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A minority language in the globalizing world: The Buryat language on the Internet

Introduction

Although the Internet is a worldwide network, it has its local spheres which are highlighted by "local" domain name extensions such as .pl, .fr or .ru. Figuratively it can be said that although the Internet is a global network, it can be seen with the same borders as on the map. These "local" areas of the Internet refer to particular countries, regardless of their size. This division, however, only reproduces the regional situation that is visible on the political map of the world: peoples that do not have their state have no clearly defined separate Internet spheres. It was already in 2001 that Manuel Castells drew attention to the problems of the global digital divide (Castells, 2001), and this

issue has been further explored by many other scholars (see for instance: Orton-Johnson & Prior, 2013; Ragnedda & Muschert, 2013).

In this article we analyse the situation of the Buryat Internet. Buryats are a group of around half a million people living in south-eastern Siberia in the Russian Federation, in Mongolia and in China (Głowacka-Grajper, Nowicka, & Połeć, 2013). We focus on Buryats living in the Russian Federation. In their case, the additional problem is bilingualism – virtually all Buryats living in Russia speak Russian (Khilkhanova, 2015), which makes it easier to use online resources available and created in Russian rather than in their language.

The topic of the Buryat language in the Internet has been considered in some articles by Buryat scholars, for example Zhargal Badagarov (2009), who provides an overview of the topic and notes difficulties in creating the Buryat cyber world. There are also multiple articles where Buryat activists promote creating Buryat content in the Internet and using this opportunity (Nimatsyrenova, 2014). We analyse a number of specific conditions for creating online content in Buryat as well as its role in various types of websites. (1) We are trying to show that Buryats create them for reasons that are autotelic rather than instrumental in nature, such as efforts to preserve their own language and culture, the desire to emphasize their activity or compare themselves with nations which have websites in their own languages. (2) An important part of our discussion concerns the relationship between efforts aimed at the preservation and development of ethnic language in spoken and written form and the development of web content in that language. We thus show the relationship between "on-line" and "off-line" problems faced by Buryats today. We also try to present the dynamics of these processes.

The most frequently raised issue in this respect is access to the Internet and skills that condition the use of it. In view of the dominance of English on the Web, what is also important is access to content in one's mother tongue (Cunliffe, 2007). This is not a problem for users of languages that have a significant dissemination of content, especially those that have official status in a particular country (Pelyasov & Kuritsyna-Korsovskaya, 2011). The situation of a language on the Internet seems to reproduce the language situation in a given country, and the Internet itself is a natural extension of other media such as television or the press. Thanks to the development of solutions that allow the customization of content, but also switching the language of displayed content according to the Internet access point, the average Internet user can access it in his or her own language without

even considering another option. Consequently, the problem of language on the Internet may seem to be solved. However, this is not the case of languages of national, ethnic and regional minorities: their situation on the Internet seems to reproduce their unprivileged status in offline reality.

This certainly does not mean that such cultures are not present on the Internet. Potentially, the Internet can be a great opportunity for minority cultures, which cannot count on support of the state or a separate educational system. As a bottom-up medium, the Internet can be a solution to their lack of access to traditional media such as television, radio, newspapers, books and films. In reality, however, taking advantage of this opportunity and building up a sufficient body of web content requires mobilization of a large number of minority culture participants. In the case of populous nations, it is easier to create content even if the level of involvement of individuals is relatively small. On the other hand, in the case of minority cultures it is much more difficult to create a separate sphere of the Internet which could be functionally equivalent to those of such nations as Russians, the French, Poles or other even less populous ones. In other words, in the case of groups with many members, the key factor behind the success of their Internet projects is their scale. The opposite can be seen in the case of languages with fewer users (Mętrak, 2014): they cannot take advantage of the economies of scale – the creation of web content requires a much greater mobilization and a much greater effort on the part of individuals. A scale effect is also necessary to achieve a qualitative change, i.e. to obtain the amount of resources that is large enough to enable the user to move freely between resources in the same language. In the absence of such an effect, the Internet becomes another sphere of activity in which members of a minority are pushed to use the dominant language – the Internet becomes another tool of cultural domination. The situation on the Internet can not only reproduce the situation in real life but also aggravate the problem: minority languages which are unavailable in new technologies might be considered useless. The struggle for Internet in a minority language can therefore be understood as a struggle to preserve it, and not only as an attempt to facilitate access to the Internet for representatives of a given minority.

