Multiple identities of multilingual minorities? How religious values and other extralinguistic practices influence the social, national and personal identity formation

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This empirical study examines the ways multilingualism influences the identity of minority individuals and minority groups. The motivations for their specific social behavior are rarely obvious to the multilingual speakers themselves, which made it necessary to scrutinize their behaviors and attitudes using a mixed-methods analysis (including sociolinguistic interviews, questionnaire surveys, and field observations) of the mostly unconscious processes of identity formation among multilingual Kui speakers in northeastern Thailand. The approach used, focusing on group behavior and analyzing extralinguistic sociocultural data in terms of social identity formation in a minority group, revealed specific rituals and practices. These findings add to the knowledge of overt multilingual language use in the context of multilingual Kui people and demonstrate how social psychology and sociology can be used to analyze the identities of multilingual minorities and show how multilingual language use does not produce multiple identities. The investigation, using theories of several social and linguistic approaches to understand identity construction, demonstrates how important the Thai national identity is and how strongly it influences the identity formation among the minority group.

Key words: Identity formation, minority languages, multilingualism, extralinguistic practices, social networks, group behavior, religion and national identity

INTRODUCTION

There have been no studies on the identity formation of the multilingual Kui minority. Kui is spoken as a first language in only a few remote villages (Bos, 2009), which makes this research urgent. Because of the negative ethnic stigma around them, the Kui people benefit (in the sense of avoiding from ethical stigmatization) from the absence of major physical differences between them and the Khmer, the main ethnic group in Cambodia, and have tended to blend in with the Khmer whenever this is possible (Swift, 2013). However, this trend seems to have ended, with some Kui society beginning to reaffirm their Kui identity, motivated by newly recognized benefits of identifying as Kui and a reduction in the prevailing of stigmatization of minority identities (Swift, 2013).
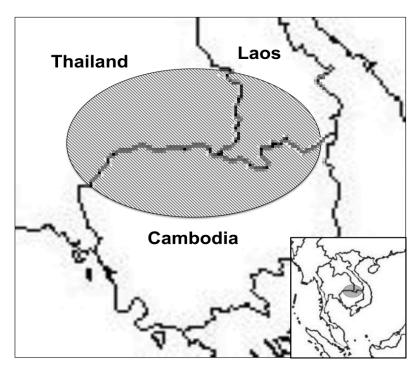
Figure 1. Estimated Kui Homeland in the bordering areas of Thailand, Laos and Cambodia.

Kui[1] is one of the 23 main Austroasiatic languages spoken in Thailand (Premsrirat, 2006, p. 643); it is also spoken in bordering areas of Cambodia and Laos (Bos and Sidwell, 2014; Sidwell, 2005; Figure 1). Ethnologue classifies the status of Kui as *threatened* in Thailand and Laos, meaning that it is losing active users. In Cambodia, Kui is described as *shifting*, meaning that childbearing generations can speak the language among themselves, but it is no longer being passed on to their children.

Almost all Kui speakers are multilingual, speaking the official language of their country (Thai, Lao, or Khmer), and they usually possess good command of one or more additional languages. Approximately all of the Kui in Thailand speak Thai,[2] and more than half are fluent speakers (Siebenhütter, 2020, p. 11). Most native Kui speakers in Sisaket or Surin (provinces in Thailand), for instance, are able to communicate using Kui, Thai, and Lao or Khmer and one or two other local languages (Siebenhütter, 2020), and for most, two or three languages are spoken at home and have been since childhood (Siebenhütter, 2020, pp. 9-10).

The Kui are an ideal subject for the study of multilingual minority speakers, and they provide a rich opportunity for work on language contact and language change phenomena. Comprehensive, state-of-the-art investigations of the Kui language from a sociolinguistic perspective and of identity formation among the Kui are still lacking. Few studies have been done on social identity among the Kui and in other minority groups in mainland Southeast Asia.

Individuals seek to improve their living conditions, including their financial situation and employment opportunities; these are important reasons promoting language shift, especially in the economically impoverished regions of northeastern Thailand, southern Laos, and northern Cambodia, where most Kui speakers live. Young people may leave their ethnic community and move to larger cities in hopes of improving their financial situation (Karan, 2011).

For multilingual Kui, two main paths to identity formation can be seen during adolescence, namely, reflection and identification, with the latter being more important for this paper. Identification can occur through a feeling of belonging to a group (an in-group), which can appear in the form of several types of groups, whether religious, ethnic, national, or political. Identification can result from specific roles, expectations, and models. Bourdieu (1996) captures group-specific forms of behavior (including language use) under the name of habitus, as the ingrained dispositions of an individual. Group-specific behavior patterns reflect society's role expectations, which are also called habitus in Bourdieu's sense (1996, 2005). Hence, habitus is the active realization of societal expectations through concrete action. In the language context, this is where the symbolic

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[1]As written language, it is called Kuay, Suai, Sui, Soai, Souei, Lao-Sui, Khmer-Sui, and Kamen-boran, among other names (Bos & Sidwell 2014; Sidwell, 2005); however, as a spoken language, it is primarily written as Kui.
[2]Here, Thai means central Thai.

content of signs is mastered and used by society, with the class-specific requirements of the addressee group (Siebenhütter, 2016). Kui speakers in Thailand certainly construct their identity according to traditional Kui culture, but they also show a tendency to identify with the majority Thai culture. Studies of the Kui (Siebenhütter, 2020) have examined awareness of language use and competences among the Kui.

