

Understanding Thai honorifics via Japanese concepts

Songthama Intachakra
Department of Linguistics
Thammasat University

Setting the scene

- **Frequent observations that Thai has a complex system of honorifics** (Shibatani, 1998; Ide, 2005)
- **Lack of research specifically addressing Thai honorifics** (cf. Iwasaki and Ingkaphirom, 2005; Khanittanan, 2005; Srinarawat, 2005, for instance)
- **Application of analytical frameworks used extensively for Japanese honorifics and modes of thinking, to understand Thai honorifics**

Two types of honorifics

1. Addressee honorifics

(addressee-controlled; index of **formality** and/or **social distance**)

- address forms (e.g. *sir*, *madam*)
- particles (e.g. Thai *kha?* vs. *khráp*)
- verb endings (e.g. Japanese *-masu*, Korean *-sumni*)
- linguistic systems (e.g. Japanese *teinei-go* (polite forms))

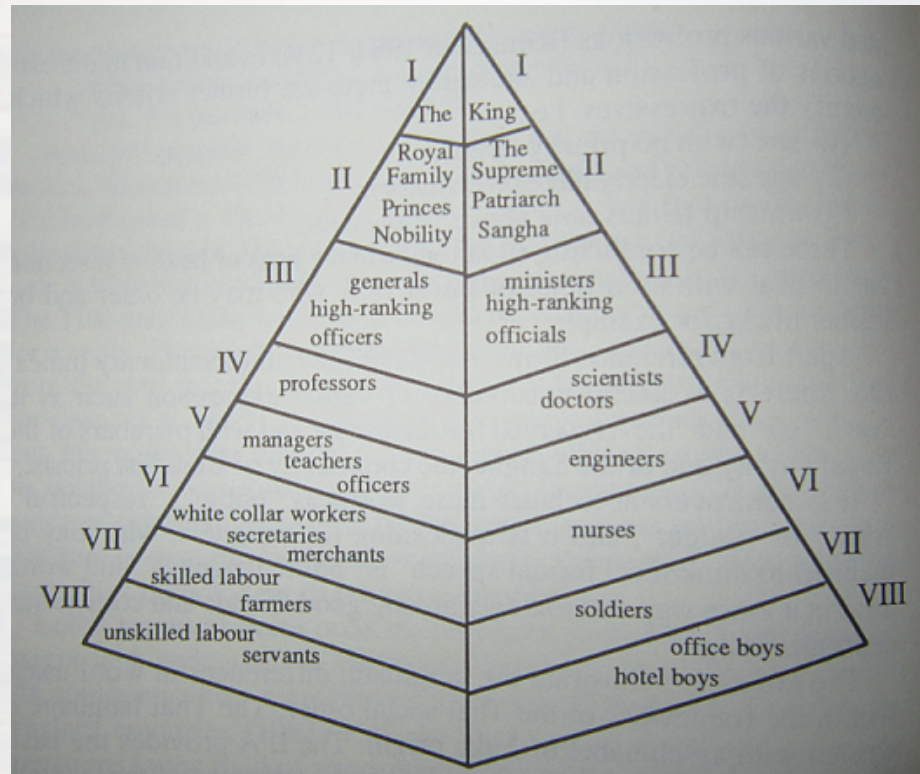
2. Referent honorifics

(referent-controlled; index of **deference** and/or **power status**)

- honorary titles (e.g. *professor*, *uncle*)
- pronouns (e.g. French second person singular *vous*)
- nouns (e.g. Javanese *arta* 'your esteemed house')
- linguistic systems (e.g. Japanese *sonkei-go* (respect forms) and *kenjō-go* (humble forms))

(Cook, 2011; Hudson, 2011; Shibatani, 1998 Tokunaga, 1992; Irvine, 1992)

Hierarchy in Thai society



(Kummer, 1992: 330)

Hierarchy in Thai society (cont'd)



Thai sociolinguistic conventions

“In Thai special weight is put upon operations in the field of socio-pragmatics with a highly differentiated hierarchy of personal relations. The ways of communicating in Thai [...] are, in fact, the means of norm and convention, typical of the language and culture group. [...] In Thai, the communicative partners are constrained by the variables of sex, age, education and profession. It is on the basis of such norms that Thai people will distribute sets of expressive with care” [my emphasis].