The language of particular websites can often create a barrier to access to online content for a potential user. The strength of this barrier will vary according to the number of languages that the person has a command of. Of course, a great number of websites have several language versions (with a large preference for English), and there is automatic translation software, yet still imperfect even when it comes to European languages

(Orăsan & Chiorean, 2008). This does not change the fact that such a barrier will exist for each Internet user, even if they are not fully aware of it: the Internet is often used locally in the sense that user's interests are spatially and thematically limited. What is important here, however, is that for the average user of a "populous" language (such as Polish) their mother tongue can satisfy most of their needs associated with the use of the Internet. In this case, the use of language is automatic and not reflexive (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994) – one uses the language of web pages with instrumental motives. Here, it might seem a truism to say that the use of a website in the native language version is easier and more intuitive.

However, the situation is different for minority members. In their case, using the Internet in their native tongue does not have to be as easy and intuitive as in the case of dominant languages. Using the Internet in the mother tongue becomes a matter of reflection, choice and may be dictated by the desire to maintain it. Thus, it becomes an autotelic value. In addition, general problems of this kind can be aggravated by the local conditions of a given language and its users. One problem here can be the inner diversity of a minority language: the use of different dialects and the absence of its standardized version (Mensching, 2000).

Methodological note

The idea to research the problem occurred to us back in 2014, when we developed a database of Buryat websites and webpages with Buryat language versions. Our intention was to check if and how they would change, develop over time. After five years, we repeated our analysis to see which websites developed, which remained unchanged, and which have ceased to exist. This is the reason why some of the data in this article comes from 2014. The preliminary results of the first part of our research were presented at the conference "The Network Society – Between Freedom and Enslavement" (Społeczeństwo sieciowe – między wolnością a zniewoleniem) in Poznań the same year.

Since the beginning of our research, we have seen dynamic developments not only in the global Internet, but also in its Buryat part. We could see what was a temporary phenomenon and what turned out to be more stable, which projects were successful and which came to be abandoned or failed to develop the dynamics required to achieve their goals. Some of the webpages in the Buryat language that used to exist in 2014 are no

longer functional today, while some other tools and platforms, like Instagram, launched new forms of information exchange ("#buriaadkhėlėnchallenge", 2018).[1] In this article we try to present the dynamics of these processes. Of course, content, once created, can exist on the Internet as long as the author chooses to maintain the site, but it can also change from day to day. As we write in our article, this is not only a technical issue but also part of the process we focus on here.

In view of the subject, we decided to make some changes in relation to the usual ways of citing websites. First, we separate the websites and webpages that we analysed from the rest of the bibliography. Secondly, to indicate which websites are the subject of our analysis, we refer to them using their web address and not the name of the author or the site. The information about the last access to the analysed websites and about their availability at the time of publication of this article is also listed at the end of the text. What is more, this form seems clearer to English-speaking readers than titles in Buryat such as cited above and listed in the bibliography ("#buriaadkhėlėnchallenge", 2018).

When writing about the Buryat Internet, a distinction should be made between the availability of the Internet in Buryatia and in other regions inhabited by Buryats, information on Buryat culture available on the Internet, for example in Russian or in other languages, and Internet content in the Buryat language. In this article, we are only interested in the Buryat language on the Internet. Our research questions, then, focus on whether there are websites in Buryat which (a) are created only in this language, (b) have a version in Buryat alongside other language versions, and, importantly, (c) what content is available in the Buryat language on these websites. In our study we also take into account websites that facilitate access to the language, such as dictionaries with Buryat as one of the languages, textbooks for learning it, and pages containing literary content or other types of creative expression in this language.

