Dividing the Rice II: Achieving Agreement
Author(s): Jack Bilmes

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/.

The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society is published online via eLanguage, the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.
Dividing the Rice II: Achieving Agreement

Jack Bilmes
University of Hawaii

This paper concerns a negotiation that took place in a Northern Thai ricefield in 1988. At issue is how the harvested rice is to be divided between the owner of the field and the sharecropper. I will argue that there are in fact two kinds of negotiation taking place. One concerns the division of the rice. But they are also negotiating, in the sense of working out, their social relationship. The entire proceeding was audiotaped and transcribed. In an earlier paper, also titled "Dividing the Rice" (Bilmes 1992), I made some observations concerning culturally distinctive practices in this negotiation. I noted, for example, the occurrence of a genre of talk used by mediators, stylistically related to blessings, with standard content, expressions and constructions, and features of articulation. I found that these "admonitions" (as I called them) were fit into the talk in a certain way and repeatedly elicited certain responses and served certain functions. I found that, although anger is sometimes expressed very clearly, the M’hang (the main Northern Thai ethnic group, closely related in language and custom to both Central Thai and Lao) reaction to a declaration of anger is quite different from the reaction typical for at least many Americans. For an American, to declare that one is angry with an interlocutor is to "communicate," to begin a possibly therapeutic process of repairing a strained relationship. For the M’hang speaker, to declare anger is to exacerbate the situation. To say "I am angry" is itself an angry act. The first step in repairing a strained relationship is to deny anger. Finally, I found a normative preference for outcomes based on positive sentiment over those based on rights and justice.

My discussion here of the negotiation of relationships will add further information on the cultural dimensions of M’hang discourse. However, much of what emerges from the present analysis does not appear to me to be distinctively M’hang or Thai (on this point, see also Bilmes in press; Moerman 1988). I think that many of my conclusions have wide, if not universal, application. But perhaps the finding that Thai conversation is not all that exotic, and the discovery of the ways in which it is not exotic, are also of some interest and significance.

The setting, as I have indicated, is a ricefield. There is a sharecropper, Kêew, 39 years old, and his wife, Deen, 39. (I put it this way because, although Deen plays a very important role in the negotiation, Kêew is considered the head of the household and the ultimate decision-maker.) There is Dii, 70, the owner of the rice fields. There is Muun, 75, a former village headman, and presently a village representative to the district Land Rental Committee. Muun is ostensibly there to mediate, but he tends to negotiate on Dii’s behalf. Also present are Cân, who is a villager working as my research assistant, myself, and two men who were hired by Dii and Muun respectively to help transport the harvested rice (Muun has stopped in
Dii’s field on the way to his own. Late in the negotiation, Dii’s sister arrives, but remains mostly in the background.

The rice, a four-acre crop, has been harvested and threshed, and is piled in the center of the field. What is occurring is most unusual. The sharecropper and the owner are negotiating over how the rice is to be divided. Dii (the owner) had, some months earlier, told Kêew that this would be Kêew’s last year sharecropping these fields. Dii wanted his nephew to take over. Sharecroppers are not usually dealt with in this way, and Kêew was angry. He was determined not to divide the rice in the usual fashion, but to demand more than the normal share. He had some power in this matter, since there was a national law that specified a division much more favorable to the tenant than the traditional division. The law, apparently, was formulated to deal with problems that existed mainly in other regions of the country, and the local officials encouraged the villagers to base their rice division on tradition and mutual agreement rather than on the law. In fact, I never witnessed or heard of a single case of rice being divided according to the stipulations of the law. Nevertheless, it appeared that the officials would have to enforce the law if a villager demanded it.

In the course of the negotiation, which lasted about 30 minutes from first proposal to final agreement, Dii made four proposals, specifying how he would be willing to divide the rice. Each succeeding proposal was in some way more generous than the last. The first proposal comes just minutes after Dii arrived at the field, where Kêew and Dêen were waiting. Muun is approaching as the exchange takes place.

(1) first proposal

24. (2)
25. Kêew: haw păn kn cday
26. : (*)
27. Dii: hêe
28. Kêew: pôo nôy păn cdây ("khâaw")

(2)

29. (2)
30. Dii: păn yay (kò) păn kòî (nâ) lâ kô că phèa hâu khiê pâa kàa:

(2)

Kêew : How will we divide?
?: (*)
Dii: Huh?
Kêew: How will you divide ("the rice")? ((He addresses Dii as Father nôy. nôy is a title indicating that the bearer was once, but is no longer, ordained as a novice. This is the usual way that villagers of inferior generation would address Dii.))

