

The Kwatha Dialect of Meitei

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1. The Kwatha dialect of Manipuri (Meitei) is spoken in a small village called Kwatha, situated at the Indo-Burma border near Moreh, which is 109 kilometers to the south of Imphal town. It is the only hill village in Manipur in which the Manipuri language is spoken. It is surrounded by villages belonging to three different tribes, namely Maring, Kuki and Kom.

In this Kwatha village, there are twenty-five houses with a population of about 150 individuals. It is not known exactly when these people migrated to this hill village from the valley of Manipur. One of the local beliefs is that they settled there during the reign of king Kiyamba (14th Century A.D.) of Kangleipak (Imphal).

The name Kwatha is derived from the roots *kwa* 'betel nut' and *tha* 'to grow.' This village is the only place in Manipur where areca-nut trees are grown abundantly. The Kwatha villagers have not been influenced by Hinduism except for the fact that they observe the *yaosang* (Doljatra) festival. The deities that they worship are Nongpok Ningthaw and Panthoibi (which are also worshipped by the Meiteis of the plains.) Nowadays people of Kwatha are being converted to Christianity.

One interesting difference between the customs of the Kwatha and those of the plains Meiteis is that, in the case of the former, the bridegroom must stay, after the marriage, for the first three years (earlier it was for the first five years) at the bride's residence. This custom, known as *khoidou-kaba*, is not practised among the plains people.

2. The dialectal differences that occur between Kwatha and Standard (Imphal) Manipuri are mainly of the following four types:

- (i) phonological differences
- (ii) differences in the kind of sandhi changes that occur in compounding
- (iii) differences in the kind of sandhi changes that occur in inflection
- (iv) lexical differences.

On the whole, Kwatha appears to be rather conservative in that many of the sandhi changes that occur in the Standard dialect are absent. It is possible that the isolation of this dialect in the hill village for the past

several hundred years is responsible for this situation. However, there do occur some innovative sandhi changes in the Kwatha dialect as well.

The four main types of differences between the Kwatha and the Standard Manipuri dialects will be described in somewhat greater detail below:

3. Phonological Differences

3.1. The most interesting phonological difference between these two dialects is that the level tone of the Standard dialect regularly corresponds to a falling-rising tone in the Kwatha dialect. Examples:

<i>Standard</i>	<i>Gloss</i>	<i>Kwatha</i>
nā	'ear'	nǎ
yā	'tooth'	yǎ
mōn	'pillow'	mǒn
kūm	'year'	kǔm
yēn	'hen'	yěn
kwā	'betel nut'	kwǎ
mirōn	'generation'	mirǒn
irūbə	'bath'	irǔbə
phīrēn	'best cloth'	phǐrēn

This correspondence persists even in those instances where sandhi change affects the tone of roots and affixes. That is, when the falling tone of a syllable changes to level tone in the standard dialect, it changes to falling-rising tone in the corresponding syllable of the Kwatha dialect. Examples:

<i>Standard</i>		<i>Standard Sandhi</i>		<i>Kwatha Sandhi</i>
ña	'fish'	ñārəw	'roasted fish'	ñǎrǎw ¹
la	'banana leaf'	lātōn	'tip of banana leaf'	lǎtōn
phī	'cloth'	phijī	'border of cloth'	phicǐ
thā	'month'	thakhay	'fortnight'	thakhay
sēn	'money'	sendōy	'interest'	senthǒy
kūm	'year'	kumsī	'this year'	kumsǐ
yā	'tooth'	yathək	'upper tooth'	yathək
i	'water'	ipōm	'wave'	ipǒm
i-	'my'	īsīn	'my duty'	isǐn
nə-	'your'	nēñāy	'your relative'	nēñǎy
mə-	'his'	mətāw	'his friend'	mətǎw

¹ The symbol ñ is used for the velar nasal [ŋ] in this paper. [Ed.]

3.2. It has been found that there is a need to establish a word-juncture in the case of the Standard dialect in order to account for the contrast seen between the following two sets of forms:

Standard dialect

canəbə	'to eat with one another'
ca-nəbə	'for eating'
phunəbə	'to beat one another'
phu-nəbə	'for beating'
kawənəbə	'to kick one another'
kaw-nəbə	'for kicking'
panəbə	'to read for one another'
pa-nəbə	'for reading'

Kwatha dialect

canəbə	'to eat with one another'
caɳay	'for eating'
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kawɳay	'for kicking'
panəbə	'to read for one another'
paɳay	'for reading'

3.3. The distinction between the sounds *r* and *l* is rather a superficial one in both these dialects. Generally, *r* occurs intervocally and between a semi-vowel and a vowel, whereas *l* occurs elsewhere.

However, when preceded by the prefix *ə*, *l* changes to *r* only in the Standard dialect but not in the Kwatha dialect. Examples:

Root		Standard	Gloss	Kwatha
ləw	'to take'	ərəwbə	'one who takes'	ələwwə
ləy	'be easy'	əraybə	'easy'	ələybə
ləw	'be broad'	ərawbə	'broad'	ələwwə
laɳ	'be noisy'	əraɳbə	'noise-maker'	ələɳmə

3.4. In word-final position, the sounds *l* and *n* are found to be in free variation in both these dialects. Further, syllable-final *n* has been found to change to *l* in both the dialects when followed by *l*. Examples:

- (i) lan ~ lal 'war'
 un ~ ul 'snow'
- (ii) cen 'to run' celli 'is running'

hun	'to throw'	hulli	'is throwing'
yon	'to sell'	yolli	'is selling'

3.5. The two dialects are found to differ from one another by the fact that the Kwatha dialect allows vowel clusters to remain as they are (in sandhi formation), whereas the Standard dialect inserts a glide and thereby breaks the vowel clusters.

The glide to be inserted is *y* in the case of clusters having *i* as the second vowel, and *w* in the case of clusters having *u* or *o* as the second vowel. Examples:

Standard	Gloss	Kwatha
nāyīn	'ear ring'	nāīn
cāyīn	'feeding'	cāīn
səwun	'skin of animal'	səun
miwoh	'type of man'	mioh
sawōh	'figure (body)'	saōh

3.6. The vowel *o* has an optional *w*-glide in the Standard dialect even in word-initial position, whereas the Kwatha dialect does not show any such glide. Further, when preceded by the semivowels *y* or *w*, syllable-initial *o* takes this *w*-glide in the case of the Standard dialect but not in the Kwatha dialect. Examples:

Standard	Gloss	Kwatha
thēwwoh	'nature of work'	thēwoh
maywon	'orientation'	mayon
lāywoh	'nature of disease'	lāyoh

4. Sandhi changes in compounding:

One general characteristic of the sandhi changes to be discussed in this section is that they are all rather irregular and idiosyncratic in their occurrence. The same root may be found to undergo the change in some of the compounds in which it occurs, whereas in others it may fail to do so for no apparent reason.

4.1. In the Standard dialect, the voiceless stops *p*, *t*, *c* and *k* are found to become voiced when preceded by a voiced sound. The change is more frequent when the preceding root has an initial aspirated stop or a fricative. No comparable change is found to occur in the Kwatha dialect. Examples: