

THE LANGUAGES OF MANIPUR: A CASE STUDY OF THE KUKI-CHIN LANGUAGES*

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Abstract: Manipur is primarily the home of various speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages. Aside from the Tibeto-Burman speakers, there are substantial numbers of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian speakers in different parts of the state who have come here either as traders or as workers. Keeping in view the lack of proper information on the languages of Manipur, this paper presents a brief outline of the languages spoken in the state of Manipur in general and Kuki-Chin languages in particular. The social relationships which different linguistic groups enter into with one another are often political in nature and are seldom based on genetic relationship. Thus, Manipur presents an intriguing area of research in that a researcher can end up making wrong conclusions about the relationships among the various linguistic groups, unless one thoroughly understands which groups of languages are genetically related and distinct from other social or political groupings. To dispel such misconstrued notions which can at times mislead researchers in the study of the languages, this paper provides an insight into the factors linguists must take into consideration before working in Manipur. The data on Kuki-Chin languages are primarily based on my own information as a resident of Churachandpur district, which is further supported by field work conducted in Churachandpur district during the period of 2003-2005 while I was working for the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, as a research investigator. The data on other languages of Manipur are taken from my personal communications with the native speakers of the languages and also from available scholarly materials.

Keywords: Manipur; Languages of Manipur; Kuki-Chin languages in Manipur

1. INTRODUCTION

Located in northeast India, Manipur is bordered by Myanmar to the east, Mizoram to the south, Nagaland to the north, and Cachar district of Assam to the west and northwest. The total area of Manipur is 22,327 square kilometres, out of which 2,238 square kilometres is Imphal valley, while the remaining areas are hilly tracts. The valley is inhabited by the Manipuris and 120,000 Muslims who are descendants of the marriage of Muslim traders and laborers with Manipuri women (Chelliah 2003). And it is here that all political activities are centred. The hills surrounding the valley are inhabited by the various speakers of Kuki and

* Pauthang Haokip acknowledges the contributions of the following: Chongom Damrenghang Aimol (C.D. Aimol), Doland Singh and Th. Chandramani Singh for providing lists of PhD dissertations submitted to the department of Linguistics, Manipur University; Dr. Panger Senla Walling of Deccan College, Pune, for sending me the grammar of Lamgang; Prof. Jashawanta Singh, of Manipur University, for his comments on minor languages of Manipur with a population of less than 10,000.

Naga languages. Thus, Mao and Maram Naga are spoken to the north of Imphal valley bordering Nagaland, Rongmei and Liangmei to the west and northwest bordering Cachar district of Assam, and the different speech forms of Tangkhul to the east and northeast of the Imphal valley. The Kuki-Chin languages are spoken in the southwest district of Churachandpur. The Kuki-Chin speakers are also found in all the districts of Manipur.¹ To the north we find Kuki villages just to the south of Naga settlements, to the northwest they live in close proximity to the Rongmei Naga along National Highway 53 bordering the Cachar district of Assam. Again, to the east, they live alongside the Tangkhul Naga. Towards the southeast, their settlement extends to the extreme border town of Moreh bordering Myanmar. Thus, T. C Hodson (1911: 2) was right in saying said that “Indeed the Kuki is to be found almost everywhere in the state except in the territory occupied by the Mao confederacy”. Aside from the Manipuri, Kuki and Naga languages, there are substantial numbers of Dravidian (Malayalam, Telegu and Tamil) and Indo-Aryan (Hindi and Bengali) speakers in different parts of the state in few pockets.² Apart from these Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages, there are two Khasi [Pnar] villages, viz., Khebagor Khasi and Khamrengkha, located near Ziribam, a small town bordering North Cachar district of Assam. It is to be noted here that Khasi belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. Manipur was also once the home of some languages such as Andro and Sengmai which were said to be very different from Manipuri. But all of them are now replaced by Manipuri.

On the basis of their genetic relationships, the languages of Manipur may be broadly divided into two groups: the Kuki-Chin group and the Naga group. The term “Naga” as a genetic subgroup within Tibeto-Burman has been questioned by recent classifications, particularly Burling 2003.³ But, for want of a better term which can place all these languages satisfactorily, I will still use the old term “Naga” for convenience. The Naga languages of Manipur are very distinct from one another and are mutually unintelligible. The Kuki-Chin languages on the other hand are quite similar to each other, with most of the languages, viz., Thadou, Paite, Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte and Zou, being mutually intelligible. One of the distinguishing characteristic traits of the Nagas which is absent among the Kuki-Chin is that in spite of their linguistic differences they are nonetheless united in their common struggle for greater political recognition from the Indian government. The Kuki-Chin speakers on the other hand have failed to find a

¹ The majority of the Kuki-Chin speakers living in other districts of Manipur (outside of Churachandpur district) are the so called Thadou speakers.

² C. Yashawanta Singh (1995) reports that in the small town of Moreh, on the Indo-Burma border, there are many ethnic groups speaking different speech forms belonging to three language families, viz., Indo-Aryan (Hindi and Bengali), Dravidian (Malayalam, Telegu and Tamil) and Tibeto-Burman. Since these ethnic groups have borrowed many lexical items from Manipuri and Burmese, it is conceivable that a new pidgin may emerge ultimately, as the place is a centre of commerce.

³ Burling (2003: 172) suggests that “The languages spoken by ‘Nagas’ fall into at least two, and more possibly several, completely distinct branches of the Tibeto-Burman family”.

common political platform which could unite them (see section 4.1 for discussion of problems with unification among the Kuki-Chin speakers).

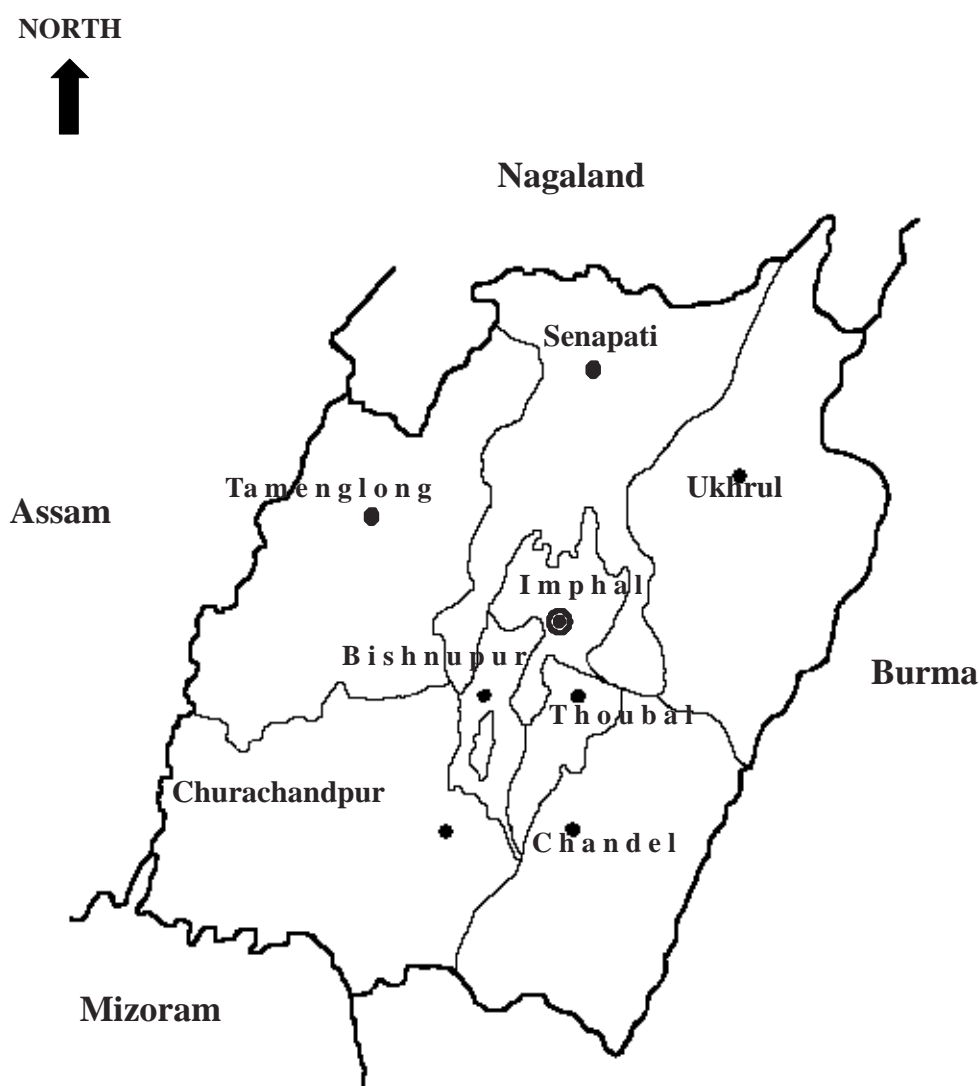


Figure 1: District map of Manipur

2. LINGUISTIC SITUATION OF MANIPUR

The linguistic situation of Manipur is very interesting and at the same time complicated. It is interesting because many intelligible dialects are classified as separate languages, and, on the contrary, very distinct varieties of speech forms are classified as a single language. It is complicated because under such a prevailing situation, it is very difficult to determine the exact number of languages spoken in the state. For example, most of the mutually intelligible dialects of Kuki-Chin, many of which are represented in the Southern district of Churachandpur, viz., Thadou, Paite, Vaiphei, Simte, Gangte and Zou, are classified as belonging to separate languages simply on account of the legal recognition as one of the scheduled tribes by the constitution of India. On the contrary, the mutually unintelligible speech forms of Tangkhul spoken in Ukhrul

