An analysis of conversational structures  
between local government officials and ethnic people  
การวิเคราะห์โครงสร้างบทสนทนา  
ระหว่างเจ้าหน้าที่รัฐกับชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์  

Kornchanok Nanthakanok*  
zapzap77@hotmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to study conversational structures between the local government officials and ethnic people at the Registry Office, Chiangkam District, Phayao Province, Thailand. The data was collected by recording natural conversations and observing the behavior of local government officials and ethnic people during their conversations. There were a total of 50 conversations recorded. Data from the recorded conversations were analyzed based on Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) conversational analysis approach.

The results of this study reveal that conversational structures can be divided into three sections: opening section, body section, and closing section. These conversations are different from regular conversations in that they highlight the status and rights of ethnic people. Most conversations are initiated by local government officials: 1) getting attention by calling or calling out the name of an ethnic person, 2) asking questions concerning the purpose of the visit to the Registry Office, 3) using utterances that show continuity from the previous conversation, and 4) describing process details or procedures. For ethnic people, they tend to start the conversation by 1) calling out the name of the local government official they wished to see, 2) greeting, and 3) stating the purpose of their visit immediately. Conversations between local government officials and ethnic visitors tended to be of a questions and answer format to the end of the conversation. It is a unique pattern of government contact in which local government officials acquire information from visitors, in such a way that it implies their authority.

Keywords:  conversation analysis, conversational structures, local government official, ethnic people

* Lecturer of School of General Education, Kasembandit University
บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาโครงสร้างบทสนทนาระหว่างเจ้าหน้าที่รัฐกับชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ โดยใช้แนวคิดการวิเคราะห์บทสนทนา (conversation analysis) ที่ศึกษาจากงานของแซคส์ เชกโลฟและเจฟเฟอสัน (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) โดยเก็บข้อมูลจากการบันทึกบทสนทนาที่เกิดขึ้นจริงและสังเกตพฤติกรรมของผู้ร่วมสนทนาก่อนที่ติดต่อราชการในหน่วยงานทะเบียนราษฎร์ สำนักทะเบียนอำเภอเชียงคำ จังหวัดพะเยา จำนวน 50 บทสนทนา

จากการศึกษาพบว่า โครงสร้างบทสนทนามีอยู่ 3 ส่วนคือ การเปิดการสนทนา การดำเนินการสนทนา และการปิดการสนทนา ซึ่งแตกต่างจากบทสนทนาในชีวิตประจำวัน บทสนทนาที่พบจากการศึกษาเป็นเรื่องที่เกี่ยวกับการสอบถามและสิทธิของชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ การเริ่มต้นบทสนทนาโดยฝ่ายเจ้าหน้าที่ พบว่ามีการเปิดการสนทนาด้วยการเรียกให้ชื่อหรือเรียกให้มาพบ การถามคำถาม การกล่าวคำว่า “ท่านค่ะ” และการขอข้อมูลขั้นตอนการทำงานในส่วนผู้มีอำนาจที่เป็นชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์เปิดการสนทนาด้วยการเรียกกรอกล่าวคำว่า “ท่านค่ะ” การดำเนินการสนทนาด้วยการตอบกลับระหว่างเจ้าหน้าที่กับผู้มีอำนาจที่เป็นชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์จนกระทั่งสิ้นสุดการสนทนา รูปแบบของบทสนทนาที่พบทั่วไปเป็นการถามคำถามของเจ้าหน้าที่และการตอบคำถามของผู้มีอำนาจที่เป็นชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์ไปจนกระทั่งสิ้นสุดการสนทนา ซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นถึงการมีอำนาจหน้าที่ในการปฏิบัติงานของเจ้าหน้าที่ซึ่งทำให้เป็นพื้นที่ที่จะใช้กลิ่มน้ำมันด้วยคำกล่าวต่างๆ ได้

คำสำคัญ: การวิเคราะห์บทสนทนา, โครงสร้างบทสนทนา, เจ้าหน้าที่รัฐ, ชนกลุ่มชาติพันธุ์
1. Introduction

Conversation is a means by which humans socialize with others (Mey, 1993, p.214). It is an activity for a group of people without fixed time, in which each person has the right to speak and listen equally. Conversation is an activity that happens all the time in society. Ideas that speakers communicate along with their discourse include their thoughts, their feelings, and also their attitudes, which can be conveyed to the receivers directly and indirectly according to the speakers’ will. Moreover, conversation is a chance to create, maintain, or end relationships with others.

In Thai society, many ethnic groups live together. One thing that cannot be avoided is communication, whether it is for a general purpose or for trade and business purposes. It is necessary for officials in government organizations to communicate with local ethnic groups, especially officials in registration sections who deal with the information of residents of the country. Information from ethnic visitors must be correct and true in order to avoid mistakes and problems in the future. Therefore, registration officials play an important role as those who directly communicate with ethnic groups.

For these reasons, the researcher has an interest in the study of conversation between local government officials and ethnic people who contact the Registry Office in Chiang Kham District, Phayao Province. A large number of ethnic groups, the subjects of this study, reside in this area. The conversation analysis approach of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) was used as the basis of this study of language through conversation and will help clarify the style of language usage in society. The data was collected from various ethnic groups as follows: Tai Lue, Lao, Hmong, Yao, migrant workers, and undocumented persons. The registration section of the Registry Office in Chiang Kham District, Phayao Province, is divided into 2 divisions, namely, for registration for Thai citizens, and for ethnic people. The ethnic people division deals with the legal status and nationality of ethnic people, and immigrants.
In reviewing on previous researches, it was found that there are numerous studies on conversation using a conversation analysis approach in various contexts. Most of these studies are of the important components in the conversation, and include: Conversational Interaction in Central Thai (Hinds, 1988); An analysis of discourse in Thai (Cholthicha, 1996); Topic shift devices in Thai conversation (Nitayaporn, 2002); A study of preference patterns in Thai conversation (Visanee, 2003); An analysis of Mon conversation (Sungkaman, 2006); A study on turn-taking and floor management in Thai TV Talk (Sirisai, 2006); and Claiming power in doctor-patient talk (Ainsworth -Vaughn, 1998).

The emphasis of this current research is on conversation between local government officials and ethnic people in context from the beginning of the conversation until the end. The focus is on the study of the opening-closing sections of the conversation and the body sections which are questions and answers. The structure of the conversation can reveal the communication patterns between local government officials and ethnic visitors to the public Registry Office. Local government officials will be able to adapt the results of this study to benefit their communication with ethnic groups in the future to improve work efficiency.

2. Data and Methodology

This paper is based on recorded natural conversations and observation of the behavior of local government officials and ethnic people during their conversation at the Registry Office, Chiang Kham District, Phayao Province, Thailand. The data was collected during January - May 2011. There are a total of 50 recorded conversations. The conversation data was collected from various ethnic groups as follows: Tai Lue, Lao, Hmong, Yao, migrant workers, and undocumented persons. The language data used was a mixture of khammuang, “northern Thai dialect,” and Standard Thai. The data from the recorded conversations was transcribed by using the Thai script in Thai orthography adapted from Theraphan (1992) and the transcription notation was adapted from Jefferson (2004). The conversations were analyzed by means of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson’s (1974) conversation analysis.
approach. The format for data presentation is: the first line is in Thai script and the second line is in word-by-word glossary and free translation in the third line.

3. Findings

From the study of the conversations between local government officials and ethnic people in the official context, it was found that the conversations tended to be questions and answers between participants until the end. The conversations between local government officials and ethnic people that occurred in the Registry Office were usually related to the personal profiles of the ethnic visitors. The data record of the ethnic people in the Registry Office is from a survey of the legal status of people in the locality and information provided to the government by the ethnic people themselves. This data has to be verified in many processes. The officials have to acquire information on many issues from the ethnic visitors using various techniques in order to obtain the most accurate information. Inquiries, interviews, or questioning used with the ethnic visitors are the methods the officials used for an initial screening before proceeding to the procedures of proof of nationality and legal status development. However, these procedures depend on the circumstances of each individual, as legal status coincides with rights and benefits available to the person living in the locality, and these rights vary according to legal status.

The results of the analysis of conversation between local government officials and ethnic visitors can be divided into three sections: opening section, body section, and closing section.

3.1 opening conversation

The patterns of opening conversation depend on the relationship among participants: participants who know each other and the participants who do not know each other.

As for the participants who knew each other, there were three ways of opening conversation initiated by local government officials: 1) getting attention, 2)
asking questions, and 3) using utterances that show continuity from a previous conversation. The ethnic people tended to start the conversation by 1) getting attention, 2) calling out the name of the local government official they want to see, and 3) stating the purpose of their visit immediately.

**Initiated by local government officials**

Example 1: getting attention

\[ \text{T1 จ} \]  มา นี่ | มา นี่ มา | ไป ไป ทำไร่ทำนา

\[ \text{T1 จ} \] ма ใ่ |  ма ใ่  ма | ไป ไป ทำไร่ทำนา

Come here come here come EXC go cultivate

นานเท่านั้น หรือ?

so long real QP

‘Come here. Why did you cultivate so long?’

\[ \text{T2 ช} \]  //((ออกมาหายใจ)) ทำไร่ ทำไร่ ทำไม ทำไม ทำไร่

\[ \text{T2 ช} \] ชั่ว //((sigh)) cultivate FP yet not finish

‘(I’m) cultivating now. It’s not finished.’

\[ \text{T3 จ} \]  //ทำไร่ จะไร่ ตอนนี้?

\[ \text{T3 จ} \] ทำไร่ก่า // do what now

‘What are you doing now?’

\[ \text{T4 ช} \] ตอนนี้ จะไป ### ถั่ว

\[ \text{T4 ช} \] ตอนนี้ จะ ไป ### ถั่ว

now will go ### bean

‘I will ### bean.’

\[ \text{T5 ช} \] จะ?

\[ \text{T5 ช} \] จะ?

QP

\[ \text{T6 ช} \] หนัง ก็ปลูก ป่ ได้?

\[ \text{T6 ช} \] หนัง ก็ปลูก ป่ ได้?

what REP grow not get

‘There is nothing to grow.’

\[ \text{T7 ช} \] ปลูก ถั่ว

\[ \text{T7 ช} \] ปลูก ถั่ว

Grow bean

‘To grow bean’
With respect to the above conversation, the visitor walked into the office and went directly to the official’s desk. When the official recognized the visitor, she then called the visitor to meet her and asked about her living (turn 1), ‘Come here. Why did you cultivate so long?’ before coming to the point of the conversation. This shows that the official and the visitor were acquainted or knew each other.

Example 2: asking questions

→ T1 จ: หยั่ง

  do what

  ‘What do you want to do?’

T2 จ: มา ตั้ง บัตร

  come receive card

  ‘I want to receive my ID card.’

T3 จ: ไป ห่อ ดูก ใคร ก่อน?

  receive go give child with QP

  ‘Do you want to receive your child’s ID card, too?’

T4 จ: (0.2)

T5 จ: ไป ห่อ ดูก ใคร.

  get go give child with FP

 ใส่ ซอง ก่อน?

  Put in envelope QP

  ‘You get an ID card for your child. (Finding a pink ID card) Do you want an envelope? ((Looking at the ethnic visitor)) Are you feeling cold?’

