Russian in Kirkenes (Northern Norway): The interplay of economy, history, face-to-face contacts and languages.

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The purpose of this study is to examine commodification of Russian in Kirkenes and link it to the emergence of the new economy and to the contemporary policy of collaboration between Norway and Russia. Furthermore we will trace the attempts of the authorities to get back to the historical phenomenon in the region – The pomor trade.

The globalized new economy has resulted in the commodification of language (Heller 2010, Heller & Duchene 2012) and several studies observe the emergence of Russian in a linguistic landscape of many tourist places in Europe today (Pavlenko 2008, 2009, 2012, Jakosuo 2001). But the situation in Kirkenes is specific. It has no tourist attractions and a quite middling and expensive town. In spite of that there are a lot of Russian tourists, who come there for shopping.

Kirkenes is a "capital of Norwegian-Russian Borderland". Everything here clearly indicates that the border with Russia is just 15 km from the town. Street signs, advertisements and other commercial texts are in Norwegian and Russian. Most of the shops and offices have Russian employees. About 500 people (10% of population) are Russian immigrants and almost the same number of Russians visits the town every day.

Our analysis of the linguistic landscape (the corpus consists of 80 digital pictures), printed materials, official documents on the collaboration and interviews with Russian tourists and the town’s citizens will show that the importance of Russian in Kirkenes is related not only to tourism. Furthermore Kirkenes is adapted not just for Russian tourists but for Russian residents as well.

The situation in Kirkenes illustrates the transformation of the old economy into the new one: a former mining town has changed into a tourist attraction and became the center of Russian-Norwegian collaboration. And in these new circumstances Russian has become a commodity.

Keywords: Russian, a linguistic landscape, language commodification.