Sociolinguistic Aspects of Thai Politeness

by

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Abstract

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This study is an investigation of linguistic politeness phenomena of the Thai language. It presents Thai linguistic data and analyzes it using various techniques, particularly those of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and conversation analysis. The Thai data is compared with American English politeness phenomena and also data from Japanese and Chinese. The theories of H.P. Grice (1975) and Brown and Levinson (1987) are considered against the Thai data.

The work is divided into three conceptual parts. The first part (Chapters 1 through 3) consists of an introduction to the study, a review of earlier works in pragmatics and linguistic politeness to give background to and establish the need for this study, and an explanation of the methodology used here. The second part (Chapters 4 through 13) comprises the bulk of the study and presents the Thai linguistic data, which show how Thai natives achieve politeness in interaction. This part includes an ongoing comparison of Thai politeness phenomena with that of American English, as well as analyses of the Thai data using the theory of politeness proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson. The third and final part (Chapters 14 through 17) analyzes the effectiveness of Grice's model of Conversational Logic and Brown and
Levinson's framework for linguistic politeness in regard to the Thai data. This part also builds a picture of the Thai concept of face, which is crucial in understanding Thai behavior.

This research constitutes a comprehensive study of Thai linguistic data focusing on politeness and the Thai concept of face. The theories of Grice and Brown and Levinson are put to the test against these data, and it is demonstrated that neither theory has universal applicability. Moreover, the current work makes the following contributions: it provides politeness data from a non-Indo-European language; it offers a comparison of politeness in Thai and American English; and it provides valuable cross-cultural information to students of Thai as a second language.
For

Pongsuwan, Jack, and Brian, who never lost faith;

and for little Ollie
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Goals of the Current Study
This dissertation examines (linguistic) politeness in the Thai language. At present, there are three purportedly universal theories of politeness — that of Lakoff (1973; 1975), Brown & Levinson (1987), and Leech (1983). These theories were developed by western scholars, and much of the work on politeness — though certainly not all (see, for example, Ide 1989; Matsumoto 1988; 1989; Zhan 1992, etc.) — has focused on western languages. Thai is, of course, a Southeast Asian language belonging to the Tai-Kadai family of languages.

The goals of the current work are multifold. The chief aim is to put Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory, the most widely applied of the three “universal” theories, to the test against the Thai data. Several scholars, particularly those examining Japanese (Ide 1989, Matsumoto 1988; 1989) and Chinese (e.g. Mao 1994; Chen 1990), doubt the universality of Brown and Levinson’s theory. It seems to have shortcomings as far as these Asian languages, and this study seeks to determine whether this is also the case for Thai, which shares features with both Chinese and Japanese. Since it comprises the underpinnings of Brown and Levinson’s theory, Grice’s (1975) theory of Conversation Logic will also be examined vis-à-vis the Thai data.

In addition to these goals are the ancillary objectives of characterizing elements of Thai politeness and the concept of face in Thai culture. The bulk of this study examines language data and shows how particular features of the Thai language are manipulated to convey politeness. A coinciding and non-trivial
benefit is, of course, providing politeness data for a non-Indo-European language. Finally, to further develop a picture of the Thai concept of face, which is germane to a study of politeness and must be investigated to properly test the applicability of Brown and Levinson’s theory, anthropological data is analyzed.

It is furthermore hoped that this work will contribute to cross-cultural understanding and serve as a helpful tool for second language learners of Thai. Effective communication in a foreign language (or one’s own, for that matter) involves not only the mastery of grammar but also being able to conduct oneself according to cultural and social norms. Hymes (1972: 279), for example, observes that “[c]ompetency for use is part of the same developmental matrix as competence for grammar.” It is important not only to become proficient in the grammar of a language and be able to form sentences but also to know how those sentences are to be appropriately used. For the second language learner/speaker it is therefore important to be socially competent in the foreign culture, and a significant part of social competence involves politeness. A speaker who knows how to express her wants and needs or ask questions in technically or grammatically correct language, which is at the same time offensive to its native speakers, could not be considered completely fluent in that language (excluding particular instances, such as arguments or insults). She would not be communicating effectively or appropriately, under normal circumstances, due to a lack of pragmatic fluency in the language. Members of the foreign society would see her as somehow incompetent at communicating, though perhaps technically competent. Therefore, in order to be considered fully proficient in a foreign language, a speaker would need to have 1) some degree of lexical proficiency in the target language (in other words, knowledge
of vocabulary); 2) mastery of the target language’s grammar (i.e. correct pronunciation of the lexical forms and knowledge of syntactic structures); and 3) an understanding or instinct about the socially acceptable way(s) of communicating particular utterances. In other words, a competent speaker would need to know not only what to say, but how to say it appropriately or politely according to social context. This work focuses on the last of these three elements: pragmatic competence,¹ and particularly politeness, in Thai.

Some Differences in Thai and English Politeness

Just as language usually varies across cultures, so too does polite behavior. An American English² speaker learning how to communicate in Thai might, initially at least, feel overwhelmed not only by Thai phonology especially but by the differences in the politeness system of the Thai. There are many salient differences between our two systems.

One of the most obvious linguistic differences between the English and Thai languages is that Thai has polite sentence-final particles and English does not. These short monosyllabic words, which vary according to the speaker’s gender, are used by Thai speakers at the end of statements or questions when speaking to equals or superiors, and their absence, in certain social context, would be critically noted. The same particles are used to politely answer questions in the affirmative as well, and an allomorphemic variant (for the

¹ Lakoff (1996: 483) defines “full pragmatic competence as including (but not limited to) a knowledge of the felicity, or preparatory and essential, conditions necessary for the appropriate performance of any speech act in which the person being evaluated is involved (in any capacity), an appreciation of conversational logic, and an understanding of the rules and forms of dyadic conversation.”

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feminine) is used to respond to summonses. Variations of the particles may be used affectionately among close friends or family or aggressively in other contexts. English has no equivalent forms.

Another area of obvious divergence between the two languages is that of person-referring terminology, an area well-covered in the literature (e.g. Cooke 1968; Palakornkul 1975; Kanittanan 1988; Simpson 1997). Briefly, Thai has an elaborate person referring system, offering many choices for first, second, and third person pronouns and referential terms. The choice of which terms should be employed in a particular interaction depends on social context. Some factors which must be considered in making these choices include relative social status of the speakers, relative rank, and the formality of the situation in which the speaker(s) find themselves. Deciding which pronominal expressions to use is much more complex in Thai than in English. In English, there is only one pronoun available for each referent (with the exception of the third person singular): i.e. "I" for the first person singular, "we" first person plural, etc. While the choice is slightly more complex in some European languages — such as French — which adhere to a T/V system for second person reference, it is still simpler than the Thai situation. Even English third person reference, where choices must be made as to gender (he or she?), singular vs. plural (she or they?), and nominative vs. accusative (she or her?), poses fewer challenges than Thai's choice of third person terms (at least eight possibilities). In English, the

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2From this point on I will refer to American English using only the word "English," unless otherwise indicated.
3 These particles are discussed in Chapter 5.
4 In this discussion, rank refers to an individual's status according to his/her occupation or vocation. Social status, on the other hand, refers to an individual's standing in society as a result of his/her royal or common status at birth, status through marriage, wealth, age, etc.
choices are based on semantics alone, whereas in Thai, the choices are based on both semantics and socio-pragmatic considerations (i.e. the right form for the right context).6

**Pragmatics**

The study of politeness is included in the linguistic subfield of pragmatics. Therefore, it will be useful to briefly consider this particular subfield of the discipline before going any further.

Pragmatics is, broadly speaking, the study of language usage taking into consideration the relationship between linguistic form(s) and extra-linguistic context(s). In order to understand utterances purely linguistically, it is necessary to comprehend their phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic composition. However, having understood all these elements, a hearer may still fail to grasp an utterance’s full meaning: how the speaker intended it and how the hearer was meant to receive and understand it. Understanding utterances in full involves more than comprehending a word’s composition and meaning and the grammatical relationships between an utterance’s words. The relationship between an utterance’s structure and the context in which it is spoken is also essential to understanding, and this is the realm of pragmatics.

Lakoff points out that an utterance can be grammatically correct but pragmatically odd. She claims that “…the pragmatic content of a speech act should be taken into account in determining its acceptability just as its syntactic material generally has been and its semantic material recently has been” (1973:

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Thus while both of the following sentences are syntactically correct, the first sentence of the set is acceptable to native speakers while the second is pragmatically strange to speakers of American English:

**EXAMPLE 1.1:**

a. You make me sick!
b. You make me sick, don’t you?

The intention of 1.1a is to insult the hearer, or at least to convey insulting information to her. The reason why 1.1b is strange is that it contains the same insulting content as 1.1a, but it asks the hearer to collude in the insult. In 1.1b, impolite content is (apparently) conveyed in a polite way, resulting in a pragmatic clash.

The type of clash illustrated in 1.1b above results from a mismatch between syntactic form and pragmatic function. In Thai, there is another type of clash and/or accord, alluded to briefly above, of which it is necessary to be aware. Ide (1989:227) noted a phenomenon of Japanese which she termed “socio-pragmatic concord”. Using an example from Japanese, Ide shows that socio-pragmatic concord is the equivalent of grammatical concord but is determined by the social rules of the society in which the language is employed.

A violation of socio-pragmatic concord is what I am terming socio-pragmatic clash. A socio-pragmatic clash exists in Thai when linguistic forms indexing a particular register or context (e.g. formal vs. informal) co-occur with

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6 Thai person-referring terms are discussed in Chapter 4.
7 While these examples are my own, they are inspired by those of Lakoff (1973: 294).
another form (or forms) which indexes a different register or context. Consider the following example:

EXAMPLE 1.2

a. somdet-phratheep sadet- paj sawaj thii Emporium
crown-princess HON.go HON.eat at Emporium

The Crown Princess went to eat at Emporium.

b. #somedet-phratheep paj kin thii Emporium

The crown-princess go eat at Emporium

The crown princess went to eat at Emporium.

In example 1.2, the subject of both sentences is the Crown Princess of Thailand. When speaking of royal persons, it is necessary to use the appropriate royal language because Thai culture insists that speakers be polite to those of high status, even when they are not present. 1.2a is a sentence in which the necessary royal forms (the most formal and polite forms, reserved for speaking to and of royalty) are used. 1.2b, on the other hand, appears syntactically and semantically correct — the verbs mean what they are supposed to mean and appear where they should in the sentence — but is socio-pragmatically inappropriate. In speaking of a member of the royal family, the verbs in 1.2b should not be employed. A thoroughly competent Thai speaker who wanted to express the proposition “The Crown Princess went to eat at Emporium” would use 1.2a and not 1.2b.
Definitions of Politeness

Linguistic politeness involves linguistic and/or discursive interpersonal communications designed to promote smooth interactions. Ide (1989: 224) notes that while attention has been paid to linguistic politeness, not many scholars actually define it. I will define politeness here to give the reader a clear idea of what the term covers within linguistic pragmatics.

Lakoff (1975: 64) defines politeness broadly as a phenomenon which "...is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction..."

Reducing this friction can involve conveying information in such a way as to make the recipient of the information think well of the person conveying it (Lakoff 1973: 298). In a later work, she expands only slightly on her 1975 definition, stating that "[p]oliteness is a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange" (Lakoff 1990: 34). She assumes a universal human potential for conflict and confrontation and views politeness as a sort of grease for the linguistic wheel of interpersonal communication.

Brown & Levinson (1987), the developers of the most critically examined and widely applied politeness theory, claim that:

...the problem for any social group is to control its internal aggression while retaining the potential for aggression both in internal social control and, especially, in external competitive relations with other groups (Maynard-Smith, in press). In this perspective, politeness, deference and tact have sociological significance altogether beyond the level of table manners and etiquette books (Goffman 1971: 90); politeness, like formal diplomatic protocol (for which it must surely be the model), presupposes that potential for

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8 The symbol "#" is used to indicate pragmatic anomaly.
aggression as it seeks to disarm it, and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties.

Brown & Levinson also assume a potential for communicative turmoil and maintain that politeness can facilitate linguistic interchange.

Ide’s (1989: 225) definition of politeness is the most comprehensive. Unlike the previous definitions, Ide’s formulation specifically recognizes that, in order to be polite, speakers must on occasion tailor their utterances according to typical speech patterns and/or according to specific social contexts. Ide states that linguistic politeness is:

... the language usage associated with smooth communication, realized 1) through the speaker’s use of intentional strategies to allow his or her message to be received favorably by the addressee, and 2) through the speaker’s choice of expressions to conform to the expected and/or prescribed norms of speech appropriate to the contextual situation in individual speech communities.

For Ide politeness consists of strategic uses of language as well as conventional or expected ones. The goal of both of these linguistic realizations of polite language, though, is frictionless communication.

In fact, the motivations behind all three of these explanations for polite behavior see smooth, friction-free communication as its goal. The first two definitions explicitly state the potential for communicative friction in interpersonal interaction. Lakoff’s (1973; 1975; 1990) representation sees politeness as being motivated by a desire to avoid conflict and/or confrontation.
and the notion that presenting a message in its most cooperative form is most likely to get it accomplished. Brown & Levinson’s definition views the motivation for politeness as the enabling of communication and the avoidance of (the appearance of) aggression. Ide’s definition sees the motivation for politeness as the promotion of smooth communication and conformation to speech norms. In the end, the ultimate goal behind polite linguistic behavior is the same: the desire to achieve smooth interpersonal (and, on a grander scale, intersocietal) communication, whether it be actual or apparent.

Organization of the Dissertation

The current study is organized into three main conceptual parts. The first consists of three chapters, including this one. The second chapter is a discussion of theoretical works in pragmatics and politeness. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the works that have influenced the direction of the present study, but also to show that there are empirical lacunae in the literature, which this work addresses. The third chapter explains the methodology used in the collection, transcription and analysis of the data presented here. Chapters 4 through 13 look at the Thai politeness phenomena themselves. The final part consists of chapters 14 through 17. Chapter 14 uses Grice’s (1975) theory of Conversational Logic to analyze the Thai data, and it is shown that Grice’s model does not successfully account for Thai conversation. Chapters 15 and 16 use data from anthropological and other research to help characterize the Thai concept of face. This is important because face plays a crucial role in the politeness theory being

\footnote{i.e. using language in a particular way (e.g. being indirect) in order to achieve a specific goal}
examined here, that of Brown and Levinson (1987). The final chapter (17) shows that this theory is not sufficiently descriptive for an analysis of Thai politeness and can therefore not be considered universal.

(e.g. avoiding imposition on the hearer).
CHAPTER 2
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter examines research related to the study of politeness and politeness in Thai. It includes reviews of important theoretical works as well as research on cross-cultural politeness (although the principal aim of the study is the analysis of Thai politeness). The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the works that have influenced the direction of the present work and also to show that there are empirical lacunae in the literature, which this work addresses.

Theoretical Works

Grice

H.P. Grice's (1975) paper, *Logic and conversation*, is the basis for all contemporary linguistically based theories of politeness. Grice observes that conversations do not usually consist of a series of disconnected remarks and that interlocutors generally have a common purpose in conversing (even while this purpose may change over the course of a single conversation) (45). He proposes that speakers and listeners abide by what he calls the Cooperative Principle. The Cooperative Principle states:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (ibid.)

The Cooperative Principle is defined on the one hand by implicature and on the other by four maxims — Quantity, Quality, Relation, and Manner — and their submaxims. The maxim of Quantity basically tells us to be as informative as required (but not too informative) in our conversational contributions. The
maxim of Quality instructs us to tell the truth. Relation dictates that we should be relevant in our conversational contributions. Finally, the maxim of Manner pertains more to how something is said rather than the content of that remark. This maxim has four submaxims that instruct the speaker to be clear, succinct, and direct. When a person speaks according to the maxims, the result is "a maximally effective exchange of information" (47).

According to Grice, conversational implicature can occur when one or more of the maxims is not obeyed, and even when no maxim has been violated (51). Grice uses the term "flouting" to describe situations in which speakers disobey one or more of the maxims. Nevertheless, the hearer is expected to understand the conversational contribution, and s/he usually does.

Grice gives many examples in which certain of the maxims are flouted, including explanations about why interlocutors can still understand what is being communicated despite the violation(s). His main assumption is that speakers and listeners normally believe their interlocutors are abiding by the Cooperative Principle, and they therefore assume that all utterances are intended to be understood and will be interpretable, despite apparent deviation(s) from strict informativeness. Deviations from the maxims receive many interpretations, such as irony, hyperbole, ambiguity, or politeness, among others.

R. Lakoff
Lakoff (1973) is the first work on linguistic politeness. The author argues that pragmatics, like other levels of language, is rule-governed. An utterance that makes perfect sense both syntactically and semantically can be pragmatically strange, such as Lakoff's own example: "You can take your methodology and

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shove it” versus “Can you take your methodology and shove it?” (294). Further proof of the idea that speakers follow pragmatic rules is the fact that there are instances of pragmatic ambiguity that are disambiguated by context and a knowledge of these rules.

Lakoff suggests two Rules of Pragmatic Competence: 1) Be clear; and 2) Be polite (296). The first was included in Grice’s system as the Maxims of Conversation. But (as Lakoff points out) “...a normal, interesting conversation violates these rules at every turn...” (297), and in many kinds of discourses, clarity is sacrificed for the sake of politeness. Her explanation for this is that people in such contexts are less concerned with conveying information than they are with strengthening interpersonal relationships.

When politeness is the pre-eminent concern in a conversation, the second Rule of Pragmatic Competence comes into play: Be polite. This rule also has subcases. These subcases are 1) Don’t impose; 2) Give options; and 3) Make A feel good—be friendly (298). At the time of this publication, Lakoff thought the rules were not mutually exclusive, and therefore that there could be more than one rule in effect in a particular utterance or conversation.

The first rule — Don’t impose — requires that the speaker not meddle or interfere in her interlocutor’s business and precludes the speaker from intruding upon the hearer’s (symbolic) turf. When a speaker follows this strategy, she maintains distance between herself and her interlocutor. Examples of Rule 1 are found in academic writing, legal discourse, formal etiquette, and some types of indirectness.

The second rule — Give options — give an addressee the option to decide what an utterance means. Using hedges and euphemisms can be interpreted as

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2 Although Lakoff’s publication predates Grice’s, the latter’s ideas had been accessible to scholars since he gave his lectures on the topic in 1967.
3 Later, however, she considered the rules to be separate systems.
abiding by Rule 2. For instance, a euphemism can be used when the speaker wants to refer to a taboo subject, but not directly. Thus the hearer decides whether or not to discuss the (potentially) unpleasant subject by responding to the taboo subject or ignoring it.

Finally, the third rule — Make A feel good — be friendly — means basically what it says. This is the rule that promotes camaraderie between people (whether or not there really is any). It should be noted that Rule 3 is directly contradictory to Rule 1.

The author claims that, like Grice’s Cooperative Principle, the rules of politeness apply to actions as well as linguistic behavior and, furthermore, that they are universal. If someone seems rude, it is probably not the case that they have different rules of politeness, according to Lakoff’s theory. It is more likely that they order their rules differently in importance. The ordering of politeness rules may differ dialectally as well as culturally.

Lakoff (1977) considers politeness and performatives. Her main goal in this paper is to look at why several ways of saying one thing exist and what possible contexts might govern a speaker’s choice of how to say it. Politeness is shown to be an important factor in determining which form of expression a speaker chooses. A very interesting part of this paper is the discussion of the different effects each type of performative might have on an interlocutor (101).

Lakoff (1979) begins by drawing an analogy between transformational grammar and personal style. Just as linguistic behavior is rule-governed, so too is personal style. The concepts of ungrammaticality and co-occurrence constraints, for example, remain useful if transferred into this framework and used to describe normal (and/or atypical) human behavior. Thus it should be

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4 According to Austin (1994), a performative is an utterance, which, by uttering it, a speaker performs the action described in the utterance (provided certain other conditions are appropriate).
possible to propose a system of rules to both predict and interpret an individual’s surface style. This is, of course, where the Rules of Politeness enter in, but this time they are shown along a continuum.

In this article, Lakoff proposes a theory of communicative competence, a scale of behavioral strategies that individuals might select depending on the situation. On one end of the continuum is clarity. Moving to the right we find distance, deference, and then camaraderie. While the strategies have been presented as points on a continuum, it is important to note than any one speaker may employ more than one strategy in his/her style. Even members of the same culture may have divergent politeness styles possible due to gender differences but presumably also according to social factors.

Finally, in one of Lakoff’s most recent books — *Talking power* — the issue of politeness in language resurfaces, this time with some discussion of politeness (and conversational logic) in languages other than English. The Rules are still present, but they are not presented in this work as numbered rules. Instead, the author refers to distance, deference, and camaraderie cultures/systems. The point is made again that while getting the point across in the shortest amount of time may be the most direct way to communicate, this is not always the goal of linguistic interaction (Lakoff 1990:171). The author notes that, as Americans, we tend to believe that honesty and directness in communication are desirable. However, “...when [being honest and direct] would infringe on manners or taste, or be actually or potentially hurtful to one or both participants...” we tend to “...mitigate [our] utterance — make it harder to understand in order to make it gentler and kinder” (30). Thus, depending, of course, on the conversational situation, a speaker would opt for politeness over clarity in communication in an attempt to minimize any potential for conflict or confrontation. (However, in her study of clarity versus indirectness in requests, Blum-Kulka (1987) shows that
the most indirect strategies (e.g. hints) were not judged to be the most polite strategies by speakers of Hebrew and English. Instead, conventionally indirect requests were seen as the most polite because a certain degree of clarity was found to be a necessary part of politeness.

**Brown and Levinson**

Brown and Levinson's (1978; 1987) politeness theory is perhaps the most cited work in the field of politeness and the theory to be focused on in this study. A chief aim of Brown and Levinson's (henceforth B&L) is to identify universal principles in politeness. In order to do this, they posit a model person (MP) who is assumed to be rational and to have face. Face — a concept borrowed from Goffman (1955) — consists of two components: negative face and positive face. Negative face refers basically to MP’s desire to be uninhibited in their actions and their claims to property. Positive face refers to MP’s positive self-image and her desire for that image to be appreciated by others. Certain other points must be taken for granted in B&L’s model. Among them are that one’s face can be satisfied by one’s own actions and also by the actions of others. Thus speakers (S) and hearers (H) will be interested in maintaining each other’s face. Another important aspect of the theory is that there exist face-threatening acts (FTAs), and there are several strategies to carry them out. To do an FTA “baldly on record” (in accordance with Grice’s conversational maxims) is the most direct way. But an MP might choose a different strategy in order to minimize the FTA. MP will not choose a more risky strategy than necessary so as not to threaten H’s face.

There are many different strategies that can be followed if one actually decides to go through with an FTA (one could very well find the situation too risky and opt out of doing the FTA altogether). They are as follows: do the FTA
off record, do it on record without redressive action (i.e. action that gives face to H), or do it on record with redressive action. In the case of the latter, S would have to decide on a negative or positive politeness strategy. As I mentioned above, to do the action baldly on record is the most direct strategy and is in accordance with Grice's maxims. To use a positive politeness strategy would mean appealing to H's positive face. Positive politeness strategies often concern building solidarity. Some of these are exaggeration, noticing H's interest, and using in-group identity markers. B&L list 15 positive politeness strategies. Using negative politeness would entail action oriented toward H's negative face. These strategies include conventional indirectness and minimizing the riskiness of the FTA. Negative politeness is where formality comes in. When doing an FTA off record, S leaves herself an out. She does not have to take responsibility for the FTA and at the same time allows H to ignore it (if that is what H chooses to do). An example of an off record strategy is hinting. Off record strategies violate one or more of the Gricean maxims. For instance, hinting violates the maxim of Relevance or Quantity.

Leech
The third and final politeness theory which claims universal applicability is that of Leech (1983). Leech proposes a partner to Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle: the Politeness Principle. Like the Cooperative Principle, the Politeness Principle has attendant maxims — at least six and possibly more — and each of these maxims has a set of opposing sub-maxims. The Politeness Principle explains linguistic behavior which is not cooperative (in a Gricean sense), and is thus "a necessary complement, which rescues the CP from serious trouble" (Leech 1983: 80). However, the maxims of the Politeness Principle are not equally important in the same way as Grice's in languages for which the Cooperative Principle
obtains. For example, the Tact Maxim is more important than the maxim of Generosity and the maxim of Approbation more so than the maxim of Modesty, if one accepts, as Leech suggests (132), that politeness is more other- than self-oriented. Furthermore, it seems that these first four maxims are more important than the final two.

The six maxims of Leech's Politeness Principle are Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. Each maxim is associated with one or two of Searle's (1979) illocutionary categories (although Leech uses slightly different terminology); for example, the Tact Maxim is relevant to impositives (Searle's directives) and commissives. As noted, each maxim of the Politeness Principle also has opposing sub-maxims. So for the Tact Maxim these are "(a) Minimize cost to other [(b) Maximize benefit to other]" (132). Furthermore, it is possible for a speaker to adhere to more than one politeness maxim simultaneously. So the speaker who tries to get her addressee to install software on the computer for her might say, "Oh, you're so much better at it than I am," thereby adhering to both the maxims of Approbation and Modesty.

One reason for resisting Leech's theory of politeness for an analysis of Thai is that it is not theoretically economical. It seems that under this framework a principle or maxim may be created to account for linguistic phenomena that cannot already be explained by the existing maxims. Any theory that permits one to propose a principle or maxim to explain any fact of human linguistic behavior for which the framework cannot already account does not seem sufficiently rigorous, and the more parsimonious system of Brown and Levinson is the one that will be explored here.
Wierzbicka

Wierzbicka (1991) is not focused specifically on linguistic politeness per se, but rather on cross-cultural pragmatics. Some of the points she makes, however, relate directly to issues of politeness in language.

Wierzbicka begins by noting that most of the work in the field of pragmatics has been anglo-centric, focusing on English and authored by English-speaking researchers. As a result, many of the conjectures that have been made about language in general may not be true for languages other than English. For example, the idea that people generally make indirect requests while avoiding imperatives in order to be polite is not necessarily true in languages other than English, and it is definitely not true for Polish or Hebrew.

Part of the problem with the anglo-centric studies, according to Wierzbicka, is that they rely on terms or values that are not universal to characterize language and culture, terms such as "directness", "self assertion", and other "culture-specific" concepts (129). If other societies do not or cannot identify with such concepts, then it does not make sense to characterize them in these terms. Along these lines, Wierzbicka criticizes Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model (among other works), which is based on a particular notion of 'face'. She argues that the model is flawed, since not all cultures share a concept or notion that matches B&L's idea of face. These points are perhaps the most valuable ideas in Wierzbicka's work.

The author goes on to propose a "natural semantic metalanguage" (6) composed of "universal semantic primitives" (7) to explain various concepts in different languages. "Universal semantic primitives" themselves are concepts which Wierzbicka considers to be universal — or near universal — to all the

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5 See below Matsumoto (1988; 1989) on Japanese politeness and Chapter 15 of this study.
world’s languages and cultures. Some examples of semantic primitives are “I”, “you”, “want”, “don’t want”, “good”, and “bad” (8). The metalanguage is meant, therefore, to be independent of any one language or culture, relying on these straightforward and almost universally encountered primitives to describe cultural and linguistic notions. According to Wierzbicka, the benefit of such a system is that meanings encoded in disparate linguistic systems can be more easily compared using notions familiar to all (or almost all) people.

A problem I see with Wierzbicka’s system is that even though a researcher is using a system of primitives, that researcher’s description of a given concept is apt to be colored by her own cultural background and even her personal interpretation. For example, Wierzbicka’s explanation of thank using the natural semantic metalanguage gives the following:

\[ \text{thank} \]
1. I know: you did something good for me
2. I feel something good towards you because of this
3. I say this because I want you to feel something good

(157)

Point (3) might just as accurately be stated as “I say this because it is positively polite to do so (whether or not I care that you feel good).” In addition, a situation in which thanks are proffered could arise based on different, more complicated circumstances as well, such as “(1) I know: you thought you did something good for me.” This, in turn might ultimately result in yet another option: “(3) I say this because I do not want you to feel bad,” which, in this scenario, seems more precise than saying “I want you to feel something good.” Yet another option might be that the speaker simply has to say something at this

\[ \text{6 Admittedly, “polite” is not one of the universal primitives given by Wierzbicka. But my point is basically that the speaker’s wanting the hearer to feel something good might not be the only motivation for thanks.} \]
juncture in the exchange, and the most appropriate thing is to thank the hearer. Finally, Ervin-Tripp (personal communication) points out that children are taught that there is an adjacency pair rule between a participant who gives and object and a participant who says thanks. In these situations, saying thanks has nothing to do with making the first participant feel good.

While Wierzbicka’s system of primitives has value — especially when doing detailed comparisons of similar notions from different languages — it seems to exclude pragmatic uses of particular concepts that simply cannot be expressed in such atomical terms. Culture, language, and human behavior are more complex and cannot (always) be broken down in this fashion. Another more basic challenge for her theory, it seems to me, is discovering the varying nuances of particular primitives in cultures. That is, it is not obvious to me that “good” and “bad” are necessarily equivalent across cultures. Thus I think it would be difficult to use this system to give anything but rudimentary characterizations of any particular culture or language.

Cross-cultural Politeness

In this section I consider some analyses of politeness or related phenomena from non-Indo-European languages. Each of these studies is valuable in that they help to point out ways in which the basic assumptions of Grice’s framework of Conversational Logic and other paradigms may not be valid for non-western languages.

Japanese

Ide 1989; 1982, Ide et al. 1986

Ide’s (1989) article throws into question the universality of Brown and Levinson’s politeness framework. In particular, she claims that Brown and Levinson’s
theory fails for non-Western languages like Japanese, from which her examples are drawn. According to the author, the framework excludes formal forms (in this case, honorifics), an aspect of linguistic choice, and discernment, an aspect of linguistic use as defined in this article.

The conventional forms Ide focuses on are Japanese honorifics. Brown and Levinson treat such forms as manifestations of negative politeness strategy. However, according to Ide, the use of formal forms is not strategic. Rather, Ide argues, a speaker of Japanese must make a choice irrespective of strategic considerations due to the fact that in Japanese, a formal form is both socio-pragmatically and grammatically obligatory. Because the Brown and Levinsonian paradigm accounts for polite behavior in terms of strategies, it fails to account for formal forms.

Discernment is "the speaker's use of polite expressions according to social conventions rather than interactional strategy" (223). It is the choice of linguistic forms whereby elements such as rank, status, etc. of the referent(s) (usually but not always the addressee) and speaker are systematically encoded in talk. Brown and Levinson's framework neglects this aspect of Japanese verbal communication, for it is focused on strategy. In addition, it appears that Brown and Levinson's theory assumes that interlocutors have the same status and that a speaker would use honorifics only to raise the other person and/or humble oneself (negative politeness). However, a Japanese speaker assumes a status difference exists between herself and the interlocutor and uses an honorific obligatorily to show she knows her place in society. Discernment and the strategies of negative and positive politeness have the same goal — smooth communication — but in the latter the speaker bases her choice of linguistic forms on her own intentions. The notion of discernment is interesting and important for an inquiry of Thai politeness as well.
Another interesting section of Ide’s paper is the one in which she points out problems in B&L’s framework (as opposed to omissions). Briefly, the problems with their paradigm is that they:

1) Confuse behavior and linguistic strategies (239)
2) Consider social but not psychological variables (240)
3) Make assumptions about ‘face’ (241)
4) Make assumptions about rationality (242)

The most compelling of the four reasons are the last two, and it will be important consider these in light of the Thai data as well.

Ide (1982) deals with women’s language and politeness in Japanese. The article focuses on honorifics, which Ide claims are the core of Japanese politeness. The article is split into four parts. The first involves the grammatical structure of honorific forms. The second and longest section explores the social factors which determines a Japanese speaker’s choice of honorific(s). The third part looks at women’s language, and the fourth and shortest section considers honorifics in the context of politeness universals.

In the second, and, in my opinion, most interesting section, Ide proposes her “Social rules of politeness” (366). She says they are for Japanese, but it appears they might apply equally well to Thai. The three “Ground rules” are:

Be polite to a person of a higher social position (366)
Be polite to a person with power (367)
Be polite to an older person (368)

The final rule, called the “Overriding rule,” is “Be polite in a formal setting” (371). As the name of this last rule suggests, it will prevail over the others dependent upon social context. For example, when strangers interact they usually maintain

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7 Lakoff (personal communication) notes that these rules are also present in English but that a speaker’s motives in following them might be interpreted differently.
a formal attitude, regardless of, say, their respective social positions (since they are strangers they do not actually know their relative social positions). However, as familiarity increases, formality is likely to decrease. Thus if one interactant holds a higher social position than the other, the social superior might end up using less polite language than her interlocutor once they have gotten to know each other a little better.

Honorifics, according to the author, create a formal atmosphere and can serve as indirect expressions by virtue of the fact that they obscure expression meaning and thereby reduce imposition on the hearer (383). Ide also mentions other devices a speaker might use, such as hedging, questions, negation, etc. She concludes the paper by asserting that indirectness is an underlying universal characteristic of linguistic politeness (384).8

A 1986 article by Ide, Hori, Kawasaki, Ikuta, and Haga looks at gender and politeness in Japanese. The authors recognize the "universal hypothesis" (25) that women are more polite than men,9 and their primary goal is to determine why this is so.10

Ide et al. develop a politeness scale and then administer surveys to Japanese men and women which are interpreted according to this scale. The authors found that women judged individual linguistic forms less polite than the men who were surveyed did, and, therefore, in situations where women thought they should be polite, they were more polite than men. They also found that men and women had different assessments of social distance, with women tending to assume greater social distance between themselves and their interlocutors. Finally, the authors found that men and women, at the time of

8 It should be noted that Ide's generalizations presented here are all from self-report, a point for which she has been criticized (Susan Ervin-Tripp, personal communication).
9 However, see the discussion of Keenan (1974) below.
10 Ide (1990) addresses similar issues.
their research, had the same patterns of interaction but different frequencies of interaction with various members of society.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Matsumoto 1988; 1989}

In Matsumoto (1988), the author considers universals of politeness as postulated by B&L, and particularly their notion of 'face.' One of Matsumoto's main claims is that B&L's 'face' does not accurately describe Japanese 'face.' Thus one of her conclusions is that a theory of universals of politeness should take cultural differences into account.

B&L’s ‘face’ may be positive or negative face. Negative face, according to Matsumoto, is “most alien” to Japanese culture. The author points out that, in Japanese society, individual territory or property is not of primary concern. More important to a Japanese is acknowledging and fitting into her position in the hierarchical social structure of her culture and gaining acceptance from this group.

The article describes Japanese culture and society, relying on the findings of three researchers — Nakane, Doi, and Sugiyama Lebra — to put forth the idea that the most important unit in Japanese society is the group and not the individual. A Japanese person’s primary concern is to acknowledge that she knows her relative position in the group and to gain acceptance from them. By contrast, B&L’s face is computed on the basis of individuals' treatment by and of others. For the Japanese (and Thai and perhaps other Asians) though, face is computed on the basis of how their behavior is responded to by the group.