Further research questions concern whether multi-language Internet projects include a Buryat version. The first such project we consider is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia designed to facilitate instant access to information on various topics, including those that are not to be found in traditional encyclopedias. Wikipedia has many language versions created by its users. In our analysis we consider not only the current shape of the Buryat Wikipedia and its evolution in comparison to other language versions (including those that

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[1] #буряадхэлэнchallenge

are most readily available to Buryats), but also the discussion on the process of its creation available on online forums and in other sources.

As it is today, various social media are an important part of the Internet. In our study, we do not examine the content of messages but problems related to the creation of the Buryat language version of a popular social media site. In this case, one of the key facts is that the project was conducted by independent Buryat activists and not by the company that runs the service. This part of the analysis is very important, because the purpose of developing particular language versions is to generate content that will be comprehensible in everyday use. It should reflect specific technical aspects of a given medium, taking into account specific Internet-related vocabulary. In the case of the Buryat version, this involved making difficult choices.

An overview of the Buryat Internet

As Maria Khankhunova writes, the history of the Buryat Internet is a story of enthusiasm (Khankhunova, 2017). In the early 1990s, in Buryatia, as in many regions of Russia, there were digital networks but there was no Internet – it appeared there at the end of 1995: there was the first provider company (Information Systems of Buryatia), the first websites (like the Buryat People's Website), the first torrent tracker (Ulanovka) and forums: Baikal. Net or Macon (Khankhunova, 2017). Since then, the number of websites has been growing and the Internet can hardly be called a "virtual" reality as it has come to encompass many spheres of social life.

Since the Buryat language is an official language in the Buryat Republic, some of the institutional pages are obliged to have a Buryat version, for example the websites of the Buryat government (http://egov-buryatia.ru)[2] and the Buryat State University (http://bur.bsu.ru/), or the site devoted to Buryat cultural projects under the Ministry of Culture of Buryatia (http://soyol.ru/). However, a closer analysis shows that Buryat versions play a different role than their Russian counterparts: they were probably created for prestige or for official reasons, but sometimes they are not even updated. For example, in the Buryat version of the Buryat State University website, no information was added even about the new rector; what is more, you can now (October 2019) go directly from the Russian version of the University

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[2] As mentioned in the methodological note above, information about the last access to the analysed websites and about their availability at the time of publication of this article is listed at the end of the text.

website to the English version and the version for the visually impaired, but there is no link to the still existing Buryat version. On those pages that are updated, there is less emphasis on the Buryat version than the Russian one, which seems to be a noticeable trend not only in the case of pages in the Buryat language (Mętrak, 2014).

As outlined above, most "Buryat" pages appear in Russian. Some of them contain the Buryat language in texts, articles, forums and discussions – although they are not fully in Buryat, one can easily find Buryat content there. Also, there is a lot of content in Buryat on such sites as YouTube. Apart from those, there are Buryat-language websites featuring literary resources. One of them is Буряад хэлэн (http://buryadxelen.com/), a Buryat-only site which not only offers materials for learning Buryat but also provides information on Buryat culture and literature in the Buryat language, as well as practical information on how to write in Buryat on a computer using Buryat characters. Other websites with a similar profile which were active in 2014 have since disappeared, including http://www.nomoihan.org/, http://www.uulen.ru/ or http://www.toonto.mn/. The latter one was particularly interesting: it was a Buryat-only site developed by Buryats living in Mongolia. In 2019, we had an opportunity to meet the people who had created it in Ulaanbaatar and we were told that they were considering re-launching it as a website of a Buryat association in Mongolia.

Thus, one can say that many Buryat websites in fact offer mixed content. For example, the publishing house Buriaad Ünèn (https://burunen.ru/), with newspaper and magazine articles in Buryat and Russian; a site allowing to listen to Buryat radio over the Internet (http://buryad.fm/); or the website of the Ministry of Culture of the Buryat Republic (http://www.minkultrb.ru/), where most of the content (and interface) is in Russian. These sites can be an example of on-line reproduction of the off-line situation of the Buryat and Russian languages in Buryatia.

Some sites are obviously bilingual, like ones where we can find a Buryat-Russian dictionary or a Buryat textbook for Russian speakers (https://buryat-lang.ru/). However, the case of the website "Buryat Corpus" is much more interesting: this linguistic resource is accessible via interface in English and Russian, but not in Buryat (http://web-corpora.net/BuryatCorpus/search/).