T6 จ: ((สะยายหัว))

  ((shaking one’s head))
In Example 2, the visitor came in and waited at the official’s desk. When the official met the visitor, she began the conversation with the question ‘What do you want to do?’ in turn 1 to inquire about the purpose of the contact. Then, the visitor replied in turn 2 with ‘I want to receive my ID card.’ In turn 3, the official asked the visitor, ‘Do you want to receive your child’s ID card, too?’ This utterance shows that the official remembered the visitor and knew that her child also had requested an ID card.

**Initiated by ethnic people**

Example 3: getting attention

→ **T1**: หวัดดี | น้อง | นั่ง | นาน.
greeting PP sister (name)

‘Hello, Nong Nung.’

**T2**: ยัง | นี้ | ใช้ | หรือ? | (มองไปที่บุคคลที่มาคู่พื้นที่)
yes this who QP

‘Yes. Who is she?’ ((look at a person who come with a visitor))
From the conversation in Example 3, the visitor gains the attention of the official by saying the greeting in turn 1, ‘Hello,’ followed by calling out the official’s name, ‘Nong Nung’ to let the official know that she was going to engage in a conversation. Initiating the conversation using the kinship term ‘Nong’ (younger sister) shows that the visitor knew and was familiar with the official. The visitor may have contacted the official many times before and was now acquainted with her.

Example 4: stating the purpose of their visit immediately

→ T1 ช: มา เรื่อง บัตรประชาชน.
   Come subject ID Card
   ‘I come here about the ID card.’

T2 จ: ฮะ
   HES
   ‘what?’

T3 ช: เรื่อง บัตรประชาชน ของ ลูกสาว.
   subject ID Card of daughter
   ‘It’s about my daughter’s ID card.’
In this conversation, when the visitor met the official, he stated his purpose immediately without any initiation, as in turn 1, ‘I come here about the ID card.’ Because there was no initiation, the official may not have been prepared for the conversation or may not have heard what the visitor said clearly. This is demonstrated by the question in turn 2, ‘What?’ Then, the visitor stated his purpose again in turn 3 explaining that he came about the ID card of his daughter. When the official learned his purpose, the conversation continued.

For those who do not know each other, the opening conversations are initiated by local government officials: 1) getting attention, 2) asking questions, and 3) describing process details or procedures. The ethnic people tended to start the conversation by getting attention, and stating the purpose of their visit.

**Initiated by local government officials**

Example 5: asking questions

→ ต่ำ: ตั๋ว ลุก ไหน มา นี่? | ถาม ก่อน.
   you come where come HES ask before

   ‘Where are you from? Let me ask.’
This conversation is between an official and an ethnic Tai Lue visitor from Laos. The topic is about his and his child’s change of nationality. The opening, in turn 1, was begun by the official with the immediate question about the participant’s hometown, ‘Where are you from?’, without greeting. The visitor then answered that he was from Khop Village in Khop District, which is in Laos (turn 4).

The opening question in turn 1 ‘Where are you from?’ immediately after the participants had met each other can be interpreted as the official wanting to both obtain information and express greeting to the participant at the same time. The official may have been familiar with Tai Lue people in the area as there are many communities of Tai Lue people residing in Chiang Kham District, Phayao Province. The inquiry about the visitor’s hometown is a frequently asked question in everyday
life for Tai Lue people. Also, it is possibly aimed at determining which community
the hearer is from.

Example 6: describing process details or procedures.

→ ตู้: นี้ เดี๋ยวนี้ บางตี้ vana |เปิ้น ก้อ ห่อ อัน จะไป ตี
this now some place FP he give give REP inform go at
อ่าเภอ ไว้ ต้นทาง vana |ว่า เจ้าทั้ง ได้ มา รายงานต่อ ก่อ |
district keep source FP that you give come report QP
ที่ เขา คง ทำ หนังสือ ไป ยัง อ่าเภอ เมายำ แท้แม่ |
at I have to do paper go to district (district’s name) again
ยันนี้ คือ คน นี่ มา จาก เมายำ | เพราะ เป็น บอก
It this be person this come from (district’s name) because he tell
ว่า พอที่ อ่าเภอ เขี่ยงค่า แจ้ง ไป ยัง อ่าเภอ เมายำ
that require district (district’s name) inform go to district (district’s name)
ว่า คน นี่ ให้ มา รายงานต่าง เต็ม ก่อ | คือ วัน ตี มา
that person this get come report real QP be day REP come
เข้า พื้นที่ ปุ๊บ เขา คง มา ทัน ปีเต็ด | เทมมกิ้นกับ
enter area immediately you have to come here immediately same as
ไป บ้าน เปิ้น น่า ไป บอก เปิ้น ไป บอกกล่าว ก่อน เที่ย
go home he FP go tell he go tell each other FP
ก่อน เหมี่ยง | น่าให้ ว่า จะ นั้น สา ไป บอก เปิ้น | มา เมือติด |
before FP not that will back FP go tell he come when
ไป เมือติด | เสรย ตู้ เบท | ควรหลัง บ่า เข็น ตี ห่า น่า.
go when I not know FP next time not sign give FP FP

‘Nowadays, some of the Registry offices want a report about the arriving of their
alien worker to this place. You are an alien worker from Mae Sai district. They
want to check that you arrive there. When you go to other residence area, you have
to inform a local government official that you stay in the area not just telling when
you’re going to leave the area. Next time, I’ll not sign your documents.’
An analysis of conversational structures between local government officials and ethnic people

Conversation 15

This conversation is between the official and an alien worker who works in the area. The visitor received permission to enter the locality to report to the Registry Office, but came on the last day before leaving, which is not the appropriate practice. The visitor gave the document to the official. While the official was checking the document, she started the conversation explaining about the regulations for alien workers entering and leaving the locality. This was to inform the visitor of the correct procedures and practices, as in turn 1, and that reporting should be done on the first day of entering the locality and not just before leaving the area. This is because, as alien workers, they are legally restricted to live or work in the registered locality. If they want to leave the registered locality, they have to get permission 3 days before leaving, and they can live outside the registered locality for 180 days at most after permission is granted. Generally, alien workers who come into the locality have to report at the Registry Office immediately after entering. But from turn 2 of the conversation, the visitor explained that she did not know the regulations so she did not comply with them. From this conversation, it appears that the visitor had entered and left the area many times without permission. The official’s
explanation in turn 1 made the visitor aware of the regulations so she could comply with them next time.

