



Navigating Identity: A Study of the Khasis in Meghalaya's Multilingual Borderlands

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Abstract: This paper attempts to study the factors that influence identity perception of the Khasis in a language contact environment in four borders of Meghalaya. The study finds that the ecology of contact, intermarriage, and migration play a significant role in shaping the linguistic and cultural identity perception of the Khasis. The study also demonstrates that the language that people use in a particular community is not just a matter of communication, but is also influenced by the social and cultural context of the contact environment. Apart from utility and value, the kind of motivation associated with language can perceptively affect one's language and cultural identity. The study provides valuable insights into the complex factors that influence cross-border multilingualism and its impact on identity formation. The findings of the study have implications for the understanding of multilingualism in a contact situation on one hand, and the underpinnings of language and cultural in identity formation.

Keywords: language, Culture, Khasi, Ecology of Contact, Acculturation, Identity, National and International Borders, Meghalaya

1. Introduction

The relationship between language and identity is complex as language signifies one's identity while also serving as a tool for asserting one's identity. In a language contact situations where different linguistic communities interact, the interplay between language and identity becomes even more intricate. The ongoing cross-border movement and migration in the borders of Meghalaya, India has enabled a feasible contact environment between the Khasi residence of Meghalaya and other linguistic groups from neighbouring regions like Assam and Bangladesh, respectively in the national and international contexts of Meghalaya, providing an ideal context to analyze the interaction of language, culture, and identity factors. The Khasis inhabiting the northeast Indian state of Meghalaya possess a rich linguicultural heritage and predominantly speak Khasi, a branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family and one of Meghalaya's most widely used languages (Diffloth, 2005). The additional languages spoken in Meghalaya include Pnar, a Khasi dialect, and Garo, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Garo Hills region and both Khasi and Garo have a number of dialects (Dkhar, 2023). The Khasis have a long history of contact- socially, economically and culturally with other linguistic communities, such as those from Bangladesh and Assam, especially in the border areas. This contact results in a dynamic environment where diverse linguistic and cultural influences converge (Dkhar, 2019). Understanding how the Khasis perceive their linguistic and cultural identity in such a context is crucial for comprehending the complexities of identity formation, language choice, and cultural adaptation. By investigating the factors that shape identity perception, such as the ecology of contact, intermarriage, and migration, this study aims to contribute valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, culture, and identity among the Khasis in a multicultural and multilingual language contact setting that Meghalaya embraced.

1.1 Meghalaya: Location and Boundaries

Northeast India consists of seven sister states: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. Sikkim is the eighth state in the region. The northeastern part of India is linguistically diverse, encompasses various languages from three language families. Meghalaya, popularly known as the 'abode of clouds'



is located in the north-eastern corner of India. It is sandwiched between the lower Assam plain in the north, and the Surma Valley in the south. In the north, it is bounded by the Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam, on the east by the North Cachar district and Karbi Anglong, and on the west and south by Bangladesh. Toponymically, the state of Meghalaya is a plateau which emerged out of the plains of Assam millions of years ago (Zimba, 1977). According to Devi (2010:6), the elevation of the plateau ranges between 150 m to 1961 m. The central part of the plateau comprising of the *Khasi Hills* has the highest elevations, followed by the eastern section comprising of the *Jaintia Hills* Region. The *Garo Hills* region in the western section of the plateau is nearly plain. The state of Meghalaya is therefore broadly divided into three hill sections: The Garo Hills in the west, The Khasi Hills in the middle and the Jaintia Hills in the east. Politonymically, the state of Meghalaya at present comprises of 11 Districts: East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, South-West Garo Hills, East Jaintia Hills, West Jaintia Hills, East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and South West Khasi Hills.

1.2. Study Area

Four geographically contiguous border areas of Meghalaya, located in different parts of East Khasi Hills district, parts of East and West Jaintia Hills districts, and parts of Ri-Bhoi districts, marked by red dots in Figure 1. below were delineated for the study.

These four specific areas include:

1. *Bholaganj*- Location: Southern parts of East Khasi Hills (see Figure-2),
2. *Tamabil*- Location: South of the West Jaintia Hills and parts of East Jaintia Hills (see Figure 3)
3. *Byrnihat*- Location: North of Ri-Bhoi district (see Figure 4).
4. *Saphai*- Location: South-East of East Jaintia Hills district (see Figure 5).

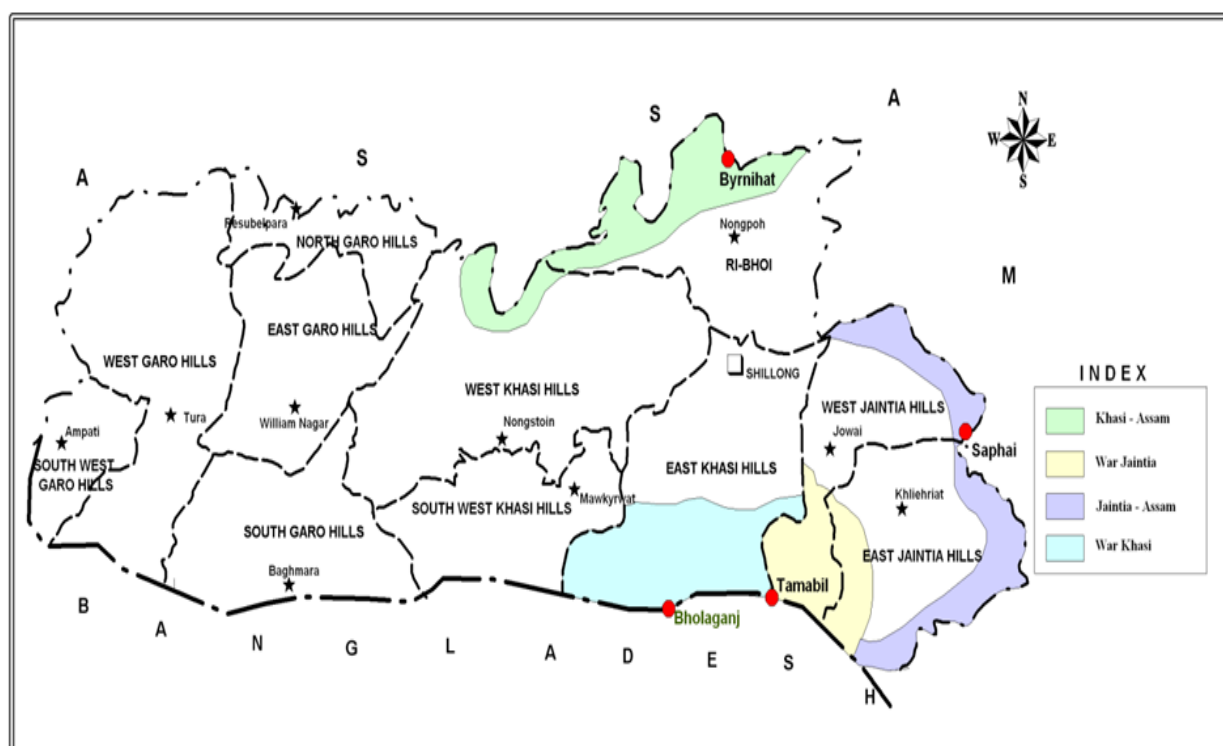


Figure 1. Location and base map of study area – Meghalaya

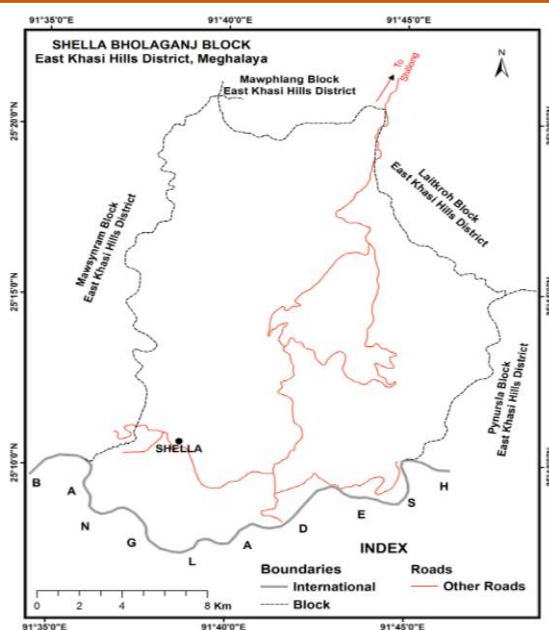


Figure 2. Base Map of Shella-Bholaganj in Meghalaya-Bangladesh International Border

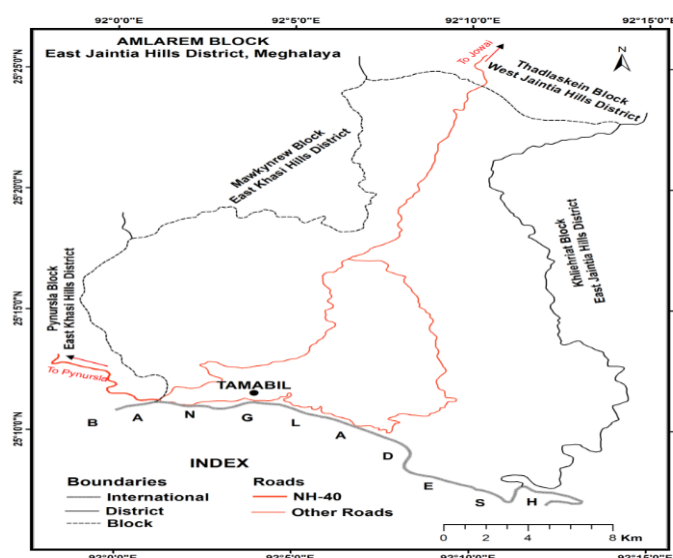


Figure 3. Base Map of Tamabil in Meghalaya-Bangladesh International Border (*Primary source)

