

**Dr Polina Kliuchnikova**

*p.s.klyuchnikova@durham.ac.uk*

*OWRI Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Durham University*

**Language Borders: Entry Certification, Migrant Identities and Support Networks for FSU  
(Former Soviet Union) Migration to Russia**

**ABSTRACT**

Intensive migration flows within the post-Soviet spaces have maintained a relatively homogenous image of Russian as a persistent 'lingua franca' of the region; the Russian language of these mobile groups, however, has long become occasional rather than systematic, non-standard rather than normative, conversational rather than formalized (Pavlenko 2008; Ryazanova-Clarke 2014). The decades after the collapse of the USSR have contributed to further diversification of what once was known as 'standard Russian', taught in every Soviet educational institution, into several regional vernaculars (Mustajoki et al. 2010; Sociolinguistic Studies 2015).

Once mobile migrant groups from the FSU space arrive in Russia, however, they usually face strong language normativity exercised in different communicative contexts, which labels them as 'non-native' speakers of the language (Popova 2012). One of the recent changes that the Russian Federation has made to regulate its incoming migration is the introduction of compulsory testing in Russian language, history and legislation that every immigrant should undertake to be able to work in Russia officially. Given the fact that over 90% of present-day migration to Russia comes from FSU countries (Chudinovskikh 2015), this measure can be viewed as part of Russia's general policy of enhancing the ideological value of the standardised Russian over the post-Soviet space (Gorham 2011; Ryazanova-Clarke 2015). What this means to FSU migrants is that language competence becomes a focal point for their experiences in the process of integration into the present-day Russian society.

The official certification imposed by the government is aimed at constructing an idealised 'language profile' a successful candidate should demonstrate (Shohamy 2001; 2013). By preparing for, passing through, and using the results of this procedure, migrants not only acquire the necessary legal status, but also undergo the critical (re)construction of their migrant identity (Blackledge 2009; Byrne 2012). Migrants' own subjective interpretations of their language competences and 'guises', therefore, become integral part of their experiences: their vision of their own language skills changes in the larger context of migration, with inevitable social consequences this 'calibration' implies (Blommaert 2010; Phipps & Kay 2014). Migrant pathways are built through the events of language (mis)use as their key points, and new, experience-based networks of communal support are formed ad hoc (Cederberg 2014; Kramsch 2009; Nawyn et al. 2012). Different local groups within Russian society also consider their role in the process of migrant integration – the variety of initiatives has sprung up to aid in resolving language-related problems that FSU migrants might face. Their forms may vary from amateur language courses and linguistic 'first-aid' centres to grassroots public campaigns or informational websites but what they all share is a wider perspective on making Russian more accessible and 'transnational' in its usage.

The paper will discuss preliminary findings from the first stage of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2017 in Moscow and St Petersburg, supplemented by the analysis of regulatory documentation and teaching textbooks on language testing for migrants, as well as expert interviews with RFL experts.

**Key words:** language entry examination, migrant and non-standard vernaculars, language ideologies and policies, sociolinguistics of migration, language support

## References:

- Blackledge, A. (2009) 'As a Country We Do Expect': The Further Extension of Language Testing Regimes in the United Kingdom. *Language Assessment Quarterly*. 6 (1). Pp. 6-16.
- Blommaert, J. (2010) *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Byrne, B. (2014) *Making Citizens: Public Rituals and Personal Journeys to Citizenship*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cederberg, M. (2014) Public Discourses and Migrant Stories of Integration and Inequality: Language and Power in Biographical Narratives. *Sociology*. 48 (1). Pp. 133-49.
- Chudinovskikh, O. (2015) *International Migration Report 2015: The Russian Federation*. OECD Continuous Reporting System on Migration.
- Gorham, M. (2011) Virtual Rusophonia: Language Policy as 'Soft Power' in the New Media Age. *Digital Icons*. 5. Pp. 23-48.
- Kramsch, C. (2009) From Communicative Competence to Symbolic Competence. *Modern Languages Journal*. 9. Pp. 249-52.
- Mustajoki, A. Protassova, E. & Vakhtin, N. (2010). *Instrumentarium of Linguistics: Sociolinguistic Approaches to Non-Standard Russian*. *Slavica Helsingiensia* 40. Helsinki: Department of Modern Languages.
- Nawyn, S., Gjakaj, L., Agbenyiga, D.L. & Grace, B. (2012) Linguistic Isolation, Social Capital and Immigrant Belonging. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. 41 (1). Pp. 255-82.
- Pavlenko, A. (ed.) (2008) *Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Phipps, A. & Kay, R. (2014) Languages in migratory settings: place, politics and aesthetics. *Language and Intercultural Communication*. 14 (3). p. 273-86.
- Popova, E. (2012) *Self and Other: Representations in Contemporary Russian Discourse on Migration*. A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh.
- Ryazanova-Clarke, L. (ed.) (2014) *The Russian Language Outside the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Ryazanova-Clarke, L. (2015) From Commodification to Weaponization: The Russian Language as 'Pride' and 'Profit' in Russia's Transnational Discourses. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. Pp. 1-14.
- Shohamy, E. (2001) *The Power of Tests: A Critical Perspective on the Uses of Language Tests*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Shohamy, E. (2013) The Discourse of Language Testing as a Tool for Shaping National, Global and Transnational Identities. *Languages and Intercultural Communication*. 13:2. Pp. 225-236.
- Sociolinguistic Studies* (2015) *Post-Soviet Identities: Ethnic, National, Linguistic, and Imperial (Special Issue)*. Ed. by A. Zabrodskaja & M. Ehala. Vol. 9.2-3. 2015.