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Language Purity as Metadiscursive Regime in China's Tibet

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Abstract

Tibetans in twenty-first century China have engaged in an increasingly high-profile campaign to promote language purity. In this purity campaign, Tibetan comedians and rappers have encouraged their audiences to speak pure Tibetan, and a host of neologisms have been coined to help people speak Tibetan even in modern contexts. Although coining new terms involves tremendous innovation, Tibetans almost uniformly view purism in this fashion as promoting traditional knowledge and practices considered to be under threat. This paper examines Tibetan media discourses on language purity to understand the development of new metadiscursive regimes in Tibet that link otherwise contemporary values like language purity, with the preservation of Tibetan traditions.

Keywords

Sitting on the grassland one day in 2013 in a pastoral community in the ethnolinguistic subregion of Northeastern Tibetan known as Amdo[1], I spoke with a young, educated Tibetan man who, taking care not to mix Chinese and Tibetan, ruminated on the recent development of a purist language ideology in Tibet, saying:

> As in the past, if I tell you what it was like, when you went to school and came back or worked in an office, a person like this, no matter what, if they spoke a few words of Chinese, this was excellent. And, among nomads, if you could speak Chinese it was evaluated as being really, uh, sort of great. And so, in the past, if one could speak some Chinese in with their Tibetan, they had the idea that "Oh, he's really an impressive person." However, these days, this perception is changing… These days for example, if you go to school, when you come back, if you don't know how to speak pure Tibetan [T, bod skad gtsang ma] when speaking Tibetan, and if you're speaking Chinese, that's not good. …That's not what a good person does. (pers. comm., 8-31-2013)[2]

This narrative supported a development I had noticed elsewhere in my research: whereas only a few years previously, mixing Tibetan and Chinese (and, if possible, English) was an index of one's education, this consultant, and many other Amdo Tibetans I met, now associated mixing with illiteracy and a lack of education. Similarly, the Tibetan purity campaign has developed in direct opposition to borrowing Chinese loanwords.[3] It appeared in comedies, popular music, and in essays on the ubiquitous social media platform, WeChat. In twenty-first century Amdo, pure Tibetan is a moral orientation: it is the goal of a good person.

To support this purist language movement, a number of stakeholders have coined new terms for modern objects and concepts. Through examining the methods used to coin Tibetan neologisms and normative statements on language purity (sourced from interviews and in popular media), this article seeks to understand the development of a purist language ideology as a form of verbal hygiene. This campaign links language purity and the appropriate use of neologisms with a desire to preserve Tibetan traditions more generally. At the same time, through attention to the role of comedians and other culture brokers in spreading purist

ideologies, this article also gives crucial insight into the complex language politics of contemporary China. In doing so, it contributes to a small but growing corpus of literature on language ideologies of contemporary Tibet specifically, and in China more broadly.

Verbal Hygiene

The overwhelming concern with language purity in Tibet may be interpreted as a project of what Cameron (2005[1995]: 1) terms "verbal hygiene": practices "born of an urge to 'clean up' language." Verbal hygiene can entertain, create or consolidate a sense of (sometimes imagined) community, and be a symbolic way of considering race, class, and culture. Verbal hygiene also indicates "concern about preserving the orderliness of the world and integrity of the self against the forces of disorder and fragmentation" (Cameron 1995: 218). Importantly, purity campaigns and other forms of verbal hygiene have a "moral dimension that goes far beyond its overt subject to touch on deep desires and fears" (Cameron 1995: xiii). All of these statements, as we shall see, have deep resonance for Tibetans in Amdo.

In social interaction more broadly, verbal hygiene constitutes one important metadiscursive regime,[4] requiring a speaker to "closely monitor his or her own linguistic repertoire and each and every utterance" (Bauman and Briggs 2003: 32) to ensure that they conform with the prevailing campaign. In the Tibetan case, activities and discourses promoting pure Tibetan—a language of solidarity (see Hill and Hill 1980) for Tibetans relative to the Chinese state's "language of power", Putonghua 'universal speech' —may be seen as attempts to exercise control over a linguistic world that threatens to spiral away from them as Tibetan communities become increasingly integrated into the Chinese state and the global marketplace. When Tibetans critically evaluate spelling errors (see, for example, Wu Qi 2013: 268-270), they

are engaging in verbal hygiene. When they bemoan children's inability to use Tibetan proverbs, they are engaging in verbal hygiene. Also, when they write impassioned articles on the importance of "pure" Tibetan, they are engaging in verbal hygiene.

