

Backchannel response in Mon conversation*

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Abstract

The objective of this article is to analyse conversation in Mon language, focusing on backchannel response and its forms, functions and behavior used. The conversations used were from Mon people aged over 35 years old in the Phrapradaeng district Samutprakarn province in Thailand.

The findings revealed that the backchannel responses of Mon conversations are similar to those of other languages but it is different in detail because of their types of conversation and culture. This study found that there are seven types of backchannel responses: short verbalization, repetition, lexical item, phrases, short question and answer, sentence, and Thai backchannel response. Although the responses used in Mon conversation are words and phrase or even Thai loan words and expressions, the most frequently used backchannel is short verbalization and the most significant backchannel is repetition of previous utterances. In addition, support and agreement function is the most frequently in backchannel responses. This study also found that the selection of the backchannel responses depends largely on the relationship of the participants.

0. Introduction

There are always speakers and listeners in every conversation. As a result, one speaker must maintain the floor while the others listen. Backchannel is a short utterance aimed at expressing the listener's attention to the conversation. Such a short utterance may or may not interrupt the current turn-taker. However, in general, it does not disturb or influence the current speaker to stop speaking. Rasikawan (2001:35-37) referring to the works of Tannen (1984), says that there was a simultaneous speech while the current speaker still continues speaking without any pause. Both the current speech and the simultaneous one were considered two different turns. This means that backchannel responses may be considered either turns or non-turns, depending on whether or not those backchannel responses interrupt the current turn. If they do, they are considered a non-turn. On the other hand, if they do not, they are considered a turn.

Mon is a language with interesting backchannel response. Backchannel responses appear almost at every adjacency pair. Thus, backchannel behavior in Mon conversation is very prominent, which makes it worth discussing their types, their functions and their behavior.

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The data were collected from natural conversations of Mon people aged over 35 years old in Phrapradaeng district, Samutprakarn province, Thailand, by recording on 60 minute audio-tapes.

1. Types of backchannel responses

Although backchannel behavior is thought to be a universal strategy used in every language, it is rather language-and culture-specific. According to Heinz (2003:1137), differences in backchannel behavior depend on the culture and the linguistic system. As her citing on Clancy et al., (1996); Ramat, (1995); and Toa and Thompson, (1991), the range of the individual variability, including age, social status, educational level, life histories, and social factors can differentiate the backchannel behaviors. The characteristics of backchannel in Mon language are also particular to its language and culture.

Heinz (2003:1117) also mentions the characteristics of backchannel. It is revealed that backchannel responses are divided into two groups: verbal and nonverbal. The verbal backchannel that Heinz collected includes short verbal utterances, assessments, sentence completion, brief requests for clarification, restatements, short questions and answer, exclamations, and attempted interruptions. In sum, most researchers focus on short verbalization such as *oh* or *uh huh*. However, backchannel never interrupts the current turn. In general, a backchannel response is a regular and systematic behavior. Nevertheless, individuals and situations may affect the production of backchannel responses.

The characteristics of the verbal expressions classified as backchannel in the Mon language are found in this study that there are seven types of backchannel response as follows:

a) Short verbalization

The backchannel responses in Mon may be the short verbalization and there are several items used in the Mon conversation, e.g. [ʔa:], [ʔɤ:], [ʔɔ:], [ʔɔ:], [ʔu:], and [ʔum]

- (1) T1 A: ha:m lɯp moa klo:ŋ ʔitɕo? ra?
 speak enter one way accompany FP
 /lɯp moa klo:ŋ tɕo? ra?
 enter one way accompany FP
 ‘They told everyone to use the same entrance. Enter
 the same way.’
 → B: /ʔa:
 RP(Th.)
 ‘Aha’.

The backchannel response used in this example is produced by B. It is a short verbalization [ʔa:], which overlap T1.

Short verbalization can be performed as the backchannel response in a single form or a set of the short verbalization by repetition of a single item in a turn, as the following example shows:

- (2) T1 A: ʔɔ: ʔa: tɕ^hia ʔitɕoʔ
 RP(Th.) go market accompany
 ‘Oh! You are going to the market, together.’
- T2 B: ʔa: tɕ^hia:
 go market
 ‘Go to the market.’
- T3→ A: ʔɯ ʔɯ ʔɯ ʔɯ
 RP(Th.)
 ‘Um Um Um Um.’

