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Researching Local Languages in Kinnaur

INTRODUCTION

The District Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh, India) is known to be an area of great linguistic diversity, hosting linguistic varieties belonging to the Indo-European and Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman) language families. In the course of the FWF project *Documentation of oral traditions in Spiti and Upper Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, India* (P15046) first steps were taken to research and document three hitherto hardly studied speeches of Kinnaur. Speech communities often comprise only a few villages and may be further subdivided according to caste. As a consequence of the effects of modern life on the speech communities the long-term survival of these languages is seriously threatened.

In the present paper I will report on the project's research activities and deliver a brief sketch of the results as it concerns the Kinnauri area, whereby the main focus will be the linguistic aspects of the research work. In section 1 I briefly introduce the project and summarise the results of its documentary efforts. In section 2 I sketch the language situation in Kinnaur as presented in the literature and introduce the languages under investigation. Section 3 deals with the research strategies employed in the field and summarises the results. Section 4 concludes the paper.

1. THE *DOCUMENTATION OF ORAL TRADITIONS* PROJECT (2001–2004)

The project's objective was to document oral traditions such as songs, narratives and other local lore but also local celebrations and festivals by means of audio and video recordings beside gathering materials for an ethnomusicological pre-survey. The field researchers were Veronika Hein (University of Bern), the present author and Dietrich Schüller (both Phonogrammarchiv, Austrian Academy of Sciences). Hein and the present author undertook four field trips each (amounting for each to ca. 8 months of research in the field), project leader Schüller joined in the Au-

tumn field trip in 2002. Hein was in charge of the Tibetan varieties spoken in Spiti and certain areas of Upper Kinnaur. The present author was in charge of the non-Tibetan Tibeto-Burman and Indo-European language varieties of Kinnaur. The project was also successful in establishing a reliable research infrastructure in the relevant area, e.g. by building up a network of local informants supporting the fieldwork and even engaging members of the local population in doing documentation work on their own (under the guidance and technical assistance of the Phonogrammarchiv), from which future research will benefit greatly.

1.1. RECORDED DOCUMENTATION

The field recording activities produced 287 hours of audio material and 47 hours of video material, amounting to a total of 334 hours. The recorded material comprises songs, narratives, speeches, interviews, linguistic elicitations, and documentation of festivals, celebrations, and other events, and is deposited in the Phonogrammarchiv. The project thus succeeded in collecting a comprehensive and unique corpus of recorded data pertaining to oral traditions and local culture of Spiti and Upper Kinnaur. The gathered data offer first-hand sources that are not available otherwise. Much of the song and narrative or interview material could already be transcribed and translated. All transcriptions, translations and analyses of texts were made with the help of and in collaboration with local informants, most notably, Sonam Chering (village of Tabo), Kesar Negi (village of Kanam) and Gopi Negi (village of Jangi). As a matter of principle, local individuals that participated in a recording session were given copies of the recordings in which they participated, if they so wished, and/or copies of photos.

1.1.1. Songs

A total of more than 300 songs and instrumental pieces was collected (Tibetan: 156 (transcribed and translated: 100, see also Hein in print); Kinnauri: 130 (76); Kinnauri-Harijan: 6 (3); for most of the remaining songs, partial transcriptions/translations or summaries exist). The songs are about local deities, the founding of temples, mythological and religious issues, events in connection with festivals, or personages from villages in past times. Some songs are of modern origin. A number of songs are about Lotsa Rinpoche. Songs in Kinnauri-Harijan, the language of the lower castes in lower Kinnaur, appear to be exclusively Shivratri songs (for Shiva's main festival) and are sung only by members of the lower castes. Songs often employ obsolete expressions that pose lexical difficulties to the speakers of the present-day language.

