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**WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PRESERVATION OF NATIVE
LANGUAGE IN RUSSIAN REGIONS?**

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Abstract

Today, the world is getting complicated, and a modern man can think and speak two – three languages. The majority of the population in Russia speaks the main language of international communication - Russian. However, in all national regions there is an acute problem concerning the preservation and development of the native language of indigenous peoples (Dagbaeva & Taraskina, 2015), as for them it is a kind of an important link, connecting them with the past, and those living at present with future generations. Commonly, the native language loses its pragmatic value for young people, and it is moving from actions in the sphere of the practical necessity of language knowledge to the spiritual sphere (Sanzheeva, 2014). The decision "yes" or "no" to learn the native language is taken at the level of consciousness, which mainly is trained and achieved at a certain stage of intellectual and spiritual development. In this regard, a great role belongs to education, formal and informal at all levels (Dagbaeva, Taraskina, 2012). The authors believe that strengthening the position of the native language should primarily occur at the ethnic homeland. This paper is based on the data of a sociological survey conducted by scientists of Buryatia, presents the analysis of the situation with learning the Buryat language, and the study of prospects for its development. The questions put forward are on whom the preservation and development of the Buryat language depends, whether the efforts of educational institutions and intentions of the governmental structures are enough.

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1. Introduction

In recent years the phenomenon of the Buryat language is constantly in the spotlight of both the public and the researchers. Indeed, one is dealing with a fairly rare phenomenon in the history of Nations, when the ethnos with a high culture and education level (according to the number of people having academic degrees, the Buryats are among the top three nations in Russia) has to make Herculean efforts to preserve and protect its native language, appealing to people to learn and multiply this wealth. The attitude to the native language is clearly contradictory: having a full understanding of the need for its protection and development, in reality, one faces the whole layers and segments of the Buryat ethnic group, who cannot speak it (Dagbaev, 2015b).

The Buryat language belongs to the Mongolian group of languages; it is spoken by the Buryats and some other Mongolian peoples. Wikipedia indicates that, on the whole, it is spoken by 283 thousand people (according to the 2010 census), in Russia – 218 thousand people, in China, in the Autonomous region of Inner Mongolia – 18 thousand, in Mongolia – 46 thousand people. In Russia, native speakers live mostly on the territory of the three Federal subjects – the Republic of Buryatia, Irkutskaya oblast and Zabaykalsky Krai (Dugarova, Starostina, Namsarayev, Dagbaeva, Malanov, 2016).

In accordance with the law of the Republic of Buryatia "On languages of peoples of the Republic of Buryatia" the Buryat language alongside with Russian is the state language. In real life, however, it is largely used in the spheres of everyday domestic speech. Despite the fact that the Buryat language is taught in secondary schools, fiction, socio-political literature is published in it, television and radio programs are broadcast, the Republican newspaper "Buryaad Unen" is published in Buryat, the language still remains uncompetitive (Dagbaev, 2015a).

The local education system has also been making some efforts: the Department of education and science of the Republic of Buryatia controls the process of providing all conditions for teaching the Buryat language according to the major program and as the official language in all educational institutions on the territory of the Republic of Buryatia. Scientists are studying the theory of the matter and develop training manuals. There is a dissertation Council for defending theses in methods of teaching the native language at the Buryat state University, it is the only Council of this kind in Russia (Elaev, Gunzhitova, 2012)

2. Problem Statement

What are the reasons for a problem situation with the Buryat language? At first glance, the situation looks paradoxical, because all public institutions and government organizations responsible for the development of this sphere support the development and protection of the Buryat language. No social power opposing the situation publicly. But in real life each of us sees hundreds and even thousands of people of Buryat nationality, who know and speak Russian very well, but do not speak their native language even at the elementary level (Dagbaev, 2015c). At the same time, quite an adequate for the situation legal framework has been created in the Republic of Buryatia, there are legislative acts, including the constitutional ones. This regulatory framework consists of: the Buryat language development Concept; the state national policy of the Russian Federation Strategy for the period up to

2025; the Laws of the Republic of Buryatia "On education in the Republic of Buryatia", "On amending the Law of the Republic of Buryatia", "On education in the Republic of Buryatia", "On measures of the Buryat language support as the state language of the Republic of Buryatia".

