

KINSHIP TERMS IN MEITEIRON:

A special reference to compound words

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This paper mainly attempts to discuss a detail study of Meitei kinship terms more specially on the Meitei compound words. The kinship terms are differentiated by various features, by sex, as father and mother; by generation, as son and daughter; and by lineal relation, as uncle etc. In the present study, the kinship term is analysed into various groups and sub-groups on the basis of their meaning and structure. The formation of Meitei Kinship term is first started from the clan level, then at lineage and extends at the family level. The components of compound words and its different orders show the different functions of compound in the language.

Key words: nuclear family, extended family, reduplication, reversed order

1. Introduction

From the early periods most of the people have been searching to identify themselves in social contexts. Such identification goes through the act of naming, culture which is playing a vital role in the society. Before learning and categorising other's life styles, one's first step is to identify his status in the society. The element of identification is done by the name of the individual and that kind of individual's name brings him apart from other people or groups. Hence the role of individual's name is very important in the society and it indicates the uniqueness within society.

The ethnicity and its cultural heritage of a particular group bring them a common platform in the society. Obviously each and every culture shows a set of kinship terms. And it also defines the roles which are served in society.

The tradition of tracing kinship relationships through several generations (descent) is done by the researchers of the particular field. To be extended its importance and meaning of the relationships among the people the kinship terminology i.e., the system of linguistic categories for denoting kinds of relatives are obviously used.

2. Kinship Terms and Terminology

Kinship terms are the lexically identical terms. Kinship terms, according to E. R. Leach (1958), are “category words by means of which an individual is taught to recognize the significant groupings in the social structure into which he is born (p.143).” Sometimes, Meiteiron uses the same term of address for different kinship terms. For example, ego’s father’s father “paternal grandfather” or ego’s mother’s father “maternal grandfather” can be both *ipu* “grandfathers”. Whereas, ego’s father’s mother “paternal grandmother” or ego’s mother’s mother “maternal grandmother” can be called *ibok* “grandmothers”.

In Meiteiron, kinship terms may be divided into two major categories:

2.1. Basic and,

2.2. Non-basic

2.1. Basic kinship terms are those that designate blood or consanguineal relation, for example: *ipa* “father”, *ima* “mother”, *əɣaɣ* “child” of a family.

2.2. Non-basic kinship terms are those that designate relationships by marriage i.e., relationship through marriage or affinal relationship, such as *ipuroibə* “husband”, *loinəbi* “wife”, *imak* (female ego) or *ija* (male ego) “son-in-law” etc.

The systems of **terminology** are also unique that are labelled with a distinctive social and cultural nature. Kinship terminology refers to specific systems of inherited or familial relationships. It includes the **terms of address** used in different language communities for different relatives and the **terms of reference** used to identify the relationship of these relatives to ego or to each other. There are also some different between the term of reference and the term of address in accordance with the sex of the ego in certain cases. For instance, the words *ibuɣ* (female ego) and *tadə*, where *ibuɣ* is a term of reference and *tadə* is a term of address.

The study of kinship terms is an interdisciplinary work for each language community. Generally, most of the language community’s kinship terms belong to the basic vocabulary of the particular language. In this work, first, describes the Kinship Terms and Terminology; second, explains the Relatives; third, discusses the Concept of Kinship Terms; fourth, analyses the Classification of Meitei’s Kinship Terms; fifth, shows the Relative Age; sixth, mentions the Kinship Organisation; seventh and eighth deal with forms of Addressing and the Cultural Connotation of Meitei Kinship Terms respectively.

3. Relatives

The word Kinship is the relationship modeled on the culturally recognized connection between parents and children. It may be extended to siblings and through parents to more distant relatives. There are also three kinds of relatives.

They are:

3.1. Primary Relatives

3.2. Secondary Relatives and,

3.3. Tertiary Relatives

These relatives are different with one another. For examples, in Primary Relatives, Ego's parents and siblings and his spouse and children in his family are included. In Secondary Relatives, father's father, mother's sister, wife's mother, brother's son, etc. are there and father's sister's husband, wife's sister's daughter etc. are in Tertiary Relatives respectively.

