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Present Situation of Buriad Language in Mongolia

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Abstract: The purpose of the research work is to study the present situation of Buriad language, the minority languages of the nations and ethnic groups in Mongolian territory, within the framework of the language policy, and to define the language vitality and endangerment based on some of the international criteria and the information in “Ethnologue Languages of the World” (19th edition, 2016).

In this research, we used some sociolinguistics methodologies such as collecting and developing the materials, sociological survey, investigative and statistical method, and comparing and contrasting logical method, and correlation method, analytic and synthetic method and so on.

In this study, to define the Buriad language’s vitality, the author used the six criteria on language vitality and endangerment such as Language Vitality and Endangerment (UNESCO 2003), UNESCO Framework (UNESCO 2009), Ethnologue Vitality Categories (Lewis 2009), Language Vitality and Endangerment (Michael Kraus, 2007); Fishman’s Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS 1991), Expanded GIDS by Paul Lewis and Simons (EGIDS 2010) used more commonly and frequently in international level.

Finally, as a result of the study, according to the above mentioned six criteria, the Buriad language included in the categories such as severely endangered, endangered, threatened, critically endangered or definitely endangered.

During the research, we observed that several factors such as demography, politics, geography, social and economic situation, psychology, population movement, the government policy on language and others have influenced to decrease the number of the minority languages of the nations and ethnic groups.

Eventually, it is necessary to study, save, revitalize and document the minority languages and inherit them to the next generation.

Keywords: Mongolian languages, minority language, Buriad, dialects.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the research work is to study the present situation of Buriad language, the minority language of the nations and ethnic groups in Mongolian territory, within the framework of the language policy, and to define the language vitality and endangerment based on some of the international criteria and the information

in “Ethnologue Languages of the World” (19th edition, 2016; Sutthipornphalangkoon, 2016; Taher, Shrestha, Rahman, & Khalid, 2016; Hilao, 2016).

Any nations and ethnic groups have taken the responsibility of inheriting their languages, cultures, traditions and national peculiarities without absorbing in the process of globalization which has spread throughout the world since the 1990s.

Almost 90 percent of the Mongolian population is speaking khalkh dialects including neutral/intermediate dialects. Modern Mongolian language has basic four dialects such as Khalkh, Oirad, Buriad and Uvurlugh, each of which is divided into sub-dialects and oral sub-dialects.

Present situation of Buriad language: Since ancient times the Buriads who have inhabited in the forested mountains around Baikal Lake are the biggest representatives of ethnic groups in Mongolia. They have maintained their language and culture for centuries. The users of Buriad language are concentrated around the following regions of Mongolia such as Ereentsav farming, Bayandun, Bayan-Uul and Tsagaan Ovoo soums of Dornod province, Dadal, Binder and Batshireet soums of Khentii province, Mungunmorit soum of Tuv province, Khudur and Eruu soums of Selenge province, Teshig soum of Bulgan province, Khatgal, Khankh and Tsagaan Uur soums of Khuvgul province, Choibalsan, Darkhan, Undurkhaan, and Ulaanbataar, the capital of Mongolia, cities.

Apart from above-mentioned regions of Mongolia, small communities of this ethnic group are residing in the Republic of Buriadia and Irkutsk, Chita, Aga cities of Russian Federation, Manchuria, a region in northeast China and Khulunbuir province of China respectively.

Researcher G. Gantogtokh conducted research on “The Components of Buriad Language Vocabulary” and obtained a doctoral degree in linguistics. In his research, he made a comparative research on vocabulary of Buriad language and Old Mongolian script. He used “The Secret History of the Mongols” which is the record of Mongolian language of the medieval period to reveal the similarities and differences between the vocabulary of Buriad language and Old Mongolian Script. He also published “The Dictionary of Buriad Language” based on his research findings and valuable collections of language facts.

Researcher T. Tsermaa wrote a thesis on “Aga dialect” in 2006 and obtained a doctoral degree in sociolinguistics. She viewed that although Aga dialect was affected by Khalkha Mongol dialect and Russian language in some parts, the peculiarities of its dialect and language traditions of Mongolian script have been maintained to a certain extent.

By 2010, the number of Buriad ethnic group in Mongolia has reached over 45000.

The number of Buriad ethnic group:

Nationalities and ethnics	1956	1963	1969	1979	1989	2000	2010
Buriads	24.625	28.523	29.772	29.800	35.400	40.600	45.000

This statistical data demonstrates that the number of population of Buriad ethnic group increased considerably.