(Kummer, 1992: 328)

“In Thai culture, for instance, the traditional polite form of language may include the use of polite particles, nouns, pronouns, address forms, kinship terms, titles, and particular verbs of varying degrees of politeness. These are chosen with respect to the grading of interpersonal factors such as social status, role relationships, age, educational background, and intimacy” [my emphases]. (Srinarawat, 2005: 176)

Data

- **Thai subset of Mr O Corpus to data collection** (collected audiovisually in February 2012, supported by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (JSPS))
- **20 informant pairs from universities in the Greater Bangkok area:**
 1. 10 student-teacher pairs (- social distance/strangers)
 2. 10 student-student pairs (+ social distance/acquaintances)
- **Activities:**
 1. task of arranging 15 picture cards into a coherent story
 2. personal narrative on outcome of task 1 (told to data collector)
 3. conversation relating to experience with surprises

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (teacher-student pairs)

Teachers may use or drop honorifics when speaking to students.

Hypothesis 2 (teacher-student pairs)

Students use honorifics appropriate to their subordinate role when talking to teachers.

Hypothesis 3 (teacher-student pairs)

Students use honorifics anyway even when talking to a stranger who looks more senior.

Hypothesis 4 (student-student pairs)

It is not necessary for fellow students to use/exchange honorifics.

Hypothesis 5 (general case)

There is a regularity as to when honorifics are to be used or found.

Conventional use (formal)

Excerpt 1 (T09 (task) 2.23-2.43)

- 1 Teacher: ʔà: ʔawŋí: puúp puúp dǎaw nǔ: lɔ:ŋ du: wâ: man châj pà Ø
OK let's see INJ INJ soon you(dim) try see RCL it correct QST
'OK, let's see. Hmm. Hmm. Why don't you try and see if this is the right way?'
- 2 Student: khà ʔanní: khw: khâ:m dâj di: máj khá khru: HON + HON + HON
PCL(pol) this one copula cross able good QST PCL(pol) teacher
'Yes. Do you think this [picture] can get across, ma'am?'
- 3 Teacher: [incomp. speech]
- 4 Student: ʔà:w thammaj man khâ:m dâj sɔ:ŋ ʔan ??? Ø (self-reflexive)
INJ why it cross able two CLS
'Well, how can both get across?' [laughter] HON + Ø (self-reflex.)
- 5 ʔanní: kɔ: dâj khà lé:w kɔ: ʔanní: lé:w ʔanní: khw: ʔàraj niâ ???
this one also able PCL(pol) already also this one already this one copula what PCL
'This one's also fine. What is this one doing here?' [laughter]
- 6 Teacher: dǎaw ná Ø
soon PCL
'Wait.'

Conventional use (formal)



student (L) vs. teacher (R)

Conventional (mock)

Excerpt 2 (T10 (task) 0.03-0.10)

1 Student L: *rian* *lx:j* *khà*
arrange already PCL(pol)
'Please arrange it then.'

HON (mock)

2 Student R: *ʔɔ:* *khà*
INJ PCL(pol)
'Oh, OK.'

HON (mock)

3 Student L: *temthi:* *lx:j* *khà*
fully PCL PCL(pol)
'Please do it anyway you like.'

HON (mock)

Conventional (mock)



student (L) vs. student (R)

Conventional use (informal)

Excerpt 3 (T10 (task) 1.07-1.10)

- 1 Student L: ʔawtɛːcaj ʔawtɛːcaj
self-centered self-centered
'You're so self-centered.' Ø
- 2 Student R: lɛːw maː cɾː ʔanníː lɛːw kɔː dɾːn klàp
already come find this one and then walk return
'Then he finds this and then walks back.' Ø
- 3 Student L: chán māj khâwcaj naj lɔcɪk kɛː
l(equ+coa) not understand in logic you(equ+coa)
'I don't understand your logic.' [very heightened voice] Ø
- 4 Student R: kɔː còp ʔà dì jàŋŋán ʔɾː nīː man pen hɛːtkaːn tòː kan pàw duː dì duː ʔanníː dì
then end PCL PCL like that er this it copula event next mutual not look PCL look this one PCL
'Then we're done. Well, but are these consecutive events? Look. Look at this one.' Ø

Conventional use (informal)



student (L) vs. student (R)

Creative use (zero honorifics)

Excerpt 4 (T15 (task) 1.35-1.48)

- 1 Teacher: sèt lé:w kɔː lé:w man kɔː dɾ:n klàp di: pà
finish PST then PST it then walk return good QST
'After this's done, then he walks back. How's that?' Ø
- 2 Student: cháj ???
yes
'Yes.' *Ø
- 3 Teacher: dɾ:n klàp ma: lé:w paj cɾ: máj penpajdáj mé
walk return come PST go find stick possible QST
'He walks back and finds the stick. Is that possible?' Ø
- 4 Student: dáj ??? man mi:ʔ anní: th̃: man khlá:j khlá:j kan ???
able it have this one RP it similar similar together *Ø + *Ø
'Yes. This one looks similar [to something else].'
- 5 Teacher: ʔannía ha.ʔ ʔannía jaŋ mâj hěn ʔanní: jím sàdɛ:ŋ waː khítʔɔ:k
this one search this one still not see this one smile show that recall
'This one means he's searching. This one means he hasn't seen it. This one means he's smiling, showing he can recall something.' Ø
- 6 Student: cháj ??? ʔanní: hă: kɔ:n ???
yes this one search before *Ø + *Ø
'Yes, this one means he first searches for something.'
- 7 Teacher: penpajdáj pàʔ ájnía hă: lé:w ma: cɾ:ʔ ɾ:
possible QST this one search PST come find yeah Ø
'Is it possible that this one means he's searched and then found it? Yeah.'

Creative use (zero honorifics)



student (L) vs. teacher (R)

Creative use (status reassignment) (1)

Excerpt 5 (T17 (task) 5.37-5.44)

- 1 Student: *ʔaw məj ??? *pʰi:* *Ø + *HON
get PCL older [sister]
'Is that OK, big sister?'
- 2 Teacher: *nâcà chāj ʔawlá ʔawlá* Ø
likely yes INJ INJ
'Yes, maybe, maybe.'
- 3 Student: *ʔanní: ʔa:ca:n ruǃ: plàw kʰá* HON
this one lecturer QST not PCL(pol)
'Are you a lecturer?'
- 4 Teacher: *ʔa:ca:n kʰà* HON
lecturer PCL(pol)
'I'm a lecturer'.
- 5 Student: *ʔɔǃ: ʔa:ca:n kʰà kʰɔǃhót duáj ??? nuók wā: pʰi: ???* HON + *Ø + *Ø
INJ lecturer PCL(pol) sorry also imagine RP older [sister]
'Oh, a lecturer! I am sorry. [wai 'apologetic hand gesture'] I thought you were a senior friend.'

Creative use (status reassignment) (1)



student (L) vs. teacher (R)

Creative use (status reassignment) (2)

Excerpt 6 (T15 (task) 4.14-4.28)

1 Student: ʔu: dâ:j má:j ma:

hmm get stick come

'Hmm. He got the stick.'

Ø (self-reflexive)

2 Teacher: ʔâj troŋ nía ʔo:kʰe: ná? *pʰi: wâ: man dâ:j kʰru: wâ: man dâ:j

TL this point OK PCL older [sister] think it alright teacher think it alright

'I think here is OK. I think it is alright. I think it's alright.' [chuckles and covers mouth with hand]

Ø

3 Student: kô: ɲán kô: nâ:ʔà?

so then so maybe

'Er. Then maybe...'

Ø (self-reflexive)

Creative use (status reassignment) (2)



student (L) vs. teacher (R)

Verifying the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 (teacher-student pairs)

Confirmed

Teachers may use or drop honorifics when speaking to students.

Hypothesis 2 (teacher-student pairs)

Rejected

Students use honorifics appropriate to their subordinate role when talking to teachers.

Hypothesis 3 (teacher-student pairs)

Rejected

Students use honorifics anyway even when talking to a stranger who looks more senior.

Hypothesis 4 (student-student pairs)

Yes, but there are exceptions

It is not necessary for fellow students to use/exchange honorifics.

Hypothesis 5 (general case)

Predictable but inconclusive

There is a regularity as to when honorifics are to be used and found.

