

Social Dynamics and Changing Male and Female Speech Differences in Meiteilon

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Abstract

It is widely agreed that in most of the patriarchal societies, women speak more politely without much command than men do. The same pattern is observable in Manipuri society. There are observable differences in male and female speech in this society. However, in due course of time because of various feminist movements, empowerment of women and also the expansion of their representation from their traditional role of housewife to political, economic and other newly emerging sphere brought changes in the speech patterns of the women.

In this study a corpus of 30 dramas of *Meiteilon* discourse has been utilized. In addition to it some of the speech made by male and females in various discussion sessions telecasted in few local TV channels, as well as its continuum at domestic sphere are also used. While using these sources, an attempt has been made to match the male and female characters, evaluating them from the same social scale and number of males and females are made equal to make the calculation and comparison easy.

Keywords: Meithei society (Manipuri), socialization, subculture, polite forms, social dynamics, male and female speech.

Introduction

Different sociolinguistic studies reveal that there is a regular and systematic pattern of sociolinguistic variation among male and female speakers. According to Robin Lakoff (1975), language gives a concrete expression to implicit social norms, and language both reflects and subtly reinforces social order. In every society, males and females are differently referred and have different allocation of roles and responsibilities. The unequal roles and the unequal status results to or reinforces the existing power relationships in the socio-cultural milieu of the society. It is also well known that in many of the patriarchal societies, women often use minimal responses, tag questions and hedging devices. Therefore, their languages are often regarded non- assertive, polite, and hesitant. As the system already fixes code of conduct for both the sexes, all the female speech has a tendency to use standard form at the same time are counted as friendly, gentle, enthusiastic,

grammatically correct and unimportant, whereas, men's speech is considered assertive, adult and direct, attention seeking (dominating, boastful, loud and forceful), dominating, authoritarian, aggressive and frank. This very fact of speech act is in support of the argument given the 'Social Dominance Theory'.

On the other hand, according to another theory known as "Social Difference Theory", a different female speech is attributable to their separate subcultures rather than their subordinate position.¹ Therefore, males and females have different values and norms developed out of social segregation. Jespersen (1922) claims that women's speech is stereotyped as it is more euphemistic in expression. They tend to use more hyperbolic and terms of circumlocution and phrases. One probable reason why they tend to use circumlocutional forms is their visualization of the speech partners as equal as their talk group is non-hierarchical in organization and smartness in talking put a distance between the talk groups, (Coates J. 1989).

Meitei society is no exception to the aforesaid features. Males and females in Meitei society speaks differently, though the difference is not sex-exclusive but sex-preferential. There is a gradable difference in the usage of polite forms, persuasive, commands, endearment forms and in reduplicated forms. These variations are non-discrete. However, it is interesting to observe a marked difference in the usage of these forms.

The paper focuses on the areas how speech act is directed by changing male female relation due to various factors by using a qualitative data though there are other sex differentiated speech forms. By assessing the differences observed in the usage of above mentioned features, we are in a way to give a reason for why there are differences in the speech of Meitei males and females in the course of changing social dynamics in regard to male female power relation.

Historical Background of Meitei Woman and Their Present Status

Many writers on "Manipuri Women" hold the opinion that that -women in this part of the country are far better than their counterpart elsewhere both socially as well as economically. Most of them draw this statement from the fact that Manipuri women are actively engaged in many socio-economic, religious, and political activities in the region as men do. Apart from their important position in religion as priestess called *Maibi* and their role in economy as team labour known as *Nupi Khut-lang*, the historically and socially significant market known as *Ima Keithel* is very significant. Moreover, the history of Manipur also clearly indicates that Manipur women can take important role in resolving any socio-political conflicting situation. The evidence in the history of Manipur are the First *Nupi-Lal* (women's war of 1904) and Second *Nupi-Lal* (second

¹ Social Difference Theory, advocated mainly by Coates J. D., Maltz and Borker , and Jespersen . See, Coates J. D. Cameron (1989) – *Women in their Speech communities*, London Longman; and Maltz & Borker (1982) – Male and female miscommunications in Dell Hymes & J.J. Gumperz (eds) *Directions in Sociolinguistics*.

women's war of 1939) in both of which Manipuri women fought against British colonialism. And at present they continue to participate as social reformers in all the important state events by taking up various roles in the society. Various organizations like *Nisha Bandi* (Women workers against addiction), *Meira Paibi* (female torch bearers), etc. to name a few are being formed to protect the society from social evils and to uplift the socio-economic status of the women.