district are classified as a single language simply on account of the fact that the constitution of India does not recognize them as separate languages/tribes. David Mortensen (2003: 1) contends that “The Tangkhuls are quite diversified linguistically, and the speech varieties of most Tangkhul villages are not mutually intelligible with those of the neighbouring villages (though the similarities are large enough to facilitate the rapid learning of one another’s languages)”. A similar observation on Tangkhul is also found in the work of Brown (1837), who also is of the opinion that Tangkhul is a group of languages, rather than a single language. Thus, under the existing scenario, it has become customary to use the term “language” to refer to a linguistic variety spoken by a group of people who are formally recognized as a separate tribe, otherwise their speech is not recognized as a language regardless of whether it is mutually intelligible with another form or not. The anomaly in classifying the languages of Manipur started with the tribe recognition act of Manipur in 1956. Under the prevailing act even with a homogenous community which speaks mutually intelligible dialects, those dialects can be classified as separate languages and, on the contrary, a heterogeneous community which speaks mutually unintelligible speech varieties can have those varieties classified together as a single language. Since then, the tradition of equating tribe with language just on account of their legal recognition has led to anomalies in the classification of the languages of Manipur. Thus, the general belief that a tribe should have a separate language overrides the pure linguistic criteria for the determination of whether a particular speech form is a language or dialect. If we are to go by purely linguistic criteria, we will call the different languages of the Kuki-Chin people as dialects and the different speech forms of the Tangkhul people as separate languages.

Studying the languages of Manipur is also difficult and at the same time confusing because of constant shifts in ethnic loyalty. It is on account of such shifts in ethnic loyalty that the Old Kuki groups in Manipur viz., Aimol, Anal, Maring, Mayon, Monsang, Lamgang, Chothe, Chiru, and Kom, have declared themselves as Nagas, with whom they share no linguistic affinity. Burling (2003: 188) also noted that:

A few groups whose language a linguist would without hesitation classify as ‘Kuki’ have declared themselves to be ‘Naga’. Everyone agrees that Nagas and Kukis are sharply distinct ethnically. Indeed they have been killing each other from time to time. Nevertheless, exactly which groups are ethnic Nagas and which are ethnic Kukis can be disputed. Unless the people actually shift languages, which of course, they sometimes do, a shift in ethnic and political affiliation should not change a group’s language classification, but when people talk in new ways about ethnic affiliation, they often talk in new (and confused) ways about language affiliation as well.

The social relationships which different linguistic groups enter into with one another are often political in nature and are seldom based on genetic relationship. Thus, Manipur presents an intriguing area of research in that a researcher can end up making wrong conclusions about the relationships of the various linguistic groups unless one thoroughly understands which groups of languages

are genetically related and distinct from other ethnic or political groupings. In order to avoid such misconceptions in the study of languages, it has become all the more imperative that ethnicity and political groupings should not be used for the determination of membership within a particular linguistic group.

3. LANGUAGES OF MANIPUR

Manipuri is the official language of the state as well as the lingua franca among the various ethnic groups in the state. It is the only language of the state to be included under the 8th scheduled languages of the Indian constitution. The rest of the languages are non-scheduled languages, many of them spoken by dwindling number of speakers. Speakers of these non-scheduled languages are accorded the status of scheduled tribes by the government of India. According to the 2001 census of Manipur, there are a total of 29 scheduled tribes in Manipur (see table 1 at the end of this section). This section presents a brief profile of the languages of the state. The population figures for languages which are spoken by more than 10,000 speakers are drawn from the Census of India 2001, while the remaining languages spoken by less than 10,000 speakers, which are not included in the census of India 2001, are taken from the primary census abstract of Manipur 2001. The figures for a few languages, such as Tarao, Kharam and Poumai, whose figures are not available from either of the sources stated above, are taken from *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. The long standing political instability of the state that began in the colonial period and has continued even after the post-independence period has made the state inaccessible to the outside world to conduct research into the languages of the state. Given the historical background, there are not many grammatical descriptions available for most of the languages.

3.1. Manipuri

Region: Manipuri, or Meithei/Meitei as it is known, is primarily spoken in the state of Manipur. Substantial populations of speakers have fled to neighboring Assam (Sylhet, Sibsagar and Silchar), Bangladesh (Dacca and Mymensing) and the hills of Tripura due to either internal wars or wars with Burma (Chelliah 1997). Chelliah is also of the opinion that the Manipuris were taken to Burma as captives in 1819 during invasions by Burmese.

Population: The population of Manipuri speakers, according to the Census of India (2001), is 1,466,705.

Dialects: The exact number of Manipuri dialects is somehow not made clear by the previous researchers working on the language. According to Yashawanta Singh (1995), there are four major Manipuri dialects, viz., Andro, Phayeng, Sekmai, and Khakching, though Thoudam (1980) lists eight dialects, viz., Kakching, Thanga, Nongmaikhong, Ngaikhong, Moirang, Lanthel, Palel and Tokcing. Chelliah (1997) suggests the list of dialects given by Thoudam is just geographical names rather than dialectal names of Manipuri. Chelliah is also of the opinion that the Lois and Sekmai, who are segregated from the main Hindu Meiteis, speak a different dialect. In addition to the documented dialects, Sekmai

and Pheyeng, Chelliah (1997) believes that Brahmin Manipuri and Muslim Manipuri, which have not been documented by other researchers, are different dialects.

Classification: Manipuri is often regarded as constituting a genetic subgroup within the so called Kuki-Chin-Naga group. But Burling (2003) and Thurgood (2003) pointed out that there is no clear evidence to show that these subgroups constitute a larger super group, though Manipuri shares some lexical similarities with the Kuki-Chin languages and Tangkhul due to prolonged contact between these languages. The position of Manipuri within Tibeto-Burman is yet to be properly determined.

Language use: It is the official language of Manipur. The speakers of Manipuri also use English, Hindi and Bengali.

Language development: It should be noted here that the Meitei Mayek script was used until the eighteenth century before it was replaced by the Bengali script. Recently, the Meitei Mayek script was reintroduced as the writing system of the Manipuris (see *Manipur Gazette* 1980 for the approval of Meitei Mayek).

Grammatical Description: A fairly good number of grammatical descriptions have been done on the language. Some of which are listed below:

- 1) G. H. Damant. 1875. *Notes on Manipuri grammar*.
- 2) A. J. Primrose. 1887. *Manipuri grammar*.
- 3) A. J. Primrose. 1888. *A Manipuri grammar, vocabulary, and phrase book*.
- 4) T. C. Hodson. 1908. *The Meithei*. [Comparative vocabulary and grammar 157-80; 'Mumit Kappa' in 'archaic Meithei', modern Meithei, and with interlinear translation 188-211, fluent translation 125ff.; Hrangkhoh vocab., 157-80.]
- 5) William Pettigrew. 1912. *Manipuri (Meitei) grammar*.
- 6) Robert Shafer. 1961. *Native names of some birds and plants in Manipur, India*.
- 7) Robert Shafer. 1966. *Some Manipuri words from archaic Kukish dialects*.
- 8) Ningthoukhongjam Khelchandra Singh. 1964. *Manipuri to Manipuri & English dictionary*.
- 9) Inder Singh. 1975. *Manipuri phonetic reader*.
- 10) Madhubala P Devi. 1979. *Manipuri grammar*. Unpublished PhD dissertation.
- 11) P. C. Thoudam. 1980. *A grammatical sketch of Meiteiron*.
- 12) Warlbam Raghmani Singh. 1989. *The Kwatha dialect of Meitei*.
- 13) Shiro Yabu. 1992. *The linguistic position of the Meitei language*.
- 14) D. N. S. Bhat and M. S. Ningomba. 1997. *Manipuri grammar*.
- 15) Shobhana L Chelliah. 1997. *A grammar of Meithei*.
- 16) Shobhana L Chelliah. 2003. *Meithei*.
- 17) Chungkham Jashawanta Singh. 2000. *Manipuri grammar*.
- 18) Amy Kim & Seung Kim. 2008. *Meitie (Manipuri) speakers in Bangladesh: A sociolinguistic survey*.

Note: For a more complete list of works on Manipuri see: Shobhana L Chelliah. 1990. *A bibliography of Meiteiron (Manipuri) linguistics*.

3.2. Kuki-Chin Languages

For the purpose of the present study, the Kuki-Chin languages of Manipur are divided into Old Kuki and Northern Kuki-Chin, as proposed by Grierson (1904).

