

MANIPURI DIALECTS

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1. Manipuri, also called Meiteiron by the native speakers themselves, is a Tibeto-Burman language; and it is spoken mainly in Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. In India, it is spoken at various states, namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Manipur state bordering Myanmar is its native place. Manipuri speakers live in all the cities in India either doing some jobs or business, or as students undergoing a certain course.

There are Manipuri speakers in Dhaka and mainly in Sylhet district of Bangladesh. Manipuri speakers are found in Sagaing division, around Mandalay and Yangon, etc., in Myanmar.

Of the over two million population (through personal communication) of the state, about one and half million people speak Manipuri as their first language in Manipur alone, and another half a million speakers live in different states of India. Manipuri is also used extensively as second language or lingua franca in Manipur among the various tribes (twenty nine tribes) and as trade language in the neighbouring states, particularly in Nagaland and at Kabo Valley in

Myanmar.

Manipuri is the only one among the Tibeto-Burman languages (there are more than one hundred mother tongues) which has received recognition as one of the national languages of India.

Manipuri is the mother-tongue of three major groups of people in Manipur, namely the Meiteis, the Pangals (Muslims) and the Lois. Pangals live scattered around Imphal, the capital city of Manipur, and at various parts of Manipur valley; Lois dwell exclusively at the periphery of the valley and the Meiteis occupy the central portion. Historically, the Meiteis were the ruling class people and they brought in the Pangals (Muslims) from Cachar district of Assam, India as prisoners of war. "Lois were those subdued people who paid tributes to the Meitei Kings and remained unassimilated in the Meitei fold. Hence the name Loi was given to them." (Sanajaoba 1988:148).

The kingdom of the Meitei kings was divided into a number of divisions ranging from four to ten depending upon the wisdom of the ruling king. These administrative units (divisions) are known as Panas. The most popular Panas are : Ahallup Pana, Naharup Pana, Laipham Pana and Khabam Pana.

The Meitei society consists of seven yeks (clans), namely, Angom, Khuman, Khaba Nganba, Luwang,

Moirang, Ningthawja (Mangang) and Sarang-Leisangthem. A Meitei must belong to one of these seven Yeks. However, there are few exceptions, probably from the 18th Century A.D., due to Sanskritization of Meitei society. The Brahmins, Lairik Yengbams, Khetrinmayums etc. do not have their affiliation to any of those yeks, but they are very much among the Meiteis.

Those people who are under the fold of Meiteis are the only legitimate Pana Machas (Members of a Pana). The function of Pana is to participate in the affairs of administration, join in religious, social and cultural activities. For instance, a person who is not a Pana member cannot join in a wrestling competition, boat race, festivals, etc. where the king is to grace the occasion. The competition of any sort was being arranged amongst the Panas only (a social segregation indeed ?).

Before the advent of Hinduism (18 Century AD) a member of any tribe or community could become a Pana member if the king so desired. Many people, particularly from the East and the West, came to Manipur and became ingredients in the cauldron of Meitei society which has been developed for the last 2000 years or so. Perhaps the belief prevalent among the different tribes and the Meiteis of old generations that they were one and the same, would be correlated with such social convictions and other practices in the

past.

2. On the basis of old texts, Manipuri makes use of fifteen consonants and six vowels. Tone was not taken care of properly. Of the fifteen consonants, there are seven stop consonants (p, t, c, k, p^h, t^h and k^h), three nasals (m, n, ŋ), two fricatives (s, h) one lateral (l) and two semi-vowels (w, y).

Modern Manipuri is found using nine more consonants i.e. b, d, j, g, r, b^h, d^h, j^h and g^h. The first four consonants are the voiced counterparts of the voiceless stops, p, t, c and k; the flap r was derived from the lateral (l) and the four voiced aspirated stops b^h, d^h, j^h and g^h would be developed due to the impact of loan words.

The dialect variations, among the three Manipuri dialects, can be taken as spin-off due to extension of new sounds and tonal shifts among them. In the process of new development, the standard dialect (Meitei) is more dynamic than the Loi and the Pangal (Muslim) dialects. This does not mean that the Loi and the Pangal dialects take no changes at all. They also do change in their own way which is quite different from that of the standard one; but the number of such changes is not many.

The major variations that are found among the three dialects are in (1) Voicing (2) Deaspiration and (3) Change of fricatives s and h, (4) fricativization

and (5) changes affecting the lateral l.

