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Dividing the Rice II: Achieving Agreement

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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 *Muay* (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 *Muay* 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 *Muay* discourse. However, much of what emerges from the present analysis does not appear to me to be distinctively *Muay* 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, K^hew, 39 years old, and his wife, D^hen, 39. (I put it this way because, although D^hen plays a very important role in the negotiation, K^hew 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 C^han, 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 Kĕew that this would be Kĕew's last year sharecropping these fields. Dii wanted his nephew to take over. Sharecroppers are not usually dealt with in this way, and Kĕew 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 Kĕew and Dεεŋ were waiting. Muun is approaching as the exchange takes place.

(1) first proposal¹

24. (2)
 25. Kĕew: haw pǎn kn cday
 26. ?: (*)
 27. Dii: hĕē
 28. Kĕew: pǎw nǎy pǎn cday
 ("khāaw")
29. (2)
 30. Dii: pǎn yay (kǎ) pǎn kǎŋ (ná)
 lá kǎ cà phūa hūu khiŋ nāa kàa:

- (2)
 Kĕew: How will we divide?
 ?: (*)
 Dii: Huh?
 Kĕew: How will you divide ("the rice")? ((He addresses Dii as Father *nǎy*. *nǎy* 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.))
- (2)
 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:** ǎ pǎn kəŋ khāa bà aw
Kēew: No, I won't divide in half.
32. **Dii:** ɛ̃ɛ ((starts high and rises))
Dii: Huh?
33. **Kēew:** khāa bà aw (.) bà tokloŋ
Kēew: I won't do it. (.) I don't agree.
34. (1) (1)
35. **Dii:** bə tokloŋ nyía nyǎy
Dii: If you don't agree, what shall we do?
36. (2.5) (2.5)
37. **Kēew:** pǎn sǎam nán na
Kēew: Divide in thirds. ((It is understood that Kēew would get two thirds.))
38. **Dii:** phó pōw nǎan wāa (*)
pǎn pěn (1) (*//*)
Dii: Because Father nǎan ((Muun)) said (*) He's (1) (*//*) ((nǎan is title for former monk))
39. **Kēew:** ǎ bə wāa (1.5) pōw nǎan (pōw nǎan maa la) (.5) lé khāa bà tokloŋ
Kēew: I'm not talking about (1.5) Father nǎan (Father nǎan has come) (.5) and I don't agree.
40. (1) (1)
41. **Dii:** à tokloŋ kə tǎamcǎy na:
Dii: If you don't agree, it's up to you ((literally—follow your heart))
42. **Kēew:** ǎ
Kēew: Yeah
43. (3) (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:

(2)

128. **Kĕew:** əə tham//madaa nii **Kĕew-:** Yeah, usu//ally there is
(.) man khwa:mzii khwaamsɔp good feeling and affection, right?
kap kǎn naa
129. **Muun:** (*) wâa **Muun:** (*) say
130. **Muun:** mhm **Muun:** mhm
131. **Kĕew:** əə (hân) khwaamdi: **Kĕew:** Yeah, good feeling and
khwaamsɔp kap kǎn (.) pǎn kəŋ affection (.) and they divide in half.
kǎnpay
132. **Muun:** nnân na kàa= **Muun:** That's it.
133. **Kĕew:** =phǎy ba khít naa **Kĕew:** They don't calculate
(according to the law)).
134. **Muun:** nâa kàa **Muun:** That's right.
135. **Kĕew:** mîa ((=m u-a)) **Kĕew:** Now (.5) there is no good
badiawnii (.5) bǎi khwaamdii feeling or affection between us so it
khwaamsɔp kap kǎn lá maa pǎn seems we can't divide in half.
kəŋ thâa ba dây
136. **Muun:** (*) tǎamcǎy **Muun:** (*) up to you
137. **Kĕew:** əə khâa bə tokloŋ **Kĕew:** Yeah, I don't agree (.5) (*)
(.5) (*) wannii khâa bə pǎ/n today I won't divi//de.