1.1.2. Narratives

In the Tibetan-speaking areas stories of two categories were recorded: (i) *namthar* stories, which tell the story of an important, usually religious person's life, and (ii) so-called king's stories, i.e. parts of the epic of King Gesar (in Spiti known as *Lingsingsing Gyalwo*). Recordings were made also of a certain type of formalised speech called *mola*. V. Hein is working on these materials. Oral tradition was also recorded in the form of interviews with village elders about their knowledge of local myths and the way village festivals are celebrated. In the non-Tibetan-speaking area of Upper Kinnaur and adjacent areas of Lower Kinnaur, recordings were made of narratives and interviews in the language of the Shumcho area, in the



Fig. 1: location of Himachal Pradesh in India (adapted from www.mapsofindia.com)

language of the lower castes of Lower Kinnaur, and in the high caste language of Jangi, Lippa and Asrang, and in Kinnauri. Aside from recording folk tales, oral traditions were collected pertaining to local culture, general issues of life in the villages, the history of Buddhist monasteries and religious issues, such as local festivals and deities, and the topic of *grokhs* (i.e. trance media). Most of these materials could be transcribed and translated.

1.1.3. Festivals, celebrations

The following events (festivals, celebrations, etc.) were documented phonographically and/or videographically (name(s) or description(s) of the event(s) in italics are followed by the place(s) in parentheses): *Namken* (Demul, Tabo), *Menthoko* (Kanam), *Presentation of the Heir* (Kanam, Nako, Ribba, and various sites in lower Spiti), *Shuktok* (Dubling), *Ukhyang* (Ribba), *Bishu* (Ribba), *dance gathering* (Ribba), *Phulaij* (Sangla), *Chakhar* (Tabo), *Rarang Devi meets Lochen Tulku and both speak to the local population* (Malling), *wedding ceremony* (Mane), *New Year's celebration* (Gyu), and a *Kinner Kailash Parikrama* (circumambulation of the sacred mountain of Kinner Kailash).

2. INVESTIGATION INTO SOME UNSTUDIED LANGUAGES OF KINNAUR

Since the project was concerned with the recording and documentation of oral traditions in the form of narratives, interviews, songs, etc., basic knowledge of the respective languages (and their distribution) was a (minimal) prerequisite for analysing the recorded texts. As the language situation in the research area is rather complex and some of these languages are still unstudied, the analysis of recorded texts had by necessity to go along with linguistic investigations.

2.1. THE LANGUAGE SITUATION IN KINNAUR

To date, no detailed studies are available for many linguistic varieties of Kinnaur. Likewise, linguistic data to establish the precise areal and social distribution of languages or all their dialects over the villages and the dialect boundaries are still insufficient. Apart from varieties of Tibetan spoken in the areas towards the borders with the Spiti region and Tibet (in the villages of Charang, Kunnu and Nesang; in Upper Kinnaur, starting in Pooh), the following three (groups of) varieties have been proposed for the remaining (non-Tibetan) Tibeto-Burman speech in Kinnaur:

- (i) *Kinnauri* (also termed Kanauri, Kanawari, Milchang, etc.), which is spoken along the Satluj valley and its side valleys from Chaura to Moorang, and in the Baspa valley apart from the villages of Rakchham and Chhitkul;
- (ii) *Chhitkuli*, spoken in the villages of Rakchham and Chhitkul;
- (iii) *Thebarskad* (Thebör skad, Tibarskad, Tibberkad, etc.), attributed to villages in Upper Kinnaur such as Lippa, Jangi, Asrang, Labrang, Kanam, Sunnam, Namgia and Shyaso (see e.g. A. Cunningham 1854: 391, Bailey 1911: 661, Sharma 1988: 6).

