Meiteilon, the local name of Manipuri language, is a language belonging to the ramified group of Tibeto-Burman languages known variously as Kukish or Kuki-chin. Tibeto-Burman is a large language family consisting of some 200 or more languages\(^1\) (300 reported by Shafer). The family encompasses a great deal of linguistic diversity and the geographic area over which these languages are spoken does not coincide with any convenient designated geographic or political area.\(^2\) The groups speaking many of these languages are highly isolated and the comparative analysis of data from even a fraction of them is extraordinarily difficult.\(^3\)

Tibeto-Burman languages may be classified typologically, as tone languages, monosyllabic languages, subject-object-verb languages: according to observable structural

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characteristics, an approach that is quite fruitful in studies of language universals (Greenberg 1963, 1974; Seiler 1977) but precarious as a basis for genetic grouping. Emeneau (1956, 1965) and Masica (1975) provide us with tantalizing characterizations of the Indian linguistic area, which show that there are numerous linguistic characteristics which are shared even across language family boundaries, and which can be used to define a linguistic area.

**Structural Features of the Tibeto-Burman Languages:**

There is such a great variety of Tibeto-Burman languages (as mentioned earlier) and they represent so many different stages of development, that it is not surprising to find them varying widely from each other, both basically and grammatically (Zograph, 1982).

**Phonology:**

One important phonological feature of the Tibeto-Burman languages, in general, is their use of tones to convey phonemic distinction. Another is the high frequency of the velar nasal ( /n/ can occur initially, medially and finally). Absence of final clusters (Abbi & Mishra, 1984) is another characteristic of Meiteilon.
Morphology:

The Tibeto-Burman languages are of the agglutinative type. Grammatical gender, number and person are all missing whereas necessary natural gender as well as number can be expressed with the help of special words which tend to function as postpositions. It is by means of postposition that case relations are shown. As a rule, attributive connection is expressed syntactically only, i.e. by juxtaposing the qualifier with the qualified. Tibeto-Burman languages like Siamese-Chinese does not distinguish between the different classes of words in the same way as Indo-European languages. The same word can often be used as a noun, as an adjective, and as a verb. The Tibeto-Burman languages belong to that class of speeches regarding which Professor Friedrich Muller remarks that they do not possess a real verb. The Tibeto-Burman verb is properly a noun. It is not capable of inflection for person, number or gender. Tense is usually expressed by the addition of supplementary focusing words.

Syntax:

The normal order of words in the Tibeto-Burman sentences is SOV, though this is not always and everywhere rigorously observed. The qualifier always accompanies
the qualified closely, whether preceding or following it, and such collocations have a great measure of syntactic cohesion, being treated as single words when postpositions have to be added. Over and above, Tibeto-Burman words are monosyllabic.

Meiteilon is spoken not only in the state of Manipur but also in some parts of Burma, Assam and Bangladesh. It is the official language of the state of Manipur and is the lingua franca among the various hill-tribes of Manipur. Meiteilon has not been studied properly and comprehensively by scholars. Whatever work has been done is either scanty or unscientific or at times simply the gross imposition of a grammar of a different language on Meiteilon has been found.

Studies of this language can be broadly divided into three groups.

I. Studies by English Scholars:

The first hand to touch this language was William Pettigrew who brought out the first 'Manipuri Grammar' (in English) in 1912. Through English traditional grammar, he analysed this language and he did so very briefly. He deals with Pronunciation, Nouns (Gender, Number, Case), Adjectives, Articles, Pronouns, Verbs, Miscellaneous Affixes, Compound Words, certain sentences, Adverbs
Postposition, Conjunctions, Interjections, Syntax, etc. The pages devoted for dictionary and illustrative sentences are much more than for actual description.

Another is a well known scholar, George Grierson (1927). He in his volume III, Part III of 'Linguistic Survey of India' makes a good attempt to study Meiteilon. Like William Pettigrew, he discussed very briefly the pronunciation, articles, noun (gender, number, case) adjectives, numbers, pronouns (demonstrative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, indefinite pronouns), verbs, clauses, etc. He was of the opinion that Meiteilon belonged to the general Tibeto-Burman group but expressed some doubts as to the adequacy of Kuki-Chin to delineate the sub-group to which this language belongs.

Another is T.C. Hodson (1908). In his book 'The Meitheis' he devoted some pages to the study of the language. Like his predecessors, he also discussed general aspects of this language and that too very briefly.

II. Manipuri Sanskrit Scholars:

Then we have a group of Sanskrit scholars: names and books worth mentioning are Kalachand Shastri's Manipuri Byakaran Koumudi (1962), Kh. Modhumangol Sing's Manipuri Byakaran (1964), W. Yunjao Sing's Remarks on the Manipuri language (1968) (in English), Dibjamani Dev

Kalachand Shastri in the preface of his book wrote, "...surprised to find that the principles of the grammatical science as formulated in Sanskrit by Panini and Patanjali and expounded by Bhattoji Dikshit in his 'Siddhant Koumudi' apply so extensively to Manipuri. This has given me on the one hand realization of the fundamental similarity of human speech and the universality of the grammatical science as developed by these great sages."

Yumjao Singh (1968) goes round a funny theme that Meiteilon belongs to Indo-Aryan-group or its daughter languages. To verify his proposition he picked up some words of Meiteilon and then compared with Sanskrit words. He introduced some statements on sound changes in his book. It is his opinion that lots of Sanskrit words have come into Meiteilon through phonetic decay of the original (Sanskrit words).