Tibetan linguistic conservatism: A Historical Perspective

Importantly, the Amdo Tibetan verbal hygiene campaign is one that draws on Tibet's historical linguistic conservativsm, that is an ideology that celebrates the resistance to borrowing (see Sherzer 1976 and Kroskrity 1992). The Tibetan language has maintained a long history of adapting to foreign influences, and the writing system, attributed to the great translator Thon mi Sam bho ta during the 7th century reign of (see Li and Coblin 2013, 124) has played an essential role in this. The Buddhist arts of writing then became an essential technology for managing a growing Central Asian Empire with the Tibetan adoption of Buddhism (Kapstein 2000). To facilitate this, tremendous effort was made to translate foreign concepts, and Tibetans have historically held translators in high esteem. At the same time, attempts to engineer and control translations work have been around almost as long, including, for example, an edict codifying the translations of Indian terms into a system known as skad gsar bcad system in 814AD (Stein 2010, 1). Then in the 11th century, after centuries of stagnation following the dissolution of the empire, "new translations" and translation schools were essential to the later spread of Buddhism (T, phyi dar), and literary Tibetan became primarily a language of scriptural translation.

Tournadre (2010) notes that classical Tibetan features loans from Sanskrit, Mongolian, Uyghur and classical Chinese. Beyer (1992) notices that early translators have deployed a variety of methods for incorporating foreign concepts into Tibetan language. He recognises that most borrowings, for example, "come from four source languages of cultural and political importance

in central Asia": Uyghur, Mongolian, Chinese, and Sanskrit. Borrowings include the Chinese cha for 'tea' (T: ja), Uyghur emtshi for 'physician' (which in Lhasa dialect is em chi), Mongolian 'Dalai' (as in the Dalai Lama), and Sanskrit vaidurya for 'lapis lazuli' (T: baidurya).[5]

At the same time, there are also many of what Beyer terms "loan translations" which "conveys the semantic content of a foreign word by translating its components into native terms" as well as "loan creations" (calques) which "conveys the content of a foreign word by creating an entirely original word out of native elements to express the foreign concept" (Beyer 1992, 142). A few examples of religious terms translated from Sanskrit may serve to help illustrate this. Terms like sangs rgyas (Buddha), *byang chub sems dpa'* (Bodhisattva), and las (karma) are just a few examples of instances in which Sanskrit terms were translated into Tibetan not for their sound value, but for their semantic components. Other examples are easy to find.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party has used both of these strategies in overseeing the creation of a variety of neologisms primarily, though not exclusively, to support the new government's propaganda purposes (Shakya 1994). With new translations like spyi tshogs ring lugs "socialism," as well as borrowings like tang, 'political party,' and *kru'u zhi* 'Party secretary' were borrowed directly from Chinese (see Kapstein 2006: 23). The emergence of new technologies, meanwhile, has also seen a variety of vernacular borrowings. Though not used in state propaganda, these new borrowings include Chinese terms for telephones (dianhua), television (dianshi), telephone numbers, and more (Kalsang Yeshe 2008).

On the other hand, the Chinese government manages Tibetan language both in the domains in which it can or should be publicly used, and the new words that can be used in state-supported media (see Shakya 1994 and Makley 2013). Article Four of the constitution of the

People's Republic of China, for example, ends by stating: "The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages, and to preserve or reform their own ways and customs" (National People's Committee of the People's Republic of China 2004). The government also supports broadcast stations, publishing houses, and newspapers in some of China's minority languages, including Tibetan (see Si and Li 2013, Martinsen 2006). In this fashion, the government provides at least the semblance of legal protection for minority languages.

We should not dismiss the importance of this official support for Tibetan language, both for the continued use of Tibetan language in modern domains and for the grassroots attention to language. In fact, the Chinese government has a special committee tasked with creating new Tibetan terms for propaganda purposes. Early examples included tang 'party' (see above) and dril bsgrags formed of dril 'to summarize' and bsgrags 'to proclaim,' which translates the Mandarin xuanchuan 'propaganda.' In the present, State news agency Xinhua recently announcing that "The National Tibetan Language Terminology Standardization Working Committee" (Ch, Quanguo zangyu shuyu biaozhunhua gongzuo weiyuan hui) has created a list of over 1500 Tibetan neologisms (Xinhua 2018) after the 18th Party Congress, including terms like "Virtual Reality," and "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" (T, *Zhi cin phing gis dus rabs gsar par krung go'i khyad chos ldan pa'i spyi tshogs ring lugs kyi bsam blo*) (see Padma Tshering 2018). One might also, however, argue that there is a veritable chasm between theory and practice (see Zhou 2004, and Limusishiden and Dede 2012), and new laws stipulate that using minority languages in the legal system is now "desirable rather than mandatory" (de Varennes 2012, 19). In this way, the government's continued ambivalence toward Tibetan language—combined with language's importance as a criteria for "ethnic

