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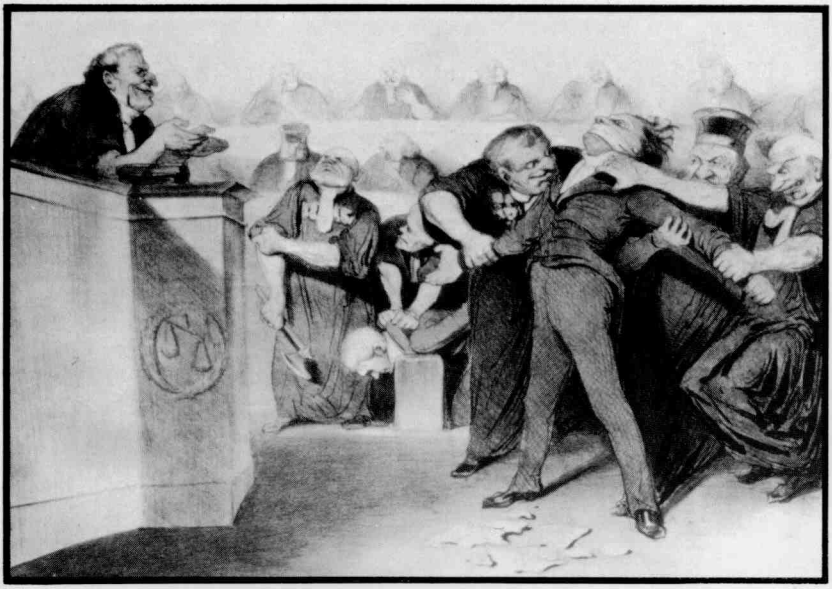
Social Anthropology and the Politics of Language



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'Janus-faced signs' – the political language of a Soviet minority before *Glasnost'*

Caroline Humphrey

It is not easy to discover the political attitudes of minority peoples of the USSR in the pre-*glasnost'* period. Any such idea as we must approach it, as it appears in speech or writing, cannot be fully understood on its own, since it exists in a context consisting of the domain of possible concepts. 'Possible concepts' include memories, ideas expressed in dialects or the vocabulary of special groups, latent and about-to-be-formulated notions, and ideas which cannot be stated in given political circumstances. It is from the domain of possible concepts and the evaluation attached to them that we can perceive the resonance of the political vocabulary which is actually used. The paper discusses the emergence of new political ideas among the Buryat and their fate in the twentieth century – a story which is necessarily incomplete, not only because of the distance of the subject from ourselves[1] but also because all that is available to us for study, language as actually employed, is necessarily ambiguous and open to interpretation.

A proposal to study ideas by means of analysis of the political vocabulary entails some obvious methodological problems. The first is the lack of any generally accepted theory, in either linguistics or philosophy, of the relation between words and consciousness. It would clearly be mistaken, as Skinner has pointed out (1980: 562–78), simply to equate the word and the concept, since it cannot be a necessary condition of someone thinking along certain lines that s/he already possess a corresponding and accepted linguistic term. Furthermore, in the case of certain highly general terms, such as *being* or *infinity*, used with perfect consistency by an entire community, it might be possible to show that there are no concepts which answer to their agreed usages. However, Skinner concluded that, while there can be no single formula for the relationship between concepts and words, we can assume for practical purposes that 'the possession of a

concept will at least *standardly* be signalled by the employment of a corresponding term. As long as we bear in mind that "standardly" means neither necessarily nor sufficiently, I think we may legitimately proceed' (1980: 564).

This formulation seems preferable to the position on this subject of the early 'materialist' semiologists such as Voloshinov. Voloshinov (1973: 10–15) argued that consciousness itself can only come about by means of some kind of semiotic material. Anything which represents, depicts, or stands for something outside itself is a sign. We can remain neutral on his bald statement, 'consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs', which would appear to deny the possibility of deliberate invention of terms, but still find valuable many of his other ideas. In particular, let us pause on the idea that 'reality reflected in sign is not merely reflected but *refracted*'. For Voloshinov it is because signs are subject to ideological evaluation that they may distort reality. This insight of Voloshinov's, an advance at least on Saussure, is attached by him to the notion of the class struggle.

> How is this refraction of existence in the ideological sign determined? By an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community, i.e. by the class struggle. This social multi-accentuality of the sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large it is by this intersecting of accents that the sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and capacity for further development. . . . The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium. The ruling class strives to impart a supra-class, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occurs in it, to make the sign uni-accentual. (1973: 23)

A similar point has been developed sociologically by Bourdieu and Bloch, without, however, focusing on Voloshinov's idea that any sign is always actually a focus for different evaluations. There are problems with Voloshinov, though: we may accept his idea of the ideological conflict over evaluations without agreeing that *this* alone is what gives rise to the 'refraction of existence' of the sign. The 'refraction of existence', or the body of myths and beliefs which seem to us to misrepresent the world, has never been shown

to be linked entirely and systematically with the intersection of social interests within a community. This is not to say that ethnographical studies, particularly in fact those of relatively simple classless societies, have not been able to demonstrate a close correspondence between the interests of social divisions (e.g. those between the sexes) and a significant part of the symbolic content and structure of the cosmology, but they have never explained the whole of the 'misrepresentation' nor its general motivation. (To explain, for example, even a primitive cosmology such as that of the Nuer or the Barasana should we not also look at the struggle between given social forms and 'nature' (the environment as perceived), or at relations with other societies as Lévi-Strauss has pointed out, and in more complex cases at attitudes to ethnicity, and the interaction with perceived past states of this same society?)

If we must decouple Voloshinov's causal link between 'multi-accentuality' and the 'refraction of existence' this is not to deny the importance of both of these ideas. However, in my view it is necessary to unhinge yet another of the connections in his causal thinking, the explanation of 'multi-accentuality' of the sign by the class-struggle. As this study will demonstrate, some classes, if classes are defined by politico-economic position, may incorporate a far greater internal diversity of evaluations than others, which may be characterized by something like unanimity. In other words, it is not simply class which produces divergent 'accents', though class may have this function. In the case of the Buryat, pre-Soviet political cultures, of radically non-European kinds, have been far more important than class. For peoples like the Buryat the Soviet state did in fact operate, as it was intended to, on non-class lines, drawing into its arenas and functions virtually anyone prepared to engage in the official political discourse along the correct 'line'. The line, frequently subject to abrupt change, was the product of specific political circumstances in eastern Siberia, and it was maintained by repression and terror. This meant, as the twenties and thirties progressed, the sloughing off of sections of the population, as indigenous concepts and vocabularies tied to the very past circumstances and social structures the State intended to transform, became, one by one, illegitimate from the point of view of the State and Party. It is only insofar as we can call these alienated and marginalized groups 'classes', though they were not distinguished economically from anyone else provided they kept silent, that one might possibly retain Voloshinov's

idea that it is the class-struggle which determines the 'multi-accentuality' of the sign in political discourse.

