

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc., M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

=====

Abstract

Manipuri language is taught with Bengali script earlier and now the trend is to teach through Meitei Mayek script along with the coexistence of Bengali script. The traditional way of arrangement of Meitei Mayek letters is not uniform in the Meitei Mayek textbooks. An analysis was done to find out the differences in the methods of presentation and teaching. Not only the problems related to the arrangements of the scripts but also the method of teaching the scripts are to be revised, simplified and modernized. In this context of confusion, this paper gives an alternative method of arrangement and teaching which will help the learners to a greater extent.

Keywords: Manipuri language, meiteilon, meitei mayek, mapung mayek, iyek ipi, lonsum iyek, cheitap iyek

1. Introduction

Manipuri, locally known as Meiteilon (Meitei - the Meitei community; lon - language) is the state language of Manipur which is one of the seven states of North-East India, with the city of Imphal as its capital. The state is bounded by Nagaland in the north, Mizoram in the south, Assam in the west, and by the borders of the country Myanmar in the east as well as in the south. Manipuri belongs to the Kuki-Chin-Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman sub family of the Sino-Tibetan family of languages (Grierson & Konow, 1903-28).

Manipuri language has been recognized by the Government of India as the state official language of Manipur along with English and it is one of the 22 scheduled languages of India. By the 71st amendment of the constitution in 1992, Manipuri is included in the list of Scheduled Languages in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India (Sarangi, A. 2009).

Manipuri is the mother tongue of the major ethnic group, the Meitei. This language is also being spoken by some native Manipuri speakers in the neighbouring North-Eastern states of India, viz., Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. There are some native Manipuri speakers in parts of Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is the main common medium of communication among 33 different mother tongues of different tribes in Manipur and also among other people inhabiting in Manipur and hence, it is being used as the lingua-franca in the state of Manipur.

Manipuri language is the only Tibeto-Burman language in India which has its own script, the Meitei Mayek script, which has been in existence from 1st century A.D. in coins of Wura Konthouba (568-658) (Kamei, G. 1991). Ancient records in Meiteilon were written in Meitei Mayek script only' (Sanajaoba, N. 2005). The origin of this language and its script are a mystery as many of the rich heritages of Manipuri language and many historical documents were destroyed at the beginning of the 18th century during the reign of King Pamheiba (1709-1748) at the suggestion of the Bengali saint Shantidas Gosai. The current Manipuri script, i.e., the Meitei Mayek script, is a reconstruction of the ancient script and since the early 1980's this has been taught in schools along with the Bengali script in Manipur (Imocha Singh, 2002). A non-government organization called Meetei Erol Eyek Loinasillon Apunba Lup (MEELAL) has been struggling for a long time to popularize Meitei Mayek script and to replace the Bengali script textbooks in the schools. It has been taking strong steps to promote the script among the common people. The Government of Manipur has introduced all the textbooks from 1st to 10th standards in Meitei Mayek script and for the first time in the educational history of Manipur, the High School Leaving Certificate Examination for the current year 2015 was conducted in Meitei Mayek script.

The traditional way of arrangement of Meitei Mayek scripts is not uniform in the Meitei Mayek textbook entitled 'Prime Mayek Mapi' written by L. Basantakumar, which is taught in the schools, 'Government approved Meitei Mayek Script (as per Manipur Government Gazette Number 33 – April 22, 1998) and 'Mapi Lairik Ahanba Wakhal (2000)' and 'Mapi Lairik Anishuba Wakhal (2002)' published by 'The North-East Meetei Mayek Academy (NEMMA)'.

The comparative statement of presentation of the script lessons are given below.


Sl. No.	Lessons	School Textbook	Government Approved	North Eastern Meitei Mayek Academy (NEMMA) Textbook
1.	Mapung Mayek	1	1	2
2.	Swar Mayek	2	4	1
3.	Lonsum Mayek	3	2	3
4.	Cheitap Mayek	4	3	4































Table No. 1

Further, Mapung Mayek is named as Iyek Ipi in the notification as per Manipur Government Gazette Number 33 – April, 22, 1998. This notification which has been issued for the uniform usage of the script throughout the state is not followed in the present school textbooks. This kind of variations will confuse the learners while learning the Meitei Mayek script.

In this perspective of using different ways of presenting the letters and teaching methods, not only the problems related to the arrangements of the scripts as stated above but also the method of teaching the scripts, are to be revised, simplified and modernized. In this context of confusion, this paper gives an alternative method of arrangement and teaching which will help the learners to a greater extent.

2. Traditional Way of Representing Vowels and Consonants

The traditional way of arrangement of twenty seven letters of Meitei Mayek script is based on body parts for eighteen letters up to the letter *atiya*  /ə/ and the remaining nine letters do not have any objects to represent.

