we look at William Labov's New York, then we see that in the 1960s, when his famous study there was done, there were fewer newcomers. There was more segregation, less inter-ethnic/inter-cultural communication, possibly less mixing, and as a result identity needs were different. The social system was class-based and resembled European class divisions. In this situation, it was realistic to study groups and their behaviour. In shops, a researcher would find a certain type of people, and their language would be relatively predictable. Nowadays, New York

city has a crumbling class system. Shop stature can no longer be used as a reliable predictor of accent of shoppers or personnel, and the New York accent has changed its identity by losing some of its prestige. Norm language (General American) dominance is becoming more pertinent and so is the status of non-native Englishes. There is likely to be more mixing, because of the mingling of populations and because of increased intercultural communication. There are more newcomers and tourists, and amongst the long-term populations there is new-dialect formation, which uses as a source the New York accent, African American English, General American, and many sense a continued settling of the Italian and Jewish communication styles in the typically modern New York speech style [Tannen 2008].

### **What to study**

As said, the study of communication in highly diverse settings, which is what urban settings often are, comes down to a study of the application of the elements of the communicative pool. The researcher looks at functions, rituals, politeness, and communicative regimes by finding out which elements speakers select in certain settings. Rather than studying predefined groups, group formations and their labelling (by themselves or others) are the object of study. Young people with different language and cultural backgrounds in particular develop their own expressions, pronunciations, and communicative norms in order to be identifiable as a group.

Nowadays, staying in the same place all one's life is still common, but amongst certain populations it is becoming less common. 'Global Nomads' [Elliott, Urry 2011] and their offspring, so-called 'Third-Culture Kids' [Pollock, Van Reken 2009], are increasingly common. Their norm-formation could be indicative of future ways in which people construct language norms — aimed at some sort of global norm that is culturally and regionally less rooted than traditional norms have been. These populations typically pick up features from various places/people without committing to a regional or social dialect. They might speak Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, Malay, or Swahili but do not commit to the cultures or language norms typically associated with these languages. These and other inhabitants are amongst the modern new inhabitants of urban spaces.

To study new communication in the city, it may be necessary to study the differences between the countryside and the city and to look

at past times as well. Rather than dive into superdiverse settings only, one could investigate diversifying settings in the recent and far past. One could look at the beginnings of language contact in modern settings. Historical data can be combined with modern data. The nature of the change may show difference or resemblance. In the past, more assumptions on race and class were likely to exist; groups were more fixed. Nowadays, we could look at groups in a new way by applying new criteria. The fluidity of groups is another issue to take seriously, because membership may vary on the basis of the prominence of a certain criterion. Examples of this and of the historical approach are given later on in this article.

### **Hypotheses about communication issues in the public space**

Such research could yield practical results. A recent research proposal by Daniel Kádár (Budapest), Patrick Heinrich (Venice), and Dick Smakman (Leiden) contained the following hypothesis, which seems in order here: “In superdiverse settings, economic forces tend to favour the most powerful actors (authorities & residents) and reinforce social tensions, while the government as an agent tends to be slow to react to demographic changes.” The underlying thoughts to this hypothesis were that the public space has received little consideration in the agenda of diversifying the European population [Francis et al. 2012] and that this is due to economic opportunities generated by this diversification. Furthermore, little sociolinguistic research has been done on the actual operation of communicative practices in the public space. This communication may nevertheless be the source of conflict.

There is a certain self-evidentness to the idea that social conflicts exist in the public space. In Venice, conflicts between local food salesmen and tourists from certain regions are common, and Amsterdam suffers from tourists trying to find their way in town or trying to solve practical problems (including communication with authorities after, for instance, accidents and theft). This presumed self-evidentness is the very reason it should be investigated; no inquiry has attempted to map these conflicts systematically from a communicative point of view. Conflicts are often assumed to come from insufficient knowledge of English and the tourists’ lack of practical and cultural knowledge. However, such conflicts are not necessarily related to language or cultural barriers per

se and therefore not solved simply by teaching people English or the national language of the country where a city is, or by using simpler language in writing and spoken communication. Lists of cultural instructions or small handbooks on culture are also known not to work. All kinds of cultural assumptions that language fails to communicate unambiguously cause misunderstanding and conflict. Practical examples are: international versus local politeness rules, assumptions as to how discourse starts and ends, the definiteness of the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’, the meaning of ‘thank you’ and facial expressions, the rhetorical value of speaking the local/national language (including just a few words), and, for instance, the meaning of smiling and body language. A reasonable hypothesis is that these have little to do with formal knowledge of English, Dutch, Russian, Norwegian, Arabic, Italian, or another large or small language, yet they are the most likely cause of misunderstanding and source of conflict. One could propose the design of a sociolinguistic model of such communicative variation, and, subsequently, solutions to the resultant misunderstandings.

Public space is an ideological space characterised by struggles for legitimacies and by conflicts of interest, amongst others practical ones. The resultant struggles take place between individuals but they follow patterns through which the sociolinguist can model public space as a communicative setting. European governments are said to embrace the United in Diversity ideology, ‘*varietate concordia*’. Yet, the countries promote national languages, and a few minority languages ‘on the side’. There does not seem to be a strong promotion of diversity and intercultural smooth communication, while there is no strong promotion of international lingua francas. Large-scale immigration and tourism can lead to superdiverse cities, especially at certain times of the year. This could lead to a permanent or temporary ‘sociolinguistic discrepancy’ between language policies, language attitudes, and real-life communicative practices in the public space, and thus to less easy communicative access to the public space. One could say that superdiversity leads to superconfusion. Within and outside Europe, this superconfusion does not seem to have ended up on any agenda.