It also may be noted here that Manipuri women made themselves economically self-reliant by engaging in handloom and handicrafts, fishing, gardening, and marketing these products in the market run by women only and even running different vender and stall for pan, tea, snacks, etc. Because of all their significant contributions there exists the biggest Bazaar called *Ima-Keithel* in the heart of Imphal apart from small local women markets in every district. Because of these women's collective contribution in the market, agriculture and other self-help group called *Marup*. Women in this society can at times constitute a strong pressure group which can be visible at any time of crisis. As a result, they are highly respected and their presence in all the spheres cannot be ignored.

However, despite the fact of their high participation in the socio-political, economic, and religious sphere, it is doubtful to say that they are enjoying higher status. Because women seem to be rewarded insufficiently as to what they contribute in the society. Meitei society like any other patriarchal society has a well-defined gender role. Female are visualized as subordinate and unable to exist without support from a male. It is also evidenced when most of the agricultural and economic tools associated with women are not ritualized while men's hunting, and agricultural tools are ritualized. This indicates the different value assignment to the different roles accorded to them. This male female difference in role and status is very much reflected in the male female speech. The study is an attempt to understand the male female role and status in the society as well as its dynamism at present by looking into various aspects of their male female speech.

Role of Different Agents of Socialization and Male-Female Speech Differences

Socialization plays an important role for the construction of individual identity. Differential pattern of treating the two sexes is visible right from the choice of toys in Meitei society. It is generally seen a boy with toys like gun, vehicles, aeroplane in the individual level and with footballs, etc. such toys encouraged more masculine and plays with the toys that are removed from daily domestic life, they have sociable toys allowing competitiveness, aggressiveness, and constructiveness whereas girls' toys encouraged more feminine and fantasy play that was centered on domestic life having the traits of creativity, manipulability, nurturance, and attractiveness.

Then come the language of socialization, male stereotyped sayings also make Meitei male child bolder, more assertive, powerful, and dominant, allowing them to keep all possible domains under their control. Socializing agents i.e., the parents, teachers, kin, and peer groups, orientations

to specific socialization patterns and segregation makes boys different from girls. This difference in the socialization makes them aware of well demarcated males' and females' domains. So, ultimately women as a whole developed a sub-cultural attitude among themselves within the context of patriarchal male dominated culture. This women's differential attitude leads to the formation of sex preferential forms of speech differing in the levels of morphology, vocabulary and phrasal expressions etc., however limited the lexical items may be. It seems likely that there can be degrees of gender difference. The fact is indicated by the degree of usage of some lexical items or morphological features, which though occurring in both males and female's speech were used more frequently by women than men and vice-versa. Differences in the speech of men and women are observable in two levels morphological and lexical level. Lexical differences are preferential choices and are observable in-personal remarks given to the addresser, comment giving, adjectives indicating the sex of the individual.

Theoretical Analysis of the Males and Females in Meitei Society

If we critically analyse both the theory mentioned above in Meitei society, the theory of social dominance as well as the theory of social difference are applicable equally to certain extent. As mentioned earlier men are the dominating group and the women are the subordinate group. Women in traditional Meitei society in general is not visualized as equal to men, they are always the subordinate group. Women have a restricted domain to interact, they are not allowed to take part in decision making, they are to follow either their father or her husband or brother. Moreover, feminist theory also argues that when a girl married her status is decided by her husband and when the women became a widow her status is accorded by the son. Thus, in any patriarchal society women do not have their own independent status. Moreover, their presence in the public square though not restricted is not appreciated. There are a lot of stereotypic sayings supporting the theories of social dominance and social difference. Followings are few examples in support of the social dominance theory.

1. nupidi nupa p^həɾəgə loɪɛ? "It is everything for women if she gets a good husband."
2. nupinə lai.ɪk jamnə təmləgə kə.ɪ tənədoino? "What is use of a girl to get highly educated?"
3. nupigidi cak t^hoŋbə həɪrəgə loɪɛ "It is enough for her if she could cook well."
4. məsi nupi əŋaŋgi wa nətte "This is not a matter of women and child."

The above examples support and strengthen the patriarchy in which women are made to agree to their subordinate role and notion which in turn made them to use various kinds of polite words while interacting with males. Such sayings are found to be the major mechanism to make women to agree to their inferior position in the larger social context too. Finally, they can hardly imagine that they could have a world different from this male dominated world.

