

*Original Paper*

# The Icing on the Cake: English as another Addition to Our Linguistic Repertoires

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## **Abstract**

*In Asia, how do non-mainstream multilingual youth view English? Why would indigenous youth, already fluent in one or more dominant languages, invest in learning English and seek fluency in English? What are the specific reasons they give for learning English? This article offers answers to these questions, by focusing on a specific indigenous group of young Buriat Mongolians from Buriatia, Russian Federation. They have chosen to migrate to China for high school and higher educational studies. This article reflects findings from a long-term ethnographic research project.*

## **Keywords**

*multilingual, youth, indigenous, Inner Asia, English*

## **1. Introduction**

*“Eskimo children spoke Eskimo; Chinook children spoke Chinook; Pukapuke children spoke Pukapuke” (Mead, 1963: 186).*

This classic epigraph seems clear and pragmatic. Yet, when carefully considering the ideas inherent in the phrase, one finds a strong, assumed correlation between culture and language. Mead wrote these words over sixty years ago, in 1963. Yet, for us living in the postmodern world, I question the assertion that culture is finite, transferable product, and that people can be so easily defined, by linguistic or other approaches. For example, not all Americans are English speakers, and not all Chinese are Mandarin speakers. Moreover, in many parts of the world, young people grow up speaking two or more (non-English) languages, as a matter of necessity. They may have one indigenous home language, and one or more dominant languages for work, education, and/or media usage; they may also have English. As an English language educator, I then ask myself: Where does English fit into a non-mainstream multilingual youth’s scheme of things? Why would young students, already bombarded with several languages, seek fluency in English?

In my studies of non-mainstream multilingual children from Siberia, I have found that young Buriat students studying in North China have many valid reasons to switch to English, in both oral and written

form. They want a wide audience to communicate with where they live; they want to be cool; they want to get all kinds of information; finally, they want to connect with the global community. This article outlines how and why a specific population of Buriat students, who are Indigenous young Mongolians from Siberia and living in Inner Mongolia, China, use and enjoy English, as they negotiate their way through a multilingual and multicultural lifestyle. This research offers both a reflection and analysis of language choice in specific contexts, addressing how communicative acts in English demonstrate conscious linguistic choices among young non-mainstream multilinguals. Finally, this research illustrates focal children and their communicative acts, by describing and analyzing their English usage in context via ethnography of communication.

### *1.1 Framework: Language Socialization*

Language socialization projects explore how multilinguals negotiate their identity through language in multilingual settings as they acquire language(s) in classrooms and other contexts. Power relations among speakers are often unequal (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The connection between language and identity is complex: language may serve to mark national, or ethnic identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004), as a form of symbolic capital, or as a means of social control (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 1995). Moreover, these functions may be isolated or interrelated. Within sociocultural approaches, identity is viewed as a dynamic, evolving attribute in the mind of the student (Norton, 2000; Lemke, 2002). Language is considered an important conduit to socialize people, as we all use language to communicate and transfer cultural knowledge. How youth react to language socialization, however, is not a cut and dry process, for language choices and subsequent usage can be negotiated, questioned, reproduced and transformed constantly (Eisenhart, 2001)

### *1.2 Background Information*

Indigenous Buriat youth are the focus of this study. These young people are self styled 'modern nomads' from Siberia (see map). Until the late 18th century, Buriats lived in nomadic groups dedicated to hunting, fishing, and running horses, cattle, and sheep around Lake Baikal, now known as Buriatia. After the 17th century Russian conquest and colonization of this region, Buriats were gradually forced to adopt a less nomadic lifestyle, and to settle down and adopt a more sedentary lifestyle (Montgomery, 2005). Some started farming, adopting Russian agricultural methods. During the Soviet era, many Buriats migrated to cities, with the two main urban centers being Ulan Ude and Irkutsk. The Western Buriats are considered more Russified than the eastern Buriats, due to stronger colonial and missionary forces. The majority of the Buriat population currently lives in these two cities (Khilkhanova & Khilkhanov, 2004). The focal children depicted in this study are all Eastern Buriats from in and around Ulan Ude.