Dii: Divide how? Why, divide in half and I’ll give you an extra share. ((The way this is phrased implies, “Of course we’ll do it this way. How else?”))
31. Kēew: ṣō pān kʰəŋ khāa bə aw
32. Dii: čee ((starts high and rises))
33. Kēew: khāa bə aw (. ) bə tokloŋ
34. (1)
35. Dii: bə tokloŋ nyía nyāy
36. (2.5)
37. Kēew: pān sāam nān na
38. Dii: phō pō nān wāa (*)
pān pěn (1) (*//*)
39. Kēew: ṣō bō wāa (1.5) pō nāa (pō nāa māa la) (.5) lē khāa bə tokloŋ
40. (1)
41. Dii: a tokloŋ kə tāamcāy na:
42. Kēew: ṣə
43. (3)

Kēew: No, I won’t divide in half.
Dii: Huh?
Kēew: I won’t do it. ( . ) I don’t agree.
(1)
Dii: If you don’t agree, what shall we do?
(2.5)
Kēew: Divide in thirds. ((It is understood that Kēew would get two thirds.))
Dii: Because Father nāan ((Muun)) said (*) He’s (1) (*//*) ((nāan is title for former monk))
Kēew: I’m not talking about (1.5)
Father nāan (Father nāan has come) (.5) and I don’t agree.
(1)
Dii: If you don’t agree, it’s up to you ((literally—follow your heart))
Kēew: Yeah
(3)

Dii’s first proposal is to divide in half, which is traditional. He would also give Kēew an extra share of unspecified amount. He is actually offering more than he has ever given before. In the past, he has divided 50-50, with no extras, which is less generous than most other owners. The proposal is elicited by Kēew’s explicit question. Kēew responds to the offer quite brusquely. It is unusual to hear villagers speak to each other with such anger (for that, my informants agreed, is what is expressed), especially a younger (Kēew is 39) speaking to an elder (Dii is 70), and a poor sharecropper to a relatively wealthy owner. Kēew does not even make a counterproposal until pressed by Dii, and then delays, as if reluctant to settle under any terms. Finally, he demands a division in thirds, it being understood that he would get two parts and Dii one.

This is only one of several points early in the negotiation where Kēew expresses anger toward Dii. At another point, when Muun urges Kēew to accept a traditional settlement, dividing the rice in half, this exchange takes place:
128. Keew: əə tham//madaa nii (. ) man khwa:mdii khwaamsǐop kap kän naa
Keew-: Yeah, usu//ally there is good feeling and affection, right?

129. Muun: (*) wāa
130. Muun: mhm
131. Keew: əə (hân) khwaamdi: khwaamsǐop kap kän lā pān kōŋ känpy
Keew: Yeah, good feeling and affection (. ) and they divide in half.

132. Muun: nnān na kāa=
133. Keew: =phāy ba khít naa

134. Muun: nāa kāa
135. Keew: mīa (=m u-a) badiawnii (.5) bnni khwaamdi: khwaamsǐop kap kän lā maa pān kōŋ thāa ba dāy
Keew: Now (.5) there is no good feeling or affection between us so it seems we can’t divide in half.

136. Muun: (*) tāamcāy
137. Keew: əə khāa bō tokloŋ (.5) (*) wannī khāa bō pā/n
Keew: Yeah, I don’t agree (.5) (*) today I won’t divi//de.

Shortly after, there is an angry exchange in which Keew accuses Dii of breaking a promise, which Dii denies.2

Keew begins the negotiation (see extract 1) by asking Dii how he will divide the rice, thus according Dii the control of the situation which is his due by virtue of ownership, wealth, and age. But Dii’s predictable proposal is brusquely rejected and followed by an inflexible demand by Keew. Both Keew’s display of anger and his negotiating tactics constitute a derangement of normal social relationships. As I noted in my earlier paper, Muun consistently tries to reframe the situation as one based on Keew’s needs and Dii’s generosity, rather than as one in which the sharecropper is making demands based on legal power and a sense of justice.

A significant part of the rest of this occasion is devoted to repairing the situation. The following exchange occurs just after an angry episode in which Keew accuses Dii of having broken a promise:

233. Keew: əə tāa phāy ba (h)ū(h)á hehhaha
Keew: I don’t say whose fault it (h)w(h)as hehhaha I’m not criticizing anyone hahaha= Deen: =Yeah

234. Deen: =əə
235. Këew: khâa bo aw khôt hûu phây // (sâk) khon lá
Këew: I’m not angry at anyone //at all.

236. Deen: (haw) bo khôt hûu phây // (sâk) khon ná // (yàan) ùy kãnná
Deen: (We) aren’t angry at anyone // at all // (like we said)

237. Këew: əə
Këew: Yeah

238. Dii: ba khôt náa nîi tûn ba // (khôt nâa)
Dii: Don’t be angry, you/we mustn’t // be angry.

239. Këew: // əə (.) khâa bô khôt hûu phây ná
Këew: // Yeah (.) I’m not angry at anyone.

240. Deen: əə ba khôt ba kiat hûu phây sâk khon ná
Deen: Yeah, we’re not angry, we don’t hate anyone at all.

241. (.5)

242. Dii: mîi kâa suû (*) phôô naâ mâaday kô sîi khây kiat=
Dii: There’s only you (*) Whenever I look at you, you look angry=

243. Deen: =oɔ: // bo cûy (.) pân ba khôt ba (**)
Deen:=Oh: // not so (.) he’s not angry, not (**)

244. Këew: əə khâa bo kiat (.)
Këew: No, I don’t hate [anyone] (.) I’m like this, I’m hardly (.5) at home (.5) I don’t go to see anyone (.5) I go out to seek a living myself, that’s all.

