

# Linguistic Habitat of Mutually Intelligible Kuki-Chin Languages in North-East India

Tingngaih lun Neihzial<sup>1</sup>, Shailendra Kumar Singh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Linguistics North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India  
Email: [0ngngaih lunneihzial95\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:0ngngaih lunneihzial95[at]gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Linguistics, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India  
Email: [sksinghnehu20\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:sksinghnehu20[at]gmail.com)

**Abstract:** *The article describes the linguistic habitat of Kuki-Chin languages of Manipur and explains the pragmatic principles that determine the mutual intelligibility among Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou and Vaiphei. It adopts the concept of habitat to describe the nature of existence and functioning of these languages by looking into the domains of language use, code switching and mixing and multilingualism. It also looks into the language concerns owing to dynamic nature of linguistic habitats in general, the manner of adaptation and language preservation by the respective indigenous communities.*

**Keywords:** linguistic habitat, mutual intelligibility, kuki-chin languages

## 1. Introduction

The fundamental requirement for any living organism to survive is a habitat, an environment which provides the resources to grow and thrive. Ecologist and environmentalist have their own way of defining habitat, subjective to the matter they are concerned and want to emphasize about. For instance, Block and Brennan (1993) discussed the concept of habitat in the context of ornithology, their way of selection and adaptation to environment. Early ecological perspective viewed a habitat primarily as a distinct space, a dwelling environment or a geographical space (Nichols, 1917; Clements, 1905; Flahault and Schroter, 1910). Thomas (1979) introduced a broader definition, characterizing habitat as the total collection of specific resources required by an organism. According to this view, a habitat encompasses the environmental conditions and resources within a given area that enables an organism to occupy the space, survive and successfully reproduce. Considering the various ideas, it can be inferred that a single definitive explanation of a habitat is elusive. However, it certainly is directed to a physical setting equipped with the necessary amenities needed for an organism's survival. An organism typically selects its ideal habitat based on how well environment features align with its physical and physiological needs. But, the crucial characteristics of dynamicity cannot be overlooked, every environment or ecosystem undergoes if not rapid but slow gradual change, this undoubtedly suggests the fact that the organisms too experiences adjustments and adaptations required for their survival in that environment.

The theory of habitat, in linguistics, investigates upon how languages adapt to its environment, impact its functioning and how this in turn affects and organizes the habitat. The theory posits that language is not static but rather a dynamic entity that change based on its environment. The approach to the study of the interaction of language and its environment termed as 'language ecology' was first proposed by the Norwegian-American linguist Einar

Haugen in 1972. Its study concerns the ways in which different languages in their spoken and written forms co-exist and interact in a multilingual community or habitat. The factors of habitat are closely related to each other. Also, although language is treated as an organism or a living entity, it cannot be studied in isolation rather done with reference to the people speaking it.

Like any living organism languages needs resources to survive, imbalance or unavailability of these takes a heavy toll or threatens the existence of the language in several ways. Since, language is a part of culture, it cannot be studied in autonomy. It certainly is done in relation to the people speaking it. Hence, the first and foremost element needed for the existence of language is the speaker of the language, a language devoid of its native speakers is regarded as extinct, it finds its ultimate expression when it is spoken by people. Language also needs an environment where it is spoken to maintain stability and growth, this initiates its introduction in various domain of daily activities and functioning. In the midst of existence and survival, like any species languages are also constantly pressured from internal as well as external forces, triggered by the dynamic nature of the environment, awareness of such constraints becomes crucial to curb or tackle the problems, to bring up solution or find adaptive measures to cope up with them. Hence, the factors which contribute to linguistic habitat must be seriously considered.

### 1.1 Towards Introducing Mutually Intelligible Kuki-Chin Languages

Kuki-Chin is a general term encompassing a group of the indigenous languages spoken in north-east India, the speakers are mostly concentrated in the Churachandpur district of Manipur. They belong to the Tibeto-language family and the languages display certain resemblances and affinity among them.