Among all the indigenous groups in Siberia, the Buriats are the most numerous (approximately 500,000) and they are considered the most Russified. Buriats have adopted Russian language and ways of life to a greater extent than other indigenous peoples (Humphrey, 1996; Khilkhanova & Khilkhanov, 2004). Yet, after the demise of the USSR in the early 1990s, the Buriats have created and supported a cultural

and spiritual regeneration (Mandalstam, 2011). Buriat language radio, media, and education exist and are funded by the Russian government; Buddhist temples have been reconstructed and are well attended (Khilkhanova & Khilkhanov, 2004). Buriat shamans have reappeared and are no longer persecuted for offering spiritual and ritual seances (Reid, 1994; Mandalstam, 2011). As an indigenous language, however, the UN Endangered Language website reports that some varieties of Buriat are in the UN Red Book of Endangered Languages. All the Buriat children depicted in this article are fluent in Buriat, with varying levels of competence. They use Russian to speak with each other and with me; with their parents and elders they use both Russian and Buriat.

Buriats who created the micro-community of Buriats studied in this research first migrated to Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China, in 2005. Only three families made the initial journey. They came because one of the three families had met a Buriat man, Bata, who was born in China. He traveled to Ulan Ude on business ten years ago. In the early 1920s, his grandparents, along with a colony of fleeing Buriats, had settled in the northern grasslands of Hulunbeir, Inner Mongolia, China, to escape the ravages of the Russian Civil War.

After getting acquainted with Russian Buriats living in or around Ulan Ude, Bata convinced some of them to migrate to Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia. His argument was based upon the superior educational resources in Chinese Inner Mongolia. Bata explained that a fusion of traditional Tibetan, Mongolian and Chinese medical practices could be learned at a medical institute in Hohhot. These Buriats, being Yellow Hat Buddhists (followers of the Dalai Lama), felt that giving their children this honorable profession - a doctor being also a spiritual healer for Buddhists (Laird, 2006) - was an ideal educational opportunity. Families made plans, trekked to Hohhot, and were met and helped by Bata and his extended family. Bata helped these Russian Buriats for no gain, monetary or otherwise. As a Buddhist, Bata wished to help revitalize Buddhist medical practices.

Soviet Mongolians (Buriats and Outer Mongolians) had lost these ancient Indigenous healing arts during Stalin's purges in the 1930s (Montgomery, 2005). Likewise, the Chinese had shut down indigenous medical institutions during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) (Dikötter, 2010). After the Open Door Policy in the early 1980s, Chinese authorities again allowed and supported to some extent this type of esoteric medical training. Because of the Inner Mongolian ancient historical connection with Tibetans, Mongolians, and Chinese (Laird, 2006), Hohhot remains one of the few places on earth where this kind of medical knowledge can be learned. To qualify, students must be literate in Old Mongolian script, Chinese characters, and depending on advanced specialities, also know some Tibetan. None of the information is offered in English, although a twice weekly 50 minute English lesson is offered as part of the coursework at the medical institute, and is part of China's national educational requirements (Feng, 2007).

To prepare the young Buriat students to become literate in Chinese and Old Mongolian, Bata suggested that the Russian Buriat children first attend a Mandarin-Mongolian bilingual school, also located in Hohhot. This school had been built in the late 1980s, to promote indigenous language education, thus

reaffirming communist policies toward China's so called 'minority peoples.' (Feng, 2007). Briefly, the Inner Mongolians, along with Chairman Mao, established the first minority autonomous region in China in over 60 years ago (Bulag, 2002, 2003). The school is modern, prosperous, and well funded. (The other four autonomous republics are: Tibetan, Uighur, Guangxi and Ningxia. Although China has 55 "official minorities," there are hundreds of languages and language varieties within China's borders (Harrell, 1992)).

Bata and the school leaders suggested that the Russian Buriat children could be placed either in the Chinese language track or Mongolian language track; either way they would gain fluency in both Old Mongolian and Mandarin within a few years. Additionally, the school had a dormitory for foreign students and Inner Mongolian children from the northern grasslands. This bilingual school combined middle and primary levels. English was offered three times a week, by a Chinese Mongolian instructor, and each lesson lasted for 50 minutes.

