COVID-AFFECTED LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE: A CASE OF CITY SIGNS IN PUBLIC PLACES

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ABSTRACT: The article discusses recent changes to the urban linguistic landscape that were instigated by the spread of the coronavirus infection and expedient public code introduced by city authorities to regulate life in the pandemic-stricken megalopolis. It focuses on relevant signs and images as new entities of the multimodal dialog between the city and its residents. While before 2019 city signs were elements of the city navigation system, the pandemic realities changed their status and role in urban linguistic landscape. The study is based on a dataset of visual records collected across Moscow's public locations over the years 2020 through 2022. Empirical data are analyzed for their function, language form, and multimodal components. The results suggest that city signs conveying COVID-related messages to city residents perform four major functions: they warn about the virus and health risks, prescribe certain behavioral patterns, motivate to fight the pandemic, and inform about safety measures undertaken by city facilities and businesses. The functional specificity of city signs tends to determine their verbal and non-verbal representation. The study also explores the interplay of visual and verbal components in COVID-affected urban communication and offers insights into new discourse strategies adhered to by the megalopolis when interacting with different social groups in key pandemic moments.

KEYWORDS: linguistic landscape; multimodal communication; urban discourse; COVID-19

1. Introduction

COVID-19 has dominated the global agenda for over two years, boosting an incredible amount of research across all fields and disciplines. Scholars are studying its impact on all vital spheres of human activity, such as healthcare, economy, industry, energy, transport, education, etc. While the pandemic's effect on life sustenance systems is obvious and holds a major international spotlight, its aftermath to less apparent domains, including language, culture and communications, seems largely underresearched, which should be treated as a scholarly oversight since language and communication practices are extremely sensitive to emerging social phenomena. Big data analysis systems and digital research methods allow using language facts and data to examine emerging sociocultural developments on the basis of their verbal representations.

This study seeks to fill in this research gap and address the coronavirus-associated crisis drawing on language and social interaction data. Specifically, the paper focuses on urban communication understood as interaction between a megalopolis and its residents. Its goals include analyzing multimodal messages conveying COVID-19 relevant information and investigating discourse strategies employed by municipal authorities to control compliance with new coronavirus-inflicted city rules.

A considerable amount of literature related to language use under the pandemic circumstances has been published over the past two years. Across languages attempts have been made to track coronavirus-associated language changes, specifically, emergence of neologisms and naming strategies (Cappuzzo, 2020; Lei et al., 2021), political and social aspects of pandemic language (Mocini, 2020; Ostanina, 2021; Belova & Georgieva, 2021). A number of studies focused on confrontation-related language used by pro- and anti-vaccination speakers (Coltman-Patel et al., 2022) and pandemic narratives (Sárdi, 2022). However, despite a variety of language- and communication-related issues raised and discussed in recent literature, there is one perspective that has not been looked into by researchers. The urban discourse perspective of the pandemic-driven language change has not yet gained the scholarly attention that it merits while one cannot deny that city life, navigation and communication patterns have seen drastic changes since the first days of the pandemic and introduction of restrictive measures.

Recent developments both in Europe and all over the world have heightened the need for effective communication between citizens and local authorities as regulators are looking for efficient solutions to stop the pandemic and relief its aftermath. This need is especially urgent in metropolitan areas with high population densities. Despite all measures and efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 and provide quick medical aid, numbers of cases remain high. Under such circumstances residents' attitude becomes one of the key factors determining responsible behavior.

The present study is designed as a first starting point towards exploring coronavirus-driven changes to discourse practices and communication patterns in various linguacultural communities, specifically

focusing on integration and interaction of verbal and visual elements within the city-to-resident communication system. Thus, it has a two-fold objective. First, the article aims at tracing the development of new coronavirus-affected urban discourse practices relying both on visual and verbal representation of the message being communicated. Second, it examines the interplay between verbal signs and images as elements of non-verbal sign systems in conveying different meanings under various sociocultural and contextual conditions. The research urgency follows from the need to explore how the pandemic is affecting urban communication and what consequences the aftermath may have for the post-COVID future the world is stepping into. It is also important to capture the moment, archive and analyze visual and text data reflecting the metropolitan struggle against the coronavirus within the city-to-resident communication system while putting emphasis on the language and its role in ensuring public safety. A special emphasis in this study is placed on visual images and their contribution to shaping the multimodal dialog between the city's authorities and the urban community.

