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It takes two to tango: linguistic and cultural (co-)variation in digital documentation

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It takes two to tango: linguistic and cultural (co-)variation in digital documentation

Anju Saxena

1. Introduction

Ideally, our aim in a digital documentation project is to document the linguistic and socio-cultural practices of a community as close to its reality as possible, where the format of the documentation should make it possible to take into account language variation, including differences of dialect, sociolect, register, etc., and to identify and classify the various languages spoken in a region, while also faithfully capturing the fact that speakers of these languages sometimes also share their socio-cultural traditions. The documentation format should also be able to take care of the reverse situation, where one language (linguistically speaking) is spoken by two or more ethnic communities, each with its own distinct socio-cultural traditions. The question is, of course, "How?" This question will be raised here by presenting two case studies: Kinnauri–Harijan boli[1] and Hindi–Urdu. The Kinnauri and Harijan boli languages, spoken in the Sangla valley villages of Himachal Pradesh, India, have had a long and intensive contact, where the two languages have influenced each other and the two communities share a number of socio-cultural features. This poses problems for what we can call the "one language = one culture ideology" sometimes implicitly adopted as the default mode in language documentation programs (this is called the "Herderian equation" by Foley, this volume). The reverse situation is observed in the case of standard Hindi and Urdu, spoken in Old Delhi (as also in other parts of India). The relationship between language and culture in this case differs dramatically from that of Kinnauri–Harijan boli. Hindi and Urdu are part of one language system (with major differences in the lexicon), but socio-culturally the Hindi and Urdu speech communities maintain distinct identities – each with its own set of socio-cultural traditions.

These two complementary case studies highlight the need to discuss questions relating to the archive format in language documentation projects. It will be suggested here that a discussion of the relationship between language and culture is necessary before the start of a documentation project, as well as during all its stages, as the assumptions made especially during the initial stages have implications for the design of the archive system. The documentation format and the conventions we adopt will determine what we can or cannot do in a documentation project and how the archived information can be retrieved and presented, for example, via a web-based interface.

The organisation of this paper is as follows: section 2 presents the Kinnauri–Harijan boli case study. It begins with background information on Kinnauri and Harijan boli, followed by a description of the linguistic and socio-cultural consequences of the intensive contact between the two communities. Section 3 discusses the Hindi–Urdu case study. The implications of the two case studies for language documentation will be discussed in section 4.

2. Kinnauri–Harijan boli

2.1 Background

The two 'language communities' which form the focus of this case study live in Sangla Valley, a region in Kinnaur district, Himachal Pradesh state, India. Both Kinnauri (a Tibeto-Burman language) and Harijan boli (an Indo-Aryan language) are spoken in most villages in Sangla. Socio-culturally as well as linguistically the population of Sangla can be broadly divided into two groups: peasants and workmen ("artisans"). The Kinnauris comprise the peasant group. They are also called Rajputs and they often bear the surname "Negi". The Indo-Aryan communities are often called Harijan and Ores. They traditionally comprise the "workmen" category (also called *Scheduled castes* in the Indian context) – each with its own specialisation.[2]

Kinnauri (also referred to as Kanauri, Kanawari, and so on) belongs to the West Himalayish subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family (which is a subgroup of Sino-Tibetan; see Figure 1). Harijan boli belongs to the West Pahari subgroup of the Indo-Aryan language family (which in turn is a branch of Indo-European; see Figure 2). According to the 1991 Indian census, Kinnauri had 48,778 speakers. This, according to the *Ethnologue* (Grimes 2000), comprises 72% of the total population of the Kinnaur district. Harijan boli is unfortunately not specified in the Indian census reports, but according to the *Ethnologue*, it had 6,331 speakers in 1998 in the Kinnaur district. Note, however, that this figure includes all non-Kinnauri languages of this district (not just Harijan boli).

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[2] Each of the groups 'Rajputs' and 'Scheduled caste' have their own sub-divisions (of castes) within it, e.g. there are sub-castes within the Kinnauris.

