



**“Unwanted presence” in the urban
space: Russian-speakers’ attitudes
towards migrants’ languages**

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Theoretical concepts:

- micro-level practices in language planning (Davies, Ziegler 2015; Liddicoat, Baldauf 2008; Baldauf 2006)
- individual contributions of different actors: ‘this shift in focus led to a rethinking of agency – who has the power to influence change in these micro language policy and planning situations’ (Baldauf 2006: 147).
- ‘language management’ (Spolsky 2004)
- ethnic soundscape: ethnic music, languages and ‘noise’
- ‘superdiversity’ (Blommaert 2013; Vertovec, 2007)

Research questions:

- What are Russian native speakers' language attitudes to non-Russian languages?
- Are there any connections between attitudes and everyday language management?
- Who and how controls migrants' communication at work?



Data



- 2 sets of interviews with migrants (2009-2010 and 2017-2018)
- Interviews with Russians who work with migrants
- Internet forums and discussions
- Language planning documents, web-sites of FMS and commercial services for migrants

Language policy and public attitudes



According to the law “On the Legal Position of Foreign Citizens” №161211-6 since 2015 foreigners must demonstrate knowledge of Russian in order to obtain work permit.

In 2013 LDPR suggested changes in legislation forbidding foreigners to speak foreign languages at work (changes were not accepted)

Dominance of Russian in services for migrants

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Тестирование мигрантов на владение русским языком, знании истории России и основ законодательства

Для получения патента или разрешения на работу, а также разрешения на временное проживание или вида на жительство необходимо предоставить документ об образовании, выданный в СССР до 01.09.91г. либо документ об образовании, выданный на территории РФ после 01.09.91г.

Если вышеуказанных документов у иностранного гражданина нет, то необходимо пройти тестирование на владение русским языком, знании истории России и основ законодательства.



[Тарҷумаи ҳуҷҷатҳои](#)

Languages in courts: “non-Russianness” as a trick

“One of the means criminals use for confrontation with law enforcement authorities quite often is their language of inner communication” (Vinnikov A. Etnicheskaya prestupnost’ i problemy natsional’nogo yazyka sudoproizvodstva // Populyarno-pravovoj al’manakh MVD Rossii “Professional”, 2012, 3 (107), p. 30)

Deteriorative references to migrants' speech

- Tarabarshchina
- Balabolyat
- Lopochut na svoem
- Orut kak dikari
- Govoryat na plokhom russkom
- Portyat yazyk

Catch 22

Migrants retain
their language

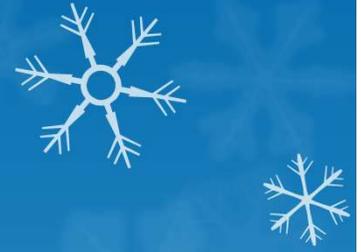


They are convicted
of being malicious
and dangerous

Migrants switch
into Russian



They are convicted
of deteriorating the
Russian language



Stigmatization of native languages among migrants

Language attitudes among migrants
presuppose high prestige of knowing Russian

- But when we came here, what use had we of Georgian, we needed Russian! And I myself was speaking Russian badly but I tried anyway (DM, f, 56, Georgian from Abkhazia, in St. Petersburg since 1993)

Self-limitation

- I was suggested to move [to a Russian school from the Georgian one] but I refused immediately since my Russian was not of the highest level, how could I teach classes? With Georgian [children] it was ok with an accent but what Russian children would make of me? (M, f, 56, Georgian from Abkhazia, in St. Petersburg since 1993)

‘Speake only Russian when Russians are around you’

Native speakers possess control over non-native speakers’ verbal behaviour:

- [The informant works as a cloakroom attendant in the school her sons attends] The teachers tell me off too, they make remarks: ‘[Name], in the corridors or... with children you shouldn’t speak in Armenian, always in Russian, in Russian’. <...> I’m not that ignorant, I understand that it’s not nice, when there are Russians all around you should speak Russian. (M., f, from Armenia, St. Petersburg)

Immigrants prefer to avoid drawing attention

- Because when you speak your native language – people stare at you. They don't understand and they think we're saying something... [Armenian woman, b. 1971 in Georgia, Kotelniki, Moscow province, 2010].
- Migrants quite often dare shouting loudly in the streets. Or going along the street and almost shouting in a cell phone some incomprehensible words. And human brain is build in such a way that loud phrases in unknown language are perceived negatively. Especially if the language is not as melodious as Italian or French, and its speaker doesn't look like an English gentleman.

Language management at working places



The employer actually has the right to dictate someone's choice of language

- Because our landlord, the owner of this shop, he doesn't like it when people talk in their own native language. I agree with that. I came to Russia – please speak in Russian. In Kyrgyzstan you can speak Kyrgyz. (Kyrgyz woman from Uzbekistan, b. 1978, Korolyov, Moscow province)

Choice of language



2017-2018: according to new observation and interviews language control became not so total

Q: Do you communicate in Uzbek or in Russian with your colleagues at work?

A: In Uzbek, not everyone can understand Russian (D, m, 32, from Kazakhstan, St. Petersburg)

Well, [we speak] mixing both. At work we can speak both Russian and our native language. Yes, that's it.

<...> What is good in that is you can explain, express what others can't... But I don't know, they [Russians and non-Russians] understand each others it seems (A., 40, Kyrgyz, St. Petersburg)

Conclusions



- Communication between migrants and ethnic majority is hierarchically structured; not only employers and other ‘institutionalized’ Russians but almost anyone can make public comments about migrants’ language and control it
- In the last decade though the choice of language for communication at working places became more diverse and pragmatic (standard Russian, ethnolect, native minority languages, Uzbek as a lingua-franca among all Turkic-speaking migrants)
- Reasons: increasing migrant population as well as awareness of their rights among some groups of labour workers.