### *1.3 Focal Participants*

This work highlights the voices of five Buriat youth who are currently living and studying in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China. (All names in this study are pseudonyms). Some reside with their families, some with guardians, and some live with other foreign children, mostly Outer Mongolians, in dormitories, either at the bilingual school or at the medical institute. All of these young people have had to adjust to their new circumstances. They have encountered shifts and differences in the landscape, clothing, language, cultural products, as well as religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. The children also must face new, often baffling, experiences. Finally, they must also struggle with new linguistic and cultural interactions as they encounter all aspects of the dominant Han Chinese society. Specifically, at the sociolinguistic level, Buriat children must shift outside their homes from the Russian and/or Buriat language to Mandarin Chinese and Temut or Khalk (Mongolian languages of Inner and Outer Mongolia, respectively), and sometimes to English as well. The children have the least amount of access to English language instruction (three times a week, for 50 minutes), and they have reported that the instruction is of 'poor quality.' My observations agree; often the teacher plays an old movie and exits the room, leaving the children to their own devices. Otherwise, she has the children recite rote phrases, which are never placed in any context.

Yet in Hohhot, different contexts require the Buriat children to perform in different languages. Sometimes they must determine which language is appropriate for a given situation. Also noteworthy is the fact that these Buriat focal children are all unique; each child in this study has differing degrees of multilingualism in all of these languages listed above. One child, Masha, is also biracial - being half Slavic (father's side) and half Buriat (mother's side). Family dynamics and economic conditions also vary among the children's families. The Buriats are also considered as class of Chinese minority within the school (Russians and Mongolians are both part of the so-called 55 minority groups), with less than ten Russian Buriats attending classes.

In their daily lives in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China, the focal children move amongst different social spaces: domestic, school, street, and recreational. In their homeland of Buriatia and also in Outer Mongolia, these children move additionally in religious and/or spiritual spaces. Everywhere, they interact with others, adults and non-adults, who may be Buriats, Outer Mongolians, Inner Mongolians, Han Chinese, another Han minority group, foreigners from Central Asia, Africa, or even the Western world.

Through their interactions with the internal family world and with the outside world of non-Buriats, the young Buriat focal children choose to use certain language(s) for specific reasons. This article examines their use of English. Results indicate that the children's reasons for using English are often personal, but sometimes academic. This is noteworthy, as these children are living inside a linguistic environment where Mandarin Chinese, not English, is the dominant language of education and society at large.

This article offers maximum voice to the focal children, focusing on their use of English as opposed to other languages within their ken. After introducing the research methodology for this ethnography of communication, I then offer transcripts of the children's voices, to demonstrate why these young people choose to use English. The final section reflects on the findings, and offers suggestions for more research.

#### *1.4 Researcher Positionality*

I am what Teresa McCarty (2002, 2005) calls "an invested outsider;" I care deeply about a small group of Buriat families who reside in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China. As a white, middle-aged woman with no children, my interest is accidental and serendipitous. I met these people in 2004, and I have maintained cordial relationships with them to the present day. My linguistic profile is as follows: I am a native speaker of English, with near native proficiency in Russian, intermediate proficiency in Mandarin; I do not speak Buriat. As an adult female researcher, I was careful in communicating with the children, to allow them respect, agency and voice. I have been trained in ethical standards to respectfully conduct research among Indigenous groups by my university, and also I have completed Child Safety and Child Protection workshops under the auspices of the British Council in Beijing.

## **2. Method**

This project lasted 15 months, involved watching focal children for 10-15 hours a week in a bilingual Mandarin-Mongolian school, from September 2012 through May 2013, with a winter break of five weeks in January-February due to the Chinese Spring Holidays. Additional hours were spent in homes and other domains. The research was conducted under the auspices of a university ethical standards committee. Out of the focal group group, five Buriats are depicted to reflect the findings of this paper.

Sociolinguistic research is based upon an anthropological-linguistic approach, ethnography of communication, first developed by Dell Hymes (1964, 1966, 1972, 1974) in the early 1960s (Saville-Troike, 1982). In analyzing the data, I employed various methodological and theoretical tools

to understand the perspectives of the focal children. When conducting this work, I kept in mind that the children have the same rights as adults, and therefore I treated them with dignity and respect. When collecting and analyzing data, I tried to highlight the children's agency via their narratives taken from transcripts and notes.

The data used for this article was gathered during my first of two years in the field. During this time, I carried out extensive ethnographic fieldwork, primarily in one site: Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, China. I visited the focal children's homes and dormitories; I sat in on their classes and watched them learning Chinese and Mongolian. I tutored several of these children in pairs, in English, every week for six months. I talked to their parents and guardians about their language use, fluency and studies. I attended school celebrations and private parties in Buriat homes, observing language use. Finally, I watched the children as they used computers for studies, information gathering, entertainment, and other recreation. After the school year ended, I trekked with one Buriat family to Buratia, to observe children in their homeland, and to interview relatives and elders.

