CHAPTER-V

CONCLUSION
5.0 Summary

Language reflects culture. Language is meaningful in the cultural context only because that particular language has grown within that culture, and the language serves the purpose of the bearers of that particular culture only. Linguistic behaviour reflects the underlying cultural attitudes. Language is a form of social behaviour. It is the ‘reflection’ of reality or a ‘reinforcer’ of the status quo. Language ‘reflects’ social conditions. Linguistic variation is after all, a direct reflection of social variation.

Since Labov (1966), the relationship between social structure and language usage has been a primary research area for sociolinguists interested in the processes of language variation and language change. Typically, most studies in the early Labovian sociolinguistic framework focused on quantitative analyses of the relationship between linguistic structures (phonology, syntax, lexicon) and social categories and statuses such as age, sex, education, socio-economic class and so forth.

In the present study the concept of social network has been used to explore how Meiteis create and sustain linguistic norms for themselves and for others through one another’s social contacts. The social network framework assumes that there is a connection between a speaker’s linguistic choices and pressures of the social contacts that the speaker makes within a given community. The study focused on the relationship between different speech activities and the type of social networks that are found in the Meitei speech community. This social group approach focused specifically on group linguistic behaviour, wherein the patterns of language usage in this speech community are related to the speaker’s positions in the social structures.
In the course of the study one aspect of Meiteilon in use i.e. socializing habits of the Meiteis is being discussed as a preliminary contribution to a broader explicit understanding of the diverse ways in which language functions in social life. Speech is explicitly recognized as an important instrument of social activity. Speech activities connect people and form a network in a society. It is an integral component of the whole socio-cultural system of a given community. Genres of speech activity namely proverbs, greetings, leave-taking, luck-talk and address terms are used by members of the Meitei speech community forming a network. The different genres of speech in Meitei speech community are studied in relation to social factors such as age, sex, kinship, education, social status, degree of intimacy etc.

In order to study the social network of the Meitei society, the study has been restricted to only a few genres of speech activities. Speech activities namely proverbs, gossip, greeting, leave-taking, luck-talk and address terms are taken up for analysis in the course of the study. These speech activities seem to be particularly revealing of social attitudes of the Meiteis. By studying these speech activities we can understand the beliefs, customs, conventions, traditions and norms prevalent in the earlier Meitei society as well as the types of network that Meiteis have and can also see the changes that are taking place in the present society.

The present study *Social Network in Meitei Speech Community* is divided into five chapters. The first chapter - Introduction, is the general introduction to the language of the Meiteis i.e. the Meiteilon and the social classes in the society. An attempt is also made to introduce the concept of social network and its relevance in studying the linguistic behaviour of the Meiteis. The Second Chapter - Metaphor and Gossip consist of two sections – metaphor and gossip.
The study of metaphor is restricted to proverbs. The other section deals with gossip as a socializing habit in which varieties of metaphorical proverbs are used. The third chapter – Greetings, Leave-taking, Luck-Talk comprise three genres of speech activities i.e. greetings, leave-taking and luck-talk. The fourth chapter – Language and Power studies the different types of address forms and some morphological suffixes used in the Meitei society which reflect the power relationships between the interlocutors. And the fifth chapter – Conclusion is the final chapter in which the summary of the findings has been outlined.

In the first chapter – Introduction, an attempt has been made to give a brief sketch of Meiteilon – the language of the Meiteis. Since it is imperative to examine the different social classes in the society, the same has been done. A brief explanation of certain concepts namely speech community, social network etc. that are relevant in the study are given in this chapter.