This paper investigates extra linguistic practices of the Kui minority group in northeastern Thailand and analyzes the strategies employed by them. This paper's research question focuses on the general sociocultural specifics of the practices and behaviors of the minority among the Thai majority. The differences between the majority Thai and minority Kui sociocultural practices are intertwined with their sociolinguistic behavior. Presumably, as fewer members of cultural minorities identify themselves with the given heritage, values, and practices and begin to adjust themselves to conform to the values and practices of the majority culture, they may relinquish their vernacular culture entirely, including language use, sociolinguistic awareness, and sociocultural behavior.

Sociolinguistic studies incorporate the study of linguistic factors, such as phonological factors and other variations. This paper focuses on the extra linguistic factors of ethnic minorities, such as their social behavior and hierarchical societal structures, in addition to the linguistic factors of the ethnic minority that have been evaluated in earlier studies on Kui language use, awareness, and competences (Siebenhütter, 2020). It addresses issues of identity formation and self-image among minority speakers themselves.

Data on Thai identity formation were drawn from the literature allow for comparison with the acquired data. For instance, instead of distinctive Kui traditions (dances, songs, and religious practices), the cultural practices of the Thai majority are more commonly encountered among them; then, the minority would not be considered special. In this case, although the minority group remains different from the majority, they identify with it and see no value in preserving diversity. Here, it is also necessary to consider how the Thai majority perceives their own identity as (ethnic) Thai.

First, the terms *identity* and the process of *identity construction*, as used in this paper, are defined. Further, to clear away the definitional casuistry around the concept group (Brubaker, 2002, p. 164), the term *group*, the terms *ethnicity* and *identity*, and their current understanding in several disciplines are reviewed in the following section.

Social identity theory research and objectives

The study of identity in various disciplines

Social identity is a focal point in various research disciplines, such as social psychology of language (Hogg, 2018, 2003; Stets and Burke, 2000; Stets and Serpe, 2013; Tajfel, 1974, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), sociolinguistics (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004, 2005; Duff, 2012; Gumperz, 1982; Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Zhou-min, 2013), variationist sociolinguistics (Drummond and Schleef, 2016), second-language acquisition (Goldstein, 1995; Peirce, 1993, 1995; Siegal, 1995), social cognition, organizational psychology, and sociology (Hogg, 2003; Stets and Serpe, 2013).

In this paper, identity is understood, following Tajfel (1982) as follows: (1) individuals aspire to maintain or improve positive social identity, (2) positive social identity can be gained through comparison with relevant out-groups to strengthen one's own social identity, and (3) negative comparison can lead to leaving one's own group and switching to another or to upgrading one's own group. Further, the researcher used the definitions provided by Alexander and McCargo (2014) and Bucholtz and Hall (2005). Alexander and McCargo's (2014, p. 61) conceptualization of identity includes what Tracy (2002, p. 18) called the "master identity, an identity associated with a person's ethnicity, gender, national and regional origin that also constitutes social groups or categories with which individuals identify themselves" (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

Identities are constructed in a way that incorporates several aspects of the relationship between self and the other (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). Social identity theory for groups describes group-generation and intergroup processes and phenomena (Hogg, 2018). Identity theory generates a strong social psychology, which can present macrosocial, microsocial and perhaps mesosocial processes in relation to intergroup and intragroup relations and can describe a strong integration of the notions of group and role (Stets and Burke, 2000).

Social identity functions in a group include the following: (1) Affirming, conforming, or strengthening individual or group identities; (2) Identity consolidation that includes the need to persuade audiences to adopt specific behaviors, known as the mobilization function (Klein et al., 2007); (3) Protection of self-concept and self-esteem; (4) Experience of achievement and success in daily life (feeling of self-efficacy); (5) Sense of belonging to a group; and (6) Ability to cope with stigmatization (as in the ethnic–racial identity enactment model proposed by Cross et al. (2017).

Shared "rituals [may] identify members of the group who can be trusted in future interactions" (Watson-Jones and Legare, 2016, p. 43). Practices and rituals have a structuring effect on society (Stollberg-Rilinger, 2013, p. 9) and are usually well integrated into a community's daily life (Siebenhütter, 2016, 2019a, 2019b). These rituals and practices retain their social meaning to continue to function over time (Stollberg-Rilinger, 2013) and may strengthen social relationships and social group cohesion (Aßmann, 2018, p. 227; Fischer, 2018, pp. 263-266; Watson-Jones and Legare, 2016).

Linguistic and extralinguistic factors in identity research

If a particular population forms a community of shared practices, traditions, rituals, beliefs, and values, language can function as part of a communal identity shared by each individual in the society (Siebenhütter, 2016).

If "language is a salient marker of group membership, the individual may face linguistic adaptations that may result in subtractive bilingualism or even language erosion if a large number of members of a particular group assimilate into another to achieve a more positive group identity" (Hansen and Liu, 1997, p. 568). If members of the Kui minority believe that their lives would improve if they belonged to the central Thai group, they might choose to give up their own vernacular identity (including language and other cultural practices) over the long run.

