

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE MPR STATE COMMITTEE FOR TERMINOLOGY:  
BASIC PRINCIPLES IN FORMULATING NEW VOCABULARY

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Under the provisions of the Japanese-Mongolian Treaty for Cultural Cooperation, a research team of Asia University was invited by the MPR Academy of Sciences to visit Mongolia in September 1977. The research theme of the group was "A Study of Mongolia's Modernization." My task was to investigate modernization in the linguistic field of terminology or neologisms.

As a result of the revolution in 1921, the Mongolian People's Republic (MPR) became the second socialist state in world history. Since then the MPR has exerted great efforts in building a modern socialist nation. It has been particularly successful in the educational field in the three decades since the second world war.

In spite of much turmoil immediately following the revolution in 1921, the Mongolian government mapped out plans for the national development of education. One problem that blocked the success of the plan was the lack of necessary vocabulary due largely to the traditional nomadic background of the Mongols. It was therefore imperative to create or standardize academic terms essential to the modern development of education, particularly for ideological education.

To meet this necessity, efforts were made to create new terms by translating or adopting foreign terms. To promote and coordinate this task, the Mongolian government established a Committee for Terminology under the State Committee of Sciences (to become the Academy of Sciences in 1961). At the first Great People's Khural, held in November 1924, Jamyan, chairman of the Committee of Sciences reported: "Almost everyone is inventing new words or new terms as they please. To protect the purity of the Mongolian language and to meet a rising demand of the times, we have set up some ten specialized subcommittees and assigned to them the scientific study of needed new academic terms."

In 1930 a Translation Committee for Political and Economic Terms was organized under the Committee on Propaganda and Education of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP). This translation committee soon published a Russian-Mongolian dictionary for political and economic terms containing some 600 ideological terms from Marxist-Leninist works. A Russian-Latin-Mongolian botanical dictionary was published in 1931. In 1932 an Academic Terms Committee was established within the Department of Philology and Phonetics of the MPR State Committee of Sciences. This committee later became the State Committee for Terminology. In 1935 this committee published a Russian-Mongolian dictionary of mathematical terms and a Russian-Mongolian dictionary of geographical and meteorological terms. In 1937 it published a Russian-Mongolian dictionary for chemical terms, a Russian-Mongolian dictionary for physical terms, and in 1965 it published a Russian-Mongolian dictionary of

academic terms. Since 1959, the State Committee for Terminology has been publishing a quarterly periodical, "Supplementary Volume on Academic Terms," to announce newly adopted industrial and agricultural terms. To publicize and popularize new terms among the common people, the state committee publishes a quarterly, "News of the State Committee for Terminology."

It has published to date three volumes entitled "Collection of Academic Terms," containing more than 30,000 terms. The Political Bureau of the MPRP Central Committee adopted a resolution in 1963 entitled, "Work of the Language and Literature Committee of the MPR Academy of Sciences." The resolution directed that in formulating or standardizing academic terms, the State Committee for Terminology should adhere to the principle of motivating and assisting the Mongolian people to understand the best scientific, cultural and technical achievements in the world, of facilitating the students' studies, and of continually enriching the vocabulary of the Mongolian language. The State Committee should constantly investigate actual usage of new terms in the society and if necessary, correct and improve them on the basis of public opinion. This resolution continues to be the fundamental guiding policy of the committee today.

On September 12-13, 1977, I had the opportunity of interviewing Professor Lubsandendeb, president of the Language and Literature Institute of the Academy of Sciences in Ulaanbaatar and concurrently chairman of the State Committee for Terminology. I also interviewed Professor Lubsanjab, dean of the Literature Department of the Mongolian State University and concurrently member of the State Committee for Terminology. They explained how new academic terms are formulated in the Mongolian People's Republic. The following remarks contain the gist of their statements and several articles written by Mongolian scholars on the subject of terminology.

There is presently a Department of Academic Terms within the Language and Literature Institute of the Academy of Sciences. Apart from this, there is the State Committee for Terminology consisting of nine scholars appointed by the central government. All government offices and affiliated agencies are required to propose new terms they desire to incorporate in their various activities. They do so in cooperation with the above-mentioned Department of Academic Terms. The proposals drafted are then submitted to the MPR State Committee for Terminology. Several subcommittees of specialists within the State Committee then study the proposals with the assistance of other specialists from various fields. If necessary, the subcommittee amends the proposed draft of terms and, after approving them, the State Committee for Terminology announces them officially. Official announcements of new terms are incorporated in the quarterly magazine published by the State Committee. From time to time, the State Committee also publishes dictionaries or collections of terms in various industrial, scientific, and cultural fields. The State Committee for Terminology strictly observes certain fundamental principles in creating new academic terms so that the new terms are formulated on a scientific basis; they should be nationalistic, systematic, standardized and unifying.

The Mongols formulate new terms by borrowing from Indo-European languages. Almost all new or modern words come from or through the Russian language. This is an inevitable consequence under present circumstances. There is, however, a fundamental policy that the new terms should be derived from basic Mongolian



vocabulary as much as possible.

