

Mother tongue in education: a step towards preservation of language diversity of the Himalayas

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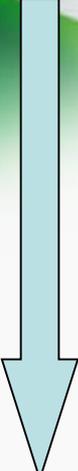
According to the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger the status of many languages in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh varies from vulnerable to critically endangered

These languages:

- are mostly spoken in daily communication at home and within the neighborhood
- have no official status
- have no standard norm
- do not present at school



According to terminology based on UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment framework:



Safe	language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
Vulnerable	most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
Definitely endangered	children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home

The most salient factor of vitality/endangerment is **intergenerational language transmission**. The main indicator of the language vitality is children's language competence.

According to the results of our fieldwork research among school children in Kullui-spoken area:

- Parents speak Hindi with them (from childhood)
- In school and with friends they speak Hindi
- They speak some Kullui only with grandparents who cannot speak Hindi properly
- Some children can only understand Kullui, but do not speak





What is the main factor of breaking down the intergenerational transmission of Himalayan languages?

In our opinion, it is the educational system.



Kumaoni (Uttarakhand)

- two large dialect continua
- Hindi serves as an official language in both states
- means of oral communication in villages
- not taught in schools

Marwari (Rajasthan)

Vulnerable

?

Safe



Kumaoni (Uttarakhand)

- two large dialect continua
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Vulnerable

17th place on the list of states of India by the level of literacy

Marwari (Rajasthan)

Safe

33rd place on the list of states of India by the level of literacy
the lowest female literacy rate in India



Why the current educational system in India has negative impact on minor languages, particularly Pahari languages:

- right from the primary level, the education is performed in Hindi or English, speaking Pahari in school is unofficially prohibited or not approved in order to improve Hindi/English skills
- the skills of apperceiving and expressing one's own thoughts are developed at the age of 6-7 years mostly due to school education. Children are being taught to express their thoughts not in their native language.
- parents speak Hindi with their preschool children to facilitate their primary education
- the negative image of native languages is created due to incorrect linguistic conceptions and prejudice

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Linguistic misconceptions imposed by today's school education:

- dividing the idioms into bhasha 'language' and boli 'dialect'
- equation between language and script, resulting in idea that any language has to have its own script



Groff, Cynthia, “Language, Education and Empowerment: Voices of Kumauni Young Women in Multilingual India” (2010)

“Most young Kumaunis are being taught that Kumauni is a boli, in contrast to Hindi, among other languages, as bhasha”.

[Groff 2010: 159]

“When I got here to the Ashram... that's when I learned that Kumauni is a boli and that Hindi is a bhasha. Kumauni isn't written”. [Groff 2010: 160]

“I heard Kumauni referred to as “just a spoken language,” “just a boli,” “only a dialect.” The implication seemed to me to be that a boli, as “just” a boli, is in some inferior condition in its progression towards becoming a bhasha, something more advanced or more developed than a boli”. [Groff 2010: 161]

“Kumauni... is a dialect -- what we call boli. It is not a language; it is a dialect. Because when we write Kumauni we write it in Hindi”. [Groff 2010: 165]

“You can't call Kumauni a language. It is a boli. It needs to have a script. Now Kumauni uses Hindi script...” [Groff 2010: 165]



An interesting fact: language is identified with script in all regions of India. For example, it was the base lying beneath the invention of the autochthonous scripts of languages belonging to Munda family:

Santali – Ol Chiki (1925)

Sora – Sorang Sompeng (1936)

Ho – Warang Chiti (1950-e)

Mundari – Bani Hisir (1990-e)

The equalization of language and script seems to date back to the beginning of the XX century or maybe earlier. So it may be easier to invent a new script than to fight the linguistic biases.



