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Int. Jr. of Contemp. Res. in Multi. *PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL* *Volume 4 Issue 3 [May- Jun] Year 2025*

Research Article

Silhouettes of Speech: Unravelling Linguistic Identity in Hindi Cinema's North-East Narratives

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15359691

Abstract

Language plays a notable role in shaping the identity of characters and the overall narrative in cinema. The use of language in films can be seen as a tool for constructing and representing identity and exploring cultural and social issues. This paper will explore the relationship between language and identity in films, drawing on various studies and research. One of the key aspects of language and identity in films is the representation of marginalized groups of Northeast India. This paper focuses on three specific films, namely *'Mary Kom'* (2014), *'Axone'* (2019), and *'Anek'* (2022), which are based in Northeast India. The study investigates how these films contribute to understanding the region's linguistic diversity and cultural exchange. The study unravels the diversity of the Northeastern language and culture. It highlights the significance of studying Hindi films based in Northeast India to comprehend the complexity of linguistic identities. The portrayal of Northeast India in Hindi films is critically analyzed, particularly emphasizing the linguistic identities depicted. The languages spoken in these films and their presentation of the region's linguistic diversity are examined. The use of dialects, accents, and local languages in creating authenticity and capturing cultural nuances is also explored. The study delves into the influence of Hindi films on shaping linguistic identities and promoting cultural exchange in Northeast India.

Manuscript Information

- **ISSN No:** 2583-7397
- **Received:** 18-04-2025
- **Accepted:** 19-04-2025
- **Published:** 07-05-2025
- **IJCRM:**4(3); 2025: 28-37
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- **Plagiarism Checked:** Yes
- **Peer Review Process:** Yes

How to Cite this Article

Chakma T, Chirom K. Silhouettes of Speech: Unravelling Linguistic Identity in Hindi Cinema's North-East Narratives. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2025;4(3):28-37.

Access this Article Online

www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Language, Linguistic Identity, Northeast India, Hindi Cinema.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein states, "Language is much closer to film than painting is." The concept of language is so potent because it can completely mould a person's identity in reality and cinema. People's words and phrases significantly influence their thoughts, culture, and identity. Language determines our societal position, ethnicity, and community. Our language shapes not only our social identities but also our prospects for the future.

Cinema is an influential tool to showcase the nuances of linguistic diversity, from regional dialects to foreign languages, encouraging empathy and understanding among global viewers. Films possess the exceptional capacity to transcend geographical

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barriers and submerge audiences in diverse linguistic environments. Language defines the cultural setting of a film, whether it is the British accents in Pride and Prejudice, the Swahili conversations in *The Lion King*, or the Brooklynese in *Goodfellas*. It gives viewers an accurate and engaging experience. Since language represents a society's historical, social, and geographical aspects, filmmakers frequently use language variances to add authenticity to their work and evoke a particular feeling of place and time. In films, language is a reflection of identity. Film language can investigate the creation of an identity that defies imposed social categories and questions normative social standards. The relationship between language and identity in cinema is reflected in many ways, including cultural variety, translanguaging, and the portrayal of stateless people and small countries. In cinema, language is a vital component of linguistic identity (Dragojevic *et al.*, 2020).

Linguistic identity in cinema refers to an individual's sense of belonging and connection to a particular language. It encompasses numerous aspects, such as language proficiency, choice, and attitudes. Language is a powerful tool in cinema, shaping the narrative, character development, conveying emotions, and the cinematic experience. Language and identity are inextricably connected, forming and influencing one another in various ways. It is essential in film because it conveys cultural nuances, personal relationships, and social conceptions. Films can reflect, criticize, and reinforce cultural identities, emphasizing the complex relationship between language and identity. Films must depict other cultures since it helps to close the divide between various groups and geographical areas. India is well known for its intricate cultural fabric, comprising many languages, traditions, and customs. One region that particularly stands out in this vibrant mosaic is Northeast India, a treasure trove of cultural diversity. The Northeastern part of India, often called the "Seven Sisters and One Brother," boasts rich cultural diversity and a unique heritage encompassing many ethnicities, languages, and traditions. Its unique geography and breathtaking landscapes characterize this region, and, most importantly, it's astounding cultural diversity. In the realm of Hindi cinema, this cultural diversity has been represented through various northeastern languages, offering a glance into the region's rich heritage. The representation of languages in cinema is not only about linguistic identity but also about the broader question of ethnolinguistic identity, dialect and language, language choice, and language standardization (Greenberg, 2005). Therefore, the representation of Northeastern languages in cinema should be approached with sensitivity and accuracy to avoid misrepresentation or stereotyping. Representation of Northeastern languages in cinema plays a notable role in shaping the linguistic identity of the Northeastern region. Films can visually construct and represent minority identities, including religious, ethnolinguistic, and sexual minorities. The cinematic medium allows for exploring historical continuities and portraying diverse linguistic and cultural identities (Sengupta, 2020). However, ensuring that the representation of Northeastern languages in cinema is accurate and balanced is essential.