4. Concept of Kinship Terms

Each particular language has its own kinship terms, which reflect the culture with which it is associated. The meanings as well as features of kinship terms reflect the relationships among kin in each particular society. It can be found that kinship terms may be differentiated by various feature, e.g. by sex, as father and mother; by generation, as son and daughter; and by lineal relation, as uncle etc. In the present study, the kinship term is analysed into various groups and sub-groups on the basis of their meaning and structure.

The concept of kinship term 'cousin' in Meiteiron can be both brother and sister according to the sex and the relative age to ego. It could be one's father's brother's children or one's mother's sister's children etc. Whereas, the English word 'cousin' does not carry the semantic meaning of sex. So the term is not clear from the word that whether the word is a male or a female. Another one is that Meitei kinship terms have more referent terms than the English and also have different words for describing the same kin in accordance with the sex of the ego. For example, a younger sister of a male is termed as *icə*/whereas the younger sister of a female is *inau*.

5. Classification of Meitei Kinship Terms

In Meitei society both the classification of *luhɔŋləgə t^hoknəbə məri* (affinal) and *i-gi məri t^hoknəbə* (consanguineal) relationships are found. All the indigenous Meitei kinship terms used as terms of reference (consanguineal) are consisted of this prefix *i* meaning 'blood relationship' for instance, *i* in *ipa* 'father', *i* in *ima* 'mother', *i* in *ice* 'elder sister', *i* in *ijambə* 'elder brother' etc. Interestingly an exceptional case is found that the borrowed word *k^hura* which is used as referent term can be added by the prefix *i* whereas it can't be added to *mamma* 'uncle' as it is borrowed one.

Generally kinship term is first originated from a nuclear family i.e., consists of a husband, wife, and their children. Then it goes through extended family. An extended family consists of two or more nuclear

families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship rather than of the husband-wife relationship.

Quite the contrary, “Meitei kinship is classified at the kin system (Yek-salai), then at lineage (Sagəi) and finally at the family level (imuṅ mənunṅ) (*Manipuri Culture, LIS-India*).”

Examples:

yek (yek-salai)	‘clan’
sagəi (sagəi-natəi)	‘lineage’
imuṅ (imuṅ-mənunṅ)	‘family’

From the above examples it appears that the formation of Meitei Kinship term is first started from the clan level and extends at the family level and so on.

