

DIFFICULTY IN TEACHING DZONGKHA¹ IN AN ENGLISH MEDIUM SYSTEM

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Despite its small size, Bhutan has several vernaculars spoken in different regions. In the past, the geography of the country with steep mountains, cliffs, gorges, dense forests and rivers have been a natural barrier, preventing frequent movement of people from one region to another. These communities remained isolated from each other for many years. As a result, vernaculars of each community could not spread far to other regions and thus remained confined to their own locality. Even today, these dialects exist, some of which are spoken by a handful of people.

“As you catch your first glimpse of Bhutan from the air, it is easy to see why such diverse ethnic groups should have survived in this tiny Himalayan kingdom. Jutting southwards from the main mountain range, ridges kept the valley isolated for centuries. Even today, many remain several days walk from the nearest road”, writes Solange Hando, Kent, UK in the Tashi Delek in-flight magazine of Druk Air³ April-May-June issue, 2003.

She also adds, “Archeological finds suggest that people inhabited these mountains as early as 2000 BC and a Monyul⁴ state may have existed around 500 BC, long before the first recorded settlers 1400 years ago”.

Of all the languages in the country, Dzongkha is established and accepted as the national language of Bhutan. Its history dates back to the times of the Buddha or even much before. It is identified as one of the native languages, the so-called Prakriti⁵. The twelfth century records reveal that spoken Dzongkha was used as the language of the royal court, the military elite, and erudite scholars. It is spoken by a majority of people as their native language in the eight of the twenty districts viz. Thimphu, Punakha, Paro, Wangdue Phodrang, Gasa, Haa, Dagana and Chukha. Today it is spoken as the *lingua franca* through out the country.

¹ The National Language of Bhutan.

² Principal, Institute of Language and Culture Studies, Semtokha.

³ Bhutan's National Airline.

⁴ Old name for Bhutan.

⁵ One of the four major languages literally known as the natural or native language.

Types of Vernaculars

There are around 19 different vernaculars in different parts of the country, which are listed as follows⁶:

<i>Languages</i>	<i>Speakers</i>
Dzongkha	160,000
Checha ngacha	20,000
Brokpa kha (Dur, Tang & Khangtangdrok)	5000
Merak Saktengpa Brokpa kha	300
Lakhapa	8000
Tibetan	1000
Bumthangkha	30,000
Khengkha	40,000
Mangdepaikha	10,000
Kurtoepaikha	10,000
Henkha	10,000
Chalipa	1000
Zalapa	15,000
Dagpaikha	1000
Southern Bhutanese (Nepali)	156,000
Lepcha	2000
Tshangla (Sharchogpa)	138,000
Lhopa (Tabadomtse, Droya)	2,500
Monkha (Rukhapai Olekha)	1000
Gongduepaikha	2000

Dzongkha the National Language

Ever since Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal established the dual system of government in the 17th century, Dzongkha was the main language of the *dzong*⁷, and a tradition of customarily speaking Dzongkha within the four walls of the *dzong* was observed. More over, the recorded songs of Gaylong Sumdar Tashi, who was recruited as monk following the monk tax system during the ninth Je Khenpo,⁸ Gyalwa Shakya Rinchen (1744-55), is in Dzongkha. Similarly the story of

⁶ The statistics are based on George Van Driem's *Languages of the Greater Himalayan Region* published in 1998, Leiden University.

⁷ Fortresses which some are now used as the residence of the monk body as well as the center of district administration.

⁸ A title given to the Chief Abbot of the Central Monastic Body.

Garsa Lamai Singye⁹ dates back to 1837 during the times of the 37th Desi,¹⁰ Tashi Dorje. This information proves that the written form of Dzongkha evolved during the 17th century.

It was during the nineteen sixties that the importance of a national language was felt, when the third king, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (reign: 1952-1972), the visionary leader saw in his wisdom, the possibility of a total unification and integration of his people and nation, where so many different vernaculars are spoken in different parts of the country. Taking into consideration all these aspects, Dzongkha was introduced as the national language of Bhutan. The process of committing the language to script was initiated in 1971. Of all the languages within the country, Dzongkha alone qualified to be a language acceptable to all Bhutanese. It was the most established and advanced languages with as many as 160,000 native speakers, and it was the only Tibeto-Burman language in the whole of the country that had a written form.

Until the early 1960s, Dzongkha was more a spoken language, and for official communication purposes Chokey¹¹ was used. But slowly, the importance of Dzongkha, not only as a spoken language, but also as a written language was strongly felt.

Evolution of Dzongkha

Though some form of written Dzongkha seems to have appeared from 17th century onwards, it was referred to more often as Phelkha which was not exactly the present day Dzongkha. Moreover, spoken Dzongkha was more local, and Chokey featured largely in the written form of language, which was also unquestioningly accepted as Dzongkha. Therefore, the sounds of some words did not match the way they were written. This gave room for different spelling system for a particular word. In the absence of a standard format of developing spellings, independent writers of those times took the liberty to establish different spellings. Thus a tradition of diverse spellings for a particular word appeared in practice. There was not a single body to look into these discrepancies.

Therefore, Department of Education under the expertise of Lopon Pema Tsewang, published the Dzongkha Dazhung¹², the so-called

⁹ A legend reflected in a love story called Garsa Lamai Singye.

¹⁰ The temporal rulers of Bhutan under the leadership of Zhabdung Ngawang Namgyal known as Deb Rajas.

¹¹ The textual language of religion, philosophy, medicine and scientific treatises.

¹² Name of a Dzongkha Grammar text which literally means the main text of grammar.

Dzongkhai Drashed Rabsel Kyarengdangpo¹³ in 1971, which made an earnest attempt to lay down the foundation of Dzongkha grammar rules. This grammar book was largely based on the sound system used by the native speakers of Thimphu and Punakha and drawing in possible relevance from the Chokey orthography as per the Chokey grammar. Therefore, Chokey, the language of learning and liturgy, influenced the vocabulary of spoken and written Dzongkha. Its influence could be compared to what Latin is to Roman languages. Some of the new ideas were also inspired by modern English grammar.

Till the 1960s, the term Dzongkha was used to denote both the spoken language as well as the literary exponent, which was Chokey because these two were not perceived as two distinct languages. Till 1971, Dzongkha, which was taught as a written language in the schools, was actually Chokey and the spoken language was Dzongkha. Since then, efforts have been made to bring the written language closer to the spoken one. But, Chokey remained as the standard language in which many of the scholarly documents were written.

The Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) was established in 1986 to give a fresh impetus to the pace of the overall development of Dzongkha. So many literary publications such as Dzongkha Grammar books and dictionaries came out. This was the beginning of a new face-lift to Dzongkha, as new versions of literature began to appear. But these publications remained confined to limited readers and did not seem to go beyond to other sections of the society because of their limited standard of literacy and capacity to read and understand these literature.

This, howsoever, lifted the standard of Dzongkha as a language. Many new ideas and terminologies started to feature in different forms of writings and in the spoken language of people, especially between the late nineties and today. Modern ways of writing substituted some of the traditional writings, which are largely influenced and inspired by English structure and style. Therefore, modern Dzongkha texts took a paradigm shift in their presentation and expression. The DDC publications however, served as a basis for the consistent writing of Dzongkha in schools and various departments.