The term regarded an endonym is a conglomeration of two terms 'kuki' and 'chin' attested to them by the British during the colonial period to collectively identify the people

occupying the hill areas of Manipur and the adjoining areas. This term, therefore, does not signify any particular tribe falling under them nor is a term which was derived by the tribes themselves, rather a term to collectively identify the indigenous people of the region. The term was later adopted by the government of India to identify the same in different parts of the country to be recognised as non-scheduled tribes under 'any kuki-tribe'. However, in Manipur the tribes are identified by their own respective names.

There are 33 Scheduled tribes and 7 Scheduled Castes recognized in Manipur. In genealogy the Kuki-Chin languages belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family (Grierson 1904; Benedict 1976; Bradley 1997; Peiros 1998; Peterson 2000), the typological characteristics of the languages also shows uniform pattern. Tungdim (2018) classification of the Kuki-chin also mentions distinction between the r-group and the g-group, he claims that the R-group employs the thrill sound /r/ in their language. Whereas, in the G- group languages there is absence of the /r/ sound and is instead replaced by /g/ sound. The intelligibility criteria also being quite questionable in the case of R-group, on the other hand, the languages included under the g- group is likely to display mutual intelligibility among themselves. Haokip (2011) also asserts that the Kuki-Chin languages are quite similar to each other, with most of the languages, like: Thadou, Paite, Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte and Zou are mutually intelligible. The genetic and typological affinity of the languages enhances the ability of population to adopt the other languages easier. The prolonged language contact and co-existence of the various kuki-chin speech communities has resulted in a phenomenon known as embedded multilingualism in the state. Singh (2011) also contends that multilingualism is a household phenomenon among people residing in contact areas like Manipur.

## 1.2 Ethnolinguistic Demography of Kuki-Chin Languages

The region of Manipur resonates to a beautiful tapestry of languages, inhabited by the Meitei, Naga and Kuki-chin speaking communities. It displays a picture of linguistic harmony. The state portrays multi-cultural and multi-ethnic composition of certain indigenous groups. Historically, these indigenous tribes were initially classified under the broader terms as, 'Any Naga Tribe', 'Any Kuki Tribe' and 'Any Lushai Tribe' – under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribe) [part C state] orders, 1951. However, following the constitutional modification of 1956, as per the recommendation, the names of the 29 groups were listed by the President's order. Consequently, each recognized tribe has preserved and asserted a distinct identity that sets them apart from one another.

In the plains Meitei/ Manipuri is used extensively as the major inhabitant belongs to the Meitei community. It is also used as a lingua franca among the non-Meitei or the Naga and Kuki-chin speaking masses. The district of

Churachandpur can be considered home to the major Kuki-chin population.

The distribution of the population of scheduled tribes of Manipur according to the 2011 Census by the Government of India is given in the following table1:

**Table 1:** Census of the Schedule tribes of Manipur

Sl. No.	Tribe	2011
1	Aimol	3190
2	Anal	23509
3	Angami	95
4	Chiru	8599
5	Chothe	3585
6	Gangte	17178
7	Hmar	48375
8	Kabui	103908
9	Kacha Naga	66158
10	Koirao	4475
11	Koireng	1873
12	Kom	14528
13	Langang	7770
14	Mao	93343
15	Maram	27524
16	Maring	26424
17	Any Mizo (Lushai) tribe	8064
18	Monsang	2427
19	Moyon	2516
20	Paite	55524
21	Purum	278
22	Ralte	17
23	Sema	40
24	Simte	6728
25	Sukte	804
26	Tangkhol	178568
27	Thadou	215913
28	Vaiphei	42925
29	Zou	24294
30	Poumai Naga	127381
31	Tarao	1066
32	Kharam	1145
33	Any Kuki Tribe	28342

The Scheduled tribes of Manipur contribute to a significant percentage of the state's total population. Especially for the Kuki-chin speaking population, the hill region serves their home and it is here that their existence, culture and settlement stabilized.

There is also observable flexibility in population across the years of kuki-chin speaking population which re-affirms their growth and maintenance.

The following table presents the decadal population of kuki-chin speakers and the decadal percentage increase/ decrease from 1971-2011, as given by the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, (1971-2011).