This example shows backchannel responses of the speaker A that are repeated in T3. A also used a low voice, as indicated by the italic letters, in uttering the backchannel response.

Moreover, short verbalization may occur with the other kinds of backchannel responses, as shown in the following examples.

- (3) T1 A: ʔapa: deh ʔikoj
 father P3 who
 ‘Who is her father?’
- T2 B: ʔapa: ɲeah roa kɔʔkret (...) krɔp kɔ:
 father P3 PL N near with
 mɔ̌: suʔet raʔ tɕiat
 doctor(Th.) N FP SP
 ‘Her father is from Kohkret. Near Doctor Sued’s hometown.’
- T3→ A: ʔɔ: ha:
 RP(Th.) QP
 ‘Aha. Really?’

The context is a situation in which A asked B about C’s father in T1. B answered A’s question in T2. T3 is the backchannel response of A with [ʔɔ:] plus a short question that does not need an answer [ha:].

- (4) T1 A: moanɛ tat kləŋ tɕiaʔ ʔale:
 jiffy out come eat P
 ‘I will come out to eat in a few minutes.’
- T2→ B: ʔɣ: koh le:
 RP(Th.) that FP
 ‘Oh. Is that so?’
- T3→ A: ʔɣ: k^hɔh ʔɣ: :: (.)
 RP(Th.) good F
 ‘Aha. Good. Um.’

The backchannel response the speaker B used in T2 consists of a short verbalization [ʔɤ:] ‘RP’ plus a phrase [koh le:] ‘Is that so?’, which is another kind of the backchannel response. The backchannel response speaker B used in T3 consists of a short verbalization [ʔɤ:] ‘RP’ plus a word [k^hoh] ‘good’, which is another kind of the backchannel responses and a short verbalization [ʔɤ:] ‘RP’

b) Repetition

Repeating previous utterances in a primary turn is a kind of backchannel behavior that is the most prominent device in Mon conversation. From observation, there are as many repetitions as short verbalizations. Consider the following examples:

- (5) T1 A: ... huʔ ʔa: laʔ ʔoa ha:m
 NG go FP P1 speak
 ‘I told them I was not going.’
- T2 B: ʔu:
 RP(Th.)
 ‘Aha.’
- T3 A: huʔ pə: raʔ
 NG see FP
 ‘(I) don’t see(it).’
- T4→ B: huʔ pə:
 NG see
 ‘Don’t see (it).’

This example shows repetition in T4. It is partial repetition: [huʔ pə:] ‘not see’. The repetition does not function to emphasize or hold the floor as a repair strategy in conversations, but to support the previous utterances of A.

- (6) T1 A: ʔitoʔ t^hiam toh tiʔ
 T N be sister
 ‘Grandma Thiam is the younger sister.’
- T2→ B: toh tiʔ
 be sister
 ‘Younger sister.’
- T3 A: ʔitoʔ ʔoa to boa
 grandma I be older-sister
 ‘My grandma is her older sister.’

The backchannel response speaker B used here is a partial repetition [toh tiʔ] ‘be younger sister’ which is only a phrase. This phrase is the core of the primary utterance and backchannel response is in T2.

The repetition of the previous utterance in a primary turn often comes after short verbalization. Such a repetition may be a word, as illustrated in the following example.

- (7) T1 A: ʔɤ: saho:t ʔitɕeʔ /kʰɔh kəʔ(.) nia
 RP(Th.) power P3 good able pinch
 ‘Yes. He is strong. He pinches.’
- T2→ B: /ʔɤ: saho:t
 RP(Th.) power
 ‘Aha. Strong.’

The backchannel response speaker B used here consists of a short verbalization [ʔɤ:] ‘RP’ plus a partial repetition [saho:t] ‘power’ which is only one word. The word repeated is a content word, and is the core of the primary utterance.

Moreover, the partial repetition occurs after the short verbalization may be a phrase, such as:

- (8) T1 A: tɕʰaʔ nɤ:(.) sə:ŋ da:tɕ kla:n deh
 P FP(Th.) drink water many P3
 nɔ:m ruaj
 urine often(Th.)
 ‘Well, drinking a lot of water makes you want to urinate so often.’
- T2 B: ʔa::(.) nɔ:m ruaj(...)
 RP urine often(Th.)
 ‘Aha urinate so often.’

