
Greeting and Leave-Taking

Mayuri Sukwiwat and John Fieg
Sukhothaimathirath Open University

Through eight situations the author shows cultural and linguistic differences between Thais and Americans in the seemingly simple acts of greeting and leave-taking.

In "Initial Greetings", cultural differences at one's work place are highlighted, specifically the inappropriateness of greeting superiors verbally in the Thai context. Reference is also made to phrases acceptable in Thai but which when translated are too direct in English. Further examples of this are given in the next two situations, "Passing in the Street."

In situation four, "Greetings Involving Personal Comments" differences in what are acceptable subjects for comment are shown, the example given being weight, which is acceptable for Thais but not for Americans.

The fact that conversations are closed quickly in Thai but tend to be drawn gradually to a close in English is the difference considered in the fifth situation, "Leave-Taking on the Telephone". This difference also applies in the next situation, "Leave-Taking from a Friend's House."

The final two situations "Giving Encouragement in Leave-Taking" and "Leave-Taking after a Social Function" concentrate on possible grammatical errors resulting from translation of Thai phrases to English.

Though there are ritualistic expressions of greeting and leave-taking in both English and Thai, they differ considerably in the two languages. Thus what might be a perfectly acceptable utterance in one language may come across as a meaningless or even rude remark if an approximation is attempted in the other language. Certain standard greetings in English, such as "Hi," "Hello," "Good morning," and "Good night," which can be used in a wide range of situations and with a wide variety of interactors, have no real parallel in Thai. In many instances in which Americans would greet each other verbally Thais rely on nonverbal communication--a slight bow (known as the "Wai"), a smile, or perhaps just a raised head to acknowledge the other's presence.

In both cultures a greeting may involve a comment on some recent event (such as the heavy traffic on the way to work) or a personal remark about the other's physical appearance. But even here the range of appropriate topics does not exactly coincide in the two cultures. Both languages make use of formulaic questions in greeting, but once again the expressions differ--"How are you?" in English versus "ไปไหน" ("Where are you going?") in Thai.

The pattern of leave-taking--whether in person or by telephone--contrasts in the two cultures. In American leave-takings there is more of a sense of gradually winding down a conversation. Thai leave-takings, on the other hand, often involve a single statement in the form of an announcement that the other person is leaving. It is difficult for many Thais to develop a feel for the American style of gradually drawing conversations to a close. Consequently, their leave-

2. Greeting While Passing on the Street

Orawan has just taken up residence in a dormitory at an American university. One day as she is returning to the dorm, she passes another resident, an American named Jenny, who is walking in the opposite direction--on her way to do several errands. As they pass each other, Orawan says to Jenny, "Where are you going?" Jenny thinks to herself, "Well, it's really none of your business," but she answers somewhat brusquely, "Oh, I have a few errands to run" and continues on her way. Orawan feels that Jenny's response is somewhat chilly and wonders why Jenny did not give a more friendly reply to her greeting.

Thai	Problem Area Cultural and Semantic :	Appropriate
อรวรรณ : กำลังจะไปไหนคะ	Orawan : Where are you going?	Orawan : Hi, Jenny. How are you?
แดง : ไปซื้อข้าวแล้วจะ ไปดูหนัง	Jenny : Oh, I have a few (annoyed) errands to run.	Jenny : Fine, thanks. And you? Orawan: Fine, see you later.

Analysis : Orawan's greeting, "Where are you going?" is a common expression in Thai, as is its counterpart, "Where are you coming from?" In English, however, both of these utterances come across as an unwarranted prying into the personal affairs of the other individual. Someone in authority over another (such as a parent over a child) would have the right to ask such questions, but ordinarily they are considered rude. Thus Jenny was annoyed when Orawan greeted her in this way, and she gave a vague answer in a somewhat irritated manner.

These questions about where one is going or coming from apparently originated in the days when Thailand was frequently at war with Burma. The questions were addressed to soldiers on their way to or returning from the scene at battle; eventually their use spread throughout Thai society generally. Another Thai question often used in greeting is "กินข้าวหรือยัง" (Kin Khaaw Ryy Yang--Have you eaten (rice) yet?). Though ritualistic in terms of its frequency, a truthful answer is expected. For if the hearer has not yet eaten, he will often be invited to share some food. This question is believed to have come from the Chinese, who used it with utmost seriousness. For given the frequent scarcity of food in China in bygone days, the concern with whether one had eaten or not was obviously of prime importance.