The First Dzongkha School

Semtokha Rigney¹⁴ Lobdra, which is now upgraded to the Institute of Language and Cultural Studies, was established on the fourth day of the 6th month of Iron Ox Year, corresponding to 16th of July 1961 under

¹³ The first bright rays of the dawn of the commentary on Dzongkha grammar.

¹⁴ The study of Arts and Sciences.

the Royal Patronage of His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck. The school initially offered only Chokey courses, but later Dzongkha began to feature more and more in its curriculum. The courses offered were full time and therefore the proficiency in it was obvious.

But the scope of this one-sided school system proved to be limited. In a changing world, these graduates despite their proficiency in Dzongkha, seemed to be limited without knowledge of English. Therefore, English was also introduced as a functional subject in 1976. But this did not meet the required standard of English to fit into the employment world. This concern gave birth to many curriculum changes from 1986 onwards, and finally in 1996 a cross-sectoral brain storming session was conducted on the overall existing curriculum of the school, and as a result a major change in the curriculum surfaced. Accordingly new components of study areas were introduced. Fulltime English courses equivalent to other English medium institutions of the same level were introduced, both at the pre-university and degree level. This definitely gave a new perspective to the students.

Education System

The first modern school in Bhutan was introduced during the reign of the First King Ugyen Wangchuck (1907-1926) in the form of Ha Higher Secondary School. Hindi¹⁵ was the medium of instruction, although it was neither an international language nor a Bhutanese language. It was chosen as the medium of instruction because of the easy availability of textbooks from India. During the reign of the second king, Jigme Wangchuck (reign: 1926-1952) the number of schools was increased to five. But the late fifties and early sixties is considered as the beginning of a new era in the Bhutanese history. It was during the reign of His Majesty King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck that many new development processes took place. Bhutan slowly began to break the shackles of the self-imposed isolation. Many modern schools came into existence. Gradually, a nationwide school system was set up. Both Dzongkha and English took over as the medium of instruction from the earlier Hindi medium, sometime in 1966.

Prior to the advent of modern education in the country, monastic institutions were the only source of learning and the course content was confined to purely religious studies and emphatic literatures on philosophy. Biographies of accomplished Buddhist Masters were prescribed as leisure and complimentary reading. Beyond this, there

¹⁵ The Indian National Language.

were no books for language skills except a few conventional grammar texts.

Learning centers did not exist in big numbers. Only a few centers within the country including Bumthang¹⁶, Tharpaling¹⁷ Shedra¹⁸, offered informal courses on Buddhism, which was founded by the great Buddhist scholar Kuenkhen Longchen Ramjampa (1308-1363) in the 14th century. People traveled to these centers to avail Buddhist studies and some even traveled as far as Tibet in search of knowledge.

Gradually, the need for such learning centers in different parts of the country increased. As a result, monastic institutions began to appear simultaneously in different parts of the country. These institutions largely contributed to the social and educational development of the country in its own way. The kind of students enrolling in the study was exclusively monks. They not only played important roles in the spiritual sphere but also played equally important roles in the administration of different social and official arrangements, since they were the only lot of people adequately educated. Thus the monastic education system served as a pivotal instrument in all the spheres of religious and secular contexts until the introduction of modern schools in the mid 20th century.

The transfer of knowledge in the monastic institutions was very closely monitored and guided both by the guru¹⁹ and the tutor. The duration of studies was spread over a period of nine to ten vigorous years, under the supervision of a renowned master. Moreover, the areas of study were not diversified, but rather were more focused and concentrated. Philosophy and spiritualism dominated the core of the courses.

Despite a large number of scholars in Chokey, it is interesting to note that they have not given adequate importance to language and literature studies in the same manner they have given to philosophy and religious studies. This tradition was passed down to generations who maintained the same pattern of education. Therefore, people mastered in philosophy as the core study and language skills were developed incidental to religious and spiritual studies.

As the modern schooling system progressed, the standard of English also began to take a noticeable stride with the introduction of many modern areas of studies such as science, mathematics, geography, history etc. Over the years, English and English related subjects kept on

¹⁶ One of the districts in central Bhutan.

¹⁷ Name of a Buddhist institution founded by the great scholar Kuenkhen Longchen Ramjampa.

¹⁸ A monastic institute for higher learning.

¹⁹ Sanskrit term for teacher.

increasing while Dzongkha, on the other hand, did not see much of a change.

Standard of Dzongkha in the School Curriculum

“Is the standard of Dzongkha that comes through the school satisfactory?” is a question to be asked, looking at the school curriculum. Owing to limited contact hours, the intensity of learning and teaching is limited. Today the subject ratio between English and Dzongkha and their instructional periods is 6:2 throughout the country, with exception of the Institute of Language and Culture Studies where the ratio is 2:4 respectively. Yet people expect the standard of Dzongkha to be at par with English, which is impossible in such a situation.

Dzongkha is a major subject in schools. One has to pass it. For a student, sometimes, the quest of knowing it becomes far less significant than the compulsion to pass it. This scenario can be compared to the learning approach of some of the world’s dying languages such as Sanskrit. Sanskrit is Indian identity and in schools a student is required to pass it. Therefore, they some how manage to pass in it with high marks and then forget it. Dzongkha is Sanskrit in the Bhutanese context. Students tend to underestimate the significance of its knowledge and therefore, they fail to give it importance and care.

Despite studying Dzongkha for about eleven to twelve years in schools, the majority of the students are unable to write without many mistakes. The standard is far less than that of English. A class ten graduate can use his English skills to earn a living, but with the kind of Dzongkha standard the graduates have, unless trained and groomed for another couple of years, they will not be ready for any kind of employment. This itself is a clear indication of Dzongkha standard measured in the light of English standard. The reason assumed for this is - Dzongkha is a difficult subject. Students begin to lose interest and the mind-door is shut, long before the commencement of the task of studying it, making it even more difficult to begin to learn. The mind set is so strong that Dzongkha is compelled to appear difficult even though it isn’t that difficult. In fact, Dzongkha seems difficult, not because it is a difficult subject, but because the limited contact hour and limited time span that is given.

The other factor is that Dzongkha is taken very lightly because of the generous assessments of students made by Dzongkha teachers. Despite very low standards, students score high marks. This is a factor of relaxation to their standards. Moreover, two Dzongkha subjects out of 6-7 English subjects get very light response from students.

Limited Scope and Opportunities

Promising scope and opportunities would ease away the tough and bumpy upward journey of learning Dzongkha despite the general notion of difficulty in learning the practical complexities of its grammar. The bulk of the burden of difficulty could be mitigated and outweighed, if tremendous scope and opportunities are attached to it.

No matter how the language policy reads of the importance of Dzongkha, it will appear secondary because of its utility, scope and opportunity. The real fact is that whether some one is literate in Dzongkha or not, it does not matter as much as English does. The demand for English is inevitable. Almost all the documents in most offices are maintained in English and official correspondences are comfortably done in it. The people in the system are the products of the system where English has always been the strength.