**Table 2:** Growth of kuki-chin languages and decadal percentage increase/decrease

S. No.	Languages	Decadal Population					Decadal Percentage Increase/ Decrease			
		1971	1981	1991	2001	2011	1971- 1981	1981-1991	1991-2001	2001- 2011
1	Gangte	6033	-	13695	14500	16542	-	-	5.88	14.08
2	Paite	27157	32607	49237	64100	79507	20.07	51	30.19	24.04
3	Simte	-	-	-	-	6728	-	-	-	-
4	Thadou	51054	57536	107992	190595	229340	12.7	87.69	76.49	20.33
5	Vaiphei	12209	15618	26185	39673	42784	27.92	67.66	51.51	7.75

The table depicts that languages experienced increase in the number of speakers but the past two decades show subsequent decrease in growth percentage although gradual growth over the years in term of speaker strength remains intact, with an exception for Simte which records it as an endangered language in the year 2011 according to the UNESCO norms as the speakers fall below 10,000. The table also highlights that there is uneven distribution of the speakers. However, this has not hindered people from speaking their mother tongue, rather aided in maintaining a multilingual region.

**2. Methodology**

The study adopts both qualitative and quantitative approach, the data collected from primary sources are through interview and questionnaire of the Kuki-chin speakers of Manipur. A total of 150 responses (30 from each language) has been considered for the study. Secondary data are accessed from published articles, reports and books.

**2.1 Linguistic Habitat of the Kuki-Chins**

**2.1.1 Domains of Language Use**

In sociolinguistics, the term domain is usually used to denote the social context of interaction. Domain is an area of human activity in which one particular speech variety or combination of several variety is regularly used. The term was first proposed by Schmidt Rohr in 1932. An interesting fact about the Kuki-chin speakers of Churachandpur is that even in the midst of a multilingual set up, each tribe holds up to their own mother tongue and employs it in maximum possible domains. This in a way has helped to affectionately bond with the language they speak and has also promoted language awareness and learning. A significant reason behind this fact is the absence of lingua franca and the persisting of mutual intelligibility. Although, the official language of Manipur is Meiteilon, the language finds minimal use in the hill areas, only in case of interaction with the people of the valley or neighbouring non-Kuki-Chin speakers. As of the hills, since the languages are intelligible, the people enjoy the liberty to speak their own native tongue without communication breakdown.

The ways different languages are used in different domain is highlighted in the following table2:

**Table 2:** Domains of Language Use

S. No.	Domains	Languages used
1	Home	Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei
2	Religious places	Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei
3	Education	English, Kuki-Chin languages
4	Business/ Market	Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei, Hindi, English

5	Health care	Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei, English
6	Politics	Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei, English, Hindi
7	Government offices	Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei, English, Hindi
8	Media	English, Hindi, Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei

The table portray that the people of the region are skilled multilinguals, each domain employs multiple languages of the stated Kuki-Chin group, with English and Hindi limited in a few domains like education and business. This pattern of communication has been operational in the region for generations and people are adapted to this unique pattern.

**2.2 Code Mixing and Code Switching**

Wardough (1998) explains a code as a system of communication between two or more parties used on any occasion. Crystal (1987) further explains that it is a set of conventions for converting and signalling systems into another. Human language is therefore a code consisting of words that represent ideas, events or objects that aids in communication. The terms code mixing and code switching are sometimes interchangeably used by scholars: Scotton (1992), Hill and Hill (1980). While, others try to draw a distinguishing line between the two, Gumperz (1982) suggests code mixing as mixing of pieces of one language while a speaker is basically using another and Fischer (1972) contends that code switching or inter sentential code alteration occurs when a bilingual speaker uses more than one language in a single utterance above the clause level to appropriately convey his/her intent. Fasold (1996) explains, if a person uses a word or phrase from another language, he has mixed not switched, but, if one clause has the grammatical structure of one language and the next is constructed according to the grammar of another then code is switched. Code mixing and switching is a prominent characteristic of multilingual societies. This phenomenon is stimulated by varying social factors like bilingualism and multilingualism, situation-oriented, prestige and solidarity.

