

Conference Paper

Polylingualism in Monolingual Yekaterinburg, a 2018 World Football Cup City

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Abstract

The paper was aimed at finding the alternative substitute communicative practices and factors influencing communicative situations between Spanish-speaking visitors and their Russian hosts in monolingual Yekaterinburg during the 2018 World Football Cup. The socio-linguistic data revealed that visitors and hosts used multimodal modes of communication such as 'polylingualism' in metrolingual situations. The atmosphere and guests' and hosts' attitudes during the tournament contributed to communication as well as imprint an everlasting image of the city and Russia on all visitors.

Keywords: polylingualism, metrolingualism, multimodality, world football cup, Spanish language

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1. Introduction

Yekaterinburg, one of the most developed cities in modern Russia, though infamous for being the place where the imperial family perished, is known for its great industrial, cultural, scientific, and educational traditions. Because throughout the Soviet period the city was an important center of the defense industry, it remained closed to foreign visitors. In comparison with their fellow Muscovites and Petersburgers, Yekaterinburgers' lack of contact with foreigners may have determined that today the population is still largely monolingual.

In the last twenty years with the advent of capitalism and economic diversification, the city ranks third by the size of its economy, culture, transportation, and tourism. Commendable achievements in sectors such as international banking and commerce,


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machine production and metallurgy for export as well as the strong presence of multinational companies in the city and surrounding areas are responsible for a surge in foreign language literacy, especially English, German, French, Spanish, and Chinese. In today's Yekaterinburg, literacy in foreign languages or foreign language education (FLE) has become a must and is the result of its needs in modern business and industry as well as the international economic relations and trade established with countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

In Russia, foreign language literacy begins at a very early age and comprises all the years of general education. FLE programs in the country are a response to the perceived social and individual needs in the political, economic and social spheres and a projection of the country's integration to the rest of the world. In Yekaterinburg, though English is the usual parental first foreign language of choice for their children and interest in Chinese is on the rise to the extent that demand exceeds supply of teachers, other FLE possibilities include French, German, and Spanish. Interestingly, demand for Spanish is relatively low despite Cervantes' language is the second most widely spread in the world after English, the unrivaled lingua franca. The appeal of Chinese is justified by growing economic and political relations with the Asian giant and its undeniable future role as the world center of power. On the other hand, French has always been a language signaling prestige in Russia, while German is tied to economic relations.

However, it should be pointed out that research [1], [2], [3], [4] has shown that classroom communication, the excessive use of the mother tongue, and error correction in addition to the challenges posed by new learning environments call for a change of mentality and practices in FLE practitioners and learners. These conditions imposed by, for instance, the advent of IT, the presence of the multiple language repertoires performed in international classrooms at the universities, and the resulting multicultural contact in and outside campus [5] demand proactive language policies in which not only the educational environment but also the city as whole is considered.

The city is home to a vast private network of language schools and centers, mostly devoted to adult FLE education. These institutions provide tailored services to companies and individual learners as well as organize all types of foreign language (L2) courses mostly in English and to a lesser extent in German, French, and Chinese in that order; the study of Spanish, still perceived by many as exotic, is affected mainly by the lack qualified pedagogical personnel, the belief that the only correct language model is that of the European peninsula, and the demand of native-speakers teachers to the detriment of the few indigenous teachers of the language.

A significant contribution to the development of foreign languages literacy, though not yet satisfying the demands in terms of quality, is also made by the twenty-one higher education institutions in the city. The aim in all cases is associated with the development of internationalization and academic mobility at the undergraduate and postgraduate level. All the undergraduates specializing in language and linguistics receive a trilingual education while all other specialties receive at least one L2, English in most cases. In none of the cases, Spanish is the first or second L2, though the Ural Federal University (URFU) and the Ural State Pedagogical University have been taking steps to improve this situation.

Against this unfavorable linguistic background, Yekaterinburg received the 2018 World Football Cup, an event that created a new socio-cultural situation when players and fans from Egypt, Uruguay, Mexico, Sweden, France, Japan, Peru, and Senegal defended their national colors in the city arena in their attempt to advance to the knockout stage of the tournament.

