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Written Ladakhi and the Future of Ladakh's Culture

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Written Ladakhi and the future of Ladakh's culture in the newly formed Union Territory of Ladakh, India. The Ladakhi language is at a critical pivotal period. Its survival in the next two generations depends directly on the introduction of the Ladakhi language in its written form in the educational system. Using written Ladakhi for real communication is the key to survival. Spoken Ladakhi is still widely used in the home and in public, as well as at formal events, All India Radio Leh, television, and millions of audio and video recordings on social media and internet sites. However, because Ladakhi is not used in schools, the next generation is likely to find other languages more suitable for daily use, and the language is on the verge of extinction. Historically, no doubt, Ladakh and several other regions of the Indian Himalayas have shared a common literary heritage with Tibet. The Ladakhi language and culture have immense potential for development: it is shared by Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and others; the culture is valued by many non-local Indians and tourists; and it houses a major monument of world literature, the Kesar Epic. Therefore, an effort is being made in the present article to highlight the existing written corpus in Ladakhi and provide some information about the differences between literary varieties present in the region, and some language policy issues facing the Ladakhi language, its survival and potential development.

Keywords: Written Ladakhi; Ladakh's Culture; Language Policy; Central Ladakhi

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1. Introduction

Currently about 7,000 languages are spoken in the world. More than 80% of the languages (*i.e.*> 5,600 languages) are spoken by communities of fewer than 100,000 speakers, representing less than 1% of the world's population. The number of spoken languages is rapidly declining due to globalization and the national linguistic policies of many countries. The great majority of languages have not developed a written form. According to Wikipedia's list of written languages, fewer than 300 written languages are currently being used.[1]

Fewer than 40 scripts are commonly used in the world out of which *only fifteen scripts date from more than a millennium ago* (Tournadre 2016, and the websites sorosoro.org and ethnologue). The Tibetan script also called Sambhota script�སམ་རྟོ་ཏའི་ཡི་གེ(for the name of its developer) is one of these fifteen scripts.

Languages that do not use a written form for their education system are in danger of disappearing rapidly.

The present article shows that Ladakhi already has a significant written corpus. We provide information about the differences between literary varieties present in the region and some language policy issues facing the Ladakhi language, its survival and potential development.

2. The Various Names for Written Ladakhi

Ladakhi and Tibetan belong to the Tibetic language family, which includes a dozen languages derived from Old Tibetan: Common Tibetan (a variety of Central Tibetan), Amdo, Northern Kham, Balti, Ladakhi,[2] Purik Skat,[3] Dzongkha, Lhoke (Sikkim Bhotia, also called Denjongke), Sherpa, Sharkhok, Spiti, Choča-ngača, and many other smaller languages spoken not only in Tibet but also across the Himalayas in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan, and marginally Myanmar (for detail, see Tournadre & Suzuki 2023)[1].

The main written languages used in Ladakh are English, Urdu and Hindi, and two Tibetic languages: Tibetan and Ladakhi. However, currently, both written Ladakhi and written Tibetan are used much less often in Ladakh than written English, Hindi or Urdu.

For Buddhist religious and cultural uses, written Tibetan (or Classical Tibetan) has been considered the Latin of High Asia and benefits from great prestige.

To designate the written language of Ladakh, several terms including *Bhoti, Bodyik, Bodhi* and *Choskat* are used, but each of these is ambiguous and has generated confusion.In addition, the language, the script and religion are confused in many people's minds, (see below, Section 2.1). In Kargil district, Muslims generally prefer the termཡི་གེ 'Yige' for both the Tibetan script and the written language, and the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council in Kargil held a week-long certificate program on 'Yige' reading and writing in August 2024 for Kargil's youth.

In any case, there is no consensus about the designation of the language, but many people simply choose to refer to the spoken and written language of Ladakh as 'Ladakhi'.

2.1. Bhoti

The term *Bhoti*, locally pronounced /boṭi/, has been used occasionally since the early 1990s to refer to spoken and written forms of Ladakhi, as well as written Tibetan and other Himalayan languages. In this sense, it is roughly equivalent to the English term 'Tibetic'. The word བྷོ་ཊི*bho.Ṭi* 'Bhoti' is newly coined in Tibetan script and in English from the Sanskrit adjective भोटीय *Bhoṭīya* 'Tibetan', itself derived from the Tibetan word བོད་*bod* 'Tibet'.

The term Bhoti is sometimes used today in a broad sense to designate a fantasized Tibetic language spoken throughout the Indian Himalayas, in some cases also including non-Tibetic languages such as Tamang, Gurung or Thakali. In the Himalayas in India, Nepal and Bhutan, along the border with Tibet, there are a number of Tibetic (or Bhoti) languages derived from Old Tibetan. They include Dzongkha (Bhutan); Lhoke or Denjonke (India); Sherpa, Loke or Mus-

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[1]The Ethnologue website: "The exact number of unwritten languages is hard to determine. Ethnologue (24th edition) has data to indicate that of the currently listed 7,139 living languages, 4,065 have a developed writing system". (source: ethnologue.com 2022). However, in most of these languages, the written systems were proposed by missionaries and are not currently used by the people, who are illiterate in their own language. Moreover, when a written system has been developed, the corpus of texts is usually limited to extracts of the Bible or some tales.

[2]Locally called /ladaks-e skat/.

[3]Locally called /purik skat/ or /purikpe skat/ but officially sometimes called Purki, Purgi, or Purigi.

tangi, Dolpo and Yolmo (Nepal); and several other languages spoken by small communities. However, all these languages *cannot be considered a single language.* They do not allow mutual understanding.[4] The term Bhoti may be appropriate to designate the whole 'Tibetan language family' (རྫོ་ཏིའི་སྐད་ཡིག་གི་ཁྱིམ་རྒྱུད་*bhoTi'i skad yig gi khyim rgyud), i.e.* the family of languages derived from Old Tibetan, and spoken not only in Tibet, but across the Himalayas.

In some Himalayan regions, the term Bhoti is used in school textbooks and other documents to refer to the local Tibetic language: Ladakhi, Spiti or Lhoke, etc. depending on the region. In order to avoid such ambiguity, we suggest specifying 'Ladakhi Bhoti', 'Spiti Bhoti' or 'Lhoke Bhoti,' etc.

The term Bhoti is also used in a very different sense, to refer to the written Tibetan language used over a huge territory in the Himalayas stretching from the Union Territory of Ladakh to Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh. This written language, which is basically Classical Tibetan or a more modern variety, is mainly used by religious Buddhist people and some lay intellectuals. In this sense, Bhoti fulfills a similar role to Latin in medieval Europe. It may be considered the common written language of the Tibetic-speaking regions of the Indian and Nepalese Himalayas, functioning as the main medium of scholarly exchange, especially in the field of Buddhist studies, but not only[2–4]. (Konchok Tashi, 2021, pp. 8–9)[5].

When the related term Bhotia is used as an ethnic label, Ghosh (2008, p.1) remarks, for example, "The Bhotias are generally called by various names like Bhotia, Bhutia, Bhote, Bhuti, Budhi and so on. The neighbouring peoples other than the Bhotias belonging to different parts of the Indian Himalayas, identify the Bhotias as distinct from themselves. The above names identify the group of people who had come from *Bhoṭa deśa, i.e., Bod yul.* So the above namings are the local variations used by the neighbouring groups[6]."

The term 'Bhoti' has acquired a political dimension. This term is used in order to seek official recognition for Ladakhi, Lhoke and other Tibetic languages in the 'eighth schedule' of the Indian constitution.[5] Using 'Bhoti' federates

many related languages and thus allows the integration of a greater number of speakers, whereas Central Ladakhi or Lhoke alone would each represent less than 100,000 speakers.

The choice of the term Bhoti over 'Classical Tibetan' is a conscious part of the strategy of the leaders of the movement belonging to diverse peoples in the Indian Himalayas to affirm their status as a part and parcel of the Indian identity, (See Konchok Tashi 2021)[2].

2.2. Bodyik

The term *Bodyik*, reflecting the word བོད་ཡིག*bod.yig* "Tibetan letters," is commonly used in Ladakh to refer to either the Tibetan written language or the Sambhota (Tibetan) alphabet or script. Locally pronounced /bodik/ or /budik/, it is also attested as *Bodyig, Bodik,* and *Budik.*

As noted rightly by Zeisler (2006): "Buddhist scholars usually do not differentiate between language and script, and [think] that spoken Tibetan and the Tibetan script is in a way inseparable from its use for the Buddhist scriptures"[7]. The Tibetan script, which historically descends from Indic scripts, is indeed separable from the Buddhist scriptures, as it has been used to write texts of other traditions: Bön, Christian, Islamic, and Hindu texts, as well as all kinds of secular purposes: news, poetry, politics, history, science, etc., not related to Buddhism.

The confusion between a script and a language is problematic: obviously, the same language or closely related dialects may be written in two different scripts: this is the case, for example, for Tajik and Persian, which allow mutual intelligibility but are written respectively with Arabo-Persian and Russian script. The same is true for Hindi and Urdu which are written in different scripts, but the spoken languages are mutually intelligible and very close.

Conversely, totally different languages such as English, French, Indonesian and Swahili (in Africa) are written with the Roman script. Tajik, an Iranian language and Russian, a Slavic language, are both written in the Cyrillic script although they belong to different language families. Likewise, Sanskrit, Nepali, Hindi, Marathi and several other languages

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[4]Similarly, it would be incorrect to speak of a general Germanic language which would subsume all the existing Germanic languages (German, English Dutch, Swedish, Icelandic, etc.). Germanic (as opposed to German) is not used to designate a specific language but refers to the whole language family.