Social identity theory relies upon numerous interrelated concepts and sub-theories that focus on social-cognitive, motivational, social-interactive and macrosocial elements of group life (Hogg, 2018). These include social identity or group-related motivation. Language is a relevant factor in terms of inclusion or exclusion from a speech community. Furthermore, language is an integral part of the structure of certain characteristics, such as personal, sociocultural, and sociopolitical identities (Evans, 2018; Sarnou, 2019). However, social identity goes beyond language use. Like shared linguistic practices, extra linguistic behavior can function as a group-stabilizing factor as well as excluding out-group members. Moreover, extra linguistic factors can function as the basis for identification basis with a minority group among a majority group. If the extra linguistic and linguistic factors of a minority group are lost, its identity will likely become unstable.

Cultural, national, and ethnic identity formation among the Kui minority

Cultural identity can be divided into *ethnic* and *national* identities. National identity formation is given in Phinney and Devich-Navarro (1997) and ethnic identity formation is given in Phinney (1992) and Phinney and Ong (2007). Language use by a minority group (the in-group, or "we-code," language) and a majority group (the out-group, or "they-code" language) (Gumperz, 1982, p. 66; Sebba and Wootton, 1998) assumes a particular relationship between monolingual and multilingual communities. Code switching may differentially signal group membership and identity (Auer, 2005; Hansen and Liu, 1997, p. 568; Sebba and Wootton, 1998). It seems impossible to separate identity construction among multilinguals from close phenomena, such as the social context (situational domain) of a language community (Klein et al., 2007, p. 14; Noels, 2014, p. 95), that is, discourse practices, spaces, and community practices, among others (Hall

and Nilep, 2015).

The concepts "Thai-ness" and "Thai style" (*baeb Thai*) are commonly encountered in Thailand (Farrelly, 2016, p. 333). The military government of the country creates a list of the 12 ideal national core values that they considered Thai people should possess. Among the most important of these were (1) upholding the three main pillars of the country: nation, religion, and monarchy; (2) preserving Thai traditions and culture; (3) maintaining discipline and respect for laws and the elderly; (4) putting the public and national interest before one's own interests; and (5) being conscious and mindful of one's actions, viewed in the context of His Majesty's royal statements (Farrelly, 2016, pp. 333-334).

According to LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1985, p. 237), the "group or groups with which from time to time we wish to be identified may be various, and some of them may have very little of an ethnic component." Here, we can refer to the example of the Yorkshire identity, which most would not define as an ethnic group; however, there are definite linguistic stereotypes associated with this identity. The Kui identity may be described like this in certain contexts.

In Thailand, the phrase *kwam bpen Thai* refers to a kind of Thai-ness or a way of being Thai that is used by the Thai people themselves to explain certain behaviors. The exact meaning of this being Thai can only be fully understood by the Thai (Farrelly, 2016). Acts of identity of this type (LePage and Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 181) are those wherein "the individual creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behavior to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished" (Kiesling and Schilling, 1998; LePage and Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 181).

The Thai-ization of Thailand may cause discomfort in certain cultural contexts, as it may produce a negative impact on the relationships between ethnic Thai and minority groups in Thailand (Nitaya, 2011, p. 46). Stigmatization and shame can lead to negative behaviors such as taboos and avoidance behavior, which allow speakers to identify themselves in terms of their social space: "To deny the existence of a language and cultural entity, […] is a very powerful practice" (Nassenstein, 2019, p. 179). Linguistic and cultural existence is powerful. If it comes to be said that there are no Kui in Laos, this might seem to deny the existence of the Kui in general.

Objectives and limitations

Language is often closely bound up with identity, and multilingual language use is related to multiple identities. These relationships are reviewed in this paper. Interactional sociolinguists (Gumperz, 1970, 1982) use language to study social identity. Language and ethnic identity have a common link through the concept of associated language, wherein language is an aspect of

our self-ascription (LePage and Tabouret-Keller, 1985, p. 237). However, language is not the only important factor in-group identification.

Similarly, speaking a certain language is often equated with belonging to a certain ethnic group (Holt, 2015; Rosenberg, 2015), and "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language" (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982, p. 7). The concept of a group initially exists in the form of an idea (Brubaker, 2002), and the subjectivity of these ideas leads to different constructions of identity, including what has been studied as multiple ethnic identities (Keupp et al., 2002), multiple identities (Stets and Serpe, 2013), and hybrid identities (Foroutan, 2013). Auer (2005), however, warns against easily equating hybrid *language* use with hybrid social identity.

This study investigates the identity formation of multilingual Kui people and observes the relationship between values (which express what should be) and practices (which embody what is) (Gupta et al., 2002). In the broader context of multilingual language use, this paper mainly concentrates on extralinguistic practices and addresses issues of identity and self-image among minority speakers themselves. Extralinguistic factors here are defined as those that fall outside the realm of linguistics, that is, other social behavior beyond explicit linguistic practices, including (1) social (in-group and out-group) behavior (traditional or modern role models), (2) hierarchical or less-hierarchical society structures (that is, greetings, eating, working, and marriage practices), and (3) societal practices (that is, religious and other traditional behaviors).

METHODS

To understand identity construction among Kui speakers, several extralinguistic and linguistic factors must be considered. Kui speakers were interviewed regarding rituals and practices related to their ethnic minority background. This was done to understand how the interviewees felt about belonging to their specific group (whether it was the Kui minority or the Thai majority). In social sciences, the autobiographical narrative interview (Schütze, 1983) is a commonly used tool in qualitative research. Qualitative data were collected from field observations, in-depth narrative interviews, and written questionnaires for further evaluation.

