

## A COMPARATIVE ETHNOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF MONGOLIAN AND INUIT LANGUAGES

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### ABSTRACT:

This article presents a comparative ethno-sociolinguistic analysis of the Mongolian and Inuit languages, examining how linguistic structures, oral traditions, and cultural narratives encode and transmit cultural and spiritual worldviews. Anchored in both American and Soviet-Russian ethnolinguistic frameworks, the study investigates the role of language as a repository of cultural identity and a reflection of environmental adaptation. Inuit languages, characterized by polysynthetic morphology and rooted in animistic and shamanistic traditions, demonstrate a linguistic embodiment of ecological interdependence. In contrast, Mongolian, an Altaic agglutinative language shaped by nomadic life and a syncretic spiritual heritage combining shamanism and Tibetan Buddhism, reveals a lexicon and grammatical system reflective of social and cosmological values. Despite distinct geographic and cultural contexts, both languages exhibit structural and functional parallels that underscore the interrelation of language, environment, and belief systems. The article highlights the urgent need for comprehensive documentation and revitalization in the face of linguistic endangerment, arguing that language preservation is essential for maintaining epistemological diversity and cultural continuity. The findings contribute to broader discourses on language policy, sociolinguistics, and cultural heritage preservation.

**Keywords:** ethnolinguistics, Inuit, Mongolian, cultural identity, sociolinguistic analysis

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is both a reflection and a repository of culture, shaping and expressing the identities of its speakers [3, 4]. The study of ethnolinguistics, as an interdisciplinary field, has emphasized the preservation and revitalization of minority languages as carriers of cultural heritage [4]. This article examines the Mongolian and Inuit languages, in-depth into their linguistic structures and cultural narratives, and evaluates how these elements represent the ethos of their respective societies.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnolinguistics has evolved significantly, with two primary approaches shaping the discipline. The first, American ethnolinguistics, is rooted in the works of F. Boas and E. Sapir and emphasizes the anthropological study of language. Their work, particularly in the context of the American Indian languages, focuses on how language reflects the cultural and social contexts of its speakers. The second major approach, Soviet and Russian ethnolinguistics, has broadened the scope of the field to include socio-cultural and ethnographic aspects, developing a more interdisciplinary framework that incorporates not just language, but also society, ethnography, and sociology.

Scholars like Boas, Sapir, and Fishman have laid the foundation for understanding the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and identity, providing a robust theoretical framework for ethnolinguistics [4]. American ethnolinguistics, stemming from the work of Boas and Sapir, centers on the relationship between language and culture through an anthropological lens. In contrast, the Soviet-Russian approach has expanded the study of language to encompass broader socio-cultural and political dimensions, recognizing that language cannot be fully understood without considering the social structures and historical contexts in which it evolves.

Ethnolinguistics is increasingly seen as the study of language in relation to the people, ethnic history, cultural styles, and social relations, with some scholars viewing modern ethnolinguistics as closely tied to sociolinguistics [26]. This convergence has given rise to the term "ethno-sociolinguistics," which reflects the growing recognition of how language and society shape each other. In recent years, there has been a focus on the languages and cultures of ethnic minorities, particularly in how they express and preserve their unique cultural identities.

The works of key scholars in the field, including Boas, Sapir, Whorf, Fishman, Giles, and Edwards, as well as those from German, Italian, and French traditions, have all contributed to the development of ethnolinguistics. Additionally, Soviet and Russian linguists such as Zelenin, Grinkov, Trubetsky, Polivanov, Yakubinsky, and Larin have enriched the discipline by incorporating insights from ethnography, sociology, and anthropology, helping to shape the theoretical foundations of modern ethnolinguistic research [9; 26].

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a comparative ethno-sociolinguistic approach, analyzing the structures, lexicons, oral traditions, and cultural contexts of the Mongolian and Inuit languages. The research draws from linguistic texts, ethnographic records, and secondary literature to highlight parallels and distinctions.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Inuit and Mongolian languages, though geographically and culturally distinct, both offer fascinating insights into how language is intricately linked to environment, culture, and spirituality. The Inuit languages, spoken primarily in the Arctic regions of Canada, Greenland, and Alaska, belong to the Eskimo-Aleut language family. These languages exhibit complex polysynthetic structures, which are finely attuned to the Inuit's deep connection with the natural environment. Their vocabulary reflects themes such as survival, resource utilization, and community cohesion [5]. Inuit spirituality, rooted in animism and shamanism, imbues the natural world with spiritual significance. The Shaman plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony between the community and its environment [6, 11]. This linguistic connection to the environment and spirituality is reflected in the grammatical structure of Inuit languages, where words are often constructed to express complex relationships and qualities.

In contrast, the Mongolian language, which belongs to the Altaic language family, reflects the nomadic traditions of the Mongol people. The Mongolian lexicon includes distinct categories related to herding, horses, and vast territorial expanses, highlighting the intimate relationship between language and the Mongolian way of life [2]. Influenced heavily by Tibetan Buddhism since the 16th century, Mongolian culture incorporates teachings on compassion, interconnectedness, and the cycle of life and reincarnation, which also inform the language's structure and social values. Unlike the Inuit, whose spiritual practices remain grounded in shamanism, Mongolian culture represents a hybrid belief system combining shamanism with Tibetan Buddhism [10, 12]. Both languages, though differing in religious and philosophical outlook, serve as a vehicle for shaping and expressing worldviews, demonstrating how language acts as a mirror to cultural and spiritual identities.

