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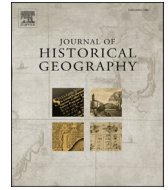
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## Correspondence, scale and the Linguistic Survey of India's colonial geographies of language, 1896–1928

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Linguistic Survey of India (LSI), a monumental exercise supervised by George Grierson to survey and classify the languages of colonial India. It considers why the LSI developed into an atypical scheme that corresponded with a multiethnic and multinational network of officials and scholars to survey India's languages. It makes the case that the networked practice of surveying was reciprocated at different scales, from localised linguistic surveys in districts and princely states to gather information and specimens, to a loosely governed transnational exercise involving Indians and Europeans to edit, review and publish results. The paper argues that the LSI's scalar geographies were negotiated by Grierson and, more importantly, his assistant Gauri Kant Roy and demonstrates that scale, as an analytic or process, was not an abstraction or predetermined for those entangled in the LSI's survey of India's languages.

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In 1896, the Anglo-Irish linguist and administrator, George A. Grierson (1851–1941; Fig. 1), commenced a monumental programme to survey, classify and map the languages of colonial India.<sup>1</sup> Over three decades, the Linguistic Survey of India (LSI), as it became known, identified over 700 hundred languages and dialects. Three 'specimens' – a translated set text, piece(s) of songs, verse or prose, and a list of 241 words and phrases – were gathered in each and published from 1903 to 1928 in twenty volumes arranged by language family and subgroup.<sup>2</sup> The published specimens constituted the core of the LSI's output, accompanied by narrative descriptions outlining a language's geography, demography and history, and several maps. Considering its significance to

Indian linguistics and as an exercise in imperial space-making, the LSI has rarely been studied on its own terms until Javed Majeed's recent comprehensive two-volume study.<sup>3</sup> Linguists have mainly focused on surveys found in smaller or relatively less diverse national contexts such as Germany and France.<sup>4</sup> For geographers, language surveys such as the LSI merit greater examination since many colonies were consolidated and governed through the categorisation and mapping of language and those efforts continue to shape post-colonial nations and communities.<sup>5</sup>

The LSI was geographical as much as it was linguistic, not only surveying what languages were spoken and by whom, but also where. What made its achievement remarkable was, unlike other colonial surveys in India, the LSI did not employ trained or qualified staff to complete surveying. Linguists consequently viewed the LSI as a useful but flawed resource, a reputation largely formed in the mid twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Majeed's important study, which this paper is indebted to and builds on, has shown instead that the overlooked and misunderstood cultural, intellectual and political history of this multifaceted project is at odds with existing

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<sup>1</sup> Note on terminology: some languages referred to in this article may be known differently today.

<sup>2</sup> George Grierson (compiled and edited), *Linguistic Survey of India*, 20 vol (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1903–1928).

<sup>3</sup> Javed Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India; Nation and Region in Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Georg Wenker's dialect survey of Germany in the 1870s, and Jules Gilliéron's and Edmond Edmont's *Atlas linguistique de la France* (1902–1910). For a comprehensive introduction to language surveys see, P. Auer and J. E. Schmidt, *Theories and Methods, Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation*, Volume 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010). See also special issue: 'Surveying speakers and the politics of census', ed. by A. Duchêne and P. N. Humbert, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 252 (2018), 1–152.

<sup>5</sup> Post-independence India was reorganised along linguistic lines, although many communities felt unrepresented by changes. Louise Tillin, *Remapping India: New States and their Political Origins*, (London: Hurst, 2013) pp.27–66.

<sup>6</sup> Murray B. Emeneau, 'India and Linguistics', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 75 (1955) 145–153; Siddheshwar Varma, G. A. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India: A Summary*, Part 1 (Hoshiarpur: Panjab University, 1972).

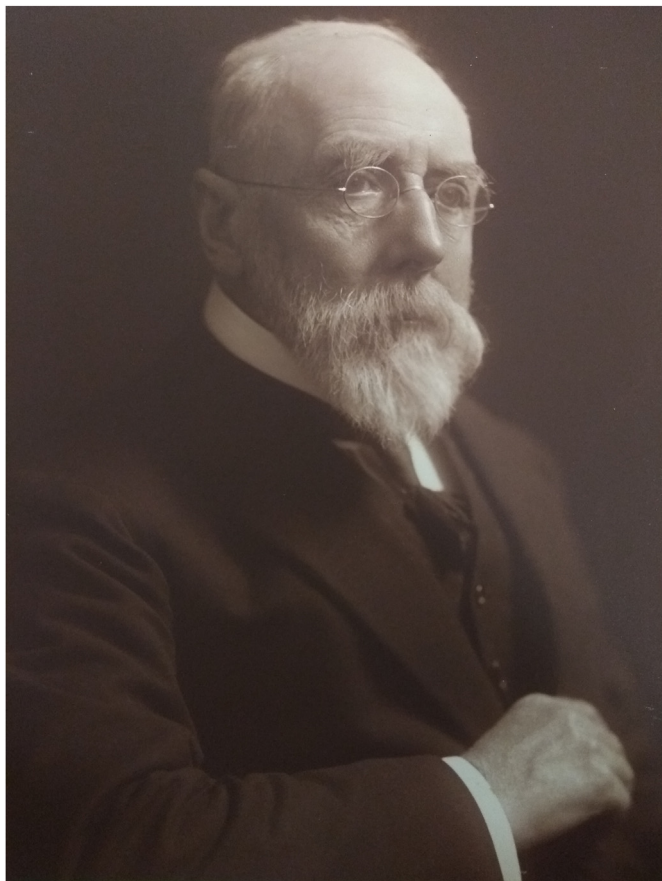


Fig. 1. George A. Grierson, (undated). Source: Courtesy of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland.

assumptions about how power is implicit in the production of colonial knowledge, arguing that the LSI's 'power and authority lie in its idiom of doubt and uncertainty'.<sup>7</sup> The LSI 'transcends', to borrow from Rajend Mesthrie, the conventional colonial survey and its language of command in Majeed's reading of Grierson's scheme.<sup>8</sup> More recent work has responded to Majeed and begun considering the social and political facets of the LSI, participating in a much wider discussion around linguistics as a colonial discipline.<sup>9</sup> This paper, on the other hand, proposes a geographical reading of the LSI, drawing on the substantial work of geographers and historians who have productively engaged with colonial topographic and other scientific-economic surveys in India and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Both have been at the forefront of analysing their roles as institutions of colonial knowledge production and how surveys

imagined, created and exploited imperial spaces.<sup>11</sup> While geographers have largely overlooked the LSI and other language surveys, colonial or otherwise, this paper establishes that they shared the same motivations as other scientific surveys even if, as others have shown, their mastery of space was fleeting and doubtful.<sup>12</sup>

Using the LSI archive in the British Library and the underutilised LSI materials at the National Archives of India, the first part of the paper explores how a scheme envisioned along the lines of the existing surveys of India was rejected for financial and political reasons and, in response, employed a method of corresponding with a multiethnic and multinational network of actors to survey on a mostly voluntary basis.<sup>13</sup> Brought together at different stages by the LSI, these *language surveyors* (used here to describe their heterogeneous roles) included officials of varying rank, who were chiefly involved in identifying languages and gathering specimens, and scholars and missionaries involved in classifying and proofing results. At the centre of this changing network of correspondents was Grierson and his assistant in Calcutta, Gauri Kant Roy (1861–d. unknown; Fig. 2), who became an important figure once Grierson returned to Europe in 1899 for health reasons. Managed by both, the surveying process involved the circulation of lists, forms, notes, and maps by postal correspondence (and occasionally telegraph).<sup>14</sup> Crucially, the circulation of material and knowledge was a diffuse and ongoing process, with specimen proofs and language descriptions rechecked by different experts for discrepancies and inaccuracies until what remained was a 'collection of facts, not of theories.'<sup>15</sup> While surveying by correspondence proved at times unreliable and haphazard, the LSI's approach ensured most of India was surveyed by 1905.

The second and third part of the paper asserts what constituted the Linguistic Survey of India were a series of localised linguistic surveys conducted at a smaller scale in districts, agencies and princely states, running in parallel and eventually superseded by a loosely governed transnational exercise to study and publish the results of the survey. Expanding on Stephen Legg's proposition that scales are not essential or pre-determined but 'networked into existence', this section broadens the domain of analysis from the legal, social and political to the scientific in colonial India, showing that the networked practice of surveying language was

<sup>11</sup> Although Bernard Cohn, an anthropologist, remains pivotal in how colonial surveys have been approached as an imperial 'investigative modality'. Bernard Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) pp.1–15.

<sup>12</sup> An argument made in Edney, *Mapping an Empire*, and elsewhere. For example, Thomas Simpson, *The Frontier in British India: Space, Science, and Power in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). On the (dis)connected place of linguistics in the history of geography see, Philip Jagessar, 'Geography and Linguistics: Histories, Entanglements and Departures', *Geography Compass*, 14:11 (2020), e12540.

<sup>13</sup> Majeed takes a less networked view of the survey's epistolary approach in *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.220–229.