3.2.1 Old Kuki

The Old Kuki languages are spoken by dwindling numbers of speakers, many of them being used only in the home or village domain. Also, these languages are neither taught in schools nor used in mass media such as radio⁴ and television. Owing to their social, political and economic disadvantages, speakers have to depend on the valley for their government jobs, education and to market their agricultural products. Most of the Old Kuki groups are settled in the foot-hills surrounding the valley. This has facilitated frequent contact with the plain Manipuris. On average, most of the Old Kuki groups today speak by far more fluent Manipuri than any other tribal groups in the state. This intense contact with the Manipuris who populate the valley is likely to threaten their languages in the near future. The UNESCO report (2009) has listed most of these languages either as extinct or critically endangered. See the following website:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/unesco/themes/languages-and-multilingualism/endangered-languages/>.

1. Aimol

Region: The speakers of Aimol are found in three districts of Manipur, viz., Chandel, Senapati and Churuchandpur. In Chandel district they are found in Aimol Khullen, Khunjai, Khodamphai, Ngairong, Chingunghut, Aimol Tampak, Kumirei, Satu, Unapal, Khudengthabi. In Senapati district the settlements of Aimols include Tuikhong, and Karam Thadoi. In Churachandpur district they are found at Luichungbum Kha-Aimol (near Loktak Lake). (Consultant: C. D. Aimol, a native scholar). To the best of my knowledge, the speakers of Aimol are not found in the neighboring states of Tripura and Mizoram. But a few Aimol households live along with other Kuki-Chin speakers in and around Balisor village, located 30 kilometres away from Silchar (Assam). A pilot survey conducted in Balisor village in February 2010 by a combined team [including the author] of the Department of Linguistics, Assam University, and Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, reveals that the people of Balisor village are a mixture of Aimol, Changsen (Thadou), Chongloi (Thadou), Vaiphei, and Hmar who no longer speak their own languages but instead speak a language known as Syriem or Fyriem, which is another Kuki-Chin language hardly known to the outside world. According to Sangthang Aimol (a resident of Balisor village), there are four other Syriem-speaking villages, two of them, viz., Noxa, also

⁴ The All India Radio station at Imphal transmits its program mainly in Manipuri, and partly in the languages of wider communication: English and Hindi. Out of the total broadcast time only 25-30 minutes are allocated for major tribal languages, viz., Thadou, Paite, Hmar, Tangkhul, Kabui, and Mao.

known as Nengpur, and Bagbahar, are located in Hilakandi district, and the other two, viz., Syriemkho and Nagathol, are located in Cachar district. It is to be noted here that all of them (Syriems) are highly competent in Sylheti (a local form of Bengali widely spoken in Barak valley of Assam) as a result of intense contact.

Population: 2529 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Closely related varieties: Related to Chiru, Purum and reportedly intelligible to Koirang.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904, Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Aimol is not taught in schools nor used in radio or mass media. The language is restricted to use in homes and in community life such as churches. Most speakers of Aimol in Manipur are highly proficient in Manipuri. The younger generations use mostly Roman script while elderly people still use Manipuri written in Bengali script.

Christian writings: Aimol is one of the least studied languages in Manipur. There is no written literature available in the language. The only piece of literature available in the language is a hymn book called *Biakruo La*. The New Testament of the Bible, called *Chongthar Rabu*, is under preparation and is expected to be published soon.

Dissertation: Shamungou Singh. 1995. A descriptive grammar of Aimol. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

2. Anal

Region: The Anals are concentrated mainly in the Chandel, Chakpikarong and Tegnoupal subdivisions of Chandel district. One or two villages are also found in Myanmar (Gangmumei Kamei 1985).

Population: 23,191 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Namfau.

Dialects: Laizo, Mulsom. Anal is closest to Lamgang.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904, Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Anal is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Most speakers of Anal are also comfortable bilinguals in Manipuri. Younger generations use Roman script while Manipuri written in Bengali script is used by the older generation.

Christian writings: The first New Testament (with Psalms) called *Pedinna Hrin Ru Tuna Lla* was published in 1983 by the Bible Society of India. An Anal hymn book called *Puruwng Piipana* (with Tonic Solfa) was published by Anal Naga Baptist Association Literature Committee in 1988. Other hymn books include *Zochara Hla* and *Anal Hla Hrin*, meant for informal church gatherings.

Primer: The only piece of grammatical work available in Anal is a primer for primary education called *Thimbol*. In the past Anal was introduced up to class V, but it is now no longer taught.

3. Chiru

Region: The Chirus are found in three districts of Manipur, viz., Tamenglong, Senapati, and Churachandpur. There are two villages in Tamenlong west, viz., Lamdangmei and Dolang, seven in Senapati, viz., Dolang Khonou/Khoirok, Chiru Nungsai, Kangchup, Thangzing, Sadu, Bungte and Uram village. Charoi Khullen in Churachandpur, Vaithou in Thoubal district and one village near Jiribam (consultant: Ngamkholen Chiru a lecturer from Manipur).

Population: 5622 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Chhori.

Closely related varieties: Kom and Koirang.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904).

Language use: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Speakers have high proficiency in Manipuri. Older people read and write in Manipuri written in Bengali script, but the younger generation prefer English in Roman script.

Dissertation: Salam Brojen Singh. 2008. Chiru grammar. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

Christian writing: Chiru is also one of the least documented languages of Manipur. There is no literature on the language. The Bible has not been translated into Chiru. Ngamkholen Chiru reported that the people in the villages used the Manipuri Bible (written in Bengali script) while the educated people used the English Bible. According to him, the New Testament of the Bible in Chiru is in press and it will be circulated very soon. The only Christian writing available is a hymn book called *Tiekna Lah*.

4. Chothe

Region: The speakers of Chothe are mainly concentrated in 15 villages in Southeast Chandel district of Manipur, viz., Khongkhang, Chandolpokpi, Lunghu, Lirungtabi, Zeonthlang, Ajouhu, Pumthapokpi, Laininghu, Chandrapoto, Tampakhu, Purumchumbang, Old Wangparal, New Wangparal, Lungle, Shalemthar and Happy Bethel. There is one Chothe village in Bishnupur district of Manipur known as Lamlanghupi (Consultant: Theivar Lung, native language consultant working for Central Institute of Indian languages, Mysore). The speakers of Chothe are also reported in Nagaland and near the Myanmar border. Historians describe the Chothe as Purums, as they settled at a place called Purum in Chandel district.

Population: 2762 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Chothe, Chowte, Chawte.

Closely related varieties: Tarao and Purum.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904, Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Chothe is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. The purest Chothe is spoken in Purum Khullen. The speakers of Chothe are highly proficient in Manipuri. Chothe speakers of *Lamlanghupi* in Bishnupur district also speak Rongmei/Kabui, as they live in close settlement with the Rongmei.

Younger generations use mostly Roman while the elder generation use Manipuri written in Bengali script.

Dissertation: H. Brojen. 2003. A descriptive grammar of Chothe. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

5. Hmar

Region: Hmar speakers are scattered over a vast area comprising Northern Mizoram, Churachandpur district of Manipur and parts of N. C. Hills and Cachar districts in Assam.

Population: 83,404 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Hamar, Mhar, Hmari

Closely related varieties: Closest to Mizo. According to Grierson (1904), the name “Hmar” is related to the Chin word *mar*, which among the Hakas and other tribes is the name given to Lushais (now Mizo).

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904, Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Hmar is taught up to graduate level in Manipur and Assam. Recently, the Academic Council of Assam University passed a resolution to introduce Hmar in colleges of Assam under its affiliation. Hmar speakers of Manipur use Manipuri while Assamese and Bengali are used in Assam. Ethnic Hmars living in Mizoram speak Mizo as their first language. The All India Radio station at Imphal also broadcasts Hmar programs for 25 minutes daily.

Grammar: P. N. Dutta Baruah & V. L. T. Bapui. 1996. *Hmar grammar*.

Dictionary: Rochunga Pudaite. 2008. *English-Hmar dictionary*.

Christian writings: The gospel of Mark, translated by F. J. Sandy of the Eldh Presbyterian Mission at Aizawl and published in 1920, was the first portion of the scripture printed in Hmar. Later the whole New Testament was translated by H. S. Thanglung and H. L. Sela, published in 1946. The entire Bible in Hmar is called *Pathien Thuthienghlim*. *Hla Tharbu* and *Independent Hlarbu* are the common hymn books in Hmar.

6. Koireng

Region: According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009), Koireng speakers are found in five villages in and around Saikul and Kangpokpi subdivisions of Senapati district; three villages south of Moirang in Bishnupur district; and two villages near Pallel in Chandel district.

Population: 1410 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Kwoireng, Koireng, Kolren, Koren.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904). Based on two samples and a list of standard words prepared by Babu Bisharup Singh, Grierson noted that Koireng essentially agrees with Hallam, Kom, Rangkhoh, and Langrong, but for some features seems most closely related to Khongzai [Thadou]. The speakers of Thadou are also known as Khongsai or Khongzai by the plain Manipuris in Manipur.

Language use: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Adults can read and write Manipuri written in Bengali script while younger speakers use English in Roman script.

7. *Kom*

Region: Kom speakers are found in three districts; Churachandpur, Tamenglong, and Senapati. Some of the villages of Kom in Manipur are Makokching, Saikul, and Sinam-Kom in Senapati district; K. R. Lane of Imphal, Kharam and Ichum in Imphal West; Thei-Ong in Imphal East; Sengpanjar, Kangathai, Khoirentak, Sagang and Kom-Keirap in Churachandpur district; Tonsen and Mahou-Tera in Chandel district and Mantak in Thoubal district. Source: LIS India, CIIL, Mysore: <http://www.lisindia.net/kom/kom.html>

Population: 14,602 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Komrem is the common nomenclature of the Old Kukis in Manipur, e.g., Kom, Aimol, Chiru.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904, Thurgood 2003).