2. Linguistic Landscape and Pandemic Language

It is obvious that the city reflects political and social changes, and the COVID-19 pandemic serves a formidable example. In academic fields linguistic landscape has gained a surge of interest from the 1970s onwards. This paradigm is now "somewhere at the junction of sociolinguistics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and media studies" (Sebba, 2010, p. 73) with the focus on public signage in urban environments. Laundry and Bourhis proposed the following definition of linguistic landscape: "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Laundry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). Since then, the term expanded and integrated various theoretical and epistemological standpoints coupled with new methods and approaches. As a result, explorations of linguistic landscape deal with the language representation in public places and individuals' interactions with different signs (Mensel, et al., 2016). Research suggests that sign positioning is not random and relates to social context and practices, for instance, signs can be informational markers providing important information, they can convey emblematic significance or contribute to the public space symbolic construction (Marshall, 2021). All textual elements, including signs and inscriptions, are part of a complex urban communicative system conveying messages to city residents via different channels (Leontovich, 2019). Urban discourse studies are a promising field of research as human civilization is becoming increasingly urbanistic and various ethnic, social and cultural communities co-existing within city boundaries need mutual understanding and the ability to be easily controlled by municipal authorities. Scholars examine the specifics of urban discourse and city-to-resident communication in different parts of the planet (Abdul & Yu, 2020; Loeb, 2022), investigate how the urban discourse reflects collective memory and conveys commemorative messages (Venturini, 2013) and analyze its samples in media (Kokkonen & Ryzhkova, 2021). A new avenue of urban discourse studies focuses on the COVID-19 effects on public spaces (Honey-Rosés et al. 2020) and the reflection of the pandemic in multicultural linguistic landscapes (Müller, 2020; Kusse, 2020). This study is designed to continue the trend by addressing the pandemic language of the Russian capital that emerged in 2019 as the first coronavirus restrictions were imposed and continued into 2022 when there appear new reports about growing numbers of cases.

With the COVID-19 outbreak, new restrictions and pandemic-related signs have flooded public space. Recent studies have found that these signs depend on the context which makes them intelligible. For instance, after a few months of the pandemic, just the image of a mask is enough to oblige wearing it. What is more, linguistic landscape can be regarded as a dynamic domain as it comprises all forms of dealing with the pandemic from the standardized official clichés to creative signs and pictures (Kusse, 2020). In (Müller, 2020) pandemic signs are classified into two categories: "business" (concerning commercial activities) and "behavior" (regulating the passers'-by behavior). Possible reasons for the restrictions were also identified: "Authorities" (reference to the local and regional orders); "Care/Protection" (health concerns); "Current Situation" (without further details); "Epidemic" (informing about the COVID-19 pandemic or the virus); "Technical reasons" (Ibid.).Latest studies related to COVID-19 pandemic signs highlight that they have dramatically changed people's perception of the city image, the way we live and behave. As (Nugraha & Haq, 2021) point out, the deadly disease provoked mixed responses among people from fear to stigma attached to those infected. Analysis of the World Health Organisation posters aimed to eradicate COVID-19-associated social stigma and discrimination led the scholars to conclusion that health campaign posters can be seen as a powerful tool of communication to inform and persuade, spread knowledge and appeal to people's awareness due to a symbiotic effect of verbal and non-verbal messages. Ideas of cooperation and positive mindset are successfully promoted through such posters.