Kinnauri is sometimes subdivided into Lower Kinnauri and Standard Kinnauri (e.g. Bailey 1911: 661). The term Thebarskad is mostly used as a cover term for three linguistic varieties spoken in Upper Kinnaur. While Gerard (1841: 88, 1842) reserves the term for the variety spoken in Sunnam and recognizes two additional varieties, one spoken in Lippa, the other one in Kanam and Labrang, J. D. Cunningham (1844: 224, 225, note) includes all three under the heading of Thebarskad. The three varieties are also mentioned in Sanan and Swadi (1998: 99): “[dialects of] Sunnam, Jangram, Sumcho”, in Bajpai (1991: 43): “Sangnaur”, “Jangiam”, “Shumcho”, and in Grimes (2000a: 465, 442, 464): “Sunam”, “Jangshung”, “Shumcho”; however, they do not present any data. According to the last two works, the Shumcho variety is spoken in Kanam, Labrang, Spillo, Shyaso, Talling and Rushkilang, the Jangram variety is spoken in Jangi, Lippa and Asrang, and the Sunnam variety is spoken only in the village of Sunnam (for the location of these and other villages see the appended maps). A. Cunningham (1854: 391), Bailey (1911: 661f) and Sharma (1988) use the term Thebarskad without further sub-divisions. Beames (1868) lists the Shumcho variety (“Sumchu”) as an independent language beside Thebarskad (i.e. here the Sunnam variety). Some authors place Kinnauri, Chhitkuli and the remaining related varieties all within a Kinnauri dialect continuum. Some examples of dialectal variation are given in Neethivanan (1976) and Sharma (1988: 7–11). All non-Tibetan Tibeto-Burman speech varieties of Kinnaur are nowadays classified as West(ern) Himalayish (e.g. Grimes 2000b: 703, van Driem 2001: 934f, 939). Grimes (2000a, b) proposes a sub-group of West Himalayish termed “Kanauri”, containing (among other languages from outside Kinnaur) Kinnauri, Shumcho, Jangshung and Sunnam (note, however, that Grimes wrongly lists here also “Kinnauri, Bhoti” and “Tukpa”, which are in fact varieties of Tibetan). Scarcity of available data, however, does not allow us to fully determine the position of the Thebarskad varieties with respect to Kinnauri (or other West Himalayish languages) or to each other. In fact one is frequently told by locals that in Kinnaur the language changes every 10 or so kilometres. It would thus be interesting to know whether Grimes’ (2000a, b) list needs to be extended. However, this would require an in-depth linguistic survey covering most, if not all, villages.

It has also been noted that in many villages the lower castes apparently speak a language different from the high caste. The phenomenon was first pointed out by J. D. Cunningham (1844: 224) and is mentioned also in Sharma (1988: 6f., 1994: 4), Bajpai (1991: 43), and Sanan and Swadi (1998: 99). In Lower Kinnaur, the lower castes speak an Indo-European language (a brief word list sample is given in J. D. Cunningham 1844: 225ff.), whilst the high caste speaks Kinnauri. In Grimes (ed. 2000a: 444f.) the language appears as “Kinnauri, Harijan” and is classified as Western Pahari. In Upper Kinnaur, according to Sharma (1988: 6), various forms of Thebarskad come into play.

Linguistic data from Kinnaur were published as early as the early-to-mid 19th century in works such as Herbert (1825), Gerard (1842), J. D. Cunningham (1844), A. Cunningham (1854), and Beames (1868). However, these data do not go beyond collections of words and numerals and a handful of simple sentences. Among the non-Tibetan speech varieties of Kinnaur, only the language nowadays referred to as Kinnauri has received greater attention. Grammatical sketches are found in Konow (1905), Bailey (1909), Grierson (1909), and Joshi (1909), the latter also containing a Kinnauri dictionary. Another Kinnauri vocabulary is Bailey (1911). Joshi (1911) also published a collection of Kinnauri songs. More recent grammatical treatments of Kinnauri are Neethivanan (1976) and Sharma (1988). Particular grammatical issues are addressed in Saxena (e.g. 1992, 1995, 1997, 2002a, b, 2004) and Takahashi (2001). The only other non-Tibetan speech variety of Kinnaur apart from Kinnauri to which separate studies have been dedicated is Chhitkuli (Bailey 1915: 78–86, Sharma 1992).

To date no study is available of any of the Thebarskad (or Indo-European lower caste language) varieties. The scarce published Shumcho data are confined to collections of some words, numerals and a few sentences or simple phrases in works such as Gerard (1842: 548–551), J. D. Cunningham (1844: 225–228, Kanam entries), Beames (1868: 80), Neethivanan (1976) and Sharma (1988: 7–11). Some interspersed forms appear also in the Kinnauri vocabularies of Joshi (1909) and Bailey (1911). Some Shumcho forms also occur in some of the songs published in Joshi (1911). Published data from the high caste language of Jangi, Lippa and Asrang is perhaps confined to the words collected in the Lippa entries of J. D. Cunningham’s (1844: 225ff.) list of Thebarskad (“Tibberkad”) words.