Language use: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Some speakers of Aimol, Koireng, and Chiru also understand Kom. Most of the speakers of Kom are fluent in Manipuri. The younger generation use Roman script while the older generation can read and write in Manipuri written in Bengali script.

Dictionary: M. Telent had written Dictionary of Kom in 1992. (see Language Information Services (LIS)-India, CIIL, Mysore).

Christian writings: The gospel of Mathew was translated by Lunkhohen in 1954. Later the first New Testament combined with Psalms, called *Tongtep Ther leh Hla*, was translated by Daniel Kom and published by the Bible Society of India in 1976. The entire Bible in Kom, called *Pathen Tong Intheng*, was published by the Bible Society of India. The Hymn books include *Christian Hlather*.

Dissertation: Chongom Damrengthang Aimol. 2007. A descriptive grammar of Kom. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

8. *Kharam*

Region: Kharam is primarily spoken in Senapati district of Manipur. The major settlements of Kharam in Manipur are Tuirenphai, Laikot, Karam, Loikot Phaijol, Purum Likli, Laikot Kharam, Tampak Kharam, New Keithel Manbi Kharam and Kharam Khulen (consultant: Khaidem Dutta Singha, PhD scholar working on Kharam at Assam University, Silchar).

Population: According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009) the total population of Kharam is 1,400.

Classification: Like the speakers of other Old Kuki languages, the Kharams are also identified as Nagas in Manipur, though their language shares a lot of lexical similarities with the Northern Kuki-Chin languages, particularly in terms of body parts and kinship terms. According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009), Kharam belongs to the Northern Kuki-Chin group of languages.

Language use: The language is not taught in schools nor used in radio or mass media.

9. Lamgang

Region: The speakers of Lamgang are mainly found in Chandel district of Manipur. According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009), there are six villages in the west of Chandel district east of Sugnu, six villages on the road between Chalong and Mombi New, and 18 villages on the roads between Pallel and Chandel town and Pallel and Sibong. Thounaojam & Chelliah (2007: 2), citing *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005), stated that Lamgang speakers are also found in two villages in Nagaland and one village in Myanmar on the border with Southeast Manipur.

Population: 5894 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Lamkang, Hiroi-Lamgang, Lamkaang, Lamkang Naga.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904); Thounaojam & Chelliah (2007: 9) agree with *Ethnologue* (Gordon 2005) in classifying it as a Northern Kuki language. Gordon (2005) states that Lamgang is closely related to Anal.

Language use: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. According to Thounaojam & Chelliah (2007), the Lamgang speakers have borrowed a lot of lexical items from Manipuri as a result of intense contact with the Manipuri speakers. Thounaojam & Chelliah also pointed out that the socio, political and economic condition of Lamgang speakers is such that they have to depend on the valley of Manipur for their jobs and their livelihood, and as a result there is the possibility erosion of the Lamgang language in near future.

Christian writings: The New Testament of the Bible was translated into Lamgang in 2002.

Grammar: Harimon Thounaojam and Shobhana L. Chelliah. 2007. The Lamkang language: Grammatical sketch, texts and lexicon.

10. Monsang

Region: The Monsang are primarily found in the Chandel district of Manipur. Today, there are five villages, viz., Liwachaning, Heibunglok, Liwa Sarei, Japhou, and Monsang Pantha (consultant: Morning Monsang research scholars at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong).

Population: 2130 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Moshang, Monshang, Mushang, Mawshang.

Closely related varieties: Closest to Moyon and Anal.

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin. (*Ethnologue* Lewis 2009).

Language use: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Speakers of Monsang are fluent in Manipuri. The younger generation use mostly Roman script.

Christian writings: Monsang has no written literature except a hymn book called *Thangpa Lha*. The Mosang Bible is in press.

11. Moyon

Region: The Moyons are primarily found in the Chandel district of Manipur. They are mainly found in 14 villages including Moyon Khullen, Khongjom, Mitong, Komlathabi, Penaching, and Heigru Tampak in Chandel district of Manipur.

Population: 2970 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Alternate names: Moyon, Mayon, Mayol.

Closely related varieties: Related to Monsang and Anal.

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin. (*Ethnologue* Lewis 2009).

Language use: Moyon is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Moyon speakers used Manipuri quite fluently. The younger generation use mostly Roman script while the older generation can read and write in Manipuri written in Bengali script. They are also conversant with Monsang and Anal.

12. Purum

There are two different communities known by the name “Purum”: the Chothe who are known as Purums and the Purums of Purum Likli and Purum Khullen. These two communities are found mainly in Chandel, Bishenpur and Senapati districts of Manipur. Chothes known as Purums are mostly found in Chandel district and one village in Bishenpur district (Lamlanghupi). These Chothes call themselves Purums and Chothes interchangeably. There is another linguistic community in Senapati district known by the same name, Purum. Due to this reason there is a lot of confusion in the identification of the two communities in question. Linguistically and culturally, the two communities are closely related. This factor adds further confusion in differentiating the non-Chothe Purums from the Chothe Purums. However, we can differentiate the former from the latter in that no non-Chothe Purum people live either in Chandel or Bishenpur districts. They are found only in Senapati district of Manipur. Today, the Purum Likli and Purum Khullen of Senapati district are the only two Purum villages found in Manipur.

Population: The Population of Purums according to the Manipur primary census abstract 2001 is 571. Certain sections of the community feel that the real figure would not reach 571, as Purum Khullen has a mixed population of Kom and Purum speakers. There are comparatively fewer Purum speakers in this village at present. Hence, Purum Likli is the Purum village which is least disturbed by speakers of other communities, unlike the Purum Khullen.

Closely related varieties: Chiru, Aimol and Kom.

Classification: Old Kuki (Grierson 1904).

Status of the language: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. The Purum Likli and Purum Khullen are surrounded by the Manipuris, Kukis, Koms and Nepalīs in all directions. Due to language contact with all these languages, Manipuri, which is the most dominant among them, has influenced the Purum language in a considerable way. Today, most of the Purums are highly competent in Manipuri.

Dissertation: Gopendro Singh. 2003. A descriptive grammar of Purum. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

Note: The above report on Purum is mainly based on the paper presented by Karung, Tarun Kom entitled “Purum: An Endangered Language” at a National Seminar-Cum-Workshop on the Emerging Linguistic Scene in North East India at NEHU, Shillong, in 2007.

13. Tarao

Region: The speakers of Tarao are mainly concentrated in the hills of Chandel district. According to Jashawanta (2002), the Tarao villages of Manipur are Tarao Khullen (Tarao Laimanai), Leishokching, Khuringmul and Heikamul, of which Heikamul is the most recently established one, situated near Pallel. About eight families are still at Shanakeithel (Ukhrul district). Jashawanta also mentioned six clans of Tarao, viz., (1) Khullen (2) Katrimsa, (3) Cana, (4) Siloy-Sanei, (5) Manthang-Manci and (6) Kahlangsa. Cana is further divided into four sub clans: (i) Leikhan, (ii) Teileap, (iii) Sary, and (iv) Thamon.

Population: 870 (*Ethnologue*, Gordon 2005).

Alternate names: Tarao, Tarau, Taraotrong,

Closely related varieties: Closest to Chothe.

Classification: Based on the earlier writers such as T. C. Hodson (1908), R. B. Pemberton (1835), and J. Shakespear (1912), Chungkham Jashawanta Singh (2002) is of the opinion that Tarao is an Old Kuki language. According to *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009), Tarao belongs to the Northern Kuki-Chin group.

Language use: Tarao is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media. Speakers also use both Manipuri written in Bengali script and in Roman script. The older generation read and write Manipuri written in Bengali script, while younger people prefer Roman script.

Grammar: Chungkham Jashawanta Singh. 2002. *Tarao grammar*.

3.2.2. Northern Kuki-Chin

1. Thadou⁵

Region: Thadou or Kuki, as it is known, is by far the largest Northern Kuki-Chin language, spoken primarily in the Indian state of Manipur and in the adjoining states of Nagaland and Assam. In Myanmar (Burma) the language is also spoken along with other Kuki-Chin languages, viz., Tiddim Chin, Lai, Zahau, Sizang, Mizo and several languages whose number is difficult to quantify. In Manipur, they are scattered throughout all the hill districts. In the southern district of Churachandpur, they live alongside closely related languages, viz., Paite, Simte, Gangte, Vaiphei, Hmar and Zou. In the north, they share contiguous area with the Mao and Maram Nagas along the entire stretch of National Highway 39. In the northwest they live with the Rongmei Naga along National Highway 53

⁵ The settlements of Thadou speakers in Ukhrul and Tamenglong districts of Manipur have considerably shrunk after the ethnic clash between the Nagas and the Kukis which erupted in the early nineties.

bordering the Cachar district of Assam. In the east, they live alongside the Tangkhul Naga. Towards the southeast, their settlement extends as far as to the extreme border town of Moreh bordering Myanmar.