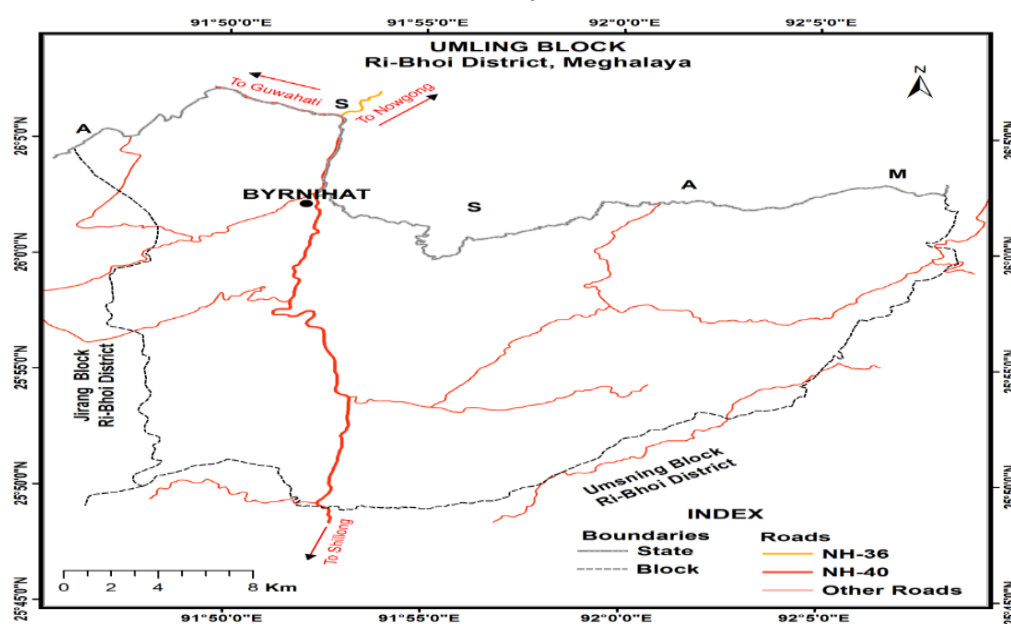


Figure 4. Base Map of Byrnihat in Meghalaya-Assam National Border (*Primary source)

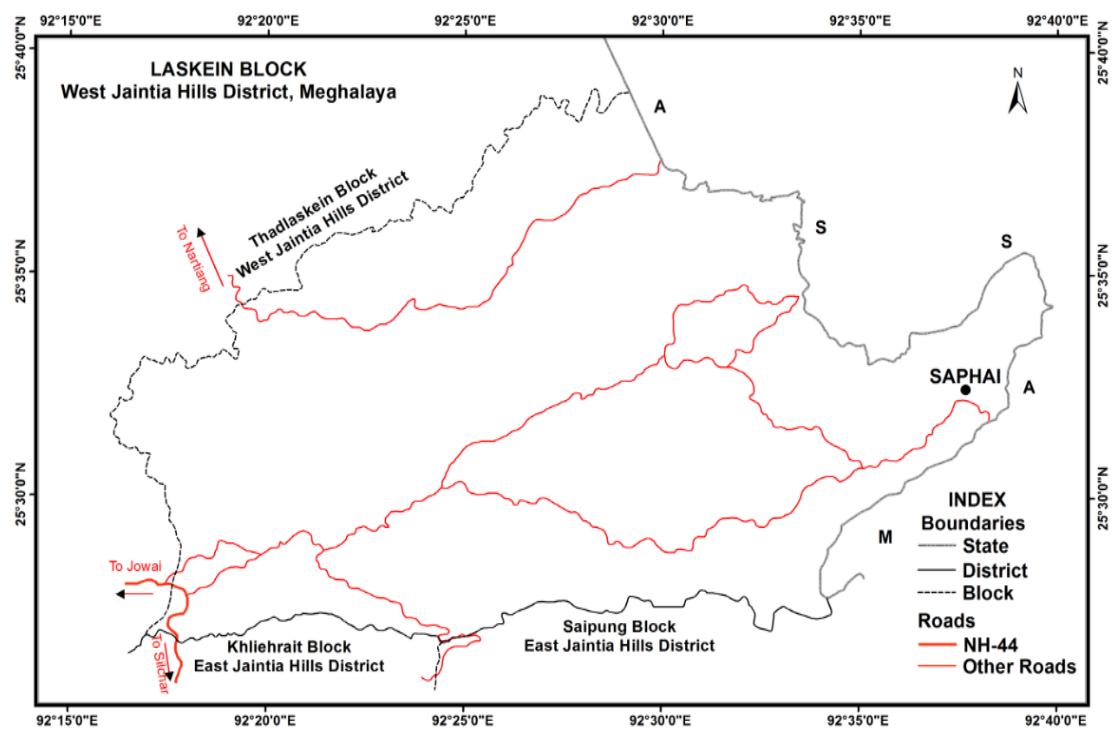


Figure 5. Base Map of Saphai in Meghalaya-Assam National Border (*Primary source)

2. Material and Methods

2.1. Objectives

- 1. To critically highlight the socio-cultural and linguistic contact situation as evident in the National borders of Byrnihat and Saphai, and the international borders of Bholaganj and Tamabil in Meghalaya.
- 2. To examine the interaction of ethno-cultural and linguistic identity perception of the Khasis (in-group) towards their out-groups respectively in Byrnihat, Saphai, Bholaganj and Tamabil borders of Meghalaya.