Noticeably, despite all the work in infrastructure, city make-up, and organization carried out during the preparation stage, the city, it seems under the spell of the world lingua franca assumption, only prepared for English-speaking players and fans when 42 % of the teams and fans were from the Spanish-speaking world, out of which 65 % were from Latin America. Out of this figure, around twenty-five thousand were Mexicans who, during their stay in the city, were the object of 6, 770 pieces of news -- a number well above that of their Latin American brothers. These criteria as well as their friendly approach to communicating with Russians and visitors from other countries and willingness to express their joys and misfortunes primed over others in the choice of Mexicans as subjects of study.

This paper, part of a research project on Language Literacy carried out by a group of investigators from the Ural Federal University, is aimed at discerning the alternative language practices, means and modes of expression used as compensation for lack of communicative competence in Russian by Spanish-speaking visitors during the FIFA World Cup 2018 in a Yekaterinburg, a largely monolingual city, and determine whether these conditions affected their impressions of the event. Derived from the objective above, the paper addressed the following questions:

1. What kinds of service areas were considered by the Mexicans as Spanish friendly?
2. What means and modes of expression did Russians use to compensate their lack of Spanish literacy?

3. What alternative language practices between Spanish-speaking visitors and the Russian-speaking hosts allow to discover "new ways of interacting and playing with languages" around FWC 2018 City?
4. What kind of multilingual educational city practice could be seen in Yekaterinburg during the sport event? And what do they tell the city about the future?

Following the ideas of Mora, we understand the notion of *the city as literacy* [6], [7] as an expansion of the view of literacy as 'reading the world and the word' [8]. The city is a converging arena for a myriad of multimodal texts establishing a sense of identity, expression, and understanding; that is, the city as literacy in and of itself [9]; in other words, the city is interpreted in its involvement in the living dynamics of communication regardless of the multiplicity of language codes. As such, the city can no longer be assumed as *monochromatic* [7]. Its full comprehension entails an in-depth view of multiple linguistic, aesthetic, and semiotic interactions, a multi-layered and complex entity. This understanding is an essential feature to engage in a rich, detailed description of the [multimodal] texts that appear and are composed in [and by] the city [7].

The idea of the city as literacy stems from the research tradition in New Literacy Studies [10], [11], [12], [13], [14], [15], [16], [17], [18]. New Literacy Studies, covering a wide research body spanning over forty years, define literacy as socially situated [19]. Text creation and interpretation ultimately lies on the personal and social needs that each social context and each context of situation requires. However, the extension of this framework responds to the complex relations between literacy practices and urban spaces [20]. To this effect, the conceptual framework in this paper also relies on three recent concepts proposing novel approaches to revisit today's textual and linguistic configurations [7].

This framework, elaborated by Mora, includes three key concepts. First, *multimodality* [21], [22], [23] and [24] in whose opinion: "the integration of a set of modes (e.g. sound, color, text, images among others) as resources for sending a message [in order] to improve learning processes, as it makes messages simpler to understand, as the result of the said integration of modes or synesthesia" [7, 24]; second, *polylinguaging* in the interpretation of Chiquito & Rojas [25] for whom the human activity of using more than one language to communicate something makes the mastery any language at a high level irrelevant, because just having the knowledge of some necessary linguistic features is enough. Polylinguaging creates the possibility of acquiring comprehension of words in other languages and using them to communicate; and third, *metrolingualism*

[26], [27] understood as: "a set of creative linguistic conditions present in any time or space, despite the different relations that culture, history or politics can add to a city or social context ... to describe how people with different backgrounds use, relate and negotiate their identity through language ... Metrolingualism focuses on the relations between language practices and the city" [cited by 25, 2792].

As Mora asserts, the four ideas (New literacy Studies, multimodality, polylinguaging, and metrolingualism) established in this framework allow for a dialectical [28] relationship establishing a symbolic relationship between the city and the languages present there. On the one hand, through languages, city dwellers read and create new definitions of the city. On the other hand, the city, as a living entity in itself, produces new and creative texts, relying on the languages at hand in its diverse contexts [7].