identification" in the 1950s (see Harrell 2001) and the place of translators like Thon mi Sam bho

Ta within the emic historical narrative of Tibetan national identity—has empowered the Tibetan

language as a space for contesting concepts of Tibetanness in contemporary China and beyond.

Meanwhile, the idea that Tibetan language is unified by a written standard, with a long history of

conservative adaptations to external influence underpins the growth of the purist ideology.

Purifying Language in Contemporary Tibet

The words gtsang ma 'pure, clean, immaculate'[6] and dag ma 'pure,' frequently used in

relation to the contemporary Tibetan language purity movement, invoke complicated links to

Tibetan tradition. Purity is one of the key bases for creating and managing fortune (see Sa mtsho

skyid and Roche 2011 and Thurston 2012), and may refer to spiritual, bodily, or behavioural

cleanliness. Purity is always desirable. Just as the hygiene metaphor suggests a relation between

linguistic practice and cleanliness, the Tibetan discourse of "pure father tongue" pha skad gtsang

ma[7] and "pure Tibetan" bod skad gtsang ma uses purity to index spiritual and physical

cleanliness. Impure Tibetan, characterized by mixing Chinese and Tibetan words, is termed

sbrags skad 'combined language,' bsres skad 'mixed/confused language,' and 'dre skad, a term

which uses the double entendre of 'evil spirit' and 'blending.' In this way, the moral-hygienic

metaphor of purity taps into both popular anxieties and deeply held traditional beliefs.

With the restriction of the Central Tibetan cultural sphere in the post-Mao period, and the

shift toward Amdo as a primary site for the production of Tibetan cultural identity (Shakya 2012,

27), media from Amdo has grown increasingly visible across the Tibetan Plateau. The purist

ideology began appearing in Amdo Tibetan cultural production from the late 1990s and early

2000s.[8] After the 2008 riots in Lhasa and the subsequent protests across the Tibetan Plateau,

several consultants explained to me, Amdo Tibetans began to prefer music sung in Tibetan,

disliked Sinophone Tibetan authors, and leading at least in part to the development of a larger

Sinophobic purism.[9] At the same time, general increases in literacy brought about through

education and a more general shift in Tibetan cultural production from concern with social issues

associated with communist thought and values—including free-choice marriage, secular

education, and religious atheism—to the importance of cultural issues—including cultural

preservation, ecological conservation, and linguistic purity—at the end of the twentieth century

and the beginning of the twenty-first century (see Thurston 2015). It has since developed into a

purity campaign, with many of Tibet's most famous intellectual culture brokers—including

authors, singers, religious leaders (see Gayley 2011: 445), public intellectuals, university

professors, and comedians (see Thurston 2015 and 2018)—as its champions, exhorting people to

"speak pure Tibetan."

> Examples of this abound. The famous bla ma 'Jig med phun tshogs, for example, said:
>
> While there is a pure Tibetan ethnic group, they absolutely must know pure Tibetan language, and they have to use that knowledge. If Tibetans don't make their own clothing, and don't use their pure language, then, at that time, the name "Tibetan" will be lost.[10]

In Tibetan society more broadly, mass protests over the perceived discrimination against Tibetan

language in education have continued since 2010 (Robin 2014), while Barnett (2012) also

recognises how calls for language preservation have outweighed those for Tibetan independence

in the farewells of Tibetan self-immolators.[11] Meanwhile, I have witnessed Tibetan shopkeepers

in Amdo refuse to do business with people who speak Chinese in their shops, while friends have

told me about drivers who fine language-mixing riders. From schoolyards to shopkeepers to

religious teachings, the ideal of pure Tibetan language is widespread, even if the practice is not.