2.2 Participants

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were adopted for the study. Quantitative method involved the elicitation of data via questionnaires from 80 participants. These participants were selected from four distinct geographical regions, namely Bholaganj (n=20), Tamabil (n=20), Byrnihat (n=20), and Saphai (n=20). All participants shared a common background as Khasi by ethnic origins who are permanent residents of their respective areas. To ensure consistency in the study, the variable "period of residence" was used as a selection criterion where only participants who had resided in their respective areas for a minimum of 10 years were included. This criterion aimed to examine the impact of language contact from neighboring languages (out-group) on the language behavior of these permanent residents (in-group). By focusing on individuals who had established long-term residency, the study sought to identify and analyze the manifestations of language contact and its influence on the participants' linguistic, cultural and identity patterns.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants in the four contexts

| Note: Language(s) marked by the symbol (*) denote 'optional' | | | | |
|--|--------|--------|---|-------|
| Location | Gender | | Linguistic Profile Average | Total |
| | Male | Female | | |
| Byrnihat | 10 | 10 | Polyglot (<i>Khasi, Hindi, Assamese, Bangali, Bodo *Garo</i>) | 20 |

| | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|---|-----------|
| Saphai | 10 | 10 | Polyglot (<i>Khasi, *Hindi, Bodo, Assamese</i>) | 20 |
| Tamabil | 10 | 10 | Polyglot (<i>Khasi, Hindi, Nepalis *Assamese, Bengali</i>) | 20 |
| Bholaganj | 10 | 10 | Polyglot (<i>Khasi, Hindi, Bengali & Assamese, Nepalis</i>) | 20 |
| Total | 40 | 40 | - | 80 |

Table 1. below provides a comprehensive overview of the participant's demographic profile and background information. Qualitative method used in this study involved eliciting data through interview method conducted with key informants from each area, particularly the headmen/ secretary shnongs and local individuals who are knowledgeable about these respective regions. This method enables us to validate claims that participants made in the questionnaire and also allow for an in-depth exploration of the participants' perspectives, experiences, and insights regarding language contact and its effects on the community.

3. Theoretical Background of the Study

The theoretical background of this study examines the multifaceted concept of identity, highlighting its intricate relationship with language and cultural expressions.

The notion of identity is a multifaceted construct that is closely intertwined with language and cultural expressions. An individual's sense of self is not a static entity, but rather a dynamic construction shaped by the various identities we adopt within different social and political contexts. Abrams Hogg and (1988:2) define identity as "people's conceptions of who they are and how they relate to others". Social scientists view identity as a multidimensional construct, shaped by interconnected categories like "gender, age, religion, social class, culture, ethnicity, nationality, kinship roles, sexual orientation, and language" (Owens, 2011:9). Edwards (2009:23) emphasizes the fluidity of identity, characterized as a fluctuating and contingent phenomenon: a "process, rather than an entity".

Understanding the link between language, ethnicity, and culture in identity formation is crucial and remains an emerging field of inquiry. Studies reveal a deep connection between these elements. Culture, encompassing shared beliefs, values, and customs, shapes our worldview and interactions (Bates & Plog, 1980, in Kecskes, 2015). It is 'all the ideas and assumptions about the nature of things and people that we learn when we become members of the social group...as socially acquired knowledge' Yule (1985:267). Ethnicity, on the other hand, refers to shared characteristics – biological, geographical, or linguistic – and the subjective belief in a common ancestry (Liebkind, 1999:140). Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1990:309) highlight that 'ethnic identity, for the most part, is activated and regulated through the dynamics of language and communication'.

Both culture and ethnicity rely heavily on language for transmission, preservation, and embodiment of a distinct national or local identity. Language acts as a crucial tool, binding diverse social groups together and transmitting cultural and ethnic information across generations. Bucholtz and Hall (2004:369) argues 'among the many symbolic resources available for the cultural production of identity, language is the most flexible and pervasive'. Smolicz (1984:39) further emphasizes this point stating that languages are 'the core value of many, probably most cultures' and that their loss can deactivate cultures intellectually (quoted in Theiberger, 1990:339).

