

## NOUNS IN MEITEIRON

Purna C. Thoudam  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
Center of Post-Graduate Studies, Imphal

0. Introduction. Meiteiron, a language belonging to the ramified group of Tibeto-Burman languages known variously as Kukish, Kuki-Chin, or Kuki-Chin-Naga, spoken in Manipur, parts of Burma, Assam, and Bangladesh is one of the most important languages in the group. Meiteiron is the official language of the state of Manipur and is the lingua-franca between the various hill-tribes of Manipur. Meiteiron is also known as Meithei, or Meithlei, or Manipuri, but the local people call themselves Meitei and the language Meiteiron.<sup>1</sup>

1. Languages differ in as to how form classes are structured. Languages are not uniform in the determination of these classes. Nouns in Meiteiron are generally determined by their function in constructions as subjects and objects and by means of prefixes and suffixes which can occur with them. Accordingly, those forms which can take one or more of the following sets of prefixes and suffixes are nouns in Meiteiron. The prefixes and suffixes are:

a-	'personifier'
a ~ i-	'first person pronominal'
na-	'second person pronominal'
ma-	'third person pronominal'
ma ~ khut-	'manner/mode/way'
-na	'agent/actor/instrument'
-pu ~ -bu	'patient'
-ta ~ -da	'locative'
-ti ~ -di	'particularization'
-tu ~ -du	'demonstrative (the/that)'
-ka ~ -ga	'with'
-ki ~ -gi	'possessive/ genitive'
-la ~ -la ~ -ra ~ -ra	'interrogative/question'
-taŋ ~ -daŋ	'isolating'
-chu	'also'
-chi	'this'
-chiŋ	'plurality'
-khoy ~ -hoy	'collective/many (inclusive)'
-mæk	'personification'
-ni	'copula'

There are restrictions on the acceptance of these prefixes and suffixes by the roots and forms.

2. On the basis of formation, nouns in Meiteiron are divided into two main categories: (a) simple, and (b) compound. Again, simple nouns can be subdivided into two: (i) non-dependent, and (ii) dependent. This can be represented diagrammatically:

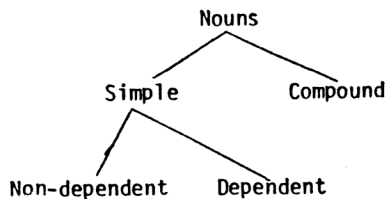


Figure 1: Diagram showing types of nouns.

2.1 Simple nouns: Those forms (i) which by themselves can occur as nouns, such as /mi/ 'man', /ŋa/ 'fish', /cawbə/ 'Chaoba', etc.; (ii) which can occur as nouns by prefixation, such as /khut+ka/ 'manner of climbing', /mə+ca/ '(his) son'<sup>2</sup>, /mə+thon/ 'manner of cooking', etc.; and (iii) which can occur as nouns by suffixing /-pə ~ -bə/ directly after the root or after some other suffixes, such as /ca+bə/ 'eating', /thək+pə/ 'drinking', /ca+khi+bə/ 'eat + definite + nominalization' etc., are called simple nouns. The nouns under this category can accept some of the suffixes and prefixes listed in sec. 1 above. Illustrations:

mi + nə	'by man'
mi + bu	'to man'
mi + du	'that man'
mi + gə	'with man'
mi + gi	'man's'
mi + rə	'is it man?'
mi + dən	'only man'
mi + chu	'man also'
mi + chi	'this man'
mi + chin	'men'
mi + ni	'this is a man'
khut + ka + du	'the mode of climbing'
mə + ca + nə	'by the son'
mə + ca + bu	'to the son'
mə + ca + gə	'with the son'
mə + ca + gi	'for the son'
mə + ca + rə	'is it his son?'
mə + ca + dən	'only his son'
mə + ca + chu	'his son also'
mə + ca + chi	'this son (of his)'
mə + ca + chin	'sons'
mə + ca + ni	'this is his son'
<sup>3</sup> ə + ca + bə	'eater'
mə + ca	'manner of eating'
ca + bə + nə	'by eating'
ca + bə + bu	'eating (used as object)'
ca + bə + də	'at eating'

Those nouns falling under (i) above are non-dependent, while those falling under (ii) and (iii) above comprise the dependent nouns.