Written questionnaire

A multiple-choice questionnaire including eight items was used (Appendix). It included metadata items given in Kui and Thai to guarantee correct understanding. The full questionnaire (including 174 questions[3]) asked for personal information; characterization of

language proficiency, use, and choice; and language identity, attitudes, and awareness (Siebenhütter, 2020). This paper, however, primarily evaluates the eight items on rituals and practices to analyze the extralinguistic factors most relevant to the Kui. Some of the items included options for which the participants could provide detailed responses. The questionnaire underwent two pilot tests (with 7 and then with 15 participants in February 2019), following which it was slightly modified: Altering the length and the detail of the questions and the answer options, providing means of assurance that the participants fully understood all questions without having to ask the research assistant, and ensuring that the questions were consistent, as measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Then, they were given to the main participants. Native speaker assistants helped with the selection of language consultants and assisted with the administration of the questionnaire. Overall, 211 Kui speakers from the northeastern part of Thailand participated in the survey (including the two pilot tests) in March and

April 2019, but data from only 74 completed copies of the questionnaire were used in this paper. Most participants completed the questionnaire online in Thai; however, some participants (particularly those in rural areas) provided oral responses, which were recorded and then coded during the evaluation stage. The native Kui consultants (evaluated group) were grouped into nine age cohorts, between 15 and 68 years old. Most of the participants were born in Chom Phra or Tha Tum, both in the province of Surin, and grew up in or near their birthplaces. The consultants included men (35%) and women (65%), and most (75%) had received >6 years of schooling; however, a significant minority (19%) had 4-6 years of schooling, and a few (5%) had only 2 or 3 years.

Interviews and field observations

Six in-depth interviews[4] incorporating open-ended questions (partly semi-structured, with multiple-choice questions) and field observations were conducted over a 2 months' period in the spring of 2019. From these, two types of data were gathered: (1) Appropriate extralinguistic data (e.g., age, place of origin, profession, social hierarchy, sociocultural practices, and rituals such as dance) and (2) Data on interviewees' language use and language awareness and attitudes.[5] However, not all data samples collected were evaluated for this study. Only those data considered relevant to the extralinguistic factors were used. Additional field observations and interviews provided information on speakers' assessment of the present sociopolitical situation. Interviews with older Kui speakers in villages were held in Kui whenever possible, as the use of the prestige language could influence the consultants' responses. Each interview lasted approximately 2 h and took place either in small groups or in one-to-one settings. The audio recordings of the interviews were coded and categorized according to the speakers' attitudes and awareness, life histories, and personal experiences, among other classifications. Field observations included visits to Kui villages, participation in a traditional Kui festival featuring elephant rituals, and observation of traditional dances and music.

Gupta et al. (2002) describes cultural values as indicating what should be and practices as presenting what is. Both values and practices can be measured either by questioning people directly or using field observations. Field observations produced both audio and video data, and field notes were taken during and after specific

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[3] The full questionnaire included 13 groups of questions, namely biodata; sociocultural data; sociolinguistic data and language use; age; gender; social class; language attitudes and language policy; language attitudes and beliefs; social networks (insiders-outsiders); language and migration; language and borders; dialects and dialectology; and registers, politeness and taboos.

[4] Half of the interviewees had also completed the questionnaire.
[5] The analysis of language use included multilingualism, language competences, place and frequency of language use, and levels (sounds, words, and sentences) of both male and female speech variations, as described in Siebenhütter (2020).

Table 1. Types of marriages in a Kui village.

Type		Most usual	Sometimes	Rare but possible	Never
Individual partner choice	74	67 (90.54%)	1 (1.35%)	4 (5.41%)	2 (2.7%)
Arranged marriage	74	2 (2.7%)	18 (24.32%)	21 (28.38%)	33 (44.59%)

observations to be transcribed later. Certain dances, rituals, and village visits were also recorded in audio-only or audiovisual form. The audio data were transcribed and evaluated using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000).

Data analysis

The data analysis included a summary of information according to the selected subgroups (age and gender) through the computation and visualization of absolute and relative frequencies. All of the statistical graphs in this paper provide relative frequencies to compare distributions across subgroups. The software R Core Team Vienna (2019) was used for all statistical analyses. The evaluations of the responses were primarily descriptive. The relationships of these factors to age and gender were considered.

FINDINGS

Sociocultural data on Kui values and practices

Kui speakers reported their social interactions, such as vernacular rituals and practices, to assess how group behavior and sociocultural factors relate to within-group social identity formation. All participants (100%, $N = 74$) were Buddhists. Most reported being able to make their own marriage (82%) and employment (81%) decisions. The most common type of marriage was individual partner choice (91%; Table 1). However, a slight difference was found for gender in relation to the decision on the marriage partner: 24% of the male respondents reported that they could decide for themselves whether to marry someone; 46% of the female respondents said that they could. Individual partner and employment choices are signs of a less hierarchically structured society. These results can be compared with those of mainstream Thai society, which is strongly hierarchical, as is clear in both linguistic and extralinguistic behaviors.

The interview findings supported the results of the questionnaire. None of the interviewees had an arranged marriage, and all of them said that they could choose their own profession.

Specific Kui rituals and practices (songs, dances, and festivals)

Data evaluation provided insight into specific Kui rituals and practices (that is, dances, particular festivals, and traditional and current popular Kui songs) and the

speakers' ability to participate actively in these rituals and practices. A difference was found between knowing about certain dances and songs and the ability to participate actively in traditional Kui practices.