Appropriate Expressions: Orawan could have chosen the expression which in effect takes the place of "กำลังจะไปไหน" in English--"How are you?" This could be preceded by "Hi" or "Good morning". One consideration slightly complicates things here, however. For just as Americans can be annoyed by repeated questions about where they are going or coming from, so also can Thais be irritated by recurring queries about the state of their health. One can, in Thai, ask about another person's well-being--by using either "เป็นยังไงบ้าง" (Be how some) or "สบายดีหรือ" (Comfortable + question word). But the first expression would not be addressed to one's colleagues, roommates, and others that one sees nearly every day. And the latter would be used only in conversing with someone the speaker had not seen for a long time. In fact, a Thai has to be somewhat wary of overusing this second question, for it might suggest that the speaker thinks the hearer has a problem or is not feeling well. If the hearer is feeling fine, he might then get somewhat defensive as he assures the speaker that nothing is the matter.

What both Thais and Americans have to understand is that these standard greeting questions in both languages are ritualistic rather than inquisitorial. Such questions serve as conventional ways to greet rather than as probing questions about one's personal affairs or as serious inquiries about the state of one's health. The standard, almost automatic response to "How are you?" is "Fine"--even if the other person has a splitting headache! In Thai, there is more room

for variety and one can, if he wishes, tell where he is actually going or coming from. But there are two or three stock answers as well, somewhat analogous to "Fine" in English. One can, for example, answer "ไปเที่ยว" (Go for fun) or "ไปธุระ" (Go on an errand), or one can simply answer "เปล่า" (No). Though this is non-sequitur to "Where are you going?" In English, this general negation of the whole event is possible in Thai, as if the hearer were answering "No" to the question, "Are you going to (or coming from) any particular place?"

3. Another Passing-on-the-Street Greeting

Somboon met Mike when he first came to an American university a couple of weeks ago, but he does not yet know him well. One day on his way to the bookstore Mike crosses paths with Somboon and greets him by saying, "What's happening?" Somboon looks confused, so Mike says, "How's it going?" Somboon still looks puzzled and says to Mike, "Oh, Hi, Mike. How are you?" Mike answers, "Oh, pretty good. Thanks." and continues on his way. Somboon is left wondering just what exactly Mike meant by his two initial utterances.

Thai	Problem Area Cultural and Semantic :	Appropriate
เลิศ : สอบเป็นยังไง	Mike : What's happening? (What's new?)	Mike : What's happening? (What's new?)
สมบูรณ์ : ก็... เรื่อย ๆ	Somboon : (Looks confused)	Somboon : Oh, nothing much. What about you? (How about you? What about yourself?)
	Mike : How's it going? Somboon : Oh, Hi Mike. How are you?	Mike : I've got three mid-terms this week, and I've hardly cracked a book.
	Mike : Oh, pretty good. Thanks.	
		Somboon : Yeah, I know what you mean. I've got two mid-terms myself next week.

Analysis : Another fairly common greeting in American culture involves broad, general questions as to how events generally are affecting or impinging on the hearer or what new events have somehow affected the hearer's life (e.g., What's happening? What's new? How's it going? etc.). Underlying these questions seem to be an interest in what changes are taking place, for these new, diverting experiences are what add spice to one's life—at least in American terms.

Thai thinking, on the other hand, is shaped by the Buddhist notion that all things are constantly changing by themselves; therefore, they do not have the same curiosity to keep up with every new event, for all is transtory, ephemeral. Thus a vague question about "What's happening?" seems pointless unless one comes in the midst of turmoil or trouble. Thais might then ask, "What's happening?" (เกิดอะไรขึ้น { Happen / Born } what's up?), but they would be asking with respect to that particular incident. Thus when Thais ask questions about events in the hearer's life, they are usually highly specific, like "How was your test?" (สอบเป็นยังไง) or "Was the party fun?" (งานเลี้ยงสนุกไหม). This type of question, then, would be asked only when the speaker knew about some particular incident in the life of the hearer.

Somboon is thus confused by Mike's greeting question, "What's happening?", even though he might understand at some basic level the general thrust of the question. It might be thought

of as an expression which conveys some meaning but doesn't really make sense to Somboon due to the cultural differences discussed above. Mike, sensing Somboon's confusion, switches to another greeting question of this type--"How's it going?" But this simply presents another unfamiliar expression to Somboon, who resorts to a greeting he is more familiar with--"Oh, Hi Mike. How are you?"