[5]The Ladakhi MP, Jamyang Tsering Namgyal introduced a Private Member's Bill: 'The Constitution (Amendment) Bill 2022, (Amendment of 8th Schedule)' in Lok Sabha, India's Parliament, on 1st April 2022.

are written in the Nagari script.

2.3. Bodhi

The term *Bodhi*, locally pronounced /bodi/ or /budi/, was used for decades as the name of the Ladakhi language in official documents and as the name of an academic subject in the Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir State. According to Venerable Konchok Phanday.[6] the term was mistakenly coined in English by Pandit teachers in Leh as a romanization of *bod.yig* "Tibetan letters."

It is unrelated to བོ་དྷི་*bodhi*, the Sanskrit term for the 'Enlightenment of the Buddha'.

The term 'Bodhi' is not normally written in Tibetan script, but it is very rarely attested as བྷོ་དྷི་*bho.dhi*.[7] With this orthography, this word has no meaning in Tibetan or Ladakhi. Thus, the term Bodhi in Ladakhi, English, Hindi or Urdu is inappropriate to designate any Tibetic language.

2.4. Choskat

Choskat ཆོས་སྐད་*chos.skad* "dharma language," pronounced /čhoskat/ in Ladakhi, is used to refer to the Tibetan written language, usually Classical Tibetan. The term is useful to refer to some specific lexical items and literary styles used in Buddhist texts, but cannot designate a 'dharma language' since Choskat does not have any distinct grammar from Classical Tibetan, just as Biblical English is not a different language from English, and simply corresponds to a style or a register of English based on the Authorized ("King James") version of the Bible. In addition, if Choskat 'Dharma language' is simply the equivalent of the 'Written Tibetan language', then it is misleading since this language is used everyday to write articles or books dealing with all possible fields (history, politics, science, art, etc.) and is not restricted to Buddhism.

In many Tibetic languages, the term Choskat is used in contrast to Phalskat (ཕལ་སྐད་*phal.skad*) "the ordinary language" denoting the spoken language, but in some languages it carries a derogatory meaning. It also contrasts with Yulskat (ཡུལ་སྐད་ *yul.skad*) which refers to any spoken dialect.

In order to clarify all the above mentioned issues, in this article, we will simply use the terms *written Tibetan* (བོད་ཀྱི་ཡིག་སྐད་*bod.kyi yig.skad*)and *written Ladakhi* (ལ་དྭགས་སི་ཡི་གེ་ *la.dwags.si yi.ge*).For the spoken languages, we will specify the language or dialect: *e.g.* Central Ladakhi (ལ་དྭགས་སི་གཞུང་སྐད་*la.dwags.si gzhung.skad*),spoken in the Leh area; Purik Skat (པུ་རིག་སྐད་ *pu.rig skad*) spoken in the Kargil area; and Common Tibetan (སྤྱི་སྐད་ *spyi.skad*), based on a variety of Central Tibetan.

3. Dialectal Diversity within Ladakh

A number of Tibetic languages and dialects are spoken in Ladakh, and may be divided into two large groups. Zeisler divides them into the Kenhat dialects (གྱེན་སྐད་*gyen.skad*) a.k.a. Western Innovative Tibetan, spoken in the upper Indus area, and the Shamskat dialects (གཤམ་སྐད་*gsham.skad*) a.k.a. Western Archaic Tibetan:

- "Western Archaic Tibetan: the non-tonal 'conservative' dialects of the north-eastern and central areas: Baltistan, Purik, Lower Ladakh, Nubra, and Leh, showing initial and final consonant clusters.
- Western Innovative Tibetan: the 'innovative' dialects of the south-eastern areas: Upper Indus, Changthang, and Zangskar,[8] where the clusters have been reduced and tonal features can be found." (Zeisler, 2011)[8].

Out of all these dialects, two languages of communication have emerged and gained a dominant position in Ladakh: Central Ladakhi spoken in the Leh area and Purik Skat spoken in the Kargil area. Almost all the Tibetic speakers of Leh District and Zangskar in Kargil District can understand Central Ladakhi, so this variety already serves as a lingua franca. The same can be said of the Kargil variety, Purik Skat, which serves as a lingua franca in most of Kargil District. Many speakers of Purik Skat can also understand Central Ladakhi.

4. The Relationship between Ladakhi and Tibetan

Both Ladakhi and Tibetan belong to the Tibetic language family, which includes 76 groups of dialects (or lan-

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[6] Personal communication to Rebecca Norman, on November 14, 2023.

[7] For example, it occurs in the brochure 'Bhoti language and its importance', published by the Central Institute of Indian Languages. Mysore. Himalaya Buddhist Association. Delhi. 2008.

[8] The name of the language in written Tibetan and Ladakhi is ཟངས་དཀར་Zangs.dkar but it is locally pronounced /zāhar/ and officially written Zanskar. In the romanization used in this article, we use Zangskar, reflecting the Central Ladakhi pronunciation /zangskar/.

guages) derived from Old Tibetan (Tournadre & Suzuki 2023)[1]. The relation between Ladakhi and Tibetan is comparable to the relation between French and Spanish, which both belong to the Romance family. Like French and Spanish, Central Ladakhi and Tibetan do not allow mutual understanding.[9] For example, when His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives teachings in Ladakh, a translator is required. Buddhist Ladakhis are pleased with this opportunity to understand His Holiness's teaching in their own language. For instance, during his teaching in Choglamsar (28–30 July 2022) on Shantideva's 'A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life', he was translated into Central Ladakhi by Geshe Lobzang Tsewang.

The differences between Central Ladakhi and Common Tibetan include the phonology, the grammar and the lexicon. Both differ from Classical Tibetan in their grammar and lexicon. We will illustrate some of these differences below.

4.1. Phonological and Lexical Differences

Regarding the phonological differences, many letters (pre-radicals and suffixes) which are silent in Common Tibetan are still pronounced in Central Ladakhi (see Norman, 2019). A description of the phonological differences is beyond the scope of this article. (See Norman, 2019 and Tournadre & Suzuki, 2023)[1, 9].

Concerning the lexicon, many lexical items present in Central Ladakhi are not used in Common Tibetan, but reflect forms found in Classical Tibetan. See **Table 1** below:

Clearly, while both Central Ladakhi and Common Tibetan are closely related to Classical Tibetan, there are enough differences to consider them three separate languages. In many cases, each of the descendant languages uses a different Classical root for its common modern word (see 'to do' and 'yesterday' in the table above.) In some cases, the Classical root has undergone a semantic shift (see 'to go' above). In some cases, one or the other of the modern languages uses a word that is distinct from Classical Tibetan (see 'food' above).

4.2. Grammatical Differences

Every language (and even each dialect of a single language) has its own grammar. This is the case even when languages are derived from the same older language[10] and are closely related. For example, Spanish, Italian and French, which are all derived from a variety of Latin, do not share the same grammar today. Similarly, Central Ladakhi, Common Tibetan, and Dzongkha, which are all derived from Old Tibetan, have developed their own distinct grammars. The development of specific grammatical features is a universal phenomenon of the evolution of languages. As they evolve, languages undergo changes in their phonology, lexicon, and grammar. Likewise, the grammar of Classical Tibetan is not the same as that of Common Tibetan as spoken nowadays in Central Tibet and in the diaspora.

However, some traditional Buddhist scholars in Ladakh assert that the Ladakhi language does not have grammar, which is of course not true as mentioned above. For these traditional Buddhist scholars, 'grammar' essentially means the Classical Tibetan treatises (སུམ་ཅུ་པ་*sum.cu.pa* and རྟགས་ཀྱི་འཇུག་པ་*rtags.kyi.'jug.pa*) allegedly composed and developed by Thonmi Sambhota in the 7th Century. It is important to understand that these two grammatical treatises are based on the spoken language of the 7th Century. Moreover, this ancient and 'sacred' grammar does not describe the whole grammar of Classical Tibetan (see Tournadre 2010), and is not at all adapted to describe Modern Literary Tibetan[10].

Let us briefly illustrate just a few of the grammatical differences between Central Ladakhi, Common Tibetan and Classical Tibetan. We will restrict our observations to some of the main salient grammatical differences: interrogative pronouns, nominal cases, nominalizers and verb auxiliaries, although the grammatical differences are much more widespread than just these.

4.2.1. Interrogative Pronouns

Interrogative pronouns in Central Ladakhi are usually closer to Classical Tibetan than Common Tibetan as shown in the **Table 2**:

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[9]The language spoken by H.H. the Dalai Lama is Common Tibetan. During his teachings, he often quotes texts in Classical Tibetan (which is difficult for many Tibetans to understand), but he gives commentary in Common Tibetan.

[10]A proto-language which is usually reconstructed by linguists on the basis of attested languages which are derived from this historical language.

Table 1. Lexical differences between Central Ladakhi, Common Tibetan and Classical.