Ability to participate in traditional Kui dances

Most of the participants (89%) were unable to participate in traditional Kui dances. Only a few produced specific names of dances (e.g., Rum Kael-mo, a dance believed that is used to purge negative things from the dancer). In field observations, traditional dances were found to be generally practiced during the festivals and not at all in everyday life. An age difference was found in the data, where the older the respondents were, the more likely they were to know traditional minority rituals and practices, such as songs, dances, fairy tales, and stories.

The interview findings support the questionnaire findings for both the knowledge of specific Kui songs, dances, and festivals and the ability to participate in the dances.

Knowledge of traditional Kui practices and Thai values

Kui society is an oral tradition, where knowledge is not passed down in writing (the Kui do not have their own orthographical system and instead use Thai orthography). The questionnaire data reveal knowledge on Kui myths, fairy tales, and stories. In contrast to dances and rituals, younger participants did know the traditional stories well and could re-narrate them in an interview setting.

The question on Kui traditional songs produced different results in the questionnaires, interviews, and field observations. The author participant observed a large Kui festival in 2019, where many Kui youths participated in Kui dances, sang Kui songs, and practiced spiritual rituals.

Figure 2 presents the participants' knowledge of traditional and contemporary Kui songs, myths, fairy tales, stories, and other specific Kui rituals and practices. Generally, the older participants responded "Do not know" less often. Most Kui stories relate to elephant hunting or other rituals related to elephants, such as "อาเจียง ช้าง การจับช้าง" (*Jeang Chang*, "elephant catching").
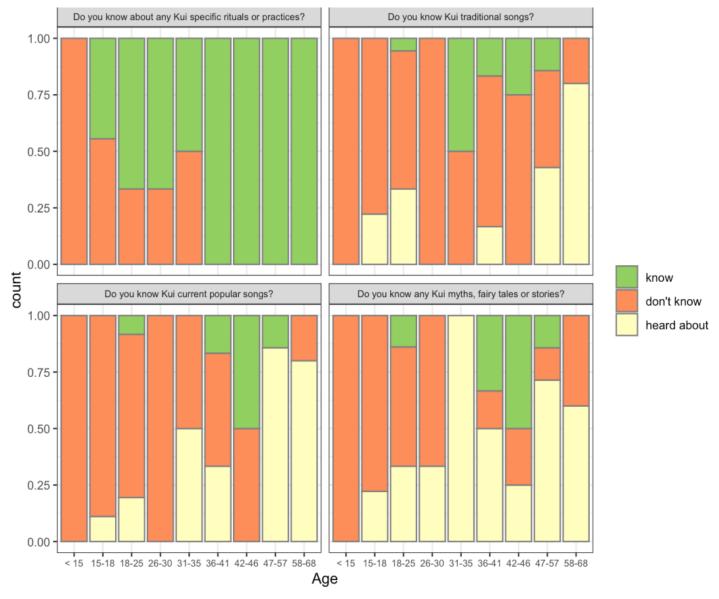
Figure 2. Knowledge of Kui songs, practices, and stories.

Members of the younger generations describe how these legends or stories had been passed down orally from their grandparents.

Identification with Kui minority practices and (ethnic) Thai values

Multilingualism is ubiquitous, not only in day-to-day life but also in the context of religious and personal rituals. Field observations of traditional Kui festivals provided rich material for the study of religious and group practices, including dances and music. The sociolinguistic questionnaire indicated that participants used more than one language for praying and local Kui rituals, and many used more than one language regularly. Usage was reported by participants for Kui (40%), Thai (35%), Lao (33%), and Khmer (13%), and 1% also reported other languages. However, in interviews, the participants mostly described themselves as Thai and said that their mother language was Thai. As Siebenhütter (2020) notes, ethnic minorities such as the Kui often report a dominant language to be their mother language such as Thai, although they use local languages in their everyday lives. The interviews revealed a positive attitude toward Kui, and some equated it with Khmer. A strong and rather positive attitude was also found toward the Thai language and ethnic Thai practices. Furthermore, Thai values, such as belief in the monarchy, are respected among the Kui

respondents.

DISCUSSION

Cultural values and practices among minority speakers

Findings from the literature on the Thai ethnicity were used to compare Kui rituals and practices to present a broader context. Such rituals and practices are understood in the narrower sense as a sequence of actions characterized by a standardization of external form, repetition, performance, and symbolic character and by a fundamental structuring effect in the society (Stollberg-Rilinger, 2013, p. 9).

The Kui actively use Kui traditional practices and rituals. However, only a few are able to dance the traditional dances, and participants only participate in traditional Kui practices, such as songs, dances, and other rituals, in the context of specific celebrations. Group rituals such as Kui dances and songs have symbolic functions in society, such as inclusion in a group, strengthening and maintaining social relationships, and ensuring group affiliation, along with the associated increase in self-esteem that these practices bring about (Aßmann, 2018; Fischer, 2018). However, such traditions seem to have no additional relevance to daily life. In recent times, few traditional dances, songs, or religious practices that are still part of everyday life are being replaced by the practices of the majority Thai culture. This indicates that the Kui are not considered to be a special group by the Kui themselves. Instead, they appear to view themselves as being different from the majority in a way that omits any values that would need to be preserved.

The individuals studied often seemed unaware of their group's own knowledge and practices. However, viewing the results of the methods used separately, it appears that the Kui know more about their heritage than they would reveal when asked directly. As their own behavior is considered by them to be a simple daily routine, they may not consider what they do to be a manifestation of themselves as a particular minority or group or as part of a cultural heritage.