Some characteristics of Thai honorifics

- Mostly lexical alternates or lexical insertion
- No honorific morphemes affixed to verbs and nouns
- Use and non-use of speech acts and other conversational tokens
- Non-verbal communication (e.g. wai, facial expressions, other gestures, etc.)
- Focus on indexicality of speaker-hearer role relationships
- Mixture of styles even in a short conversational exchange that has no change of context
- etc.

Japanese and Thai views of honorifics

Addressee and referent honorifics

Japanese: (More or less) clear-cut distinction between both types of honorifics

Thai: No distinction between both types of honorifics in the commoner register. But there are systems similar to referent honorifics, for commoners to use when referring and talking to the royal family or Buddhist monks.

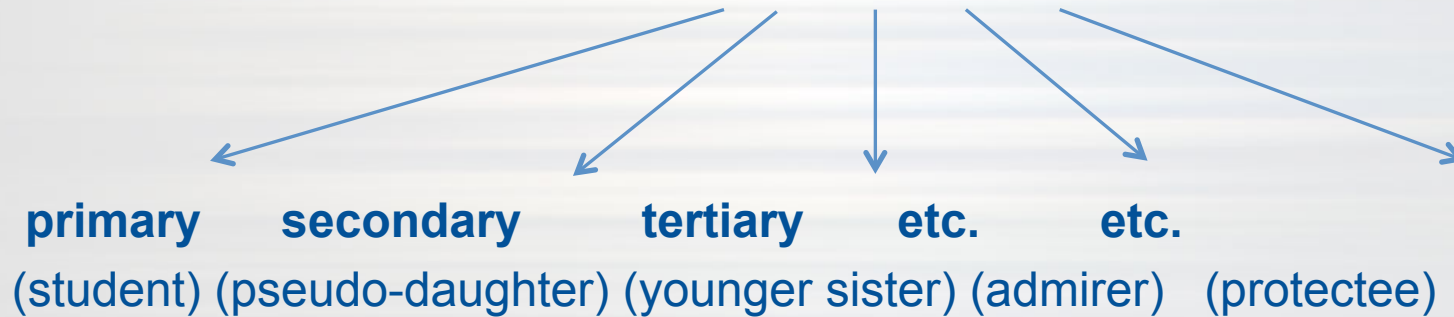
Despite a lack of honorific distinction in commoner interaction, Thais have an awareness of both addressee and referent honorifics; in most cases, an honorific form may index not only formality but also deference at the same time.

The concept of 'sense of place' in Japanese and Thai honorifics

- Replacement of 'facework' (Goffman, 1974; Brown and Levinson, 1987) with 'sense of place', especially for East/Southeast Asian politeness (Ide, 1989, 2005; Haugh, 2004)
- The extent to which role relationships are indexed and managed (rather than how face is threatened, maintained or enhanced) should serve as a better-suited framework for the analysis of Asian honorifics and politeness.