However, it has historically been underrepresented in mainstream Bollywood cinemas. This article delves into the representation of Northeast India in Hindi cinema, exploring the evolution of portrayal, challenges faced, the relationship between language and identity in films, and the potential for more inclusive storytelling. This essay will examine how linguistic identity is represented in selected Hindi films based on the Northeast region, exploring its impact on cultural narratives and the broader significance of language in shaping our perceptions of the world.

Exploring Linguistic Identities:

Linguistic identity refers to the way individuals or groups of people identify themselves based on the language or languages they speak and their connection to those languages. Beyond cultural and linguistic identity, language plays a vital role in shaping individual identities in films. The choice of language characters use reflects their background, upbringing, and personal history. Bilingual or multilingual characters represent the complexity of modern identities, embracing a mix of cultures and languages. In this context, language becomes an expression of self-identity and personal history, unraveling the multidimensionality of characters and their relationships. For instance, in the film "Lost in Translation," the characters' language barriers underscore their isolation and longing for connection. As they grapple with communication challenges, their identities are amplified through their struggle to convey emotions and experiences in a foreign land. In such instances, language becomes a metaphor for the barriers and bridges that shape human connections and our sense of self. Various factors, including social, cultural, and historical contexts, shape linguistic identity. Fishman (1991) argues that language shift, where a community abandons its native language in favour of another, can significantly impact linguistic identity. This process often occurs due to political, economic, or social pressures. For example, spreading English as a global language has led to language shifts in many countries (Crystal, 2003). This shift can result in individuals developing a hybrid linguistic identity, incorporating elements of their native and dominant languages. Linguistic identity is significant as it shapes an individual's sense of self and belonging. It influences language choice, language attitudes, and communication patterns. Moreover, linguistic identity is closely tied to cultural identity, as language is an essential aspect of culture. Preserving linguistic diversity and supporting endangered languages is crucial for maintaining cultural heritage and promoting inclusivity. Language is often used as a marker of cultural and social identity. People may identify themselves or be identified by others based on the language they speak. For example, someone who speaks Spanish may identify as Hispanic, while someone who speaks Mandarin may identify as Chinese. According to Bucholtz and Hall, Language is crucial in shaping and reflecting identity in film. The use of language in cinema can challenge normative social categories and highlight the emergence of an identity that does not conform to assigned social categories. Transgender identity and cross-gender performance in films have been explored to

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challenge traditional concepts of gender. Ethnic, racial, and national boundary crossing in films also contribute to exploring identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

The development of both individual and group identities is significantly influenced by language. It is impacted by several things, such as personal experiences, language learning, and cultural background (Vincent et al., 2011). Linguistic identity in cinema is a complex and multifaceted topic explored from various perspectives. One aspect examined is the use of African-American English by European-American actors in Hollywood films, which has been argued to be a form of linguistic minstrelsy (Bucholtz & Lopez, 2011). This phenomenon raises questions about the ideological and indexical aspects of linguistic representation in cinema. Another perspective focuses on the translation of multilingual films and the visibility of translation in films that depict language diversity (Andino, 2013). Researchers have analyzed how filmmakers can use multilingualism as a tool and serve an aesthetic purpose. The power dynamics of multilingualism in cinema have also been explored, with language being seen as a socially loaded and complex tool that characters can exploit to exercise authority (King, 2013). Additionally, the representation of minority identities in cinema has been explored, focusing on religious, ethnolinguistic, and sexual minorities in South Asian film narratives (Sengupta, 2020). Cultural diversity and language are closely intertwined in cinema. Thematic, formal, and linguistic variables can influence the acceptance or rejection of particular film messages. The consumption of films produced in specific regions, such as Galicia, can be influenced by the audience's sociodemographic, axiological, and consumption habits (Andión & Mayo, 2013). Language is also a powerful source of introducing cultural politics and shaping cultural identity.

Language policies that neglect minority languages can lead to a lack of recognition and representation for ethnic minority groups. It is vital for nations to continuously transmit, preserve, and promote languages to preserve distinct cultural identities (Parajuli, 2021). Language in a film is essential in conveying the identity of the people portrayed. Cinema can express a person's spiritual culture's worldview, values, and ideals, making it a powerful tool for constructing a sociocultural identity (Abdulayeva, 2022). Through language, filmmakers can depict the unique linguistic characteristics, dialects, accents, and verbal expressions of different communities, which contribute to representing their cultural and social identities. One of the most pivotal aspects of language in cinema is its ability to convey authenticity. When characters speak in their native tongues, it adds depth and credibility to the narrative. Filmmakers often make meticulous efforts to ensure the accuracy of linguistic representation, enlisting the help of linguistic consultants and native speakers. This attention to detail enhances the cinematic experience and respects the portrayed cultural identity. For instance, Ang Lee's "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" masterfully blends Mandarin and Cantonese to mirror the cultural diversity within China. The choice of language here is not just about communication; it is about preserving the cultural nuances that shape the characters and their world. Films are crucial in preserving endangered and indigenous languages, often threatened by globalization and dominant languages. By incorporating these languages into their narratives, filmmakers give a voice to marginalized communities and shed light on their unique cultural practices. Such films are valuable tools in language revitalization efforts, as they document the language and showcase its relevance in contemporary settings. Through cinematic storytelling, viewers can better grasp the importance of linguistic diversity in maintaining cultural identities. Overall, linguistic identity in cinema is a rich and diverse field of study encompassing various aspects such as linguistic representation, translation, and minority identities. Different linguistic cues and multilingualism convey meaning, exercise authority, and represent minority identities (Hung & Guan, 2020; King, 2013; Sengupta, 2020; Tallapessy et al., 2020). Language in cinema represents linguistic identity through various means, such as movie genres, multilingualism, representation of minority identities, postcolonial discourse, and cultural and historical contexts. These representations contribute to the overall meaning and impact of films.

