Research Paper

Language Choice in a Language Contact Situation: The Case study of the Khasis in the International Border of Meghalaya-Bangladesh

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Abstract
The inter-state contact situation in the International Border of Meghalaya, India in Bholaganjwith the languages represented in the borders of Bangladesh exhibitdiverse socio-cultural and linguistic coexistence and provides a feasible research for analysing the sociolinguistic aspect of language contact studies. Contact here is identified between three language families namely Austro-Asiatic represented by Khasi and its dialects, Indo-Aryan language family represented by Bengali, Assamese, Hindiand to some extend Nepalisand Tibeto-Burman languages represented by Bodos andGaros. The presence of the different languages in this area has in essence, created feasible ecological condition for language contact and the latter prerequisite the linguistic analysis of bi/multilingualism which entail different socio-cultural and linguistic convergence. Evidently, Multilingualism which was found to be at the individual and societal level is deep rooted in this area. Focusing on aspects of language use, the present study, in particular, attempts to examine the pattern of language choice appropriated by the local Khasis in this area with reference to the domain configuration.
Keywords*: Language Contact; Bi/multilingualism;Khasi; Austro-Asiatic; Language Domain and Language Choice.*

I.   Introduction

The War-Khasi area in Bholaganj-Shella constitutes the southern border area of the state of Meghalaya. Geographically, it falls on the East Khasi Hills District which was carved out of the Khasi Hills on the 28th of October, 1976 with Shillong as its district headquarters (see **Figure-1**). Bhattacharyya (1994, p. 35) points out that the War-Khasi form a part of the Khasi tribe and 'they are mainly concentrated along the southern slopes of the districts of the East Khasi Hills. They are distributed in about 30 villages of the East Khasi Hills and the West Khasi Hills districts of Meghalaya'. East Khasi Hills District alone covers the total area of 2,820 square Kilometres Devi (2010, p. 8). Of particular interest to the present study is the War-Khasi contact area in Bholaganj. [1]'Bholaganj village is located in Shella Bholaganj Tehsil of East Khasi Hill District in Meghalaya. It is situated 48km away from sub-district headquarter Shella Bholaganj and 101km away from district head-quarter Shillong'. This area shares an international border with Bangladesh. **Figure: 1 and Figure-2**below show the location, base map and district map of East Khasi Hills of the present study.
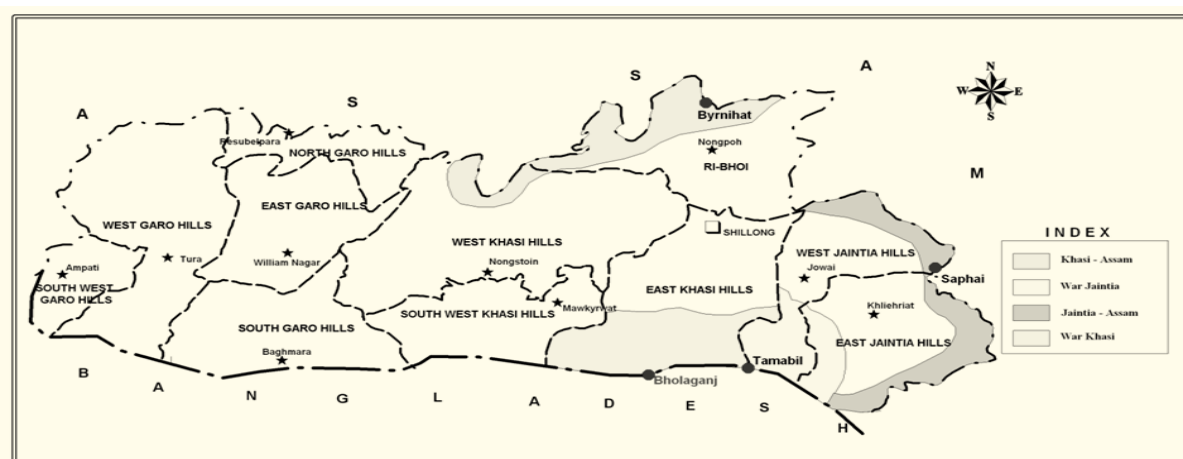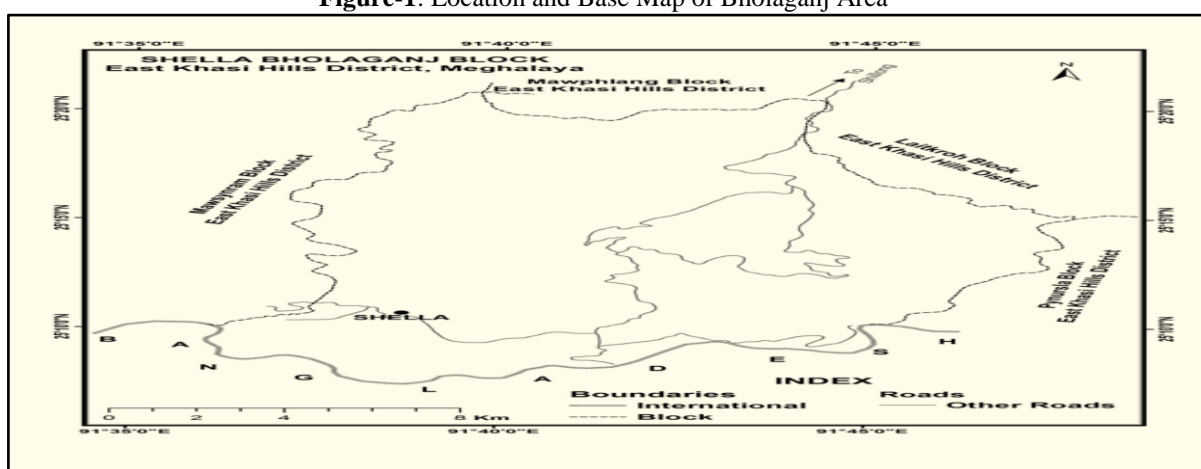
Figure-1: Location and Base Map of Bholaganj Area