  /k/ kok	  /s/ sām	  /l/ lai	  /m/ mit	  /p/ pa
  /n/ na	  /c/ cil	  /t/ til	  /kh/ khəu	  /ŋ/ ŋəu
  th thəu	  /w/ wai	  /y/ yaŋ	  /h/ huk	  /u/ un

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

ᱚ ᱚ /i/ i	ᱞ ᱞᱟ /ph/ phəm	ᱠ ᱠᱟᱹᱵᱟ /ə/ ətiya	ᱡ ᱡᱟᱹᱴᱟ /g/ gok	ᱢ ᱢᱟᱹ /jh/ jhəm
ᱣ ᱣᱟᱹ /r/ rai	ᱤ ᱤᱟ /b/ ba	ᱦ ᱦᱟᱹ /j/ jil	ᱨ ᱨᱟᱹ /d/ dil	ᱩ ᱩᱟ /gh/ ghəu
ᱪ ᱪᱟᱹ /dh/ dhəu	ᱫ ᱫᱟᱹ /bh/ bhəm			

Table No. 2: The 27 letters

The first letter of this system is kok ᱚ /k/ which represents the head and other letters excluding nine letters, denote other body parts. This arrangement of letters does not separate vowels and consonants as in the other major Indian languages. Meitei Mayek script contains three vowels and twenty four consonants. Other vowel letters are derived from the three vowels with some particular secondary symbols. The vowels are not represented by a picture as specified for the consonants and are not presented in a systematic way.

This traditional way of representing the letters is not logical in the world of modern technology, modern methods and techniques. The teaching of Meitei Mayek script is to be revisited based on linguistic principles which help in analyzing and teaching language in a scientific manner.

3. Rearrangement of Meitei Mayek Script Letters

Instead of presenting the Meitei Mayek script letters as shown in the above three presentations (in table no. 1), which will not serve the purpose of teaching and learning fruitfully, a new way of presenting the script is suggested here in this paper. The script is to be divided into vowels and consonants as given in most of the Indian languages. This will help in learning the letters of the script of other languages as well as a spin-off sequel. Since the school children learn Hindi as third language in this way, the suggested classification will help them in learning Manipuri and Hindi.

3.1. Vowels

In the traditional arrangement and method, there are three pure vowels, namely, ꯏ /ə/, ꯊ /i/, and ꯋ /u/ which are taught along with other consonants. The six vowels, viz., ꯎ /a/, ꯍ /e/, ꯏ /əi/, ꯐ /o/, ꯑ /əu/ and ꯒ /əŋ/ are taught as vowel sounds derived from the letter ətiya ꯏ /ə/ in the traditional method.

Out of these nine, ꯏ /ə/, ꯎ /a/, ꯊ /i/, ꯋ /u/, ꯍ /e/ and ꯐ /o/ are vowels; ꯏ /əi/ and ꯑ /əu/ are diphthongs and ꯒ /əŋ/ is neither a diphthong nor a pure vowel but a combination of both. Besides these, five more diphthongs are available in Manipuri; they are ꯎꯊ /ai/, ꯋꯊ /ui/, ꯐꯊ /oi/, ꯎꯋ /au/ and ꯎꯐ /ao/. Altogether there are seven diphthongs, namely, ꯏ /əi/, ꯑ /əu/, ꯎꯊ /ai/, ꯋꯊ /ui/, ꯐꯊ /oi/, ꯎꯋ /au/ and ꯎꯐ /ao/. Thus, there are six vowels, namely, ꯏ /ə/, ꯎ /a/, ꯊ /i/, ꯋ /u/, ꯍ /e/ and ꯐ /o/ and seven diphthongs, namely, ꯏ /əi/, ꯑ /əu/, ꯎꯊ /ai/, ꯋꯊ /ui/, ꯐꯊ /oi/, ꯎꯋ /au/ and ꯎꯐ /ao/ in Manipuri.

Height	Front	Central	Back
High	ꯊ i		ꯋ u
Mid	ꯍ e	ꯏ ə	ꯐ o
Low		ꯎ a	

Table No. 3: Suggested vowel chart

3.1.1 Distribution of Vowels

Out of the six vowels represented in table number 3, ꯏ /ə/, ꯎ /a/ and ꯍ /e/ occur as pure vowels only in the initial position and as combinations with consonants in the initial, medial and final syllable of a word; ꯊ /i/, ꯋ /u/ and ꯐ /o/ occur as pure vowels in all the three positions and as combinations with consonants in the initial, medial and final syllable of a word.