They have increased significantly the funding of the State program "Preservation and development of the Buryat language in the Republic of Buryatia for the period of 2014-2020", in 2014, it was funded with 32 million rubles, i.e. increased several times compared with 2013. The program includes activities to develop methodical maintenance, development of the basic theoretical and methodological foundations of the implementation of the fundamental core of the regional education content, training teaching staff for educational institutions, retraining of teachers, development and publication of educational-methodical literature in the Buryat language, providing competitions and festivals, and other activities (Dyrkheeva, Khilkhanova, 2014).

So, the reasons for the relative neglect of the Buryat language are either in poor public policies, or the rejection of the situation by the community, or in the insufficient activity of educational institutions.

3. Research Questions

However, it is impossible not to recognize the fact that to a certain extent there is a braking mechanism in the Republic of Buryatia. This very fact may explain the situation when, frankly speaking, for a long time, these legal possibilities have not been implemented, the situation has not changed radically (Dagbaev, 2014).

So it was crucial to find out the causes of the current situation with the Buryat language, as they say, "firsthand", that is, from the viewpoint of people in power or executive authorities. In the paper, the authors examine the positions of different categories of regional community. This sociological study aims at providing a survey with respondents - representatives of state and municipal authorities, public administration institutions.

The hypothesis of this sociological survey consists in the fact that the representatives of state bodies and municipal authorities assess adequately the status of the Buryat language and its real prospects, understand the natural difficulties and obstacles to the revival of the Buryat language, but they are not completely confident in positive results.

In the course of analysis, the authors also want to find out why the educational efforts of scientists and practitioners do not lead to significant results in the study of the native language.

4. Purpose of the Study

So, the purpose of the poll was to reveal the opinions and positions of representatives of state bodies and municipal authorities directly involved in this process, towards the status and prospects of the Buryat language revival under present conditions. In the end, the obtained results will allow one to assume possible actions and steps to be undertaken for further development of the Buryat language, and thus, to evaluate the prospects (Aktamov, Gunzhitova, 2016).

With regard to the activities of educational institutions, in total 62 thousand children study the Buryat language in 352 schools of 467. At 115 schools, the language has not been studied yet. By 2019, it

is planned to create conditions for studying the Buryat language at all schools. At present, more than 131 thousand children study from the 1st to 11th grade, 46 thousand of them are Buryats. According to the Education and Science Department of the Republic, only 16 thousand children out of those 46 thousand speak the Buryat language, i.e. about 38%. These data are alarming for the entire system of education (Randalov, 2012)

5. Research Methods

In accordance with the General concept of the study, the survey was addressed to that part of the society which represents people who are directly involved in the work of state bodies and municipal authorities responsible for developing regulations, regulatory frameworks and their enforcement. However, they differ in their functions. Some of them carry out political decisions. Others are implementing solutions. But they are all involved in this process, and therefore their opinion is equivalent.

About the research sample. It should be noted that the sample was taken according to general principles of political and social science. The regional state power consists of three branches – legislative, executive and judicial. Each of them in accordance with the power separation principle performs its own specific functions. Issues connected with the Buryat language at the legislative (state) level are considered by the People's Khural, in particular the national issues, international relations, culture, science and sports Committee to drafts laws on the Buryat language. The Committee consists of 8 members. In addition, consultants and specialists of the Committee directly participate in its activities.

Thus, these 5 deputies and three experts of the Committee have been chosen as the respondents of our survey.

Exactly the same principle was taken to produce the sample of respondents representing the Executive branch of power exercised in the Republic of Buryatia, i.e. by the Government of the Republic. There is no special Department or Agency on these issues in the Government, however, the administration of the Head and the government of the Republic of Buryatia has a special subdivision, the Committee on interethnic relations and civil initiatives development, which is responsible for the preparation and implementation of such issues. The number of responsible members of the Committee is 8.

