Language attitudes and identity in the Tibet Dharamsala diaspora

Jeff Izzard
SOAS, United Kingdom

Linguistic and identity construct multiplicity are salient features of the Tibetan Dharamsala diaspora (TDD). Irrespective of linguistic diversity and issues of intelligibility among intra-Tibetan groups a shared perception of a common heritage, and a common plight, accentuated by the displacement of exile, emphasises a desire to preserve and value symbols of Tibetan culture resulting in the formation and awareness of multiple Tibetic variety repertoires and increased competence in multiple Tibetic varieties.

This research seeks to investigate the language attitudes of the members of the TDD linking this concept with linguistic repertoires and informant reported linguistic competence specifically seeking to establish if a multiple Tibetan variety paradigm constitutes as a polynomic language situation and whether positive attitudes towards a multiple Tibetan identity paradigm increases the aptitude of competence in Tibetic varieties.

The data for this research was collected over the period of a year in the TDD combining quantitative and qualitative research instruments in a mixed methodology approach. Two questionnaire surveys were conducted with large sample sizes as well as a verbal-guise test and interviews. The results of the three data collection techniques were triangulated facilitating an analytical amalgamation structured on the comparison, correlation and contextualisation of data therefore attempting to capture as much of the complexity of the subject matter as possible.

The research incorporates an interpretive perspective in conjunction with a strong motivation to use informant lead descriptions and definitions of linguistic varieties and cultural items particularly in reporting on the concepts of linguistic status and purity and the notion of unity in diversity in Tibetan intra-group relationships.

This research hopes to inform the field of sociolinguistics, specifically focusing on the relationship between language attitudes and multiple identity constructions.

Keywords: language attitudes, multi-Tibetic varieties.