But what do Tibetans mean when they speak of "purity" in relation to language? In contemporary contexts, language purity primarily suggests the refusal to use terms borrowed form Chinese while speaking Tibetan.[12] In place of these terms, they seek to modernise the Tibetan language through coining new Tibetan terms for emergent technologies, and concepts whose Chinese versions may be more widely known to Tibetan speakers. Some of the most broadly accepted Tibetan neologisms today concern technology. Examples include:

kha par	telephone
glog klad	computer
glog brnyen	movie
brnyen 'phrin	television

Several of these are calques, translating the semantic parts of their Chinese equivalents, including glog klad, 'computer,' and glob brnyen 'film,' which translate the Chinese diannao, (lit. 'electric brain') and dianying (lit. 'electric shadow') respectively.

These neologisms emanate from a variety of sources. On the one hand, a number of dictionaries, sponsored by monastic communities, schools, NGOs, and local public intellectuals as well as government units, have been produced to provide vocabulary updates for Tibetan intellectuals. The most popular and famous of these in the present moment, however, must be the trilingual picture dictionary produced by Serta Monastery's internationally renowned Abbot, Tshul khrims blo gros. Many of these dictionaries use calques to create Tibetan alternatives to Chinese terms. Examples include *'khyag sgam* (Ch: bing xiang) 'refrigerator,' glog klad (Ch: dian nao) 'computer,' and skyes skar spri gor (Ch: sheng ri dan gao) 'birthday cake') (Tshul khrims blo gros 2008). In other instances, they introduce novel Tibetan neologisms like khu nag 'Cola,' kha par 'telephone,' and *rlung 'phrin* 'radio' over the Chinese: kele, dianhua, and shouyinji, respectively. For these contemporary translators, "the method of forming or translating a new word by combining existing morphemes represents nothing new in Tibetan…this

system… has been used by Tibetans in the past to translate new terms and concepts" (Shakya 1994: 161). In using the same approach to the creation of new Tibetan terms as their predecessors, Tibetan translators tap into a much older cultural logic that provides an important resource for modernizing the Tibetan language without compromising its essential characteristics.

Pure Tibetan Language as a Jewel

Amdo Tibetan kha shags 'comedic dialogues,'[13] a scripted, orally performed genre combining the Han Chinese comedic tradition of xiangsheng[14] and traditional Tibetan verbal art, provide one fruitful modern source for discussing pure Tibetan language. With explicit state support and performed in state-sponsored contexts, kha shags satirise particular situations in contemporary life, ranging from religion and religious faith to cultural preservation and the importance of modern education. Given their verbal medium, it makes sense that Tibet's comedians focus heavily on language (see Thurston 2015 and 2018). On a number of instances the comedians accomplish this through satirizing Tibetans who mix Chinese and Tibetan. One of the primary tools for Tibetan comedians to satirise these forms of inappropriate linguistic behaviour is to describe a general state of affairs in Tibetan society, and then to illustrate it with a sample dialogue. The framing dialogue then guides audiences to the appropriate interpretation of the critique. Two examples drawn from popular comedic dialogues help to illustrate this point.

In "The Jewel" (T: rin po che), Mgo log Zla b+he[15] and his bshad rogs 'speaking partner' posit that the Tibetan language is a jewel, and comment that these days many people no longer speak the Tibetan language well. To illustrate this, they break from their conversation to act out a number of dialogues that approximate daily life. At one point the two speakers act out a

telephone conversation between a father in the countryside and his daughter at school,

presumably in some urban or periurban center (Chinese terms are written in bold):