In the second chapter – Metaphor and Gossip, the first section deals with metaphor. The study of metaphor is restricted to proverbs. Forty proverbs have been discussed, and from the analysis it can be inferred that the ‘direct’ performative/illocutionary force of the Meiteilon proverbs tends to be mainly ‘assertive’ through either claiming, informing, reporting or complaining about certain aspects of both the physical and the subjective world. A relatively small amount of proverbs are ‘expressive’ in their ‘direct’ illocutionary force by blaming to someone. In pragmatic terms and within the framework of the model of the study, these ‘direct’ illocutionary acts of assertion and expression are only foundational to the higher, ‘indirect’ acts which require the activation of the other competencies beyond the linguistic competency.
The major 'indirect' illocutionary forces (which happen to be intended acts) the proverbs are used to perform, vary and include the 'directive' act of advising, warning, recommending; expressive ones of blaming and lastly but quite significantly, the 'verdictive' acts of assessing and evaluating. It can thus be safely inferred that the proverbs perform illocutionary acts that are conventional and intentionally indirect. The findings suggest that the intended illocutionary force of the proverbs serves as an ethical mechanism for regulating human behaviour and enhancing social control. For example, proverb such as malem ləymana lumbəne pəlem imana marumə koraw nəŋmadonna waŋbəne pənthaw ipana məwag-i which has metaphorical meaning 'mother and father is greater than everybody else' serves as a mechanism to control the behaviours of the youngsters.

By studying Meiteilon metaphorical proverbs information can be provided about the culture of the Meitei society. By studying proverbs, it is possible to confirm a great deal about the lifestyle and environment of the past. The study of proverbs from a linguistic and cultural point of view is extremely valuable in providing information on the development of languages and ideas. This is perhaps the only way to obtain such insight for a culture like that of the Meiteis where no extensive written records exist that might document the nature of the language and culture in historical times.

Besides analyzing proverbs as speech acts, the usage of the proverbs is also highlighted in the study and it has been inferred that these metaphorical proverbs are understood by Meiteis as proverbs whose metaphors relate to a range of situations that they experienced in the society. At sometime in the past, these proverbs may have in fact been used non-metaphorically as well, as aphorisms.
and it is easy to understand how an observer unfamiliar with the Meitei culture might fail to grasp their deeper meaning and hence their significance beyond the literal meaning. Many other Meiteilon proverbs with a variety of metaphors exhibit the same kind of contrast between literal surface meaning and underlying metaphorical meaning, with some being extremely difficult to understand.

Metaphorical proverbial expressions used by elders are sometimes quite difficult for the younger generation to understand. A number of proverbs which were considered true in early times have been contradicted by modern habits and ways of life. The modern mind has not been impressed by such sayings as penamuk laybo 'to be as easy as pena, (a kind of stringed musical instrument).

Pena is the most typical instrument which was used as an invariable accompaniment in all religious functions and royal processions. In early times, every house could claim one or two male members as pena players. But with time the attitudes of the people have taken a different turn. Except for professional pena players other people hardly seemed to care about it.

The second section of the second chapter deals with gossip as a socializing habit of the Meiteis in which varieties of metaphorical proverbs are used. There are a wide range of speech actions in which men and women display different ways of understanding the social world. Among different kinds of interactional events, gossip is chosen for the analysis keeping in view certain social parameters such as sex, age, education and economic status. After studying gossip, the conclusion that has been arrived at is that men also gossip like women but the topic differs. While women usually gossip about topics ranging from malicious scandals to jewellery and beauty, men's gossip focuses on topics like sports, cars and possessions. Women's gossip focuses predominantly on personal experiences and personal relationships, on personal problems and feelings. The
focus for men’s gossip is on information facts rather than on feelings and
reactions. Metaphorical proverbs are often found to be used by women and rarely
by men in the provided example.

Men, through scrupulous adherence to a one-at-a-time floor, avoid
overlap and thus avoid interruption thereby, maintaining equality by respecting
each other’s right to the solo floor and acknowledging the individual ownership of
ideas. Women, by contrast, draw on a collaborative mode of conversational
organization where their shared ownership of floor symbolizes collective rather
than individual values, solidarity rather than separateness.

Another important aspect that has been highlighted is the changes in the
nature of gossip because of the changes taking place in the Meitei social structure.
Many changes in the nature of gossip have been unearthed with the changes in the
social structure of the society. Gossip plays an important role in the cultural
reflection of the everyday cultural behaviour of the Meiteis. At previous times in
history, most residents of small villages/towns essentially knew what everyone in
their restricted social world was thinking. There was enough gossiping and sharing
of opinions that most people were fairly knowledgeable about where those around
them stood on the key issues of the day. But there have been changes over the
years in the ability of humans to compare themselves to people in the social
systems around them. As Meitei society has gotten bigger, it is impossible, for the
most part, to know what everyone in the society is thinking. The social networks
and highly frequent face-to-face interaction that was once there do not seem to be
there wholly as society is becoming more complex.