Appropriate Expressions : In response to questions such as "What's happening?", "What's new?", or "What's up?", the hearer has a couple of options. Either he can give a noncommittal answer, such as "Oh, nothing much" or, if he so chooses, he can comment on some aspect of his life, particularly what activities he's engaged in, what project he's working on, etc. After either the noncommittal or the specific answer, the hearer can then quite properly toss the question back to the greeter by asking, "What about you?", "How about you?", or "What about yourself?" Use of "yourself" as opposed to "you" indicates a greater degree of informality and is thus generally used only when the two individuals know one another fairly well. Somboon chose to answer Mike's initial greeting with the noncommittal response. Mike, on the other hand, opted to answer Somboon's return question with a comment about his life, namely, "I've got three mid-terms this week, and I've hardly cracked a book." This opens the door to further discussion of this topic or other subjects.

4. Greetings Involving Personal Comments

Wanee and Ann are co-workers in a large international organization. Ann has just taken a four-week vacation and is returning for her first day back on the job. As she comes into the office, Wanee greets her with, "Ann, why are you so much fatter? Did you go to a lot of parties?" ("Ann, your clothes are so loose. Why did you get so much thinner?") Ann is hurt and embarrassed and tries to quickly change the subject by saying, "Oh, I had a very nice time. What's been going on around here?" Wanee wonders why Ann so clearly side-stepped her question.

Thai	Problem Area Cultural :	Appropriate
วานี : โอ้โฮ ทำไมดูสมบุรณ์ ชั้นต่งเยอะ ไปกินเลี้ยงบ่อยหรือ	Wanee : Ann, why are you so much fatter? Did you go to a lot of parties?	Wanee : Ann, nice to have you back. How was your trip?
แดง : ทำไมจะไม่อ้วนล่ะ (embarrassed) ไม่ได้ทำอะไรเลย มีแต่กินกับเที่ยว	Ann : Oh, I had a very nice time. What's been going on around here?	Ann : Oh, I really had a great time. I can't wait to tell you all about it.

Analysis : Thais sometimes greet by commenting on some aspect of the other person's physical appearance--such as the clothes he or she is wearing, a new hair style, etc. Americans do this as well, but they tend to rule out certain topics--such as weight and the cost of clothes or accessories--which are commented on more freely by Thais. Americans generally view such topics as personal and potentially embarrassing and thus avoid them. Thais, on the other hand, tend to feel that such questions show a warm, personal interest in the other person. Weight gain or loss is viewed as being an objective condition by both speaker and hearer rather than as a sensitive issue which might embarrass the one commented on.

Wanee's question, while appropriate in the Thai context, is regarded by Ann as a tactless, offensive remark. She thus tries to change the topic as soon as she can. This is not to say that Americans never discuss this topic. But it is usually initiated by the one who has gained or lost the weight. If a comment along these lines is made by someone else, the speaker usually would

have a close enough relationship with the hearer to know that such a remark would cause no embarrassment. Thais should probably avoid references to weight loss or gain when speaking to Americans unless they know the individual very well and are certain that he or she will not be embarrassed by such comments. Americans, on the other hand, should remember that these remarks are not tactless in the Thai context and should make allowances for this cultural difference if they are on the receiving end of such comments from Thais.

Appropriate Expressions: A cordial way (from the American standpoint) to greet a returning co-worker would be to indicate pleasure that the other person is back (“Nice to have you back”) and then give him or her the opportunity to tell something about the trip (“How was your trip?”).

5. Leave-Taking on the Telephone

Kanika has just begun her graduate program at an American university. She wants to clarify a homework assignment with an American classmate, Jane, and gives her a call. As soon as she has received the information that she needs to complete the assignments, she says to Jane, “That’s all,” and hangs up the phone. Jane is surprised by the abrupt end to the conversation and wonders why Kanika had to be so rude--especially after she had just helped Kanika with her homework.

