

Mode of Loanword Adaptation in Meiteilon

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to show the linguistic changes of Meiteilon as a result of the phenomenon of borrowing- that is, when Meiteilon speaker utilize lexical items in a foreign language. Since the late seventeenth century, there has been a significant amount of borrowing from Indo-Aryan languages, specifically, Sanskrit, Bengali, and Assamese; subsequently, from Hindi and English. In olden days, people used to think that it was an honor to use borrowed words rather than native ones. Numerous indigenous terms vanished as a result. But a lot of people have started substituting native terms for foreign ones in recent years. This paper discusses the impact of borrowing and the semantic changes that result from borrowing.

Key words: semantic; loan terms; borrowing; phonological changes; meiteilon.

1. Introduction

Meiteilon, also known as Manipuri, is a Tibeto-Burman language that is primarily spoken in the Indian state of Manipur as well as the neighbouring north-eastern states. The state of Manipur holds a distinct geographical position, serving as a virtual meeting point for south-east Asia and India. Borrowing is a natural process of language change, in which a language takes up new terms from another and incorporates them into its own vocabulary. Language contact of Meiteilon with Indo-Aryan and Burmish families may be taken into account for borrowing with languages, such as; i) Burmese, ii) Sanskrit and Bengali/Assamese, iii) English and iv) Hindi. Borrowing takes place heavily when the Meitei Kingdom has adopted Hinduism as state religion in the late 17th century which also marked the beginnings of the language contact with Indo-Aryan family. At that time, the people believed that the use of borrowed terms were more honorific or in higher social status than the use of native terms, e.g. the borrowed word *jol* 'water' is preferred to use than the native word *isij*. The effect was so intense that many native terms disappeared and the borrowed terms prevails till today. Nonetheless, borrowing is one of the most common ways to take up new vocabulary, and people who speak any language do it. Words that are borrowed are known as loan words (Trask, 2015). Therefore, one of the most common ways to learn new words is through

borrowing. When there is no word in the language to express the idea or the concept, then, borrowings take place (see Haugen, 1953: 373 and Poplack et al., 1988, for discussion). For instance, the word '*tiket*' in Meiteilon comes from "ticket" in English, with no pre-existing synonym in Meiteilon.

Code-Switching, or the transition between languages within or between utterances, is one of the main outcomes of prolonged language contact. This may cause linguistic changes over time, occasionally producing a mixed code with new structures. The use of numerous loanwords from Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, English, etc, is a notable characteristic of modern Meiteilon. Note that in contrast to earlier this century, when loan words were almost exclusively used as the names of novel objects, there is now a greater tendency to adopt abstract terms and combine loan words with native terms that are already in use. Numerous sources of data indicate a significant but uneven use in the percentage of new loan words entering in Meiteilon. As Sapir (1921) stated that the borrowing of foreign words always entails their phonetic modification. There are sure to be foreign sounds or accentual peculiarities that do not fit the native phonetic habits. They are then so changed as to do as little violence as possible to these habits. Frequently we have phonetic compromises. Here, in the present-day context code-mixing with English is common, for example, in the phrase *eik^hoigi-k^hunnai* 'our society' is code-mixed as, *eik^hoigi-sosaiti*. Here, the native word *k^hunnai* is replaced with *sosaiti* to mean it 'society'. Interestingly, the foreign speech movements are replaced by native speech movements. Thus, in English the word government [*gʌvəmənt*] is replaced by [*gomen*]. Similarly with Hindi too, for instance, the kinship term *b^habi* 'sister-in-law' is commonly used for addressing sister-in-law, especially among city dwellers, in place of the native word *iteima* or *inamma*. This leads to the vulnerability of Meiteilon vocabulary.