Geographical map of the Republic of Buriadia which was published in 2005 recorded that Buriad Autonomous Republic has the population of 981,200.

The Language of Buriads use can be said a language in some aspects but a dialect in other aspects since it is not only a dialect but also it has a characteristic of an independent language. Buriad language is divided into two dialects; sub-dialect of Dornod Buriads and sub-dialect of Selenge Buriads. The sub-dialect of Dornod Buriads are further divided into oral sub dialects such as Agiin Buriad, Khori Buriad, Khamnigan Buriad, Buriads

of Barga, Buriads of Mungun Morit who almost shifted into Khalkha dialect. However, sub-dialect of Selenge Buriads are split into oral sub-dialects including Tsongol Buriads, Uder, Tsunkh Buriads.

2. METHODS

In this research, we used some sociolinguistics methodologies such as collecting and developing the materials, sociological survey, investigative and statistical method, and comparing and contrasting logical method, and correlation method, analytic and synthetic method and so on.

3. RESEARCH

Mongolia should learn from best experiences of other countries which have carried out various activities and have taken some measures on language preservation and documentation. It is also essential to take measures to document, restore and preserve the dialects of ethnic groups.

Legal environment on implementing the policy on language preservation and development has upgraded in Mongolia. The provision 3.1.B of Law on Culture which was approved in 1996 defines that “... to maintain, preserve and restore the language and dialects of oral and written traditions of ethnic groups in Mongolia”; The provision 3.2 of this law also determines that “Cultural values include language, literacy, oral traditions and folklores”. However, it was defined in the provision 4.1 (4) of this law that “The citizen of Mongolia has a right to inherit and develop his/her mother language, literacy, custom, history, and traditions”. The provision 4.5 says that the citizen of Mongolia has a duty to preserve and develop history and culture of his/her own country, study the mother language, inherit it from previous generation and pass it down to the next generation and protect cultural values from various dangers.

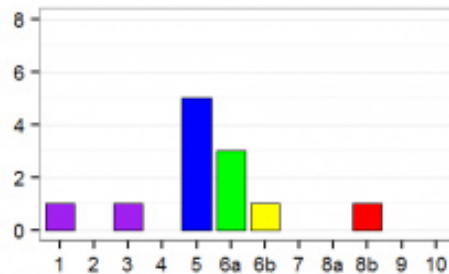
It is defined in the chapter 4.1 of the Law on “The Preservation of Cultural Heritages” which was approved in 2001 that “Cultural heritages include the following intellectual cultural values with the artistic and scientific significance in terms of history, ethnography, folklore, traditions, intricate design and skill. Those cultural values are the representations of the nation’s talent, wisdom, knowledge, experience, education and skills which have been intangibly inherited from generation to generation.

Let’s consider the reports on languages and dialects in Mongolia which were published by “The SIL International” international organizations. The 19th publication of “The Ethnologue Languages of the World” which was published by SIL International in 2016 stated that there are 12 individual and living languages in Mongolia. Those 12 languages have been determined by a new level on validity of language according to Paul Lewis and Simon. Of 12 languages, 7 are indigenous and 5 are non-indigenous. Also, two languages are institutional, five languages are developing, three are vigorous, one is in trouble and one is dying of them. These are:

1. Mongolian, Halh [khk] 1 (National).
2. Russian [rus] 3 (Wider communication).
3. Chinese, Mandarin [cmn] 5 (Dispersed).
4. Kazakh [kaz] 5 (Dispersed).
5. Tuva [tyv] 5 (Dispersed).
6. Uyghur [uig] 5 (Dispersed).
7. Mongolian, Peripheral [mvf] 5 (Developing).

8. Buriad, Mongolia [bxm] 6a (Vigorous).
9. Daur [dta] 6a (Vigorous).
10. Mongolian Sign Language [msr] 6a (Vigorous).
11. Oirat [xal] 6b (Threatened).
12. Evenki [evn] 8b (Nearly extinct).