**Initiated by ethnic people**

Example 7: getting attention

→ **T1**: นี่ ชีพ | นี่ ชีพ คือว่า อัน | ขณะ นั่น มา ขอ อัน |
  sister PP sister PP be REP I will come come require REP

ไปขอเอกสารหนังสือ
d a permission document to go outside the area of residence

ชัก วัน หนึ่ง คับ | ได้ ก่อ คับ? | พอตี จะ |ไป คับ
about day one PP get OP PP (?) it’s about time will go pick up

สุก ชื่อไทย | ส่ง ละอ่อน ไป โอน | ลูม อัน
Child (Province’s name) sent children go learn and REP

ปั้นเทอม จะ | ไป คับ มา
end of semester will go pick up come

‘Sister. Sister. I want to get a permission document to go outside the area of residence. Can I get it? I will pick up my children at Chiang Mai Province.’

**T2**: นี่ ชื่อ ชัง ที่? 

This name (name) OP (?)

‘Your name is Thong.’

**T3**: ชีพ

yes

‘Yes’

**T4**: ที่ อยู่ ทิ้ง แล้ว ที่ นั่น มา หา ยี่ ยัง? 
You stay (district’s name) already you come meet I do what (?)

‘You live in Theng district. Why do you contact me?’

**T5**: นี่ ใช้ ชีพ ตะกอน อยู่ ทิ้ง | แต่ว่ายื่น พอดี
not yes PP previous stay (district’s name) but REP it’s about time
An analysis of conversational structures between local government officials and ethnic people

This excerpt demonstrates how the visitor started the conversation with the kinship utterance, ‘Sister. Sister.’ in turn 1 to get the attention of the official. He promptly and directly states his purpose in the same turn. Then the official asked the name of the visitor in turn 2 with ‘Your name is Thong?’ This shows that the official knew and remembered the name of the visitor. As the visitor had moved to another district, the official instructed him to contact the local government officials in his current residential area because, unlike citizens, ethnic people cannot contact the government officials outside their residential area, so the contact has to be made in their registered locality.

In conclusion, the data reveals that the opening section patterns of conversations between the government officials and the ethnic people, categorized by the relation between participants, are similar. For the opening section with calling, it was found that when the participants were acquainted or had met each other, the official would start the conversation by calling out the visitor’s name to show that the official knew and remembered the visitor. Then the official started asking questions regarding the visitor’s profile, the reasons for the delayed affairs, and the visitor’s living in order to get familiar with the participant. This is different from when the participants did not know or had not met each other. However, from

มา แต่งงาน กับ ผม | ถ้า มา อยู่ ที่ ฮ่องซ่าน พื้น.

This will tell give otherwise expire you will not get take a photo

I will tell you that you have to contact the local government official at Theng district to register to change your status.’

(Conversation 49)
the conversation, it was found that in such cases, the official used kinship terms in calling the visitor, such as “uncle” for an older male visitor, or “mother” for an older female visitor, while the visitor referred to the official as “older brother/sister.” In the researcher’s opinion, the usage of kinship terms used by both the officials and the visitors were not only for getting the participants’ attention, but also an attempt to express mutuality and familiarity. After the conversation was opened by one of the participants, they would continue on to the purpose of the contact, as will be further explained in the following section.

3.2 Body section

The body section occurs immediately after the opening section by one of the participants. The participants take turns until the conversation is over. The conversation will continue as long as there is natural turn-taking between the participants. The speaker uses a certain style of language to show that s/he is talking in his/her turn. The utterances in each turn can be either grammatically correct or convey complete meaning. They may be sentences, clauses, phrases, or words. The basis of the conversation consists of turn-taking, which allows the conversation to continue smoothly.

It was found that the conversations between the government officials and the ethnic visitors were of a basis question-answer pattern. Conversations between local government officials and ethnic people proceeded according to two types of turn-taking: smooth and non-smooth. Smooth turn-taking involves the participants taking turns at a transition relevance place. The answers are direct and relevant to the topic. For the non-smooth turn-taking in this study, there were certain types of problem which caused non-smooth turn-taking in the conversation. It was found that there were 5 types of problems: 1) no turn-taking at TRP, 2) overlapping, 3) silence, 4) insertion sequence, and 5) repair. (Nanthakanok, in press)

In this paper, the focus is on the insertion sequence in the conversations, which involves a different pattern from the insertion sequence in general adjacency pairs. An adjacency pair is a set of two utterances, each from the different speakers,
occurring in chronological pairs during the conversation. The second utterance is the answer to the first utterance and they usually occur adjacent to each other (Levinson, 1983). Various kinds of adjacency pair can occur sequentially, simultaneously, or as an interruption between the speaker and listener, during either their own or the other’s turn.

This study revealed that the insertion sequences occurred when there were at least 3 participants in a conversation. The insertion sequences found were utterances in the conversation between the visitors who could not communicate with the officials, so the officials had to communicate through local interpreters who could speak Thai and were from the same ethnic group as the visitor. The interpreters would receive the message from the officials and convey the meaning or explain to the visitor in their ethnic language in order to conclude the issue. Such conversation is an insertion sequence, as will be further explained in the following examples.

