

Kinship Terminology in Meiteilon: a Sociolinguistic Study¹

N. Pramodini

Manipur University, Imphal

1.0 Introduction

This paper examines, from a sociological perspective, the changes that have taken place in the kinship terminology of Meiteilon, since the advent of Hinduism in the kingdom of Manipur in the 18th century. First of all, it describes the changes that have taken place after the kingdom of Manipur was merged into the Indian Union in 1949. In other words, this paper attempts to spell out the processes whereby a complex of changes in parts of a social system determines a complex of changes in the corresponding parts of a linguistic system.

Friedrich (1966) has demonstrated that changes in the kinship terminology of Russian were the consequence of major changes in Russian society, namely the emancipation of serfs, the Revolution, and the two World Wars. Such major social changes have radically transformed the nature of Russian kinship and have thereby caused a drastic diminution in both the size and repertoire of the kinship terminology and the semantic specialization of the individual terms.

1.1. Prior to our discussion of the changes in the Meitei kinship terminology, it is quite relevant to have a rough idea of the complexities inherent in Meitei social structure itself.

The inhabitants of the Valley of Manipur comprise the following groups: (1) Hindu Meiteis, (2) Meitei Lois and Taithibis (scheduled castes), (3) Brahmins, (4) Mayangs (people of non-Manipur origins), (5) Kabui Nagas (scheduled castes), and (6) Pangans (Muslims).

There was no caste system during the pre-Hindu period in Manipur. Instead, there was a class system. When Hinduism was introduced into Manipur, the caste system was also brought along with it, but it was not as rigid as in other parts of medieval Hindu India. Over the past two hundred years, however, the Meiteis living in the shadow of Brahmanic caste values have acquired a great deal of caste consciousness in their habits and life

¹ Meiteilon, the language of the Meiteis, is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the state of Manipur in northeastern India. It is the official language of the state, alongside English. It is also the medium of instruction in schools up to the tenth standard. As Manipur is also the home of many other "hill tribes", Meitei serves as a *lingua franca* for the diverse population of the state. Meiteilon is also spoken in the adjacent areas of the neighboring states of Assam and Tripura, as well as in adjacent areas of Bangladesh and Burma.

style. The Brahmins do not accept cooked food or water from the remaining groups, as they are considered of low caste. The Brahmins can have a hypergamic relationship with Meiteis by marrying a Meitei woman, but a Brahmin husband maintains his ritual distance from his wife by not accepting food cooked by her.

1.2. For our present study we will consider only two groups, the Brahmins and the Hindu Meiteis. The Hindu Meiteis consist of three sub-groups: (1) the RK's (Rajkumars and Rajkumaris), (2) the Leimas, and (3) the Commoners. This study will not consider the remaining groups as they do not reside in Imphal town or its outskirts.

1.2.1. *The RK's*²

The Meitei RK's are the descendants of male members of the royal family. Since the advent of Hinduism they have been known as Rajkumars 'male royal descendants in the male line', and Rajkumaris 'female royal descendants in the male line'. In Meiteilon they are called *Ningthemcha* 'royal descendants'. These Rajkumars and Rajkumaris are not actually the children of kings, but the fact that a man or woman is a descendant of Garibniararaj (18th century) through the male line is sufficient to entitle a man to be a Rajkumar, and a woman to be a Rajkumari (N. Tombi Singh, 1975). The legitimate children of kings are referred to as Maharajkumar 'prince', and Maharajkumari 'princess' (in shortened form, MK), and are addressed as *məja-ibung* and *məja-ibəmə*. They have enjoyed the highest status among the royal descendants. The RK's, too, have enjoyed special privileges, such as the right to wear special types of dress, and to be provided with special seats on important occasions. This group of people claim to belong to the Meitei Kshatriya (warrior) caste group.

1.2.2. *The Leimas*

These people are related to the RK's. They are the descendants of female members (i.e. Rajkumaris) of the royal family. The term Leima is generally considered to refer only to the daughters of females, since this term is mostly associated with women-folk, but the group of people that can be established here on the basis of kinship usage includes both male and female children of Rajkumaris. This group also claims to belong to the same caste group as the RK's.