In as much as any distincitvely Buryat political ideas (concepts expressed in the indigenously formulated terminology) had become illegitimate by the mid-1930s, we must consider the possibility that the entire Buryat people became a marginalized group in the above sense. This however was not the case. There is no doubt that the majority of Buryats participated in state politics as best they could. Nevertheless, this paper argues that minorities such as the Buryat perceived political activity differently from the Russians. The Buryats were the heirs of their own deeply-ingrained habits of thought, underlying political ideas. For example, the cyclical view of time, meant that the very notion of irreversible progress was, if not incomprehensible, not truly apprehended and internalized. Such 'possible ideas', latent for decades, might unexpectedly surface. Here is an illustration: by the Brezhnev era the consolidation of state power in a relatively defined social group had established something like a recognizably hierarchical social structure, and it was suggested by at least one Buryat linguist that the old honorific styles of address, earlier used for lords and Buddhist lamas and subsequently 'swept away by the Revolution' should be revived for address towards dignitaries of the Soviet state (Shagdarov 1972: 11).

This study will suggest that the most serious and brutal attempts to impose a single meaning in political rhetoric cannot succeed. Voloshinov was right, despite the reservations mentioned above, to point out the Janus-like, 'inner dialectical quality' of the sign, and it is this that we shall now explore.

The emergence of a Buryat political terminology

The Buryats live in south-east Siberia and speak a Mongolian language. Subjects since the seventeenth century of the Russian Empire, they nevertheless found themselves at the cross-roads of north Asia, a point where Russian, Mongolian, and Manchu/Chinese trade and communications met. The Buryats were not themselves ever politically unified. They were a collection of tribes, of varied origins in the north Mongolian world, each with its own dialect. The majority were converted to Buddhism by the early nineteenth century, but other groups remained believers in shamanism and in some areas were subject to rather cursory

missionizing activity by the Orthodox church. Possibly because of these diverse influences on their development, the Buryats by the beginning of the twentieth century had a remarkable intelligentsia, multilingual, and adept in the manipulation of different cultures. It was from this class, remarkable for its energy and diversity, that there arose leaders determined to provide an indigenous political vocabulary to deal with the modern world.

The initial spur was the Tsarist land-reform of 1901–2, which threatened to transfer much Buryat territory into the hands of Russian settlers. By proposing peasant land norms for the whole population it threatened the entire Buryat way of life, which was based on extensive and often nomadic pastoralism. The 1905 'revolution' in Russia provided a new political discourse of democracy and revolt, and the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in Mongolia in 1911, a regime which had seemed monolithic and eternal, suddenly showed that political change was possible. The Buryat intelligentsia was split: there were those nationalist traditionalists who clung to the hierarchical Mongolian ideal, there was a pro-Russian faction, and there were nationalist radicals who aimed for a modern transformation of Buryat-Mongolian society. It was this latter group which flung itself into activity: newspapers and brochures to raise Buryat consciousness, proposals for reform of the clan system and the Buddhist church, translations of European classics, reform of the cumbersome Mongolian writing system used by the Buryats, dictionaries and encyclopaedias. Out of all this, there emerged the new political vocabulary.

The new terms were not the simple translation of Russian or international words into Buryat. Potent nationalism made this course unacceptable. In some cases, words which were already present were given a new meaning. In others, new words were made up. Since words in the Mongolian languages are built up of meaningful roots and suffix morphemes it is possible for us to see the ideas behind the construction of the new vocabulary.

For example: *xubisxal* 'revolution'. In the nineteenth century this word had meant 'metamorphosis' or 'transformation'. It is formed from the root *xubi* 'fate' or 'destiny' and is one of a group of words built up on this base, including:

xubilaxu 'to be transformed', 'to deteriorate'

xubilgaxu 'to transform'

xubilgan 'a reincarnation', especially of lamas who are reincarnations of deities

xubiraxu 'to change', 'to fade,' 'to wilt'

xubiragulxu 'to make to change', 'to distort'
xubisgaxu 'to change' (transitive), 'to transform'

The word *xubisxal* is made up of the following elements: *xubi* 'fate', + *-s* (very forming suffix), + *-ga* (suffix making verb transitive), + *-l* (suffix forming abstract nouns). In this the -s suffix seems crucial, perhaps implying suddenness. Other abstract nouns formed from *xubi* have different meanings according to whether they employ the -l or the -r suffix, e.g.

xubilal 'evolution'
xubiral 'change (of a negative kind)'

We can see that the word *xubisxal* has a quite specific context in the Mongol languages. It was not used for the 1911 change of government in Mongolia, when the Manchus were thrown out and the autonomous regime initiated. Its use for 1917 was a quite deliberate extension of the reference of a word which previously had no political implications but rather religious ones. In the early period it was used for an abstract idea, the deliberate transformation of (one's) fate, but its reverberations in its linguistic context must have been given various connotations by different speakers.

There is no need to do a similarly extended analysis of other words created or re-deployed at this period. A glance at the following list will show the kinds of operation involved:

neyigem zirum 'socialism', derived from *neyigem* 'community', 'society', 'all'; *zirum* 'established order', 'code of laws'.

anggi 'class' (in political sense), derived from *ang* 'division' 'separation'.

eb-xamtu-yin nam 'Communist Party', derived from *eb* 'harmony', *xamtu* 'together', *-yin* (possessive suffix), *nam* 'people of a similar type, or belonging to a single group'.

zöblel 'soviet', derived from *zöb* 'truth', 'right', *zöblexü* 'to give advice', 'to consult'; *-l* (abstract noun suffix).

ed-ün zasag 'economics', derived from *ed* 'things', 'objects', 'property', *-ün* (possessive suffix), *zasag* 'rule', 'power'.

xamtu-yin azal 'collective farm', 'co-operative', derived from *xamtu* 'together', *-yin* (possessive suffix), *azal* 'task', 'work'.

tengri-ügei üzel 'atheism', derived from *tengri* 'sky', 'heaven', 'god', *-ügei* (negative), *üzel* 'view'

None of these words, nor others of the same kind, are now normally used by the Buryats, either in speech or writing. Although the 'new' vocabulary has not entirely disappeared from Mongolia, it has been replaced in Buryatiya by Buryatized forms

of Russian or international words (*kommunis*, *parti*, *kolxoz*, etc.). Contemporary Soviet linguists explain this by saying that the lexicon of the 1920s was unwieldy and did not express the 'true meaning of the concepts', with the result that people were confused. It is certainly true that many of the new expressions were lengthy, e.g. for 'agronomist' (now *agronom*): *gazar taria-alang-iin uxaanda bolborson xün* ('a person educated in the science of tilling the land'). But such expressions are not unclear, and I shall argue that it is their over-determined character, their abstract intelligibility, which is one of the reasons for their demise.

Indeed, in the early period it was the borrowed foreign words which gave rise to misunderstandings. In the 1920s the Buryats used *xubisxal* interchangeably with the Russian *revolutsiya*. The latter was doubly alien, since ordinary people had little access to European history which might have enabled them to see what revolutions had occurred, or indeed that there might be different sorts of revolution at all. People told me of a folk-etymology at the period of the phrase '*oktyabrskaya revolutsia*', the adjective only adding an element of mystification, since it was not clear why the month should make any difference. People thought that there was a woman (perhaps because of the feminine ending *-skaya*, in itself a misunderstanding of Russian grammar) who was named after the month October, and that she led some kind of *revolutsiya* against the Tsar. This made sense to uneducated people because it was clear that one person's revolt – particularly one led by a woman! – should be different from another person's revolt, while the political difference between the February and October revolutions escaped them.

But during the 1920s a commutation took place: misunderstandings over Russian terms were short-lived and their referential meanings soon became crystal clear, and at the same time the meaning of the Buryat expressions clouded over as it became difficult to tell to what in the real world they applied. In order to understand this we must examine the general socio-linguistic context of the 1920s. The rapid political education of ordinary people was of course a priority of the revolutionary government. Commissions were sent out to record the dialects and vocabulary of the Buryats. One survey, conducted by the eminent Mongolist N. N. Poppe in various Buryat collective farms, is available to us and we may assume that it is a fairly exact record of rural speech at that time.

