

Tibet Dialects as Defined by Factors

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ABSTRACT

Tibetan dialects are an essential part of the cultural heritage of the Tibetan people, reflecting local distinct identities and historical development. However, these unique dialects are facing threats of extinction due to various political, cultural, and historical factors. This paper explores the significance of endangered Tibetan dialects and presents arguments on the severity of Tibetan language preservation. Drawing from existing research and scholarly work, this paper aims to shed light on the confusing status of Tibetan dialects: whether or not they require immediate attention and severity in Linguists' recognition.

Introduction

There has long been a debate on Chinese Government's effect on disappearance of Tibetan dialects. In reminder of 297 languages existing in China,[3] Tibetan is often considered to be linguistically homogeneous, which can be seen from Graph 1. Yet through careful common acknowledgement and analyzation, Tibetan language lacks adequate recordings on its dialects (limited to Tibet Autonomous Region, TAR).

I will focus on political influence on Tibetan languages in section 1. In section 2, I will demonstrate how to define Tibet and Tibetan minority dialects. In section 3, I provide the idea of Tibetan language current status.

Political influence on Tibetan languages

Victor Mair mentions his point of view in post *Linguistic diversity in Greater Tibet(2014)*: number of Tibetan speakers approximate 8 million and has various languages and dialects, yet politically demonstrated in China that 1.3 billion Sinitic speaker use a single language Mandarin.[2] Mair(2014) expresses concern in political prosecution on Tibetan language by mentioning the video "Linguistic Diversity on the Tibetan Plateau",[4] which focuses presenting endangered dialects and classifying three main regions of Tibetan dialects. The three regions are also proposed by *Tibet's Minority Languages: Diversity and endangerment* on page 1240-1243.[3] I will mention this later in section 2.

I consider China political influence on Tibetan language has not reached to endangered dialects. Two years after Mair(2014), the same author states that Tibetan and Uyghur regions and Inner Mongolia massive land area help explains why "the government is extremely nervous about separatist tendencies".[5] Thus, I conclude idea of Mair(2016) to be "governmental actions threatening concept of multi-Linguistic diversity". However, till 5 Aug 2022, Tibetan dialects are still allowed to use all circumstances, including governmental conferences as I investigated sociolinguistic in and around Nyingchi prefecture for two months. Noticeably, dialects are strongly related with regions and ethnic groups.

In the study of Mishmi people at Southern Tibet border, I communicated with local Tibet Mishmi people(Digaro) and discovered one possible theory: Tibetan dialects are preserved better in Southern Tibet than western Ngari and

Shigetse Prefecture due to political necessity to maintain cultural tendency near McMahon Line. This theory cannot yet be proved with semantics or phonology, but possible on a historical Linguistics view.

I consider dialects and languages are clearly defined in Chinese politics, as dialects in Tibet are classified and chosen to be protected. Political environment is not the main contribution to the wide spread of language endangerment in Tibet.



Graph 1 Language protection Project(2015) Dialect dot graph [1]

Define minorities in Tibetan dialects and languages

First, I will define languages and Tibet dialects. Siegel (2010) states clearly that mutual intelligibility is “seldom an absolute criterion for distinguishing language”[3]. Lexical difference are easier to be found among Tibetan dialects. E.g. Anu language referring to Nujiang dialect of Trung(A.K.A Derung language, Sino-Tibetan), is represented by differentiated palatal fricatives.[7]

Roche (2018) differentiate Tibet into two regions: the Tibetan Administrative Area(TAA) and the Nonautonomous Tibetan Area(NTA).[3] NTA includes whole TAA and few more counties. Within TAA, the Ngandehua language is spoken by approximately 4,000 people in eastern Qinghai Province. Ngandehua is also called Wutun language,[3] a Sino-Tibetan creole language which demonstrates speakers’ identity as Tibetans instead of Qinghai province residents. Also, Baima, spoken by about 10,000 Tibetans in northern Sichuan and southern Gansu, is another language with a controversial genetic relationship. Baima is considered to be a Tibetan dialect, but speakers of Baima refuse to accept Tibetan ethnicity.

Therefore, I conclude from preceding analyzations that linguistic diversity still thrives in Tibetan languages and dialects., partially proved and against what has been stated in Mair(2014): approved with political threats, against with

urgent call to preserve Tibetan language.