Central Ladakhi	Common Tibetan	Classical Tibetan	Translation
སྐྱོད་ *skyod* (hon.), ཕེབས་ *phebs* (high hon.)	ཕེབས་ *phebs* (hon.)	སྐྱོད་ *skyod*, ཕེབས་ *phebs*	to go, to come (hon.)
ཆ་ *cha* (< Classical ཆས་ *chas* 'to set out')	འགྲོ་ *'gro*	འགྲོ་ *'gro*	to go (pres., fut.)
བཅོས་ *bcos* (< Classical བཅོས་ *bcos* 'to make', 'to correct,' 'to treat')	བྱེད་ *byed*	བྱེད་ *byed*	to do
སོང་ *song*	ཕྱིན་ *phyin*	སོང་ *song*, ཕྱིན་ *phyin*	to go (past)
སལ་ *sal* (< Classical སྩལ་ *stsal* 'to bestow')	གནང་ *gnang*	གནང་ *gnang* སྩལ་ *stsal*	to give, to bestow (hon.)
མཛད་ *mdzad*	གནང་ *gnang*	མཛད་ *mdzad* གནང་ *gnang*	to do (hon.)
ཚོར་ *tshor* (< Classical ཚོར་ *tshor* 'to feel') ཐོས་ *thos* 'to hear' (hon. object)	གོ་ *go*	ཐོས་ *thos*, གོ་ *go*	to hear
འཇིགས་ *'jigs*	ཞེད་ *zhed*	འཇིགས་ *'jigs*	to be afraid
མདང་ *mdang*	ཁ་སང་ *kha.sang*	མདང་ *mdang*, ཁ་རྩང་ *kha.rtsang*	yesterday
གོས་ལག་ *gos.lag*	དུག་སློག་ *dug.slog*	གོས་ *gos*	clothing
ཁར་ཇི་ *khar.ji*	ཁ་ལག་ *kha.lag*	ཟ་མ་ *za.ma*	food
ཞག་ *zhag*	ཉི་མ་ *nyi.ma*	ཉིན་ *nyin*, ཉི་མ་ *nyi.ma*, ཞག་ *zhag*	day (duration)
སོ་མ་ *so.ma*	གསར་པ་ *gsar.pa*	སོ་མ་ *so.ma*, གསར་པ་ *gsar.pa*	new

Table 2. Interrogative pronouns in Ladakhi and Tibetan.

Central Ladakhi	Common Tibetan	Classical Tibetan	Translation
ཅི་ *ci*	ག་རེ་ *ga.re*	ཅི་ *ci*, གང་ *gang*	what
ནམ་ *nam*	ག་དུས་ *ga.dus*	ནམ་ *nam*	when
ཚམ་ *tsam*	ག་ཚོད་ *ga.tshod*	ཇི་ཚམ་ *ji.tsam*	how much, how many
སུ་ *su*	སུ་ *su*	སུ་ *su*	who

4.2.2. Nominal Case Forms

Written Ladakhi and written Tibetan exhibit some differences in their nominal case systems. The main differences are in the instrumental and comparative cases. The forms of the genitive, the agentive and the dative are also slightly different, as shown in the **Table 3** below. There are many variants (allomorphs) depending on the last letter of the preceding word, in both Ladakhi and written Tibetan.

Table 3. Nominal cases in Ladakhi and Tibetan.

Central Ladakhi	Classical Tibetan	Translation
∅ (no marker)	∅ (no marker)	Direct (or absolutive)
འི་ *'i* (or ཡི་ *yi*); གི་ *gi*; ངི་ *ngi*; དི་ *di*; ནི་ *ni*; བི་ *bi*; མི་ *mi*; རི་ *ri*; ལི་ *li*; སི་ *si* [11]	འི་ *'i* / ཡི་ *yi*; ཀྱི་ *kyi*; གི་ *gi*; གྱི་ *gyi*	Genitive
ས་ *-s* (or ཡིས་ *yis*); གིས་ *g*; ངིས་ *ngis*; དིས་ *dis*; ནིས་ *nis*; བིས་ *bis*; མིས་ *mis*; རིས་ *ris*; ལིས་ *lis*; སིས་ *sis*	ས་ *-s* (or ཡིས་ *yis*); ཀྱིས་ *kyis*; གིས་ *gis*; གྱིས་ *gyis*	Agentive (or ergative)
དང་ *dang*/ (or the variant ནང་ *nang*)	Identical to the agentive (see above)	Instrumental
ལ་ *la*; འ་ *'a*; ག་ *ga*; ང་ *nga*; ན་ *na*; བ་ *ba*; མ་ *ma*	ལ་ *la*; སུ་ *su*; རུ་ *ru*; ར་ *-r*; ཏུ་ *tu*; དུ་ *du*	Dative
སང་ *sang*	ལས་ *las*	Comparative
ནས་ *nas*	ནས་ *nas*	Ablative

- Direct case

  The direct case (also called absolute) is the same in Ladakhi, Common Tibetan and Classical Tibetan: ∅ (no marker). Some examples in Central Ladakhi:

  (1) ཁོས་ཡི་གེ་བྲིས། *kho-s yi.ge-∅ bris* 'He/she wrote a letter'.

  (2) ཁོ་ངའི་མཛའ་བོ་ཡིན། *kho-∅ nga'i mdza.bo-∅ yin* 'He is my friend'.

- Genitive case

  The genitive markers in written Ladakhi depend on the preceding word-ending consonant sound, but they are all generally pronounced /i/. Here are some examples:

  (3) མེན་ཏོག་གི་ལོ་མ་[12] *men.tog-gi lo.ma* 'petal of a flower'

  (4) ཨ་ཞང་ངི་ཁང་པ་ *a.zhang-ngi khang.pa* 'Uncle's house'

  (5) ཆོན་ནི་དཔེ་ར། *chon-ni dpe.ra* 'meaningless talk'

  (6) ཁབ་བི་མིག *khab-bi mig* 'eye of a needle'

  (7) སྨོན་ལམ་མི་ལག་པ། *smon.lam-mi lag.pa* 'Monlam's hand'

  (8) ཀུན་མཛེས་སི་མགོ *kun.mdzes-si mgo* 'Kunzes's head'

  These contrast with the genitive markers used in Classical Tibetan below:

  (9) མེ་ཏོག་གི་འདབ་མ། *me.tog-gi 'dab.ma* 'petal of a flower'

  (10) ཨ་ཞང་གི་ཁང་པ་ *a.zhang-gi khang.pa* 'Uncle's house'

  (11) སྐད་ཀྱི་གདངས། *skad-kyi mdangs* 'language intonation'

  (12) རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱི་དེབ། *rgyal.mtshan-gyi deb* 'Gyaltsan's book'

  (13) སྨོན་ལམ་གྱི་ལག་པ། *smon.lam-gyi lag.pa* 'Monlam's hand'

  (14) ཀུན་མཛེས་ཀྱི་མགོ *kun.mdzes-kyi mgo* 'Kunzes's head'

  However, in Common Tibetan, there is no distinction in the pronunciation of the written forms *kyi, gi,* and *gyi.*

  When the word ends with a vowel, འི ('*i*) is added in both Central Ladakhi and Classical Tibetan:

  (15) ལྷ་མོའི་ལག་པ། *lha.mo'i lag.pa* 'Lhamo's hand'

  (16) ཁང་པའི་བདག་པོ། *khang.pa'i bdag.po* 'owner of the house'

  (17) ཨ་མའི་འོ་མ། *a.ma'i 'o.ma* 'mother's milk'

  (18) ངའི་སློབ་དེབ་ *nga'i slob.deb* or ང་ཡི་སློབ་དེབ་ *nga-yi slob.deb* 'my textbook'.

- Agentive case

  Like the genitive markers in Ladakhi, the agentive (or ergative) markers vary according to the preceding word-ending consonant sound. In Central Ladakhi speech, the agentive is pronounced exactly like the genitive, /i/ but in written Ladakhi the ས (*s*) is written, because it is pronounced in other regions of Ladakh, it plays an important grammatical function, and it helps to understand the structure of the sentence.

  (19) ཀུན་མཛེས་སིས་བྲིས། *kun.mdzes-sis bris* 'Kunzes wrote (it)'

  (20) རྒྱལ་མཚན་ནིས་དྲིས། *rgyal.mtshan-nis dris* 'Gyaltsan asked'

  (21) དཀོན་མཆོག་གིས་སྐྱོབས། *dkon.mchog-gis skyobs* 'God protected (him)'

  Note the contrast with Classical Tibetan:

  (22) ཀུན་མཛེས་ཀྱིས་བྲིས། *kun.mdzes-kyis bris* 'Kunzes wrote (it)'

  (23) རྒྱལ་མཚན་གྱིས་དྲིས། *rgyal.mtshan-gyis dris* 'Gyaltsan asked'

  (24) དཀོན་མཆོག་གིས་བསྐྱབས། *dkon.mchog-gis bskyabs* 'God protected (him)'

  Where there is a vowel ending, ས (*-s*) is added in Central Ladakhi, as in Classical Tibetan:

  (25) ཁོས་ཡི་གེ་བྲིས། *kho-s yi.ge bris* 'He/she wrote a letter'

  (26) ངས་རིན་པོ་ཆེ་ལ་ཞུས། *nga-s rin.po.che-la zhus* 'I said [it] to the high lama'

  Instrumental case

  The instrumental case is དང་ *-dang* in Central Ladakhi (often pronounced/-nang/), but in Tibetan, it is simply identical to the agentive (or ergative):

  Ladakhi instrumental:

  (27) ངས་སྨྱུ་གུ་དང་ཡི་གེ་བྲིས་པིན། *Ngas smyu.gu-dang yi.ge bris-pin* 'I wrote [the] letter with a pencil.'

  (28) གྲི་དང་གཏུབས། *gri-dang btubs* 'cut with a knife.'

  Tibetan instrumental:

  (29) ངས་སྨྱུ་གུས་ཡི་གེ་བྲིས་པ་ཡིན། *Ngas smyu.gu-s yi.ge bris-pa.yin* 'I wrote [the] letter with a pencil.'