\textsuperscript{11} An important fact about the work of Ide is that it is based on questionnaires and norms, and what speakers say they do and what they actually do are often quite different. However, what people say they do, i.e. people’s perceptions of what polite behavior is, is certainly of value and interest.
The examples and explanations given by Matsumoto show how Japanese linguistic politeness confirms the above claims about Japanese society and the individual’s functioning within it. The first set of examples illustrates the notion that acknowledging one’s inferior position to another using linguistic formulae is considered polite, and that interdependence is encouraged in this society. The third set of examples concerns honorifics and their use as “relation-acknowledging devices.” Matsumoto claims that “[t]aken in their broader sense, honorifics are morphological and lexical encodings of social factors in communication, such as the relationship between the interlocutors, the referents, the bystanders, the setting, etc.” (Matsumoto 1988: 414) Again the author stresses that maintaining face in Japanese society is inherently tied to acknowledging one’s position vis-à-vis others, and that honorifics are tools that Japanese speakers use to do this. The fourth and final set of examples concerns verbs of giving and receiving and their different plain, polite, and superpolite forms. Here it is stressed that the interlocutors must display their recognition of their relationship to one another in the context of Japanese social structure when making polite requests.

In her conclusion, Matsumoto asserts that Lakoff’s stylistic strategies of politeness can more accurately account for politeness in Japanese because they leave room for culturally and personally preferred styles. One of Lakoff’s strategies is Deference (Rule 2), and the Japanese culture is usually described as one of deference. However, Matsumoto is careful to point out that Japanese deference is different from western deference. While western deference says “Don’t impose; give options,” Japanese deference says “Leave it to someone higher” (in the hierarchical social structure). The author concludes that a proposal of universals of politeness is not impossible, but that such a proposal must account for culturally determined notions of ‘face’.
In Matsumoto (1989), the author attempts again to explain why the generally accepted theories of Grice and B&L cannot adequately explain the politeness phenomena of Japanese. Grice’s theory, for example, is based on describing the propositional content of utterances — what is said or unsaid. This idea presupposes that politeness expressions are things that are “added on” to a neutral expression. In Japanese, however, there is no such thing as a neutral expression. Every utterance conveys more than just propositional context, as some indication of social context is necessarily present in every Japanese utterance.

B&L’s theory, like Grice’s, also fails to take social context into account. And, as noted above, B&L’s notions of ‘face,’ particularly negative face, are not appropriate for a description of Japanese. The first issue Matsumoto tackles is that of honorifics. B&L claim that honorifics are used to minimize the offense of a ‘face-threatening act’. However, Matsumoto shows that honorifics are used even in simple propositions in Japanese, propositions which are not likely to threaten face (unless simply giving information constitutes an FTA, which, in Japanese, it apparently does not). Thus B&L’s theory cannot account for the usage of honorifics in such a context.

Another criticism of B&L’s universals is that they consider a different motivation for politeness than exists in Japanese, namely the preservation of positive and negative face. According to Matsumoto, Japanese are more concerned with fitting in and recognizing their place in the group than with the preservation of their property or the desire to be unimpeded in their actions (B&L’s negative face). A speaker will attempt to show that she understands her relationship to her interlocutors and the situation she is in. A Japanese’s use of honorifics and her choice of the proper speech level (via, e.g., verb forms) will demonstrate this understanding.
Matsumoto's notion is that a universal theory of politeness would better account for the data if it regarded all Japanese utterances as "intrinsically face-threatening" (219). The main problems she identifies in the theories of Grice and B&L, then, are that neither of the two can sufficiently account for cultural differences in language. In the case of Japanese in particular, social context appears to play a larger role than in western languages.

Malagasy

Keenan (1974) offers interesting insight into politeness (although the article is not specifically on politeness and she is not a native speaker of the language) in Malagasy, the Austronesian language spoken in Madagascar. The Malagasy strive to avoid open confrontation and/or conflict, and Keenan points out that criticism is generally prefaced by some sort of praise or compliment (130).

The author discusses other situations in which confrontation might occur and how the Malagasy handle these. The various situations are accusations, ordering and asking. In the case of accusations, the author notes that explicit accusations are rarely made. As for ordering and asking, affront to the hearer can be reduced via two techniques. The order can be softened using verbal niceties; or the order/request can be passivized to take the focus off the one who is to perform the order. Another technique in making requests in Malagasy is to allude to wanted items without actually asking for them. In sum, indirect speech is critical to Malagasy politeness and it is the way in which respect is shown in this culture.

On the other hand, Malagasy women are known to violate these norms of behavior, as they are considered to be direct and willing to enter into angry confrontations. Keenan describes at least one situation in which a Malagasy man deals indirectly with a problem but later returns with his wife who deals directly
and in no uncertain terms with the same issue. In general, the Malagasy find encounters with Europeans annoying, for the latter are known to be more direct (not unlike Malagasy women, it would appear). Therefore, Malagasy women are often recruited to enter into dealings with Europeans, since they are seen to be more similar in nature (142).

In Keenan (1976), the author works again with the Malagasy language looking at Grice’s Conversational Logic and specifically at the Quantity maxim: be informative. Keenan shows that English (or western language speakers) might expect their interlocutor to be maximally informative in conversation, but a Malagasy speaker would not have the same expectation. In fact, a Malagasy speaker will normally provide less information than their interlocutor wants to hear, even if they have access to more information (70), and this is what their (Malagasy-speaking) interlocutor expects. The reason for this is twofold: first of all, having information is prestigious in this culture; and second, Malagasy speakers do not always necessarily want to commit themselves to the information they give (presumably in case they are mistaken).

Another way the Malagasy differ from westerners is that they avoid identifying people directly and/or by name for fear of bringing them to the attention of unfriendly forces (72). Therefore, they might choose another word from a category to which the referent belongs, e.g. referring to one’s sister as “the person” when speaking about them. Under Grice’s schema this would be non-cooperative, since to refer to one’s sister as “the person” would implicate that “the person” was not one’s sister or even someone that the speaker knew. The Malagasy can also avoid mentioning people specifically in conversation is by using the passive and circumstantial voice.
Hebrew

Blum-Kulka (1992) discusses politeness phenomena in Hebrew. She looks at politeness in the public sphere and in the private realm. Of the former, she notes that "...Israeli present-day culture seems less consolidated; the metapragmatic discourse of informants admits to the lack of cultural scripts in this area and expresses a longing for both deference and demeanour, very much in the Western meanings of the terms" (278).

The more interesting findings regard interpersonal relations among family members and friends. The main finding here is that Israelis prefer to be direct in their interactions. For example, Israelis consider it more polite to tell the truth than to lie to save a friend’s feelings, and hypocrisy is considered impolite. So directness (and/or truthfulness) in interaction is more highly valued in Israeli culture than avoiding imposition on others (270-271).

There are, however, ways to make direct commands, for instance, more polite in Hebrew. To do this, one could add a nickname, change a direct imperative into a question, soften one’s tone of voice, and add an appealer, when speaking within the family (267). Humor and informativeness can also be used as ways of being (positively) polite. While some of these techniques, e.g. changing an imperative into a question or softening one’s tone of voice, are those of negative politeness, the author finds that Israeli society largely favors rapport in communication over deference. All of these techniques speak strongly to what Blum-Kulka refers to, in B&L terminology, as a "positive politeness-oriented style of mitigation" (269), which is preferred in this culture to indirectness.
Ojibwa

Black (1973)

Black did field work with two communities of Ojibwa in North America in the 1960s. Although she was not doing research specifically on issues of pragmatics, much less politeness, Black's findings are quite interesting for the scholar of linguistic politeness.

The questioning strategy of the Ojibwa contrasts sharply with the Israeli style described by Blum-Kulka (1992). Whereas Israelis are very direct in their linguistic behavior, the Ojibwa are indirect to the extreme when asking questions (Black uses the term ambiguous). For the Ojibwa, direct questions regarding personal or factual information are rude, and it is presumably offensive to burden one's interlocutor with requests for information. It is much better to phrase a question in such a way that the respondent can decide what is being asked (and whether or not to answer it).

For her part, the person of whom the question is asked is likewise expected to be vague or ambiguous when responding to direct questions (Black refers to the "rules" for respondents as "deflection ploys" (15)). In fact, it is not uncommon to receive silence as an answer in this culture (which would, of course, be impolite in American culture, for example). Black indicates that it is not only rude to ask a direct question in Ojibwa but pointless as well, since an answer — if there is one — is certain to be vague and very likely devoid of any useful information. In American culture, this type of response would be completely non-cooperative, since, in Gricean terms, it violates the maxims of Manner and Quantity, and probably the maxim of Relevance as well.
Rhodes (1989)
This work specifically examines politeness in Ojibwa, a Native American language of the Algonquian family spoken in the United States and Canada. In this paper, Rhodes follows the framework of B&L (1987) but argues — contra B&L — that positive politeness strategies can be conventionalized and in fact are so in Ojibwa.

Rhodes shows that Ojibwa utilizes politeness strategies that are also widely present in other languages. That is, the Ojibwa commonly employ bald-on-the-record imperatives (a finding which directly contradicts Black’s), indirect strategies, etc. (253-254). At the same time, the author is careful to point out that social distance and power differences do not play big roles in this society. Thus threat to face is minimized in this culture, and plain imperatives are common.

This is not to say, however, that face-threat does not exist at all. Rhodes shows that the Ojibwa presume cooperation among members of their culture, and that this is the basis for the predominance of positive politeness strategies in their language. The Ojibwa phenomena, according to the author, make sense in light of the B&L framework.

Chinese
In her monograph on politeness in Mandarin Chinese, Zhan (1992), the author’s purpose is to describe Mandarin politeness strategies and explain them to native English speakers. Lakoff has argued that when Grice's conversational maxims conflict with politeness, politeness will prevail. Zhan applies this finding to Chinese. The first chapter attempts to explain some features of Mandarin grammar and their relationship to politeness strategies. It also contains some information on the Chinese cultural and psychological influences on politeness.
Zhan follows B&L (1987) in using the terms positive and negative politeness. Two among many Mandarin positive politeness strategies are, for instance, the acts of claiming group membership for oneself and the act of avoiding disagreement. Some examples of negative politeness strategies in Mandarin are showing deference with honorifics, softening one's tone of speech, or using conventional indirectness. She offers many examples of off-record speech acts, such as giving hints, using irony, asking rhetorical questions, and being vague.

The core of Mandarin positive politeness, according to Zhan, is kinship. The core of negative politeness is the avoidance of conflict, and being vague is the most used type of off-record politeness. Her conclusion is that politeness strategies vary from language to language and from culture to culture, and that Chinese is basically a positive politeness culture.

Thai

Cooke (1968) looks at pronominal reference in three Southeast Asian languages: Thai, Burmese, and Vietnamese. Although it is not a work specifically on politeness, it is an extremely useful source for a study of politeness.12 The appropriate usage of pronouns in Thai is a key aspect of a speaker's appearing polite or impolite to others. While Cooke does not provide conversational data, his work is very thorough in discussing the appropriate context(s) for each pronominal term's usage as well as the crucial importance of relative status relationships and how they govern a speaker's selection of a pronoun or other person-referring term.

12 Pronouns will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.
Cooke’s work gives lists and general descriptions of the different types of words used in Thai pronominal reference. His five categories of pronominal reference terms are:

1) Personal pronouns proper (first, second, and third person): e.g. chan, thae, khaw
2) Pronominally used kin terms: e.g. pāa (elder aunt), luŋ (elder uncle)
3) Pronominally used status terms, a group which includes all nouns that are not kin terms: e.g. ?aacaan ('professor'), khunjīŋ (a female title of nobility)
4) Name nouns, i.e. given names
5) Nicknames

Many charts are provided which show possible pairings of the pronominal terms. In addition, Cooke discusses the cultural and personal aspects in the use of these terms and also mentions some points of confusion in their usage.

This study is invaluable to gaining insight into the workings of the rich system of Thai pronominal reference. According to Cooke, it “…is one of remarkable vigor, vitality, and versatility. In a striking way it mirrors some of the more important features of Thai culture; and at the same time it provides considerable scope for the expression of individual attitudes and personality” (68).

Bhamoraput (1972)

This useful work considers final particles in Thai. The author provides an exhaustive list of all the particles along with transcribed utterances containing them and their definitions. Final particles accomplish a variety of linguistic goals in Thai, such as mitigating or exhorting. Bhamoraput looks at intensifying, emphasizing, hortative, definite, question, post-question, and status particles.
Not all of these particles are used in the expression of politeness, but many are. This study provides several useful examples for the analysis undertaken here.

The paper also looks at other details of final particle usage, such as phonetic and morphemic issues as well as the possible co-occurrence of particles.

*Palakornkul (1975)*

This work deals exclusively with pronominal usage in Bangkok Thai. Again, this work is not specifically on politeness but is useful to a study of politeness. Palakornkul offers an annotated list of social categories underlying speakers' possible social roles. These are: power and status; kinship; friendship; occupation; religion; age; sex; and genealogical distance. This list is particularly useful since the Thai pronominal system combines both pronominalization and social marking based, of course, on the speaker and the addressee's social role.

The author also provides a hierarchy of significant social and cultural factors to consider when selecting pronouns (23), as well as an explicated list of nine social and cultural features that affect (social) role relationships (24-26). These are intimacy, solidarity, and formality, to name a few.

The work is generally helpful in understanding the Thai pronominal reference system, despite the author's attempt at formalizing the analysis using a feature-based system. An appendix at the end provides a list of pronominally used terms.

*Wongkhomthong (1985)*

Wongkhomthong (1985) compares formulaic expressions of greeting in Thai and Japanese. Greetings are a discourse form in which politeness is often expressed, and Wongkhomthong has many examples of appropriate Thai language usage. For example, the greeting/question *pen yaj baay* "How are things going?" is
suitable when speaking with ones inferiors, friends, or peers (73). But the phrase used with a superior or elder would be considered impolite. The study is useful in that it outlines contexts and situations in which certain expressions are suitable.

*Kanittanan (1984; 1988; n.d.)*

Kanittanan's (1984) work examines the usage of address terms, on the basis of which individuals are judged polite or impolite. Thai has many address terms to choose from, and selecting address terms can be challenging. Making the correct choice can be so tricky, in fact, that Kanittanan says people often avoid using any address term at all (pronominal subjects can be omitted in Thai, as in Japanese). Kanittanan considers second-person pronouns, kinship terms, titles, first names and nicknames, as well as a category which she calls honorifics (this category, however, is not considered at length).

The paper explains the circumstances under which each term is used, the two major factors being age and social status. In Thai culture, older is superior (3). But, the second part of the paper, a study of address term usage in a university community, demonstrates that status currently supersedes age in determining choice address terms (and very likely other aspects of social interaction as well).

*Kanittanan (1988) is an important source for Thai linguistic politeness. Its first section focuses primarily on expressions for referring to the second person (a category which is not restricted to pronouns in Thai) and secondarily on expressions for the first person. The second part looks at terms that express linguistic politeness.*

The first part of the work looks at first and second person pronouns, and other terms of address. The author indicates three dimensions along which speakers base their choice(s): pronominal reference, age, and social situation. In
the first section the author argues for speaker self-effacement\textsuperscript{13} in Thai (355). The section on age deals with kinship terms, which are widely used as address terms even outside the family in Thailand. Finally, social situation involves second person reference and titular use. Kanittanan claims that showing politeness through deference in this way is a rather recent phenomenon in Thailand, developing as a result of "...social innovations, modern institutions and forms of work differing from the earlier agricultural society" (357). Finally, address terms can be combined to show even more respect and politeness.

In the second part of the article, Kanittanan shows how particular lexical items convey politeness using several Thai expressions and sentences. This section is not only thought provoking but it provides me with some good examples for my own work.

The author concludes: "Four constituents of linguistic politeness in Thai have been identified above: elevation of listener, self-effacement of speaker, formal linguistic usage and the use of long deferential expressions" (361). Thus Kanittanan's work is fundamental to mine, both in the examples she brings forth and her explanations of them.

In Kanittanan (n.d.), the author discusses two ways to express politeness: tone of voice (Thais, like most people, do not like abrupt utterances but prefer utterances that are softer and drawn out phonetically)\textsuperscript{14} and lexical choice (30). Among the latter are words that are inherently polite, such as the Thai particles \textit{khā} and \textit{khráp}, self-effacing terms (those which humble the speaker), and terms that raise the addressee (those which make the hearer seem more important than the speaker).

\textsuperscript{13} While Kanittanan never specifically defines this term in her article(s), "speaker self-effacement" is understood to mean the speaker's linguistic humbling of him or herself.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, lengthening the vowel of the affectionate particle \textit{câa} in the summons \textit{liilaa câa} causes it to sound more intimate and affectionate.
Simpson (1997)

Simpson’s dissertation considers the use of pronouns and pronominalized nouns — what she calls person-referring expressions — in a particular speech community. Her data consist of conversational data as well as material from interviews collected from students of approximately the same age at a university in Thailand. Person-referring expressions carry a range of social meanings and are used differently by males and females. Simpson’s goals are to examine the differences in the way males and females use person-referring expressions; to study their discourse level variation; and to look at speakers’ attitudes toward these variations. She only considers first and second person-referring terms.

The analysis of her conversational data reveal that there is a greater range of pronominal terms used by female speakers than by male speakers among friends. Male speakers mostly used the pair kuu (first person pronoun) and myŋ (second person pronoun), terms that are considered crude but are used among intimates (mostly males). Female students, on the other hand, use a larger variety of terms for first and second person reference, including their own and others’ nicknames. Simpson also found that speakers would switch terms or use terms in a “syntactically optional position” (87) to signal emotional stance, such as anger, emphasis, disbelief, etc.

In her examination of the data from interviews, Simpson shows that females again use a greater variety of pronouns. Whereas males were able to use the term phôm — “a polite but status-neutral” (110) masculine pronoun — females had to expend more “cognitive energy” (146) in making their pronominal choices. This is due to the fact that there is no neutral feminine word (that parallels phôm, for example) for the self in Thai, and yet there are many terms to choose from. Simpson (148) states:
...it appears that women actually have access to a greater number of linguistic resources for self-reference. However...we realize that although women have more options available, this does not necessarily lead to linguistic efficiency or convenience for them. Rather...women are forced by the socio-pragmatic grammar of self-reference to define their social positions more explicitly than men, or else to avoid self-reference if at all possible.

Females tended to use pro-drop more frequently than males. In addition, female students were more likely to avoid person-referring expressions (first person) because they tended to avoid the self as a topic of conversation.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction
The goal of the analysis is to use new conversational and previously published data to single out and investigate sociolinguistic aspects of Thai politeness. A second goal is to test the universality of two western theories of conversation and politeness in light of these Thai data. The code being analyzed is Standard or Bangkok Thai, which is the dialect taught in schools, heard on television, and used by most Thais in communicating with those who do not share their regional dialect. It is also the dialect taught to foreigners learning Thai.

The Data Corpus
The data used in this dissertation come from three sources: videotaped conversations involving native Thai speakers; published works on Thai linguistics; and anthropological studies of Thai culture and language. The videotaped conversations were recorded from television during the periods June-July 1995 and April 1997. The speakers are adults who hosted and/or appeared as guests on Thai television talk shows. Approximately 16 hours of televised conversation were recorded.

Because of the limitations of the conversational data (see below for further discussion), a significant portion of the data analyzed here also came from published sources. The most heavily relied upon works were Cooke (1968) on pronominal reference terms; Bhamoraput (1972) on discourse particles; and Kanittanan (1984; 1988) on Thai politeness. These works are discussed in detail.
in the next major section. Haas (1964) also served as an invaluable source of definitions and examples of individual lexical items. From the field of anthropology, the most relied upon works were Phillips (1970) and Bilmes (1975; 1992).

**Methods of Analysis**

I began by examining the videotapes myself and selecting the conversations that were likely to be helpful in this study. Some reasons for disqualifying portions of recorded data were, for example, poor sound quality or excessively complex language (as in, for example, a political debate).¹ The selected spoken data were transcribed by me and/or my research assistant (a native Thai speaker) using Thai orthography first. I then did a second screening to narrow down which excerpts would serve as examples in this study. When the appropriate passages had been chosen, I phonetically transcribed and translated this data using a broad transcription. The phonetic transcription follows for the most part the system developed by Mary R. Haas. (Refer to Appendix II for an explanation of this system. For transcription conventions, refer to Appendix III.) Throughout the entire screening and transcription process, it was necessary to refer back to the videotapes as well.

I searched for examples of polite behavior in the recorded data relying on my familiarity with Thai, my experiences interacting with Thais in and out of Thailand, and my observations of Thai interaction(s). I am a bilingual speaker of

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¹ All things being equal, passages whose content was more interesting to the analyst were preferred to the others.
English and Thai, and although I have not lived in Thailand since I was a small child, I have visited Thailand regularly for periods of (for the most part) no shorter than one month and up to three months at a time. These visits were spent with my Thai-speaking relatives. Thai was also spoken in my home in the United States, and I deepened my knowledge of the language with college-level classes both at U.C. Berkeley and at Chiang Mai University in Thailand. While I may not be fully bicultural (having spent the bulk of my time in the United States), I do have a strong instinct for both the Thai language and culture. I therefore feel confident in analyzing the data for evidence of polite linguistic behavior. As assurance, though, I submitted portions of the transcripts to native speakers of Thai for their intuitions and assumptions. Where possible, I tested these assumptions against published works.

The qualitative analysis draws mainly from work in pragmatics — specifically in politeness studies. I rely most heavily on the ideas put forth by Grice (1975), Lakoff (1973; 1990), Brown and Levinson (1987), and Searle (1979). The next chapter (Background to the Study) discusses these works in more detail.

**Limitations of the Videotaped Data**

The nature of the conversational data resulted in certain limitations for the analysis. Because the conversations occurred in the context of television talk shows, they were not samples of spontaneous talk. The topic of conversation was driven by the questions of the host(s), and the guests rarely, if ever, had the opportunity to drive the direction of the conversation. Furthermore, the talk was produced for an audience, either a live audience, a television audience, or both. Yet the conversations, while they are not completely natural due to these factors,
are not contrived or scripted. While the speakers are more likely to pay attention to what they are saying because of the overhearing audience, they are not being overly formal because of the fact that the conversations are being publicly aired.\(^2\) The participants are observing Thai norms of politeness, which is what is being studied here.

A related issue is that the talk being studied reflects only one or two registers of Thai, polite registers that are appropriate in this form of public discourse (for the most part the conversations are more casual, but there is at least one formal conversation cited in the study). As a result, it was not possible to analyze politeness in other registers using these conversational data. The use of data from published sources is meant in part to address this lacuna.

A final note regarding these data: the excerpts chosen feature more women than men (3 men vs. 7 women). This was not done on purpose, and this study is not gender-focused (although such a study would be a welcome addition to the current body of knowledge). The imbalance comes as a result of the fact that most of the talk shows featured interviews with and by women. This does not, however, interfere with the goals of the study: to identify elements of Thai linguistic politeness and to test Brown and Levinson’s purportedly universal theory of politeness against the Thai data.

\(^2\) There are, of course, conversations that are more formal than others. But that is not due to the fact that they are public discourse. Rather other factors, such as the relative status difference between interlocutors and/or the subject of the conversation, determine their formal tone.
CHAPTER 4

PRONOMINAL REFERENCE AND PERSON-REFERRING EXPRESSIONS

This section relies for the most part on existing work regarding Thai pronouns and noun substitutes. In it, I explore the issues of pronominal choice, selecting the appropriate pronoun or other noun substitute for a given social context, and the consequences of making the wrong selection with respect to politeness.

Cooke (1968: 68) notes that the Thai pronominal system mirrors important features of Thai culture and also allows scope for expression of individual attitudes and personality. The Thai system is extremely rich and has received attention from many scholars over the years. In a discussion of politeness, the system is of interest because proper and/or improper manipulation of noun substitutes (pronouns and other person-referring expressions) can have bearing on whether a speaker is perceived as polite or impolite. In selecting noun substitutes to refer to oneself, one’s addressee, and/or a third person, Thais must be mindful of an array of sociocultural factors. Primarily, participants in communication “...are characterized by the social role(s) each occupies which is essentially determined by underlying social and cultural factors indicative of Thai society and its social structure” (Palakornkul 1975: 15).

Thai pronouns pattern syntactically like nouns. The correct usage of pronouns involves observing both grammar rules and sociolinguistic rules. It is the sociolinguistic rules — or more precisely the socio-pragmatic rules — of pronominal choice that interest us here.
Categories of Pronominal Reference

There is a large collection of pronouns and noun substitutes from which to choose in Thai. They can be classified into the following five categories:

1. Personal pronouns proper
2. Kinship Terms
3. Names and Nicknames
4. Status Terms (Titles and Occupations)
5. Zero

In Thailand, there are three main social groups—the royalty, Buddhist monks, and commoners. For the most part, I will be concerned here with the pronouns and noun substitutes used by commoners.

Personal Pronouns Proper

The category of pronouns proper designates a large set of words in Thai. Most of these forms are monosyllabic, but the more formal forms tend to be polysyllabic. According to Kanittanan, "...the length of linguistic or semantic expressions is important in assisting in the indication of politeness in Thai: the longer the expression, the greater seems the deferential politeness and degree of speaker self-effacement" (1988: 360). Thus it is not surprising that pronouns used to address royalty are the longest of all forms. A more important hearer merits the trouble it takes the speaker to produce a longer expression.¹

Cooke (1968: 8) notes that it is difficult to reach a "simple and consistent" formal definition for this grammatical category. He does manage, though, to note a few basic features of this word class. One of the primary traits of

¹ While it is not a pronoun, the case of the Thai word for Bangkok will help illustrate this point. In everyday conversation, the city is referred to as krugthéeep. But the city's official name, only a
pronouns, of course, is that they (usually) differentiate person as the main feature of their class meaning (ibid.). That is, pronouns, as part of their semantics, usually indicate which person — first, second, or third — is being referred to. However, there are three obvious exceptions to this rule in Thai. The word *kháw* can be used as a first person pronoun, usually by women (although not exclusively) speaking to intimates, or may function as a gender and number neutral third person pronoun. The pronoun *kee* is also not specific as far as person. It can be used as a second or third person pronoun, and the way in which it is being used will be clear from context. Finally, the pronoun *raw* can be used as a first or second person singular or plural pronoun. Again, context is relied upon for disambiguation.

Lakoff (1984) discusses speaker versus hearer-based cultures (and languages). In a speaker-based language — such as English — speakers tend to take (or are assigned) responsibility for the meaning of the message being conveyed. Precision and explicitness are valued, and misinterpretation of meaning is the fault of the speaker. But in a hearer-based language or culture, precision and explicitness are generally marked, as imprecision and ambiguity are preferred. In such cultures, "... the most desirable strategy will be to leave decisions about meaning, as about so many things, at least conventionally up to the hearer" (482). Thai is a hearer-based language, and participants rely largely on context to derive linguistic meaning.
For example, some Thai pronouns are unspecified in gender and number. *kan, raw, khun, naaj,* and *khâw* can be used by, to, or about males or females. The pronoun *raw,* as noted above, can be used as a first or second person singular or plural pronoun. Simpson (1997: 145) finds that female university students use *raw* frequently in her interviews, perhaps because of its sociopragmatic neutrality, and despite the fact that it is "inherently referentially vague."\(^2\) Hearers must rely on context to decipher meaning, since the context will determine the meaning.

What is notable about Thai pronouns and the Thai pronominal system in general are the varying degrees of deference, formality, and solidarity, which all contribute to perceptions of politeness, that can be expressed simply through pronominal choice. For example, good (usually male\(^3\)) friends of similar age might use the "nonrestraint"\(^4\) pronominal pair *kuu* (1\(^{st}\) person) and *mytj* (2\(^{nd}\) person) with each other, as discussed by Simpson in her study. If used with anyone but an intimate, the pronouns would be considered vulgar and offensive. But among close friends their use implies solidarity, a relaxed social atmosphere, a sort of "we’re so close you can call me this" attitude.\(^5\) On the other hand, if one of a dyad accustomed to using this pair switches to the more formal *phôm* (1\(^{st}\)

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2 She notes that the pronoun *raw* seemed "inadequate for some speakers at certain points in the discourse" for the same reason (Simpson 1997: 145).

3 Sources such as Cooke claim that "nonrestraint" (see the following note for an explanation of this term) pronouns are used by males, implying that women eschew such ruffianly and vulgar language. However, female intimates can be heard — though rarely — addressing each other with these forms. Generally this might occur in private contexts when the speakers are joking around with each other.

4 Cooke (1968: 34) explains the feature of nonrestraint as one which "... may be described as suggesting a certain defiance of or nonconformity to underlying standards of more proper usage — a certain sense, therefore, of ego-freedom."

5 Parallels exist in English, such as "you old goat" or some off-color nicknames (e.g. "stinky") uttered in particular (non-aggressive) contexts.
`person) and khun (2nd person) pair, for example, another message is being sent. It is true that this pair is more formal and might be appropriate for two people of relatively equal status just making each other’s acquaintance. Yet between two people who were accustomed to more casual or intimate usage, the move to formality might signal distress in the relationship (unless it were being used humorously). The switch to formal pronouns where intimate ones were once used could imply anger, aggression, or sarcasm on the part of the speaker. Ervin-Tripp (1976: 63) observes that: “To address a familiar peer as a non-peer is to be cold and distancing.” It is the equivalent of moving from first-naming to title plus last name or to V where T had been the norm in a European language. (Ervin-Tripp also observes that using over-polite forms is a technique that can be used to offend superiors. This is because “… the deviance from a norm is given a social interpretation that ingratiation can be as insulting as deviance through rudeness” (64). Speakers must be aware of both his/her listener’s expectations as well as the social factors which contribute to those expectations in order to accurately communicate their intended meaning.)

An interesting pronoun is núu. The primary definition of this word is ‘mouse’.6 Haas (1964: 561) gives its secondary and tertiary definitions as a first person pronoun used by children and as a second person pronoun used when speaking to children. In actuality, though, its use is more widespread. The word is commonly used by (younger) women as a first person pronoun and even by some men as a first person pronoun, usually when speaking to their mothers

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6 And, interestingly, this word comes to Thai from Chinese hanú ‘slave’ (Pongsuwan Bilmes, personal communication)
(probably because they are accustomed to referring to themselves this way — with this particular person — since childhood). A less common use is as a second person pronoun to some men, especially those who are much younger than the speaker and among gay men.

Thus nūu, which designates a diminutive animal, has come to be widely used as a first and second person pronoun denoting inferior status. The first person user of this pronoun is stating his/her diminutive stature and recognizing the addressee’s superior position. In this way, the speaker is making him/herself metaphorically smaller than the hearer and thereby showing the hearer deference. This is certainly the case when young women use the pronoun.

A list of the most common first, second, and third person pronouns is given in Appendix IV.

**Kinship terms**

Kinship terms are used by Thai speakers for pronominal reference. According to Benedict (1943), Tai (of which Thai is a family member) is unique among the world’s languages for the variety of its kin expressions (though Chinese apparently has many kin terms too). For example, Thai has four distinct terms for ego’s four grandparents (vs. two in English), four terms for parents’ sibling (vs. two in English), two terms for in-laws, two terms for parents, two terms for spouses, two terms for siblings, and one for siblings’ children (contra English, which in this case, has more: two)!
Kinship terms function semantically like personal pronouns in Thai. They can be used to refer to first, second, or third person nouns. Following are some examples illustrating the pronominal usage of kinship terms.

EXAMPLES 4.1 & 4.2:

   elder.aunt  FUT  go  buy  food
   
a.  I’m going to buy food. (parent’s elder sister speaking)
   b.  (Your) aunt is going to buy food. (spoken by a third party)

4.2  lūuk  duu  nīi  hāj  nòj  dāj  máj.
   child  look  DEM  give  little  able  INT
   Can you look at this for me? (parent to child)

Kinship terms are commonly used to refer to and address intimates of one’s family who may not actually be blood relatives (whom Haas refers to as affinal relatives) and non-kinsmen or “fictive kin” as well.7 For affinal relatives, pronominal usage is based on the most appropriate consanguineal term (Haas 1969). For intimate non-kinsmen, kin terms are also commonly used. Phillips (1970: 23) notes that:

...the terms for older sibling (phiī), elder uncle (lung), and elder aunt (pāa) are used as terms of address and

7 This exists to a certain degree in American culture too. For example, in Hawaii an elder respected person might be referred to as “auntie” or “uncle”, whether there is a blood tie or not. An amusing example is the following: My friend’s father, speaking to my daughter, referred to himself as “uncle grandpa”. In Thai, however, the practice is more widespread, extending beyond the generation of one’s parents.
reference between individuals who are obviously not related to each other, but who wish to mark overtly their fondness and respect for one another. The use of these fictive terms is of course sometimes prompted by nothing more than the desire to be polite, but equally often it symbolizes genuine feelings of affection and obligation not too different from what the terms imply when they are used in their original kinship context.

Even non-kinsmen with whom one does not share an intimate relationship can be addressed or referred to with kinship terms. For example, *luy ‘parent’s older brother* is a respectful term of address for an older equal or inferior (status-wise) man. A waiter in a restaurant could politely address a client as *phi ‘elder sibling’,* as long as the client was not too much older — and of course not younger — than the waiter. (Otherwise the waiter might choose the kinship term meaning elder aunt or uncle for an older patron, or avoid using any term at all, if possible.) When addressing restaurant clientele who appear to be younger, the waiter could use the deferential title *khun* or avoid using pronominal reference altogether.

A list of kinship terms is given in Appendix IV.

Names and nicknames

Names and nicknames can be used in Thai for first, second and third person reference. While Thais have given names and family names, title + given name are generally used in second and third person reference. Surnames, Thai *naamsakun,* are not used in first or second person reference at all and can often be dispensed with in third person reference as well, i.e. it is not considered impolite to refer to a person without using their surname. For example, in referring to or
addressing Prakaithong Thong Yai — where Prakaithong is this person’s first name and Thong Yai her family name — one could use either Khun Prakaithong (where Khun is a gender-neutral polite title, similar to miss, mister, or missus); Acaan Prakaithong (ʔaacaan — “professor” — is this person’s occupational title); or Khun Ying Prakaithong (Khun Ying is this person’s inherited title of nobility). 8 Alternatively, given name alone can be used in pronominal reference in all three persons, although the speaker would either have to be socially superior or equal to the referent to do this. In addition, most Thais also have nicknames, which are generally acquired during childhood. In more intimate situations, nicknames may be used pronominally. Simpson (1997: 76) finds that among college-aged students, females use nicknames for first and second person reference frequently when speaking with friends of approximately the same age.

Status Terms

Status terms — titles and occupational titles — are another category of noun substitutes that can be used pronominally. These are more frequently used in second and third person reference, but can be used in first person reference as well. Titles of rank or status can be inherited or conferred (e.g. by the King or Queen). Individuals in certain occupations, such as teachers, professors, and doctors, are usually referred to by their occupational titles. When occupational titles are used, they usually refer to someone of superior status (although this is occasionally not the case). Palakornkul (1975: 15) notes that:

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8 With all these choices, how then does one choose? A person with no knowledge of Prakaithong’s status — either occupational or inherited — would by default choose the first option. But the last two are better options, and both are equally respectful.
Titles are employed as pronouns in second and third persons for addressing persons who have titles. This is not only to honor the person but it is also considered inappropriate not to do so in Thai.

