

## FOCUS ON LANGUAGE UNDER ILLUMINATION OF DEMOCRACY

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Democracy has shifted Mongolian politics and economy into a globally accepted model and as a result commercial reform has taken place in all sectors including mining. Democracy has facilitated culture exchanges and lifestyle changes over the last 25 years.

But light has its shadow. There is no denying the negative impacts followed by rapid development and outburst of social changes.

This article attempts to argue on the detrimental effects to language and culture that trailed behind Democracy as did other social changes throughout the history.

Democracy has opened the doors for Mongolians to the outside world, resulting in a mass migration that is the primary cause of language deterioration. The emerging generation of migrated population has been on the verge of losing its language. Children born in Mongolian families learn basic Mongolian but it gets lost as soon as they enter day-care centers and kindergartens where English is the dominant language. Early childhood is the crucial stage to learn language and environment is vital to that process. The childhood environment for learning a language includes the same-language-speaking immediate and extent families, media and entertainment tools, neighborhood, children in the playground, schools and churches and other social interactions where that language is used consistently. Thus even though family members use their native language at home children tend to acquire dominant language of mass culture quicker than that. Most minority ethnic groups have their churches or temples and Sunday schools for learning language and culture but that does not weigh much against mainstream culture. So it is the society that plays a dominant role in acquisition of language. A new generation of migrated population is assimilated into mainstream society no matter what effort was placed upon their upbringing.

Historically, Mongolian language has had some influence from foreign languages like Manchu and Tibetan when first Qing Dynasty and then Tibetan Buddhism overtook Mongolia, but with a limited vocabulary and mostly in religious terms.

During the communist regime Russian was the second language to learn from middle school throughout college years with organized efforts and encouragements. But the limited number of Mongolian students abroad and a little or no labor migration to Russia left no room for Russian speaking population to be spread in numbers. After the introduction of democracy English replaced Russian as a second language and this time it has spread much faster due to rapid development of tourism, trade, migration, and communication and information technology.

There is governmental and societal encouragement of English proficiency in Mongolia with incentives of scholarships for foreign colleges or better salaries in job market, which makes parents push their children to get education in English schools and causes youth attraction to English in the form of fashionable trends. Defective attitude towards learning English in Mongolia is the attempt to replace

the mother-tongue with English starting from the childhood as for “becoming as a native-like speaker” .

Learning foreign language is a tool for obtaining knowledge through those languages. It is a part of knowledge and skills. Studying foreign language is a branch of knowledge the same as history, chemistry, mathematics, physics or biology that everyone should get a basic understanding of them if not deeply or fluently mastered in. Mastering of a certain branch of science in depth does not make other branches unimportant or lesser in value. Same goes for language; one language is not superior to other. By urging youth to learn English more than learning Mongolian the younger generation is in danger of losing native culture, tradition and sense of value of ethnic identity.

Why is ethnic identity important? Money-driven market economy wipes out ethnic value and minority culture and languages. Cultural homogeneity is not a desirable phenomenon, which is a result of globalization. Reserving a language and a culture has no economic benefit or monetary reward, but it is a core value of an existing nationality. It is unique heritage and it makes you stand out of crowd instead of hiding in a grey shadow of the mass. It is important in a sense of mentality and self-worthiness of people. It has the same value as each and every person has personal distinctiveness and character that differentiates an individual as a unique entity. Hence each and every ethnicity has its own language or dialect and culture that make them to be recognized as a separate entity.

Mongolian diaspora communities outside of Mongolia face the language-decline-adversity because of the political and economic policies of the host countries and cultural imperialism. But for the independent Mongolians today it is not a political force, it is the general tendency of Democracy and Globalization. Population size and density, speed of westernization and mental attitude also affect the process, for instance, a majority of Chinese immigrants in America still keep their language and culture even after the second generation; vs. most European immigrants hardly speak their original language after the first generation.

Everywhere local culture is facing submission from the mass-produced outpourings of western commercial broadcasting. David Crystal states in his book “Language Death” that even if people stay in their rural setting, there is no escape because the same transport systems which carry country people into the cities are used to convey consumer products and the associated advertising back to their communities. The centralization of power within the metropolis invariably results in an inevitable loss of autonomy for local communities, and often a sense of alienation as they realize that they are no longer in control of their own destinies and that local needs are being disregarded by distant decision-makers. The language of the dominant culture infiltrates everywhere, reinforced by the relentless daily pressure of the media, and especially of television- an effect which Michael Krauss has likened to 'cultural nerve gas,.

Cultural assimilation is the threat to language. Traditional knowledge and practices are quickly eroded. Especially, the Mongolian culture that is stemmed from the nomadic civilization has become vulnerable in the whirl of the urbanized modernization and the mining craze.