Then (late 1920s – early 1930s) the Buryat-Mongolian political vocabulary was still in use:

xubisxaliin erdem surgaal 'wise teachings of the revolution'
xagaan zasagai ülegdel 'survivals of the Tsarist (Khan's) regime'
bodolgo 'politics', etc.

But at the same time an extraordinary number of the words used in everyday speech were Russian, even where Buryat equivalents existed. Sometimes Buryat and Russian vocabulary was used interchangeably:

kolxooz and *xamtiin azal* 'kolkhoz'
xulaaguud and *bayad* 'rich farmers'
xot and *gorod* 'town'
nam and *parti* 'Party'

Very noticeable is the use of a purely Russian political vocabulary:

arganizaasa (Rus. *organizatsiya*) 'organization'
pirigib (Rus. *peregib*) 'deviation' (in political sense)
voyono kommunizami (Rus. *voyennyi kommunizm*) 'war communism'
splosnaa kiligtivizaasa (Rus. *sploshnaya kollektivizatsiya*) 'complete collectivization'
trudne momentuudta (Rus. *trudnyye momenty*) 'in difficult moments'

(Poppe 1934 and 1936).

What is clear, if we compare this with documents such as newspapers of the period, is that the ordinary speech of kolkhozniks was much more Russified than written texts. This has continued to be the case to the present day, although the two have come closer together, and we should look at the reasons.

In the late 1920s–early 1930s Buryat writing was still dominated by the arguments of the native intelligentsia. Buryat was written in the Mongolian script, an archaic form which differed markedly from any spoken dialect. This was thought to hold back educational development, because the script was difficult to learn, ambiguous, could not be used for reading aloud, etc. Opinions were hotly divided as to whether it should be retained in its present form (to preserve access to centuries of culture), reformed so as to remove ambiguities, or given up in favour of a Cyrillic or Latin transliteration of the spoken language. In the end the Party recommended the Latin option, which had long been in preparation by the Buryat scholar Baradiin and others. An

orthography was finally agreed upon at the end of the 1920s, but it had a short and confused life. In 1933 the Central Committee of the Buryat Communist Party decreed that the language to be used as a base for writing was no longer to be Khalkh Mongolian but the Selenga dialect of Buryat. At the same time, 'archaisms' and 'Mongolisms' were to be abandoned, and international and Russian words to be introduced. Fear of pan-Mongolian nationalism and its links with Japanese expansion in north Asia were the background to these decisions. The disarray among writers of Buryat was only intensified when, in 1936, it was decreed that the dialect basis was to change again, from Selenga to Khori. In 1939, as part of an all-USSR policy, the Latin script was rejected and replaced with the Cyrillic. All of this constituted a devastating attack on the attempt by Baradin and others to retain a Mongolian culture in Buryatiya. It was now declared that Buryat was a separate language. The Party constantly urged writers to abandon 'Mongolisms', which were labelled 'bookish' and 'difficult for ordinary people to understand', and to bring their writing closer to the speech of the masses.

By the end of the 1930s, the early leaders of the Buryat intelligentsia, especially those associated with the Buddhist Church, had all been repressed. Those of their number surviving into the 1930s had been accused of 'bourgeois nationalism', and it is probable that for anyone to use their neo-Mongolian vocabulary of politics in writing would have been very dangerous. We can therefore see the disappearance of the Buryat terms in the written language as a matter of dire necessity – they were simply erased by decree.

But this does not explain why the spoken language was, even by the later 1920s, so markedly more Russified than Buryat writing. Even in Selenga, the district closest to the Mongolian border, the oral texts recorded by Poppe show that around 14 per cent of the vocabulary used in talking about political matters was Russian. The central organs of the Buryat Party were disingenuous in suggesting that the neo-Mongolian terminology was 'not known' among the people, or 'difficult to understand'. As the texts show, the terms were used and used correctly. I would suggest that the reason they were being abandoned in favour of Russian terms, even in advance of the Party's decrees, was that they were completely understandable as concepts, but what happened was that reality no longer corresponded to them. For the Buryat peasants and herdsmen, half-literate at best, and situated at the

end of a complex administrative hierarchy of which the heights (in Moscow) were completely unknown to them, the socio-political reality of the 1920s and 1930s must have appeared bewilderingly arbitrary. Why War Communism, and then why the New Economic Policy, and then why De-Kulakization and Collectivization? Some of these expressions, such as 'the Ural-Siberian Method', floated briefly into vogue and then disappeared again. The drastic nature of the changes, and the fact that decisions about them were taken outside the known world, meant that no native Buryat concepts, even those specifically constructed for the revolution could accurately reflect the situation. Russians and Mongolians, faced with similar revolutionary upheavals, had only their own languages at their disposal and therefore tended to continue to use the old terms, however inappropriate they became. The Buryat solution was to turn to Russian terms which were used primarily as means of identification.

To take a very simple example: the Buryat word *bayad* (rich people) was the equivalent of the Russian *kulak* (rich peasant) in ordinary language. But as policy followed policy, it was soon apparent that kulaks were not *bayad*: the category 'kulak' was administratively defined, by criteria which changed from time to time for reasons which cannot have been clear to Buryat herdsmen. Initially these were essentially criteria from the Russian economy, such as area of land owned, number of cattle owned, or whether there were any employees on the farm. As the criteria widened many of the people defined as 'kulaks' could not have been rich in any Buryat understanding of the word. Buryats defined wealth by the number of cattle and horses owned, not by the area of sown land, nor the area of pasture, nor by the presence of employees. Furthermore, during collectivization the term 'kulak' came to be used for anyone who opposed the policy, i.e. it became a political category (Hirooka *et al.* 1988). In this situation, no-one in their senses would have used the word *bayad* to refer to kulaks; *bayad* meant rich people, and kulaks were *xulaaguud*, as the Buryats pronounced it. The sense of the term may have twisted out of sight, but the reference was entirely clear: 'kulaks' were found in every village.

The distinction between sense and reference is useful for understanding the fate of the Buryat-Mongolian vocabulary too. The terms had not only sense, but also their own implications of moral values which could not be forgotten. It would have been possible for the kolkhozniks to go on calling the Party '*eb xamtu-*

yin nam' ('the community of harmony and togetherness'), but to do so in view of the enormous changes which took place in the size, composition and socio-political role of the Party in this period, would have been to use this phrase as a clearly inappropriate even ludicrous label. No Buryat speaker could ignore a lingering sense, and an evaluation precisely linked with deeply felt aspirations of the specific social movement now long-since past, associated with these words. As a label 'Kommunis Parti' functioned much better.

Furthermore, with the Buryat terms it was not clear to what in the real world they should correctly be applied. In other words, while their sense was evident, their range of reference in many cases was not. The terms had first been defined by intellectuals in the capital and had, as we saw, reached the kolkhozniks during the 1920s. But the intellectuals became steadily less influential, and it is highly doubtful that as Soviet institutions changed, they could have established a more differentiated range of terms to deal with the situation in the countryside. Poppe's texts make clear that kolkhozniks used the term '*eb xamtu-yin azal*' ('work-group of harmony and togetherness') to refer without differentiating to communes, cooperatives, artels, and collective farms, but these were different kinds of organization, all but the last to be abolished in the collectivization drive. In discussing the present (1930s) the herdsmen simply used the Russian-derived *kolxooz*, since it was quite clear what a kolkhoz was. Who was to say that the reference of '*eb xamtu-yin azal*' was to be extended to include the kolkhoz?