For Mora et.al. (ibid) the main factor of influencing the sociocultural [and linguistic] environment surrounding the university is the city with its events, projects, institutions and features of communication. The city is the carrier of a special type of literacy where manifestations of polylingualism and polyculture develop directly in the course of sociocultural practices such as the city visualization in the form of advertising, navigation, street art, city clothes, computer services, names of shops and goods, the name and menu of cafe and restaurants, movie theaters and concerts posters, for instance.

2. Methodology

Based on a sociological approach, data for the paper was obtained first through a survey (see below), which once processed, gave way to an unstructured interview aimed at obtaining more information about specific aspects of interest. A focus group with student-interpreters volunteering during the event was added to triangulate some unfavorable opinions about the quality of guides and translation services once the report was complete.

The survey included eleven questions:

1. Gender
2. Level of education
3. Profession
4. Language abilities other than Spanish
5. Fluency in this/these language(s)
6. Use and usefulness of audio guides during city excursions

7. Help needed/requested to navigate the city maps on special stands, street signs and attractions, public transport stops
8. Evaluation of gastronomic services in Yekaterinburg
9. Mexican restaurants in Yekaterinburg. Real "Mexican cuisine"?
10. Communication with the Russian citizens. Language used and other means communication.
11. Impressions of their visit to Russia

In nine of the questions, the respondents had to choose from a set of possible answers. The last question was completely open. The questions monitored different modality channels of information transfer: visual, verbal, gestures. Data processing tried to establish the relationship(s) between the visitors' socio-demographic and socio-cultural characteristics as well as their level of involvement in cultural communication in a language largely unknown to Yekaterinburgers.

The survey was applied at random by a Latin American student who together with other Asians, Africans, and Russians volunteered vacation time to help the cup become a success for Russia and the football world. The survey was applied to 100 Mexicans visiting Yekaterinburg during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia; 70% of the respondents were males. Almost 87 % of the respondents have higher education and postgraduate education. Most were architects, engineers in several fields, lawyers, psychologists, businessmen, and economists. The rest were teachers and high school students. Once the survey answers had been hurriedly processed, twenty of the fans agreed to expand on them. Both the survey questions, the extra information obtained during the interview-like conversation and focus group triangulation mentioned before allowed to add useful data for the university project. This data was processed and discussed by the research group writing this report.

3. Results

Among the respondents, English, as expected, is the foreign language they know (76.60%) best. Other foreign languages for the Mexican visitors were French (8.51%), Portuguese (8.51%), and German (4.26%). Interestingly, none of them had an idea of Russian. As almost 15 % had no knowledge of a second language, this meant that some of the fans surveyed knew or at least studied a third foreign language. However, as only 63.83% used their foreign language(s) frequently and 21.28% did not, it is quite likely

that some foreign language attrition or loss cases might be present because of lack of use.

As stated before, the city had thoroughly prepared for communication in the universal lingua franca. A translation into English of street names and signs as well as maps, orientations arrows, the names of places of interest, and main buildings were displayed during the event. A few weeks before the tournament started, to the surprise of many Yekaterinburgers, transport began to be announced in both Russian and English. The usefulness of these changes to city orientation signals was greatly appreciated by almost all visitors. Only 12.77% stated they had had no need to look at any of them for they had used GPS and other mobile phone applications. Furthermore, only 40.43% of the respondents made use of audio-guide services during excursions to places of interest. Almost all considered that this type of service had been very efficient and convenient. However, almost all opined that, in many cases, they could not understand correctly because of the audio quality, the accent, and the lack of familiarity related to information overload. Some of them, however, believed that their English language skills may have been the problem interfering with successful communication.

Though the city had officially prepared for visiting fans only in English, private gastronomic services, quite early before the championship started, realized that Spanish was necessary to attract customers. This explains why most city center restaurants and cafeterias had their menus in Spanish too. Many even put notices at the doors announcing services in this language. To increase hospitality, and of course profitability, some restaurants even hired Russian-Spanish interpreters. Nightclubs, some of the interviews commented, presented their programs in Russian, English, and Spanish.