Language as a Reflection of Cultural Identity:

A robust reflection of cultural identity, language is more than just a tool for communication. Just as every individual has a unique personality shaped by their experiences, every culture has a distinct identity shaped by its language. Language serves as a vessel for traditions, values, history, and the collective consciousness of a community, making it an integral part of cultural identity. In cinema, language serves as a potent tool to portray cultural identity. Filmmakers often employ specific languages to situate their narratives in particular cultural contexts. For instance, Spanish language films capture the vibrancy of Latin American cultures, while Mandarin or Cantonese language films provide insight into the rich heritage of Chinese societies. Filmmakers instill realism and establish a strong emotional bond between characters and viewers through genuine language, which promotes empathy and respect for cultural diversity. In films, language conveys cultural nuances, local dialects, and unique expressions that define specific communities. It allows viewers to immerse themselves in unfamiliar worlds and empathize with characters facing diverse challenges and celebrations. Language, therefore, becomes a mirror through which audiences can witness and appreciate the multiplicity of identities across the globe. Language in cinema is often called the "silent character" that plays a pivotal role in shaping a film's narrative. It serves as a bridge, allowing audiences to connect with the characters and immerse themselves in different cultural contexts. Furthermore, language in cinema influences cultural diversity and representation. Films can shape cultural discourses and practices, particularly in the context of institutionalized diversity in the film sector (Nwonka & Malik, 2018). Language plays a significant role in reflecting cultural identity in cinema. In the Indian context, the term "regional cinema" is used to differentiate non-Hindi language cinemas from Hindi cinema, highlighting the diversity of national cinema. Language is inextricably entwined with the region, as it is linked

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to the emergence of language-based administrative units in India. (Radhakrishnan, 2021). Different languages in regional cinema are a marker of cultural and linguistic diversity within the country.

Linguistic Diversity in the Northeast India

The northeastern part of India, often called the "Seven Sisters," is a diverse and culturally rich region with a mosaic of languages and ethnicities. This region has a unique linguistic landscape that reflects its historical, cultural, and geographical diversity. This essay will explore how northeastern languages have been portrayed and used in Indian cinema to construct and reinforce linguistic identities. The northeastern region of India is known for its linguistic diversity, with more than 220 languages spoken in this relatively small geographical area. This linguistic diversity has been a significant aspect of the region's cultural identity and has found its way into cinema as filmmakers attempt to capture the region's essence. Through analyzing select films, this essay will examine how northeastern languages contribute to portraying regional identities in Indian cinema. The northeast region of India is a linguistic melting pot, with each state and even smaller regions within states having their own languages, dialects, and linguistic traditions. Some prominent languages spoken in the region include Assamese, Manipuri, Bodo, Mizo, Nagamese Creole, Khasi, and many more. This linguistic diversity reflects the unique cultural tapestry of the region, with each language acting as a marker of identity. Indian cinema has often been criticized for its focus on Hindi and the domination of Hindi films in the national and international markets. However, a growing trend of regional cinema has gained recognition and showcased India's linguistic diversity over the years. Northeastern cinema has played a pivotal role in this trend by highlighting the linguistic identities of the region. Northeastern languages are frequently used as narrative devices in cinema. They help create a sense of authenticity and provide a window into the region's unique culture and traditions. For example, in "Kothanodi" (2015), an Assamese film, the Assamese language is used to immerse viewers in the rural Assamese setting and folklore, adding depth to the storytelling. The representation of linguistic identities in cinema is closely tied to the broader issue of cultural representation. Cinema serves as a platform to depict the diversity of cultures and languages in the northeastern region, which often goes unrecognized in mainstream Indian media. Indian cinema, especially Bollywood, has often stereotypically portrayed northeastern characters, perpetuating biases and prejudices. Northeastern cinema, on the other hand, has been instrumental in breaking these stereotypes. These films challenge preconceived notions about the region's people by showing diverse characters with nuanced stories and backgrounds. While using northeastern languages in cinema has positively impacted cultural representation and linguistic preservation, filmmakers also face challenges in promoting linguistic diversity. In the northeast region of India, where linguistic diversity is a hallmark of identity, cinema always plays a crucial role in showcasing these languages' beauty and richness. Filmmakers used their craft to challenge stereotypes, preserve linguistic heritage, and celebrate the region's cultural diversity. As India grapples with issues like cultural homogenization and linguistic marginalization, the voices of northeastern cinema become even more crucial. These films allow underrepresented languages and cultures to flourish and be celebrated nationally and internationally. The future of northeastern languages and linguistic identity in cinema depends on continued support, investment, and recognition of the region's unique cultural and linguistic tapestry. Through cinema, these languages can continue to thrive and contribute to the vibrant mosaic of Indian culture.

