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[Papers from the Special Session in Honor of
Erving Goffman (Professor at the University of
Pennsylvania 1968-1982)] Deference, demeanor,
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1 Introduction

My aim in this abridged paper is to look at Goffman's concepts of deference and demeanor and how they may apply to an example of codeswitching in conversation. The data, involving primarily Thai and Lao natural discourse, were collected in Buriram Province, Thailand, in 1999. The selections that appear in this paper concern a salespitch given by a traveling salesman, and how a group of villagers react to it. Interactions were collected on videotape, transcribed with the help of a field assistant, and replayed to participants to check for accuracy and to elicit additional emic information.

Thai is of course the national language of Thailand. Lao is the national language of Laos, but also the largest regional language in Thailand, with more than 12 million speakers in the northeast of the country, a region called "Isan" (Smalley, 1994:89). Most Lao speakers in Thailand are bilingual, with varying degrees of competence in Thai. Competence in Thai overall is improving as state institutions penetrate the Isan countryside (in the form of schools, mass media, and government), and as northerners enter the Bangkok labor market, or other contexts requiring the use of Thai.

Central Thais tend to disparage northerners as country bumpkins, and the term "Lao" is typically used in the pejorative (cf. McCargo and Hongladarom, 2000). The pervasive stereotypes of the northerners as inferior are perpetuated by the low-level jobs they are forced to take in the capital: construction work, cab drivers, and other service sector jobs. Another reason for this condescending attitude has to do with the Lao language, in that the variety spoken in the northeast does not use the same array of status and politeness markers—especially pronouns—as does central Thai.

2 Codeswitching in the Countryside

Thai and Lao, perceived emically as distinct codes, each carry different meta-meanings. In Isan, Thai is generally associated with state functions, formal education, mass media and other officialdom. Lao, the "local" language (*phasa thong thin*), indexes more village and regional solidarity, minority status, and home life. Generally speaking, villagers know both and speak both; they are simultaneously villagers and national citizens.

Codeswitching is normal in this speech community; a person who speaks (or at least who is perceived as *capable* of speaking) only one code would be regarded as 'marked'. At the same time, however, villagers do make a sharp ethnic distinction between Thai and Lao (even if they cannot always sustain the difference when they are reviewing transcripts), partly on ethnic/class grounds and partly contingent on interaction, since there are norms governing when one uses Lao as opposed to Thai.

Thai and Lao are very similar languages syntactically and lexically, but differ significantly in tones.¹ Nevertheless there are times when it is difficult or even impossible to tell them apart. This ambiguity between languages can be exploited by speakers to express two different (meta-) meanings at once, in what Woolard (1998) calls "simultaneity". This paper will focus on such bivalent utterances and other forms of codeswitching to see how they are used for both instrumental and ceremonial dimensions of interaction.

3 The Teams

The data was collected on videotape at a small market in a rural village in Buriram province, in northeastern Thailand. The most obvious team consists of just one member—the salesman—who was going to give the official performance. Everyone except for the salesman (and me) are village locals. Although they are to be the audience for the salesman's pitch, the fact that they know each so well and work in unison to maintain a certain front means they also constitute a team (Goffman, 1959:92). In the data I present here, we must keep in mind that both "teams" are performing, but that the structure of the interaction (the sales pitch) makes it appear as though it is only the salesman who is performing.

The salesman is also from the northeast, also a native speaker of Lao, but from a province several hundred kilometers to the east. He is regarded as a *khon-Isan* (northeasterner), the regional identity to which the market people also ascribe. He is relatively young, certainly younger than all the people for whom he is about to perform. He represents a company from central Thailand (near Bangkok) selling portable convection cookers (of exceedingly low quality) called the G-UFO 900. As such, he has a particular performance that he must deliver and for which he received training from his company; he has practiced (and performed) this performance many times, rendering it what Richard Schechner has termed 'restored behavior'

¹Different varieties of Lao also have different tones from each other, but are by and large mutually comprehensible, and villagers meeting from different regions often speak a somewhat "normalized" variety (Smalley, 1996:90).