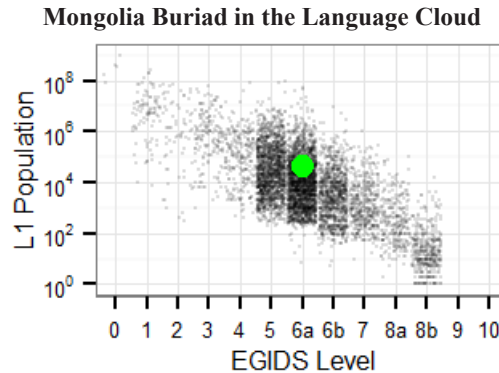
Here we chose the Buriad language to study because it is a language of Mongolia, the language code is *ISO 639-3*: The language status is 6a (Vigorous) by Paul Lewis and Simon's EGIDS criteria (2010) and it is not a literary language in Mongolia.



This graph shows the profile of languages in Mongolia with respect to their status of language development versus language endangerment. Each individual language that has an entry for Mongolia is included in the profile. The horizontal axis represents the estimated level of development or endangerment as measured on the EGIDS scale. (See the pages on Development and Endangerment for a fuller explanation.) The height of each bar indicates the number of languages that are estimated to be at the given level. Consult the Status listings for Mongolia in order to see the specific languages for each level.

The color coding of the bars matches the color scheme used in the summary profile graphs on the navigation maps for the site. In this scheme, the EGIDS levels are grouped as follows:

- Purple = Institutional (EGIDS 0-4) -the language has been developed to the point that it is used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community.
- Blue = Developing (EGIDS 5) - the language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.
- Green = Vigorous (EGIDS 6a) - the language is unstandardized and in vigorous use among all generations.
- Yellow = In trouble (EGIDS 6b-7) - Intergenerational transmission is in the process of being broken, but the child-bearing generation can still use the language so it is possible that revitalization efforts could restore transmission of the language in the home.
- Red = Dying (EGIDS 8a-9) -the only fluent users (if any) are older than child-bearing age, so it is too late to restore natural intergenerational transmission through the home; a mechanism outside the home would need to be developed.
- **Black** = Extinct (EGIDS 10) - the language has fallen completely out of use and no one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language.



The EGIDS level for this language in its primary country is 6a (Vigorous) — the language is used for face-to-face communication by all generations and the situation is sustainable.

This graph shows the place of Mongolia Buriad within the cloud of all living languages. Each language in the world is represented by a small dot that is placed on the grid in relation to its population (in the vertical axis) and its level of development or endangerment (in the horizontal axis), with the largest and strongest languages in the upper left and the smallest and weakest languages (down to extinction) in the lower right. The population value is the estimated number of first language (L1) speakers; it is plotted on a logarithmic scale (where $100 = 1$; $10^2 = 100$; $10^4 = 10,000$; $10^6 = 1,000,000$; $10^8 = 100,000,000$). The value for the development versus endangerment dimension is the estimated level on the EGIDS scale.

Mongolia Buriad is represented by a large, colored dot. When the population is unknown, a color-coded question mark appears at the bottom of the grid. When there are no known L1 speakers, an X appears at the bottom of the grid. The color coding matches the color scheme used in the summary profile graphs on the navigation maps for the site.

The EGIDS level indicated by the large, colored dot may be higher than the EGIDS level reported in the main entry for the language. This is because a separate EGIDS estimate is made for every country in which a language is used. Our method for calculating the EGIDS level for the language as a whole is not to take an average of all countries, but to report the highest level (that is, most safe) for any country. The logic here is that if the EGIDS level of a language is taken as a predictor of its likely longevity, then its longevity will be determined by where it is the strongest.

Each dot in the cloud is gray at the level of 20% black. As dots are superimposed on each other, the spot gets darker. Thus a spot of total black indicates that at least 5 languages are at the same spot in the cloud. The population scale is continuous; thus the placement in the vertical axis corresponds exactly to population. The EGIDS scale, however, is discrete. Rather than placing all of the dots for a given EGIDS level exactly on the grid line for that level, the dots are “jittered” (that is, the horizontal placement is random within a band around the grid line for the level).

By 2010, the number of Mongolia’s population was 2.631.1 million, 82, 4% of them were Khalkha Mongols and the remaining 18.5% were the representations of ethnic minorities at that time. Bigger ethnic groups were khalkha Mongols (81.5%), kazakh (4.3%), durvud (2.8%), bayad (2.1%), Buriad (1.7%), but the smallest ethnic groups were tsakhar (123 inhabitants) and khorchin (150 inhabitants). In recent years, there have been lots of changes in the structure of ethnic groups in Mongolia due to the great migration from rural areas to the city. There are some differences between age, ratio of gender and education level of ethnic groups. 72.14 % of total population in Mongolia are young people around 30s.