Two Mexicans pointed out that they had been in a bar which on one of its windows had a notice in Spanish which read, "Welcome to the Bar of the Mexican Conquest." The notice was historically incorrect in two senses, they stated: first, Mexico has never been involved in any conquest; and second, it reminded the tragic conquest of their country by Spain in the XV century which destroyed the Aztec civilization. This implies the need to be more careful in the choice of names in the potential customers' language for this choice may have implications beyond language and into history. As stated before, text interpretation ultimately depends on the personal (our visitors felt uncomfortable with the name) and the context (they intuitively understood the notice meant no offense and most probably lack of knowledge). By the way, the notice is still there at the time of writing this paper.

The surveyed evaluated the city gastronomic services as excellent (48.94%) and good (38.30%). Most of the surveyed and later interviewed stated that restaurants,

cafes, nightclubs and the like have nothing to envy when compared with similar ones in Mexico and other parts of the world. Unfortunately, because communication in fast food outlets was only in Russian, some of the interviewees believed it was the cause of misunderstandings and dissatisfaction. However, in the places where the menus were only in Russian, visitors chose what to eat by pointing at the images or photographs in the menus, or as not few laughingly said, "by pointing at what others were eating and then to the mouth." That is, communication is multimodal in Kress's sense and allows for polylinguaging. Here sound, gestures, pictures as well as all the means to make oneself understood and understand the other are more relevant than the actual language used. While it is obvious that Russian and Spanish have nothing in common, the social context and conditions fueled the creative use of extra-linguistic repertoires for communication in a city not usually involved in metrolingual practices.

Most of the Mexican fans were interested in genuine Russian food such as in salads, *shashlik* (skewered and grilled cubes of meat), and *pelmeni* (Russian dumplings) about which they had read before the cup started. In all cases, the evaluation of these and other dishes such as *borsch* (a sour soup with beetroots and *Smetana*---a sour cream), *blini* (pancakes), beef *Stroganov* (sautéed pieces of beef served in a sauce with *Smetana*) was excellent because of their quality and unique taste. Central Asian food which many city restaurants serve also received very positive opinions, especially the Georgian *Ajapsandali* (a stew of vegetables served as soup or main dish) and the Uzbek *plov* (rice simmered in a stew of vegetables and lamb). Unfortunately, the very few Mexicans (22 %) longing for a taste of their national cuisine in the Russian environment said that the city restaurants calling themselves Mexican are only Mexican in name. "Hot chili peppers do not make a dish Mexican," they categorically stated. This calls for a re-evaluation of the authenticity of many advertised services.

Nevertheless, despite the unlucky events in fast food outlets, the poor quality of Mexican food, and the citizens' general lack of competence in Spanish, creative forms of communication such as signs, hand and face gestures, mime, and drawings were used to compensate shortcomings. Interestingly, some of the interviews asserted that some Russians despite knowing they were dealing with foreigners kept on speaking in "very fast Russian" when a simple hand or head movement could have conveyed a message. It seems that Yekaterinburgers are not still 'mentally' or 'practically' ready to engage non-Russian speakers. This calls for a change of mentality in which federal and state services as well as educational institutions play an enormous role.

Some of the fans who self-qualified as very competent speakers of English contended that the guides', in many cases, seemed uncomfortable and nervous when using this

language. They spoke "in a very low voice as if trying to conceal their uncertainty about the accuracy of what they were saying." If the above is to be believed, the causes may be attributed to lack of language practice or competence, especially for the students specializing in translation studies, or again, lack of opportunities to put into practice in real situations the skills acquired at the university. Yekaterinburgers' general competence in English was considered as very low.

This assessment is not surprising. The *English First: English Proficiency Report 2017* (EPI 2017) ranks Russia in the 38th position out of 80 countries; that is, among the countries with a very low proficiency level (52.9). The Ural region, according to the same review ranks just a little above the country media (52.59). An informal focus group interview with four students-interpreters from the Ural Federal University after the world cup denied the Mexican's assumptions of incompetence. The interpreters stated that it was difficult to understand the accent of many visitors whose English, in many cases, was not intelligible enough to be translated and demanded rephrasing and repetitions to have a clear idea of what they wanted or inquired for.