Thai	Problem Area Cultural and Semantic :	Appropriate
(หลังจากที่ได้คำชี้แจงแล้ว)	(After receiving the needed information)	(After receiving the needed information)
กรณีการ : เท่านั้นนะคะ	Kanika : That’s all.	Kanika : Well, I’d better get back to the books. I’ve still got three chapters to read in history besides this paper. Thanks so much, Jane, for your help.
มาดี : ค่ะ	Jane : Uh . . .	Jane : Don’t mention it. If anything else comes up, just give me a call.
(ทั้งสองคนวางหู)	(Kanika hangs up.)	Kanika : OK. Jane. See you in class tomorrow. Thanks again for everything.
		Jane : Don’t work too hard. See you tomorrow.
		Kanika : OK. Bye-bye.
		Jane : Bye-bye.
		(Both hang up.)

Analysis : The problem here lies in the fact that in Thai leave-taking there is often a brief phrase which either announces the extent of the information sought (current incident) or describes what the leave-taker is about to do (next incident). This announcement or description is then softened by one or two following particles (e.g., *นะคะ*). Thus a brief phrase and the accompany particles bring the conversation to a polite conclusion. The English pattern differs considerably in that there is much more of a sense of “winding down” or “drawing to a close” the conversation. By American standards, Thai leave-takings appear brusque and seem to end things too soon. By Thai standards, on the other hand, American leave-takings seem to drag on and involve unnecessary verbiage.

When Thais carry the Thai pattern over into English, they often use simply the brief phrase ; for there are no comparable softening particles in English. This is what Kanika does here in removing the polite particles, then putting the Thai phrase “เท่านั้น” into English as, “That’s all”. Jane is startled by what comes across to her as a curt, abrupt end to the conversation and doesn’t even have time to respond before Kanika hangs up the phone.

Appropriate Expressions : Kanika could have given some reason for drawing the conversation to a close, such as, “Well I’d better get back to the books. I’ve still got three chapters to read in history besides this paper.” She could then show her appreciation to Jane by saying, “Thanks so much, Jane, for your help.” Jane is then alerted to the fact that the conversation is about to end and offers further help to Kanika if needed. Kanika further winds down the conversation by indicating where they will next meet (“See you in class tomorrow,”) and reaffirms her appreciation (“Thanks again for everything”). Jane then gives Kanika some cautionary advice (“Don’t work too hard.”) and acknowledges that they will meet again tomorrow. Only then do they say “good-bye” (often shortened to “bye-bye.”) and hang up the phone. It is this gradual drawing to a close which serves to round out the conversation and leave both parties with the sense that the parting is unhurried and polite.

6. Leave-Taking from a Friend’s House

Chai and three other students have had lunch over at Frank’s apartment, and the five of them have been chatting for about an hour afterwards. Now Chai wants to leave, and he says to Frank, “I am going first.” Then he rather inobtrusively slips out the door. Frank is surprised and tries to think back to see if any of them has said something that would have upset Chai, causing him to leave in this abrupt way. Frank is also puzzled by what Chai said and wonders what he meant when he mentioned that he was going “first.”

Thai	Problem Area	Appropriate
	Cultural and Semantic :	
(เมื่อคนหนึ่งตัดสินใจแล้วอยาก จะกลับ)	(When one person has decided that he wants to leave)	(When one person has de- cided that he wants to leave)
ชัย : ไปก่อนนะครับ หรือไปละนะ	Chai : “I am going first.” (inobtrusively slips out the door)	Chai : I’m afraid I’d better be going now. I promised Apasara I’d meet her at 3 : 30. Frank : Can’t you stick around just a few more minutes ? You’ve still got plenty of time. Chai : I’d like to, but I’ve got to run a couple of errands first. Frank : Oh, OK. Glad you could make it. Have a good week- end. See you later.

Analysis : This is another example of the abbreviated Thai pattern of leave-taking as opposed to the extended American pattern. In Thai, when one wants to leave, he generally just announces that he is going (ไปก่อนนะครับ "Go first" plus two polite particles ; this is often shortened to simply "ไปนะ" -- "Go" plus two polite particles) and then inconspicuously slips away. The American style, as was the case in the telephone incident, again involves a winding down.

When Chai attempts to approximate the Thai phrase in English, he naturally has to leave the softening particles unaccounted for since they are unavailable in English. His statement comes across to Frank as a curt announcement rather than as a cordial leave-taking expression. Frank then incorrectly infers that Chai is upset. Chai's use of the word, "first,"--which also confused Frank--is a literal borrowing from Thai. Its use in the Thai leave-taking expression perhaps originated in the case in which several persons had come together for a chat, meal, or party and then one decided that he wanted to leave before the others. He then said, "ไปก่อนนะครับ" (Go first plus two particles), indicating that he was going "first" or "before" (ก่อน also means "before") the others. Gradually the expression was extended to all leave-taking situations, so that today one says "Go first" even if he is the only visitor or the only leave-taker in other situations involving departure.

