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Language provision activism for FSU migrants in Russian cities

Recent flows of post-Soviet migration to the Russian Federation have been both a strong factor to re-shape its urban linguistic landscapes and subject to scrutinizing policies from the authorities based on migrants' estimated competence in the Russian language. These transformations have had their effect on the way the receiving society sees incoming migrants in terms of their sociolinguistic profiles and reacts to the diversified variety of language uses and competencies. While mainstream media discourses and public opinion polls demonstrate strong anti-migration sentiment, there is also a small number of local grassroots initiatives providing language support and guidance for those migrants who are not native in Russian. These include short courses to prepare children to enter Russian schools, supplementary tuition for schoolchildren who struggle at classes, language lessons for adults to pass their certification exams or boost up their conversational skills.

The paper looks closely at a selection of projects run by Russian citizens in large cities and aimed at language support for post-Soviet migrants but perceives them as sites of multilingual interaction and changing (arguably, more 'transnational') identities. It therefore examines the process of language provision content- and role-wise; what is understood and taught as 'vital' Russian for people with migrant experience becomes interwoven with re-defining of roles ('convener', 'volunteer', 'assistant', 'provider', etc) which people involved in language provision take. The co-created context of exchanging language experiences makes the cultural space of language support less bound to nationalized language ideologies and more trans-national in its perspective and practices.