2.1 All suffixes that begin with an unaspirated voiceless stops, namely p, t, c and k became voiced when preceded by a voiced sound in the standard dialect. There is no corresponding change in the Loi dialect (Sekmai), except the consonant p changes to m when preceded by another p, and k changes to m when preceded by another p, and k changes to ŋ after syllables ending in a nasal.

The voiceless stop p changes to voiced stop b after a voiced sound in the standard dialect. The suffixes affected by this change are : (1) benefactive -pi (2) infinitive -pə and (3) accusative -pu. No corresponding change is there in the Loi dialect (Sekmai). However, the consonant p changes to m when preceded by another p in the Loi dialect. In pangal (Muslim) dialect, p changes to b as in the case of standard dialect, and it also changes further to b when preceded by an unaspirated voiceless stop p as in the examples below:

p > b	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
	cabə	capə	cabə	'to eat'
	kəppə	kəpmə	kəbbə	'to weep'
	səbībə	^v _v səpībə	səbībə	'to make'
	thəmbə	thəmpə	thəmbə	'to put'
	cuppībə	cupmībə	cubībə	'to kiss'

	māruppu	mārupm ^Y	mārubbu	'friend' (accu)
t > d	pācē	pāte ^V	pade	'not read'
	cāṇde	cāṇte	cāṇde	'not enter'
	yumdā	imtā	yumdā	'at home'
c > j	hayjā	haycā	hayjā	'to request'
	pūjā	pūcā	pujā	'to carry'
	thōṇjā	thōṇcā	thōṇjā	'to cook'
k > g	āygi	āyki ^Y	āygi	'my'
	magi	maki ^Y	magi	'his/her'
	sāmgō	sāmkō(s) ^Y	sāmgō	'with hair'
		sāmṇjā (k)		

2.2 Deaspiration : The aspirated voiceless stops k^h and t^h are deaspirated in the standard and the Pangal dialects. The suffixes affected by these changes are (1) $k^hāt$ 'upward direction' (2) k^hay 'destruction' (3) t^hok 'outward direction' and $thāt$ 'to snap something'. The deaspiration takes place when these suffixes are preceded by a syllable beginning with an aspirated consonant or a fricative (s.h). The deaspirated consonant are further affected by the voicing change discussed above.

$k^h > k > g$: Standard Loi Pangal Gloss

hapkātṭā hapkhātṭā hapkātṭā 'to put on'

thekkātṭā thekk^hātṭā thekk^hātṭā 'to bent upward'

khungātṭā khunkhātṭā khungātṭā 'to pick up'

thugaybə	thukhaybə	thugaybə	'to break'
th>t>d: hektətpə	hekthətpə	hektətpə	'to pluck &
sudətpə	suthətpə	sudətpə	'to pound &
phoydətpə	phoythətpə	phoydətpə	'break'
thəyḍokpə	thəyṭhokpə	thəyḍokpə	'to uproot & break'
			'to carry outside'

2.3 the fricative *s* in two suffixes, namely, (1) sin or sən 'inward direction' and (2) sinna 'pretence' is also found to show a comparable change in the standard and the Pangal dialects, but there is no corresponding change in the Loi dialect, When preceded by a syllable having an aspirate or fricative, this consonant changes to *c* and *j* in the standard and the Pangal dialects respectively.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
thəkcin	thəksin [✓]	thəkjīn	'to drink in'
hapcin	həpsin [✓]	həpjīn	'to put in'
sitcin	sitsin [✓]	sitjīn	'to sweep in'
khikcin	khiksin [✓]	khikjīn	'to sprinkle in'

The fricative *s* changes to *j* in the standard dialect when preceded by a syllable having a final voiced sound and an initial aspirated stop or a fricative; it is *s* elsewhere.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
thajin	thasin [✓]	thajīn	'to send in'
hayjin	haysin [✓]	hayjīn	'to exaggerate'

phumjīn	phumsin	phumjin	'to conceal'
pusīn	pusin	pujin	'to carry inside'

The vowel *i* of the suffixes sin 'inside' and sinnə 'pretence' freely varies with *ə* in the standard dialect, but no such change occurs in the Loi and the Pangal dialects.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
kapsin	kapsin	kapjin	'to shoot inside'
kapsən			
khikcīn	khiksin	kikjin	'to sprinkle in'
khikcən			
thəmjīn	thəmsin	thəmjin	'to put inside'
thəmjən			
yasīnnə	yasinna	yajinna	'pretend to agree'
yasənnə			