The backchannel response of the speaker B used here consists of a short verbalization [ʔa:] ‘RP’ plus a partial repetition [nɔ:m ruaj] ‘often urinate’ which is only a phrase. This phrase is the core of the primary utterance.

In addition, the partial repetition occurs after the short verbalization may be a sentence, such as:

- (9) T1 A: ʔɔ: jneah ʔikoh hn̩i moa moa klɔŋ
 RP(Th.) P3 that CL one one way
 ‘They are cousins.’
- T2→ B: ʔu: hn̩i moa moa klɔŋ
 RP(Th.) CL one one way
 ‘Yes. they are cousins.’
- T3 A: ʔɤ: moa (...)
 RP(Th.) one
 ‘Yes, one’

The backchannel response of the speaker B in T2 consists of a short verbalization [ʔu:] ‘RP’ plus a partial repetition [hn̩ moa moa klɔŋ] ‘they are cousins’. This repetition is a sentence, and is a part of the previous utterance in T1. This backchannel response is uttered in a low voice, as indicated by the italic letters. The backchannel response is used to signal the attention of the listener to the conversation. Thus the backchannel is uttered in a low voice because the listener does not want to interrupt the current turn.

The repetition after the short verbalization may be a word, a phrase or a sentence, but the repeated part contains the major meaning of the previous utterance.

c) Lexical item

The backchannel responses in Mon may be performed at the lexical level. They include [jəʔ] ‘yes’, [kwɛh] ‘true’, [tɛ:m] ‘know’ and [k^hɔh] ‘good’. They may express agreement or support idea or awareness which tell the speaker that the listener is hearing. They are illustrated in the following example.

- (10) T1 A: na:hjiah nɔʔ(.) pih tət mɔŋ ʔɤ:::
morning this P2 sleep be VOC(Th.)
k^hitlo:(.) k^hitlo: p^hɔ:n na
think think N FP(Th.)
‘This morning, while I was in bed, I thought that...
thought that it’s Phorn.’
- T2→ B: jəʔ
SP
‘Yes.’

[jəʔ] ‘yes’ that B uttered in T2, is a word functioning as a backchannel response. Although the word [jəʔ] means ‘yes’, it is not an answer because A’s utterance is not a question, so it is categorized as a backchannel.

The next example is also the backchannel response which is a reduplication, not an isolated word.

- (11) T1 A: ʔanɔʔ kɔk le huʔ tɔp /ʔateʔ
here cool P NG same there
‘Here the weather is cool, not like over there.’
- B: /kwɛhkwɛh
true
‘That’s true.’

The backchannel response used here is the word [kwɛh] ‘true’. The repetition of it indicates the reduplication [kwɛh kwɛh].

d) Phrase

Phrases comprise another type of backchannel response used in Mon conversation. Frequently used phrases include [kwɛh hale:] ‘It’s true’, [k^hɔh kwɛh] ‘very good’ and [koh le:] ‘That’s it’. They may express agreement or support ideas. The following examples illustrate backchannel responses at the phrase level.

- (12) T1 A: ʔu: sa:ŋ ʔale: rəʔ ʔalo:ŋ /teʔ
 RP(Th.) build FP destroy house there
 kləŋ sa:ŋ
 come build
 ‘Aha. Build it. (We) destroyed the building over there and took the (usable) items to build it.’
- T2 B: /ʔu:
 RP
 ‘Yes.’
- T1 A: tɕəʔ ʔapo:t(.) tɔi ha:m kəʔ k^hɔn
 keep thing then speak able carry(Th.)
 tû:tô:
 cupboard(Th.)
 ‘The storage... then we can talk about carrying the cupboards.’
- T2→ B: kwɛh hale:
 true FP
 ‘(It’s) true.’

This example contains a backchannel response, The phrase [kwɛh hale:] ‘(It’s) true’, as indicated by an arrow in the second T2.

- (13) T1 A: ...t^ha: ʔana:n ʔinum ʔadua nɔʔ ʔo:j
 if(Th.) stair have inner this INJ(Th.)
 k^hɛ:p ʔale:
 narrow(Th.) FP
 ‘If the stair is inside, ough! So narrow.’
- T2→ B: kwɛhkwɛh hale:
 true FP
 ‘(It’s) so true.’