Example 8: insertion sequence

```
T64 ช: แล้ว ทำไม ที่ เรา วิบ ไป จึงเลย สะ
    Already why father you hurry go FP HES
    ‘Why did your father hurry to go aboard?’

T65 ช: ไม่ ทราบ เหมือนกัน ค่ะ
    not know same PP
    ‘(I) don’t know.’

T66 ช: ฮะ? เหมือนนี้ทำไม ที่ เรา วิบ ไป ทำงาน จึงเลย. ((พูดกับ ช2))
    HES (name) why husband you hurry go work FP
    ‘Meili. Why did your husband hurry up to go for a job?’ ((talk with ช2))

T67 ช: ((ภาษาชนกลุ่ม)) ((ไปพูดกับ ช1))
    (ethnic visitor language) (talk with ช1)

T68 ช: ((ภาษาชนกลุ่ม)) ((พูดกับ ช2))
    (ethnic visitor language) (talk with ช2)
```
T69 ช1: ถ้า ไม่มีเงิน // อยากไป เที่ยวอีก.
REP not have money want go same
'(I) have no money. (I) want to go, too.'

T70 ช: //ไม่มีเงิน | ทำไม ทำไม พาเราไปด้วยที่? ((มองหน้า ช2))
not have money he not take you go with QP (?)
'No money. He didn’t take you to go with him, did he?’ ((look at ช2))

→ T71 ช2: ((ภาษาชนกลุ่ม))  ((พีนัสไปคุยกับ ช1 ทันที))
(ethnic visitor language) (talk with ช1 immediately))

T72 ช1: ไม่พาค่ะ เพราะว่ามี | มีลูกเยอะ | ((หัวเราะ))
not take PP because have have child many ((laugh))
มีน้องเยอะ.
have sister/brother many
'My parents have many children. I have many sisters/brothers.'

T73 ช: น้องเยอะ.
child many
'Many children'

(Conversation 7)

The context of this conversation is an application for Thai nationality. In order to apply for Thai nationality, if the blood father or mother has Thai nationality, the children can also apply for Thai nationality with certification from the father or mother. In this context, the visitor’s father who has Thai nationality had gone to work abroad and had not applied for Thai nationality for his child yet. The visitor then came to apply for Thai nationality herself, but with no certifier, it could not be done. In turn 64, the official asks why the visitor’s father was in a hurry to go abroad. The visitor, who is the daughter (ช1), replies in turn 65 that she did not know. Then (turn 66), the official asks her stepmother (ช2), ‘Ha, Meili. Why did your husband hurry to go for a job?’ The official calls the participant’s name to get her attention. But the stepmother (ช2) is not fluent in Thai, so the utterance in turn
An analysis of conversational structures between local government officials and ethnic people

67, which should be the reply, was interrupted with the adjacency pair in turn 67 and 68 ((T67-T68)) which were in the ethnic language, and the reply to the question in turn 66 came in turn 69.

Then the official spoke with the stepmother (ช) in turn 70 with a question, ‘He didn’t take you to go with him, did he?’ which means the husband did not take her to America. The stepmother (ช) replies in turn 71, in her ethnic language immediately after the official finished her question, and the visitor (ช) then had to translate her stepmother’s answer (ช) for the official (turn 72). This shows that the visitor’s stepmother (ช) can understand Thai language, but is not fluent in speaking Thai, so the visitor (ช) acted as the interpreter.

Example 9: Insertion sequence

\[ \begin{align*}
T22 & \text{: เราจะให้ร้องเพลงชาติไทย หมายถึงร้องกัน} \\
& \text{I will give sing Thai National Anthem FP will sing together} \\
& \text{ชิ้นสีชมพู} \text{((พูดกับช1))} \\
& \text{QP (?)} \\
& \text{‘You have to sing Thai National Anthem. Will both of you sings?’} \\
& \text{((talk with ช1))} \\
\rightarrow T23 & \text{ช1:} \text{((ภาษาชนกลุ่ม))} \text{((พูดกับช2))} \\
& \text{((ethnic visitor language))} \text{((talk with ช2))} \\
T24 & \text{ช2:} \text{ร้องได้\text{€}} \text{เขา} \text{ร้อง} \text{บ} \text{ได้\text{€}} \text{((ตอบคำถามเกี่ยวกับนั้นเท่า)} \\
& \text{sing he sing not get} \\
& \text{‘He can’t sing (the Thai National Anthem).’} \text{((answer the question))} \\
\end{align*} \]

This conversation occurred during the registry verification between the official and 2 visitors who were a woman (ช) and a man (ช). The man had Thai nationality, but the woman has only completed the procedures for proving nationality. According to the conversation in turn 22, the official says that she wants
them to sing Thai National Anthem and asks ‘Will both of you sing?’ The next turn should be the answer to this question, but there is an immediate insertion sequence in turn 23 in the ethnic language spoken by the first visitor (ช1) to the second visitor (ช2). Turn 24 is the reply to the question. The second visitor (ช2) explains the answer of the first visitor (ช1) to the official. This suggests that the first visitor (ช1) understood the official’s words, but could not communicate in Thai. So, turn 24 is an insertion sequence.