Appropriate Expressions : Just as in the telephone incident, the American pattern here is more gradual, often beginning with a reason why one is leaving. Thus Chai could have said, "I'm afraid I'd better be going now. I promised Apasara I'd meet her at 3:30." Americans often try, in a good-natured way, to urge the other person to stay. Frank, for example, might say, "Can't you stick around just a few more minutes? You've still got plenty of time." If Chai absolutely cannot (or simply does not want to) stay any longer, he can politely yet firmly point out that he must go ("I'd like to (stay), but I've got to run a couple of errands first."). At this point, Frank realizes that Chai is intent on leaving and mentions that he is glad that Chai could come. He then adds the well-wishing statement, "Have a nice weekend." Expressions of this type (others would include "Have a nice day", "Take care", and "So long") are fairly common in American leave-takings and can be a source of confusion to Thais since there are no comparable expressions in Thai. Thus it is not surprising that Thais relatively rarely utter such phrases in English and often fail to properly acknowledge these expressions (such as with "Thanks. You too.") when they hear them. Frank's final utterance ("See you later.") is also sometimes confusing to Thais, and they may try to pin down the speaker by asking, "When?" This is true even though there is a corresponding Thai expression -- "วันหลังค่อยเจอกัน" (Later gradually meet together). Notwithstanding this similarity, Thais still frequently take the English expression literally and seek to determine just when this "later" is. Actually it refers to no specific later time but is merely a conventional leave-taking utterance in English.

7. Giving Encouragement in a Leave-Taking

Manit is a participant in an international conference on Law of the Sea. On the closing day of the conference, he is about to bid good-bye to one of the American participants, Greg Anderson, who has been chosen to carry out a complex project involving fishing resources. Manit wants to offer his encouragement and thinks that one way to do so is to use an expression involving some form of "succeed." Thus he might say, "I hope you will succeed your work", "I wish you will be successful", or simply, "Get successful, Greg." Or he may feel that an utterance involving "Luck" would be more appropriate, in which case he might say, "Good luck for you" or "Lucky you!"

Thai	Problem Areas	Appropriate
มานิต : หวังว่างานที่จะทำนั้น คงได้ผลสำเร็จนะครับ หรือ ขอให้โชคดีนะครับ	Semantic : Manit : - Good luck for you. - Lucky you! - I wish you will be successful. - Get successful, Greg.	Manit : - Good luck, Greg. or - Best of luck, Greg. or - I want to wish you all the best, Greg. Plus (optional). I'm sure your project will be a great success.
	Grammatical : - I hope you will succeed your work.	

Analysis : The problem with the first sentence is simply the wrong choice of prepositions. The sentence should have been, "Good luck *to* you" instead of "Good luck *for* you." In using the phrase, "Lucky you!", Manit has chosen a common idiomatic expression, but he has misunderstood its meaning and thus fails to recognize that it is inappropriate in this context. For "Lucky you!" does not mean the same thing as "Good luck" or "Good luck to you." Instead, it would be used in a situation where someone has just won a prize or has been chosen to go on an interesting trip or is about to embark on some other type of enviable adventure. "Lucky you!" can also be used sarcastically, as, for example, in the case where someone has been saddled with a burdensome task or has been chosen to perform an activity which no one else wants to do.

Unlike in some of the other functions where Thais have to make considerable syntactic, semantic, or psychological/cultural shifts to conform to an alien pattern in English, in the case of "Good luck", no such problems present themselves. For the expression "โชคดี" (Chôok Dii, luck good) is used in many comparable situations in Thailand, the chief difference lying in the fact that it is perhaps not used as frequently in Thai. Thus most Thais notice the relative frequency of the English "Good luck" when they come to the U.S., how it is used in everyday leave-takings among colleagues and classmates rather than solely in connection with more serious undertakings such as long trips or final exams. There was an approximately equal split among the Thais interviewed in our study as to whether *โชคดี* (luck good) was used more frequently among city-dwellers or rural residents. In addition, some felt that among elderly Thais (especially in the rural areas), expressions such as "อยู่เย็นเป็นสุข" (Live cool be happy) and "ไปดีมาดี" (Go good come good) were used more frequently than "โชคดี".