Figure 1: Genetic relationship: Kinnauri

Sino-Tibetan

    Tibeto-Burman

        Himalayish

           Tibeto-Kinnauri

              West Himalayish

                Kinnauri

Figure 2: Genetic relationship: Harijan boli

Indo-European

    Indo-Iranian

        Indo-Aryan

           Northern zone

              Western Pahari

                Harijan boli, Koci, Koṭgaṛhi

Even today, not much is known about the linguistic situation and the languages spoken in Kinnaur. According to the literature three linguistic varieties belonging to the West Himalayish sub-branch of Tibeto-Burman are spoken in Kinnaur: (i) Kinnauri, (ii) Chitkuli, spoken in Rakcham and Chitkul villages, and (iii) Thebarskad, sometimes used as a cover term for the language variety spoken in Upper Kinnaur (Cunningham 1844; Bailey 1911). As there has not been any comparative work done on these linguistic varieties, it still remains unclear if they represent different points on a dialectal continuum or not. Kinnauri is sometimes further classified into Lower Kinnauri and Standard Kinnauri (Bailey 1911). There has been some work done on Kinnauri, especially Lower Kinnauri (for example, Konow 1905; Bailey 1909; Grierson 1909; Joshi 1909; Neethivanan 1976; Sharma 1988; Saxena 1992, 1995, 1997, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, to appear).[3]

Cunningham (1844:224) was perhaps the first scholar to note that the lower caste in Lower Kinnauri speaks an Indo-Aryan variety whereas the high caste people in these villages speak a Tibeto-Burman language (i.e. Kinnauri). As Kinnauri (which itself is a less-dominant language in the larger Indian perspective) has traditionally been the

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[3] Joshi (1909) and Bailey (1911) include small wordlists.

dominant language of this region, there is no literature, not even a Bible translation, in Harijan boli. It is also not mentioned in the *Linguistic Survey of India* (Grierson 1916) which even today remains a good source of information on Indian languages. Apart from a short word list which appears in Cunningham (1844), almost nothing is known about this language.

2.2 Indo-Aryan influence on Kinnauri

Kinnaur presents several layers of language contact. Traditionally, trade and administration as well as the introduction of Hinduism seem to have contributed to the heavy impact of Indic culture on the socio-cultural practices of the Kinnauris, the Tibeto-Burman community. The linguistic changes in Kinnauri, mentioned below, are a reflection of this socio-cultural contact.

Local native languages are the means of communication in villages and in family situations. Kinnauri being the language of the farmers/landowners has more prestige associated with it locally, as compared to Harijan boli which is the language of the farm-workers. In inter-group communications, Kinnauri is traditionally used as the *lingua franca* (a practice continued to date among elders). For this reason, Harijan boli speakers usually can speak at least some Kinnauri, but the opposite is usually not the case.

Today, we are witnessing the next stage of Indo-Aryan influence – that of the increasing dominance of Hindi (and also Indian English). With changing socio-cultural conditions and an increasing awareness among the locals about Hindi as a medium for social mobility, Hindi is increasingly becoming the inter-community language (especially among the younger generation of Kinnauris and Harijans). Hindi and English are seen as modern languages, associated with status-bearing jobs and generally higher status, whereas local languages (Kinnauri and Harijan boli alike) are associated with a traditional, backwards life-style. Young people spend a large part of their time outside Kinnaur enrolled in schools and colleges where the medium of instruction is Hindi or English. Once they complete their education, the structure of the employment market forces them to continue to live away from their villages – in places where their mother tongue is not the dominant language. Further, because of the modern mass media (including television programs in the national languages and/or in the regional official/dominant languages) even villagers are regularly exposed to other languages to an unprecedented extent. The traditional lifestyle rapidly falls victim to these recent social developments to the extent that linguistic competence of the younger generation in their native languages is decreasing dramatically (one example of this is the fast-disappearing tradition of oral storytelling). The previously dominant role of Kinnauri is increasingly being taken over by Hindi. The younger generation increasingly turn to Hindi as their *lingua franca* – the function earlier served by Kinnauri – and frequently mix their native language with Hindi and Indian English words.