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[11]The Ladakhi cases provided here are the written forms. In the spoken language, in Central Ladakhi, there is no difference between ergative and genitive cases, which are both pronounced /-i/. The same is true for the dative which has six forms in written Ladakhi, but only two distinct pronunciations in Central Ladakhi: /-a/ and /-la/. For detail about the spoken cases, see e.g., Zeisler (2007); Tournadre & Suzuki (2023).

[12]Or ལོབ་མ་ *lob.ma*

(30) གྲིས་གཏུབ། *gri-s gtub* 'cut with a knife.' (In Classical Tibetan, the variant ཡིས་ *-yis* is also used: གྲི་ཡིས་གཏུབ། *gri-yis gtub*).

- Dative case

The dative case also slightly differs between Ladakhi and Tibetan.

The dative markers in Ladakhi depend on the preceding word-ending consonant sound:

(31) ཀུན་མཛེས་ལ་བཏངས་པིན། *kun.mdzes-la btangs.pin* 'I gave [it] to Kunzes.'

(32) ཨ་ཞང་ང་བཤད་པིན། *a.zhang-nga bshad.pin* 'I told Uncle.'

(33) རིན་པོ་ཆེ་གླེའ་ཕེབས། *rin.po.che gle-'a phebs* 'The high lama went to Leh.'

In Common Tibetan the dative marker is ལ་ *la* (the allomorph ར་ *r* is also used after a vowel), for instance,

(34) ཀུན་མཛེས་ལ་སྤྲད་པ་ཡིན། *kun.mdzes-la sprad.pa.yin* 'I gave [it] to Kunze.'

(35) ཨ་ཞང་ལ་ལབ་པ་ཡིན། *a.zhang-la lab.pa.yin* 'I told Uncle.'

(36) རིན་པོ་ཆེ་གླེ་ལ་ཕེབས། *rin.po.che gle-la phebs* 'The high lama went to Leh.'

- Comparative case

In Central Ladakhi, the comparative is the genitive followed by *sang*:

(37) ལ་དྭགས་སི་སང་བོད་ཆེ་བ་ཡོད་ཀྱག། *la-dwags-si* **sang** *bod che.ba yod.kyag* 'Tibet is larger than Ladakh.'

(38) བོད་དི་སང་ལ་དྭགས་ཆུང་བ་ཡོད་ཀྱག། *bod-di* **sang** *la-dwags chung.ba yod.kyag* 'Ladakh is smaller than Tibet.'

In Common Tibetan, the comparative is the direct case followed by *las*:

(39) ལ་དྭགས་ལས་བོད་ཆེ་གི་རེད། *la-dwags* **las** *bod che.gi red* 'Tibet is larger than Ladakh.'

(40) བོད་ལས་ལ་དྭགས་ཆུང་གི་རེད། *bod* **las** *la-dwags chung.gi red* 'Ladakh is smaller than Tibet.'

- Ablative case

The ablative case is the same in Central Ladakhi and Common Tibetan: ནས་ *nas* 'from'. Classical Tibetan uses the same ནས་ *nas*, as well as ལས་ *las* (which is also used for the comparative).

An example that is the same in Central Ladakhi and Classical Tibetan:

(41) ལྷ་ས་ནས་ཕེབས། *lha.sa-nas phebs* 'He/she came from Lhasa.'

4.2.3. Nominalizers

Nominalizers play an important role in the grammars of Tibetic languages. They allow transforming a verb into a noun, and thus share some functions of the infinitive in European languages. They are also used along with verb auxiliaries to form verb endings. The nominalizers differ in the various Tibetic grammars. We provide here only a few of the most common ones in **Table 4** below:

As we can see from the above chart, the infinitive differs strikingly in the three varieties (Ladakhi, Common Tibetan and Classical Tibetan). Each of these languages has dozens of nominalizers.

Some infinitive verbs in Ladakhi:

(42) ཟ་ཅེས་ *za-ces* 'to eat'

(43) དཔེ་ཆ་སིལ་ཅེས་ *dpe.cha sil-ces* 'to read a traditional book'

(44) གླུ་བཏང་ཅེས་ *glu btang-ces* 'to sing'

The same in Common Tibetan:

(45) ཟ་ཡག་ *za-yag* 'to eat'

(46) དཔེ་ཆ་ལྟ་ཡག་ *dpe.cha lta-yag* 'to read'

(47) གཞས་བཏང་ཡག་ *gzhas btang-yag* 'to sing.'

In Classical Tibetan:

(48) ཟ་རྒྱུ་ *za-rgyu* 'to eat'

(49) དཔེ་ཆ་ལྟ་རྒྱུ་ *dpe.cha lta-rgyu* 'to read'

(50) གླུ་ལེན་རྒྱུ་ *glu len-rgyu* 'to sing.'

In all three languages:

(51) ཟ་ས་ *za-sa* 'place of eating.'

4.2.4. Verb Tenses and Verb Stem Alternation

In Classical Tibetan, the verb has up to 4 different single-syllable forms which indicate tense and modality (imperative); the verb is often followed by an auxiliary, but it is not compulsory. Most of the modern Tibetic languages, including Ladakhi and Common Tibetan (except Amdo language and a few others), have lost this set of stems for each verb. Instead, they use a single stem (usually based on the Classical present or past stem), and indicate tense or modality with suffixes and auxiliaries, except for a very few irregular verbs. In Central Ladakhi, the verb stem undergoes regular morphological change to indicate imperative and past. In both of these modern languages, there is no separate future stem.

In Central Ladakhi, the past verb stems of intentional verbs (both transitive and intransitive) are constructed with a

Table 4. Some common nominalizers.

Central Ladakhi	Common Tibetan	Classical Tibetan	Translation
མཁན་ *mkhan*	མཁན་ *mkhan* པ་pa	མཁན་ *mkhan* པ་pa	Agentive and patientive nominalizer
ས་ *sa*	ས་ *sa*	ས་ *sa*	Locative nominalizer
ཅེས་ *ces*, also spelled ཅས་ *cas*, བྱེས་ *byes*, or བྱས་ *byas*< Classical ཆས་ *chas* 'thing'	ཡག་ *yag*	རྒྱུ་ *rgyu*	Patientive nominalizer and infinitive

regular morphological derivation: adding the ས་ /s/ suffix to the Ladakhi present verb stem. For unintentional verbs, the past and present stem forms are the same. The only irregular verbs are the very common words for 'to go' and 'to eat.'

In Central Ladakhi, the imperative stem is formed by regular morphological changes to the present stem, except the two irregular verbs. If the vowel in the present stem is the unwritten /a/ vowel, it changes to /o/ for the imperative.[13] If the vowel in the present stem is not followed by a consonant (an open syllable), the imperative has an ས་ /s/ after the vowel.

In Common Tibetan, as in Ladakhi, the number of different stems has been reduced from the Classical Tibetan, but in some cases, Central Ladakhi and Common Tibetan have settled on different forms (see **Table 5** below). In Common Tibetan the relation between the present, past and imperative are not as morphologically regular as in Central Ladakhi.

In modern Tibetic languages, tense, aspect and modality (imperative) are mainly expressed through the use of auxiliaries. Here are some examples of the progressive, simple present, simple past, perfect and future, which are the main tenses and aspects in the three languages:

Progressive: '(I) am planting barley.'

(52) ནས་བཏབ་བིན་ཡོད། *nas btab-**bin.yod*** [Central Ladakhi]

(53) ནས་བཏབ་ཀྱི་ཡོད། *nas btab-**kyi.yod*** [14] [Common Tibetan]

(54) ནས་འདེབས་(བཞིན་ཡོད།) *nas 'debs*(-***bzhin.yod***) [Classical Tibetan]

Simple present: '(I) plant barley.'

(1) ནས་བཏབ་བད། *nas btab-**bad*** [Central Ladakhi]

(2) ནས་བཏབ་ཀྱི་ཡོད། *nas btab-**kyi.yod*** [Common Tibetan]

(3) ནས་འདེབས་(ཀྱི་ཡོད།) *nas 'debs*(-***kyi.yod***) [Classical Tibetan]

Simple past: '(I) planted barley.'

(4) ནས་བཏབས་པིན། *nas btabs-**pin*** [Central Ladakhi]

(5) ནས་བཏབ་(པ་)ཡིན། *nas btab*(-***pa*)*yin*** [15] [Common Tibetan]

(6) ནས་བཏབ་(པ་ཡིན་)། *nas btab*(-***pa.yin***) [Classical Tibetan]

Perfect: '(s/he) has planted barley.'

(7) ནས་བཏབས་ཏོག *nas btabs-**tog*** [Central Ladakhi]

(8) ནས་བཏབ་བཞག *nas btab-**bzhag*** [Common Tibetan]

(9) ནས་བཏབ་(སྟེ་འདུག) *nas btab-(**ste.'dug)*** [Classical Tibetan]

Future: '(s/he) will plant barley.'

(10) ནས་བཏབ་ཅེན། *nas btab-**cen*** [Central Ladakhi]

(11) ནས་བཏབ་ཀྱི་རེད། *nas btab-**kyi.red*** [Common Tibetan]

(12) ནས་གདབ་(པར་བྱ) *nas gdab(-**par.bya)*** [Classical Tibetan]

Clearly, the three varieties exhibit a very different grammar for the various tenses and aspects. They mainly differ in their auxiliaries, but also sometimes in verb stems. In addition, the auxiliaries are not compulsory in Classical Tibetan.[16]

4.2.5. Morphology and Semantics of Auxiliary Verbs

The verb grammar of Central Ladakhi presents many features that are not present in Common Tibetan.