<sup>14</sup> The relatively slow Indian postal service was more reliable by the turn of century than often credited. Mark Frost, 'Pandora's post box: Empire and information in India, 1854–1914', *The English Historical Review*, 131 (2016) 1043–1073. For more on the postal service in India see, Devyani Gupta, *The Postal System of British India, c.1830–1920*, (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016). On the telegraph service see, Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury, *Telegraphic Imperialism: Crisis and Panic in the Indian Empire, c.1830–1920* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

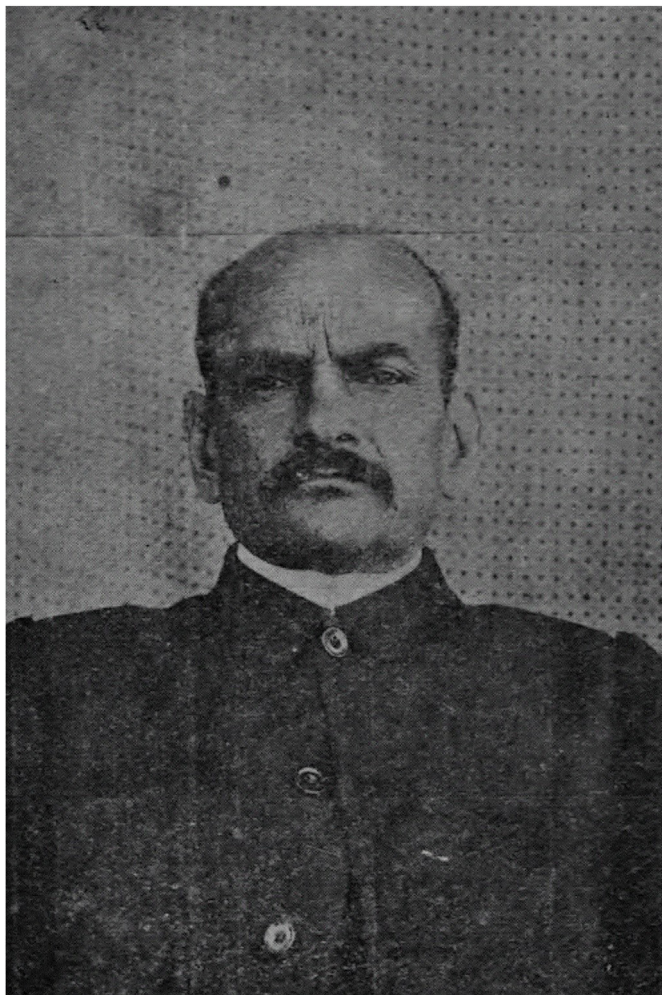
<sup>15</sup> *Linguistic Survey*, Volume 1.1, p.21. Historians of science have paid particular attention to circulation and the creation of hybrid forms of knowledge. Kapil Raj, *Relocating Modern Science: Circulation and the Construction of Knowledge in South Asia and Europe, 1650–1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Anna Winterbottom, *Hybrid Knowledge in the Early East India Company World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p.12.

<sup>8</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p.12; Rajend Mesthrie, 'Transcending the colonial? Colonial linguistics and George Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India', in *Colonial and Decolonial Linguistics: Knowledges and Epistemes*, ed. by A. Deumert, A. Storch and N. Shepherd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021) pp.46–61.

<sup>9</sup> Mesthrie, 'Transcending the colonial?'; Ayesha Kidwai, 'Life to Indian Languages: A Linguist Responds to Javed Majeed's Study of Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 55 (17 October 2020).

<sup>10</sup> For example: Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India, 1765–1843* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997); D. Graham Burnett, *Masters of all they Surveyed: Exploration, Geography, and a British El Dorado* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000). Environmental historians have paid particular attention to colonial forest surveys e.g., Gregory Barton, *Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Richard Tucker, *A Forest History of India*, (New Delhi: SAGE India, 2012).



**Fig. 2.** Gauri Kant Roy, 1914. Source: P. N. Bhargava, *Second Supplement to Who's Who in India: Brought up to 1914* (Lucknow, 1914).

reciprocated at each scale.<sup>16</sup> Local officials contacted by the LSI would adopt its method, often adapted to the particular cultural or political circumstances of the area, to correspond with knowledgeable residents such as local schoolteachers and subordinate officers to survey their jurisdictions. Coexisting with the localised surveys was a transnational LSI centred on Grierson's correspondence with experts in India and Europe to classify, edit and review the survey's results as they were drafted and circulated.

Historians of science have more recently begun to conceptually engage with scale, especially in the history of climate and environmental research, augmenting longstanding work by historical geographers attending to the role of scale in understanding nineteenth and early twentieth century science.<sup>17</sup> Deborah Coen's work

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Legg, *Prostitution and the Ends of Empire: Scale, Governmentalities, and Interwar India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014) p. xi; pp.22–39; See also, Legg, 'Transnationalism and the Scalar Politics of Imperialism', *New Global Studies* 4 (2010) Art. 4; 'Of scales, networks and assemblages: the League of Nations apparatus and the scalar sovereignty of the Government of India', *Transactions of the IBC*, 34 (2009) 234–253.

<sup>17</sup> *Geographies of Knowledge: Science, Scale, and Spatiality in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Robert Mayhew and Charles Withers (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2020); Deborah Coen, *Climate in Motion: Science, Empire, and the problem of Scale* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2018); Lachlan Fleetwood, *Science on the Roof of the World: Empire and the Remaking of the Himalaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

on climate, in particular, has called for a deeper historical understanding of *scaling* 'to weigh the consequences of human actions at multiple removes ... about what is involved in working between and across different scales of observation, analysis, and action.'<sup>18</sup> Working between and across the scalar geographies of the LSI were Grierson and, more importantly, his assistant Gauri Kant Roy. Grierson's return to Europe left Roy in India to negotiate and supervise the return and editing of specimens gathered by language surveyors. Granted the authority and encouragement to do so, Roy actively shapes the direction and results of the Linguistic Survey. The collaborative roles of often forgotten or unrecognised native intermediaries and go-betweens in producing knowledge has been extensively studied, however, Majeed rightly points out Grierson went further to embed and elevate Indian participation in the LSI, recognising the surveying and editing efforts of different Indian volunteers by name.<sup>19</sup>

While scaling was a practical response to the question of how a few individuals could manage a survey covering a linguistically complex region such as India, it also depended on Roy cohesively arranging the returned specimens and other resources from the geographically fragmented local surveys so the materials could be studied and classified by Grierson and his fellow experts across the world.<sup>20</sup> In illuminating the LSI's approach to surveying language, this paper provides a geographical framework for understanding scale in the history of the language sciences and allows us to not only recognise the colonial LSI as presenting a 'global India-centric geography' but also localising an emerging international science of language.<sup>21</sup>

### Surveying by correspondence

The idea for a linguistic survey was first put forward by Grierson at the International Congress of Orientalists in 1886, in response to the 1881 Census which revealed a confusing linguistic situation in India.<sup>22</sup> On his return to India, Grierson proposed employing fourteen provincial directors and two general directors to oversee and coordinate surveying, based on the conventional structure for an Indian survey (e.g. Geological or Archaeological Survey) with a central authority and provincial arms.<sup>23</sup> One general director would be an Indo-Aryan expert and the other in the Dravidian languages (the chief language families of India), with the former apparently senior of the two. The proposal was sent to the provinces and several princely states under British suzerainty, whose agreement and financial support Grierson required.

Barring a few exceptions, the provinces and states contacted were less than enthusiastic, with the main obstacle being costs. Their combined offer amounted to less than a third of Grierson's estimate, with most funds coming from the wealthier provinces of

<sup>18</sup> Coen, *Climate in Motion*, pp.16–17.

<sup>19</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, 212–233. For a recent study on the role of imperial intermediaries and go-betweens see, Carol Boshier, *Forgotten Voices of the British Empire: How Knowledge was Created and Curated in Colonial India and Burma* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Described by Majeed as a 'complex linguistic environment'; *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p.206.

<sup>21</sup> Majeed, *Nation and Region*, p.62. On the localising of colonial practices see also, Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> *Report on the Census of India, 1881*, Volume 1 (London: Government Printing, 1883), p.194.

<sup>23</sup> Circular, 13/12/1889. National Archives of India (NAI), Home/Public A/February 1895/253–279.

Bombay and Bengal.<sup>24</sup> Some were sceptical about the need for a linguistic survey, especially one financed by the state. The existing surveys of India had a clear economic or military function whereas it was suggested linguistic research was the purview of the Asiatic Society and universities.<sup>25</sup> Grierson tried to make the case for state support, stressing its practical importance for governing a multi-lingual empire, and could have pointed to how the Archaeological Survey overcame scepticism of its utility to become an established research arm of the state.<sup>26</sup> While some members of central government remained open to Grierson's survey, he was informed in 1889 that the Finance Department would not cover the substantial shortfall.<sup>27</sup> Plans were largely shelved from 1890 to 1895, forcing Grierson to revise the scheme.

Grierson's first significant revision was to shrink the LSI's coverage, leaving out Madras and the southern princely states, including Hyderabad, Mysore and Travancore, as well as Burma in the east (see Fig. 3). This was not an arbitrary decision since Madras – a province chiefly populated by Dravidian speakers – was particularly critical over the lack of input from Dravidian scholars.<sup>28</sup> There had been a longstanding intellectual division in India between the strand of Indo-Aryan philology dominant in Calcutta (and to a lesser extent Bombay) which played a meaningful part in the rivalry between Madras and the two other major presidencies of India.<sup>29</sup> Grierson's Indo-Aryan bias perhaps came to the fore by cutting out Madras and associated states, articulating an exclusionary geographical vision that relegated the Dravidian languages below, and even external to, what was linguistic India proper.<sup>30</sup> Grierson's inopportune suggestion that the Indo-Aryan general director would oversee the work of the fourteen provincial directors would not have helped matters.