The sociocultural values and practices examined seem to be part of individual Kui identity. Regarding extralinguistic practices, such as marriage practices and job decisions, we can see that Kui society is not hierarchical. Most participants reported being able to decide for themselves who they want to marry and what employment they pursue. Most marriages involved individual partner choice, in contrast to ethnic Thai society, which is strongly hierarchical. In the ethnic Thai context, families with higher socioeconomic status generally have greater parental involvement in spouse choice (Cherlin and Chamratrithirong, 1988). Although a

declining degree of family control and a change in marriage patterns have been noticeable over recent decades, the overall marriage patterns in Thailand remain diverse, and arranged marriage and parental involvement in spouse choice are still practiced, especially in families with a lower socioeconomic status (Cherlin and Chamratrithirong, 1988). The Kui are located in northeastern Thailand, which is a poorer area of the country. Nevertheless, their marriage practices seem to reflect less-hierarchical societal structures.

An individual's self-identification relates to expected group behavior and to specific individual goals, such as having a feeling of belonging to an in-group. This constant reassurance needed by individuals in a context of multiple groups is also related to language use. The findings indicated that Kui society is less hierarchically structured (as seen in the free choice of marriage partner and independent employment decisions) than ethnic Thai society. The Kui seem to be aware of their traditional practices (including language use) and incorporate the Thai self-concept (in terms of the language of central Thailand and Thai societal structures) and associated behaviors, along with their Kui minority identity (including language, rituals, and social structures).

The situation for minority Kui speakers in Thailand includes both sociolinguistic and sociocultural group-specific behavior. Many ritual theories assume that ritual communication works in much the same way as a language (Leach, 1968; Stollberg-Rilinger, 2013, p. 194). In this case, traditional practices and rituals may be important in maintaining positive minority group identification among younger individuals. Most participants in this study had heard about rituals or practices from older family members or seen them but were unable to practice them independently, simply reserving them for specific traditional festivals. Many Kui aged 36 years and above know some Kui songs, fairy tales, and myths, and all of them recognize traditional Kui practices and rituals.

Ethnicity and indigenous identity of the Kui minority

Certainly, linguistic and ethnic identity is hard to comprehend. The Kui speakers who participated in the questionnaire survey had difficulty deciding whether their mother tongue was Kui, Thai, or another language spoken in the geographical area (Siebenhütter, 2020, pp. 8-9). Bearing in mind the question of the high or low language prestige of majority and minority languages in mind, along with the finding that the Kui use several languages for their local rituals and prayers, the Kui may be said to have multiple ethnic identities, in the sense of Keupp et al. (2002) and Stets and Serpe (2013).

If identity "is derived from group membership" (Hansen and Liu, 1997, p. 567) and social identity is "part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his

knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69), then self-identification with one or more groups would appear to be relatively important for individuals from a minority language background.

If indigenous identity is revived (Swift, 2013), the Kui language could become more stable and vital. However, if development tends more in the other direction, Kui speakers will tend to use the national Thai language more and more. Either direction of development is possible: A revival of indigenous identity (Keating, 2013; Swift, 2013) or a tendency toward rapid assimilation and a shift to monolingualism in majority languages (Bos, 2009; Bos and Sidwell, 2014).

If members of the Kui minority perceive improvements in their lives due to being part of the central Thai group, they may tend to assimilate, as indicated by ethnolinguistic identity theory (Giles and Johnson, 1981, 1987). Using the ethnolinguistic identity theory, which draws heavily on Tajfel and Turner's (1986) social identity theory, Giles and Johnson (1981, 1987) believe that inputs from social psychology may improve language-maintenance research by strongly including the social and group functions of language. Language is "a salient marker of group membership and social identity," and "individuals compares their own social group to out-groups to make their own favorably distinct and that positive distinctiveness enables individuals to achieve a positive social identity" (Hansen and Liu, 1997, p. 568). The use of several languages in different contexts, as is commonly seen among the Kui (Siebenhütter, 2020), may indicate membership in one or more groups, as proposed in the analysis of speech communities (Hall and Nilep, 2015, p. 32) by the terms "we-code" and "they-code" language. These terms indicate that language is unquestionably an integral part of the structure of personal, sociocultural, and sociopolitical identities (Evans, 2018; Sarnou, 2019). Thailand's minorities are a prime example showing the ways in which language is not the only and probably not the most important identification factor for minority group members. The Kui, a minority group, express membership by sharing their own rituals and practices. They also share a strong feeling of identification with the majority group, the central Thai and this identification is borne from the use of the majority language and a strong sociopolitical sense of Thai-ness.

Minorities' identity formation in Thailand and the trinity of Thai-ness

Tajfel (1982, p. 102) defines social identity (in contrast to cultural identity) as part of an individual's self-concept, resulting from the knowledge of his or her membership in social groups and the value and emotional significance associated with this membership. In this study, as in earlier research on sociolinguistic behavior of the Kui (Siebenhütter, 2020), it was found that the Kui are well aware of their minority identity, and they include this status in their self-concept. However, problems of identity are not limited to the minorities in Thailand. The majority of the Thai population is also aware of the sensitive questions regarding identity. Young people in particular complain about the lack of a common identity in Thailand (Blümel, 2019). The official national identity in Thailand (mainly based on the trinity of Thai-ness) is a constructed one and does not satisfy all the personal needs of the Thai people. Thananithichot (2011, p. 258) noted that if Thai national identity was constructed to preserve Siam's independence from the colonialist powers, its mission would already have been fulfilled during the reign of King Rama VI. The questions that have been raised concerning Thai identity appear to be largely political, and these may not necessarily be the questions that allow an individual to define his or her personal and social identity. In general, identity conflicts are acute in Southeast Asia, and domestic conflicts revolving around identity concerns are often linked to historical conflicts within the linguistically and religiously heterogeneous societies of Southeast Asia (Croissant and Trinn, 2009).