2.1.1 Non-dependent: Nouns which cannot be subdivided into smaller morphemic segments and by themselves can function as nouns without any prefix or suffix, but can take some of the prefixes and suffixes listed above are called non-dependent. Illustrations:

mi	'man'
laphu	'plantain tree'
cəwba	'Chaoba (name of a person)'
khut	'hand'
kok	'head'
phi	'cloth' etc.

2.1.2 Dependent: Nouns which are formed by prefixing and/or suffixing to a root<sup>4</sup> are called dependent. Dependent nouns also can take some of the prefixes and suffixes listed in sec. 1 above. There are four different types in this category:

2.1.2.1 - Prefix + root:

mə + pa	'manner of reading'
mə + pi	'manner of giving'
mə + thon	'manner of cooking'
khut + ka	'manner of climbing' etc.

2.1.2.2 - Prefix + root + suffix:

ə + pa + bə	'reader'
ə + ca + bə	'eater'
ə + həŋ + bə	'questioner'
ə + ŋak + pə	'guard'

2.1.2.3 - Root + suffix:

pa + bə	'reading'
ca + bə	'eating'
cət + pə	'going'
tok + pə	'leaving' etc.

2.1.2.4 Root + verbal suffix(es) + suffix:<sup>5</sup>

ca + khi + bə	'definite eating'
hay + ru + bə	'something said'
ca + rəm + mi + bə	'something eating continuously'

2.2 Compound: Forms which can act as nouns even when they are combined with some other or similar types of nouns or roots are called nouns showing compounding. There are seven different types under this category:

2.2.1 - Noun + noun:

cak + chən	'kitchen'
kon + thon	'gate'
u + hay	'fruit'
yot + cəy	'iron rod' etc.

## 2.2.2 - Noun + augment:

huy + jaw	'big dog'
yum + jaw	'big house'
i + caw	'flood' etc.

## 2.2.3 - Noun + diminutive:

huy + naw	'puppy'
thoŋ + naw	'window'
chən + naw	'calf' etc.

## 2.2.4 - Noun + root:

wa + həŋ	'question'
i + ləm	'water away'
khəŋ + ləy	'travel company' etc.

## 2.2.5 - Noun + dependent noun:

phi + chabə	'weaver'
u + chubə	'carpenter'
thoŋ + ŋəkpə	'watchman' etc.

2.2.6 - Noun + noun + dependent noun:<sup>6</sup>

cak + chəŋ + chabə	'kitchen builder'
kon + thoŋ + chambə	'gate repairer' etc.

2.2.7 - Noun + empty form:<sup>7</sup>

chumaŋ + theləŋ	'surroundings of the house'
napi + naraŋ	'snakes and creatures' etc.

Notes

This is a revised version of a paper read at the VIII International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Berkeley. Only the morphology of Meiteiron nouns has been presented here.

<sup>1</sup>Meiteiron is the combination of two words Meitei 'the people' and Lon 'language'. [l] and [r] are allophones of the same phoneme.

<sup>2</sup>məca is the generic 'son'. The construction also is marked for inalienable possession.

<sup>3</sup>The two ca roots are different. The first means 'son', while the second means 'eat'.

<sup>4</sup>A root in Meiteiron does not indicate its form class. This is only determined by examination of which prefixes and suffixes it combines with.

<sup>5</sup>These nouns are purely derivational, derived from verbs by adding the nominalizing suffix -pəw-bə.

<sup>6</sup>These are noun phrases.

<sup>7</sup>In some such combinations both parts have meaning, but in most cases only the first has a meaning. They are treated as compound nouns because of their structural behavior.