ꯏ /ə/	initial	ꯏꯪꯩ	/əŋaŋ/	‘baby’
		ꯏꯪꯩ	/məŋa/	‘five’
	medial	ꯏꯪꯩ	/kəppə/	‘crying’
	final	ꯏꯪꯩ	/ləirəŋ/	‘oven/kiln’
ꯎ /a/	initial	ꯎꯪꯩ	/anok/	‘spectacles’

		𑜋𑜨𑜃𑜫	/kacin/	‘corner’
	medial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ləibak/	‘country/soil’
	final	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/nupa/	‘man’
𑜇 /e/	initial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ekagari/	‘bicycle’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/yenbi/	‘hen’
	medial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/hameŋ/	‘goat’
	final	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ice/	‘elder sister’
𑜇 /i/	initial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ima/	‘mother’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/mit/	‘eye’
	medial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ə-i-bə/	‘author’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/həyiŋ/	‘house fly’
	final	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ləphoi/	‘banana’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/nupi/	‘woman’
𑜇 /u/	initial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/uci/	‘rat’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/kurak/	‘butterfly’
	medial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ya-u-m/	‘mouthful’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/phəmuŋ/	‘bed’
	final	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/khau/	‘bag’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/cəphu/	‘earthen pot’
𑜇 /o/	initial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/oy/	‘left side’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/lon/	‘language’
	medial	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ha-o-rəi/	‘cock’s comb (a kind of flower)’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ləirol/	‘layer’
	final	𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/cə-ha-o/	‘cahao, a kind of black rice’
		𑜇𑜨𑜃𑜫	/thəro/	‘water lily’

Note: ၵ /i/ and ၶ /u/ individually form one letter words, meaning ‘blood or thatch’ and ‘tree’ respectively.

3.1.2 Distribution of Diphthongs

There are seven diphthongs in Manipuri, namely, ၶၶ /əi/, ၶၶၵ /ai/, ၶၶၵ /ui/, ၶၶၵ /oi/, ၶၶ /əu/, ၶၶၶ /au/ and ၶၶၶ /ao/. Out of these seven, ၶၶ /əi/ and ၶၶ /əu/ are graphically written as pure diphthongs and the remaining five diphthongs are represented by two vowel sequences. The three diphthongs ၶၶ /əi/, ၶၶ /əu/ and ၶၶၵ /ai/ occur as pure diphthongs initially; ၶၶၵ /ui/ and ၶၶၵ /oi/ as pure diphthongs initially and medially while the diphthongs ၶၶၶ /au/ and ၶၶၶ /ao/ do not occur as pure diphthongs in all the positions of a word. All these seven diphthongs occur as combinations with consonants in the initial, medial and final syllable of a word.

a)

ၶၶ /əi/	initial	ၶၶၶၶ	/əihak/	‘I’
		ၶၶၶၶၶၶ	/səisəkpə/	‘male singer’
	medial	ၶၶၶၶ	/əphəibə/	‘horizontal’
	final	ၶၶၶၶ	/məpəi/	‘heap’
ၶၶ /əu/	initial	ၶၶၶၶၶၶ	/əuraibə/	‘read/study’
		ၶၶၶ	/phəu/	‘paddy’
	medial	ၶၶၶၶၶ	/əthəubə/	‘brave, sharp’
	final	ၶၶၶၶၶ	/pənthəu/	‘father’

b)

ၶၶၵ /ai/	initial	ၶၶၶၶၶ	/ain/	‘law’
		ၶၶၶၶၶ	/paijə/	‘chisel’
	medial	ၶၶၶၶၶၶ	/əpaibə/	‘flying’
	final	ၶၶၶၶၶ	/khərai/	‘barbecue, lattice’
ၶၶၵ /ui/	initial	ၶၶၶၶၶ	/uibə/	‘doz/nap’
		ၶၶၶၶၶၶၶ	/huinao/	‘puppy’
	medial	ၶၶၶၶၶၶ	/ə-ui-bə/	‘napping/resilient’

		𑜋𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ə-khui-bə/	‘faded/withered/wrinkled’
	final	𑜋𑜨	/hui/	‘dog’
𑜋𑜨 /oi/	initial	𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫-𑜋𑜨𑜃𑜫	/oijə-oithək/	‘benefit’
		𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/loipot/	‘tribute, levy’
	medial	𑜂𑜫𑜋𑜨𑜃𑜫	/phəu-oi-bi/	‘name of a Goddess’
		𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨	/iroibə/	‘swimming’
	final	𑜂𑜫𑜂𑜫	/ləphoi/	‘banana’
𑜋𑜨𑜃𑜫 /au/	initial	not used		
		𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫-𑜨𑜃𑜫	/lau-khongbə/	‘shout, howl’
		𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/pautak/	‘advice’
	medial	𑜋𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨	/əraubə/	‘loud’
	final	𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/icau/	‘flood, inundation’
𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫 /ao/	initial	not used		
		𑜨𑜂𑜫	/kao/	‘wild bull’
		𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/əŋaobə/	‘mad’
	medial	𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/əphaobə/	‘famous, renowned’
	final	𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨𑜂𑜫	/likcao/	‘big chain (of neck)’

3.1.3 Cheitap Iyeks (Secondary Symbols of Vowels)

Cheitap Iyeks are secondary symbols of vowels. The vowels 𑜋𑜨 /a/, 𑜨 /i/, 𑜨𑜃𑜫 /u/, 𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫 /e/, 𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /əi/, 𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫 /o/, 𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /əu/ and 𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /əŋ/ with their corresponding secondary symbols as found in the arrangement and method are given below, except 𑜋𑜨 /ə/ which has no secondary symbol.