2.2. LANGUAGES UNDER INVESTIGATION

Since most of the speech varieties of Kinnaur have to date received little or no scientific attention, in-depth linguistic investigations were begun in addition to the documentation activities as language informants became available. Thus it was pos-

sible to confirm the existence of a number of local linguistic varieties mentioned only in passing in some of the literature. It could also be confirmed that in many villages the lower castes speak a language different from the high caste. Unfortunately, with the exception of Kinnauri, there is no general terminology for the language or dialect names of the area in question. In particular, the locals themselves often appear to have no widely accepted names for their languages or dialects. Terms such as “Milchang” or “Thebarskad” (see 2.1) were not met in the field and appear to be unknown to present-day speakers.



Fig. 2: location of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh (adapted from Sanan & Swadi 1998: 12)

Fieldwork started out with the language spoken in the area locally known as “Humcho”, lit. “bunch of three” (*hum* = “3”, *cho* = “bunch, group”), which refers to the villages of Kanam, Labrang and Spillo (in Kinnauri: “Shumcho”), and was carried out with individuals from Kanam, Labrang, Spillo, Jangi and Shyaso. The language was found to be spoken by all castes in Kanam, Labrang, Spillo and the small hamlet of Karla. Outside of Shumcho it is spoken by the two lower castes in Jangi, Lippa and Asrang. The high caste in the latter villages speaks a different language (local informants all distinguish three castes in Kinnaur). According to the consulted locals from Shumcho and Jangi, the language of Shumcho is also spoken (or at least understood) in the villages of Shyaso, Sunnam, Rushkilang, Gyabong and Ropa, although details are currently unknown; moreover, they say that other languages are also spoken there. The issue will be closer investigated in future field trips. Shumcho speakers say that there is also some dialectal variation between their villages. Some variation between speakers could indeed be detected but could so far not be related to particular villages. In Shumcho speakers from e.g. Jangi there may be some interference with the other language spoken in the village.

As informants became available, the research work was extended to the language of the high caste in the villages of Jangi, Lippa and Asrang (the language of the two lower castes in these villages, as noted, being the language of Shumcho). The fieldwork was carried out with individuals from Jangi. According to the informants, members of the lower castes in these villages are also fluent in the upper caste language (a fact that was also confirmed in the field) but not vice versa.

Both languages are varieties of what appears under the heading Thebarskad e.g. in J. D. Cunningham (1844) and belong to what is sometimes termed the “complex pronominalised” group of Tibeto-Burman (see e.g. Grierson 1909), that is, they display complex verbal agreement morphology. The language of Shumcho corresponds to Gerard’s (1842) “Soomchoo” data and Beames’ (1868) “Sumchu” data. Grimes (ed. 2000a: 464) and others list the language as *Shumcho*, which is the Kinnauri name for the area where it is spoken. The high caste language of Jangi, Lippa and Asrang appears to correspond to the language represented in the Lippa entries of J. D. Cunningham’s (1844) list of Thebarskad (“Tibberkad”) words. To judge from the indication of villages it is entered in Grimes (ed. 2000a: 442) as *Jangshung* (not to be confused with the extinct Zhangzhung language, for which see e.g. various papers in Nagano & LaPolla 2001). J. D. Cunningham (1844: 225, note) attributes it also to Akpa, which however could not yet be verified in the field (note, in this connection, that according to locals, the village of Akpa constitutes the border between Upper and Lower Kinnaur). Both languages are different from the language represented in Gerard’s (1842) “Theburskud” data or A. Cunningham’s (1854) “Tibarskad” data, which is the Sunnam variety.



Fig. 3: District Kinnaur in more detail (adapted from Verma 2002: xiv)

As mentioned above, consulted speakers were not aware of any names for their languages; however, these speakers insisted that their languages are distinct from, and not mutually intelligible with, Kinnauri or with each other. This point is supported by the fact that there are significant differences in lexicon and grammar, and was tested in the field by playing recorded texts to speakers of different languages and by confronting speakers of different languages with each other (see 3.4). This indicates that speaking one of these languages as a mother tongue does not *per se* enable speakers to also understand and converse with speakers of one of the other languages, unless some knowledge of that language has been acquired additionally. In fact, the local population in Kinnaur is quite plurilingual. Apart from their home language, Hindi (and, increasingly, English), people often have knowledge (in varying degrees) of other local languages or dialects, be it because one parent is from

a different area, or the speaker grew up or later spent time in different places. In earlier times, Kinnauri served as the *lingua franca* of Kinnaur (Sharma 1988). However, while some older people from different linguistic areas may still use Kinnauri as a means of communication in a contact situation, the middle and younger generations will shift to Hindi in such cases.