Statement I. /n/ in in Meiteilon
/nam n/ /n min/ 'name'

Statement II. 'n' changes into 'in'
/h n/ /hin/ 'night'
In the midst of these Sanskrit scholars, a different scholar named I.S. Kangjam, out of the trend, brings out a book, Longi Wareng (Essays on Language, 1977) a collection of twenty five essays. He discussed about language in general - its nature genesis, language family then comes to descriptive study to the language in nut shell.

III. Scholars of 1980s:

Scholars of this time were already exposed to the developments of the Modern Linguistic Sciences.

Miss Modhuba1a Devi (1980) in her thesis 'Manipuri Grammar' deals with Phrases (noun phrase, verb phrase, adjective phrase, adverb phrase and co-ordinate phrase) and clauses.

She has distinguished between:

a. Non-embedded clause (Bi-transitive, transitive, Bi-intransitive, Intransitive, bi-ecubative and Ecubative).

b. Embedded clause (Independent embedded clause and Dependent embedded clause).
Sentence: Clause co-ordinate complex, counter expectancy sentence, Parallel sentence, Resultant sentences, Negative, Interrogative and Imperative, etc.

All of these, however, are not discussed comprehensively.

P.C. Thoudam, in his thesis, "A Grammatical Sketch of Meiteilon" (1980) deals with Phonology, Morphology and Syntax. The title also indicates clearly that the discussion is not in detail.

A. Chandramani Singh, M.S. Ningomba and I.R. Babu bring out a small grammar for class IX and X (in Meiteilon) 'Meitei Lonmit' (Meiteilon Grammar, 1981). Another is the work of W. Tomchou. His book 'Meiteilon Grammar' (1981) is in two volumes. Both these works are very primary and far from the adequate description of this language or any particular aspect of this language.

No one has taken up a particular aspect of the language in detail. The topic of this present thesis is "Some Aspects of Meiteilon (Manipuri) Syntax" and it can at least, be considered an additional contribution to the descriptive studies of this language. The present study is a descriptive one.

Though no questionnaire was used for collecting data, the authenticity of the data and the various semantic
interpretations of the sentences were tested with native speakers of all ages. Above all, being the native speaker of the language, my own judgement has helped me in writing this thesis.

To study syntax is to study various aspects of how sentences are formed and how they are understood (i.e. interpreted semantically) in a particular language and in languages generally. No language allows sentences to be formed by stringing words together randomly. There are observable regularities/rules. Rule suggests some sort of imperative, that is, what one should do to convey a proper meaning to the hearer. To really understand the meaning of a sentence we must understand its relationship to all other possible sentence-meanings, but on the plane of the sentence, as also on that of the single constructions, there exists no set of criteria, applicable to all utterance of a language, to which we may appeal (Hatcher, 1972).

Linguistics has recently become concerned with the relations between syntax and semantics. In Syntactic Structures (1957), Chomsky is concerned with problems of syntax rather than semantic description, and semantics tends to be considered from the point of view of the use of language. The emphasis changes in Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (1965), where one of Chomsky's main
concerns is the interrelation between syntax and semantics in a competence model of grammar.

In recent years, the study of the use of and meaning of utterances in relation to their situations have become more and more important, as the inadequacies of a purely formalist, abstract approach to the study of language have become more evident. Speaking the truth, the present study has made an effort to the study of how different utterances - negation, interrogatives, imperatives - have meanings in situation and has tried at the maximum to the study of utterances in various meanings in social context, taking 'language' itself as communication system. The study also keeps a close eye on the grammatical rules of sentence construction.

The study of "Some Aspects of Meiteilon Syntax" is delimited to the study of verb 'be', Negation, Interrogatives and Imperatives only. The aim of this study has been the synchronic description of the above-mentioned aspects of Meiteilon Syntax. Additionally, the aim to make this study descriptively adequate was also there. Since it was felt that mere describing the data would not suffice, so the context of use (of a particular structure) is also mentioned wherever it was found necessary. It is well known that context of use always involves semantic factors as well, so the title of this
study "Some Aspects of Meiteilon Syntax" is perhaps an understatement.

The present study has seven chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter II discusses some salient features of Meiteilon grammar. It discusses briefly the word-order, grammatical categories, form and function, and reduplication in Meiteilon language. Chapter III deals with the different theories and syntactic analysis of verb 'be' in this language. Different functions (like existential, possessive, locative, etc.) of verb 'be' are also discussed in this chapter. In Chapter IV, Negation in Meiteilon is discussed. Different Negative markers, their environment of occurrences and uses, Negative strengthening and Polarity Items, Multiple negation, Pleonasm, etc. are discussed in this chapter. A very brief account of Negation in some other Tibeto-Burman languages is also given in this chapter. Chapter V deals mainly with nature and uses of yes/no question markers and Wh-question words. It also incorporates different types of questions (such as Negative Yes/No questions vs. Negative Wh-questions, etc.), Reduced interrogatives and Tag questions, Interrogatives involving complex sentences are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter VI discusses the construction of Imperative sentences in Meiteilon. It also discusses different imperative markers (command and request both) and their
occurrences and uses, occurrence of two or more than two imperative markers in a sentence, construction by which command is implied and various other semantic and socio-cultural nuances of imperative sentences in Meiteilon.