² I am including the MK's (below) in this group.

1.2.3. *The Brahmins*³

The Brahmins form a distinct social group, as reflected in the usage of kinship terms. They have traditionally enjoyed the highest ritual status. They originally migrated into Manipur from North India. As they were naturalized in the Meitei community, they became conversant in Meiteilon.

1.2.4. *The Commoners (Meitei Hao Aranba)*

The Commoners form the fourth level in the hierarchy. They wear the "sacred thread" by which they also claim membership in the Kshatriya caste.

1.3. The kinship terms show distinct sets of variables corresponding to the social distinctions mentioned above. In present Imphal society, we can see a four-fold distinction in the structure of kinship terms which can be correlated with the four-fold social system, namely, the RK's, the Leimas, the Brahmins, and the Commoners.

The kinship terms used by the RK's differ from those used by the Commoners in the following points.

1.3.1. When they refer to elders (either of higher generations or the same generation), the RK terms generally take the honorific suffix -si:

Terms used by the RK's	Gloss	Terms used by the Commoners
ima-si	'mother'	ima
inem-si~ine-si	'paternal aunt'	ine
indon-si	'maternal aunt'	indon
icem-si	'elder sister'	ice
mam-si	'maternal uncle'	mame
ibuṅ-si	'elder brother'	ibuṅ

1.3.2. However, there are some terms belonging to this category which do not take this honorific suffix -si:

³ I have put the Brahmin caste in the third category of the social hierarchy because they use the same suffixes with kinship terms as do the Leimas. Nevertheless, it is the Brahmins who enjoy the highest ritual status in the caste hierarchy, as in other parts of India.

Terms used by the RK's	Gloss	Terms used by the Commoners
pabuŋ-sənəkhwa	'father'	pabə
sənəkhwa-pure	'grandfather'	ipu-bok
yambuŋ	'elder brother'	tadə

The term pabuŋ-sənəkhwa 'father' was conventionally restricted to a king (i.e. in the RK groups) and his immediate relatives, such as his brothers.

1.3.3. It may be noted that the honorific suffix -si is never used in terms for younger kin in ego's generation or descending generations. For example, it is not used in terms like inaw 'younger sister' (for female ego), or ica 'child'. In other words, the suffix -si is attached to the basic kinship terms in order to denote respect to elder kinfolk (whether in ego's generation or ascending generations).

1.3.4. In the case of kin younger than ego (i.e. younger kin in ego's generation or descending generations), honorific suffixes, namely, ibuŋo 'my dear (male)', and ibemə 'my dear (female)', are attached only in the immediate circle of kings, e.g. inaw-ibuŋo 'younger brother' (for a female ego), inaw-ibemə 'younger sister' (for a female ego), etc.

Furthermore, there are other terms derived from the kinship terms which have non-kin connotations, namely, məja-ibuŋo 'prince', and məja-ibemə 'princess'. These two terms have been derived from the kinship terms məca-ibuŋo 'his son', and məca-ibemə 'his daughter', respectively.

1.4. The Leima group uses the same set of honorific suffixes that are used in the case of younger kin of the RK's (only the RK's who are in the immediate circle of kings). But in the case of the Leima, the suffixes are attached only to the elder kinship terms (whether in ego's generation or ascending generations), e.g.

Terms used by the Leimas	Gloss	Terms used by the Commoners
taybuŋo-tamo	'elder brother'	tadə
khura-ibuŋo	'paternal uncle'	khura
indo-ibemə	'maternal aunt'	indon

1.5. Though they enjoy the highest ritual status, the Brahmins use the same suffixes as the Leimas. However, the Brahmins use the same terms for cross-cousins and parallel-cousins, employing sibling terms for both, while the Meiteis use distinctive terms for cross-cousins and parallel-cousins, but the same forms for parallel-cousins and siblings:

	Cross-Cousins	Parallel-Cousins	Siblings
Brahmins	X	X	X
Meiteis	Y	X	X

This will be discussed further below.