If we closely study the time allocation for English and Dzongkha throughout a student's school career, a student studies for about 2,880²⁰ days during his average 16 years of schooling, out of which 2,529 days are allocated for English and English related subjects and only 351 days are allocated for Dzongkha. A student who has studied English for about 2,529 days against 351 days of Dzongkha, will definitely feel comfortable to work in English, and that person cannot be expected to have proficiency in Dzongkha, which is not his strength. The larger part of the educated Bhutanese population comprises of this category. The demand for English literate persons against Dzongkha is very high in almost all the work places, both public and private. Parents therefore, prefer to send their children to schools, known for their good English environment both within and outside the country. Schools are rarely chosen for their Dzongkha standard. The present socio-economic arrangement does not encourage to thinking of Dzongkha seriously.

What would the parents expect their children to become after studying Dzongkha? By making children focus more on English language, parents hope to see their children becoming engineers, doctors, scientists, architects, pilots, designers, UN staff, country diplomats, professors etc. Dzongkha is not an element to determine these professions. What do parents want their children to be after they graduate from colleges and universities? No doubt the preference is doctors to engineers to pilots, which an education in Dzongkha does not promise at least in the foreseeable future. Therefore, in the light of the present scenario, the general notion is that proficiency in English is a

²⁰ The statistic is based on 180 instructional days every year with eight hours of daily schooling.

determining factor in ones career, while knowledge of Dzongkha, in addition to English, is always considered a bonus.

Dzongkha as a Study Area - Choice of Few

Knowledge of Dzongkha has not been of much interest today because traditional knowledge to many appears an old recipe, dating hundreds of years. But the history of English as a language to Bhutan is a recent phenomenon, hardly four decades of age. Knowing new things, exploring new avenues and mastering new areas have always been a source of jubilation and pride to most people. Today, unsurprisingly, English is deemed a career building factor.

Almost all the students, if given a chance, will prefer to continue their English studies and will not intend to shift to Dzongkha. For most, it seems to be the last of choices. This itself is a clear indication of the future of Dzongkha if it is left for chance and choice. The importance and scope of Dzongkha, the national language, will be diluted unless a good share of individual benefit is guaranteed.

The answer to the question, 'how many Bhutanese would place the national interest on the top at the cost of one's interest', is to be seen in the light of practice. But nevertheless, theoretically, to an individual, the study of Dzongkha should seem a bright avenue to explore both for oneself as well as the nation. It should convince that its knowledge should provide better options and choices in life besides the importance it upholds as an crucial aspect of Bhutanese identity. And this is a reality we must learn to believe in.

Today people are not sure of what concrete advantage would they avail from the knowledge of Dzongkha. Therefore, the series of questions appear to an individual's mind:

Is there any special demand?

Am I going to get comparatively a better option in life?

What are the plus and minus points in studying and not studying it?

What advantage would I have over one who has not?

Approximately 95% of the school children take English or English related streams and only an insignificant 5%²¹ takes Dzongkha as their main mode of study after the tenth grade. The Institute of Language and Culture Studies, Semtokha is the only institution in the whole of the country, which offers full course in Dzongkha. Sherubtse College²² also

²¹ Based on the number of students for Dzongkha courses and on approximate number of monks and lay practitioners in different Shedras and Centres.

²² A college in the eastern part of Bhutan which is presently functioning under Delhi University.

does offer Dzongkha courses, but caters to a very small number of students. The rest of the institutions and schools offer English and English related streams in different forms as the core area of study.

Dilemma

Every native language is the best medium of communication to relay local and indigenous thoughts and values. Dzongkha is a language of Bhutanese religion, philosophy and culture. No language can better understand and interpret what is unique to Bhutan, its culture, tradition and religion. *Tha damtshi*²³, *lejudre*²⁴, *tshog sag*²⁵, *drinlen*²⁶, *tsawasum*²⁷ are some of the strong culture revealing Bhutanese terminologies, which cannot be exactly expressed in English with a single term. Similarly, English is more close to modern science and technology. If it were to be interpreted and understood through Dzongkha, the degree of accuracy and clarity of information would be questioned.

To lend the words of DDC, Dzongkha and English are the two wings of a bird in the air. But it becomes important to see how this notion of importance is being translated into action. What are the indicators that are in place to address this supposedly high importance attached to Dzongkha? The present drive and scope of utility will enliven English, but how will Dzongkha manage to receive the same treatment?

The presence of Dzongkha in the school education system itself is a great relief. But its presence as a subject area is limited. Study areas such as science, geography, mathematics etc. cannot be taught in Dzongkha because it lacks the vocabulary among other things. Neither can Dzongkha subject areas be increased, because the curriculum is already overcrowded and it would dilute the content of the existing curriculum. The possibility of considering Dzongkha as the medium of instruction for technical subject areas is very vague at least in the near future. Therefore, dominance of English in the curriculum will continue and the problem of imbalance in the distribution of subject areas and contact hours will remain unsolved, unless a bold step is taken to teach some of the subjects which are less technical in nature in Dzongkha, in order to increase the contact hours.

While there is scarcity of literature in Dzongkha, some attempts by publishers have failed to draw the attraction of the general readers, the size of the Dzongkha audience is small and limited. This has already been

²³ Mutual commitment and loyalty between two or more individuals.

²⁴ The Universal law of cause of effect-the concept of Karma and Karmic propensity.

²⁵ The Buddhist concept of accumulation of merit through both mental and physical actions.

²⁶ Repay of honour and gratitude in deeds especially that of parents, teachers and seniors.

²⁷ The Three Roots- Government, People and The King.

a hindrance to the encouragement of diverse Dzongkha publications. At the same time, reading habits of students in general has been unsatisfactory. Theoretically literature is important for the promotion of any language. But the habit and interest to read books is also equally important. The size of the readers determines the frequency of publications.

Creation of a conducive atmosphere for application of Dzongkha would play a big role in the development and generation of appreciation for Dzongkha. But to create a Dzongkha atmosphere is not always likely in an English literate society and the tendency to create an English atmosphere is natural. Every thing is seen and thought in English.

Television, radio and newspapers are sources of information. Unfortunately Dzongkha does not appear big and does not have a major share in the Bhutanese information world. An hour's Dzongkha program aired every evening in the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) television does not entice people when there are so many other parallel entertainment channels broadcasted simultaneously by cable operators.

Kuensel, the national newspaper, is published both in English and Dzongkha. But the number of Dzongkha Kuensel is minimal where as English Kuensel thrice more. At present, only three thousand eight hundred Dzongkha Kuensels are in demand while English has touched twelve thousand. When there is a choice between English and Dzongkha, English is picked up. This is a clear indication of the size of the Dzongkha readers and their interest. Even sign boards, addresses, banners, to the extent vehicle registration plates stand evidence to the popular usage of English and Dzongkha where the later sometimes seems to appear just symbolic.

But above all and everything, Dzongkha is unanimously understood as an important and indispensable aspect of Bhutanese culture and identity. But the question is 'how do we translate this into reality?'