Another research on semiotic-discourse analysis of COVID-19 posters defined three basic types of signs and their functions against the pandemic: instructional – to provide people with guidelines to avoid infection (social distancing, washing face and hands, wearing masks, etc.); motivational – to urge citizens to follow the health recommendations; ironical – to address attention to the need of reasonable steps to curb the spread of the disease (Kadim & Abbas, 2022). Apart from that, as the pandemic progressed, there were attempts to instil a positive message about mask-wearing and other major adjustments to normal behaviour citizens were obliged to make. A. Smith and M. Higgins identified a shift towards a reunited collective voice in government public health posters, claiming shared experience and responsibility during the pandemic. The call for collective effort is emphasized through the first-person plural pronoun "we" and possessive pronoun "our", the present continuous tense links to the need of ongoing process of compliance (Smith & Higgins, 2022). Overall, the message of COVID-19 signs is straightforward and clear, it reinforces the idea of mutual altruism and greater engagement to win together against the common enemy. It is worth considering that city signs, posters, banners, etc., can be regarded as the easiest and cost-effective way to deliver a message to the general public. When it comes to health-related issues, they are proved to bring improvements in health practices, to raise awareness and change behavior patterns (Gobind, 2014). As regards the language response to the threat specifically, in (Kotelnikova & Leontovich, 2020) crucial similarities and differences in Chinese and Russian urban media discourse are revealed. Both countries urge citizens to wear masks and gloves, wash hands regularly and follow the guidelines via social advertising. According to the study, the Russian social anti-coronavirus campaign adheres to stylistically neutral way of delivering information, while in China appeals are more emotionally targeted at each and every that indicates a high level of social responsibility. The metaphor of war is widespread in Chinese discourse, the pandemic is portrayed as the common enemy, there are battlefields and the front line (hospitals), heroes (the medical profession), the idea of national resistance is imposed. In general, communication related to COVID-19 in China is institutionalised, consistent and unified. In Russia, on the contrary, it is rather individualized, diversified and multi-faceted. What is more, coronavirus led to new words and phrases, usually ironic ones, especially in the Russian language. This trend can be perceived as a coping mechanism with fear and threat (Ibid.). Moving on now to consider other ways to overcome psychological consequences of the COVID-19 trauma, Todorova and Padareva-Ilieva examined nostalgia as a strategy for managing stress in social media (Todorova & Padareva-Ilieva, 2021). The lack of physical contact and social experiences challenged people and provoked anxiety, depression, inability to perform mundane tasks. The communication during the pandemic became mostly virtual and social media served as a medium to unite people and save them from isolation. The researchers grouped the posts found on networking websites into four categories concerning historical memories, personal memories, literary reminiscences and nostalgic games. Instead of focusing on the negative side, people indulged in warm memories, sought salvation in examples of famous people and writers who survived the hardships and passed their wisdom which gives hope (Todorova & Padareva-Ilieva, 2021).When analyzing gender specifics of emotional expression in social networks during the COVID-19 crisis, Katermina and Ilmaz-Ledeneva found that gender stereotypes concerning men's and women's emotional reaction to the pandemic are erased. The most frequent ways of expressing an attitude to the coronavirus, both in men and women, turned out to be emoji emoticons, capitalization, the use of invective vocabulary and intensifiers (Katermina & Ilmaz-Ledeneva, 2021). Apart from being a dynamic tool to promote community, social media encourages the spread of unreliable information. A number of methods to spot, detect and neutralize fake news were proposed (see (Mavrodieva, 2020)). It is clear that misinformation might spread panic in people, which has to be prevented. Since the COVID-19 pandemic is a multidimensional crisis, it is studied from different perspectives in social sciences. The language cannot detach itself from the changes the society faces. Recent findings support the idea that analyzing messages, for instance, in terms of speech strategies, rhetorical devices, new expressions and words (Dacheva, 2022; Paudel & Williamson, 2021; Al-Salman & Haider, 2021) in the context of the pandemic helps identify mechanisms of shaping socially approved behavior under the circumstances that require solidarity, mutual understanding and support. This paper seeks to further investigate coronavirus-affected urban discourse and bring to light its multimodal dimension highlighting the interaction between verbal and visual components of the linguistic landscape changed by the pandemic.

3. Dataset and methodology

With the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak entering the life of nearly every human being and imposing significant risk to wellbeing and health, authorities made major efforts to curb the spread of the disease. The pandemic was especially hard on large cities with multi-million populations, one of the problems requiring immediate control on the part of the city authorities being communication with residents and providing them with all relevant information. Human crowds lacking proper instructions on what to do and how to behave