Example 10: insertion sequence

14 ช: ตอนนี้ อยู่ บ้าน กาแล หรือ?
   Now stay village (village’s name) QP (?)
   ‘Are you living in Kalae village, now?’
15 ช1: อยู่ ### ไม่มีใคร เลย | ก็ เอา มา.
   stay not have who take REP take come
   ‘I live ### No one takes (me). (So, my son) take (me).’
16 ช: บ้านดั้ง แม่ เจริญ ปี่ คำ โประ | บ้า เจ้า.
   What QP FP headman not understand
   ‘What? A village headman. I don’t understand.’ (talk with ช2)
→ 17 ช1: (ภาษาชนกลุ่ม) (พูดกับ ช2)
   ((ethnic visitor language)) ((talk with ช2))
→ 18 ช2: (ภาษาชนกลุ่ม) (พูดกับ ช1)
   ((ethnic visitor language)) ((talk with ช1))
19 ช2: พอดี กาแล เรื่อง ใหญ่ เหมาะ มา | มา อยู่
   it’s about time (village’s name) topic big again QP come live
   โดย นี่เอ.(ลองเจ่หาน้ำทั้ง) ถูก นับ บ้าน บ้าน เป็น ประชาพัฒนา.
   with this Child it home other (village’s name)
   หมู่ ชาวบ้าน.
moo twenty-one
‘There was some trouble at Kale village. Her son is in Prachapattana village, Moo 21. So, she lives with her child.’ ((talk with €))

This conversation is in the context of questioning for Thai nationality, as her name is listed in the Thai nationality database but she did not have an ID card. To apply for an ID card, the village headman (¥2) had to certify the document as a witness. The visitor can speak Thai but not fluently, and the sentences are arranged ungrammatically which confused the official. This can be seen from turn 14 when the official asks about her current residence. The answer in turn 15 is not clearly spoken and the official cannot catch the words, so she asks the village headman (¥2) in turn 16 what the visitor (¥1) had said. The insertion sequence then occurs straight after turn 17 because the visitor (¥1) turns to explain her answer to the village headman (¥2) in the ethnic language up to turn 18. Then, in turn 19, the village headman (¥2) explains the visitor’s answer (¥1) to the official.

In conclusion, this study of the communication between the officials and ethnic visitors found that one of the problems for ethnic visitors’ communication in Thai is turn-taking in the conversation. When a problem occurs in the conversation, the participants have different ways of solving the problem and continuing the conversation. In the cases where the visitor cannot communicate in Thai, interpreters are needed. The interpreters may simply be people who accompanied the visitors, or unrelated people who know the ethnic language. These interpreters are an important medium between the officials and the visitors. They speak or help explain the utterances to both the officials and the ethnic visitors to establish a mutual understanding between the two, and this leads to the non-smooth turn-taking. It is different from the communication in everyday life whereby insertion sequences usually occur between 2 participants. But in this study, the insertion sequences are communication exchanges between the interpreters and the visitors who cannot directly communicate with the officials themselves. They are the visitor's responses which are explained by the interpreters in that turn. The conversation between each
pair of participants consists of the opening section, the body section, and the closing section. The closing section will be explained in the next topic.

3.3 Closing section

The closing section occurs in the last section of the conversation before the conversation is over. In some conversations, there are verbal or nonverbal signals to indicate the closing section. Findings concerning the closing section include six types of closing by local government officials and two types of closing by ethnic visitors.

Six types of closing by local government officials included: 1) ending the conversation without signal, 2) concluding and reviewing the topic, 3) changing the topic, 4) explaining the procedure and advising, 5) informing that the procedure is finished, and 6) making an appointment for the next meeting. Two types of closing made by ethnic visitors included: 1) ending the conversation without signal, and 2) saying goodbye or thanking.

Example 11: ending the conversation without signal

T68: ตัว ตัว สมัครใจ เลือก รหัส อะไร ถาม หน่อย |ตอนที่ ขอ
you you volunteer choose code what ask |FP when require
สมัครใจ เลือก รหัส อะไร?
volunteer choose code what (?)
‘Which ID code did you choose (in your application form)?’

T69: ตอนที่ ขอ เลือก รหัส 5 ที่.
when require choose code five PP
‘I chose ID code number 5.’

T70: น่าน เท่านั้น มั้ย | เสี้ยว เสี้ยว สมัครใจ ละ ตัว มา ไวยา
EXC see QP (?) owner she volunteer and you come make a scene
An analysis of conversational structures between local government officials and ethnic people

115

อะไร. ((หัวหน้าไปทาง ช2))
what

‘You see? She is willing to choose this ID code. Why did you make a
scene?’ ((look at ช2))

T71 ช2: ก็ นั่น แหละ | แล้ว ก็ แบบ ทำ ทำ อก อย่างนี้ ทำไม่
REP that FP already REP like make make difficult like this why
พี่ชาย ค้า ไม่เอา หมายเลข เหมือน พี่ชาย ไป เลย.
Brother she not take number eight same brother go FP

‘Yes. I think this ID code is difficult. Why didn’t she choose ID code
number 8 like her brother?’

T72 จ: หนึ่ง
one
‘First’

T73 ช2: ยิ่ง
yes
‘Yes’

T74 จ: หนึ่ง นะ อยากได้ ชั่งนี้ คือ สิ่งที่ ดีที่สุด | ก็ ค้า นะ เลย ชั่งนี้ คือสิ่งที่ดีที่สุด.
One FP want get thing best be she will take thing best

‘First, she would like to have the one which gives her all the rights (just
like other Thai citizens.)’

T75 ช2: นั่น นะ.
that FP
‘Yes’

T76 จ: ยิ่ง สิ่งที่ ดีที่สุด ตอนนี้ มัน ไม่ให้ ไม.
Yes thing best now it not give FP

‘However, they do not grant Thai citizens code at this moment (the system
is temporarily closed.)’

(Conversation 16)
This conversation was between the official and the visitor who is Hmong. The visitor had been to the office before to change the Thai nationality ID code from number 8 to number 5. But the issue could not be settled as the central registry system was closed and nothing can be done during this time, so the official could not do anything at the time. The relative of the visitor had also come to see the official many times, but nothing could be done.