Population: According to the 2001 Census of India, Thadou as a mother tongue was returned by 190,595 people, and Kuki was returned by 52,873 people (see section 4.2. for further discussion on the census report).

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin (Grierson 1904 and Thurgood 2003).

Grammatical writings: Thadou has received more attention from linguists, both Indians and foreigners, than any other Kuki-Chin language spoken in Manipur. Available works on Thadou include the following:

- 1) R. Stewart. 1856. *A slight notice on the grammar of the Thadou or New Kookie language.*
- 2) T. C. Hodson. 1905. *Thado grammar.*
- 3) William Shaw. 1929. *Notes on the Thadou Kukis.*
- 4) M. S. Thirumalai. 1971. *Some aspects of negation in Thadou* [Papers and talks delivered at the Summer School of Linguistics, Mysore].
- 5) M. S. Thirumalai. 1972. *Thadou phonetic reader.*
- 6) Shree Krishan. 1980. *Thadou: A grammatical sketch.*
- 7) Boisi Hangsing. 1972. *Thadou Kuki dictionary.*
- 8) T. S. Agou Singson. 2001. *Thadou Kuki Suonmantam dictionary.*
- 9) Larry Hyman and T. Haokip. 2004 draft. *Kuki-Thaadow grammar.*
- 10) Pauthang Haokip. 2007. *Thadou-Kuki word book: A classified vocabulary.*

Language use: Thadou is taught up to class XII (twelve) standard as a subject of instruction. The language is also taught at the primary level in Nagaland under the name Kuki language. Most speakers of Thadou can speak Manipuri. Two radio stations at Imphal and Kohima broadcast Thadou programs daily. In Imphal the program is broadcast under the name “Thadou program”, whereas in Kohima it is broadcast under the name “Kuki program”.

Christian writings: The gospel of John translated by Ngulhau Thomson and revised and prepared by the American Baptist Missionary William Pettigrew was published by the Bible Society of India under the name “Thadou-Kuki” in 1942. Later, the complete version of the Bible translated by Tongkhojang Lunkim and published by the Bible Society of India in 1971 came to be known as the “Kuki Bible”. Hymn books in Thadou include *Lathah bu* and *Houbung la*.

2. Paite

Region: Paite is the second largest Northern Kuki-Chin language, primarily spoken in Churachandpur district of Manipur. Some of the important settlements of Paites in Churachandpur district are: New Lamka, Pearson, Bungmual, Khuga dam (Mata), Tuithapi, and in the district sub divisions of Thanlon and Singat. In Myanmar (Burma), the language is subsumed under Tiddim-Chin. The speakers are also found in Mizoram.

Population: 64,100 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Paite or Paihte.

Dialects: Bukpi (Bukpui), Dapzal (Dapzar), Dim, Dimpi, Lamzang, Lousau, Saizang, Sihzang, Telzang (Teizang), Tuichiap.

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin subgroup (Grierson 1904 & Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Paite is taught up to graduate level as a subject of instruction in Manipur. The All India Radio station at Imphal broadcasts Paite programs daily for 25 minutes. Paite speakers also use Manipuri and Mizo.

Christian writings: The first Bible of the Paite called *Laisiang Thukhun Lui leh Thukhun Thak Kigawm* (Old and New Testament) was translated by Nengzachin and committee and published by the Bible Society of India in 1971.

Grammatical writings: The most notable grammatical works in the language include the following:

- 1) T. C. Tiankham. 1948. *English-Paite-Manipuri word book*.
- 2) H. Ginpau. 1960. *School English grammar I*.
- 3) T. Gougin. 1950. *English-Hindustani Paite primer*.
- 4) T. Chinzam. 1964. *English Paite dictionary*.
- 5) H. Kamkhenthang. 1972. *English-Paite dictionary*.
- 6) B. B. Kumar, et al. 1975. *Hindi Paite dictionary*.
- 7) B. B. Kumar, et al. 1977. *Paite (Tedin Chin) Hindi self teacher*.
- 8) V. Thanglian. 1978. *Paite English vocabulary*.
- 9) Kaizasong, Guite. 1978. *School English grammar II*.
- 10) K. P Guite. 1983. *English Paite self taught*.
- 11) T. Chinzam. 1989. *Paite reader III*.
- 12) K. Gouzagin. 1989. *Meitei pau Zilna Laibu (Manipuri learning book parts I & II)*.
- 13) Norem, Saratchandra Singh. 2006. *Paite grammar*.

3. Vaiphei

Region: The third largest Northern Kuki-Chin language of Manipur is Vaiphei. The speakers of Vaiphei are distributed mainly in Churachandpur district. Their major settlements are Lingsiphai, Tangnom, and Kangvai. They are also sparsely distributed in other districts of Manipur, where they are partially or completely assimilated with the Thadous.

Population: 39,673 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Bhaipei, Vaipei, Veiphei.

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin. (*Ethnologue*, Lewis 2009).

Language use: Vaiphei is taught up to X (ten) standard under the Board of Education of Manipur. The All India Radio station at Imphal broadcasts Vaiphei programs once in every week for 15 minutes. Like most of the tribal languages of the state, the speakers of Vaiphei use Roman script as their writing system.

Christian writings: The gospel of John was translated into Vaiphei by Walkin R. Robert and published by the Bible Society of India in 1917. The New Testament with Psalms was translated by Siaklam in 1957. Later the entire translation of the Bible was published in 1981 by the Trinitarian Bible Society in London.

Primer: S. Tinal Vaiphei. 1990. *Zillai Thumal Bu*.

Grammar: Henzagen Vaiphei. 1996. *Vaiphei grammar*.

4. Zou

Region: The majority of Zou speakers are distributed in Singat Subdivision of Churachandpur district and a substantial population in Sugnu areas of Chandel district. Some of the villages of Zou in and around Churachandpur town are Zouvang, Zou colony, Kamdou veng, Tuitengphai, etc.

Population: 20,857 (Census of India 2001).

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin. (*Ethnologue* Lewis 2009).

Language use: Zou is taught up to X (ten) standard as a subject of instruction as a major Indian language under the board of education Manipur. The language is not used in radio nor in mass media, both print and electronic.

Christian writings: The New Testament, translated into Zou by Semkhopau Samte, T. Tungnung and P. Kaizakham, was published by the Bible Society of India in 1967. A revised New Testament called *Thuhun Tha leh Sam Labupi* (with Psalms) was published in 1981 by the Bible Society of India. The entire Bible in Zou, called *Pasian Laisiengthou: Tulai Zo Haam a kilekhie*, was published in the year 1983 by the Diocese of Impal, Bishop's house, Imphal, Manipur. Later, another version of the Bible was translated by Taithul with the approval of the Bible Society of India, and was published in 1992. Zou has two hymn books called *Labupi* and *Lathabu*.

5. Gangte⁶

Geographical location: The Gangtes are mainly found in Henglep subdivision of Churachandpur district. There are around 37 villages in Churachandpur. Some of the important villages are Chengkonpang, Gangpimol, Khousabung, and Vantungbung etc. The speakers of the language are also found in Myanmar.

Population: 14,500 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Gante or Rante.

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin (Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Gangte is not used in school nor in radio or mass media.

Christian writings: The first gospel of Matthew was translated and published in 1952 by the Bible Society of India. Later the whole New Testament was translated by Thangzakham and Vungzadal and was published in 1959. The entire Bible, called *Pathien Lehkhabu Thiengtho*, was translated by Khaigin Gangte and published in 1991 by the Bible Society of India. A few magazines and newspapers are also available in Gangte.

⁶ In recent times, some Gangte speakers have declared themselves to be Mizo.

6. *Simte*

Region: The speakers of Simte are mainly concentrated in Churachandpur district of Manipur. Major settlements of Simte in Churachandpur district are Mingjang, Tubuong, Simveng, New Bazar, Thanlon, Leikangpai, Zouthang, Shumtuk, Monjon, Pamjal, Sasinoujang, Tallian, Dumsao, Khungung, Lungthul, Singhat, Moijin, Maokot, Suangdai, and Suangpuhmun.

Population: 10,225 (Census of India 2001).

Classification: Northern Kuki-Chin (Thurgood 2003).

Language use: Simte is not used in school nor in radio or mass media.

Dissertation: Naorem Brojen Singh. 2010. A descriptive grammar of Simte. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

Christian writings: The gospel of John was translated by Ramlien Pudaite and published by the Bible Society of India in 1957. The entire Bible, called *Laisiamthou*, was published in 1993.

Note: In addition to these Kuki-Chin languages, there are substantial numbers of Mizo or Lushei speakers in some parts of Churachandpur and in the border town of Moreh.

3.3. *Naga Languages*

1. *Zeme*

Region: The speakers of Zeme are distributed in the three states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. In Manipur, they are found in Tamenglong district viz., Tousem, Impa, Taguaram, and Mandeu. In Nagaland the speakers of Zeme are found in Jhaluke, Paren, Yangkhullen (Zeram), Yangkhunou (Bakie), and Medzephima in Kohima district of Nagaland. The important villages of Zeme in North Cachar district of Assam are Lodiram and Laisang.