The ethnographic approach serves as a vital key to take into account how societies and cultures and languages impact linguistic choices among young people. I found that the expectations of Buriat parents shifted from a previous Buriat and/or Russian expectation regarding education and children. Buriat parents chose, consciously or unconsciously, the model for young students defined by the Chinese government. This meant that young students spent more time at school than they would have in Buriatia. At school, they studied in a foreign language, Chinese or Mongolian or both, and also had English lessons. These lessons required much memorization; language was taught by presenting vocabulary and text was analyzed according to the Grammar Translation Method. Unlike Buriatia, lessons required choral responses, with little or no individual participation wanted or expected by the teachers. Moreover, I observed no communicative language teaching in the bilingual school, local university, or in the medical institute, as Chinese norms follow the Confucian tradition of teacher as absolute authority who delivers information in lecture format (Feng, 2007).

Inside the home, more traditional (i.e., Indigenous) modes of living and behaving took place. The children spoke primarily in Russian to family members. When Inner Mongolian or Han Chinese guests appeared in the home, the children often took on the role of language brokers, translating and/or clarifying information for the parents. When children were chastised by parents while I was present, however, parents spoke to children in Buriat. I observed that, in Buriatia parents spoke Buriat to each other and their children approximately 50% of the time, while the young Buriats I observed used Russian exclusively with each other, and often answered their parents queries in Buriat with a Russian response.

In two homes, expectations put upon children inside of the homes combined the Chinese educational expectation with that of the Russian educational expectation, thus adding to the burden of study for the focal children. This also emphasized the two dominant languages: Chinese and Russian. It appeared that the children had little time for play, and as Fields (1995) suggests, children were losing a vital part

of their childhood. At home, these young people studied Chinese at school, and then studied for a Russian high school diploma at night. Watching this burden of studies, I asked: With all of these studies, where did English fit in? Moreover, in addition to confronting new languages and cultures outside their home, e.g., Chinese and Mongolian, the children also had to maintain and preserve the language and ways of being: Buriat and Russian, at home. Yet, to my surprise, they also succeeded in speaking and communicating in English, with much of this language learned auto-didactically.

In addition to my ethnographic observations, field notes, transcripts, and interviews, I also interviewed many people, Buriat and Mongolian, Central Asian, and European, who had, in my opinion, something relevant to say that would help me to understand linguistic choices in terms the struggles and challenges these Buriat focal children encountered in China. Critical friends; or insiders to my focal community, helped with advice and analysis. Additionally, I employed multiple modes of data collection, and sought to present multiple perspectives. because the sample sizes were small (Spradley, 1980; Wolcott, 1999). Examining communicative acts in context was vital to my analysis (Hymes, 1972). Contextualizing data placed the information in a larger perspective and captured a realistic and holistic portrait (Boyle, 1994). Although many hours of participant observations served as my prime instrument in data collection (Wolcott, 1999), I also employed multiple techniques to gather data: passive observations, interviews (formal and informal), and artifact collection. Interviews were taped, translated, transcribed and coded. My literature review constantly expanded as well, in an attempt to understand the complex sociopolitical context these children experienced.

While conducting the research, I kept in mind that the focal children were considered social agents who participate and create meaning to the processes they choose to be involved in, making analysis of their actions and communicative practices both valid and necessary (Grover, 2004; James, 2007). I sought to help the children to be active, vocal participants in the research and elicited the children's voices. After observing the children in their homes and at school, I started tutoring some of them in English, privately, in pairs, in my home, to discover their English fluency levels and to create a conduit to ask them about the English usage. This arrangement allowed me to develop personal relationships with each child, apart from the relationship I had with their parents or guardians. Cordial relationships across our ages were established in this fashion. Second, I asked the children to communicate with me, either by text (cell phone) or by chat modes (Internet texting: WECHAT; WEIBO; email) to further expand my data regarding their language choices and communicative practices. I also communicated with them and verified what they had told me, especially if they shared information in a language other than English. These two strategies gave the children a space to express themselves, and it also gave them a space in which they co-constructed their sense of self with me, outside the domain of other adults and educational institutions.