The decision to leave out a significant area of India also demonstrated a paradox in the spaces of Indian surveying; it was often easier (bureaucratically-speaking) to survey external areas than parts of India itself. Beyond the inter-provincial rivalries which saw the rise of provincial departments, the cartographic Survey of India had to follow all sorts of rules and contracts to map the princely states while it effectively mapped much of the Middle East and Central Asia with far less regulation and barriers.<sup>31</sup> As explained later, the LSI did not have the same issue with the princely states but its expanded yet partial view of what constituted a surveyable India was not unique. Surveys rarely covered 'all-India' and invariably extended beyond, making the 'of India' a misnomer.<sup>32</sup>

As Majeed points out, however, Grierson was more open to Dravidian influences on Indo-Aryan languages than his peers and

by corresponding with experts in a private capacity and using existing linguistic research, the LSI was able to publish a Dravidian language volume.<sup>33</sup> Another change to the proposal was dropping costly plans to remunerate surveyors. The retired civil servant and statistician William Wilson Hunter, who completed the similarly ambitious *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, recommended a cheaper and more efficient approach that would see the LSI bring together 'officers and missionaries and native scholars in each province' to independently survey languages based on a set of simple instructions circulated by Grierson.<sup>34</sup>

By 1896, and after several revisions, a substantially reduced and inexpensive scheme which became the Linguistic Survey of India was sanctioned.<sup>35</sup> Echoing Hunter's recommendation, Grierson devised a system of corresponding with officials posted across India to compile lists of languages, source translated texts and specimens, and gather other useful linguistic information, completed on top of their existing administrative duties for which they received a salary.<sup>36</sup> The approved LSI was not a complete revamp of the initial proposal as Grierson already envisioned surveying would be completed through correspondence with local schoolteachers. Using schoolteachers was not new either: Grierson may have based the idea on Georg Wenker's survey of the German Empire (1876–1887) which involved sending a questionnaire to elementary schoolteachers with set sentences to translate in the local German dialect.<sup>37</sup>

Adapting what was until then a European model of surveying national languages, or more commonly dialects, to India was another impediment in getting the LSI off the ground. The language 'specimens', a term firmly locating the LSI within European natural science, are a case in point.<sup>38</sup> For the set text, Grierson chose the 'Parable of the Prodigal Son' which had been used since Charles-Étienne Coquebert de Montbret's survey of Napoleonic France (1806–1812).<sup>39</sup> However, Grierson was warned by officials on the ground that references to pigs and 'fattened calves' in the Parable would be problematic for Hindus and Muslims and could hinder the immediate work of gathering translations. The Resident (British representative) in Nepal asked for a different text to avoid offending Hindus in Nepal and India, while authorities in Rajputana Agency went further and pushed the LSI to drop the use of any Bible passage which might 'give rise to a suspicion that the linguistic survey is connected with missionary or religious work.'<sup>40</sup> Grierson retained the Parable, perhaps to align with accepted international linguistic conventions of the time, but adapted the text for an Indian audience by removing references to pigs, calves and anything that might be overtly construed as religious. The second specimen was a piece (or pieces) of prose, verse or song, followed by the third specimen, a standard list of 241 words and phrases for comparative study.

<sup>24</sup> Circular, 13/12/1889. NAI. Home/Public A/February 1895/253–279. Grierson estimated it would cost c. Rs. 350,000, but the provinces and princely states only offered c. Rs. 100,000 in total. See Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p.52.

<sup>25</sup> W. Hunter to J. Peile, 14/2/1887. George Grierson private papers (Mss Eur. 223), British Library, Mss Eur. E223/272.

<sup>26</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.50–56. For a history of the ASI, see D. Chakrabarti, *A History of Indian Archaeology: from the beginning to 1947* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Hewett to Grierson, 26/12/1889. NAI. Home/Public A/February 1895/253–279.

<sup>28</sup> Circular, 13/12/1889. NAI. Home/Public A/February 1895/253–279. However, the use of correspondence would allow the LSI to contact Dravidian scholars. See also Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p.52.

<sup>29</sup> See Thomas Trautmann, *Languages and Nations: The Dravidian Proof in Colonial Madras* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> Majeed deals more authoritatively with Grierson's Indo-Aryan bias in *Nation and Region*.

<sup>31</sup> *Hand-book of General Instructions for the Survey of India*, 3rd ed. (Calcutta, 1907). For example, survey parties had to employ assistants provided by the native state authorities at different rates than in British territory.

<sup>32</sup> The Survey of India had responsibility for surveying the wider Middle East and Central Asia for much of its existence.

<sup>33</sup> Majeed, *Nation and Region*, pp.124–128.

<sup>34</sup> W. Hunter to J. Peile, 14/2/1887. Mss Eur. E223/272.

<sup>35</sup> Initially known as the *Survey of Vernacular Languages* in government correspondence until 1896/1897.

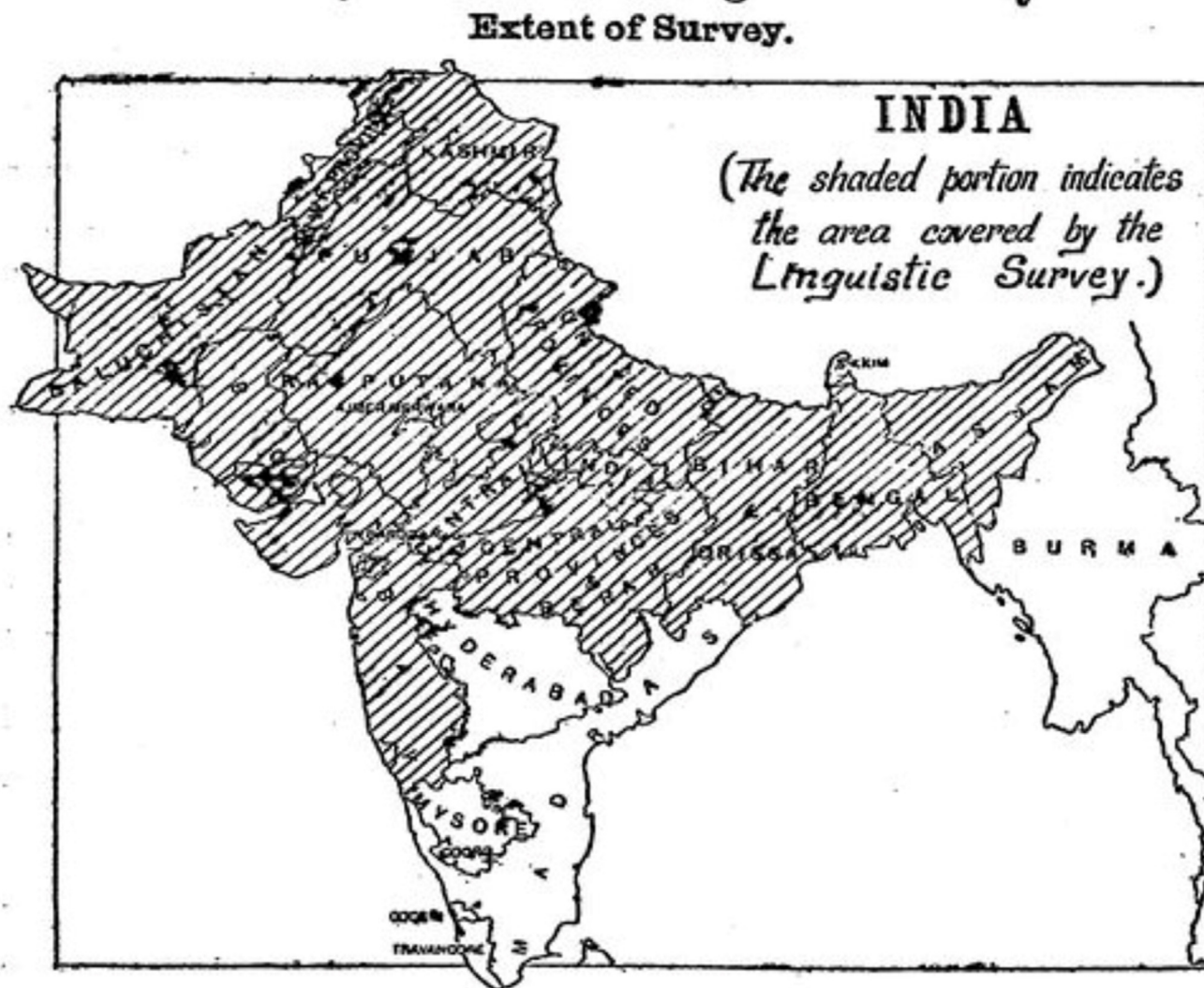
<sup>36</sup> Internal correspondence. NAI, Home/Public/December 1895/159–160; Home/Public A/February 1896/192–196. The first idea was to produce a catalogue raisonné and gather one specimen, estimated to cost a cheap Rs. 2000 per year.

<sup>37</sup> For an overview of Wenker's survey see, Jürg Fleischer, *Geschichte, Anlage und Durchführung der Fragebogen-Erhebungen von Georg Wenkers 40 Sätzen: Dokumentation, Entdeckungen und Neubewertungen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> 'Specimen' often had racial undertones in colonial science. Gyan Prakash, Science "'Gone Native' in Colonial India', *Representations*, 40 (1992) 153–78.

<sup>39</sup> Camiel Hamans, 'The return of the prodigal son', *Scripta Neophilologica Poniensis*, 27 (2017) 103–116.

<sup>40</sup> Memo, February 1896; letter from A.G-G Rajputana, 23/3/1896. NAI. Foreign/Internal B/April 1896/324–328.



**Fig. 3.** 'Map showing the area covered by the Linguistic Survey'. Source: George Grierson *Linguistic Survey of India, Volume 1, Part 1 -Introductory* (Calcutta, 1927), p. 25. Courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library.