Meitei

Kin

Terms

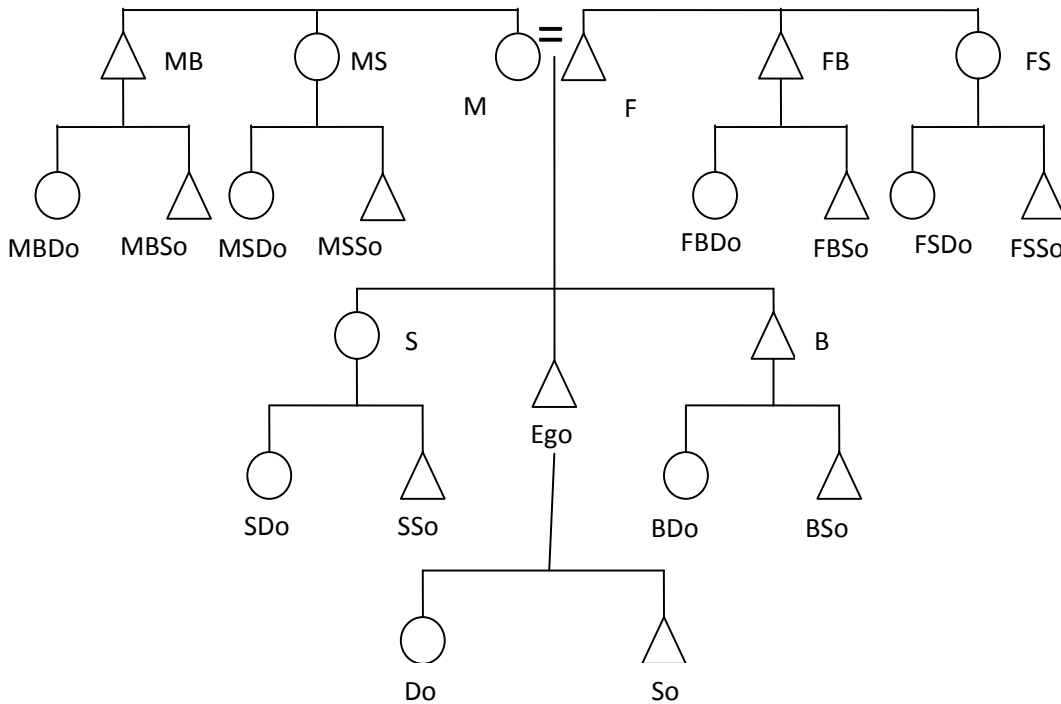


Diagram showing several basic relationships that are designated by kin types.

5.1. Genealogical Abbreviations and Symbols:

F = Father	M = Mother	So = Son
Do = Daughter	B = Brother	GF = Grandfather
GM = Grandmother	Y = Younger	E = Elder
W = Wife	H = Husband	GSo = Grandson

GDo = Granddaughter	S = Sister	f = female
- = dash	+ = combined with	m = male

At present there are seven clans in Meitei society, viz - m̄əŋaŋ, luwaŋ, k^humən, əŋom, moiraŋ, k^habə-ŋanbə, and s̄əraŋ l̄əisaŋt^hem. Under each clan there may have many sagəis (lineages). The lineage wise distribution of Meitei clans (Moirangthem, 1982:11/12) is illustrated as follow:

Number of *sagəis* (lineages) that exist in the particular *yek-salais* (clans):

i. Mangang /m̄əŋaŋ/	-117 lineages
ii. Luwang /luwaŋ/	-57 lineages
iii. Khuman /k ^h umən/	-110 lineages
iv. Angom /əŋom/	-50 lineages
v. Moirang /moiraŋ/	-71 lineages
vi. Khaba-Nganba /k ^h abə-ŋanbə/	-25 lineages
vii. Sarang Leishangthem /s̄əraŋ l̄əisaŋt ^h em/	-40 lineages

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Total = 470

Fig: Seven clans showing the number of lineages contained.

6. Terms for compound words in Gender Relation

The terms used as compound words indicating gender relation in Meiteiron are prominent. The order of constituents i.e., the order of words referring to males and females is divided into two types: i) the words referring to females occur before the words referring to males and ii) words referring to male

occur before the words referring to females, Nameirakpam (2005). About the gender of the person, Devi (2008) opines that “most of the terms specify the gender of the kin’s men.”

The components of compound words in Meiteiron are used as reduplications, reversed order, order of sex, ascending order of age, descending order of age, ascending order (of time), descending order (of time), same period of time, order of relation, order of ego’s gender, terms used by only male person as well as by only female person respectively. These can be illustrated with the help of the following examples:

6.1. Reduplications

In this form the compounding features are reduplicated type. The components of these words may be used as modern and modern, modern and archaic, archaic and archaic and archaic and modern respectively. The referring terms may be used in either male or woman and the age may be both senior and junior. This is illustrated below:

Terms of Reference	Order of Time	Ego’s Sex	Nature of Relationship with Ego
əhəl-ləməl	modern + modern	male or female	seniors
əŋaŋ-nəwa	modern + archaic	male or female	juniors
irup-ipiŋa	archaic + archaic	male	friends
isuj-imanəbə	modern + modern	male	friends
isuj-imanəbi	modern + modern	female	friend
ita-iroi	archaic + archaic	female	friend
mərup-məpaŋ	modern + archaic	male	friend
pələm-əpokpi	archaic + modern	male or female	mother
pələm-ima	archaic + modern	male or female	mother
pənt ^h əu-əpokpə	archaic + modern	male or female	father
pari-ibuŋo	archaic + modern	male or female	son
pari-nəwa	archaic + archaic	male or female	son

6.2. Reversed Order

The components of these compound words can be used in reversed order. The order of sex and order of age also can be seen as follows:

Terms of Reference	Order of Age	Order of Sex	Ego's Sex	Nature of Relationship with Ego
ice-icən icən-ice	senior + junior junior + senior	female + female female + female	male or female	ES + YS/YS + ES
iku-inem inem-iku	senior + junior junior + senior	male + female female + male	male or female	F+in+Law+M+in+Law/ M+in+Law+F+in+Law
nupa-nupi nupi-nupa	senior + junior junior + senior	male + female female + male	male or female	man and woman/ woman and man
nupi-əṅaṅ əṅaṅ-nubi	senior + junior junior + senior	female + child child + female	male	woman and child child and woman
nəha-əhəl əhəl-nəha	junior + senior senior + junior	young + old old + young	male or female	young and old old and young

6.3. Order of Sex

In this type of pairing the words referring to males occur as a first constituent as below:

Terms of Reference	Male	Female
ipu-iben	ipu	iben
	'grandfather'	'grandmother'

ipari-imom	ipari	imom
	'son'	'daughter'
sabi-sanəu	sabi	sanəu
	'son'	'daughter'
nupa-nupi	nupa	nupi
	'man'	'woman'
iku-inem	iku	inem
	'father-in-law'	'mother-in-law'
ipa-ima	ipa	ima
	'father'	'mother'
k ^h ura-indol	k ^h ura	indol
	'uncle'	'aunt'
mətəi-mənau	mətəi	mənau
	'husband'	'wife'
lainiŋt ^h əu-lairembi	lainiŋt ^h əu	lairembi
	'king of God'	'Goddess'
niŋt ^h əu-məharani	niŋt ^h əu	məharani
	'king'	'queen'

6.4. Order of Sex

In this type of pairing the words referring to females occur as a first constituent and are followed by the males as below:

Terms of Reference	Female	Male
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pəlem-pənt ^h əu	pəlem	pənt ^h əu
	'mother'	'father'
ima-ipa	ima	ipa
	'mother'	'father'
nupi-nupa	nupi	nupa
	'woman'	'man'
inem-iku	inem	iku
	'mother-in-law'	'father-in-law'
ləimə-niŋt ^h əu	ləimə	niŋt ^h əu
	'queen'	'king'
niŋol-piba	niŋol	piba
	'daughter'	'son'
pi-pa	pi	pa
	'female'	'male'

6.5. Ascending Order of Age

The following pairing of words referring to the ascending order of age, the juniors occur as a first constituent and the seniors follow after it. Moreover it is also not possible to use as reversed order except the pairing *nəha-əhəl* as given below:

Terms of Reference	Junior	Senior
tadə-mammə	tadə	mammə
	'brother'	'uncle'
ipa-ipu	ipa	ipu
	'father'	'grandfather'

nəha-əhəl	nəha	əhəl
	'junior'	'senior'
ipa-ipəl	ipa	ipəl
	'father'	'father's elder brother/uncle'
isu-ipu	isu	ipu
	'grandson'	'grandfather'
ice-inem	ice	inem
	'elder sister'	'mother-in-law'
ica-iwa	ica	iwa
	'child'	'husband'

6.6. Descending Order of Age

Unlike the above, the seniors occur as a first constituent and the juniors follow after it. In addition, similarly (as above 6.5), it can not be possible to use as reversed order with an exception of the pairing *nəha-əhəl* as under:

Terms of Reference	Senior	Junior
ica-isu	ica	isu
	'child'	'grandson'
əhəl-nəha	əhəl	nəha
	'senior'	'junior'
iroi-inau	iroi	inau
	'friend'	'younger brother'
ipa-itol	ipa	itol

	'father'	'uncle'
ine-indol	ine	indol
	'aunt'	'aunt'
ima-indol	ima	indol
	'mother'	'aunt'

6.7. Ascending Order (of Time)

One important feature to be noted in Meitei Kinship is that the number of compound word referring ascending order is only one, for instance, *əŋaŋ-nəwa*. Here the first combination of words is started by **modern** word *əŋaŋ* then follows **archaic** word *nəwa*.