(Schechner, 1985). The overt (instrumental) purpose of his performance is clear: he wants to sell cookers, for which he gets a commission. He underwent his performance training (his salesmanship training) in central Thailand, and reported that he found he must adapt the performance training he learned to the audiences of the northeast region to make it more effective. The salesman has delivered his pitch many times to similar audiences, and the villagers have had other traveling salesmen come through touting their products. Thus both sides, although they have never met, have a sense of the performance as a "situated activity system" (Goffman, 1961:121)—that is, each side knows and works for a common purpose, and each knows what is expected of them in the roles they assume within the activity system. A slight caveat should be mentioned: the villagers were quite adamant that they did not want to buy an oven, but were going to let the salesman make his pitch anyway. So the orientation to the performance was not completely cooperative—the teams did not share the same goal of oven transaction. One may speculate that this may have been the case in many of the villages he went to, as villagers in general do not easily part with the small amount of money they have. Saying they have no plans to buy an oven but will let him perform anyway may be a culturally reproduced way of aligning the village team to the sales pitch in a manner that may prove beneficial to them if they do indeed decide to buy an oven after all.

Performing the sales pitch requires the salesman to maintain a certain face, not only to maintain the integrity of the performance, but also for personal or ceremonial (Goffman, 1967:54) reasons; that is, to maintain "character". Character may be thought of as a more durable or accumulative version of "face"; face is bound more to a particular interaction. A critical element of character is "composure", which in turn is composed of "presence of mind", "dignity", and "stage confidence" (Goffman, 1967:255). So the ostensible purpose of the performance is selling cookers, but this involves maintaining "face" for both performance and personal reasons. This is in keeping with Goffman (1967:12), who writes, "Ordinarily, maintenance of face is a condition of interaction, not its objective."

My position as researcher is harder to ascribe to any particular team. In general I tried to be as peripheral as possible and not participate. But a white man with a video camera is rather conspicuous in rural Thailand, so being peripheral was difficult. It was my aim at the time to gather data on codeswitching, and I found that my presence overly influenced people's code choice (in favor of central Thai, which they generally assumed—correctly as it turns out—that I speak better than Lao). So I hung out at a distance, pretended to be preoccupied, and only spoke when I was directly addressed. If I had to be regarded as a member of one of the two teams, it

would be the locals' team and not the salesman's, since I had connections and was living in the village. By the time this data was collected, villagers were generally used to my presence and the camera. I was worried, however, that the salesman would become too self-conscious in my presence, so after getting permissions for taping, I kept my distance and made the camera as unobtrusive as possible (by placing it inconspicuously on a shelf with many other items, and by covering the conspicuous red recording light).

4 The Stage and Sign Equipment

The demonstration of the cooker took place at the market, on a table which belonged to one of the market stalls. The performance transformed the space into a stage area, redefining the space into two regions, the salesman's and the locals'. Such an arrangement helped the salesman control his stage space, since he has easy access to the sign equipment he had brought along, and he could more easily employ other, especially somatic, parts of his performance. There was something of a backstage area, outside of the stall space, but this backstage could only be accessed as a backstage by the audience team, not the salesman. There was also a semi-backstage area (hereafter the *side-stage*), within the space of the stall but a little further from the table, where at least two of the audience team carried on a separate conversation. I term this area *side-stage* because it could not be categorized as either stage or back stage. It was not back stage because the salesman had a full, clear view of it and was easily in earshot of what was happening there. Neither was it 'on stage', since the people there did not really interact much with the performance. But it was also not 'non-stage', independent of the performance, since it was present in the same space and there were a few key interactions from this area to the 'on stage' area proper. The *side-stage* afforded a subset of the audience team a way to maintain a particular performance vis-à-vis the salesman.

The salesman had a variety of sign equipment, foremost among which was the cooker itself, and several gadgets associated with it. Other pertinent sign equipment included the salesman's clothes, his badge, shoes, and his manual/recipe book. Unlike the villagers in the audience, the salesman was wearing an ironed shirt, slacks and tie. A tie in rural villages is a rare sight indeed and firmly indexes officialdom and urban life. His company badge further underscored the official dimensions of his demonstration, signifying, as it does, both official membership in a sales company and officialdom in general. The salesman also had a manual with photos and recipes and other information; the materials in the manual are all written in Thai, and the pictures of the product were all set in a clean looking urban office

environment. All of these props, because the officialdom they index, suggest that Thai would be the language he should speak in order to give a consistent performance.

I would like to say something about his shoes, however, that does not quite support the 'officialdom' generated by his other sign equipment. Nearly every villager wears thongs since they are cheap, ventilated, and easy to remove. The salesman's shoes were patent leather, a rare sight outside official contexts. In that sense they index urban culture. But the shoes were in dismal condition, and, the salesman wore them in a fashion typical of rural areas—he folded down the heel cups into the shoes, so that they could be worn like slippers. This clearly indexed village as opposed to urban life. So the shoes, like features of his language I will discuss momentarily, had a simultaneity about them, indexing both officialdom and rural life. We might attribute this to what Goffman (1961:108) calls 'role distance', in which the performer marks a dissonance from the role he is enacting, although this might have been largely unconscious.