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

Kĕew 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 Kĕew. Both Kĕew'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 Kĕew'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 Kĕew accuses Dii of having broken a promise:

(3)

233. **Kĕew:** əə tǎa phǎy ba **Kĕew:** I don't say whose fault it
(h)hú(h)á hehhaha (h)w(h)as hehhaha I'm not criticizing
anyone hahaha.=
234. **Dɛɛŋ:** =əə **Dɛɛŋ:** =Yeah

235. **Kēew:** khāa bō aw khōt hūu phǎy // (sák) khon lá

Kēew: I'm not angry at anyone //at all.

236. **Deej:** (haw) bō khōt hūu phǎy // (sák) khon ná // (yàan) ũu kǎnná

Deej: (We) aren't angry at anyone // at all // (like we said)

237. **Kēew:** əə

Kēew: Yeah

238. **Dii:** ba khōt naa níi tǎj ba // (khōt naa)

Dii: Don't be angry, you/we mustn't // be angry.

239. **Kēew:** // ηəə (.) khāa bō khōt hūu phǎy naa

Kēew: // Yeah (.) I'm not angry at anyone.

240. **Deej:** əə ba khōt ba kiat hūu phǎy sák khon ná

Deej: Yeah, we're not angry, we don't hate anyone at all.

241. (.) (5)

(5)

242. **Dii:** mii kāa suǔ (*) phōđ naā mũaday kō sǐi khāy kiat=

Dii: There's only you (*) Whenever I look at you, you look angry.=

243. **Deej:** =ɔ: // bō cǎy (.5) pōn ba khōt ba (**)

Deej:=Oh: // not so (.5) he's not angry, not (**)

244. **Kēew:** əə khāa bō kiat (.) (khāa tǎj yη ía k hā bàa (.5) lām: day yūu b aan (.) khāa tǎj ba pay fii phǎy (.5) k haa sǒ kǐn hǎa kǐn khon diaw khāa ta ǎn ná

Kēew: No, I don't hate [anyone] (.) I'm like this, I'm hardly (.5) at home (.) I don't go to see anyone (.5) I go out to seek a living myself, that's all.

This is the first of several exchanges in which Kēew and Deej deny being angry. It is not surprising that Kēew'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. Kēew replies immediately:

(4)

249. **Kēew:** əə (khāa) ba aw (.5) pǎn sǎam pǎn kǎa (.) pǎn sǎam pǎn (.) khāa ca pǎn (.) thāa pǎnsǎam tokloŋ a

Kēew: No, (I) won't accept that (.5) I'll divide if we divide in three (.) in three I'll divide (.) I'll divide (.) If we divide in three, I agree.

Kēew'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 Kĕew's demand on Dii's behalf.

(5)

253. **Muun:** =pǎn sǎam // (khiŋ) **Muun:** =Divide in three // (you) (.)
(.) pǎn sǎam khiŋ ca aw sǒŋ sùn divide in thirds and you will take two parts.
254. **Kĕew:** khāa kò tɔŋ ba dāy **Kĕew-:** I won't be able to work
niua' [these fields] again.
255. **Kĕew:** əə **Kĕew:** Yeah.
256. (.8) **Kĕew:** (.8)
257. **Dii:** kĕe pay kâ **Dii:** It seems like too much.
258. **Muun:** nám léew hân mót **Muun:** And then it will be done with.