Social media, like Facebook and its Russian equivalent VKontakte (vk.com), also feature content in Buryat, be it separate groups, pages or articles. Owing to the bottom-up nature of such initiatives, we can see new pages in Buryat appear on the one hand, and

existing projects abandoned on the other. The rules of the Internet also mean that some websites disappear completely because their authors do not prolong hosting. For this reason, it is difficult to talk about the accumulation of materials available in a minority language. This is somewhat different in the case of social media or similar projects, in which the technical side is not an issue and enthusiasts only deal with content. We write about such projects in the following parts of the article.

The Buryat Wikipedia

The Buryat version of Wikipedia (http://bxr.wikipedia.org/) was created in 2003. When we started our research (24 April 2014), it contained 979 entries; five years later (31 March 2019) the number of entries was 2,124. For the sake of comparison, we also checked the Polish, Russian and Mongolian versions of Wikipedia on the same days: the Polish version had 1,042,231 entries in 2014 and 1,328,553 in 2019; Russian – 1,107,842 in 2014 and 1,537,049 in 2019; and Mongolian – 12,355 in 2014 and 18,611 in 2019. Based on their activity in March 2014, the Buryat Wikipedia authors were a group of around 5,516 people, of whom only about 33 were "active users", i.e. registered users who had made at least one edition in the previous 30 days. In five years, the total number of users has almost doubled (10,419), but the number of active users has dropped to 20 people ("List of Wikipedias", 2019). To compare, on 24 April 2014 the Polish version had 611,528 participants, 4,162 of them active; Russian – 1,242,973 participants, 11,342 of them active; Mongolian – 28,404 participants, 116 of them active.

It should be noted that the content of articles in the Buryat Wikipedia greatly varied. When we checked them in 2014, many were very brief or only included basic information. This came as a result of the strategy applied by one of the administrators aiming to pump up the statistics, which was much criticized by other co-creators ("Buriatskaia Vikipediia", 2019). In fact, the number of articles exceeded 1,000 but was reduced from 1,200 to 700 under a new administrator. As it is today, most of them are quite adequate. As we can see, the work is being done: in 2019 there were already 2,125 entries in the Buryat Wikipedia.

Considering its content, there could be two possible hypotheses. The first one suggests that the articles are related directly to Buryat culture and issues concerning the life of Buryats. One would therefore expect to find complex articles on Buryat traditions, customs and people associated with Buryat culture.

Indeed, back in 2014 we had an impression that the Buryat Wikipedia aspired to include first of all information on Buryat culture. Some newspaper articles written at the time confirmed our hypothesis:

> There are no biographies of many significant personalities of Buryatia who made the republic famous in different periods. At the same time, there is information about people whose significance for Buryatia is very doubtful. […] It is strange that although Buryatia has a great number of artists, only three of them appear in Wikipedia: Zorikto Dorzhiev, Dashi Namdakov and Radna Sakhaltuev. They certainly are world-class personalities, but this representation is clearly not enough.
>   The "military art" section has long featured the names of five Buryats, heroes of the Soviet Union, without any information: Garmazhap Garmaev, Mikhail Markheev, Bazar Rinchino, Vasily Khantaev. Some of them have streets in Ulan-Ude named after them. At the same time, no one really knows what kind of people they were (Badueva, 2014).[3]

The author of this article strongly advocates the use of opportunities of "democratic" Wikipedia for the popularization of Buryat culture and people. She is critical about the fact that those who made little for the nation are included while information on those whose merit is beyond doubt is not available there at all.

According to our analysis from 2019, the Buryat Wikipedia is more oriented to the global culture. Apart from entries devoted to Buryats, it also includes multiple biographies of people known all over the world, distinguished in science, art or politics. All entries are divided into the following sections: biographies, history, society, culture, science, geography, religion, sport, state, language. "Ethnic" topics are collected in a separate section called Buryat-Mongol, which is not that numerous. In conclusion, the Buryat Wikipedia does not focus on "local" topics but strives to represent "global" knowledge.

