

BACK-CHANNEL BEHAVIOR IN THAI AND AMERICAN CASUAL TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS

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Abstract

Although back-channel behavior is universal, its usage and use vary from one culture to another. The purpose of the study was to investigate the similarities and differences in back-channel behavior by Thais and Americans in terms of frequency, types, locations and functions. The data consisted of 10 hours of telephone discourse collected from 60 same-sex dyads, 30 American and 30 Thai pairs. The data revealed that Thais employed back channels more frequently than Americans did but the difference existed only between the male groups. The overwhelming majority of back channels in both groups fell within the short utterance category. The location where back channels occurred the most in both Thai and American English was at clausal units. The study also showed that in both groups the most frequently displayed function of back channel was understanding.

Keywords : conversational analysis, discourse analysis, verbal communication

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