Mongol Identity in Danger? Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Mongolia and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

Programme

14:00-14:40 Merle Schatz (Georg-August Universität Göttingen)

Bilingualism, Identity and the Rest
(remote presentation)

Defining, defending and protecting the own identity/rights/position/role in a multiethnic nation-state is a demanding reality for any ethnic group in China. Recent developments in Inner Mongolia show how important language – often perceived as a typical identity marker – is for the actors involved, especially when the spheres of language usage are changed by a dominant nation state in favor of another language.

Despite linguistic transfer phenomena and frequent Chinese-Mongolian code switching among bilingual Mongols in Inner Mongolia, despite even total language loss among younger people, there is a very clear awareness of a typical Mongolian identity. Language sometimes matters, sometimes not. I will look at the specific input of the three levels institution, idea and practice that shape the complexity of the situation. Language is one factor among many used to negotiate established-outsider figurations among Mongols and Chinese in Inner Mongolia.

14:40-15:20 Veronika Zikmundová (Univerzita Karlova)

Education and linguistic diversity in western Hulunbuir

Western Hulunbuir, since 1947 part of Inner Mongolia, has been home to several minority languages, mainly Mongolic and Tungusic. In addition, Russian and Japanese were used on its territory during the 20th century. The Hulunbuir indigenes often had active command in three or more languages.

In different periods, several languages of instruction were used in schools in western Hulunbuir. Until recently, however, the most important language of instruction was Mongolian. The tradition of creative and experimental education, which started with the efforts of the Hulunbuir Daur intellectuals in the beginning of the 20th century, has, in various ways, continued into the present day.

This presentation attempts to trace the connection of the local tradition of schooling in western Hulunbuir with the preservation of, and changes in, the linguistic diversity in the area.

15:20-15:30 Break

15:30-16:10 Elisabetta Ragagnin (Università Ca' Foscari, Venice)

Minority Languages in Mongolia
(remote presentation)

The official language of Mongolia is Khalkha Mongolian. Minority Mongolic languages include Khamnigan Mongol, Darkhat and Oirat varieties. Besides, Mongolia is home of language varieties belonging to the Turkic languages family, namely Kazakh and Sayan Turkic. Tungusic varieties are apparently not any more spoken in Mongolia. The present talk will offer an overview of the sociolinguistic situation of minority languages of Mongolia, with special focus on Turkic varieties.

16:10- 16:50

Veronika Kapišovská (Univerzita Karlova)

Preliminary remarks on the language situation of the Buryats in Mongolian northern aimags

The Buryats inhabit mostly the northern and eastern parts of Mongolia (Khentii and Dornod aimag) adjacent to their former Buryat homeland. Groups of Buryats escaped their former homeland in search of a shelter from the unfavourable political and social situation and from famine. The dispersion in the new territories, where Khalkha Mongols were a majority, exposure to the politically motivated repressions in 1930s and effect of official state policy with the aim to create "one ethnicity with one language" affected the native language of three or four generations of Buryats in Mongolia. This presentation describes the language situation of Khentii Buryats and compares it to that of Dornod Buryats as is seen by Buryats themselves. It attempts to identify the main causes and impacts, including the fact switch in that their ethnic identity is no longer represented through the languages, but rather through other specific cultural features.
It attempts to identify the main causes and impacts, including the fact the language is no longer perceived as a means of representation of their ethnic identity.

16:50-17:00 Final remarks