If we return to *xubisxal* 'revolution', which today is definitely classed as an archaism, we find that contemporary Buryat dictionaries allow the word as a term for the February revolution, but not the October one, which in Buryat is *revolyutsi*.

Even in the period before the decrees outlawing 'Mongolisms', people must have sensed the official preference for Russian terms. At least with Russian terms, one could preserve the appearance of keeping up with the flow of policy which somehow or other had to be put into practice. Hold 'political discussions' and 'purge the leadership' of the 'class enemy'? – much the simplest was to say 'These are our discussions (Rus. *beseda*) and those are the class enemy (Rus. *klassovoi vrag*)', whatever the reality of the situation. The necessity of doing this was just as strong if no real attempt was made to carry out the instructions. All that was necessary was to report that a *beseda* had taken place and a *klassovoi vrag* had been

unmasked. The fulfilling of instructions in a purely formal way (Rus. slang '*na galochki*' – 'for the record') was very common, indeed universal in the case of orders which had to be obeyed and which were difficult to check up on. In this situation having the appropriate label was most of what was required.

The function of Russian words as labels when they were used by Buryats becomes even clearer when we realize that many of them were used in current speech as abbreviations (this is true of native Russian speakers too), for example:

'*sotsialisticheskii*' becomes 'sots'
'*kommunisticheskaya partiya*' becomes 'kompartiya'
'*produktsiya*' becomes 'prod'
'*potrebitel'skii*' (consumption) becomes 'po'
'*snabzheniye*' (supply) becomes 'snab'

Unlike words in the Buryat language, which are made up of morphemes with meaning, no amount of working out from first principles will tell you what a foreign abbreviation stands for. The word *sel'po* (local branch of the consumers' co-operative) may not be understood, but the institution can be pointed out, 'There it is, right in the middle of the village'.

To use Russian is also a kind of protection of the Buryat language. Even if it is unconscious, people may wish to preserve their own values from the huge ideological pressure of the Soviet institutionalization – especially when those institutions, and even the ideological value attached to them is constantly changing. The corollary of this is that the Buryat language is increasingly kept for those situations in which an understood morality is shared – for example, in family life.

Written Tibetan and Mongolian and Buryat honorific speech have disappeared from the Buryat and Russian. Some idea of their use is gained from the following table constructed by Loseva on the basis of her field-work among kolkhozniks in the Aga Buryat National Okrug in the early 1970s (Loseva 1974: 123).

I would suggest, however, that the socially important difference now is between the formal or 'official' language, whether Buryat or Russian, on the one hand, and informal language on the other. The table shows that Buryat is ceasing to have much vitality as a written language. 'Informal language' is spoken Buryat, much interspersed with Russian colloquialisms.

The definition of linguistic codes of various kinds (known in Russian as 'styles') has been a matter of concern in the Soviet Union ever since the 1930s. In other words, the Soviet government

Use of language		*men*	*women*	*total*	*%*
Buryats stating native lang. to be:	Buryat	243	182	425	97.7
	Russian	4	6	10	2.3
Conversing at work in:	Buryat	90	60	150	35.7
	Russian	8	25	33	7.5
	Either B or R	149	98	247	56.8
Conversing at home in:	Buryat	170	136	306	70.3
	Russian	15	16	31	7.2
	Either B or R	62	36	98	22.5
Conducting correspondence in:	Buryat	13	24	37	8.7
	Russian	139	91	230	52.7
	Either B or R	95	73	168	38.6

has deliberately set out to create specific forms of linguistic expression for particular occasions. Numerous congresses and publications have debated the question of defining functional 'styles' and attempted to set out the number and type of 'styles' appropriate to given languages, the most important being Russian. The question of whether it was desirable to have such 'styles' hardly seems to have arisen. 'Style' itself was defined as a semantically closed, expressively limited and intentionally organized system of means of expression, corresponding to one or another genre of literature, writing, or social activity (Budayev, Dambayeva, and Shagdanov (eds) 1972: 13).

An influential All-Union Congress of 'stylistics' took place in Ashkhabad in 1966, attended by 360 linguists from all over the Soviet Union. It was decided that six functional 'styles' were to be differentiated: 1) artistic, 2) social-publicist, 3) official-business, 4) scientific, 5) production-technological, and 6) everyday communication. Academician Vingradov's objection to the notion of an 'artistic style' was swept aside. The Buryat delegates decided in favour of the Ashkhabad categories, with the qualification that in the relatively low state of development of the Buryat language it was not necessary to distinguish between the 'scientific' and the 'production-technological' styles (Budayev *et al.* (eds) 1972: 19).

The 'official' language

In fact, the social-publicist and official-business styles are indistinguishable. They constitute what I call 'official' language.

'Official' Buryat is so heavily influenced by 'official' Russian that it often gives the impression of being simply a Buryatized rendering of the latter. It is increasingly differentiated from any spoken form of Buryat, and although it is based on the Khori dialect, writers and speakers at meetings, etc. are discouraged from using any local-sounding words. Not only single terms, but also whole expressions are formulae ('exhaust all possibilities', 'liquidate deficiencies', 'make a categorical improvement' and so on) transferred directly from Russian officialese to Buryat. The sense, range of referents, and sometimes even grammatical characteristics, such as word order, are taken directly from Russian, e.g. Russian *denezhnyi oborot* ('financial turnover') – Buryat *müngenei er'ese*; Russian *obshchestvennyi stroi* ('social structure') – Buryat *olonshtyn baiguulalta*; Russian *imeni* ('named after' as in *Kilkhoz imeni Karla Marksa*) – Buryat *neremzhete*, etc. Even the strangely redundant Russian expression *rogatyi skot* ('horned cattle') appears in Buryat as *eberte mal*. Very common are terms consisting of paired Russian and Buryat words, e.g. *xütelberilxe shtab* ('leading staff'), *soyol kul'turyn emxi* ('organization of culture'). A large number of Buryat suffixes are now used in such a way as to correspond grammatically with Russian word endings, e.g. *-beri* corresponds with the Russian *-stvo*. Of course, literary Buryat contains a majority of words which have always existed in the language, but a large number of these have come to have specifically Soviet referents, and the 'old meanings' – which still obtain in ordinary spoken language – have been discarded.[2] An example is the word *bagsha*, which had the connotations of guru, mentor, or guiding spirit, but is now used in literary Buryat only with the meaning of 'teacher' in a school or other educational institution.

The guardians of the 'official' style are newspaper editors, broadcaster, journalists, Party officials, school-teachers. There is little distinction between written and oral modes, since speeches are written out and delivered to the letter. For important political meetings, the speeches are often written by specialists trained at the Higher Party Schools and distributed to the appropriate speakers. Frequently they are written in Russian and then translated into Buryat, as are the main (and perhaps all) regional newspapers. At less exalted levels, Party officials make a check on speeches before they are given.