The focus in this paper is, however, on the traditional contact situation in this region. The names of the days of the week as well as the names of the month (and the division of the year into months) in Kinnauri are loanwords. They reflect the consequences of the larger cultural influence of Indo-Aryan on this community. Table 1 presents the relevant information about terms for the weekdays in Kinnauri, where the Kinnauri terms are shown together with their cognates in Indo-Aryan languages, primarily Koci and Kotgarhi.[4]

Table 1: The days of the week

Gloss	Kinnauri	Indo-Aryan (IA) correspondences
Sunday	təvaraŋ	twaːr (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), ɪtvaːr (Hindi), Lw.Sk. *ādityavāra-
Monday	səvaraŋ	swāːr (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), somvaːr (Hindi)
Tuesday	mənglaraŋ	mɔŋgəl (baːr) (Koci), muŋgəl̩ (Koṭgaṛhi), maŋgalvaːr (Hindi)
Wednesday	budaraŋ	būd: (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), budʰvaːr (Hindi)
Thursday	brespat	brēst (Koṭgaṛhi), brespat (Koci), braspativaːr (Hindi)
Friday	šukaraŋ	ʃūk:ər (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), šukravaːr (Hindi)
Saturday	šanšiiras	ʃēnʃər, ʃəɳɪcːər (Koṭgaṛhi), ʃɔɳʃər (Koci) šanivaːr (Hindi), Sk. śanaiścaraḥ

The same pattern is also observed in the case of the terms for months in Kinnauri (see Table 2). Here we find not only the similarity in the forms of the names of the months, but also in the way in which the year is divided into months. It is the same in Kinnauri and Indo-Aryan.

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[4] Koci and Koṭgaṛhi, like Harijan boli, belong to the Western Pahari subbranch of the Indo-Aryan group. Hindi, too, is an Indo-Aryan language. Koci and Koṭgaṛhi data are from Hendriksen (1976–1986), cited here in the transcription used by him.

Table 2: The months of the year

Gloss	Kinnauri	IA correspondences
Month name for mid March–mid April	četraŋ	tsɛt:ər (Koṭgaṛhi), tsɔitər (Koci), četram (Hindi), Sk. caitraḥ
Month name for mid April–mid May	veša:kʰaŋ	veša:kʰ (Hindi), bəʃa, bəʃē (Koci), bəʃē: (Koṭgaṛhi)
Month name for mid May–mid June	ǰeštaŋ	dzēʈːh (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), jyesṭ (Hindi), Sk. jyaiṣṭhaḥ
Month name for mid June–mid July	əšaraŋ	ʃāṛ, ʃā:ṛ (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), Sk. āṣāḍhaḥ
Month name for mid July–mid August	šɔnaŋ	ʃauṇ (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), šra:vaŋ (Hindi), Sk. śrāvaṇaḥ
Month name for mid August–mid September	bʰədraŋ	bʿadro (Koci), bʿɔd:ər (Koṭgaṛhi), badʰɔ (Hindi)
Month name for mid September–mid October	ɪndrəmaŋ	ʃino (Koci), sɔ̄:ɟ (Koṭgaṛhi), Sk. āśvayujaḥ
Month name for mid October–mid November	katyaŋ	kat:ɪ (Koci, Koṭgaṛhi), ka:rtik (Hindi)
Month name for mid November–mid December	magširaŋ	maŋgʃər, magʰar (Hindi), Sk. mārgaśirāḥ, pg. 172
Month name for mid December–mid January	pošaŋ	pōʃ (Koṭgaṛhi), pō:ʃ (Koci), pɔš (Hindi), Sk. pauṣaḥ
Month name for mid January–mid February	mahaŋ	māg: (Koṭgaṛhi), mɑ:g (Koci), mɑ:gʰ (Hindi)
Month name for mid February–mid March	pʰəgnaŋ/ pʰəngnaŋ	phaguṇ (Koci), phāg:əṇ (Koṭgaṛhi), pʰagun (Hindi), Sk. phālgunaḥ

2.3 Kinnauri influence on Harijan boli

The direction of influence is not only from Indo-Aryan to Kinnauri. There are also signs of Kinnauri influence on Harijan boli, as illustrated for two lexical items in Table 3.