Much more complex and confusing for generalizing the sample is the situation with the third branch of power. In this regard, the authors made the optimal, in their opinion, decision to represent equally respondents (experts) from all most important law enforcement agencies and organizations, including the Prosecutor's office, the Supreme and district courts of the Republic of Buryatia, the Department of bailiffs, investigators, law firms, lawyers-teachers at higher education institutions, notaries. In general, all these people represent the major segments of the legal (law enforcement) community of the Republic of Buryatia.

The municipal authority is represented by the largest and most significant body – the city administration of Ulan-Ude. Considering the powers and functions of the municipal departments, the authors chose the respondents accountable for the development of the Buryat language – employees of the Education Committee of the city administration of Ulan-Ude. Thus, 53 respondents, politicians and

experts from these bodies and organizations were interviewed. They are all competent in the issues concerning the development of the Buryat language.

6. Findings

Clearly prevailing assessment of the status of the Buryat language among all categories of authorities is that "the Buryat language is now facing great difficulties, but it is possible to revive it" - the People's Khural and the Government of the Republic of Buryatia – by 62.5% of respondents and the administration of Ulan-Ude - 75% . The exception is the opinion of lawyers and representatives of law enforcement agencies, who are almost equally noted that "the Buryat language is now experiencing great difficulties because of the neglect on the part of the Buryat youth and other reasons, it will be very difficult to revive it." There is more skepticism about the status of the Buryat language, which may be explained by the fact that this category of employees does not deal with such problems in their daily activities. But in general, the authorities remain confident of the possible revival of the Buryat language, still recognizing obvious difficulties on this way or it can be done with serious reservations.

It is logical that after the issue on the assessment of the status of the Buryat language there is the question about the conditions for its revival. The respondents could answer the question by defining their own dispositions favorable/unfavorable. According to the first variant, among unfavorable conditions they chose the following: "globalization", "internationalization", "natural assimilation," and others. Favorable conditions were related to "society democratization", a "high education level", a high level of social organization", "national movement". This list probably could be continued, if necessary.

There is a clearly positive opinion (mostly two-thirds and more – 75% of respondents from the People's Khural of the Republic of Buryatia and the administration of Ulan-Ude equally, 87.5% of the Government) on the conditions of the Buryat language revival – "Despite the coincidence of some complicating, negative circumstances, there are favorable conditions for the Buryat language revival".

This speaks for strong belief in society, in the internal strength of the nation who wants to protect its language, belief in intelligence and self-organization of society.

Similarly, as in case with the answer to the first question, lawyers and law enforcement officials expressed a significant opinion (in the second place, 39.2%) that "the conditions for the language revival are very limited and complicated." Here one sees some connection with the answer to the first question, when the "third branch of power" shared its doubt about the possibility to revive the language. In this case, they point to some natural difficulties in solution of this matter. On the whole, there is some doubt that the conditions for the Buryat language revival are not one hundred percent favorable.

The next question concerned opinions as to which institution or organization should play a crucial role in the revival of the Buryat language. One must clearly understand: the protection and revival of the national language is impossible without an active role of the state. The liberal hope for society itself seems naive. And the historical traditions of the ethnic development are entirely bound up with the state protectionism. Thus, there is a fundamental difference from the situation in Western countries.

In general, one must recognize the fact that the respondents are active to name all the state institutions enumerated as variants of answers. The authors see that all the options are called as the most important institutions to solve this problem: firstly, the Federal state - the Russian Federation; secondly,

the national state – the Republic of Buryatia; thirdly, the Department of education and science of Buryatia; fourthly, mass media; and fifthly, the identity of Buryats themselves, their families supported by state institutions. They are all enumerated actively by the respondents with slight variations. Particularly, a lot of hopes are connected with the identity of a person (from 75% to 87.5% of respondents), the Republic of Buryatia (from 39.5% to 50%), the Department of education and secondary schooling system (39.5% to 62.5%), mass media and civil society institutions (from 50% to 57.5% of respondents called the institutions, obviously, those which are functioning in the Republic). Thus, one can say that the Buryat language can be revived in Buryatia only due to the active role of both the state and society.

Interpreting these data, it should be noted that it is possible to change the situation with the Buryat language if only to combine common efforts of all the state and public institutions equally. This generally well-known truth is confirmed again, the representatives of the authorities consider the problem exactly in the same way as the population of the republic as a whole (Dagbaev, Dagbaeva, Dashinimayeva, Zandeeva, 2015).

Generally, this opinion is shared by all the authorities, to a bit lesser extent by the lawyers who hope for the Republic of Buryatia itself (see Table 1).

Table 01. What institutions, in your opinion, should play a crucial role in the revival of the national language of the Buryat nation? (several options)

Decision makers	People's Khural of RB	Government of RB	Administration of Ulan-Ude	Law institutions
1. Federal state	37.5	25	12.5	14.2
2. Republic of Buryatia	50	50	50	39.2
3. The Department of education and science of RB, secondary schools	50	62.5	50	39.2
4. Mass media and the institutions of the emerging civil society	50	50	50	57.1
5. The identity of a person, family, environment	75	87.5	75	75
6. Difficult to response	0	0	12.5	0

The question encouraging respondents to pragmatics - why is it necessary to know the Buryat language? -reveals a fundamental point in the social position of the respondents that contributes to the defining of public functions of the Buryat language, and thus, the prospects for its functioning.

On the whole, it appears that the Buryat language implements a lot of needs of people, the respondents named a few items. Although the opinions differed, in general, the authors' attention was drawn by the overall leadership of the point "to be attached to the values of the national culture" (from 75% to 87.5% in all groups). The point "for the enrichment of the spiritual life" turned out stable (from 62.5 % to 75%), "to be a real Buryat", that is, the Buryat language still functions to meet the needs of

ethnic identification (from 25% to 62.5%). A large range of opinions is observed for the "progress of the nation" (from 100% to 37.5 %), which indicates, perhaps, the language's great significance for the prospects of the ethnos (nation's) development.

According to the responses, the Buryat language plays no role "for operational needs", it has a very small value "for public needs", "for a civilized interethnic communication", for employment after graduating from a higher institution, for high quality education, for a career. Frankly speaking, there is no great pragmatics in the knowledge of the language, it is more essential for the humanitarian and patriotic purposes (see Table. 02). It is worth emphasizing the attitude of the deputies and specialists of the People's Khural, who noted the 100 percent position "for the progress of the nation".

Table 02. Why, do you think, it is necessary to know the Buryat language for a Buryat person?

Demands	People's Khural of RB	Government of RB	Administration of Ulan-Ude	Law institutions
1. For career needs	0	0	0	0
2. For public needs	12.5	0	25	21.4
3. To be a real Buryat	62.5	37.5	25	53.5
4. To be attached to the values of the national culture	75	87.5	87.5	85.7
5. For communication in the family	25	12.5	50	14.2
6. For the enrichment of spiritual life	62.5	75	62.5	71.4
7. For progress of the nation	100	37.5	62.5	53.5
8. For the civilized international communication	50	12.5	37.5	17.8
9. For receiving high quality education	0	0	12.5	0
10. For employment after graduating from a higher institution	0	0	0	0
11. For career	0	12.5	0	25
12. Other variants (write down your variant)	0	0	0	0

The authors were particularly interested in a set of questions, which was aimed at revealing the public opinion of the authorities concerning the concrete subjects of the native language teaching and educating within the system of educational institutions. To find out the matter, the authors put a number of specific questions.

What is the evaluation of training the Buryat language teachers? The low rating leads, moreover in all groups of representatives of the authorities – “the level of training is more likely to be not high enough” (from 32.1% to 62.5%). In the second place, there is the response - "it is generally appropriate to the required level" (it differs little from the number of responses going in the first place, a quarter of all respondents in all groups, excluding the city administration, where the score is 37.5 %). This is a serious challenge to determining the causes of poor learning the Buryat language (see Table 03).