Population: 34,110 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Kachcha-Naga or Empeo

Dialects: Paren, Njauna.

Classification: Grierson (1903) calls the language Empeo or Kachcha Naga and groups it under the Naga-Bodo subgroup along with Khoirao and Kabui. Burling (2003) on the other hand places it under the Zeme group.

Language use: The language is not used in schools nor in radio or mass media.

Christian writings: The New Testament in Zeme, called *Samdegai Karchibe*. There are two hymn books, viz., *Helew Kanchibe* and *Helew Karchibe*.

Dictionary: N. H. Pouhau and Hiaduing Newme. 2008. *Teluichu (An Anglo-Zeme dictionary)*.

2. Liangmai⁷

Region: The speakers of Liangmai are also distributed in the three states of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. In Manipur they are mainly found in Tamenglong district. Some of the important villages of Liangmai in Tamenglong district of Manipur are Namtiram, Phelong, Taningjan, Inen, Machenglong, Gaililong, and Makhuilongdi. In Senapati district they are found in the Kalatombi area of Senapati. In Nagaland they are found in Samjuiram, Jhaluke, Paren, and Medzephima districts of Kohima. In Assam they are found in the upper Barak valley.

Population: 34,232 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Kwoireng, Liyang, Liangmai, Liangmei, Kacha-Naga.

Classification: Grierson (1903) calls the language Kwoireng or Liyang and groups it under the Naga-Kuki subgroup. Burling (2003) places it under Zeme group.

Language use: The language is not used in school nor in radio or mass media. The speakers also use Manipuri but write in Roman script.

Christian writings: The Bible in Liangmei is called *Masan Bou Ariak*. There are two hymn books called *Hiuna Khombo Lui* and *Luisan*.

Dictionary: Dee Abonmai. 2006. *English-Liangmai sentence dictionary*.

3. Rongmei/Kabui

Region: The speakers of Rongmei are mainly distributed in Tamenglong district and in and around the Imphal valley. Speakers are also found in Cachar district of Assam and in Nagaland. Rongmei/Kabui is said to have different dialects, viz., Tamenglong dialect, Imphal valley dialect (inner dialects) and Cachar dialect in Assam (outer dialect), which are understood to be mutually intelligible dialects.

Population: 94,758 (Census of India 2001).

Classification: Grierson (1903) calls the language Kabui or Kapwi, and groups it in the Naga-Bodo subgroup along with Khoirao, and Mikir. Burling (2003) on the other hand groups it under the Zeme group.

Alternate name: Kabui, Kapwi, Nruanghmei, Rongmei.

Language use: The speakers of Rongmei residing in Imphal valley are highly proficient in Manipuri, as they are surrounded by Manipuri speakers. The language is also taught up to class VIII as a subject of instruction in Manipur. The All India Radio station at Imphal also broadcasts programs under the name “Kabui program”.

Christian writings: The Bible of the Kabui, called *Nthamei Bible*, was written in 1989. The hymn book is called *Hymdai Lu*.

Dictionary: Fr. Francis. 1992. *First ever Rongmei Anglo Rongmei dictionary*.

⁷ The Liangmai, Rongmei and Zeme are together known as *Zeliangrong*, which is an ethnic grouping and not a linguistic grouping.

4. Koirao

Region: The speakers of Koirao inhabit the mountain ranges to the south of the Mao and Maram, but they identify themselves by the name “Thangal”. They are mainly concentrated in the Sadar Hill subdivision of Senapati district.

Population: 2348 (Manipur primary census abstract, 2001).

Classification: Grierson (1903) calls the language Khoirao and groups it under Naga-Bodo subgroup. Burling (2003) places it under the Zeme group.

Language use: Koirao is not used in school nor in radio or mass media. The speakers also use Manipuri written in Bengali script but Roman script is popularly used by the younger generation.

Dissertation: Th. Chandramani Singh. 2008. Structural analysis of Thangal. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

5. Mao

Region: The majority of the Mao speakers are found in Senapati district of Manipur and a few villages in the neighboring state of Nagaland.

Population: 77810 (Census of India 1991). The census figure for Mao speakers is not available in Census of India 2001 because the census was not taken in Senapati district of Manipur.

Alternate names: Mao or Sopvoma.

Dialects: Paomata. Breton (1997) says Paomata and Pome (alt. name for Poumei) are the same.

Classification: Grierson (1903) calls the language Sopvoma or Mao-Naga and groups it under the Naga-Kuki sub-group. Burling (2003) on the other hand places it under the Angami-Pochuri group.

Language use: Mao is taught up to class VIII as a subject of instruction. The All India Radio station at Imphal broadcasts Mao programs for 25 minutes daily. Speakers also use Manipuri, but write mostly in Roman script.

Christian writings: The Mao Bible was translated in 2001.

Grammar: P. P. Giridhar. 1994. *Mao grammar*.

6. Maram

Region: Most of the speakers of Maram are distributed throughout the Tadubi subdivision of Senapati district and the rest are distributed in the Kangpokpi subdivision of Senapati district. Most of the Maram villages are found along National Highway 39. Some of the villages along the national highway are Tumuyon Khullen, Mayangkhang, Rajaimai, Lower Sangkhongmei, Rümlung, New Maram, Maram Khullen, Willong Khullen and Katumei, concentrated in Senapati district of Manipur.

Population: 37,340 (Census of India 2001).

Dialects: Willong Circle, Maram Khullen Circle, T. Khullen, Ngatan.

Classification: Like Liangmai and Mao, Grierson (1903) groups Maram under the Naga-Kuki subgroup. Burling (2003) groups it under the Zeme group.

Language use: Men are more bilingual in Meitei than women. Most of the young people can read and write in Roman script.

Dissertation: Pebam Ibopishak Singh. 1984. A descriptive grammar of Maram. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Manipur University.

Article: Awadesh, Kumar Mishra. 2007. Some aspects of the morphology of Marām.

Christian writings: The New Testament in Maram is called *Bangpü Rasham*, and the hymn book is called *Tammatoilü*.

7. Maring

Region: In Manipur the Marings are distributed in the southwest in the mountainous regions along the northern border of Chandel district and in and around Tengnoupal subdivision of Chandel district.

Population: 22,326 (Census of India 2001).

Classification: According to Grierson (1903), Maring belongs to the Naga group. But Burling (2003) places it in the Tangkhul group. According to David Mortensen (2003: 8), “Lexically, [Maring] seems to have more in common with the Kuki-Chin languages than the Tangkhul languages, but it does not feature such characteristic Kuki-Chin features as stem alternation and pronominal clitics marking subject agreement ... On balance, it does not appear that Maring is part of the core Tangkhul group, although it seems certain that Maring and the Tangkhul languages do belong to the same top-level branch of the Tibeto-Burman family”.

Language use: Maring is not used in school nor in mass media or radio. The older generation still use Manipuri written in Bengali script while the younger generation use mostly Roman script.

Christian writings: The New Testament was translated into Maring in 2001.

8. Tangkhul

Region: Tangkhul territory covers the northeastern quadrant of Manipur. The speakers of Tangkhul are mainly concentrated in Ukhrul district of Manipur.

Population: 142,035 (Census of India 2001).

Alternate names: Tangkhul, Luhupa or Luppa. The language is also known as Tangkhul Tui among the Tangkhuls.

Classification: Grierson (1903) calls the language Luhupa or Luppa and groups it under the Naga-Kuki subgroup. Burling (2003) on the other hand places it in the Tangkhul group.

Tangkhul speech varieties: In spite of the diversity of Tangkhul languages, and the fact that most of the speech forms of Tangkhul villages are mutually unintelligible to each other, David Mortensen (2003) contends that the Tangkhul languages are closely related to one another and form a distinct subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman family. Mortensen divided the speech forms of Tangkhul into nine varieties as discuss below:

1). Standard Tangkhul: This is used as a medium of worship by the Tangkhul Christians. It is also used in education, government and for literary purposes. According to Mortensen (2003: 3), “This speech is mutually intelligible with the speech of Ukhrul town, but differs from it in several respects ... Standard Tangkhul is now accepted as the intra-tribal medium of communication by young and middle-aged Tangkhuls (although there are still older people who do not speak it) but it has not displaced the so-called ‘village dialects’—the highly local and diversified languages employed at a family and village level”.

2). Ukhrul: This speech is spoken in Ukhrul town, the largest settlement in the Tangkhul area. According to Mortensen most scholars working on Tangkhul fail to differentiate between this variety and Standard Tangkhul, which is used as a *lingua franca*.

3). Kachai: This variety is spoken by the people of Kachai village (in west-central Ukhrul district bordering Senapati district). It is quite distinct from Standard Tangkhul and the Ukhrul dialect. This speech variety is spoken by slightly more than 3000 people living in Kachai village.

4). Phadāng: Based on the wordlist collected by McCulloch (1859) from Phadāng village, Mortensen is of the opinion that Phadāng is intermediate between Ukhrul and Kachai. Mortensen (2003: 4) however, contends that “this is probably due in part to innovations that have occurred in the Kachai area since the collection of these data”.

