

Manipuri Kinship Terms

Manipuri kinship terms may be studied in the following ways.

Kinship terms in Manipuri are bound in nature. As they express kinship relationships between two persons pronominal prefixes are always attached to them to make a free word. Manipuri has three pronominal prefixes to indicate three types of persons as – **i-** “first person”, **nə-** “second person” and **mə-** “third person”.

Manipuri kin terms signifies the following points

- a. Sex of the person addressed or/and referred to.
- b. Sex of the linking relative and
- c. Sex of the ego.

All these three points are equally significant in the study of Manipuri kinship terms.

Reference terms indicating different kin relations have different forms based on the sex ego. The word for younger brother in Manipuri has two forms depending on the male and female ego. **mənau nupa** is for a male ego while **məupwa ~ məupwa nupa** for a female ego. Words indicating male and female (**nupa** ‘male’ and **nupi** ‘female’) are added to the kin terms whenever the particular term cannot specify the sex of the kinsmen. For example, the bound forms –**ca** ‘child’, –**nau** ‘younger brother of a male ego or younger sister of a female ego’, –**su** ‘grand child’, etc. cannot specify the sex of the kinsmen. **nupa** ‘male’ and **nupi** ‘female’ are always attached to them to differentiate the sex of the addressee or referred to. It may be mentioned that **mə-** ‘generalized

prefix’ is added to the bound forms to make a free word. Thus **məcha nupa** indicates ‘son’ while **məca nupi** ‘daughter’, **mənau nupa** refers to three kinship relations as (a) younger sister’s husband of a female ego, (b) younger brother of a male ego and (c) husband’s younger brother. Similarly, **mənau nupi** has also three reference terms as (a) younger sister of a female ego, (b) younger brother’s wife of a male ego and (c) wife’s younger sister. To indicate the sex of a grand child **məsu nupa** ‘grandson’ and **məsu nupi** ‘grand daughter’ are used.

It may be observed the addition of **nupa** and **nupi** is not only used for distinguishing the sex of the kinsmen but also found attached to the kin terms referring to younger addressee. For example, **məməu** can optionally take the word **nupi** as **məmau nupi** which also refers to three kinship relations: (a) daughter-in-law, (b) elder/younger brother’s daughter of a female ego and (c) younger/elder sister’s daughter of a male ego.

Another point to be noted is that to show respect to the addressee (both in elder and younger) the following word **ibuŋo** (i-is optionally deleted in address term) ‘male’ and **ibemmə** (i- is optionally deleted in address term) ‘female’ are added both in reference and address terms. For example, the word for ‘grandmother’ is **məbok~məbok ibemmə** which is for reference term and while address term is **əbok~əbokbemmə**. For a younger addressee the reference term for younger brother of a male ego may be **mənau~mənauibuŋo** while the address term will be **inau~inauibuŋo**.

It has been observed that Manipuri kinship terms are based on sex ego only in the

present generation. The kinship terms for ascending generations that of parents and grand parents are not based on sex ego thereby using common terms. For example, **məma** ‘mother’ does not have two different forms based on male and female ego whereas word for elder brother has two different words like **məjamba** ‘elder brother of male ego’ and **məbuŋ** ‘elder brother of female ego’. Some more examples are illustrated below:

Common in reference term

məma	mother
məpa	father
məməbok	mother’s elder sister/ father’s elder brother’s wife
məndomca	mother’s younger sister/father’s younger brother’s wife
məpən	father’s elder brother/mother’s elder sister’s husband
məton	paternal uncle/ mother’s younger sister’s husband
məmə	maternal uncle/ father’s sister’s husband/ brother’s wife’s father
məne	paternal aunt/mother’s brother’s wife
mənembok	mother-in-law
məkubok	father-in-law
məbok	grand mother

məpu~məpubok
grandfather

The reference terms mentioned above have their corresponding address terms also. For instance, the address term for mother is **ima** ‘my mother’, **nəma** ‘your mother’ and **məma** ‘his/her mother’. The address term for elder brother is **tadə**, **tamo**, **tachou** (eldest brother) for both male and female ego. Word for elder sister is also common for both male and female ego i.e. **ice** ‘my elder sister’, **nəce** ‘your elder sister’ and **məce** ‘his/her elder sister’. In this context, it may be noted that the pronominal prefixes are not attached to some kinship terms which are not indigenous Manipuri words such as **tadə** ‘elder brother’, **məmə** ‘maternal uncle’.

The kinship relation of the ego’s generation referring to the preceding generation is not based on the sex ego as shown in the above examples. On the other hand, while referring to the ego’s generation by the preceding generation the male and female ego is taken into account. The kinship relationship of father’s sister to a female will be **məməu~məməunupi** and for a male it will be **məyanupa**.