> Ka: zhi mo yin nis/ **ni hao** a pha yin
> *Kha: o, a pha yin nis/ khyod bde mo e yin/ a ma 'di bshad khu gi yod no, chi byed* go
> ka: o da **pha** med ga des
> kha: **pha** med gi bdag go, skyon med gi zer ra ro,
> ka: **pha** med gi ra skyon med gi gnyis ka gcig ma red nis/
> kha: gcig yin zig ga de, rang gi pha skad shod no pha lo/
> ka: pha lo bshad go no da pha skad gtsang ma bo red ya/pha yul **pha** med pha skad min nas pha yod red.
> *kha: da 'di gi chi byed rgyu a ba, a bo gi kha par ang grangs chi gzig yin dra?*
> ka: **yao** sum **ba jiu qi yao wu** lug lug **jiu jiu**
> kha: uh, lug bdag po yin nis na nor bdag go yin nis bzo mi shes gi ra da bris btang a pha
> ka: de na dge rgan kun bzang tshang gi **hao ma** chi gzig red
> kha: hao ma yin dra, uh dge rgan tshang gi ang grangs gcig gsum brgyad dgu bdun gcig lnga
> ka: da khyod hra mgo ma byed la, yag pa ye shod dra
> *kha: ngas bshad ... nga cho'I slob grwa'I nang nas rgya ska*d bshad go dus rgya skad *dag dag ra bod skad bshad dgo dus bod skad gtang ma bshad go ni red, sgra ma 'dra gi 'brel skad bshad ni ma ra, a pha gong pa ma tshom go*
> *ka; da 'u gnyis kas ?? ? rgyu ma ra a rog las ngan ma*
> kha: da ngas khyod rgya skad dag dag bshad res a pha
> *ka: 'di bab gi go ni ma red*
> *kha: 'o da rgya skad bod skad gnyis ka'I gcig ga ra mi go dus da chi gzig bdag go bshad* re?
> ka: da bod skad gi nang nga rgya skad ra bshad, rgya skad gi nang nga bod skad ra *bshad 'di shes bshad dgo ni red*
> kha: de na, da so ma ang grangs bshad go dus gi cig cig cig ra lug lug lug can go gi skor dra de mo di gzo rgya skad ra bod skad gnyis ka gcig ra ma red mo.

In the translation that follows, I switch between English and Spanish (in italics) to portray the

switches between Tibetan and Chinese respectively:

> A: Is that my daughter? Hola, it's Dad!
> B: O, is it my father? How are you? Is Mom ok? what's going on?
> A: O, it's no problemo!
> B: What's "no problemo," you should say "there's no problem" ok?
> A: Aren't "no problemo" and "no problem" the same?
> B: They might be the same, but Dad, please speak your own father language.
> A: Saying *'pa'* is my pure father tongue! Fatherland, no problemo, and father tongue all have 'pha' in them.[16]
> B: Well then, what can I do? What is Brother's phone number?
> A: uno three ocho nuevo siepte uno cinco sheep sheep sheep nuevo nuevo

> B: Uh, I can't even tell if they're sheep or livestock, write it to me, Father.
> A: Well then, do you have Teacher Kun bzang's home numero?
> B: It's not a numero, but, uh, the Teacher's home telephone number is 1389715
> …
> A: Don't be like that, speak properly!
> B: I'm saying,… in our school, when speaking Chinese you must only speak Chinese. When speaking Tibetan, you should speak pure Tibetan, and not speak that mixed-sounding language, Father I'm sorry.
> A: Then we won't be able to communicate OK? Unfortunate girl.
> B: What if I only speak to you in Chinese?
> A: I wouldn't understand that at all!
> B: Oh, well, if you can't understand either Chinese or Tibetan, then what the heck should we speak?
> A: Add some Tibetan to your Chinese. Add some Chinese to your Tibetan. We should speak like that.
> B: Then the "one one one" and "sheep sheep sheep"'s that you just said when giving a telephone number, are neither Chinese nor Tibetan.

By beginning with the assumption that people no longer speak the language well, they focus audience attention on the instances of linguistic borrowing. In this case, the comedians take on two particular discursive practices—the use of pha and the mixing of Tibetan and Chinese in giving telephone numbers—to illustrate their larger concerns about impure language practices.

Though quite common on the Tibetan Plateau, pha is frequently viewed as being borrowed from the Chinese pa (both are aspirated, voiceless bilabial stops), meaning "to fear" or "to be afraid of." Tibetans frequently say pha med (literally "not pha") or pha yod ni ma red ("it is not pha") to mean that something is not a problem or insignificant. When the daughter, however, says that they must speak Tibetan, the father says that pha, meaning 'father' in Tibetan, is in fact Tibetan language, as in pha skad 'father tongue', pha yul 'fatherland.' By this logic, pha med 'no problemo' should also be Tibetan. Though this is a witty retort, the audience immediately recognises that the two uses of pha draw upon different linguistic systems.