Corresponding with officials to source translated specimens was not unique to the LSI either. For his survey of France nearly a century earlier, Coquebert de Montbret contacted departmental prefects – an administrative position created under Napoleon – to translate the Parable in local dialects.<sup>41</sup> Although there is no evidence that Coquebert de Montbret's survey directly inspired the LSI, Grierson insisted on using officials and resisted calls to work with the Asiatic Society and other learned networks to survey India.<sup>42</sup> What mattered for Grierson was not the expertise or reach of potential correspondents – the Asiatic Society and other institutions had knowledgeable contacts all over India – but the uniformity and reliability of officials. On a practical level, Grierson suggested that scholars, missionaries and other private actors might expect payment or expenses covered for gathering specimens whereas officials could be ordered to complete work on top of

their existing duties. Crucially, civilians were 'not trained in the school of official discipline' and holding their work to account would be difficult.<sup>43</sup> Grierson sought government support because he needed the state's human resources as much as, if not more, than its economic resources to ensure surveying was completed in an efficient and timely manner as demanded by financial and political constraints.

Unfortunately for the LSI, the use of untrained officials rather than trained surveyors or linguists would later be used to question the intellectual rigour of its results.<sup>44</sup> Grierson also had a rather optimistic view of the 'official discipline' of his fellow civil servants. As the following section will outline in more detail, some officials surveyed quickly and efficiently while others returned unusable specimens and information, never finished surveying, or simply ignored the LSI.<sup>45</sup> As much as Grierson and his assistant Gauri Kant Roy pressed officials to complete their work, they had little

<sup>41</sup> Sven Ködel, *Die Enquête Coquebert de Montbret (1806–1812): die Sprachen und Dialekte Frankreichs und die Wahrnehmung der französischen Sprachlandschaft während des Ersten Kaiserreichs*, (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Hewett to Home Department, 25/1/1895. NAI, Home/Public A/February 1895/253–279; Home/Public/December 1895/159–160.

<sup>43</sup> Grierson to Hewett, 15/01/1890. NAI, Home/Public A/Feb. 1895/253–279. He also suggested financial rewards would induce the 'wrong types' to volunteer.

<sup>44</sup> Varma, G. A. *Grierson's Linguistic Survey*, p.2.

<sup>45</sup> See also, Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.55–56.

authority to ask them to prioritise what was effectively an additional voluntary task.

The LSI mapped itself onto the existing political geography of colonial India by integrating the practice of surveying language into the government's network of officials. The scale at which dialects and languages were surveyed was a calculated choice. The officers tasked with surveying on behalf of the LSI were the District Collectors, Deputy Commissioners and others of a similar grade in charge of a district (an administrative level below that of a province and division), of which there were over 250 across British India.<sup>46</sup> Districts were quasi-coherent units, varying in size, topography and population but their defined administrative position, with settled headquarters, provided a stable locus for the circulation of forms and information.<sup>47</sup> Subdividing surveying enabled the LSI to map India expeditiously and identify languages precisely, district-by-district, at a reduced cost and burden to government. Consequently, the LSI entrenched the district as the scale at which linguistic differences could be observed. In practice, geographic and demographic differences between districts greatly impacted surveying as the subsequent section shows. Grierson also made use of the hierarchical authority of the British administrative system in India to solicit the support of a divisional commissioner (overseeing several districts) to compel reluctant district officers to return completed specimens.<sup>48</sup>

Complicating surveying was the 'internal anomaly' of the quasi-sovereign princely states subjected to an unequal political arrangement with the Crown.<sup>49</sup> Their geographies varied substantially, with states such as Kashmir and Hyderabad comparable to the largest provinces in size while small states were often confederated into Agencies. Whereas the seemingly semi-uniform hierarchical territory of British India masked its unevenness, the anomalous and distant geographies of the princely states exposed the asymmetry of scaling surveying both locally and across India. Their complicated legal and political status in the Indian Empire meant rather than integrate language surveying onto an existing networked geography of officials, the LSI adapted surveying to satisfy – and sometimes evade – the protocols which not only governed relations but differentiated the princely states. In a prominent state like Kashmir, Grierson formally corresponded with the British representative (e.g., a Resident or Political Agent) through the Foreign Department which maintained the external relations of British India.<sup>50</sup> The Resident in Kashmir then applied to the Darbar (Court) for permission to gather language specimens, a lengthy process.<sup>51</sup>

In smaller and less influential states, surveying was less cumbersome as the Political Agent could directly forward Grierson's request and instructions to an influential political figure such as the Munsiff (Chief Judge) of Jodhpur (Marwar).<sup>52</sup> Although surveying the native states was not a straightforward process, the

LSI benefitted from not being associated with government as overtly as other scientific surveys connected to the military and economic establishment, and its limited financial and ambiguous institutional position meant it could present itself as a more benign scholarly exercise that transcended imperialising.<sup>53</sup> It also empowered Grierson to subvert the protocolised spaces of state-sanctioned surveying by using personal connections and shared linguistic interest to directly correspond with key figures in the princely states. The Dewan (Chief Minister) of Cooch Behar, Kalikka Das Datta, for example, had a noted interest in the Garo languages and was glad to check and proof specimens in response to an informal enquiry by the LSI.<sup>54</sup>

The LSI's progress was roughly divided into three overlapping stages. From approximately 1896 to 1898, Grierson mapped out a network of prospective language surveyors by contacting officials to identify and compile an initial list of attested languages in the districts. Grierson further recruited an assistant from the Home Department in January 1896 with the requisite administrative experience and language skills: Gauri Kant Roy.<sup>55</sup> The principal surveying stage when translated specimens and other information were gathered and returned, lasted from 1898 to around 1905, although some translated copies of the Parable were returned as early as 1896, while more distant regions along the frontier were surveyed as late as 1919.<sup>56</sup> The final stage, which began once the first specimens were returned and lasted until the final LSI volume was issued in 1928, included the editing of returned language material, reviewing drafts, and printing. Volumes were published as and when they were completed.<sup>57</sup> Two significant moments in the second and third stages changed the LSI's geography. First, Grierson returned to Europe for health reasons, settling outside London in 1900. At this juncture the LSI pivoted more towards Europe; India remained central but classifying and proofing took on an international dimension with scholars in Europe more involved. Secondly, Grierson employed Sten Konow, a Norwegian linguist, to address his weaker knowledge of the Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman languages. As the last section explains, Konow's recruitment signalled a survey of – and in – India had become part of a global programme of language surveying and linguistic research.

### Scaling India's linguistic area

In an influential 1956 article for *Language*, the Berkeley linguist Murray Emeneau characterised India as an area where genetically distinct languages appeared to share common features through geographical proximity and contact, building on work by Jules Bloch and others who used the LSI to make those connections.<sup>58</sup> Yet calling India a linguistic area (whatever its merits as a concept) presented a deceptive coherence to its geography, one that could be effortlessly surveyed, ordered and studied. The organisation of the LSI's results contributed to the perception of an orderly linguistic

<sup>46</sup> *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*. Vol. 4, Administrative, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p.48.

<sup>47</sup> Although some districts changed boundaries during surveying. See Grierson to Deputy Commissioner, Jhelum 15/1/1912. India Office Records (IOR), British Library, S/1/6/10.

<sup>48</sup> Grierson to Commissioner, Central Division, Bombay, 24/2/1902. IOR, S/1/9/1.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen Legg, 'An international anomaly? Sovereignty, the League of Nations and India's princely geographies', *Journal of Historical Geography* 43 (2014) 96–110. For a comprehensive overview of the native states and their relationship with British India, see Barbara Ramusack, *The Indian Princes and Their States*, The New Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>50</sup> Internal memo, 9–10/2/1896. NAI, Foreign/Internal B/April 1896/324–328. For more on the Foreign Department see, Sneha Mahajan, *Foreign Policy of Colonial India, 1900–1947* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Grierson to Sir Adelbert Talbot, 15/3/1900. IOR, S/1/12/1.

<sup>52</sup> Grierson to Munsiff of Jodhpur, c.1899. IOR, S/1/10/1.

<sup>53</sup> The LSI operated in a 'grey area' between state and scholarship as Majeed argues: *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.69–70.

<sup>54</sup> Corr. with Diwan of Cooch Behar, 4/5/1900–26/11/1900. IOR, S/1/3/12. The Dewan was Chief Minister to the Maharaja of Cooch Behar (Koch Bihar) State, located south of Bhutan.

<sup>55</sup> Internal memo, 8/1/1896. NAI, Home/Public A/February 1896/192–196. Roy seems to have been the only person fluent in Hindi, Urdu and English available and willing to work with Grierson.

<sup>56</sup> Majeed sees specimen collection as clearly delineated although evidence suggests some Parables were returned with the lists in the first stage. *Colonialism and Knowledge*, p.2.

<sup>57</sup> For several reasons, some outlined in the next section, issues with printing frequently delayed publication. For a more extensive discussion, see Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.182–184.