The initial fricative *h* in the causative suffix hən in the standard and the Pangal dialects changes to velar aspirated stop *kʰ* in the Loi dialect when it is preceded by a voiceless stop.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
kaphən	kapkhan	kaphən	'cause to shoot'
cəthən	cətkhan	cəthən	'cause to go'
lekhən	lekkhan	lekhən	'cause to lick'

2.4 *Fricativization* : The initial aspirated stop *kʰ* of continuative suffix *kʰi* in the standard and the Pangal dialects

changes to h in the Loi dialect when it is preceded by a voice sound.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
cak ^h igani	ca ^h igani	cak ^h igani	'will continue to eat'
phank ^h igani	pha ^h nhigani	phank ^h igani	'will continue to cut (grass)'
tamk ^h igani	ton ^h hinani	tamk ^h igani	'will continue to learn'

2.5 Changes affecting the lateral l are found in the following inflectional suffixes.

1. Present imperfect -lī
2. Present perfect -le
3. perfective -lām
4. command -lu
5. persuasive -lo
6. Future negative -loy
7. Towards the speaker -lā, lāk
8. Away from the speaker -lū

The lateral l changes to r when preceded by a vowel or a semi-vowel in the three dialects as shown below :

l > r :

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
carī	carī	cari	'is eating'
care	care	care	'has eaten'
carōy	carōy	caroy	'will not eat'
carəy	carəy	carəy	'came & eat'

carāk-i	carāk-i	carāk-le	'ate & came'
pāyri	pāyri	payri	'is flying'

The lateral *l* of perfective suffix *lām* changes to *j* in the Pangal dialect, whereas there is no such corresponding change in the other two dialects.

l > *j* :

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
lotlāmme	lotlāmle	lotjāmle	'had hidden'
pūrāmme	pūrāmle	pujāmle	'had carried'
kəkāmme	kəklāmle	kəkjāmle	'had cut'

After syllables ending with *p, m* and *ŋ*, the initial *l* of these inflectional suffixes changes to *p, m* and *ŋ* respectively in the standard dialect; it remains unchanged in the Loi dialect, whereas in the Pangal, *l* changes to *b* after *p* (with simultaneous homorganic change of *p* to *b*); after *m*, the initial *l* is not changed and after *ŋ*, *l* changes to *ŋ* as in the case of the standard dialect.

l > *p, m, ŋ* and *b* :

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
kappe	kəple	kəbbe	'has wept'
tumme	tumle	tumle	'has slept'
yēŋge	yēŋle	yēŋge	'has looked'

The consonant *l* is lost when the preceding syllable ends with *k* in the standard dialect; and there is no corresponding change in the Loi and the Pangal dialects.

1 > ø :

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Pangal</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
kək-e	kək ^h le	kək ^h le	'has cut'
lāk-ōy	lāk ^h lōy	lakloy	'will not come'
lat-ūy	taklūy	takluy	'went and told'

3. Manipuri has two-fold tonal contrast - level and high-falling. The level tone in the standard dialect invariably corresponds to falling, rising in the Loi dialect (see examples in the preceding sections). The high-falling tone is left unmarked.

3.1 A separate junctural phoneme may be realized in the standard dialect, whereas there is no such situation arises in the Loi dialect.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
pin ^h əbə	pinəbə	'to give one another'
pin ^h #əbə	pinɣay	'for giving'
lawnəbə	lawnəbə	'to take one another'
lawn#əbə	lawnɣay	'for taking'

Some more examples of juncture in the standard dialect are illustrated below :

a)	ta	ubə	'to see a spear'
	tawbə		'to fry'
	sa	ubə	'to see an animal'
	sawbə		'be angry'
	ka	ubə	'to see a room'
	kawbə		'to forget'

ŋa ubə 'to see a fish'

ŋawbə 'be mad'

b) manitombəkhoydə ləy 'someone is at Manitomba's'

mani tombəkhoydə ləy 'Mani is at Tomba's'

3.2 w and y glides are found in the standard dialect.

The former one occurs in the native words and the latter in the loan words. But, out of the five cases of w-glides, only two are found in the Loi dialect; and in the case of y-glide, it is found only in the standard dialect.