2. Cross-cousin marriage as reflected in kinship terminology

It appears that matrilineal cross-cousin marriage was formerly allowed in Meitei society. This approval of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is reflected in kinship terminology. That is, the terms denoting relationships connected with marriage (i.e. affinal relationships such as 'father-in-law', 'son-in-law', 'daughter-in-law', 'sister-in-law', 'brother-in-law', 'husband', and 'wife') are also used for denoting relationships not directly connected with marriage (i.e. consanguine relationships), but established through approved marriages (i.e. the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage). This point is illustrated in Table I (*please turn to next page.*)

The table shows that the terms used to denote relationships derived through marriage (column I) are the same as the those used for the corresponding relationships not directly connected with marriage, but established through preferred marriage (column II), while there is an entirely different set of terms for denoting relationships that do not traditionally allow such establishment through marriage (column III)

For example, the same term *iku iman* is used for denoting 'father-in-law' (column I) and 'father's sister's husband' and 'mother's brother' (column II), whereas there is a distinct term *khura* (for younger uncle) and *ipən* (for elder uncle), which is used for denoting 'mother's sister's husband' and 'father's brother' (individuals which are not traditionally allowed to marry).

TABLE I

I

II

III

Marriage Relationships			Marriageable Relationships			Non-marriageable Relationships		
1.	<u>iku</u> , <u>iman</u>	'F-I-L'	<u>iku</u> , <u>iman</u>	'MB', 'FSIH'		<u>idon</u> E.term <u>khura</u> Y.term	'FB', 'MSIH'	
2	<u>ine</u> ~ <u>inem</u>	'M-I-L'	<u>ine</u> ~ <u>inem</u>	'FSSI', 'MBW'		<u>imhan</u> E.term <u>indon</u> Y.term	'M: SI', 'FBW'	
3	For δ <u>iya</u> For ϕ <u>imak</u>	'S-I-L'	For δ <u>iya</u> 'BS' For ϕ <u>imak</u>	For ϕ <u>imək</u>	'SIS'	<u>ica-nupa</u>	For ϕ <u>For ϕ</u> 'SIS', 'BS'	
4	<u>iməw</u>	'D-I-L'	<u>iməw</u>	For δ <u>iməw</u> For ϕ <u>'BD'</u>	For ϕ <u>'SID'</u>	<u>ica-nupɪ</u>	For ϕ <u>For ϕ</u> 'SID', 'BD'	
5	For ϕ <u>inamə</u> For ϕ <u>ican-nupɪ</u>	E.term Y.term	For ϕ <u>inamə</u> For ϕ <u>ican-nupɪ</u>	For ϕ <u>itaymə</u> For ϕ <u>inaw-nupɪ</u>	E.term Y.term	<u>ica</u> E.term <u>inaw-nupɪ</u> Y.term	'FəpaCo'	
6	For ϕ <u>itay</u> For ϕ <u>ibay</u> For ϕ <u>isen</u>	E.term Y.term	For ϕ <u>itay</u> For ϕ <u>ibay</u> For ϕ <u>isen</u>	For ϕ <u>itay</u> For ϕ <u>ibay</u> For ϕ <u>isen</u>	E.term Y.term	<u>dada</u> E.term <u>ipua</u> Y.term	'MaPaCo'	
7	<u>itay</u>	'H'	For ϕ <u>itay</u>	For ϕ <u>itay</u>	'E Ma Cr Co'	<u>dada</u>	'E.Ma Pa Co'	
	<u>inaw</u>	'W'	For ϕ <u>inaw</u>	For ϕ <u>inaw</u>	'Y Fə Cr Co'	For ϕ <u>ican-nupɪ</u>	'Y Fə pa Co	

Notes: Double line(=) = the terms are not identical, F=father, I=in, L=Leu, M=Mother, B=Brother, Si=Sister, H=Husband, S=Son, W=Wife, D=Daughter, Fə=female, Ma=Male, Cr=Cross, Co=Cousin, pa=parallel, E=Elder, Y=Younger. ϕ = male ego and δ = female ego