Terms of Reference	Modern	Archaic
əŋaŋ-nəwa	əŋaŋ	nəwa
	'child'	'child'

6.8 Descending Order (of Time)

Other pairing of words denoting compounds accept the above 6.7. are all under the descending order:

Terms of Reference	Archaic	Modern
pəlem-əpəkpi	pəlem	əpəkpi
	'mother'	'mother'
pənt ^h əu-əpəkpe	pənt ^h əu	əpəkpe
	'father'	'father'
pari-ibujo	pari	ibujo
	'son'	'son'
pəlem-ima	pəlem	ima

	'mother'	'mother'
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6.9. Same Period of time

Double archaic words are used in this type. If the components of words are used as referring to reduplication, the meanings also may have identical.

Terms of Reference	Archaic	Archaic
pari-nəwa	pari	nəwa
	'son'	'son'
pəlem-pənt ^{həu}	pəlem	pənt ^{həu}
	'mother'	'father'

6.9.1. Order of Relation

In this type of pairing the first referring term (i.e., left hand side) is more important than the second one. It is because of the fact that the words which occur before the right sides are closer link than the other.

Terms of Reference	Nearer	Near
ica-iməu	ica	iməu
	'child'	'daughter-in-law'
icən-ica	icən	ica
	'younger sister'	'child'
ipa-iton	ipa	iton
	'father'	'uncle'
itu-ica	itu	ica
	'wife'	'child'
ica-inau	ica	inau

	'child'	'younger brother'
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6.9.2. Order of Ego's Gender

The components of these compound words can not be used as reversed order. But, the gender of ego may be either the first component or vice versa. This is illustrated as follow:

Terms of Reference	Nature of Relationship with Ego
isel-ibai	brother-in-law
ɲai-sel	the relationship between two fathers-in-law or mothers-in-law
isu-iben	grandson and grandmother
icin-inau	brother and sister
itəi-inəu	husband and wife
ipa-ica	father and child
ima-ica	mother and child

6.9.3. Terms used by only Males

In Meitei society there are distinct terms to be used exclusively by males and females. The following pairs of words are used only by males.

Terms of Reference	Nature of Relationship with Ego
itu-ica	wife and child
ipa-ica	father and child

6.9.4. Terms used by only Females

Quite to contrary (above), the following pairs of words are used only by females.

Terms of Reference	Nature of Relationship with Ego
ibuŋ-ipəwa	elder brother and younger brother
ica-iwa	child and husband
ima-ica	'mother and child'

In the above examples it is noticed that some compound words are formed by combining the reduplicated archaic and modern words such as palem-ima 'mother', pari-ibuŋŋo 'son', əhəl-ləməl 'senior' and isuŋ-imənəbə 'male friend', by combining the archaic words such as pari-imom 'son and daughter' and by combining the modern words such as ima-ipa 'parent' etc.

7. Relative Age

Age is the most important parameter for terms of addresses in Meitei society among non relatives. The nature of Meitei kinship system is least descriptive. It merges different relatives into a small number of categories. Ego distinguishes between relatives only on the basis of sex and generation. In some languages, the term **Relative Age** is used as a form referring to some relation rather than one term for **brother**. The word **brother** can not be categorized whether he is younger or brother to ego in English. It is due to the fact that English language does not have different terms for brother. But, in Meiteiron it is used as different terms, for example, an elder male sibling is referred to ego's *dəda* or *ijambə* "elder brother", and a younger male sibling as ego's *inau* "younger brother", whereas elder and younger female siblings to ego are *ice* "elder sister" and *icəɪ* "younger sister" respectively.

8. Kinship Organisation

Meitei kinship term is unilineal and patrilineal descent types. Unilineal descent is the principle whereby descent is traced either through the male line "patrilineal" or the female line "matrilineal." The kinship terms used in Meitei society seems to be a classificatory in nature except some descriptive terms. My brother's wife is a descriptive term while sister-in-law is not. A sister-in-law may be either wife's sister or brother's wife (**Murphy, 2001**). Moreover there are only four descriptive terms in Meiteiron. They are:

1. ima 'mother'

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| 2. ipa | 'father' |
| 3. iku/ikubok | 'father-in-law', and |
| 4. inem/inembok | 'mother-in-law' |

The terms which are denoting other relations are related to the above feature (classificatory term) as well. Two or more elementary terms are combined to denote a specific relative in kinship term. Terms of address in Meiteiron are categorized by many parameters, such as age, hierarchical differences (i.e., between royalty and commoners), kinship, etc.