The term Thai-ization refers to "everything that reflects 'Thai-ness' or 'being Thai', which may be expressed in both verbal and non-verbal aspects" (Nitaya, 2011, p. 45). It is generally considered true in Thailand, that the three pillars of being Thai, "nation, religion, and monarchy," are essential for the identity of Thai citizens and must not be criticized by anyone (Blümel, 2019). This basic triad, the military, Buddhist monks, and the monarchy are the main identity markers for the Thai and cannot be criticized (Blümel, 2019; Farrelly, 2016, pp. 335, 338; Thananithichot, 2011). All participants (100%, 74) in this study indicated that they were Buddhists. This fact joins the Kui to the majority Thai population.[6] Because identity is associated with a person's ethnicity, gender, and national and regional origin, which also create the social groups or categories with which individuals identify themselves (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), the Kui tend to identify with Thai culture and language, in addition to identifying with their local languages, practices, and sociocultural heritages. Further, these backgrounds (Thai and Kui) appear to be inextricably intertwined.

It does not, therefore, seem surprising that the participants described themselves as Thai and reported that their mother tongue was Thai (Siebenhütter, 2020) even though "many less educated Northeasterners are unable to speak central Thai confidently" (McCargo and Hongladarom, 2004, p. 226). However, to use the "we-code," which "performs the role of an in-group marker," which "could be used comfortably only among people

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[6] However, a mixture of animist and folk Buddhist ideas use of nature religious and animism rituals practiced by the Kui, i.e., relying on traditional healers in the case of illness (Woykos, 1989).

from the same group, and was not to be shared casually with possible outsiders" (McCargo and Hongladarom, 2004, p. 226), speakers must be sufficiently confident in the language they choose. This ability does not seem universally shared among all minority speakers in northeastern Thailand (McCargo and Hongladarom, 2004, p. 226). Further, "Bangkokians and central Thais 'looked down' on people living in the Northeast" (McCargo and Hongladarom, 2004, p. 232). As a result, minority speakers in northeastern Thailand seem to prefer to consider themselves Thai and belong to the "urban people of a higher class" instead of being "looked down" on as "second-class citizens" (cf. McCargo and Hongladarom, 2004, p. 232). The "we-code" does not necessarily refer to the ethnic language of a multilingual community, and the "they-code" does not necessarily refer to the language of the wider society, as proposed by Sebba and Wootton (1998). The Kui minority likely consider themselves to be included in the Thai group, and they do not consider the majority language to be a "they-code." Thus, there might be more than one "we-code."

Language shift, or language loss, is associated with language ideologies, language power, and changing ethnic identification (Wildgen, 2005). Kui variations may exhibit differences as a result of specific sociocultural and sociolinguistic influences. Kui has relatively little social prestige, and Thai is attributed a high-prestige language (Siebenhütter, 2020). Nevertheless, it was found that individuals born and living in Thailand seem to be proud to be Thai, regardless of whether they have ethnic minority identification (Ricks, 2019). This matches the finding that ethnic minorities in Thailand often declare that their mother tongue is Thai, even though they may use Kui, Lao, or another language most of the time in their daily lives (Siebenhütter, 2020). How do minority speakers construct their sociolinguistic identity? The mother tongue reported by the Kui participants in this study varied among Kui and Lao, Thai, and Khmer, depending upon when the question was asked and indicating no clear self-assignment to any one language as a mother tongue (Siebenhütter, 2020). This may be a result of the multilingual setting of families and their multilingual socialization at home, at school, and in the communities where they grew up. It also reflects the multilingual practice of local prayer. However, it is even more likely that their strongest identification is related to the successful protection of a sense of national identity (Ricks, 2019). Auer (2005) warned against "a rash equation of 'hybrid' language use with 'hybrid' social identity" because this may be as essentialist a move as the identification of nation and language that lies behind traditional European language ideologies. In fact, only "one-third of Thailand's inhabitants" speak central Thai as their mother language (Ricks, 2019, p. 257), but even so, "ethnic mobilization remains minimal" in Thailand, "because of the large-scale public acceptance and

embrace of the government-approved Thai identity." Minorities in Thailand are culturally assimilated to the majority of the population as part of "Thai-ization" with the intention of achieving a uniform cultural identity (Seitz, 2006, p. 195). "Even among the country's most disadvantaged, such as the Isan people, support is still strong for 'Thai-ness'. Most inhabitants of Thailand espouse the mantra that to be Thai is superior to being labeled as part of an alternate ethnic group" (Ricks, 2019, p. 257).

Future directions for social identity research on minority groups

To summarize, social identity is a dynamic phenomenon that is often context bound. Single studies necessarily yield only a single view of a complex phenomenon (Hansen and Liu, 1997, p. 573). Certain study limitations were identified (that is, the sample was relatively small, and further studies of Kui speakers in other areas might broaden the results found in this study). Future studies should compare language use and attitudes across age and gender.

