

The lingual integration of migrants in Russia: declarations and realities

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Abstract. This article examines the issue of the integration of ethnic migrants, whose numbers have considerably increased over the last twenty years, into Russian society. The authors identify the major issues in the integration of migrants into Russian society. The article's primary idea is that for migrant integration to be a success in Russia it is necessary to spread the Russian language beyond its pale. The authors problematize the need for taking account of the language factor in social migrant integration in Russia. Based on the results of their own research and comparing them with the findings of a number of foreign studies, the authors come to the conclusion that there is a need for working out a state language program specifically oriented towards migrants.

[Ryazantsev S.V. **The lingual integration of migrants in Russia: declarations and realities.** *Life Sci J* 2014;11(8s):139-143] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 29

Keywords: migration policy, immigrants, adaptation, integration, Russian Federation, Russian language

Introduction

By tradition, following the disintegration of the USSR, immigration flows into the Russian Federation became more ethnically diverse. However, it is hard to come up with an accurate assessment of the ethnic structure of immigration flows into Russia – there are no credible statistics not only on the numbers of migrants but their ethnic identity. It is known that the share of ethnic Russians in the flow of immigrants dropped from 61% in 1993-2000 (taken as the average for the period) to 33% in 2007 [1]. After that, Rosstat stopped collecting and processing data on the ethnic composition of immigrants, and we ceased to know representatives of which ethnicities come to Russia for permanent residency. Only data on citizenship has been preserved. When it comes to the flow of worker migrants, ethnical and language characteristics have never been gleaned; also only one's citizenship has been recorded. However, data from population censuses indicates that there has been a steady rise in the index of ethnic diversity in Russia. For instance, in 1989 it was 33.2%, and by 2002 it had risen to 36.1% [2: 80]. It is apparent at this juncture that the integration of immigrants from different ethnic groups is an extremely topical issue for Russia. This includes the growing significance of the language aspect of the integration of migrants, many of whom have a poor command of Russian. There has been an increase in both native language and Russian attrition rates [3; 4; 5]; therefore, “amid polylingualism and the intensification of migration processes and border transparency, what is thrown into sharp relief are issues of the state, not spontaneous, linguomodelling of the language personality of a new polylinguomental type” [6: 832]. Specialists stress the acuity of the issue of the lingual integration of

migrants from the post-Soviet space in Russia, pointing out that there is taking place “an evolution of the modern language personality in the Eurasian space amid the polyethnic nature of globalization” [7: 791]. Indeed, “under globalization, due to the information revolution, there is occurring not only combination of linguocultural codes but blackout of real-life communication and interruption of living traditions, which, in turn, leads to deformation of spiritual relations between people” [8: 79].

We find much interest in the positive foreign experience relating to issues of immigrant integration. Many countries (Germany, Japan, Brazil, Australia, Canada, Switzerland, etc.) have made knowledge of the primary language of the recipient country a top priority for integration. Our studies on Russians living in Australia allow us to call this phenomenon “the fading of the language by the third generation” [9: 20]. According to Australia's 2006 census data, 67 thousand people identified themselves as being of Russian descent, while just 36 thousand people spoke Russian at home, which, in our view, indicates the substantial success of the integration and assimilation of Russians into Australian society [9: 23]. Russian immigrants in Australia have successfully mastered English, although “there is no doubt that irrespective of the nature of peoples-contactors there forms a speech couleur locale, which is expressed in the conditions of material-spiritual culture and language” [6: 833]. We believe that teaching immigrants Russian should become a part of the integration process and, consequently, an indispensable part of Russia's migration policy.

Fortunately, integration became a part of the concept of Russia's migration policy in 2012, when the government passed the *Concept of the State*

Migration Policy of the Russian Federation through to 2025, which clearly states that “the major elements of the state migration policy of the Russian Federation are creating conditions for the adaptation and integration of migrants...” [10]. However, just a few years back the word “integration” was missing in the “lexicon” of Russian migration policy. What did the trick was the integration of the findings of scientific studies into the process of regulating migration through various channels. Among the most important and efficient are the Scientific and Public councils created under the Federal Migration Service (FMS) of the Russian Federation. A special office was created within the establishment of the FMS of the Russian Federation to deal with issues of adaptation and integration; there commenced practical work on creating centers for learning Russian for migrants (pilot projects were launched in Tambov and Orenburg). However, there are several serious issues yet to be resolved in the area of immigrant integration in Russia. Firstly, the integration infrastructure remains insufficiently developed: there are not enough accessible courses for learning Russian, self-teaching guides and literature, or consulting agencies; migrants do not have decent access to health care and social services, etc. The state sets forth relevant integration objectives but does not ensure their implementation. A good example is requiring that immigrants speak Russian. Yet, there is lack of opportunities and access to learning Russian and there is no consideration of the nature of recipient regions and criteria for the ethnopsycholinguistic norm [11: 22]. Lingual resources for migrants should become a social – not commercial – project in Russia.