### 3. Results

After months of getting to know the children, coding and analyzing their transcripts, I found my findings to be divided into four main themes. Each theme is offered briefly, with transcripts (translated from the Russian if necessary).

#### Tanya: I want to talk to other foreigners here

Tanya is presently eighteen years old; she is a Buriat girl from Ulan Ude. Five years ago, her parents placed her in the Mandarin-Mongolian bilingual school. She studied there for two years, in the sheltered Chinese class. After passing the Chinese proficiency exam (HSK) for university, Tanya elected to attend a local university, rather than the medical institute. Below are excerpts from a conversation with her (in English).

VS: Why did you come to China?

Tanya: Of course, I came for Chinese, but actually English was (my) first choice. I wanted to go (to) New Zealand. It didn't work. So I came here.

VS: When do you speak Russian, Chinese, English?

Tanya: I use Russian with Russian friends, and Chinese for studies, but there are many foreigners here, not Russian speakers. To communicate (with them), I need English. I have friends from Africa, from Mongolia (Outer), India, two even from UK. We speak English. My English not good, but we speak English and understand each other.

#### Yanna and Donduk: We want information

Yanna and Donduk are eighteen and seventeen, respectively. Both are Buriats from areas near Ulan Ude. Both are enrolled in traditional medical studies at the medical institute in Hohhot. Donduk spent four years at the bilingual school. Yanna spent two years at the bilingual school. Below are excerpts from a lunch interview with them.

VS: (In Russian) Tell me about your language use, especially English...

Yanna: (In Russian) I speak very little English, but I can read in English. I go online and look for medical information in English.

Donduk: (In Russian) It is the same with me. I want to know more, about medicine, the western style, and I want to know about the Dalai Lama and Buddhism. In English some information is different. I sit and read with my dictionary, or ask friends who know English to help me.

Yanna: (In English) I like English! Useful! (In Russian) Chinese is so difficult, I spend much time learning and reading, I don't have enough time for English. Maybe later.

Donduk: (In Russian) My dream is to work abroad, that way I will learn more English, and exchange information with other doctors, too. (In English) I want talk in English to foreign doctors.

#### Zhargal and Masha: We want to be cool

Zhargal is a teenage Buriat boy of 16; he spent seven years at the bilingual school. Currently, Zhargal is attending the medical institute and studying at home for a Russian high school diploma. He has had six months of private tutoring in English when he went on a business trip to Vietnam with his parents in



2011. His fluency in English is the highest of all the Buriat youth. The excerpts are from a tutoring session in English with him.

VS: Why do you like English?

Zhargal: It is cool language.

VS: Why?

Zhargal: Because best music is in English.

VS: What is the best music?

Zhargal: Dubstep. I listen only to Dubstep.

VS: What kind of English do you hear?

Zhargal: The song says cool things, like 'I think I am going crazy.'

VS: Any other reasons why English is cool?

Zhargal: Yeah...everybody know English, Steve Jobs speaks English, movies are cool in English.

VS: Why?

Zhargal: I dunna know...maybe more colorful, more action...

Masha is a 13 year old teenager, studying in the Mongolian track at the bilingual school. She is tutored privately in Russian at home to prepare her for Russian high school studies. She often texted me in English. Here are some excerpts:

(cell phone text) Ohhhh ... the smell of Amerika is in English!!!!

(cell phone text) English is kool! Luv Lady Gaga. Luv Madonna.

(cell phone text) Give me English lesson tonight? My friend Husile jealous, good!

Tanya and Donduk: We want to know the world outside

Tanya stated very clearly that she thought English was the best conduit to the outside world;

"I can only speak Russian with Russian friends. Chinese is difficult for everybody, but everybody speak English. Some countries it is partner language, like France. I need English to know the world."

(emphasis added) (Russian)

Likewise, Zhargal said: "In Vietnam I spoke English, not Chinese. English has no politics. Russian is not popular. English is free world language. No politics. And music, the music is the best..." (Russian)

Donduk said (In Russian): "I know I must get better in English. I feel as if I am half blind. Certainly Chinese is good, I need it for my medical studies, but if I knew English, so many more doors would be opened, so much more knowledge would be available to me, I know this.."