Figure-2: Base Map of Shella Bholaganj Block- East Khasi Hill District, Meghalaya
*****SourceFig-1 & Fig-2**: Primary survey through GIS Application

II.   Language Contact and Multilingualismin Bholaganj

The pattern of language use in the context of this study underscores the nature, outcome and influence of contact manifested in the linguistic scene of an international context in the border of Meghalaya-Bangladesh area in Bholaganj. Demographically, [2]Shella-Bholaganj villages have a population of 1225 of which 620 are males and 605 are females as per Census of India, 2011. The following are the distribution of population by Literacy, Schedule Tribe/ Caste and Literacy in Bholaganj is stipulated in the tabular representation below (see **Table-1.1**).

	Total	Male	Female
Total No. of Houses	**232**		
Population	**1,225**	620	605
Child (0-6)	**238**	123	115
Schedule Caste	**0**	0	0
Scheduled Tribe	**168**	79	89
Literacy	**65.15**	71.83	58.37
Total Workers	**370**	326	44
Main Workers	**364**	11,336	0
Marginal Workers	**6**	3	3

Table-1.1: Demographic profile of Bholaganj
(Source: http://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/278873-bholaganj-meghalaya.html)

Based on the primary source, the interviews conducted with three informants reported that cross-border movement both legally or illegally is common in both sides of the border areas. Influx of the neighbouring people in the border of Meghalaya is brought about by innumerable factors like migration, prospect of job (note: mining of limestone is the main source of livelihood for the Khasis in Bholaganj which also attracts the neighbouring people), trade and commerce and endogamy. Economically, inter-trade and commerce across the international border has brought about proximity between the contact groups. The primary source via interview

with the informant also indicates that legal or illegal trade is carried out across border between the two communities in a market known as '*iewpuran*' which is situated approximately 8-9 kms from Bholaganj.