Table 03. What is your assessment of training of the Buryat language teachers? (give the only answer)

Rating levels	People's Khural of RB	Government of RB	Administration of Ulan-Ude	Law institutions
High level of training	0	0	0	7.1
In general matches the required level	25	25	37.5	25
Most likely. the level is not high enough	62.5	37.5	37.5	32.1
Low level of training	12.5	25	25	14.2
Cannot assess. have no idea	0	12.5	0	21.4

The attitude of most students to the Buryat language lessons is assessed differently, but in approximately equal proportions as "positive, interested" and "indifferent and neutral". Obviously, this should be interpreted as – "there are students who study with interest, and those who are indifferent students" (see Table 04).

Table 04. In your opinion, what is the attitude of most students to the Buryat language lessons? (give the only answer)

Attitude	People's Khural of RB	Government of RB	Administration of Ulan-Ude	Law institutions
Negative	12.5	12.5	0	14.2
Positive. interested	37.5	50	25	17.8
Indifferent. neutral	50	25	50	42.8
Cannot say	0	12.5	25	21.4

A separate set of questions reveals the views of representatives of the authorities on the ways of the Buryat language revival. What is it necessary to do to revive the functional status of the Buryat language?

On the whole, it should be noted that the majority of respondents showed great interest in sharing their suggestions. Almost all the suggested points were pointed out by them equally. Therefore, there is no need to rank the responses strictly: in some groups they are ranked first, in others - they occupy lower positions. The picture is the same within all the questions: "improving methods of teaching the Buryat language", "increasing teachers' salaries", "qualitative training and retraining the Buryat language teachers," "publication of new textbooks and manuals on methods of teaching, creating a favorable moral and psychological climate", "strengthening contacts between parents and teachers", "television and radio propaganda", "creation of a public movement in support of the Buryat language." Among the less popular are the responses concerning tutoring and financial support from public organizations. It should be emphasized that all these measures are somehow being taken in the Republic of Buryatia at present.

Among the most effective measures for the revival of the Buryat language, taken by the state, are legislative acts, both of Federal and regional levels which are aimed at supporting the language and, in particular, at compulsory study of the native language (from 35.7% to 75%). Also the authors can underline the point concerning the annual adoption of the budget article on the financial support of both the Russian language and languages of national minorities, equating the state languages of national

minorities to the Russian language. A small percentage of respondents believe that the decree of the Russian Federation President will help to solve the matter. And it is positive that the number of respondents who do not believe in the possibility of the Buryat language revival is absolutely insignificant (see Table 05).

Table 05. In your opinion, what measures of implementation of the national policy on the part of the Russian Federation will be the most effective in regard to the Buryat language revival? (Any number of responses is possible, if you do not choose item 6)

Effective measures	People's Khural of RB	Government of RB	Administration of Ulan-Ude	Law institutions
The decree of the President of Russia on measures to develop the Russian language and the languages of the peoples of Russia	12.5	25	37.5	17.8
Legislative acts of the Russian Federation	50	62.5	62.5	35.7
Legislative acts of the Russian Federation subject – the Republic of Buryatia	50	75	75	50
The adoption of the budget article on the annual financial support and development of the Russian language and languages of national minorities	25	87.5	75	50
The adoption of legislative measures for actual equating the second state language in the national autonomies to the first state language. i.e. Russian	50	50	50	28.5
I think no measures will be of help	0	0	0	14.2

7. Conclusion

The opinions and assessment of the authorities and law enforcement bodies, which can influence the status of the Buryat language sufficiently, are not too much different from the traditional opinions of the majority ethnic group. The common dominant scores coincide. On the whole, the authorities are positive about evaluation and definition of the ways of the Buryat language revival. They believe that, despite a number of objective difficulties, the Buryat language can still be revived. The conditions for this have been preserved. And they impose the main hope in the success of this process on the functioning of state institutions responsible for the development of culture and education.

Their attitude towards the language is favorable; they appreciate the Buryat language as a sign of the Buryat ethnos, its role in uniting the nation, spiritual enrichment and so on.

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