A speaker who (knows and) neglects to use an addressee or referent’s title — if that person has one — can be viewed as gauche or even rude in Thai. A person with a title should be given due deference. To deny it would cause the speaker to look bad for not displaying her knowledge of her interlocutor’s status. In Thai conversation it is crucial to acknowledge the status of one’s interlocutor(s).

Examples of some common status terms that are used pronomially are given in Appendix IV.

Zero

In Thai sentences, subjects NPs can often be omitted, especially pronouns. Since there are many (sociocultural) factors to consider when choosing pronouns, it is sometimes easier to avoid using any at all. According to Cooke (1968:10):

Deference or politeness does not necessarily require that pronouns be used. In fact, most speakers would, for example, avoid use of first and second person pronouns in addressing high-ranking royalty.

As with some other languages, such as Italian or Spanish, if it is clear who is being spoken to or about, a person could use zero subject to refer to herself, her interlocutor, or a third person or people.9 The following example illustrates this.

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9 On the other hand, zero object is not possible in these languages where zero object and zero direct object are both possible in Thai, e.g. nīt hāj pāj lēew — Nid give go already — “Nid gave (it) (to them) already.”
EXAMPLE 4.3:

(zero) probably FUT bathe able

a. I'll probably be able to bathe.
b. You'll probably be able to bathe
c. She/he/they'll probably be able to bathe.

Using zero anaphora makes it possible to avoid awkward situations in conversation by eschewing pronominal selection, where there is always the risk of making the wrong choice and offending someone. For Thais, this risk is more daunting than the danger of possible confusion that might ensue if the speaker’s intended referent were misinterpreted. Furthermore, if it is already clear who is being spoken about, it is unnecessary to use pronouns or noun substitutes, whether or not politeness issues are present. Thus it is not necessarily the case that the omission of pronominal reference terms indicates social or interactional problems. A Thai speaker could omit such terms for other reasons, such as convenience or economy.

Status-structuring and the Choice of Person Referring Terms

In Thai the use of an appropriate pronoun marks a speaker as polite and conversely. There are several factors to be considered in selecting the appropriate pronominal form. The following is adapted from Palakornkul’s list of sociocultural factors that influence pronominal usage:

55
intimacy
respect
solidarity
formality
presence of a child
presence of non-acquaintances or persons with power
and status
(1975: 24-26)

In addition, speakers' roles must also be considered when choosing the
appropriate pronoun or noun substitute, and there are situations in which an
amalgam of noun substitutes are used. In determining the order of noun
substitutes in these amalgams, the following hierarchy of social and cultural
factors is considered (in descending order of importance):

- power and status
- kinship and family relationship
- age
- friendship
- occupation
(23)

Thus a woman who is an aunt and a doctor at the same time may be called ʔaa
mō — 'younger paternal aunt or uncle' plus 'doctor' (kin term + occupational
title) — by her nieces and nephews, since kinship is higher in the hierarchy than
occupation. Another example is of a grandmother with a royal title (indicative of
high status). She would be called câw jaaj — 'a title for northern Thai royalty'
plus 'maternal grandmother'. In this case, the combination is status title + kin
term, because a title of kinship is lower than one of power and status in the
hierarchy.

The most important among these categories and characteristics of social
roles are power and status. Specifically, in the selection of pronouns and noun
substitutes, the assessment of relative power and status between the speaker, hearer and referent is crucial. Cooke (1968:19) gives the following:

The variety of meanings in the various person pronoun forms may be explained in terms of a number of semantic distinctions. The most important of these are distinctions which relate to the category of person, and those which involve relationships expressed or implied between speaker, addressee, and referent. Other distinctions include those relating to sex, age, and (to a limited extent) number.

In Thai society, which is overtly hierarchical, it is critical that the speaker pay close attention to her status relative to that of her interlocutor(s), and often to her status in relation to a third party (or parties) who may or may not be present. Campbell (1969:20) says a speaker’s choice of pronoun “...will depend largely upon the real or imagined relative social status of the speaker and his audience.”

Status in Thai culture is a complicated and important issue, in pronominal selection as well as in other linguistic and social arenas, and it can be the result of several social elements. Cooke says that “The important factors in evaluating status in Thai community are age, rank, kin relationship (an amalgam of age and rank), and, in a measure, nonintimacy” (Cooke 1968: 58). Generally, older kin, such as older siblings or cousins, aunts, uncles, etc., have higher rank.10 People of high ranking social position include doctors, teachers, professors, and well-educated people, priests and religious teachers, government officials, employers, masters or mistresses, conferred nobility of various ranks, and royalty of all

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10Cooke notes that even if they are younger, cousins who are the children of a parent’s older sibling are considered to have higher status. However, there may be situations in which they may be treated as equals or inferiors. There are exceptions to almost all situations (i.e. cases where situational rules apply).
ranks (Haas 1951). Aside from younger kin and younger people in general, those with lower social positions in the Thai community include (but are not necessarily limited to) commoners (vs. conferred nobility and/or royalty), students (vs. teachers), certain ethnic groups, beggars, and those engaged in coolie professions, like garbage collectors and street sweepers.

Cooke (1968) gives a number of scenarios where speakers may have difficulty making the appropriate pronominal choice. While he was not talking about politeness per se, his examples are instructive here. They illustrate pronominal pitfalls for Thai speakers which could result in their sounding incompetent or impolite.

Scenario 1: A young man and a peddler (Cooke's Situation 1)

In this example, "[A] young man who has been exposed to democratic ideals" is speaking to a peddler. He has difficulty choosing pronouns for the interaction. The options seem to be (with first person pronouns shown as the first of each pair and second person pronouns second): khāa and ?en; chān and kee; and phōm and khun. The first pair is rarely used in present day Thai. This pair of pronouns was often used by a superior speaking to an inferior, and especially between master and servant. Therefore it is too condescending for use in this context. Nowadays, this pair of words can be used between close friends (usually male) in banter or in a jocular way, or even to express anger or assertiveness to equals or inferiors. Other users might be much older women speaking with their domestics.
The second pair — *chān* and *kee* — is also, according to Cooke (63), “undemocratic” and too casual and disrespectful for a young man to use to speak with an elder person. Age entitles a person to some degree of respect, and this is true even though the elder in this case has little power and occupies a low status occupation. In addition, it seems that presently the pronoun *chān* is more commonly used by women.

The last pair — *phōm* and *khun* — is too formal, according to Cooke, when one considers the peddler’s relatively low status. However, if the young man is well-educated or otherwise refined (having a noble background, for example), he could decide to use *phōm*. This would create some social distance between him and the addressee. In addition, Simpson (1997: 110) claims that this masculine first person pronoun “does not necessarily signal formality,” although it is still considered polite and is used in formal situations. So *phōm* is a plausible choice for the young man in this context.

In sum, the first and second pairs of pronouns would be impolite because they imply the exceedingly low status of the peddler and would thus insult him. The third pair is not impolite, but it is not a perfect choice either. Given the social context it might be awkward for its possibly excessive formality. In fact, the selection of this last pair would be characteristic of a person just learning Thai. Such a person might only be familiar with polite pronouns, and/or she may have little confidence in her ability to accurately determine relative social standing. Ervin-Tripp (1976: 64) notes that: “New learners of languages containing many social alternatives … are said to have great difficulty in achieving address which is neither sarcastically deferent or rude.” Hence the
non-native Thai-speaking novice may wish to avoid offense at all costs by sticking to "safe" pronouns. In any case, for the young Thai man in this example (the social superior), the best choice here would be to use no pronouns at all. In this particular situation, where the young man and the peddler are presumably interacting in some sort of commerce situation where the roles they play in the interaction are clear, this may actually be possible. For his part, in the unlikely event that he needs to use a first person pronoun at all, the peddler could use phöm.

Of course, this is not always the situation in interpersonal interaction, and sometimes choices must be made. These choices are dependent upon the particular individuals and also specific situations. In general, a higher status person, say, a professor, can more comfortably use a formal pronoun in a wider range of situations (as I noted above for phöm). As another example, a female professor in the interaction just described could easily use dichăn to refer to herself. Even if it appears that she is younger than the peddler, she is still sure that her social rank is higher than his. If she is certainly older than he is, she need not be so formal in addressing him and can even use the more casual chăn.

Scenario 2: Two brothers (Cooke's Situation 3)
In this situation, a man's (grown) younger brother wishes to consider him a friend and equal. However, he finds it difficult to ignore his older brother's superior kin status. According to Cooke, he continues to use deferential terms (presumably phīi — 'older sibling') which he no longer considers appropriate and more often avoids pronouns whenever it can be done.
In this situation, the younger brother clearly wants to consider his elder brother a friend. However, he cannot ignore the elder brother’s higher rank within the family. Apparently, he feels it would be inappropriate or rude to deny him the deference he is due by virtue of his higher familial status. By avoiding pronouns altogether, he can avoid offense.

This is an example of a case where the social use of pronouns has been spelled out. A violation of these rules would be impolite.

Scenario 3: A woman and a man (Cooke’s Situation 4)

In this situation, a woman must decide how to refer to herself with a male acquaintance of her own age. Her choices of first person pronouns are dichān, chān, nüu; or three other person-referring expressions: her own name or nickname, or nīi — a demonstrative form meaning ‘this, this one’ — or zero.11 The first choice is probably too formal, the second is probably not formal enough, and the third sounds childish. The best choices are therefore the three remaining options (her name, her nickname, or nīi); however, it can be difficult in prolonged conversation to consistently avoid first person pronouns. And, according to Cooke, using one’s own name or nickname for first person reference is not a universal practice (although Simpson (1997) shows that using nicknames pronominally is common among college-aged females). nīi is therefore used as a last resort by some, but others, according to Cooke, would consider this usage

11 Another possibility, which Cooke does not consider, is the pronoun raw. It might in fact be a good choice for this situation; but at the same time it can be referentially vague and perhaps therefore not always suitable. The speaker (and hearer) might also consider it too informal for the context.
implausible. Hence, for the female who is not comfortable using her own name or nickname and cannot rely on zero anaphora — because of referential ambiguity — there is no good solution! While men may occasionally find themselves in similar situations, the problem is much less acute for them. This is because there are fewer pronouns for men to choose from, particularly in this type of situation (semi-formal, but the interlocutors are probably of equal status). The male first person pronoun phom can be appropriately used in a variety of contexts, as it is “polite but status-neutral” (Simpson 1997:110). Simpson states that “[t]hough [phom] is considered to be polite and is used in formal contexts, it does not necessarily signal formality. No other term can be construed as pragmatically unmarked in such a wide range of speech contexts” (127). There is no such equivalent for women.

The speaker in this example is constrained by considerations of politeness and context. She does not want to sound too formal, for this may impose undue distance between her and the hearer, which can be offensive. By the same token, she does not want to presume too much familiarity. Assuming undue familiarity or intimacy robs the hearer of the respect that he is due, and this conveys what would seem like speaker’s estimation of hearer’s lower status and disrespect. While zero would be the ideal choice for a person who does not want to use her name for self-reference, ambiguity may prevent her from doing this.

In each of the above scenarios, the face of both the speaker and the hearer is at issue. In Scenario 1, the young man has higher status than the peddler, but he still does not want to offend the peddler — and show himself to be uncouth
— by addressing the peddler in a condescending way. That is, he does not want to offend the peddler’s face by undervaluing it, and he wants to maintain his own face by showing he knows his relative social position. This, in fact, is the heart of the matter. It is important for the young man to use appropriate pronouns in order to show he knows his place — and that of the peddler — in the social hierarchy.

In Scenario 2, the younger brother feels compelled to recognize his older brother’s superior kin status. He does this by using the term phiι to address him. Brown and Levinson’s (1987) explanation would be one of the following: 1) this deferential act attends to the older brother’s negative face; or 2) this deferential act caters to the older brother’s desire to have his stature recognized (a kind of positive face). These explanations may both be valid, but it is also the case that by continuing to use phiι in addressing his older brother, the younger brother is indicating that he knows his place (and therefore also his brother’s) in the family. It also bears noting that this particular term, used within the family, is not particularly deferential. It simply serves to indicate the relative age relationships between members of the same generation.

The woman in Scenario 3 is certainly constrained by issues of face considerations. She does not want to sound too formal, thereby creating too much social distance (and offend the hearer’s positive face); nor does she want to sound too casual (and offend the hearer’s negative face). This is an instance in which Brown and Levinson’s explanations seem to work well. The woman’s choice of first person pronoun is strategic in that she is trying to select a pronoun
that will accomplish something specific in the interaction: maintain face for both of the conversational participants.

In sum, it can be tricky for Thai speakers — even native speakers — to select an appropriate person-referring expression for him or herself, his or her addressee, and even a third person who may or may not be present. When the speaker makes the "correct" choice — if any choice is made at all — face is maintained for all participants. The speaker has preserved the addressee's face by choosing a term which recognizes that person's status; the speaker's own face is maintained because s/he has shown that s/he knows his/her place in the social hierarchy; and any additional participants are not embarrassed due to any display of poor (linguistic) behavior on the speaker's part. Speakers can also choose to give more face to an addressee by using person-referring expressions that are more deferential — although not overly ingratiating — in second person reference. Another way a speaker can show more deference to an addressee is by using first person terms that are more humbling in nature, an act that has the effect of making the addressee seem more important. When Thai speakers purposely choose person-referring terms in order to give face to or maintain the face of conversational participants, a speaker's choice of Thai person-referring expressions are predictable from Brown and Levinson's theory.

However, there are situations in which person-referring expressions are selected based not on strategic face concerns but simply because social conventions dictate the choice. The most obvious example concerns royal language, where the first and second person pronouns that can be employed are prescribed (please see Tables II and III in Chapter 13). In a case like this, social convention rather than strategy governs which forms may be used. In addition,
face-saving strategy is not relevant in non-face-threatening situations in which a speaker must use pronouns or other noun substitutes. For example, a student telling a fellow student about a particular professor’s class would still use the status term ?aacaan ‘professor’ to refer to the professor, whether or not the professor was present. This is a situation in which there is no negative or positive face-threat to the professor nor the addressee. Brown and Levinson’s theory fails to account for polite usage in scenarios like these since it results from social convention rather than strategic catering to participants’ face.
This chapter considers a set of particles that includes “polite particles”. Polite particles are used when speaking to superiors or non-intimate equals. They generally appear in utterance final position, but they can also stand independently as complete (affirmative) responses. If there are other particles in an utterance, the status particles will follow all of these. These particles make utterances more polite, respectful, gentler, and less abrupt. A speaker who uses them properly shows herself to be socially aware and appropriately deferential. Thais, in fact, feel that to phûut khâ khâa — speak using khâ and khâ (polite particles) — is the appropriate way to communicate. In formal situations, the absence of polite particles would be quite noticeable.

Besides polite particles, there are other particles in the status group: affectionate, casual and nonrestraint forms. Haas (1964: xxii) considers only what I have named polite and affectionate particles in the status group. However, I include the casual and nonrestraint forms here as well. These appear to be variants of the polite particles that are used to express attitudes other than respect or deference when speaking, but they still indicate the social status of the speaker vis-à-vis his/her interlocutor. The other status particles may be employed when speaking to intimate equals or inferiors. In this dissertation, these particles are less interesting to us and will be discussed only briefly.

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1 As noted in an earlier footnote, “nonrestraint” is Cooke’s (1968) term “...used to describe forms that imply a degree of freedom from the restraints of more proper usage” (11).
Another set of particles (which will not be discussed) are superpolite ones. These are used when speaking to high-ranking royalty.

The following table shows the status particles and their variants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPERPOLITE</th>
<th>cāwkhā</th>
<th>Used as khā but more deferential</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pheekhā</td>
<td>Used by women when speaking with royalty or the king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cāwkhā</td>
<td>Used as khā but more deferential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>khāorāp</td>
<td>Used more or less as khārap but more deferential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITE</td>
<td>khā</td>
<td>Used by women after a question, in summonses, or as a reply when spoken to; polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>khā</td>
<td>Used by women after statements and commands or alone as an affirmative; polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>khāa</td>
<td>Used by women to call attention or as a reply when spoken to; polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>khārap</td>
<td>Used by men after questions, statements, to call attention, or as a reply; polite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>khārap-</td>
<td>Used by men after questions, statements, to call attention, or as a reply; more polite than plain khārap and generally only used in formal situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>phōm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFECTIONATE</td>
<td>cā</td>
<td>Used mostly by women to inferiors, children, or intimates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cāa</td>
<td>Used mostly by women to intimates to call attention or as a reply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMAL</td>
<td>hā</td>
<td>Used by both genders; informal but not impolite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NONRESTRAINT</td>
<td>wā</td>
<td>Nonrestraint form used mostly by men to intimates or inferiors, perhaps when angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>yā</td>
<td>Nonrestraint form that distributes like khā but is impolite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I
Status Particles

It is easy to find examples of polite particle usage in everyday Thai, as in greetings and expressions of gratitude.

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2 Matisoff (personal communication) notes that khārap derives from khoā rap thōot 'beg receive fault' or “please blame me.” It is thus quite deferential in nature.
EXAMPLE 5.1:

sawàatdii khâ/khráp.

hello/goodbye POL

Hello or Goodbye.

khòcp-khun khâ/khráp.

thank-you POL

Thank you.

Both of these phrases are completely grammatical without the polite particles, but they would not be as respectful. The particles make the utterances gentler and more formal, conveying the speaker's respect to the listener. In using them, the speaker is granting the listener a degree of social distance, or perhaps acknowledging the social distance between them, by making the interaction more formal. The use of these particles is also deferential because it does not presume offensive familiarity and allows the listener to make the choice as to whether to bridge the social gap between him/herself and the speaker.

On the other hand, if the interlocutors already share a close relationship and so do not normally use polite particles in conversation, and one member of the pair were to (re-)introduce them, the second member might feel offense. The (re-)

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3 This particle should not be confused with the similar sounding krâphôm, which is a superpolite masculine first person pronoun. See Table II, Chapter 13.
introduction of formality suggests the breakdown of intimacy and displeases the interlocutor.

To illustrate the effect that polite particles have on utterances, let's consider the following minimal pairs.

**EXAMPLE 5.2:**

?àan nān-syy lēm nīi ryy jān **khrāp**.
read book CLF this INT yet POL

*Have you read this book yet?*

?àan nān-syy lēm nīi ryy jān Ø.
read book CLF this INT yet Ø

*Have you read this book yet?*

?àan nān-syy lēm nīi ryy jān **cá**.
read book CLF this INT yet POL

*Have you read this book yet?*

The three questions have the same surface meaning, but the polite registers of the questions differ. The first question sounds the most formal due to the presence of the male polite particle *khrāp*. Asking the question this way is respectful, and one could guess that the speaker is talking to a superior or perhaps an acquaintance, someone he does not know well yet. Also, the particle used tells us that the speaker is male (although this does not seem to be central to its polite effect).
The second question has no utterance final status particle. While it is not necessarily rude, neither is it polite or particularly respectful. This question might be interpreted as rude if it were asked by a social inferior of a social superior. Used between equals, it is simply neutral.

Finally, the last example contains the affectionate utterance final status particle cá, which can be used by men but is usually used by women. This form would only be used to an intimate equal or inferior. Adding cá makes the question seem mild. It conveys no particular respect, just affection.

Ide (1989: 223) discusses the notion of discernment: “the speaker’s use of polite expressions according to social conventions rather than interactional strategy”. The use of Thai status particles, particularly polite particles, serve as good examples of discernment. In some contexts, the polite particle is socio-pragmatically necessary.

The video-taped data contains many examples of polite particles and also the casual status particle há (discussed below). The following excerpt comes from a talk show where I is the female interviewer and G is her female guest.

EXAMPLE 5.3:

1. I: khun-núj pàcuban thaam ñaan ?àraj jüu khá.  
   Khun-Nuy today do work what PROG POL

2. G: tọn-níi a (.) pen caaw-kh̀n̄j rán dòk-máaj chomphuu  
   Now uh (.) be owner store flower pink
3. florist ná há.
   florist PRT STA

4. I: [khâ.
   [Yes.

5. G: [thēw baŋphlât khâ.
   [area Bangphlat POL

   Bangphlat that [itself PRT POL

7. G: [khâ.
   [Yes.

1. I: What are you doing now, Khun Nuy?
2. G: Now, uh, I'm the owner of a flower store, Champuu
3. Florist.
4. I: [Yes (I see).
5. G: [In the Bangphlat area.
6. I: Right in [Bangphlat itself
7. G: [Yes.

As noted earlier, polite particles serve to make speech sound more respectful, which in the above example it does. In this excerpt, the interviewer (I) uses khâ or khâ at the end of every turn she takes (lines 1, 4, & 6). In line 4, khâ stands independently. Its purpose here seems to be a polite backchannel, letting G know that I is still listening or keeping up with the conversation.
The guest also uses a status particle at the end of each utterance (lines 3, 5, & 7). In line 3, the particle she uses is not the polite particle *khá* but the casual status particle *há*. This does not necessarily signal a change in the tone of the conversation or mood of the speaker, however, or at least it does not here. Thai speakers frequently alternate between *khá* and *há* when they are not being extremely careful in their speech, as in a more formal situation.

In line 7, G uses *khá* as a complete utterance, as the interviewer did in line 4. However, the function of the polite particle is not identical to its function in line 4. In this case, it serves as a polite confirmation to I’s question/ assertion in line 6.

The following example has the same female interviewer speaking to the audience. There is one instance of *khá* and several tokens of *khá* in this excerpt. They all make the interviewer’s speech sound more polite. In addition, a couple of particle uses at the beginning serve secondary functions as well.

**EXAMPLE 5.4:**

1. I: **khá.** thān-phūu-chom khá. (...) sāmrāq chūaj sūt-thāaj ná khá
   
   POL audience POL (...) for time last PRT POL

2. naj chūaj khrua Sharp naj wan níi kā cā? pen ryaŋ-raaw khūŋ in span kitchen Sharp in day this PRT will be story of

3. ?aahāan caan próot khūŋ daaraa. (...) wan níi phūu thīi cā? maa food plate favorite of star (...) day this one that will come

4. choo fīi-myy naj kaan tham ?aahāan caan dét hāj show skill in NOM make food plate outstanding give
Yes. (Dear) audience, for the last part of the show, today’s Sharp Kitchen Segment will have to do with the favorite food of a star. Today the person who will show her skill in cooking an outstanding dish for us to admire is Ms. Ann Angkhana. Thimadiii. She will come make something for us to admire. Let’s take a short break and come back and meet her.

The previous example gives five instances of the female polite particle. There are three examples in line 1. The first two of these polite particles function somewhat like a summons, calling the audience’s attention to what the host has to say. This use is considered respectful. The first could probably be compared to some utterance initial uses of “okay” in American English, when a speaker is initiating her talk by calling attention to what she is saying. This instance of the polite particle is the form used in statements: khâ.
The second instance of the polite particle in line 1 directly addresses the group whose attention the host is trying to get, that of the audience. The attention-getting phrase, though, since it is closer to a question than a demand for attention, is more polite. The question-like form gives the impression that the host does not assume she has the audience's attention but is requesting it, giving the audience the option to withhold it if they choose.

The third and fourth uses (the last in line 1 and line 6) of the polite particle follow another particle which is used in polite discourse, ná (discussed in the following chapter). The last example is in line 8. Each of these simply cause the host's speech to sound more polite.

The last example comes from a different talk show. The host, again represented by I, is male. The guest, a professor (P), is an expert on Buddhism and the customs associated with it.

EXAMPLE 5.5:

1. P: əə kaan nāŋ tɔɔ-nàa phrá nija? ná khráp⁴ pen (...)
   uh NOM sit in-front-of monk PRT PRT POL is (...)
2. kaan sadɛɛŋ-ʔɔɔk thaaŋ kirijaa.
   NOM show way manners
3. I: khráp.
   yes

⁴The careful reader may notice that the particles in this line are not sentence-final. Particles can occur clause-finally as well as sentence-finally and often occur before pauses.
that-is appropriate will must make give (...) polite respectful

5. (...) ò̀ ̿ ̋ ṅ̀ aàn ṅàŋ ̀ tì̀i ́ thùûk-tòòŋ ́ khyò̀ ng̀-́pàá̆-́pì̆̀á̆p. 
   (...) uh NOM sit that-is correct is sit-with-both-legs-tucked-to-
   one side (on the floor)

6. I:  khráp.

   yes

   store end end-of-feet

1. P:  Uh, sitting in front of monks is
2. a way to show good manners.
3. I:  Yes.
4. P:  What is appropriate must be polite, respectful.
5. Uh, sitting which is correct is to sit with your legs folded to one
   side.
6. I:  Yes.
7. P:  To hide one's toes.

The polite particle is used only once phrase finally by the professor, in line
1. The interviewer uses it in lines 3 and 6. His usage of khráp is to show polite,
   continuing interest in what the professor is saying, as a backchannel response.

While the professor does most of the talking here, he does not employ the
polite particle very often, perhaps because he outranks the interviewer in that he
is older than the interviewer (which tends to give him higher status) and, more
importantly, by virtue of his profession. Being a professor in Thailand carries
with it very high status. While it would not be strange for him to use the polite particle in his speech, he would not want to sound overly deferential or respectful when speaking to social inferiors. But P does not come off as rude by any means. In fact, the conversation sounds quite formal and polite to the audience.

The particles ʰâ (at the end of questions) and ʰâ (at the end of statements and commands) are not particularly polite or impolite. Often they are used when speakers are not being careful to pronounce polite ʰká or ʰkâ (for women) or ʰkrâp (for men). Therefore, they can signal a more casual conversation in which the speaker does not need to strictly “mind his p’s and q’s”. The following examples are from Bhamoraput (1972: 37):

EXAMPLE 5.6:

câ?  pāj kâp phôm māj ʰâ.
will  go with I(male) INT STA

Are you coming with me?

māj  sanūk ləəj ʰâ.
NEG fun  at-all STA

I didn’t enjoy it at all.

ʰâ and ʰâ are the more casual variants of ʰkâ/ʰkâ and ʰkrâp. They occur infrequently in the data set. One instance is in Example 5.3, line 3 above.
The status particles já and jâ do not occur in the corpus at all. This is because they are impolite variants of khá/khā and khráp. The following examples are again from Bhamoraput (1972: 37-38):

EXAMPLE 5.7:

nâŋ loŋ sit já.
sit down PRT STA
Sit down.
paj já.
go STA
Sure, I'm going.

Finally, the particle wá also does not occur in the data set. Haas (1964: 500) refers to it as a "rustic or vulgar final particle used in place of the polite form [khráp]." Through her definition, Haas implies that this particle is used only by men. Bhamoraput (1972: 38) mostly agrees with this but suggests that women might use this form when speaking with very close friends.

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5 Bhamoraput's transcription is different from my own. In this dissertation, I have "normalized" all transcription systems so that they are uniform throughout the document.
EXAMPLE 5.8:

cīŋ māj wā.
true INT STA

Is that true? (ibid.)

?araj wā.
what STA

Well, what is it? (Haas 1964: 500)

Thai status particles come in a continuum of politeness. On one end of the continuum are the nonrestraint particles used either rudely or as solidarity building devices with intimates. At the opposite end of the continuum are the superpolite particles used when speaking to royalty. In the area between these polar extremes are the affectionate particles (used with intimates), the informal status particles and the commonly heard polite particles.

Depending on the context, the absence of polite particles can threaten the face of the addressee and also the speaker. In a formal context, the addressee’s face may be threatened because they might assume that the speaker does not hold them in high enough esteem to speak politely using these particles. According to one explanation, their negative face may be offended because appropriate deference has not been shown. According to another explanation, positive face may be threatened because the hearer’s desire to have their status appreciated by the speaker has not been met.

For his/her part, the speaker may lose face by not using a polite particle in a formal context because she will have shown herself to be socially inept; she will
not have displayed her realization that she is in a formal context and needs to behave accordingly. Social convention frequently demands the use of polite particles (or even superpolite particles) in conversation. In this respect, Thai status particles can function as indexicals for social status (although Okamoto (1999) shows that for Japanese no single honorific form can be directly linked to any particular contextual feature). This recalls Ide's (1989: 223) notion of discernment, which concerns linguistic forms used according to social convention(s) rather than strategy.

An example of this is the following: when speaking to a member of the royal family, a woman would be obliged to use the superpolite particle *pheekhá* in the place of plain *khá* (along with other special vocabulary). Her failure to do so would be considered not only rude but probably also ignorant. This is due to the fact that *pheekhá* is always expected in this extremely formal context. The speaker who used plain *khá* in place of *pheekhá* here would fail to make her utterance(s) agree socio-pragmatically with the rest of the utterance (presumably) and the social situation. Status particle usage in such a context is more a function of observing social conventions than of strategy; it is expected.

However, there are certainly many conceivable situations in which status particles may be used strategically. For instance, if the context is not too formal and the speaker uses polite particles in all of her utterances, such usage may be considered strategic since she is trying to be polite in order to flatter or show deference to her addressee. (Of course this strategy could backfire if the approach is seen as too obsequious or as an attempt to impose distance between the interlocutors.) Nonrestraint particles used between friends who are
accustomed to speaking with them can also be considered strategic, since they contribute to a feeling of solidarity between the interactants. In other words, they fulfill a positive face want of the addressee. The same can be said about the affectionate particles cà and cãa, whose use can be deferential but is always affectionate whether or not deference is involved (i.e. a grandchild speaking to her grandmother could use an affectionate particle deferentially, but a grandmother using an affectionate particle to her grandchild would presumably only be conveying affection).
This section discusses Thai discourse particles that modify illocutionary force, particularly those particles that weaken "the force with which the illocutionary point of a speech act is presented" (Holmes 1984: 345).\(^1\) The illocutionary force of an order is distinct from that of a request, although both speech acts share the same illocutionary point: getting the speaker to do something. The particles of interest in this section are those that cause the strength of utterances to be gentler or milder.

**Mitigation**

Mitigation is defined as "the reduction of certain unwelcome effects which a speech act has on the hearer" (Fraser 1980: 341). An order given by a student to a professor would certainly be considered impolite (except in, say, an emergency situation), so a wise student would choose to reduce the aggressive force of her speech act by framing her directive as a request rather than an order. While the illocutionary forces of the speech acts differ, the illocutionary points are the same: getting the professor to do something.

Fraser is careful to point out that mitigation is not the same as hedging (344), although hedges can sometimes have a mitigating effect. Hyland (1988: 1), for example, says that hedges "express tentativeness and possibility in communication..." Hyland also cites a definition of hedging from Zuck and Zuck (1986) which states that hedging is "the process whereby the author reduces the strength of a statement..." (ibid). (Yet note that this description is

\(^1\) The illocutionary point of an utterance comprises only part of its illocutionary force (cf. Searle 1979: 3).
neither self-explanatory nor basic.) As defined by G. Lakoff (1972: 195), hedges are “words whose job it is to make things more or less fuzzy.”

Fraser points out that hedges, according to the above definition, are 1) words; and 2) involve a notion of fuzziness. Fuzziness, it is true, is not necessarily a trait of mitigation. On the other hand, the uncertainty of hedges can contribute to the softening of an assertion or statement and reduce any negative repercussions on the hearer. In this study, it is understood that mitigation is a broad term for anything that weakens the strength or intrusion of an (speech) act. Lexical hedging can therefore be a form of mitigation.

One scholar who has looked at these phenomena is Robin Lakoff. Lakoff (1990) considers speaker strategy and the subsequent willingness of the addressee to respond. In the case of orders, the author observes that “…hedged orders are more likely to receive compliance… because the addressee feels more cooperative toward a speaker who has behaved with solicitude” (Lakoff 1990: 30). An addressee is more likely to respond to a hedged order (one that has been mitigated). Therefore it is in the speaker’s interest to use a hedged order (except of course in a situation where the speaker has unquestioned power over the addressee and can expect her orders to be fulfilled without their being mitigated).

Lakoff (1980) looked at the speaker’s risk and the hearer’s obligation in the face of certain unqualified speech acts. She suggested that hedging a speech act alleviates the burden on the hearer by allowing her the option of whether to believe, respond, or comply. In addition, Lakoff (1990) put forward the idea that a hedged or mitigated order is more likely to receive some sort of response, as opposed to an unmitigated order (except, again, if the speaker has obvious power over the addressee). This is because a hearer might resent the obligations placed upon her by the unmitigated order, preferring the more solicitous
mitigated form. Of less relevance but interesting nonetheless, some of the pressure on the speaker is also lifted when she uses a mitigated form. She has not fully committed herself to any utterance if she has hedged it. Thus if she is accused of brazen, rude, or aggressive behavior, she can always argue that she did not, in fact, breach any social relations by ordering any one about or making too bold of an assertion. She was only suggesting, etc.

In a work that precedes Lakoff’s, Labov and Fanshel (1977) consider mitigation at the discourse level. The authors note that a discourse analyst must be sensitive to “...[a] subject’s desire to mitigate or modify his expression to avoid creating offense” (84). Politeness involves the avoidance of conflict or confrontation, and conflict and/or confrontation can result from offense to either party in a conversation. Therefore mitigation and mitigated forms are often relevant to politeness, and it does not surprise us to encounter mitigation in polite forms or tactics.

Labov and Fanshel point out some types of utterances that might be considered mitigating or — the opposite — aggravating. Regarding requests, for instance, petitions, pleas, and suggestions are understood to be mitigated whereas orders, commands, and demands are understood to be unmitigated (or aggravated) requests (63). In petitions, pleas, and suggestions, the speaker is not asserting her right to have an act performed by the hearer. The hearer’s options are therefore open: she can comply or not. Orders, commands, and demands, on the other hand, can be threatening to the hearer because the speaker is asserting her right to have the act completed by the hearer. The direct imperative — present in orders, commands, and demands — carries with it the implicit assumption that the speaker has, or at least thinks she has, power over the hearer and that she can therefore make the latter person comply. So while Labov and Fanshel did not consider risks or obligations to either speaker or
hearer, they did note that downgrading the illocutionary force of an utterance
will lower the likelihood of a conflict, a clear possible outcome of reducing risk to
and relieving obligation on conversational participants.

The phenomenon of mitigation exists in Thai. In the examples to be
discussed, the reason for mitigation is politeness: avoiding offense to the
addressee or to a third party. An interesting mitigation tool in Thai that does not
exist in English is the use of certain discourse particles to attenuate the force of
potentially unfavorable propositions. Thai has, according to Bhamoraput (1972),
twenty-eight particles aside from the status particles discussed in the preceding
chapter. In this chapter, the particles of interest are those with a mitigating
effect.² Five particles are discussed here: rök, ná, nỳj, si, and thal.

The Particle rök

The Thai word rök is a sentence particle which downplays the potential threat of
utterances. Haas (1964: 569) defines rök as:

[a] particle often used with statements of negation,
contradiction, or those correcting a misapprehension.
Usually makes a statement milder, less abrupt, or
expresses reassurance.