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[1]https://villageinfo.in/meghalaya/east-khasi-hills/shella-bholaganj/bholaganj.html
[2]http://www.census2011.co.in/data/village/278873-bholaganj-meghalaya.html

Linguistically, the Khasi of the Austro-Asiatic family in Meghalaya is adjacent to the Bengali speaking groups across the international border of Bangladesh. The primary observation shows that there is a fair representative of other groups like Assamese, Bengalis, Garo, Nepalis and Hindi speakers which essentially created a multilingual network and pluri-cultural social setting. Contact between these groups is embedded in all spheres of activities- marriage, trade and commerce and social mobility. Linguistically, the different languages spoken in these areas include Khasi (standard variety) mostly spoken outside the home domain when communication corresponds with the intra-group outside their home domain or in the market situation in inter-group contexts. However, within the home domain and neighbours, it is War Khasi and sometimes War Shella (dialects of Khasi) that prevails. Other languages spoken in these areas include Hindi, Bengali and Assamese of the Indo-Aryan language's family, Garo of the Tibeto-Burman language while English is also known to the respondents. The ecological context of acquisition of the different languages mentioned above is given in **Figure-3**below.
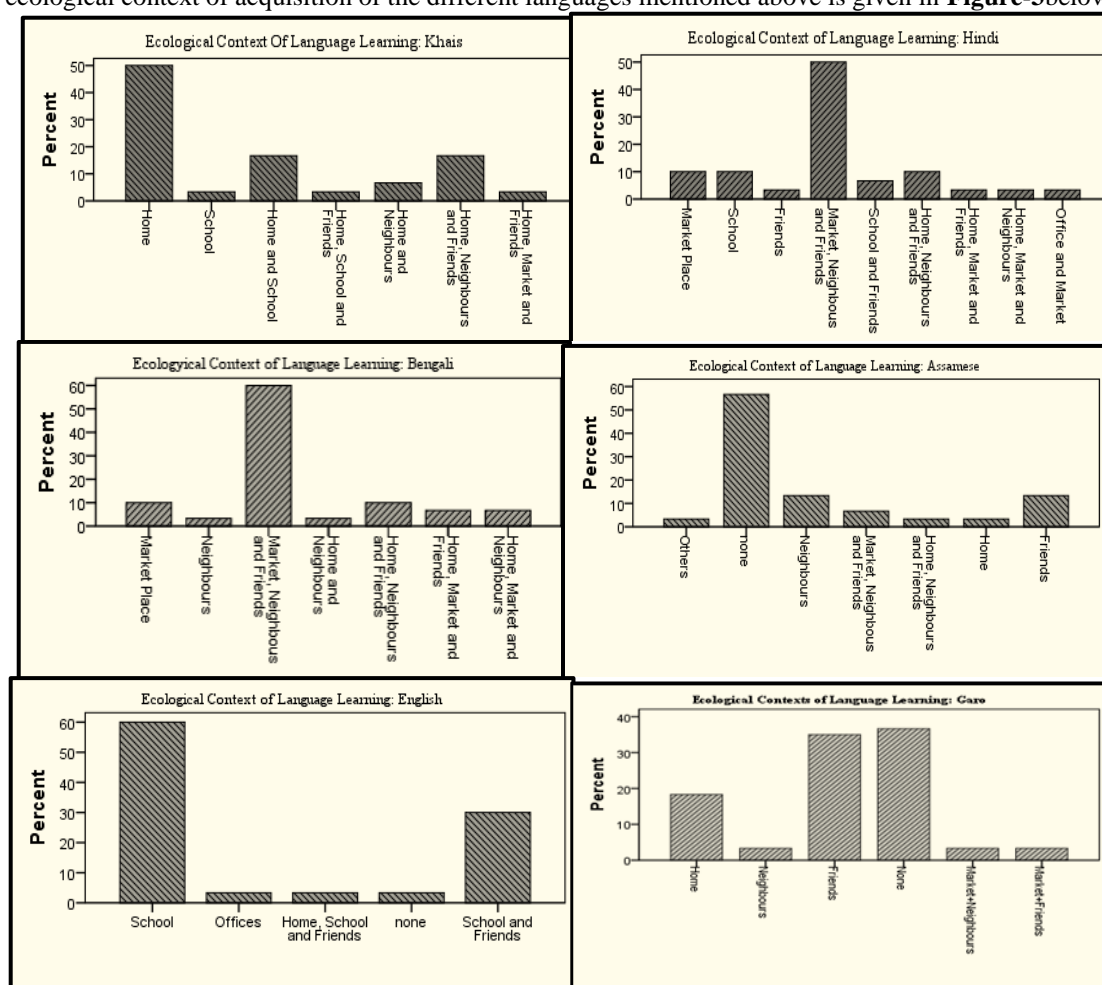