Some Other Sayings Supporting the Social Difference Theory are:

1. nupinə miḡi məmaṅdə tʰokləḡə kəi lemḡəi? “What is the grace for a woman to be in the public?”
2. nupiməcadi laidʰibi, caktʰoṅbi sanəḡədəbəni “Girl should play with dolls, with replica of kitchen.”
3. məsiḡi əṅaṅsi nupidəunə imuṅdətə ləi “This boy (child) always lives inside the house like a girl.”

All these stereotyped sayings relating to both the sexes make Meitei males and females different. Male stereotyped sayings make Meitei male children bolder, more assertive, powerful, and dominant, allowing them to keep all possible domains under their control. Socializing agents’ (i.e., the parents, teachers, kin, and peer groups) orientations to specific socialization patterns and segregation make boys different from girls. This difference in the socialization makes them aware of well demarcated male’s and female’s domains. So, ultimately women as a whole developed a sub-cultural attitude among themselves within the context of patriarchal male dominated culture. This women’s differential attitude leads to the formation of sex preferential forms of speech differing in the levels of morphology, vocabulary and phrasal expressions, etc., however limited the lexical items may be. It seems likely that there can be degrees of gender difference. The fact is indicated by the degree of usage of some lexical items or morphological features, which though occurring in both male and female speech are used more frequently by women than men and vice-versa.

Differences in the speech of men and women are observable in two levels: morphological and lexical level. Lexical differences are preferential choices and are observable in personal remarks given to the addresser, comment giving, adjectives indicating the sex of the individual.

Women’s Politeness and Recent Changes in Male-Female Speech Pattern in Manipur

Polite form of speech in Meiteilon is the prestigious variety. Therefore, the use of polite forms means using the standard variety. Meitei women like the general women of the world are more status conscious. They are kept in a subordinate position and also experience a different subculture within the larger Meitei cultural domain. Because of these facts, they speak using more polite forms. In this regard Thorne and Henley (1975) also writes, ‘one typically finds that social inferiors are required to use more polite and elevated speech to their superiors, ‘that greater circumspection in behaviour often accompanies greater subordination’. This is also true in Meitei society. Meitei women are expected to use differential speech style more in addressing their husbands, than their husbands are expected to use with them.² Because of certain stereotypical sub-cultural motives Meitei women use more of polite forms as compared to their male

²Parallel feature is found in Javanese too

counterparts. Males without exception use polite form of speech either to gain control or to show his cultural refinement.

However, society is changing rapidly through various efforts made by the government to improve the status of the women. Various changes in different allocation of role and status are also observed today in Meitei society. The traditional norm of the importance of male child and differential treatment between boys and girls in terms of educational facilities, choice of career, exposure, etc., are weakening today in Meitei society. Some of the recent research conducted by NCERT, Shillong also indicate that the traditional differential treatment accorded to boys and girls for their educational and educational play materials are no more found in many nuclear families.³ Various efforts and measures made by the government to improve the socio-economic and political status of the women in India also have greater impact on Meitei society. Special efforts for improvement of girl's education under the scheme of "Free and Compulsory Education for All", Right to Education Act 2009 and other incentive schemes like SSA, RMSA and scholarship for girl child results to increase not only the female literacy rate but also improve their social and economic status in the society. Other form of empowerment like political reservation for women also weakens the traditional notion of women in Meitei society.

The most unique change that is observed in Meitei society today is women's collective efforts to intervene in various social and political reforms. Women's role in resolving group conflicts and social nuances cannot be undermined. Over and above, we have seen their equal contribution in the Sports both at National and International levels. With the emergence of more nuclear family norm, the traditional control of a family exercised by father-in-law, which ultimately strengthened the patriarchal social units, is also breaking down. Moreover, in many cases many spouses are staying in different places as women also started participating in gradually increasing modern job market. These kinds of changes have various impacts on the male and female speech but in different forms in different social setting and situation. The difference of male female speech level in Meitei society can be marked in three important spheres. These are as follows.