2. Meiteilon in language contact

Languages, such as, Sanskrit, Bengali and Assamese belong to Indo Aryan family. The language contact with these languages came to existence from the late 17th century AD. The influence of these languages was due to the conversion of state religion to Hinduism. However, the distinctive characteristic of borrowing was to replace the existing native terms with the loan words. Thus, many vocabularies derived from Indo-Aryan languages become an integral part of Meiteilon. The following examples demonstrate some of the loan words which are commonly used in place of the native terms are as follows:

<u>Loan words (Indo-Aryan languages)</u>	<u>Meiteilon (native terms)</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
1. <i>byab^har/beb^har/bebəhar</i>	<i>t^həksi-k^hasi</i>	‘etiquette’
2. <i>gyan</i>	<i>ləwsiŋ</i>	‘knowledge’
3. <i>gyan</i> (if followed with native term <i>tabə</i> ‘to fall’ gives the meaning of ‘understanding’)	<i>k^həŋbə</i>	‘understand’
4. <i>asa</i>	<i>niŋjəbə</i>	‘hope’
5. <i>upai</i>	<i>pambei</i>	‘means’
6. <i>mat^ha</i> (if followed with native term ‘sabə ‘hot’ means ‘tension’)	<i>koksabə</i>	‘tension/worried’

English is an Indo-European family, sub-group of West Germanic branch. Its contact began during British rule in Manipur (late 19 century) and also as the medium of instruction in education. Thus, this language becomes the main source of borrowing, especially, in the field of technical terms. Interestingly, the terms used for greetings in English are becoming an integral part of greetings in the modern Manipuri society because it lacks greeting words like *good morning* or *good night*.

In olden days, Meitei has its own professional titles, but it seems that those titles are already replaced by the borrowed foreign terms. Some olden or archaic professional titles:- *maicəu* ‘scholar/enlighten one’, *seluŋbə* ‘accountant/cashier’, *pakhəŋ-lak-pə* ‘head of youth affair (male)’, *lanjiŋ-purel* ‘commander general’, *əmai-bə/-bi* ‘priest/priestess’, etc. Some modern loanword professional titles:- *daktər* (academic and medicine) ‘doctor’, *prop^hesar* ‘professor’, *sar* (any male official or professional) ‘sir’, *medam* (any female official or professional) ‘madam’.(Sarangthem, et al, 2014: 108-114). Almost all technical terms are borrowed from the Standard English. This phenomenon is due to the medium of instructions in the institutes for higher studies.

The language contact with Hindi came into existence when Manipur becomes a part of India. There were influx of mainland Hindi speaking people to this state as migrant workers, job seekers and for trade and commerce related activities. Borrowing becomes essential as new items of day to day usage come into existence which was non-existence before it appeared.

However, there is no evidence that contact with Sanskrit/Bengali/Assamese/Hindi/English has altered the grammar of Meiteilon.

Burmese belongs to the southern Burmish branch of the Tibeto-Burman sub- grouping under the Sino-Tibetan language family. Meiteilon has been in contact with Burmese since time immemorial. For example *p^henat* is Burmese term for ‘sandal’; however, today it is hardly used. Instead it is replaced by the word *sendəl* which comes from the word ‘sandal’ of English (Greek origin). Another word which is still in used is the word ‘*p^hura*’ derived from the Burmese term ‘*p^həya*’ a memorial structure. However, as time evolves the phenomenon of Burmese loanwords become extinct after Manipur becomes a part of Indian Union; easy accessibility between the people of Manipur and Myanmar has certain restriction. Burmese and Meiteilon being Tibeto-Burman languages share many common vocabularies, such as;

English	Meiteilon	Burmese
4. <i>eat</i>	<i>ca</i>	<i>ca</i>
5. <i>fire</i>	<i>məi</i>	<i>mi</i>
6. <i>ear</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
7. <i>fish</i>	<i>ŋa</i>	<i>ŋa</i>
8. <i>flower</i>	<i>ləi/məpan</i>	<i>pan</i>