In view of these contradictions, what really happened may never be known. However, one thing is clear: future interpreters and teachers must finally realize that English is no longer the language of the US, Britain and a few other first world countries. Having invaded the world as a lingua franca, comprehension of oral English must also be seen within the marked broad variety of accents that Asians, Latin Americans, and Africans can produce because each of which will be influenced by the speakers L1.

On the other hand, the use of technology such as smart cellphones allowing the use of apps with voice and text translator, bilingual dictionaries, GPS technology, personalized maps, and others helped facilitate communication and orientation in the city. Some fans, however, complained that it was sometimes impossible to obtain what they wanted when they tried to convey a message. "Even when I showed what I wanted in writing, some people said they did not understand," four fans said. "When Russians said something the voice translator said something that was not logical," other remarked. About these cases, it is possible to hypothesize that either it was the fault of technology --- it is well known that online translation is still in its infancy, or that Yekaterinburgers do not adjust their language to the needs of the non-Russian speaker. This adjustment must be in the form of slow speech, simplified grammar, and lack of colloquialisms. In other words, this practice could also be a manifestation of cultural relativism. Yekaterinburg citizens generally expect to be addressed in Russian, and as such they respond.

Nevertheless, all the visitors, without exception, agreed that Yekaterinburg had been an exceptional host. The cup in the city was an example to follow in terms of organization, security, and quality of the venue. The use of fan cards had, at first, greatly facilitated border movement, transportation inside the country as well as easy identification for all purposes. These ensured organization and security. One of the interviewees spoke about the sense of security he and his wife had felt in the city. Contrary to how they had recently felt in a European capital where they saw army patrols with helmets, balaclavas, and bulletproof vests bearing rifles in the streets as if they were at war, "in Yekaterinburg," the man expressed, "one may see the occasional normal police patrol with the usual small firearms as if saying all is quite here and nothing will happen." "I need not say," the woman emphasized, "I feel safe here in your city."

Other measures taken to enhance security during the games were related to traffic, the sales of alcohol, and the entry into the stadiums. Once in the city, the visitors praised the closing of traffic in areas adjacent to the stadium before and during the matches which allowed fans to move together towards the stadium, show their national colors, sing, and display a sense of unity in the face of victory -- or defeat. During the same period, the sales of alcoholic beverages were severely restricted to avoid unpleasant incidents derived from rivalries, as unfortunately has happened in other world cups and European championships. Pre-event fears of racism and hooliganism did not materialize neither in Yekaterinburg nor in any other Russian city. The completely rebuilt stadium and the use of digital technology provided a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere to enjoy the beautiful game inside and outside the venues. Entry into the stadium was in an orderly fashion without pushing ahead.

An additional and highly praised feature of the event was the Fan Fest Zone in Yekaterinburg during the cup. Located in an area of 97 hectares, of which 70 are woodland, and a capacity of 70 thousand, the Mayakovski Central Park of Entertainment and Culture welcomed national and international fans who enjoyed the games from a huge screen as well as partied together regardless of the results. On June 27, in a brotherly fashion despite having lost against them an hour ago, thousands of Mexican fans celebrated with the Swedish, Germany's defeat and elimination at the 'feet' of the South Koreans. The '*Auf Wiederseh'n Germany*' meant the Latin American's advance to the next stage, and there was every reason to dance, sing, and drink with the ones who had temporarily eliminated them by knockout. These manifestations underscore that sports events of this magnitude are far more than the euphoria or sadness games generate; these manifestations stress that sports are about peace and understanding among peoples regardless of their culture, language, and place in the world.

However, neither the organization and security nor the quality of the stadiums and recreation areas could have given the FIFA 2018 World Cup the title "The best of all," as all Mexicans, and very many fans from all nationalities asserted. They saw the real Russia with their own eyes and enjoyed not only the matches but the country as such despite the calls for boycott from some western countries in the forms of press campaigns, the lack of official delegations, and unfounded criticism of the government. Most visitors insisted on the fact that had it not been for the Russian people who openly displayed respect, kindness, and friendliness, the tournament would not have been an unprecedented, spectacular success paving the way for the celebration of future events in the country such as Yekaterinburg's bid to host the World Expo in 2025. In other words, Yekaterinburgers and all Russians, we dare assert, imprinted an ever-lasting image in the minds of all the fans.