Dzongkha Literate People at a Glance

About 28% of the total population is native Dzongkha speakers²⁸.

About 65% of the population speaks Dzongkha

About 60% of the population can read and speak basic Dzongkha

About 55% ²⁹of the population can read, write and speak basic Dzongkha

About 20% of the population can read, write and speak fluently

About 5% of the population can read, write and speak professionally

²⁸ Based on 160,000 native speakers in the country.

²⁹ Based on the national literacy rate assuming that every one who goes to school can read, write and speak basic Dzongkha.

Complex Syllable Formation

Dzongkha is considered a difficult language by both Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese. Some feel that it can be listed amongst the most difficult languages of the world. Learning Dzongkha is like cracking a hard walnut. It is difficult in the beginning. Foundation must be laid firmly. So many formulas and rules for the formation of combined letters have to be learned thoroughly. Once the rules and formulas are crystal clear, the path to Dzongkha becomes easy.

The teaching/learning approach to Dzongkha in the beginning differs from that of English. It takes comparatively longer to achieve its basic foundation. In fact the first four to five years of schooling should focus on the thorough learning of just the alphabet and its various letter combinations before teaching to learn different words and construction of sentences. It might take just few years to achieve the basic foundation of any language and take another ten to eleven years to master it. But in the case of Dzongkha, it works the other way round. It takes seven to eight years to learn the basic and require another five to six years to master. It takes more time to learn the basics and less time to master. But the overall duration of study would not differ in terms of the total number of years but the first few years required to gain basic foundation makes the difference.

As a beginner in learning English, construction of different words such as a-p-p-l-e=apple, b-o-y=boy etc. is taught immediately after learning alphabets. But in Dzongkha there are so many other intricate steps before someone is ready to learn to construct words. This is where the learning pace of Dzongkha becomes slow and takes more time than learning English in the initial stage.

Moreover, the English teaching method is adopted to teach Dzongkha despite the vast difference in the nature of the two languages. Time allocation is also done in the same proportion to that of the pace of English teaching while in real terms Dzongkha needs more time and focus especially in the beginning. In such a case, the content of the syllabus mismatches the time allocated and therefore, the notion of difficulty crops up in the minds of learners.

So, the amount of time given to Dzongkha studies in schools in the same proportion to the time given to English is inadequate to provide the kind of standard we see in English language over a period of time. Therefore, the study of Dzongkha requires more time and concentration on the syllable and word structures than the learning of English requires to achieve the same standard.

The syllable or word formation through a complex and unique orthographic set up can be, to an extent, one aspect of difficulty. But if it

is looked at from a linguistic perspective, it is interesting to know that Dzongkha follows a systematic formation of words and syllables. It entails a scientific and logical approach of syllable arrangement. The letter combination is based on formulas like mathematics, which requires the adherence of certain standard key rules and formulas.

One of the few distinct features of Dzongkha word structure is the complex orthographic arrangement such as the prefixes, suffixes, second suffixes, subjoined letters³⁰, surmount letters³¹, mingtha³² and root consonants³³ in a syllable. The prefix, surmount and subjoined letters are unique to producing distinct tonal sounds of words of the same basic sound besides tense identification.

Unlike the English alphabet, not all the letters go along with any other letter. Except twenty three words in the whole of Dzonkgha and Chokey vocabulary, every syllable has got either a prefix, suffix, second suffix, subjoined or a surmount letter or all the characters. A very low percentage of the Dzongkha words would be represented by words with just the root consonant and suffix eg. *nang* (inside), *rang* (self), *dag* (pure), *khag* (difficult or bitter) etc. It is impossible to arrange the alphabets according to the sounds of words just like English without following these rules of application, especially when tones of different distinct words in different tenses need to be produced.

Prefixes

The letters *ga*, *da*, *ba*, *ma* and *'a* are the five prefixes. The prefix *ba* is male, *ga* and *da* are neuters, *ha* is feminine and *ma* is Shintumo³⁴. These prefixes mainly determine different tenses of words and also cause different levels of pitches of sounds. Yet some of the sounds may fail to relate and identify the prefix of a word because modern speakers have failed to make the distinction of sounds of different combination of characters in a word, eg. *'aGrub*, *bsGrub*, *'aDrub* etc.

But in olden days, the Chokey orthography is known to have had a fine tradition of relating to the different combination of characters in a syllable from the way it was pronounced. But this tradition is completely lost in Chokey. However, some words in some of the Tibeto-Burman languages such as Tshangla, Choecha Ngacha, Ladaaki, Sikkimese languages still do eg. *Grang*³⁵, *Brang*³⁶, *sMen*³⁷, *Choes*³⁸ etc. Here not only

³⁰ Letters fixed below the root consonants otherwise called subscript.

³¹ Letters fixed on top of the root consonants otherwise called superscript.

³² A collated letter attached either to the root consonant or a suffix or a second suffix to give a specific meaning.

³³ The main letter of a syllable where the prefixes and suffixes are collated to.

³⁴ Literally means ultra-feminine which when applied produces a very low pitch.

³⁵ Number in Tshangla/Sharchop.

the root consonant is audible but the prefixes along with the subjoined and surmount letters are also distinct. This is evidence to the existence of a unique sound system in the past. But today the functions of prefixes are limited to determine tenses, identify transitive and intransitive verbs and distinguish the pitch level of words.

Below is a table of alphabet arranged in five different groups for grammatical reasons called *detshen*³⁹.

Table 3: Dzongkha Alphabets

DETSHEN	1 ST	2 ND	3 RD	4 TH
THE FIRST GROUP	KA	KHA	GA	NGA
THE SECOND GROUP	CA	CHA	JA	NYA
THE THIRD GROUP	TA	THA	DA	NA
THE FOURTH GROUP	PA	PHA	BA	MA
THE FIFTH GROUP	TSA	TSHA	TZA	WA
THE SIXTH GROUP	ZHA	ZA	HA	YA
THE SEVENTH GROUP	RA	LA	SHA	SA
THE EIGHTH GROUP	HA	'A		

When we talk about prefixes in Dzongkha, they do not exactly correspond to the prefixes used in English. There are two different kinds of prefixes in Dzongkha; one at the syllable level which is attached to the root consonant and another at the word level. The prefix at the word level may correspond to the kind of prefixes used in English. The prefix at the syllable level, either independently or supported by the suffixes determine the tense eg. *bsGrup*; to complete/ to perform/ to achieve, *bsGrups*; completed/ performed/ achieved, *sGrup*; completing/performing/achieving, *sGrups*; imperative, where as the prefix at the word level qualifies the meaning of the word attached to eg. *Rab mdZe*; very beautiful, *Rab dGa*; very happy etc. About 90 percent of the syllables with the prefixes are verbs or verbal nouns.

The tenses both transitive and intransitive in nature are solely determined by the combination of the prefixes, suffixes, and second suffixes along with the root consonant with or without subjoined and surmounted letters. The whole Dzongkha word structure is based on this format. Therefore, the only possible way to make Dzongkha appear simpler is to give adequate time and undergo a bit more vigorous and intensive study. Manipulating the conventional spelling system in an

³⁶ Place in Tshangla/Sharchop.