A comparative linguistic and ethnographic approach reveals that both Inuit and Mongolian languages are deeply reflective of the cultural and spiritual practices of their speakers. While the Inuit continue to practice shamanistic traditions, Mongolian culture has blended these with Buddhist teachings, resulting in a unique religious landscape [9]. Both languages feature taboos that are integral to their shamanistic traditions, underscoring the centrality of spirituality in both societies [13, 15]. The linguistic structures, shaped by these spiritual practices, continue to influence daily life and societal values, ensuring that language is not merely a means of communication but a repository of cultural identity.

The globalized world poses significant challenges to the survival of minority languages like Inuit and Mongolian. Both face the risk of extinction as larger global languages dominate. To combat this, international efforts have been made to document, preserve, and transmit these languages and their associated cultural heritage [4]. The Inuit language, with its four regional dialects—Alaskan, Western Canadian, Eastern Canadian, and Greenlandic—has only recently developed a written form. Documentation efforts began in the 18th century, led by Moravian missionaries in Greenland and Labrador (Parker, 2005). Conversely, the Mongolian written language, first adopted by Genghis Khan in 1204, has a much longer history [2]. Today, Mongolian is written in both Cyrillic and traditional Mongolian scripts, with Khalka Mongolian being the predominant form [1, 16].

While both languages exhibit agglutinative structures, there are notable differences in how they express grammatical relationships. Mongolian relies heavily on suffix chains to express grammatical relations, whereas the Inuit language uses suffixes, rather than nouns, to convey qualities or characteristics [5]. Both languages, however, share a deep connection to the land and their nomadic heritage. Mongolian nomads migrate across grasslands, while the Inuit's nomadic lifestyle is adapted to ice-covered terrains, both shaping their respective languages and worldviews [12, 13]. These environmental influences are also evident in their systems of counting, which are based on human anatomy. In Inuit culture, numbers are tied to the body, with "six" symbolizing the transfer of counting to the other hand, and "twenty" representing the count of all fingers and toes [5, 7]. Similarly, in Mongolian, numbers are expressed based on physical aspects of the body and the environment [1].

Both Inuit and Mongolian languages have rich oral traditions that serve as important cultural repositories. Inuit oral literature, rich in folklore and shamanic rituals, emphasizes community storytelling during the long Arctic winters. Similarly, Mongolian oral traditions, including epic tales and folk songs, mirror the nomadic lifestyle and serve as

cultural chronicles [8, 9]. These oral traditions are crucial for cultural preservation, passing down knowledge, values, and beliefs through generations.

As both languages evolve in response to modern technological advances, they continue to reflect the intertwined relationships between language, culture, and environment [21]. The comparative exploration of Inuit and Mongolian languages highlights how linguistic structures serve as cultural repositories, reflecting the lived experiences of the people who speak them. These findings underline the importance of language as a tool for preserving cultural identity and heritage in the face of globalization and linguistic dominance.

Finally, the linguistic structures of both the Inuit and Mongolian languages provide profound insights into the cultural and spiritual life of their respective peoples. While both face challenges in preserving their languages in a globalized world, efforts to document, protect, and revitalize these languages are crucial for maintaining their cultural significance. By examining these languages through the lens of their environments, traditions, and spiritual practices, we gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which language shapes and is shaped by the world around us.

## CONCLUSION

The Inuit and Mongolian languages serve as cultural and spiritual repositories, encapsulating the resilience of indigenous traditions amidst globalization. Both exemplify the dynamic relationship between language, environment, and community. In the context of modern sociolinguistics in Mongolia, particularly in areas such as language policy, language planning, and cultural heritage protection, this research topic is timely. It aligns with the growing focus on preserving ethnic and cultural languages within a globalized world, offering significant opportunities for further exploration within the theoretical frameworks and methodologies of sociolinguistics.

The Canadian Arctic provides a notable example of the global commitment to language preservation, with Inuit communities collaborating with international organizations to protect their language environment through assessment, monitoring, and language proficiency programs. Despite undergoing significant changes due to European influence, including an increase in borrowed words from English and German, Inuit language efforts highlight the importance of language policy as a foundation for safeguarding cultural heritage. UNESCO's recognition of the Inuit language as nearly extinct underscores the urgent need for research in the area of minority languages, particularly in light of the significant factors contributing to their extinction, such as cultural imperialism, urbanization, and negative attitudes towards minority languages.

Given the challenges faced by both the Inuit and Mongolian languages in a rapidly globalizing world, further sociolinguistic research is crucial. The findings from such research will be invaluable to governmental and non-governmental organizations, researchers, and individuals committed to the fields of ethnicity, language, culture, and human rights. Additionally, the results can contribute to resource development in areas like textbooks, manuals, and policy recommendations, ultimately supporting the preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity in higher education and beyond.

Future research should focus on deepening the exploration of language as a tool for cultural preservation, examining the intersection of language policy, sociocultural identity, and the impacts of globalization. By doing so, we can ensure that the survival of unique worldviews and identities, embodied in these languages, remains a priority amidst the forces of global change.

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