(khaa tûn yû ia k ha baa (.) lâm:

(kaa tûn yû ia k ha baa (.5) lâm:

(kaa tûn yû ia k ha baa (.5) lâm:

(kaa tûn yû ia k ha baa (.) lâm:

This is the first of several exchanges in which Këew and Deen deny being angry. It is not surprising that Këew’s expression of goodwill in excerpt (3) is immediately followed by another proposal from Dii. This time, Dii upgrades his offer; he says that he will “support” (that is, pay half of) the plowing and threshing costs. (Many owners in the area do this as a matter of course, but Dii never had.) Muun adds on Dii’s behalf that he would give an extra share as well. Këew replies immediately:

249. Këew: əə (khâa) ba aw (.5)
Pân’saam pân kàa (.) pân sàam pân (.) khâa ca pân (.) thàa pân sàam
tokloŋ a

Këew: No, (I) won’t accept that (.5) I’ll divide if we divide in three (.).

Këew: I won’t accept that (.5) I’ll divide if we divide in three (.). If we divide in three, I agree.

Këew’s refusal is immediate, but different from his earlier refusal in that, without prompting, he states his own conditions and says that if they are met he will agree to divide. He emphasizes that willingness several times. He has not changed his position, but his manner of expression shows some desire to reach an amicable agreement.
At this point, Muun appears to accept Kèew’s demand on Dii’s behalf.

(5)
253. **Muun**: -păn sãam // (khịị) (.păn sãam khịị ca aw sọọị sụan

254. **Kèew**: khàa kọ tụ ya dáy niua'

255. **Kèew**: òo

256. (.8)

257. **Dii**: kēe pay kāa

258. **Muun**: nám lēew hàn mọt

**Muun**: =Divide in three // (you) (.) divide in thirds and you will take two parts.

**Kèew**: I won’t be able to work [these fields] again.

**Kèew**: Yeah.

(8)

**Dii**: It seems like too much.

**Muun**: And then it will be done with.

Dii’s protest is weak, suggesting his readiness to accept Kèew’s conditions. (In fact, I have very strong reasons to suppose that Dii had told Muun beforehand that he expected Kèew to demand a one-third/two-thirds division and was ready to accept such a division.) Kèew has been asking for a division in thirds since the beginning of the negotiation. That the concession comes at this point is perhaps not coincidental. Two important things have happened. First, Kèew has progressed from demonstrations and even declarations of anger and ill-feeling to declarations of nonhostility. Second, Kèew, for the first time, expresses himself in a way that shows some desire to settle. However, as Muun and Dii apparently concede a division in thirds, Kèew adds to his demands. Muun says to divide in three and be done with it:

(6)

258. **Muun**: nám lēew hàn mọt

259. **Kèew**: nám lēew (nyãŋ) (.5) kám dáy kám ká- (.lót maa hũu khàahēem=

260. **Dii**: =ōo ba // kám le (tọ)

261. **Muun**: òo (.kàa lọt phày wàa nyia // än

262. **Kèew**: ə (.*) bọc kàm bọc kám kọ (*) khàa bọ pàn tịa // wanni khàa bọ păn

**Muun**: And then it will be done with.

**Kèew**: (What do you mean) done with (.5) support should support the cost- (.lót of the tractor ((i.e., pay part of the cost, usually one half)) for me also=

**Dii**: Oh I won’t // support that.

**Muun**: Oh (.kàa lọt phày wàa nyia // än

**Kèew**: a (.*) if you don’t support don’t support (*) I won’t divide // Today I won’t divide.
Both Dii and Muun seem shocked by Kēew’s new demand. Kēew also returns to a coercive, uncompromising rhetoric, evident in the way he refuses the offer. Kēew and Dii continue in this vein, reiterating at several points that Dii “must” support the cost of plowing. Moreover, they are not offering to negotiate the amount; they specify that Dii must pay one-half the cost.

Dii’s third proposal is once again clearly occasioned by its sequential environment.