³⁷ Medicine in Ladaaki language.

³⁸ Dharma in Ladaaki language.

³⁹ Group of alphabets arranged in a particular sequence and order for grammatical reasons.

attempt to simplify the complexities of word formation may not serve any purpose.

The written Dzongkha, mostly with few exceptions, follow the Chokey spelling conventions with as little as one *'aDro* (to go) for all tenses or as many as four (*bsGrup*, *sGrup*, *bsGrups*, *sGrups*) different orthographic forms to exhibit different tenses including the imperative case. However, Dzongkha verbs do not consistently follow the Chokey orthography. Sometimes Dzongkha uses only one orthographic form where Chokey uses several. *bTshug*, *'aZugs*, *bTsugs*, *Tshugs*; in Chokey means to plant, to establish, or to insert but in Dzongkha only *bTsugs* is used for all tenses including the imperative case because spoken Dzongkha normally does not have different sounds for different tenses. This is an example, which illustrates that Dzongkha does not necessarily follow the Chokey conventional orthography. This, in a way, is a simplified order of orthography.

Almost 99 percent of Dzongkha words are either with a prefix or a suffix or both with and without the subjoined and surmount letters eg. *bsGrigs*; to arrange, *bKah*; order or decree, *'gegs*; obstruction or hindrance etc. In the whole of Dzongkha words, there are only twenty three different words, which can give an independent meaning all by itself without a prefix or a suffix viz. *kha* (mouth), *ga* (who?), *nga* (I), *cha* (pair), *ja* (tea), *nya* (fish), *tha* (worst), *da* (now), *na* (fall sick), *pha* (father), *ba* (cow), *ma* (mother), *tsha* (pain), *wa* (jackal), *zha* (physically disabled), *za* (to eat), *ya* (single), *ra* (goat), *la* (mountain), *sha* (meat), *sa* (earth, soil), *ha* (puffed air) and *aa* (interrogative expression). Some times a letter must take along another single letter to mean something eg. *Ka wa* (pillar or pole), *sha wa* (stag) *tha ma* (worst).

Surmount Letters

There are three different surmount letters viz. *ra*, *la* and *sa*. The surmount letter *ra* always goes with twelve root consonants viz. *ka*, *ga*, *nga*, *ja*, *nya*, *ta*, *da*, *na*, *ba*, *ma*, *tsa* and *za*. Similarly, the surmount letter *la* goes with ten root consonants viz. *ka*, *ga*, *nga*, *cha*, *ja*, *ta*, *da*, *pa*, *ba* and *ha* and the surmount letter *sa* goes with eleven consonants viz. *ka*, *ga*, *nga*, *nya*, *ta*, *da*, *na*, *pa*, *ba*, *ma* and *tsa*. With the surmount letters, if there is any prefix it is definite to have the male prefix *ba* and not any other prefixes.

Subjoined Letters

Similarly, there are four different subjoined letters viz. *ya*, *ra*, *la* and *wa*. The subjoined letter *ya* always goes with seven different root consonants viz. *ka*, *kha*, *ga*, *pa*, *pha*, *ba* and *ma* where as the subjoined letter *ra* goes with fourteen different root consonants viz. *ka*, *kha*, *ga*, *ta*, *tha*, *da*,

na, pa, pha, ba, ma, sha, sa and *ha*, while the subjoined letter *la* goes with six different root consonants viz. *ka, ga, ba, za, ra* and *sa*. The subjoined letter *wa* goes with 15 different root consonants viz. *ka, kha, ga, nya, ta, da, tsa, tsha, zha, za, ra, la, sha, sa* and *ha*.

Suffixes

There are ten suffixes viz. *ga, nga, da, na, ba, ma, 'a, ra, la*, and *sa*. They go with all the characters and largely influence the sounds of words and to some extent qualify tenses as well but are largely dependent on prefixes. The sounds of suffixes in Dzongkha are similar to the sounds of *g, ng, d, n, b, m, h, r*, and *l*, in the words *bag, hang, had, fun, grab, farm, oh, far, goal* etc. respectively. But unlike other suffixes, the sound of suffix *sa* is quite often silent (eg. *Choes* and *mZes* are pronounced as *Choe* and *Ze* respectively).

There are only five letters viz. *ka, ga, pa, ba* and *ma* to which the surmount letter *sa* and the subjoined letter *ya* can be combined together to form a cluster eg. *sKya, sGya, sPya, sBya* and *sMya*. Similarly there are three letters viz. *ka, ga* and *ma* to which the surmount letter *ra* and the subjoined letter *ya* can be combined together to form a cluster eg. *rKya, rGya* and *rMya*. The surmount letter *sa* and subjoined letter *ra* as a cluster can be attached only to five letters viz. *ka, ga, pa, ba* and *ma* eg. *sKra, sGra, sPra, sBra* and *sMra*.

Second Suffixes

There are two different second suffixes viz. *da* and *sa*. The letter *da* goes with the suffix *na, ra* and *la* while *sa* goes with *ga, nga, ba* and *ma*. The alphabetical sounds of the second suffixes are not produced but their presence effects the extension of the sounds and thereby the tenses of the words.

The second intricate aspect of Dzongkha language is its complex grammar structure. Every single alphabet is classified into genders in addition to the gender identification of prefixes, suffixes and second suffixes.

Table 4: Gender Classification of Root Consonants

Masculine root consonants	Neuter root consonants	Feminine root consonants	Ultra-feminine root consonants	Mosham ⁴⁰ root consonants
KA	KHA	GA	NGA	RA

⁴⁰ Alphabets that are pronounced with a very low tone which literally means barren; void of high pitch

CA	CHA	JA	NYA	LA
TA	THA	DA	NA	HA
		Male Root Consonants	Female Root Consonants	
		KA	GA	
		CHA	JA	
		TA	DA	
Male Prefix (ba)		TSA	TZA	
			ZHA	
			ZA	
			SHA	
			SA	
PA	PHA	BA	MA	'A
TSA	TSHA	TZA		
		WA		
		ZHA		
		ZA		
		HA		
		YA		
		SHA		
		SA		

The combination of these genders is based on the conventional spelling system demanded by the phonological distinction of words. Therefore, a masculine prefix will always go with masculine and feminine root consonants, and the feminine prefix with feminine and neuter root consonants and the neuter prefix with the masculine and feminine root consonants. The following are the application of prefixes with different root consonants.

Table 5: Masculine Prefix *ba* (b) to Masculine and Feminine Root Consonants

bKag; to stop,

bChom; to subdue,
bTags; to tie or name,
bTsong; to sell,
bGo; to divide,
bRje; to exchange,
bSdam; to tie
brZang; to see off or send off,
bZhu; to melt,
bZung; to catch,
bShags; to die (honorific)
bSlab; to study etc.