Kuki-Chins residing in Manipur also engage in regular code-mixing and switching owing to the linguistic diversity. However, a comparative study may show code switching to be more common than the other, the reason being the least differences of vocabulary, where, in a stretch of one sentence a word or two may be the only defining difference, in such situation code switching happens instantly. Whatsoever, there is no rigid or strict pattern which can be identified to following code mixing and switching among the Kuki-Chin speakers. It is a very prompt process. The motivators of this can be attributed to the practice of linguistic solidarity and tolerance. Moreover, their

settlement is organized in scattered fashion, so, the constant contact and interaction between the varied speech communities enhances the process. The people get exposed to multiple languages as it is employed in majority of the domains which stimulates the early learning of the languages, the pattern and manner of their utterance and practice them accordingly in occasions to the extent of some attaining native like fluency in their speech. e.g., a speaker of Paite and Simte may switch over to Thadou and Vaiphei or may mix codes with that of his own language for conversing to the speakers of the respective language or vice-versa.

Eg., A: khawi ah chia u maw? (vaiphei speaker)  
Where loc go pl Q ‘Where did you go?’

B: Bazar a chiah dek (Paite speaker)  
Market loc go fut  
‘We are planning to go to the market’

The above example is a speech extracted from communication in a neighbourhood, where A asks the whereabouts of the neighbour B, B a Paite speaker responds in his language while mixing code with Vaiphei, the word for ‘go’ in Paite is ‘hawh’, so instead of using it, the speaker

sticks to ‘chiah’ which is a vaiphei word for go. However, the Paite speaker uses the word ‘dek’ a future marker in Paite instead of the future marker ‘gua’ in Vaiphei.

C: Bu na neh u tam? (Thadou speaker)  
Food 2 eat pl past Q  
‘Have u finish eating food?’

D: Henge, ka ne tau-ve (Gangte Speaker)  
Yes, I eat perf-pl ‘yes, we have eaten’

The above example shows a communication between a Thadou and Gangte speaker where the speaker C ask D if they had already had their food, the Gangte speaker responds in a proper Thadou sentence without mixing codes.

The given examples clearly portray that there exist regular code mixing and switching in the natural speech events and that the people are very well accustomed to it.

There is certain similar vocabulary among the languages, which aids in intelligibility. The following table of wordlist (from swadeshi wordlist compilation) will exemplify the claim:

Table 3: Word-list of Kuki-chin languages

S. No.	English	gangte	paite	simte	thadou	vaiphei
1	I	kei	kei	kei	kei	kei
2	We	kei-uh	kei-u	kei-u	kei-ho	kei-u
3	Who	kuo	kua	kua	koi	kua
4	what	bang	bang	bang	ipi	bang
5	two	nih	nih	nih	ni	ni
6	man	mihing	mihing	mihing	mihing	mihing
7	tree	thingkung	thingkung	singkung	thingkung	thingkung
8	leaf	nah	nah	nah	napa	dua
9	egg	aktui	aktui	ahtui	ahtui	aktui
10	head	lu	lu	lu	lu	lu
11	heart	lungchang	lungchang	lungtang	lungchang	lungchang
12	eat	ne	ne	ne	ne	ne
13	walk	chieh	pai	pai	chia	chia
14	sit	chu	tu	tu	chu	chu
15	say	gen	gen	gen	sei	gen
16	moon	thapi	thapi	khapi	thapi	thapi
17	cloud	meipi	mei	mei	mei	sum
18	night	zan	zan	zan	zan	zan
19	cold	dap	vawt	vawt	dap	vawt
20	mountain	tang	tang	tang	tang	tang
21	white	vam	kang	kang	kang	kang
22	red	san	san	san	san	san
23	new	thak	thah	thak	thah	thak
24	child	naupang	chapang	chapang	chapang	naupang
25	husband	posal	pawsal	pawsal	zi pa	pawsal
26	wife	zi	zi	zi	zi nu	zi
27	wet	chek	kawt	kawt	chek	kawt
28	correct	dik	dik	dih	dih	dik
29	play	ki chiem	ki mawl	ki mawl	ki chiem	ki hel
30	sing	la sa	la sa	la sa	la sa	la sa

Based on the provided data, the languages exhibit distinct lexical similarities and variations. The notable sound correspondences include:

- 1) /th/ → /s/, the phoneme /th/ in Gangte, Simte, Thadou and Vaiphei corresponds to /s/ in Paite, as seen in the variation between ‘thingkung’ and ‘singkung’, in table

3:7.