For example, Ladakhi uses an auxiliary རག་ -*rag* /rak/, derived from Classical Tibetan *grag* 'to sound', to convey sensory but non-visual information (see Tournadre 2023)[11]. This auxiliary is not attested in Classical Tibetan, Common Tibetan, Central Purik or Balti, although it is attested in a few other Tibetic languages such as Kham (see Tour-

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[13] In the case of some honorific verbs, the vowel remains /a/. (see Koshal 1979: 225)

[14] Unlike Classical Tibetan and Ladakhi, which distinguish between progressive and simple present (habitual), Common Tibetan has only one usual form for the two functions. We leave aside here the discussion about evidential function of auxiliaries, which indicate the source and access to information, since this goes beyond the scope of the present article. Some evidential functions will be briefly discussed in the next Section 4.2.5. However, for detail, see e.g. Tournadre & Suzuki. (2023).

[15] In the variety of Common Tibetan spoken in the diaspora, the suffix pa is usually dropped, but in the Common Tibetan spoken in Tibet, it is present.

[16] In Classical Tibetan these verb auxiliary endings are not compulsory and often dropped, but in the modern literary form written since the beginning of the 20th century, they are commonly used.

Table 5. Verb stems.

	Central Ladakhi	**Common Tibetan**	**Classical Tibetan**	**Translation**
Pres./fut.	འཐུང་ *'thung*	འཐུང་ *'thung*	འཐུང་/བཏུང་ *'thung/btung*	drink
	ལྟ་ *lta*	ལྟ་ *lta*	ལྟ་/བལྟ་ *lta/blta*	look
	བརྒྱབ་ *brgyab*	རྒྱག་ *rgyag*	རྒྱག་/བརྒྱག་ *rgyag/brgyag*	hit/*verbalizer*
	བཏབ་ *btab*	བཏབ་ *btab*	འདེབས་/གདབ་ *'debs/gdab*	sow
Past	འཐུངས་ *'thungs*	འཐུང་ *'thung*	བཏུངས་ *btungs*	drank
	ལྟས་ *ltas*	བལྟས་ *bltas*	བལྟས་ *bltas*	looked
	བརྒྱབས་ *brgyabs*	བརྒྱབ་ *brgyab*	བརྒྱབ་ *brgyab*	hit/*verbalizer*
	བཏབས་ *btabs*	བཏབ་ *btab*	བཏབ་ *btab*	sowed
Imperative	འཐུང་ *'thung*	འཐུང་ *'thung*	འཐུངས་ *'thungs*	Drink!
	ལྟོས་ *ltos*	ལྟོས་ *ltos*	ལྟོས་ *ltos*	Look!
	རྒྱོབ་ *rgyob*	རྒྱོབ་ *rgyob*	རྒྱོབ་ *rgyob*	Hit!/*verbalizer*
	བཏོབ་ *btob*	བཏབ་ *btab*	ཐོབས་ *thobs*	Sow!

nadre & Suzuki 2023 and *Skal.bzang 'Gyur.med&Skal.bzang Dbyangs.can* 2002)[1]. The opposition in Ladakhi between visual and non-visual sensory information is quite rare in the world's languages, although it is widely attested in the languages of the Amazon Basin.

For another example, Ladakhi has developed a past form པིན་ *-pin* used after auxiliary verbs, which did not exist in Classical Tibetan. There are many other differences in the verb auxiliaries. Some of the main auxiliary verbs and copulas and their grammatical differences are summarized in the following **Table 6**.

Table 6. Copulas (also used as auxiliary verbs).

Central Ladakhi	**Common Tibetan**	**Classical Tibetan**	**Translation**
ཡིན་ *yin*	ཡིན་ *yin*	ཡིན་ *yin*	'to be' [egophoric]
ཡིན་པིན་ *yin.pin*	ཡིན་ *yin*	ཡིན་ *yin*	'to be' [egophoric, past]
ཡིན་ནོག་ *yin-nog*	རེད་ *red*	ཡིན་ *yin*	'to be' [definitory-gnomic]
ཡིན་ཀྱག་ *yin-kyag*	རེད་ *red*	ཡིན་ *yin*	'to be' [assumptive][17]
ཡོད་ *yod*	ཡོད་ *yod*	ཡོད་ *yod*	'to exist' [egophoric]
ཡོད་པིན་ *yod.pin*	ཡོད་ *yod*	ཡོད་ *yod*	'to exist' [egophoric, past]
ཡོད་དེ་(ཡིན་)ནོག་ *yod.de-(yin) nog*	ཡོད་རེད་ *yod.red*	ཡོད་ *yod* ཡོད་པ་རེད་ *yod.pa.red*	'to exist' [definitory-gnomic]
ཡོད་ཀྱག་ *yod-kyag*	ཡོད་རེད་ *yod.red*	ཡོད་ *yod* ཡོད་པ་རེད་ *yod.pa.red*	'to exist' [assumptive]
རག *rag* (<གྲག *grag*)	འདུག *'dug*	འདུག *'dug*	'to exist' [non-visual sensory auxiliary]
འདུག *'dug*	འདུག *'dug* བཞག *bzhag* [only auxiliary, not copula]	འདུག *'dug*	'to exist' [visual sensory auxiliary]

5. Standardization and Variations in Written Ladakhi

Despite a large published written corpus, Ladakhi has not been conclusively standardized, and wide variation is seen in the written language of Ladakh. However, three main trends or 'styles' in the current local literature can be identified.

a) Ladakhi-Tibetan: essentially Tibetan grammar, with Tibetan vocabulary sometimes influenced by Ladakhi.

b) Ladakhi conservative spelling: Ladakhi grammar, and Ladakhi vocabulary. If the vocabulary is similar to a Classical Tibetan word, the Classical spelling is used; but where the Ladakhi vocabulary is not similar to Tibetan, the Ladakhi word is written.

c) Ladakhi phonetic spelling: Ladakhi grammar and vocabulary using Ladakhi phonetic spelling.

These three 'styles' sometimes intermingle and thus form a continuum.

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[17]The term factual is also used.

5.1. Ladakhi-Tibetan

The first style (a) is basically written Tibetan, more or less influenced by Ladakhi vocabulary. Documents written in this form of language are characterized by the fact that the grammar essentially remains Tibetan, even if a few parts of the vocabulary are clearly Ladakhi.[18]

For example, Ladakhi-Tibetan often includes typical Ladakhi lexical items not found in Tibetan, such as ཁག་ཅན་*khag.can* 'important', རྒྱལ་ལ་*rgyal.la* 'good', དཔེ་ར་བཏང་*dpe.ra btang* 'to speak', ཆ་*cha* 'to go', བཅོ་*bco* 'to do', མོལ་ *mol* 'to speak (hon.)', རྟིང་ན་*rting.na* 'after', and ཚོགས་*tsogs* 'like.'. However, the grammar remains essentially Tibetan. For example, it includes auxiliaries and verb endings such as V+བཞིན་ཡོད་*bzhin.yod,* V+བ་ཡིན་*ba.yin,* V+ཡོད་*yod,* V+རྒྱུ་ཡིན་*rgyu.yin,* V+བྱུང་*byung,* the genitive case markings ཀྱི་*gyi,* གི་ *gyi* and the agentive case markings ཀྱིས་*kyis,* གིས་ *gyis,* and even the Classical connector ཅིང་*cing* and its variants ཞིང་*shing* ཞིང་*zhing.* In a few cases, some Ladakhi grammatical forms such as the definite article པོ་*po* and the pronoun ང་ཞ་*nga.zha* 'we (excl.)' may occur.

5.2. Ladakhi Conservative Spelling

The second style (b) uses Ladakhi grammar while conserving Tibetan spelling to a great degree.[19]

For example, Ladakhi with conservative spelling will usually include the following Ladakhi copulas, auxiliaries and verb endings: ཡིན་ནོག་*yin.nog,* རག་*rag,* V+འད་*'ad,* V+པིན་*pin,* V+ཀྱག་*kyag* (or ཀག་ *kag).*

Writers of the Ladakhi conservative spelling style write specific Ladakhi verb forms, for example the simple past with a final ས་ 's': མོལས་*mols* 'to say (hon., past)', ཕུལས་*phuls* 'to offer (hon., past)', བཏབས་*tabs* 'to plant (past)', བསྟནས་*bstans* 'to show (past)', that are typical of Ladakhi grammar. Some writers avoid this use of this final ས་ 's' after certain letters where it is not allowed by Tibetan spelling rules.

In some of these documents with Ladakhi conservative spelling, Tibetan genitive case markings and the agentive case markings are replaced by genuine Ladakhi forms, respectively – C + i and – C + is (see **Table 3** above). However,

different authors have taken different approaches to this issue.

The comparative and causative case སང་*sang* is used (see **Table 3** and examples 37, 38 above).

One of the most distinctive markers of Ladakhi is the infinitive ending /čes/. Different writers of Ladakhi conservative spelling choose various ways of spelling this nominalizer. (see above, **Table 4.** Nominalizers, and Norman 2019, p xviii). The spellings ཅེས་*ces* or ཅས་*cas* reflect the fact that this ending derives from the Classical Tibetan word ཆས་*chas* 'thing'. In Classical Tibetan and some modern Tibetic languages, the equivalent nominalizer is རྒྱུ་*rgyu* which also means 'object, thing'. (see **Table 4** above). Tibetan nominalizers are normally derived from nouns.