Table 6: Feminine Prefix *ha* (h) with Feminine and Neutral Root Consonants

	Female Root Consonants	Neutral Root Consonants
Female prefix (ha)	GA	KHA
	JA	CHA
	DA	THA
	BA	PHA
	TZA	TSHA

Table 7: Neutral Prefix (ga and da) with Male, Female and Ultra-Female Root Consonants

	Male Root Consonants	Female Root Consonants	Ultra-feminine Root Consonants
Neutral prefix (ga)	CA	DA	NYA
	TA	ZHA	NA
	TSA	ZA	
		YA	
		SHA	
Neutral prefix (da)	KA	GA	NGA
	PA	BA	MA

'aGog; to stop,
'aJel; to see (honorific)

'aDogs; to tie or name,
 'aBeb; to bring down or to decide something,
 'aTzin; to hold,
 'aKhor; to rotate,
 'aCham; to befriend,
 'aThen; to pull,
 'aPhen; to shoot,
 'aTshong; to sell etc.

The following shows the application of neuter prefix *ga* (g) and *da* (d) with masculine and feminine root consonants.

gChar; to go near,
gTong; to send,
gTsabs; to slice or cut into pieces,
dKri; to wrap or tie,
dPog; to guesstimate,
gDab; to sow,
gZhel; to measure,
gZugs; to plant or pierce,
gYog; to cover,
gShegs; to die (honorific) or arrive,
gSog; to accumulate,
dGag; to stop,
dBab; to bring down or to decide something,

The masculine prefix *ba* (b) therefore, goes for past and future tense, while neuter prefix *ga* (g) and *da* (d) goes for present and future tense, feminine prefix 'a also goes for present and future tense and the super-feminine prefix *ma* (m) goes for all the tenses alike.

A Unique Orthographic System

The Dzongkha or Chokey orthography can be classified into four major categories based on the combination of the prefix, root consonant, subjoined letter, surmount letter, suffix and second suffix of a syllable. About 90% of Dzongkha and Chokey verbs do fall directly into this format of spelling. An intense study on the etymology and the combination of words based on the conventional word formation would definitely give a new dimension in the attempt to lubricate the method of teaching and learning of Dzongkha and Chokey in a more scientific way.

Of the four main classifications of syllables, the first category is the one that takes the prefix *ga* along with the root consonants *da*, and prefix *da* along with the root consonants *ga* for future tense transitive, whereas

the present tense transitive takes the prefix 'a with both the root consonants *ga* and *da*. For past tense transitive, the prefix *ba* goes along with the male root consonants *ka*, *cha*, *ta* and *tsa*. The imperative cases normally do not take any prefix but the root consonants are usually neuter viz. *kha*, *cha*, *tha*, *pha* and *tsha* if the root consonant of a word is masculine for past tense (eg. *gDags*, 'a*Dogs*, *bTags*, *thogs*;) to name or to tie, *bsKor*, *sKor*, *bsKord*, 'a*Khor*; to rotate or turn round.

Therefore, in this category, the prefix *ga* and *da* are more for future tense transitive, 'a for present tense transitive and prefix *ba* for past. The following are some of the words that belong to the first category.

Table 8: Classification of Main Syllables (1st Category)

Future tense	Present tense	Past tense	Imperative	Word meaning
GDUEL	'ADUEL	BTUEL	THUEL	TO SUBDUE
GDAB	'ADEPS	BTAB	THOBS	TO SOW
GDOEN	'ADOEN	BTOEN	THOEN	TO READ
GDING	'ADING	BTING	THINGS	TO SPREAD
DGAG	'AGOG	BKAG	KHOGS	TO STOP
DGANG	'AGANG	BKANG	KHONGS	TO FILL IN
DGAB	'AGAEBs	BKAB	KHEBS	TO COVER
DGUG	'AGUGS	BKUG	KHUGS	TO BEND
DGUM	'AGUMS	BKUMS	KHUMS	TO KILL

But the root consonants with the prefix *ba* along with surmount letters would also reflect future tense eg. *bsGrub*; to complete, achieve or finish, *bsKor*; to rotate. This will be explained later.

Here it is interesting to note that for past tense, if the root consonant is the first letter of a *Detshen*, then the future tense and present tense would take the third letter of the same *Detshen* but with different prefixes. According to this structure, the prefix *ga* and *da* are used for future tense transitive; 'a for present tense transitive and *ba* for past even without the surmount letters. Therefore, if a particular word takes the prefix *ga* and *da* for future tense, then by nature of the classification it should be the prefix 'a for present and *ba* for the past. This category of words would represent about 35% of the transitive verbs.

The second category is the one which takes the prefix *ba* with the surmounted or subjoined root consonants *ka*, *ga*, *nga*, *ja*, *nya*, *ta*, *da*, *na*, *tsa*, *zta*, *za*, *ra* and *sa* for both future and past tense transitive verbs. The only difference between the two is for future there isn't a second suffix, but for past there must be either a suffix or a second suffix. For present tense transitive, there is no prefix. In this category the root consonants remain the same across all the tenses.

Table 9: Classification of Main Syllables (2nd Category)

Future	Present	Past	Imperative	Word meaning
BSKOR	sKOR	BSKORDA	KHOR	TO ROTATE
BSGRUB	sGRUB	BSGRUBS	sGRUBS	TO COMPLETE
BSKUM	sKUM	BSKUMS	sKUMS	TO BEND
BS TSAL	s TSOL	BS TSAL	s TSOL	TO GRANT
BRTSIG	RTSIG	BRTSIGS	RTSIGS	TO PILE
BRTSAM	RTSOM	BRTSAMS	RTSOMS	TO COMPOSE
BRTSI	RTSI	BRTSIS	RTSIS	TO COUNT

Here the prefix *ba* with surmount letters reflect the future and past tense transitive, and for present tense transitive there is neither a prefix nor a second suffix. The Dzongkha/Chokey grammar explains: '*For transitive past there is a prefix ba along with a second suffix; for present tense there is neither a prefix nor a suffix, and for future there is a prefix but without a second suffix*'. Therefore, if a particular word is a cluster with surmount letter then by the nature of classification, the prefix should be none other than *ba* for future and past, and for the present and imperative there should not be any prefix. This category of words would represent about another 20%.

The third category is the one that takes the prefix *ba* along with the root consonant (usually) *ka* and *tsa* without the surmount letters for future and past tense transitive, with and without the second suffix respectively, and the prefix '*a* along with the root consonant *tsha* for present tense transitive. The root consonants *kha* and *tsha* without any prefix reflect the imperative case. The following are some of the examples.

Table 10: Classification of Main Syllables (3rd Category)

Future	Present	Past	Imperative	Word meaning
BKYIG	'AKHYIG	BKYIGS	KHYIGS	TO TIE OR TO BIND
BKRTU	'AKHRUD	BKTRUS	KHRUS	TO WASH
BTSO	'ATSHOED	BTSOES	TSHOES	TO BOIL
BTSONG	'ATSHONG	BTSONGS	TSHONGS	TO SELL
BTSUM	'ATSUM	BTSUMS	TSHUMS	TO CLOSE
BTSAG	'ATSHAGS	BTSANGS	TSHOGS	TO FILTER OR SIFT
BTSAL	'ATSHOEL	BTSALDA	TSHOL	TO SEARCH ETC.