2.1 Phonological changes

Earlier Meiteilon has 13(thirteen) consonantal phoneme, namely, /p/, /t/, /c/, /k/, /p^h/, /t^h/, /k^h/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /s/, /h/ and /l/; 2(two) semivowels viz. /w/ and /y/ with 6 (six) monophthongs, such as, /i/, /e/, /ə/, /a/, /o/, and /u/; diphthongs like /ai/, /au/, /ei/, /əi/, /oi/, and /ui/ respectively. It was believed that during the period of king Pamheiba also known by the name Garibniwaj (18th Century), the borrowed terms like Ravan, Rama, Radha, Guru, etc. were found to be written in Puya or ancient manuscript as ‘*lapol OR rapol*’, ‘*lam*’, ‘*lat^ha*’, ‘*kuru*’, etc. Thus, the voiceless phonemes /p/, /t/, /c/, /k/, /p^h/, /t^h/, /k^h/, /s/ and /l/ generate their respective voiced counterparts, e.g. /b/, /d/, /j/, /g/, /b^h/, /d^h/, /j^h/ and /r/. Nevertheless, in the puyas only /b/, /d/, /g/, /j/ and /r/ are commonly found. The followings are some of the names found in Ramayana epic to show how the shift or changes in sound have taken place.

Loan words

Meiteilon

9. *ravən* (Ravan)*lapol/n* → *rapol* → *rabon* (/l/ and /n/ usually occur as free variants).

10. *rama* (Rama) *lam* → *ram*
11. *rad^ha* (Radha) *lat^ha* → *rad^ha*

Further, in sentences also the use of voiceless sounds are found in archaic Meiteilon (puyas) which gradually shifted to voiced sounds in modern Meiteilon.

For example;

<u>Archaic</u>		<u>Modern</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
12. <i>hai-tə-pə-la</i>	→	<i>hai-də-bə-ra</i> → <i>hai-də-bra</i>	‘Didn’t (I) say?’
say-NEG-NMZ-QM		say- NEG- NMZ- QM say- NEG - QM	

In the above example it is noted that there is a contracted form of [bə+ra > bra] by deleting vowel /ə/.

13. *ta-t^hi-pi-ku-no* → *ta-t^hi-bi-gə-no* → *ta-t^hi-bi-gə-nu* ‘Please don’t get annoyed’
hear-bad-HON-ASP-PROH hear-bad- HON-ASP-PROH

Here the honorific marker *-pi* changes to *-bi*; likewise, the irrealis aspect marker *-ku* changes to *-gə*; however, the prohibition markers *-nu* or *no* are the allomorphs.

This suggests that the voiced sounds were gradually added to Meiteilon. Furthermore, borrowing of foreign terms compels to introduce another 9 (nine) consonants to the original inventory of consonants. The newly introduced consonantal phonemes are /b/, /d/, /j/, /g/, /b^h/, /d^h/, /j^h/ /g^h/ and /r/. Thus, altogether 24 consonantal phonemes are available. These newly introduce sounds are only to make the nearest sounds of the borrowed terms. Thus, phonological changes have taken place to adapt the borrowed terms. The borrowed word with a voiceless labiodental fricative /f/ is almost invariably substituted by the voiceless aspirated bilabial stop /p^h/. There is no labiodental fricative /f/ in Meiteilon. This pattern of substitution applies in all the position i.e. /f/ is initial position or medial position of distribution. For example;

English	Meiteilon
14. <i>film</i>	<i>p^hiləm,</i>
15. <i>fashion</i>	<i>p^hesən,</i>

- | | |
|------------|---------------------|
| 16. office | op ^h is. |
| 17. figure | p ^h igər |

Regarding the plosives in the borrowed terms from English or Indo-Aryan; Meiteilon replaces it with the suitable plosives, such as,

English	Meiteilon
18. president	prəsidən
19. bulb	bələp
20. project	projek
21. drug	drək

Indo-Aryan	Meiteilon	Gloss
22. bandh	bən	‘ban’
23. pəri:ksa	pərik ^h a	‘examination’
24. a:fa:	asa	‘hope’
25. s ^h radd ^h a	sorat	‘a ritual for demise’

It is noted from the above examples, the complex coda in borrowed words were simplified and only voiceless plosive in the final position of the word.