The spellings བྱེས་*byes* or བྱས་*byas* reflect a belief that this ending derives from the Classical Tibetan verb བྱེད་*byed* 'to do'/ བྱས་*byas* 'did.' Apart from the fact that nominalizers are all derived from nouns, there is also a phonological reason that this is unlikely: Western Ladakhi dialects have a verb བ་*ba* /ba/ 'to do,' so if this verb ending were actually derived from the Tibetan verb བྱས་*byas* 'to do (past),' then Western Ladakhi (Shamskat) dialects would pronounce it with a /b/ sound, e.g. /byas/ or /bas/, but in fact they pronounce it /čas/.

5.3. Ladakhi Phonetic Spelling

In the third style (c), each writer uses their own idiosyncratic spelling to reflect Ladakhi pronunciation, often their own personal dialect, which depends on their family and the various places they have lived.

Ladakhi with phonetic spelling for the most part does not follow Classical Tibetan spelling. For example, in publications[20] (such as Genesis 2022) which have adopted this style, we find the following words: ཁས་པ་*khas.pa* 'learned, expert', (instead of མཁས་པ་*mkhas.pa*). ཟད་ *dzad* 'to do (hon.)', (instead of མཛད་*mdzad*), ནམ་ཁ་ *nam.kha'* 'sky' (instead of ནམ་མཁའ་*nam.mkha'*), ཇིག་རྟེན་ *jig.rten* 'world' (instead of འཇིག་རྟེན་ *'jig.rten*). This spelling aims at deleting most of the 'silent' letters.

However, these letters are neither always silent, nor unimportant. They affect the pronunciation of the word, both

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[18] Some examples of the Ladakhi-Tibetan style include the magazine ལ་དྭགས་ཕོ་ཉ་སྐྱ། Ladags Phonya, Leh and the school textbooks prepared by Pethub Khangtsen Education Society, in Pethub (Spituk) monastery. (ལ་དྭགས་དཔེ་ཁྲབ་དགོན་པ་)

[19] Some examples of the Ladakhi Conservative Spelling style include the magazine Ladags Melong, and books by Bakula Rangdol Nima Rinpoche, Konchok Phanday, Konchok Gyaltsan; and Francke's Kesar.

[20] https://www.bible.com/bible/1458/GEN.INTRO1.LBJ Genesis (2022).

in Central Ladakhi dialect and other dialects of Ladakhi, and function according to regular sound change rules of each dialect. In addition, they are often pronounced in compound words even if not when they appear at the start of a word, e.g. མཚོ *mtsho* /tsho/ 'lake,' but རྒྱ་མཚོ *rgya.mtsho* /gyamtso/ 'ocean.'

The 'silent' preradical letters also connect Ladakhi to the history and etymology of the word, tracing back to Classical and Old Tibetan.

This Ladakhi phonetic spelling style is rarely found in publications and has been mainly used by Christian missionaries and some NGO materials. Unlike the Ladakhi-Tibetan and Ladakhi conservative spelling styles, the phonetic spelling has three major flaws:

- It does not allow easy access to the etymology.
- It is linked with one particular dialect, and thus would not be suitable for other dialects.
- It does not help the learning of Classical Tibetan and other Tibetic languages.

Conversely, the styles a) and b) preserve the etymology, exhibit limited dialectal variation, and allow easy learning of Classical Tibetan and other Tibetic languages. Since the phonetic spelling c) is rarely used, it is likely that it will gradually disappear.

The only drawback of historical spelling as in styles a) and b) is that the pronunciation of words may be slightly different from the spelling. However, as we mentioned above, this is balanced by the fact that speakers of various Ladakhi dialects can more easily read an etymologically motivated spelling.

This situation is found in many countries of the world. This is the case in French, *where nearly 30% of words end with a silent letter*. Silent-letter endings often include *t, e, s, x, d,* and more marginally *g, p.*[21] For example, in the frequent words *temps* 'time', *vent* 'wind', *sang* 'blood', *coup* 'strike', *grand* 'great, big', *pas* 'step', *est* '(s/he) is', the letters in bold are silent.

English also has many silent letters (e.g., *knee, island, dumb, daughter, doubt, night*). There are also words spelled differently but pronounced the same, such as *soul/ sole/ Seoul* and *our/ hour*. In addition, there are words that use the same spelling with different pronunciations, such as *read*, pronounced /riːd/ (present) and /red/ (past), or *live* pronounced /lɪv/ (verb) and /laɪv/ (adjective).

These silent letters usually reflect the history of these languages and were pronounced earlier.

The situation is similar in Tibet. When reading modern written Tibetan, speakers of Ü-Tsang, Kham and Amdo do not pronounce many final and initial letters. Many words such as སེམས་ཅན *sems.can* 'animal', གངས་རི *gangs.ri* 'glacier', or ལྟོགས *ltogs* 'to be hungry' are written with a final ས 's' although this letter is not pronounced in Common Tibetan nor in any of the modern dialects of Tibet. However, in modern written Tibetan, the spellings སེམ་ཅན *sem.can*, གང་རི *gang.ri* 'glacier', or ལྟོག *ltog* are never used: the final silent ས 's' is not dropped.

Users of a Ladakhi phonetic spelling may sometimes write སེམས་ཅན *sem.can* /semšan/, or གང་རི *gang.ri* /gaŋri/, to reflect their pronunciation. However, unlike in Common Tibetan the ས 's' is still pronounced in the Ladakhi words སེམས *sems* /sems/, གངས *gangs* /gaŋs/, and ལྟོགས *ltogs* /ltoks/ in several dialects of Ladakh including Central Ladakhi.

Another advantage of retaining the etymology concerns the preradical letters (སྔོན་འཇུག *sngon.'jug* and མགོ་ཅན *mgo.can*).

In Central Ladakhi, the preradicals ད་ར་ལ་ས *d, r, l,* and *s* are usually pronounced, but undergo significant variation even in very closely related dialects. However, the other preradicals, *i.e.* ག་བ་མ་འ *g, b, m,* and *'a* are usually silent when they occur at the beginning of a word, but are often pronounced in the middle of a word. For example, རྟ *rta* 'horse' /**s**ta/ (Central Ladakh, Nubra) but /**r**ta/ [ʂta] (Sham). In the word དཔེ་ར *dpe.ra* 'talk', the preradical ད *d* is pronounced as /r/ [ʂ] in Central and Western Ladakhi dialects: /**r**pera/ [ʂpera], silent in eastern dialects: /pera/, and causes a regular sound change in Kharu area and Zangskar, where the word becomes /fera/ [ɸera]. The word ལྟ་བ *lta.ba* 'view, opinion' is pronounced /**l**tawa/, /**s**tawa/, or /tawa/, etc., depending on the dialect. Another example is རྟིང་པ *rting.pa* 'heel of the foot' /**r**tingpa/ [ʂtingpa], /**l**tingpa/, /**s**tingpa/, /tingpa/, depending on the dialect.

If one were to choose an alternative spelling such as ལྟིང་པ *lting.pa* or སྟིང་པ *sting.pa* to reflect a local pronunciation, it would be valid only for some dialects and undermine the linguistic unity of the region. The traditional spelling allows each dialect of Ladakhi to read their own pronunciation by following regular sound change rules.

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[21] See Silex: A database for silent-letter endings in French words.

5.4. Issues of Standardization

It is normal for any written language to run into standardization issues. Even in major languages such as English, French, Chinese, Russian, and Arabic, there are still variations and various standards. The spellings of those languages are largely standardized, but there are still a few debates.

The choice of one spelling over another is eventually validated by the most common writing habits of the natives. This happens in all living languages. Some choices that happen may not always be relevant or correspond to the historical evolution of the language, but this should not be a major concern.

For example, in Old English the verb *cunnan* 'could' was written without an 'l' (*cud*), and the 'l' was introduced in the 15th century on the model of *shall/should* and *will/would*. The same is true for the 'h' in the French *haut* 'high' derived from the Latin *altus*. Other Romance languages such as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese have *alto* without an 'h'. The initial 'h' of *haut* was probably added in French under the influence of the Germanic languages (German *Hoch*, English *high*), but has no historical basis in French.

In Dzongkha, a Tibetic language, the spelling of the verb འབད *'bad* 'to do' was introduced in the 1970s to reflect the pronunciation of modern Dzongkha. This spelling corresponds to the Classical Tibetan verb འབད *'bad* 'to strive', and has no etymological relation to the Dzongkha verb འབད *'bad* 'to do', which is actually derived from the Classical Tibetan verb བྱེད *byed* 'to do', and its pronunciation has simply evolved. Although Modern Dzongkha's spelling is sometimes awkward when it reflects the pronunciation, those rather rare un-etymological spellings are now well established and there is no major reason to change them. Similarly, in Central Ladakhi, the verb 'to do, to make' is often spelled བྱོ *byo* (pres.) and བྱོས *byos* (past) by analogy with Tibetan བྱེད *byed*. However, it is derived from བཅོ *bco*, བཅོས *bcos* 'to make, treat, correct' as shown by Norman (2019). The choice between the two spellings will eventually be validated by usage. These marginal inconsistencies exist in most of the world's languages and do not impede comprehension. As the corpus size of written Ladakhi is increasing, a standardization trend will naturally emerge.

Having a written form for the language is crucial to its survival, and these minor details should not stop a linguistic community from reaching that goal.

The main remaining issue is the choice between Ladakhi-Tibetan style and the Ladakhi conservative spelling. As we have already discussed, the major difference between these two written forms is their grammar. While in the Ladakhi-Tibetan style, the grammar remains essentially Tibetan, the Ladakhi conservative spelling style reflects Ladakhi grammar (see Section 4.2).