Figure-3: Ecological Context of Learning different languages in Bholaganj

When different languages are spoken in adjacent areas, speakers on both sides of the boundary will be exposed to the other language. Ease access between groups cross geographically hasten linguistic and culture diffusion and results to exchange of language and culture.

Socio-culturally, it was reported that exogamic marriage is a common phenomenon in Bholaganj. As interview conducted with the local headman report that the Khasis in Bholaganj (both male and female) often has a system of exogamous marriage with Bangladeshi or Assamese of their neighbouring country Bangladesh or Assamese immigrant and the direction is bilateral. Further, the pattern of settlement is such that Khasi womenfolk tend to settle in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh in case of inter-marriage along the border.

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The situation is the same with womenfolk of the neighbouring country Bangladesh who tends to settle to the state of Meghalaya in matrimonial alliance with the Khasi menfolk. This pattern of settlement not only created a network of socio-linguistic and cultural zone but also accelerates diffusion of language, religion and cultural component brought alongside in the border areas. Thus, all informants are in agreement that inter-trade relations and mixed marriage and religious factors between groups along this border have brought the Khasis closer to their out-group's socio-cultural values and vice-versa, where a symmetrical composite of inter-cultural practices and transmission is also evident.

The concomitant socio-cultural and linguistic proximity of the model community (Khasis of Meghalaya) with the cultural and linguistic community of the neighbouring territory (Bengali and Assamese of Bangladesh) contributed to a bi-directional influence on language learning and acquisition along this borders as a consequence of increase face to face interaction among the local Khasis with their respective out-groups. This has consequences on the functional slot that languages would enter into different domain of language use configuration. Given the intensity of contact situation in Bholaganj, language choice and linguistic behaviour of the Khasis amidst the multilingual orientation at the individual and societal level becomes a curious question. Thus, in conjunction with the prevailing multilingual scenario in Bholaganj contact area, the present work attempt to highlight the pattern of language choice appropriated by the Khasis in this area.

III.   Material and Methods

3.1. *Objectives*
i) To investigate the pattern of language choice of the Khasis that exhibit in the contact situation of Meghalaya-Bangladesh border in Bholaganj.
ii) To examine the pattern of language choice vis-à-vis the multilingual structure that exhibit in Meghalaya-Bangladesh border in Bholaganj

3.2 *Participants*
Both qualitative and quantitative method was adopted for our study. Quantitative data was elicited from 60 subjects, both males and females (see **Table-1**). Subjects were chosen from different geographical areas in Bholaganj contact areas. All subjects (male and female) are Khasi ethnic group who are permanent residents of these respective areas.They were drawn from different socio-cultural and demographic profile ranging significantly in the different variables like age, gender, education and period of residents. The subject's demographic profile is stipulated in **Table-2** below. The criteria for the variable 'period of residents' involve a circumspective effort where a conscious decision was taken to include only those subjects who reported to be the permanent residence of the areas under study or who have settled in the given area for more than 10 years. This is deliberately done in order to trace the impact of language contact in which the neighbouring language (out-group) has in these border areas (in-group) which will be manifested from their language behaviour.