Table 3: Kinnauri influence on Harijan boli

Gloss	Harijan boli	Kinnauri	Tibeto-Burman	Indo-Aryan
'mouth'	kʰɑk	kʰɑkəŋ	khā (Tibetan), kʰá (Tod), áh (Paṯani), á(h) (Tinani),	ɟɑ:t (Koci, Koṯgaṛhi)
'hundred'	rɑ:h	rɑ	rà (Tinani), ka (Tibetan), brgya: (written Tibetan)	ʃɔ̄: (Koci, Koṯgaṛhi)

2.4 Convergence in the numeral system

It is well-established that in the late stages of Proto-Indo-European the numeral system was a consistent decimal system, where higher decades (for example, 20, 30, 40, 50, 100) were derived etymologically from the word for 10 by the principle 2x10=20, 3x10=30, 10x10=100 etc.[5] This decimal system of late PIE was inherited into Proto-Indo-Iranian and this is the pattern found in the older Indo-Iranian languages and continued even in the majority of modern Indo-Aryan languages. But there are some modern Indo-Aryan languages which display a secondary development, where one finds modified versions of the vigesimal counting system (a vigesimal-decimal system where 50, for example, is derived by 2x20+10).[6]

In the Himalayan region, one finds evidence of this modified vigesimal numeral system. Both Kinnauri and Harijan boli display this pattern, as shown in Table 4. In this regard, Harijan boli differs from the closely related languages Koci and Kotgari, too. Koci and Kotgarhi have a more traditional Indo-Aryan decimal system – both in their forms and

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[5] In IE the word for 100 is derived from the word for 10.
[6] In a true vigesimal system 50 is "two and a half twenties".

in their decimal numeral system (compare Harijan boli with Koci and Kotgarhi in Table 4).[7]

Table 4: Vigesimal numeral system in Kinnauri and Harijan boli

Gloss	Kinnauri	Harijan boli	Koci, Koṭgaṛhi
1	ɪd	ek	e:k
2	nɪš	dui	dui, Sk. d(u)ve
3	šum	trawn	ci:n (Koci), cɔ:n (Koṭgaṛhi), Sk. trīṇi
4	pɑ	čʰar	tsɑ:r, Sk. catvāraḥ
5	ŋa	pančʰ	pɑ:ndz, Sk. pañca
7	tɪš, stɪš	saat	sāt:, sā:t, Sk. sapta
10	sɛ	das	dɔʃ, Sk. daśa
11	sihɪd	gyarah	gɛ:rɑ (Koṭgaṛhi), ɡja:rɑ (Koci), Sk. ekādaśa
15	soŋa	pandrah	pandra (Koci), pɔndra (Koṭgaṛhi), Sk. pancadaśa
20	niža	eisa	bī:, Sk. viṃśati
21 (20+1)	nižo ɪd	eisa ek	kɔ̄j
22 (20+2)	nižo nɪš	eisa dui	bāj, Sk. dvāviṃśati
23 (20+3)	nižo sum	eisa trawn	tēj, tēj bī:
24 (20+4)	nižo pə:	eisa cʰar	tsɔbi, tsɔbi bī:,[8] Sk. caturviṃśati
30 (20+10)	nižo sə(y)	eisa das	ti:s (Hindi)
31 (20+11)	nižo sihɪd	eisa gyarah	ikkattis (Hindi)
50 (2x20+10)	nisnižo rəy	dweesa das	pədza, Sk. pancaśat
100	ra	raah	ʃɔ̄:, Sk. śatam

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[7] The vestiges of the old barter system prevalent till today in temples suggest that even that was based on 20. It is called "rekhaN" the word itself is an Indic loanword (*rekha* 'line').