At the beginning of the conversation, the visitor’s relative does not listen to the official’s reasons and insists on her request to change the profile. In the conversation, the visitor who is the interested party has no role in the conversation. In the last section of the conversation, the official asks the visitor in turn 68, ‘Which ID code did you choose (in your application form)?’ and the visitor replies, ‘I chose ID card number 5.’ Then the official turns to speak with the visitor’s relative (ประเทศไทย) in turn 70, ‘You see? She is willing to choose this ID code. Why did you make a scene?’ The right to choose the type of citizen ID number is the applicant’s and should be made without interference from the official. It seems that the visitor’s relative still did not listen and tried to explain her reasons to the official. The official then refers to the visitor herself asking if she wants the ID number 5 for type of citizen, and explains in turn 74 and 76 that the person with the ID number 5 will benefit most and the visitor can choose to have this number. Then the conversation is terminated when the official finishes her sentence without closing section or any signal.

Example 12: explaining the procedure and advising

→ T112 จ: ถ้าออกนอกเขตพื้นที่จังหวัดพะเยาต้องมา
   If go outside area province (province’s name) have to come
   ขออนุญาตออกนอกพื้นที่ให้ถูกต้อง บ่ายบ้า
   require permission go outside area give right otherwise
   ยกเลิกหน้า ตัดออกเลย
   cancel FP cut out FP
‘If you go out of Phayao Province, you will have to ask for permission. If you don’t ask for permission, I will withdraw your status in the document register.’

T113 จ: เข้า
yes

‘Yes’

→ T114 จ: โดนจับ แล้วถูกคุมขัง นั้น เนื่องจาก มีการกระทำความผิด
be arrested this time it this not know not be what but know

แล้ว ต้อง ปฏิบัติตาม ตาม หน้า.
already have to do allow FP

‘I don’t concern, if you are arrested. You already know the law. You have to do according to the law.’

T115 จ: เข้า
yes

‘Yes’

(Conversation 43)

This conversation is the closing section. Before the conversation is over, the official informed and advises the visitor, who is an alien, about legally requesting permission to leave the locality (turn 112). If she does not comply with the law, her personal status and right will be withdrawn. This can be seen when the official says, ‘If you don’t ask for permission, I will withdraw your status in the document register.’ which means that, the person will not be protected by law. She also advises, ‘You already know the law. You have to do according to the law.’ in turn 114, which means it was alright this time, but next time the visitor has to comply with the law. Then, the conversation is terminated in turn 115.
Example 13: making an appointment for the next meeting

→ T42 จ.: ให้ สิทธิ์ ใช้ หลัง มัน ก่อ อยู่ที่ เข้าตัว นะ | ไป ไป
  use right use what it REP depend on owner FP not not
  สนใจ (0.5). เรา ถึง บํา| interest each other FP get this QP
  เรา เบอร์ ไว้ นะ | เรา เบอร์ ไว้ | คือ ข้าเจ้า
get phone number keep FP get phone number keep awhile I
  จะ อ่าน นี่ ไว้ | เพราะ ตั๋นนี้ เนี่ย. ถ้า ลง คิด ประเภท
will REP this keep because now FP if record wrong category
  เนี่ย เป็น มัน จะ อีง เลย สิทธิ์ อีเท่า นะ | เพราะ ข้าเจ้าที่
FP he it will more lose Right FP FP because I REP
  ตัดสินใจ ไว้ ถูก ต้องนะ | ข้าเจ้า ขอ เบอร์ ไว้ จิ้ม
decide not true FP I ask for phone number keep FP
  มะ หรือว่า จะ ห่อ ติดต่อ ปีหลวง ไป โดยตรง.
FP or will give contact headman go straight

'It’s your right. It’s up to you to use it or not. You are not interested. Okay. Leave your telephone number with me, I will call back. If you register in the wrong category, you will lose your right. I can’t decide. I will call back or I will tell your village headmen.'

T43 ข.: ติดต่อ ปีหลวง ก็ ได้.
contact headman REP get

'(You) can contact the village headman'

T44 ข.: ติดต่อ ปีหลวง นะ | เพราะว่า เขา ตัดสินใจ ไม่ ถูก | เข้า
contact headman FP because I decide not right I
  ตรงๆ ถ้า ลง คิด ประเภท ไป หรือ บีบ | อะ เป็น
say straight if Record false category go give he and he
An analysis of conversational structures between local government officials and ethnic people

You can contact your village headman because I can’t decide. If you register in the wrong category, you will lose the right.”

‘Yes. I will let you know no later than this coming Friday.’

‘When I call you back, please take him to the registry office to finish all this matter. He will get the right.’
มา อยู่ ใหม่ นี่ | ข้างเจ้า นี่ เลย เทียบเท่า หน้า.

come stay new this I REP not get same FP

‘You live here for a long time. You are suitable for getting the right. If you have just arrived, I will not manage anything for you.’

T51 ช: ที่
yes
‘Yes’

T52 ช: นี่
FP
‘Okay’

(Conversation 24)

This conversation is the last section about the granting of personal status after the person has been questioned. The local government official talks with the person (ผ) who comes with the visitor. He helps explain the visitor’s issue to the official. The visitor just sits beside him and does not say anything. But, in the case of this visitor, his status was unclear and the official could not make the decision, so he had to discuss with the central registry office. The official then asks for the phone number (turn 42) and makes an appointment to contact the visitor no later than the next Friday (turn 46). This is the signal to the participant that the conversation is over (turn 52).