5). Huishu: This variety is spoken in Huishu village located in the northeastern part of Ukhrul district, bordering Burma. According to Mortensen (2003: 4) this variety “is far more innovative than standard Tangkhul, Kachai, or Phadāng in its phonology, morphology, and lexicon. However, it still shares many of the distinctive characteristics of Tangkhul languages”, such as Champhung, Northern and Central Tangkhul, Khangoi, and Southern Tangkhul.

6). Champhung: According to Mortensen (2003: 4) this variety “seems to share some characteristics with Kachai and Phadāng, but these are as likely the result of conservation in these three languages as of shared innovation. Champhung is notable in preserving PTK final **-l*”.

7). Northern and Central Tangkhul: According to Mortensen (2003: 4), these varieties show great resemblance to each other and to the other varieties mentioned above, and also share certain amount of lexical similarities with Kuki-Chin languages.

8). Khangoi: According to Mortensen (2003: 5), this variety “seems to share only slightly more with the core Tangkhul group . . . than with Kamarupan languages generally and seems to share a good deal with the Kuki-Chin languages”.

9). Southern Tangkhul: Mortensen is of the opinion that this variety, which Brown (1837) calls Southern Tangkhul, is clearly a Kuki-Chin language, and there is no basis for classifying it as Tangkhul except for the tribal identity of its speakers.

Language use: Tangkhul is taught up to class XII (twelve) standard as a subject of instruction. The language is also used in programs of the All India Radio station at Imphal. The language is also used in magazines and newspapers.

Christian writings: The Bible of the Tangkhul is called *Kathara Tui* and the hymn book is called *Khokharumpao*.

Grammatical writings:

- 1) D. N. S. Bhat. 1969. Tangkhur-Naga vocabulary.
- 2) James A. Mattisoff. 1972. Tangkhul Naga and comparative Tibeto-Burman.
- 3) T. Luikham. 1974. Tangkhul (Wung) dictionary.
- 4) William Pettigrew. 1979. Tangkhul-Naga grammar and dictionary.
- 5) S. Arokianathan. 1980. Tangkhul-Naga phonetic reader.
- 6) S. Arokianathan. 1995. Tangkhul-English Hindi dictionary.
- 7) S. Arokianathan. 1987. Tangkhul-Naga grammar.
- 8) S. Arokianathan. 1995. Tangkhul-English-Hindi dictionary.
- 9) David Mortensen. 2003. Comparative Tangkhul.

9. *Poumai*

Region: The speakers of Poumai are mainly found in Senapati district of Manipur. Some of the important villages are Purul, Oinam, and Phuba.

Population: 51,000 (*Ethnologue*, Lewis 2009).

Alternate names: Poumei, Paumei, Pomai, and Pome. Poumai is close to Mao. Not the same as Puimei (Breton 1997: 217).

Classification: Poumai people were recognised as part of the Mao group until recently. *Ethnologue* (Lewis 2009) places it under the Angami-Pochuri group.

Language use: The speakers also use Manipuri but write mostly in Roman script.

Christian writing: the New Testament was translated in 1992. The hymn books in Poumai are *Poula* and *Loubvii*.

In addition to the languages described so far, there are substantial numbers of Khezha speakers in Ukhrul district in the northeastern part of Manipur. Kapfo (2005) reports that *Zhesami* in Mainpur and *Pfütsero* in Nagaland are the two biggest villages of the Khezha. Manipur is also the home of unclassified and endangered languages and dialects for which little or no information is known. Two such speech forms are Inpui and Khoibu. The only source of information on Khoibu is that of *The comparative vocabularies of Khoibu and Maring* collected by Brown (1837). Based on Brown's vocabularies, Grierson (1903) claimed that Maring and Khoibu are closely related languages. Today, Khoibu is threatened with possible extinction (See E-pao September 05, 2010 on Khoibu dialect not being put on UNESCO's list of endangered languages). Regarding Inpui, not much information is known. However, based on the preliminary information gathered by one of the PhD scholars working on Inpui (Pinky Devi by name), we have learnt that some Inpui speakers are found in Tamenglong district of Manipur, of which Haochong is the biggest village.

<i>SL.</i>	<i>Total Scheduled tribes</i>	<i>74,1141</i>
1.	Aimol	2529
2.	Anal	21242
3.	Angami	132
4.	Chiru	5622
5.	Chothe	2762
6.	Gangte	9442
7.	Hmar	42933
8.	Kabui	82386
9.	Kacha naga	42013
10.	Koirao	2348
11.	Koireng	1410
12.	Kom	14602
13.	Lamgang	5894
14.	Mao	4736
15.	Maram	1225
16.	Maring	23238
17.	all Mizo (Lushai) tribes	15164
18.	Monsang	2130
19.	Moyon	2970
20.	Paite	49271
21.	Purum	571
22.	Ralte	5
23.	Sema	13
24.	Simte	11065
25.	Suhte	1905
26.	Tangkhul	146075
27.	Thadou	182594
28.	Vaiphei	38267
29.	Zou	20567

Table 1: Scheduled tribe population of Manipur, 2001

Source: State Primary Census Abstract for Individual Scheduled Tribes, 2001.

4. LINGUISTIC SITUATION OF THE KUKI-CHIN IN MANIPUR

The remainder of this paper will be devoted to discussing the linguistic situation of Kuki-Chin speakers in Manipur. The socio-linguistic situation of the Kuki-Chin languages in Manipur is very interesting, and at the same time very complicated. Linguistically, it is very interesting because not only are many of the languages, such as Thadou, Paite, Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte, and Zou, mutually intelligible, but also many of the clan names are also the same. For example, clan names such as Hangsing, Singson, Guite, Lhungdim or Tungdim, and Chonthu are found among many of the Kuki-Chin tribes, even though the people speak different dialects. Linguistically, it is very complicated because, in spite of their mutual intelligibility and cultural similarities, they are classified as separate languages.

In Churachandpur district, where most of the Kuki-Chin languages are represented, viz., Thadou, Paite, Simte, Gangte, Zou, Vaiphei, Hmar and a few pockets of Mizo, the intelligibility is found to a greater extent than in other parts of Manipur. Their writing system too is the same, i.e., the Roman script. The linguistic situation in Churachandpur is such that people can understand each other's dialects and there is no dominant dialect. Their village setup is also such that they either live in mixed localities or in close proximity to each other, thereby facilitating the learning of each other's dialects. As different speakers meet almost every day in public places, such as schools, market places, churches and offices, code mixing and code switching has become a common phenomenon in Churachandpur. Usually two or more dialects are spoken in the same locality and as people meet frequently, a speaker of one dialect may switch over to another dialect or may mix his/her dialect with that of the dialect of the person he/she is talking to. For example, a speaker of Zou or Vaiphei may switch over to Thadou or Paite or may mix his/her dialect with that of Thadou or Paite during the course of his/her conversation and vice-versa.

As one moves away from Churachandpur district to other parts of Manipur where the Kuki-Chin dialects are spoken, the mutual intelligibility decreases. But, with some effort they can still communicate with each other in their respective dialects. It would be rather unusual and strange to see two Kuki-Chin speakers communicating in Manipuri even if they belong to different districts and are meeting for the first time.

Although Manipuri is widely spoken in other parts of Manipur, it has not taken root in Churachandpur district, as Manipuri speakers constitute a small proportion of the total population. The general level of competency in Manipuri among the Kuki-Chin speakers in Churachandpur district is comparatively low compared to other Kuki-Chin speakers elsewhere in the state. This is particularly true of the Hmar, Paite and Mizo speakers, with a large section of speakers having little or no knowledge of Manipuri. In sharp contrast to other parts of Manipur, where a tribal speaker has to learn Manipuri to communicate with not only the Manipuris but also with other groups in the state, most Manipuris residing in Churachandpur district have developed a fairly good understanding of some of the Kuki-Chin dialects as a result of prolonged intense contact. The Indo-Aryan speakers, such as the Malwaris, Biharis and Bengalis who have come here as traders, have also developed a fairly good understanding of at least two dialects, particularly Paite and Thadou, and as such are able to communicate with their customers in their own dialects. In other parts of Manipur where the Kuki-Chin and Naga languages are spoken, communication between the two groups is always carried out in Manipuri.

4.1. The problem of unification among the Kuki-Chin groups in Manipur

The term "Kuki", though not popularly accepted in Mizoram and Chin Hills of Myanmar, where "Mizo" or "Chin" is preferred, was still the unifying force among the Kuki-Chin speakers in other parts of North East India, particularly in

Manipur, Nagaland, Assam and Tripura, until the early part of the last century. The various tribes within the Kuki group accepted that they belonged to the same linguistic group and lived together in harmony until the early part of the last century. Unfortunately, the unity which held them together under one linguistic roof was short-lived, as it failed to fulfil the linguistic aspiration of various groups. One of the reasons which is widely held responsible for the disintegration among the Kuki tribes in Manipur was the imposition of the Thadou dialect on other Kuki tribes by the then Thadou chief Zavum. According to Vumson, the author of *Zo history* (1986), it so happened that just before India's independence, Zavum had organized a meeting of all the Kuki tribes in Manipur to chalk out common problems which would be faced in the event of a change of power from the British to the Indian government. The meeting took a different turn, as some leaders walked out because Zavum insisted that the Thadou dialect be used as the medium of discussion, as it is spoken by the largest number of Kuki tribes. Until today, many people hold the belief that one of the main causes for the disintegration of Kuki in Manipur was the superior feeling of the Thadous over other tribes. The Thadou speakers themselves also held the same belief as their forefathers, who considered themselves to be real Kukis and others to be 50 paisa Kuki or 25 paisa Kuki, which is to say that other Kukis are half Kuki or less than half Kuki. But there is no evidence to authenticate such a claim.