The following example is from Iamworamet (1993: 1198) and illustrates the use
of this particle in a negative statement which can be used to a correct a
misapprehension. It must always be used preceded somewhere in the utterance
by the word māj, the Thai negative.

² The functions of some of the other particles are, for example, to indicate a question or to
emphasize or intensify what the speaker is saying.
EXAMPLE 6.1:

mâj dâj ñâaj mŷan thîi khun khît jâaŋ nán rôk.
NEG can easy like that you think like that PRT

It isn’t so easy as you think.

The particle rôk, as Haas (1964) notes, makes the statement milder. This is evident when the example is compared with its minimal pair. When used to correct a misapprehension, rôk makes the statement seem less abrupt. The following example is the same sentence without the particle:

EXAMPLE 6.2:

mâj dâj ñâaj mŷan thîi khun khît jâaŋ nán.
NEG can easy like that you think like that

It isn’t so easy as you think.

The two examples are the same, except that 6.1 contains the mitigating particle rôk and 6.2 does not. The English translations are semantically identical but they are pragmatically distinct. Using rôk is a way to mitigate one’s utterances. Contradiction or correcting misapprehension(s) can be particularly risky for speakers. This is due to the fact that people generally do not like to hear that they are wrong. Unless the speaker is unquestionably (usually socially) superior to the hearer, she would probably want to handle the situation with some care, so as not to offend the second person and cause social friction. When a statement is less abrupt, it is less likely to offend the hearer and therefore also less likely to result in conflict. Usage of this particle contributes to polite behavior and/or the perception of speaker politeness.

Another example of rôk from Iamworamet (1993) is the following:
EXAMPLE 6.3:

pen chên nán ciyi-ci ń rọ̀k rýy.
be like that really PRT INT

Is that really so?
(1198)

The above example is one where mild contradiction is expressed. The speaker is voicing her doubt as to whether what her interlocutor has said is really the case or not. By using the particle, she has softened the force of her contradiction. Again, contradicting or telling someone else you think they are wrong is a potentially risky behavior for a speaker, depending as usual on the speakers' relative status. Without the particle rọ̀k the sentence is not necessarily rude, but, as Haas has suggested in her definition (above), it is milder in force with the particle present. The contradiction with rọ̀k may be perceived by the hearer as less of a challenge to her knowledge than a gentle inquiry, which is less threatening to her face.

The following example, from the corpus, is also an example of contradiction. The excerpt occurred on a talk show where a female celebrity guest (G) has been invited to cook one of her favorite dishes on the show. The dish that G is making is a pork dish, and the female host (I) is commenting on the fact that pork is rather fattening.

EXAMPLE 6.4:

1. I: léew hün dii jàaŋ nii ná. thiį-ćiŋ mūu nii man kɔ̀ ʔūan ná.
   and figure good like this PRT really pork this CLF PRT fat PRT

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2. G: (laughs) naan-naan thii māj-pen-raj rōk khā. (laughs) long time it-doesn't-matter PRT POL

3. I: māj-pen-raj chaj māj há. it-doesn't-matter right INT STA

1. I: And (your) figure is so good. And yet pork is fattening.
2. G: (laughs) Once in a while it doesn't matter.
3. I: It doesn't matter, right?

G apparently does not disagree with I’s assertion that pork is fattening. But she does want to express the idea that it’s alright to eat pork (once in a while), despite the fact that it is fattening. Her answer to I’s comment about pork seems to be contradicting the host’s previous assertion in that she is saying that it is actually all right to eat pork from time to time although it is fattening. In addition, G’s response is made more polite by the fact that she also uses the female polite particle khā in answering the interviewer.

*The Particle nā*

The Thai particle nā is a polysemous word, according to Haas (1964), but its senses are closely related. The common thread among the polysemous forms is the use to make utterances gentler. The particle is thus found in many polite utterances. The two (out of three) uses³ of nā which concern us here are when nā behaves as a

³The third use of nā is as a “part. expressing mild reproach, disappointment, criticism (Haas 1964: 259).
1. particle used to make an utterance gentler, milder
2. particle indicating a mild question...sometimes with an additional element of invitation, coaxing, suggesting

(259)

While his definition is not as thorough as Haas', McFarland (1944: 446-7) also notes the polite usage of this particle, defining it in his dictionary as:

a final syllable or sound used as sign [sic] of the vocative, equal to "please"...

Finally, a Thai lexicographer, Iamworamet (1993: 508) defines na in his dictionary (in Thai) as:

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{sàap} & \text{sàam} & \text{nàamsiàŋ} \\
\text{word} & \text{promote/facilitate} & \text{intonation/manner of speaking}
\end{array}
\]

a word which promotes (good) intonation or manner of speaking

While the definitions of the three authors are not identical, they all seem to agree that the particle na acts to soften utterances, improve tone of voice by making it more pleasing, and, in effect, approximate in use the force or feeling of 'please' in English. Haas, the most thorough of the three, tries in her Thai-English dictionary to link the meaning and force of the particle as closely as she can to English terms or phrases, although, as she herself notes, there is no literal translation. She remarks that:

In all uses of [ná] there is an element of gentleness, mildness, and in some cases this is the primary implication... As a mild question [ná] is often comparable to English "may I? won't you? aren't you? isn't it? okay?" etc... However, in this use, [ná] is sometimes best left untranslated...”

(Haas 1964: 259).

By making a question, statement, or order more mild, a speaker is lessening its potential to offend. Thus na behaves as a mitigator in Thai by modifying the
force of a speech act and thereby lessening the likelihood of conflict or confrontation between interlocutors.

It is also interesting to note that, in the Haas citation above, some of the phrases to which *ná* is comparable in English are tag questions. Lakoff (e.g. 1975; 1990) has remarked on the use of tag questions in English as a politeness tactic. It would seem that *ná* has a similar pragmatic effect in Thai (and so too, apparently, does Japanese *ne*).

McFarland (1944) suggests — as is often the case in my data — in his definition that *ná* appears as a final morpheme/word. It also may occur utterance or phrase finally. In interrogatives, it is often accompanied by one of the Thai polite status particles — the feminine *khá*, the masculine *khráp*, or the more casual *há*. *ná* plus deferential particle conveys the notion of urging, suggesting, intimating, or requesting. In addition, *ná* can occur with the affectionate or intimate variant of the polite particles, *cá*.

The first example from a television show has the show’s female host (I) talking about taking a trip. She is giving the audience some advice in the excerpt below.

EXAMPLE 6.5:

1. I: thîaw thîi nâj kõ khoâ hâj thîaw kan jàaŋ travel place where PRT beg give travel together like

2. sanûk-sanâñ ná khá. jaŋŋaj -kâ-lée-w-tee kâoon dâaan-thaanje kõ fun PRT POL it-is-up-to-you before travel PRT

3. triam tua hâj dii ná khá. duu rýañ rót-raa chék rót hâj dii sá prepare self give good PRT POL look issue car check car give good PRT
4. kòon lèew kò paj thîaw kò jàa-mua-tèe thîaw
   before and PRT go travel PRT do-not be-busy-with travel

5. phlœen ná khá. duu-lee râksâa süßkhâhâap tua-ʔeeŋ düaj
   be-oblivious PRT POL take-care take-care health yourself also

6. ?aakâat rön mâak mâak nîi jàa lyym triam jaa-kan-dëet paj
   weather hot very very here do-not forget prepare sunscreen go

7. düaj ná khá. nîŋ khwaam sûaj-ŋaam mâj wâa câ? pen khun
   with PRT POL related-to NOM beautiful NEG say FUT be (title)

8. phûu-jîŋ rîy khun phûu-chaaj kò taam ná khá. ?aw-lâ khâ thîaw
   female or (title) male PRT follow PRT POL enough POL travel

9. nàj kò kho̓c hâj sanûk lèew-kan.
   where PRT beg give fun that's-it

1. I: Wherever you go (on a trip),
2. have a lot of fun. Whatever the case, before travelling
3. prepare yourself well (okay?). Check your car, check your car well
4. before and when travelling don’t merely travel
5. obliviously (okay?). Take care of (your) health.
6. With very hot weather don’t forget to prepare sunscreen to take
7. with you. For the sake of beauty. Whether you’re a
8. woman or a man doesn’t matter. Okay.
9. Wherever you go, just have a good time.

In this bit of talk, the host is urging the audience or suggesting to them to have a
good time on their travels. She has a few suggestions, like preparing
themselves, checking the car before leaving, and taking sunscreen along. In
English translation, these sentences appear to be bare imperatives, but in Thai their force is milder than that of a bare imperative. By using *ná* (*khá*) the host has turned her imperatives into gentler suggestions or invitations, since it would be rude for her to assume — or appear to assume — that she knows what the audience needs, wants, or is willing to do (Brown & Levinson 1987:146). In Thai as in English the bare imperative conveys both orders and suggestions. But in Thai, the addition of *ná* makes the suggestions seem even more mild.

The next example has the same host with a celebrity guest who has been invited to do a cooking demonstration on the show. It illustrates the same phenomena as in the previous example. This time the guest is the one using the mitigating particle plus polite particle.

EXAMPLE 6.6:

1. G: *kha* (...) *ké cháj náŋ műu kçon* *ná khá*.
   
   POL (...) PRT use hide pork before PRT POL

2. I: *tham ?aríaj khá*
   
   make what POL

   
   hide pork

4. I: *cēe náŋ műu*.
   
   soak hide pig

5. G: *khâ*.
   
   POL

6. I: *töm náŋ műu*.
   
   boil hide pig

7. G: *töm khâ* (...) *pramaan hök naathii khâ*.
   
   boil POL (...) about six minute POL
8. I: hòk naathii.
six minute


PRT press [six] press high PRT POL

1. G: Yes. (Let's) use pork rinds first.
2. I: What are you making?
4. I: (You're) soaking pork rinds.
5. G: Yes.
6. I: (You're) boiling pork rinds.
7. G: (I'm) boiling them. About six minutes.
8. I: Six minutes.

Here the guest is teaching the audience how to cook a particular dish. Therefore, she must, by necessity, issue directives. She softens her imperative by using ná khá, making it sound more like an invitation (line 1). Without the phrase ná (khá), her directive would sound abrupt. The same is true for the directive issued by G in line 9.

The next excerpt is also a cooking demonstration. This time the show's host (H) is giving the instructions. This speaker uses both ná khá and ná há, (where há is the more casual variant of khá).
EXAMPLE 6.7:

1. H: raw kó mii (...) náam-prík-keεŋ-khûa ?an níi. dîaw-níi raw mâj we PRT have (...) chili-paste-base CLF this now we NEG

2. tôŋ khîòok léew ná khá. hâa sûy dâj taam tôŋ talâat must pound already PRT POL find buy can along stomach market

3. thûa-paj ná khá. (...) sôŋ chôon tô? (...) kûŋ hêeŋ everywhere PRT POL (...) two spoon table (...) shrimp dry

4. ná khá. sák khûŋ thûaj (...) hêt-faan (...) ná há. PRT POL about half cup (...) straw-mushroom (...) PRT POL

5. lýk bêep tum tum ná há. mâj tôŋ baŋ mâak. kó mâj choose type bud bud PRT POL NEG must thin much PRT NEG

6. wâj ná há. hêt-faan sák khûŋ kiiloo. (...) hûa-kathí able PRT POL type-of-mushroom about half kilo (...) coconut -cream

7. nûŋ thûaj. (...) hâaŋ-kathí sák sôŋ thûaj. (...) lê? náam-plaâ jàaŋ one cup (...) coconut-milk (...) about two cups (...) and fish-sauce like

8. dîi ná khá. (...) sôŋ chôon tô? khá. raw maa duu withii good PRT POL (...) two spoon table POL we come look method

9. tham kan lêaj ná khá. make together then PRT POL

1. H: So we have this chili paste base. We don’t have to pound it ourselves now. (You) can find it in the heart of the market

2. everywhere. Two tablespoons dried shrimp.

3. About a half cup straw mushrooms.
5. Choose the roundish type; they don’t have to be very thin. Those
6. won’t do. About half a kilo of fang mushrooms. One cup
7. coconut cream. About two cups of coconut milk. And good fish
   sauce
8. (alright?). Two tablespoons. Let’s go
9. see how to make it (shall we?).

This person’s usage of nákhá/há is parallel to that discussed for the previous
example, except she uses ná há where the other person did not. This makes her
speech seem slightly more casual, but definitely not rude, aggressive, or
impolite. She uses the expressions to convey the information to and encourage
the hearer, instead of ordering her. The speaker does not use nákhá/há every
time she gives directions (e.g. lines 6-7), but she uses it often enough times to
appear solicitous. The strength of imperatives with nákhá in Thai is blunted, and
the mitigated forms make the speaker appear more polite.

The next two excerpts involve male speakers. They are both from a show
where the male host (I) is speaking with a professor about how best to behave in
a Thai Buddhist temple and interact with Buddhist monks.

EXAMPLE 6.8:

1. I: naj chūaŋ weelaa nán tham tua hâj mii satǐ? hâj mii
   in interval time that make self give have consciousness give have
2. samaatí hâj khit ryan jaaŋ nii să chūaŋ weelaa lék
   concentration give think issues like this PRT interval time small
3. nóoj thi jiu̍ haj wát ná khráp.
   tiny that stay in temple PRT POL
1. I: In that time, give yourself over to consciousness and concentration, to thinking about issues like these in the very short time that you’re in the temple (okay?).

As in the previous examples, the speakers use of ná plus polite particle turns I’s imperative into a gentler request.

Example 6.9 below shows conversation between the two men, with the professor using ná khráp this time. The topic here is the different ways that people across Thailand refer to monks.

EXAMPLE 6.9:

1. I: há. màj máy kan. naj têe-lá thôø-thîn ?aat cà? mii têek-tàaŋ POL NEG like each-other in each locality might FUT have differ

2. ?ik.

3. G: khráp-phôom. jok tua-jàaŋ chên thaan phjàak-tàaŋ nán (...) màj dâj extra-POL lift example for-example way south DEM (...) NEG can

4. rîak wàa lûaŋ phií ná khráp.

call that luang older-sibling PRT POL

5. I: khráp.

POL


call that older-sibling luang

7. I: ūø.

oh


reverse with language way central-region
9. I: mm.
   mm

or luan father (...) people southern-region FUT call father luan

11. I: ná khráp.
PRT POL

oh extra-POL

as-for way norhtern-region that FUT call monk that Thu

Thu

POL

16. I khráp.
POL

   NEG can mean-that fat PRT POL

18. I: hâ. hâ.
STA STA

   be pronoun that we call monk that Thu

   extra-POL

1. I: That's right. They're not the same. In each locality there might be

2. more differences.

3. G: That's right. For example, in the south (there), they don't
4. say luang older brother.
5. I: Yes.
7. I: Oh.
8. G: It's the reverse of the language in the central region.
9. I: Mm.
10. G: Or luang father. Southerners say father luang (you know?).
11. I: Oh. Yes.
12. G: As for the north (there), they'll say Thu.
13. I: Thu.
15. I: Yes.
16. G: It doesn't mean (the monk is) fat, now.
17. I: Yes. Yes.
18. G: It's a pronoun that we call a monk, Thu.
19. I: Yes.

There are three instances of ná khráp in the professor's talk. The second one — lines 10-11 (gloss 10) — is a good example of using this expression to make an utterance milder. The professor, a high status individual and expert on the subject, is dispensing a lot of information. However, since he is not in the classroom, he may not want to come off sounding too authoritarian. He can use ná khráp to make his statements less assertive for the television interview.
The first use of *ná khráp* occurs at line 4 (gloss 3) when the guest is about to give an example of how southerners refer to monks. He says it as though correcting a mistake, since he has previously told the audience that (one of) the appropriate ways to refer to monks is *lűn phìi*. What he is about to say, though, is going to modify that. So this particular statement functions almost as a warning, but it is made milder by the presence of *ná khráp*.

The third instance is similar to the first. This occurs when the professor says that ‘Thu’ — *tú*? — does not mean “fat” in line 17 (gloss 16). The professor points this out because there is a central Thai homonym that does mean “fat”. Here again, then, he is correcting a possible misapprehension on the part of the audience, and the phrase *ná khráp* makes his correction less threatening and assertive to those listening.

*The Particle *nój*

The morpheme *nój* behaves both as a content word and, according to Bhamoraput (1972), a particle in Thai. Haas (1964: 556) treats it mainly as an adverb⁴, while McFarland (1944: 904) calls it an adjective. It can be glossed as “a little; a little bit”. The following example is from Haas (1964: 556):

**EXAMPLE 6.10:**

!iik *nój*
more a-little

a little while longer or a little more

---

⁴ Actually, she refers to it as a “secondary verb”, which is to say, in this case, that it behaves like an adverb in English (Haas 1964: xxii).
The word often appears as part of a phrase with the word nít, which means “small, diminutive, little” (McFarland 1944: 457). The phrase nít nòj means “a little bit”, and it can be used to trivialize or diminish a potential imposition. For example:

EXAMPLE 6.11

khooj nít-nòj.
wait a-little-bit

Just wait a few moments.
(904)

By using this diminutivizing phrase, the speaker has made it seem like the amount of waiting to be done by the hearer is very small (of course, she can say this even if she knows it to be untrue!). In suggesting that the hearer will not have to wait long, the speaker is reducing, at least linguistically, the degree of imposition on the hearer. In this way, nòj can be used in polite expressions in Thai.

The word has also been treated as a particle. In Bhamoraput (1972), a work specifically on final particles in Thai, nòj is treated only in this capacity. It is frequently used to soften the tone of requests. It appears utterance finally, although it can be followed by a polite status particle (khâ or khráp). The two following examples are from Bhamoraput (22).

EXAMPLE 6.12

khôo klya nòj khâ.
ask-for salt PRT POL

Pass me the salt, please.
yip nān-sāy lēm nān hāj nāj.

Hand me that book, please.

To an English speaker unfamiliar with Thai it might appear that the first of the two preceding examples could be equally well translated as "Pass me a little salt, please." This is not the case. If a Thai speaker wanted just a little salt, they would use the phrase nīt nāj and not just plain nāj here, i.e. khāo klya nīt nāj khāa. In Example 6.12, nāj makes the directive more polite, by attempting to diminish the imposition on the speaker.

The careful reader might also notice that the polite status particle khā is the final word of the sentence. This begs the question of whether the sentence is not already polite without nāj. Indeed, the directive khāo klya khā is a polite request in Thai. However, for the reasons mentioned above, the request in Example 6.12 is even more polite than this.

The last example given above can be explained similarly. The addition of the particle nāj to the end of the utterance is an attempt to make it appear to the hearer as just a small request, not a big deal. In both of the preceding examples, the particle modifies the illocutionary force of each directive by minimizing the imposition on the hearer, making it more polite.

**The Particle si/sî**

This particle occurs at the end of utterances and has the effect of coaxing the hearer to do something, or telling them that they ought to do it. It is used familiarly and would be considered uncouth if used toward a superior or non-intimate addressee. One of its possible effects is to make direct imperatives
somewhat less forceful. There were no examples in the data set, so the following come from Bhamoraput (1972: 24):

EXAMPLE 6.13

l̄aw phleen kʰɔŋ thao hâj faŋ bâŋ si.
tell  plan of you give listen some PRT

Tell me something about your plan.

thao pl̄ɔŋ chán nɔj si.
you comfort me a-little PRT

Please comfort me.

In both of these sentences, direct imperatives are used. The addition of the particle si/si contributes to diminishing the forcefulness of the commands (another factor in these examples is the use of the familiar second person pronoun thao).

*The Particle thə? (thɔat)*

This particle is used utterance finally or in combination with other particles to indicate an exhortation or command. It is used when the speaker’s intent is to suggest that the hearer do something. There were no examples of this particle in the recorded data. The following are from Bhamoraput (1972:25):

EXAMPLE 6.14:

cïit nỳk phâap ?een thə?.
Jeet imagine picture self PRT

---

5 The transcription in parentheses reflects the spelling pronunciation of the word, i.e. the transcription according to how the word is spelled in Thai. In speech, however, the usual pronunciation of this word is thə?.
Jeet, imagine the picture yourself!

paj dúaj-kan tha?.
go together PRT

Let’s go together.

This particle, like the others, can be combined with other particles. For instance:

**EXAMPLE 6.15:**

thon jiu tāo-paj tha? ná.
endure stay continue PRT PRT

Have endurance and continue your stay there, okay? (ibid.)

Here the particle *tha?* encourages the hearer to do what is suggested while the particle *ná* makes the directive milder.

**Distribution of Particles**

Questions may arise as to how the particles discussed here should be used. These are questions of great interest, and a thorough investigation of this topic would require a dissertation in itself. Therefore, it will only be possible to give a very brief explanation here.

The use of the first three particles — *rāk*, *ná*, and *nāj* — is more easily explained than that of the final two. All three are appropriate in a variety of social situations. As previously noted, *rāk* is used to soften utterances expressing contradiction or negation. It is almost always used with the word *māj* (NEG) somewhere before it in an utterance, and therefore, unlike the other particles, it cannot simply be added to the end of an utterance. It can co-occur with other particles, such as *ná* (cf. Example 6.16 below) and status particles. The Tamil particle *ēe* — as discussed by Brown and Levinson (1987: 159-161) — can be used
in similar contexts as Thai rök. This Tamil particle is used to "politely weaken a statement [the speaker] clearly knows to be true" (ibid.).

ná is used to make a wider range of utterances milder. It frequently appears utterance finally but is also often followed by the status particles khá, khráp, and há, as the data show. rök and ná can be both be used with other particles and may even be used together, as in the following:

EXAMPLE 6.16

mâj châj rök ná.
NEG right PRT PRT

That isn't it.

With ná, the contradiction is even gentler than with rök alone. The addition of a polite particle (khá/khráp) at the end of the utterance in 6.16 would make it even more polite and suitable (in certain contexts) for speaking to socially distant superiors.

nòj is perhaps best understood by English speakers if translated as "please". This particle is used in requests. It can also combine with other particles (cf. Example 6.12 above), although not with rök. Directives using nòj are viewed as polite. Translated literally, nòj, which means 'a little bit', is a diminutivizer that minimizes the imposition on the hearer.

The use of the final two particles discussed here — sì/sî and thaʔ (thàat) — is more difficult to master. Both are used with directives to make them less forceful, but thaʔ can be used in more contexts than sì. sì should not be used with social superiors (except, perhaps, in certain marked circumstances), while thaʔ is permissible in combination with a status particle. This is because sì can be
used in directives where the speaker feels that the action she proposes might already be obvious to the hearer. So, for example:

EXAMPLE 6.17

tha hīw k5 kìn sì.
if hungry PRT eat PRT

If you're hungry, (then) eat.

On the other hand, tha? tends to imply that what the speaker is suggesting (ordering, etc.) is what ought to be done, which is not as potentially face-threatening to the hearer. (To suggest that something is obvious could seem condescending to the hearer, whereas to suggest that the speaker feels a particular way about something is not as potentially offensive.) As previously noted, tha? can be used with (some) social superiors, which would allow the following:

EXAMPLE 6.18

jaaj pāj nōn tha? khā.
grandmother go sleep PRT PRT

Go on to bed, grandma.

Both sì and tha? can be combined with other particles, as in, e.g. 6.15. However, these two particles are never used in combination with each other.

All of the particles described here may co-occur with other particles, although certain particles may not co-occur with all of the other particles. As previously mentioned, the five mitigating particles discussed in this chapter are only a few out of many in the Thai language, and I will consider only these and
the status particles (Chapter 5) in the following discussion of sequencing and the joint occurrence of particles.

rook and noj do not occur together, nor do si and tha?. The following rules, in which the asterisk (*) indicates a non-possibility of co-occurrence, shows the permissible sequencing and possible joint occurrence of the particles described in this study. The pound sign (#) serves as a place holder for particles (not discussed in the current study) which may also co-occur with those shown here.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>rook</th>
<th>*si</th>
<th>*tha?</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>ná</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>nōj</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>thā?</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>ná</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>STATUS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the rules show, rook does not occur with either si or thā?. This is due to their semantic incompatibility. rook indicates contradiction or negation and is used in statements, whereas thā? and si are used in directives. All of the (other) particles can precede ná or ná + status particle, plain status particle, or none of these. The tone of the status particle will depend on whether the particle concludes a statement or question (please refer to Table 1 in Chapter 5). One salient exception to these rules, however, concerns si + status particle. In statements and commands, si is followed by status particles with a high tone, which is usually only heard in questions, instead of the expected falling tone.

All of these discourse particles are used to hedge the illocutionary force of utterances and are meant to minimize the imposition on their hearer or claim some familiarity with the hearer. The speaker using the mitigating discourse particles discussed in this chapter does not assume that the hearer is able or willing to do whatever it is s/he asks. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, then, using them is a way to respect the negative face of the addressee.
Their theory specifically addresses the use of hedges on illocutionary force (146-164), and the explanations therein are by and large applicable to the Thai data.

Another subsection of Brown and Levinson (176-178) deals with minimizing the imposition of a face-threatening act on the addressee, another negative politeness technique. The Thai particle nbj performs this task in Thai by dimunitivizing the directive. Again, it appears that the theory of Brown and Levinson is adequate to explain why a speaker would use such a particle and what the speaker is trying to accomplish when s/he does so.
CHAPTER 7
THE WORD khoo

The verb khoo is common in spoken Thai. Haas (1964: 51) defines it as follows:

1. common term to ask for, beg, request...
2. may I have (such and such)...
3. let me, may I

In sentences like the following, its meaning is transparent to speakers of English:

EXAMPLE 7.1

khoo naam nøj.
beg water little
May I have some water?
or
Give me some water.

khoo duu nøj.
beg see little
Let me look at it.

(ibid.)

The verb khoo is a performative. A performative sentence or utterance is one in which “… the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something” (Austin 1994: 6-7). Thus when using khoo, the speaker is not only saying it, but also performing the action of khoo-ing, or asking. In this sense, the verb is used much like its English
equivalent. In other cases, though, *khọ* is used in ways that English *ask* would not be employed.¹

Kanittanan (1988) argues that in many cases *khọ* is used as a shortened form of *khọ?anújáat* — ‘to ask for permission’ (359). Therefore, she continues, when a speaker uses *khọ* (in certain expressions), it is as though she is asking the hearer’s permission to do the action. By doing this the speaker is putting the hearer in a higher position relative to herself, or raising the hearer. She is behaving as though the hearer has the power to grant her permission (even though this may not actually be the case). The speaker’s raising of the hearer is likely to make that person feel good, since being deferred to as being more powerful is generally desired and occasionally flattering, and the hearer’s importance is being honored by the speaker (359). Another way of looking at it is this: by appearing to ask the hearer’s permission, the speaker is implying the hearer’s higher status (whether it exists or not). After all, the person with higher status is the one who is capable of granting permission. Using *khọ* in this way should therefore be considered polite usage.

Kanittanan’s examples clearly illustrate the difference that the word *khọ* can make in the illocutionary force of a sentence.

**EXAMPLE 7.2:**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{nưu} & \quad \text{cà? (khọ) nāŋ thīi-nīi sāk khrūu.} \\
1\text{PERS FUT (beg) sit here j} & \text{ust moment}
\end{align*}
\]

I’ll sit here for just a minute (*may I, please?*)

¹ Cf. also Lahu *ḻ-ve-khọ-ve* “beg and beseech” (Matisoff 1998: 1404), a synonym couplet consisting of both a native Lahu verb and the Tai borrowing.
phôm (khōo) sanāh pāit prachum.
1PERS (beg) recommend give close meeting
I ('d like to) recommend the meeting be adjourned.

In these examples, it is easy to see that when khōo is present, the sentence is more deferential, like a request or suggestion. When khōo is absent the sentence is a statement or assertion. The presence of khōo will often make a sentence or utterance more deferential and therefore polite.

khōo is commonly paired with the words meaning ‘thank you’ to make an expression of gratitude more polite. In the following sentence, for example, a television show host (S) is thanking her sponsor at the end of a cooking show:

EXAMPLE 7.3:

1. S: wan nī tōn khōo khōop-khun nā hā (...) tūu-jen nēechnēl...
   day this must beg thank PRT POL (...) refrigerator National

1. S: Today (I/we) would like to thank National Refrigerators...

The English sentence does not show the literal meaning of the words in Thai. A more literal translation would show that the speaker is asking (permission) to thank National Refrigerators. By “asking permission” first, the speaker is being more deferential.

The next example involves a different female speaker on an interview chat show. She, as host, is concluding the show by thanking the two people whom she interviewed.
EXAMPLE 7.4:

1. I: ʔaw-lá khâ. tŏŋ kh̀̀o khòop-khun thán-sŏng thán mâak.

   enough POL must beg thank both PRN.HON a-lot

1. I: Okay. I want to thank both guests very much.

Again, the conversational English translation does not readily show the politeness inherent in the Thai sentence. This example is similar to the previous one in that, in Thai, the speaker is asking for permission to thank the two people who were her guests. In addition, it is interesting to note that she has further acknowledged the importance of her guests by ‘raising’ them through the use of the honorific pronoun thán.

The two previous examples showed kh̀̀o matched with the Thai expression for ‘thank you.’ But the word kh̀̀o can be manipulated in polite usage when joined with other verbs as well. In the next example, the same speaker as in the previous example is starting a segment of her show, in which a celebrity guest teaches the audience how to cook a dish using Sharp kitchen products. The host starts by welcoming her audience to the show with an expression that includes kh̀̀o:

EXAMPLE 7.5:

1. I: kh̀̀o tŏon-rāp khāw sùn nàa-rōn nai chūan sàpdaa rēek kh̀̀o

   please welcome come toward summer in interval week first of

2. dyan meesāayon kàp chūan khrua chàap níi nà khà.

   month April with period-of-time kitchen Sharp this PRT POL
1. I: (Please) let's greet the summer this first week of
2. April with this Sharp Kitchen Segment (of the show).

In this case, the English translation more or less succeeds in replicating the force of the Thai sentence. By using *khɔɔ* plus the verb *tɔɔn-rá̄p* — 'to welcome, greet,' the host is asking the audience to allow her to welcome the hot season. By asking or suggesting rather than demanding or ordering, the host is being courteous toward the audience and thereby honoring them.

The example which follows shows *khɔɔ* joined with a different verb phrase. It was uttered by the same speaker as in Example 7.5.

**EXAMPLE 7.6:**

1. I: thîaw thîi nāj kɔ khɔɔ hâj thîaw kan jān
   travel place where PRT beg/ask give travel together like
2. sanûk-sanān ná khá.
   fun PRT POL

1. I: Wherever you go (on a trip), have
2. a good time.

A more literal translation makes it appear as though the speaker were *asking* that the hearer have fun traveling, i.e. "Wherever you go I ask that you have a lot of fun." For English speakers, this is unusual, since we usually only ask people to

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2The Thai summer or hot season does not coincide with western summers (June - August), running instead from approximately April - June or July and then transitioning into the rainy season in July - August.
do things for us (the speaker), not for themselves (the hearer). For example, in the same context as above, an English speaker would be more likely to say:

"Wherever you go, have fun!"

or perhaps

"Wherever you go, I hope (that) you have fun."

Even the most polite of English speakers would be unlikely to say "Wherever you go, I ask that you have fun."

I do think, however, that Kanittanan (1988) would consider the above usage of khoo as an example of the speaker “acting as though asking permission to do something” (359). Her reasoning might be that the speaker of the utterance above is granting the audience superiority, or raising them by not presuming to give an order, even if it involves something the hearer would want to do for her own good. The speaker could have left the entire phrase khoohaj out of her sentence and kept it grammatical, but that would have been less deferential. A second feature of the sentence which adds to its politeness is the final expression ná khá (discussed in the preceding chapter), which attenuates the force of a would-be imperative by making it a suggestion rather than an order.

This example shows that certain Thai and English directives can have the same illocutionary point but not the same force. According to Searle (1979: 13), the illocutionary point of directives “...consists in the fact that they are attempts... by the speaker to get the hearer to do something”. So both the Thai way of asking that the hearer have fun and the English way of “ordering” the hearer to do so are directives. But the force of the English sentence, as an

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3 Naturally, there are exceptions to this, such as “For your own sake, I ask that you try to relax.”
imperative, is different. The Thai way assumes hearer superiority and seeks to avoid imposition.

The following excerpt from “The Twilight Show,” a Thai interview chat show, illustrates the use of khō in a long, deferential expression (complex deferential expressions are discussed in Chapter 8). The male interviewer, in closing his show, uses expressions with khō twice. First he thanks the main interviewee, a professor, and then he thanks two other guests who also appeared during the interview.

EXAMPLE 7.7:

1. I: 
   wan níi raw dāaj  rýañ-raaw māak-maaj lāaj jāañ düaj-kan
day this we get/obtain story a-lot many type together

2. ná khráp. wan níi tōñ  khō khōp-phrá-khun thāan -?acaan jāañ
   PRT POL day this must beg thanks.HON HON.professor like

3. sūañ ná khráp.
   high PRT POL

4. [thīi karunaa kāp raaj-kaan khōñ raw.
   [that be-kind with show of us

5. P: [khráp.
   POL

6. I:  khō khōp-phrá-khun thāñ-sōñ thāan    chēñ-diaw-kan düaj kan
   beg thanks.HON both HON.(pron.) similarly with each-other

7. ná khráp. thīi karunaa kāp raaj-kaan khōñ raw.
   PRT POL that be-kind with show of us

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1. I: Today we learned so many things together (right?). Today we must thank the professor very much (okay?)

4. [for being so kind (with our show).

5. G: [Yes.

6. I: Thank you also to both (other) guests who were so kind to our show.

In line 2, the expression with khõ is khõ khôp-phrá-khun...jâaj suun. khôp khun is the most common way to express gratitude among non-intimates in Thai. Adding the morpheme phrá in the middle of the two other syllables makes the expression of gratitude more formal and deferential.4 jâaj suun. — literally ‘like high’ but idiomatically here perhaps ‘very respectfully’ — is also extremely polite. In Thai, that which is raised or high (physically and/or metaphorically) is honored. By using the expression jâaj suun the host is raising the guest linguistically. And, of course, here again, khõ is very polite in that the speaker appears to be asking permission to thank the addressee instead of presuming that right. Line 6 shows similar formality but is slightly less deferential due to the absence of the expression jâaj suun. Since the two people being thanked are of lower stature than the professor, the slightly less deferential expression is appropriate.

The examples given here are what Brown and Levinson (1987) would classify as instances of negative politeness. Specifically, they would argue that

4The morpheme is used in words referring to royalty and royal items and also designates a Buddhists priest or Buddha images. In this use, it carries no royal or religious overtones but serves to make the expression more deferential and formal.
using *khọ* in this fashion is a way to give deference to H and that S is showing that s/he recognizes the power differential between them. By acknowledging the relative power discrepancy, S is “…defus[ing] potential face-threatening acts by indicating that the addressee’s rights to relative immunity from imposition are recognized — and moreover that S is certainly not in a position to coerce H’s compliance in any way” (178).