Before *glasnost'* all over the Soviet Union articles and letters ostensibly written by members of the public were re-written by

journalists in the appropriate style before publication. This was true even of the most humble newspapers. When Aleksei Losev was working on a local paper in a small town in north Sakhalin, it was his job to 'organize' the reactions (*otkliki*) of the public to current political events. He describes a morning in the newspaper office. A colleague says to him:

> 'I, Aleksei Vladimirovich, will take the working class – a workshop for making stools, and I'll do the scientific-technical intelligentsia, at Dal'tekhsnab. But you do a state farm, so we can have some representatives of the nationalities. And you, as a young man, can probably organise a woman.'
> 'But where am I to find her, Ivan Mikhailych?'
> 'Well, try ringing the hospital, or the library. Or you could try the post-office, Lyudmilla Vasil'yevna. She always gives us good reactions.'
>
> And we get down to it.
>
> 'Hullo, is that Dal'tekhsnab? Could you give me the Party Secretary please . . . Sergei Sergeyevich? Hullo, how are you? It's Ivan Mikhailych from the newspaper speaking. We have the idea of putting your reactions in the next number. To what? To the Plenum, to the Plenum, of course. Good. O.K. Shall I ring you and read them out when they are ready, or will you trust us? . . . Well fine. Thanks for your trust.'
>
> 'We got hold of the working class, the old Bolsheviks, women, the scientific-technical intelligentsia, the nationalities, and sometimes even pioneers and schoolchildren, and then got down to invention.
>
> 'I as a mother who has brought up four children . . . cannot help remembering the unforgettable days of October . . . and only with Soviet power has our little nation . . . I guarantee still more to . . . .' (Losev 1978: 242–3)

In this style there is a limited range of adjectives and adverbs: success (*uspekh*) is creative (*tvorcheskii*), labour (*trud*) is also creative (*tvorcheskii*), help (*pomoshch'*) is brotherly (*bratskaya*), participation (*uchastiye*) is active (*aktivnoye*), and so on.

It is a truism to say that many political meetings carried out in this style were pure 'performance'. They achieved a change of

state, for example the public 'decision' to take some action, but this was irrespective of the attitudes of those attending. In many cases such meetings consisted entirely of incantations. For example, from a meeting held in July 1973 to award the Buryat ASSR with the Order of the October Revolution, a speech made by N. F. Tatarchuk, chairman of the Krasnoyarsk Krai Soviet, selected at random from seventeen similar speeches, and of course in Russian:

> We, comrades, are heartily thankful and express our deep gratitude to the Leninist Central Committee of the Party and to our Soviet government for their continuous and attentive care for the development of the productive forces of the eastern regions of our country. Please, Mikhail Sergeyevich, convey to the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Party, to the Soviet of Ministers of the USSR, and to the Soviet of Ministers of the RSFSR our great gratitude for the great brotherly help which has been given, for the support in the strengthening of the economy and the development of the productive forces not only of the Krasnoyarsk Krai but also of all the eastern regions of our great multinational Homeland – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. (Applause)
> Long live the thrice decorated Buryat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and her manly and work-loving people! (Applause)
> Long may the indestructible union and brotherly friendship of all the people of our international Homeland – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – live and flourish! (Applause)
> Glory to our Leninist Communist Party of the Soviet Union and her Central Committee headed by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid Il'ich Brezhnev! (Applause) (Materialy . . ., 1973: 74–5)

The 'official' style has some further characteristics which stem from the Soviet ideological attitude to history. Both the sense and the reference of political terms are constantly in the process of being defined and re-defined. A stream of publications has this function: text-books, collections of speeches, directories for local Party workers, managers, chairmen of enterprises, etc., official records of current formulations of policy. Many such books are aimed explicitly at instruction and consist of chapters of

explanation, with the significant words in heavy type, followed by a series of 'control questions'. To take a typical example, the first chapter of a book on economics in agricultural production sets out to explain the difference between 'socialism' and 'developed socialism' (Emel'yanov (ed.) 1977: 3–14). The 'control questions' at the end of the chapter begin:

1. What is the economic strategy of the Party and what are its basic elements?
2. What is the connection between the economic policy and the economic strategy of the Party? In what ways are they the same and in what ways different?
3. In what do the scientific bases of the economic strategy of the Party consist?
4. What are the characteristics of the contemporary stage of the development of the economy and how are they reflected in the Party's economic strategy?

Such questions do not bear too much thinking about in the abstract; it is clear that what the reader is expected to do is to answer the questions by referring back to the heavy type in the preceding chapter. What these 'guide' books are doing in effect is to provide a current definition of political terms. They sometimes give the sense of the terms ('Politics is the concentrated expression of economics') but they are mainly devoted to defining the reference, and usually not to some possible category, but to actually existing phenomena or processes which have occurred ('Socialism was built in our country already in the 1930 . . .'; or, 'One of the simplest forms of vertical integration is the sovkhoz-factory . . .. Examples of such agro-industrial unions are the sovkhoz-factories 'Chuma' and 'Viktoriya' in the Moldavian SSR . . .').

Within the sphere of the 'official' rhetoric the 'struggles' over the evaluation of language have had a peculiar form. This is because, firstly, the definitions of the meanings of political words were established by high officials who did not take ordinary speech as a basis, and, secondly, while the current version of the reasoning behind these definitions was sometimes explained, in the text-books, the history of changes of opinion was assiduously erased.

It may seem incredible to Western readers that this really could be so. Surely old text-books and political speeches,

visible evidence of different opinions, lie around undisturbed in provincial libraries? But a teacher in a small rural school in the Ukraine during the 1940s–1960s wrote:

> I did not observe any case of control by the organs of the state security over the school, but lists of publications due for confiscation were showered on us regularly and efficiently. The confiscated literature was destroyed in the presence of witnesses and with written confirmation. We were all amused when, after the 20th Party Congress, the new people in power hurriedly sent out circulars giving instructions for the confiscation of their own recent speeches and works. (Tiktina 1978: 80–1)[3]

People may notice, and be amused or appalled by changes in values, but discussion of such matters used to be dangerous and still is not without risk. The evidence is destroyed. As a recent article in *Izvestiya* on the teaching of history observes, 'The fact that Catherine II forbad the word "slave" did not mean that slavery disappeared' (21 July 1987: 3), but the existence of an effective 'social' evaluation (Voloshinov) depends on there being social means by which people can communicate on these matters – more or less absent for the Soviet rural population. Above all it depends on an understanding or *possession* of the concepts, which is difficult without a knowledge of their unfolding through time.

Essential to this process of re-definition of political concepts is the idea that the strategy of the Party is scientific. Processes in society develop according to laws which have the same objective character as the laws of nature. Consequently, the study of the laws of society becomes progressively deeper just as does the scientific study of nature. The laws of society and economics can be misunderstood. In the same way that past scientific theories were 'wrong', past political and economic theories were 'wrong' and are now superceded. The development of knowledge proceeds in parallel with the development of the economy.[4] Soviet ideology thus provides reasons for discarding past interpretations of economics, on which political policy is in theory based. Past values are at best useful indications of paths which should not be taken. At worst, they are dangerous misunderstandings. The orientation is away from the past and towards the future.

