Chapter Three

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

From the early 20th century, a new trend in linguistic approach in observing and describing language structure came into force. This new trend is known as the structuralists movement. The procedures these linguists propose for linguistic analysis are based on the assumption that linguistic data are in essence amenable to empirical treatment, and the technique necessary for this can be inferred from a common-sense considerations of some of the consistently observable characteristics of natural language. The aim of such an approach is to provide a frame for the acquisition of reliable knowledge about languages, rather than a systematization or 'explanation' of things already known or assumed to be known (Garvin, 1972, p.7).

According to the structuralists the material to be observed in describing a language or languages is the synchronic state of the languages under study. In other words, we can say that the approach is data based, objective, inductive and empirical (Kovacs, 1981, p. 211).

In linguistics, one of the principal ways of learning about the object is the construction of models: designed representation of concepts or entities, used to describe or explain their structure or function. There are three types of models: (1) models, the object of which are concrete process and phenomena in languages. The first serious attempt was made by the Prague structuralists. (2) Models, the object of which are the procedures which lead linguists to the discovery of linguistic phenomena, referred to as the Research models. The first serious attempt to develop such a model was made by the American descriptivists. (3) Models, the object of
which are linguistic descriptions rather than processes and phenomena in languages or research procedures (Apresjan, Ju. D., 1973, p. 110).

Research models can be subdivided into three groups according to the nature of their primary information. In the first group of models the source of information is a text, and all the facts about the system, that is, the language from which the text derives must be drawn from data contained in the text. In models of the second group the primary material consists not only of a text but also a set of grammatical sentences in the given language. For example, in practice, this means that the linguist uses an informant who determines whether the sentences presented to him are grammatical or not. The informant can also be the linguist himself, if he is fluent in the language under study. Finally, in models of the third group the primary material consists not only of a text and a set of grammatical sentences, but also of a set of Semantic Invariants. In practice this means that the informant must determine not only whether the sentences are grammatical but also whether any two sentences have the same meaning or not. (Apresjan, 1973, p. 112)

Against these structuralists' extra emphasis on form and surface structure, a new revolution came into action in the field of linguistic theory i.e. Chomskyan linguistics.

In the linguistic investigation distressingly little attention is paid to field linguistics even though it is one of the most essential, initial steps in any linguistic research. The investigator who decides to study a language he does not know in order to describe it scientifically runs into unexpected problem - the lack of clearly formulated principles of how to do so. In the absence of any standarized guidelines
we may look at the five principles (sets of procedures) stated by Kibrik (1977, p.5) which are necessary for a complete investigation. They are:

1) Methods for describing the target language.
2) Methods for describing grammatical facts.
3) Hypothesis about the properties of language in general.
4) Methods for eliciting linguistic information from an informant.
5) Methods for the practical learning of the target language.

In this present research, in the elicitation procedures, I took the help of informants and other friends who are native speakers of the target language, mono or multi lingual.

Eventhough I am a native speaker of Meiteilon, I can not trust my own ears and pronunciation and the tonal differences I perceived. To obtain the necessary linguistic information on this language, especially, in the field of phonetics, I took the help of three informants aged 21, 22, and 23 respectively. They belong to different places in Manipur. It can be seen from the chart given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL. No.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Languages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sangeeta (1)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Imphal</td>
<td>Manipuri, English, Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Sangeeta (2)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Kakching Khunau</td>
<td>Manipuri, English, Hindi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Indira</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Khurkhul</td>
<td>Manipuri, English, Hindi, Spanish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I presented a list of Meiteilon words of all the different phonemes in this language and recorded these words in tape recorder to see the differences in their
pronunciation, allophonic differentiation and tonal differences. Not only this, I also presented them a list of words of minimal pairs and these were recorded.

Then, these recorded sounds are transcribed down on the paper and checked the differences in the sounds among these informants first by two friends of mine who are Ravi and Uday who are experts in phonetics, and the tonal differences were checked again with the help of another friend whose name is Satya.

After checking by my friends, I myself checked all the recorded sounds and the different tones and then wrote the final result.

An essential factor in eliciting procedure is that the native informants are capable of linguistic activity in the language but do not know how the language is constructed and can not answer point blank questions about the language. The native informants can only produce utterances which are grammatical from the standpoint of the language and meaningful from the standpoint of the non-linguistic situation.