The Evaluation of Language in Bollywood

The relationship between language and identity in films has evolved. Earlier cinema predominantly favoured a narrow range of languages, often perpetuating stereotypes and overlooking the diversity of human experiences. However, as the world becomes more interconnected, filmmakers have embraced multilingual narratives, reflecting the globalization of identities. Films today exhibit a rich tapestry of languages, echoing the complex intermingling of cultures and fostering a greater appreciation for diverse identities. Hindi cinema, often referred to as Bollywood, has been the focus of much scholarly attention and popular discourse. It is usually considered representative of Indian cinema as a whole (Kumar, 2011). However, this perspective overlooks the diverse range of films produced in other languages, including those from the Northeast region of India. While Hindi is a predominant language throughout the country, numerous dialects spoken in the East and Northeast are underrepresented in mainstream Hindi cinema (Bandyopadhyay, 2008). The evaluation of the use of northeastern languages in Indian cinema is a significant topic that highlights the linguistic diversity within the Indian film industry. Bollywood, the Hindi component of the Indian film industry, comprises approximately 45% of the total Indian film market. However, it is essential to note that India produces around 1,000 movies every year in various languages, showcasing the remarkable linguistic output of the country's film industry (Si, 2011). The representation of Northeast Indian languages in Hindi cinema is a complex issue. Hindi films predominantly use a mixture of Hindi and Urdu, spoken by a little more than 50% of India's population (Matusitz & Payano, 2011). However, this linguistic dominance of Hindi and Urdu in Indian movies has marginalized the representation of other regional languages, including those spoken in the Northeast. While much of the focus in Indian cinema studies has been on mainstream Hindi films or "Bollywood," there is a growing recognition of the need to explore the many popular cinemas of the subcontinent. It includes films in the four languages of South India and the numerous languages of East and Northeast India (Kumar, 2011). The use of northeastern languages in Indian cinema can reflect this linguistic diversity and the representation of different regions within the Indian film industry. The Northeast region of India is linguistically diverse, with each state having its distinct language or dialect. These languages include Assamese, Manipuri, Nagamese, and many others. However, due to the dominance of Hindi in mainstream Indian cinema, the

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representation of Northeast Indian languages is limited. This lack of representation might be ascribed to various things, including the market demand for Hindi films, the influence of Bollywood's cultural hegemony, and the limited resources available for producing and distributing films in regional languages (Kumar, 2011). Code-switching, particularly between Hindi and English, is a common linguistic phenomenon in Indian media, including Bollywood films. However, there is relatively little research on the interplay of Hindi and northeastern languages in Indian cinema. Studying code-switching in Indian cinema can provide insights into the industry's sociolinguistic dynamics and language use patterns (Kathpalia & Ong, 2015). The circulation and consumption of Indian films, created in Hindi and subtitled in English, among diasporic communities, including South Asian Americans, highlight the role of language in identity formation and the negotiation of cultural belonging (Shankar, 2022). The use of northeastern languages in Indian cinema can contribute to the representation and visibility of northeastern communities within the diaspora. In this article, we explore the various ways in which language influences and enhances the film medium. One of the most apparent aspects of language in film is dialogue. Character personalities, relationships, and motivations are revealed through well-crafted conversations. The characters' words help establish their identities and drive the plot forward. Language helps establish the cultural context of a film. Films set in different parts of the world often incorporate the native language of the characters, providing a sense of authenticity and immersing viewers in the depicted culture. The use of language in films can be seen as a tool for constructing and representing identity and exploring cultural and social issues. One of the key aspects of language and identity in cinema is the representation of marginalized groups. The relationship between language and identity in films is a dynamic and multifaceted one. Language acts as a channel for expressing culture, offering insight into diverse communities and their unique experiences. It also shapes individual identities, reflecting characters' personal histories and struggles. Moreover, language can be an instrument of resistance, empowering marginalized communities to reclaim their identities. As cinema continues to evolve, the portrayal of language and identity will remain an essential aspect of storytelling, enriching our understanding of the human experience and fostering empathy and cultural appreciation on a global scale. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of language in movies. Language is essential to the success of cinematic communication and storytelling. It allows filmmakers to convey their ideas, emotions, and messages to the audience clearly and effectively. One aspect of the language of cinema is its linguistic nature. According to (Shirinova, 2019), cinematic language should be explored from a linguistic perspective. Linguistics helps filmmakers understand cinematic language's structure, grammar, and semantics, enabling them to communicate their intended meaning effectively. By studying the linguistic aspects of cinema, filmmakers can refine their language use and enhance the impact of their films. Moreover, language in cinema is closely tied to the learning and teaching of foreign languages. Tang (2021) states that filmmaking can be an effective tool for learning and teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Making films or trailers in English classes allows students to develop their communication skills and become more active and creative in their learning. By exploring language in films, learners can enhance their language skills and comprehension of literary works. In addition, the intersection of vision and language in cinema has gained prominence in recent years. Das et al. (2017) raise their focus on challenges with envision captioning, text-to-image coreference/grounding, and video/movie description that arise at the connection of vision and language. This shows that language is essential for describing and interpreting visual content in cinema. The language used in film descriptions and dialogues helps viewers understand and engage with the film's visual elements. Furthermore, language in cinema can be a powerful tool for representing multilingualism and exercising authority. King (2013) discusses how language functions as a socially loaded and complex tool in contemporary multilingual French cinema. Characters in films often exploit their multilingualism to exercise authority and power. This demonstrates the importance of language in shaping the dynamics and relationships portrayed in cinema. Overall, language plays a vital role in cinema. It helps filmmakers effectively communicate their ideas, enhances the learning and teaching of foreign languages, facilitates the interpretation of visual content, and can be used to represent power dynamics. Understanding the importance of language in cinema allows filmmakers to harness its potential and create impactful and meaningful cinematic experiences.