could become a catastrophe for any megalopolis under the threat of the pandemic. In different countries this emergency situation was approached from different angles. While some cities resorted to direct messaging with residents and other methods, Moscow relied largely on the system of city signs that create a semiotically marked urban space (Avanesov, 2016). The Government of Moscow opened a COVID-19 Information Centre that provides credible information on the spread of coronavirus and outlines measures necessary to combat the infection. The city authorities can reach out to residents via different channels – reduced but not limited to – TV and radio programs, newspapers and city information signs. City signs inform residents, signal of restrictions, regulate traffic users and provide guidance. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic the city was overwhelmed with signs reminding to wear face masks and gloves, keep social distancing, stay at home, get vaccinated, etc. The megalopolis attuned to the new rules and restrictions imposed by the authorities and used signs to regulate the behavior of its dwellers. As the world is in its third year of living under restrictions, new visual and verbal elements seem to become inextricably integrated into metropolitan linguistic landscapes. The study draws on a variety of empirical data collected by the authors in Moscow's public locations, including transport, shopping malls, theatres, museums, etc. The collected data amounts to over five hundred items, each presenting a unique pandemic-inspired sign or poster.

The data-collecting procedure was based on the field-study approach, specifically, on the method of on-site direct observation. In the planning stage, a list of relevant city locations was compiled. To make sure the list was a representative one, locations related to all social spheres of city life were included. The following locations were covered: transport (metro, buses, city trains), public health (hospitals, clinics), education (schools, universities), culture (theatres, movie theatres, museums, libraries), social infrastructure (shopping malls, supermarkets, markets, streets). Geographically, the on-site observation was conducted in Moscow's downtown area (within the Sadovoe koltso location) and the south-western districts. In the on-site stage, relevant signs were photographed and registered in the research database. To be included into the empirical database, an item was examined in accordance with a set of criteria that would allow assessing its relevance to the study. They are as follows: 1) an item under consideration is located in a public place within the administrative borders of Moscow; 2) an item under consideration is a multimodal urban text featuring both the visual and the textual components; 3) an item under consideration conveys a message explicitly related to the COVID-19 pandemic by either referring to it directly or by means of associations that are clearly understood to all native Russian speakers. If an item did not meet any of the criteria above, it was not considered in this study. It should also be pointed out that in many cases identical signs were registered in different locations, for instance, in schools or in shopping malls. In this case, the were considered as one occurrence, not multiple ones. Therefore, the empirical database includes over five hundred unique items. The final stage of the research included data analysis that focused mostly on the communicative, linguistic, and multimodal features of city signs. As stated in the introduction, this study is designed as a first step of a larger project devoted to investigation of changes in the urban discourse that were inspired, driven or imposed by the pandemic. The main goal of the primary step was to examine empirical data and identify possible avenues for future research.

Images are known to be context-sensitive and context-embedded (Chernyavskaya 2021), so visual records may provide important information on the sociocultural context of the newly emerging coronavirus-affected urban discourse. Imagery is a reliable resource of meaning making and transferring which gains even more power in combination with verbal elements. The main research question raised in this study is how visual images embedded in text shape our perception of the message produced by communicators to the COVID-driven urban dialog.

4. Results and discussion

All of the signs, posters, and stickers included into the research database were analyzed according to a number of relevant parameters which include their communicative function, language features, and visual elements. The complex of factors taken into account in the course of the analysis allowed contouring a COVID-era model of the city's interaction with its residents in public locations.

Functionally, four types of signs can be differentiated, each one communicating a different message to city residents: *explanatory signs, prescriptive signs, motivational signs,* and *assuring signs.* The explanatory, prescriptive, and motivational types are contrasted to assuring signs in the way of addressee – addresser orientation. While explanations, prescriptions, and motivations focus on the addressee as the subject required, advised or requested to follow a specific behavioral pattern, assuring signs focus on the addresser as the subject performing certain actions to provide for the addressee's safety. Cf. *Не рискуй, привейся! Забывчивость в 80 лет – это возможно, в 20 – это ненормально. 33% пациентов после COVID-19 страдают от нервно-психических расстройств. Don't risk, get vaccinated! Forgetting things is okay for an eighty-year-old, but it's not okay if you are twenty. 33% of patients suffer from*

neuropsychic disorders. vs *Сопротивление воздуха. Мы увеличили воздухообмен на 30%, чтобы снизить темпы распространения коронавируса. Air resistance. We increased air change by 30% for lower risks of coronavirus spreading.* In terms of language means, this opposition is marked by the use of imperative sentences in explanatory, prescriptive, and motivational signs as contrasted to statements in assuring signs. This contrast is also accentuated with address forms, often informal ones that are commonly used by friends, family, and peers and are not quite expected in official discourse. This choice of the informal second-person pronoun and imperative forms suggests a shorter distance between the city authorities and residents and changes the communication mode from official to informal.