We might also note that his sign equipment constitute important dimensions of his demeanor: aside from the somewhat subversive shoes, his sign equipment were designed to generate a demeanor of officialdom. His well-practiced hand gestures during his performance also suggested this.

5 Deference and Demeanor

Success of the sales pitch can be viewed in two ways: instrumentally, whether a cooker was sold, and ceremonially, whether face was maintained (Goffman, 1967:54-55). That is, was social equilibrium maintained? To evaluate this latter point, Goffman's notions of deference and demeanor become critical. These terms are meant as heuristics or "analytical terms" (1967:81, 84), designed to explain ceremonial interaction. Goffman points out (1967:78) that such ceremonial relations can be either symmetrical (among equals) or asymmetrical, among those with differing statuses. What strategies of deference and demeanor do we see the different teams pursuing in this case?

Near the beginning of his presentation, the salesman tries to get two members of the audience to look at the manual he has brought. They resist him, since they do not want to be singled out as potential buyers. When the audience members physically resist taking the manual, he, the salesman, is in danger of losing face. He tries to hand the manual to a woman across the table, but she resists. To avoid losing face, he tries again: he leaves the area behind the table and moves *next to* the woman. His position on the same side tries to suggest that he is somehow also on the same "team"; he momentarily

breaks the frame of the stage to become more personable, to be “with” the woman rather than “at” the woman; he is out of character (Goffman, 1959: 190). This is further underscored by a switch into Lao [:22]. The switch again expresses distance from his role as urban Thai salesman. But, unlike his shoes, this role distancing is conscious. The shoes were likely modified unconsciously, a part of his rural habitus ‘leaking’ through his performance role. But his switch from Thai into Lao appears far more intentional, as was his move away from the stage area. The role distance in this sense is designed to facilitate—not subvert—the situated activity and his performance. That is, if the ostensible purpose of the situated activity is to sell an oven, then this role distance—presenting himself as on the same rural team—may be regarded as a strategic and perhaps even necessary part of his demeanor. His role distance fosters rather than hinders, from his perspective, the situated activity at hand.

At this point, however, he comes very close to losing face. If he does not succeed in getting the woman to look at the manual, then he has failed in his role-distancing ‘realignment’ (Goffman 1959:190) of coming offstage. Apparently sensitive to this, a woman from the side-stage area (one of those holding a conversation in Thai) cuts in [:24], and (in Lao) tells the woman ‘to just look at the manual’; the woman capitulates. The woman on the side channel repaired what would have otherwise been an embarrassing moment for the salesman, and thereby maintained both performance and social equilibrium.

6 Deference, Demeanor, and Language

I have alluded several times to code choice, and would now like to explicate more fully its role in the deference/demeanor interaction. All things considered, Thai was the best choice if the salesman was going to present a consistent demeanor and performance. But as the transcript shows, he often switched into Lao and into a mix of Lao and Thai. I have argued that in one case he switched into Lao and came offstage to express role distance (or perhaps role *proximity*, from the point of view of other Lao speakers); now I would like to turn to other reasons he switches and mixes code.

Looking at his lines at [:01] we see it is a mix of Lao and Thai. The underlined segments in this case aim to highlight that he is (probably) speaking Thai but with a Lao accent. In [:15] and just after [:15], we see him speak Lao with a few words of Thai interjected. In [:41] we see him move from Lao and a mix back into Thai, and he continues predominantly in Thai for quite some time thereafter.

What is going on here with respect to deference and demeanor? If language is one of the devices by which he maintains a particular demeanor, then Thai would be the most appropriate choice of code, consonant with his other sign equipment. So why all the Lao?

Notice two of the words for which the salesman substitutes Thai in his otherwise Lao utterances are /phom/ and /khap/. /Phom/ is the masculine pronoun for “I” in Thai, and a relatively polite one in the hierarchy of Thai pronouns (Iwasaki and Horrie, 2000; Palakornkul, 1975). The variety of Lao spoken in this area does not have a hierarchy of pronouns, using instead one universal pronoun /khoi/, as in the /khoi/ we see woman-d say just after [:15]. In a Thai utterance, /khoi/ would sound rude, but in a Lao utterance it would be perfectly normal. /Khap/ is a particle placed at the end of phrases in Thai to make the phrase more polite. In the variety of Lao spoken in this area, there is no particle analogous to /khap/. Because the syntax of Thai and Lao are almost identical, and the languages so lexically similar, it is very easy to add Thai pronouns and particles into Lao utterances. By drawing on what are regarded as polite Thai pronouns and politeness particles in otherwise Lao utterances, the salesman ensures he paying maximum deference to the audience. In a way he has no choice. Because so many parts of his demeanor suggest Thai is the appropriate language to speak, he is bound, in a sense, to the levels of deference associated with Thai.