In Thai society giving deference like this does acknowledge the addressee’s “power” and right to be respected, but it also has an important function for the speaker. The speaker who shows proper deference to another is indicating that they are aware of their own social standing. In a hierarchical society such as that of Thailand, this is a non-trivial issue. Showing that one knows one’s place relative to other society members is an act that saves face for the speaker (and those closely associated with him or her) and the addressee.
CHAPTER 8
OTHER LEXICAL FEATURES OF THAI POLITENESS

There are other features of Thai politeness which, while they do not appear (or appear infrequently) in the television talk show data, still bear mention. Kanittanan (1988) reminds us of two of these, which are discussed below. The data in this section is mostly drawn from text sources such as Kanittanan, Haas (1964), and Iamworamet (1993).

kràap

This Thai term refers to a specific act of obeisance which is more formal and respectful than the more common wâaj. The person performing this action is seated on the floor with knees bent. The palms of the hands will be pressed together, and the edges of the hands (i.e. the little finger side) are against the floor. The person's forehead is lowered and touches their thumbs. The highest sign of respect in terms of body language is to kràap tháaw (tháaw = foot), to prostrate oneself in the manner just described at another's feet. It is necessary to kràap highly respected persons, such as monks, the king, and members of the immediate royal family. Other highly respected and/or important elders may also command this type of respect as well.

Again, the idea here is that the lower one gets physically, the more respect is being shown to the other person. To lower and fold oneself over when

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1 Both wâaj and kràap are discussed briefly in Chapter 13 on Body Language and Politeness.
performing the kràap is to make oneself small, as small as possible in the physical sense. In this way, the person doing the prostrating is showing their humility in the presence of the (second) respected person. One of the desired effects is, of course, that the grandeur and importance of the second person is emphasized in comparison to the humility and small stature of the first.

Kanittanan (359) notes that not only is the word kràap used to designate this most respectful of actions, but it is also used in speech before other verbs to express deference. Examples of expressions with kràap did not appear in the corpus because none of the situations were formal enough or required such a high degree of deference on the part of any of the speakers as to warrant their usage. Therefore, it is necessary to look elsewhere for examples. Among the examples given in Kanittanan are kràap rian, kràap khàop khun, and kràap laa, each of which will be discussed briefly below. These forms are a kind of grammaticalization of politeness in gesture, wherein the extremely deferential action kràap is linguistically evoked and used in speech to be extremely polite.

kràap rian: The central definition of the term rian is ‘learn; study’. It is also a more formal expression meaning ‘tell; inform’ (as opposed to the common bòok ‘tell’) and “a term of respect used in the salutation of a letter (followed by the name of the addressee)” (Haas 1964: 463). The longer kràap rian is an elegant, deferential expression to be used by an inferior speaking to a superior. At the

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2 It is more polite for Thais to be seated (on the floor) in the presence of monks, in contrast to the west.
beginning of a letter, the longer expression followed by the name of the
addressee indicates heightened respect for the addressee and a high degree of
defferece on the part of the letter writer.

kràap khòap khun: khòap khun means 'thank you' or 'to thank' in Thai. Thus
kràap khòap khun is simply a much more deferential way of expressing one's
gratitude. An inferior will thank a superior in this way, but never the opposite.

kràap laa: The word laa means “to take leave; to say goodbye”. Haas (481)
defines kràap laa as “to take leave of (one’s elders or superiors).” To do this, then,
is polite behavior since for Thais, as for many others, it is important to show
proper respect to one’s elders and superiors.

Expressions which combine kràap with another verb convey a higher degree of
respect than their counterparts without kràap. This is not to say, of course, that
expressions without kràap are impolite. Rather, it is to say that expressions with
kràap are extremely polite. Without exception, the kràap + verb expressions are
spoken or performed by inferiors to superiors (just as the physical act of
prostrating oneself is) to show deference and recognition of the superior’s
high(er) stature. They are very polite forms.

pròot

The word pròot has two senses in Thai. One is as a verb, meaning “to favor” or
“to be favored” (334). The second sense is adverbial and is best translated into

3 This is not meant to imply, however, that the word kràap can simply be combined with any verb
English as 'please'. The word is used before verbs to make requests more polite.

Iamworamet (1993: 659) defines pròot in his dictionary both in Thai and in English. In Thai he says that the word is:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{kham sàp} & \quad \text{thîi cháj sadeen khawm khawróp} \\
\text{word vocabulary that use show NOM respect}
\end{align*}
\]

A word used to show respect.

In English, the definition Iamworamet gives for this lexical item is: "please; May I trouble you (to do sth./for sth.); Would you mind (doing sth.)" (ibid.).

Iamworamet gives several examples of the word used in Thai sentences. Because utterances which include pròot are generally rather formal, it is not possible to draw examples from the data corpus. The talk show contexts — at least those in question here — are not formal enough for this particular word to be used within them. Therefore, two of Iamworamet’s (ibid.) examples will be used to illustrate how pròot is used, along with two written examples.

EXAMPLE 8.1:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pròot nàŋ loŋ.} \\
\text{please sit down}
\end{align*}
\]

Sit down, please. Please sit down. Please be seated.
EXAMPLE 8.2:

pròot niap nòcj.
please quiet PRT

Be quiet; [sic] please. Will you please be quiet?\(^4\)

In the two preceding examples, pròot is used to make the directives polite, or in the case of the second example, more polite. Both of the sentences would be grammatical commands without this particular word, but its addition causes the utterances to be more respectful, courteous, and appropriate for use in situations where there may be some distance between the speaker and hearer. Additionally, in such cases, the hearer is — or is assumed to be — socially superior to the speaker.

The word is also found frequently in public locales. Many written directives use this term. Consider, for example, the following texts from two signs at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok:

EXAMPLE 8.3:

pròot rawañ sìisà?.
please be-careful head(HON)

Please watch your head.

(A sign in the University bookstore)

\(^4\) Phrased this way (the second sentence of the definition), the directive can sound rude in English, as though its speaker were annoyed. I believe Iamworamet meant to translate the sentence as a polite question rather than an annoyed inquiry.
EXAMPLE 8.4:

prōt chūaj kan ráksāa khwaam să?àat.
please help each-other care-for NOM clean

Let’s help each other keep (this place) clean, please.

(A sign in a University classroom)

Because publicly posted signs give directives to a wide audience — e.g. students, professors, visitors, etc. in this case — and it is unclear who the speaker is, they often assume a certain distance from addressees. This is especially obvious in the first of the two preceding examples, where the formal sīsā is used instead of the more common hūa for ‘head’.

karunaa

Another Thai word used in directives to make them polite is karunaa. While these words differ in some of their senses, it seems that karunaa and prōt can be used interchangeably in their capacity as adverbs. That is, both words can be used before verbs to make utterances more courteous and respectful. However, prōt sounds slightly more formal than karunaa.

According to Haas (1964: 15), karunaa can be defined as follows: “1. to be kind merciful. 2. be so kind as to, please (do such and such).” Iamworamet (1993: 32), for his part, gives the following definition in Thai:

5 i.e. another sense of prōt is ‘to favor or be favored’, while another sense of karunaa is ‘pity; compassion; sympathy’ (McFarland 1944: 54).

121
khọc-rọ́ŋ khon ṭyun dūaj khwaam nọčp-nôom
request people other with NOM respectful/submissive

To (make) request(s) of others with respect and submissiveness

Pragmatically speaking, karunaa behaves just like pròot.

Once again, it was not easy to find examples of this particular lexical item in my corpus because of its formal and extremely polite register (although one token in the corpus will be discussed below). It will therefore be useful again to rely on the examples given in Iamworamet (ibid.) to illustrate the word’s usage in Thai.

EXAMPLE 8.5:

karunaa tòçp dooj-reew dūaj cà? khọc-p-khun mâak.
please respond quickly also will thank-you much

Be good enough (or Be so good as) to give us an [sic] reply.

EXAMPLE 8.6:

karunaa khâw rûam prâchum taam weelaa.
please enter join meeting according-to time

Please be there on time. (Your presence is requested at the meeting on time.)

6 karunaa comes to Thai from Pali, pròot from Khmer, and Thai royal language is composed mainly of words which are of Khmer origin (see, e.g. Varasarin 1984).
EXAMPLE 8.7:

karunaa ne?-nam dûaj.
please suggest also

Your advice is hereby earnestly solicited.

Iamworamet's English translations of his sentences show that utterances with karunaa are meant to be polite and deferential. All three sentences appear to assume a certain distance between the speaker and the addressee. They are phrased so as to suggest that we must recognize that the speaker is not assuming compliance on the part of the hearer.

**Long and Complex Expressions**

Another feature of Thai politeness discussed in Kanittanan (1988) is the use of "long and complex expressions." Kanittanan (360) notes that speakers are able to combine polite expressions to make utterances even more polite:

...[I]t can be seen that the length of linguistic or semantic expressions is important in assisting in the indication of politeness in Thai: the longer the expression, the greater seems the deferential politeness and degree of speaker self-effacement.

Clearly, the words discussed in the preceding sub-sections — kràap, pròot, and karunaa — serve as partial examples of this. The placement of these polite words before verbs make the utterances which contain them more respectful. They also lengthen the utterances in question, a consequence which bolsters Kanittanan's claim above.

The following excerpt from "The Twilight Show," a Thai interview talk show is an example of the phenomenon under discussion. In the previous
Chapter (7), the use of *khọ* was described, and the example below was given to show its usage in a polite context (Example 7.7). This word makes utterances more polite in part by lengthening them. The male interviewer, in closing his show, uses *khọ* twice. First he thanks the main interviewee, a professor, and then he thanks two other guests who appeared during the interview.

**Example 8.8:**

1. I: *wan níí raw dâaj rîaŋ-raaw mâak-maaj làaj dûaj-kan*  
   day this we get/obtain story a-lot many type together

2. *ná khráp. wan níí tôn *khọ* khôć-phra-khun thâan -?acaan làaj  
   PRT POL day this must beg thank.HON HON.professor like

3. *suuŋ ná khráp.*  
   high PRT POL

4. *[thîi karunaa kâp raaj-kaan khôć raw.]*  
   [that be-kind with show of us

5. *P: [khráp.*  
   POL

6. I: *khọ khôć-phra-khun thàŋ-soń thàan chên-diaw-kan dûaj kan*  
   beg thanks.HON both HON.(pron.) similarly with each-other

7. *ná khráp. thîi karunaa kâp raaj-kaan khôć raw.*  
   PRT POL that be-kind with show of us
1. I: Today we learned so many things together
2. (right?). Today we must thank the professor
3. very much (okay?)
4. [for being so kind (with our show).
5. G: [Yes.
6. I: Thank you also to both (other) guests
7. who were so kind to our show.

This excerpt was discussed in the previous chapter on *khāo* (Example 7.7). It is repeated here because it serves as a good example of lengthening utterances and making them more linguistically complex to show increased deference to the hearer(s).

Some ways in which the interviewer lengthens his utterance (which were not already mentioned in the previous chapter) are, for example, in lines 1-4. Briefly, he uses a great deal of verbiage to express the simple idea that he and the viewers learned a lot on this show (line 1). I believe he does this to exaggerate, to make the information he and the audience have received sound copious, varied, and colorful (a positive politeness strategy). Hence the giver of that information, his guest, feels good.

One might also argue that the length of the speaker’s utterance achieves politeness symbolically. Blum-Kulka (1992: 269) observes that “…politeness in certain circumstances is directly linked to quantity of verbal effort invested in performing the speech act. There are situations where one needs to display politeness by investing in words.” In Example 8.8, I conveys to the hearer (and
audience) how important that person is by taking the extra time and effort required to produce a protracted polite utterance.

The use of long and complex expressions as a politeness tactic is not one that should strike English speakers as unusual. Under formal circumstances, English exploits the same technique. Lakoff (1990: 100-101), citing B. Bernstein (1962), speaks of elaborated versus restricted code. The former is used for public discourse and the latter for speaking (in private) with intimates. Lakoff states that:

... in elaborated code discourse, things are spelled out: precise pronunciation, specifically referential words, complex syntax. In restricted code communication, we can count on other participants to catch on quickly, and we are more telegraphic and less careful. We trust the other participant, both to understand the language and to understand us. (101)

Thus a wedding invitation — a form of public discourse — might read:

"Together with our parents, Mary Jones and Bob Smith request the honour of your presence at our wedding." This is a more elaborate way of saying "Come to our wedding" (and yet it is probably one of the simpler wedding invitation formulae). Formal and drawn out wording establishes distance politeness because it explicitly assumes the need to spell things out. The autonomy of the addressee is respected, and this is considered polite both in the cultures of American English speakers and Thai speakers, although not in the same way.

Brown and Levinson (1987) do not specifically mention the use of formal forms like those discussed here (although they mention honorifics, which are "direct grammatical encodings of relative social status between participants..." (179)) or long drawn out expressions as politeness strategies. But the intent of
such usages on the part of speakers, at least for the most part, is to show
deference to addressees. Using formal and drawn out language shows that the
speaker recognizes the hearer’s importance and/or the hearer’s right to have the
social/emotional distance between them maintained. In other words, the
speaker acknowledges, in Brown and Levinson’s terms, high values of P (power)
and/or D (distance). Thus formal lexical items and long elaborate expressions
would fall under the strategy “Give Deference” as a negative politeness strategy.

However, Brown and Levinson speak of using negative politeness (and
other) strategies to defuse the offense of potentially face-threatening acts. It
seems that Thai speakers can use these techniques even when face-threat is not
an issue. For instance, in Example 8.8 above the interviewer uses long and
drawn out expressions to thank his guests. This may be necessary to maintain
the face of the professor, who has high status and is older than the interviewer
(this is issue is explored further below), but it is not necessary in the case of the
other two guests, who are younger than the interviewer and do not outrank him
socially. Thanking them so respectfully does not threaten their face; if anything
it gives them face. 7

Example 8.8 above presents an interesting puzzle for Brown and
Levinson’s framework in another respect. According to their theory, it is the
negative face of the speaker (in this case, the interviewer) which is threatened in
an example such as this, since “expressing thanks” means that “S accepts a debt,
humbles his own face” (67). While the speaker’s face may be at risk here, it is not

7 In fact, one might be of the opinion that the interviewer in Example 8.8 is being too deferential
in thanking the other two guests who are of lower status than himself and the professor. He
(or at least not only) for the reason Brown and Levinson predict. In a Thai situation like the one in Example 8.8 — specifically where the interviewer thanks the professor — showing oneself to be appropriately deferential to an important addressee like the professor, i.e. recognizing the importance of the addressee and one's relative status, is more significant than concerns of losing face by humbling or indebting oneself. Furthermore, in Example 8.8 the interviewer needs to maintain face for professor by thanking him very politely, because not being sufficiently deferential could offend him. So the whole act of thanking the professor attends to the face of both participants. The interviewer saves face for himself by showing he knows his and his addressee's relative social standing and more importantly, he has by the same token shown the requisite respect to the addressee.

Certainly one pitfall for Brown and Levinson's theory, when considering a situation like this one, is that their framework assumes the equality of participants. But Thai society, like many (perhaps most or even all) Asian societies is hierarchical, and conversational participants are often not social equals. Thus the social inferior who needs to express thanks to a superior is not so concerned about his own negative face loss. The inferior realizes the social superior, because of that person's high(er) stature, is entitled to respect, and it does not cause the social inferior to lose face when giving it; in fact it is quite possibly the opposite. In addition, the more deferential he is (up to certain limits), the better he has saved face for all parties involved.

could “get away with less” here. But his display of deference, despite the fact that it goes beyond what is needed, does not cause him to look bad or lose face.
CHAPTER 9
INDIRECT SPEECH ACTS

Ervin-Tripp (1976) looks at the ways in which speakers of American English are able to communicate directives without literally saying what they mean. She shows that directives can take many different forms with a similar function: to get the hearer to do something. Being indirect is the way to communicate one's intended message without stating it explicitly.

Indirect speech acts make it is possible for the speaker to perform one illocutionary act indirectly through the performance of the other (Searle 1979: 31). For example, by saying "Can you reach that book?" the speaker is asking something but can (as always, depending on the context) mean something more. The explicit question is an inquiry into the hearer's ability to reach the book, but one utterance is also a request for the book in question passed to the speaker. Searle (33) calls the indirect aspect of the utterance (in the example just given, the request), the primary illocutionary act, and the direct and explicit aspect (the request for information) the secondary illocutionary act.

Ervin-Tripp, Searle, and others have pointed out that one motivation for indirectness in the issuance of directives is politeness, since direct imperatives are often considered rude or off-putting. Speakers often use other devices to communicate these concepts. Lakoff (1990: 30) notes that: "Asking a question is, in general, less troublesome than giving an order, and providing information is perhaps the least interactively difficult of the three." In English, the evidence certainly bears this out (see, for example, Ervin-Tripp 1976). Orders are often disguised as questions (e.g. "Are there any napkins over there?") or as
statements (e.g. "We're out of napkins."). The Thai data provide evidence of the same linguistic devices at play, as the following examples show.

The first example is an exchange that occurred on a talk show between a female interviewer (I) and her female guest (N). Before the actual interview begins, the two women perform what turns out to be a vignette, where the guest is at the (closed) door peddling Chinese noodles. This, it turns out, is just a pretext to get the interviewer to open the door, although, in fact, making and selling noodles (and wine!) is the guest's real life vocation (after having been a celebrity). Once the guest is in the apartment, the two sit down for the interview. While the dialogue is planned to a certain degree, it is realistic and does not sound contrived.

EXAMPLE 9.1:

   chinese-noodles come already POL

2. I: ūj. mii khraj [maa khaaj nöm-ciin.
   oh have who [come sell chinese-noodles

3. N: [mii khraj juu bāan máj khá
   [have who stay house INT POL

   sell what PRT POL

   sell chinese-noodles be pot POL

   sell chinese-noodles be pot oo [not-yet hungry PRT POL

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1 As always, context is important in the deciphering of indirect speech acts.

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7. N: The Chinese noodles have arrived!
8. I: Oh! Who's come [selling Chinese noodles?
9. N: [Is any one home?
10. I: What are you selling again?
11. N: (I'm) selling Chinese noodles out of the pot.
12. I: Chinese noodles out of the pot? Ooh [I'm not hungry yet.
14. Right out of the pot
15. (you know?). Not in a bag or anything like that. Please open the door,
16. won't you? It's really delicious.
17. I: My goodness! This saleswoman is really persistent!

In the preceding interaction, there are three instances of directives that are delivered indirectly. The first of these occurs in line 1, where N announces from the other side of the closed door that the Chinese noodles have arrived. The announcement, which would be categorized as an assertive in Searle's (1979)
taxonomy, is simply a statement that provides information. However, the speaker means to convey more than she is literally saying. In this case, her primary message is a directive, namely, "open the door and buy some noodles." As noted earlier, orders are apt to be expressed indirectly. This is what has occurred in this Thai example. Providing information about the availability of the noodles is certainly less presumptuous and bossy than an order to open the door and buy some.

The next example of indirectness occurs in line 6, uttered this time by I. She responds to the peddler on the other side of the door by telling her she is not hungry yet. Here an assertion is used to express a refusal indirectly. The second part of line 6 is explicitly a statement of the speaker’s lack of hunger. But the intended message is a rejection of the noodles. Stating the lack of hunger is the speaker’s way of politely refusing to buy the noodles. Searle (1979: 5) states that “[t]he psychological state expressed in the performance of the illocutionary act is the sincerity condition of the act…” In this case, though, the speaker is quite possibly being disingenuous: She may or may not be hungry. Whether the sincerity condition expressed in this speech act is true or false, though, the primary illocutionary act of rejecting the noodles is understood. The account (lack of hunger) constitutes the refusal.

In the third example, lines 7-9, the noodle seller is still trying to convince the hearer to open the door and buy some noodles. To make a blunt demand would be considered rude. Therefore, N chooses the indirect route and gives the hearer reasons why she should buy noodles: they are very fresh (still in the cooking pot) — unlike the kind sold in bags — and very delicious. Insistence
would be considered an imposition so she must take pains to be polite. (On the other hand, in line 10 I treat N as persisting in the face of refusal.)

The indirect portion of the following excerpt occurs in the first few lines. However, many more lines have been given below to show that the hearer interpreted the speaker's indirect message in the way that I am claiming it was meant and responded accordingly. The participants here are the same women as from the immediately preceding example, and this segment is from the interview itself.

EXAMPLE 9.2:

1. I: nāq-càak ṭàn ḱhōŋ əa kaan thaaṃ-ŋaan tsěn-nán nija ná. mii ?iik outside-of subject of uh NOM work then PRT PRT have other

2. ṭàn nŋ thii bōhk waa māj-khōŋ-mii chōk dīi. māj rū māc chōk dīi subject one that tell that NEG-have-much luck good NEG know Noy

3. cà khit ʔeeŋ ṭūy-plaaw. bōhk wāa (...) nāj ṭàn ḱhōŋ khwaam rāk FUT think yourself or-not tell that (...) in subject of NOM love

4. māj-khōŋ chōk dīi sāk thāw-raj. NEG-much luck good PRT not-very

5. N: kō ṭàn ḱhōŋ khwaam rāk ṭūy hā (...) man kō māj chōk dīi PRT subject of NOM love INT POL (...) CLF PRT NEG luck good

6. talōt [kō (...) all-along [PRT (...)]

7. I: [mm. [mm

8. N: khyy mii khyn mii loŋ. thāa khyn raw jūu dūaj kan namely have up have down if up we stay with each-other

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9. dāj. [raw kǭ jūu.
can [I/we PRT stay

10. I: [hâ.
STA

11. N: têe thâa khûu jûu düaj kan mây dâj nija kǭ kǭ lûak-laa
but if couple stay with each-other NEG can PRT PRT PRT leave

12. kan paj.
each-other go

13. I: hâ.
STA

1. I: Outside of the subject of, uh, working then, there's another
2. thing that tells (us) that (you) don't really have good luck. I don't know
3. if you think so yourself or not. It tells us... In matters of love
4. you're not really that lucky.
5. N: In matters of love? It's
6. always been unlucky. [(Thai particle)
7. I: [mm
8. N: There are ups and downs. If it's up then we
9. can be together. [So I/we stay.
10. I: [Yes.
11. N: But if we can't stay together then then I/we
12. end it.
13. I: Yes.
The first line has an indirect phrase embedded within it. In the example, the speaker begins with a segue from the previous topic discussed: the interviewee’s previous work in X-rated movies, referred to here as *kaan thaam naam toon nán* — essentially ‘the work you were doing then.’ What is happening here is that the speaker is avoiding mention of the risqué topic directly, perhaps to avoid offense to listeners or perhaps because it makes her uncomfortable to state it explicitly. In this case, the speaker is using euphemism “the work you were doing then” as a form of deference politeness.

Next the interviewer moves into the topic of the interviewee’s love life, by drawing a parallel between it and N’s former career. She tries to elicit this information indirectly by making a statement comparing N’s bad luck in work and love. In making this statement, the interviewer is not only giving information but also indirectly steering N to address the subject the speaker has chosen: N’s unfortunate love life. It seems clear from the rest of the excerpt that N has understood I’s directive in this way. She proceeds to discuss her unlucky love life with very little further prodding from I in the rest of the segment (lines 8-9 and lines 11-12). This is an example wherein the speaker has stated a (purported) fact as a question. This question, in turn, works as a directive to elicit a response.

Politeness is a reasonable explanation for this use of indirectness. The subject of someone’s love life, much less someone’s unfortunate love life, is a touchy one, at least in American culture. Even stating that the other person’s love life is dogged by misfortune would be considered overly brusque by many.

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2 Why she would avoid this now, however, is unclear, as the two women have just completed a
Americans, although this is apparently permissible in Thai culture. Yet urging someone to speak on the subject needs to be handled with some care, so the speaker frames her request indirectly.

Thus far my examples have shown directives framed indirectly. These are the easiest ones to find — particularly in this corpus. Furthermore, as Ervin-Tripp (1976: 26) points out, directives “ask work of the hearer.” Therefore, it should not surprise us that they are delivered politely.

The examples here are of indirectness, or “any communicative behaviour, verbal or non-verbal, that conveys something more than or different from what it literally means” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 134). There are examples of conventional indirectness — employing utterances whose literal meanings are different from their unmistakable situational meanings — in Examples 9.1 and 9.2 above. According to Brown and Levinson, the speaker would use this negative politeness strategy — “Be conventionally indirect” — when confronted with both “the desire to give H an ‘out’ by being indirect, and the desire to go on record” (132).

There are also examples of indirectness that is not “conventional” which are used in Thai conversation as well. Lakoff (1973; 1990) would view such linguistic behavior as attempts at avoiding imposition, since the speaker is discussion of the very topic just prior to the segment shown here.

3 The reader might feel that this is impossible to judge by this example alone. But the author has observed that Thais freely address or ask about subjects that might be considered taboo in American culture, e.g. weight gain or loss, bad luck, etc.

4 There are other points of politeness in this segment. For one thing, the speaker does not come right to the heart of things immediately. It takes her a little while to reach the core of the matter she wants the interviewee to discuss, and this “wind-up” might be a politeness tactic. Another tactic she uses is to give the hearer the option to disagree with what she is saying by inserting the sentence at the end of line 2 (gloss 2) and beginning of line 3 (gloss 3): “I don’t know if you think so yourself or not.”
making an effort to refrain from saying that which would make the hearer uncomfortable (or at least that which the speaker thinks would make the hearer uncomfortable). For instance, in Example 9.1, I say *jaŋ-mâj hîw rôk khâ* — "I'm not hungry yet" — instead of being more direct and simply saying "I don't want any noodles." The most likely explanation for her doing this, other than — and perhaps in addition to — the fact that it might be true, is to avoid offense to the noodle-seller. In analyzing this example, Brown and Levinson would likely refer to it as a face-threatening act (FTA) done off-record, for "it is not possible to attribute one clear communicative intention to the act" (211). Off-record acts are indirect, and they allow the speaker to avoid taking responsibility for the FTA. They are meant to invite a particular conversational implicature, but at the same time, they allow the speaker to deny responsibility for the face-threatening information if it is found to be too offensive. It is important to note that for Brown and Levinson, off-record acts are not polite per se because they fall outside the politeness system.

In contrast with conventional indirectness, going off-record really does allow both speaker and hearer and "out". The speaker could claim after the fact that s/he really intended only the secondary illocutionary act. For his/her part, the hearer could ignore (or perhaps pretend to ignore) the primary illocutionary act. Off-record utterances invite conversational implicature because they flout one or possibly more Gricean maxims (Relevance, in the example just discussed). The next chapter explores more utterances of this type.
Chapter 6 discussed mitigation as achieved through the use of certain discourse particles. Mitigation, or “the reduction of certain unwelcome effects which a speech act has on the hearer” (Fraser 1980:341), can be accomplished in Thai speech through the use of indirectness as well. While it is not always the case that indirectness results in politeness¹ (or vice versa), the instances of indirectness to be examined here are ones in which the overall effect of the indirect utterances is polite.

This section examines forms of indirectness which do not involve speech act substitution but rather illustrate indirectness achieved by hedging (expressing uncertainty or lack of total commitment to a particular proposition) or by using euphemisms, i.e. lexical substitution.

Indirect linguistic behavior of this sort in English can be explained using Grice’s theory of conversational logic. Utterances that adhere strictly to the Cooperative Principle and do not flout any of its attendant maxims are clear and direct. Implicature results when a speaker flouts one or more of the maxims. So if B is asked whether she likes the way A has rearranged her office and B does not want to give a direct negative response for fear of hurting A’s feelings, B might say: “I sorta liked it the other way.” B’s response flouts the maxim of Quality. Even if B really did like the old set-up better, by answering this way she

¹ An example of being indirect without being polite (at least not to the referent, although perhaps to the audience) would be the following statement about Geraldine Ferraro made by former first
is really saying that she does not like the new one. One might also argue that the indirect response also flouts Quantity, for B's contribution is not as informative as it could be. To be maximally informative, for example, B would have had to say she does not like the new office layout.

The first example involves an utterance in which the speaker avoids using a direct imperative:

EXAMPLE 10.1:

   and if you-the-audience like that FUT make food PRT POL
2. kàp taw majkhroowee k5 lcoon tit-tôo nîi laej ná khâ...
   with oven microwave PRT try contact here consequently PRT POL

1. S: And if you like to cook
2. with a microwave, try contacting us here (at)...

Instead of giving the unqualified order for the audience to call the show, she asks them to "try contacting" the show — lcoon tit-tôo nîi laej ná khâ. This suggests that there is an optionality or possible non-completion of the action in question by the hearer. The speaker has left the hearer an "out".

In addition, by hedging the directive the speaker has avoided making herself sound too pushy or overbearing. Even if the speaker believes

lady Barbara Bush: "She's something that rhymes with rich." My thanks go to Robin Lakoff for bringing this example to my attention.
wholeheartedly that viewers really ought to contact the show about the microwave, she avoids an assertion to this effect.

The next example involves an indirect assertive. In this case, the speaker substitutes a more agreeable expression for what may otherwise be a hurtful or unpleasant statement. When sensitive information is conveyed, it might sometimes be necessary to deliver it in a shrouded way to remain polite. In this case, the information given might damage the face of another of the conversational participants. The speaker tries to avoid committing herself to the potentially unpleasant assertion by making understating it.

This conversational extract comes from a television talk show in which a female host (I) was interviewing a young celebrity couple (W - wife and H - husband). The host has just asked the couple why they chose to have a child so soon after their marriage. The wife, who does most of the talking throughout the interview, starts to answer her question.

EXAMPLE 10.2:

1. W: lēew kō khwaam thīi jāak cā? dāj (...) lūuk rew māak (...) phrō and PRT NOM that want FUT get (...) child fast much (...) because

2. ciŋ-ciŋ lēew thīi jāak dāj lūuk rew nỳŋ khyy khun-ūut nija? really already that want get child fast one that Khun-Ut here

3. khoonkhān (... māj nūm. rather (...) NEG young-man

4. [māj (...) māj wajrūn mỳan lēew (laughs) [NEG (...) NEG adolescent like and (laughs)

5. I: [māj nūm. ój cā? bök wāa māj nūm. (laughs) [NEG young-man oh FUT tell that NEG young-man (laughs)
6. 6arıj ků màj rů.  
what PRT NEG know

7. H: nům nůj. nům nůj. nům nůj. nům  
young-man a-little young-man a-little young-man a-little young-man

8. I: 7új sadůn-daŋ hýak.  
oh be-startled sound-of-a-gasp

9. W: (continues laughing)

10. I: 6a.  
oh

11. W: ků khyy jąak hąj (...) lůuk too than kaan than cháj  
PRT be want give (...) child big in-time time in-time use

12. I: pen nům ją wąa țůn.  
be young-man big say like-that

1. W: and we wanted a child right away because

2. really to have a child right away first is rather because Khun Ut here

3. is rather not young

4. [not, not a teenager like and (laughs)

5. I: [Not young! Oh! She’s trying to tell me he’s not young! (laughs)

6. Nonsense!

7. H: Only a little young. Only a little young. Only a little young.  
Young...

8. I: I can’t believe it!

9. W: (continues laughing)

10. I: oh.

11. W: I mean I/we want our child to have time (with us), to use
The wife is responding to the interviewer’s question, and in her response she makes an assertion in lines 2-3. The nature of the assertion is that the couple wanted to have a child soon after getting married because her husband is (getting too) old (and therefore their time might be running out). However, to state this directly, e.g. “Khun Ut here is old,” would be too forthright and probably hurtful and embarrassing to her husband. So rather than make a direct assertion, the wife states this indirectly as: “...Khun Ut here is rather not young.” She uses a hedge — ‘rather’ khoon khāañ — to make it a little fuzzy and to distance herself from the assertion somewhat. She also employs litotes to hedge in another way, by saying her husband is “not young”. W has not committed herself to saying her husband is (getting) too old to have children, yet she nevertheless manages to convey this message.

She also uses a euphemism to avoid stating what might be unpleasant information directly. She avoids saying bluntly that he is old, opting to say instead that he is “not young”. Specifically, she says he is not nùm — ‘young (man); adolescent.’ Thus she focuses on what he is not rather than on what (she thinks) he is, distancing herself even more from the facts (or at least the facts as she perceives them).

By making her assertion this way, W has flouted more than one Gricean maxim to achieve her intended implicature. By using khoon khāañ māñ nùm ‘rather not a young man’ in her utterance, W has flouted Manner (she is not as brief as
she could be). She has also flouted Quantity, since what she says is not as informative as it could be.

The response of the interviewer indicates that she has picked up on the intended message, the primary illocutionary act. She responds with surprise to the unmitigated message that is implied, and her reaction conveys amazement at the idea that the husband might be getting too old to have children (lines 5 and 8). It also seems as though she might be trying to save face for the husband by reacting this way, responding with disbelief to what the wife has said (possibly a form of politeness, if she also believes that the husband is too old). Another possibility is that she is saving face for herself and/or the audience, since it can be uncomfortable to be in the presence of someone who has just been embarrassed, in this case the husband, presumably. (In point of fact, she may really be surprised the wife has said this, since the husband does not appear to be too old, at least not to father children. On the contrary, he looks to be a young man).

For his part, the husband downplays the perceived unpleasantness of what his wife has implied. He states over and over “only a little young,” in response to the objections the interviewer has made to W’s statement (a flouting of the maxim of Manner). This action on the husband’s part is negatively polite in that he is being deferential to the interviewer, his wife, and the audience (who might be feeling uncomfortable). By doing this, he seems to draw a compromise between the positions of the two women. By saying he is “only a little young,” he shows partial agreement with his wife. At the same time, by saying this, he has not refuted the interviewer’s position either. He thus strikes a compromise between the positions of the two women: I’m not old, but I’m not young either;
I'm just a little young. In this way, H saves face for all involved — his wife, the host, himself, and even the audience.

The next example involves other euphemisms. The two interlocutors are a female interviewer (I) and her guest (M). M is a fashion model. At this point in the conversation, the two women² are discussing a particular issue of appearance that comes with age: getting fat.

EXAMPLE 10.3:

1. M: khon thî mii ?ajú? mâak khîyn nîja? (...) êe nâa nîja? man câ? (...) duu people that have age much up PRT (...) uh face PRT CLF will (...) look
2. duu duu duu mii nîya. look look look have flesh
3. I: mii nîya. have flesh
4. M: pen khon câw-nîya. be person plump
6. M: [ah [châj mâj
7. I: lâm câw-nîya. begin chubby

1. M: People who are getting older (...) uh, their faces will (...) look
2. look look look like they have flesh

² It is tangential to the point being made here, but interesting to note anyway, that M is actually a transgendered man. M’s appearance and linguistic behavior on this show, however, do nothing
3. I: Have flesh
4. M: They’re plump.
5. I: Here. It’s started already. (I’m getting) older [plump
6. M: [ah [right?
7. I: Starting to be plump

In Thai, the common word for ‘fat’ is ฤา. To say, as M does in line 2, that a
person’s face looks like she has flesh may not sound particularly polite in
English. However, in Thai this is a much nicer way of saying that people’s faces
look fat when they start to age. The speaker tries to avoid offending the
interviewer and any of the audience by couching her assertion in inoffensive
terms.