A closer scrutiny of Wikipedia entries available in the Buryat language indicates that the second hypothesis is closer to reality: that the Buryat Wikipedia could be a copy of other

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[3] Zdes' net biografiĭ mnogikh znachitel'nykh lichnosteĭ Buriatii, proslavivshikh respubliku v te ili inye gody. Odnovre-menno prisustvuet informatsii o liudiakh, znachimost' dlia Buriatii kotorykh vesma somnitel'na. […] Stranno, chto uchityvaia v Buriatii ogromnoe kolichestvo predstaviteleĭ khudozhestvennogo iskusstva, v Vikipedii predstavleny vsego lish' tri persony. Ėto khudozhniki Zorikto Dorzhiev, Dashi Namdakov i Radna Sakhaltuev. Nesomnenno, ėto lichnosti mirovogo urovnia, odnako ikh iavno nedostatochno. V razdele «voennoe iskusstvo» uzhe dolgoe vremia visiat v vozdukhe bez kakoĭ-libo informatsii piat' buriatov, geroev Sovetskogo Soiuza. Ėto Garmazhap Garmaev, Mikhail Markheev, Bazar Rinchino, Vasiliĭ Khantaev. Imenami nekotorykh iz nikh nazvany ulitsy Ulan-Udė. Pri ėtom nikto tolkom ne znaet, chto ėto byli za liudi. This and all subsequent translations from Russian into English are by the authors of this article.

language versions, their choice of entries and structure. It seems that its creators aim to develop a tool similar to that available in other languages rather than to create a specifically Buryat "ethnic" encyclopedia.

Some of the articles are abbreviated versions of those available in Russian and have similar content not only when it comes to text but also graphic material. One interesting point is that some of the articles included in the Buryat Wikipedia are transferred directly from the Mongolian version. It can be presumed that others are based on Mongolian models, taking advantage of the proximity of the two languages; for instance, the entry "Democracy", which even looks similar, as can be seen in Illustrations 1 and 2.

Illustration 1: The entry "Democracy" in the Buryat Wikipedia
Source: https://bxr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Арадшалал

Illustration 2: The entry "Democracy" in the Mongolian Wikipedia
Source: https://mn.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ардчилал

It is important to note that creators of the Mongolian Wikipedia have also been involved in the work on its Buryat version. In April 2012, there was a proposal to close the Buryat Wikipedia due to the lack of active editors and in the context of the presence of the Mongolian Wikipedia. Fortunately, it was rejected ("Buriatskaia Vikipediia", 2019), largely thanks to the arguments of the participants of the Russian Wikipedia, who pointed out that the Buryat language is quite viable – it is an official language in Buryatia and there is hope for the development of the section in the future.

As we can see, it is difficult to say that the Buryat version of Wikipedia in its present form performs instrumental functions, and nor can it be viewed as a specific source of knowledge about Buryat culture and tradition. We deal here with a project that is autotelic in nature – above all, Buryat Wikipedia is created to show that Buryats have their own version, just like "populous nations". Based on this example, we can see how Internet projects create the models and standards of making one's presence visible.

Internet as a space for discussion of off-line issues: the case of translation of Vk.com page into the Buryat language

The social media service VKontakte is the Russian equivalent of Facebook. In terms of frequency of use it is the largest Internet website in Russia and Ukraine, and the second one in Belarus and Kazakhstan. VKontakte is available in many languages of the Russian Federation: Tatar, Bashkir, Udmurt, Mari, Tuvan, Chuvash, Yakut and so on. One impulse to create the Buryat version of the service was the launch of the Kalmyk version in June 2013. A group of translators working on the Buryat version assembled the same month. As can be seen from the forum and the list of translators, all of them were young people under 30, concerned about the issue of maintaining the Buryat language. Most of them had no background in Mongol philology. It is interesting that the main language of communication in the group was Russian.