Example 14: saying goodbye or thanking

T53 ช: นี่สอง คน เลี้ยง | ((ยื่นเอกสารให้)) คืน ใบนี้ ที่
FP two person FP sister return paper this give

ตั๋ว นี่ อย่า นี่ | และก็ เบี้ย ถ่าย บัตร จะยืม แต่ เป็นของ you not take FP and this copy card like this but belonging

ป่อนกับน่ามา เลี้ยง | คู่ใหญ่บ้าน หรือ ถ้านี่ ถ้า อันนี่ จะ ที่ headman come with headman or leader EXC it this will give
This conversation is between the official and the alien worker who has requested permission to leave the locality. The document needed for the request to leave the locality consists of various documents including those by the certifier who can be one of the village headmen, a sub-district headman, or a government official.
At the last section of the conversation, the official gives information on the required document. Then, the conversation is terminated with ‘Thank you.’ from the visitor (turn 56) and the official’s reply (turn 57).

In conclusion, to end the conversation without the closing section is the method used by both participants. From the study, it was found that ending without the closing section may occur for numerous reasons such as: when the procedures are over; when the official has to issue the document; when the official needs no more information from the visitor; or when one of the participants stops the conversation. For the closing section by the visitors, it was found that most of the conversations ended with thanks, saying goodbye, or a traditional Thai Wai gesture. This is different from the closing section by the officials which include no thanking or saying goodbye. One possible reason for this is that the official manages the issue for the visitor, so it is the visitor who should thank and say goodbye to the official. Moreover, it was revealed that, in most of the conversations, the one who started the closing section was usually the official. It may be that the officials have a role as provider or may be that it is to do with dominant or superior relationship, so all the procedures depend on the officials.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

From this study of conversation between local government officials and ethnic groups, it was found that the conversations were formal. For the opening section, it was revealed that the participants started the conversation by calling out names, asking questions, or immediately stating their query. These inquiries may be about unfinished processes, an explanation of the procedures by the local government official to a first-time ethnic visitor, or a statement of the ethnic visitor’s objectives without introduction. These opening sections were found to be in contrast with the study of Schegloff (1979). They are different from general conversation situations which are usually started with a greeting or an apology to get the other participant’s attention. For the various closing section patterns, it was found that the closing section was semi-formal. Most of the patterns are related to the purpose for
contact. The official’s role was not only to provide service but also to initiate questions, while the ethnic visitor’s role was to reply to the questions until the conversation was terminated. It is a unique pattern of government contact in which the local government officials have authority to obtain information from the visitors. Moreover, this study also reveals that the official is the one who controls the conversation by changing the topic, and summarizes by concluding, explaining, advising, or making an appointment for the next meeting. She usually informs the visitor when the procedure is finished. These were similar to the study of a conventional consultant such as between a doctor and a patient in which the physician often concludes that conversation in a medical setting (Ainsworth-Vaughn, 1998).

The body section is the part where the participants take turns in the conversation. It was found that there is both smooth and non-smooth turn-taking. The non-smooth turn-taking is caused by awkwardness in the conversation, which usually occurs in natural conversation. It can be caused by some adjacency pairs which do not occur sequentially, or there is an insertion sequence between the adjacency pair. The study of turn-taking, reveals that the insertion sequences in the conversation between the officials and the ethnic visitors occurred mostly when there were at least 3 participants in the conversation. In cases where the visitor could not communicate with the officials, or convey the correct meaning, interpreters, who were also the ethnic people, were the ones who explained or translated the answers to the officials in order to continue the process. The insertion sequences found in this study are different from those found in Levinson’s (1983) study in which insertion sequences occurred when there were only 2 participants. This current study also found that the utterances in adjacency pairs did not necessarily occur sequentially and could be a part of the previous pair. In this study, the adjacency pair of question-answer may be a question in the first turn of the conversation, but the next turn may not be the answer to the first turn question, rather it may be another question to the first speaker. When the first speaker answers the second speaker’s question, the second speaker then answers the question from the first turn. From the conversation,
it was found that most of the ethnic people can communicate with the officials with northern Thai dialect or central Thai language. On the other hand, the officials could not speak or understand any of the ethnic languages. As to this issue, the researcher finds that if the officials knew the ethnic languages, it would benefit the efficiency of their work.

5. Transcriptions

// Indicated overlapping point

= Indicated contiguous utterance

[ Indicated simultaneous utterance

| Indicated breaking point

:: Sound stretch

? Rising intonation

(( )) Indicated a non-verbal activity or verbalization without transcription

### Words unclear

Local government official

Ex. ก = the first local government official
    ’ก = the second local government official

Ethnic person

Ex. ภ = the first ethnic person
    ’ภ = the second ethnic person

6. Abbreviations

EXC = exclamation

FP = final particle

HES = hesitation

PP = polite particle

QP = question particle
Acknowledgements

This article is a part of my M.A. thesis, “An analysis of conversational structures between local government officials and ethnic people”, which was supported by the Thailand Research Fund, TRF Master Research Grants. Scholarship code: MSG54Z0007. I would like to express my gratitude to Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sujaritlak Deepadung for her comments and suggestions during the writing of this paper and my thesis.

Endnotes

1The first digit in the ID card refers to type of citizen. Altogether there are 8 types:

Examples: Type 1 is a person who was born in Thailand, has Thai nationality, and whose birth was notified on the valid date after January 1st, 1984.

Type 3 is a Thai and alien person who has an alien certificate and whose name is formerly registered in the house registration (Jan 1st – May 31st, 1984).

Type 5 is a Thai person who has been granted permission to add the name to the house registration in case of incomplete census or other cases.

Type 8 is an alien person who legally enters the locality, which means who has an alien certificate with the change of nationality to Thai and who has been granted Thai nationality.

References