Finally, it was also possible to do research on the Indo-European lower caste language of Lower Kinnaur. According to informants from Ribba, it is spoken in many dialects by the lower castes from Ribba downwards in all of Lower Kinnaur. Again, members of the lower castes are also fluent in the language of the high caste (here, Kinnauri) but not vice versa. Fieldwork was done mainly on the Ribba dialect with a number of individuals from the village of Ribba, and to some smaller extent with a speaker of the Sungra dialect. In addition, speakers from Kalpa and Brelingi were consulted. Comparison of the Ribba and Sungra data does indeed show several differences. In Grimes (2000a:444f.) the language appears as “Kinnauri, Harijan” but the consulted speakers were not aware of a name for the language.

Research was done mostly on the language of Shumcho since the present research infrastructure is most fully developed for that language, and only to a lesser extent on the high caste language of Jangi, Lipka and Asrang and the lower caste language of Lower Kinnaur. At present, no numbers of fully competent and fluent speakers can be given with any certainty for any of the languages.

3. RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Since all three languages are unwritten and therefore have no written tradition, all linguistic data have to be gathered directly from the speakers. In gathering linguistic data in the field, a dual strategy was pursued. Data were mainly gained from two sources: (i.) direct elicitations, and (ii.) texts recorded from speakers. Thus, for all three languages, data were gained in lexicon and grammar elicitation sessions with native speakers, as well as by recording, transcribing, translating and analysing narratives, folk tales, interviews, songs and conversations in the field with the help of local informants. The linguistic research was complemented by photographic and videographic documentation (e.g. of treated items, locations, procedures etc.).

3.1. DIRECT DATA ELICITATION

Systematic elicitation of data took place in general linguistic fieldwork sessions covering all areas of language structure, i.e. phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, lexicon plus other aspects (e.g. pragmatic, cultural) as they arose. In

data elicitation sessions informants are mainly presented with materials prepared in advance by the researcher, such as word lists or grammatical questionnaires. Word lists serve for collecting lexical items in order to build or expand the vocabulary of a language. This goes along with eliciting additional aspects of an expression's meaning or use, such as the circumstances in which it would normally be used, in the case of verbs also providing example sentences that demonstrate in which sentential context(s) a verb may occur and which construction(s) it may demand or allow. Word lists are also the starting point for detecting the sound system of a language.

Grammatical questionnaires are used to investigate the grammar of a given language, e.g. to establish conjugation paradigms, examine different clause types and constructions, or to discover other grammatical phenomena. To give just a few examples, investigated issues include nominal and adjectival morphology, the case system, the pronominal and deictic system, honorificity, the expression of number, verb morphology (e.g. tense/aspect, agreement), modality, evidentiality, the expression of reflexivity and reciprocity, transitivity alternations, causatives, different clause types (interrogative, relative, subordinate, etc.), clausal or phrasal expression of possession, co-reference vs. disjoint reference, information structural phenomena, and many more. Phonetic/phonological, lexical and grammatical issues were also addressed as they arose when translating and analysing recorded texts. In general it proved useful to reserve a certain degree of flexibility in working sessions and to address interesting or unexpected issues in ad hoc investigations if it was necessary or if the occasion was favourable. In order to detect misunderstandings, eliminate errors and correct mistakes or to reveal the necessity of going into more detail at certain points, results from earlier sessions or field trips etc. were subjected to frequent checking and cross-checking. Data elicitation sessions (as well as text analysis sessions) often assumed an interactive character that allowed language informants to provide information beyond what was directly asked.

Attention was also paid to data one came across accidentally outside planned sessions or other recorded occasions. If an interesting piece of data cropped up e.g. at some informal occasion, an investigation was done on the spot, or a note was taken, etc. The investigation of such data was then resumed and the data were cross-checked in a regular working session. The working sessions were documented to the largest possible extent with digital audio recordings, accompanied by the field notes taken during the sessions.