The third sentence -- "I *wish* you will be successful." -- reveals a fairly common confusion of the words "wish" and "hope", no doubt due to the fact that both are included in the single word "หวัง" (wang) in Thai. There is a tendency for Thais to overuse "wish" in sentences of this type, when in most cases the appropriate word would be "hope". In the next sentence ("Get successful, Greg."). Manit, in trying to succinctly encourage Greg towards a successful outcome, has picked the inappropriate imperative form. The imperative *is* appropriate in certain well-wishing expressions, such as "Have a nice time". However, the imperative forms "Get" and "Go" are generally associated with a series of vulgar expressions. To use the imperative "Get" with a positive word such as "successful" is simply not appropriate and comes across as rather humorous to a native speaker of English.

Another fairly common problem with "succeed" is a tendency to treat it as a transitive verb, as Manit has done in "I hope you will succeed your work." In the first place, it is not essential that anything follow "succeed", thus one could say simply "I hope you will succeed". If, however, something does follow this verb, it must be a prepositional phrase (generally beginning with "in") rather than a direct object. The grammatically acceptable version of Manit's sentence is thus : "I hope you will succeed *in* your work".

Appropriate Expressions: Two very common short expressions that Manit could have used here are "Good luck, Greg." and "Best of luck, Greg." A somewhat more formal and serious-sounding expression -- "I want to wish you all the best, Greg" -- would also be appropriate here. Manit could lend a further note of encouragement by adding to any one of the three just-mentioned expressions the following sentence: "I'm sure your project will be a great success". In fact, when one uses words such as "succeed", or "successful" in this context, it is generally more appropriate to indicate a certainty ("I'm *sure*...") regarding the successful outcome rather than merely a hope that the listener will meet with success. Thus Manit's final sentence, even if made grammatically acceptable by adding "in", might convey a subtle impression that Manit has some doubts as to whether or not Greg will be successful. Rather than offering encouragement, then, such an utterance might instead discourage Greg by calling to his attention how difficult it is to succeed in his undertaking.

8. Leave-Taking after a Social Function

Nuu has been invited to a dinner party at the home of the Johnsons, an American couple living in Bangkok whom she knows very well. She is just about to leave and would like to indicate to Mrs. Johnson what a good time she has had throughout the evening. She has heard Americans use the word "enjoy" a lot in these situations, but she is not quite sure just how to fit this word into an appropriate sentence. So she might say any one of the following utterances: "I enjoy very much," "I'm very enjoy tonight," "I am really enjoy the party," or "I'm enjoyable." Then, wanting to compare this party favorably to others, she might say "It's quite a nice party I've ever attended" or "It's a wonderful party that I have before." She wants to make special mention of the food and says, "The food is very wonderful." Mrs. Johnson acknowledges her remarks by saying, "Oh, we're so glad you could come, and thanks for your kind words." Nuu wants to indicate that her (Nuu's) comments were not idle flattery and says to Mrs. Johnson, "It's from my mind." Then, as she might in Thai, Nuu concludes by making reference to a possible future party: "If you will have this party again, don't forget to tell me."

Thai	Problem Areas	Appropriate
	Grammatical :	
หนู : อี๋ สนุกจังเลย สนุกที่สุด อาหารอร่อยจริง ๆ ชอบคุณ มากนะคะ	Nuu : - I enjoy very much. or - I am really enjoy the party. or - I'm enjoyable.	Nuu : Thank you so much for the lovely evening. I really enjoyed every- thing, and the food was delicious.
เจ้าภาพ : แหม แจกยาหอมเก่งจัง	- It's quite a nice party I've ever attended. or	Mrs. Johnson : Oh, we're so glad you could come, and thanks for your kind words.
หนู : จากใจจริงๆ (หรือ พูดจริง ๆ ค่ะ) มีเสียงออกย่ำดินบอคนะคะ	- It's a wonderful party that I have before.	Nuu : Oh, I really meant it. Thanks again for every- thing. Good night.
	The food is very wonderful.	
	Mrs. Johnson : Oh, we're so glad you could come, and thanks for your kind words.	
	Semantic and Cultural :	
	Nuu : It's from my mind. If you will have this party again, don't forget to tell me.	