TABLE II

I

II

III

111

Marriage Relationships				Marriageable Relationships		Non-marriageable Relationships				
1	<u>iku</u> , <u>iman</u>	'F-I-L'		<u>mamə</u>	'MB', 'FSIH'	<u>idan</u>	E.term	'F B' 'MSI M'		
						<u>khura</u>	Y.term			
2	<u>ine</u> ~ <u>inam</u>	'M-I-L'		<u>ine</u> ~ <u>inam</u>	'FSI', 'MBW'	<u>imhan</u>	E.term	'MSI, 'FBW'		
						<u>indomca</u>	Y.term			
3	<u>For δ</u> <u>iya</u> <u>imak</u>	<u>For q</u>		<u>For δ</u>	<u>For q</u>	<u>ice-nupa</u>		<u>For q</u>	'BS'	
				<u>iya</u> 'BS'	<u>imak</u> 'SIS'			'SIS'		
4	<u>iman</u> 'D-I-L'			<u>iman</u>	<u>For δ</u> BD	<u>For q</u> SID	<u>ice-nupol</u>		<u>For q</u> 'BD'	
5	<u>For δ</u> <u>inamə</u> <u>itaymə</u> <u>icən-nupol</u>	<u>For q</u> <u>itaymə</u> <u>icən-nupol</u>	'SI-I-L'	<u>ice</u> <u>inaw-nupol</u>	E.term Y.term	<u>ice</u> <u>inaw-nupol</u>		E.term Y.term	'FəpəCo'	
6	<u>For δ</u> <u>itay</u> <u>icən-nupa</u>	<u>For q</u> <u>ibay</u> <u>icən</u>	'B-I-L'	<u>dada</u> <u>inwa-nupa</u>	E.term Y.term	<u>dada</u> <u>ipwa-nupa</u>		E.term Y.term	'MapəCo'	
7	<u>itay</u> 'H'			<u>dada</u>	'EMəCrCo'	<u>dada</u>		'EMəpəCo'		
8	<u>inaw</u> 'W'			<u>For q</u> <u>icən-nupol</u>	'YəCrCo'	<u>For q</u> <u>icən-nupol</u>		'YəpəCo'		

This point is also illustrated by the terms used for husband and wife. The term *itəy* ('elder brother-in-law' and 'elder male cross-cousin' for a female ego) is also used to refer to one's 'husband'; and the term *inaw*, a contracted form of the term *inaw-nupɪ*, is used to refer to 'younger sister-in-law' and 'younger female cross-cousin', as well as to one's own wife. The compound term used for 'husband and wife' is *itəy-inaw*.

In modern society, apparently due to the introduction of Hinduism and Bengali culture, cross-cousin marriage is being looked upon with extreme disfavor. Neither the Brahmins nor the Bengalis have this practice of cross-cousin marriage. As a result, only the classificatory cross-cousin marriage, i.e. a girl marrying her classificatory aunt's (real aunt's husband's brother's wife's) son is allowed.

The traditional Meitel saying *məne matuŋ inbə* literally means 'a girl follows her paternal aunt', but the term *məne* 'her aunt' is today being interpreted as denoting only 'classificatory aunt' (such as 'father's sister's husband's brother's wife'). This saying also reflects the fact that cross-cousin marriage was once matrilineal. This change in the marriage system has also affected the use of kinship terms in modern society, as can be seen by comparing Table I with Table II, which represents modern usage (*please turn to preceding page.*)

Table II differs from Table I primarily in that in Table I, the kinship forms in columns I and II are identical, whereas in Table II, the kinship terms in columns I and II are identical as far as terms (5-8) are concerned. In (1) also, terms in columns I and II have been differentiated through borrowing in the case of column II. Only in (2-4) in column II have the terms remained unchanged.

The merging of the terms has apparently resulted from the fact that cross-cousins are now being considered equal to parallel-cousins or siblings, because of the change in the marriage system. It is possible that youngsters feel it very odd to use the same terms for kin connected through marriage and for those who are not connected (or connectible) through marriage. Changes in kinship terms are seen particularly in the case of elder kin belonging to ego's generation, namely (5-8). The reason for this is that younger kin are normally addressed by their respective personal names.

For example, *inəmə* 'elder female cross-cousin' (for a female ego) and *itəymə* 'elder female cross-cousin' (for a male ego) in (5-6) in column II of Table I are being replaced by the kinship term *ice* 'elder sister' for both egos. Similarly, *itəy* 'elder male cross-cousin' (for a male ego) and *ibay* 'elder male cross-cousin' (for a female ego) in (6) in column II, Table I are being replaced by the kinship term *dəda* 'elder brother' for both egos.

Furthermore, the terms *itəy* 'elder male cross-cousin' (for a female ego) and *inaw* (the contracted form of *inaw-nupɪ*) 'younger female cross-cousin' (for a male ego), which were identical with the terms for

husband and wife in Table I (7-8) columns I and II, are also now being replaced by terms for parallel-cousins and siblings such as *dəda* 'elder brother' and *icən-nupɪ* 'younger sister' [for a male ego] (cf. Table II, (7-8), column II).

Another innovation is the usage by a female ego of the term *ibay* in addressing her elder male cross-cousin. This term was formerly used only by a male ego. The traditional term used for 'elder male cross-cousin' for a female ego was *itəy*. Since this term is also used to refer to one's husband, modern female speakers in the urban areas try to avoid the term *itəy* in addressing or referring to their elder male cross-cousin.

Since the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union in 1949, the traditional hierarchical structure of Meitei society has been gradually changing into something entirely different. The social distinctions that prevailed among the four strata of people are being reduced. The royal group is no longer in control of the use of language. Instead, the socio-economic conditions and social status of the people play a greater role in determining the use of the different variables of kinship terms. Some of the terms once used only amongst royal descendants (particularly the Leima group) are being taken over in modern society by some of the commoners.

Yet it is noteworthy that the kinship terms used by the RK's have not become more widespread, except for the two terms *pabuŋ* 'father' and *yambuŋ* 'elder brother'. The extension of the term *pabuŋ* 'father' might be due to the fact that it is also used by the Leimas, whereas the extension of the term *yambuŋ* might be due to the fact that this is the only RK term which does not take any of the honorific markers *-si*, *sənəkwa*, and *səmkha*.

It is quite reasonable to ask why the rest of the RK terms have not been extended to commoners. It might be that the honorific markers *-si*, *sənəkwa*, and *səmkha* are considered exclusively royal suffixes, and therefore terms with these suffixes have been reserved for the RK's.

Most of the Leima kinship terms (i.e. those with the honorific suffixes *ibuŋo* 'sir' and *ibemə* 'madam' have been extended to commoners of high status, as follows:

<i>idhəu</i>	'grandfather'
<i>pabuŋ</i>	'father'
<i>pabuŋ-hən</i>	'uncle' (elder than father)
<i>pabuŋ-ton</i>	'uncle' (younger than father)
<i>maybuŋo-mayŋo</i>	'uncle' (mother's brother, father's sister's husband)
<i>ine-bemə-inemə</i>	'aunt' (father's sister, mother's brother's wife)

indo-bemə~indoy-mə	'aunt' (mother's sister, husband's brother's wife)
taybuŋo~tayŋo~tamo	'elder brother'
ice-bemə~icemə	'elder sister'

Leima terms which have not been extended are given below:

imay-bemə~imay-mə	'mother'
khura-ibuŋo	'uncle' (father's younger brother')
əbok-bemə~əboymə	'grandmother'

The term *imay-bemə~imay-mə* is not used by commoners, but even in the case of Leimas it is used in very few families, such as those very close to the king. The term *khura-ibuŋo* 'uncle' (father's younger brother) has not been extended to commoners because the term *khura* itself has become obsolete (in the Imphal dialect), and has been replaced by the newly-borrowed term *kəka*. The term *əbok-bemə~əboymə* has not been extended because a newly-developed reduplicated form *bo-bok*, from the term *əbok*, is being used.

Another change made possible by the decline of monarchical rule is that some commoners can now be observed to use the RK terms sarcastically in order to make fun of other commoners who give themselves airs.

Thus the social value that the different variants of kinship terms had in traditional society is no longer the same in modern society. Nevertheless, the sense of superiority is so much instilled in the royal descendants that the new liberty in speech behavior gaining currency among all classes of speakers is being viewed by them with disapproval.

Due to the extension of the kin terms of the Leimas, some of the terms used in the past by the commoners have become obsolete in the urban dialect, and are now used only by less sophisticated rural folk.

The earlier terms which are being replaced by Leima terms are given below:

Earlier Terms	Gloss	Leima Terms
ipən-dhəu	'paternal uncle' (eldest)	pabuŋ-hən
ipən	'paternal uncle' (elder)	pabuŋ
paji~baji, pabə	'father'	pabuŋ
imhan-dhəu	'maternal aunt' (eldest)	imay-bemə

imhan~imhal, imabok	'maternal aunt' (elder)	imay-bemə
indon	'maternal aunt' (younger)	imay-bemə, indoy-bemə
iku-bok	'father-in-law'	pabuŋ
inem-bok, əbok	'mother-in-law'	imay-bemə
ipu-bok	'grandfather'	idhəu

4. *Effects on the Meitel kinship system of contact with the Bengali language*

Lexical borrowing is often explained in terms of lexical needs and socio-linguistic innovations. People borrow from another language which they consider to be more prestigious.

In Meiteilon we come across some kinship terms which have been borrowed, particularly from Bengali. This borrowing has affected the system of kinship terms to a certain extent. When Meiteilon came in contact with the Bengali language of the dominant culture, it underwent replacement of some of the native kinship terms. This process has been one-sided borrowing from Bengali into Meiteilon.

The borrowed kinship terms were subject to phonological modification in Meitei, and in the process of acculturation some changes have also taken place in the usage of the terms.

Terms which have been borrowed from Bengali are given below with their Bengali counterparts:

English Gloss	Forms Replaced	Terms Borrowed	Bengali Terms
1. 'maternal uncle'	iman, iku	mamə	māmā
2. 'paternal younger uncle'	iton	khura	khūra
3. 'paternal younger uncle'	khura	kəka	kākā
4. 'elder brother'	iyambə, ibuŋ	tadə, tada, dəda	dādā
5. 'father'	pabə, pa-ji	bəba	bābā

It is evident from the data that the borrowed terms have been subject to some phonological modifications. The long vowel has been replaced by the short vowel a in word-final position, and by ə in medial position. However, the term mamə is an exception, reflecting perhaps the fact that Meiteilon

already possessed a term *mə-ma* 'his or her mother', which was homophonous with the borrowed term.

In the borrowed term *khura*, *r* is an alveolar flap [ɾ], whereas the corresponding Bengali term *khūra* has a retroflex stop [ɖ]. Since Meiteilon does not have a retroflex, the alveolar flap [ɾ] has been substituted.

4.2. The usage of these borrowed terms is also quite different from that in Bengali. When Bengali terms were introduced, their connotations were also extended to cover the whole semantic range of the native Meitei terms that they replaced. For these additional connotations standard Bengali is found to use distinct terms.

In Meiteilon, the kinship term *mamə* is used for both 'mother's brother' and 'father's sister's husband', whereas in Bengali, the form *māmā* is used only for 'mother's brother'. A distinct term *pīsā* for 'father's sister's husband' is used in Bengali.

In the new generation, however, the earlier borrowed kinship term *khura* 'father's younger brother' and 'mother's younger sister's husband' has been replaced by a newly borrowed term *kəka*. The term *khura* is now being restricted to rural and older generation usage.

The original Meitei terms *iyambə* 'elder brother' (for a male ego) and *ibuŋ* 'elder brother' (for a female ego) have been replaced by the borrowed Bengali term *tadə-təda-dəda* for both the egos.