[8] Note that *e:k bi: tsa:r* is also used for '24'

2.5 Shared socio-cultural traditions

The socio-cultural practices in Kinnaur also show signs of long and intensive contact. This is, for example, reflected in the reinterpretation of the traditional Hindu caste system as well as in the festivals which are celebrated by the two communities. In some ways the two speech communities have merged, making the two communities components of one cohesive whole.

2.5.1 The caste system

According to the Classical Vedic caste system, Hindu society is divided into five classes (called 'varṇas'): Brahmins (priests), Ksatriya (warriors, rulers), Vaisya (traders, producers, craftsmen, farmers, herders), Sudra (servants) and untouchables. The Sangla region demonstrates an interesting reinterpretation of this caste system. Kinnauri, the Tibeto-Burman group, are referred to by the locals themselves as "Rajputs" (thus, warriors or the Ksatriyas in the traditional caste system) and the Indo-Aryan group are referred to as Harijans (thus, Sudra/untouchables in the traditional system). This is probably symbolic as to how the various groups in the region are treated as part of one whole with different 'specialisation', where Kinnauris are traditionally farm-owners, and Harijans farm workers. Ores traditionally work with wood and Lohar who also belong to the Harijan category, traditionally make jewelry, etc., for the temple gods and *mukhang* of devtas.

Irrespective of the source of this 'caste system', the prevalent caste system in this region raises a relevant question in relation to language documentation projects. That is, should this caste system be part of the documentation, if the focus is on Kinnauri or on Harijan boli? If yes, how?, especially when the two 'castes' speak two different languages. But if one decides to concentrate on one 'caste', because the focus is on one language (for instance, Ksatriyas, i.e. 'Rajputs' in the Kinnauri documentation), is it really justified to mention only one aspect of this caste system? The significance of one varṇa really only makes sense in relation to other varṇas, but the other varṇas in this case happen to coincide with different 'language communities', so that in taking a language-centered approach to documentation and focusing on Kinnauri, we have no obligation to mention them, as it were.[9]

2.5.2 Shared festivals and religious practices

There are additional signs of socio-cultural convergence in terms of the festivals which are celebrated in this region and the religious practices of the various communities. In both

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[9] This differs from, for example, documentation of Hindi where a presentation of all five castes is considered a natural part of the documentation (in the description of socio-cultural aspects of the language community).

these cases (as also in the 'caste system' mentioned above), the whole village is treated as one unit, irrespective of the genetic affiliations of the languages involved. Here I will briefly describe two festivals, both of which are celebrated by both Kinnauris and Harijans.

Phulaich

Phulaich is a festival of flowers celebrated in the month of August/September (*baḍʰɔ*) throughout the Kinnaur district (but on different dates), and called by various names in different parts of Kinnaur, for example, *Ukʰyaŋ*, *namŋan* and *mɪtʰoko*. Generally people celebrate this festival on hilltops near their villages. The village deity is carried to the top of a hill as part of a procession with a musical band. A particular type of flower (called *šūlɔ*), is woven into garlands. Towards the end of this festival (which lasts some days) these garlands are offered to the deity. Immediately afterward, people accompany the goddess to the village adorned with flowers, singing and dancing on their way back. A male goat is sacrificed and a fair is held as part of this festival.

Phaguli

Phaguli is celebrated in the month of February/March (*phagun*); the spirit of *Kando* ('peaks') called Kali is worshipped. The festival lasts about two weeks and is celebrated all over Kinnaur. Each day of the festival is called by a different name and marked by special celebrations. On the last day people worship Kali on the roof of their houses and then there is a feast. This festival is celebrated to please the godess Kali so that she blesses the villagers with prosperity and a large yield in their farms in the coming year.