In the earlier period when life was very simple, women had nothing much
left to do after finishing their household chores and after their husbands have left
for their work. Women would come out of their houses and gathered in the courtyard of a woman. They would sit digging into each other’s hairs looking for fleas and would gossip. Sometimes, especially during winters they would sit in the sun and eat things like sinju (a local term for an eatable made with mixed raw vegetables) fruits particularly, a fruit called nobab or (Limon Linn burmf)’. They would sit and talk the whole afternoon till it was time for them to go back home and continue with their household chores.

However, due to modernization and westernization, the setting for women’s socialization is not only restricted to the private domains of home and Leikai. The domain now expands to include office and various other institutional complexes. With modernization the mental horizon has been broadened. As women have become educated they are absorbed in offices and various institutions as employees. For such women the settings for gossip are the tea-stalls in their offices or institutional complex. Women take breaks in between their works to go to the nearby tea stall to relax and gossip.

The place for men’s talk used to be the Leikai or the locality. In the olden days men would gather in the morning before going to their workplace or in the evening after coming back from work and would talk about various topics. Gathering of men either in the mornings or in the evenings are called Leipungphamba meaning sitting on the mound. In the earlier period when life was very simple, men had nothing much to do and such gatherings were clearly visible in and around every locality. In the present times such gatherings are not a common sight in the urban areas as men are somewhat busy trying to meet their ends. As life becomes complex with modernization, men have also changed their arena for socialization. After a day’s work men usually gather in the evening to go for a walk to keep good health. They usually go and relax in parks or in gardens.
where they can get fresh air. Tea stalls have also become important arena for
gossip and socialization for men.

In the third chapter – Greetings, Leave-taking and Luck-talk, an attempt
has been made to study these three speech activities. The first section of the
chapter deals with greetings. Greeting is of particular interest to a study of the
Meitei speech community because it occurs in every interaction. Every social
relationship therefore must be at least partially statable in terms of the role
structure of the greeting. That is, since certain roles are forced onto any interaction
by the nature of greeting exchange, those roles are ingredients in every social
situation and basic to all personal alignments.

Different types of greeting expressions prevalent amongst the Meiteis of
Manipur are examined restricting the study to Imphal area in relation to social
parameters such as age, sex, educational and economic status. Three types of
greeting expressions that are prevalent in Meitei society are analysed. They are
Type A greeting expression \textit{i.e.} \textit{cakcârabra} ‘Have you lunched?’, Type B
greeting expression \textit{i.e.} \textit{koday cotoyno/nunjayribre} ‘Where are you going?/How
are you?’ and Type C greeting expression \textit{i.e.} paralinguistic or facial expression
or gesture. As has been demonstrated the frequency of occurrence of different
types of greeting expressions correlates with sex, age education and economic
status. From the analysis it has been inferred that greeting expressions used by
Meiteis are not the same. Usage of greeting expressions differs with the
differences in social parameters. Type A greeting expression is prevalent among
the aged females belonging to the lower educational group whereas Type B
greeting expression is widespread among the younger male groups who had
college education. But we have also seen a shift in the greeting expression from
Type A to Type B. Aged people are conservative in their language use, hence they prefer the traditional style of greeting expression *i.e.* Type A. But as the younger generation grows older, the scope and frequency of use of Type B forms also grows, becoming the most commonly used type of greeting expression replacing the Type A greeting expression. With the changes in the social structure the corresponding changes that have occurred in the greeting structures of the Meiteis have also been mentioned in the study.

In the earlier Meitei society, the members of the society were in close contact with each other, while contact with members of the other communities was rather limited. So, therefore when people met in the village or in the lane, it was natural for them to spend sometime greeting each other. Moreover, since transport and communication was not in good shape, people visit one another after a long interval. Meeting after a long duration means spending long hours talking to catch up things.

Greeting expressions such as *cakcárobrah* 'Have you lunched?' was the most popular form of greeting expression among the people. But it has become outdated in the present day Meitei society among the younger generation. Another greeting expression *kaday cottoyno* 'Where are you going?' also is not very much liked by the new generation. They feel that such an expression sounds more like intruding in the personal life of the people. The new generation are more acquainted with the western style of greeting expressions. Whenever they meet their peer group they tend to use greeting expressions such as 'Hi' or 'Hello'.

Greetings therefore cannot remain unaffected by social change. In earlier times prostration was the humblest mode of salutation among the Meiteis. In the course of time this long fatiguing exercise gave way to bowing at the feet of the
superior. Subsequently, at a later stage it was replaced by a low bow or a slight inclination of the body which has finally been reduced to a scarcely perceptible nod, the greeter thus placing symbolically or by implication at the feet of the person saluted. As the Meitei society became more complex, modes of greeting became progressively simpler restricting to simple ‘Hi’ or ‘Hello’.

In the second section of the third chapter, leave taking as a genre of speech activity is studied. In the analysis of leave-taking the linguistic and social behaviour of the Meities when they take leave from one another in various situations has been described and explained. From the study it can be concluded that taking leave in Meitei society does not involve an elaborate form of parting ritual because the society is a close knit society, in which continuing relations among individuals are taken for granted. Leave-taking in the western societies involves an elaborate form of parting rituals. In such societies, people often make several signals before really leaving. But in the Meitei society people usually take leave abruptly and the leave-taking varies depending on the type of relationship the interlocutors have.

In the last section of the third chapter some of the beliefs which Meiteis had from time immemorial are discussed. Two major festivals of Meiteis coyrawba or the ‘Meitei New Year’s Day’ celebration and niŋol cakawba or ‘inviting sisters/daughters in the brother’s/father’s house’ are discussed. The reason for selecting these two festivals in particular is that in these two festivals luck talk usually takes place along with elaborate rituals. Luck-talk that centres around two important ceremonies of Meiteis i.e. Marriage and Swasti-Puja are discussed. Some of the beliefs that Meiteis believed to bring good luck and some other beliefs that are believed to bring bad luck and the rituals to be performed to counteract or ward off these bad lucks both on societal as well as personal level
has also been discussed. The luck-talks are discussed in relation to social parameters such as age, sex, educational and economic status. In the course of the study the point that has been highlighted is that Meitei beliefs of good luck and bad luck and the rituals to be performed to ward off bad luck are intimately related to the cultural values of wealth, prosperity, good health, happiness, harmony, improvements and so forth of the Meitei society.

As regards luck-talk no significant changes have taken place as far as giving blessings by elders is concerned. But the new generation sometimes do not even understand the type of blessing they are getting from their elders. When they give wish/luck to their fellow mates, they normally prefer using English wishes such as ‘Good Luck’ or ‘All the Best’ etc.

The fourth chapter – Language and Power is also divided into two sections. The first section deals with different types of address forms and the second section examines some of the Meiteilon morphological suffixes namely -bi ~ -pi, -co ~ -jо, -si which serve as politeness markers. In the course of studying address terms and suffixes the concept of power has been explored. While analyzing address terms and suffixes (politeness markers) in Meiteilon, the point that has been highlighted is the role address terms and suffixes play in reflecting the power relations between interlocutors.

Like other behavioural routines, which are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context of a society, address terms assert and create a network of bonds and obligations. Certain unique features which reflect the Meitei socio-cultural milieu have been unearthed. For example, it has been noted that age supersedes rank in dyadic relationships. Being colleagues in the Meitei society does not necessarily imply equality. An older person addresses a younger person by name
but the latter dares not reply in the same way. It is considered impolite, rude and grossly insolent to address an older person by name among the Meiteis. Again, it is not always age that supersedes rank. In some cases, rank also supersedes age. An officer in an established officialdom would be addressed as saheb ‘Sir’ by a peon, even though the peon is older (in age) than the officer.