The main advantage of the style (b) which reflects the Ladakhi grammar is that it allows much easier comprehension and acquisition for children and adults who want to learn to read and write their own language. The implementation of this Ladakhi conservative spelling style in the education system can facilitate preservation and development of the Ladakhi language. Conversely, the use of the Ladakhi-Tibetan style (a) creates difficulty for most Ladakhis, as they do not clearly understand what is written unless they have mastered the Tibetan language.

6. The Tradition and Corpus of Written Ladakhi

Aside from Classical and Modern Literary Tibetan, only a few of the Tibetic languages have developed a written form. They include Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, Lhoke/Bhutia (or Drenjongke) in Sikkim, and Ladakhi. Other languages such as Balti and Sherpa have been used as written languages, but rarely.

The Ladakhi language has been written in Tibetan script for more than one hundred years. Some of the first texts appear in the 19th century.

One of the earliest books ever published in the vernacular of any Tibetic language was the Kesar (or Gesar) Epic published in written Ladakhi by A.H. Francke in 1905, transcribed from the speech of a storyteller in Sham. This is written in the 'Ladakhi Conservative Spelling' style. This great Tibetan epic has been adopted by other Asian cultures including Mongolia and Manchuria. The Kesar Epic is recognized by UNESCO as part of the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'.[22] The old version of the Kesar Epic in written Ladakhi is a real jewel of the Ladakhi culture.

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[22]"Gesar epic tradition: Inscribed in 2009 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/gesar-epic-tradition-00204

Since then, the corpus of written Ladakhi has continued.

Many of the texts in Ladakhi are devoted to Buddhist scriptures.[23] Some books provide commentary in Ladakhi (Conservative Spelling) of important Classical Tibetan texts, such as Bakula Rangdol Nima's translation of Nagarjuna's *The Good Hearted Letter* (2014)[12], and Konchok Gyaltsan's *Commentary on Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (2017)[13]. In 2022, a monumental translation of the *Life and Songs* of rJetsun Milaraspa was published by Bakula Rangdol Nima[14]. The translation of this fundamental work of the Classical Tibetan canon into Ladakhi Conservative Spelling style makes it accessible to the Ladakhi public.[24]

The Quran and the Bible have also been partly translated into Ladakhi[15, 16].[25]

Materials for secular purposes are frequently published by various government departments, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. Each writer, editor or publisher has woven his own path between Tibetan and Ladakhi (and almost all of them have been male so far).

Ladags Melong ལ་དྭགས་མེ་ལོང་། magazine was published from 1993 to 2006, bilingual in Ladakhi and English[17]. The stated mission of the magazine was to popularize the use of written Ladakhi so that it could then be used more widely. It covered current events and issues, as well as translations of parts of the Quran, and explanations of Buddhist texts and rituals. *Ladags Melong* also included cartoons for neo-literates to encourage reading of Ladakhi. It was popular among the general public as it was written in colloquial Ladakhi with conservative spelling.

ལ་དྭགས་ཕོ་ཉ། *La.dwags Pho.nya*, the newsletter of the Leh District government, has been published since 1908, sometimes in Ladakhi and sometimes in English[18].

The Jammu and Kashmir Academy of Arts and Culture ("The Cultural Academy") has published many books including the annual publication *Shiraza* in Ladakhi, mostly in Ladakhi-Tibetan style.

The many NGOs in Ladakh have produced posters, brochures, and books written in Ladakhi or bilingual with English or Urdu, about health, education, wildlife, environmental conservation, solar energy, and other topics. These have often been written in the Ladakhi conservative spelling (see Section 4) in a form similar to that in *Ladags Melong,* but some have been either more phonetic Ladakhi or more Ladakhi-Tibetan[17].

J&K Board of School Education textbooks for the Bhoti[26] subject in schools have tended toward the Ladakhi-Tibetan style: Tibetan grammar, with some Ladakhi vocabulary and a few Ladakhi turns of phrase. The materials have included translations of Aesop's fables and other European stories, Hindu and Indian stories, and original Ladakhi content.

Around the world, Christian missionaries have been at the forefront of developing or using writing systems for unwritten or rarely written languages. The Bible was translated into a more Classical Tibetan style, but some other Christian books were translated into Ladakhi. In the 1930s, a Christian convert proposed a phonetic Ladakhi writing style with radical changes to Tibetan spelling for local publication, but these were criticized and never adopted. By the late 20th century, Christian missionaries wrote most of their materials in Ladakhi with conservative spelling, but some documents have appeared with phonetic spelling. In any case, their efforts to convert Ladakhis to Christianity were moving away from printed materials toward video and audio materials, utilizing Ladakhi story-telling and dramatic styles.

There has been a steady stream of other publications in Ladakhi, often self-published, including novels, histories of Ladakh, biographies of important Ladakhis, collections of folksongs, and children's books.

In the 21st century, many Ladakhis have bypassed the question of how to write in the Sambhota (or Tibetan) script, by producing huge amounts of materials on social media written in Romanized Ladakhi. The spelling is individual and idiosyncratic, with each person choosing his or her own way of portraying the sounds of Ladakhi and their own dialect. This allows written expression to all speakers of Ladakhi with a modicum of education, whether they know the Sambhota script, and whether or not they are willing to attempt writing in it. However, it abandons the historical and etymological connection of Ladakhi with other related languages.

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[23]See also Konchok Phanday (2017) and Konchok Tashi (2014 a, b).
[24]Bakula Rangdol Nimahas also translated, from Amdo into Central Ladakhi, a film of seven hours about the life of Milaraspa.
[25]See Molvi Omar in Ladags Melong (Mirror of Ladakh), Spring-Summer 2003, p 39; and www.ladakhibible.org/en/download-scripture
[26]Formerly called 'Bodhi.'

It fails to correspond with the dialect diversity within Ladakh, which the Sambhota script does so elegantly.

As we have mentioned above, many scholars, both foreign[19, 20] and native[21–24], contributed to the written Ladakhi language and the number of publications is rising. However, we still lack statistics about publication figures.

7. Reactions to Written Ladakhi

Efforts to promote a wider and more popular use of written Ladakhi have increased since the last decades of the 20th century.

Some people, mostly Buddhist monks, have made the claim that written Ladakhi could be a threat to the Classical and Modern Tibetan languages, but this position is not justified. Written Dzongkha has been the national language of Bhutan since 1971, and coexists well with Classical Tibetan there. Written Dzongkha, which is easier to learn for the Dzongkha speakers of Bhutan, serves as a bridge between the two languages. Knowledge of Dzongkha allows people to learn Classical Tibetan more easily and effectively.

Similarly, in Ladakh, the knowledge of written Ladakhi could facilitate the learning of Classical Tibetan and bridge the differences between the two languages. For these reasons, some Buddhist scholars of Ladakh have undertaken translations of major Tibetan texts into Ladakhi (Bakula Nima Rangdol 2005, 2010, 2014, and 2022; and Konchok Phanday 2017)[12, 14, 22–24].

Likewise, Muslim scholars have been engaged in the translation of the Quran and other texts into Ladakhi.

For most Ladakhis, written Ladakhi is far easier and more accessible than Classical Tibetan,[27] once they have mastered the Sambhota (or Tibetan) alphabet. Once they can read written Ladakhi comfortably, it is easier for them to start learning to read Classical Tibetan.

Contrary to some assertions, the integration of written Ladakhi into the educational systems is critical to the survival of both Ladakhi and written Tibetan in Ladakh.

8. Language Policy for Ladakhi

The Constitution of the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir State recognized Ladakhi as one of the regional languages of the state.[28] However, since Ladakh became a Union Territory in 2019, there is no specific language policy for U.T. Ladakh, except the official languages of the central Indian Government *i.e.* Hindi and English. Police and land records remain in Urdu, which was the official language of J&K State, but almost all other official documents in Ladakh are in English, with almost none in Hindi, Ladakhi or Tibetan. A language policy must be adopted in order to preserve, promote and develop the native languages spoken in the region[25].

The advocates demanding the inclusion of Bhoti as a nationally recognized language in the 8th Schedule of the Indian Constitution say that this will increase the use of the language in the education system, or make it compulsory in schools. However, in order to include a language in the Indian Constitution, it must be shown that the language is already used as the medium of instruction in schools, and that there is a thriving corpus published in the language.

The use of languages in education in Ladakh is complex. No schools currently use written Ladakhi as the medium for instruction, nor is it offered as a language class. Almost all schools and colleges in Ladakh use English as the primary language, with other languages taught as single subjects. Many schools offer either 'Tibetan' or 'Bhoti' as one subject (depending on which exam board they are affiliated with).

India has a "three-language policy" in education that, for about 50 years from 1968 has meant that children in India are supposed to study three languages. One of these is the 'medium of instruction' for the other subjects, meaning the social studies, science, and math books and exams would be in that medium. The second and third languages are required subjects.

In Ladakh, school students have had to study three languages from among English, Urdu, Tibetan and Hindi, with any of these or Arabic or Sanskrit as compulsory second and third language subjects. No single written language is used by all literate people around Ladakh, with the result that English, or at least the Roman script, is increasingly the only written language known by different literate people who speak Ladakhi.

In discussing language in education, it must be remembered that the 'medium of instruction' in Ladakh has always referred to the language of books and exams. In the class-

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[27]We did experiments with Ladakhi laypersons who know the Tibetan script and asked them to read various texts in Ladakhi. They can understand the Ladakhi texts without difficulty in most cases, whereas they find it very difficult to understand Classical Tibetan.