- 2) /k/→/h/, the /k/ sound found in Gangte, Thadou and Vaiphei shifts to /h/ in Paite and Simte in the words ‘aktui’ and ‘ahtui’, as seen in table 3:9.
- 3) /ch/→/t/, where, the /ch/ sound in Gangte, Thadou and Vaiphei corresponds to /t/ in Paite and Simte, shifting

the words from 'chu' to 'tu' in table 3:14.

The data also highlights instances where a single language differs completely or partially from the others:

- 1) Unique lexemes: In table 3: 4, the interrogative word for 'what' is similar across Gangte, Paite, Simte and Vaiphei that is 'bang', whereas, Thadou uniquely uses the term 'ipi' for the same.
- 2) Partial similarity: in table 3: 8, for the word 'leaf' Gangte, Paite and Simte share identical form that is 'nah', Thadou displays partial similarity with 'napa', while, Vaiphei has a completely different lexeme 'dua'.
- 3) Diverse lexical forms: for the verb 'play' in table 3:29, the languages splinter into distinct lexical variations: 'ki chiem' is used by Gangte and Thadou, 'ki mawl' in Paite and Simte and 'ki hel' in Vaiphei.

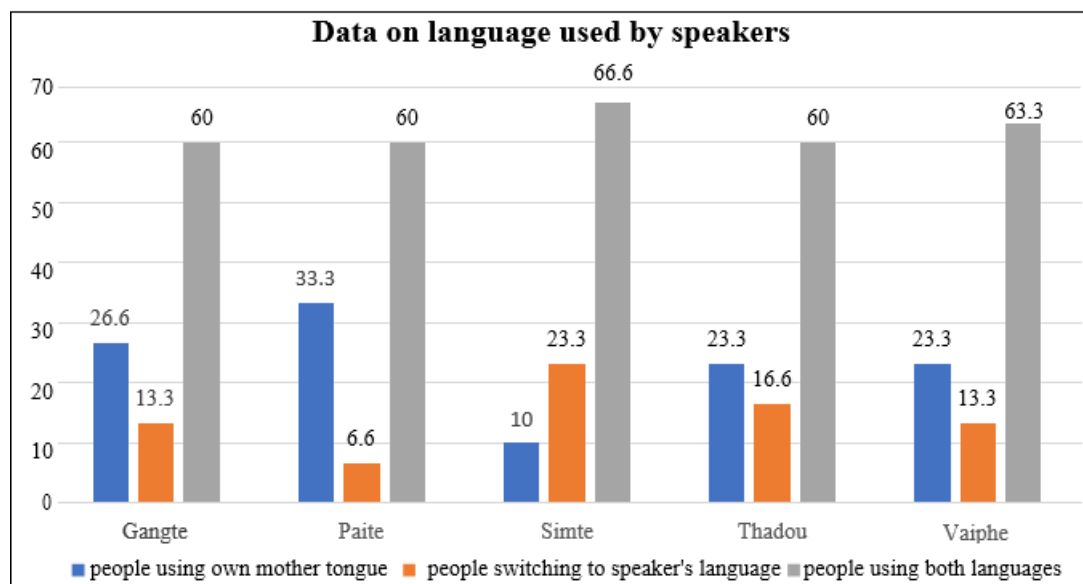
Further, several words demonstrate complete uniformity across the kuki-chin languages, like in table 3:1, the first-person pronoun for 'I' is 'kei' for all the languages; the verb 'eat' is uniformly represented as 'ne' in 3: 12 and the word 'mountain' is consistently rendered as 'tang' across all the languages.

Linguistic affinities in the lexical and structural levels have

facilitated mutual intelligibility to a large extent among the speakers. The presented word list showcases that coordinating lexemes of absolute or at least of partial similarity among the varied languages.

The kuki-chin speakers settle in close geographical proximity if not the same, the absence of linguistic boundary and liberty to switch at any instance ease this process. This has assimilated to be a part of their culture. Moreover, due to inter-tribe marriages, a significant number of households also employs multiple languages at their disposal in home domain which has again helped in equipping with multiple languages.