Village god: Shri Naranji

Generally all the inhabitants of Kinnauri practice three religions: lamaism, hinduism and worship of the local village deity. Each village has its own local god, which is worshipped by all communities in the village.

Shri Naranji is the village god among my language consultants. The temple dedicated to this deity is sacred and revered by all residents of the village, both by Kinnauris and Harijans.

This, however, should not be taken to indicate that the two communities have completely merged. While there are festivals such as Phaguli and Phulaich which are celebrated by all groups in the village, there are other festivals which are celebrated by one speech community only. Shivratri, for example, is celebrated only by Harijans (and not by

Kinnauris),[10] as is Gupta devi. Further, even when the socio-cultural practices are shared (for example, shared festivals), there are different roles associated with the two communities (for example, in which order the Kinnaurs and Harijans walk in the procession). This suggests that while the two groups have merged in some ways, each community also maintains its own separate identity. For documentation purposes, this obviously poses a challenge. The question is how to capture this complex picture in a language documentation project.

2.6 The 'one language=one culture' hypothesis

The above description shows that Kinnauris and Harijans have lived together for such a long time that their languages and their socio-cultural traditions have merged to the extent that a "one language=one culture" ideology does not do justice to the languages and cultures of this region. The question then becomes: What kind of an archive format design is more suitable for situations such as these? We will return to this question in section 4.

In the next section we will consider the case of Hindi and Urdu which represents quite a different kind of relation between language and culture.

3. Hindi–Urdu

In the case of Hindi and Urdu, while the linguistic knowledge is shared by the two communities, socio-cultural factors keep the two communities distinct. Here I focus my attention on the spoken variety of Hindi–Urdu from old Delhi.

Linguistically Hindi and Urdu can be considered two varieties of the same linguistic system (and are frequently so considered). Hindi and Urdu share the same grammar, but have two different lexicons (while that of Hindi is more influenced by Sanskrit, the lexicon of Urdu is more Persian-based). Generally, if one understands Hindi, one can also understand Urdu. People with a Muslim background generally speak Urdu and people with a Hindu background generally speak Hindi in the Old Delhi region. Traditionally in this area there are communities where Urdu is the dominant variety and others where Hindi is, and then others where both are prevalent. It is, therefore, not uncommon to have friends or neighbours who speak a different 'language' – Hindi or Urdu. As the two varieties are mutually intelligible, people continue to speak their own variety.

The Hindu and the Muslim communities have two very distinct socio-cultural traditions. Apart from national official celebrations such as Independence Day, the two communities usually continue to celebrate their own festivals and not participate in the
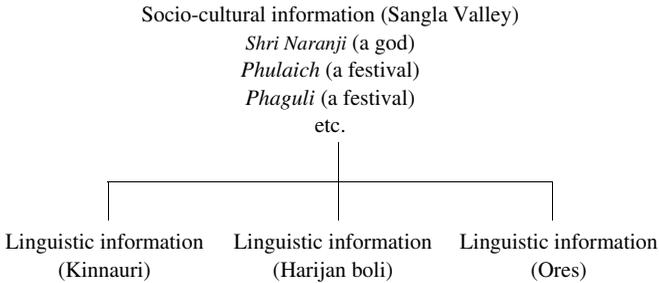
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[10] This difference is not necessarily related to any religious ties, as Beech (Baisakhi), Lohri, and Shivratri are celebrated in other parts of India as part of Hindu festivals.

other community's festivals or cultural traditions, even if, for example, two families otherwise have a close relationship.[11]