In line 4, M introduces another euphemism. Haas (1964: 276) gives the
following definitions:

cāw-nýa: to be fat, plump, chubby (used esp. of children).
khon cāw-nýa: fatty, fatso

Again, to say that someone is cāw-nýa (lit. ‘flesh lord’) is much nicer in Thai than
to say directly that they are fat or ฤา. As Haas’ definition shows, the term cāw-
nýa is used especially for children. Generally terms for children are endearing,
and a child’s chubbiness is often considered cute, or at the very least, not ugly or
inappropriate. However, in modern Thai culture, as in American culture, being

to betray this fact. (M is so well-known that her true gender status is common knowledge in
Bangkok society, at least). M will be referred to here using the feminine pronoun “she”.

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overweight is not considered cute for adults. It is for this reason that M avoids
the more direct term for the condition, employing a pleasant euphemism instead.

This section’s final example comes from the concluding portion of the
previous interview. The same interlocutors are involved, although here I is
doing all of the talking.

EXAMPLE 10.4:

1. I: kõ khít wâa jaŋ-ŋaj -jaŋ-ŋaj nija? naj rajá? weelaa pií níi pií-nâa
   PRT think that whatever PRT in period time year this next-year

2. pií núun raw jaŋ khoŋ hên khun-mâa pen naâbêep thîi døøn jyâŋ-jân
   year there we still probably see Khun-Maa be model that walk elegant

3. mâyân mêw jüu bon catwalk tøø-paj ná khá. phrû-wâa
   like cat stay on-top catwalk from-now-on PRT POL because

4. khon kêŋ khon thîi duu-leâ tûa-ën jaŋ nîi nija? mîi nîj mâak. (...)  
   person clever person that care-for self like this PRT have few very (...) 

5. ?ajû-?anaam kõ mâj baw léew ná.  
   age PRT NEG light already PRT 

6. M: (laughs)

   but she PRT still stylish still and-then-some PRT POL 

1. I: I think that in any case in the future 
2. we’ll probably still see Khun Maa the model walking elegantly a cat 
3. like on the catwalk. Because

3 In point of fact, there is probably no polite way to say this in American English, although terms
such as “well-rounded” or “pleasingly plump” are better than plain “fat”.

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4. there are few clever people that take care of themselves like this.
5. Now she isn’t so young any more
6. M: (laughs)
7. I: But she’s still stylish.

The indirect remark comes in line 5 of the interviewer’s remarks. The
unmitigated message (the implied message, continued in line 7) is that despite
M’s old (for a model) age, she is still stylish. But instead of saying the direct ?ajú
k3 māak léew ‘she is old (lit. her age is a lot) already’ — which would definitely be
rude — the interviewer chooses a more gracious, and therefore less offensive-
sounding way to express this proposition.

There are two techniques that I uses to make her comment about M’s age
more elegant. For one thing, she uses the “elaborate expression” (Haas 1964:
xvii) ?ajú-?anaam instead of the usual ?ajú. The morpheme ?anaam has no
independent meaning. It only appears following the word ?ajú. One of the
original reasons for the addition of such a morpheme was to meet the metrical
requirements of Thai poetry. In this context, the speaker uses the extra
morpheme to make her speech sound more elegant and agreeable, a sort of
negative politeness. When such expressions are used outside of its usual context,
the hearer is nevertheless reminded of poetry, which is generally a refined and
elegant form of discourse.

In addition to this, I chooses to say that M’s age is (literally in Thai) “not
light” as opposed to “heavy” or simply that M is old or aging. Stating it this way

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has the effect of removing the speaker — and possibly the referent as well — from the underlying proposition.

Both of the tactics mentioned here flout at least one and possibly two of the Gricean maxims. For one thing, Manner has been flouted: I has not been as brief as she could have been in expressing her proposition. One should also note that she has employed expressions that are somewhat obscure, another way in which she would be flouting Manner. In addition, it might also be argued that Quantity has been flouted as well, for, due to the obscurity of her expression, I might also be accused of not being as informative as she could be.

The indirectness achieved through flouting some Gricean maxims in the above examples is meant to save face, both for speakers and addressees. Speakers save face by distancing themselves from the potentially offensive implied content of their message(s). They need not be directly responsible for unsavory or rude assertions and can therefore (hopefully) be perceived as polite people who know how to behave properly. Addressees' face is saved or maintained by virtue of the fact that they are not directly associated with the noisome communication.

This kind of indirectness, a type of linguistic hedging which avoids saying the unpleasant thing too forwardly, qualifies as off-record communication in a Brown and Levinsonian (1987) analysis. It is therefore, strictly speaking, outside their bipolar system of positive and negative politeness. By avoiding direct statements of potentially rude thoughts or assertions and making instead utterances which have more than just one interpretation (i.e.

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*My gratitude goes to Rungpatra Roengpitya for helping me to better understand this.*
more than just the unsavory one), speakers are giving themselves an "out". At the same time, the hearer can choose to ignore the face-threatening act if s/he so chooses.
In general, Thais are concerned with making a good impression on others and therefore strive to display good manners. Two ways of doing this are to show interest in the addressee or to flatter or compliment the addressee. Another way is to "entertain" the addressee.

**Showing Interest in the Addressee**

Showing interest in one's addressee by asking questions about them not only (presumably) satisfies the curiosity of the speaker, but it is intended to make the hearer feel good. It is positive politeness, in Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, and a Rule 3 — Camaraderie/Make hearer feel good tactic, in Lakoff's (1973) terms.

In Thai culture, showing interest in the addressee is often accomplished by a series of shotgun questions about the addressee's personal life. To many westerners, this might feel rude or intrusive. But to the Thai, asking many questions of the addressee is a way of displaying the fact that the speaker is interested in them, a way of making them feel good. Benedict (1952: 24) notes that Thai politeness involves:

... a running fire of questions about the stranger's private affairs — age, plans, cost of articles he is wearing, and everything else he can think of. If a stranger is not asked these question [sic] it means that he is of no interest, and the Thai feel strongly that anyone who has nothing to hide will respond freely.

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1 But see Tannen (1984) regarding New York high involvement conversational style.
Apparently, being asked personal questions of this genre (and being expected to answer them) is not supposed to be embarrassing for the Thai hearer.\textsuperscript{2} To the contrary, this type of questioning should be considered flattering, since the speaker is showing interest in the addressee. Furthermore, it is assumed that unless the addressee has something to hide, s/he will happily answer.

Elsewhere, Phillips (1970: 54) has remarked on Thai villagers' "ubiquitous politeness". He observes that this politeness may "... take a host of forms", among which "... the genial hospitality that is expressed toward a newcomer, usually in the form of "personal" questions serving both to identify the person and to make him feel that others are interested in him ("How old are you? Any children? How much did you pay for your shirt or your land? Why don't you have any children?)... " While Americans might consider this type of invasive "probing" rude (because it is threatening to negative face), Thais see this as a form of positive politeness.

In this study, it will not be possible to give specific examples of this type of camaraderie politeness from the data corpus. Because the data are composed mainly of interviews, the format is already by necessity of the question-answer type, with the interviewers asking many questions of the addressees. It is assumed that the reason for this discourse format is not the speakers' (the interviewers') concerted attempts to be positively polite to the interviewees but rather due to the demands of the talk show format. This is not to imply, of course, that the interviewers are not purposefully polite or even positively polite during the interviews. In the context of the recorded data, though, it would be wrong to conclude that the numerous questions being asked were as a result of

\textsuperscript{2} There are some topics which are off-limits in Thai culture; for example, those regarding a situation in which the addressee lost face. But Thai boundaries concerning what is "personal" are looser than American ones.
the speakers' showing polite interest in their addressees, as opposed to simply
doing the job of television show interviewer.

**Giving Compliments or Flattering the Addressee**

Complimenting or flattering the addressee is a politeness tactic used by some
Thai speakers. Complimenting is used here to mean comments or observations
by the speaker that reflect positively on the hearer or people and/or objects
associated with the hearer, from the point of view of one or both. Flattery in this
context is similar and might also include stretching the truth for the same
purpose. Both are meant to make the hearer feel good. In some cases, flattery
might also be used by the speaker to win favor with the addressee. Thai
complimenting and flattery can be considered politeness tactics: they are
designed to create positive feelings between interlocutors, which decrease the
likelihood of conflict or confrontation between them.

Robert and Nanthapa Cooper (1982) note that flattery is an integral part
of Thai small talk. Thais are apt to bend the truth in order to maintain a polite
demeanor, part of which might include compliments or flattery: “The Thai does
not deliberately lie, but also does not deliberately tell the truth. Norms of
respect and politeness require flattery and exaggeration” (81). While Cooper
(1982) is meant to counsel the western tourist on what to expect on a visit to
Thailand, it is also true that Thais use this tactic among themselves and not just
with westerners or other tourists. “Flatter whenever possible, Thais love it,” the
Coopers advise (242).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 66) regard complimenting as both a threat to
the hearer’s negative face — i.e. each person’s desire to be uninhibited in her
actions and claims to property — and also as a way to maintain positive face.
They indicate that compliments might give the hearer “…reason to think that he
may have to take action to protect the object of S's [Speaker's] desire, or give it to S..." (ibid.). Presumably a face threat of this sort would be particularly acute in societies where material commodities are at a premium and/or a sense of envy is keen among groups or individuals within the society.

This does not appear to be the case, however, in Thai society. It would seem that for Thais complimenting is not a negative face threat but rather a way to make the hearer feel good. In the terminology of Brown and Levinson, then, compliments and flattery would thus constitute positive politeness rather than negative politeness for Thais. Positive politeness appeals to the hearer's positive self-image and her desire to have that image appreciated by others. In Lakoff's (1973) model, Thai complimenting would be a Rule 3 or Camaraderie technique, designed to make the hearer feel good.

A point worthy of mention concerns the content of Thai compliments and flattery. Wolfson (1981) examines compliments from a cross-cultural perspective and shows that people of different cultures may not view the same utterances as complimentary. For example, she demonstrates that even while Japanese and English compliments are often similarly realized, Americans might not find all Japanese compliments favorable (118-119). In a similar way, Americans might not welcome all Thai compliments.

Cooper (1982: 43) notes that "[h]eight, hair, eyes and skin colour are all acceptable subjects for praise" in Thai culture. Perhaps the authors feel it is necessary to point this out to the foreigner, since this type of praise, while it is comfortable for Thais, might not always be comfortable for westerners. In the data set, one of the speakers makes comments about other people's appearance

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3 Her example concerns a Japanese speaker commenting on the hearer's beauty as a result of the hearer's having spent money on pure gold earrings. Wolfson claims that "[f]or speakers of American English it is difficult to accept the idea that it is considered complimentary to suggest that another's attractiveness depends on having money" (1981: 119).
and physical attributes in ways that might be discomfiting for English speakers. Americans may judge these particular compliments as too intrusive or personal, a verbal invasion of personal space. So a Thai acquaintance’s complimenting an American’s small stature may be considered a negative face threat by the American even while it might have been intended as a rapport-building comment by the Thai person.

In the examples given below, it should be noted that the compliments are generated by only two women interviewers. While I believe that giving compliments and flattery are politeness tactics that Thais commonly use — and especially Thai women — I do not draw that conclusion based solely on the transcribed data in the examples here. For the following reasons I feel that complimenting and flattery are politeness tactics in use among at least some Thais. First of all, the phenomenon is well documented by Cooper (1982), presumably for members of both genders (e.g. pages 43; 81; 242) and also mentioned in Phillips (1970: 71). Second, the addressees in the data set — i.e. those being complimented — do not appear to react as though something abnormal or threatening has occurred when a compliment is given. This leads me to believe that the giving and receiving of compliments are considered normal behavior by both the people who deliver them and the people who receive them. Third, Thai people who have observed the tapes seem to find nothing threatening or peculiar about the segments where the compliments are given and received, in terms of content or otherwise. Fourth and finally, the author, as a bilingual English-Thai speaker, has been in situations of complimenting and flattery with Thais and experienced the phenomena firsthand. These situations, in a Thai sociolinguistic setting, did not seem unusual or marked in any way. Therefore, there seems to be reason enough to conclude
that at least some Thais exploit complimenting and flattering as rapport-building politeness tactics.

That said, I would like to emphasize again that the compliments discussed here cannot be used alone to draw broad conclusions about Thais’ complimenting behavior. They do, however, serve as good examples of the phenomena I am describing. Based on the examples as well as the observations of others, it is asserted here that complimenting behavior should be considered a positive politeness or rapport building tactic in Thai interpersonal communication.

The three excerpts that follow are from a Thai cooking show where a celebrity guest (G) has been invited to do a demonstration. The flattering comments are made by the show’s host (I). The remarks in question all have to do with the guest’s appearance, which has nothing to do with her cooking skills. However, the guest seems to accept the comments without any problem.

EXAMPLE 11.1:

1. I: māj nāa-chyā wāa sūaj bēsp nīi.  
   NEG believable that pretty like this

2. G:  (laughs)

   FUT have time come-in kitchen also

1. I: It’s hard to believe that you’re this pretty.

2. G:  (laughs)

3. I: You also have time to cook?
In this case, G responds to the compliment with laughter, apparently accepting the comment, and certainly not denying it. Such a compliment in American English, however, is likely to make the addressee uncomfortable. In American society, we like to (say we) believe that what’s on the inside is what counts, beauty is only skin deep, etc.\(^4\) Pointed compliments regarding an addressee’s appearance — such as the one in the previous example — would under some circumstances constitute a negative face threat for Americans, as Brown and Levinson claim. It seems much too laudatory — or perhaps too laudatory of the wrong thing — and its recipient might suspect an ulterior motive on the part of the speaker. For a Thai, however, this type of appreciation of another’s physical beauty is completely acceptable. Apparently, one appropriate way to accept or acknowledge the compliment is to laugh (as G does in line 2).

The next example (which appeared previously as Example 6.4) involves the same two speakers later in the show. This time the compliment about G’s figure is thrown into a conversation whose topic is really about the fat content of pork.

**EXAMPLE 11.2:**

1. I: leēw hün dii jāaŋ njī ná. thīi-ciŋ mūu nī man kō ?ūan nā. and figure good like this PRT really pork this CLF PRT fattening PRT

2. G: (laughs) naan-naan thīi māj-pen-raj rōok khā. (laughs) long time does-not-matter PRT POL

3. I: māj-pen-raj chāj māj hā... it-doesn’t-matter right INT STA

1. I: And your figure is so good. Actually pork is fattening.

2. G: (laughs) Once in a while it doesn’t matter (it’s alright).

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\(^4\) Paradoxically, of course, we are obsessed with beautiful celebrities and supermodels.
3. I: It doesn’t matter, right?

The interviewer flatters the guest here in line 1: “And your figure is so good.” In line 2, G responds with laughter, but it is unclear whether the laughter is in response to the comment about her figure or to the comment about pork being fattening or both. Either way, what she says — “Once in a while it doesn’t matter” — is definitely a response to the observation that the host has made about the fat content of pork. For Americans the compliment might seem abnormal in this context; either out-of-place or too personal, or both. But to Thais it is acceptable and unremarkable.

The next compliment also seems irrelevant to the topic of the conversation. It is given indirectly in a statement about the type of food that G likes.

EXAMPLE 11.3:

1. I: sadeeq waa saaw sUUaj khon nii ch3op khem mAAk kwAA.
   show that young-woman pretty CLF this like salty much more

2. G: chAAj hAA.
   right PRT

1. I: That shows that this pretty girl likes salty (foods) more.

2. G: That’s right.

In this example, G does not respond directly to the compliment because the compliment is in a presupposition, which cannot be responded to directly. Her response is to the main proposition of I’s sentence, the fact that G likes her food to be salty.
Here again I think that Americans would be uncomfortable with flattery, even as indirect as it is in the preceding case. It is hard to imagine, for example, Oprah Winfrey and Michelle Pfeiffer in the same situation on the Oprah Winfrey show. Americans might consider such a comment condescending but also just strange. A similar compliment might pass better at the opening or conclusion of a show, as if, for example, Oprah (or whoever) were to say: “I’d like to welcome/thank the beautiful and talented Michelle Pfeiffer to our show/for joining us today.” So it is not that Americans never openly and/or publicly appreciate beauty (and talent) in others, it is just that there are probably particularized contexts for this appreciation.

In the next Thai example, repeated from Chapter 10 (10.4), a compliment(s) is used in such a context — the closing of a show. The complimenter is the same interviewer as in the previous examples, but the guest is a different person (M).

EXAMPLE 11.4:

1. I: kó khít wāa jaŋ-ŋaj -jaŋ-ŋaj nija? naj rajá? weelaa pii níi pii-nāa
   PRT think that whatever PRT in period time year this next-year

2. pii núun raw jaŋ khoŋ hën khun-máa pen naañbéeep thīi daon jyāŋ-jāŋ
   year there we still probably see Khun-Maa be model that walk elegant

3. mýan meewith júu bon catwalk tō-paj ná khá. phr5-wāa
   like cat PROG on-top catwalk from-now-on PRT POL because

4. khon kēŋ khon thīi duu-lee tūa-ʔen jaŋ ŋii nija? mii nōj máak. (...) 
   person clever person that care-for self like this PRT have few very (...)

5. ?ajú-ʔanaam k5 māj baw leew ná.
   age PRT NEG light already PRT

6. M: (laughs)
Nearly all of the interviewer’s comments are complimentary to her guest: her appeal is likely to endure, she walks elegantly, she’s clever, she’s stylish. In lines 5 and 7, though, I gives a sort of backhanded compliment, saying that M is not so young anymore; but she follows this up saying that M still has plenty of style. Even with the follow-up, though, such a comment would probably never occur in a similar context in the United States. In Thai, though, this is acceptable, and the interviewer’s utterances acknowledge and approve of M’s accomplishments.

The two examples that follow are from a talk show hosted by a different Thai female interviewer (I). The guests in the examples are a husband and wife celebrity couple (H & W). The flattery in this case seems as though it might be more familiar to an American audience than the previous examples.

EXAMPLE 11.5:

1. I: *thīy wāa pen khūu chiīwīt thīi nāa-rāk nā khā.* (...) 
   believe that be couple life that cute PRT POL (...)
2. kô khoơ-hâj mii lûuk thîi nâa-râk phlôo maa ?iik
   PRT ask-for have children that cute emerge come more

3. lâaj lâaj khon.
   many many CLF

4. H&W: (laugh)

1. I: I believe that you're a cute (life) pair, (you know),
2. so I hope you have many, many more cute children to come.
3. H&W: (laugh)

The compliment, which is in line 1, is the speaker's acknowledgment of a positive attribute of the addressees' (that they are a cute couple). This type of compliment might seem more normal to American listeners because it is not so personal and it comes at an 'appropriate' time — at the conclusion of the show. (On the other hand, there are probably those who would consider it too intrusive, and wishing children on people seems more Thai than American.) It does not seem unusual that a television show host would thank her guests by saying something nice to them and, in this case, wishing them well.

This section's final example concerns the same interlocutors as the previous one, also occurring at the show's conclusion.

EXAMPLE 11.6:

1. I: ...phrơ-wâa thâa-thaâŋ sanûk kâp kaan líâŋ lûuk.
   ...because appear fun with NOM raise child

2. W: sanûk. sanûk khâ.
   fun fun PRT

1. I: ...because it seems that you're having fun with raising (your) child.

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2. W: Yes. Yes (indeed).

This compliment is similar to the one in the preceding example because it demonstrates the speaker's appreciation of a positive attribute of the addressees', or rather, an appreciation of a positive aspect of their lives. The speaker is publicly acknowledging a favorable situation that the addressees have created for themselves — the fact that they are having fun raising their child. The target (one of the two recipients) of this compliment responds by showing her agreement with the speaker's assessment in line 2.

It is difficult, based on the small number of examples available here, to draw solid conclusions about how Thai speakers respond to compliments. It would seem, though, that the most common response is laughter. Another response, as in Examples 11.2 and 11.6 is to respond — either by agreement or (polite) contradiction — with some of the proposition being made by the person doing the complimenting. It does not seem as though thanking the speaker for a compliment is considered polite or necessary in these Thai interactions.

Another thing to note about these examples regards which person is doing the complimenting. In all of the instances here, the interviewers compliment their guests and not the other way around. In a talk show, the interviewer is the person with more power. She is responsible for the show running smoothly, and she directs the topic(s) of conversation. One might also speculate that, because the interviewers want the audience to be interested in their guests and their show, they compliment their guests in order to show how good and interesting these people are. At the same time, the act of complimenting or flattering still serves as a positive or camaraderie politeness technique among the interlocutors.
Other forms of Positive Politeness

Phillips, who studied villagers in Central Thailand, noted other forms of Thais' positive politeness. One form is to pick conversational topics that the speaker thinks the hearer will find interesting or entertaining (1970: 71). In this way, the speaker strives to make the hearer feel good. Another type of camaraderie politeness — and a form touched upon above — is to give interlocutors one's attention when the other person speaks. Phillips notes that Thais “provid[e] others with a pleasing audience — being silent, attentive, and eager when others are declaiming on a favorite subject” (ibid.). He notes further that “…many times the villagers are not listening, but they try to behave as if they were. The aim here is to make others feel that what they are saying is worthwhile” (ibid.). These are simply other ways in which Thais show interest in their addressee. In these ways of expressing positive politeness, Thais do not differ much from Americans.
Several authors and researchers have examined Thai culture and society (e.g. Phillips 1970; Bilmes 1972; Moore 1974; Klausner 1987). While their analyses are not explicitly linguistic, their examination of interactive techniques provides a way to understand Thai linguistic politeness. Linguistic politeness is closely related to non-linguistic interpersonal behavior among the Thais as among everyone else.

Avoidance of Conflict and Confrontation

In general, the authors come to similar conclusions on major points: the Thai preference for avoiding conflict; their proclivity for indirectness; as well as Thai concepts which affect behavior that have no direct analogue in English. Thus nearly all the works consulted discuss the Thai tendency toward avoidance of conflict and confrontation. Phillips (1970: 54) notes “...the main precept of social interaction... [to] ‘Avoid face-to-face conflict!’” Thais, like most people, do not like displays of anger or impatience, especially in public. This principle also extends to avoiding any comment or behavior — such as criticism — that might cause the hearer to behave poorly, i.e. those that cause the hearer to react to losing face.

The Thai avoidance of negative emotion may arise out of the Buddhist religion. Buddhism urges restraint from emotional extremes, commitment, and confrontation. Good Buddhists should “walk the middle line” (dyyn sāaj klaan), avoiding polar emotional extremes. Therefore, sensitive or embarrassing topics, which could push someone to become overly emotional, are shunned. Phillips (69-70) points out that often a sticky issue is avoided, even when discussing it...
would profit one (or both) parties. Even when it would be beneficial for one of
the sides to have the uncomfortable truth known, a Thai would be loath to
“trigger another’s discomfort” (ibid.).

Klausner (1987:84) observes that Thais, like everybody else, do experience
strong, negative emotions despite the outward appearance that they do not: “It
is often said by western writers that the Thai are a happy, carefree race who
don’t feel anger, annoyance, hatred and the like. ... such emotions are felt,
although it is deemed improper and unwise to accentuate and exaggerate such
anti-social emotions and bring them into direct and open expression.” But the
Thai tendency to avoid unhappy or emotionally charged situations keeps such
“undesirable” emotions hidden. Klausner’s claim that Thais experience the same
range of emotions as any one else seems obvious, but they have different rules
translating these “undesirable” emotions into surface expression.

Proclivity for Indirectness
While many of the works consulted note that Thais prefer an indirect approach
to problems or potentially sensitive situations (Insor 1963; Cooper 1982; Klausner
1987), anthropologists do not necessarily use “indirectness” as linguists
understand it. While linguists use that term to refer to the use of conversational
implicature (Grice 1975), anthropologists mean by it that Thais do not react
candidly to things that may annoy them. They may, for example, show their
feelings in other ways. Klausner (1987: 81) says that “[t]hough they avoid the
direct display of anti-social feelings, they have an infinite variety of ways of
revealing them in subtle, devious and indirect ways.” Thus this indirectness is in
keeping with the avoidance of conflict or confrontation discussed above.

While westerners say they value candor (which in practice is not usually
the case), the Thai do not place high value on this quality. And while westerners
might say they prefer to be told directly if they are doing something annoying or offensive (whether or not this is actually true in practice), for a Thai this is definitely too uncomfortable (44). Therefore, Thais must resort to letting the offender know indirectly that s/he has done something upsetting or irritating:

The individual who has been antagonized, insulted or hurt in some manner does not express his displeasure directly but turns it toward another object. This is done quite consciously and with the express purpose of having the other person know that one is annoyed, angry or disgusted with him. And yet, social order is preserved as the facade of amicable relations is maintained. (81)

In conclusion, Thais prefer to deal with problematic issues, if at all, through an indirect method rather than a direct, get-right-to-the-heart-of-the-problem approach.

**Thai Concepts for which there is no Direct Translation in English**

*kreeŋ caj*

*kreeŋ caj* is a prevalent concept in Thai culture and governs to a large degree Thai social behavior. Phillips (1970: 49) describes this concept, which has no direct translation into English, as “the feeling and attitude of self-effacement and humbleness, involving the desire to avoid intruding upon or embarrassing others.” For his part, Moore (1974: 181-2) describes it (similarly) as being related to the Chinese notion of saving face and involving “…the desire to be self-effacing, respectful, humble, and extremely considerate, as well as the wish to avoid embarrassing other people (and oneself), intruding upon them, or causing them to extend or trouble themselves.” Perhaps *kreeŋ caj* is best described as a Thai’s desire not to impose on others. Moore notes further that *kreeŋ caj* is also
concerned with "...a Thai's reluctance to answer direct questions in any but the vaguest possible terms" (ibid.).

This last part of Moore's explanation is related to an action that at least two of the authors have remarked on: the Thai preference for avoiding abrupt refusals. That is, Thais would rather, for example, accept an invitation to dinner, even when they have no intention of showing up, rather than give a direct refusal, or any refusal, for that matter. Americans also prefer to avoid abrupt refusals, but they would prefer to politely refuse the invitation — say by making excuses, telling a white lie, or otherwise wriggling out of it — rather than accept with no intention of attending the dinner. While an American is likely to be offended if a person accepts an invitation to dinner and does not come, a Thai host is not bewildered by the no-show and treats this behavior as normal. The Thai host understands that her no-show invitee felt kreerj caj and did not want to refuse the dinner for fear of hurting the host's feelings or offending her. Her expectations that the invitee will actually come to the dinner are not strong, and she is always ready not to be surprised. For Thais, form clearly supercedes the facts. Saving face for both herself and the would-be host during their face-to-face interaction is more important than the invitee's true intentions for the evening.

Bilmes (1972) studied village interactions in Northern Thailand, but his conclusions about their behavior apply, I feel, to Thais in general. He notes that:

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1 By this statement Moore is referring to Thais' reluctance to directly answer questions when their response is potentially face-threatening to the hearer, i.e. their hesitation to give a dispreferred second, such as refusing to do a favor.

2 This example may be particularly bewildering to Americans, for whom the acceptance of an invitation and subsequent no-show would violate positive politeness in a very strong way. It may help American readers to understand that, because of the structure of Thai households (i.e. that they generally consist of the extended family as well as domestic help), any extra food that is prepared — usually not personally by the host him or herself — will not go to waste. It has also been claimed by Pongsuwan Bilmes (personal communication) that Thai hosts' reactions in such a no-show situation is evidence of their easygoing nature.
It is a commonplace among Westerners who have lived in Thailand (and among Thais who have lived in the West) that when Thais give information in the form of commitments concerning future action, that information frequently turns out to be false. The villager is reluctant to refuse requests, orders, and invitations, particularly when issued by persons of higher status, but he compensates for his lack of freedom in the encounter by assuming the freedom to disregard the commitments which he has made. (70) (emphasis mine)

The villagers Bilmes observed felt *kreen caj* in their interactions with people of higher status and were therefore willing to agree to (what they thought) the superiors' wants rather than put both themselves and the superiors in an uncomfortable position of face-loss. Yet no one is surprised — neither villager nor superior — when individuals finish by disregarding the obligations they have agreed to.

Another example comes from Hollinger (1977). She describes a situation involving westerners teaching English at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. She does not cite it specifically as an example of *kreen caj*, yet it epitomizes the concept. She says:

The first month of teaching at Chulalongkorn is the trial period and I expect that it was designed rather expertly to force unadaptable Westerners to flee of their own volition, for the Thai are the politest people on earth and they loathe discharging anyone. (34)

The month trial period allows inept or unhappy instructors to save their own face by leaving without having to undergo the humiliation of being fired. Likewise, it permits their Thai superiors to avoid the discomfort of having to fire them, for a Thai would feel *kreen caj* toward the person being fired for putting them in a position of such extreme face loss. This example also serves as one of the Thai desire tendency to avoid conflict and confrontation.
Finally, an (extreme) example of *kreen caj* is the following: An uncle of mine became extremely ill and needed to be hospitalized. He chose to go to a hospital owned by a family friend. During his stay, a doctor (not the friend/owner) treated my uncle for tuberculosis with a drug that caused an extreme allergic reaction in him. While the family wanted to move my uncle to another hospital, they did not dare to do so because they felt *kreen caj* toward the family friend (who was not even the physician tending to my uncle). The family concluded that even after the mistreatment by the staff doctor, the embarrassment and threat to their friend’s face would be too great. Therefore my uncle remained where he was.

Thus *kreen caj* combines deference and consideration along with a reluctance to threaten the face of others.

*mâj pen raj*

Another prevalent Thai attitude which has been noted by anthropologists, authors, and tourists alike is *mâj pen raj* — 'it doesn’t matter' or 'it’s nothing' — basically ‘never mind’. In some cases (1963: 12) comments that: "Thais are masters of unconcern: *Mai pen rai* (‘Never mind’) is almost the first phrase a foreigner learns." Phillips (1970: 50) notes that the phrase is a "verbal device repeatedly used to shrug off and ignore all the little frustrations and difficulties that occur in daily life; the Thai government once tried, unsuccessfully, to forbid all government employees to use the phrase.” People who have experience dealing with Thais may are likely to have the impression that they are easygoing, happy,

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3 Cf. Japanese *shikata ga nai* “there’s nothing to be done”, Lahu *tëq-chî mà hê* “it’s nothing”, and Chinese *mèi guānxi*. 

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and carefree. Thais wish to maintain peace and moderation in relationships, seeking to overlook minor frustrations, and, as we saw above, not allow anger and passion to surface. Keeping *māj pen rai* in one's vocabulary and belief system facilitates this, at least on the surface.

An example from Hollinger (1977) illustrates this idea. An American living in Thailand, she began to adopt Thai attitudes. She says:

One evening as we were expecting ten people to dinner within the hour, Uthai announced pleasantly that both water and electricity had vanished. I was startled to hear my own voice murmur "*Mai pen rai.*** Uthai gave me a gentle smile and her large liquid eyes approved my answer. As I helped her look for old candles I brooded over the fact that I wasn't in hysterics. (11)

Hollinger was apparently surprised at herself for not being more concerned about the situation. She realized that she had adopted a more easygoing Thai attitude toward a problem that would have previously bothered her.

**chāaj (chāaj) and caj jen**

These concepts are related to the Buddhist ideology that encourages followers to 'walk the middle line' and not be pulled to emotional extremes. *chāaj (chāaj)* means "to be impassive, indifferent, unperturbed" (Haas 1964: 133) and implies a sort of sangfroid or indifference. *caj jen* — literally 'heart/mind/spirit cold' — means "to be calm, steady, cool-headed, imperturbable" (127). Both (closely related) qualities are desirable to Thais. Moore (1974: 183) notes that "[o]ne of the most important means the Thai use to maintain pleasantness in social relations and other important affairs of life is by maintaining a certain aloofness

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4 In fact, the title of Hollinger's book is *Mai pen rai means never mind.*
or noninvolvement." Smooth social relations are of paramount importance in Thai culture and society. Thus indifference and sangfroid are desirable attributes since, again, they allow Thais to avoid emotional extremes which may be publicly embarrassing to themselves or others.  

5 Lakoff (personal communication) notes that Americans have been developing similar proverbial expressions: "no sweat", "don't worry-be happy", "hakuna matata" ("no worries" — from The Lion King), etc. It is not clear, though, that these "worry-free philosophies" have taken a strong hold in American culture.
CHAPTER 13
A BRIEF WORD ON BODY LANGUAGE AND POLITENESS

Body language is quite obviously not a component of linguistic politeness, but in Thai society and culture it is very relevant to politeness in general. Therefore it bears at least brief mention in this dissertation. In the literature, body language is discussed by, among others, Segaller (1980), a British journalist, and the authors of a guidebook to Thai etiquette, Robert and Nanthapa Cooper (1982).

A salient non-linguistic feature of Thai communication is the ubiquitous wāaj, which is used predominantly in greetings, farewells, and thanks, but also in apologies or shows of contrition. The respectful gesture involves bringing one’s palms together in front of the chest and bowing one’s head and uttering a linguistic formula. The most common such formulas are sawàtdii khâ or sawàtdii khrâp — ‘hello’ or ‘goodbye’ (feminine and masculine speakers, respectively) — and kh̀òp khun khâ or kh̀òp khun khrâp (feminine and masculine speakers, respectively) — ‘thank you.’ The wāaj is also performed unaccompanied by words and is understood as a way of showing deference toward others. The noun and verb for this action is wāaj. It is always initiated by the person of lower status, which means that the person of lower social rank (which also includes inferior age) will wāaj first and the gesture will usually be reciprocated by the superior of the dyad. However, if the social distance of the interactants is great, the wāaj may not be reciprocated by the social superior at all. The more pronounced the difference in social rank, the lower the first person will bend her
head and even lower her body by bending her knees. (Men are more likely to lower themselves by bowing rather than bending their knees.)

In addressing high-ranking royalty or nobility, monks, or praying before the Buddha in a temple, Thais will approach on their knees to keep their bodies low, placing their palms against the floor and bringing them together again. This is called kraap, as discussed in Chapter 8, and is usually repeated three times to show the proper respect. And if, for example, the King is walking by, people will remain prostrate with their foreheads to the ground at least until he has passed.

The basic idea here is one of deference politeness: the lower one gets physically, the more respect is being shown. Lower conveys smaller, and smaller conveys humility. Humility is valued in Thai society, so it is important for social inferiors to be humble in the presence of their superiors. Obviously, a way for inferiors to show deference to their superiors' high stature is by making themselves small or low in their presence.

This belief extends beyond the wâaj in Thai interaction. For example inferiors seated in a room with a superior must always try to be lower than the superior. So if I am in a room with my grandmother and she is seated on the floor, I, her inferior, could not be seated in a chair. I would also have to sit on the floor, for I could not be "higher" than the head of a person who outranks me. Even if my grandmother were seated in a chair I might still choose to remain on the floor to show proper deference to her stature.