Location	Gender Male	Female	Linguistic Profile Average	Total
Bholaganj	30	30	Polyglot (*Khasi, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese, Nepalis, *Bodo *Garo*)	**60**

Table-1: *Demographic Profile of the Participants*

Location	Gender Male	Female	Age Group 10-31	31-50	50+	Education Illiterates	Primary	Middle	Hgr.Sec	Grads
Bholaganj	30	30	20	20	20	10	10	14	15	11
						Total= 60				

Table 2: *Demographic Distributional of the Participants*

IV.   Data Interpretation and Discussion

The frequency analysis of Patterns of Language Choice appropriated in the different domain of activities in Bholaganj area where communication corresponds at *home* (among mother, father, sibling- brothers and sisters etc.), *social context* (among friends, neighbours, elders, children etc.), *commercial domain* (among seller and buyers), *mass-media* (language preference in *print* media i.e. in newspapers, magazines andjournals etc. *audio-broadcast* such as radio programmes and *audio-visual* broadcast such as television programs etc.), and *Institutions* (languages used in formal domains such as church, public and private offices and educational institutions such as schools and colleges etc.) is computed in the following tables below:

4.1 Home Domain

For intra-group communication in**Home** domain (see **Table-3**),the preferred choice of language for interactions in one's home domain with one's mother, father and siblings corresponds mostly to the native language i.e. Khasi followed by Bengali or both.

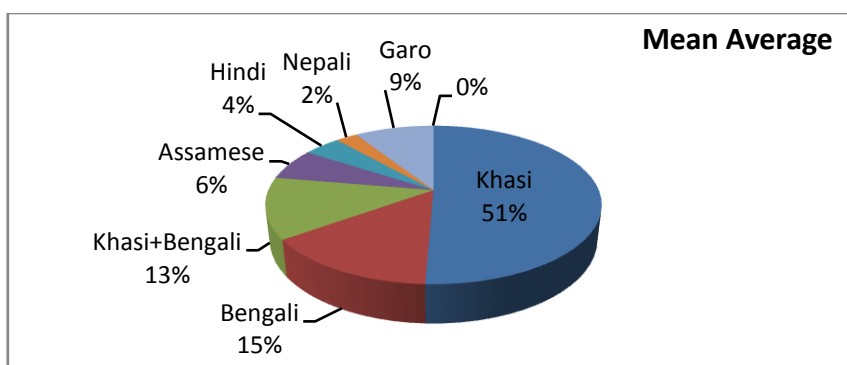| Languages	Mother	Father	Siblings
Khasi	55.0%	46.0%	05.0%
Bengali	15.0%	19.0%	10.0%
Khasi+ Bengali	05.0%	15.0%	18.0%
Assamese	06.5%	08.0%	05.0%
Hindi	03.0%	03.0%	07.0%
Nepali	05.0%	nil	nil
Garo	10.5%	09.0%	08.0%
Total=	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table- 3: *Percent use of different language by the Khasis in Home settings – Bholaganj*

Thus, the mean average show that half of the total participants i.e. $\bar{x}$= 51.0% useKhasi at home. Bengali is another important language used by participants which account to $\bar{x}$=15.0% of the subjects. Thus, the total of $\bar{x}$=13.0% use both Khasi and Bengali. Other languages (i.e. $\bar{x}$=21.0%of the mean score) are also used in home domain which include Garo ($\bar{x}$=09.0%), Assamese ($\bar{x}$=06.0%), Hindi (04.0%) and Nepali ($\bar{x}$=02.0%) respectively.

4.2 Social Context

The language choice for **societal** interactions in informal settings like neighbours, friends, community and acquaintance can easily be deduced to correspond not to a single predominant choice of language but varieswithin this domain.