Theorists consistently emphasize the pivotal role of language in identity. Thieberger (1990) sees language as integral to both group and individual identity. Liebkind (1999) underscores its salience in symbolizing cultural differences and as an ethnic identity marker. Tajfel (1974) suggests that through interactions with other groups, individuals compare themselves and their group to those they encounter on numerous valued dimensions, which can increase their distinctiveness. Distinctiveness is achieved through social identity (membership in a group and the values attached to it), categorization (perceiving group differences and valued attachments), and comparison with members of their out-groups. Le Page & Keller (2010) argue that individuals strategically adjust language use to align with groups they identify with, highlighting language as a tool for self-representation. Torop (2015) suggests that richer languages within a culture provide greater opportunities for self-identification, implying a link between linguistic repertoire and cultural identity.



In conclusion, the concept of identity is closely intertwined with language and cultural expressions. Therefore, considering the intricate connections between language, culture, and ethnic identity and their dynamic nature, it is reasonable to suggest that in contexts of language contact situation, many socio-cultural and linguistic changes resulting from ecological and intergroup influences can play a significant role in shaping individual identity. These changes can impact how individuals perceive themselves, their affiliations, and their cultural identities. Mohanty (1994:121-122) aligns with this view, suggesting that socio-psychology of language seek explanations for 'the outcome of the intergroup contact and interaction in terms group identity and maintenance of culture and linguistic distinctiveness'. To explore this dynamic, the interactions between the Khasis in the borders of Meghalaya and neighboring communities in Assam and Bangladesh provide an ideal case study to examine this phenomenon more closely.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Socio-Cultural & Linguistic Background in the Borders of Meghalaya

According to Matras (2009:48), in rural border areas and ethnically mixed regions, language acquisition occurs primarily through face-to-face interaction. In such contexts, there exists a balanced incentive for individuals from all communities to acquire each other's languages. This phenomenon of cross-border multilingualism is particularly prominent in the context of the national and international borders between Meghalaya and Assam, as well as Meghalaya and Bangladesh. In a detailed investigation, Dkhar (2019) reported that ecology of contact in Bholaganj, Tamabil, Saphai, and Byrnihat exhibits at the different domains of activities that consequently conditions the reciprocity of language acquisition/learning in these border areas. Dkhar give the following account of the background information of these four border areas of Meghalaya as highlighted here.

Socio-economically, the commercial exchange observed in these four settings extends beyond mere transactions of goods and services between the Khasis and other speech communities in the market. It also facilitates the reciprocal sharing of cultural and linguistic resources. Consequently, contact in these four areas promotes the transfer of linguistic elements between languages at various grammatical and lexical levels through linguistic borrowing (Dkhar, 2019). Borrowing of words, according to him occurs in both directions in all four areas and is not limited to morphology and syntax. It permeates almost all semantic domains (Dkhar, 2019:265-266). As a result, increased social interaction with out-groups in these four contact areas, across various domains of activity, has led not only to language learning but also to a state of multilingual coexistence. Thus, linguistically, the Khasis in all four areas are polyglots, possessing knowledge of at least three different languages: Hindi, Bengali, and Khasi in Tamabil and Bholaganj, located on the international borders of Meghalaya, and Assamese, Bengali, Mikir, and/or Nepali in Byrnihat and Saphai, situated on the national borders of Meghalaya (Dkhar, 2019).

A further inquiry via interview conducted with the the local informants, as well as the headman, and assistant secretary shnong of all these respective study areas with regards to the nature of exogamous marriage prevalent in these areas reveals a similar picture. In Bholaganj, intermarriage primarily occurs between the Khasis and individuals who are Bangladeshis, Assamese or Nepalis background. In Tamabil, mixed-marriages is a recurrent practice between Khasis and individuals who are Biharis, Assamese, Bengalis, or Darrang ethnic groups. Byrnihat witnesses mixed-marriages between the Khasis and individuals who are Assamese, Mikirs, Garos, Bodo, Nepalis, or Bengalis backgrounds. In Saphai, albeit less common, there are a few reported cases of exogamic matrimony between Khasis and Assamese, Bengalis, Manipuri, Bodo, Rabha (primarily in lower Assam), and Nepalis background.

In all these areas, with a limited number of cases reported in Saphai, married Khasi women (in-group) often relocate with their husband (out-group) outside the border for settlement. However, there are reported cases where the reverse (husband relocates to their wife's community for settlement especially, in cases where the wife is the youngest daughter of her family) is also true, depending on mutual understanding between the couples and the respective shnongs (locality). A similar pattern holds true for Khasi men, as the majority of them move out to settle with their spouse (out-group) outside the border areas, as this is customary with Khasi tradition. The pattern of mixed marriages in these areas has accelerated the transmission of language and religious components and has brought about acculturation developments in the national and international borders of Meghalaya. Through marital unions, languages are transmitted from one generation to the next, as children are often raised speaking both parents'



mother tongues. For instance, interviews conducted in Bholaganj and Tamabil reported many cases where children in Khasi-Bengali families learn to speak Khasi at home but acquire Bengali from their mothers/fathers and the wider community. Over time, this has contributed to the use of both languages in their daily lives. Additionally, local informants report cases of cultural and religious exchange and hybridization taking place between intermarried spouse where religious celebrations and other festivals take on a blended form incorporating elements from each culture. According to them, food, dress, music and art, are fused together through shared households. Religiously, families may choose to respect both spousal faiths, visiting temples and churches.