<sup>58</sup> Murray Emeneau, India as a Linguistic Area, *Language*, 32 (1956) 3–16.

geography to India, however as Majeed has noted, Grierson acknowledged the arbitrariness, incompleteness and difficulties in surveying a 'complex linguistic environment'.<sup>59</sup>

Delegating surveying was not only a pragmatic answer to the political and financial constraints faced by the LSI, but an admission that overcoming India's complex linguistic area and uneven geography could only be achieved by a relatively decentralised scheme that entrusted officials who knew their localities better and had direct access to knowledgeable informants. Compiling lists of attested languages proved a preliminary test of the LSI's surveying method. Specific instructions were circulated asking officials to record the 'names of genuine local dialects' or home languages, rather than commercial or social lingua francas, and Grierson advised having forms 'filled for me by some intelligent person well acquainted with the local modes of speech'.<sup>60</sup> Grierson further suggested officials use other sources of data to cross-reference and eliminate anomalies in the compiled list of languages. Although most lists were not retained, a surviving few shed light on the LSI's methodology. The language list from the Deputy Commissioner of Chhindwara District (Central Provinces), R. H. Ryves, showed census data and settlement reports were used to identify around twenty-nine languages in the district, verified by unnamed, presumably Indian, informants.<sup>61</sup> Grierson, with Roy's help, used Ryves' version to produce a consolidated language list of the district which reduced the number of languages to twenty-four, removing duplicates, non-local languages (such as Punjabi), or statistical anomalies (Ryves recorded one speaker of Kannada in the whole district).<sup>62</sup>

At the same time, copies of the Parable translated by missionaries in sixty-five Indian languages were circulated, ensuring the widest coverage for areas where Hindi, Urdu or other major languages were not widely understood.<sup>63</sup> Some officials were particularly proactive, going beyond Grierson's instructions to collect numerous specimens of verse or prose, such as the Collector of Chittagong who returned over sixty proverbs in the local Bengali dialect by May 1896, promising to gather three hundred more if necessary.<sup>64</sup> Such an energetic response and the relative success of asking local officials to compile lists perhaps assured Grierson that delegating surveying would be effective.

District officials and representatives in the princely states were mostly left to gather specimens as they saw fit once the main phase commenced, only receiving Grierson and Roy's consolidated language list for their area with basic instructions on preparing the remaining specimens. The letter accompanying the forms for the Resident of Kashmir, for example, simply instructed how to prepare specimens and when they had to be returned, but did not determine how to source specimens or what other language data they could collect.<sup>65</sup> Officials came to embody a localised LSI, adapting its method of circulating information, forms and other materials – sometimes in person due to proximity, but usually by

correspondence – to survey the area under their charge. The Assistant Collector in Bombay, Arthur Simcox, went as far as reworking the instructions and forms to meet local conditions.<sup>66</sup>

Most officials facilitated surveying in their jurisdiction since very few were language experts. Who prepared specimens differed by district although schoolmasters and other members of the educational service acquainted with local dialects were a typical choice, echoing Wenker's earlier example in Germany. Simcox's revised instructions was intended for schools in the area, while the Collector of Satara corresponded with the local Educational Inspector to complete the Kunbau specimens.<sup>67</sup> In the district of Belgaum, most of the Survey's work was completed by the Assistant Master of a local school, H. G. Joshi.<sup>68</sup>

Subordinate officers were also commonly tasked with surveying. Like members of the local educational service, subordinate officers were invariably Indians 'well acquainted with the local modes of speech' or assumed to know who to correspond with locally. In some cases, adept subordinate – often multilingual – officers would complete work in its entirety. The deputy to the Assistant Political Agent for Dir, Swat and Chitral (a confederation of native states on the frontier with Afghanistan), Abdul Hakim Khan, was commended by the LSI for locating and translating specimens of fifteen regional languages and dialects, while in Chhindwara, the Extra-assistant Commissioner, Gopal Rao Dougre, gathered and prepared the specimens of local dialects for R. H. Ryves.<sup>69</sup>

Officials mirrored the LSI's scaling in other instances by devolving surveying to those in charge of smaller administrative units such as the tehsil or taluk. The Mamlatdar (revenue collector) of Parasgad was asked by the Deputy Collector of Belgaum to survey the language of the Kaikadis, a nomadic group who occasionally settled nearby.<sup>70</sup> However, officials in charge were not always assigning work for the LSI's benefit but avoiding adding a voluntary exercise to their workload. The division of surveying labour invariably fell on junior, usually Indian, colleagues who become the LSI's surveyors in the (metaphorical and actual) field. The LSI recognised the important contributions of Abdul Hakim Khan and others, as part of what Majeed sees as the LSI's ongoing exercise of joint authorship which acknowledged the work of both Indians and Europeans.<sup>71</sup>

Surveying proved haphazard, nevertheless, and numerous issues arose with the collection or translation of specimens and the reliability of officials.<sup>72</sup> Often irreplaceable correspondence and language materials were occasionally lost. The only copies of the Tibetan specimens from Laurence Waddell went missing in the offices of the Home Department in Calcutta, while the list of 241 words and sentences completed by Tika Ram for the Deputy Commissioner of Simla never reached Roy nor could be found.<sup>73</sup> The latter proved particularly odd since Roy was based in Simla. Distance evidently had very little influence on correspondence or materials going missing. Yet missing specimens were a minor inconvenience compared to the reliability of officialdom. Gauri

<sup>59</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.197–206.

<sup>60</sup> Circular to Political Officers, 19/05/1896. NAI, Foreign/Internal B/June 1896/300–303. Grierson distinguished home languages from regional lingua francas spoken in courts and markets.

<sup>61</sup> Language list from R. H. Ryves, 1896. IOR, S/1/7/3. Mentions it was double-checked by 'intelligent people'.

<sup>62</sup> Consolidated list, Chhindwara district (undated). IOR, S/1/7/3. What a 'home' language was troubled the LSI in its mapping efforts since speakers often internally migrated or spoke multiple languages.

<sup>63</sup> 41 were Indo-Aryan, 4 Munda, 16 Tibeto-Burman, 3 Tai and 1 Khasi, ensuring broad linguistic coverage. The Parables were published as *Specimen Translations in Various Indian Languages* (Calcutta, 1897).

<sup>64</sup> Collector of Chittagong to Grierson/Home Department, 24/5/1896. Mss Eur., E223/272.

<sup>65</sup> Grierson to Resident in Kashmir, January 1899. IOR, S/1/12/1.

<sup>66</sup> Revised instructions, A. H. A Simcox, 30/7/1901. IOR, S/1/9/10.

<sup>67</sup> Collector of Satara to Grierson, 6/1903. IOR, S/1/9/11. Kunbau, or Kunbi, is a Khandesi dialect spoken in Maharashtra today.

<sup>68</sup> Correspondence with Collectors of Belgaum and Ass. Master, High School, 7/11/1899–1/1/1905. IOR, S/1/9/12.

<sup>69</sup> Grierson to Risley, 8/12/1902. IOR, S/1/2/1; Ryves (Deputy Comm. Chhindwara) to LSI, 30/4/1898. S/1/7/3.

<sup>70</sup> Deputy Collector, Belgaum to Grierson, 7/11/1899. IOR, S/1/9/12.

<sup>71</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.220–233.

<sup>72</sup> Majeed provides other cases in *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.197–202.

<sup>73</sup> Hewett to Grierson, 10/01/1901. IOR, S/1/2/1; On Tika Ram: Dep. Commissioner, Simla to Grierson, 10/12/1902. S/1/2/4.



Kant Roy kept meticulous logs which showed that by December 1902, around four to five years after the principal surveying stage had begun, numerous districts had not yet returned all three specimens and a few others had not even produced one.<sup>74</sup> A later undated log suggested the LSI never received a complete set of specimens for many languages across India.<sup>75</sup>

Surveying was understandably relegated in times of crisis. The Assistant Commissioner of Hyderabad, W. Haig, took over two years to complete surveying because he had to deal with a regional famine.<sup>76</sup> But more often it was officials not prioritising what was effectively a voluntary assignment, explaining why subordinates were often tasked with surveying. His reluctance to help forced Grierson to go to the Collector of Ahmednagar's divisional superiors to compel him to survey, while the Deputy Commissioner of Raipur simply discontinued surveying on the grounds that there was no knowledgeable person locally to work on the Gondi language (although one might question how hard he looked).<sup>77</sup> Delays slowed the broader progress of the LSI. Grierson reluctantly postponed the Gujarati section in 1903 to give the Collector of Land Revenue time to send him notes he was preparing.<sup>78</sup> Grierson's faith in 'official discipline' clearly wavered, which changed his stance on remunerating H. G. Joshi and others for their expeditious work translating and preparing materials for the LSI.<sup>79</sup>

The unevenness between the enacted spaces of surveying was a more fundamental reason behind the disparities in identifying languages and gathering specimens. Districts and princely states varied in size and population, some were relatively homogenous in linguistic terms, while others were exceptionally diverse. Administrative reorganisation rarely accounted for language and the unequal distribution of dialects distorted the LSI's approach. In the important state of Kashmir, which was comparable in area to the more densely populated province of Punjab, the LSI had to additionally wait for permission. The LSI listed only 10 languages and dialects to be surveyed in Kashmir – a small number relative to the size of the state – yet it took several years to complete.<sup>80</sup> Officials like the Resident of Kashmir were not only surveying disparate areas but also working across different scales of observation and communication as they corresponded with teachers, subordinate officers or other languages surveyors in more immediate locations within their jurisdiction while conveying results and information to Roy and Grierson in Calcutta and London.<sup>81</sup>

Moreover, geography greatly impacted surveying on an India-wide scale. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the districts and princely states situated along the sparsely populated frontier and in remote, mountainous regions of India (see Fig. 4, for a visual example). The Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills (a mountainous area between Burma and Assam) was unable to acquire specimens of several tribal languages in the Hills because of difficulties reaching or contacting communities speaking those languages.<sup>82</sup> Surveying by correspondence was rarely an option for insecure and contested frontier areas which lacked communication infrastructure or a formal British presence, meaning the LSI depended on expeditionary parties which invariably had 'limited

success ... in gathering information ... with rising rivers, inadequate paths and struggles communicating, rendering large portions of the uplands inaccessible.<sup>83</sup> Parties were often militarised and in one case the Chief Commissioner of Assam informed Grierson that they were unable to gather information on the 'Bebejiya Mishmis' because of hostilities, overlooking that it was a punitive expedition.<sup>84</sup> The LSI might have inadvertently participated in the colonial state's violence when it asked the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills to make enquires regarding the language of the 'Yachumi' people, to which the official responded that they tried but 'they were unfriendly and had to be punished'.<sup>85</sup>

Simpson compellingly argues that as conventional topographic 'surveying extended further into colonial India's frontiers, British spatial imaginaries became not less but more convoluted, shadowy and riven with double entendres'.<sup>86</sup> For the LSI, what distinguished the frontier as a spatial imaginary from the more settled and better connected interior of India was not that it challenged surveying in an exceptional way. As Majeed has shown, the LSI was riven by self-doubt and uncertainty no matter what part of India it was surveying.<sup>87</sup> What differentiated the frontier as both a space for, and scale of, surveying was its temporality and the LSI readily accepted that the geographical and political complexity of the frontier required more time (and patience) to survey. As late as 1919, Grierson asked S. E. Pears, the Political Agent in Khyber, to gather more information and specimens on the languages spoken in the mountainous Tirah region.<sup>88</sup> The significance of time to surveying the frontier was exemplified by the fact that most volumes published later by the LSI (1916–1922) covered language groups spoken along the northwestern frontier, in contrast to volumes covering the core languages that were published before 1910.