9. Forms of addressing

In Meitei society there is a tradition for respecting the elder/older persons. The younger persons never address the elder ones by their names. This tradition is handed down from the early periods. The form of addressing among the people of the Meitei society exhibits a mutual respect with each other. The sense of politeness as well as courtesy prevails from generation to generation. Each family knows that there has a system of addressing persons, for instance, to whom or to what person, the kinship terms will be used or when and how will be addressed among the people. While addressing a man, the real name of the man may be avoided. Such form of addressing term may be explained as follow:

The terms of address which are mainly used among **relatives** and **non relatives** are as given below:

The bachelor is addressed as '*pak^həŋ, pak^həŋ səri*' while the unmarried woman/spinster is addressed as '*ləisabi, ləisabi səri*.' The widow is addressed as '*luk^hra, luk^hrabi*' while the widower is addressed as '*pək^hra*.' The step mother is addressed as '*poktəbi məma, lonnəbi*' while the step father is addressed as '*poktəbə məpa, lonnəbə*.' The step daughter is addressed as '*lonnəbi məca*' while the step son is addressed as '*lonnəbə məca*.' The barren woman is addressed as '*ək^huŋbi, məcapoktəbi*.'

The child is addressed as '*nənu, nauca, nəuwa, buŋo, bəmmə, əŋəŋ*' etc.

The common form of addressing under friend circle (among the male peer group) includes: '*mərup, itau, itau, məruploi, bai, bond^hu, imanəbə, itaubi*' whereas friends (among the female peer group) include: '*imanəbi, k^hoinəu ita, ita, itaro*' etc.

9.3. The Cultural Connotation of Meitei Kinship Terms

Culturally, the terms of address to be called to the seniors can be divided into four types. They are:

- i. Address to those seniors in age

- ii. Address to those seniors in generation
- iii. Address to those seniors in age and generation
- iv. Address to others

i. Address to those seniors in age:

Kinship terms play a very important role in daily life. In Meitei society, there is a convention that the younger persons respect the older ones. The elder/older persons are the symbols of representing of authority and superiority while younger ones as inferiority and obedience. According to Meitei tradition, the inferior is not allowed to call the superior by name.

ii. Address to those seniors in generation:

Generation is one of the most important features to identify the relatives. In this type those persons who are older in generation can address one's name. The person he addresses may be junior or senior to him in age.

iii. Address to those seniors in age and generation:

Within the family those older or senior in generation are always addressed by the right kinship terms. For instance, a younger person (m) will address an older one as *tadə*, *k^hura*, *mammə*, *pabuŋ* etc. On the other hand, an older person can address the persons who are junior to him as *inau*, *ibuŋo* etc. Another interesting feature is the spouse almost addresses one another as *taribərə* "Are you listening" by male or *tabiribərə* "Are you listening" by female. It is due to the fact that the kinship term represents a member's status in a family and his relations with other members in the society. Obviously, there are close links between language, culture, and thought. Unlike a name, a Meitei kinship term is a special symbol of the surrounding culture that carries many meanings.

iii. Address to others

Most of the constructions to be used in this type are of the opposite of the above. It is mainly used among non relatives.

Conclusion

A unique form of Meitei indigenous terms is shown by Meitei kinship system that has its roots in Meitei culture. It examines the Meitei kinship terms at different categories, different relatives and different classifications. The study can be focused mainly on the relations of a culture's kinship system and the influence of a certain kinship system on different generations. In the study of compound words, it is

found in many forms as reduplications, different types of orders, periods, relations, ages, gender differences etc. At the conclusion it analyses different forms of addresses to be called to the seniors and it will be deserved and helpful mainly in intercultural communication studies.

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