To the people responsible for defining the 'line' on some matter, a change from an earlier position need not seem blameworthy. On the contrary it is evidence of progress. This is true even if the

matter under discussion is purely ideological, e.g. in literary criticism. In the Stalinist period, the Buryat 'Geser' epic was condemned, and the discussions separated out two incorrect views (that a bowdlerized version was acceptable, and that the epic merely suffered from an 'anti-people' character) which were contrasted with a correct 'scientific' view. (The term 'anti-people' is still used, but now applied to folk epics, which are widely published.) The critics in the 1950s felt aggrieved that they had not been given guidance from above, from the Scientific-Research Institute of Culture, thus allowing them to make incorrect judgements (Khadalov and Ulanov (eds) 1953: 196–7). But for the ordinary people, the recipients of the 'correct' line, all of the past is erased. They hear only that historians, philologists and philosophers have deeply studied the matter and arrived at a conclusion. In the case of economics and politics the 'line' is even more ineluctable, in that it is based on laws which are 'independent of the wishes of people' (Emel'yanov (ed.) 1977: 10).

Skinner has suggested that with historical change, words, if they are not dropped altogether, tend to accrete new meanings by specific types of social argument and re-evaluation (Skinner 1980: 562–78). Of course this does occur in large parts of the Soviet vocabulary, but the political lexicon has appeared until recently on the contrary to be subject to a narrowing process, both in sense and range of reference. I have suggested that there are two main reasons for this: firstly, the progressive cutting away of earlier evaluations of words, and secondly the definition of abstract concepts in terms of specific institutions, rather than in terms of principles. What remains is, essentially, a label.

Internalization of the 'official' language

The conceptual-linguistic resources of Buryat may impede the translation of certain crucial political ideas. To take one example, the concept of the 'bright future' (*svetloye budushchee* in Russian) cannot be adequately expressed in Buryat. The Mongolian languages seem to have no way of expressing a hopeful, definitively positive view of the future. This is consistent, of course, with the Central Asian cyclical view of time. In Mongolian and Buryat the 'future' is rendered by the following expressions:

xoito – 'after'; also, 'behind', 'northern side' (with connotations of coldness, uncleanness, peril)

ereedgüi sag – 'the time which has not come'
xozhom oixi sag – 'the afterwards time'

The expression 'bright future' is thus rendered in Buryat as:

ereedgüi sagai gereltei kommunisticheske baidal – 'the bright communist existence of the time which has not come', a phrase which is not as inspiring as its Russian original.

The concept may be understandable through this thicket of words nevertheless. How are we to know to what extent ordinary people think politically through the 'official' language? Almost no data exist on this subject for the Buryat, and we must make use of indirect evidence. A starting point is the same question applied to ordinary Russians of Siberia. Losev, the newspaperman mentioned above, has preserved some letters from his rural public. These, barely literate, and in their undoctored, unpublished form, he saw as important social documents, which should be read taking into account

> the special psychology of the author (it is not everyone who writes to newspapers), his inability to express his ideas (in itself this may be very expressive), and the influence of the stamp of official propaganda, undigested or misconceived, taken seriously or ironically, because written expression cannot be conceived outside this stamp (and this is also of social significance). (Losev 1978: 241)

Let us take the example of a letter from a schoolgirl of about 15 who wrote to take part in a discussion about the role of pioneer-leaders in schools.

> The vocation of man is the continuous, demanding realisation to help the masses, inactivity leads to stupidity, and then to idiotism. But man must work in contact with the mass and work graphically, according to the hourly graph and the plan!
> In the mass there is always the sputnik of biological fermentation and it is not recommended to get nervous and angry with the mass, since after work there is wear and tear of the organism, and man falls into a state of underdevelopment, it is particularly hard to work among children because they have so many 'Whys?' These 'whys?' monitor the personal character and therefore, according to the individual 'why?' it is possible to define whether this person is useful to society or not, and even the state of his health and the length of his fruitful work.

> All normal children engage in voluntary social work after school hours, but the underdeveloped are not in a fit state to engage in these questions – that is why there are pioneer-leaders: the leader is duty bound to set up the plan of work, so that the brain of man can begin to work according to his individual abilities, BUT the main thing is: 'The Regime of the Day!', 'The Plan of Work!', 'Why?' (Liz Sh)

One has the sense of someone who has learnt the labels and slogans (the 'mass', the 'sputnik', 'fruitful work', 'the regime of the day') and applies them mechanically. This is not simply childishness. Adults also make sense of the political ideology by incorporating parts of it into the practical world they know. Such attempts characteristically refrain from any individual interpretation and make almost desperate links between high policy and the people's wisdom. Losev received, for example, letters from an inventor – not a collector, an inventor – of proverbs (1978: 262):

> Livestock farming, as you know, depends on a sufficiency of fodder. The culture of legumes decisively raises the quantity of fodder. You know it was not by chance that the March Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of USSR devoted much attention to peas and legumes. And sufficient attention was given to the raising of productivity. Fertiliser, including organic fertiliser, plays in this matter a leading role. Do my proverbs not correspond to this?
> 'Take manure to the field and wheat will give you a great yield'
> *Vyvezennyi v pole navoz – eto i pshenitsy oboz*
> 'Sowing pea and bean will keep cows from getting lean'
> *Sei gorokh i boby i ne budet u korov khudoby*.

Such attempts directly to grasp the 'official' language are likely to occur in a bureaucratic society with centralized control of the means of communication. In Russia this is not new: peasants in Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead* familiarized the foreign '*kapital*' to '*kopital*' from the verb '*kopit*', to save or hoard. There are many such examples from the Buryats. A milkmaid in a newspaper interview says that it is the second year of our ninth five-year plan which has suggested to her the need to give some advice about massaging udders (*Buryaad Ünen*, 16 March 1972). Such examples are so common that we need not assume that they are invariably the result of journalists' re-writing.

This is unlike the cases of political participation in Africa studied by Bloch, Parkin and others in which a *range* of language codes, increasingly formalized, correspond to a range of increasingly ideologized political contexts (Bloch (ed.) 1975). In the Soviet Union any context (massaging udders) can be ideologized. People can make mistakes in the code, but they do not have a series of codes to choose from. The choice, in the public domain, is between Buryat 'official' language and Russian 'official' language.

It is interesting that 'official' Buryat often contains fewer Russian words than everyday Buryat speech of townspeople in particular. This is because, during the 1960s there was some concern in ruling circles at the extent to which the language was becoming impoverished. Attempts were made to create Buryat terms corresponding to Russian or international words. The central political lexicon remained untouched, but a number of words such as:

mergejelted – specialists
xüdelmergüidelge – unemployment
xütelberilegshed – leaders

were made up. The spelling of these new and complicated words was still not yet completely formalized in the 1960s (Shagdarov 1967: 90). Many of the suffixes used in their composition had only recently been taken up, and by linguists rather than ordinary people at that (Shagdarov 1967: 75). As pointed out earlier, some of these suffixes had themselves been created recently in order to correspond with Russian grammatical endings. A choice to use such words is thus *not* an expression of ethnicity, but of pomposity (in the Buryat mode).

Re-Buryatization of the 'official' language has created a situation which is in some ways the opposite of what one normally finds in situations of acculturation. In most cases, the familiar vernacular remains the more or less pure native language, while a range of public styles are acculturated. In the Buryat case, the vernacular is far more directly Russianized than the 'official' language. This arises from the different relation in neo-colonial and Soviet conditions between language and the state. The Soviet government has made an attempt to revitalize native languages, and it is also sensitive to the political need for them. But as earlier noted, most governmental documents, newspaper leaders, etc. are composed in Russian, and only subsequently translated into Buryat. This very political origin has created a gulf between the

'official' style, whether spoken or written, and ordinary talk. Important features of the Soviet case apply to both Buryat and Russian: the infusion of the 'official' style with ideology by means of 'suitable' combinations of words, and the consequent undertones of subversion in the vernacular which are possible through play with 'unsuitable' words and combinations of words.