The attachment of **i-**(first person pronominal prefix) to a kin term referring to a second/third person shows the expression of politeness or respect towards the addressee. For example, **nəŋgi ima** ‘your mother’ **məhakki ima** ‘his/her mother’ is a respect form which shows that the speaker is polite towards the addressee. It may also be referred to a

younger addressee showing politeness or in a formal situation .e.g. while talking in a television show or radio talk. Address forms like **nəŋgi nəma~nəma** shows the rudeness of the speaker towards the addressee even if the later is younger.

One particular kinship term may have even six kinship relations of either paternal or maternal except 'father' and 'mother'. For example, **məbai** 'elder brother-in-law of a male ego' has five kinship references as (a) elder sister's husband (b) father's sister's son (elder to the speaker) (c) wife's elder brother, (d) mother's brother's son (elder to the speaker), (e) daughter-in-law's father (elder to the speaker) and (f) daughter's father in-law (elder to the speaker).

The word **məsen** 'younger brother-in-law of a male ego' has the same kinship references as (a) younger sister's husband (b) father's sister's son (younger to the speaker) (c) wife's younger brother, (d) mother's brother's son (younger to the speaker), (e) daughter-in-law's father (younger to the speaker) and (f) daughter's father in-law (younger to the speaker).

Both the above terms **məbai** and **məsen** shows cross-cousin reference.

One may use **ibai**, **nəbai** or **məbai** as address term while in case of **məsen** only the reference term retains. The reason behind this is because of the younger age of the addressee and in such cases people address name of the person referred to.

List of the kinship relations of the existing generation.

Elder male ego

məjambə - 'elder brother, wife's elder sister's husband, mother's sister's son'

məbai - 'elder sister's husband, father's sister's son (elder to the speaker), wife's elder brother, mother's brother's son (elder to the speaker), daughter-in-law's father (elder to the speaker), daughter's father-in-law (elder to the speaker)'

məce - 'elder sister's, wife's elder brother's wife's, mother's sister's daughter, daughter-in-laws mother of a male ego'

mətəimə - 'elder brother's wife, wife's elder sister, father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter'

Younger male ego

mənaunupa - 'younger brother, wife's younger sister's husband, mother's sister's son'

məsen - 'younger sister's husband, father's sister's son (younger to the speaker), wife's younger brother, mother's brother's son (younger to the speaker), daughter-in-law's father (younger to the speaker), daughter's father in-law (younger to the speaker)'

məcən~məcənnupi – younger sister, mother's sister's daughter, daughter-in-law's mother, daughter's mother-in-law'

mənaunupi – 'younger brother's wife, wife's younger sister, father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's sister'

Elder female ego

məpuroibə- 'husband'

məce - 'elder sister, mother's sister's daughter, father's brother's daughter, husband's elder brother's wife, mother's brother's son's wife, father's sister's son's wife'

mənəmmə - 'elder brother's wife, father's sister's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, daughter-in-laws mother of a female ego, daughter's mother-in-law'

məbuŋ - 'elder brother, mother's sister's son, father's brother's son, daughter's father-in-law of a female ego, daughter-in-law's father'

mətəi – 'husband's elder brother, sister's husband, father's sister's son, mother's brother's son'

Younger female ego

məupwa~məupwanupa – 'younger brother, mother's sister's son, husband's sister's husband, father's brother's son, daughter's father-in-law of a female ego, daughter-in-law's father'

mənaunupa – 'husband's brother, sister's husband, father's sister's son, mother's brother's son'

mənaunupi – 'younger sister, father's brother's daughter, husband's brother's wife, mother's sister's daughter'

məcənnupi – 'younger brother's wife, husband's sister, father's sister's daughter, mother's brother daughter'

Descending generation

Male ego

məcənupa – 'son, brother's son'

məcənupi – 'daughter, brother's daughter'

məmak – 'daughter's husband, sister's son, son's wife's brother'

məməu – ‘son’s wife, sister’s daughter, son’s wife’s sister’

məsunupa – ‘grandson’

məsunupi – ‘granddaughter’

Female ego

məcanupa – ‘son, sister’s son’

məcanupi – ‘daughter, sister’s daughter’

məjanupa – ‘daughter’s husband, brother’s son’

məmau – ‘son’s wife, brother’s daughter’

məsunupa – ‘grandson’

məsunupi – ‘granddaughter’

Ascending generation

There is no distinction in male and female ego in case of ascending generations. They are illustrated below:

Elder

məma – ‘mother’

məpa – ‘father’

məməbok – ‘mother’s sister, father’s brother’s wife’

məpən – ‘father’s brother’

məkubok – ‘husband’s/wife’s father’

mənembok–

‘husband’s/wife’s mother’

məne – ‘father’s sister, mother’s brother’s wife, brother’s wife’s mother, sister’s husband’s mother’

mamə – ‘mother’s brother, father’s sister’s husband, brother’s wife’s father, sister’s husband’s father’

məndon ~**məndomca**–
‘father’s brother’s wife, mother’s sister’