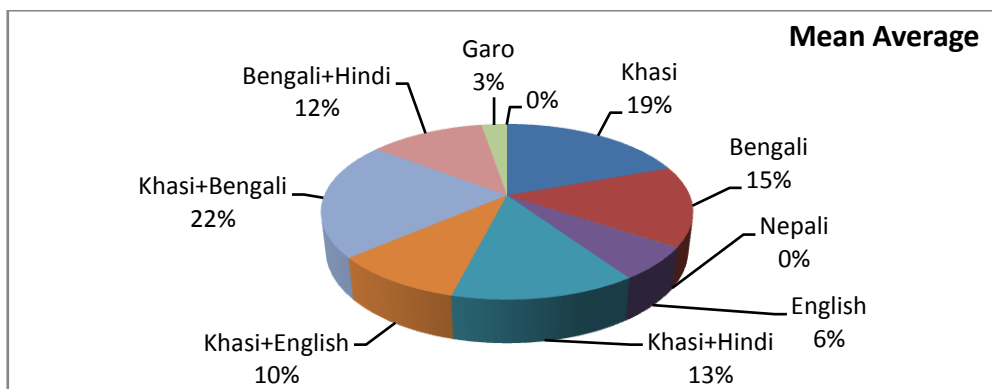| Languages	Friends	Neighbours	Acquaintance	Community
Khasi	17.7%	20.7%	20.0%	29.7%
Bengali	22.0%	18.3%	12.3%	14.3%
Nepali	nil	03.3%	nil	03.0%
English	03.6%	nil	nil	10.3%
Khasi+Hindi	13.0%	12.7%	19.0%	16.7%
Khasi+English	nil	nil	10.0%	12.0%
Khasi+Bengali	31.0%	20.7%	32.0%	14.0%
Bengali+Hindi	12.7%	21.3%	06.7%	nil
Garo	nil	03.0%	nil	nil
Total =	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table- 4: *Percent use of different language by the Khasis in Social context - Bholaganj*

Thus, Khasi $\bar{x}$=19.0% and Bengali $\bar{x}$=15.0% receive the highest mean score in this domain discerning from their individual preference or their alternate combinatory choicesi.e. Khasi+ Bengali ($\bar{x}$=22.0%). The alternate/combine choice of Khasi with other languages such as Hindi ($\bar{x}$=13.0%) and English ($\bar{x}$=10.0%) is also significant.Other language preferred includes the alternate/combination of Bengali (the official language of the neighbouring country, Bangladesh) and Hindi (the official language of India and also the lingua franca in the border of Meghalaya- Bangladesh) which account to $\bar{x}$=12.0%. English ($\bar{x}$=06.0%) and Garo ($\bar{x}$=03.0%) are hardly visible in this domain.

4.3 Commercial Domain

The pattern of language(s) that operates in the **Commercial settings** favour a more feasible link language depending on the value that language(s) holds profitable in the market (see**Table-5**).

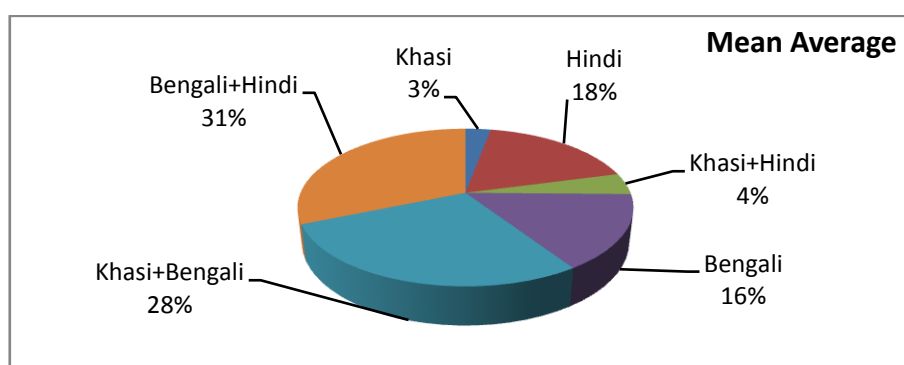| Languages	Market	Sellers	Buyers	Mean
Khasi	03.3%	02.3%	03.3%	02.9%
Hindi	21.0%	15.0%	17.7%	17.9%
Khasi+Hindi	06.7%	03.3%	03.3%	04.4%
Bengali	12.3%	13.7%	20.7%	15.4%
Khasi+Bengali	26.4%	34.0%	23.3%	**27.9%**
Bengali+Hindi	30.3%	31.7%	31.7%	**31.2%**
Total=	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table- 5: *Percent use of different language by the Khasis in Commercial settings - Bholaganj*

Being a multilingual area, the choice of language use in the market domain almost always corresponds to the language(s) of the buyers. The analysis clearly shows that in Bholaganj, about $\bar{x}$=31.0% and $\bar{x}$=28.0% of the total mean score lean heavily to the alternate combination of Bengali+ Hindi and Bengali+ Hindi respectively which are the dominant choice in the market. Bengali and Hindi alone attain a mean score of $\bar{x}$=16.0% and $\bar{x}$=18.0% respectively while the choice of Khasi ($\bar{x}$=03.0%) or its alternate/combination with Hindi ($\bar{x}$=04.0%) is almost insignificant in commercial domain.