𑜋𑜨	/ʾ/	called as 𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /atəp/
𑜨	/ɸ/	called as 𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /inəp/
𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ʷ/	called as 𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /unəp/
𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫	/ɔ/	called as 𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜫𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /yetnəp/
𑜋𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫	/ɤ/	called as 𑜨𑜂𑜫𑜫𑜂𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫 /cəinəp/

𑜏	/ɔ/	called as 𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫 /otnəp/
𑜏	/ʊ/	called as 𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫 /səunəp/
𑜏	/ɔ/	called as 𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫 /nuŋ/

Since the combination of consonant and vowel represented by secondary symbol form a syllabic letter, their distribution is given in the initial, medial and final syllables.

Examples:

𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/kaŋ/	‘mosquito’
	medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/ənabə/	‘patient’
	final	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/ima/	‘mother’
𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/tin/	‘saliva’
	medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/lairik/	‘book’
	final	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/napi/	‘grass’
𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/cuhi/	‘sugarcane juice’
	medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/əmubə/	‘black’
	final	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/məku/	‘owl’
𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/len/	‘hail’
	medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/təreŋ/	‘spinning wheel’
	final	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/ice/	‘elder sister’
𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/kəinya/	‘bride’
	medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/əhəi-əsɪŋ/	‘learned, scholar’
	final	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/məhəi/	‘education/skill’
𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/lon/	‘language’
	medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/jəgoy/	‘dance’
	final	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/sono/	‘crank, mentally disorder’
𑜏 /ɔ/	initial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜫	/phəu/	‘paddy’

	medial	ᱠᱚᱵᱚ	/ənəubə/	‘tender’
	final	ᱠᱚᱵᱚᱰ	/niŋthəu/	‘king’
ᱠᱚ /’/	initial	ᱠᱚᱵᱚ	/kəŋkhu/	‘dry cough’
	medial	ᱠᱚᱵᱚᱰ	/əkəŋbə/	‘dry’
	final	ᱠᱚᱵᱚᱰ	/ikəŋ/	‘draught’

3.2 Consonants

As per the Manipur Government Gazette Number 33, April 22, 1988, there are 27 letters called ‘Iyek Ipi’. They are ᱠ /k/, ᱡ /s/, ᱢ /l/, ᱣ /m/, ᱤ /p/, ᱥ /n/, ᱦ /c/, ᱧ /t/, ᱨ /kh/, ᱩ /ŋ/, ᱪ /th/, ᱫ /w/, ᱬ /y/, ᱭ /h/, ᱮ /u/, ᱯ /i/, ᱰ /ph/, ᱱ /ə/, ᱲ /g/, ᱳ /jh/, ᱴ /r/, ᱵ /b/, ᱶ /j/, ᱷ /d/, ᱸ /gh/, ᱹ /dh/ and ᱺ /bh/ which are arranged neither by point or manner of articulation of the letters nor in a logical way separating vowels and consonants. Definitely, this is an unquestionable native traditional way of arrangement of letters.

Since the letters ᱮ /u/, ᱯ /i/ and ᱱ /ə/ which are vowels are rearranged, we have 24 Mapung Mayek or Iyek Ipi ‘consonants’ left, viz., ᱠ /k/, ᱡ /s/, ᱢ /l/, ᱣ /m/, ᱤ /p/, ᱥ /n/, ᱦ /c/, ᱧ /t/, ᱨ /kh/, ᱩ /ŋ/, ᱪ /th/, ᱫ /w/, ᱬ /y/, ᱭ /h/, ᱮ /ph/, ᱰ /g/, ᱳ /jh/, ᱴ /r/, ᱵ /b/, ᱶ /j/, ᱷ /d/, ᱸ /gh/, ᱹ /dh/ and ᱺ /bh/.

These consonants are to be rearranged as per the point and manner of articulation. This arrangement will help to know the point and manner of articulation and will help in learning them easily.

3.2.1 Rearrangement of Consonants

ᱠ	ᱡ	ᱢ	ᱣ	ᱤ
/k/	/kh/	/g/	/gh/	/ŋ/
ᱦ	-	ᱧ	ᱨ	-
/c/	-	/j/	/jh/	-
ᱩ	ᱪ	ᱫ	ᱬ	ᱭ
/t/	/th/	/d/	/dh/	/n/

ᱯ	ᱥ	ᱪ	ᱠ	ᱭ
/p/	/ph/	/b/	/bh/	/m/
ᱮ	ᱦ	ᱚ	ᱡ	-
/y/	/r/	/l/	/w/	
-	ᱱ	ᱢ	-	-
	/s/	/h/		

Manner of Articulation	Aspirated/ Unaspirated	Bilabial	Post-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
		vl vd	vl vd	vl vd	vl vd	vl vd
Stops	unaspi.	ᱯ ᱪ p b	ᱠ ᱡ t d		ᱮ ᱚ c j	ᱭ ᱭ k g
	aspi.	ᱥ ᱠ ph bh	ᱢ ᱣ th dh		ᱦ ᱮ jh kh	ᱱ ᱢ gh
Nasals		ᱭ m		ᱚ n		ᱭ ŋ
Fricatives				ᱱ s		ᱢ h
Lateral				ᱚ l		
Flap				ᱦ r		
Approximants		ᱡ w			ᱮ y	