The backchannel response the speaker B used here is the phrase [kwɛh kwɛh hale:] ‘(It’s) so true’.

e) Short questions and answers

Short questions and answers may also be used as backchannel responses in Mon conversation to express clarification or exclamation or awareness signaling to the speaker that the listener is listening. e.g. [ha:] ‘QP’, ([hakoh] ‘that’) (plus word(s)) plus [ha:] ‘QP’, [hakoh] ‘that’ plus a high-rising intonation, as shown in the following examples.

- (14) T1 A: *neah ti? ha?ka:w ?at^he: mǎŋ koh*
 P3 brother brother T N that
 rao(...) t^hi mɔ:ŋ paŋ kləŋ koh
 FP that(Th.) live mouth canal that
 ‘He is either a younger or an older brother of
 grandpa Mong, who lives at Pakkhleng.’
- T2→ B: *hakoh1*
 RP
 ‘Really?’
- T3 A: *?ɣ:*
 RP(Th.)
 ‘Yes.’

The backchannel response of speaker B in T2 is a short question [hakoh] ‘really’ plus the high rising intonation, used to indicate her attention to the conversation. However, A responded to B with a short verbalization [?ɣ:].

f) Sentence

Backchannel responses in the Mon can be performed at the sentence level. The sentence [kɔ: deh ?ale:] ‘yes’, which supports the idea and indicates an agreement is illustrated in the following example.

- (15) T1 A: *?anɛ:ŋ kɔ: pə:ŋ hu? ?anɛ:ŋ ha: tɕea?*
 Take give rice NG take or eat
 ket ?ano?
 take here
 ‘Do you bring food from home?’
- T2 B: *tɕea? ?ano? kam(.) ?anɛ:ŋ kam(.) tɕea?*
 eat here some take some eat
 hu? tɕi?
 NG down
 ‘Sometimes I buy it here, sometimes I bring it from
 home because we can not eat here.’
- T3→ A: *kɔ: deh ?ale: h h h ()*
 P yes FP laugh
 ‘Yes. (laugh)’

The backchannel response of A in the T3 is a sentence. The sentence [kɔː deh ʔaleː] ‘yes’ is projectability.

g) Thai backchannel response

In addition, backchannel responses in Thai may be used in Mon conversation. Most of them are short questions and answers e.g. [lɔ̌ː] ‘QP’, [nɔ̌ː] ‘QP’ and [tɕʰâi] ‘yes’. They may express agreement or support an idea or an awareness which tells the speaker that the listener is paying attention to what he is saying. The Thai backchannel responses are illustrated in the following examples.

- (16) T1 A: ʔuː klɔm naː pih weːlaː koh nia
 RP(Th.) good P P2 time(Th.) that FP
 ‘Oh! She’s good now.’
- T2→ B: lɔ̌ː h h h
 RP(Th.) (laugh)
 ‘Really?’
- T3 A: ʔoːj haːm klɔm husiaŋ (...)
 INJ(Th.) speak good QP
 ‘Oh! Talkative.’

The backchannel response of B is [lɔ̌ː] ‘really’ is borrowed from Thai language. It is a question particle, but an answer is not actually required.

The backchannel response in Thai may occur after a short verbalization as shown in example (17).

- (17) T1 A: moat koh kʰɔh /ʔatoː mɨt tɕaŋ koh ra?
 eye that good ear NG good that FP
 ‘The eyes are still good but the ears are not so good.’
- T2 B: /ʔɤː ʔɤː tɔp ʔale ʔipɔʔ kamtɔp
 RP(Th.) RP(Th.) same FP this same
 la moat koh kʰɔh ʔatoː koh huʔ kʰɔh
 F eye that good ear that NG good
 ‘Yes, yes, it’s the same. It’s the same. The eyes are still good but the ears are not so good.’
- T3→ A: ʔɤː tɕʰâi
 RP(Th.) yes(Th.)
 ‘Oh! Yes.’

The backchannel response of A is [tɕʰâi] ‘yes’ which is a backchannel response borrowed from the Thai language. It is a short answer occurring after a short verbalization.