Certain parameters seemed to be in conflict while trying to choose address terms. For example, there is a conflict between age and generation. Generation plays a major role in the composite seniority variable of the behavioural analysis of the Meitei address terms. But recently in the new generation, some changes are being noticed in the kinship behaviour. Relative age seems to be playing a greater role in deciding the kin terms of address instead of generation. An uncle may be addressed by his personal name if he is of the same age or younger than the ego. Such a usage was not allowed in the past as the traditional kin mode of address was based primarily on generation. Again, there is a conflict between age and occupation. Meitei customs do not allow persons who are older than the speaker to be addressed by their personal names. A kin term is always the preferred form to address a person who is older. An older person addresses a younger person by name but the latter dares not reply in the same way. But occupation may come in conflict with age. For example an officer in an established officialdom would be addressed as saheb ‘Sir’ by a peon, even though the peon is more older (in age) than the officer. In the official domain, the officer has more power and commands respect than the peon. The peon would adopt deferent or even servile attitude. Against the background of the complex pattern of interaction among factors of age, occupation, status, intimacy and situation etc. and different address terms, a Meitei is faced with a problem of choice. However, the form chosen to address another person arises from assessment of the
relationship between interlocutors, from the expected norm of behaviour appropriate to the situation and from what the speaker wants to emphasize the relationship with the speaker.

In line with the social changes, there have been significant changes in the kin term of address. The importance attached to parameter such as generation has changed. Generation plays a major role in the composite seniority variable of the behavioural analysis of the Meitei address terms. But recently in the new generation, some changes are being noticed in the kinship behaviour. Relative age seems to be playing a greater role in deciding the kin terms of address instead of generation. An uncle may be addressed by his personal name if he is of the same age or younger than the ego. Such a usage was not allowed in the past as the traditional kin mode of address was based primarily on generation. Social parameters such as age, sex etc. have been to certain extent sidelined and have been replaced by parameters such as economic status, educational and occupational status. Kin terms of address which were once used only for addressing royal descendants are now used for addressing commoners of high socio-economic, occupational and educational status. According to the Meitei sociolinguistic rule juniors are addressed by name by seniors but this is not applicable in the case of high officials, addressing them by name is not allowed and is considered to be rather disrespectful. The older speakers would address them by their honorific words \textit{ibungo} ‘Sir’ and \textit{ibemjo} ‘Madam’ along with their occupational specialties.

In the second section of the chapter, some morphological markers namely -\textit{bi} ~ -\textit{pi}, -\textit{co} ~ -\textit{jo}, -\textit{si} etc. that serve as politeness markers are being studied. After studying these markers it has been found that they are usually employed to a
person who is superior (either in age or in social status). Power relationship between the addressee and the addressor is manifested linguistically in the usage of politeness markers. Whoever is powerful is respected by the inferiors and respect is shown by using polite speech forms. An important point that has been noticed in the course of study is that, in the Meitei society, politeness markers are not only used by inferiors to superiors but are found in the speech of superiors while speaking to inferiors to show the former's cultural refinement.

People are related to one another in terms of several different normative frameworks at one and the same time and a person's behaviour in part is modelled by and or also understood in light of patterns of coincidence of these frameworks of personal relationships. People's speech reflects the types of networks they belong to. The different speech activities namely proverbs, gossip, greetings, leave-taking, luck-talk address terms and politeness markers discussed in the course of the study are related to the three network types. The exchange network refers to the network links between people with whom the probability of rewarding exchanges is high for instance, kin and close friends. Speech activities namely proverbs, gossip, greetings, leave-taking, luck-talk and use of address terms are related to this network. The interactive network refers to the network links between people with whom probability of rewarding exchange is low, good examples are workmates and neighbours. The related speech activities of this network are also speech activities such as greetings, leave-taking, luck-talk and using politeness markers. The passive network represents the link between the people with whom ego does not interact on a regular basis, but whose impact on ego is strong. This kind of network is a loose-knit network where interaction is not frequent and when it does takes place it happened only on formal occasions. Speech activity related to this network is using politeness markers.
Meitei society has been a close-knit society where members of the society have close contacts with other members belonging to the community. Meiteis comprise majority of the population in the valley of Manipur. Any Meitei family has a network of social relations with kin, neighbours and even distant acquaintances. Even though Meitei society has been a close-knit society, in the last few decades features of loose-knit network are noticed in this society. Though people live in close proximity to one another, distance is maintained as far as relationship is concerned. Under the influence of modernization, people do not seem to be very concerned about socio-cultural values or their effort in maintaining interpersonal relationships. In social intercourse, co-operation among the members of the society was highly desirable and the spirit of cooperation was considered a social value. But in the present day Meitei society cooperation is slowly giving way to competition. Rather than cooperating with members of the community, people are having an individualistic and indifferent approach towards other members of the same society. Such changes in the social set up have led to the corresponding expansion and diversification in linguistic behaviour of Meiteis.