Table No. 4: Manipuri Consonants Chart

3.2.2 Distribution of Consonants

Out of twenty four consonants, only twelve consonants, namely, ᱯ /p/, ᱠ /t/, ᱮ /c/, ᱚ /j/, ᱭ /k/, ᱭ /m/, ᱚ /n/, ᱭ /ŋ/, ᱱ /s/, ᱚ /l/, ᱦ /r/ and ᱮ /y/ can occur in all the positions; eight consonants, namely, ᱥ /ph/, ᱪ /b/, ᱢ /th/, ᱣ /d/, ᱮ /kh/, ᱭ /g/, ᱢ /h/ and ᱡ /w/ occur medially and finally; four consonants, namely, ᱠ /bh/, ᱣ /dh/, ᱦ /jh/ and ᱱ /gh/ occur only initially.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

3.2.2.1 Bilabial Stops ꯏ /p/, ꯍ /ph/, ꯎ /b/, ꯐ /bh/

Voiceless Bilabial Stop ꯏ /p/

initial	ꯏꯪ꯫	/pat/	‘lake’
medial	ꯏꯪ꯫ꯎ	/əpəŋbə/	‘foolish’
final	ꯏꯪ꯫	/mərup/	‘friend’

Aspirated Voiceless Bilabial Stop ꯍ /ph/

initial	ꯍꯪ꯫	/phəmun/	‘bed’
medial	ꯍꯪ꯫ꯎ	/ləphoi/	‘banana’
final	not used		

Voiced Bilabial Stop ꯎ /b/

initial	ꯎꯪ꯫	/bora/	‘gunny bag’
medial	ꯎꯪ꯫ꯎ	/laibək/	‘fore head’
final	not used		

Aspirated Voiced Bilabial Stop ꯐ /bh/

initial	ꯐꯪ꯫	/bhut/	‘ghost’
medial	not used		
final	not used		

3.2.2.2 Post-dental Stops /t/, /th/, /d/, /dh/

Voiceless Post-dental Stop ꯑ /tə/

initial	ꯑꯪ꯫	/təndən/	‘glow worm’
medial	ꯑꯪ꯫ꯎ	/kətən/	‘lazy fellow’
final	ꯑꯪ꯫	/sumjit/	‘broom’

Aspirated Voiceless Post-dental Stop ꯒ /th/

initial	ꯒꯪ꯫	/thəmmoi/	‘heart’
medial	ꯒꯪ꯫ꯎ	/məthel-lukoi/	‘dishes’

final	not used
-------	----------

Voiced Post-dental Stop 𑜋 /d/

Initial	𑜋𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/dukan/	‘shop’
medial	𑜏𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/təndən/	‘glow worm’
final	not used		

Aspirated Voiced Post-dental Stop 𑜊 /dh/

Initial	𑜊𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/dhatu/	‘metal’
medial	not used		
Final	𑜊𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/gədhə/	‘donkey’

3.2.2.3 Palatal Stops /c/, /j/, /jh/

Voiceless Palatal Stop 𑜇 /cə/

initial	𑜇𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/cəraŋ/	‘dragon fly’
medial	𑜇𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/icel/	‘water current’
final	𑜇𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/cəməc/	‘spoon’

Voiced Palatal Stop 𑜊 /j/

initial	𑜊𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/jəgoy/	‘dance’
medial	𑜊𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/khəjai/	‘cheek’
final	𑜊𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/jəhaj/	‘ship’

Aspirated Voiced Palatal Stop 𑜊 /jh/

initial	𑜊𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/jhan/	‘cymbal’
medial	not used		
final	not used		

3.2.2.4 Velar Stops /k/, /kh/, /g/, /gh/

Voiceless Velar Stop 𑜇 /kə/

initial	𑜇𑜃𑜂𑜆𑜇	/kələm/	‘pen’
---------	-------	---------	-------

medial	ꯏꯪ꯫	/həikək/	‘chest nut’
final	ꯏꯪ꯫ꯏ	/tinkhak/	‘caterpillar’

Aspirated Voiceless Velar Stop ꯃ /khə/

initial	ꯃꯪ꯫	/khəjin/	‘prawn’
medial	ꯃꯪ꯫ꯏ	/məkhon/	‘sound’
final	not available		

Voiced Velar Stop ꯄ /gə/

initial	ꯄꯪ꯫	/gyan/	‘knowledge’
medial	ꯄꯪ꯫ꯏ	/jəgoy/	‘dance’
final	not available		

Aspirated Voiced Velar Stop ꯅ /ghə/

initial	ꯅꯪ꯫	/ghəri/	‘clock/watch’
medial	not used		
final	not used		

3.2.2.5 Nasals /m/, /n/, /ŋ/

Bilabial Nasal ꯆ /m/

initial	ꯆꯪ꯫	/mənəm/	‘smell’
medial	ꯆꯪ꯫ꯏ	/phəmun/	‘bed’
final	ꯆꯪ꯫	/ləm/	‘land’