In a related situation, if I were with people who were seated on the floor and I wished to leave, I could not simply walk out. I would have to be careful

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not to cross over any person's body (or food), whether or not the person is my inferior or not. If my superiors were in the room, I would either hunch very low when leaving or remain on my knees as I exited. Although it would be nearly impossible for me to be physically lower than the seated individuals, by lowering myself as much as I can, I would be making an effort to show proper respect and humility.

So the higher one's rank, the higher one should be — or is entitled to be — physically. This phenomenon is true for other cultures as well. For example in Japan, the lower the bow, the more respect is shown. In fact, I have heard stories about Japanese pairs initiating increasingly lower bows in attempts to outdo each other in showing deference. The act of lowering or humbling oneself is typical of deferential behavior. Lakoff (personal communication) notes that the respect associated with greater physical height is likely to be the reason why monarchs wear crowns, which increase their physical stature.

Similarly, for Thais, "...the head [is] the most important and honoured part of the body; and, conversely, the foot is the most degraded" (Segaller 1980: 69). These beliefs are encoded linguistically, as illustrated by the Thai pronominal system. The best examples are found among first and second person pronouns for speaking to high-ranking individuals. The following two tables show some first and second person pronouns used when addressing high-ranking persons, such as royalty.

\footnote{Of course there are situations where this cannot be helped, such as the actual situation between my grandmother and myself, since I am over a foot taller than she is.}
Table II
First Person Pronouns for Speaking to High-Ranking Persons

What unites these very formal and deferential pronouns, of course, is that they all refer to the head or hair of the head. In fact, the less formal and more commonly used male first person pronoun, phôm, literally means ‘hair’.

The next table shows second person pronouns used when addressing royalty. While they are all extremely respectful, they are listed in order of increasing reverence.

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2 This superpolite pronoun should not be confused with the similar sounding krâpphôm, which is a very polite status particle. See Chapter 5.
In the case of this second set of pronouns, it is easy to notice that their common thread involves a literal translation involving the sole of the foot or the dust under the foot. This may seem strange, since it hardly seems respectful to address a person of high-status using words that refer to the feet. The explanation for this is that the respected person is so important and revered that the speaker is extremely humbled in his/her presence, to the degree that the speaker cannot even address the respected person directly. The speaker is so low as to only be able to address the hearer's foot, or in the case of the king himself, only the lowly dust under the sole of his royal foot. This is because the addressee him/herself is so metaphorically high (and probably physically as well, when and where this can be controlled) above the speaker.

So one might refer to a royal person as tāajfaaphrābāat — 'under the sole of (your) foot' — and to oneself as kramm — 'top of the head' (Kanittanan 1988: 355). The use of these pronouns together refers to a metaphorical situation in which the speaker places the highest part of herself below the lowest part of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECOND PERSON PRONOUN</th>
<th>LITERAL MEANING</th>
<th>USED WHEN ADDRESSING:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tāajtháaw</td>
<td>underneath foot</td>
<td>high ranking superiors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faaabāat</td>
<td>sole of foot</td>
<td>lower or mid ranking royalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faaphrābāat</td>
<td>sole of royal foot</td>
<td>high ranking royalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāajfaaphrābāat</td>
<td>underneath sole of royal foot</td>
<td>high ranking royalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāajfaala?oonphrábāat</td>
<td>dust underneath sole of royal foot</td>
<td>high ranking royalty, especially those close to the King</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāajfaala?oonthúliiphrábāat</td>
<td>dust under sole of royal foot</td>
<td>King</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table III
Second Person Pronouns Used for Speaking to High-Ranking Persons
respected person. The speaker is thus suggesting that his highest, most honored (body) part is underneath the lowest, most degraded part of the royal person.

A striking example of this concept translated into physical behavior is recounted by Matisoff (personal communication). He mentions a 1965 scene in the Chiang Mai Airport in which many Thais were gathered awaiting the King’s arrival. As the monarch walked by, some of the prostrate women put their handkerchiefs in his path. After the King passed, having stepped on the handkerchiefs, the women placed the trampled handkerchiefs on their heads.

Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness, like the other purportedly universal politeness theories, extends beyond linguistic behavior to encompass physical comportment as well. The Thai custom of humbling oneself physically in the presence of social superiors would, in this framework, be classified as negative politeness. The theory’s proponents would claim that when social inferiors make themselves physically smaller they are respecting social superiors’ right to freedom from imposition. This is certainly one effect of this behavior on others, but it is perhaps not the chief motivation for it. Thai culture holds that properly behaved, socially well-adjusted individuals know their relative position in this hierarchical society and further that they recognize situations in which they should make this knowledge explicit. Thai spoken and body language is structured to allow and even require speakers (and actors) to do this. By doing so, a society member displays their social awareness and shows how they fit into the group. This is more important in Thai society, where the group, rather than the individual’s claim to privacy or autonomy, comes first and foremost.

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The influential theory of H.P. Grice (1975) serves as a point of departure for all three of the purportedly universal theories of politeness. Since the current study considers the applicability of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness as a whole to the Thai data, it is important to consider Grice’s theory of Conversational Logic as it applies (or not) to the Thai data as well. This section discusses the usefulness of Grice’s theory for a description of Thai conversation.

According to Lakoff (1990), clarity in conversation results from strict adherence to the maxims. On the other hand, certain linguistic forms generate implicatures for the listener, which may result from the speaker’s attempts to be polite and/or build rapport (although not exclusively so). She states:

There are in ordinary conversation higher obligations than clarity. One of our culture’s basic beliefs is that good communication consists in making oneself clear and getting to the point. One should be honest, direct, and straight from the shoulder. But no one lives by that precept alone and survives. In fact, most of us actually live by a more complex precept: try to be honest and direct and make your point clearly; but when doing so would infringe on manners or taste, or be actually or potentially hurtful to one or both participants, mitigate your utterance — make it harder to understand in order to make it gentler and kinder. (30)

Lakoff’s Politeness Strategies account for linguistic behavior that deviates from Grice’s maxims of conversation.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 55) make the point that politeness can be explained as “divergences from some highly rational maximally efficient mode of communication (as, for example, outlined by Grice 1967, 1975).” They later go on to say that:
The whole thrust of this paper is that one powerful and pervasive motive for not talking Maxim-wise is the desire to give some attention to face... Politeness is then a major source of deviation from such rational efficiency, and is communicated precisely by that deviation. (95)

Brown and Levinson's theory is thus based on the notion that seeming deviations from Grice's Cooperative Principle are committed for face-saving purposes, and politeness is motivated by the desire of rational society members to preserve face.

*Neutrality of Propositions*

Both of the above theories claim that politeness can explain deflections from conversations that abide by the maxims, and it seems to be taken more or less for granted by their authors that the theory of Grice is a powerful enough tool to explain what is meant by clear and efficient conversation. However, Grice has been criticized for being too culture-specific. While the theory may work nicely for English, and even for other western languages, it does not always work quite as well for some other languages. Wierzbicka (1991:103) states that: "European culture has traditionally placed a great premium not only on 'knowing' but also on saying what one knows, that is, what is knowable (or true). Other cultures may value knowledge without valuing verbal articulation of knowledge."

Keenan (1976), for example, has demonstrated that this last claim is true for the Malagasy. In the Malagasy language, the maxim of Quantity is attenuated, and
normal conversational expectations of and by the Malagasy do not include the notion that speakers will be maximally informative.¹

Other works have thrown into question the universal applicability of Grice’s theory: those of Matsumoto (1989) and Ide (1999) on Japanese. Matsumoto observes that Grice’s theory assumes that there exist neutral propositions. That is, "... Grice’s analysis is based solely on the propositional content or on what is said and unsaid" (208). In this framework, the social-psychological attitudes of the speaker — communicated through the use of politeness expressions — would corrupt the neutrality of the utterance, creating implicature(s).

However, the structure of the Japanese language requires that the social-psychological attitudes of the speaker be expressed. According to Matsumoto, no utterance in this language can be neutral. She states that for Japanese, “no utterance can be neutral with respect to the social context. A Japanese speaker cannot avoid conveying the setting and the relationship among the addressee, the third person(s) or object(s)…” (ibid.). So what would be considered implicature for English speakers are considered obligatory grammatical elements in Japanese speech. Japanese speakers use and expect others to use linguistic forms that encode social context and relationships in all of their utterances.

Ide (1999) points out that what it means to speak in the East and the West is fundamentally different. In Western conversation, “the heart of the matter” should be arrived at, at least eventually. In contrast, the Eastern way reflects a

¹ This of course raises another problem that researchers have noted in regard to Grice’s theory, i.e. how to calculate seemingly subjective qualities in conversation, such as how much
belief that the important thing cannot be spoken. This philosophy contrasts sharply with Grice's maxims and Cooperative Principle.

The Thai language has many characteristics that are similar to elements of the Japanese language, such as honorifics and the need to lexically encode the social context of utterances. Thai falls between English and Japanese on a Gricean continuum. With English on the right of the continuum as a language for which the Cooperative Principle and its attendant Maxims applied well, and Japanese on the left of this continuum as a language for which these notions were not relevant, then Thai would be located somewhere in between the two.

![Gricean Continuum](image)

**Fig. 1.** Gricean Continuum

In Matsumoto (1989: 210-212), the author uses sentences with the verb 'to eat' to illustrate her point that even verb choice in Japanese requires attention to social context. An example from Thai using the same verb will show the ways in which Thai is similar to Japanese and distinct from it. The following Thai sentences all mean "He (or she) is going to eat at a restaurant."

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1. It should be noted that this particular Thai verb is unique in having formal, informal, and rude variants. However, there are many Thai nouns with polite and informal variants, e.g. *thāaw* (pol.) and *tiin* (informal) for 'feet'.

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EXAMPLE 14.1:  

a. kháw cā? paj kin thīi ráan-ʔahāan.
   CLF FUT go eat at restaurant

b. kháw cā? paj thaan thīi ráan-ʔahāan.
   CLF FUT go eat at restaurant

c. kháw/thān cā? paj ráprathaán thīi ráan-ʔahāan.
   CLF/deferential CLF FUT go eat at restaurant

d. kháw cā? paj dēek thīi ráan-ʔahāan.
   CLF FUT go eat at restaurant

S/he is going to eat at a restaurant.

The two forms which are most often heard in Thai conversation are those that appear in (a) and (b).  *thaan* is a more formal form of the verb, while *kin* is the more casual one.  (c) is the most formal of the four options.  (While the classifier *kháw* can be used in partnership with this verb, the formal and deferential *thān* is more appropriate.)  *dēek*, the verb used in (d), is an extremely rude and vulgar form and is only included here for the sake of completeness.  While it used to be the case that *thaan* was more commonly used, *kin* is currently used in more and more social situations.  Because of this, it makes sense to discuss the situations in which *thaan* might be used.

*Thaan* is now only used in formal situations or when speaking to superiors, for instance in inviting one’s boss (one’s social superior) to eat, or with intimates in a formal situation.  For example, a person attending a formal dinner might use *thaan* to her cousin (an intimate with whom she would usually use *kin*), as a

3 This example excludes Thai royal language, which would have its own verb for eat (*sawāji*).
result of being in the formal setting. Her verb choice would be dictated by the social situation rather than by her relationship with the addressee. *thaan* might also be used with an intimate who is also a social superior, for instance, one’s grandmother (who is superior by virtue of her age, at the very least). But a Thai speaker could use either word in this case, provided the context was not a formal one (in which case only *thaan* could be used).

The third verb for 'eat' in (d) is, as noted earlier, crude and vulgar. Some Thai speakers would consider it a "lower class" word. This verb variant would only be used between very close intimates, perhaps if they were joking around with each other, and certainly in the most casual of situations. It is useful to mention it here to illustrate the point that lexical choice in Thai can give information, i.e. regarding the social relationship between interlocutors and their setting, beyond that contained in the sentential proposition itself.

Matsumoto claims that in Japanese there are never situations in which a neutral statement can be made. Social indexing is necessary in all Japanese utterances, and failing to index accurately has negative repercussions for the speaker (and possibly the hearer as well). In Thai the situation is less rigid. There are contexts in which a speaker must choose the more formal variant of 'eat', but usually, *kin* is a "safe" choice. So Thai usage falls somewhere between Japanese and English. Thai is like Japanese in that there are situations in which the relationship of the speaker to the hearer and the setting must be spelled out explicitly through lexical choice. But Thai does not distinguish so precisely

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4 Pongsuwan Bilmes (personal communication).

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between social situations. Thai, like English, has in many situations the possibility of expressing an utterance “neutrally”.

The following example illustrates this point. It contrasts two permissible responses to the question “What are you doing?” One (14.2b) contains the polite feminine discourse particle *khâ* and the other (14.2a) does not. The particle does not change the meaning of the utterance, only its register.

**EXAMPLE 14.2:**

a. sák phâa
   wash fabric
   Washing the clothes.

b. sák phâa khâ
   wash fabric POL
   Washing the clothes (sir, ma’am).

The second response is made more polite by the addition of *khâ*. As in English, then, in Thai politeness expressions can be added to neutral propositions. (English equivalents of *khâ*, as the gloss of (b) suggests, are honorific titles.)

But Thai differs from English in one important way. The translation of (a) option would suffice in a greater number of English language exchanges.\(^5\) However, option (a) is not appropriate in as many contexts in Thai as its English translation is in American culture. For instance, (a) can always be used speaking with intimates or inferiors in Thai. But it cannot be used when speaking with

\(^5\) Naturally exceptions to every rule can be found. An enlisted man in the military speaking to his commanding officer, for example, could not dispense with the obligatory “sir” at the end of his
social superiors, except of course in some marked situations, such as a longstanding employer-domestic relationship where there is a great difference in social rank but some intimacy as a result of the long term acquaintance. Otherwise, the absence of the polite discourse particle when speaking with social superiors would be noticed. The repercussions of its being absent would be an offense to the hearer's face and a probable loss of face for the speaker as well. An implicature of the sort Matsumoto terms "interactional" (214) results: the propositional content of the utterance is the same, but the speaker's omission of the polite particle might be taken as a conscious decision to attack "conventional [social] relationship[s]" (ibid.). So while it is not the case that khâ is either forbidden or compulsory (there is a gray area), its absence would be negatively remarked upon in a greater number of situations than for its English equivalent(s).

Thais, in fact, go to great lengths to express politeness, as was shown in Chapter 8, Example 8.8, in which the speaker uses complex and drawn out expressions to thank his respected guest. From an English speaker's point of view, the speaker flouts Manner by showing his gratitude in what might be regarded as a linguistically prolix way. Prolixity on the part of the speaker implies honor to the hearer, a form of symbolic politeness. But Thai interlocutors expect this in such situations, i.e. situations in which respected persons are being addressed. Another example of very complex expressions being used is Thai Royal Language, in which a special vocabulary — more complex than standard Thai — is employed when talking to or about members of the Thai royal family.
In fact, Thai Royal Language is so complex that even members of the Royal Family find it difficult to use (Matisoff, personal communication).

In English, there are ways to express social factors that go beyond neutral propositions, and there are also situations in which such expressions would be expected. However, as Matsumoto (215) points out, “the degree to which specific forms on a particular occasion are obligatory is more pronounced in Japanese than in English.” While the obligation to employ such honorific forms is not as pronounced in Thai as it is in Japanese, it appears that it is more pronounced for Thai than for English.

**The Maxim of Quality**

Another way in which Gricean Conversational Logic does not function as well for Thai conversational phenomena involves the Maxim of Quality. Grice holds that conversational participants will not usually say things they believe to be false, so that interlocutors can expect that the information speakers provide in a conversational exchange is true. But this expectation of truth may be a western phenomenon. Wierzbicka (1991:103) claims that western society has “elevated the truth (first the private, personal ‘truth’, and then the public, impersonal truth) to a particularly high place among generally accepted ideals; and ‘truth’ can be seen as opposed to both ‘lying’ and ‘concealment’…” It is her claim that there are different cultural attitudes to truth.

The Thai approach to “truth” in conversation bolsters Wierzbicka’s position and also shows that Quality is not assumed in Thai conversation. An

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when a subordinate addresses a superior.
example was given earlier in Chapter 12 wherein it was explained that Thais would rather accept an invitation to a dinner they had no intention of attending than cause the person inviting them to lose face at the time the invitation is made. Saving face is more important in such a situation than telling the truth. So the Cooperative Principle is attenuated when it comes to avoiding the utterance of unpleasant things.

This, of course, does not mean to suggest that Americans enjoy uttering unpleasant things in the name of truth. On the contrary, Americans prefer to find more complex ways to express ideas that may be distasteful to their interlocutors, as illustrated by the passage from Lakoff (1990: 30) cited earlier in this chapter. And in a situation like the one just described, a "little white lie" may be acceptable to avoid hurting the host's feelings. Yet certainly acceptance of the invitation when the speaker has no intention of showing up at the dinner would be unacceptable to Americans, whereas such an action in Thai would be acceptable. So while a Thai might say "I'll be there" without intending to at all, an American would be more likely to say "I can't be there because (of some little white lie I'm making up)." In the terminology of conversational analysts, then, Thais try harder to avoid dispreferred seconds than do Americans, but neither are opposed to saving face via untruths. Americans generally say they prefer to avoid the utterance of unpleasant things and uphold the Maxim of Quality at the same time when possible (although perhaps not in those words), whereas Thais prefer to avoid the utterance of unpleasant things but do not have the same commitment to this Maxim in conversation.

Wongkhomthong (1985) investigates formulaic greetings in Japanese and Thai. She finds that Grice's maxims apply in some Thai conversational situations
but that "... Grice’s maxims are not applicable when a question is taken as a
greeting because the answer will not be based on fact or truth" (182). She
therefore concludes that some Thai conversations do not fit Grice’s model.

Likewise, when it comes to saying pleasant things, such as complimenting
or flattering someone else, the Cooperative Principle might again be attenuated
by a Thai speaker. Wolfson (1981) discusses the fact that compliments vary
cross-culturally in form, function, frequency, and distribution. What may be
complimentary in one culture may not be considered so in another. As noted in
Chapter 11, Thais love flattery and regard it as a rapport building type of
politeness. Exaggeration is the norm in this area, so while Thais do not
necessarily expect to be lied to, neither do they expect wholehearted honesty
when it comes to compliments and flattery. On the other hand, while many an
American has uttered a compliment that she or he did not fully believe,
Americans (say they) value very highly the telling of the truth. Meanwhile,
Thais openly acknowledge that they place a higher premium on saying pleasant
things that make the hearer feel good and avoiding unpleasant things in
conversation.

6 It would seem that this is true for English conversation as well.

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CHAPTER 15
THAI FACE AND GROUP HARMONY

This chapter examines instances of Thai polite behavior taken from works by anthropologists. Various scenarios have been selected to illustrate the importance of the concept of face and its role in social interaction. It will be shown that Thais' attention to face in these interactions is directed first and foremost toward maintaining harmony among members of their social group, rather than, as Brown and Levinson (1987) predict, addressees' right to freedom from imposition and their desire to be unimpeded in their actions. Social unity, to a much greater degree than individual rights or autonomy, is of paramount importance to Thais, and individuals strive to conduct themselves in ways that are in harmony with their community's expectations. It is important for Thais to show that they fit into the group, for each person desires its respect and acceptance. Each individual's need/want to be included is more important than their need/want to be left alone.

The importance of the social group, in these cases the village, cannot be underestimated. Bilmes (1976: 46-47) states that: "The villager often thinks of himself in relation to the village or to the other villagers as a group. Certain individual decisions are influenced by the desire to conform, so that one will not be criticized by 'the villagers' as being a source of dissention." Individuals' actions are thus moderated by the opinion(s) of others in their social collective. Failing to conform to the group's expectations invites criticism and disrupts the social order. This is loathsome to the Thai. Therefore, each person does their best to behave in ways that preserve social harmony.
In previous chapters, the different ways Thais honor and recognize hierarchy and each others' roles have been discussed (primarily Chapters 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, and 13). Thai society is hierarchical, and each person has a role within that hierarchy. When individuals recognize their role and the roles of others, group harmony is preserved. In addition, peace is also maintained by avoiding putting oneself and/or others in awkward or embarrassing situations, as discussed in Chapter 12. Knowing one's place (and showing it) and eschewing anything that would make social interaction uncomfortable results in social accord.

It is also the case that face is an important concept in Thai culture, to a much greater degree than in western culture in general. And, in Brown and Levinsonian terms, it can be threatened. Anything that promises to disrupt group harmony can be considered damaging to Thai face. For instance, disregarding the hierarchy and one's role within it, denying the interdependence of group members, and causing the embarrassment of one or more group members are all actions that threaten Thai face. The examples discussed in this chapter are ones in which face is maintained or saved in the interest of preserving the peace.

Before discussing them, though, it is necessary to consider the nature of these examples. They come from the anthropological works of Bilmes (1975; 1992) and Phillips (1970). Bilmes studied a northern Thai village (San Tong) near Chiang Mai and Phillips did his research in a central Thai village (Bang Chan) not far from Bangkok. Their data involve village interactions.

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1 A comparison of the relative importance of this concept in western vs. Thai culture will be undertaken in the following chapter.
An objection might be raised that analyses based on village data are not applicable to this study. My response to this is twofold. First off, while the data thus far presented have involved the speech of city-dwellers, one of the primary aims of the study is to characterize politeness (chiefly linguistic) as expressed by Thais in general. Therefore, the behavior of a Thai villager is just as interesting here as the behavior of a Thai urbanite. Furthermore, and more importantly, because the two — to a very high degree — share the same culture broadly speaking, the behavior of one should be intelligible to the other. It is my position that there is enough shared understanding between Thai villagers and other Thais that allows them to achieve mutual intelligibility despite their varying lifestyles.² To a high degree, villagers and urbanites have similar expectations as to how one should behave. If this were not so, the two would not be able to communicate. Phillips (1970:46) observes that:

... although the enumerated characteristics [discussed in his work] may not be attributed to all Siamese, they are part of the Thai system of interactive expectations; the personality traits of an upper-class urbanite and a landless Northeastern peasant obviously differ in many respects, as do those of a Bang Chan man and a Bang Chan woman as well as those of every individual Thai. All these people, however, share certain broadly defined expectations about how each is most likely to behave, at least toward one another; were it otherwise, they could not interact.

Phillips makes the valuable (and obvious) point here that all individuals, whether peasant or elite, male or female, differ. Yet at a certain more general

² It should be noted that there is a Northern Thai dialect which might be unintelligible to speakers of Standard Thai, and Bilmes' villagers are speakers of this dialect. However, Standard Thai is the language taught in schools across Thailand. So while Bangkok urbanites might not understand these villagers, most if not all of the villagers understand Standard Thai.
level all of these people have shared understandings and behavioral expectations that unite them as members of the same society.

(Before continuing, a word on generalizations: In a study like this one it is difficult to avoid discussions that do not involve some generalizing of the facts, e.g. Thais favor social harmony. Certainly, despite its prevalence, there must exist Thais who feel little or no loyalty to this notion. But in general, Thais as a group cling to the idea. It would be impossible — perhaps even undesirable — to take into account the tendencies and behavior of each individual society member.

There are those who dislike this sort of "lumping" together of Thais and/or Asians into one group and Americans and/or Westerners into another. Westerners in particular seem to object to this practice. Nevertheless, I persist in it here and especially in the following chapter because at very broad levels, there are social characteristics, customs, and institutions that are common to each of the groups discussed, or at least to a large percentage of the people who form those groups. Were it not so, individuals would not be able to identify with the group to which they belong, e.g. westerners, Americans, Californians, etc. No offense is intended to any group or individual.)

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3 I gave a conference paper in which it was necessary to distinguish between Asians (Japanese, Chinese, and Thai in particular) on the one hand and Americans and other westerners on the other. Following the presentation, several people of western origin objected to my having clumped westerners together in one group, insisting that Danes feel differently about this or the English aren't like everyone else regarding that. One of the points I was making was that westerners are more focused on individualism and less on conforming with the group, and the fact that only westerners made these objections, even though there were at least as many Asians in the room, seemed to prove my point.
EXAMPLE 14.1

This scenario is taken from Bilmes (1975). He describes a meeting at a village school to discuss, among other things, the appointment of a new school committee. School committees in this village are formed of villagers chosen by the headman and led by the headman and the head teacher. The committee in question was formed of people chosen by (and including) the old headman, and the new headman wanted to make some changes. It is suggested that one of the motivations for this might be the fact that the present headman had two recent acrimonious disputes with the ex-headman. The recently appointed head teacher, who did not live in the village, led the meeting. The following excerpt begins with the head teacher speaking:

'The second thing I want to talk about is this: The present school committee was set up a long time ago. Some of the members have gotten old. We should sympathize with them ... So I would like to ask that capable young persons serve on the committee, replacing the old persons...'

At this point, the ex-headman, an elderly member of the old committee said: 'As for me, I would like to retire, because I have bad eyes and ears.' Luang, another even older member, said: 'I would also like to retire. I am old already.' (65)

Pursuant to these remarks, the head teacher suggests that, because he is old, Luang should be allowed to retire. As for the ex-headman, though, the head teacher and other people object to his leaving. At several other points, the ex-headman says that he would like to retire, giving his age and failing eyesight and hearing as reasons. Meanwhile, the others persist in asking him to stay on. In fact, everyone at the meeting except the present headman encourages the former headman to stay on the committee despite the latter's requests to be relieved of his duties. Other subjects are then addressed at the meeting, and it concludes
with no clear outcome regarding whether the former headman is on or off the committee.⁴

These data give several instances of Thais' attention to face. To begin with, the head teacher introduces the subject of retiring some committee members by saying that they are old. This, I believe, is done to save face for (at least one of) the members who are being "asked" to leave. To be old in Thailand is not negative; on the contrary, the old are honored and treated with more respect in general. So to suggest that one should be relieved of their duties because they are old is not insulting (although the same suggestion in American culture would be). Furthermore, the head teacher says "we should sympathize with them" (because of their age), suggesting that a favor would be done them rather than an insult committed unto them. The proposal avoids putting the older committee members in a position which would result in a loss of face. On the other hand, to suggest that a person retire because someone does not like them or because they are incompetent would be threatening to their face in Thai culture (and probably in American culture as well). Thais are reluctant to be the source of others' discomfort, so using age as a scapegoat in this situation is quite likely a face-saving measure, at least as far as one of the members is concerned.

Both the ex-headman and Luang then express their desire to relinquish their duties on the committee, citing reasons of poor hearing and eyesight, and old age, respectively. Bilmes (66) notes that the ex-headman's claim of wanting to retire is "quite routine". He states:

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¹ It is the ambiguous outcome of this and other Thai interactions that is the subject of Bilmes' article.
It is common for villagers to show reluctance to accept positions of public responsibility and for office-holders occasionally to request to retire. If there is the barest hint that it might be desirable for an office-holder to relinquish his position, he almost inevitably expresses a desire to be relieved of his official duties.

By agreeing with the head teacher's politely phrased suggestion, Luang and the ex-headman are saving face for all involved. The two men's ready agreement with the suggestion that older members retire means that no one will have to make the uncomfortable proposal that these individuals in particular step down.

As noted in Chapter 12, Thais go to great lengths to avoid awkward or uncomfortable situations. Being the cause of an embarrassing or uncomfortable situation would cause one to lose face, and, depending on the circumstances, cause others to lose face too.

The two men also give the committee an "out" by pointing to issues of failing health (bad eyes and ears) and old age as reasons why they should be allowed to retire. They, like the head teacher, may be offering these issues as scapegoats. It is much less face threatening to cite physical frailty, which is out of anyone's control, than to imply or admit to incompetence or some other reason that might cause loss of face. This would make it much easier for the villagers to remove the ex-headman and Luang from the committee, as they could all simply agree that retirement was the best thing for the men healthwise.

Finally, objections by those present to the ex-headman's retiring are more than likely statements geared toward saving the ex-headman's face. Bilmes (66) notes that: "The participants to whom I spoke claimed to interpret these exchanges [in which others at the meeting object to the ex-headman's retirement]
at face value, but a villager who observed the meeting without participating in it said, ‘They were saving his face; in their hearts they wanted him to leave.’ This latter interpretation is, I suspect, correct; at the very least, it is plausible.” By urging him to stay on, the other committee members were trying to save the ex-headman’s face.

In this scenario, the interactants are all trying to maintain each other’s face. The head teacher attempts to prevent loss of face to committee members who may retire by suggesting that it will be easier for those older members to do so instead of saying, for example, that the present headman wants the former headman off the committee. Luang and the ex-headman save face for themselves and others present by readily agreeing to remove themselves from the school committee. And many of the meeting’s other attendees try to save face for the ex-headman by objecting to his leaving the committee. Loss of face to the ex-headman would be uncomfortable for everyone involved in the meeting, as one person’s discomfort would make all of them uneasy. What Bilmes refers to as “socially sanctioned dishonesty” (ibid.) is tolerated — indeed welcomed and expected — in the name of group harmony.

The face-saving moves in this scenario are examples of deference politeness, what Brown and Levinson (1987) would call negative politeness. But the reasons for negative politeness are not due to a desire to support a person’s individualism or their right to be left alone, as Brown and Levinson’s (negative) face model would suggest. The people involved in this interaction are negatively polite because they are trying to preserve the harmony of the group. It is more important to maintain the peace in interaction and be a good member of the
group than to respect rights to autonomy or, apparently, conclude the meeting with a clear outcome.\(^5\)

EXAMPLE 14.2

In the previous example, we saw that a Thai office-holder is apt to offer to step down “[i]f there is the barest hint that it might be desirable for [him] to relinquish his position” (Bilmes 1975: 66). Elsewhere, Phillips (1970: 71) makes an observation on a similar issue. He states:

Villagers explain ... that the reason there is never any more than one candidate for the post of hamlet or commune headman, on the rare occasions when such elections are held, is to avoid embarrassing the individuals involved. The eventual headman would be embarrassed because the presence of a competitor would suggest doubt about his competence; the candidate who lost would be embarrassed by the very fact that he lost. To avoid hurt feelings, only one candidate is presented, voted on, and elected.

Phillips says individuals behave in the manner described “to avoid hurt feelings,” but this is just another way to talk about face preservation. In this case, the very presence of a competitor would cause a loss of face for the candidate because of the implication that he might not be the right person for the job. The loser would experience a loss of face, of course, because he would be proven to be the wrong person for the job in the eyes of most of the voters. Besides this, if there is only one candidate to vote for, everyone can easily agree on him, and no one — neither voters nor candidates — are put in an uncomfortable position.

\(^5\) The reader may be curious to know the ultimate result of the meeting: was the former headman on or off the committee? Five villagers who attended the meeting were interviewed afterwards. Three said the ex-headman was on the committee, two said he was off. And, Bilmes (1975: 72) adds, “[a]ll spoke without qualification, as if they knew for certain.” To the best of his
This example shows that even "the barest hint" that any one is dissatisfied with a candidate or office-holder is enough to make that person uncomfortable and probably cause them to step down from their position. If the candidate abandons the race or the office-holder leaves his duties, then he no longer needs to be concerned that others are dissatisfied. In addition, he himself need not worry about being the cause of others' unhappiness. From a Thai viewpoint, it is better to relinquish leadership than to be a source of unease or dissatisfaction. The welfare of the group is more important than any one member's aspirations.

One explanation for this behavior is that the candidate or office-holder is protecting his positive face. He wants to enjoy a good reputation and be liked, so he will make every attempt not to tarnish his good image, or perhaps to salvage it before too much harm is done. Another plausible explanation for this type of behavior is that the candidate or office-holder is being negatively polite in the sense that he is being deferential vis-à-vis the rest of the group. He hesitates to impose his imperfect leadership on those who may not desire it. In this way, he is taking steps to preserve social unity.

EXAMPLE 14.3
Thais will go to great lengths to avoid uncomfortable interactions, and they hesitate to cause offense to others (cf. the discussion of the concept kreey caj in Chapter 12). Bilmes (1992) and Phillips (1970) have both documented instances of Thais' behavior in potentially uncomfortable situations and how far they will go to avoid awkwardness.

recolletion, Bilmes (personal communication) says the former headman remained on the
Phillips (1970: 75) writes that "...a villager who wants to quit working for another will usually preface his request with some goggling, although equally often he will just leave — saying absolutely nothing — and will later send a middleman to collect his wages and make the severance official. The latter alternative is prompted by the desire to avoid all awkwardness." The presumed awkwardness in the first place would result from the employee not wanting to upset, disappoint, or embarrass the employer or him/herself by quitting the job. This conclusion is based on the assumption that telling an employer that one does not want to work for them any more threatens their face. Not facing the employer to recuperate wages later also allows both parties to avoid any other discomfort that might result from the worker having left the job in the first place. Face is presumably saved for both parties if the employee simply fails to show up and then sends a middleman because awkward confrontations between the two parties have been avoided, and harmony, at least to all outward appearances, has been maintained. If anything, a potential face-to-face conflict and/or interactional unease have been sidestepped. This is no small matter for Thais, as the most important aspect of communication is the psycho-emotional comfort of the participants while the communicating is taking place.

A similar example is found in Bilmes (1992). The author describes the usual arrangements between sharecroppers and landowners in Northern Thailand. Sharecroppers work the land, and sometimes landlords will help with the expense of farming (e.g. fertilizer, etc.). However, it is often the case that the sharecropper will not know what portion of the costs the landowner will cover
— or even how the crop will be divided between them — until after the harvest. Bilmes (578) notes that "... contracts, even verbal ones are awkward and not a preferred method for handling their affairs." The sharecropper will thus frequently wait until the day the rice is actually divided to ask the owner for a contribution to farming expenses; that is, he will wait until the last possible day that such an issue can be negotiated. According to Bilmes (ibid.), requesting that the landowner share in the expenses "... is, apparently, awkward to do. In one case [he] witnessed, the tenant faced away from the owner and asked as the owner walked in the opposite direction." In this case, the sharecropper may have been reluctant to make the request because doing so would cause a loss of face to himself and/or the owner. Making such a request puts him in an inferior position vis-à-vis the landowner. Additionally, the sharecropper may have been concerned about offending the owner’s face by causing him to feel uncomfortable or making him angry.

In these cases it looks as though the employee and the sharecropper respectively are trying to cater to the negative face of the employer and the landowner. It is also the case, though, that each person is trying to safeguard his own face. While it is probably true that neither the employee nor the sharecropper want to anger their addressee, their motivation is more likely less due to a fear of disrespecting that person’s claim to territory and their rights to be left alone and more due to a desire to preserve group harmony. More than anything I suspect the "speakers" hesitate to instigate or be a part of an ugly, uncomfortable exchange. Avoiding uncomfortable interactions — whether they be so for the speaker, the hearer, or both — at almost any cost is of paramount
importance. This example, like the previous one, illustrates how vital the preservation of social harmony is in this society.

EXAMPLE 14.4

One of the features of Thailand's society is the interdependence of its members. There is a high degree of dependence, and juniors are likely to ask elders (or those who are otherwise socially superior) for help and advice. Relying on superiors in this way shows respect, since asking for help and advice is evidence of one's confidence and trust in the superiors while it simultaneously acknowledges that person's greater experience and wisdom. It also reinforces the notion of the society as a group of intertwined individuals who rely on and are responsible for one another. Speaking of Japanese society, Matsumoto (1988: 410) notes that "... deferent impositions can enhance the good self-image (that is, the 'face') of the addressee." The same is true in Thai society. Imposing on elders or superiors by asking for help and advice is expected and welcome because it shows dependence and a respect for the hierarchy.