From the data, we can see the diversity of backchannel responses in the Mon conversations. The next section will discuss their functions.

2. The functions of backchannel responses

According to the definition of backchannel responses, their main function is to provide feedback to the primary speaker and to signal the hearer's attention to the conversation. Heinz (2003: 1117), identifies other functions associated with backchannel responses, such as signalling attention, showing involvement, acknowledging the ongoing telling, indicating agreement, etc.

For Mon conversation, the functions associated with backchannel responses are subdivided into seven categories as follows:

a) Supporting the idea and indicating agreement

The backchannel response may be used to support ideas and indicate agreements with the speaker. From the data, this kind of backchannel response is mostly found in the Mon conversation. As mention earlier, Mon people prefer to lead a simple life and do not like to compete with others. They are illustrated in the following examples.

(18) T1 A: ná(.) mǎ: deh k^hɔh lamtɔp
 FP doctor(Th.) P3 good same
 'The doctor is good.'

T2 B: jəʔ /h h h
 SP laugh
 'Yes.'

A mentioned the good behavior of her doctor and B response with [jəʔ] 'yes' in agreement with A's utterance.

(19) T1 A: p^hɔt ʔamot ta:w
 Fear fire burn
 'Afraid of being on fire.'

T2 B: kwɛh hale:
 True FP
 'It's true.'

A was concerned about the wind in case of fire and B responded with [kwɛh hale:] 'true' in agreement with A's opinion.

- (20) T1 A: tɛh ʔa: kla:j mǎ: tɕʰə: saʔ
 must go find doctor(Th.) see CONJ
 huʔ kwəʔ ʔa:
 NG able go
 ‘Have to go see the doctor but (I) still can’t.’
- T2 B: ja:klo: le:
 carry FP
 ‘Carry him.’
- T3→ A: ja:k le:
 carry FP
 ‘Carry him.’

Speaker B expressed an opinion about A’s painful conditions. A also agreed with B by partially repeating B’s utterance.

b) Awareness

Some backchannel responses may also indicate an awareness of the listener, meaning that the hearer is still paying attention to the conversation. The following example shows the awareness function of backchannel response.

- (21) T1 A: tɕʰa ʔoa huʔ fəʔ ʔa: lɔ: ná
 F P3 NG able go where FP
 ‘I can’t go anywhere.’
- T2 B: jəʔ
 SP
 ‘Yes.’
- T3 A: ʔət nɔ:m kɔ: ʔanoʔ
 stool urinate P here
 ‘I pooh and pee here (on the bed).’

A talked about being admitted to hospital and B acknowledged the A’s utterance with [jəʔ] ‘yes’.

c) Clarification

This function may be used to ask questions or request clarification.

- (22) T1 A: ...moatɕiʔ klɔm huʔ tɛ:m tɕap ɲi:m
 how much hundred NG know to thousand
 kɔ la huʔ tɛ:m ɲəntɕa:t
 P F NG know money(Th.)
 ‘I don’t know how much. Is it a thousand? I don’t know.’

- T2→ B: tɕia:t
SP
'Yes.'
- T3 A: ʔo: k^hit tɔi tɔm mɔŋ da:ŋ
INJ(Th.) think (Th.) already think be expensive

nu: dɔŋ se:m plɔ:n le: ha:w koh...
than city Thai again FP rice FP
'Oh! I think rice is more expensive than in
Thailand.'

The backchannel response used here is [tɕia:t] 'status particle'. B used this kind of backchannel to ask A for clarification. Then A explained more clearly in the next turn.

d) Exclamatory question

The backchannel response may function as an exclamatory question, as shown in the following example.

- (23) T1 A: num nu:m(.) ʔiŋɔʔ p^həŋ kəʔ tɛ:m
have have this ASP get know

tɔ:ʔaraw kamtap
after same
'Yes...yes...I've just heard about it.'
- T2→ B: hakoh(...) ʔoa mən deh ha:m deh le:
QP P1 hear P3 speak P3 FP

klo:n luam kɔ: klau ʔi dam koh ra?
do with give husband T N that FP
'Is that so? I heard that he works with Ms.Dam's
husband.'

This example shows the backchannel response of B in T2, which functions as a question. B responded to the unexpected message she heard with the question particle [hakoh] 'really'.

e) Reference

Some backchannel responses request the reference of the speech that the speaker has previously uttered.