As mentioned before, the LSI had a partial yet extended view of what constituted linguistic India, fully aware that its linguistic area was not neatly confined to international boundaries but, as Emeneau also pointed out, part of a language continuum stretching further into Asia (Fig. 5.; LSI's attempt at mapping a continuum).<sup>89</sup> The drawing of international (and internal) political boundaries in South Asia rarely considered shared linguistic identity. The boundary between Afghanistan and colonial India split the Pashto speaking population in half, while the Balochi speaking population were divided between Persia and India, and several Himalayan languages crossed Northern India and Nepal.<sup>90</sup> Extending linguistic surveying beyond British-controlled India into the anarchic spaces of 'Inner Asia', the LSI conversely reduced the unit of surveying to individuals – often current or former colonial officers – who operated across the frontier in an unconstrained, vaguely independent, capacity (although sometimes acting on behalf of the

<sup>74</sup> Simpson, *The Frontier*, p.66. See also, Sanghamitra Misra, *Becoming a Borderland: The Politics of Space and Identity in Colonial Northeastern India* (London: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> Sec. to Chief Commissioner, Assam to Grierson, 15/5/1900. IOR, S/1/4/1. For more on the expedition see Ranju Bezbaruah, 'Mitaigaon outrage and the Bebejiya Mishmi expedition, 1899–1900', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 54 (1993) 416–422.

<sup>76</sup> Captain Woods to Grierson, 13/7/1900. IOR, S/1/4/10. The Yachumi are the Yimkhung, one of several Naga ethnic groups living on India's border with Myanmar.

<sup>77</sup> Simpson, *The Frontier*, p.72.

<sup>78</sup> Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.197–206.

<sup>79</sup> Grierson to S.E Pears, 4/7/19. IOR, S/1/12/5.

<sup>80</sup> Emeneau, 'India as a Linguistic Area', pp.3–16.

<sup>81</sup> Which still affect the political stability of the regions in question. See, for example, Elisabeth Leake, 'Constitutions and Modernity in Post-Colonial Afghanistan: Ethnolinguistic Nationalism and the Making of an Afghan Nation-State', *Law and History Review* 41:2 (2023) 1–21.

<sup>74</sup> List of specimens still due from various districts, c. 1903. IOR, S/1/2/4.

<sup>75</sup> List of specimens still due (undated). IOR, S/1/2/5.

<sup>76</sup> Home Department to Grierson, 12/5/1900. IOR, S/1/2/1.

<sup>77</sup> Note from Gauri Kant Roy to Grierson, 20/3/1901. IOR, S/1/2/4.

<sup>78</sup> Grierson to Collector of Land Revenue, Customs and Opium, Bombay, 2/2/1903. IOR, S/1/9/2.

<sup>79</sup> Note from Grierson to Gauri Kant Roy, 17/9/1901. IOR, S/1/2/4. Grierson was willing to pay 10 rupees for each specimen Joshi completed.

<sup>80</sup> List of languages for Kashmir, c.1899. IOR, S/12/1.

<sup>81</sup> To borrow from Coen, *Climates in Motion*, pp.16–17.

<sup>82</sup> Letter to Grierson, 1/4/? IOR, S/1/4/13.

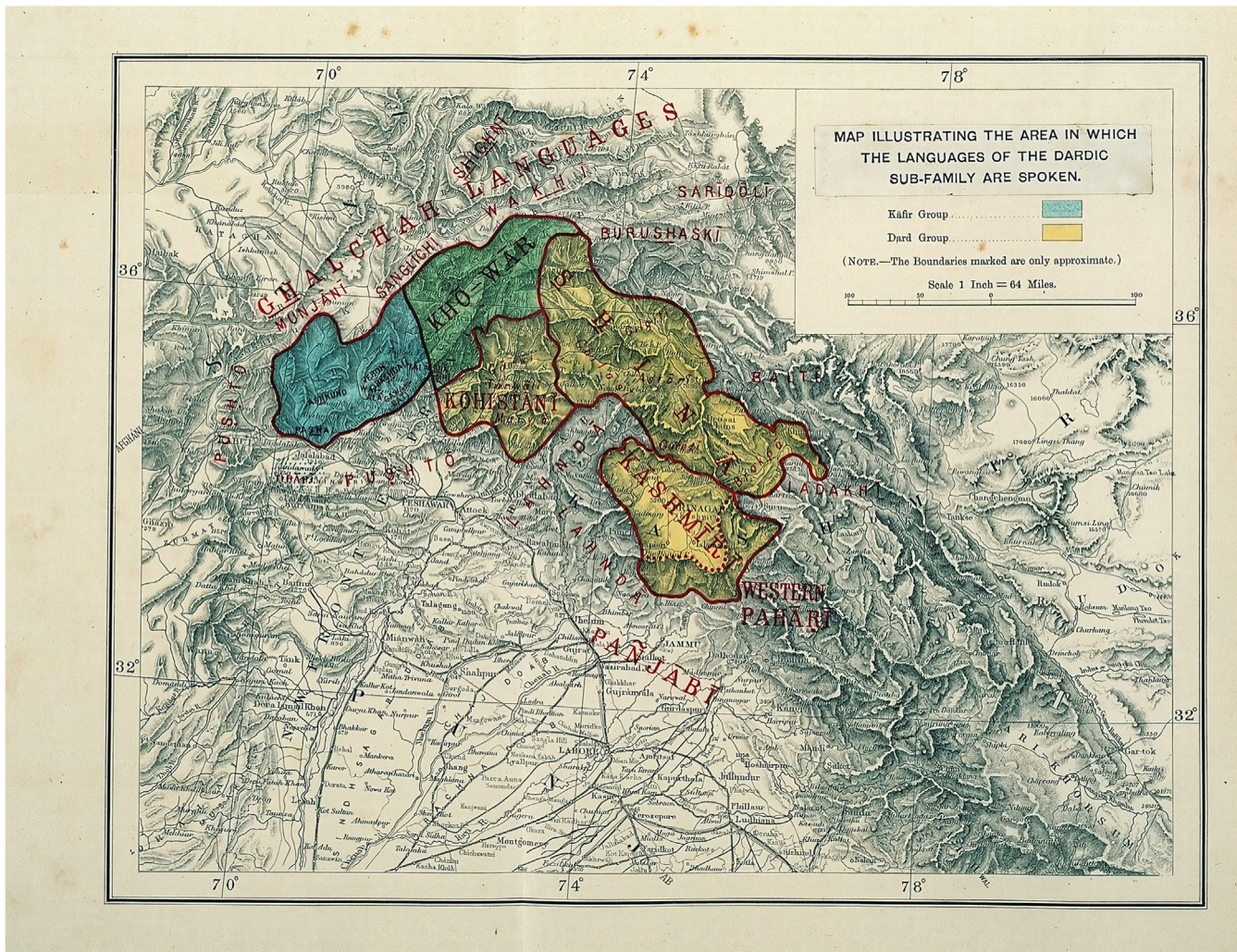


Fig. 4. 'Map illustrating the area in which the languages of the Dardic Sub-Family are spoken'. Source: George Grierson *Linguistic Survey of India, Volume 8, Part 2 -Specimens of the Dardic or Pisacha Languages (including Kashmiri)* (Calcutta, 1919), p. 1. Courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library.

state).<sup>91</sup> These included Laurence Waddell, an Army doctor and expert on the Tibetan languages; David L. R. Lorimer, a military officer based in the North-West Frontier Province who managed to source specimens on Afghan and Iranian languages that the LSI struggled to gather elsewhere; and most famously, Hungarian-born archaeologist Aurel Stein, who befriended Grierson and helped with several Afghan and Pamir languages he came across in his travels.<sup>92</sup>

While it had to embrace a more flexible and unrestricted approach to surveying ungoverned areas, what constituted the Linguistic Survey in India were a series of discrete, localised linguistic surveys adapted to meet the conditions of the district or native state. Officials rarely ventured beyond their assigned area to survey a language, to the extent that the Deputy Commissioner of Bannu informed Grierson that he could not gather Ormuri specimens because most speakers were found in the neighbouring

district of Tank.<sup>93</sup> By scaling surveying, the LSI surmounted unfinished specimens or incomplete work as languages invariably overlapped multiple jurisdictions. Hence, once Grierson received a complete set of Bagri specimens (an Indo-Aryan language), four other districts where the language was listed no longer had to return a set.<sup>94</sup> What frustrated Grierson about the Collector of Ahmednagar's apparent refusal to complete surveying was that the LSI only required information on one of four listed languages, having already gathered material on the others from neighbouring districts and sources.