The sexual distinction which was prevalent earlier in the case of these kinship terms has been lost in address forms, but is still maintained in reference forms. That is, the terms *iyambə* (for a male ego) and *ibuŋ* (for a female ego) are still used as reference forms.

Of the variants *tadə-təda-dəda*, the form *tadə* is obsolete among the younger generation. It once denoted 'elder brother' and 'male parallel-cousin' in Meiteilon, whereas the equivalent Bengali form *dādā* is now used to denote 'elder brother', 'elder male parallel-cousin', and also 'elder male cross-cousin'. Meiteilon has two distinct kinship terms for 'elder male cross-cousin': *ibay* (for a male ego) and *itəy* (for a female ego).

The other two forms *təda* and *dəda* are now current among the new generation. These two forms are apparently due to re-borrowing of the Bengali term *dādā*. They are also being used for 'elder brother', 'elder male parallel-cousin', and also 'elder male cross-cousin' by the new generation, as in the case of Bengali. The native words *ibay* and *itəy* are now being used only as reference terms.

The kinship term *bəba* is used for 'father' and also for 'elder or younger uncle' in Meiteilon, whereas in Bengali it is used only for 'father'. The old kinship terms *pəbə* and *pəjɪ* are still being used in rural areas.

The borrowed terms have been accepted as a part and parcel of modern Meiteilon. Some terms like *khura* 'younger paternal uncle' have become so thoroughly incorporated into Meiteilon that most native speakers are unaware that such terms are borrowed.

The borrowed terms *mamə* 'maternal uncle', *tadə* 'elder brother', and *khura* 'younger paternal uncle' have lost their foreignness to a great extent. They can now be used along with the native honorific suffix *ibuŋo* (as in *maybuŋo* 'maternal uncle', *taybuŋo* 'elder brother', and *khura-ibuŋo* 'paternal uncle'), whereas other borrowed terms like *kəka* 'younger paternal uncle' and *bəba* 'father' are not used with this suffix. This may be due to the fact that *kəka* 'younger paternal uncle' is a very recent term that was borrowed after the decline of monarchical rule. Therefore, the need to suffix the honorific marker *ibuŋo* might not have arisen. The term *bəba*, though not a very recent borrowing, has a matching form *pabuŋ*, considered to be its honorific equivalent.

Conclusion

The central purpose of this paper has been to examine the interrelationships between patterns of social behavior and patterns of kinship terminology. One problem has been to correlate the stratified Meitei society with the kinship terms that are in use. The second problem has been to correlate the changes that have taken place in Meitei society due to the advent of Hinduism and the introduction of a new political system (i.e. democracy) with changes that have taken place in kinship terminology.

First of all, the impact of Hinduism and Bengali culture on Meitei society is quite significant in the sense that there has been a major change in the marriage system. For example, cross-cousin marriage, which is reflected in the traditional kinship terminology, has been disallowed. In the earlier generation, distinct kinship terms were used for cross-cousins on the one hand, and parallel cousins and siblings on the other. Furthermore, the terms used for in-laws of the same generation were the same as those used for cross-cousins.

In the new generation, the change in the marriage system is also reflected in the kinship terminology in that the same terms are being used for siblings, parallel-cousins, and also cross-cousins. Furthermore, the two sets of kin (that is, in-laws of the same generation on the one hand, and siblings, parallel-cousins and cross-cousins on the other) are being differentiated.

Secondly, the traditional hierarchical structure of Meitei society has been gradually changing into an entirely different structure since the merger of the kingdom of Manipur into the Indian Union in 1949. Some of the terms once used only by the royal descendants have been taken over by commoners of high socio-economic standing.

Changes in kinship terminology have also occurred due to contact with the Bengali language. There have been some borrowings of kinship terms from this language. The earliest of these borrowings have already lost their foreignness.

References

- Friedrich, P. 1966. "The linguistic reflex of social change: from Tsarist to Soviet Russian kinship", in S. Liberson (ed.), *Explorations in Sociolinguistics*, special issue of Sociological Inquiry 36:31-57.
- Singh, N. Tombi. 1975. *Manipur and the mainstream*. Delhi: Rajesh Printing Press.