Informal language

The Russianization of spoken Buryat started long before the Revolution. The economic and commercial vocabulary acquired in the nineteenth century was supplemented by the politico-administrative terminology of the revolutionary period and the vast array of technical words of the mid-twentieth century. However, there are several ways in which Russian makes deep in roads into spoken Buryat:

a) colloquialisms, e.g. Taahad tedeentei utarxai el soo *vozit'sya* bolono beshe gut? (Have you had to *bother* with them for a whole half year?)

b) word-order, e.g. *raekom parti*, instead of Buryat *partiin raiono komitet*

c) the take-over of whole social contexts by Russian, such as the sphere of organized work, where despite the existence of common and useable Buryat terms, Russian words are preferred, e.g. *oboroto* (work, from Russian *rabota*, instead of Buryat *ajal* or *xudelmeri*), *shaban* (shepherd, from the Russian *chaban*, instead of the Buryat *xon'shin*).

Interjections in vernacular Buryat, as in colloquial Russian, are still predominantly religious, taken from the traditional value system:

'*Ai, burxan*!' – 'Oh, God!'

'*Adxa shamai*! *Ene yamar haixan xubuun geesheb*!' – 'The devil! What a good-looking boy he is!' (an *adxa* is a small, evil spirit).

'*Noxoi*! *Morinhoo bu unysh*!' – 'Watch out!' (literally 'Dog!')! 'Don't fall off your horse!' (The dog is an unclean animal in the Mongol view.)

Interjections in the 'official' language, on the other hand, come from Russian: '*Ura*! *Exe oronigoo tülöö uragsha*!' – 'Hurrah! Long live the Mother-Country'.

There are many ways in which a bridging took place between the bureaucratic and the everyday styles. This was a general Soviet

phenomenon, not merely Buryat. One of these was simply the ironic:

Ya malenkaya devochka,	I am a little girl,
Ya v shkolu ne khozhu,	I don't go to school,
Ya Lenina ne videla,	I have never seen Lenin,
No ya ego lyublyu.	But I love him.

Or:

Proshla zima, nastalo leto,	The winter has gone, the summer has come,
Spasibo Partii za eto,	Thank you, Party, for that,
Spasibo Partii za to,	Thank you, Party, for the fact that
Chto ya kupila sebe pal'to.	I bought myself an overcoat.

But what is remarkable is that it is frequently the very political labels and slogans, the armory of the Stalinist state, which were taken up and transformed. Let us look at the 'Sovet Narodnogo Khozyaistva', an organization set up by Khrushchev, ordinarily known as the Sovnarkhoz, or by its initials SNKh. Popular doggerel took up the initials and played with them, backwards and forwards:

Stalin Nash Khozyain,	Stalin is our leader,
Khozyain Nash Skonchalsya,	Our leader has died,
Strane Nuzhno Khozyain,	The country needs a leader,
Khozyain Nashelsya Sam,	The leader found himself,
Samyi Nakhalnyi Kohzyain,	The most bumptious leader,
Khrushchev Nikita Sergeich.	Nikita Sergeich Krushchev.

This kind of transformation recognizes the object-like quality of political terms. It is applied to ordinary labels, e.g. the registration letters on Soviet cars, which are given various idiotic meanings, but also to acronyms, to politicians' names, to standard expressions and definitions, to the official names for socialist countries (for example the People's Republic of Mongolia, which is officially called Bugd Nairamdax Mongol Ard Uls 'The Friendly-to-all Mongolian People's State', jokingly termed 'Bugderee Niilzh Manaid Arxi Uuya' – 'Let's all get together and have a drink at my place'). These are truly 'Janus-faced' signs. In the Buryat

examples leaders are characteristically pulled-down, physicalized, and localized to their native origins. Often likened to animals (in the vast array of Buryat bestial terminology) the most dignified leaders are given nicknames which act like switches: one could be referring to politician X, or to the cow in the back yard.

Almost the converse as a style is the commandeering of ordinary language ('proletarian' language) in the service of bureaucratic ends. Characteristic of this is the one-sided use of the familiar *ty* (you) in Russian or *shi* in Buryat from the official to the addressee; or the bullying ('straightforward') manner: 'So you (familiar) think you can get away with . . .? The Party expects . . .. Got it?'

Colloquial Buryat is in effect one or other dialect, and only the official language is common to all districts. I was present at many meetings of people from different regions where the main topic of conversation was a dialect comparison. Sometimes the dialect differences are so great as to make mutual understanding difficult. This in itself may have contributed to the common use of Russian. It certainly creates an intimacy of expression, an intimacy based on the social experience of living in small, isolated communities. Such experience is not negated but fostered by the Soviet political structure, where vertical or hierarchical communication is emphasized at the expense of horizontal links.

Although officials 'speaking down' may occasionally use an odd dialect word, as it were in inverted commas, just as Russian bureaucrats may venture a phrase in Buryat, it is clear that dialect, like informal language, was not usable as a political resource in the public arena in the pre-glasnost' era. Not only Russian but also Buryat traditions insist on a heightened style in public discourse.

Ceremonial language

It would be a mistake to assume that there are no occasions on which ordinary Buryats spontaneously express in public and in their own language their sense of what it is to be a citizen of the Soviet Union. The Buryat culture is very rich in those social gatherings where people improvise in a traditional style on beloved themes. These include eulogies to the house and hearth, to local rivers and mountains, to the first mare's milk of spring, to the first hair-cutting of a child, to the birds arriving in spring, to horses, sheep, cattle, and goats, to winning horses in races, to champion wrestlers and archers, to ancestors and respected people. An elaborate cycle of

such improvisations occurs at a wedding. They are significant in that the traditional form specifies the situating of the present event in the total cosmology and socio-political space of the celebrants.

The old framework of ancestors, clans, gods and princes has been replaced by the new Soviet cosmology. Let us take the example of the eulogy to a winning race-horse recorded in the Buryat collective farm in 1963:

May there be peace and tranquillity!
He who first ordained the reign of peace
On this earthly planet, and
Absorbed in himself learning accumulated
During hundreds of preceding epochs,
He who for the sake of all living beings
Established the clear and perspicuous revolution (xubisxal)
And was able to overcome the separation of classes (anggi)
His name is the great Lenin,
And the living creatures who listened (to him) were transformed
Into the nation of peaceful happy socialism (sotsializm).
Accomplished leaders of the workers,
Many thousands of people, all of you
Together, listen!
All of our numerous people in their places
Ordained by nature and the cosmos
Are made to grow by means of the grandiose seven-year (plan)
By our good Soviet (sovet) law
Towards the highest stage of socialism,
Widespread and flourishing,
And by further miraculous developments
And pure and good teachings
Our internal order is established.
I request your attention,
Glorious and powerful Chairman,
Custodian of the pure, sacred, fundamental order,
Clear as the golden sun,
Unadulterated as pure gold!
Under the rays of the Golden Kremlin,
The palaces of the sixteen republics (are)
Established as equal powers,
And the city of Ulan-Ude, capital of the Buryat people (is)
In a part of the earthly planet named south Baikal,
On the respected northern side of the river Ude

Which crosses the golden layered earth.
Right in the very centre
Of the fully rich white steppe,
Flourishing with a thousand blessings,
At the foot of the Xangil mountain,
By the decorative stream of Xan-Egetei,
Stands the growing settlement called 'Unen Azal' ('True Work').
It shines majestically, its red flag flying,
Its flowering trees decoratively spread,
And here is the joyful transparent festival,
And this is the day of the traditional great festivity!
Now is the time to sing to the glory of the
Accomplished pacer horse,
Which knows the Mongolian language,
Whose hooves are without dust,
Whose saddle-cloth is without sweat,
Whose gallop covers mountains in dust,
Who arrives from unknown places champing his bit . . . etc.
(Tsydendambayev 1972: 23–6)

Here we see transmuted elements of the earlier Buddhist world-view ('hundreds of preceding epochs', 'for the sake of all living beings', 'people in their places', 'pure and good teachings', etc.). And it is here that the Buryat political vocabulary, forbidden in real politics, re-surfaces (*xubisxal* – revolution, *anggi* – class). Turned into folklore – does this mean that these words have lost all vitality?