Localised surveys were not merely extracting knowledge and data but actively engaging in the classificatory project of colonial linguistics.<sup>95</sup> Abdul Hakim Khan's correspondence hints at an internal discussion between Khan, the Assistant Political Agent and a few unnamed informants trying to identify and classify several languages spoken in a small area near Chitral which Grierson was unsure of.<sup>96</sup> The Deputy Commissioner of Nainital (then part of the

<sup>91</sup> For more on the surveying and exploration of Himalayan Central Asia, see Fleetwood, *Science on the Roof of the World*.

<sup>92</sup> E.g., Grierson to Lorimer, 30/5/1900. IOR, S/1/2/9. Stein and Grierson worked together on *Torwali: An account of a Dardic language of the Swat Kohistan* (London, 1929). Majeed deals with Stein comprehensively in *Colonialism and Knowledge*.

<sup>93</sup> T. R. Pennell to Grierson via Dep. Commissioner, 16/12/1899. IOR, S/1/6/12.

<sup>94</sup> List of specimens still due from the Punjab Province. IOR, S/1/2/5.

<sup>95</sup> See Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>96</sup> Note from Abdul Hakim Khan, 8/6/1901. IOR, S/1/12/2.

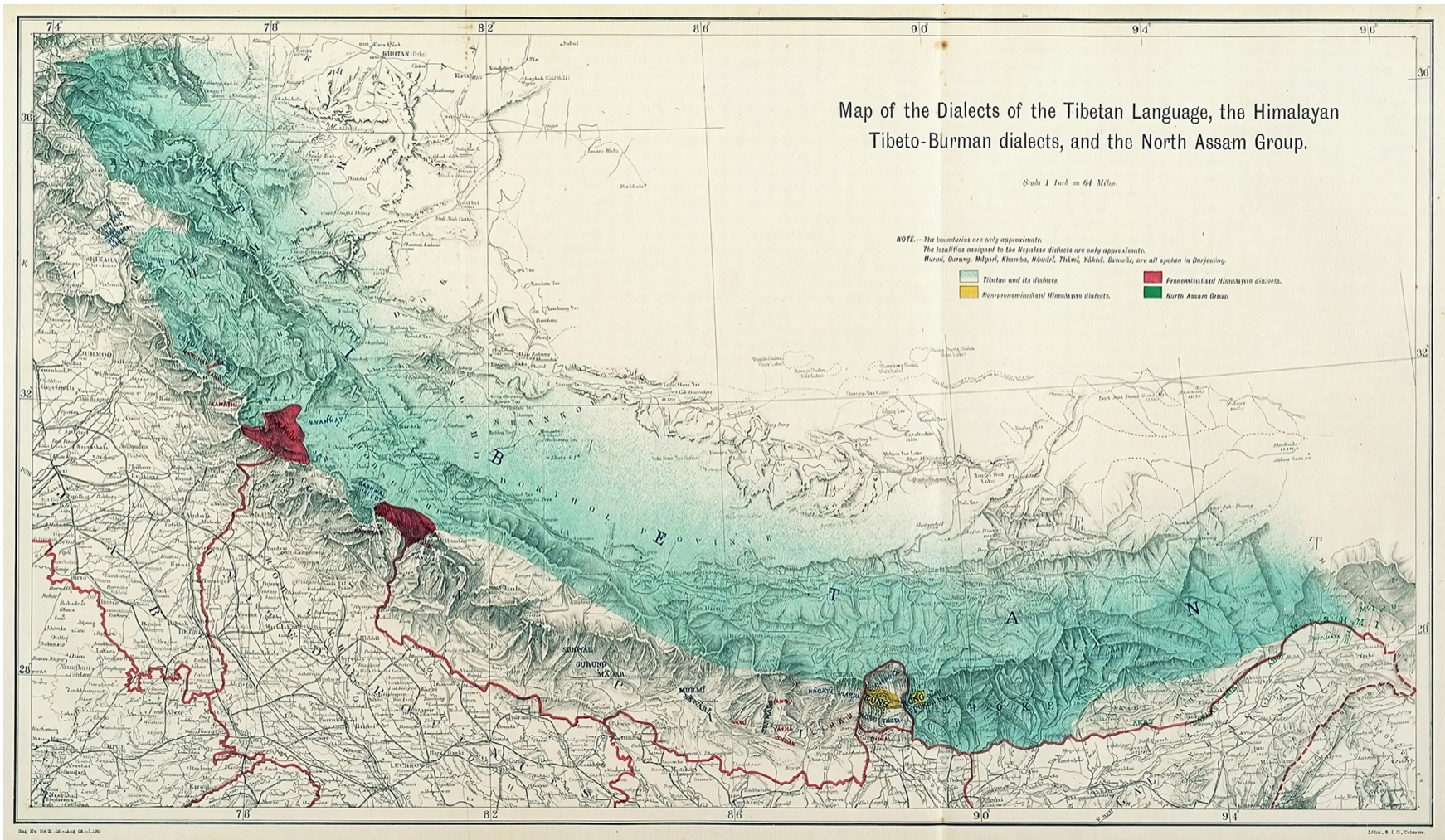


Fig. 5. 'Map of the Dialects of the Tibetan Language, the Himalayan Tibeto-Burman dialects, and the North Assam Group'. Source: George Grierson *Linguistic Survey of India, Volume 3, Part 1 -Tibeto-Burman Family. General Introduction* (Calcutta, 1909), p. 1. Courtesy of the Digital South Asia Library.

United Provinces) went a step further and asked for multiple, competing observations in order to help the LSI reach a conclusion on where the Kumaoni dialects were spoken in the region.<sup>97</sup> While Abdul Hakim Khan and others were not trained linguists, neither were they passive instruments or apparatuses for surveying India's languages.<sup>98</sup>

### Negotiating geography

As the first complete sets of specimens and language notes were returned around 1898, Grierson began preparing the results for publication. Thirteen out of twenty volumes were completed between 1903 and 1909, roughly a five-year interval between surveying and publishing. Another six were finished between 1916 and 1922, while the introductory volumes were published in 1927 and 1928. Several factors explain the gaps including the difficulties and length of time it took to survey the frontier. Trying to source the right type to print languages in diverse Indic (e.g., Nagari) and Persian scripts also caused extensive delays.<sup>99</sup>

What undoubtedly contributed to the considerable length of time it took to publish were the transnational, borderless networked spaces of classifying and editing. At this stage, the LSI turned not only to the colleges, learned institutions and missions in India but the universities and oriental societies of Europe to complete its work. While the LSI mapped onto an existing administrative system in India to survey, Grierson brought together linguistic experts across India and Europe – some known personally, others referred to him or recognised for their linguistic research – into a loosely governed network to classify, edit and review returned materials. These experts were not supervised to the same degree as officials and surveyors in India as the LSI deferred to their experience and knowledge.

German institutions were particularly renowned for Indo-European and linguistic research. Grierson corresponded with several German-speaking scholars including Ernst Kuhn at Heidelberg, who was consulted on the Indo-Aryan and Thai languages, and had various discussions on language development with the Sanskritists, Ernst Windisch, at Leipzig, and Lucian Scherman at Munich. He also had a long professional relationship with the Swiss linguist, Jacob Wackernagel, based at Göttingen and later Basel.<sup>100</sup> Noted scholars in France such as Émile Senart and Jules Bloch were also involved, while in Britain he relied on Sidney H. Ray (associated with the Anthropological Institute) for expertise in the Austronesian languages and John Sampson for the Romani languages.<sup>101</sup> Correspondence with European colleagues was helped by Grierson's return to Britain but the outbreak of the First World War severed the LSI from indispensable German expertise. While Grierson later reflected on the lost opportunities for collaboration, war also exacerbated the delay in publishing the last set of outputs, including the 'Eranian' languages volume, as Germans were particularly noted for their expertise in Iranian languages.<sup>102</sup>

European linguists were generally consulted on advanced questions of history, structure and classification, part of a much broader intellectual inquiry unfolding in university departments, international congresses and journals.<sup>103</sup> The reviewing of prepared proofs and drafts was undertaken by Indian experts working in the educational establishment such as Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna, the former principal of Sanskrit College, who reviewed a draft of the Bengali section.<sup>104</sup> Another group invited to help review proofs were an influential constituency in colonial linguistics: missionaries.<sup>105</sup> The use of predominantly European missionaries – versatile experts in Indian languages from their religious, pedagogical and charitable work – reflected the transnational scope of this stage as some were based in India, while others had moved to missions elsewhere in Asia or returned home. Reverend H. Gordon Roberts, who led the Presbyterian Church of Wales' mission in modern day Meghalaya, was invited to review the Khasi section several years after moving away.<sup>106</sup>

Missionaries frequently reviewed languages which Grierson and his colleagues had no expertise in, such as members of the Moravian mission in the Western Himalayas who were noted experts in the Tibetan languages.<sup>107</sup> Editing proved an ecumenical affair with Grierson contacting the linguist and Catholic priest Willem Schmidt to assist with the Mon-Khmer volume.<sup>108</sup> Crucially, multiple experts were invited to peer review sections or a complete volume. The Oriya proofs were corrected by the Deputy Inspector of Schools in Balasore, Ramanath Das, and the head of Cuttack Training School, Madhu Sudan Rao.<sup>109</sup> Logs showed that some drafts were recirculated multiple times to different reviewers before they were considered ready to publish. The Angami section was reviewed three times between October 1899 and May 1901, expanding from six to thirty-eight pages.<sup>110</sup>

On his return to Britain for health reasons, further removing him from the locus of surveying in India, Grierson became noticeably more dependent on Roy to negotiate the reciprocal networked geographies of the LSI. The only available – and willing – assistant in the Home Department with the right administrative experience and language skills, Roy was re-assigned in 1896 to help draft and circulate forms, organise returned material and keep track of financial accounts. From 1896 to 1899, Roy assisted Simla-based Grierson, working together to draw up and tabulate the language lists, and logging correspondence, research notes and specimens. Grierson subsequently granted Roy a large degree of authority to manage the

<sup>103</sup> The posthumous publication of De Saussure's lecture notes in 1916 perhaps marked the moment when linguistics becomes an academic science, although this had been an ongoing process since the 1870s. For an overview see, Peter Matthews, *A Short History of Structural Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>104</sup> Mahesachandra Nyayaratna to Grierson, 10/1/1901. IOR, S/1/3/11.