4.4. Mass-Media Domain

Print media, Audio broadcast, and Audio-Visual broadcast form the social networks of **Mass Media**. Language choice in connection with the media refers to the propensity of language consumption in the different languages available for media broadcast. These include language preference in audio (such as radio, listening to

music etc.), audio-visual broadcast (such as television- movie, news etc.) and print media (such as newspapers, journals etc.). The analysis of language preferred in media transmission (**Table-6**) shows that Khasi ($\bar{x}$=26.0%) and the alternate/combination of Khasi+ Bengali ($\bar{x}$=23.0%) respectively received the highest mean score. Other important language in this domain include the alternate/combine choice of Khasi+Hindi ($\bar{x}$=19.0%) and Khasi+English ($\bar{x}$=19.0%) respectively. The choice of language preferred for Assamese accounts only ($\bar{x}$=5.0%) which is very insignificant in this domain.

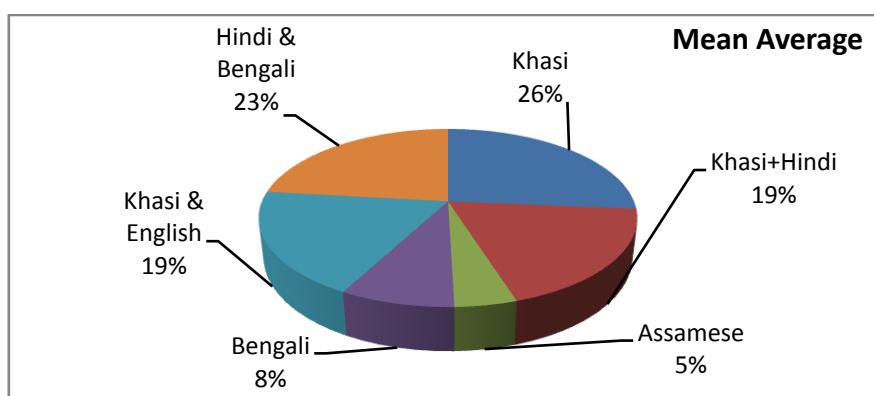| Language	Newspaper	Radio	Television
Khasi	**45.0%**	**34.0%**	09.5%
Khasi+Hindi	08.0%	**28.0%**	**27.0%**
Assamese	nil	nil	05.0%
Bengali	07.0%	10.7%	10.0%
Khasi+English	**40.0%**	13.3%	10.5%
Hindi+Bengali	nil	14.0%	**38.0%**
Total=	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table- 6: *Percentage of language consumption by the Khasis in Media –Bholaganj*

A careful observation in individual parameters clearly shows that Khasi (f=45.0%) and its alternate/combination with English (f=40.0%) is mainly consumed in print media. In audio broadcast, Khasi (f=34.0%) and the alternate/combinatory choice of Khasi+ English (f=28.0%)receives the highest frequency score while the alternate/combination of Hindi+ Bengali (f=38.0%) and Khasi+Hindi (f=27.0%) respectivelyare mainly preferred in audio-visual broadcast.

4.5. Institutional Domains

The languages used in Church, Schools and Offices collectively form the domain of **Institutional Settings**. The mean score of language choice analysis clearly indicate that the alternate/combination of Khasi, Bengali and Hindi are the dominant choice appropriated in this domain discerning from their frequent combination. Thus, while Khasi and Bengali equally received an average of $\bar{x}$ =16.0% each, Hindi accounts to $\bar{x}$ =09.0% of the average score. However, it is also notice that the alternate/combination of these three languages for instance, Khasi+ Bengali+ Hindi ($\bar{x}$=24.0%) Khasi+ Hindi ($\bar{x}$=14.0%) and Bengali+ Hindi ($\bar{x}$=10.0%) are also statistically significant.English ($\bar{x}$=09.0%) and Garo ($\bar{x}$=02.0%) are under-represented in this domain.