	<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
a)	kwā	kwǎ	'Betel-nut'
	kwāk	kwǎk	'crow'
	swaydə	əsiwaytə	'here'
	gway gway	kəway kəway	'sound of cymbal'
	nəwpwa	mənǎw	'female's younger brother'
b)	byakərən	piyakərən	'grammar'
	gyan	kiyan	'knowledge'

4. Differences at the lexical or syntactical level are of the following types :

Standard	Loi	Gloss
umaybi	kaklǎn	'kite (bird)'
kʰərəmi	kʰəyran	'cockroach'
pā	mitlu	'eyelash'
səbaw	ləgyay	'porcupine'
əruk təwre	təwhikle	'did once again'
ceŋ wanbə	cak wanmə	'to buy rice'

mit uysimbə	mit tummə	'to close eyes'
hūy k'hōŋbə	hū sōnmə	'to whistle'

5. The use of gum, kən, loy, nu and də (<de) indicates negative meanings. Except the first two suffixes, all are verb ending suffixes, e.g. cətoy 'will not go', canu 'don't eat' and cade 'didn't eat'; gum and kən are negative markers used along with si or se which is a proposal markers. The difference in general between the standard and the Loi dialects is that the proposal maker ^{s/}si and se are freely varied in the former and se in the latter.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi (general)</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
casi/case	case	'let (us) eat'
cətsi/cətse	cətse	'let (us) go'

The negative proposal sentences below are formed by inserting gum and kən in the standard and the Loi dialects respectively :

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
cagumsi	cakənsə	'Let (us) not eat'
pigumsi	pikənsə	'Let (us) not give'

In the expression of negative proposal sentences, there are further dialectal variations in both the dialects. Let us consider the following examples.

<u>Standard</u>	<u>Loi</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
cətloy si	cətnusi	'Let (us) not go'
	cəttəsi	

caroysi cadəsi 'Let (us) not eat'
canusi

(roy and tə in the above examples are the allomorphs of loy and də respectively).

The future negative marker loy, non-future negative marker də (<de) and the command-cum-negative marker nu in the above examples are used to denote negative proposal. Those dialects under Loi which use nu or də as proposal negative markers take the proposal marker si as in the case of the standard dialect.

The variation in the expression of cagumsi or caroysi 'let us not eat' in the standard dialect makes *no awareness of any difference to the speakers, whereas in the expression cakənsə or cadəsi or canusi* (Let us not eat'), the speakers are conscious of the difference among them. Hence the dialect survey or linguistic field work in the Loi villages is generally sensitive and often offended.

In one instance, two girl students hastily returned from a Loi village where they were assigned to do field work, and reported the matter that both of them were threatened to kill unless they abandoned their data collection forthwith. In another instance, a team of students were working on the dialect of a Loi village, the first day was cordial and warmly welcomed the students by their respective informants, and they began elicitation smoothly. Surprisingly enough, the

next day almost all the students came back empty handed, because their informants refused to sit with them for the purpose of collection of their speech forms. When one of the intelligent students tactfully enquired if they had committed any offense to the villagers, his informant revealed the social stigma of the villagers. They thought that the students came to their village to laugh at them. Some of the villagers got really angry and the field work had to be postponed. Subsequent field works took up at different Loi villages every year, the reaction was almost the same. The informants always tried to conceal their speech variations, and most of them say, they speak the same as that of the standard dialect.

The Pangals (Muslims) are different from the Meiteis not only racially but socially and culturally also. However, there were no visible perturbation on the part of the informants while eliciting linguistic data, and nor any untoward incidents happened at any time. The Lois, on the other hand, are much more closer to the Meitei in many respect. Sanajaoba remarked (1988:148) "The Meiteis and Lois, however, resemble each other so closely that they are indistinguishable for all intents and purposes. Though they preserve as a distinct social identity, the Lois have been part and parcel of the Meiteis society and most of the Pre-Hindu customs and practices are preserved by them till these

modern times"

The variations in the standard dialect (gum and loy) may be considered as a "social indicators" while the variations in the Loi dialect (kan, nu and də) as "social markers".

Conclusion :

Most of the variations discussed above are inflectional types, and the variations found in compounding are not properly dealt with. Moreover, the present study is only at the macro-level, a detailed study is yet to be carried out under each dialect group. There are examples of interesting variations between the Imphal dialect (standard) and the dialect spoken at Cachar district of Assam; Sekmai and Kwatha dialects (both Loi), etc. and more could be explored if such study is extended to those places where Manipuri is spoken, including Bangladesh and Myanmar.

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