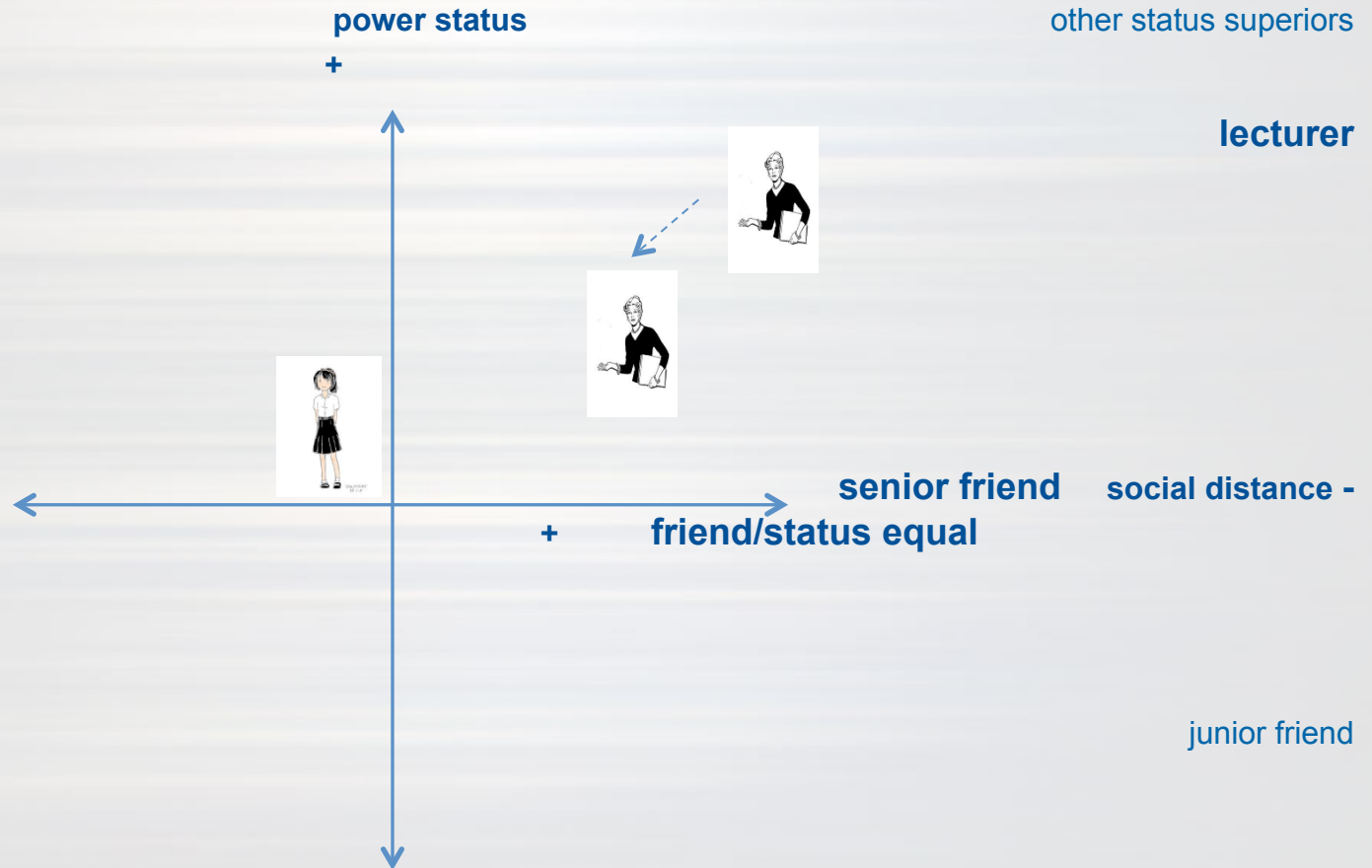
A dynamic model of 'senses of place'

Static vs. dynamic 'senses of place'(roles)



(cf. Okamoto, 1997; Mey, 2001; Cook, 2011)

Students' (changing) perception of teachers



Ba theory

- **Ba is a semantic space where interactants' sense of interdependence, closeness, collaboration and achievement of oneness are shared.**
- **Ba theory explains (in broadest terms):**
 - how interaction can be successful despite the seemingly 'illogical' (especially if seen from Western-based logic), features of communication used and
 - how to make sense of such phenomena by means of indigenous ways of thinking (see, for instance, Ide, 2005, 2007, 2011; Ide and Ueno, 2011; Fujii, 2012; Kim, 2011)

Four assumptions of *ba* theory

- Inside view
- Dual-mode thinking
- Dynamic model of improvised drama
- Covert communication

(Ide, 2011; Ide and Ueno, 2012)

Creative use of honorifics & *ba* theory (1)

- Zero honorifics



'intensified'ba (Ide, 2011; Ide and Ueno, 2012)

Participants enter into a 'merging discourse' by dropping honorifics or not using modalities associated with their conventional roles.

Such non-conformity of *wakimae* occurs as a result of:

1. Participants take **an inside view**, indicating their one-mindedness, closeness and (psychological) non-separability.
2. Participants employ **dual-mode thinking**, indicating that although they are independent individuals in physical terms, they belong to the same sense of place.
3. Participants perform **an improvised drama**. They synchronise their non-use of honorifics by means of several converging devices, which they have not previously explicitly agreed upon.
4. These assumptions are possible through participants' **covert communication**.