The second discursive practice is the use of Chinese terms in sharing phone numbers. After using the Chinese hao ma 'phone number' instead of the Tibetan ang grangs, he then

proceeds to rattle off a series of digits, primarily in Chinese. This is a common way of sharing phone numbers (see Kalsang Yeshe 2008), but the Tibetan father's poor pronunciation complicates the numbers as his pronunciation of the Chinese liu 'six,' is mistaken for lug 'sheep'. Next, when relating her teacher's contact information, the daughter's pure Tibetan confuses her father who exhorts her to yag pa ye shod dra "speak properly!" Two metadiscursive comments, meanwhile, guide the audience's reception of this message: the first explaining the school's rules about appropriate language use, and the second asking what one should speak if one understands neither Chinese nor Tibetan. The father's poor Chinese pronunciation and inability to speak pure Tibetan make him the butt of the joke.

In still another example from the same performance, the performers act out the situation of a nomad going to a restaurant. He starts by asking, **jiaozi** e yod gi, "Do you have **ravioli** [Chinese-style dumplings]" He then asks: **baozi** e yod gi "Do you have **bollo** [steamed buns stuffed with meat]?" Both times, he uses the borrowed terms jiaozi and baozi, instead of Tibetan alternatives like pan hri and mog mog respectively and is rebuked by the waitress for this error. Though this may not be why the performers are entertaining, they do encode important metadiscursive practices in which the herder's inability to navigate something so simple as a restaurant menu suggest that he is woefully out of touch with basic modern language practices.

But lest this give the impression that comedians are simply satirizing the behavior of ignorant country rubes, it is worth pointing out that urban sophisticates are not necessarily immune from these linguistic character flaws either. Comedian Sman bla skyabs, for example, provides a similar set of passages in one of his comedies, "The Telephone," this time satirizing the language practice of a (presumably) educated girl with an office job. Again using the example of the telephone—a still emergent technology at the time—and through imagining a

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representative conversation that people might have while using these technologies as a point of

rupture that forces discussion and evaluation of social changes in Tibetan life. In doing so, it

broaches the otherwise serious topic of language purism with humorous effect.

In this performance, Sman bla skyabs and his partner Phag mo bkra shis describe the

variety of telephone calls one might make and hear. In some instances, they imitate people

yelling into the phone in a manner reminiscent of nomads calling to each other across valleys,

suggesting that the callers do not fully understand how to use the technology. In another

instance, he and Phag mo bkra shis speak of a woman calling her superior to ask for a letter

granting her a holiday from her work unit, saying:

> *ka: rang gi rin thang mi shes ni'i kha rtsang de ring gi bu mo khar kher kha par*
> brgyab btang na kher re gzig nyan ni bud *'gro gi*
> kha: ya lad mo gzig byos ra/
> ka: dir dirr
> kha: we
> ka: **hello**
> kha: we, su yin
> ka: un
> kha: de chi gzig yin nis
> ka: ma shes khul bo ma byed dro
> kha: khyod sgrol ma red mo
> ka: **taoyan**! shes na ma shes kha bo byas
> *kha: yang khyod 'bri rgyu gzig yod ni min* na
> *ka: nga gnang nga zhu spyad ko'I yi ge gzig phris*
> *kha: gnang nga zhu gang nga 'gro go nis khyod*
> *ka: bya ba 'di mo 'di…* **tao yan**… *ngi gzo las na mi 'dod gi*
> *kha: de mo gzig las rgyu lag ga bud yong no shod dra! we! gnang nga zhu'i yi ge*
> ngas bris btang. Rang gis len gi shog go
> ka: uh-huh
> kha: yang chi ma nyan ni red
> *ka: 'di mo nyi ma kgzig ngi gzo'I ngo nag gos log 'gro gi, a rogs!*
> kha: we! nga yong khom med. Yang min nan gas cig ga bskur ra btang.
> ka: **ok, bye bye**.
> kha: ngu rgyu ra a rdza gzig mi yong gi ra, kha nas **o.k**. bzes no min nas khog na
> ka kha ra yod rgyu ma red ya (turns 55-74).

> A: These days, there are some girls who don't know their own value and who
> make phone calls without really listening to anything.

B: Right! Let's act this out!
A: Ring ring!
B: [greeting in Chinese] Wei?
A: [woman's voice in English] Hallo!
B: Whoa! Wei? Who are you?
A: [indignant, woman's voice] It's me?
B: What's that?
A: [woman's voice] Don't act like you don't know!
B: You're Sgrol ma, right?
A: [woman's voice] Disgusto![17] You know, but act like you don't.
B: Do you need to ask me something again?
A: [woman's voice] Can you write me a letter applying for leave?
B: Where would you go with leave?
A: [woman's voice] This job is… .disgusto… I don't want to do it!
B: [aside] This is a good job to have, don't tell me you don't like it.. Hey, I've written your leave letter, come pick it up.
A: [woman's voice] Nope!
B: Now what?
A: [woman's voice] It's so sunny, my face will become black and my clothes will fade, ok?[18]
B: Hey, I don't have time to come to you. How about I just mail it to you.
A: De acuerdo! Adios.
B: I felt tears, but except for the "OK" coming from her mouth, but it seems like the Tibetan language was nowhere in her.