Secondly, in present conditions there has formed a dissonance between a compact resettlement of immigrants and their need in learning Russian. Migrants in Russia are forced to live compactly, sometimes even secludedly, which is characteristic of the Vietnamese, the Chinese, Tadjiks, and Uzbeks in many Russian cities. But this is how their contacts with the local population are suppressed, and therefore, learning Russian is not stimulated. It goes without saying that the government ought to develop the infrastructure of learning Russian and make it as accessible for migrants as possible.

Quite efficient is the experience of Saint Petersburg, where they have launched the project with the slogan “Let’s Speak like Petersburgers”. Here is how it works: in the subway and public transport there are posters put up featuring correct grammatical forms, emphases in words, etc., which gives a chance to perfect one’s lingual skills to not only migrants but the locals as well.

Worker migration and migration for permanent residency to Russia from Central Asia and the South Caucasus are gaining a more serious dimension. Russian schools are seeing greater numbers of worker migrant children. Thus, for instance, in Moscow about 10% of children in school have something to do with migration, while in Moscow Oblast the figure is 12% and in Saint Petersburg – 5%. This brings about the need to stimulate the integration and lingual adaptation of migrant children in kindergartens and schools. Russia, as a great power, ought to set ambitious goals and, ideally, actively shape migration flows with knowledge of Russian. This will prevent many issues and costs of the integration of immigrants finding themselves inside the country. Besides, this will have immediate economic and geopolitical effects. More specifically, it will make it possible to substantially bolster relations with partner countries. In other words, an active migration policy can help us “build the bridges” and “remove the barriers”. In this regard, it is necessary to implement two key dimensions of Russian policy in the area of promoting and spreading Russian abroad.

The first dimension to the actions of the Russian state should be taking expeditious measures in terms of lingual policy. This is the so-called “narrow” approach, which involves the lingual preparation of worker migrants leaving overseas in their native land through the system of accessible courses of Russian. For instance, in Tajikistan we recorded such a social phenomenon as forming with young people a strategy for success exclusively through worker migration overseas – above all, to Russia [12: 34]. Tajik youth is in real need of learning Russian for future career growth – however, in Tajikistan programs for learning Russian have virtually been non-existent in schools, while in colleges it has been taught increasingly rarely.

Studies indicate that China and Vietnam also have a certain demographic worker and student migrant potential, but Russia has made insufficient use of it so far. Currently, there are just 15 thousand Chinese and 4 thousand Vietnamese students going to Russian universities. Yet, these countries can send a lot more students to study in Russia, but there is no relevant infrastructure for developing educational migration as yet. Based on a survey of 300 Vietnamese individuals studying and working in Russia, which was conducted in 2009 by scientists at the Institute of Socio-Political Research under the Russian Academy of Sciences jointly with scientists at the Institute of Sociology under the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, just about 1% of the respondents wanted to send their children to study in Russia (while 33% said they wanted to send their

children to study in the US). And the major reason behind this is a lack of opportunity to learn Russian in Vietnam. It is knowledge of a language, along with objective economic factors, that facilitates the formation of educational migrant flows. Economic ties between Russia and Vietnam are tending to expand. In November 2013, President of Russia V.V. Putin made a visit to Vietnam and proposed that the country be accepted into the Customs Union. However, the infrastructure for learning Russian remains quite limited in Vietnam at the moment [13].

The second dimension to the actions of the state presupposes larger scale measures (the so-called “broadside approach”), which is about spreading Russian in donor countries of worker and educational migrants. And, perhaps, one should give more consideration to creating “russophony” (by analogy with “francophony” and “anglophony”), which has come to be spoken of by linguists increasingly often [4]. Researchers acknowledge the existence of variation with the English language and its influence upon other languages [14; 15; 16], while the variability of Russian remains polemical.

The Eurasian region now has all preconditions for that both in Russia and migration partner countries. Above all, migration processes in the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) can serve as the economic basis for creating (or, rather, restoring) the “russophony” space. The social basis is the migration orientation towards Russia on the part of citizens of many countries in Central Asia. It should be noted that amid stiff competition on the global market of educational services Russia ought to come up with a whole new infrastructure for learning Russian, which should even precede an economic and political rapprochement between the countries. This infrastructure should include not only traditional courses and centers for learning Russian but such innovative forms as grant-funding programs for attracting youth to study and train in Russia; mobile groups of scientists and instructors; advertising campaigns; electronic textbooks, self-teaching guides, and I-Phone applications in Russian for businessmen and youth; programs for attracting tourists to Russia. This lingual infrastructure ought to not only spread Russian but actively recruit relevant categories of migrants for the country – above all, educational migrants. If this is accomplished, the integration of migrants in Russia will go with more success and require less investment.