- (24) T1 A: ʔa: ɲeah ha:m nɔʔ(.) deh kəʔ(.)
 F P3 speak this P3 able
 hawəʔ hataʔ huʔ ʔɔŋ pə:ŋ:::
 live next life NG starve rice
 ‘Ah. They talk like this. They won’t starve in their
 next life.’
- T2 B: kwəʔ tɕeaʔ pə:ŋ kɔ: bə:(.) /tɕeaʔ
 able eat rice with salt eat
 huʔ tɕeaʔ
 NG eat
 ‘Eat the rice with salt.’
- T3→ A: /ʔɣ: ɲeah ha:m tʰakoh
 RP(Th.) P3 speak that
 ‘Yes, they talk like that.’

This example illustrates the backchannel response in T3, which is indicated by an arrow. It consists of a short verbalization plus a sentence. It shows the reference to B’s utterance in T1.

f) Attempted interruption

Backchannel response can sometimes function as an interruption, when another party tries to interrupt the current speaker. This is illustrated below:

- (25) T1 A: deh ha:m(.) ʔa:-
 P3 speak F
 ‘He told that... Er.’
- T2→ B: husiaŋ
 NG
 ‘No.’
- T3 A: ʔakʰən ʔikoh ʔakʰən ʔalo:n husiaŋ
 time that time work QP
 ‘He was working, wasn’t he?’
- T4 B: ʔâʔ
 RP(Th.)
 ‘Yes.’

This example illustrates a backchannel response in T2, which is performed by the negative particle [husiaŋ] ‘not’. It is the attempt of B trying to interrupt A’s talking. Consequently, A stopped talking at the time when B interrupted for a minute and then she continued speaking and finished her talking when she came to the end of the sentence.

g) Waiting for the complete utterance

The backchannel response may also show that the listener is waiting for the current speaker to complete his/her speaking, as in the following example.

- (26) T1 A: ʔu:(.) t^ha: klo:n ʔaloʔ huʔ kwəʔ
 RP(Th.) if(Th.) do shirt NG able
 bəp halə: rao
 F how FP
 ‘Well, if [you] can’t make a shirt, well, how is it?’
- T2→ B: ʔu:
 RP(Th.)
 ‘Um.’
- T3 A: bəʔhni husiaŋ (.) tɕiʔ- deh tɕùktɕik
 adult NG F P3 fussy(Th.)
 tɕi klo:n huʔ kwəʔ
 then do NG able
 ‘For adults, it is complicated. Then (I) cannot do it.
 (I’ve to look after the elderly)’

The backchannel response of this example shows that B was waiting for A to continue her speaking with a short verbalization [ʔu:]. B knew that A had not finished her utterance from the sentence [bəp halə: rao] in T1, which shows that A wanted to go on but could not recollect what she was saying. For this reason, B waited for her to continue speaking and complete her utterance in T3.

From the data, there are seven functions of the backchannel responses in Mon conversation. Their uses are as important as their types, which are specific to the Mon language. Therefore, the next topic will discuss backchannel behavior in Mon conversation, which is as important as the two previous issues.

3. Backchannel behavior

As mentioned earlier, backchannel responses are specific to language and culture (Heinz 2003:1137). Likewise, their behaviors in Mon conversation are also specific. At almost every turn in the Mon conversation, participating parties perform backchannel responses. Those responses have several characteristics and functions. The selection of the backchannel responses depends largely on the relationship of the participants. Politeness is the most important feature associated with the use of backchannel responses.

This study found that there are three levels of politeness in backchannel response. The first level is the response used with monks who are in the highest rank in the Mon society. The second one is the response used with adults or relatives who are older than the speaker. The last one is the response used with a party who is younger than the speaker or the speaker's friends.

a) Backchannel responses used with monks

When Mon people speak with monks, they are always very polite. The backchannel response they use this show politeness. The most polite backchannel is [tɕia:t] 'status particle'. This word also means 'monk'.

- (27) T1 A: saʔ deh nu:m huʔ kla:n mua ná
 CONJ P3 have NG many P FP(Th.)
 'But they do not have a lot.'
- T2 B: tɕia:t
 SP
 'Yes.'