Dii's protest is weak, suggesting his readiness to accept Kĕew's conditions. (In fact, I have very strong reasons to suppose that Dii had told Muun beforehand that he expected Kĕew to demand a one-third/two-thirds division and was ready to accept such a division.) Kĕew 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, Kĕew has progressed from demonstrations and even declarations of anger and ill-feeling to declarations of nonhostility. Second, Kĕew, 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, Kĕew adds to his demands. Muun says to divide in three and be done with it:

(6)

258. **Muun:** nám léew hân mót **Muun:** And then it will be done with.
259. **Kĕew:** nám léew (nyǎŋ) **Kĕew:** (What do you mean) done with (.5) kám dāy kám kâ- (.) lót maa hūu khāahĕem= support should support the cost- (.) of the tractor ((i.e., pay part of the cost, usually one half)) for me also=
260. **Dii:** =ōo ba // kām lɛ (tɔ) **Dii:** Oh I won't // support that.
261. **Muun:** ōo (.) kâa lót phǎy **Muun:** Oh (.) the cost of the tractor, wāa nyía // ân who does // like that?
262. **Kĕew:** ə (.) (*) bɔɔ kam **Kĕew:** a (.) (*) if you don't support bɔɔ kám kò (*) khāa bɔ pǎn tūa // don't support (*) I won't divide // wanníi khāa bɔ pǎn 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 Deej 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. **Deej:** tām fii (*) pôn nyía' pôn kām kân naa mot na' (.) kām kâa heej // khon kò kām

352. **Kēew:** pôn kám kũu khon=

353. **Muun:** =an nán pôn bēej kòh // lûu

354. **Dii:** nán pôn bēej kòh (lòo ii) deej=

355. **Deej:** =bēej kòh lá kò kò phàa khāaw hũu hēem pòo cày ná (.) thām pôn tó (tām // kây tām him nii)

356. **Muun:** (kò nâa kâa) ca aw yàaŋ ân kò dâi // lûu

357. **Deej:** thā phàa k hāaw (kháw // tuj) pòocây lá

358. **Dii:** an nán ná nii (*) fii ní kò kát cày // wâa ân na

359. **Deej:** kám (*) kâa lót thây (.) kâm kâa he:ŋ: ka- an kâa cāaŋ // tii hēem

360. **Dii:** ca phàa (.5) ca phàa hũu ŋaam hũu dii ná bēej kòh ná=

361. **Kēew:** =ahhoh=

362. **Dii:** =man // ba cūu

363. **Deej:** *(*) bēej kòh ní kò man kò //tuj ba bēej tūa*

364. **Kēew:** bēej kòh kh āa ba bēej

Deej: 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, deej.=

Deej: =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.

Deej: If there is an extra share (they // will) be satisfied.

Dii: That way (*) At this end I figured // like that

Deej: 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.

Deej: *(*) divide in half there will // be no division.*

Kēew: I won't divide in half.

Deej 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 Deɛŋ 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 níi man pay yàaŋ lɔ̃ khāaw pii níi) **Kēew:** (This year is different ((i.e., better)), the rice this year.)
626. (2) (2)
627. **Dii:** pii ni- (.) pi- kɔ̃n nán dāy hok lɔ̃y // pāay nɔ̃ **Dii:** This year- (.) past years- we got more than six // hundred, didn't we.
628. **Deɛŋ:** (*) **Deɛŋ:** (*)
629. (2) (2)
630. **Căn:** // d ăy hok lɔ̃y pāay kaa **Căn:** // You got more than six hundred?
631. **Muun:** (*) (.5) (**/**) **Muun:** (*) (.5) (**/*)
632. **Kēew:** (*) (.) (*) (.5) (***) **Kēew:** (*) (.) (*) (.5) (***)
633. **Deɛŋ:** an níi khāaw (niaw) **Deɛŋ:** This is (glutinous) rice.
634. **Kēew:** níi man sày sām ba dāy (.) sày sām lá niaw **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.
635. (4.5) (4.5)
636. **Dii:** cāaŋ man tɔ̃ (.) bèeŋ sām á lé kò (.) (*) (bà) phàa // lá (i) tɔ̃ **Dii:** Let it go (.) divide in thirds and (.) (*) (won't) give an extra share // (at all)
637. **Muun:** mhm (.) tokloŋ bèeŋ sām lá kò ăw thɔ̃ **Muun:** mhm (.) Agree to divide in thirds. Take it.
638. **Dii:** khāaw cāa hěem // hāa tuaŋ kò ba aw (*) **Dii:** Seed rice is another // five thǎŋ ((50 kilograms)), I won't ask you for it (*) ((Dii had given them 50 kilograms of rice for seed))
639. **Muun:** dīi: lá kà (.) (*) tokloŋ lɔ̃ **Muun:** That's fine. (.) (*) agree
640. (2) (2)
641. **Muun:** tǎamcǎy sũu (tɔ̃ nɔ̃) **Muun:** It's up to you.
642. (1.5) (1.5)
643. **Dii:** pay (i) (*) (.) pay tǎy hěem kam yùu **Dii:** You're going to (*) (.) going to the southern fields again.