From the present study, it has been concluded that the network of social relationships that speakers form influences their use of language. The types of social contacts people have play significant parts in the differentiation of speech. The people we interact with are one important influence on our speech. The types of social networks that Meiteis have constrain and shape the Meitei’s linguistic behaviours. There is a connection between a person’s linguistic choices and the pressures of the social contacts that he makes within the speech community. The use of social network analysis in this study shows that linguistic elements do not serve only as social status or identity badges, but rather also function as network norms.
Every society changes due to the impact of a number of forces that work in the environment. The Meitei society of Manipur is not an exception to change. The radical changes occurring at the level of the global system worked their way into the fabric of social relations in general, although this was not usually apparent on the surface.

During the past few decades Meitei society has undergone profound changes – political, socio-economic, and cultural. In the last few decades, signs of a number of related socio-economic phenomena began to emerge in Manipur. Urbanization, industrialization, secularization of education and introduction of mass media of communication are only the highlights of a profound transformation of the mental and socio-cultural structure of the society. The opportunity to obtain a broader education opened the way for social mobility. Thus a new set of tensions has appeared in Meitei society. On the one hand, traditional values, beliefs and customs have persisted, on the other hand, new cultural models have arisen that express the aspiration of a new generation.

Meitei society is in the process of transition and to what extent the society has been changed from traditional to modern society has been discussed. Although the exposure to the modern setting may certainly contribute to the transformation of the traditional Meitei society, it is noticed in the course of the study that the new generation, in spite of its desire to free itself from the tutelage of social bonds, still submit to the networks of the society.

Despite the changes in the Meitei society and the corresponding changes in the behaviour of the people, there are certain social institutions that have remained unchanged. The institution of the family though exposed to change has
maintained a high degree of continuity. The socio-economic changes that have affected the institution of the family have brought about a gradual but continuous transformation of family structure that varies in intensity with social stratum. Nevertheless, the Meitei family has preserved several aspects of its traditional functions. The kinship network continues to play a significant role as a system of protection. In crisis situations the family network is practically the only system of protection upon which people depend.

Although the exposure to the modern setting may certainly contribute to the transformation of the traditional Meitei society, the new generation, in spite of its desire to free itself from the tutelage of social bonds, still submit to the kinship networks. The densest urban centre still shelter the most traditional network of human relations, the media of mass communication still disseminate folk ideas. Many of the social behaviour related with language are still maintained by the new generation, for example using kin terms of address in addressing a senior.

Cultural and social changes are interdependent, but their rhythm varies in different sectors of social life. Certain social networks have remained unchanged, and those that have been modified have been so only in part. Social network such as interpersonal relationship has been exposed to change but at the same time has it has maintained a high degree of continuity. Therefore, it is fallacious to assume that a traditional society has always existed in its present form or that the recent past represents an unchanged situation. What is seen today and labelled as the "traditional society" is often itself a product of change. Despite the changes in the Meitei society, on the whole, the Meitei society is characterized by a poor adjustment of values thereby leading to conflict between forces of changes and continuity, tradition and modernity.
The picture of the Meitei social structure that emerges from the present tentative analysis is by no means complete and comprehensive; there are still various ramifications of the subject which need to be handled with sharper and more sophisticated tools. Nevertheless, this sociolinguistic study may give some insight into the nature of the socio-psychological organization of Meitei community; its rights and obligations, duties and privileges, attitudes and beliefs. This study will hopefully provide a model for further investigations.