Explanatory signs focus on conveying information about the new infection and informing city dwellers about possible symptoms, risks, dangers, and measures that can help prevent spreading the virus (vaccination being one recommended solution). *Examples of such signs include the following items: Как вести себя после вакцинации от новой коронавирусной инфекции. What to do after getting vaccinated*; *Основные различия между симптомами COVID-19, ОРВИ и гриппа. How to differentiate symptoms of COVID-19, respiratory viruses, and flu. Инструкция: Как получить QR-код после вакцинации. Instruction: How to get a QR-code after getting vaccinated.*

Prescriptive signs are of different nature. They are not designed to inform city residents about the new virus or make things clear but rather impose a certain model of behavior in public places. Specifically, they regulate the coronavirus regime and prescribe wearing masks, gloves, keeping social distance, and using QR-codes to be allowed into some public locations. Here two ways of presenting prescriptions can be differentiated: top-down and bottom-down. Top-down signs refer to official sources as a reason for introducing restrictions. For instance, the following sign appeared on the doors of a Moscow cafe: *Уважаемые гости! В связи с указом Мэра Москвы от 22 июня 2021 г. № 35-УМ «О внесении изменений в указ Мэра Москвы от 8 июня 2020 года № 68-УМ», кофейня обслуживает посетителей только на вынос! Dear guests, in accordance with the order № 35-UM as of 22 June, 2021 "On changes into Mayor's decree #68-UM as of 8 June, 2020" issued by the Moscow Mayor, the café is open for take away only.* Bottom-down signs are more typical in a retail environment. Although they are prescriptive in nature, that is, their main purpose is directive, their command-like message is presented in a more neutral and relaxing way, often with a hint of humor, to make people feel more comfortable under restrictions: *Пожалуйста, надень маску! Это поможет поддерживать безопасность в магазине. Круто – быть добрее! Спасибо! Please, put on your mask! This will make the shop a safer place. It is cool to be kind! Thank you!*

When top-down and bottom-down signs refer to decrees and legislative acts, they push the idea that the restrictions are not biased, and citizens should simply comply with the law.

Motivational signs are used not just to inform city residents but also encourage them take certain actions. The most frequent type in this category are signs promoting vaccination. They often come in the form of a detailed explanation providing arguments to get vaccinated. For example: *COVID-19 все еще в городе! Риск заразиться по-прежнему остается. Примите взвешенное решение – сделайте прививку! Вакцина безопасна, бесплатна, особенно важна для людей 60+. COVID-19 is still in the city! There still a risk to get infected. Make the right decision – get vaccinated! The vaccine is safe, free, and especially important for people over 60. Несмотря на снятие ограничений в Москве, риск заразиться коронавирусом сохраняется. Особенно опасна болезнь для людей старше 60 лет – в этом возрасте она тяжелее переносится и чаще вызывает осложнения. Although restrictions are no longer in effect in Moscow, there is still a risk to get infected with coronavirus. It is especially dangerous for people over 60 who suffer from heavy symptoms and complications.* The appeal to get vaccinated is often accompanied by arguments demonstrating how one's everyday life may change for worse should one contract the virus: *Не рискуй, привейся! Осечки в постели в пожилом возрасте простительны. В молодом печальны. В 5-6 раз увеличивается риск эректильной дисфункции после COVID-19. Don't risk, get vaccinated! An old man failing in bed evokes sympathy. A young man failing in bed evokes sadness. COVID-19 increases the risk of erectile dysfunction by 5-6 times.* Geographically, vaccination-supporting signs can be found in all city locations, which makes them similar to prescriptions.