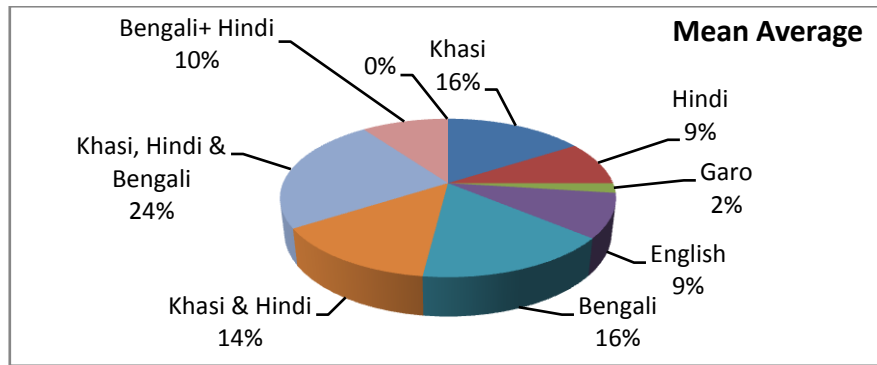| Languages	Church	Education	Offices
Khasi	60.0%	04.3%	16.0%
Hindi	05.0%	10.7%	09.0%
Garo	nil	nil	02.0%
English	nil	70.0%	09.0%
Bengali	25.0%	15.0%	16.0%
Khasi & Hindi	nil	nil	14.0%
Khasi, Hindi&Bengali	nil	nil	24.0%
Bengali+ Hindi	10.0%	nil	10.0%
Total=	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Table- 7: *Percent use of different language by the Khasis in Institutional settings - Bholaganj*

However, a careful observation within this domain shows a lot of variations. Thus, it was found that English (f=70.0%) was rated above other languages in educational institutions while one's mother tongue i.e. Khasi (f=60.0%) is almost always preferred in one's place of worship. It is in one's place of work that language choice shows variation and dispersion. Thus, in formal inter-group situation, the English (f=09.0%) is almost always the prevailing choice of language used while in more casual situation, Khasi (f=16.0%), Bengali (f=16.0%)or Hindi (f=09.0%) or their alternate/combinatory choice operates depending on solidarity of the interlocutors. Here, language choice is found to be dependent on the degree of formality or casualy of the corresponding interactions and interlocutors of the inter-group context as reported in the interview.

V.   Findings and Conclusion

The primary survey demonstrate that contact inthe borders of Meghalaya-Bangladesh in Bholaganjis not merely confined between the Khasis with their immediate neighbouring people of Bangladesh in the international border but a fairrepresentative of different out-groups belonging to different linguistic communities such as Assamese, Nepalis, Bengalisand Garo are attested in the primary survey.Thus, this area host a linguistically diverse socio-cultural network with three language families represented i.e. Austro-Asiatic family (Khasi), Indo-Aryan languages (Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalese), and Tibeto-Burman languages (Garo). The presence of these different linguistic communities created feasible sociolinguistic areas which is basically multilingual and multicultural in nature. Socio-psychologically, a peaceful coexistence of the different ethnic groups operates and linguistically, the Khasis as well as other linguistic communities represented in the border showed no adversarial attitude towards other languages. An additive type of multilingualism operates along this border where learning a second or third language do not impedeon the development of first or second languageon grounds oflanguage attrition or linguistic hegemony.Different languages in the speech repertoire compliment an important functional role in the different contexts (Dkhar, 2009). Thus, there is no conflict in terms use of any of the given languages in the different situations since language use (especially in inter-group contexts) is dictated by the most intelligibility language or link language namely, Hindi and to some extent, Khasi or Bengali which is predominant in Bholaganj. An additive type of Multilingualism operates in this area and multilingualism is at the individual and societal level.

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