(7) third proposal

351. Dii: tāam tī (* pōn nyā' pōn kām kān naa mot na'(.) kām kāa hēeŋ // khon kō kām
352. Kēew: pōn kām kūu khon=
353. Muun: =an nān pūn bēeŋ kōŋ // lūu
354. Dii: nān pōn bēeŋ kōŋ (lōo ̄ ti) deeŋ=
355. Dii: =bēeŋ kōŋ lá kō kō phūa khāaw hūu hēeŋ pōc cāy nā (. ) thàam pōn tō (tāam // kāy tāam him nīi)
356. Muun: (kō nāa kāa) ca aw yāan ân kō dāy // lūu
357. Dii: t̄hāa phāa k hāaw (khāaw // tūŋ) pōc cāy lá
358. Dii: an nān nā nīi (*) tī nī kō kūt cāy // wâà ân nā
359. Dii: kām (*) kāa lōt thày (. ) kām kāa hēeŋ: ka- an kāa cāaŋ // tū hēeŋ
360. Dii: ca phūa (.5) ca phūa hūu ñañ hūu dīi nā bēeŋ kōŋ nā=

361. Kēew: =ahhoh=
362. Dii: =man // ba cūu
363. Dii: *(*) bēeŋ kōŋ mī kō man kō // tūŋ ba bēeŋ tūa*
364. Kēew: bēeŋ kōŋ kāa ba bēeŋ

Dii: According to (*) usual practice they all support (. ) support the cost of labor ((threshing)) // also.

Kēew: They support everyone.=

Muun: In those cases they divide in // half.
Dii: There they divide in half, deeŋ= Dii: =Divide in half and give an extra, satisfactory share of rice (. ) Ask them (in // this area).

Muun: (That’s it.) If you want to do it that way, that’s // okay.
Dii: If there is an extra share (they // will) be satisfied.
Dii: That way (*) At this end I figured // like that

Dii: Support (*) the cost of the tractor (. ) support the cost of labor, co- uh cost of hiring // threshers also.
Dii: I would give (.5) give a lovely extra share if we were going to divide in half.=
Kēew: =ahhoh=
Dii: =He wouldn’t agree.

Dii: *(*) divide in half there will // be no division.*
Kēew: I won’t divide in half.

Dii is speaking of how other sharecroppers divide in half, get support for their capital investments, and get an extra share as well. She continues in that vein.
even after Muun (#356) offers to divide in that manner. Dii, understandably, sees Deeŋ as possibly proposing a division in half, with extras, and proposes to do it that way, offering a generous extra share. This proposal, too, is immediately rejected.³

It is Dii’s fourth proposal that will be the primary object of analytical interest. Unlike the first three proposals, the fourth is not visibly occasioned by the preceding talk. They have been discussing the amount of the harvest and related matters:

(8) fourth offer

625. Kēew: ( pii nii man pay yàañ lɔɔ khāaw pii nii)
626. (2)
627. Dii: pii ni- (.) pi- kɔɔŋ nán dāy hok lɔɔy // pąay nɔ
628. Deeŋ: (*)
629. (2)
630. Cān: // d āy hok lɔɔy pąay kaa
631. Muun: (*) (.5) (**/*)
632. Kēew: (*) (.) (*) (.5) (***)
633. Deeŋ: an nii khāaw (nǐaw)
634. Kēew: nii man sāy sām ba dāy (.) sāy sām lá nǐaw

635. (4.5)
636. Dii: cān man tɔ (.) bēeŋ sāam á lɛ kɔ (.) (.) (ɔ) phàa // lā (tii tɔ)
637. Muun: mhm (.) tokloŋ bēeŋ sāam lá kɔ āw thɔ
638. Dii: khāaw cǚa hɛɛm // hāa tuŋ kɔ ba aw (*)

639. Muun: dīi: lā kà (.) (*) tokloŋ lɔɔ
640. (2)
641. Muun: tāamcāy sūu (tɔ nɔ)
642. (1.5)
643. Dii: pay (tii) (*) (.) pay tąy hɛɛm kam yūu