An interesting variety of motivational signs are those focusing on specific professional or social groups. For instance, when Moscow hospitals could not cope with numbers of patients infected with COVID-19, city authorities initiated the construction of new coronavirus facilities in the district of Kommunarka. The coronavirus medical center was ready to open doors for new patients just months after the decision was made, construction workers spending days and nights on the site. The construction site featured a number of motivational signs calling on the construction workers for joined efforts and intense labor to fight the virus: *Строитель! Нам нужен этот центр! Construction worker! We need this medical center! Устал и*

опустил руки? Уступи место настоящим бойцам! Tired and depressed? Make way for real fighters! Строители! Счет идет на минуты! Construction workers! Every minute counts. Explanatory, prescriptive, motivational, and assuring signs differ functionally, which results in their location relations. While prescriptive signs are omnipresent and can be found at the entrance of any public facility be it a school, a bus, or a supermarket, explanatory, assuring, and motivational signs are more location-sensitive. Explanatory signs are typical at clinics with health tips and guidelines to follow but can also be found in other public locations, including schools, universities, public transport, shopping malls, and public WCs*: Когда и зачем носить маски? When and why should you be wearing a mask? Рекомендации по профилактике новой коронавирусной инфекции COVID-19 в кинотеатрах. Recommendations on preventive measures against COVID-19 in movie theaters.* Their purpose is to make people aware of health risks and offer basic recommendations on staying safe.

General motivational signs are more common in clinics and on public transport while signs designed for specific social or professional groups can be found in less expected locations, like work places or apartment buildings: *Дорогие бабушки и дедушки нашего подъезда! В нашем городе коронавирус. Опаснее всего он для пожилых людей. Поэтому мы очень просим вас: не ходите в людные места и побудьте пока дома. А мы, ваши соседи, позаботимся о вас! Dear Grandmas and Grandpas living in our apartment building! The number of COVID-19 cases in our city is growing. It is very dangerous for senior citizens, that's why we ask that you stay home and keep away from public places. We are your neighbors who are willing to take care of you in this time.*

Assuring signs are used mostly by businesses interested in attracting customers and making them feel safe inside. Cafes, restaurants, shops, and supermarkets are most common in this category of city places. For instance, the following sign was featured by one of Moscow Fix Price stores: *Уважаемые покупатели! Для вашего удобства и безопасности сетью магазинов Fix Price приняты следующие меры: Регулярно проводится дезинфекция поверхностей; Для сокращения очередей открыты все кассы; Увеличены поставки товаров первой необходимости, товары расположены в доступных местах; Персонал ежедневно проходит проверки на наличие признаков вирусных заболеваний. Dear customers! Fix Price shops are undertaking the following measures for your convenience and safety: All surfaces are regularly disinfected; All checkout points are open to avoid long queues; Essential goods are now available in larger quantities and convenient locations in stores; Staff are tested for COVID-19 on daily basis.* The functional varieties of city signs are also different in terms of chronological motivation. The first to appear in Moscow were explanatory and prescriptive signs. The first case of COVID-19 was registered in the Russian capital in March 2020. As the situation got worse, in April and early May 2020 the country lived under serious restrictions. That was period when the new virus caused panic or negligence due to the lack of research data and observation reports. The reaction on the part of Moscow's municipal authorities was immediate, and the city's public places turned into an advertisement board. The assuring signs followed as the restrictions were partially lifted and a number of places were allowed to return to work providing that they can guarantee safety. Finally, the motivational signs became part of the urban information system with the introduction of vaccination in December 2020. By the end of the year 2022, most signs are still in place. Although all of the quarantine measures are no longer effective, public locations prefer not to get rid of the assuring, motivational and explanatory signs as a way of preventive action. Most prescriptive signs, however, had to go as the message they conveyed was no longer relevant.

In terms of language and structure, the four types of COVID-19 signs registered in the database display the following regular features:

Prescriptive signs are imperatives starting with address forms, such as *Дорогие гости. Dear guests; Уважаемые посетители! Dear customers!* Their text commonly includes references to government decrees along with the Federal Service for Surveillance on Consumer Rights Protection and Human Wellbeing and World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations that are meant to make them sound less dogmatic but still obligatory. Explanatory signs are statements or narratives offering detailed information on coronavirus and preventive measures. They stand out among other types due to the abundance of medical terms and lengthy descriptions. Common formats include question-answer series, step-by-step instructions and narratives. Cf. *Какая вакцина против COVID-19 лучше всего подходит для меня? Все вакцины, зарегистрированные в России, эффективны и безопасны. What COVID-19 vaccine is best for me? All vaccines registered in Russia are safe and effective. – Вакцинация – самый надежный способ защитить вас от тяжелого течения коронавируса и необратимых последствий. Люди пожилого возраста переносят вакцинацию легко, без побочных эффектов. Это связано с особенностями иммунной реакции организма в вашем возрасте. Vaccination is the most reliable way to protect you*

against heavy cases of coronavirus and its irreversible consequences. People of older age go through vaccination without any side effects. This is due to specifics of the body's immune reaction in your age.