A is a monk and B is a lay person. Therefore, B selected /tɕja:t/ 'status particle' as the backchannel response in speaking.

b) Backchannel responses used with the elderly

Age is also an important factor in the Mon society. Therefore, the speakers are always polite to adults or the parties who are older than they are. The backchannel responses which they employ, are [tɕia:t] 'status particle' and [jəʔ] 'status particle'. Most of them usually perform [jəʔ], as in the following example.

- (28) T1 A: tɕa:n hoiʔ ku sɿ: koh raʔ
 side house T N that FP
 'She is beside Sri's house.'
- T2 B: hakoh(...) ʔi tɕua: tɕa:n ro:n(.) /ʔarop
 that T N side house near
 'Really? Cua lives near the house, near.'
- A: /jəʔ
 SP
 'Yes.'
- T3 B: ʔi sɿ: ʔikoh le:
 T N that FP
 'Sri.'

A was younger than B, therefore she selected [jəʔ] as her backchannel response in the conversation.

c) Backchannel responses used with the young

For younger parties as well as among friends, the speaker always uses short verbalizations and other types of backchannel responses in conversation that show intimacy or endearment. This can be illustrated by following example:

- (29) T1 A: kloʔ haʔut ʔamu jua
fat INS what sick
'So fat... you don't look like a patient.'
- T2→ B: ʔu: ha:m huʔ nateh toh hn̩ijua na
RP(Th.) speak NG believe be patient FP
'Yes, you can say that again. She doesn't look like a patient.'
- T3→ A: ʔɤ: huʔ nateh toh hn̩ijua(.)
RP(Th.) NG believe be patient
'It's unbelievable she doesn't look like a patient.'

A and B were friends. In their conversation, they selected the short verbalizations [ʔu:] and [ʔɤ:] as the backchannel responses.

Although status and age of the participants are important factors for selecting backchannel responses, individuals and situational characteristics may affect the production of backchannel responses.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, backchannel responses in Mon conversation are very prominent because there are many of them in conversation. Their types can be classified into seven groups: short verbalization, repetition, lexical item, phrase, short question and answer, sentence, and Thai backchannel response. However, it is found that the most frequently used one is short verbalization and the most significant backchannel is repetition of previous utterances. This kind of backchannel reflects the culture aspect of Mon people that they usually agree with other people. The main function of backchannel responses is that the listener uses it to signal his attention. In addition, their functions can be subdivided into seven categories. Most backchannel responses function as a support to agreement, ideas or awareness. Their behaviors in Mon conversation are also specific. There are three levels of backchannel responses. First, those used with individuals with the highest social status, namely monks. Second, those used with adults or older people, and last, those used with peers or younger people.

5. List of abbreviations and conventions

ASP	Aspect
CL	Classifier
CONJ	Conjunction
F	Filler
FP	Final Particle
FTR	Future Marker
INJ	Interjection
INS	Intensifier
N	Name
NG	Negative
P	particle
P1	First Personal Pronoun
P2	Second Personal Pronoun
P3	Third Personal Pronoun
PL	Plural
ON	Onomatopoeia
QP	Question Particle
RP	Response
SP	State Particle
T	Title
Tn	Number of turns, e.g. T1 = turn 1 T2 = turn 2
(Th.)	Thai word
VOC	Vocative

The CA transcription symbols used in the conversation are:

//	point at which the current utterance is overlapped by that transcribed below
(...)	long pauses or gaps in what is very approximately tenths of seconds
(.)	micropause –potentially significant but very short pause, comparable perhaps to an average syllable duration or somewhere below 0.2 seconds’ duration
Bold	relatively high amplitude, or shouted utterances
<i>Italics</i>	syllables stressed by amplitude, pitch and duration
::	lengthened syllables
-	glottal-stop self-editing marker
= =	‘latched’ utterances, with no gap
↑	a rising intonation contour
↓	used to indicate falling intonation contour
(())	used to specify “some phenomenon that the transcriber does not want to wrestle with” or some non-vocal action, etc.

()	uncertain passages of transcript
→	draws attention to location of phenomenon of direct interest to discussion
hh	indicates an audible out-breath, .hh an in-breath
h h h	indicates the laugh
(Adapted from Levinson 1983:369)	

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