#### **4. Discussion**

Multilingual youth of all socioeconomic statuses and cultural groups have many reasons to want to use, understand, and enjoy English. Their motivations are both practical and pleasurable. These young students realize that important sources of academic information is transmitted in English. Furthermore, these young Buriats feel that English is the key language for communications with the wider world, not only the western world speakers, but also Africans, and other Asians. There is also an aura of English

as a cool language, a language that represents the ideal (and perhaps misguided) aspects of American society, the freedom and prosperity. English is also cool because these young people, like other youngsters all over the world, choose music with lyrics sung in English.

Significantly, these Buriat children are teaching themselves English. They sit for many hours every day in classes conducted in non-English languages: Chinese, Mongolian, and/or Russian, yet they also expended what free time they have in listening to English. The children listened to songs with English lyrics, watched English movies, and asked English speakers, such as myself, for help in translating and speaking in English. They came enthusiastically to my English tutoring sessions and never missed a session. Given their already heavy academic burden, clearly, English has great merit in their eyes. As multilinguals, they also appeared to have an easier time teaching themselves; more research needs to be done on this.

Another significant finding, which confirms the research of others (Gee & Hayes, 2011), is the power of music and Internet for young people around the world. English language educators cannot fail to take advantage of these two mediums for teaching. Using popular English language music, and allowing our students to harness their Internet skills for academic purposes can enhance English language learning in the classroom.

A final note concerns the role of English as a dominant, destructive language, which overwhelms and destroys indigenous languages. This view certainly has been shown in the literature (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) and I do not dispute it. However, the Buriat students in this study appear to view English more positively, as a neutral, international language. They perceived English from the perspective of the glass being half full rather than half empty. For them at present, Chinese, and historically, Russian, are the dominant languages threatening their indigenous fluency, while English is the language of the “free world.” Some of the other Buriats in this study had already stopped interacting and even understanding Buriat actively, because their parents had adopted and assimilated to the Russian language during the Soviet era. From their point of view, if any language were to be blamed for their indigenous language loss, it would be Russian, then Chinese, and then, perhaps, English.

In sum, English holds great appeal for these young Buriat multilinguals. The Internet, together with English, transmits what they crave: creativity in the form of music; ideas, both popular and academic; and exotica, in the form of the so-called American dream. For these Buriats, Chinese is their primary working language, Russian/Buriat is for home and family, while English represents a portal to the entire world.

Today’s modern world has increased the speed in the way we as individuals, and as cultural groups, think, feel, and respond to our world and the people in it with us. Two key factors have powered this phenomenon among the Buriat youth presented here: Enormous changes in media development and in migration patterns (Appadurai, 1996). Digital media (Internet, cell phones) and the ease of migration offer Buriat youth in this study more access to more kinds of resources, both tangible and intangible, that help them transform their identities.

The tangible are easily guessed: dress, music, consumer goods. The intangible is worth zooming in upon, because it belongs to the realm of ideas and imagination. Our digital age, combined with advanced mobility, has transformed the way people communicate and the way we live our lives. For the Buriat youth, it has enhanced their chances for an expanded communicative competence - which implies not just linguistically correct communications but also socially appropriate ways of speaking and behaving. In China, these youth, like other young people elsewhere, are an example of modernity. They are multilingual and multicultural, and globally tuned into the modern world. Buriats use both the Internet and English as tools, and disregard their imperialistic connotation.

The Internet and cell phones have transformed everyday discourse styles, allowing Buriat youth as communicators additional agency. They are creating unique and dynamic identities. Mobility and media are powerful influences on the way people everywhere imagine their worlds, their selves, and their futures. Cyber-spaces in English and other languages are instantly available online. They give Buriats access to ideas from a global repertoire. These youth utilize information from the Internet to transform their local, everyday practices, and to remake themselves. Imagination, and in effect - identity & culture making - has become more dynamic, easier, and a more public, collective reality. The Buriats examined here are only one of many groups, young and old, indigenous and non-mainstream, engaged in this type of change.

Because this research is exploratory and ongoing, in the future, it would be interesting to continue to follow the lives and studies of these focal Buriat students. It would be interesting to compare their English use with other indigenous groups of young people. Other scholarly work, addressing resistance through language choices and communicative practices, could be linked with this study, to better understand how to support the education of non-mainstream multilingual youth. Other questions addressing teaching methodologies for non-mainstream multilingual children, such as these Buriat students, have not yet been addressed by the author.

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## Appendix