1. **Traditional Sphere:** In this sphere women are more found to use more polite words as there is no or little impact of modern education and other factor for women's empowerment.
2. **Urban Setting:** In this sphere there is gradual change in women's speech as there is increase not only their educational level but also their participation in politics and other newly emerging modern job market. It is also basically because of the increase of both

³ For further detail see, Kh. Bijoykumar Singh, "Impact of traditional and Modern Plays and toys on children's creativity, thinking and learning in North East", a research report submitted to NERIE-NCERT, Shillong, 2010; and Report submitted by Kh. Bijoykumar Singh, "A Study of Enrolment and Retention of Muslim Children in the Schools of North Eastern India", a research report submitted to NERIE-NCERT, Shillong, 2009.

geographical and social distance due to many new married couples' displacement and migration of their nuclear house from their parental place either as a result of getting job in other places or land pressure.

3. **New Political Setting:** There has been a great change in male female speech pattern in newly emerging Political and Public spaces where women also hold equal and unique position as males. In recent time there is increase in the participation of women in many such political and public spheres. This trend is visible in the increased number of women's representation in state politics from grass root politics to state level politics⁴. Moreover, in the time of armed conflict and political conflict, women also take a forefront role. In such sphere, gender marked difference in the speech are rare. Both the sexes use various polite forms in almost equally.

The Sample

The scope of the paper will be limited only to the observable general pattern of speech usage, through a corpus of 30 modern dramas as a basis for analysing women's speech. The changing pattern of women's speech will be analysed by using a sample taken for the discussions telecast in various TV channels in which females took part as a powerful /knowledgeable discussant. It has to be stated here that the data is limited to only 6 discussions (telecast in Doordarshan, Impact TV, TOM TV ⁵).The author does not claim any conclusive and foolproof result from this sample; rather it intends only to highlight the changing pattern. The use of polite forms, endearments, persuasive and reduplication and lesser commands by the females will be considered in both the cases.

Women and Politeness

Polite form of speech in Meiteilon is the prestigious variety. Therefore, the use of polite forms means the using of standard variety. Meitei women, like the general women of the world, are more status conscious. They are to keep hold a subordinate position and also experience a different subculture within the larger Meitei cultural domain. Because of these facts, they speak more of polite forms. In this regard Thorne and Henley (1975) also write that one typically finds that social inferiors are required to use more polite and elevated speech to their superiors, 'that greater circumspection in behaviour often accompanies greater subordination'. This is also true in Meitei society. Meitei women are expected to use differential speech style more in addressing their

⁴The ratio of elected women counsellors and Ward members in Municipal election is 52:107 (excluding Imphal), in the Assembly there are 2 women MLAs.

⁵Doordarshan Kendra Imphal- Discussion on Manipur General Election (1/3/2017), Impact TV, Manung Hutna (30/4/2018), Doorrdarshan Kendra Imphal ,ISTV, Imphal – Are women safe now (6/10/2019), TOM TV, Crime against women (137/2020), Manung Hutna- Who should be the Ministers (3/10/2020) .

husbands, than their husbands are expected to use with them.⁶ Because of certain stereotypical sub-cultural motives Meitei women use more of polite forms as compared to their male counterparts. Males without exception use polite form of speech either to gain control or to show his cultural refinement. Table numbers I (a & b), II, III and IV show female's patterns of speech in various settings with various interlocutors. Table number V depicts the changing speech pattern in which women with their increased power structure, in the context of discussion in a public domain changed the usual norm of speech.

Table I (a)* Frequency distribution of polite suffix – /-pi~bi/ by males and females.

Sl. No.	Category	Males		Females		Total	
		f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.
1	To spouse	57	12.5	574	53.00	631	40.52
2	To Superior	140	29.54	150	13.85	290	18.81
3	To friend/equal	74	15.61	84	7.75	158	10.14
4	To Subordinate	66	13.92	99	9.14	165	10.59
5	In Public	2	0.42	4	0.36	6	0.38
6	Action done for oneself	20	4.21	33	3.04	53	3.40
7	Doing a favour	101	21.30	90	8.31	191	12.26
8	Sarcastic	14	2.95	49	4.52	63	4.04
	Total	474	99.97	1083	99.97	1557	99.96

Table I (b)* – Frequency distribution of humble/polite suffix – /-cə~jə/ by males and females.