The data presented below showcases statistics (in %) of code mixing and switching among the Kuki-Chin languages according to the responses (30 speakers from each language) of a questionnaire asked on the language employed while conversing with speakers of different Kuki-chin language. The data shows whether the speaker use his own mother tongue to respond to a person belonging to different kuki-chin speaking community, whether he switches to the speaker's language or if he uses both simultaneously i.e., code switching and mixing.



**Chart 1:** code switching and code mixing among kuki-chin speakers

Based on the data above, the average of speaker speaking their own respective language while conversing with another speaker of different kuki-chin language is 22.4%, the average percentage of speaker switching to the other person language is 13.96% and the speaker using both the language switching and mixing accordingly is 63.6%. the high percentage of using multiple languages depicts code mixing and switching holds an integral part as a pattern of communication in Manipur.

### 2.3 Multilingualism

Multilingualism has been deep-rooted in society especially in a country like India, where the number of languages sums up to approximately 1721, out of which 122 being classified as major languages and the remaining 1599 as

minority (Census of India 2001). In such a linguistically diverse nation, multilingualism holds prime importance as a system of communication. In this regard, Pandit (1972) opines that multilingualism is a natural characteristic of Indian society. Singh (2012) also emphasizes that multilingualism does not function as a concept or an exception but rather a norm. The multiplicity of the languages and the inhabitation of common geographical area or at least the close proximity and constant contact of diverse speech communities have encouraged this phenomenon and motivated its persistence.

Li (2008, pp.4) defines a multilingual individual as "anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading)". European Commission (2007. Pp 6)

states: “the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day- to-day lives”. Cook (2002, pp. 23) opines “Multilingualism is the natural potential available to every normal human being rather than universal exception: Given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs.” The definitions provided leads us to a generalization that a multilingual is one possessing the linguistic repertoire to communicate in more than two languages irrespective of the varying driving force which necessitates such an adoption.

Many a times multilingualism is argued to be a threat to mother tongue with the argument that it hampers the knowledge or efficiency of mother tongue. In case of Kuki-Chins of Manipur this proves to be otherwise an exception, in fact it is regarded as an important tool to establish a

cordial and wider communication network and a valuable equipment to socialize with people around. The Kuki-Chin population as stated from the very onset are endowed with multilingual ability which could of course have been necessitated by the environment, their settlement pattern or other reasons of education and trade. Whatsoever, they can be regarded as skilled multilinguals. Singh (2009) in this regard has discussed that multilingual proficiency or native-level mastery over multiple languages and dialects is widespread in India, largely driven by early exposure to various languages and regular interaction with diverse speech communities.

The following Chart 2 shows a calculated statistics of the number languages known by the kuki-chin speakers. (total of 150 speakers 30 from each language)