4. RESULTS

According to the first of the nine factors named Intergenerational Language Transmission, Buriad language gets 2 grades because, the language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up, and the endangerment degree is *severely endangered*.

According to the second factor named Community Member's Attitudes Towards Their Own Languages and the third factor named Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population, the Buriad language gets 0.8 grades /45.087speakers 1.7%/.

According to the fourth factor named Trends in Existing Language Domains the *Buriad* language gets only 1 grade because the language is used only in a very restricted domains and for a very few functions. So the degree of endangerment is *highly limited domains*.

According to the fifth factor named Response to New Domains and Media, Buriad language gets 3 grades because it is used in many domains and the degree of endangerment is *receptive*,

According to the sixth factor named Materials for Language Education and Literacy, Buriad language gets only 1 grade because a practical orthography is known to the community and some materials are being written.

According to the seventh factor named Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use, Buriad language gets only 1 grade because the dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected and the degree of support is *forced assimilation*.

According to the eighth factor named Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language, *Buriad* language gets only 1 grade because only *a few* members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.

According to the ninth factor named Amount and Quality of Documentation, *Buriad* language gets only 1 grade because only a few grammatical sketches, short word-lists, and fragmentary texts. Audio and video recordings do not exist, are of unusable quality, or are completely un-annotated and the nature of documentation is *inadequate*.

As a result of the study, *Buriad* language gets 11.6 (1.2) grades of total 45. (Appendix 1)

In this study, we also tried to define Buriad language's vitality and endangerment, using the most common six criteria on language vitality and endangerment. (Appendix 2)

Buriad language included in (1) the 7th level /The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to use it with their elders but is not transmitting it to their children/ by Fishman's GIDS 1991, (2) severely endangered language by UNESCO (2003), (3) critically endangered /if the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently/ by UNESCO (2009) and (4) endangered /languages which, though now still being learned by children, will if the present conditions continue cease to be learned by children during the coming century /by Michael Krauss's criteria 2007, (5) only second language /if they used as second-language only. No first-language users, but may include emerging users/ by Paul Lewis's criteria 2009, and (6) the threatened (6b), /if the language is used orally by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children/ language by Paul Lewis and Simon's EGIDS criteria 2010.

5. CONCLUSION

During the research, we observed that several factors such as demography, politics, geography, social and economic situation, psychology, population movement, the government policy on language and others are influencing to decrease the number of the minority languages of the nations and ethnic groups.

Finally, as a result of the study, according to the above mentioned six criteria, the Buriad language included in the categories such as severely endangered, endangered, threatened, critically endangered or definitely endangered so it is necessary to study, save, revitalize and document the minority languages and inherit them to the next generation.

Finally, Mongolia should pay a specific attention to the rapid process of language endangerment of ethnic groups during the era of globalization and make and implement the language policy aimed at providing the sovereignty of the country and enhancing the socio-economic development and competitive skill by considering the factors such as the situation of Mongolian language, national peculiarities, history, culture, politics, economic situation, culture and geographical location.

This is one of the historical phenomenon that the languages and dialects of minority groups in Mongolia are about to become extinct and have been absorbed in the contemporary. It is common for the languages with fewer speakers to be extinct. If the users of the language are bilingual, that language becomes extinct. Also, Buriad language, especially its oral dialect is in danger of extinction. Even Buriad language has been listed in the language to be extinct in the near 10 years. It is worth saying that in recent years, TV news has been broadcast on Buriad language throughout Mongolia.

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Appendix 1
UNESCO (2003)

<i>Nine factors</i>		<i>Buriad</i>
1	Intergenerational Language Transmission	2
2	Absolute number of speakers	45.087
3	Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population	1.7% (0,8)
4	Trends in Existing Language Domains	1
5	Response to New Domains and Media	3
6	Materials for Language Education and Literacy	1
7	Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, Including Official Status and Use	1
8	Community Members' Attitudes toward Their Own Language	1
9	Amount and Quality of Documentation	1
Total:		11,6/1,2

Appendix 2
Six criteria

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Buriad language</i>
1 LEWIS & SIMON (2010)	Level 6b Threatened (Vulnerable)
2 UNESCO (2009)	Critically endangered
3 LEWIS (2009)	Second Language Only
4 KRAUSS (2007)	Endangered
5 UNESCO (2003)	Severely endangered
FISHMAN (1991)	Level 7