The importance of language in cinema:

Before delving into the representation of Northeastern dialects in Bollywood cinemas, it is essential to understand the broader significance of language in cinema. In the context of filmmaking, language encompasses not only the spoken word but also non-verbal communication, such as body language, expressions, and accents. It serves as a bridge that connects the audience with the characters and their world. Language can be a powerful tool for filmmakers to establish a character's identity, social background, and cultural heritage. Moreover, it can be instrumental in creating a sense of authenticity and immersion in a film. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of language in movies. Language is crucial in film comprehension and information processing (Lavaur & Bairstow, 2011). Films expose language learners to authentic language used in real settings, enhancing their speaking skills and intercultural communicative competence (Chaya & Inpin, 2020).

2. OBJECTIVES

The research paper aims to analyse the Hindi films based in Northeast India and textually investigates how these films contribute to understanding the region's linguistic diversity and cultural exchange. The main objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the role of language in representing and constructing identity in cinema.
2. To analyse how Bollywood films depict the linguistic diversity and cultural complexity of Northeast India.

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3. To investigate the representation of marginalized groups through language use in the films *'Mary Kom'* (2014), *'Axone'* (2019), and *'Anek'* (2022).
4. To explore the use of dialects, accents, and local languages in films as tools for authenticity and cultural representation.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this research will be content analysis of selected three Bollywood movies to analyze the representation of the native languages of the Northeast region through dialogues used in the films among the protagonists. The qualitative research will be a content analysis of three selected Hindi cinemas based on the Northeast region and their representation of Northeastern languages and identities. This research will be based on a conceptual analysis of these films: *Mary Kom* (2014), *Axone* (2019), and *Anek* (2022). Through the conceptual analysis, the concept of language as a reflection of cultural identity will be studied by analyzing the language used in the films in native dialects, and the representation of Northeast India in Bollywood films is critically examined, with a particular emphasis on the linguistic identities depicted.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Mary Kom (2014)