In the context of Tibetan life at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the girl's ability to mix Tibetan, English, and Chinese indexes education and suggests that she is trying to be trendy. At the same time, however, when framed within satirical comedic performance and spoken in the petulant voice Sman bla skyabs affects, there is no doubt that the performers are criticizing these linguistic practices and the people who produce them. Her use of the Chinese word taoyan 'annoying', for example, first relates to the work that she doesn't like. Then she uses the same term again to ask the worker granting her holiday to bring her the letter confirming this because she wishes to avoid walking in the sun.

As if this girl's spoiled behavior was not enough, the comments that frame the narrative further guide the audience's interpretation. Before beginning the example, the first speaker suggests that girls like this rang gi rin thang mi shes, "don't know their own value." At the end

of the example, meanwhile, the second speaker's metadiscursive comments further underscore the inappropriate nature of the girl's strange linguistic choices, saying, "except for the 'OK' coming from her mouth, it seems like the Tibetan ka and kha were nowhere in her," again using ka and kha, the first two consonants of the Tibetan syllabary to refer to the Tibetan language. Here we see, then, that education, while still important, cannot guarantee proper Tibetan use of modern technologies (and by extension engagement with modernity). Only the ability to consistently reproduce pure Tibetan can accomplish this goal.

Though never explicitly stated in these two examples, Tibetanness is now predicated on producing pure Tibetan language. However, as noted earlier, it is important to recognise that the discourses described here are little more than ideals. Actual linguistic practice can and does differ significantly. In practice, Tibetans rely on a variety of cues to indicate whether or not they should employ borrowed terms. When speaking with someone new, or whose educational background is unclear, even the most passionate advocates of "pure" Tibetan, will mix Tibetan and Chinese to ensure that they are understood. If both speakers then establish that they can speak pure Tibetan, they will often endeavour to do so.

Conclusion

"Where verbal hygiene 'works,'" Cameron (1995: 222) argues, "it works not by controlling our thoughts, but by mobilizing our desires and our fears." Tibet's linguistic purity campaign, "works" and has gained traction because of these fears that the Tibetan language is disappearing. Unfortunately, the language purism movement has also become an increasingly contentious issue in recent years as the Amdo Tibet's emergent purist ideology comes into contact with China's own monoglot language ideology, based on Putonghua (Dong 2009). In the winter of 2014,

within a span of less than 30 days, independent Tibetan language classes were forced to shut down in Reb gong (Ch: Tongren) county in Qinghai, a Tibetan singer in Sichuan was arrested for a song encouraging people to study Tibetan, and a young Tibetan, who had been known for having wished to preserve Tibetan language and culture, self-immolated.

Online too, posts about language are increasingly ephemeral. As I prepared an early draft of this paper, one WeChat article I had saved from April 2014, entitled "*bod la dga' na bod yig 'bri rogs*" – "If you like Tibet, write Tibetan" - had already been deleted. Attempting to open it leads to a message in Chinese saying: ci neirong bei duo ren jubao, xiangguan de neirong wufa jinxing chakan 此内容被多人举报，相关的内容无法进行查看 "This content has been reported by many people, related content cannot continue to be searched." And yet the Tibetan purity campaign continues. The neologisms coined to support this purist movement advance a Tibetan modernity based in linguistic practices perceived to have links to Tibetan traditions. In this way, neologisms can be traditional, and the appropriate use of traditionally constructed neologisms is a key element of the twenty-first century Amdo Tibetan discourses of language purity. Attention to Tibetan language purism can provide an important way of understanding the complex language politics of China, where both grassroots metadiscursive regimes and official support for minority language often clash with the State's monoglot language ideology.

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[1] Amdo is comprised of Tibetan areas of Northwest China's Qinghai Province (excluding Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture), Sichuan Province's Aba (T: Rnga ba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture as well as Gansu Province's Gannan (T: Kan lho) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Dbus gtsang is comprised of the central and western regions of the Tibetan Autonomous Region. Khams is the third ethnolinguistic subregion and includes the Eastern part of the Tibet Autonomous Region, Sichuan's Ganze (T: Dkar mdzes) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai's Yushu (T: Yul shul) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, and Yunnan's Diqing (Bde chen) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.