Sl. No.	Category	Males		Females		Total	
		f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.
1	To spouse	100	27.62	384	46.04	484	40.47
2	To Superior	66	18.23	70	18.39	136	11.37
3	To friend/equal	51	14.09	51	6.11	102	8.53
4	To Subordinate	30	8.28	49	5.87	79	6.61
5	In Public	17	4.70	20	2.40	37	3.09
6	Doing a favour	19	5.25	51	6.11	70	5.85
7	action done for oneself	79	21.82	209	25.05	288	24.08
	Total	362	100.00	834	99.98	1196	100.00

What has been observed from these two tables is that out of a total of 3753 instances of use of polite forms, males use only 836 (30.37%) and females use 1917 (69.63%) of the sample – i.e. more than a double of the total usage of polite forms is made by females. Maximum number of

⁶ Parallel feature is with Javanese society too.

differences is observable in the usage to the spouses. Men hardly direct a polite speech to their wives. Females make use of more of polite suffixes in all the possible spheres.

Using of more of polite suffix to their respective spouses by Meitei wives clearly depicts the picture of Meitei society in which females are the powerless fair half. Males very rarely use request forms to their wives as they are the decision makers. The overall pattern of the usage of polite suffixes agrees well with social dominance theory. In their socialization process man hardly learned to act as a subordinate; they always are taught to behave like a dominant sect of the society, so is the resultant.

In Meitei society, women are found to use more of endearment forms so as to encourage her partner to continue to act in the interaction, which they visualized as a co-operative activity. Since talk is regarded as having a common goal and is a co-operative effort, they in turn take up the strategy to make her partner feel that she/he is acknowledged and loved.

Meitilon endearment forms include –ko and –bo attached to the last verb. Addition of these two forms makes the statement softer and sounds sweet to hear. Semantically the two suffixes have got a slightly different meaning, the first one, i.e., -ko suffix is used to make a simple request, or at least seeks a consent of the addresser. - bo suffix is added in case in which the speaker answers in a negative way. Answering negatively may be counted as a face threatening act (FTA) in connection with the speaker, but with the addition of -bo, the statement is made milder and thereby it may be counted as a strategy not to make a FTA to the speaker. Following is a quantitative data regarding the usage of endearment forms by the two sexes.

Table: II*. Frequency distribution of polite suffix – /– bo, – ko/ by males and females.

Sl. No.	Category	Males		Females		Total	
		f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.
1	– ko	42	56.76	67	53.17	109	54.50
2	– bo	32	43.24	59	46.82	91	45.50
	Total	74	100.00	126	99.99	200	100.00

What is evident from the above table is that females use more of endearment forms than males. Out of a total 200 instance of endearment forms 126 (63.00%) is used by women, whereas males make use of only 37.00% of the total number. Again, it is evident that the usage of - ko as an endearment suffix is more (54.50%) than that of the - bo endearment suffix (45.50%)

Meitei women’s use of more of endearment forms may be a resultant of their subordinate position, which they have been and are experiencing in day to day encounters. As a norm in Meitei society, girls are brought up with the idea that they are the milder part of the society, so they are

supposed to get affection, a mild treatment which ultimately will make them more sober. Since they are taught to be and kept in a subordinate status, they are never in a position to exercise power and be assertive. Rather they switch on to use endearment or soft forms to attain their goals. What we can conclude here is that in their socialization pattern and the way of actual treatment they are receiving in the familial and societal domain, they hardly learned to be assertive. So, to make a milder form of assertion, they use endearment forms.

Meitei Women and Use of Reduplicated Form and Persuasive Forms

Meitei women have a tendency to use reduplicated form when they wanted or required assertion about the already made statements.⁷ Women's usage of more of and persuasive forms perhaps results from their interactive behavioral pattern. The same explanation will go true for the usage of persuasive. The use of persuasive has a direct relevance to the subordinate status of the Meitei women. Persuasive may be counted as a device to make an assertion or command in a milder way. And unable to command or assert means powerlessness.

The usual pattern of using of more of reduplicated forms and persuasive by women folk holds true for Meitei women also. However, the statement does not mean that Meitei male never use reduplicated forms and persuasive. They definitely do use it, but in lesser degree as compared to females. This probably is because of the women's subculture of Meitei women, in their socialization pattern as well as in their interactional domain. Women in Meitei society experience a subordinate position to their male counterparts, so in order to make their goal succeed, to make their voice heard they may need to use persuasive and emphasis (the reduplicated forms) to acknowledge their existence in the male dominated Meitei society.

Persuasive in Meitei is a set of morphemes consisting of particles (- mi~ se ~ bə~ gə~ nə). These morphemes are added directly to the verbs forms to carry a meaning of persuasion, agreement seeking. The morphemes have meanings that the user of these particles have a pre-assessment that the one to whom she/he directs the speech will agree with her/him. The usage is nonreciprocal.