Kēew: (This year is different ((i.e., better)), the rice this year.)
(2)
Dii: This year- (.) past years- we got more than six // hundred, didn’t we.
Deeŋ: (*)
(2)
Cān: // You got more than six hundred?
Muun: (*) (.5) (**/*)
Kēew: (*) (.) (*) (.5) (***)
Deeŋ: This is (glutinous) rice.
Kēew: You can’t plant the same strain of this rice repeatedly ((i.e., the yield will go down if you do)) (.) plant the same strain of glutinous rice.
(4.5)
Dii: Let it go (.) divide in thirds and (.) (.) (won’t) give an extra share // (at all)
Muun: mhm (.). Agree to divide in thirds. Take it.
Dii: Seed rice is another // five thāŋ ((50 kilograms)), I won’t ask you for it (*) (Dii had given them 50 kilograms of rice for seed))
Muun: That’s fine. (.) (*) agree
(2)
Muun: It’s up to you.
(1.5)
Dii: You’re going to (*) (.) going to the southern fields again.
644. Muun: øø // (*)  
645. Deēŋ: ((clears throat))  
646. ?: (***)  
647. Muun: phûn laû nok lo̱c  
649. Kêew: (**//*) nà  
650. Deēŋ: (***)  
651. ?:?:?:?:: ((four seconds of overlapping speech and laughter))  
652. Jack: pôc nân pay lè  
653. ( .8)  
654. Cän: pôc nân .hh heh (.) pôc nân pôncà pay tii Duan//Kêew yûu  
655. Dii: nàŋsûu maa h êem lá lòc (.) nàŋsûu (.) tii càw man (.5) // pên kamakaàn (nán lè)  
656. Cän: (*)  
657. (1.8)  
658. Dii: kamakaàn (kum) tii din nia  
659. (4)  
660. Cän: an  
661. (6)  
662. Dii: wàa nyay (.) dày sûan (.) sûan càw nàa (.5) tokloŋ kò  
663. (2)  
664. Deēŋ: koon an bà kàm sák nôcî yîi tiân bà khây tokloŋ nàa (man man // *)  
665. Kêew: kám sák nôcî (phôn) (.5) // kám khà sák nôcî (8) øø  
666. Deēŋ: (***) tōc ūu kàân  
667. Cän: (lêew) sòmmût // po- (. ) pôc nôcî ((clears throat)) cà (. ) kâm khàw taddy kò  
668. Deēŋ: ūu kàân (***)  
669. Deēŋ: (**//*) pôc nôcî lo̱c wàa maa kam lo̱c (*)  
670. Cän: kám pay hîa  
671. Muun: Yeah // (*)  
672. Deēŋ: ((clears throat))  
673. ?: (***)  
674. Muun: There’s a lot of whiskey there.  
675. Kêew: (**//*)  
676. Deēŋ: (***)  
677. ?:?:?:?:: ((four seconds of overlapping speech and laughter))  
678. Jack: Father Muun is going.  
679. ( .8)  
680. Cän: Father ((Muun)) .hh heh (.) Father (Muun) will go to the field where Duan//Kêew is.  
681. Dii: The papers came again (.) the official papers (.) uh (.) he’s a committee member ((possible interpretation))  
682. Cän: (*)  
683. (1.8)  
684. Dii: land (administration) committee  
685. (4)  
686. Cän: uh  
687. (6)  
688. Dii: What do you say? (.) You’ll get a part (.) a part of the owner’s share (.5) do you agree? ((He is repeating the offer to divide in thirds))  
689. (2)  
690. Deēŋ: If uh you don’t support us at all we won’t want to agree. (It it // *)  
691. Kêew: Support a bit (.5) // support me a bit (.8) yeah  
692. Deēŋ: (***) have to talk together  
693. Cän: Then suppose // fa- (.) Father ((Dii)) ((clears throat)) how much will you support them.  
694. Deēŋ: talk together (***)  
695. Deēŋ: Father, go ahead and say a word.  
696. Cän: Support them
671. Kēew: əə lɔɔŋ wàa maa //
   kam pày (.) le kháa cà pàn pày
672. Deen: (lɔɔŋ) u ~ u maa wàa
   kam cà kām tüu khāw tadaay
673. Kēew: əə an níi kháa // cà
   wày kín hiá (.) kháa tuŋ bà dāy nyía
   nāy sāk tìi ıa
674. Deen: (***) (.) tuŋ bà
   tokloŋ // pān òuá
675. Kēew: ())/ (**)
676. Dii: khāaw cûa hěem hěem
   hā: tuɔŋ (tuɔy) nɔ (.) (tii khāaw hān
   ná) hāa kaa hok a

Kēew: Yeah go ahead and say // the
   word (.) and I will divide.
Deen: (Go ahead and) say how
   much you will support us.
Kēew: This I // will keep to eat (.) I
   won’t be able to sharecrop anywhere.
Deen: (***) (.) won’t agree to
   divide.
Kēew: (**)  
Dii: Seed rice is another another five
   thāŋ (.) (that rice) five or six.

Over the course of the negotiation, up to the point where Dii makes his fourth proposal, the discourse has been normalized in a number of ways. The accusations and expressions of anger have abated. The talk is less intensely focussed on Kēew’s demands and grievances. It has become somewhat more casual, digressing into such matters as the high cost of labor. Even the talk which is directly relevant to the negotiation seems less confrontational. Until turn #403, Kēew and Deen had been making flat demands. They say a number of times that Dii must contribute half the cost of the plowing. However, in #403, Deen switches from tɔɔŋ (must) to the request form khɔɔ. From that point on, she and Kēew cease using “must” and use only the request form. This establishes a proper, noncoercive, respectful discourse, and is one of the crucial moments in the negotiation. The use of khɔɔ permits the interpretation that Dii is yielding from generosity rather than from necessity. By switching from demand to request, they make it easier, less face-threatening, for Dii to accommodate them. At any rate, the discourse is normalized, relations are set right, and Dii is ready to make his proposal straightforwardly and aggressively (as compared to the tentative way in which he offers his second and third proposals).