In Buryatiya, rural people differentiate between the public official culture and their own 'real' culture, but ceremonial verbal forms exist in a space somewhere between the two. Very little of ceremonial verse is ever openly expressed which has not been transformed into a Soviet civic version. Of course, there are some elements of 'folklore' which have never been Sovietized in this way (religious invocations, magical sayings, omens, etc.) and this very fact has changed their function in Buryat society and made them subversive even though they are not so in intent (Humphrey 1983). The continued existence of this fragmentary 'real' culture means that even now public folklore is not seen by officials as simply exotic – it continues to be in some sense dangerous, a possible repository of harmful, alien ideas, above all ideas with a history. Speeches like the one above are improvised, not tamely congealed

in set phrases, and this makes them more active parts of culture than published literature which has been strictly censored. This is the situation the Buryats have had to play with. We can deduce that to include the early political terms in a safely optimistic eulogy was all right. To use them in a shamanist invocation or, far worse a real political speech, would have been quite another matter.

What is difficult to tell from all this is (a) how vital and creative are these public, ceremonial forms, and (b) whether this kind of discourse has been able to preserve the meaning (sense) of native political ideas.[5] Only an analysis of post-*glasnost'* debate, not yet available, would give some answers.

The history we have described here is that of a creative expansion of the language of politics in the revolutionary period, followed by a replacement of these terms by Russian vocabulary, and the crystallization of distinct linguistic 'styles'. In part this differentiation of language was imposed by the central government for the very purpose of limiting the ways in which politics could be discussed, but it also occurred because of the necessity for ordinary people of evolving modes of expression for functioning with Soviet society without attracting blame. Linguistic orthodoxy was a political necessity. As the Buryat terms, loaded with sense and history retreated into folkloric contexts, the official language of politics became increasingly 'label-like' and restricted, so that the merest hint of a double-meaning became suspect. It is in this vulnerability that the 'inner dialectical quality' of the sign lay. There is nothing really *wrong* about the doggerel of the little girl who never saw Lenin, it is just that there seems to be something not quite right about it – enough in its time to put someone in jail.

These developments are significantly different from historical change in the language of politics in the West. There is a different overall pattern of change in the political lexicon, related to the distinctive political relations which have existed in the Soviet Union. After the initial period of invention and transfer of new terms we are no longer dealing with disagreements (the 'struggle') over meaning, either as sense or reference. Both were fixed and enforced from above, by the State-Party complex. This removed the possibility countering orthodoxy with any kind of open heterodoxy.[6] But it left the official lexicon vulnerable to the slightest differences in evaluation. The necessity of upholding the correct evaluations of political terms may itself have contributed to the rigidity of the political system. As Skinner has suggested: because appraisive words have a function of legitimizing, as well as

describing, people cannot in practice use them for any action, but only for plausible ones. In other words, people 'tailor their projects in order to make them answer to the pre-existing language of moral principles' (1980: 575–6). This may or may not have been the case in specific episodes in Western history, but it does seem a real possibility in the Soviet case, at least for the less educated and minority peoples deprived of the history of their concepts. One of the problems of *glasnost'* at this level may be the difficulty of dredging up a language for it.

But for the Buryats this paper would suggest that the difficulty is not insuperable. Their heritage of political concepts includes the timeless and hierarchical, in the Buddhist mode, but also the discourse of change and independence, resistance and cooperation, derived existentially from living as a minority through the revolution (in its widest sense). If such ideas have been preserved in the harmless talk of intellectuals and more publicly in the 'harmless' pond of folklore they may still be retrieved.

Notes

1 The author was able to visit collective farms in Buryatiya in 1967 and 1974–5 for short periods.

2 There have been disagreements, for example, about the conflict of grammatical and natural gender in sentences such as 'The doctor arrived', when the 'doctor' ('vrach') is grammatically masculine but the doctor who actually arrived is a woman, implying a feminine ending to the verb 'arrived'. Should one say in this case 'vrach prishel' or 'vrach prishla'? Asked this question, one worker replied that the masculine form should be used, because '*vrach est' vrach*' ('a doctor is a doctor'), while another responded that the feminine form should be used, because '*zhenshchina est' zhenshchina*' ('a woman is a woman') irrespective of her profession (Comrie and Stone 1978: 169).

3 A letter to Izvestiya from a teacher in Riga, V. Svirskii, complaining about the 'silence' of history as it has been taught in the USSR, cited the following: 'Not long ago there was a television programme in which the interviewer asked a school-leaver interested in history: "Who was the leader of the Soviet government after Lenin?" And how, after all, was he to know?! I am quite sure that tens of millions of viewers, sitting at their TVs, bit their lips: "And who was it?" One may query whether it was right to ask this question, but it did publicly demonstrate one of the numerous blank spots in our historical education' (*Izvestiya* 21 July 1987: 3).

4 The use of economic laws presupposes the calculation of the real conditions of development of the economy. But these conditions change, and this demands the perfecting of the mechanism of government of the economy, of the system of planning and economic stimulation. The rich experience of the development of our country demonstrates that, as conditions have changed, the Party has always found new, more perfect, methods of developing the economy.

And here, political policy does not simply passively follow the changes in the economy. The party, basing itself on profound scientific knowledge of the

economy, forsees the tendencies of its development. And in accordance with this, it perfects the structure of the economy and methods of government in advance' (Emel'yanov (ed.) 1977: 11).

5 Austerliz discusses the vitality of the stock of inherited folklore (as opposed to new urban and industrial folklore) among a range of people of Siberia. He concludes, 'We therefore emerge with a final dilemma: in general twentieth century terms, all national cultures, the small ones included, are theoretically doomed to eventual extinction. However, in specific terms, the smaller and the more insignificant (culturally, economically) a group, the more likely it is to be pampered and its culture kept alive. That seems to me to be the circular dilemma of folklore, nationality, and the twentieth century in Siberia and the Soviet Far East' (Austerliz 1978: 145). I would agree with him on the importance of an extra-USSR 'anchorage', such as Mongolia for the Buryats, in maintaining culture, but I do not concur with the theory that all national cultures are doomed, nor that the pampering of tiny ethnic groups by the State will have much effect. Such pampering does not keep alive 'the culture' but superimposes an ersatz one.

6 There have been relatively few examples of terms imbued with the ideology of a previous era surviving, though with changed sense and/or reference into the Soviet period, i.e. of the mechanisms which have been the main forms of language change in the West (Skinner 1980: 572–3). Examples in the Buryat case would be: *namtar*, previously 'religious biography', now simply 'biography', or *surgaal*, previously 'Buddhist doctrine', now simply 'teachings'.

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