Language can be an effective tool in cinema to tell stories and immerse the spectator in a complex tapestry of cultures and societies. Mary Kom, a biographical sports drama film, is one instance of how Meitei languages are portrayed. The film, directed by Omung Kumar and produced by Bhansali Productions, was released in 2014 and depicted the life of Mary Kom, a renowned Indian boxer from Manipur. It is based on her autobiography Unbreakable M. C. Mary Kom. In the case of *Mary Kom*, the representation of Meitei and other dialects of Manipur serves as a means to capture Manipur's cultural and linguistic diversity, offering a glimpse into the lives of the Meitei people. The movie begins in 2007 at Imphal in Manipur, where the present situation of Manipur is shown in glimpses. Mary Kom, the film's main protagonist, hails from Manipur, a northeastern state of India known for its ethnic diversity and cultural richness. Manipur is home to various communities, with the Meitei being one of the prominent groups. The Meitei people have their distinct language and culture, and their traditions significantly shape the narrative of *Mary Kom.* The film is about Indian boxer champion Mangte Chungneijang Mary Kom, who belongs to the Kom tribal community in Manipur. This movie tries to portray the Manipur state and its cultural diversity. The Kom community is the smallest community amongst other tribal communities in Manipur. Language plays a vital role in each cinema as a powerful tool that shapes the narrative, developing the character and cinematic experiences. However, *Mary Kom* is a Hindi movie, and representations of the Meitei, Kom, or other languages are significantly fewer. Manipuri language Meiteilon is the official language of Manipur. The Film *Mary Kom* tries to represent the culture and identity of Manipur. However, there is less representation of Meiteilon and other native dialects in the movie. The family also uses more Hindi than the Meitei language, as the mainstream audience is mostly Hindi speakers. Only a few words from Meiteilon have been used in the movie to create Mary Kom's identity and her culture. The film portrays Mary Kom's early life in the remote village of Kangathei, where the Meitei dialect is spoken as a primary means of communication. Her journey from this humble village to becoming a world-class boxer is the film's central arc. As a result, the representation of Meitei dialects becomes crucial in authentically portraying her character and cultural background. In *Mary Kom*, language serves as a marker of identity. Mary Kom's fluency in Meitei dialects and her ability to speak Hindi and English reflect Manipur's multilingual and multicultural nature. Her proficiency in Meitei dialects is a testament to her deep-rooted connection to her homeland and her identity as a Meitei woman. This linguistic aspect adds depth to her character and underscores the importance of language as a cultural identifier. The film makes a deliberate effort to depict the Meitei dialects accurately. Conversations among family members, neighbours, and villagers are infused with authentic Meitei linguistic elements. Using Meitei dialects in these interactions creates an intimate and realistic portrayal of the community's daily life and culture. In addition to the Meitei dialects, *Mary Kom* also introduces the audience to the diversity of languages spoken in Manipur. While Meitei dialects are central to the film, it acknowledges the existence of other languages, such as Manipuri (also known as Meiteilon), Nagamese, and Hindi, spoken by different regional communities in the film. This linguistic diversity highlights the complexity of Manipur's cultural landscape. One notable aspect is the interaction between Mary Kom and her husband, K. Onler Kom, who is from the Zou community, a Naga ethnic group. This intercultural marriage is depicted as a harmonious union where language differences are bridged through love and respect. The film portrays the couple's ability to communicate in multiple languages as a symbol of their unity despite their diverse backgrounds, emphasizing the power of love and shared goals. This film represents the journey of Mary Kom; however, in this film, they mostly use the dialect of Meitei, but Mary Kom and her husband Onler belong to another tribe, Kom. However, they used only a few words from the Meitei dialect, such as Onler calling her Thoi, which means love in Meitei. There is a scene where a journalist comes and interviews Mary. Mary makes a Manipuri special dish, Iromba, and offers her lunch; mentioning the dish's name is also a way to represent the identity and culture where she belongs. When Mary first participated in the Boxing state championship, her father saw her losing the game on TV. At that time, her father shouts in the Meiteilon dialect, asking Mary to fight back. Very few words in Meiteilon are represented in the film, such as Thinjhallu, yere yere, tapthou, satthu, Ngaikho, chaobi halak-e, appa, ima, thoi, kana, eina kare, sida iao, iche, khannuda, thagatchari, nattro, hougatto, kaidaleige, Loire, keidourage, khummo—conversation between the protagonists, a few Meitei words used to create the identity through the language. In *Mary Kom,* only the Meitei dialect is spoken by the protagonist; nevertheless, the representation of the Meitei is also much less than that of Hindi. In *Mary Kom,* language helps to create the identity of Mary and

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the other protagonists. She represents Manipur, its cultural diversity, and its identity to the world. Language is a potent element in creating one's identity for others. A song by Mary Kom in the film also represents her identity as belonging to Manipuri tribes.

Axone (2019)