3.1. Data Elicitation Procedures For The Present Study

Preliminary study of natural conversation, other written forms gave us a large random sample, which was looked into, examined carefully for isolating words. Word lists - alphabetical but still random selection gave us a select sample, a large database to work on. As a second step using the earlier reference material, lists of phonemes were picked up and the data was reorganized with separate word lists for every pheneme. Examining the data closely, the phonemic pattern as given by earlier researchers, (esp. Thoudam & Khan) was re-examined, 3rd step - Phonemic charts were drawn for vowels and consonants and tentatively tones also. The word lists
(exhaustive) data then transcribed using narrow phonetic transcription for these phonemes were prepared with the help of four informants (myself & 3 others) trying to get maximum possible minimum pairs for phonemes. 4th step - a select list of words was recorded in sound proof laboratory of J.N.U and subjective to further scrutiny and examination of the phonetic details.

3.2. Data Transcription

The means of transcribing speech is also very important question. There are a great many different systems applicable to different languages and several so-called universal system of notation. For field work purpose, a universal system is required and better, since the specifics of the sounds are not already known or not clear. So, here, in the present research work - both in field work as well as writing, the IPA symbols are used.

Transcription of speech sounds can be done in broad (phonemic) or narrow (phonetic) transcription, depending on the level of linguistic analysis, the aim and purpose of the research investigation. For the present study, it is obvious that a detailed phonetic transcription is a must but in order to arrive at that we do need to use both phonemic and phonetic transcriptions alternating with each other in the whole process of data elicitations as well as analysis. In this present research both phonemic and phonetic transcription are employed. I took the help of my friends to transcribe the sounds by listening the different informants from the recorded cassette. First, they transcribed the sounds in to phonemic transcription and then employed narrow phonetic transcription. After their transcription the researchers listened to the
recorded sounds many times, transcribed them into narrow phonetic transcription. Then the two transcriptions are brought together and checked the differences and then only write down the better and the correct one.

3.3. Analytical Procedures

Linguistic analysis is essentially an inductive process, in the sense that it attempts to derive a listing of elements and a set of statements from either an examination of the responses of informants or the study of texts. It is based on the assumption that in both of these sources of data it is possible to discern regularly recurrent elements or different types and orders of complexity (Garvin, 1972, p.75).

The techniques of linguistic analysis, broadly speaking, fall into two categories: those drawing upon the Co-variance of form and meaning in linguistic structure, and those drawing upon the regularities of the occurrence patterns of linguistic elements. The former can be called form-meaning techniques; the latter are usually called distributional techniques. (Garvin, 1972, 75-76). It is usually the latter which we use for phonetic or phonemic studies.

3.4. Analytical Procedures In The Present Research

The steps in the analysis of a language differ considerably from the exposition of linguistic techniques. In the process of working with informants we can not expect to receive neatly classified data and complete paradigmatic series. We are confronted with an interrelated mass of phonological, morphological and syntactic materials. Furthermore, we must have all of these types of data, for problems of allophones and
allomorphs are closely related to matters of juncture and these in turn point to morphological and syntactic groupings. The sounds, are of course, primary and basic, but as a cater of practical procedure, we do not attempt to solve all the phonemic problems without considering the structural features.

In this present research, analysis goes hand in hand with fieldwork procedures. This process helps to detect all the significant features of the target language in the field of phonetics and phonemics. The data elicitation and analysis process tells us what to look for at the next stage. Cycles of `Hypothesis formulation - hypothesis testing - hypothesis reformulation - resetting go on till we arrive at `hypothesis' which is most generally applicable to the data. In case of tones this process had to be repeated several times, (the initial hypothesis subjected to testing and resetting) till we arrived at five tones in this language. At least one more cycle should have been conducted but due to lack of the necessary facilities to get more acoustic information we could not go further.

3.5. A Brief Description Of The Chapters

The present study is presented in five chapters, plus bibliography and appendix. In chapter one and two we have already covered introduction and the background. Research methodology is the chapter three. Phonetic analysis and description of Meiteilon sounds is included in chapter four. This chapter has three broad sections, dealing with consonants, vowels and tones. A very brief section on syllables is also included before segmental phonemes. Chapter five contains a brief summary and conclusion of the present research work.
Every chapter has a list of references at the end (except chapter four) while updated bibliography is at the end of the thesis. After the bibliography, there will be appendix. Tibeto-Burman family of languages, transcribed and classified data, word lists, and minimal pairs etc. are included in the appendix i.e. pages 187-242.
3.6. References