644. **Muun:** əə // (*)
 645. **Deɛŋ:** ((clears throat))
 646. **?:** (***)
 647. **Muun:** p̄n lâw nák l̄o
 649. **Kēew:** (*//*) n̄ó
 650. **Deɛŋ:**(***)
 651. **?:?:?::** ((four seconds of overlapping speech and laughter))
 652. **Jack:** p̄o n̄aan pay lé
 653. (.8)
 654. **Căn:** p̄o n̄aan .hh heh (.)
 p̄o n̄aan p̄ncà pay fii Duan/Kēew yùu
 655. **Dii:** n̄ans̄u maa h ēem lá l̄o
 (.) n̄ans̄u (.) t̄ii c̄aw man (.5) // p̄n kamakaan (nán lè)
 656. **Căn:** (*)
 657. (1.8)
 658. **Dii:** kamakaan (kum) fii din nia
 659. (4)
 660. **Căn:** an
 661. (6)
 662. **Dii:** w̄aa nyay (.) d̄ay s̄uan (.) s̄uan c̄aw naa (.5) tokloŋ k̄o
 663. (2)
 664. **Deɛŋ:** k̄oan an bà k̄am sák n̄ooy n̄ii t̄əŋ bà k̄h̄ay tokloŋ naa (man man // *)
 665. **Kēew:** k̄am sák n̄ooy (ph̄oŋ) (.5) // k̄am k̄h̄ sák n̄ooy (.8) əə
 666. **Deɛŋ:** (**) t̄oŋ ūu k̄aan
 667. **Căn:** (léew) s̄ommút // p̄o- (.) p̄o n̄ooy ((clears throat)) c̄a (.) k̄am k̄h̄aw tad̄ay k̄o
 668. **Deɛŋ:** ūu k̄aan (**)
 669. **Deɛŋ:** (*//*) p̄o n̄ooy loŋ w̄aa maa kam lo (*)
 670. **Căn:** k̄am pay h̄ia

Muun: Yeah // (*)
Deɛŋ: ((clears throat))
?: (***)
Muun: There's a lot of whiskey there.
Kēew: (*//*)
Deɛŋ:(***)
?:?:?:: ((four seconds of overlapping speech and laughter))
Jack: Father Muun is going.
 (.8)
Căn: Father ((Muun)) .hh heh (.)
 Father (Muun) will go to the field where Duan/Kēew is.
Dii: The papers came again (.) the official papers (.) uh (.) he's a committee member ((possible interpretation))
Căn: (*)
 (1.8)
Dii: land (administration) committee
 (4)
Căn: uh
 (6)
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))
 (2)
Deɛŋ: If uh you don't support us at all we won't want to agree. (It it // *)
Kēew: Support a bit (.5) // support me a bit (.8) yeah
Deɛŋ: (**) have to talk together
Căn: Then suppose // fa- (.) Father ((Dii)) ((clears throat)) how much will you support them.
Deɛŋ: talk together (**)
Deɛŋ: Father, go ahead and say a word.
Căn: Support them