### **How to study the city?**

To smoothen communication in urban contexts, research could be done, and this could lead to hints and tips for stakeholders. What

kind of regulatory measures can decrease potential social tensions triggered by superdiversity? Interaction between policies and public reactions to them can be viewed from a sociolinguistic angle. The research in question should not be restricted to linguistics only but communication in general; the Humanities and Social Sciences should work together in this effort. The outcome would be a depiction of how public communication works in contemporary society and of recommendations on how linguistic administration of the public space can adapt to the language regimes under pressure to change. Rather than tackling disorder and confusion retrospectively, one could anticipate the complexity of communicative situations. This way, the quality of communication in cities could improve.

### **Examples of research in the city**

#### *1. Historical approach*

An example of research that could serve as inspiration for future research into the city, is the investigation by Britain and Trudgill [2005] in the Fens area in England. In this area, several communities lived on settlements surrounded by swamps. Once polderised, these intermediate areas were populated by the people from the settlements. This way, language contact of speakers of very similar varieties of English took place. Britain and Trudgill [2005] combined historical data with more modern data and came to surprisingly detailed and feasible hypotheses. In these areas, two variants ‘met’, and rather than intermediate forms arising or one of the forms disappearing, both variants survive; each received its own sociolinguistic functions. This research is a good example of less urban ways of communicating and of new-dialect formation in previous times. Historical data and more modern insights and assumptions are combined in this investigation.

#### *2. Non-linguistic diversification*

Cornips and De Rooij [2013] demonstrated how groups of speakers in adjacent neighbourhoods (in the Netherlands) may use non-linguistic ways to demonstrate difference while their language is similar. They encountered that in a certain urban context in the Netherlands speaker background is communicated by how the tongue of one’s shoe is underneath the laces or not. The unmarked Surinamese style is to wear

the tongue of the shoe underneath, while Antilleans wear the tongue overneath. Their research shows that young urban inhabitants may think in terms of stable ethnic categories, but when we look at communication, ethnic categories may merge: these two ethnic groups may feel that they are communicatively one but different in clothing. The data also show that Self and Other are subject to redefinition throughout interaction, and dependent on which aspect of identity is referred to.

### 3. *High numbers of variables*

Another interesting example of urban research and the specific ways variation can be viewed is the well-known investigation by Milroy and Milroy [1978]. This investigation distinguishes between dense and loose networks: more density leads to more vernacular usage. The basis for network formation is broad: religious affiliation (Protestant or Catholic), neighbourhood, family size, frequency of visits to neighbours, weekly hobby activities, and, for instance, degree of care for the weaker members in a network. It is these investigations that emphasise the need to apply multifaceted research in urban contexts — involving a myriad of variables that present themselves in the process.

### 4. *Semantic diversification*

Cornips, De Rooij, and Smakman [2018] described the use of a specific term in an urban context in the Netherlands. The term was *tori zetten*, which can be translated as ‘commit *tori*’. Originally Surinamese in origin, the word ‘*tori*’ has various meanings, the most dominant one of which is ‘activity’ or ‘job’. To commit *tori* is associated with committing burglary but in the urban contexts described by Cornips et al. [2018] its meaning seems to be renegotiated by various groups using the term, with each group using it in slightly different ways. Data in their investigation suggest that the Amsterdam youths (often of Surinamese or Antillean origin, but not necessarily) from a neighbourhood called Bijlmer interpret it as referring to the embezzlement of a small amount of money, whereas in a nearby neighbourhood (Westerpark) it refers to a relatively more innocent action or job.

### 5. *Street Use Survey*

Droogsma and Smakman [due 2019] describe a Street Use Survey in four cities in Ukraine: Kyiv (Central/North Ukraine), Luc’k (West Ukraine), Kharkiv (East Ukraine), and Kramators’k (East Ukraine).

More than 400 people were eavesdropped on in total. The results show that Russian is used in all places, while Ukrainian is used more in the non-Eastern regions, and it even seems to be used increasingly often (even if the speaker doesn't speak it well). A survey showed that Russian is relatively unmarked, while Ukrainian has more of an identifying (nationalism, for instance) feel to it.

### *6. Studying misunderstandings*

Kádár, Heinrich and Smakman (in progress) are planning to capture communication problems (misunderstandings) in the Dutch city of Leiden. Random tourists and locals will be asked to enter a booth in which a video can be played and where recordings can be made. The participants will be recorded while solving certain practical issues, watch an instructional video on misunderstandings, and they will be interviewed. This basic approach can be seen as a pilot to precede a more in-depth investigation into miscommunication in urban settings.

## **Why cities matter in sociolinguistics**

Where many different people meet in the same space and try and make their way through that space, communication arises. The more varied the speakers, the more complex the communication. Studying these contexts poses many challenges, but it can push the field forward too. It gives researchers better insights into diversity than before, especially if cities and the neighbourhoods within cities are studied as self-contained communicative systems. Moscow, Amsterdam, and London are like separate countries and can be treated as such. They are different from other cities in their respective countries, and they are often more like these other cities than the surrounding countryside. Indeed, these entities face communicative challenges, and sociolinguistic research (in a broad sense) can help gain insight into these issues. Finally, urban contexts can help critically examine and readdress sociolinguistic theory; not just in the city, but in other contexts as well.

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