Alveolar Nasal ꯇ /n/

initial	ꯇꯪ꯫ꯏ	/nakon/	‘ear’
medial	ꯇꯪ꯫	/cənəm/	‘garlic’
final	ꯇꯪ꯫	/lan/	‘war’

Velar Nasal ꯈ /ŋ/

initial	ꯈꯪ꯫	/ŋamu/	‘lata fish’
---------	-----	--------	-------------

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

medial	ṭṭṭṭṭṭ	/təŋkhay/	‘half’
final	ṭṭṭṭṭṭ	/həyiŋ/	‘fly’

3.2.2.6 Fricatives /s/, /h/

Alveolar Fricative ṣ /sə/

initial	ṣṣṣṣṣṣ	/səm/	‘hair’
medial	ṣṣṣṣṣṣ	/isiŋ/	‘water’
final	ṣṣṣṣṣṣ	/məhades/	‘continent’

Velar Fricative ḥ /h/

initial	ḥḥḥḥḥḥ	/həudon/	‘cat’
medial	ḥḥḥḥḥḥ	/məhak/	‘he/she’
final	not used		

Alveolar Lateral ḷ /l/

initial	ḷḷḷḷḷḷ	/lairik/	‘book’
medial	ḷḷḷḷḷḷ	/pəlem/	‘mother’
final	ḷḷḷḷḷḷ	/mənil/	‘vapour/steam’

Alveolar Flap ṛ /r/

initial	ṛṛṛṛṛṛ	/rumal/	‘handkerchief’
medial	ṛṛṛṛṛṛ	/kurak/	‘butterfly’
final	not used		

3.2.2.7 Approximants /w/, /y/

Bilabial Approximant ʋ /w/

initial	ʋʋʋʋʋʋ	/wai/	‘paddy husk’
medial	ʋʋʋʋʋʋ	/ləway/	‘village’
final	not used		

Palatal Approximant ɣ /y/

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

initial	ꯏꯝ	/yum/	‘house’
medial	ꯏꯝꯪ	/məyai/	‘middle’
final	ꯏꯝ꯫	/məhəy/	‘result’

3.2.3 Lonsum Iyeks (Pure Consonants)

In the traditional method there are eight ‘Lonsum Iyeks’, i.e., pure consonant forms, namely, ꯏ /k/, ꯎ /l/, ꯍ /m/, ꯐ /p/, ꯑ /n/, ꯒ /t/, ꯓ /ŋ/ and ꯩ /i/. In fact, ꯩ /i/, as mentioned earlier, is a pure vowel and it should not be included in the Lonsum Iyek. Hence, there will be only seven Lonsum Iyeks.

The combination of the pure consonants with the vowel, ꯑ /ə/, is given below.

ꯏ + ꯑ > ꯏꯑ	/k/ + /ə/ > /kə/
ꯎ + ꯑ > ꯎꯑ	/l/ + /ə/ > /lə/
ꯍ + ꯑ > ꯍꯑ	/m/ + /ə/ > /mə/
ꯐ + ꯑ > ꯐꯑ	/p/ + /ə/ > /pə/
ꯑ + ꯑ > ꯑꯑ	/n/ + /ə/ > /nə/
ꯒ + ꯑ > ꯒꯑ	/t/ + /ə/ > /tə/
ꯓ + ꯑ > ꯓꯑ	/ŋ/ + /ə/ > /ŋə/

Out of the 24 consonants, 7 consonants discussed above have pure consonant forms and the remaining 17 consonants, namely, ꯊ /s/, ꯋ /c/, ꯌ /kh/, ꯍ /th/, ꯎ /w/, ꯏ /y/, ꯐ /h/, ꯑ /ph/, ꯒ /g/, ꯓ /jh/, ꯔ /r/, ꯕ /b/, ꯖ /j/, ꯗ /d/, ꯘ /gh/, ꯙ /dh/ and ꯚ /bh/ do not have pure consonant representations. The 7 pure consonant forms, viz., ꯏ /k/, ꯎ /l/, ꯍ /m/, ꯐ /p/, ꯑ /n/, ꯒ /t/ and ꯓ /ŋ/ will be pronounced as /ik/, /il/, /im/, /ip/, /in/, /it/ and /iŋ/ respectively. The remaining 17 consonants will also be read in the same way. The vowel /i/ is added before them for easy pronunciation of the pure consonants. The Manipuri way of reading the pure consonants is like kok lonsum for /k/, lai lonsum for /l/, etc.