3.2. RECORDED TEXTS

Recording folk tales, personal narratives, conversations/interviews, songs, and other instances of spoken language in formal or informal settings documents the language in its actual use and complements the data gained from direct elicitations. At the same time, such recordings (especially when pertaining to the history and culture of the area) are the basis of any documentation of oral traditions, since they locate the elicited language in socio-cultural time and space.

Since the audio recordings were made by means of a digital medium (R-DAT, 16 bit/48 kHz), they could be transferred to a notebook and subjected to further analytic procedures right in the field. The use of audio editing software allowed for easy segmenting and partitioning of the resulting sound files. The recorded texts were then listened to and transcribed, translated, glossed and analysed with the help of local informants. These data provided input for further linguistic investigations and elicitations. However, work on such texts was not restricted to treating grammatical, lexical or phonological matters but also included discussing questions of general interest that arise from a text, e.g. issues that shed light on its cultural or historical background. Such texts will also form the basis for an exemplary corpus of transcribed, glossed, translated and commented texts.

A notebook equipped with an external high-capacity hard disk and audio editing software proved to be an indispensable device in the field for transcribing and analysing recordings, and for playing them back to local informants. It allows the comfortable location, marking or isolation of passages in a recording with great precision, which immensely facilitates and speeds up the evaluation and analysis procedures. Sufficient hard-disk capacity makes it possible not only to store recordings of a given field trip but furthermore allows one to take to the field mp3 versions of recordings from previous expeditions, or other electronic materials, for reference purposes.

3.3. TESTING INTELLIGIBILITY

When it became evident that the Shumcho, Jangshung and Kinnauri varieties exhibit considerable lexical and grammatical differences it was decided to test their intelligibility among speakers. This was done by confronting speakers of different varieties with each other and by playing recorded texts to speakers of different varieties.

A tape-recorded short text in the high caste language from Jangi was played to speakers of the Humcho variety from Kanam and Labrang, and also to Kinnauri speakers from Lower Kinnaur, all of whom had no family ties to the villages of

Jangi, Lippa and Asrang and did not spend time in that area. Similarly, tape-recorded short texts from Kanam in the Shumcho language were played to Kinnauri speakers from Lower Kinnaur who had no family ties to the Humcho area and did not spend time there. When asked to retell the contents of the texts played to them, the respective individuals claimed that they could not do so, as they did not understand the respective language. Direct personal confrontations of speakers with each other on various occasions yielded the same results.

Likewise, when attempting to translate songs and short narrative texts in the Kinnauri language, recorded in villages in Lower Kinnaur, with the help of informants from Kanam and Jangi whose native tongues were the language of Humcho, this soon turned out to be an unsuccessful strategy because the informants did not understand the Kinnauri language beyond occasionally recognizing individual expressions which they happened to know. Kinnauri speakers from Lower Kinnaur who were then asked to assist in such sessions did not find this astonishing at all and attributed it to the fact that their native languages are different. Since also the comparison of the Kinnauri-Harijan data of the Ribba and Sungra varieties shows several differences, similar tests will be attempted with Kinnauri-Harijan speakers in upcoming field trips.

3.4. EXTRALINGUISTIC ISSUES

In researching “off-road” languages, also extra-linguistic factors come into play that have to be considered. One such factor is the accessibility of the research area. The villages where the fieldwork was done (mainly Kanam, Labrang, Spillo, Jangi, and Ribba) are located at altitudes around 3000 metres above sea-level in mountainous territory. Although they can meanwhile be reached via (mostly unpaved) roads, rainfall or landslides may block the roads and make it difficult or impossible to reach a particular village at a particular time. Thus, even under favourable circumstances, due to the general landscape and road conditions, covering even short distances can be quite troublesome and time-consuming. For such reasons, the technical equipment must not be bulky but should be easy to transport or to carry. Since electricity is unstable or non-existent in the research area, all recording activities and most other technical operations must necessarily rely on batteries for their power supply. The electric technical equipment (e.g. recording instruments, computers) must therefore be such that it can be battery-powered. Moreover, the main research area (i.e. the villages of Kanam, Labrang and Spillo) lies inside the so-called “Innerline”, a restricted area bordering on Tibet, for which a special permit is needed. Permits are issued for one or two weeks only, after which a new permit must be applied for. Local authorities often pursue a somewhat restrictive permit

policy, so that it cannot be taken for granted that the “Innerline” area can be entered on any desired day.

