Terms of Address in Meiteilon

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Speech is constructed in response to the circumstances of the moment and is governed by the dictates of a local-social relationship. Between language and speech lies the social structure. The form of the social relationship regulates the options which a speaker selects at both structural and lexical levels. Every speaker is free to choose linguistic forms from the totality of options his language provides him. The choice of particular linguistic forms is governed by the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The canons of choice entail planning procedures, which guide the speaker in the production of, and the listener in the reception of speech.

With this as a background, the present study explores the various linguistic forms of address, the principles of choice, and the factors that govern these principles in Meiteilon society.

Many have studied forms of address in various languages, showing significant aspects of this domain. Languages differ in the kinds of terms they use in addressing a person. Brown and Ford (1964) and Ervin-Tripp (1972) have explored terms of address in American English. In other languages, it has been found that, in addition to names, kinship terms are commonly used as terms of address, e.g. in Bengali (Das 1964), and Hindi (Mehrotra 1977). Some studies show that the choice of a term of address in a particular language depends on cultural values and sociological variables, as can be seen in studies by Brown and Gilman (1960), Brown and Ford (1964), Jonz (1975), Kramer (1975), McIntire (1972), Friske (1978) and Bates and Benigni (1975). Moreover, it has also been found that the use of address terms may vary with the speaker's psychological condition, as reflected in, e.g. one's attitude toward the addressee, or one's self-confidence and self-respect. (Moles 1974). Other published studies say that social changes may cause change in patterns of address, e.g. European countries (Brown and Gilman 1960), in Sweden (Paulston 1976, Mitchell 1979) and Indonesia (Wittermans 1967).

Terms of address in Meitei society are determined by many parameters, such as age, hierarchical differences (e.g. between royalty and commoners), kinship, and socioeconomic status.

Age: Age is an important deciding factor for terms of address in Meitei society among non-relatives; being even one day older confers 'senior' status. In other Southeast Asian systems, a difference of even 'one day' makes a person socially older (Ervin-Tripp 1976). In Meitei society even a single minute is counted; for example, in a twin-birth, the first born will be taken as older than the second one. Age can often be a more decisive factor than social status for terms of address. The job of hospital orderly, e.g., is low in prestige, but if an orderly is an older person, then he should be addressed with a senior kin term appropriate to his age:

Age group	*Address terms*
Fatherly old	mamma 'mother's brother' mamo 'id.' khura 'uncle'
Brotherly old	tada 'elder brother' tamo 'id.'
Sisterly old	ice 'elder sister' icema 'id.'
Motherly old	ine 'father's sister' ima 'mommy'

In addition, the middle name should follow the address term:

$$\text{Address form} \quad = \quad \begin{vmatrix} \text{khura} \\ \text{tada} \\ \text{ice} \\ \text{ine} \\ \text{etc.} \end{vmatrix} \quad + \quad \text{Name (middle).}$$

e.g. /ice mery/, /ice rita/, /khura tomba/

Hierarchical differences (between royalty and commoners): This society maintains a clear-cut distinction, in terms of address, between royalty and commoners. The two classes use different systems of lexical items. The speaker must select the appropriate term of address according to his own social status:

Royal terms	Commoner terms	
ima-si	ima imaybemma	'mommy'
aygya pabuŋ	pabuŋ paji baba papa	'daddy'
icem-si	ice icema	'elder sister'
yambuŋ	tado tamo tacew dada	'elder brother'
iteym-si	iteyma iteybema	'brother's wife' {iteyma+ibema}
ine-si	ine inebema	'father's sister' {ine+ibema}

There is a sociolinguistic rule that the royal address terms are maintained for royal males, while they are gradually merging with commoners' address terms in the case of royal females. In olden times (during the reign of the Manipuri kings) this social hierarchy was strictly adhered to, and it is still prevalent, though to a lesser degree. But nowadays, at least among the young, there is a trend toward loosening the distinction between royal and commoner address terms: a royal term may also be extended to a commoner, e. g. in a situation where he/she has become rich, and is being addressed by an intimate friend in a teasing manner.

Kinship: Among kin, age is not a significant deciding factor in addressing a person. The kinship relation determines the appropriate address term. Here are two illustrations: (1) Even when a sister-in-law (elder brother's wife) is 15 years junior to ego, she should be addressed as /iteyma/ or /iteybema/ or /iteym-si/. According to the sociolinguistic rule it is not permitted to call her by her given name. (2) Though a wife may be 10 years older than her sister-in-law, the wife should

call her sister-in-law /i c e/ or /i c ema/ or /i c em–s i/ 'elder sister.' This demonstrates that kinship relations exercise a strong influence on personal address terminology.

Status: Status is another deciding factor: terms of address are chosen according to the addressee's status (in this society kinship terms are extended to non-kin). Some very common kinship terms are given in the following two columns:

Higher status	*Lower status*	
pabuŋ	khura	'daddy' or 'uncle'
tamo	tada	'elder brother'
icema	ice	'elder sister'

The terms in the first column are usually used to address persons of higher status, while those in the second are used with people of lower status. That is, /khura/, /tada/, and /ice/ are used, e.g. to orderlies, peons, physical workers, clerks (lower level), shopkeepers, rickshaw drivers, etc., while /pabu/, /tamo/, and /ice/ are generally used toward higher ranking officers, to older persons of the same rank, a friend's father, brother or sister, etc. It is unusual to use /khura/ or /tada/ toward a friend's father or brother. But /ice/ can be addressed to both higher and lower status persons and the term /ima/ also is generally used toward any elderly woman, as well as to a friend's mother.

Various address terms to a husband:
Meitei society has an interesting social grammatical rule which dictates that a wife should not call her husband by name. She chooses instead from various terms:

a. Some wives call their husbands /tamo/ 'elder brother', which was commonly used until quite recently. It is still to be heard, but less frequently.

b. Some call their husbands by their professional title, for instance /oja/ 'teacher' or /dokter/ 'doctor'. Other common professional address terms are 'engineer' and 'advocate.' This mode of conjugal address is a new phenomenon in the society.

c. Some use /tabiri–bra/[1] 'are you listening to me?' as an address term; Hindi speakers also use /suniye/ 'please listen' as an address term. In earlier times this (/tabiri–bra/) was very widely used.

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[1] /taribra/ /tabiribra/: /ta–/ (root) 'listen'. /–ri–/ 'progressive aspect marker'. /–bi–/ 'honorific marker'. /–bra/ 'question marker.'