According to this structure the prefix *ba* goes for future tense transitive, '*a* for present tense transitive and again *ba* for past tense transitive with root consonants that do not have surmount letters. Here

all the root consonants change in the future tense, present tense and imperative. Therefore, if a particular word takes the prefix *ba* for future tense, without surmount letters, it should always be the prefix '*a* for present and *ba* for past, and for imperative cases it will be the neuter root consonants without any prefixes. This category would represent about 30% of the Dzongkha words.

The fourth section is syllables with the prefix *ma* along with the root consonant *kha*, *cha*, *ja*, *nya*, *tha* etc. for all tenses eg.

Table 11: Classification of Main Syllables (4th Category)

Future	Present	Past	Imperative	Word meaning
MKHEN	MKHEN	MLHEN	MKHEN	TO KNOW
MCHONG	MCHONG	MCHONGS	MCHONGS	TO JUMP
MJEL	MJEL	MJELD	MJEL	TO SEE (HONORIFIC)
MCHOED	MCHOED	MCHOED	MCHOED	TO OFFER
MTHONG	MTHONG	MTHONG	MTHONG	TO SEE
MNYAM	MNYAM	MNYAM	MNYAM	TO EQUALIZE

Here the root consonants do not change in all the tenses. If a word takes the prefix *ma* for future tense it will be *ma* across all tenses. This category would represent about 5% of the total words. Therefore, about 90% of Dzongkha words follow one of the above four categories.

In the whole of Dzongkha and Chokey word structure, there are only two exceptions, which do not follow this format viz. *mNyen*, *Nyen*, *mNyen*, *Nyoen* (to listen) and, *gNen*, *gNoen*, *mNen*, *Noen* (to press down).

Instead of having the *ma* prefix across all tenses, here it takes *ga* as the prefix in some tenses and sometimes it does not take any. Therefore, knowing these four groups of word formations, the rest of the tenses can be guessed and assumed based on this formation. About 90% of the transitive verbs of different tenses and verbal gerunds can be easily formed based on these four different formats.

Shift in the Teaching Approach of Dzongkha

Dzongkha and English are altogether two radically different languages. Therefore, the approach to the teaching/learning methods must differ. The parts of speech, subject-verb; subject-adjective agreements, word formation, orthographic structure, grammar and the pattern of writing etc., between the two are different, and do not directly compliment each other. The study of Dzongkha is altogether a different culture and needs to be addressed in its own ways.

The conventional way of teaching Dzongkha is not what is practiced in schools today. The tradition of teaching/learning Dzongkha through a systematic process of oral recitation of each letter of a syllable or word is replaced by directly pronouncing the word it is in primary levels. It is, in fact not as easy as reading the word - C O M P L E T E D - letter by letter when we have to read its parallel Dzongkha word - BSGRUBS⁴¹. In English it is just nine straightforward letters where as in Dzongkha the word that sounds DRUB (BSGRUBS) does not read that easily. It has multiple characters. Here the root consonant *ga* has a prefix, a surmount letter, a subjoined letter, a suffix, and a second suffix. Almost all the words have similar characters.

But despite all these added characters to the root consonant, ultimately the sound of the root consonant alone is prominently produced. The additional characters attached to the root consonant (prefix, second suffix, surmount and subjoined characters) do not produce alphabetical sounds, but only contribute towards producing a certain pitch and tone to the sound of the root consonant.

About 99% of the Dzongkha words have multiple characters, which produce different tones for similar sounds. Dzongkha being a tonal language, unless studied carefully, it is very hard to differentiate a particular tone from similar sounds. This is why Dzongkha spellings have been a major problem to many.

Moreover, the Dzongkha grammar entails application of complex agreements between the last letter of a word and the concerned particle for a particular case. It functions on the understanding of two syllables without any form of conjugation. Different cases follow different letter combinations. The accusative, dative and the locative cases take seven different particles viz. *su*, *ra*, *ru*, *du*, *tu*, *na* and *la*. Similarly instrumental and possessive (genitive) cases take another five particles viz. *gi*, *kyi*, *gyi*, *yi* and *hi* and the ablative case takes another two different particles viz. *ne* and *le*. Each of these cases except the ablative and vocative (*ke*, *kaye*, *kema*, *oye* etc.) cases follow different agreements with the last letter of the syllable/word before these particles. Similarly there are other parts of speech of which the particles follow different agreements.

Unlike in English, a particular particle cannot be applied to any word with any kind of ending letter. To cite an example, the particle *su* for accusative, dative and locative cases should always agree with the suffix or second suffix *sa* of the previous word. Similarly, *ra* and *ru* with those without a suffix or with a suffix '*a*'; *du* with *da*, *na*, *ra*, and *la*; *tu* with *ba*; and *na* and *la* with all the suffixes. All these particles involve

⁴¹ Completed, established or achieved.

conditions and agreements and their usage is guided and bound by agreements. This apparently creates the notion of difficulty in teaching/learning Dzongkha. But once this stage of learning and teaching is crossed, construction of sentences of any nature is not a big task.

The Dzongkha orthographic structure is complex and therefore demands a different approach to teaching it. But we have not been able to distinguish the teaching/learning techniques and methods of the two languages. Instead we have maneuvered in a uniformed way of teaching/learning overlooking the approaches and cultural differences of the two languages.

This complex and detailed orthographic structure of Dzongkha has been taught and learned just as the study of English is done. In fact the same teaching approach of English is adopted for teaching Dzongkha. The cultural differences of word formation based on the principle of agreements and conditions are ignored.

Learning Dzongkha can be antithetical to the adopted teaching approaches of English. It is therefore, deemed appropriate to revert to the conventional approach of teaching Dzongkha rather than adopting a new approach.

Therefore, the following suggestions are some measures to bring Dzongkha closer to the people and generate interest and appreciation in the minds of Bhutanese people:

- Increase of contact hours in schools to the possible extent by introducing more subject areas relevant to Bhutan
- Enhance of teaching methodologies through proper training procedures
- Design a separate intensive teacher training course with the right ratio of both traditional and modern methodologies of teaching/learning instead of adopting a pure foreign culture
- Provide proper monitoring and support services to students
- Reinforce effective assessment and evaluation system in the examination procedures
- Encourage frequent publication of children's books
- Organize attractive and catchy Dzongkha activities and events at various levels
- Create of Dzongkha atmosphere; through Dzongkha films, attractive television and radio programs
- Encourage use of Dzongkha in offices, both government and private

- Spell out the importance of Dzongkha with clear definition of assurance of scope and opportunities in the language policy
- Implement a practical language policy

Inconsistent Spellings

In Dzongkha, a habit of having more than one spelling for a particular word with the same sound and meaning has been developed in the past. The following are some of them.

*Thuenmong*⁴² or *thuenmongs*.

'aThrengwa⁴³ or threngwa

'aThinleys⁴⁴ or thinleys

This has happened owing to the lack of integration of different scholars scattered in inaccessible geographical landscapes. Literature were published regionally and functioned more in isolation. Thus, different traditions of independent writings evolved in different regions in the pursuit of imparting spiritual thoughts and values, which gave room for the creation of different spelling orders. In fact, the evolution of different spelling systems is owing to the unintended usage of wrong spellings for a particular word by erudite scholars in different regions.

Since the disciples and followers attached so much respect and submission to their teachers, they did not dare correct the spellings. Some spellings were assimilated as standard simply because they were used by a great scholar, though they may have been wrong. Moreover, in the past, since monks and celibates were the only ones who embarked on educational pursuits, more focus was given to spiritual excellence. Therefore, the provision of importance to language was diluted by content study.

The main objective of education in the olden days was the attainment of salvation and enlightenment. One of the paths to it was intensive meditation. Therefore, content was considered more important than language.

Until recent times, more importance was given to content study, and language skills were developed incidentally. Literature was more spiritual, and mundane contents were more verbal. It was only when modernization began to take place that language became an important tool for communication in day to day life and administration.

⁴² Common.

⁴³ Rosary or prayer beads.

⁴⁴ Action.

Since the beginning of the task of bringing written Dzongkha closer to spoken Dzongkha in 1971, multiple spellings for a particular word developed at various periods of time till 1986. Words like *Duechi*, *dochi*⁴⁵, *loltar*, *lobstar*⁴⁶, etc. had many ways of spelling. Since the establishment of the Dzongkha Development Committee (DDC) in 1986, an attempt to consider a standard spelling system and assimilate all the diverse spellings was made, to bring out uniformity and consistency in usage.

New Terminologies

With the propping up of different terminologies in English, Dzongkha has had a very hard time finding equivalent terms. Every relevant document that comes through English is translated into Dzongkha. Acts and Laws are mostly drafted in English and then translated into Dzongkha for endorsement by the National Assembly. The translations are normally done by the parent organization. The terminologies used for a particular word tend to differ from organization to organization, creating discrepancies in the usage of terminologies and nuances.

Relevant organizations that are parenting frequent coining of different terms such as Kuensel, Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), Dzongkha Development Commission, National Assembly and private firms, also often find themselves on different grounds. Inconsistencies in the usage of terminologies have been a common difference. All reasons and logical premise are similar but people are confused with too many different parallel Dzongkha terminologies for a particular word in English. This disparity is seen not only in the writings of ordinary people but amongst proficient Dzongkha writers and translators. Different writers resort to their own creativity.

Recently DDC has made a positive attempt to play a pivotal role in the scrutinizing of newly coined terms in Dzongkha. It has been mandated to route the terms through DDC before it is thrown into mass usage. Hopefully, this mandate will create a proper channel of green signaling the coined terminologies for uniformed usage across different organizations.

Today, so many new terminologies have begun to feature in Dzongkha. At one time, the word computer did not have a corresponding term in Dzongkha. But people today comfortably refer to as *logrig*. When television was not a Bhutanese culture it did not have a name in Dzongkha but today we call it *rGyang mThong*. Both the word

⁴⁵ It literally means present year.

⁴⁶ It means annually or on annual basis.

and their concepts have entered into the list of new Dzongkha vocabulary and understanding.

Today we do not have an official word for traffic jam, solar, video, microwave etc. In such a situation, using the direct English term in the middle of a Dzongkha sentence has become normal speech in the Bhutanese conversations. People do not seem to realize the need of Dzongkha terms, because using English terms appear comfortable. Therefore, some argue, adopting English terms would be more convenient and easy instead of confusing people with so many new terminologies in Dzongkha. Using the same logic, some share the feeling that while Dzongkha is already a difficult language, creating new terminologies is making it more difficult. The argument is, when people can understand the English terms, why unnecessarily go for a different Dzongkha terminology?

But this question demands a risk analysis. Dzongkha is more than a means of communication in the Bhutanese context. It is one of our national identities in which we distinguish ourselves and identify ourselves from others. While English as an international language is very crucial for Bhutan to participate efficiently and effectively in various international forums, it is equally important for a small nation state landlocked between two giants of the world – China and India – to maintain its identity and sovereignty at any cost. A national identity in the form of language, which is unique to Bhutan, is thus imperative.

So many new ideas and terms come through English, which currently do not exist in Dzongkha. And there will be no end to the series of additions. If these terms are blindly taken into consideration in their original form, Dzongkha in a decade or so will be seen overloaded with so many foreign words. In the context of a literate society though, the retained terms will be easy for people to understand and communicate, but the irony of this small advantage would prove to be fatal to the recognition of our language. One day Dzongkha may fail to be Bhutanese if so many foreign terminologies feature in it.

Conclusion

With the kind of education system that is in place in the kingdom, English will remain in the forefront but, possible efforts should be made to enable Dzongkha receive more importance. But can Dzongkha take over English in terms of practicality and utility? How can Dzongkha win a losing battle? How do we practically crystallize the genuine purpose of Dzongkha as an important tool to preserve our culture in the minds of Bhutanese people? How do we practically translate Dzongkha into Bhutan's vision of Gross National Happiness in the form of a language?

There are chains of questions and series of dilemmas that have no answer at present.

Nothing much has happened in the past to enable people to change their mindset and bring Dzongkha closer to Bhutanese taste, life and soul. The language policy has not been able to spell out enticements and attractions. Opportunities should be the lubricating factors to guarantee a living by learning Dzongkha. However, its importance has always been one of the highlighted themes of the national interest.

There are so many reasons to study Dzongkha, but what is more determining is its direct, visible and practical elements of utility, scope and benefit. And the irony is that the choice is between Dzongkha and English. Dzongkha and English are choices to people, which are again determined by scope and direct utility. Therefore, the future destiny of Dzongkha lies in the continued wisdom of Bhutanese policy framers and the education system to see and understand that it is crucial to Bhutanese identity, where English may not serve the same purpose despite its multi-facet advantages. The policy makers need to ensure its vibrant application so that Dzongkha is able to find and maintain a continued relevance in all changing times, rather than limiting it to theoretical philosophy. We need to go beyond the boundary of its theoretical importance and enter into the practical reality of application. Drawing on inspiration from English, we need to enrich Dzongkha and see how it would be possible to see things through it. Can we manage to teach science and other technical subjects through Dzongkha and make Dzongkha appear rich and vibrant, living with time and context? Is it proper to discard the tremendous potentials of Dzongkha simply because we see the strength of English? Can't we create its strength, give vital force to it and bring it closer to every Bhutanese? Can't we understand that English prepares us to be international and Dzongkha qualifies us to be more Bhutanese. Because we stand as Bhutanese, our presence is felt in the international arenas. Can't we see through continuous change, evolution and development that it can serve individuals much more? But how? Is it possible?

According to *Vision 2020, A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness* "Dzongkha has been a particularly powerful force for unifying the kingdom, establishing a common language among diverse ethnic groups. It is our national language and we must seek to ensure that the position it occupies is further reinforced. It has a value that goes beyond the promotion of our heritage and culture. It is an instrument for fostering national identity in ways that promote sovereignty and security" Bhutan 2020, A Vision for Peace, Prosperity and Happiness.

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