This translation was not dictated by a functional necessity. Rather, creating the Buryat version was perceived as an important ideological task. The problems faced by the young translators reveal the general problems of the Buryat language, issues like the political orientation and the choice of the language form. The Vk.com translation forum includes their comments strongly criticizing common borrowings from Russian. This tendency appeared

after the 1950s as a product of language unification in different spheres like politics, culture and education. Table 1 below presents an identical text from the 1930s and the 1990s, with the tendency to replace the original Buryat words (in italic) with Russian borrowings (in bold) clearly visible.

Table 1: Changes in the Buryat language

The Buryat language in the 1930s	The Buryat language in the 1990s
Buriaad *ulasaĭ niĭgėm*, *ulas tŭryn* asuudalnuudyn talaar *baga khural* bolokhodo *zasagaĭ gazaraĭ* zŭgḣȯȯ iurynkhėlėgshė, saĭduud orolsobo.	Buriaad **respublikyn sotsial'no-politicheskė** asuudal-nuudyn talaar **konferentsi** bolokhodo **pravitel'stvyn** zŭgḣȯȯ **prezident**, **ministrnuud** orolsobo.

Source: Sanzhaa, 2014

In this regard, the translators could either draw on classic Buryat texts or adapt inventions of modern standard Mongolian. For instance, the word "video" is *dŭrst bichlėg* (lit. recording with images) in Khalkha Mongolian, and *dŭrsėtė bėshėlgė* in Buryat. Some of the translators argued as follows:

> In general, the closer we will be to the official language of Mongolia, which is used in TV programmes, films, magazines, newspapers and web pages, the more chance we will have to use our own language. The language is alive when it's used and not just learned[4] [Erzhena].[5]

A user called Dmitri, who is not on the list of translators, commented on their work as follows:

> I've read the comments and I got furious… Why do you want to converge with Mongols??? Why do you use the Songol dialect or mix it in????? TRANSLATE IN LITERARY LANGUAGE!!!! In the department of the Buryat language at the BSU [Buryat State University] they teach only literary Buryat!!! It's obvious that such a translation will be very awkward and impossible to understand!!! [Dmitri].[6]

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[4] Voobshche chem blizhe my budem k gosudarstvennomu iazyku Mongolii, na kotorom vedutsia peredachi, fil'my snima-iutsia, vypuskaiutsia gazety i zhurnaly, sushchestvuiut internet saĭty. Tem bol'she u nas budet vozmozhnosteĭ ispol'zovat' svoĭ iazyk. A iazyk zhiv tol'ko togda, kogda on ispol'zuetsia, a ne prosto izuchaetsia.

[5] In order to protect the anonymity of the authors, we do not include direct links to the quotations in the text.

[6] Prochital kommentarii i menia mnogoe vozmutilo… Zachem zhe vy khotite priravnivat'sia k mongolam??? zachem songol'skiĭ i smeshannyĭ????? PEREVODITE NA LITERATURNOM!!!! V BGU na kafedre Buriatskogo iazyka izuchaiut tol'ko Literaturnyĭ iazyk!!! I chuvstvuetsia, chto perevod budet ochen' koriavym i neponiatnym!!!

In reaction to this comment there were appeals to replace the literary Khori dialect (standard Buryat) with the Songol dialect, which is the closest to the Khalkha dialect, the official language of Mongolia:

> Khori dialect didn't prove practical in a broad sense […]. The Songol dialect with a sensible use of the Khalkha dialect could be more effective. The main thing is not to overdo it [Vova][7].

Although dialectal differences as well as differences between standard Buryat and standard Mongolian concern phonetics and writing, they are important in symbolic terms. In this case, there are four different options when it comes to translating new terminology: to create new terms in the Khori dialect (standard Buryat); to adapt Mongolian terms to the standard Khori dialect; to use the southern dialect of Buryat: the Songol dialect; to use Mongolian terms in their original form without adaptation to any of the Buryat dialects.

In the absence of a general decision on what the language of the Buryat version of VKontakte should be like, the translators decided to make it "mixed". It is important to note that in most cases they refused to use Russian borrowings. The whole exercise was intended as a purely idealistic Buryat project, something that they probably lack in off-line reality. This can be a perfect example of how identity is formed on, and because of, the Internet, and how it can have an impact on non-virtual space, as can be seen in numerous off-line debates on what the Buryat language should look like.