[28]Section 146 (Academy for Development of Art, Culture and Languages) under Sixth Schedule (Regional Languages).

room, at least until recently, teachers have almost always spoken the language of their own convenience — usually Ladakhi, Hindi or Urdu — regardless of the books and exams. For example, science classes with books and exams in English were often taught by a Kashmiri speaking Urdu in the classroom. English was often taught by a Ladakhi teacher speaking her own language in the classroom. Bhoti classes were seen being taught by a Ladakhi monk speaking Hindi in the classroom. Private schools in Leh in the early 2000s pioneered having teachers speak the required medium in the classroom, and this practice is spreading.

Until the 1990s, students at government schools in Ladakh studied all of their subjects in Urdu, with English as a second language, and a choice of Tibetan or Arabic as the third language. The J&K Board of School Education, from which Ladakhi government schools are separating in 2024, used the name Bodhi for decades, recently changing to Bhoti (see Section 2). Since the 1990s in Leh District, and more recently in Kargil District, the government schools have had all subjects in English medium starting in class 1, with Urdu or Hindi as the compulsory second language, and Bhoti or Arabic as the compulsory third language. Because older Ladakhis studied Urdu, not Hindi, most of the government schools offered only Urdu, but as teachers with Hindi skills have been hired in recent years, more government schools offer Hindi, or a choice of Urdu or Hindi. In the class 10 exams, all subjects are in English medium, except the other language subjects. Students must pass the second language (Hindi or Urdu) in order to pass the 10th class and continue to the 11th class. The third language (Arabic or Bhoti) is compulsory to study up to the 10th class but need not be passed in order to enroll in the 11th class.

Private schools in Ladakh have long used English as the medium of books and exams, as this is what parents demand and are willing to pay for. The well-established private schools in Ladakh follow the Central Board of School Education (CBSE), based in Delhi. In the past, the CBSE Board offered 'Tibetan' (not 'Bhoti') but with Ladakh's government schools joining the CBSE Board, it has added a 'Bhoti' subject. Seeing that three compulsory languages at a high academic level is a burden for students, many private schools have reduced the required languages. For example, Lamdon School, the largest school in Ladakh, requires Tibetan and

Hindi as subjects in the lower levels, and teaches all other subjects in English medium. By 10th class, students can choose to drop either Tibetan or Hindi, and take the other as their required second language in the 10th class exam.

The Central Institute of Buddhist Studies and the monastery schools which are affiliated to it, use Bhoti medium for Bhoti as a language and the required Buddhist philosophy subject; English medium for secular subjects; and Hindi as a required language. Hindi was the medium for the secular subjects until recently. Sanskrit and Pali are offered as optional fourth languages.

The New Education Policy of 2020 (NEP-2020) attempted to relax the language formula and encourages the use of the 'local or regional' language, at least at the primary level. The policy states, 'Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, but preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/local language/regional language. Thereafter, the home/local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible. This will be followed by both public and private schools' [26].[29]

The current school textbooks for Bhoti or Tibetan in Ladakh are written in Classical Tibetan or Modern Literary Tibetan, which are difficult for Ladakhi children to understand. Therefore, it is important that trained linguists, teacher educators and native Ladakhi scholars give their inputs into the pedagogy process and prepare school textbooks in Ladakhi language rather than in Classical Tibetan for larger understanding of the students, especially at the lower school levels.

The choice of which language to use as the medium of instruction is complex. The majority of the children enrolled in the government schools in central Ladakh, especially in larger towns and villages along the highway, have Nepali as their mother tongue. Private schools enroll a diversity of students from a variety of language backgrounds. Parents of most Ladakhi-speaking students are adamant that they want English medium education for their children. Many teachers insist that they would be unable to teach books or mark homework and exams in Bhoti for subjects such as science and social studies.

With school enrollment approaching 100%, the current language policies in the schools seem destined to eradicate

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[29]Ministry of Education. (2020). New Education Policy-2020, p. 13. Government of India

the Ladakhi language within just a few decades.

Therefore, it is crucial to change the current policies. The mother tongue 'Ladakhi' should be given an opportunity to participate in the literacy process and in the educational system. Some native scholars have already made great efforts in this direction.

The use of written Ladakhi using Tibetan script needs to be further encouraged, promoted, developed and strengthened. Ladakhi language should be declared as one of the official languages/state languages of the Union Territory of Ladakh. Ladakhi language has already enjoyed the status of being one of the regional languages/state languages in the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir along with Kashmiri, Dogri, Balti, Dardi, Punjabi, Pahari and Gojri under 6th Schedule, Section 146 of erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir constitution. Trained linguists, teacher educators and native Ladakhi scholars should give their inputs for the pedagogy process and prepare school textbooks in written Ladakhi NOT in Classical Tibetan for a better understanding of the students.

This would match perfectly the UNESCO principle which, for psychological, sociological and educational reasons, recommends the use of the mother tongue[25, 27].

The administration of the Union Territory of Ladakh should not only support the use of Ladakhi in the school system but also launch various initiatives, such as having the provision to confer the 'Best Book' writers' award for Ladakhi language in the line of the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages (Konchok Tashi, 2023, pp. 145–156)[25].

9. The Visibility of Written Ladakhi

Written Ladakhi has little visibility in Ladakhi society currently. Shop signboards in Leh, the capital of Ladakh, are most frequently in English, sometimes also with Sambhota (Tibetan) script or Nagari (Hindi) or Urdu script. However, most of the signboards using Sambhota script do not convey a Ladakhi meaning, but simply a phonological transcription of the English, or a Tibetan word that is not used in Ladakhi. For example: "State Bank of India ཨེ་ཏེ་ཊ་བེང་འོཕ་འིན་གྲི་ཡ་*si.TeT.beng.oph.'in.gri.ya*भारतीयस्टेटबैंक*bhā ratīya ṣṭeṭ baink*".[30]

The signboards are a superficial performance of Ladakhi writing without trying to convey any information. This practice is frequent in India when using Indo-Aryan scripts or Dravidian scripts to render English words. A small number of signs are in Tibetan or in a mixture of Tibetan and English, but signs in the Ladakhi language are virtually absent.

Throughout Ladakh, most of the signs indicating village names are written only in English, with a variety of Romanized spellings, even if a minority do appear as well in Sambhota (Tibetan) script, Nagari (Hindi) script or Urdu. Many signboards spell names in distorted Romanized or Hindi ways, which in some cases have even come to affect how Ladakhis themselves pronounce those place names. For example, Nyemo or Snyemo is written निम्मु in Nagari script or 'Nimu' on so many signs that some Ladakhis now pronounce it that way, and Kyagar in Nubra has been called 'Tiger' by the army so much, that locals have started using that name. (For place names see Norman, 2019, pp 470 – 495)[6].

The trend toward using major languages rather than Ladakhi is exacerbated by the increasing integration of Ladakh with the rest of India and its economy, education being only offered in major languages, the massive flow of Indian and foreign tourists, the large migration from Nepal, and the departure of the Tibetan refugees from Ladakh to Europe and North America.

10. Conclusions

There is great potential for the development of the Ladakhi language and culture: it is shared by Buddhists, Muslims and others; the culture is praised by many non-local Indians and foreigners; and it enshrines a great monument of world literature, the Kesar Epic. The size of the region is significant, and it belongs to a democratic country that favors diversity and local languages.

Spoken Ladakhi is still thriving in daily household and public use, formal events, All India Radio Leh, Doordarshan television, and thousands of audio and video recordings on social media and internet sites. However, the next generation is likely to find other languages more convenient for daily

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[30]Some more signs seen in Leh Bazaar in 2022: ཧི་མ་ལ་ཡན་ཇེམས [hi.ma.la.yan jems]'Himalayan Gems',སྣོ་ལེ་འོ་ པརD་ Te.rel]'Snow Leopard Trails', ཧོ་ཏེལ་ནིའུ་གེ་ལེ་ཤར་ ཝིའུ [ho.Tel/ ni'u/ ge.le.shar/ wi'u/] 'Hotel New Glacier View', ད་བྷོ་དྷི་ཏྲི [da.bho.dhi.tri] 'The Bodhi Tree', etc.

use, and the language is at risk of dying out soon.

Thus, the Ladakhi language is at a critical pivotal period. Its survival in the next two generations depends directly on the introduction of the Ladakhi language in its written form in the educational system. Using written Ladakhi for real communication is key to survival. The spread of written Ladakhi would also strengthen written Tibetan in the education system.

Digitization and documentation are two of the most important ways that technology helps to preserve endangered languages. Digital platforms make it easier and more sustainable to document language nuances, oral traditions, and cultural practices. Digitization, archiving and social media platforms help to preserve language information while also improving accessibility. Machine translation techniques and online dictionaries can also help to conserve languages by documenting and translating texts from them into more commonly used languages. Technology has had a huge impact on language globally. It has made communication faster and more efficient. Therefore, along with the introduction of the Ladakhi language in its written form in the educational system, its use in digital and social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Telegram, X (formerly known as Twitter), etc. should also be encouraged, particularly among younger generations, to aid in the preservation and promotion of the written Ladakhi language. The Tibetan script is widely available on all social media platforms, making it easy to use for writing the Ladakhi language. Written Ladakhi could also benefit from the recent technological development of artificial intelligence applied to written Tibetan (e.g. "the Monlam A.I. project" and Google Translate).

If a clear linguistic policy is not undertaken, it is obvious that both written Tibetan and Ladakhi will disappear rapidly in Ladakh and be replaced completely by English, Hindi, and Urdu.

Whether written Ladakhi and/or Tibetan can take hold and thrive depends on three conditions.

- The will and determination of Ladakhis to preserve their own cultural heritage.
- Official policies promoting its use and development.
- Writing, producing and using more materials in written Ladakhi.

If and only if these conditions are met, the Ladakhi language has a chance of survival.

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