More than the realization of the most important football event of the world "Russia 2018", the challenge for this great country was to show the world the true Russia, its idiosyncrasy, people, cities, and potential for organization, at a moment when the whole planet had turned its gaze towards her, at a moment when the country is attacked from every direction.

On arrival to Yekaterinburg, many visitors were shocked by the welcoming activities at the very train station, something unexpected, especially, for the first round of the competition. These not only intended to officially open the city's heart but also to offer a first glimpse of what to do, where to go, and what to see. Rather than cold brochures, leaflets, and maps, human contact met the needs of newcomers in a warm atmosphere.

Although their stay was very short, Mexicans used every minute to visit places of interest and have a taste of Russian hospitality. On the first day, many enjoyed a city tour to know emblematic places such as the Dinamo Stadium, the Cosmos Center, The Church on the Blood in Honor of All Saints Resplendent in the Russian Land, the Park of Literature, The Governor's House, the Water Tower, and the lookout on top of the Vysotsky building. At this place, the only skyscraper in the city, they could admire this 1.5m inhabitants city founded in 1776. On the second, they visited the Boris Yeltsin Center and the Urals thematic exhibition tents in the *Plotinka* sector, a park built around the river Izet in the very center of Yekaterinburg. Others went to the Opera House or savored the Yekaterinburg Ballet. On the last day, they visited the areas surroundings the stadium and attended the match.

The visitors were overwhelmingly impressed by the clear mix of the city's history expressed by its majestic churches and the constructivist style of Soviet official buildings as opposed to the modernity of the metropolis around the central pond, or *Plotinka*,

and the buildings near the center Boris Yeltsin. Residential areas built during the Soviet period were described as bizarre, and seemingly tasteless. As volunteers always accompanied visitors, the information points arranged throughout the city were only used as an additional help. Those who toured alone and did not know English, on the contrary, found it hard to orient themselves and missed some of the entertainment so much so that on the second day, they joined groups of travelers.

Nevertheless, the language problem hindered their efforts to learn more about Russia and Yekaterinburg, in particular. The visitors pointed out that, although English is not popular among the Russian population and only used in restaurants and tourist shops, some Russians tried to communicate either in French or Portuguese but none in Spanish. The Russian people, the visitors pointed out, were always very kind and condescending while they looked for very creative alternatives to communicate using drawings, gestures, and signs. In other words, regardless of the language gap, communication was always established revealing the real Russia, its respectful people, and the great common sense of all good hosts.

4. Conclusion

In uncertain times plagued with media campaigns, four-year long political and economic sanctions affecting the country and its people, Russia opened to the world and showed its true image. Eight years after winning the bid for the FIFA World Cup, the government as well as the people worked tirelessly to be second to none. Not few disbelieved in that goal, but the reality spoke by itself. Despite the stunning successes, minor incidents or lack of prevision in areas such as language literacy somewhat tainted the event in Yekaterinburg. These need to be adequately addressed for upcoming events such as the Universiade in the summer of 2023 ever since the bid for the Expo 2025 was lost. These also have a strong bearing on making the city a tourist attraction, a trans-Eurasian transport hub, a modern technological city, and the host of world-class higher education institutions.

These imply that reliance in the English language, though useful to some extent, in no way can satisfy the need of visitors and travelers. Unfortunately, some of the signs and announcements in English disappeared soon after the cup finished. Furthermore, as the city is slowly but noticeably becoming a multilingual city because of the presence of international students, mainly at the Ural Federal University, other world languages such as Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic, just to mention a few, are demanding a place

in campus and in the city as a whole. This is a reality to which administrative and educational institutions must give an answer.

The practice developed in the Russian university community in the last thirty years to consider polylingualism as a Russian -- English only combination is outdated, for it cannot respond to the calls for global sociocultural events and projects organized by Yekaterinburg. Literacy concerning Spanish is paramount for it is the world's the second language of cross-cultural communication. This is a problem in the transformation of the Ural Federal University into a polylingual and polycultural educational space and community.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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