A vicious circle: Kumaoni is a *boli*, not *bhasha*, because it is not used in education. And it cannot be used in education because it is just a *boli*

- “Our Kumauni is not recognized as a language. We just speak it. It is **not written**. It is **not used for teaching**”
- “I asked about the poems that are written in Kumauni as possible evidence that Kumauni is not just a spoken language. I also told them about the books in Kumauni that I had seen in Almora. “But those aren't **school books**” [Groff 2010: 165]
- “It is **not used in schools** at all. Hindi is what they call the mother tongue here. If we think about it, Kumauni is our mother tongue, but there are not books in Kumauni -- although there is some poetry and stories written in Kumauni -- but **it's not used in school**. Hindi is considered to be the mother tongue”. [Groff 2010: 154]

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Possible ways to solve the problem of minor languages and education:

- Minor language as a language of education in primary school (as a part of MLE program)
- Minor language as a school subject
- Improving linguistic competence of the students and uprooting the linguistic prejudices

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Minor language as a language of education in primary school (as a part of MLE program)

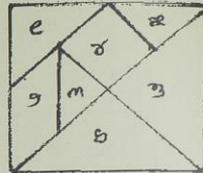
The MLE program becomes more and more popular in India. The core of the program: the education in primary school is conducted in children's native languages.

At the moment the program is promoted actively in Odisha. For example, there are schools where primary education is conducted in the Sora language

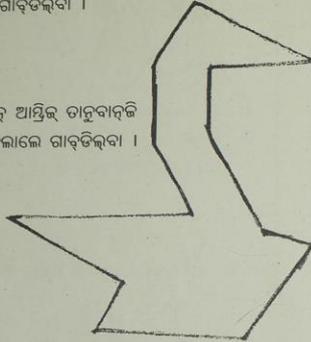
Math text book in Sora (Munda)

ଚଂଗ୍ରାମ୍ ଆଞ୍ଚାଢ଼ନାବା

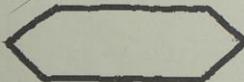
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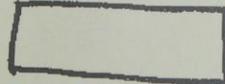
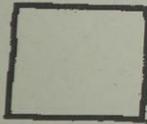
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- ସାକୋନେ (ତ୍ରିଭୁଜ) Δ ଆବ୍‌ମେବା ।



- ବାଗୁ ସାକୋନେ (ତ୍ରିଭୁଜ) ସାବ୍‌ଜାବା ।



- କାନ୍ ଆତି ମନ୍‌ଲଇ ଚାନ୍ଦୁବ୍ ଆବ୍‌ମେବା ।

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ତିକାମନ୍ ସାର୍‌କାସନ୍ ଗିଲ୍‌ଲେ

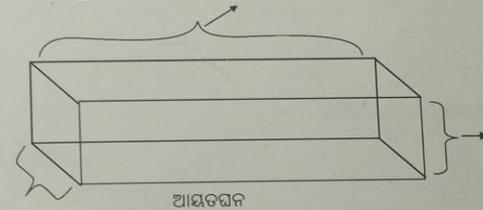
ରିୟାନ୍‌ନ୍ ଆଅନାନ୍ ତିକାମନ୍ ଆତତ ଉନ୍‌ଦୁଲେ ସାକାସନ୍ ଆଗିଲ୍‌ଗିଲ୍‌ବା ଇୟଲେକି । ଗାଆନ ଇତାଲିତାନ୍ ଗବେତିନ୍ । ତିକାମନ୍ ଗାମ୍‌ଲେ ଏ ଉଆନ୍ ତାକାନ୍‌ନେ ଆସୁଡା ଆରାଆ ଉଆନ୍ ଗବେତିନ୍ । ରିୟାନ୍‌ନ୍ ଆଅନାନ୍ ଆତବ୍ ଗାମେତିନ୍ କୁନ୍ ଆତି ଇତାନ୍ ଆସିଲ୍ ଆକ୍ରୁନ୍ (ଆୟତ ଘନ) କାନାବ୍‌ଲିତାନ୍ ଗବେତିନ୍ । ଆମାନ୍ ଗାଲାମ୍‌ଲେ ପ ଆୟତାନ୍ ଉଦ୍‌କି ତୁଦ୍‌କିନ୍, ଆକାନାବ୍ ଲିତାନ୍ କାନ୍‌ଗାଲିନ୍ (ଦୈର୍ଘ୍ୟ), ଲାନ୍‌ଗାତାନ୍ (ପ୍ରସ୍ଥ) ତ ଲାନାଦ୍‌କାନ - (ଉଚ୍ଚତା) ତାକୁ ଆନିନ୍ (ଆୟତାଘନାକାର) ଗାମ୍‌ତେକି । କାନ୍ ଆସିଲ୍ (ଆୟତଘନାକାର) ତିକାମନ୍ ଇତିନ୍ ଇତିନ୍ ଆକାନାବ୍ ଅବ୍‌ଲିତ୍‌ତେ ଆଇତଲ୍‌ବା ।