Second, Tibetan minority languages are mainly divided into extraterritorial languages, enclaved languages, and unrecognized local languages. Extraterritorial languages are not originated within the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), which are called domestic and international extraterritorial languages. Dakpa language spoken by approximate 1300 speakers in Tsona, China,[3] originated and clustered in Tawang district, controlled by India but claimed by China. Chinese Dakpa-speakers cannot experience relatively well-supported dialect environment as Konpa speakers do in Nagqu region.

Roche (2018) proposes Tibetan dialects Mawo Rma (Qiang), Northern Prinmi (Pumi), Lizu, Doxu, and Shuhing are designed to be Tibetan due to political reasons. I disagree with Doxu, because it not recorded or recognized as Tibetan language or dialects in Chinese Linguistic studies.[3][8] Roche(2018) also has a questionable view on Darang Deng people's resistance to accept themselves as Tibetan. In my interviews as I quote here, Darang Deng speakers do not separate ethnicities and Tibetan dialects. This phenomenon of combination demonstrates creole language between Mandarin and local dialects, appeared in trading markets in Southern Tibet.

School leader (Chayu, Nyingchi High School, opened for Darang Deng students):

It is actually very difficult for Tibet schools as we have Tibetan dialects.

Lhasa dialect (standard Tibetan language) is not commonly accepted in Nyingchi, even it is an governmental requirement.

Locals (Darang Deng) speak Mishmi rather than Mandarin or Lhasa dialect.

I consider unrecognized local languages to be endangered as students speak four languages since year of 5: Mandarin, English, and Lhasa dialect in school; local dialect at home. Since the classifications are primarily based on policies related to the implementation of national self-governing territories, they are clearly more influential within the TAA. Students exceed language learning capacity as common phenomenon.

Therefore, I conclude Tibet dialects are facing threats from policy limitation and burden, but not persecution. Dialects in Tibet undergoes reform and struggles to past to the next generation of Tibetan speakers.

Current Tibetan dialects status

Ethnologue data reveals several facts, analyzed in Roche(2018), which I will conclude and give opinions on.

1. Tibetan minority languages in NTA and TAA have average 198,453 and 20,049 speakers respectively. By removing exterritorial regions, numbers reach to 47,011 and 19,702.[3] Minority languages, including mostly Tibetan dialects in TAA, have weaker population foundation within TAA respective to NTA.

2. EGIDS (Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale) informs that 52.9 percent of minority languages in TAA are "threatened (Rank 6b)", marked from Rank 0 to 10. 63.9 percent of minority languages in NTA are "threatened".[3] In fact, average rank for extraterritorial languages average is 6.23; enclaved languages 6.25; and unrecognized languages 6.45. This suggests that, on average, Tibet's minority languages "are between vigorous (Rank 6) and threatened (Rank 6.5)".[3] Therefore, Tibetan minority languages face **threatened** situation. Languages with EGIDS rank higher than 6.5 are marked "endangered".[9]

Discussion

I begin analyzing Tibetan dialects with statement which indicates threats' intergrowth with protection. Political issues are used to demonstrate the difference between influence and persecution. Tibetan minority languages and dialects are clearly defined. I admit most Tibetan dialects as minorities, except for Lhasa dialect and Gro-mo dialect, which I have not clearly explained previously as common sense. In section 3, data are quoted to explain why Tibetan minority languages are not facing endangered situation.

Roche (2018) clearly explains four estimates of Tibetan minority languages while only one reveals urgency for language protection. I suggest the best approach to investigate sociolinguistics in TAA and NTA is visiting and investigating Tibet in reality. Posts(Mair(2014), Mair(2016)) on Languages Log lack sufficient evidence, or over-emphasized danger which Tibetan dialects experience.

Conclusion

Based on sociolinguistic classification, three factors discussed here have revealed sufficient and adequate reasons to convince that Tibetan languages are threatened. Tibetan minority languages and dialects require immediate attention and preservation. Reasons include political pressure, culture blending and permeation, ethnicity recognition and tendency, and cultural regional division with barriers.

As opposing to Mair (2014) and Mair(2016), Tibetan language instructions and diversity face no major threats from Government, explained by either *Ethnologue* data or local education policy. Threats come from factors mentioned above: politics, culture, ethnicity, and regional barriers. This paper benefits future studies in Southeastern Tibetan languages and local development. We shall see shifts in attitude and preservation locally in the near future.

Limitations

This paper possesses limitations as it assumes that Tibetan dialects are equally estimated to Tibetan minority languages. There lacks sufficient data to support total analysis in Tibet, both for Chinese and foreign Linguists. As studies explore Tibetan dialects in various aspects, measuring language interdisciplinary within phonetics is a seemingly solution.

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