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Understanding Metadata

The Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at SOAS, London currently holds about 3,500 hours of audio, 1,000 hours of video, 20,000 images, and 12,000 text and other documents. These resources represent about 80 deposits received so far, from most regions of the world. While the majority of depositors are those holding funding from the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme at SOAS, ELAR also takes digital endangered materials from those funded by other agencies or independent scholars.

ELAR's development has been informed by two issues that characterise the practise of language documentation: firstly, the diversity of approaches, participants, methods, and outcomes; and secondly, the issue of "protocol" –sensitivities and the resultant restrictions imposed by language speakers and documenters on the access to and distribution of resources.

Our poster will illustrate two major aspects of ELAR's activities:

- (i) a survey of the metadata types that depositors have sent, and a description of how this metadata is used to drive the web presentation of materials for browse and access
- (ii) methods used for the formulation and ongoing management of data access conditions, and how these have been implemented through a social networking model that provides for more flexible access by researchers, community members, and the general public.