4. Teaching Combination of Consonants and Vowels

The combination of consonants and vowels are taught with pure consonants normally as

i) ꯏ /ik/ + ꯑ /ə/ > ꯏꯑ /kə/

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

III 2.3

/kəkceŋ/

‘ant’

` /ka/

III

/kaŋ/

‘mosquito’

• /ki/

ਸਿੰਘ

/kin/

‘fist’

/ku/



/ku/

‘coffin’

- /ke/

卅。卅。

/kege/

‘caster’

𐌵⁹ /kəi/

 $\frac{1}{2}$

/kəi/

‘tiger’

𐌲𐌳 /ko/

III⁸ III

/kok/

‘head’

𐌆𐌵 /kəu/

四、

/kəuna/

‘a kind of reed’

Since Meitei Mayek does not have pure consonant forms for 17 consonants, the traditional way of combining them is suggested here with the consonant Ξ /ph/.

/phə/

五五五

/phəmʊŋ/

‘bed’

五五

/phək/

‘mat’

ۛۛۛ

/əpəbe/

‘good’

ii) 𑜋 /ph/ + 𑜏 /a/ > 𑜋𑜏 /pha/

Example:	𑜋𑜏𑜉	/phagi/	‘joke’
	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉𑜉	/səmphabi/	‘hair pin, hair clip’
	𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉	/timpha/	‘water leech’

iii) 𑜋 /ph/ + 𑜏 /i/ > 𑜋𑜏 /phi/

Example:	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉	/phiral/	‘flag’
	𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉	/nəphidu/	‘(that) your cloth’
	𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉	/innəphi/	‘a type of shawl worn by the Meitei women’

iv) 𑜋 /ph/ + 𑜏 /u/ > 𑜋 /phu/

Example:	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉	/phuŋga/	‘fireplace inside the kitchen’
	𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉	/iphut/	‘spring’
	𑜉𑜉𑜉	/cəphu/	‘earthen pot’

v) 𑜋 /ph/ + 𑜏 /e/ > 𑜋𑜏 /phe/

Example:	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉	/sendəl/	‘slipper’
	𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉𑜉	/cəmphet/	‘less spicy’
	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉𑜉 𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉𑜉	/kuphet kaphet/	‘twinkling’

vi) 𑜋 /ph/ + 𑜏 /əi/ > 𑜋 /phəi/

Example:	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉	/phəigən/	‘thigh’
	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉𑜉	/əphəibə/	‘horizontal’
	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉𑜉	/kakphəi/	‘leech’

vi) 𑜋 /ph/ + 𑜏 /o/ > 𑜋𑜏 /pho/

Example:	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉	/phola/	‘a kind of sweet’
	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉	/pholi/	‘silt’
	𑜋𑜏𑜉𑜉𑜉	/kəphoi/	‘pomegranate’

vii) 𑜀𑜂𑜆 /ph/ + 𑜁𑜪 /əu/ > 𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜪 /phəu/

Example: 𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜪𑜁𑜪 /phəugəi/ ‘granary’
 𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜪𑜁𑜪𑜁𑜪 /phəura/ ‘a kind of big winnow’
 𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜪𑜁𑜪𑜁𑜪𑜁𑜪 /əphəubə/ ‘dried up (in the sun)’

As given above all the consonant plus vowel combinations will be taught.

5. Method of Reading the Combination of Consonants and Vowels

The traditional way of reading the combination of consonants and vowels in Meitei Mayek script is given below in (a) and the way of reading in Bengali script is given in (b):

𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) a (b) səra	atəp əkəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok ko	atəp əkəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > ka ko əkəp > ka
𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) i (b) rəsəi	inəp rəsəikəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok ko	inəp rəsəikəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > ki ko rəsəikəp > ki
𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) un (b) rəsəu	unəp rəsəukəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok ko	unəp rəsəukəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > ku ko rəsəukəp > ku
𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) e (b) e	yetnəp ekəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok ko	yetnəp ekəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > ke ko ekəp > ke
𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) əi (b) əi	cəinəp əikəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok ko	cəinəp əikəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > kəi ko əikəp > kəi
𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) o (b) o	otnəp okəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok ko	otnəp okəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > ko ko okəp > ko
𑜀𑜂𑜆 (a) əu	səunəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆 kok	səunəp	𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜀𑜂𑜆𑜁𑜪 > kəu

(b) əu	əukar	ko	əukar	ko əukar > kəu
𑜋𑜨	𑜋	𑜇𑜨	𑜋	𑜇𑜨
(a) əŋ	nuŋ	kok	nuŋ	kok nuŋ > kəŋ
(b) əŋ	ənuŋsar	ko	ənuŋsar	ko ənuŋsar > kəŋ

Table No. 5

This way of reading will be confusing and taking lots of energy for the mother tongue and second language learners as well. Because of this reason, this article proposes a simple way of reading the combination of consonants and vowels which will simplify the concept of the combination and the formation of graphic representation.

6. Reading the Spelling of a Word

The traditional way of reading the spelling of a word is by the names of the letters in the word. For example, 𑜇𑜨𑜨 (kok) is read as ‘kok otnəp kok lonsum’ and 𑜉𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨 (təndən) is read as ‘til na lonsum dil na lonsum’.