Remember the audience also constitutes a team. When they address the salesman, they spoke in Lao: at [:08], just after [:15], and just before [:22]. Moreover, when woman-c on the side stage at [:24] instructs woman-d to just look at the manual, she does so in Lao. Perhaps she does so because she is addressing the *performance*, albeit not the salesman directly. Unlike the salesman, the audience members do not mix Thai pronouns into their Lao. For example, woman-d, just after [:15] has no compunction using Lao /khoi/. It appears to me that the audience, having the sense that the demonstration should be in Thai, chose to speak completely in Lao in order to keep the salesman within his performance (Goffman 1959:49). This is perhaps counter-intuitive; to keep social distance one might expect the villagers to choose Thai. The choice of Lao, however, insulates them from the performance which should, normatively, be conducted in Thai. Oddly, the side-stage conversation occurs completely in Thai, see for example [:13], [:35], and [:37]. This was something quite out of the ordinary. Interestingly, after the demonstration finished—but while the salesman was still there—the side-stage conversation switched into Lao. In interviews after the performance, villagers could not specify why.

As I have mentioned, there are several places in which the salesman spoke a sort of mix of Thai and Lao (for example [:01], and [:41]. Replaying

the tape after the performance, the audience members often could not decide whether he was speaking Thai or Lao; the languages, they said, were simply too mixed up. *He spoke Thai but sounded Lao*, was one comment; *he spoke both at the same time* was another comment. This constitutes an excellent example of what Woolard (1998) describes as “simultaneity” or “bivalency”. The same utterance indexes the (meta-) meanings of two different languages simultaneously. Thus the salesman could maintain the sales performance at an ‘official’ level using Thai, while also playing to local sensibilities through Lao. The latter helps him make it appear as if he is on their team, a level of identification which he thinks will help him ‘get through’ to the audience. By being both outsider and insider at the same time, he is on the sales team and on the local team at the same time. He hopes, by bridging the teams in this way, he will have a better chance of selling a cooker. Thus, like his shoes, his use of language gives him a ‘bivalent’ demeanor, both local and official at the same time. We might compare this bivalency to Goffman’s (1967:61-2) sense of multilayered deferential behavior.

The salesman is strategically counting on this indeterminacy. The pronouns are especially interesting, given Goffman’s notion that the avoidance of first names is very powerful and common mode of deference (Goffman 1967:63). Thus using pronouns acts as an ‘avoidance ritual’ by not employing real names, but in this case also as a ‘presentation ritual’ since, by using Thai pronouns, there is a degree of politeness implicit in the choice of pronouns (on avoidance/presentational ritual, see Goffman, 1967:62).

7 Ceremonial Success but Instrumental Failure

Slowly, people start avoiding eye contact or even looks in the direction of what was the stage; the demonstration fades. Within a few minutes, the salesman drifts off, without any ‘goodbyes’ or ‘thank you anyways’, and, in a very rural Isan way, with face intact, social equilibrium has been maintained.

The salesman, to maintain a consistent performance, needed to speak mostly Thai but switched into Lao to try and build a local rapport with the audience. However, since his demeanor was ‘official’, he needed to use Thai pronouns and politeness markers to maintain proper deference for the audience. The audience, also acting as a team, used Lao with the salesman, partly because of the asymmetry implied by the difference in ages, but also to enforce the integrity of the salesman’s performance and their solidarity as poor villagers. They did not want him to break out of performative mode and assert a local ethos. However, they did give him proper deference (as a team)

by ensuring his performance came off ceremonially, although they did not allow it to come off instrumentally, since they did not buy a cooker.