<sup>105</sup> *Colonialism and Missionary Linguistics*, ed. by Klaus Zimmermann and Birte Kellermeier-Rehbein (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.112–116.

<sup>106</sup> Corr. with Reverend H. Roberts regarding the Khasi section, 1900–1904. IOR, S/1/1/9. Roberts had written *A Grammar of the Khasi Language* (1891).

<sup>107</sup> Hartmut Walravens, 'The Moravian Mission and its Research on the Language and Culture of Western Tibet', *Oriens Extremus* 35 (1992) 159–69.

<sup>108</sup> Corr. with Father W. Schmidt on the Mon-Khmer languages, 1901–1926. IOR, S/1/1/22; Floris Solleveld, 'Between Dogma and Data: Wilhelm Schmidt and the Afterlives of 19th-Century Ethnolinguistics', *Histoire Épistémologie Langage*, 44 (2022) 57–77.

<sup>109</sup> Grierson to Magistrate-Collector, Balasore, 8/2/1901. IOR, S/1/3/6; Corr. to Grierson, 29/4/1901. S/1/3/5.

<sup>110</sup> Progress of the miscellaneous dialects of the Linguistic Survey from 12th September 1899. IOR, S/1/2/1.

<sup>97</sup> Note from Supt. Vernacular Office, 19/9/1896; Note from Deputy Collector, Tarai, 19/9/1896. IOR, S/1/5/8.

<sup>98</sup> Raj, *Relocating Modern Science*, pp.181–222.

<sup>99</sup> Corr. with Drugulin of Leipzig, 1904–1914. IOR, S/1/1/24. For more, see Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.182–183.

<sup>100</sup> Their correspondence is listed under S/1/1, Correspondence with Europe. For Wackernagel see Mss Eur., E223/336. Wackernagel influenced Grierson's organisation of the Linguistic Survey of India's results.

<sup>101</sup> Sampson was librarian at what would later become the University of Liverpool and co-founded the Gypsy Lore Society.

<sup>102</sup> C. Jahani, *Standardization and Orthography in the Balochi Language*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Studia Iranica Upsaliensia 1 (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1989).

surveying process and compile the returned materials as he saw fit, which Roy used to press both officials and those tasked with translating to complete their work, even threatening to drop a surveyor unless they hurried up.<sup>111</sup> But Roy kept Grierson updated and, to speed up the process, successfully made the case for remunerating Indians who helped prepare specimens for review.<sup>112</sup>

Grierson understandably needed someone in charge given the distance, making Roy the face of the LSI in India. It also enabled Grierson to focus on internationalising the LSI and integrate it into the emerging science of linguistics in Europe. In 1900, Grierson decided to hire a linguistic assistant to edit the Dravidian and Tibeto-Burman volumes. Pointed towards several capable scholars by colleagues, Grierson settled on the German-educated Norwegian linguist, Sten Konow. Roy, however, had also hoped to join Grierson in Britain and applied for the role, stressing not only his knowledge of the LSI but his ability to learn languages quickly.<sup>113</sup> Grierson could have rejected his assistant on the grounds he was not a Tibeto-Burman specialist like Konow, but rather tersely responded that the application was late, and in subsequent correspondence, suggested Roy might have found it difficult to move away from his family.<sup>114</sup>

The recruitment of a university-trained linguist should be understood as part of a greater aspiration to elevate the LSI into a project befitting a modern, scientific exercise on European terms.<sup>115</sup> Although the LSI was enormously receptive to Indian ideas and expertise, the correspondence with scholars still positioned the European linguist as the most qualified authority to answer advanced questions of classification and language development.<sup>116</sup> Grierson was also keenly aware that, while very accomplished, he was first and foremost a former civil servant and administrator at a time when linguistics became an increasingly academic discipline. Roy was not only non-European but, like Grierson, an administrator not formally trained in linguistic research.

Nevertheless, much of the systematic arrangement of specimens and other materials was completed by Roy at his desk. Grierson was kept up to date on which specimens had been returned but the materials often remained with Roy, who had them formatted and reviewed in India. Roy's tabulated logs mapped out in detail India's linguistic geography and helped classify languages even before European scholars intervened.<sup>117</sup> Roy may not have formally become Grierson's linguistic assistant, but it is through his work negotiating the production of linguistic knowledge locally in India and the editing and classification taking place internationally, that the LSI's linguistic geography of India takes shape.

## Conclusion

The recruitment of a trained linguist foreshadowed the biggest criticism levied later at the LSI: its overreliance on untrained

officials. As one linguist in India put it, 'the linguistic material received ... is often hopeless for scientific purposes'.<sup>118</sup> However, untrained colonial officials were only one component of a Linguistic Survey which integrated a multiethnic and multinational network of trained and untrained language surveyors to complete its work. Moreover, the LSI remains too often regarded as a narrower programme identifying and documenting linguistic features, when it was an ambitious attempt to chart the history of languages, understand which communities spoke those languages, and map where they were spoken. Even Emeneau, who disparagingly critiqued the use of 'minor local' officials, admitted the LSI was remarkable as a spatial exercise.<sup>119</sup> And despite its approach sometimes proving haphazard because of the inconsistent reliability of volunteers, and given colonial India's uneven geography and the exclusion of Madras and associated states, the LSI managed to impressively survey most of India within seven to eight years.

This paper has argued that the networked practice of surveying language was reciprocated at different scales, from localised surveys in the districts and princely states of India to a transnational initiative classifying, editing and reviewing the results of the India-wide survey. Officials worked across different scales of observation and communication as they corresponded with teachers, subordinate officers or other language surveyors to survey their jurisdiction for Roy in Calcutta and Grierson in Britain. Roy was initially hired to serve as his assistant but once Grierson left for Europe, negotiated the interchange between linguistic knowledge production in India and the editing and classification taking place across continents, systematically organising and mapping out the returned materials for others to study.

For historical geographers, the paper demonstrates that scale, as an analytic or process, was not an abstraction or predetermined for those entangled in the LSI's survey of India's languages. Navigating a complex linguistic, geographic and administrative environment within the financial and political constraints set out by the initially sceptical governments of India, scaling deliberately entrusted officials to survey localities they knew better, or had immediate access to the right people to ask, while acknowledging that linguistic expertise was not confined to either Europe or India. By scaling surveying so-called untrained minor officials like Abdul Hakim Khan were not simply instruments for extracting information and specimens but actively shaping the linguistic classification of languages and dialects that subsequent professional or academic linguists would study. Indeed, the LSI extended, but did not elevate, linguistics – in its emerging scientific form – beyond the domain of European and even Indian experts based in learned societies, colleges and increasingly universities.

This paper provides an intervention into the role of scale, and scaling, in the history of imperial surveying, however, the LSI was one of several which formed the cornerstone of the colonial state's scientific regime. From environmental (Geological, Zoological, Botanical etc.) to medical (Malaria) and cultural (Archaeological), more could be made of how these surveys operated at different scales inside and outside India and were shaped by, and influenced, seemingly disconnected occurrences and developments beyond the region. Moreover, the LSI was one of several linguistic surveys which emerged around the same time. As well as exercises in Europe and North America, surveys were planned in colonies such as Burma,

<sup>111</sup> Note from Gauri Kant Roy, 2/8/1900. IOR, S/1/2/4.

<sup>112</sup> Roy to Grierson, 4/7/1900. IOR, S/1/2/4.

<sup>113</sup> Roy to Grierson, 4/7/1900. IOR, S/1/2/4.

<sup>114</sup> Grierson to Roy, 4/7/1900; Grierson to Roy, 11/11/1900. IOR, S/1/2/4.

<sup>115</sup> Grierson to Hewett, 7/2/1898. Mss Eur., E223/272. Grierson reminded members of government that the LSI was 'eagerly looked forward to by the leading Philologists of Europe' and was also aware of similar projects happening in France and elsewhere.

<sup>116</sup> See Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.212-229.

<sup>117</sup> The logs mapping out India's linguistic geography can be found in IOR, S/1/2/4 and S/1/2/5.

<sup>118</sup> Varma, G. A. *Grierson's Linguistic Survey*, p.2.

<sup>119</sup> Emeneau, 'India and Linguistics', p.152.

places on the imperial periphery such as Afghanistan, and areas undergoing decolonisation such as the Caribbean.<sup>120</sup> Many remain underexamined, providing a rich set of case studies to consider their significance in ordering, categorising and mapping colonial or national spaces, paying attention to the overlooked role of scale in the history of the language sciences.

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<sup>120</sup> The unsuccessful Linguistic Survey of Burma in the 1920s was modelled on the LSI (Majeed, *Colonialism and Knowledge*, pp.60-69) while the Linguistic Atlas of Afghanistan project discontinued in the 1980s after the Soviet invasion. A Linguistic Survey of the West Indies was proposed in the 1950s: Robert Le Page, 'A Survey of Dialects in the British Caribbean', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 2 (1951) 49–50.