4. Issues for digital documentation

The Kinnauri–Harijan boli and Hindi–Urdu case studies raise some methodological issues pertinent to language documentation projects, where decisions concerning matters of cataloguing and classifying the information become urgent.
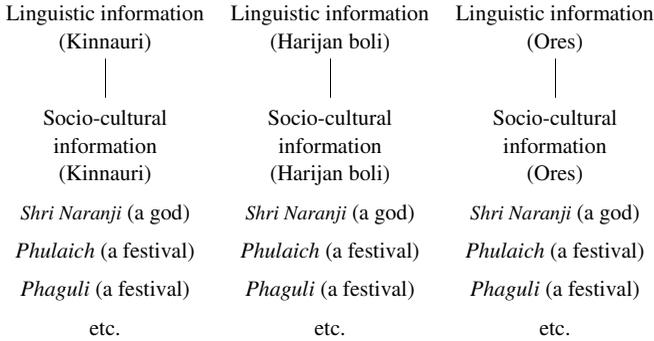
        If we consider the case of Kinnauri–Harijan boli and reflect for a moment on what kind of representation is needed, namely one which captures the hierarchical relation between the linguistic elements and the socio-cultural elements of the documentation, then one conceivable hierarchy for Kinnauri–Harijan boli can be:

Socio-cultural information (Sangla Valley)
Shri Naranji (a god)
Phulaich (a festival)
Phaguli (a festival)
etc.

| Linguistic information (Kinnauri)	Linguistic information (Harijan boli)	Linguistic information (Ores)

        Is this a viable alternative? One advantage of this scheme is that it brings to the forefront the socio-cultural similarities of the two communities, and that the same information is not repeated for each language. It does not, however, necessarily take care of the linguistic consequences of an intensive contact situation.

        On the other hand, if we take the language part of the documentation as our starting point (as in the following scheme), how should we describe the common socio-cultural-geographic information which these languages share in a concise manner, without having to duplicate some of it?

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[11] This, however, does not preclude casual participation in the other community's festivities.

Linguistic information (Kinnauri)	Linguistic information (Harijan boli)	Linguistic information (Ores)
Socio-cultural information (Kinnauri)	Socio-cultural information (Harijan boli)	Socio-cultural information (Ores)
Shri Naranji (a god)	*Shri Naranji* (a god)	*Shri Naranji* (a god)
Phulaich (a festival)	*Phulaich* (a festival)	*Phulaich* (a festival)
Phaguli (a festival)	*Phaguli* (a festival)	*Phaguli* (a festival)
etc.	etc.	etc.

A structure of the Hindi–Urdu documentation, according to this alternative, will then take on the following shape.

Linguistic information
(Hindi–Urdu)

Socio-cultural information (Hindi)   Socio-cultural information (Urdu)
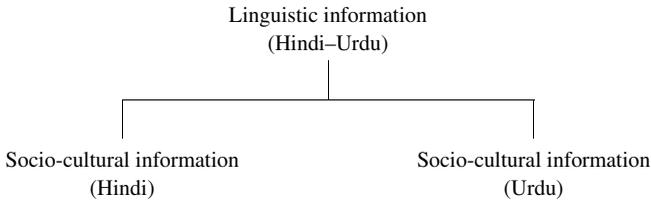
Which of the two alternatives is better or should one opt for a completely different solution? The question needs to be investigated.

5. Concluding remarks

Two quite opposing situations, illustrated here by the cases of Kinnauri-Harijan boli and Hindi-Urdu, were presented in this paper. These different situations warn us to be cautious about adopting the "one language=one culture" ideology either explicitly or implicitly in language documentation projects. Further, the case studies also highlight the need to discuss questions relating to the relationship between language and culture *before* a documentation format is designed because it will very much determine how and what information can be classified and catalogued. Further, the case studies also highlight that our documentation format should be flexible enough to present the picture of a community as close to its reality as possible, enabling us to take into account dialectal differences, identify and classify the various languages spoken in the region, while at the same time showing that, at times, groups share (a lot of) their socio-cultural traditions. The documentation format should also be able to take care of instances where the situation is

quite the reverse, where we are dealing which one language linguistically, but two or several rather distinct socio-cultural traditions.

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