A case study of commodification of Russian in India

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Commodification of Russian language in India can be traced back to the 1950s when, soon after Independence, the prime minister decided to follow the Soviet path of development with its five-year plans and state control. Many projects were implemented with the help of Soviet experts who worked in various parts of India. Slowly, tourism began to focus attention on the special needs of the Russian personnel and many private travel agencies began catering to the Russian tourists with special offers and itineraries. What started as a political initiative for the economic growth had its impact on the use of the Russian language in India: there was a mushrooming of Departments of Russian Studies all over the country. A more intriguing and fascinating feature, however, was the enthusiasm of traders and shopkeepers to use the language for furthering their businesses. Local shopkeepers, street vendors and even drivers of tourist buses were quick to pick up the language on their own without any formal training. There is a large supermarket in Delhi, which for many years has been catering to the tourists and other personnel from Russia working here. Almost all the shopkeepers now speak Russian, albeit with grammatical errors and barely any speech etiquette. The market has slowly transformed from Yashwant Place to Yashka symbolizing the changed quality of its business and the aspirations of the traders to attract the new generation of Russian clients. This paper will analyze the stages in the commodification of Russian with the focus on formal and non-formal learning of Russian.

Keywords: tourism, Russian, language commodification.