In the talk immediately preceding Dii’s fourth offer, they are talking about rice growing and crop yields. It is a fairly relaxed and casual passage, demonstrating the degree to which the emotions in the discussion have been defused. There is a 4.5 second pause in the conversation before Dii changes the topic by offering his proposal. But the placement of Dii’s fourth proposal may be less haphazard than would appear at first glance. In #634, Kēew mentions that one can’t plant the same strain of glutinous rice two years in a row. It is perhaps no accident that the new element in Dii’s proposal is to overlook the 50 kilograms of seed rice that he had provided Kēew, a provision that was necessitated by Kēew’s decision to switch strains. The offer to divide in thirds is also new in that it is the first time that Dii explicitly agrees to divide in thirds, although it has been clear for some time that he
would acquiesce to such a division. As he makes the proposal, Muun joins in support. Then Muun leaves.

It is notable that Kēew and Đeęŋ̣ do not respond to Dii’s proposal until after he reiterates it in #662. In the conversation analytic writings on preference, a delay of response to a “first pair-part,” such as an invitation or proposal, is taken to portend (for participants) a particular response from among a set of relevant possible responses. It is said to portend the “dispreferred” response, in this case, refusal (Pomerantz 1984; Heritage 1984). This formulation is, I think, faulty for at least two reasons. One is that there is an inadequate consideration of context (on this point, see Bilmes 1988). In this setting, rejections of Dii’s proposals and Kēew’s demands have regularly occurred without pauses or other hesitations. In this environment, hesitation in response to yet another proposal could very well be taken as a positive sign.

Secondly, the significance of delay itself has been misconstrued. It is true that delay is often taken, by participants, to portend refusal, and in fact it often does precede refusal, but this is a correlation that occurs through an indirect process. Delay is a marker of reluctance or trouble: The speaker is having some sort of problem with what he is about to say. Perhaps he cannot decide, or perhaps he is reluctant (or wants to show reluctance) to say what he is going to say. As it happens, refusal is generally a displeasing response, so, for the sake of politeness and solidarity, one might be reluctant (or at least want to put on a show of being reluctant) to refuse. But this depends on the speaker: how he feels and what he wants to communicate. In a negotiation setting, one might, for strategic reasons, want to refuse firmly and without hesitation, as one might if one wanted to communicate anger. And, conversely, one might want to show reluctance before accepting a proposal in a negotiation, so as to demonstrate that one is making a painful concession. Although we may say generally that delay means trouble, the participants are left with the task of figuring out what sort of trouble is involved. Which brings us back to contextual considerations. In this instance, Dii has reason to take heart from their delay in responding. It has not been their pattern to delay refusals, and in negotiations one might expect acceptance to be delayed.

Dii clearly does not take the lack of response as in itself constituting a refusal, for in #662, after another long pause, he restates his proposal, marking the fact that he is referring to his previous proposal with “What do you say?” As it turns out, they do, after all, refuse his proposal, but the fact that they did not immediately refuse in response to #636, and the formatting and expression of their response to #662, suggest a softening of their position and attitude. Đeęŋ̣’s reply in #664 is preceded by two seconds of silence. Given that a refusal is what is ultimately produced, this suggests, for the first time in the negotiation, reluctance to refuse. The refusal is preceded by a conditional, rather than being a flat no. The condition is to contribute to plowing costs, but without stating a specific amount. This could indicate a softening of their position. Finally, the refusal itself is softened. Instead
of saying “we don’t agree,” she says something roughly translatable as “we won’t want to agree.”

In #665, Kêew joins in, also asking for support without specifying an amount, and Déen, in #666 and 668, makes utterances including “talk together,” suggesting the possibility of negotiation. Căn, in #667, seems to sense where the negotiation is going, and asks Dii how much he would be willing to contribute to plowing costs. (Earlier in the discussion, Căn had urged Kêew to accept the division in thirds, without further provisions.) Then Déen and Kêew urge Dii to speak, to make a proposal (#669, 671, 672). They come very close here to explicitly saying that they will accept less than the half of the plowing costs that they had previously demanded. So, it turns out that the absence of an immediate response to Dii’s proposal did indeed precede a softening of their position.

In a very brief space, the discussion progresses from Dii urging Kêew to speak (in #662), to Déen saying they should talk about it together (#666/668), to Déen and Kêew urging Dii to speak (#669/671/672). Dii does not respond to Déen’s urging in #669. Kêew (in #671) and Déen (in #672) proceed to urge him further in more elaborated forms. Kêew adds an incentive (“say the word and I will divide”). Déen, in partial overlap, says more specifically what “the word” should concern, at the same time making it clear that they are ready to negotiate the amount of “support,” that they are no longer fixed on one half the cost of plowing. Căn

Kêew and Déen speak as a team, supporting each other’s positions, speaking on each other’s behalf, and echoing each other’s words, as do Dii and Muun in #636-639. Such sequences can be found throughout the negotiation. The “teamness” of Kêew and Déen is not discoverable merely in the fact that they are husband and wife and have common interests, but in the ways that they repeatedly “do being a team.” And, as I showed in my earlier paper, Muun has to do special work in this negotiation on each occasion that he wants to take the role of mediator. This work is repeatedly necessary because of the frequent sequences in which he teams with Dii, not merely saying that Dii is correct but actually coproducing arguments and proposals.