Thus, cultural and linguistic understanding is promoted between groups that interact regularly through familial links across the borders of Meghalaya though its intensity varies as seen in the case of Saphai which shows much much ethnolinguistic and cultural distinctiveness. Therefore, cross-border intermarriage has significantly impacted language transmission, cultural sharing and religious blending in the contexts of these four regions through the years of sustained contact. These factors promote cross-border multilingualism and acculturation developments, which in turn, may played a role in the redefining ethnic perception of culture and linguistic identities in these border regions.

4.2. Dynamics of Socio-Culture and Linguistic factors on Identity Perception

In this section, a comprehensive analysis is undertaken to explore the intricate dynamics of socio-cultural and linguistic identity factors and their profound impact on the perception of identity within the Khasis ethnic group. In focus, our analysis specifically examines the contact environment experienced by the Khasis residing along the National borders of Byrnihat and Saphai as well as the International Borders of Bholaganj and Tamabil in Meghalaya. Table-2.1 below consolidates the ethno-linguistic and identity factors asserted by the Khasis in the four contexts. The table serves as a repository of data reflecting the frequency of responses received from participants who were queried about their stance on the parameter of Ethno-Linguistic and Cultural Identity assertion. The result obtained from participants were organised based on two contrasting categories: Positive (responded by "agree") or negative (responded by "disagree") reflected by the respondents toward the items (questions) given in the data set.

Table 2. Ethno-linguistic identity factors in the National and International Borders of Meghalaya

| Parameters | | International Border | | | | National Border | | | |
|------------|--|----------------------|----------|---------|----------|-----------------|----------|--------|----------|
| | | Bholaganj | | Tamabil | | Byrnihat | | Saphai | |
| Item | Ethno-Linguistic and Cultural Identity assertion | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree | Agree | Disagree |
| 1. | Maintaining your own socio-cultural and religious beliefs is important to you? | 70% | 30% | 72% | 28% | 64% | 36% | 84% | 16% |
| 2. | Desirable for you to speak their language for daily communication at home? | 75% | 25% | 76% | 24% | 82% | 08% | 64% | 36% |
| 3. | Speaking their (out-group) language because it helps you know them better? | 70% | 30% | 74% | 26% | 77% | 23% | 44% | 56% |
| 4. | Speaking their (out-group) language because their language accrues values in this environment? | 90% | 10% | 94% | 06% | 90% | 10% | 70% | 30% |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| 5. | It made it impossible for you to speak your language since many don't speak your language? | 75% | 25% | 72% | 28% | 84% | 16% | 60% | 40% |
| 6. | One has to compromise one's language in favour of the out-group's language value owing to its utility? | 72% | 28% | 70% | 30% | 80% | 20% | 54% | 46% |
| 7. | Want others to recognise you both for your native as well as your husband/wife identity? (Agree - both own and husband/wife's identity Disagree -only native identity) | 78% | 22% | 73% | 27% | 82% | 18% | 30% | 60% |
| Mean Average Percentage | | 77% | 23% | 77% | 23% | 81% | 17% | 59% | 39% |

Languages that are perceived as instrumentally beneficial motivate people to learn them due to their perceived value they hold. This type of motivation is observed in both the in-group and out-group, as evidenced by the majority of respondents in all these four borders who conceded with the proposition stated in *Parameter- 1*, which indicates that majority of the participants are interested in maintaining their distinctive socio-cultural and religious belief systems (70%, 72%, 74%, and 84% respectively). However, this is not always the case, as there is evident of dissenting opinions from a statistically significant number of participants (accounting to 30%, 28%, 36%, and 16% respectively in Bholaganj, Tamabil, Byrnihat, and Saphai) who disagree with this proposition. This indicates that some individuals are willing to relinquish aspects of their socio-cultural belief, and linguistic ties in order to adopt the practices of their spouses.

The language factor is conditioned by the perceived values of language in the contact environment, as reported positively by a statistically significant number of respondents (see *Parameter- 4*). Here, in-group members (75%, 76%, 82%, and 64%, respectively in Bholaganj, Tamabil, Byrnihat, and Saphai) who relocates to settle with their spouse (out-group) acknowledging the necessity to use their outgroup language which hold considerable value within this environment. *Parameter-2* further strengthens this observation since majority of the participants desire to speak their out-groups' language not only as the link language for intercommunication in public spheres, but even in their domestic interaction in home domain.