- କାବା ଆନ୍‌ଲେନ୍ ସର୍‌କ୍‌ସ୍ ଖେଲ୍ ଆଗିଲ୍‌ବା ।



- ଆୟତ ଘନାକାନ୍ କାନାବାନ୍‌କି ଆଞ୍ଜିମ୍ ଆରିକା ସିଂ ଲିତାନ୍ ଆଇତଲ୍‌ବା ।

- କାବା ଆୟତଘନସିତ୍ରନ୍ ଆଇତଲ୍‌ବା ତ ଆଗାଲାମ୍‌ବା ।



ଆୟତଘନାନ୍ ଆକ୍‌ନେଲେମ୍ (ତଳ) ୬ ତ ଆକାନ୍‌ଡାଲିନ୍ (ଧାର) ଡାକିତାନ୍, ବାବ୍ ଆତୁଡ୍‌କି ତୁବ୍‌ମାଲ୍‌ଇ (ଶୀର୍ଷବିନ୍ଦୁ) ଡାକିତାନ୍ ଗିଲ୍‌ଲେ ଆଅବ୍‌ଲିତ୍‌ବା ।



In case of Pahari, introducing the MLE program in schools would solve the majority of the problems caused by the educational system:

- in many cases local schools have local teachers who can speak with children in their local dialect
- children learn to express their thoughts in their native language. The subjects do not require difficult terminology at primary level of education
- Hindi is taught as a subject, so children have to learn it anyway
- the status of Pahari will improve, the language of school education will be considered more prestigious by the speakers. The negative attitude to Pahari will decrease
- parents will have no reason to speak Hindi with their children since birth while knowing that primary education will be in Pahari and Hindi will be taught as a subject.
- some parents do not speak proper Hindi themselves, and children learn their mistakes



Is it necessary to publish school books in
Pahari languages?

If the answer is yes, the standardization is
also necessary. Is it?

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Standardization of Pahari languages

Historically, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand language maps were described in two different ways:

- in Himachal Pradesh, Himachali idioms are recognized as languages (Kullui, Mandeali, etc.)
- in Uttarakhand, two main languages Garhwali and Kumaoni are in fact two large dialect continua with significant differences among the dialects



What is the answer in case of Sora?

Spontaneous standardization: the base for writing school books is the Lanjiya dialect. It is the dialect of Baptized Christians that constitute the most active part of the Sora people. The Bible was translated in Lanjiya Sora. The other dialects of the Sora language are not studied, and the MLE program is not spread in their areas.



Results of standardization of one of the dialects from a continuum and its teaching as a school subject:

- transition to the standard norm, loss of the native dialect (Khakas language, Russia)
- unwilling or rejection to learn a very different dialect (Ket and Evenk languages, Russia)
- competition of two dialects (Khakas, partly Selkup of Tomsk district, Russia)

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Our suggestions for standardization of Pahari languages can be summarized as follows:

- there is no need in standardization, local teachers and kids can communicate in a local dialect, thus maintaining it
- textbooks in Hindi can be used for teaching. In primary schools, their content is rather visual than written
- children must learn to write in Kumaoni, but there is no need to maintain an orthographic standard



Minor language as a school subject

What should be the content of the classes?

- if there is literature in the language, it should be taught
- if there is literature in different dialects of the language, it should be taught while sorting out the dialectal differences (Telengit dialect of Altai language, Russia)
- in any case, folklore should be taught, children should be encouraged to collect folklore by themselves from the elderly generation of speakers



Improving the linguistic competence may be provided by:

- rejecting the linguistic biases like the hierarchy of languages
- introducing a school subject “Language diversity of India”
- popularization of importance of native languages and multilingualism