In the case of Dii and Muun, social structural factors are clearly not sufficiently explanatory. We may note that Dii and Muun are of similar age and status, are both well-to-do landowners, are both, by current local standards, rather ungenerous with their sharecroppers. This might explain why they would act as a team. We might note that Muun is an elderly co-villager, a former headman, and a current member of the Land Rental Committee. This might explain why he would act as a mediator. But only in his actual performance can we ascertain that he acts as both team member and mediator and see when and how he manages the transitions from one role to the other.

Through all of Déen’s, Kêew’s, and Căn’s urgings, Dii does not respond. When he finally does respond, in #676, he does not refuse. While Dii does not refuse, neither does he make a new proposal. The absence of refusal is, once again, an encouraging sign. About five minutes later, 25.5 minutes into the
negotiation, Dii proposes to give 25 thǎŋ (250 kilograms) of rice in support of the plowing costs. (Kēew had initially asked for 60 thǎŋ: one half the plowing costs.) Dii would also not ask for repayment of the five thǎŋ of seed rice. More than three minutes later, Kēew acknowledges the proposal, mentioning it to Deen, who had not heard it when it was first made. Deen bargains for another five thǎŋ, arguing that the seed rice is already present in the pile of rice before them. (This argument has limited merit, since Dii will receive only one-third of that rice.) After another 2.5 minutes, Dii agrees and tells them to begin the division.

I have said that the discourse was normalized prior to Dii’s fourth proposal. This is largely true. Anger had been suppressed and role relationships set right. Civility had been restored. But in one respect they had not yet achieved a proper negotiation. Although Dii had offered compromises from his initial position, Kēew had offered nothing. In fact, when Muun capitulated to his initial requirements, he escalated his demands. Dii could offer to divide in thirds with no qualms about loss of face: He had already told certain others that he was ready to make such a division. But to simply give in to Kēew’s more extreme and unexpected demands would have left Dii looking as though he had been pushed around and bested, despite the achievement of a veneer of civility. It is only when Deen and Kēew offer to compromise in #669-672 that it becomes apparent that they are approaching an agreement. Dii will save some rice, but, perhaps more crucially, he will save face. Compromise is in itself meaningful, aside from what is compromised. In this connection, I recall a lawyer at the U.S. Federal Trade Commission suggesting to her colleagues that, when they negotiate penalties with a company that has violated the law, they ask for more than they will settle for, so that they can give a little instead of appearing hard and arrogant.

In some of its particulars, this negotiation is distinctively Muaŋ. This is necessarily so, if only because the participants are speaking Muaŋ. Also, though, their handling of anger, of mediation, and of their stances toward one another are shaped by the local culture. Nevertheless, the broader conclusions of this analysis, as well as various details of its conversational structure have, one suspects, a wider generality. Any negotiation, it would seem, has social as well as material dimensions. An agreement is not merely a division of material resources; it is an expression of social relationships and a public act, implicating the participants’ social positions and personal efficacy. It is in the minute particulars of the local occasion: the vocabulary used, the pauses and hesitations, the placement of offers, the manner of proposal and refusal, and other such nuances of the talk, as well as the stated propositions: that these matters get worked out.

NOTES

1 See Appendix for transcription conventions.

2 One of my informants, commenting on Kēew’s evident anger, said “At least it didn’t reach the khîŋ-hae stage.” khîŋ and hae can be translated as ‘you’ and ‘I’ respectively. Muaŋ
pronouns occur in sets, expressing various degrees of intimacy and respect. (Names, kinship terms, and titles can also be used in place of pronouns. The speaker’s choice is widened still further by the common practice of dropping the pronoun entirely.) khin and ha is the most intimate pronoun set. In the village, it is used among age mates who have a close personal relationship. It is also frequently used by elders in addressing much younger persons whom they know well. My informant's observation may seem to be belied by the fact that Dii addresses Kêew as khin a number of times in this negotiation. This, however, is normal. What was worthy of note was that Kêew, despite his evident anger, never went so far as to use khin with Dii, which would have been gravely insulting. That is to say, the expressive meaning of pronoun use is conditioned by the social relationship of the participants.