[2] *sngon chad gzig 'dra rgyu gzig yin na, da cig chi yin rgyu zer na, da slob grwa song* dus khyos phyir ra yong *yang min na cig las khungs nang na bya ba las go no, 'di can po gi chi yin de yin cig rgya skad gi tshig gcig gnyis gzig bshad na 'di gzi brjid gzig ga ? go gi ya da, da 'brog pa gi nang nas khyos bar gi da cig rgya skad gi tsi ge tsi ge bshad* shes song na *da hri ge, uh, gzi brjid gi 'dra mo rtsis. da sngon chad yin rgyu na da, 'brog skad gi bar ra rgya skad tsi ge gzig bshad shes na 'di da o 'di da bab gi myi btsa ya gzig yin rgyu red, de mo gzig gi da khidge 'du shes yod, 'on kyang kha rtsang de ring de 'du shes 'di 'gyur gi yod gi ya, ...kha rtsang de ring dpe bzhag na slob grwa song na* phyir ra yong na da bod skad yin na bod skad gzig ga nam dag gzig bshad ma shes na, *da rgya skad bshad yod na, da mi hra gi ze ...'di myi gzig gis a rdza gzig las srol ma ra* b*zes...*

[3] Borrowing, "the introduction of single words or short, frozen, idiomatic phrases from one variety into the other", is distinct from code-switching, "the meaningful juxtaposition of what speakers must consciously or subconsciously process as strings formed according to the internal rules of two distinct grammatical systems" (Gumperz 1982: 66, italics in the original). While codeswitching among marginal populations is well-studied (see Gal 1987, Irving and Gal 2000, and Woolard 1987 and 1995), borrowing often receives less attention.

[4] Drawing on Foucault (1977[1975]), Briggs (1996: 19) defines metadiscursive practices as "discourses that seek to shape, constrain, or appropriate other discourses."

[5] These examples come from Beyer 1992. Beyer defines all instances in which words or concepts are imported from other languages "borrowing," which confuses given the terminology

employed in this paper. Transliteration of foreign words is termed "transfer," while translations based on the semantic components of the original language are termed "loan translations." Beyer also recognises that there are mixed forms that transliterate part of the original, and append a Tibetan term as well. For more, see Beyer 1992, 139-146. See also Kapstein 2006, 23 and Kalsang Yeshe 2008.

[6] See Sa mstho skyid and Roche (2011, 245-9) gtsang ma in the context of contemporary Amdo.

[7] Notice the gendered nature of the term pha skad 'father tongue.'

[8] I am grateful for one reviewer pointing out that comedians in Lhasa also began producing sketches strongly satirical of mixed language in the early 1990s. Though I am less familiar with these workers, Phuntsog Tashi's 1991 TV play Magpa 'son-in-law,' and the work of performers Migmar and Thubten are examples. The sort of acerbic purism that has developed in Amdo more recently, however, has not followed the same timeline as in Lhasa.

[9] See Billé 2015 for more on the concept of Sinophobia from a Mongolian perspective.

[10] *bod rigs dag ma zhig yin phyin bod kyi skad yig dag ma zhig nges par shes dgos/ shes bya de spyad dgos/   gal te bod rang gi chas gos kyang mi byed/skad yig dag kyang mi spyod na de'I tshe bod ces pa'i ming bor tshar ba red/*

[11] See also Tsering Woeser (2016) and Lama Jabb (2015, 179 n. 95)

[12] Interestingly, some speakers show less resistance to directly borrowing from English. Thus instead of Thomas's (1991) 'xenophobic purism,' which would exclude all foreign languages, one could more accurately call this 'Sinophobic purism.'

[13] For more, see Thurston 2013 and 2015.

[14] For more English-language resources on xiangsheng, see Link (1984 and 2007) Kaikkonen (1990) and Moser (1990).

[15] A popular comedian from Mgo log Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Southern Qinghai (now living in France).

[16] The Chinese pa and the Tibetan pha are both unvoiced, aspirated, bilabial stops.

[17] A Chinese term meaning annoying, loathsome, or disgusting.

[18] Women in reform era China highly prize white skin (Johansson 1998).