The Russian government ought to use all resources at hand to ensure the return and shoring up of the status of the Russian language overseas. It would be expedient to use all instruments available: political arrangements and agreements, one’s economic influence in the form of investment, and

cultural and scientific impact. Our studies indicate that Kyrgyz worker migrants adapt to the Russian labor market a lot better due to their higher level of speaking Russian, which helps them fill higher niches and get higher salaries and enjoy better work conditions. For instance, it is due to their better knowledge of Russian that Kyrgyz women have firmly occupied in private Russian households the niche of house factotums, babysitters, or personnel for the care of the sick and old [17: 14]. Their better knowledge of the language is, compared with other countries of Central Asia, due to the fact that the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan has for political reasons long remained its official language. It is apropos to mention the situation in Vietnam, where the highest political, scientific, intellectual, and business elite is still represented by the Russian-speaking Vietnamese who studied in the USSR or Russia. There is no doubt these people define the vector of Vietnam’s geo-policy towards Russia. Even the experience of inviting the Vietnamese based on agreements in the Soviet time to work in textile production and other types of production formed a social layer of people with a great attitude towards Russia.

Of course, the Russian authorities are making serious efforts in this area. For instance, there is the “Russky Mir” (Russian world) fund with a budget of 500 million rubles per year, which is engaged in popularizing the Russian language across the world through the system of grants. Under the aegis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, they formed the organization called “Rossotrudnichestvo”, which opened and supports about 80 centers for learning Russia in different states. However, due to a number objective and subjective reasons, these funds are not always spent effectively and oftentimes do not reach Russian learning centers in operation. Let us examine a specific example. The Center for Slavic Culture in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), where Russian has been successfully taught for many years, was created by a Brazilian citizen who had previously learned Russian at the Brazil-Russia Institute, which existed in Soviet times. Those are commercial courses and Brazilians pay money for learning Russian at the center. But there has been no support on the part of Russia. The center received some assistance from the consulate of the Republic of Belarus, with the center’s front office having been put in touch with Belarus State University. Russia has remained uninvolved! In the meantime, the center needs not so much money but educational materials, literature, organizational support for internships in Russia for students and instructors. Brazilians are ready to learn Russian for money, but Russia is not concerned at all about a

center that is promoting the Russian language in one of Brazil's largest cities.

The participant observation method let us identify at the center three categories of Russian learners based on their motivation. The first group – “*professional pragmatists*” – is made up of people who want to learn Russian for objective reasons – normally businessmen and professionals who have professional contacts with Russia or students who want to associate their career with Russia and the Russian language. The second group – “*pragmatists based on personal motives*” – is made up of Brazilians who are associated with Russians through personal relations and friendship; they want to learn Russian as a means of personal communication. The third group – “*nostalgic Brazilians*” – is made up of those of Russian descent and having no command of Russian for certain reasons. Above all, these learners are urged by emotional motives. They strive to learn Russian as the language of their ancestors in order to immerse more deeply into the history of their family and learn about Russian culture.

The center's instructors are representatives of the Russian-speaking community. For instance, at the center there works a young lady who is married to a Brazilian citizen; she comes from a mixed family – her father is Brazilian and her mother comes from Russia. There are also elderly instructors from earlier waves of Russian immigration to Brazil working at the center. This fact makes it possible to teach Brazilians Russian through native speakers at the center, which makes learning quite high-quality. The center has developed unique authorial methodologies for teaching Brazilians the Russian language, which are based on a special priority order of learning sounds adapted into the Portuguese language based on “the simple to the complex” method. On the initiative of the head of the center, students had internships in Minsk at Belarus State University. Unfortunately, Russia has remained uninvolved so far, rendering no support for the successful project. And the problem is not specifically with the Center for Slavic Culture but that there is no accessible information and no system for rendering support for such centers through the “Russky Mir” fund, “Rossotrudnichestvo”, and the Russian embassies and consulates overseas. One should definitely conduct monitoring of effectively operating Russian centers overseas and render them all possible support with methodologies, literature, and instructors. We are talking here not so much about increasing the size of funding for the “Russky Mir” fund and the “Rossotrudnichestvo” institution but rather fine-tuning the priorities of their activity and adopting new, more flexible, forms of their work, as well as

activizing Russia's attachés' work on culture, science, and education in its consulates overseas.

We can venture the assertion that at the present time in Russia, as a great and well-resourced country, there have ripened all the preconditions for the country to set more ambitious goals in the area of migration policy without focusing only on keeping record of worker migration, deporting undocumented migrants, and suppressing illegal immigration. It is time to engage in forming migration flows and integrating migrant categories the country needs. More specifically, in the area of migrant integration one should focus on not only measures of control over knowledge of the Russian language but spreading culture and the language. Russia's policy in this area should become more active, not only because Russian and Russian culture are rich and are worthy of this but also because it is more effective economically. A Vietnamese proverb says “An unsown field brings no growth above ground”, and there is a Russian proverb that says “As you sow so shall you reap”. In principle, if we apply the logic of these proverbs to Russia's migration policy, we can see that without actively spreading Russian beyond its pale we will have poorly integrated groups of immigrants and have to invest more and more funds in migrant integration. Indeed, the time has come to “*move the outposts of national migration policy beyond the pale of Russia*”. Eventually, that is just more pragmatic for the country.

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5/12/2014