Table: III*. Frequency distribution of usage of reduplication forms and persuasive by males and females.

Sl. No.	Category	Males		Females		Total	
		f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.
1.	Reduplicated forms	27	32.93	55	67.07	82	100.00
2.	Persuasives (-mi, -se, -bə, -gə, - nə)	27	38.03	44	61.97	71	100.00

⁷ Similar usage is found in Thailand (Warotamasikkadit 1967) noted in Philips. P. Smith (1970). Key (1975) also reports that informal studies made by students show that women use more reduplicated adjustable form.

What is evident from the above table is that Meitei women make use of more reduplicated forms. Out of a total of 82 forms found in the sample, males use this form only in 27 times whereas females make use of reduplicated forms 55 times (67.07%), almost double the number males used it. Regarding persuasiveness also women make use of more persuasive 61.97% of the sample. Males' usage of persuasive is only 38.03%.

Therefore, what we can suggest regarding the findings in connection with these two variables is that reduplicated forms and persuasives have a direct bearing to the Meitei social setup. Men are always in a superior position; they are assigned with powers, which are socially recognized. Since they are not having any lapse of power, whatever they say or do is acknowledged. Therefore, they hardly need to use the reduplicated forms and persuasives. On the other hand, for women, since they are to be seen, not heard (a feature noted in Morocco too, F. Sidiqui, 1994), they need to have either an emphasis of what they want or to pursue the hearer. Reduplicated forms carry the feature of emphasis and they are lengthier which enables drawing the attention of the hearer. The same is true in the case of persuasive also. Here in this case, women are acknowledging the greater power of the hearer, while at the same time accepting their powerlessness. The existence of this difference in the speech usage of the two components of the same society is made more clear and well demarcated by the domain difference of the two sexes. There is a distinct male domain and female domain. Women in their subculture itself learn to behave and talk like an ideal Meitei lady. As they learn the traditional manners, etiquette, and behaviour they ultimately go on carrying down the generations the features which they acquire in the socialization process.

Meitei Women and Use of Commands

Commanding or ordering is one of the manifestations of one's power, i.e., powerful speakers make orders to the subordinates, and the subordinates, in order to get their work done, either have to request or to make suggestions. Regarding the reason why females use more of suggestions and requests rather than commanding, we can look up to the works of Maltz and Borker (1982). It is also true that boys and girls are socialized in slightly different socio-cultural settings, their networks are different, and their context is different. And male and female differences in patterns of language usage are directly related to the language learned in childhood which is carried over in adulthood. Because of their interactional domain and the peer group structure, girls learn to create and maintain relationships of closeness and equality. Bossiness and ordering around is not accepted among them as it violates the relationship of equality that was previously maintained by the interlocutional partners. In this line Goodwin (1980 a) writes that girls learn to phrase their arguments in terms of group needs and situational requirements rather than personal power or desire. So, women do what they learned in their socialization pattern.

The same pattern is applicable in Meitei society also. For men the use of speech for the expression of dominance is the most-straight forward goal. It has a direct relevance to the sociolinguistic socialization pattern of boy's peer groups. Maltz and Borkar (1982) opine that social success among boys is based on knowing both how and when to use words to express power as well as knowing when not to use them. This very behavior which they internalized in the formative stage is bought till adulthood, and it becomes the characteristic features of male's speech. Ultimately to show their power they use more power. They use commands, make fewer requests, and rather suggest very rarely as their usual pattern of interaction was hierarchically based. This reason will well account for Meitei male's use of more commands, lesser requests and fewer suggestions.

Command marker in Meiteilon is -u with its alternant /-ju~pu~mu~lu~ɲu~o~əu/. The request marker -bi~pi morpheme is added before the addition of command forms. Another alternative marker for commands in Meiteilon is the use of -si (the suggestive marker). In Meitei society commands are used more by males; females either request or suggest for their ends. Following is a qualitative data (the same corpus of earlier analysis) regarding the usage of commands, suggestions and request forms by the two sexes:

Table-IV*: Frequency distribution of usage of commands, requests and suggestive by males and females.

Sl. No.	Category	Males		Females		Total	
		f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.
1.	Direct Command	75	57.25	56	42.74	131	99.99
2.	Requests	19	38.78	30	61.22	49	100.00
3.	Suggestions	18	40.90	26	59.09	44	99.99

* Source: Speech of 176 individuals (98 each of both the sexes with comparable roles) selected from 30 modern Manipuri drama.