Motivational signs are argumentative in nature. They also feature address forms and appeals both implicit and explicit. What contrasts them form prescriptive signs in terms of address forms and imperatives is the informal style. While prescriptive signs stick to the official discourse, motivational signs are much more informal, displaying informal imperative forms and the general tone of the message. On the one hand, this effect serves to shortening the distance between the city authorities and residents and thus creating the atmosphere of trust, while on the other, the choice could also be suggestive of the target audience of motivational signs. While prescriptive signs are universal and oriented on all types of addressees, the message of motivational signs suggests that the target audience are young residents. Cf. prescriptive: *Ходите по одному. Соблюдайте дистанцию. Do not approach other passengers. Keep distance.* – motivational: *Вакцинируйся и сохрани жизнь. Get vaccinated and save your life.* Assuring signs differ from the other three types in representing active subjects. While prescriptive, explanatory and motivational signs use second person plural pronouns and appropriate verb forms, assuring signs tend to prefer first person plural accentuating what the collective addresser is doing rather than what the addressee, both individual and collective, should do. Cf. *Дорогие гости! Принимая во внимание вашу обеспокоенность из-за распространения коронавируса COVID-19, хотим заверить вас в том, что ваша безопасность и здоровье – основной приоритет для нашего гостиничного комплекса. В связи со вспышкой заболевания мы приняли ряд дополнительных мер для комфортного пребывания. Dear customers, taking into account you concern due to the spread of COVID-19, we would like to reassure you that your safety and health is our top priority. Due to the virus outbreak we had to take additional measures for you to have a lovely stay.*

Strict limitations contained in the sign texts tend to be neutralized by their non-conventional and often humorous form. Humorous effect can be created by means of allusion as, for example, in the slogan alluding to Balabanov's famous crime drama Брат 2 (Brother 2): *В чем сила, медбрат? – В вакцине! What makes you powerful, doc? – The vaccine!* The slogan is based on the word play: the original question *В чем сила, брат?* is transformed into *В чем сила, медбрат?* (*медбрат* stands for *male nurse* in Russian, being an acronym for *медицинский брат 'medical brother'*). In the original movie the protagonist offers a different answer: *Сила в правде. Power comes from truth.* Another example of a humorous sign demonstrates the use of oxymoron: *Покажи свое лицо. Надень маску. Show your face. Put on a mask.* City authorities rely both on verbal and non-verbal components of city signs when conveying COVID-related messages to city residents in public places within the urban area. The records collected for this research in different locations across Moscow, including shops, cafes, restaurants, schools, transport, and other city facilities, demonstrate a number of recurrent trends:

Prescriptive signs tend to depend mostly on the verbal component, focusing on the textual message referring to legal regulations issued by the state government or city authorities. The visual component is optional for this category of signs. However, if it accompanies the textual message, it is most likely to be a symbol indicating a ban on entrance without a mask or gloves. The most obvious choice in this category is a red line crossing out a word representing the item under ban or an explanatory mark as an indicator of important information meant to draw immediate attention. It cannot go unnoticed that the choice of color is also symbolic. While all restricted items are accompanied by red symbols, items and practices that are allowed and encouraged feature green symbol. The opposition red (banned) vs green (allowed), which is common for the Russian culture in general, is also represented in COVID-19 imagery.

Explanatory signs are more dependent on images when it comes to communicating relevant information. As this type of signs often offer facts about the virus or provide step-by-step instructions, structurally they present information as a collection of small textual items, each supplied with an illustrative image. In this case visual components correlate with text sections within the sign. Images feature mostly non-human objects, such as, gloves, masks, coronavirus samples, antiseptics, etc. Human body can also be presented not as a whole, but in parts. For instance, an image of hands can be used to illustrate the appeal to wash hands more often. This type of signs may also feature graphic elements (schemes, graphs, etc.) when presenting medical facts or instructions and may often look minimalistic presenting only the bare minimum of imagery required to convey the idea.