This article proposes reading of the letters by their pronunciation in a word to spell it. Furthermore, one should remember that they are syllabic letters which should be read together (Thirumalai, 1976). This will facilitate the learners to remember the letters and their pronunciation. When pure consonants are spelt, the vowel /i-/ will be used to pronounce pure consonants without which they cannot be uttered. For example, 𑜇𑜨𑜨 (kok) will be read as ko-ik > kok and 𑜉𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨 (təndən) will be read as tə-in-də-in > təndən. This can be compared with the English way of reading the spelling of a word. For example, the English word ‘banana’ is read as ‘b-a-n-a-n-a’.

Manipuri has secondary symbols for each vowel, so it is better to teach the syllabic letters to spell a word. It is to be noted that in Indian languages each letter is a syllabic one when used in words unlike English where it is alphabetic. The above word banana (𑜉𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨) will be read as ‘ba-na-na’ in Indian languages including Manipuri. Similarly, thəwanmicak (𑜉𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨𑜃𑜫𑜨) will be spelt as thə-wa-in-mi-ca-ik but read as thə-wan-mi-cak > thəwanmicak which has four syllables and spelt not as ‘thəu wa atəp na lonsum mit inəp cil atəp kok lonsum’ as in the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

traditional way of reading. Reading by syllabic letters will make the students to understand the syllabic system of a word. It will save energy, i.e., economy of speech. Further, this will help in learning other Indian languages also which are read as suggested above.

Example:

ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /thəwanmicak/ ‘star’

Spelt as ᱠ-ᱤᱨ-ᱤᱰ-ᱤᱨ-ᱤᱰ-ᱤᱨ /thə-wa-in-mi-ca-ik/ and read as ᱠ-ᱤᱨᱤᱰ-ᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /thə-wan-mi-cak/

ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /korəuhənbə/ ‘sun’

Spelt as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /ko-rəu-hə-in-bə/ and read as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /ko-rəu-hən-bə/

ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /məitrəbak/ ‘land of the Meiteis’

Spelt as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /məi-trə-ba-ik/ and read as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /məi-trə-bak/

ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /niŋthəmtha/ ‘winter’

Spelt as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /ni-iŋ-thə-im-tha/ and read as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /niŋ-thəm-tha/

ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /lainiŋthəu/ ‘name of a God’

Spelt as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /la-i-ni-iŋ-thəu/ and read as ᱠᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨᱤᱰᱤᱨ /lai-niŋ-thəu/

7. Benefits of Rearrangement of Vowels and Consonants

The following are the benefits of the rearrangement of vowels and consonants as suggested above:

- (i) The students will be very much clear about the alphabet of Manipuri language.
- (ii) It will simplify the learning of pronunciation and the spelling of Manipuri words.
- (iii) It will help the students to learn any other Indian language.
- (iv) The non-Manipuri speakers who have learnt either Hindi or any other Indian Language will find the Manipur script easier to learn.

8. Conclusion

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

The traditional arrangement of letters in the Meitei Mayek alphabet is not logical and the methods of spelling and reading a word are complex for the first and second language learners of Manipuri. In this context the proposed new way of arrangement, spelling and reading will benefit to a greater extent.

References

1. Basantakumar, L. year not mentioned. Prime Mapi Mayek. Imphal: Prime Publications.
2. Grierson, G.A. and Konow, S. Eds. 1903-28. Linguistics Survey of India. Volume III, Parts 1-3, Tibeto-Burman Family. Reprinted in 1967. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
3. Imocha Singh, Moirangthem. 2002. History of the Evolution of Manipuri Script (Meitei Mayek). PhD Thesis (unpublished). Canchipur: Department of History, Manipur University.
4. Kamei, Gangmumei. 1991. History of Manipur. New Delhi: National Publishing House.
5. Manipur Government Gazette Number 33 – April, 22, 1998. Imphal
6. O.J.M. & M.B.S. (Resource Persons- Full names not known). 2000. Mapi Lairik Ahanba Wakhal. Imphal: The North-East Meetei Mayek Academy (NEMMA)
7. O.J.M. & M.B.S. (Resource Persons- Full names not known). 2002. Mapi Lairik Anishuba Wakhal. Imphal: The North-East Meetei Mayek Academy (NEMMA)
8. Sanajaoba, Naorem. 2005. Manipur Past and Present, New Delhi: Mittal Publication.
9. Sarangi, A. 2009. Language and Politics in India. p. 27. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
10. Thirumalai, M.S. 1976. An Introduction to Tamil Script: Reading and Writing. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.

Colophon

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:5 May 2015

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, M.Sc. M.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Teaching Meitei Mayek: A New Approach

I express my sincere gratitude to my teacher Prof. N. Nadaraja Pillai, Professor cum Deputy Director (Retd.), Central Institute of Indian Languages for his suggestions and corrections for the improvement of the article.

=====

Dr. Soibam Rebika Devi, Ph.D. (Linguistics), M.A. (Linguistics), M.A. (Translation Studies),
M.Sc. (Life Sciences), Diploma in Tamil
Resource Person
National Translation Mission
Central Institute of Indian languages
Mysore 570 006
Karnataka
India
rebika_srd@rediffmail.com