SPOKEN AND WRITTEN DISCOURSE IN THAI:
THE DIFFERENCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

Features of spoken discourse versus written discourse have long been one of the prime interests of discourse analysts and linguists (Labov 1972, Chafe 1976, Ochs 1979, Keenan and Bennett 1977). These researchers as well as others have indicated the existence of distinctions between spoken and written discourse. They generally agree that speech is less richly organized and contains less tightly packed information, i.e., spoken language typically contains little subordination. In addition, whereas interactive markers, planning "fillers" and other hesitation phenomena never occur in written language, they do very frequently in spoken language. Furthermore, spoken language tends to be filled with generalized vocabulary and repetitions of the same syntactic forms. Written language, on the other hand, usually contains well-chosen words and well-organized structures. These characteristics of spoken discourse, in contrast with written discourse, are carefully investigated and well described in many languages (for examples, see articles in Keenan and Bennett 1977).

Although there have been investigations of spoken Thai, no attempt has been made to compare the features of spoken and written discourse in Thai. The aim of this paper is to report in a preliminary fashion on an analysis of differences between them. The paper discusses three prominent characteristics of spoken Thai discourse which are not usually present in written Thai discourse. These characteristics are repetition, the use of prefabricated fillers, and particles.¹

Repetition occurs frequently in the data. However, only two types are examined: reduplication and repetition of content and form. Reduplication is repetition of vocabulary items, whereas repetition of content involves paraphrasing. Repetition of form concerns the use of the same syntactic form for a string of expressions. Generally, prefabricated fillers are defined as vocabulary items or expressions which are used in spoken discourse when the speaker feels the need to fill up discourse space. Examples of prefabricated fillers in English are well, erm, I think, you know, if you see what I mean, of course, and so on (Brown and Yule 1983:17). Prefabricated fillers under discussion in this paper are, however, phrases which signal the end of a list in spoken Thai discourse. Particles are words which do not have literal meanings in themselves. Their meanings and functions are usually determined by the discourse context in which they occur.

2. DATA AND SUBJECTS

The data come from four one-page extracts of four lectures on printing and the design of printing given by male lecturers in March, 1988. Each lecture lasted about two hours and the whole session was transcribed. However, only one page of the first section was used as data for analysis. The extracts are included in the appendix.

Fifty third-year college students served as subjects who edited the extracts. The students were asked to edit each of the extracts by deleting, adding, or rewriting any expressions which were not suitable for written language. The edited and the unedited texts were then compared and analyzed.
3. ANALYSIS

Only the expressions which were uniformly edited are discussed in this paper. The analysis reveals three distinct characteristics which make spoken discourse different from written discourse. The three characteristics are repetition, the use of prefabricated expressions and the use of particles in spoken discourse.

3.1 Repetition

Spoken discourse tends to be more redundant than written discourse in the sense that it has more repetition. The repetition which was found in the extracts being analyzed was of two types: reduplication and repetition of content and form.

3.1.1 Reduplication

Reduplication is a morphological process which produces reduplicatives. A reduplicative is thus a combination of a word or a phrase and its duplicate, the former can occur by itself but the latter cannot. According to LukSanEEyanawin (1984), there are many types of reduplicatives in Thai, however, only five instances occur in the extracts being examined, four of which are illustrated below. The characteristics of these reduplicatives are similar to "partial reduplicatives" (ibid: 131-134) suggested by LukSanEEyanawin.

The duplicate may have the initial consonant and a tone which is similar to the base word or phrase but have a different vowel or it may have all the consonants and the tone similar to the base word but have a different vowel (Ibid: 131-134). In addition to LukSanEEyanawin’s observation, the data of the present study shows that the base component may appear before or after its duplicate.

1) khwaam - nák  khwaam - khit (1 : 3)^2
   Nom^3 think   Nom think
   (thought or idea)^4

2) tam - râp  tam - raa (1 : 14)
   book   book
   (books)

3) nang - sùu  nang - hâa (1 : 14)
   book   book
   (books)

4) lâay - siŋ  lâay - yââŋ (3 : 4)
   many - Clas  many - Clas
   (many things)

All of the subjects of this study decided that reduplicatives were not appropriate for written language. In general, reduplicatives rarely occur in formal writing. This statement cannot only be supported by an examination of written text in which style is intended to be formal; it is also evident in the analysis of the edited versions of the data of this study. All reduplicatives are reduced to their regular free forms, i.e., the forms before the process of reduplication. In Example 1, the word “khwaam-khit” is retained but the reduplicated part is deleted. Similarly, in Examples 2 and 3, respectively, the word “tam-raa” and “nang-sùu” are kept whereas their duplicates are deleted.

While the duplicates of the reduplicatives in Examples 1-3 are easy to identify, it is not so in the case shown by Example 4. Both parts of this reduplicative can occur by themselves and it is not easy to determine which part is more appropriate in this context. Twenty subjects decided that the first part should remain while twenty other subjects decided for the other part and the rest changed the reduplicative to “lâay-bêep,” with a more specific classifier. The point is, however, that all of the subjects agreed that the reduplicated form was inappropriate.

It can be concluded here that reduplicatives are not considered suitable for writing style. Reduplicatives of this type are used in spoken discourse for two reasons. First, the rhyming and similar phonological characteristics of the two parts of reduplicatives make them sound more pleasant to hear. Second, since reduplication requires more space in discourse but less time in the cognitive process, they make it easier for encoding as well as decoding of messages.