1. New words or terms are taken from classical Mongolian literary words or from local dialects. They include the names of animals, plants, minerals and social phenomena. Example: *ekh* 'mother' + *bari-* 'to restore' + suffix *-gch* = *ekh barigch* 'midwife.'
2. New words or terms are derived from old Mongolian literary words or local dialects by giving them new meanings. Examples: old word *nökhör* 'friend' now means comrade; old word *tsakhilgaan* 'lightning' now means electricity, as in *tsakhilgaan emneleg* 'electric medical treatment'; old word *tengri* 'heaven' now means god.
3. New terms are formed by combining old Mongolian words in both subordinative and coordinative combinations. Examples: old words *orlogo* 'income' + *zarlag* 'expenditure' = *orlogo zarlaga* 'budget'; old words *möljikh* 'pluck' + *yus* 'system' = *möljikh yus* 'exploitation.'
4. New terms are derived by translating the meaning of foreign terms. Examples: old words *gerel* 'flash light' + *zurag* 'image' = *gerel zurag* 'photograph'; old words *nevterkhii* 'detailed' + *tol* 'dictionary' = *nevterkhii tol* 'encyclopedia'; old words *surga-* 'to teach' + *khömüüjüülekh* 'to raise, to bring up' + *ukhaan* 'knowledge' = *surgan khömüüjüülekh ukhaan* 'pedagogy.'
5. New terms are made by a simulated translation of foreign terms. Examples: *us* 'water' + *törö-* 'to give birth to' + suffix *-gch* 'element' = *us törögch* 'hydrogen'; *khüchil* 'sourness' + *törö-* 'to give birth to' + suffix *-gch* 'element' = *khüchil törögch* 'oxygen.'
6. New words or terms are created by adding suffixes to old Mongolian words. Examples: old word *ukhuula* 'to propagate' + suffix *gch* 'element or person' = *ukhuulagch* 'agitator.'
7. Categories of foreign borrowings:
  - a. Foreign words or terms adopted with some phonological changes.  
Examples: *oktyabri* 'October'; *avtobus* 'bus'; *tsirk* 'circus.'
  - b. Foreign borrowings with explanatory term.  
Examples: *nisekh* 'flying' + *ongots* 'ship' = *nisekh ongots* 'airplane'; *niigem* 'social' + *juram* 'system' = *niigem juram* 'socialism.'
  - c. Foreign borrowings with double meanings are translated differently.  
Examples: the Russian term *fizicheskaya nauka* becomes Mongolian *fizikiyn shinjlekh ukhaan* 'physical science.' The Russian term *fizicheskii trud* becomes *bieiin* 'body' + *khödölmor* 'labor' = physical labor.
  - d. Terms are created by combining foreign borrowings and Mongolian words.  
Example: *khushuuch* 'vanguard leader' + *general* = major general; *kino* 'cinema' + *zurag* 'picture' = movie; *zuragtai* 'with picture' + *radio* = television.

As one may see from the above examples, the neological technique is ingeniously developed with the priority given to the basic Mongolian vocabulary. Only when deemed unavoidable are foreign borrowings or terms adopted. Even in adopting foreign terms, it is done in a consistent, sophisticated manner. That is to say, instead of simply adopting a Russian word or term as is, the item in question is traced back to its original meaning or original form in Greek or Latin. Then it is translated into Mongolian directly from its original meaning or it is adapted in its original form from the Greek and Latin.

In spite of the fact that Russian is presently playing a leading role in the development of a modern Mongolian vocabulary, it appears that deliberate, studied efforts are being made to avoid borrowing terms directly from Russian. Foreign

borrowings of Greek and Latin origin adopted into Mongolian through Russian are defined by Mongolian linguists as international words. It is noteworthy that the number of Mongolian words borrowed directly from pure native Russian is far less than the number of so-called international words or terms. Mongolian linguists are very aware of this phenomenon. They welcome the increased use of international terms in the political, economic, scientific and cultural fields to enrich the Mongolian vocabulary. Nevertheless, in order to avoid confusion in the practical field of technical or academic terms, these linguists emphasize the absolute priority and importance of formulating terms from basic native Mongolian vocabulary.

After going through dozens of articles written by the Mongolian linguists on the subject, I have come away with the impression that all of them shared a firm and profound nationalistic respect for Mongolia's traditional culture, particularly of its language. Today the MPR is conducting advanced education and academic research on its own language. It is true that a modern Mongolian vocabulary is still in the process of being developed, but there can be no doubt that the Mongolian vocabulary has already been improved and modernized to the extent that higher education and academic research can be conducted in the language.

It is instructive to compare Mongolia's experience with that of other modernizing countries. In Japan such words as society, individual, freedom, rights, philosophy, insurance, and company had not been formulated until the Meiji era (1868-1912). Although Japan had a long tradition in the use of Chinese characters (*kanji*), it was not an easy task to create precise or apt words or terms expressing certain abstract concepts because many such expressions had never existed in Japan. Traditional Mongolia, too, lacked many abstract expressions. Mongolia, therefore, also experienced great difficulties in developing abstract terms. In spite of the differences in the political and social systems, I can see many common problems and similarities in the experience of Mongolia and Meiji Japan in the rapid adoption of foreign culture.

The MPR State Committee for Terminology is playing a leading role as a driving force in formulating, standardizing and popularizing new terms in Mongolia in a comparatively short period of time. Judging from its activities in the last half century, the role and achievements of this committee in promoting the modernization of Mongolia should be highly esteemed and commended.