The following trends are the root causes why Mongolian language has been deteriorated unnecessarily:

- Due to foreign trade a vast number of products with English labels filling up the shelves of supermarkets. There is no standardized system of translating product names, ingredients and nutritious value for health reasons as well as linguistic value. Thus only names of those products are memorized automatically and registered in vocabulary but not correctly.
- Business entrepreneurs tend to have English names for their businesses and products in order to attract young generation, and that is causing more public attraction to everything with English.
- Commercials on television and mass media are inclined to broadcast in English due to the English names of majority of products and businesses and the growing trend.
- Entertainment business is an active contributor of English, as western bands and English songs have become an idol entertainment for youth, and television programs/ movies as well.
- Since all religions are tolerated numerous branches of Christianity opened their churches, shelters, training and language centers, schools , where English is the primary language.
- Information technology contributes to foreign word increases in vocabulary. Computers, cell phones are a part of modern lifestyle for young people and whole lexicons and terms are registered in English.

When one culture assimilates to another, the sequence of events affecting the endangered language seems to be the same everywhere and throughout of human history.

David Crystal analyzed the process of language deterioration into three broad stages. The first is immense pressure on the people to speak the dominant language- pressure that can come from political, social, or economic sources. It might be 'top down, in the form of incentives, recommendations, or laws introduced by a government; or it might be 'bottom up, in the form of fashionable trends or peer group pressure from within the society of which they form a part. But wherever the pressure has come from, the result - stage two - is a period of emerging bilingualism, as people become increasingly efficient in their new language while still retaining competence in their old. Then, often quite quickly, this bilingualism starts to decline, with the old language giving way to the new. This leads to the third stage, in which the younger generation becomes increasingly proficient in the new language, identifying more with it, and finding their first language less relevant to their new needs, often accompanied by a feeling of shame about using the old language. Parents use the old language less and less to their children; and when more children come to be born within the new society the adults find fewer opportunities to use that language to them. Those families which do continue to use the language find there are fewer other families to talk to, and their own usage becomes inward-looking and idiosyncratic, resulting in 'family dialects', outside the home, the children stop talking to each other in the language, within a generation- sometimes even within a decade- a

healthy bilingualism within a family can slip into a self-conscious semi-lingualism and thence into a mono-lingualism which places that language one step nearer to extinction.<sup>1</sup>

For migrated populations this process is far more complicated and it skips the first stage and rapidly develops into second and third stages. By residing within the community of dominating culture immigrants are required to learn a new language, it is the necessity, and they are forced into bilingualism, consciously. There is a linguistic phenomenon called Subtractive Bilingualism that immigrant children face when their learning of a second language interferes with the learning of a first language. As a consequence it could turn into the limited bilingualism, in which they acquire conversational proficiency but with quantitative and qualitative deficiencies, such as insufficient vocabulary, incorrect grammar, difficulty in automatic response and creative thinking, and deficit in expressing one's emotion and richness of meanings. It prevents individual's lingual bondage with his mentality (mind set, outlook, intelligence, reasoning) and spirituality (sense of self, meaning of life, personal growth, inner peace) when the second language pushes in before his native language matures. Language is not static, it is a continuing process. It grows by learning it and using it every day in all areas of life. Native language cannot be limited in a family circle to be acquired fully - not only surface fluently but also academically competent. Youth who obtain higher education could get proficiency in English but not in Mongolian, which is one step to mono-lingualism. By statistics there are 216 thousand Mongolians living in 80 different countries today. The second generation of them has lost its mother-tongue although their parents strive for their bilingualism. When the third generation arrives it will slip into monolingualism of dominant language and it will be too late to reverse it.

The dominant language is necessary in today's world because it provides people with a bridge between the two worlds - an intelligibility bridge, without which their progress would be negligible. The dominated language by contrast, has quite another role. By definition, it has no value as an international or intercultural lingua franca; it cannot facilitate communication between peoples; it is not outward-looking. It is there for the opposite reason: to express the identity of the speakers as members of their community. It is inward-looking - but in the best sense - fostering family ties, maintaining social relationships, preserving historical links, giving people a sense of their 'pedigree. (chapter 2, p.41)

When it comes to endangered languages attitude is what counts, how people look at their language and what they feel about it when they do. If speakers take pride in their language, enjoy listening to others using it well, use it themselves whenever they can and as creatively as they can, and provide occasions when the language can be heard, the conditions are favorable for maintenance stage 2, in such a setting, is likely to last a long time.<sup>2</sup>

Fostering positive language attitudes is one of the most important initiatives to be achieved in the task of language preservation. Languages decline when these positive attitudes are missing.

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<sup>1</sup> David Crystal "Language Death" p.79

<sup>2</sup> David Crystal "Language Death" p.81

From these it can be concluded that physical attributes (social, economic, political) and mental attributes (mind-set, attitude, and self-esteem) are major factors to determine whether a language lives or dies. What has to be done to prevent Mongolian from becoming an endangered language in near future?

1. State policy towards to national heritage, Mongolian language purity and being proud-of-Mongolian-culture attitude needs to be implemented systematically.
2. Private schools, English schools and other foreign language schools are required to have a curriculum with an equal amount of class hours of Mongolian, English and other languages and literature in those languages as well.
3. Language and cultural centers outside of Mongolia are to be a part of the Ministry of Science and Education of Mongolia and to be governed by and funded from the State as Mongolian schools.

Healthy bilingualism is a state in which two languages are seen as complementary not in competition-fulfilling different roles, with each language being seen in a rewarding light.