Axone (2019) is a Comedy- drama of Bollywood cinema directed by Nicholas Kharkongor and produced by Yoodlee Films, Saregama India's Film division. The story or plot of *Axone* begins with the arrangement of Minam's wedding party in Delhi. It starts with the Khasi folk song, representing the marginalized people from Northeast India and their culture. The story revolves around Upasana, Chanbi, Zorem, and other Northeast Indian migrants who live in Delhi and help their friend Minam with her wedding. Minam, who represents her as a Galo tribe from Arunachal Pradesh using the Gallong language, is suddenly called away for an interview. In the meantime, her friends Chanbi, Upasana, and Zorem search for the ingredients to prepare a pungent delicacy named axone for their friend Minam's wedding party. The story revolves around friends from different states in Northeast India, sparking comedy and conflict with their unaccustomed neighbours. Axone is a pungent delicacy of Northeast India, which smells like shit according to other people, made for any special occasion in the Northeast and made for Minam's wedding ceremony belonging to the Galo tribe. The character Minam represents the Galo community; Chanbi represents the Meitei, a tribe of Manipur, and Upasana, who belong to Nepali from the Northeast and stay together in a rented flat in Delhi. There are other northeastern characters, too. Dagi is Minam's niece, and Chimar is her husband from the same tribe in Arunachal Pradesh. They have other friends, Zorem, Bendang, Balamon, Hayna, Martha and Sunny, who belong to different tribes from Northeast India. Even though the portrayal of Northeastern culture and the diversity of languages in *Axone* is significantly less as it is a Bollywood mainstream film, the director still tried to represent linguistic diversity and how language defines Northeast India's identity. They are all from seven different states of Northeast India who became friends in Delhi. In Delhi, their northeastern community is ready to help each other in every situation. However, the common languages used by the protagonists in this Film are Hindi and English because they are all from different states and represent diverse cultural identities. Each of them has their own community friends in Delhi. When Chanbi and Upasana are cooking the axone, a Khasi traditional folk song is played to represent the Northeastern culture to the audience. However, Upasana and Chanbi fail to make the axone on time because of insufficient gas and are caught by Shiv's grandmother because the axone smells very strong. Among themselves and with their neighbours, they speak the common language, either Hindi or English, for conversation because they are all from different states of Northeast India. Consequently, after getting bullied and humiliated by the neighbors and their landlord's mother-in-law for making their special dish, Axone, Chanbi had a panic attack. Therefore, Chanbi asks to move the wedding party to her boyfriend Bendang's place, and according to the plan of making the axone, all of them try to find a place to make that axone as the smell is too strong; those who don't eat it can't have the smell. At that time, Nicholas Kharkongor portrayed other languages nicely. There is one scene where they all have tried to find a place to cook the axone at their own community people's houses. Then, they all spoke their native dialect with their friends and relatives living in Delhi. Khasi, Meitei, Bodo, Tangkhul, Nepali, Mizo, Sema, and local Delhi dialects are represented through the dialogues. However, they speak both Hindi and English. However, no one could find a place to make the axone. They have tried many times to make axone. People from other states treat the northeastern people with neglect regarding their looks, features, and food habits. So, they could not get a single place to make the axone. Finally, Zorem finds a way to make the axone on the roof of their flat after facing trouble and dramatic situations. Hence, the friends try to make the pungent dish axone for Minam's wedding party and face conflicts with their unaccustomed neighbours and the landlord's mother-in-law. Chanbi and Upasana asked Martha to find a place to cook. Here, Martha says that cooking traditional food that smells bad creates tension between the northeastern people and others. People from the Northeast have the right to cook food, and people from other communities also have the right not to suffer due to Northeastern food's smell. While they are speaking to each other, they speak English and Hindi. The language creates the identity of each character and the tribe to which they belong. It helps the audience learn about Northeastern linguistic identity and its cultural diversity. Finally, after facing a lot of trouble and drama with neighbors and the landlord, they made the axone, and the wedding could happen successfully. *Axone* is a movie that represents the culturally rich and linguistically diverse Northeast India. It represents the richness and diversity of Northeast India and its multilingual cultures from Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and other northeastern regions of India. The film's story ends with a wedding party. The language used in Axone is Hindi, alongside different northeastern languages also used in the cinema, as the story of cinema is based on Northeastern migrants of Delhi. In *Axone*, most of the characters are portrayed by northeastern actors from different states of Northeast India alongside other Bollywood actors.In *Axone*, Nicholas Kharkongor tries to represent the diversity of Northeast India. In *Axone*, the audience is introduced to the multilingualism of Northeast India and its diverse linguistic identity by using their languages or native dialects in cinema. Here, some are Khasi, some are Manipuri, Galo, Mizo, and others are communities. So, the representation of language and identity is more realistic in *Axone*. In India, the mass audience's native language is Hindi or English. Therefore, Bollywood mainstream films always use Hindi even though the story is based in the Northeast or other parts of India because the audiences mostly understand Hindi or English. Northeast India is culturally and linguistically diverse. This linguistic diversity reflects the unique cultural tapestry of the region in cinemas. Through this cinema, audiences can see how rich the culture of the Northeast is and how linguistically diverse it is. In every Bollywood cinema, northeastern people are

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always portrayed as marginalized and neglected for their features, language, and food habits. In *Axone,* the northeastern characters are bullied and humiliated in many scenes. The film's story centered on Minam's wedding and cooking a pungent dish, axone. However, our research focuses only on language representation and how language creates one's identity in cinema. *Axone* succeeded in representing the linguistic diversity of the Northeast and how a language can create an identity.

Anek (2022)