After the failure of the proposed meeting, a union called *Khul* 'cave' or *Khulmi* 'men of cave' was formed by the leaders who walked out of Zavum's meeting, with the objective of uniting all the Kuki-Chin tribes who shared the common origin of people who came out of the cave. The *Khulmi* union was also not successful, as the different tribes under the union did not agree with each other on various issues. For various political and sociological reasons, the term Kuki, which was used to embrace these linguistic groups for quite sometime, became unpopular in Manipur around the 1920s. A feeling of mistrust among the various Kuki tribes slowly and steadily paved the way for the rejection of the term Kuki. During the 1940's and 1950's several unions were formed to promote their own political interests, such as the Vaiphei National Organisation (1944), the Hmar Association (1945), the Kuki National Association (1947), and the Paite National Council (1957), which was later changed to the United Zomi Organization in 1958. During these periods of internal crisis among the Kukis, the Old Kuki groups joined the Naga National Movement, which was gaining momentum at the time. Thus, the term Kuki, which was used to imply the entire Kuki-Chin group in Manipur, underwent a semantic narrowing and came to mean the speakers of Thadou in some sense.

The major common problem faced by the Kuki-Chin speakers in Manipur is the quest for common nomenclature which could embrace them under one umbrella. But the search for a common name could not yield a conclusive result because the Kuki-Chin speakers found it difficult to accept any other names which did not reflect their clan's or dialect's name. Moreover, the Tribe Recognition Act of 1956, which was aimed at reducing linguistic minorities in

the state, did not work well among the Kuki-Chin tribes in Manipur because under the Act, each dialect group chose to be considered as separate tribes. Thus, the idea of a separate language for a separate tribe further divided the already divided Kuki-Chin group in Manipur. Unlike the case of Mizoram, where the Bible was written in the Duhlian dialect, the Christian missionaries have not written a common standard Bible for the Kuki-Chin groups in Manipur who speak mutually intelligible dialects. With the translation of the Bible in almost all the dialects, the Bible became their most valuable piece of literature to assert their linguistic identity.

In Manipur, the relationships among the Kuki-Chin groups were not very cordial, especially after the mid 1940's. These relationships became more complex after the Kuki-Naga clash (1992-2000). During the Kuki-Naga clash only the Thadou speakers fought against the Naga, and other Kuki-Chin speaking groups shied away from the clash and were afraid to declare themselves as Kukis for fear that the Naga might attack them. During 1997-98 a misunderstanding occurred between Paites and Thadou over the issue of identity, which ultimately led to a clash between the Kuki National Front (KNF) and the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA). Thus, the groups' rivalry, which occurred from time to time, further exacerbated the rifts in the already divided Kuki-Chin linguistic group.

Today, intra-group consciousness based on dialectal differences is taking root among the Kuki-Chin speakers in Manipur, and any apparent move aimed at promoting one's own group's interests is perceived as posing a threat to the other groups. People are quite aware of their dialectal identity and often it is found that they try to assert their dialect by way of sticking to their own dialect while in conversation with speakers of other dialects, even though they can understand each other's dialects very well. My own observation as a resident of Churachandpur district reveals that people talk more of their differences than their common language and culture. This has created a lot of misunderstandings within the study of these languages because many scholars, including linguists, without proper understanding of these languages, often tend to classify them as separate languages simply on account of their legal recognition as separate tribes. It is to be noted here that, for quite some time, the proposed All India Radio station at Churachandpur could not be implemented due to the dispute between the Thadous and Paites over the broadcasting language. However, recently the proposal was inaugurated by Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh in favor of Paite.

Often, such an unhealthy relationship widens the gaps among the Kuki-Chin speakers in Manipur and disturbs their unification movement. The Kuki-Chin speakers of Manipur could be linguistically more empowered than they are today if they could forget their minor differences and amicably resolve their social impasses. For this, a common consortium should be built along the lines of modern language planning, whereby all these subgroups would find their respective places. This can be attained only when the development of one language does not hamper the development of the others. In order to prevent the

unhealthy struggle over language politics, an ideal language planning policy needs to be drawn up which can best represent them. For this, the role of language planner and an appropriate move from the government and the community is called for, to resolve their long standing quest for unification in Manipur.

4.2. One language, two names: Thadou vs. Kuki

Calling a language by different names is a very common practice for many linguistic communities in North-East India. But having different names for the same language can be a problem when there are two opposing groups who do not agree with one other as to what should be the recognized name of the language. This problem has been a pertinent issue for a long time among the so called Thadou speakers in Manipur and in the neighboring states of Nagaland and Assam where the speakers are also found. The earliest records of the language call the language in question Thado, Thadou or Thadou-Kuki. One of the earliest works on the language in question is that of Lieut. R. Stewart (1857), who calls the language Thadou Pao ‘Thadou language’ from the name of one of their principal clans. Later, the Linguistic Survey of India (1904) calls the language Thado only. T. C. Hodson (1905), Shree Krishan (1980) and M. S. Thirumalai (1972) call the language Thado, Thadou and Thaadou, respectively. Rev. Pettigrew (1926) also calls this language only Thadou. Two important native scholars, whose works are cited by Thirumalai (2005), viz., Longkhobel Kilong (1922) and Ngulhao Thomsong (1927), call this language “Thadou Kuki”.

Although the language has been recorded as Thadou with different spelling by foreign and Indian scholars alike, the question of the name of the language flared up in Manipur over the recognition of the language. When Thadou was first recognized as the name of the language after the President’s Order, published in a Gazette of India, Part II, section 1, dated August 13, 1960, it was subjected to much heated debate among the speakers. Since then, an attempt to change the language from Thadou to Kuki was initiated by the non-Thadous, who were not in favour of the term Thadou. The first major issue over the name of the language erupted in the year 1971 following the publication of the Bible in Kuki with Rev. T. Lunkim as the main translator. For a detailed discussion of the controversy surrounding the publication of the Bible in Kuki see Thirumalai 2005.

It should be stated here that Thomsong had earlier translated the New Testament of the Bible into Thadou-Kuki. Thus, having two names for the language in question entered into the religious arena and further aggravated the issue over the name of the language. In the 1990’s, conflict over the name of the language broke out again in Karbi-Anglong district of Assam, which led to the loss of a few lives. In Manipur, the issue of the name of the language appeared again around the introduction of the language as one of the major Indian languages in the schools of Manipur. However, this was settled by blending the

two names as “Thadou-Kuki”. But in the adjoining state of Nagaland, the language is taught at primary level as “Kuki” only.

Today, the issue of the name of the language has still not been resolved. The main hurdle in arriving at a consensus comes from the fact that in the aftermath of the recognition of the language (as Thadou), the speakers themselves are divided into pro-Thadou and pro-Kuki camps, which has widened the gap and made it more difficult for any reconciliation to take place. Thus, the inability on the part of the speakers to arrive at a consensus name has caused a split over the name of the language into two, Thadou and Kuki, where both groups speak one and the same language. Following the controversy over the name of the language, the first nationwide census of India, which was conducted in 1961, reports the language as Thado and groups 19 mother tongue returns under this. There is another language name stated as Kuki-unspecified in the Language Tables of the 1961 census. This Kuki-unspecified has the bulk of speakers whose language affinity is not made clear in the 1961 census. The post-census investigations by the Language Division of the Census of India Organization and the Central Institute of Indian Languages revealed that Kuki as a mother tongue was returned by those who do not generally want to be identified under either Thadou or under any particular tribal name. However, most of these people speak the same language as the Thadous. Since then it has become a tradition to list the language as both Thadou and Kuki when it comes to the census. According to the Census of India 2001, the total number of speakers who have returned Thadou and Kuki as their mother tongue is 190,595 and 52,873 respectively.

Following the controversy between choosing Thadou or Kuki to be the name of the language, there has been a lot of misrepresentation of the exact figure of the people who speak the language. For many who are unfamiliar with the two terms, Thadou and Kuki, this will give them a wrong reading that identifies Thadou and Kuki as two separate languages. The reason for the misrepresentation of Thadou and Kuki arises partly on account of the inability on the part of the speakers to arrive at a consensus name for their language and partly because the language is recognized as Thadou in Manipur, while in Nagaland and Assam it is recognized as Kuki only. Under the prevailing situation, a speaker of the language may give his/her mother tongue/language as Thadou or Kuki depending on his/her loyalty to the name or depending on the region he/she resides in. Further, the majority of speakers feel that both terms are acceptable and do not differentiate the two. As a result, they give their census report according to name (i.e., Thadou or Kuki) as it suits them. Therefore, when a nationwide census is carried out on the basis of the prevailing situation this kind of anomaly appears. In order to overcome the misrepresentation of Thadou and Kuki in the representation of the census of India, it is proposed that the census should give only one label for the language as Thadou-Kuki, Thadou (Kuki) or Kuki (Thadou).

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