3.1.2 Repetition of content and form

Though instances of repetition can be seen very frequently throughout the spoken data of this study, the discussion in this paper will basically be based on those in the form of paraphrase. Paraphrases occur in both spoken and written language. In both cases they are generally used to clarify a point. Shimanoff and Brunak (1977) state that to make a message clear, a communicator makes additions to his previous statements. In written language, paraphrases are usually signaled by lexical markers such as “in other words,” “that is,” and so on, while in spoken discourse less formal words or ex-
pressions like "I mean" and "you know" or even pauses are more commonly observed. Writers also employ punctuation devices such as dashes, parentheses, and commas to signal an up-coming paraphrase. Paraphrases which occur in the spoken data of this study are neither preceded by pauses nor any lexical items which might indicate paraphrasing. Examples below are some paraphrases found in the data.

5) cam-nuan māak-māak lāay-lāay ʔan (1:2)
   amount many many Clas
   (many in number)

6) thī raw khāw-maa yūn nay khrooŋ-kaan nī
   that we enter be in project this
   kō thū-tēŋ leťw náʔ hāʔ māy phīt (2:16)
   Part correct already Part Part not wrong
   (that we all join this project is the right idea, it is not a mistake)

7) tham-hāy phāy-phrēʔ ʔōk-pay vāŋ-kwāŋ-khwāŋ
   cause promote out widely
   pay-dāy-thūa kèp-wāy dāy naan (1:8)
   go all over keep can long
   (which will make it widespread, well-known everywhere, and can be kept for a long time)

The function of paraphrase found in this study is not to clarify a message previously stated. This type of repetition was used to maintain the continuity of the discourse content and at the same time to make the produced discourse sound smooth. In other words, a paraphrase was used in spoken Thai for the speaker's benefit rather than for the listeners' and thus was taken out of the written language.

Thai speakers may make use of synonyms or words of similar meaning in paraphrasing as in the case of Example 5. In this example, two reduplicatives of similar meanings occur side by side. In the written data, these reduplicatives are reduced to just one word "māak" and at the same time the classifier "ʔan" is deleted. The paraphrase in Example 6 is through negation: using the negative morphe "māy" and a word of opposite meaning. This paraphrase is also taken out of the written data. All of the subjects also deleted the paraphrase in the last examples.

In an examination of the edited data, it is apparent that the use of similar syntactic form is not desirable. Example 8 below shows a case which has strings of similar syntactic form.

8) pen tam-rāp tam-raa pen nāŋ-sūn nāŋ-hāa
   pen bēk-fāk-hāt pen nāŋ-sūn ʔōangjīŋ
   be exercise be book-reference
   pen nāŋ ʔōang ʔāray-tō-ʔāray thāmpuēŋ
   be book what so ever all

   (They can be texts, they can be books, they can be exercises, they can be reference books, and so on.)
In the above example, reduplicatives are also involved. In this string of expressions, each of which starts with the copula "pen", is a list of a variety of possible printed materials. All of the subjects replaced the first two expressions, which are redupli-
catives, with their regular forms, and also replaced the last expressions which end the series with the word "pen tôn." In addition, about twenty subjects further deleted the third and fourth expressions. After the first expression, the copula at the begin-
ning of each succeeding expression was also deleted.

3.2 Prefabricated Fillers

Prefabricated fillers which occur in the data are phrases which signal the ending of a list. The main component of these phrases is the generalized word "2aray" which is accompanied by other generalized words. They are expressions employed when the speaker runs out of items to add in a list of ex-
amples. Five instances are given here.

10) bat 2aray-tô 2aray tem-pay-môt-laay (1: 13)
    card what so ever all of them
    (all kinds of cards)

11) pen nâg-sû 2aray-tô 2aray thây-puay (1: 15)
    be book what so ever all:
    (...and so on.)

12) pen klôg 2aray phuak nî (1: 18)
    be box what Clas this
    (they can be made into boxes of some sort)

13) nú pen 2aray-kô-taam (1: 20)
    or be whatever
    (or whatever)

14) 2ût-sâa-hâ-kam tham phôn-la-mây krâpêy (2: 11)
    industry make fruit can
    2aray-kô-taam-têê
    whatever
    (canned fruit industry and so on)

All of these prefabricated fillers were either taken out of the edited copies or were replaced by a more specific ending. In the first three cases, either the word "pen-tôn" was used to replace the whole expression or the word "tôa-thay" was used after the noun "bat", "nâg-sû", and "klôg", respectively. Furthermore, classifiers "cha-nî" or "bêep" were usually added to these nouns. For both Ex-
amples 13 and 14, the prefabricated fillers were re-
placed by the more specific ending "pen-tôn."

The use of prefabricated fillers is one of the features which is reserved for spoken discourse. As previously discussed, all subjects who were asked to edit the spoken data used lexical items with more specific information in place of these expressions in the edited data. The speaker planning his utter-
ances at the moment of speaking does not have time to probe for the best words or expressions and tends to use the first thing that comes to mind. How-
ever, when he has more time, as in the case when a person is writing instead of speaking, he has more choices of vocabulary and expressions to use. Despite the verbosity they add to the text, the use of prefabricated fillers or other fillers does have an advantage. Not only do fillers signal the ending of a list for the audience, they also allow both the speaker and the audience to process information comfortably.

3.3 Particles

Particles occur very often in spoken and informal discourse but they hardly ever occur in written or more formal language. This is not an overstate-
ment. In casual interaction, informal talks and lect-
tures or even correspondence between friends or re-
latives, the use of particles is extensive. Researchers who have an interest in the use of particles in Thai have to rely solely on spoken data to discover their functions and distribution (see, for examples, studies