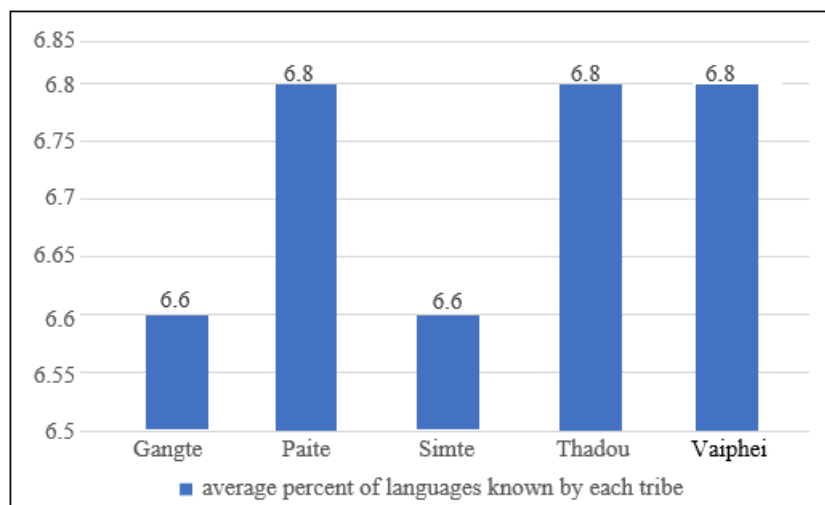


Chart 2: Multilingualism among the kuki-chin speakers

The graph shows the average no. of languages known by the people when asked about the number of kuki-chin languages they could speak or understand. An average calculation of all the languages known together yields 6.7. Multilingualism often has been perpetrated to fulfill some linguistic requirement. However, there are such cases when the phenomenon takes a natural induction upon an individual in a natural setting. Hence, speaking in one’s language or switching to another at own’s convenience does not become a hesitation as no language is subordinate to the other. The absence of such critical challenges makes it easier for the masses to acquire each other’s language. Moreover, this usually takes place without the person’s skill in native language being hampered. This has encouraged generations of continuing multilingualism in the area. The uninhibition of the minority languages and absence of competition gives way to language employed in all domains without restriction. However, there may be differences in the level of their ability concerning speaking of different languages or understanding a different language because multilingualism does not necessarily require perfect articulation or native like control over the other language. So, if not to the extent of having native like proficiency in speaking the other language, they at least possess the ability of inherent multilingualism, or of “receptive multilingualism” (ten Thije & Zeevaert 2007). Where two or more speaker of different language communicate to one

another using their respective language without switching codes. This process of inherent multilingual communication has eased in smooth communication process and delivered to be the most effective and general way of inter-tribe communications among the Kuki-chin.

#### 2.4 Language Maintenance and Preservation

Dynamicity is a conventional characteristic in any kind of habitat. Every organism has to live by adaptation and be equipped with measures to control and adapt to them. Similarly, Kuki- chin languages exist simultaneously in small region are not devoid of problems and constraints. Since the languages display significant similarities, there is possibilities of showing impacts of prolonged language contact, of language convergence or language blending.

Challenges are not imposed by existing contact languages only but also with the gaining popularity of English worldwide. It is used as a primary language in the educational institution also regarded to be a pristine form and the idea of it providing more scope for career in wider arenas put pressure upon the younger generation to master the language which impact the native language skills of the children.

Moreover, the impact of globalization where knowledge,

information, education and entertainment are continuously transmitted through the language in wider platforms compels and provides more reason to excel the language. This factor has attracted the younger generations compromising with their own mother tongue, diminishing their vocabulary. where, they substitute an unknown lexical item with an equivalent word from English which serves more spontaneous and convenient to them. The absence of cultural studies of indigenous languages at the primary level also contribute highly to the issue. Also, since globalization has taken up the world with new technologies and ease up the way of living, the words and phrases which finds no relevance to the present environment gradually diminishes, this has also contributed to the loss of words which hold cultural significance or depletes the richness of the culture and language.

The problems faced by the Kuki-Chin languages has been constant. However, there have also been ongoing strategies and applied solutions to tackle the problem. Firstly, initiative taken up by the government to protect indigenous languages and rights of the people has helped by Introducing MIL (Modern Indian Language) subject from classes V-XII aiding younger generations to get more exposed to the languages and attain more knowledge of it. Secondly, the tribes have set up their own literature society registered under the state government, with the aim of preserving their linguistic heritage. These societies through various methods are continuously engage in publishing books, dictionaries, primers and materials for language learning and preservation and also setting up libraries. They also occasionally arrange seminars and mother-tongue awareness programmes to educate people on the importance of mother tongue and need for language preservation. These organisations have shown participation in the government initiatives like, Bharatavani project, internet archiving, which is a platform for knowledge initiated by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, implemented by the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysuru, Karnataka, to build a searchable knowledge repository in all languages in India through online portal. These combined efforts together can be regarded as the crucial reasons for the possibility of balanced multilingualism in a linguistically diverse region. Thus, providing the opportunities for refinement of the languages promoting and safeguarding them.

### 3. Conclusion

The paper tries to throw light upon how languages settle with its speaker, occupies the space which he inhabits and accordingly moulds itself to grow and facilitate in various ways. The study examines the lexical similarities for interpreting the common source of mutual intelligibility paradigm by providing fresh data on lexical similarities and the extent to which the phenomenon of mutual intelligibility can be tied to the factors relevant to living in common linguistic habitat. This study concludes that the phenomenon of mutual intelligibility is useful in explaining multilingualism that exist among the kuki-chin languages.

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