In all areas of social life, the preferred method for managing interpersonal relations favors dependency. Bilmes (578) observes that:

... contracts, even verbal ones are awkward and not a preferred method for handling [villagers'] affairs. Perhaps calling for agreement in advance indicates a lack of trust. Instead, they put great emphasis on notions of sympathy, empathy, kindness and consideration. ... Claims are ideally handled through mutual goodwill, rather than by invoking individual rights. Thus, the preference is to not make claims at all — because claims imply rights — but instead to make requests, taking a dependent stance.
In a society where the individual is the primary unit, claims and rights are important to group members, and contracts are used to ensure them. Such a society values autonomy and choice, and individual rights preserve autonomy and choice. Interdependence plays a much smaller role in such a society.

Thai culture de-emphasizes individualism, preferring to stress conformity with the group and interdependence among group members. Each member wants to fit in, and acknowledging interdependence is encouraged. Making requests of each other rather than claims promotes an interdependent social framework because it implies that members must rely on one another for the group to continue to thrive. The idea that group members must depend on each other, that juniors must rely on seniors, fosters its cohesion as a social unit.

In the same article, Bilmes (598) also notes that “Thais in the United States sometimes accept jobs without ascertaining how much they will be paid. They say that they are uncomfortable asking questions about such matters.” Negotiating a salary is another form of contract negotiation, and Bilmes’ explanation above is valid here too. To ask about pay, in a Thai’s view, may be considered offensive because “it indicates lack of confidence in the other’s fairness” (578) and potential distrust of the other. This, of course, would be face-threatening. Distrust among group members is fatal to the group’s unity. Deferring to one’s superiors, putting one’s trust in them, is the preferred course of action.

These examples all show Thais’ attention to face, and each scenario illustrates how people might react in potentially face-threatening situations. What is common to all of them is that the participants will undertake face-saving
measures — some of which may seem extreme to members of American or western society — to preserve their own face and others' face. Negative politeness occurs here, but its aim is not, as Brown and Levinson predict, to preserve the hearer’s autonomy and rights to property. Instead, the overarching goal of the polite behavior in these examples is to keep the peace among the members of the main social unit, the group. In the examples discussed here this involves saving face by stepping down from one’s position, surreptitiously leaving a job without confronting one’s employer, or arranging the terms of an agreement at the last possible moment in order to avoid the uncomfortable and potentially disruptive negotiations for as long as possible.

In this chapter, I have shown that social harmony is of the utmost importance in this society and that Thais will go to great lengths to preserve it. In fact, face saving and maintenance is not focused on ensuring individual choice and autonomy but on the continued smooth functioning of the group. This brings us to the next point, which is that Brown and Levinson’s concept of face does not mesh with Thais’ concept of face. This is the subject of the following chapter.
CHAPTER 16
BROWN AND LEVINSON AND THAI FACE

This chapter focuses on the concept of face as presented by Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) and compares and contrasts it to the Thai concept of face.

Brown and Levinson’s theory is based on the notion that each competent adult member of society has face, which in turn is composed of two seemingly opposite components: positive and negative. Negative face is “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction” (61). Positive face is defined as “the positive consistent self-image or ‘personality’ (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants” (61).

Brown and Levinson contend that face as they have defined it is universal. It has also been claimed elsewhere that at a high level of generality, face is universal (Ho 1976: 881-882). It has been suggested that the concept of face itself is invariant across cultures, even while its realization could be culture-specific. Ho (ibid.) states that:

Anyone who does not wish to declare his social bankruptcy must show a regard for face: he must claim for himself, and must extend to others, some degree of compliance, respect, and deference in order to maintain a minimum level of effective social functioning. While it is true that the rules governing face behavior vary considerably across cultures, the concern for face is invariant. Defined at a high level of generality, the concept of face is a universal.

So for Thais (as for everyone), face is a factor in interpersonal interaction.
It is my contention here, however, that while the concept of face appears to be universal (even while its name — "face" — may not be), its realization is culture-specific. Hu (1944: 45) points out that: "In the analysis of a culture different in emphasis and basic attitudes from our own it is important to keep in mind that that society may have formed different conceptions of even the most universal aspects of human life." I believe that face is one of the aspects that Hu refers to, since the importance and social impact of face vary cross-culturally. Thai face serves as a good example of why Brown and Levinson's politeness universals, based on a western-biased definition of face, cannot be universal.

The most commonly cited explanation of face in English-language sources and the one that Brown and Levinson rely upon is that of noted sociologist Erving Goffman (1967: 5):

The term face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact.

Face, then, appears to be determined on a per interaction basis ("during a particular contact"). Ho (1976: 868) feels that Goffman "...seems to treat face as situationally defined, meant to refer only to the immediate respect a person expects others to show in each specific instance of social encounter." So Goffman’s face is derived from a self-image defined in discrete encounters, and it implies that an individual's face can be reformulated in subsequent encounters. By this definition, a person’s face is a clean slate, as it were, with each new interaction (although perhaps not with each individual where effects of prior encounters may carry over).
Ervin-Tripp et al. (1995) describe westerners' understanding of this concept. They note that face, which is actually a marginal concept in western culture, involves "defending honor, displaying strength, maintaining or restoring self-esteem, remedying embarrassment, and negotiating with a strategic sensitivity to appearances" (45). One of the interesting elements is the mention of "strategic sensitivity to appearances," and particularly the notion of strategy.¹ The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines strategy as: "the art of devising or employing plans or stratagems toward a goal." So western face, as described here, necessarily involves attempts to reach particular ends or objectives. This characterization implies that there is a conscious effort on the part of interactants to reach certain goals.

The same authors also suggest that for westerners face is a rather individual phenomenon: "...Westerners tend to feel that to confess or show dependence indicates weakness and lack of self reliance and independence, and they view human activities and accomplishments largely as the product of individuals" (63). The following citation from Tannen (1999: 217) also supports this contention:

Perhaps most fundamental is the Western assumption that the individual self is in ongoing opposition to society. You can hear this in everyday conversations, as people talk about learning to be true to themselves by resisting society's expectations. Donal Carbaugh listened to hours of talk on the Phil Donahue show and found that a conflict between society and the individual self was a pervasive theme running through the comments of guests and audience members. For example, one guest expressed the hope that women would learn to 'make a decision all by themselves without regard to what society or somebody else says.' Society is seen as the

¹ Cf. Ide (1999)
individual's enemy, imposing demands that conflict with actualizing your own self.

Westerners prefer to accentuate their individuality. Their concerns in social interaction tend to reflect this preference.

A member of an Asian society, on the other hand, might find this preference difficult to accept. Thai society is collectively based, or what Sensenig (1975: 119) would call affiliative. According to Sensenig, the following are some characteristics of this type of society:

- It is hierarchical;
- There is hesitation in expressing opinions among the society members (for Thais in particular this is evident in the concept *kreeg caj*);
- There is high interpersonal dependence, i.e. juniors are likely to ask their elders for advice;
- There is a high level of conformity among society members;
- Sacrifice is stressed, and;
- Society members tend to establish extensive networks of social relationships.

These characteristics can be compared with those of American society, or at least American ideals, for example, to yield stark contrasts. For instance, American society outwardly strives for equality among its members while eschewing social hierarchy. Individuals are generally encouraged to express their opinions and be independent thinkers. (In fact, the voicing of individual opinions is (supposed to be) protected by law in the United States.) Self-sufficiency and independence are prized, and individuality is encouraged and embraced in this society. Autonomy and making choices for oneself are valued.
In an affiliative society, though, the idea of an individual acting without regard for his/her social group is foreign. This is obvious when we consider the following definition of face from another such society, that of China. Face is:

... the respect of the *group* for a man with a good moral reputation: the man who will fulfill his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances shows himself a decent human being. It represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. (Hu 1944: 45) (emphasis mine)

Here, the group or collective plays a determining role in defining face. A person's face is judged by the group, and loss of face results in rejection or avoidance by the group. Therefore, a society member's relationship to others and her acceptance by them is key.

Although Hu was talking about Chinese face, much of what he said holds true for Thai face too. Thais also regard the group as the most important social unit. This contrasts with American society, where the basic unit is arguably the individual.

The importance of the group for Thais means that their understanding of face is collectively based. Their identity and integrity are connected to the collective, and therefore an individual's face is communal property. Individuals' triumph and shame are experienced by their group. The following passage, again from Hu (50), puts the point in focus:

Ego almost always belongs to a closely integrated group on which is reflected some of his glory or shame. His family, the wider community of friends, and his superiors all have an interest in his advancement or setbacks... Public disgrace or ridicule

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of a serious nature is bound to have an effect on the reputation of the family.

Westerners are, for the most part, less concerned with what effect their own loss of face will have on their family or other social group to which they belong. A Thai individual's actions are very likely to affect her family and even non-family with whom she has close connections. So some Thai parents or elders warn their children not to lose face for the family, for example by failing to complete an already started doctoral degree. Hence, Thais do not talk very willingly about face-threatening information, such as family disgrace or personal failure.² Because their face is collectivistic, revealing personal information of this kind would damage the face of more people than just the person revealing it.

Americans, on the other hand, do not attach as much stigma to revelations of this kind. In fact, Americans seem to embrace them as healing, as, for example, in the case of an individual who has finally succeeded in talking about her “issues” and overcoming them. Furthermore, “…North Americans tend to use self-disclosure as a relational strategy to initiate personal relationships,” according to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998: 67). For a Thai, such a strategy would be rare, and for many unthinkable, especially if it involved potential personal or familial face loss.

Besides this, westerners' acquisition or maintenance of face is apparently decided on a per interaction basis, if we follow Goffman, through strategic posturing by the individual. Thai face could neither be thought of as

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² One might counter that Americans do not talk very willingly about such matters either. It is my impression, though, that Americans are more willing to do so than Thais. For example, there is a genre of American television shows (e.g. Jerry Springer, Leeza, Jenny Jones, etc.) that is devoted to the discussion of particular problems — usually personal ones — wherein a live (and at-home) audience listens and is invited to help solve the problem(s).
strategically obtained or maintained nor situationally defined. Rather, it is a constant of social life whose good standing should be preserved, for oneself and one's group.

It seems obvious that aside from being quite different in nature from the face that Brown and Levinson define — particularly their negative face\(^3\) — and from the western concept of face in general, the Thai notion of face plays a much more prominent role in their society (and indeed in Chinese and Japanese society). In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that face plays a role in Thai daily life. It is a much more profound socio-cultural element — i.e. it is explicitly realized much more than with Americans — and this is reflected in part by the fact that there are more than just a few terms related to this concept in the Thai language. The wealth of expressions involving the concept of face in Thai is striking. A sampling of these, culled mainly from Haas (1964) and the author's personal knowledge, is given in the following table.\(^4\) Since the Thai word for face — nâa — appears in every expression, its gloss will usually not be repeated in the center column. Therefore, only the gloss of the accompanying morpheme(s) will appear in the center column, with the idiomatic gloss of the entire expression in the far right column.

Most of the expressions in the following table are of two syntactic types: verb + noun; or noun + adjective, where the noun is nâa in both types of expression. There are also expressions with more elaborate structures of the

\(^3\) For more discussion on the mismatch between Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative face and Japanese and Asian conceptions of face, see the previous chapter and, e.g., Matsumoto (1988) and Ervin-Tripp et al. (1995).

\(^4\) For a discussion of nearly two hundred Thai face idioms, see Ukosakul (1999).
form verb + noun + verb + noun and noun + adjective + noun + adjective. In these cases, one of the nouns will be the word nāa.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thai expression</th>
<th>Gloss of other morpheme (+ nāa)</th>
<th>Gloss of expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kūu nāa</td>
<td>redeem, salvage</td>
<td>save face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kēe nāa</td>
<td>fix, solve</td>
<td>save face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khāam nāa</td>
<td>cross over</td>
<td>disrespectfully ignore the presence of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khāaj nāa</td>
<td>sell</td>
<td>be disgraced, shamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khāaj phāa ?aw nāa rōt</td>
<td>sell cloth take (face) avoid</td>
<td>do something to get it over with (not to lose face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khỳyn nāa khỳyn taa⁵</td>
<td>rise up; taa ‘eye’</td>
<td>be well known, popular, outstanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāam nāa</td>
<td>beautiful (but used here cynically)</td>
<td>lose face; perform a bad action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chiik nāa</td>
<td>rip; tear</td>
<td>humiliate s.o. (in public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chāot nāa chuu taa</td>
<td>lift up, raise, boost, glorify</td>
<td>enhance the prestige of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dāj nāa</td>
<td>get, obtain</td>
<td>get, receive credit for (positive connotation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa dāan</td>
<td>hard, callous, coarse</td>
<td>thick-skinned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa nāa</td>
<td>thick</td>
<td>thick-skinned; brazen, shameless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa baañ</td>
<td>thin</td>
<td>thin-skinned; have proper shame, not be brazen, shameless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa mỳyt</td>
<td>dark</td>
<td>go crazy; be confused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa jàj caj too</td>
<td>big; mind; big</td>
<td>be lavish (i.e. in entertaining friends)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa lýa khèe sōŋ</td>
<td>face left-over just two inches</td>
<td>lose face such that very little is left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nīw</td>
<td>little</td>
<td>feel inferior to; be outdone, take second place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nōj nāa</td>
<td>bàak has no meaning independent of this expression</td>
<td>swallow one’s pride and turn to someone for help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bàak nāa</td>
<td>take care of</td>
<td>save face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ráksāa nāa</td>
<td>deserve + nāam nāa (facial expression = water + face)</td>
<td>serves s.o. right (it fits/deserves your face)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sīa nāa</td>
<td>spoil, waste; lose beyond recovery</td>
<td>lose face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mii nāa</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>dare to, have the nerve to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mii nāa mii taa</td>
<td>have; eye</td>
<td>(idiom.) be in a position of respect, esteem, deference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

⁵nāa...taa — ‘face...eye’ — is a synonym, what Matisoff (personal communication) refers to as an elaborate couplet, for nāa. Cf. Also nāa...caj — ‘face...heart/mind’.

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As noted, the idioms in Table IV only represent some of the many linguistic expressions involving the concept of face in Thai. Ervin-Tripp et al. (1995:45) state that “The collocations given by the OED involve only losing or saving face...,” and among the citations Ervin-Tripp et al. provide involving English usage, the only other idiom involves “restoring face” (ibid.).\(^6\) Obviously the concept is much more deeply rooted in the culture — and is also more linguistically productive — in Thai.

In sum, the way Brown and Levinson (1987) have characterized face is problematic for Thai and probably for other languages of affiliative societies (certainly for Japanese, according to Matsumoto 1988). For one thing, their notion of face, simultaneously “highly abstract” (13) and “quite specific” (58), does not mesh well with Thais’ understanding of the concept. Brown and Levinson’s face is determined according to the situation at hand and is furthermore “strategic” or determined by the speaker’s ends or objectives for each particular encounter. Brown and Levinson’s negative face in particular is

\(^6\) However, Lakoff (personal communication) points out that English speakers might express the same idea in other vocabulary, e.g. “self-esteem”, “dignity”, and “ego”.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hak naa</th>
<th>break</th>
<th>humiliate s.o. (in public)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?aw naa</td>
<td>take</td>
<td>take the credit for (negative connotation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?aw naa ?aw taa</td>
<td>take</td>
<td>(same as above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?bok naa</td>
<td>go out</td>
<td>overdo it; make oneself important, useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?bok naa ?bok taa</td>
<td>go out (face) go out eye</td>
<td>(same as above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?bok nook naa</td>
<td>go outside</td>
<td>(same as above)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV
Thai idiomatic “face” expressions
somewhat alien to the Thai way of thinking because of its individualistic nature and spirit. For western cultures, in which face is a marginal concept, this definition may work just fine. For Thais, whose society is affiliative or more group-oriented than western society — and certainly more so than modern American society — face is a much more profound cultural element, as evidenced, in part, by the wealth of idiomatic expressions surrounding it. Face goes beyond a public self-image that is preserved or threatened in interaction. Face, to borrow Young’s (1994: 19) words, is “social capital” which can be large or small, thick or thin, taken, given, enhanced, treated, solved, salvaged, or boosted. It is a phenomenon that is not purely individual but is group property.\footnote{One question concerns how, if face is group property, Thais determine the state of their own face. For example, A, B, and C are all members of the same family. A disgraces himself, and his action has negative repercussions on B and C. Is it then the case that a face-gaining action on B or C’s part improves the state of their own face, or of A’s? Is face additive? This is an interesting question that goes beyond the scope of this study.}
CHAPTER 17
REMARKS ON UNIVERSALITY

The preceding chapters describe politeness phenomena of the Thai language as well as characterizing the Thai concept of face. This has been done so that a critical examination of the theory of Brown and Levinson (henceforth "the theory") would be possible. Throughout the work, the theory is put to the test against the Thai data. While it is able to explain many of the phenomena, it fails in several critical areas, which will be summarized below. Since it cannot successfully account for all of the Thai data, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory cannot be considered universal.

At the most basic level, the theory is based on a notion of face that does not mesh well with Thai face. The two previous chapters show that Thais do not consider face to be individualistic and situationally defined, as the theory implies. On the contrary, face for Thais is group property and a continuing concern in all interactions. It is not redefined with each new encounter but carries over from previous interactions, and even the interactions of members of one's close associations. And, although this next point may not affect the usability of Brown and Levinson's theory, it is worth noting that the concept of face is present to a much greater degree in the consciousness of Thais than in that of westerners, or at the very least Americans.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson define their bipartite face model as consisting of positive and negative face. Their positive face, which refers essentially to individuals' wish that their wants be desirable to at least some others (62), poses no problem in the analysis of the data here. Their negative
face, however, is problematic in an analysis of Thai. Behavior that appears to be motivated by a respect for negative face (i.e. negative politeness) is often instead a result of the speaker’s desire to preserve group harmony and show that not only are they part of the social group but that they know their place within it. Thai honorifics, such as person-referring expressions and polite particles, allow speakers to achieve these goals.

Brown and Levinson classify honorific usage as a negative politeness strategy. Thai person-referring expressions qualify as honorifics since they are grammatical encodings of conversational participants’ relative social standing (179). The theory views the use of such words, which can diminuitivize the speaker and raise the hearer, as catering to the addressee’s right to be free from imposition. But this is not (always) accurate for Thai. If a speaker is to refer to herself and show that she understands, for example, her relative position vis-à-vis a higher status addressee, she is obliged to choose a pronoun or other person-referring word (unless of course she can avoid this altogether) to demonstrate her social self-awareness and the fact that she understands the relative position of the addressee. She does this not — or occasionally not only — to avoid imposition on her addressee. She is quite often obliged to choose some word, and the selection of the wrong one(s) will make her look socially inept. So in this case, the choice of some person-referring expression is done to abide by social conventions and/or expectations rather than according to a Brown and Levinsonian politeness strategy.
In fact, the notion of strategy itself is problematic for an analysis of Thai, as it is for Japanese,\(^1\) as well. This study has found that there are polite linguistic behaviors that are strategic, such as the use of certain discourse particles (Chapter 6) and indirectness (Chapters 9 and 10). At the same time, there are polite actions that are not strategic but occur as a result of observing social conventions and expectations. For instance, in Chapter 8 an example (8.8) was given that showed the use of drawn out formal language to thank guests. While the speaker might be trying to respect the autonomy of the higher status person present, it is definitely the case that he is using speech appropriate to the social context and thereby also proving that he is a (pragmatically) competent Thai speaker. In this respect, then, his use is not (necessarily) strategic but rather intended to conform to expectations for that particular social situation. The speaker is exercising what Ide (1989:223) calls discernment: “the speaker’s use of polite expressions according to social conventions rather than interactional strategy”.

Another problem with using the theory for an analysis of Thai has to do with the fact that Thai society is hierarchical. Brown and Levinson’s negative face, to the degree that it exists for Thais, must only be considered when dealing with superiors. That is, because the society is hierarchical, not all members are entitled to the same degree — or perhaps any degree — of freedom from imposition as others (and, of course, the notion of what constitutes an imposition is culturally variable). Those at the top of the hierarchy will tend to have their negative face catered to, while those at the bottom will only occasionally have theirs respected (perhaps, for instance, by their peers). Because the theory

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\(^1\) Cf. Ide 1989.
assumes the equality of participants, it encounters problems in analyzing the language of a hierarchical society like that of Thailand.

Finally, it seems worth noting the potential ambiguity — or perhaps flexibility, depending on one’s viewpoint — of the theory, even while it does not affect its claims to universality. Often enough it seems that a particular linguistic action can be considered both a positive politeness strategy and a negative politeness strategy at once. For example, one could argue that in English referring to a store customer as “sir” is a deferential strategy meant to cater to the hearer’s negative face or that it is a positive politeness strategy meant to make the hearer feel good by making them feel important. The theory does not specifically address this issue. But, in the end, it is not necessarily a liability to the theory and should perhaps be regarded as an asset. Speakers of language can and probably want to be able to use it in both of these ways, depending on context.

While the theory appears to work well in accounting for Western politeness and even in dealing with some politeness phenomena of Thai, we see that it cannot account accurately for the motivations underlying all Thai politeness. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson’s framework predicts the presence of certain motivations (i.e. negative face redress), which do not, in fact, exist at all levels of Thai society. Because of considerations such as these, the theory cannot be considered universal and should not be used as a sole instrument in analyzing the politeness phenomena of all languages.
CHAPTER 18
CONCLUSION

Review of the Results

In this dissertation I have identified and described different devices in the expression of linguistic politeness in Thai. Among the word-level techniques that Thai speakers have at their disposal are person-referring expressions, status (including polite) particles, mitigating discourse particles, and specific lexical items, words like khõo, kràap, karunaa, etc. At the discourse level, Thai speakers can use indirectness and indirect speech acts, long and elaborate expressions, and compliments in the expression of politeness. It is hoped that, in addition to providing politeness data on a non-Indo-European language, this information will be useful to students interested in deepening their cultural understanding of and improving their pragmatic competence in Thai.

Grice’s (1975) theory of Conversational Logic and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of politeness were considered against the Thai data. I have argued that neither theory is sufficiently robust to be considered universal. It appears that Grice’s theory cannot be used to fully explain Thai conversation in the same way that it fails in analyzing Japanese (cf. Matsumoto 1989; Ide 1999), and that the Cooperative Principle is not always observed by Thai speakers. The Maxim of Quality is frequently and acceptably attenuated in Thai conversation.

Turning now to Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory, it has impressive explanatory value vis-à-vis the Thai data presented here, although ultimately its limitations are overwhelming. Much of the phenomena described here —
complex expressions, conventional indirectness, mitigation through the use of discourse particles — qualify as negative politeness strategies in their framework. Fewer phenomena, such as complimenting and showing interest in the addressee qualify as positive politeness phenomena. Thais also use what Brown and Levinson call off-record tactics.

Thai honorifics, however, pose problems for Brown and Levinson's theory. Their framework holds that a negative politeness strategy is the reason for honorific usage when, in fact, Thai speakers often use them to abide by social convention. In addition, Brown and Levinson's notion of face, particularly their negative face, is problematic in an analysis of Thai politeness. Frequently what Brown and Levinson would call negative politeness is motivated not by a desire to respect the addressee's right to be unimpeded in their actions but rather by the speaker's desire to demonstrate their knowledge of how they fit in to the social scheme. The importance of belonging and being a good member of the group is more important on the whole than individuals' claims to freedom from imposition. These issues are significant and fatal to the theory.

As noted earlier, Brown and Levinson's theory fails in a description of Thai politeness in part because not all Thai politeness is strategic. Thai uses status marking, which is necessary whether or not there is a cost (i.e. a face threat) involved in a speech act. An important question concerns the linguistic behavior of Thai speakers when their system of social marking is overlaid with a speech act which is intrusive. The data in this study are not adequate to make any generalizations in regard to this question. It is clear, however, that Thais have politeness strategies when performing face-threatening acts, as shown, for
example, in Chapter 9, which discusses indirectness. Strategy can be combined with status marking to mitigate utterances which have a cost associated with them. Furthermore, everything in language is an interactional resource, and no aspect of talk is fixed in such a way that it cannot be manipulated. Therefore, when performing an intrusive speech act, a Thai speaker can exploit different linguistic resources to achieve his/her politeness goals. It is easy to imagine a speaker using polite intonation to make the speech act sound (more) pleasant or being careful to always include polite particles when performing an intrusive speech act. In this way, Thais can increase the politeness of utterances by manipulating elements of the status marking system. (At the same time, it seems unlikely that Thais would use more deferential pronouns than the situation requires to increase politeness when performing a face-threatening act, since upgrading pronouns to a more respectful level would be an extreme way to accomplish this goal in Thai.) More work remains to be done in order to address this interesting issue, and a theory that can account for status marking and the strategic use of language to achieve politeness must be found.

Suggestions for Further Research
This dissertation identifies aspects of linguistic politeness in Thai and tests the most prominent Western theories of conversation and politeness against them. The study raises several questions that might fruitfully be answered in further research projects.

The data relied upon for this study come from published materials and television talk shows. One area for further research, then, would be looking at

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1 This term is borrowed from Ervin-Tripp (personal communication).
politeness patterns in other discourse situations and particularly in naturally occurring conversation. Such a study could investigate the politeness patterns of the same social class examined here but in different contexts, e.g. in family or commerce settings.

Because the data set mostly involves speech by a particular social class, it would also be very interesting to look at linguistic politeness patterns of other social classes to see how they mirror or differ from those discovered here. A very interesting project would be to study politeness across social classes, since rank and status play such a crucial role in Thai politeness and interaction in general.

There are several features of the Thai language that differentiate male from female speakers, e.g. pronouns and polite particles. A natural question concerns how politeness patterns might be different for Thai men and Thai women. There have been several gender-based studies of politeness (e.g. Holmes 1988; Ide 1982, 1986; Lakoff 1975), but none involving Thai.

It would also be interesting to study politeness in Thai from a developmental standpoint. Again, such studies exist (e.g. Ervin-Tripp 1982 on English), but research looking at children’s language acquisition and sociopragmatic competence in Thai is, to my knowledge, nonexistent. How and when children learn to be polite in this culture is an interesting topic for students of Thai linguistics, pragmatics, and child language acquisition.

Another suggestion for further research would be to repeat a research project similar to this one in different regions of Thailand to see how politeness patterns might differ regionally or dialectally. On a grander scale, research that examines politeness in other languages of the Tai-Kadai family or other Southeast Asian languages would serve as a novel contribution to the current

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body of knowledge. Southeast Asia is extremely rich linguistically, and it would be interesting to discover how much the languages and cultures of the greater region share at the sociopragmatic level.

Finally, this dissertation has argued that Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness cannot adequately account for all Thai politeness phenomena and should therefore not be considered a universal theory. This leaves politeness researchers with two possible options. The first would be to alter Brown and Levinson's existing theory by examining more data from non-Western languages. In particular, close examination of the concept of negative face is called for. A second and perhaps more realistic option would be to move entirely beyond Brown and Levinson's theory by gathering data drawn from different languages and language families from a theory-neutral perspective. The goal of this project would be to create the foundations for a new theory, one which will be more fundamentally inclusive of Western and non-Western data alike. While I do not call for one of these options over the other, I believe the work in this study confirms the problems with this theory, and I look forward to watching and participating in future advances in the field of linguistic politeness.
APPENDIX I

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THAI

General
Thai is a member of the Tai-Kadai language family of Southeast Asia and is the official language of the Kingdom of Thailand. The language is largely monosyllabic, although unanalyzable polysyllabic words do occur. The language has borrowed heavily from Pali-Sanskrit (the source of many religious terms), Khmer (the source of many royal terms), and Chinese.

Phonology
Thai is a tonal language with five phonemic tones. The Thai syllable has the following shape: C(C)V(V)(C) + tone. For a discussion of phonemes and the phonetic transcription system used in this dissertation, see Appendix II.

Morphology
Thai morphology is quite simple, as the language has no inflection and uses only derivation. Compounding and reduplication are the two derivational processes present in the language. Common compounds are of the form verb + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, and verb + verb. Another type of compounding discussed by Haas (1964: xvii) results in “elaborate expressions”. Elaborate expressions are based on the compounds described above but also involve adding a new part or inserting an extra syllable into the aforementioned compounds. Reduplication in Thai consists of simple reduplication, reduplication with a change of tone (where the tone of the first syllable is higher
in pitch; this type of reduplicated form signifies emphasis), as well as “ablauting reduplication” (xviii-xix), where a back vowel alternates with a front vowel or any vowel alternates with /a/.

**Syntax**

Thai follows a subject-verb-object sentence pattern. Zero-subject sentences do occur, though, and pronouns especially are often omitted if context has made clear who or what is being discussed. This has the added benefit to the speaker of allowing them to avoid the decision of what pronoun to use. The categories of tense and number do not exist in Thai but may be indicated if necessary.
APPENDIX II

THAI PHONEMES

The phonemic representation used in this dissertation is based on the system developed by Mary R. Haas (1964: xi) with one major exception: Haas uses voiced stops in syllable final position and, in this work, I use voiceless final stops. I have chosen to diverge from Haas' system because I feel voiceless finals are more phonetically real as far as true Thai pronunciation.

Consonants

The glottal stop always precedes syllable initial vowels, whether long or short.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STOPS Voiced b-</td>
<td>d-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unasp. p</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>k</td>
<td></td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless ph-</td>
<td>th-</td>
<td>ch-</td>
<td>kh-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asp. f-</td>
<td>s-</td>
<td></td>
<td>h-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless w</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRICATIVES Glides</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>η</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SONORANTS Voiced Nasals l-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasals m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>η</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voiced Trill r-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vowels

Vowel length is phonemic in Thai.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Front Unrounded</th>
<th>Central Unrounded</th>
<th>Back Rounded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>I, ii, ia</td>
<td>y, yy, ya</td>
<td>u, uu, ua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>e, ee</td>
<td>a, aa</td>
<td>o, oo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>ε, εε</td>
<td>a, aa</td>
<td>o, oo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

225
Tones

Thai has five phonemic tones (shown with /a/).

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle (mid)</td>
<td>a (no diacritic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>à</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falling</td>
<td>â</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>á</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rising</td>
<td>ã</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consonant Clusters

All of the stops shown in the preceding consonant phoneme chart (except for glottal stop) may occur in initial position, followed by one of the approximants /l,r,w/.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>p</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>k</th>
<th>ph</th>
<th>th</th>
<th>kh</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>pl</td>
<td>kl</td>
<td>phl</td>
<td>khl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>pr</td>
<td>tr</td>
<td>kr</td>
<td>phr</td>
<td>thr</td>
<td>khr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w</td>
<td></td>
<td>kw</td>
<td></td>
<td>khw</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III
KEY TO TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS
AND ABBREVIATIONS USED IN TRANSCRIPTIONS

A broad transcription system is used in this study.

| .     | indicates completion of an utterance¹ |
| (...) | noticeable pause or break in rhythm |
| [word] | words within brackets indicate uncertain transcription |
| [ ]    | brackets on two subsequent lines indicate two people talking at the same time |
| #      | indicates pragmatic anomaly |

Abbreviations used in Interlinear Glosses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLF</td>
<td>classifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEM</td>
<td>demonstrative adjective or pronoun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HON</td>
<td>honorific form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT</td>
<td>interrogative word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>negativizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominalizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL</td>
<td>polite particle (a type of status particle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROG</td>
<td>progressivizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRT</td>
<td>discourse particle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STA</td>
<td>status particle (other than polite particles)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Note, however, that written Thai does not use periods.
APPENDIX IV
SOME PERSON-REFERRING EXPRESSIONS

The following lists are based on those given in Cooke (1968) and Palakornkul (1975).

Personal Pronouns Proper

First Person Pronouns

?àattamaa
?àattaamaaphàap
?aj
?ùa
chān/chān
dichān
kan
klāawkramòm
klāawkramòmcìn
klāawkraphòm
kramòm
kramòmcìn
kraphòm
kuu
khàa
khàaphacàaw
khàaphrâphùthacàaw
kháw
mòmcìn
nìi
phòm
raw
tua?eeŋ
Second Person Pronouns

?ẹn
cāw
fāaɓāat
fāaɓaríaɓàat
joom
juu
kẹẹ
khun
lön
lýy
myŋ
naaj
nîi
nűu
phràʔọŋ
raw
tāajfāalaʔọŋphrabaat
tāajfāalaʔọŋthūliiphrabaat
tāajfāaphrabàat
tāajtháaw
tua
tuaʔẹẹŋ
thāan
thẹẹ

Third Person Forms

?āajnān
?āajnîi
kẹẹ
khāw
khun
lön
man
nān
phîkẹẹ
phràʔọŋ
thān
thẹẹ
### Pronominally used Kinship Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?aa</td>
<td>younger paternal uncle or aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?aamáa</td>
<td>grandmother (Chinese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cée</td>
<td>older sister (Chinese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hia</td>
<td>older brother (Chinese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jåa</td>
<td>paternal grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jaaj</td>
<td>maternal grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>köŋ</td>
<td>grandfather (Chinese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lään</td>
<td>nephew; niece; grandchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lēen</td>
<td>great grandchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lōon</td>
<td>great great grandchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luŋ</td>
<td>elder uncle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luuk</td>
<td>child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mēe</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nāa</td>
<td>younger maternal uncle or aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nɔŋ</td>
<td>younger sibling or cousin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pāa</td>
<td>elder aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pāa</td>
<td>father (from English “papa”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puu</td>
<td>paternal grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phii</td>
<td>older sibling or cousin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phöø</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taa</td>
<td>maternal grandfather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tía</td>
<td>grandfather (Chinese)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thīat</td>
<td>great great grandparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thuat</td>
<td>great grandparent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Pronominally used Occupational Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>?aacaan</td>
<td>professor; teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>châañ</td>
<td>craftsman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khruu</td>
<td>teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>krapâw</td>
<td>bus conductor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mëèkhââa</td>
<td>female peddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mëc</td>
<td>doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naaj</td>
<td>master; boss; other respected person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naaj?amphoo</td>
<td>head official of a county</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naajhâaã</td>
<td>prosperous-looking Indian; western merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phajaabaan</td>
<td>nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phräkhuncâaw</td>
<td>priest (extremely polite)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phûucâtkaan</td>
<td>manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phûumûu</td>
<td>corporal or sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phôçkhâa</td>
<td>male peddler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saamlâo</td>
<td>tricycle driver(^2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theksii</td>
<td>taxi driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than?athibodii</td>
<td>director general; department head</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thankhâaluan</td>
<td>governor; commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thanrâtthamontrii</td>
<td>minister (of the government)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>túktük</td>
<td>motorized tricycle driver(^3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^2\) This is also the word for the tricycle (a rickshaw-type vehicle for transporting passengers) itself.

\(^3\) This is also the word for the motorized tricycle — used for transporting passengers — itself.
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