A similar trend can be observed with assuring signs. Unlike explanatory signs, they do not offer instructions or specifications, focusing mostly on preventive measures. However, both types resort to images of non-human objects correlating with specific actions. As assuring signs are pragmatically oriented on creating an image of a safe and attractive place, featured visual elements are usually of positive nature,

invoking pleasant associations. Images of humans are quite common as well, the most wide-spread variety featuring a smiling face of an employee or a client.

Motivating signs are different from the three types described above in the way they employ the visual component. A picture featured by a motivating sign is never a symbolic representation of an object. In most cases it is a 'genre image' presenting a visual narrative which is in line with the verbal part. For instance, the motivating signs targeted at construction workers who were building a coronavirus medical facility in the district of Kommunarka were slogans printed against images of Sergey Sobyanin, the mayor of Moscow, and city residents waiting for the hospital to be ready for new patients as soon as possible. Another illustration could be the sign in the metro reading *Отправьте наличные на карантин. Платите за проезд бесконтактно. Send your cash on quarantine. Use contactless payments.* The textual message is supported by an image of a passenger holding his mobile device over a reader at a metro terminal and a metro staff member giving him an approving smile. Thus, research results suggest that city authorities resort to different strategies in communicating messages to city residents. The information meant for city residents is transmitted via a number of channels, city signs being a simple and convenient way of conveying the information one wants. Messages are encoded both textually and visually. On the linguistic level, there are a number of features typical for the functional varieties of signs under discussion. Syntactically, urban texts can be expressed by a variety of structures, from elliptical sentences, to questions, statements, and complex sentences. Morphological aspects are related mostly to the use of formal and informal pronouns for the second person singular. On the lexical level two types of lexical units stand out: neologisms like COVID-19 that entered the language in just days, and COVID-19-related medical terms. As for the visual encoding, there are a number of patterns that show regular occurrences. One is related to the use of color. Red is recurrently associated with danger and therefore is widely used on explanatory and prescriptive signs while green is viewed as a symbol of good and often stands for the right choice, safe decisions, etc. In addition to color, a number of objects appear on city signs more often than others, the most frequent items being masks and sanitizers. Another recurrent image is that of keeping a 1.5-meter distance, usually indicated with an arrow.

A direct correlation can be established between some visual and textual elements. The most common are as follows: 1. Individual protection items along with green graphic elements are featured along imperative forms in prescriptive signs. 2. Official documents printed on signs are not complete and may come without any visual support. 3. Many images are self-sufficient, that is, can be seen and interpreted correctly without any supportive texts. Depending on the type of message being conveyed, a more formal or more informal approach can be used. Prescriptive signs are examples of the formal approach employed in situations requiring strict control. The formal nature of prescriptive signs manifests itself both in their linguistic form and avoidance of the visual component. Explanatory, motivational, and assuring signs represent a more relaxed strategy that allows using less formal and funny images, informal talk and stylistic figures. What is obvious about the COVID-affected urban communication is that the pandemic left a deep imprint on city discourse practices stimulating the development of new forms of contactless mass communication in megalopolises.

5. Conclusion

As the world is stepping in its post-COVID future, scholars explore the aftermath of the pandemic in various aspects of our lives. While some effects caused by coronavirus are still to be discovered and analyzed, there are spheres that underwent immediate changes. Linguistic landscapes proved to be extremely sensitive to new pandemic realities, reflecting all stages of fighting against the life-threatening virus. However, linguistic landscapes should not be perceived as standalone dynamic formations as they are incorporated into a larger system of urban communication that includes all parties to public interaction in metropolitan areas, specifically, city authorities, businesses, and residents. Those parties exchange important contactless messages regulating their cooperation in public facilities. The form and structure of such messages are in line with their pragmatic function and the target addressee. Our observations indicate that there is a direct correlation with the functional type of the message transmitted via a city sign in Moscow and its verbal and non-verbal implementation. The research suggests that city signs in the Russian capital systematically promote the official COVID-19 narrative.

The present study shares results on one aspect of the emerging pandemic language which is likely to remain in the focus of linguistics in the coming years as the effects of the life-changing situation are yet to be processed and described. It is a contribution to the developing field of urban language studies that explores, among other things, the linguistic landscape in its connection with the extralinguistic environment. Further research in this direction could help identify other significant factors shaping pandemic-affected urban communication in various political, social, cultural, and linguistic contexts.

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