Transcript

Key:			
Plain text: Lao		a: salesman	
Bold face: central Thai		b: woman moving about	
<u>Underlined:</u> bivalent/unclear		d + f: audience	
		c + e: ‘sidestage’	

:01	a	(to all) There’s no charge.. I provide sales service nowadays... /?/ went two times ...	bə: khit kha: sia ha:y ki: phom bə:rikaə:n lu:k kha: chuaŋ ni: khap /?/ pai sə:ŋ tia...
:05	b	(to a) ... advertising first, na	. . . kho:sana: kə:n si: ə:
:08	b	[to a] haven’t used it in a long time;... [the old one] that I talked about, it’s not broken	bə: dai <u>chai</u> do:n le:w ...thi: wao ma: man bə: sia dək
:13	c	[to e] once you have the chance, grab it quick ...	dai o:kət tə:ŋ chuai rew rew lə:y nə
	e	(to c) ...smile nice..??...	...yim suay..??
:15	a	(to d) look, please, look	bə:ŋ khap bə:ŋ
	d	[to a] nooo, I’m not looking... what	bə:;;; khəi bə: bə:ŋ ... jaŋ
	a	(to d) you can look... look at the manual [brochure] for me, na (to f) look at the manual [brochure] for me, na...what’s wrong?	bə:ŋ kan dai... bə:ŋ tamla: <u>hai</u> phom ne: bə:ŋ tamla: <u>hai</u> phom ne: ... pen jaŋ...
	f	I, uh, look ... can not	khəi kə?... .. bə:ŋ ...bə: dai
:22	a	(to f) I’ll open it for you to look at it, like this ... just look at it... not making you buy it, today...	si bət hai bə:ŋ caŋ si: ... bə:ŋ si: si: bə: mə:n hai si: khap mi: ni:
:24	c	[to f, who is resisting a] just look at it, like that	bə:ŋ si: si: han la?
:28	c	[to e, with c, while looking through a cookbook]...uhhh I want to eat this, appetizers [snacks eaten with alcohol] ...	ə:;;;... ya:k kin ni: kle:m lao
:30	e	...buy it and keep it?...	... si: ma: wai...
:35	e	[to c] like this, is it difficult? like this, is it difficult?	bə:p ni: ya:k mai ... bə:p ni: ya:k mai

:37	b	[to e and c] and ? went to Pattaya to buy lottery tickets[? unclear]	le:w phi: ? .. pai pathaya:... pai si: huai [?]
:41	a	Oh, I'll tell you, listen, listen, if you have a party or an event, you want to bake spring onions, garlic, fennel, you bake it in an indian oven number 30, number 32	me: si bo:k hai fan do: fan do: hak mi: nan mi: ka:n na:k si op hua ho:m kratiem bai yi:ra: ni: op sai mo: ke:k ba: samsip kap ba: sam sip so:ŋ
:48	c	[to e] string bean salad...can you make it?... string bean salad	yam ma?khia ya:o tham pen mai yam ma?khia ya:o

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Non-Verbal Navigational Tools of Conversation

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Goffman (1971) compares social interactions to traffic patterns to illustrate the ways an individual is similar to a vehicular unit. Just as motorists obey traffic rules to make driving go smoothly, individuals obey norms which help interactions to go smoothly. Goffman states, “The members of an orderly community do not go out of their way to aggress upon one another. Moreover, whenever their pursuits interfere, they make adjustments necessary to escape collision and make them according to some conventional rule” (1971:6). Although Goffman is primarily concerned with non-verbal interactions (e.g., pedestrians passing on the street), he alludes to the same underlying rules as governing conversations. He says, “There are rules for taking and terminating a turn at talking, there are norms synchronizing the process of eyeing the speaker and being eyed by him; there is an etiquette for initiating an encounter and bringing it to an end” (1971:3–4). All conversational encounters have an underlying system of norms that allow people to interact efficiently. For example, there are socially acceptable ways to take turns speaking and normalized times in conversation when it is appropriate to change topic. Goffman goes on to say that this points to the “awesome competency both with respect to performance and interpretation which seems to be required by all those who are able to exchange a few remarks with a friend...” (1971:4, fn 1).

Many researchers interested in discourse analysis miss a main concept of Goffman’s work, that is, information “given off” (1959) when they fail to consider the many non-verbal signals people employ when talking. Part of Goffman’s interest in examining social interactions is in analyzing the numerous non-verbal gestures people use in communication. These exude information that others use to form impressions of the individual. For Goffman, information given is only part of the equation.

In this paper I will explore the use of a number of paralinguistic devices similar to the ones that Goffman cited in “The Individual as a Unit” (in Goffman 1971), which allow an individual to maneuver effectively with others. This behavior, when accompanying talk, allows for smooth interaction among participants. In order to analyze these devices, I will use examples from a staff meeting held at the University of Maryland. The meeting involves four women: Rita, the supervisor, and three of her employees: Clara, Anna, and Melba. This analysis first examines how Rita, in particular, utilizes non-verbal communication to construct conversational preserves (cf.