Concomitantly, the prevailing demographic condition in the socio-ecological space of the new environment dictates the choice of language used at the community level. Given the strong support (75%, 72%, 84%, and 62% in Bholaganj, Tamabil, Byrnihat, and Saphai, respectively) for using the language prevalent in the socio-ecological space (as stipulated in *Parameter-5*), it is evident that the majority of participants favour adopting the dominant language(s) of their new environment. This suggests a preference for integrating linguistically with the local community, potentially driven by factors mentioned in parameter-3-5 while adapting to their new surroundings as they settle. However, since parameter-3 and 4 were positively responded significantly by the participants in all the given areas, it also indicates that participants were driven by a combination of integrative and instrumental motivation that gradually accompanies them in their language choice as observed in the data.

Ideologically, the stronger disposition towards integrative motivation among participants weakens their psychological attachments to their own language and its perceived value judgment vis-à-vis the dominant out-group's values in their socio-political setting. As predicted, the majority of respondents (72%, 70%, and 80% in Bholaganj, Tamabil, and Byrnihat, respectively) agreed with the proposition stipulated in *Parameter-6*, which likely indicates a connection between their desire to assimilate to the dominant language and the observed low maintenance of their native language. In terms of utility, the expediency of the dominant language and its associated utility, value and identity appear to be strong motivators signalling a willingness to compromise their ethnic language identity among

participants, leading to potential shift in ranging from partial to complete, depending on the specific context and individual circumstances.

The majority of participants in Bholaganj (78%), Tamabil (73%), and Byrnihat (82%) demonstrate a tendency to maintain aspects of both their own cultural background and that of their spouse's (see Table 5.1: Parameter-7). However, when their language use diverges significantly from their native socio-cultural context, the connection to their ethnic roots may weaken over time. This could be due to possible to the dynamic socio, demographic, factors and the associate value and utility of out-group's language and acculturation in this ecology as discussed above. In contrast, the Khasis in Saphai (60%) seem to hold onto their distinct cultural identity more strongly, maintaining close ties with their community despite any language shifts they may experience.

5. Discussion

A salient pattern emerges from the findings above concerning language contact and cross-border multilingualism in Meghalaya. The study reveals that this phenomenon was found to be influenced by a variety of factors, such as neighbouring proximity, intermarriage, trade, and commerce, which contribute to the mutual learning/acquisition of languages in these regions. The linguistic contact ecology in the contexts of Bholaganj, Tamabil, Byrnihat and Saphai is characterised by an increase frequency and intensity of language use among the Khasi community who alternate between different languages available in their repertoire. Interracial marriage is another significant multilingualism determinant of cross border migration observed in our study. Language acquisition in the four study areas occurs bi-directionally with spouses from differing linguistic backgrounds learning each other's languages to facilitate communication with their partners and in-laws (out-groups). The prevalence of this type of exogamous alliance as attested in all these four areas accelerates the transmission of language and religious elements, as well as the emergence of new cultural and linguistic identities within the national and international borders of Meghalaya.

Section 4.2 concerning the dynamics of socio-culture and linguistic factors and its associate identity perception suggests that both parties (in-group and the out-group) strive to maintain their distinctive socio-cultural and religious identities. However, this is not true to all our participants as evident in our analysis, which demonstrates that a sizeable number of them displayed willingness to relinquish certain socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic affiliations to converge and adopt with their spouse's practices, thereby compromising identities for relationship preservation. This suggests that cultural and religious identities in the borders of Meghalaya, particularly in the four study areas exhibit fluidity contingent on the ecological circumstances. In addition, our findings also highlight that language use in the aforementioned four study areas is embedded within socio-cultural ecological context. In other words, the utility of language in these border regions is contingent upon the perceived societal and cultural values attributed to different languages within the contact environment. The prevailing demographic conditions in the socio-ecological landscape of the new environment dictate the choice of language at the community level of the out-group. This is evident as the majority of our participants who relocates and settle with the out-group, express a desire to use the language of the out-group not only as the link language for intercommunication, but even in the home domain for daily interactions within the domestic sphere (see parameter-2).

Furthermore, the type of motivation associated with language learning also plays a discernible role in shaping linguistic and cultural identity. According to Liebkind (1999:146-7), 'People adapt their speech styles in order to satisfy a variety of motivations, but motivations to achieve or maintain a positive social/ ethnic/ ethnolinguistic identity have been most clearly implicated in studies that demonstrate language divergence and maintenance'. This view demonstrates that the type of motivation behind language learning has a significant impact on how it shapes both linguistic and cultural identity. Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished between two types of motivation: *instrumental* motivation, pertaining to learning a language to achieve practical goals like employment or cross-cultural communication, and *integrative* motivation, relating to learning a language to assimilate into a new culture or group. In the context of this present study, most respondents, across the four contact areas, were found to concur with both instrumental and integrative aspects. However, a select number of them, perhaps those engaged in business and intermarriage have developed stronger integrative motives by recognizing the advantages of neighboring community's languages (compare, parameter-3). Consequently, their linguistic identity has begun diverging from their native culture as out-group language assumes importance for communication and social interaction (compare,