The above table depicts that out of 112 goal oriented utterances made by males, 75 are direct commands, 19 are requests and 18 are suggestions. For female's direct command, request and suggestions are 56, 30 and 26 out of 112 goal oriented utterances. Out of a total of 131 direct commands men use 75(57.25%) and women use 56(42.74%). Women make more of requests in the sample out of a total of 49 requests males made only 19 requests (38.78%) and females 61.22%. Regarding suggestions, the difference in the usage is not so big; it is a difference of degrees; both the sexes use suggestions as a profitable means of manifesting the desired goals.

The probable reason why males use more of commands is that they enjoy a superior position over their counterparts, i.e., females. As for females, why they use lesser commands is

because they are socialized to do so. Meitei social norms allows male to dominate females, females thereby assuming the subordinate position. Accordingly, they are instructed to be polite, make requests and suggest in cases where they have a complete knowledge about the thing or the event. The finding is in consonance with Maltz and Broker (1982), and Godwin (1980).

The Changing Perspective

Above listed features are applicable and are visible in the general social settings which are common to all the womenfolk of Meitei society. However, there are arguments that the differences that are categories as women's language and men's language are not attributable to the sex differences alone, rather it is context dependent. O'Barr and Atkin's courtroom study (2008) concludes that women's language as described by Lakoff is not characteristic of all women, nor is limited to women, rather the so called powerful and powerless language is attributable to the positions the speaker is holding in the power hierarchy.

However, a slight change in the speech pattern of emerging socially powerful women⁸ groups is visible in certain contexts, because of their achieved social status in the society. This newly emerging group of women started using a form of language almost comparable to the male counterparts (Table –V).

Table-V*: Frequency distribution of usage of various polite markers by males and females in a public domain.

Sl. No.	Category	Males		Females		Total	
		f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.	f.	p.c.
1.	-pi~bi	43	12.68	45	11.90	88	12.27
2.	-cə~jə	83	24.48	86	22.75	169	23.57
3.	- ko,- nebə	213	62.83	242	64.02	455	63.45
4.	- si	-	-	5	1.32	5	0.69
	Total	339	99.98	378	99.98	717	99.98

* Source: Speech of 14 individuals (7 each of both the sexes) selected from 5 discussions telecast in various TV channels of Manipur.

The pattern of use of polite forms by the two sexes is observed to be changing. The changing social position of the women induces the new pattern of speech. This group of women has acquired the social positions equal to their counterparts. Subsequent to their achieved status

⁸This pattern goes in support of O'Barr and Atkin's (2008) Courtroom study

their viewpoints are acknowledged; they became experts in the field and their suggestions are sought for. They normally do not use the general polite forms like- pi~bi, cə~jə but used a lot of softeners and persuasive. The form of speech is similar to that of the male counterparts. Out of a total of 88 instances of -pi~ bi, women used it 45 times whereas males used it 43 times. For cə~jə females used it 86 times whereas males used it 83 times in a total of 169 utterances that is used in overall telecast time. Regarding persuasive, male's use of persuasive or speech softeners are slightly less compared to the females: 62.83% and 64.02% respectively. What could be safely concluded here is that the speech pattern of Meitei society in terms of male and female speech differences is changing. Hardly any difference is observed in the speech of educated males and females in formal contexts.

Conclusion

The above analysis shows that Meitei women use more of polite forms, more persuasive, more of reduplicated forms, more requests and suggestions and rather fewer commands in almost all the spheres, domestic as well as general public settings. The social dominance theory as well as the social differentiation theory explains the state speech phenomena. However, the study has highlighted a changed pattern of speech observed in the speech of powerful women. It is possible that in other domestic and social spheres women might have conformed to the traditional norm of following the speech pattern of a polite, cultured women by using more polite, persuasive, softeners, and lesser commands. As society is transforming to a more liberal one, the traditional norm of considering women as subordinate to males is fading day by day and thereby the speech of the women is also changing. The emerging dynamic nature of society carried by new various efforts made by the governments not only uplifted the socio-economic position of the women in Meitei society, but it also has given an impact to the nature of relationship between males and females. Women's as well as men's speech is no more controlled fully by the very norm of traditional patriarchal society. Even though the society still follows the patriarchal notions, in certain levels modernity makes structural changes in the power relation of males and females which is directly reflected in the changing speech act of male and female in Meitei society.

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