When it was not possible to enter the research area or the relevant villages were unreachable, the research work was carried out in Reckong-Peö, which is the administrative centre of District Kinnaur. Reckong-Peö lies outside the restricted area but is located close to all the relevant villages. Work in Reckong-Peö was done mainly with language informants from the villages that were hired as full-time assistants, and, to some extent, with speakers of the relevant languages residing there. If necessary, informants from the villages could also be brought there (e.g. in case of a permit problem). Whereas the fieldwork in the villages often concentrated on recording narratives or songs or on special data elicitations with villagers not available otherwise (beside documenting festivals, celebrations or other events), the work in Reckong-Peö was mainly dedicated to transcribing and translating recorded texts, in-depth grammatical investigations, extended lexical elicitations and the like with the permanent assistants. When working with the permanent informants, the choice of topics was made according to the necessities prevalent at the respective time.

The choice of topics to work on a given occasion depended not only on the accessibility of the relevant villages but also on the availability of informants and what topics they are suitable for. People’s routines and other concerns of their lives determine who is available when and for how long. Arrangements with speakers in villages therefore could often be made only at short notice. In working with informants, respect must be paid also to their individual abilities (e.g., someone who is a good singer or story-teller need not necessarily be equally gifted for systematic grammatical elicitations, and vice versa). Thus, the decision as to where recordings were made, in which language and on what particular topic was determined to a large extent by external factors. The field researcher must remain flexible and adapt to the respective situation and informant(s). In general, the research work could rely on the stock of local informants and the good contacts with the villages established during earlier expeditions, and maximal use could be made of the available time.

As was already mentioned (in 1.), selected local informants were also equipped with recording instruments, to allow them to collect stories or songs, or to conduct interviews independently between field trips and thus supplement unavailable opportunities during the field missions themselves.

3.5. RESULTS

During the four field trips it was possible to assemble a rich vocabulary of the Shumcho language, based on word list elicitations and other lexical investigations, lexical items from recorded texts and examples from grammatical investigations. Most of the recorded narratives and interviews could be transcribed, translated, analysed and glossed. Many areas of the language's grammar could be covered in grammatical investigations and by analysing recorded texts. Further research to confirm and expand the findings will be done in upcoming field trips. Ideally, all data should be confirmed by several speakers of both genders and of all age groups. Also for the Jangshung and Kinnauri-Harijan languages it was possible to assemble a vocabulary, study grammatical issues and transcribe, translate, analyse and gloss recorded texts and songs. Since the main focus of the linguistic fieldwork was on the Shumcho language, however, the gathered data from the latter languages are less extensive. The sound recordings provide what perhaps is the first phonographic evidence of the three languages.

4. CONCLUSION

According to UNESCO and other estimates, roughly half of the world's 6,000 languages are in danger of disappearing within the 21st century (e.g. Wurm 2001, Hale et al. 1992). In the course of the fieldwork it soon became evident that also the three languages under investigation are seriously threatened by the intrusion of modern life into the traditional communities. Speakers often spend considerable parts of their childhood outside their villages and speech communities for educational purposes. Later on they are often forced to seek work away from their home villages in a different linguistic environment. Due to the influence of mass media and the fact that the medium of instruction at school is Hindi, almost all speakers are (at least) bilingual with Hindi. Although the indigenous languages are still the preferred means of communication within the villages, the influence of Hindi can be noticed at all levels. Especially the middle and younger generations habitually mix their languages with Hindi (and to some extent also English). As a consequence, many traditional terms and language-specific means of expression remain known only to old speakers, but have passed out of use with younger speakers and are disappearing. Likewise, the availability and great popularity of television and video players even in remote valleys of the Indian Himalayas disrupts narrative traditions (e.g. story telling) so that folk tales and other forms of traditional knowledge are no longer passed on to younger generations and are being lost as the older people die. Since the languages in question have never been written and thus never developed literatures of their own, it is foreseeable that this part of the local cul-

tural heritage will eventually be entirely lost. Many speakers are perfectly aware of the fact that their languages are slowly fading away. However, as the languages, being “tribal languages”, do not enjoy high prestige among their speakers, nothing is done to preserve them. It is therefore necessary to do research on these languages as long as the languages, their speakers and their traditions are still available.

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