parameter-2, 4, and 6). This warrants concern in the Bholaganj, Tamabil and Byrnihat border areas of Meghalaya, (with the exception of Saphai, which demonstrates high ethno-linguistic vitality and cultural perception) as the higher integrative tendencies exhibited by the Khasis here is often accompanied by acculturation (given the elevated exogamous marriage mentioned) which may lead to linguistic identity decoupling from indigenous socio-cultural identity. Subsequently, this weakened ethnic bond to their own language can perceptively undermine their distinct ethnic identity, giving rise to incipient mixed or split identities that aligned with the out-group socio-cultural traits and practices. Fundamentally, this adaptation of an alternative linguistic and cultural attributes can transform identities at both linguistic and socio-cultural levels.

6. Significance of the Study

The study on the linguistic and cultural identity perception of the Khasis in the language contact environment holds significant importance and relevance. By examining the factors that influence identity perception, such as the ecology of contact, intermarriage, and migration, this study provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between language, culture, and identity. Firstly, it contributes to the existing body of literature by shedding light on the complexities of language contact and its impact on identity formation. The Khasis, residing in Meghalaya and interacting with neighboring linguistic communities, offer a unique context to explore the interplay between language, culture, and identity. Understanding how the Khasis perceive their linguistic and cultural identity in this multicultural and multilingual language contact ecology enhances our comprehension of the dynamics involved in language contact situations. Secondly, the research expands our understanding of the influence of language on identity. Language serves as a tool for asserting one's identity, however, in a language contact situation, the choices and behaviors related to language usage become even more complex. By investigating the linguistic and cultural identity perception of the Khasis, this study provides insights into how language choice, adaptation, and acculturation occur in a context where diverse linguistic and cultural influences converge. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of cross-border multilingualism. The contact between the Khasis and neighboring communities from Assam and Bangladesh, both nationally and internationally, creates a dynamic environment where languages and cultures intersect. Analyzing the impact of this contact on the linguistic and cultural identity of the Khasis deepens our understanding of the implications of multilingualism in a contact situation. Finally, the research provides empirical evidence to support the link between motivation, activity type (business, intermarriage, migration etc.) and language use in shaping identity within a multilingual language contact environment.

7. Summary and Conclusion

The case study on the "Interaction of Language & Culture on Identity Perception" thus examines the interaction between language and culture on the perception of identity among the Khasis, in a language contact environment created by the shared borders between Meghalaya, Bangladesh, and Assam in the borders of Meghalaya, India. It delves into how factors such as the ecological context of language contact, intermarriage, and migration contribute to the formation of linguistic and cultural identities among the Khasis in this long-standing language contact environment. The research reveals that the Khasis in the border regions are multilingual, speaking Khasi as well as languages of their neighboring communities belonging to Indo-Aryan language groups, such as Assamese, Bengali, and Hindi and other Tibeto-Burman languages. The presence of this cross-border multilingualism is facilitated by factors such as trade, commerce, migration, and intermarriage between the Khasis and neighboring communities, resulting in a dynamic environment with diverse linguistic and cultural influences. The survey reveals how factors such as development of integrative motives, interracial marriages and migration emerges as crucial role in driving the process of convergence and adoption of new cultural and linguistic identities within the Khasi community in these border regions. These determinants contribute to the formation of hybrid identities that integrate elements from both the ingroup culture and out-group's culture as evident in the primary survey. The Khasis here, thus exhibit a complex and nuanced approach to identity, with some individuals striving to preserve their distinct sociocultural and religious beliefs, while others demonstrate a willingness to adopt elements of their spouse's culture and language. This suggests that identity is not a fixed state but a dynamic and context-dependent process.



This study offers valuable insights for both linguistics and identity studies. By building upon the established connection between language, culture, and identity, this study delves into the complexities of multilingual settings and language contact. It sheds light on how individuals in these environments negotiate and renegotiate their identities through language use and cultural adaptation. For linguistics, the study contributes to understanding language behavior in multilingual contexts. It highlights the role of language contact in shaping identity, particularly how languages can act as markers within diverse communities. This furthers our knowledge of how multilingualism functions in border regions, where cross-border movement, intermarriage, and migration play a crucial role in forming hybrid identities. For identity studies, the research emphasizes the complexity of identity negotiation in multilingual situations. It reveals how individuals perceive their linguistic and cultural identities within these contact zones. This understanding is crucial for recognizing the dynamic nature of identity and the influence of language in its formation.

In conclusion, the study reveals that identity in contact situations is not a fixed attribute but a fluid and negotiated process shaped by sociocultural and linguistic factors. It underscores the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and identity, highlighting the transformative effects of language contact on individuals' perceptions of their affiliations in multicultural and multilingual settings. These insights emphasize the need for a holistic and contextual approach to studying language, culture, and identity in diverse and multilingual environments.

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Yes

Conflict of interest

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