Meiteilon is a language that lacks consonant cluster in its pure form. However, only the initial position of consonant cluster is possible with the first member either a stop phoneme or an alveolar fricative/s/, and the second member with semi-vowel or liquid is found in limited numbers. Many of the loan words are found to adapt it with vowel epenthesis, that is, inserting /i/ or /ə/ initially or between the two consonants, for instance;

English	Meiteilon
26. school	iskul
27. star	istar OR əstar
28. sport	isporət OR əsporət
29. state	istet OR əstet
30. bulb	bələp
31. Indo-Aryan	Meiteilon
32. kərmə	kəramə

On the contrary, in modern days the consonant clusters are devised to get the nearest sound of the borrowed terms.

Illustration;

English	Meiteilon
33. free	phri
34. class	klas
35. brand	bran
36. disc	diks
37. plate	plet
41. auto	okto

2.2 Morphosyntactic changes

All the loan terms in any word class can collocate with a verb root along with an aspect marker, namely; perfect marker-le~re, progressive marker-li~ri, or with a nominalizer-pə~bə etc., to give its complete semantic meaning. It can be illustrated as follows:

Loan words	Verb root-Asp/Nominalizer	Gloss
42. <i>kənp^hiuj</i> 'confuse'	<i>cət-le</i> go-PRF	'got confused'
43. <i>b^hərəm</i> 'confuse'	<i>cət-pə</i> go-NOMZ	'confusion'
44. <i>gyan</i> 'Conscious/knowledge'	<i>ta-nə-bə</i> fall- ADV.M- NOMZ	'Understanding'
45. <i>undərsten</i> 'understand'	<i>təu-bə</i> work- NOMZ	'to understand'
46. <i>ful</i> 'full'	<i>oi- bə</i> become-- NOMZ	'having filled'

Note in the above examples (42-46), the first morpheme is either from English or Hindi, whereas, the second morpheme is in Meiteilon.

2.3 Semantic Changes

Almost all of the borrowed words are highly bound to Western culture. They fall into the following domains: technology and communication, culture and entertainment, and politics. Because the meaning of the words is bound so tightly to Western culture, none of the borrowings from technology, communication, or politics experience any semantic change (i.e., the referents are the same). But, semantic change does occur in some cases, for example, *kolget* 'Colgate (a particular brand of toothpaste)' is adapted to mean any toothpaste in Meiteilon, but not as a brand. It shows that narrowing references occurs more often than broadening when it comes to semantic change in this language. Similarly, for the word *program* from the general concept of 'programme' is narrowing to mean that of having a romantic or date, especially to younger people. Again, it is also common to use the term *marketij* 'marketing' to mean shopping. Interestingly, the Hindi term 'ak^hbaar' is adapted as 'k^həbər' to mean 'newspaper' only. Nonetheless, the younger generation makes an effort to use it in a proper way. Some loanwords, such as *greetings* and the words like *thank you* have retained the meaning exactly with English equivalents.

3.0 Conclusion

From the above observation, it may be concluded that borrowing can have a huge effect on language change. The language has acquired new phonemes and one of the key effects of sustained language contact is code switching. Borrowing is necessary for enriching the vocabulary. However, one should not disown their own native terms for the sake of other languages that are prestigious or at higher social ranking. Nevertheless, in this language, the usage of native terms in place of loan words is developing in today's scenario.

List of Abbreviations

ASP	Aspect
HON	Honorific
NEG	Negative
NOMZ	Nominalizer
PRF	Perfect
PROH	Prohibitive
QM	Question Marker

ADV.M	Adverb of Manner
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