As Watson-Jones and Legare (2016, p. 45) proposed, group rituals serve four core functions addressing the adaptive problems of group living. Rituals (a) provide reliable markers of group membership, (b) demonstrate commitment to a group, (c) facilitate cooperation with social coalitions, and (d) increase social group cohesion. The findings may help index the development of individuals associated with minority groups such as the Kui people in northeastern Thailand and help comprehend the process of the formation of multiple selves and social identities (Stets and Serpe, 2013) in circumstances where multilingual contact is part of daily life.

Further investigations into other local and multilingual minorities, such as the inadequately researched Pearic and Katuic groups in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia, must be completed. However, the current state of scientific knowledge regarding threatened or endangered minority languages in Thailand and Laos (that is, Premsrirat, 2007) entails the need for a global effort to gain additional information on complex phenomena related to multilingual minorities. The question remains: will the large number of members of the Kui and other minority groups in Thailand and Laos be able to maintain *kwam phen Kui*, in other words, a kind of Kui-ness, that is comparable with national pride (Thai-ness), or will they instead accept and adopt the politically proposed national feeling known as *kwam phen Thai*?

Conclusions

Religious and other extralinguistic values and practices of

the multilingual Kui minority speakers and their sociocultural behaviors were analyzed. Prior studies have shown that Kui speakers are aware of their vernacular language and minority background and willing use their multilingual repertoire in response to the requirements of daily life (Siebenhütter, 2020). This study demonstrated that this is also the case with the local practices and rituals of the minorities. Most Kui perform certain specific Kui rituals and practices, including active use of the Kui language in daily life, but they also use Thai and Lao cultural practices for religious rituals. No clear trend was found in the ability to actively use Kui traditional practices, such as dancing and singing, although almost half of the participants used Kui in addition to other languages for praying and local Kui rituals. Religious practices and rituals are an important part of daily life in Southeast Asia, which means that this is a significant finding. It seems to be that the Kui use and practice the heritage of their sociolinguistic and sociocultural traditions as well as the particular behaviors entailed by a certain situation. They are aware of their minority heritage and are willing to use it. However, the Kui use several languages as indicated by different situational contexts (Siebenhütter, 2020). The findings indicated the parallel use of Thai and Kui rituals and practices among the Kui. When asked directly, none of the Kui would deny being Thai, although, they are naturally well aware of their Kui minority background. Although the Kui were aware of their heritage, they likely did not actually consider any specific behavior as belonging to a particular minority or majority cultural heritage, in the case of daily routine behavior. Thus, the complexity of this state of affairs (Alexander and McCargo, 2014; Bucholtz and Hall, 2004) indicates that the term "identity" can associated with a person's ethnicity, gender, and national and regional origin, and these also constitute social groups or categories with which individuals identify themselves (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Thus, it can be seen that the Kui strongly identify with the Thai majority. However, the Kui are also aware of their own ethnic heritage and of the need to maintain certain traditional rituals and practices that constitute their minority group identity, which goes beyond the national Thai identity. It was found that the national identity of *Thai-ness* or *kwam phen Thai* is important in Thailand and is, most likely, a main reason why minority individuals describe themselves as Thai rather than as Kui, for example. Whether the minority is aware of the strong influence of the political ideology of a national Thai identity is probably of secondary interest. Although minority speakers use rituals, practices, language, and other social identifiers, their primary identification seems to be linked with the majority national Thai identity, as reflected by the trinity "nation, religion, and monarchy," which was originally crafted to protect Siam from colonial rulers but remains in the present as one of the strongest influences on both minority and majority members of Thailand's society, although the initial intention is no longer valid. The minority identity of *kwam phen Kui* must accept its subordinate role in this construction of reality, an inextricable, intertwined mélange between the majority and minority backgrounds of Thai and Kui.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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APPENDIX

Sociocultural data questionnaire

1. SCD1: What is your religion?
Please choose only one of the following:

o   Buddhism
o   Animism, nature religion
o   Christianity
o   Islam
o   Brahman-Hinduism
o   No religion
o   Other

2. SCD2: Please choose the expressions applicable to you:
Please choose all that apply and provide a comment:
o   I can decide for myself if I want to marry someone.
o   I can decide what kind of job I want to choose.
o   Someone else decides for me who I should marry.
o   Somebody else decides for me what job I should choose.
3. SCD3: What type of marriage is most usual in your village? Please rank.

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

	Individual partner choice	Arranged marriage
Most usual		
Sometimes		
Rare but possible		
Never		

4. SCD4: Do you know about any specific Kui rituals or practices (dances, festivals, etc.)?
Please choose only one of the following:
o   Yes, I know about some.
o   No, I don't know any.
Make a comment on your choice here:

5. SCD5: Can you perform traditional Kui dances? Please specify the name(s).
Please choose only one of the following:
o   I can dance.
o   I cannot dance.
Make a comment on your choice here:

6. SCD6: Do you know any traditional Kui songs? Please specify the name(s).
o   I know.
o   I don't know.
o   I heard about some songs, but I do not remember them.

7. SCD7: Do you know any current popular Kui songs? Please specify the name(s).
o   I know.
o   I don't know.
o   I heard about some songs, but I do not remember them.

8. SCD8: Do you know any Kui myths, fairy tales, or stories? Please specify the name(s).
o   I know.
o   I don't know.
o   I heard about some stories, but I do not remember them.