Analysis: Use of the proper form of “enjoy” poses considerable problems for Thais, for it can be used as a transitive verb (as in, “I enjoyed the party.”), a reflexive verb (as in, “I am enjoying myself.”), and an adjective (as in, “The party was really enjoyable.”) In the first sentence (“I enjoy very much”), Nuu fails to round out either a transitive use of “enjoy” (i.e., “I enjoyed the party very much.”) or a reflexive use (i.e., “I enjoyed myself very much.”). In the second sentence she incorrectly uses “enjoy” as an adjective, mistakenly assuming that it can fill the slot of adjectives such as “happy” in “I’m very happy tonight.” In the third sentence, she indicates an intention to build a sentence in the present progressive tense, for she begins with, “I *am* . . .,” then she fails to follow through with the proper “ing” inflection on “enjoy.” In the fourth sentence, she incorrectly applies the adjective “enjoyable” to herself. Actually, “enjoyable” can be applied to persons other than the speaker (as in, “He’s an enjoyable performer.”) and to situations or events (as in, “It was an enjoyable play.”). But when the speaker describes him/herself as “enjoyable,” it sounds quite humorous to a native speaker.

In the next two sentences Nuu runs into a fairly common grammatical problem involving use of the superlative form of the adjective. For if she wants to use clauses such as, “that I’ve *ever* attended” (in which “ever” implies an exclusivity), then she must first use the superlative form of the adjective. Thus she could say, “It’s *the nicest*” (or *the most wonderful*) party that I’ve ever attended.” In her next sentence (“The food *is* very wonderful.”), Nuu incorrectly selects the present tense to refer to a past condition. This selection of the present tense to refer to events in the very recent past is extremely common among Thais, reflecting the fact that they tend to view various activities and conditions occurring at an ongoing or just-concluded event as still belonging to the present. But in situations such as this leave-taking one, all comments about the party should be in the past (e.g., “The food *was* wonderful.” I *had* a very good time.” “I really *enjoyed* myself.” It *was* a very nice party”).

Nuu’s attempt to reassure Mrs. Johnson that her praiseworthy comments were sincere (“It’s from my mind”) is a near-literal approximation of a Thai expression which would be appropriate in this context— “จากใจจริง” (càak cai cing From mind true). But it is questionable how much, if any, meaning this utterance conveys to Mrs. Johnson. Nuu’s final remark (“If you will have this party again, don’t forget to tell me.”), while permissible in the Thai context if made to a close friend, is inappropriate in the American. This difference in acceptability is rooted in the traditional roles of host and guest in the two cultures. In Thailand, it has traditionally been the guest who has been viewed as the party with the more burdensome responsibility. For he must make the effort to go over to the host’s house. The host considers him/herself fortunate that the guests are willing to take the trouble to come. In the U.S., the positions are somewhat reversed, and it is generally the host who is considered to be the party expending the major effort. The guests in turn are grateful to the host for taking the trouble to arrange the dinner or party. Thus from the American perspective, it would be presumptuous and rude for the guest to allude to an invitation to a future party that the host might throw. But in traditional Thai terms, such a comment from the guest would imply that he really enjoyed the party and would be more than willing to come again since he liked being in the company of the hosts. It is important to add that the Thai pattern described above is the traditional rural pattern and that in the more impersonal world of contemporary urban Thailand, the role of guest and host might more closely parallel the American pattern. But the underlying thought pattern—born in the village—has left its linguistic mark. Americans should thus not be surprised or offended if Thais occasionally allude in English to a future invitation.

Appropriate Expressions: Nuu might quite appropriately begin her farewell by thanking the hostess (“Thank you very much for the lovely evening.”), then mention how much she enjoyed the evening and particularly the food—remembering to keep both verbs in the past tense (“I really

enjoyed everything, and the food *was* delicious.”). After Mrs. Johnson has thanked Nuu for her kind words, Nuu might then convey the sincerity embodied in “จากใจจริง” by saying, “Oh, I really meant it.” She could then thank Mrs. Johnson again if this did not conflict too strongly with her cultural tendency to downplay forthright verbal expressions of gratitude. Finally, she could add, “Good night”.

The Authors

Mayuri Sukwiwat is an ELT specialist. Previously she has served as a Research Fellow at the Culture Learning Institute of the East-West Center and as a Director of the Central Institute of English Language. She has numerous publications on language and culture.

John Fieg is interested in language and culture. His previous work includes materials development for English courses at Sukhothaimathirath Open University.