671. **Kēew:** əə ɓɔŋ wâa maa // **Kēew:** Yeah go ahead and say // the
kam pây (.) lé khâa cà pân pây word (.) and I will divide.
672. **Dēɛŋ:** (ɓɔŋ) u ʔu maa wâa **Dēɛŋ:** (Go ahead and) say how
kam cà kâm tũu khâw taday much you will support us.
673. **Kēew:** əə an nii khâa // cà **Kēew:** This I // will keep to eat (.) I
wáy kɪn hĩa (.) khâa tɔŋ bà dâŋ nyía won't be able to sharecrop anywhere.
nây sák fii ía
674. **Dēɛŋ:** (*****) (.) tɔŋ bà **Dēɛŋ:** (*****) (.) won't agree to
tokloŋ // pân tũa divide.
675. **Kēew:** àɪ (**)
Kēew: (**)
676. **Dii:** khâaw cúa hěem hěem **Dii:** Seed rice is another another five
hã: tuaj (tuay) nɔ (.) (fii khâaw hân thanŋ (.) (that rice) five or six.
nã) hãa kaa hok a

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 Dēɛŋ had been making flat demands. They say a number of times that Dii must contribute half the cost of the plowing. However, in #403, Dēɛŋ switches from *tɔŋ* (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 Dēeŋ 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.⁴ 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?"⁵ 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. Dēeŋ'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, Kēew joins in, also asking for support without specifying an amount, and Dε:ŋ, in #666 and 668, makes utterances including “talk together,” suggesting the possibility of negotiation. Cǎn, 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, Cǎn had urged Kēew to accept the division in thirds, without further provisions.) Then Dε:ŋ and Kēew 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 Kēew to speak (in #662), to Dε:ŋ saying they should talk about it together (#666/668), to Dε:ŋ and Kēew urging Dii to speak (#669/671/672). Dii does not respond to Dε:ŋ’s urging in #669. Kēew (in #671) and Dε:ŋ (in #672) proceed to urge him further in more elaborated forms. Kēew adds an incentive (“say the word and I will divide”). Dε:ŋ, 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.⁶

Kēew and Dε:ŋ 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 Kēew and Dε:ŋ 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 Dε:ŋ’s, Kēew’s, and Cǎn’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 Dēeŋ, who had not heard it when it was first made. Dēeŋ 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 Dēeŋ 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 *khiŋ-haa* stage." *khiŋ* and *haa* 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.) *khij* and *həə* 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 Kēew as *khij* a number of times in this negotiation. This, however, is normal. What was worthy of note was that Kēew, despite his evident anger, never went so far as to use *khij* 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 Kēew'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 Kēew 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 Kēew'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 Kēew'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. kamməaŋ phonemes.

b: b, as in “boy”

c: voiceless palatal affricate, similar to “j” in “John,” but without the voicing.

d: d, as in “dawn”

f: f, as in “fun”

h: h, as in “happy”

k: voiceless, unaspirated, velar stop

kh: ç, as in “cow,” sometimes pronounced with affrication

l: l, as in “lemon”

m: m, as in “man”

n: n, as in “none”

ŋ: ŋ, as in “sing”

p: voiceless, unaspirated, bilabial stop

ph: p, as in “poem”

s: s, as in “some”

t: voiceless, unaspirated, postdental stop

th: t, as in “top”

w: w, as in “woman”

y: y, as in “you”

a: low, central, unrounded vowel, similar to o in “not”

ɛ: low, front, unrounded vowel, similar to a in “mat”

e: mid, front, unrounded vowel, similar to e in “bet”

i: high, front, unrounded vowel, similar to i in “bit”

ɔ: low, back, unrounded vowel, similar to ou in “bought”

o: mid, back, rounded vowel, similar to o in “note”

u: high, back, rounded vowel, similar to oo in “boot”

ɤ: high, central, unrounded vowel

ə: mid, central, unrounded vowel

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

ḵ: low tone (x represents a vowel)

ḥ: falling tone

ḫ: high tone

ḷ: rising tone

Ḹ: high falling tone

x: (with no tone marker) mid tone

ḫ̄: 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::rds 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.

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