Creative use of honorifics & *ba* theory (2)

- Status reassignment



negotiated *ba*

Process

Typically, one of the participants enters into a 'merging discourse' by dropping honorifics or not using modalities associated with his/her conventional role. Four *ba* assumptions are in operation.



The 'creative' participant realises his/her non-observance of *wakimae* and self-corrects accordingly.



In spite of this, he/she may re-enter into *ba* later on and even self-correct again. This entire practice shows the extent to which *ba* is being negotiated.

Conclusions

A satisfactory model for the Thai honorific system must take into account:

- a non-reductionist nature of certain categories (i.e. addressee and referent honorifics)
- a complex web of overlapping role relationships
- wisdom based on local/indigenous philosophies (i.e. sense of place, *ba* theory)

References

- Brown, Penelope and Levinson, Stephen. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cook, Haruko M. (2011). Are honorifics polite? Uses of referent honorifics in a Japanese committee meeting. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43: 3655-72.
- Fujii, Yoko. (2012). Differences of situating self in the place/ba of interaction between and Japanese and American English speakers. *Journal of Pragmatics* 44: 636-62.
- Goffman, Erving. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. London: Harper and Row.
- Haugh, Michael. (2004). The importance of “place” in Japanese politeness: implications for cross-cultural and intercultural analyses. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 2: 48-68.
- Hudson, Mutsuko E. (2011). Student honorifics usage in conversations with professors. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43: 3689-706.
- Ide, Sachiko. (1989). Formal forms and discernment: two neglected aspects of universals of linguistic politeness. *Multilingua* 8: 223-48.
- _____. (2005). How and why honorifics can signify dignity and elegance: the indexicality and reflexivity of linguistic rituals. In: Lakoff, R.T. and Ide, S. (eds.) *Broadening Our Horizon of Linguistic Politeness*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 45-64.
- _____. (2007). The use of honorifics and ritual communication in Japanese. Ms.
- _____. (2011). *Let the Wind Blow from the East: Using the ‘Ba (Field)’ Theory to Explain How Two Strangers Co-Create a Story*. Presidential Lecture, The 12th International Pragmatics Conference, University of Manchester, UK.
- Ide, Sachiko and Ueno, Kishiko. (2011). Honorifics and address terms. In: Andersen, G. and Aijmer, K. (eds.). *Pragmatics of Society*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, pp. 439-70.
- Irvine, Judith. (1992). Ideologies of honorific language. *Pragmatics* 2: 251-62.
- Iwasaki, Shoichi and Ingkaphirom, Preeya. (2005). *A Reference Grammar of Thai*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khanittanan, Wilaiwan. (2005). An aspect of the origins and development of linguistic politeness in Thai. In: Lakoff, R.T. and Ide, S. (eds.) *Broadening Our Horizon of Linguistic Politeness*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 315-35.
- Kim, Myung-Hee. (2011). *Why Self-Deprecating?: Achieving ‘Oneness’ in Conversation*. Unpublished paper, The 3rd Tokyo International Pragmatics Workshop, Kyoritsu Women’s University, Tokyo, Japan.

References (cont'd)

- Kummer, Manfred. (1992). Politeness in Thai. In: Watts, R., Ide, S. and Ehlich, K. (eds.). *Politeness in Language: Studies in Its History, Theory and Practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 325-36.
- Mey, Jacob. (2001). *Pragmatics* (second edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Ohtsuka, Masayuki. (2011). *On Ba Theory*. Unpublished paper, The 3rd Tokyo International Pragmatics Workshop, Kyoritsu Women's University, Tokyo, Japan.
- Okamoto, Shigeko. (1997). Social context, linguistic ideology, and indexical expressions in Japanese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 28: 795-817.
- Shibatani, Masayoshi. (1998). Honorifics. In: Mey, J. (ed.). *The Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Shimizu, Hiroshi. (1995). "Ba principle": new logic for the real-time emergence of information. *Holonics* 5: 67-79.
- Srinarawat, Deeyu. (2005). Indirectness as a politeness strategy of Thai speakers. In: Lakoff, R.T. and Ide, S. (eds.) *Broadening Our Horizon of Linguistic Politeness*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp. 175-93.
- Tokunaga, Misato. (1992). Dichotomy in the structures of honorifics of Japanese. *Pragmatics* 2: 127-40.

Thank you for your attention!