Ayushmann Khurrana and Andrea Kevichüsa play major roles in *Anek*, an Indian political action thriller released in 2022 and directed by Anubhav Sinha. Andrea Kevichüsa made her acting debut with *Anek*. Under the auspices of T-Series and Benaras Mediaworks, Anubhav Sinha, Krishan Kumar, and Bhushan Kumar produce *Anek*. The film explores several themes related to language and identity. The cinema tries to represent the diversity of languages of northeast India. However, the film cannot present one particular state or language as the cinema attempts to describe the northeastern states as one. The film is set in Northeast India and begins with Aido (Andrea Kevichüsa) being subjected to racist taunts during a police raid at a pub. It gradually becomes apparent that she is a rising boxer aspiring to become an Indian national team player. On the other hand, Aido's father, Wangnao, a school teacher who previously worked for Tiger Sanga's group and a secretary of Rongmo, is an undercover leader of a rebel group named Johnson that fights the government and Tiger Sanga. A teenager, Nico has a mother, Emma, who worries that he may join Johnson's group and perish. Amid instability, India's security force sends Joshua, also known as Aman (Ayushmann Khurrana), an undercover police officer, to the Northeast to persuade Tiger Sangha, one of the biggest rebel organizations, to consent to a peace treaty with the state. To progress toward his goal, Joshua develops a friendship with Aido, who develops feelings for him. However, Joshua discovers that there is more to the political disputes than meets the eye, which could test his allegiance. Johnson was the sole threat that needed to be eliminated for him to succeed in his quest. In *Anek*, they try to show the Northeast, but consciously, they are not choosing any particular state. They keep saying Pradesh here, but which state in the Northeast is unclear. Similarly, their approach to showing the Northeast as one of the film's characters is that sometimes they speak Hindi, sometimes English, and among the militants of Johnson, some speak Assamese and Nagamese. Niko, the young boy who lives with his mother, occasionally visits the Johnson militants as all of them were friends who joined the militant group. In a scene, Niko meets them and sings a song in the Chungli dialect of the Ao Naga people. Ao is one of the major tribes in Nagaland from the district of Mokokchung. Hence, Niko belongs to the Ao/ Naga community. The song creates the identity of Niko and his mother. However, they always speak Hindi or sometimes Nagamese. People of the Northeast do not consider them as an Indian. The story is about the Northeastern states and the peace they want. Indian government asked Tiger Sangha to sign the peace accord as they accepted all the demands except the flag and constitution of the Northeast. Johnson, the Tiger Sangha's revel group, does not agree to surrender to the Indian police. They know the peace accord is meant to show people that the Indian government can bring peace to Northeast India. Northeastern people do not consider themselves Indian because they have seen, since their childhood, the militants, police, and other government political groups rule them, as explained by Wangnao to Joshua when he came to ask him to surrender. In their state, no one can get a government job or other facilities that one Indian should get; this is what the film represents about the Northeast. Here, we focus not on the political issue but on how language creates an identity. When Aido speaks with her father Wangnao, they speak in Hindi; only when Aido calls her father Aba is the word they use in the Mongsen dialect. Aido speaks with her boxing teacher in Nagamese and sometimes Hindi. Therefore, it is not clear which tribe they belong to. Horen, the commander of Johnson's militants, speaks both Nagamese and Hindi. Two dialects are spoken in the Ao tribe; one is Chungli, and the other is Mongsen. The songs in this film are used in the Chungli dialect, English, and Hindi. The languages in *Anek* represent the identity of the Northeast as one. They did not mention any particular tribe who spoke their dialect among themselves or which specific state it could not present to the audience. Therefore, the film could not succeed in representing that language can create an identity and a particular tribe. The film *Anek* tries to portray the Northeast as one state, with eight different states and many tribes with their own dialect. By language, it is recognized as the tribe Ao from Nagaland. However, the dresses of the villagers represent the Krabi tribe. When Aido and Joshua communicate, they use the Hindi language. In this movie, Anubhab Sinha tries to portray that India always tries to dominate the Northeast; only when any of the Northeastern faces represent India to the world does India consider them as the pride of India. In the movie, *Anek* came up with a question to the mass people of India by using a dialogue between Joshua and his boss, Anjaiyyah Bellamkonda: how do we identify one identity of a person from which part of India he or she belongs? Anjaiyyah replied to Joshua that one can identify the person's identity by being fluent in Hindi.

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between language and identity in films, drawing on various studies and research. The representation of Northeastern languages in cinema plays a crucial role in shaping linguistic identity. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) state that language is crucial in shaping and reflecting identity in film. These three films have portrayed the diversity of northeast India and its languages to construct the film's plot. In cinema, language and cultural diversity are closely intertwined. According to Matusitz & Payano (2011), Hindi films predominantly use a mixture of Hindi and Urdu, spoken by more than 50% of India's population. Even the films' plots are based on the Northeast and its diverse linguistic identities, mostly the dialogues used in the Hindi language. However, this linguistic dominance of Hindi and Urdu in Indian movies has marginalized the representation of other regional languages, including those spoken in the Northeast. Language is a powerful source of

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introducing cultural politics and shaping cultural identity. Ensuring this representation is accurate, balanced, and sensitive to the characters' diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds is essential. Subtitling and cultural content in cinema should also be carefully considered to avoid misrepresenting or under-representing Northeastern languages and cultures. By doing so, cinema can contribute to preserving and promoting linguistic identity in the Northeastern region. The films used dialect, accents, and local languages for authenticity and cultural representation. The representation of Northeast Indian languages in Hindi cinema is limited due to the dominance of Hindi and Urdu in mainstream Indian films. However, independent filmmakers from the region try to promote and showcase their native languages. The rise of regional cinema and the availability of digital platforms have allowed these filmmakers to reach a wider audience. Nonetheless, there is still a need for greater recognition and support for the Northeast region's diverse linguistic and cultural heritage in Indian cinema.

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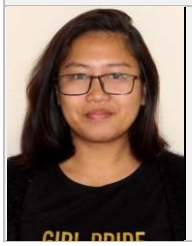

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