Conclusion

In the case of research on the Buryat Internet, it is difficult to find a good reference point in Russia because of the complexity of the Buryat situation. On the one hand, Buryats belong to groups whose situation is relatively good compared to other minorities: Buryat is the official language of their autonomous republic. On the other hand, however, it is used much less frequently than Russian. If you take as a reference point only the websites created by Buryats in Russian, you can say that the situation of the Buryat language on the Internet is not good. Ordinary, everyday communication, getting news on a regular basis, unreflective use of the Internet is only possible in Russian.

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[7] Khori dialekt ne dokazal svoiu praktichnost' v shirokom smysle ponimaniia […]. Literaturnym dolzhen stat' songol'skiĭ […] A songol'skiĭ pri umelom vzaimstvovanii s khalkhaskim mozhet byt' bolee effektivnym. Glavnoe ne pereborshchit'.

Websites in minority languages are created not because there is a need to access information in those languages, but in order to create such a need, and thus to protect and develop them. The Buryat Internet is the case of an autotelic rather than instrumental need. As a Buryat person said in a personal communication: "It's very difficult to read in the Buryat language on the Internet, but it [Buryat Internet – A. Zh., W. P.] must exist to show that we have our own Buryat Internet".

Thus, global technological tools are not always instruments that create a uniform world: sometimes they can also contribute to the preservation and development of linguistic and cultural diversity. Potentially, the Internet can be a great opportunity for minority cultures, which have no support of the state and a separate educational system. The Internet, as a medium with a great role of grass-root activism, can be an effective alternative to the traditional media. However, such activity also involves specific problems which do not exist in the case of languages that have institutional help from the state and are used on a mass scale on a daily basis, also in the traditional media.

It seems to us that the key factor at play here is not the number of users of a given language, but the wider context of its use. Also important are motivations related to national pride and comparisons with other groups, both with "populous nations" and with other groups in a similar situation. This type of comparison also creates a global context for the functioning of the Internet.

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Język mniejszości w globalizującym się świecie: język buriacki w Internecie

Abstrakt

Sytuacja języków w Internecie zdaje się reprodukować ich sytuację w rzeczywistym świecie: języki dominujące, z dużą liczbą użytkowników, mogące liczyć na pomoc państw są bardziej rozprzestrzenione. Nie znaczy to jednak, że języki mniejszości nie są w Internecie obecne. W niniejszym opracowaniu, posługując się przykładem języka buriackiego, staramy się pokazać, że witryny czy też strony internetowe w językach mniejszościowych są tworzone nie tylko w celach instrumentalnych, ale także autotelicznych. Buriaci podejmują wysiłki, by chronić swój język i swoją kulturę, kierowani są chęcią podkreślenia swojej aktywności, porównaniami z innymi narodami, które mają witryny internetowe w swoich własnych językach. Ważną częścią naszej analizy są związki między wysiłkami mającymi na celu zachowanie i rozwój

języka etnicznego w formie mówionej i pisanej a rozwojem treści internetowych w tym języku. Pokazujemy więc związki między problemami *on-line* i *off-line*, z jakimi borykają się współcześnie Buriaci.

Słowa kluczowe:
język mniejszościowy; język buriacki; ochrona języka etnicznego; Internet

A minority language in the globalizing world: The Buryat language on the Internet

Abstract

The situation of languages on the Internet seems to reproduce their situation in offline reality: dominant languages with a large number of users and support from state and society are more widespread. This does not mean, however, that minority languages are not present in the Internet. In this paper, using the example of the Buryat language, we are trying to show that websites or webpages in minority languages are created not only for instrumental but also autotelic reasons. Buryats make efforts to preserve their own language and culture; they are driven by a desire to emphasize their activity or by comparison with other nations which have websites in their own languages. An important issue in our discussion is the relationship between efforts aimed at the preservation and development of ethnic language in spoken and written form and the development of web content in that language. We thus show the relationship between "on-line" and "off-line" problems faced by Buryats today.

Keywords:
minority language; Buryat language; preservation of ethnic language; Internet