3 For a more detailed analysis of this exchange, see Bilmes (in press).

4 This delay of acceptance can be seen in the way that Dii handles Kêew’s demand for division in thirds. One of my informants was told by Dii, the day before this negotiation took place, that he (Dii) supposed he would have to give Kêew two-thirds. No doubt Dii told Muun the same thing, because, during the negotiation, it is Muun who concedes the two-thirds division. (See excerpt 5.) Dii makes a rather weak objection, which is ignored by Muun. This supports the supposition that he knows in advance that Dii will agree. Nevertheless, it is notable that Dii does not validate the offer made by Muun on his behalf. In fact, although Kêew’s first made his demand for a division in thirds at #37, it is not until #636 that Dii explicitly agrees to such a division.

5 #662 reveals #643-661 as a parenthetical sequence. The proposal begun in #636 is taken to be still relevant and still in play, unfinished business. Without it, #662 would have been unintelligible, or at least ambiguous. He does not need to restate the proposal in #662 or even to use a “misplacement marker” to show that he is referring to something that occurred earlier. He picks up the proposal sequence just as if it had never been interrupted, thus marking the talk that intervened as parenthetical. It is in ways such as these that participants reveal the structure of conversation as they perceive it. (See Bilmes 1995 for a similar example.)

6 Again, there is some contrast here with the usual position taken in conversation analysis, where it is supposed that delay or silence portend the “dispreferred” response. It is claimed that, when such delay occurs, the original speaker (i.e., the producer of the invitation, request, proposal, etc.) will frequently offer a modification, incentive, or some other form of addition to the first pair-part, seeking in effect either to avoid the dispreferred response or to provide an account for it (Davidson 1984). But in the case at hand, I have argued that Dii’s delay is likely to be taken as a positive sign. The lack of an immediate refusal encourage Kêew’s and Deen to press on. We could still say that they are trying to avoid a dispreferred response, but they are not doing so because the delay has increased their expectation of such a response. They do so because the delay seems to enhance the possibility of a positive response.
APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

1. kammaŋ phonemes.
   b: ɓ, as in “boy”
   c: voiceless palatal affricate, similar to “j” in “John,” but without the voicing.
   d: ɗ as in “dawn”
   f: ʃ, as in “fun”
   h: ʰ, as in “happy”
   k: voiceless, unaspirated, velar stop
   kh: ƙ, as in “cow,” sometimes pronounced with affrication
   l: ɭ, as in “lemon”
   m: ɱ, as in “man”
   n: ɳ, as in “none”
   ñ: ng, as in “sing”
   p: voiceless, unaspirated, bilabial stop
   ph: 팬, as in “poem”
   s: ʂ, as in “some”
   t: voiceless, unaspirated, postdental stop
   th: ɺ, as in “top”
   w: ʷ, as in “woman”
   y: ʏ, as in “you”
   a: low, central, unrounded vowel, similar to ə in “not”
   e: low, front, unrounded vowel, similar to ə in “mat”
   e: mid, front, unrounded vowel, similar to ɛ in “bet”
   i: high, front, unrounded vowel, similar to ɨ in “bit”
   o: low, back, unrounded vowel, similar to ʊ in “bought”
   o: mid, back, rounded vowel, similar to ɑ in “note”
   u: high, back, rounded vowel, similar to ʊ in “boot”
   u: high, central, unrounded vowel
   ə: mid, central, unrounded vowel

   doubling of vowel indicates lengthening (Vowel length is phonemic in kammaŋ.)

   FileType
   ファイルタイプ
   仮名

   低揚音記号
   低音記号
   高音記号
   上昇音記号
   高下落音記号
   中央中音記号
   未音記号
   未中音記号
   中央中央音記号

   低中央音記号
   中央中央音記号
   未中央音記号
   中央中央音記号

   This is not phonemic. I use it to indicate a mid tone vowel, stressed by slightly raised pitch and volume.

2. Other conventions.
(The transcript notation used here is the standard notation used in the conversation analytic literature, with one exception noted below.)

// indicates onset of overlapping utterance.
(0.0) indicates pause or silence, in seconds.
(words) indicates that the transcriber is not certain about whether the expression that appears in parentheses was actually what the speaker said. When the speaker’s name appears in parentheses, the transcriber is not certain that the named person was in fact the speaker.
(*** indicates that the transcriber could not achieve a hearing. Each asterisk denotes .5 seconds of speech. (This is a departure from standard conversation analytic notation.)

wo(h)rd indicates breathy articulation, usually within-talk laughter.
((words)) indicates analyst’s remarks.
^words^ indicates low volume speech.
words indicates louder than normal speech.
words indicates much louder than normal speech.
wo:rrds indicates lengthening of sound which is followed by colons.
= is used at the end of one line and the beginning of another to indicate that the two lines are latched. When the two lines represent utterances of different speakers, there is no pause (but also no overlap) between them. The equal signs are also used to indicate a continuous flow of speech by a single speaker when the transcript shows an intervening line of interruptive talk.

REFERENCES


