

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MITIGATION

#### 4.0 Introduction

The point of a hortatory discourse is to somehow affect a change in the behavior of the listeners. To that end, certain commands are made, or certain modes of conduct praised or condemned.

All languages have various levels of command forms. Blunt, direct forms include phrases like "I forbid you to..." "You absolutely must..." and "Go do it right now...." In English, lighter, more polite forms include phrases like, "I really wish that you wouldn't do that," which really means, "Stop that," or the more vague "I'm really hungry," which could mean, "Get me something to eat." The pragmatic intent is the same; the relative force is different.

Mitigation refers to this process of making a seemingly harsh or otherwise overt command softer. Factors affecting mitigation include sociolinguistic concerns (age, sex, experience, education of all involved in the discourse) and the degree of seriousness of the matter at hand (as perceived by the speaker). The speaker applies mitigation as he/she believes will best achieve the command's fulfillment. There is a certain sort of efficiency to this; most speakers will generally choose that form which has a strength approximately equal to that required to elicit the desired response from the hearers. To use too much force would be undesirable, inefficient.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Indeed, Brichoux found that, among leaders of the Subanun people of the Philippines, "the more effective leader uses the more mitigated style" (1984:93).

This chapter, then, will discuss several ways in which a command can be mitigated. We will then examine a select number of mitigated and unmitigated Thai command forms in an effort to determine the relative strength of each form. Finally, Phra Phayom's use of mitigation will be discussed, giving special attention to the role of indirect commands.

#### 4.1 Levels of Mitigation

Hope M. Hurlbut's study of hortatory discourse in Eastern Kadazan (Malaysia) divides commands into three basic categories: explicit, implicit, and hidden (Hurlbut 1984:123). Explicit commands directly order the listener to do something, utilizing words like "must," "have to," etc. Implicit commands are often realized through conditional sentences and evaluations, while hidden commands contain unstated propositions which the listener is expected to "fill in."

These three command categories can be further divided according to person orientation--who the speaker or author is directing his command towards. According to Hurlbut, a command directed toward an inclusive "we" is weaker than a command directed toward an exclusive "you."

The interaction of command category and person orientation can be represented as shown in figure 11.

	EXPLICIT	IMPLICIT	HIDDEN
<b>SECOND PERSON</b>	1 (You must get ready)	4 (If you look for friends, you will not be lonely.)	7 (Presumed realization--e.g., I sure hope you didn't get me anything expensive for my birthday.)
<b>FIRST PERSON</b>	2 (Let's really avoid that)	5 (If we mix with people like that who are drunkards, then of course we will follow them.)	8 (I'm hungry.)
<b>THIRD PERSON</b>	3 (This is all because each person who follows the Lord Jesus avoids drinking beer.)	6 (Even though they have trouble like that, they do not repent.)	9 (And as for eating, those white people follow certain times to eat, sometimes 12 o'clock noon.)

Figure 11. Command Types for Eastern Kadazan  
(Reproduced from Hurlbut (1984:123))

Each of these levels could be further divided. Consider the differing strengths of the following second person, explicit commands in idiomatic American English:

- (17) You must go now.
- (18) You have to go now.
- (19) Get going!
- (20) You have got to go now.
- (21) You need to go now.
- (22) You had better go now.
- (23) You should go now.

Examples 17-20 would be unconditionally classified as commands while 21-23 represent more mitigated forms--suggestions. All try to

influence behavior in some way, and are therefore hortatory in nature; they differ only in strength.

## 4.2 Mitigation in Thai

As mentioned earlier, mitigation is affected by numerous factors. It is also often very situation-specific; that is, the same words that are seen as a strong command in one situation might be seen as mere suggestions in another situation. Vocal inflection and non-verbal communication also will inevitably effect the pragmatic impact of a command.

It is nevertheless reasonable to suppose that an examination of a number of different command forms used in the same situation would provide a ranking of command strength. This ranking would reflect native-speaker intuition--that is, the way in which a native speaker reacts to each form would indicate certain things about the strength of that form in a given situation.

In an effort to determine the relative strengths of Thai command forms, students at Yonok College, Lampang, Thailand, were surveyed. The survey was designed to test explicit command forms, including suggestions.<sup>2</sup>

### 4.2.1 Survey Tool

The survey tool for this experiment consisted of a list of various Thai command forms (including suggestions) assembled as a classroom exercise by advanced English students in my ENGL 308 Translation I class at Yonok College. The test group of twenty-one ENGL 102 English II freshmen

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<sup>2</sup>Suppharatyothin (1989:36,42) contains several mitigation ranking charts dealing with those explicit command forms herein referred to as strong commands.

students were asked to rank each word or phrase on the list on a scale of 1 (weak) to 10 (strong) relative to the other words on the list. The sociological setting was stated as being that of a *p<sup>h</sup>u:2 ja:j<sup>4</sup>* 'social superior' speaking to a *p<sup>h</sup>u:2 nɔ:j<sup>3</sup>* 'social inferior.' The root verb for all of the phrases was *t<sup>h</sup>am* 'make, do.'<sup>3</sup>

The list itself, while not exhaustive, encompasses words ranging from very strong, explicit commands to polite suggestions. In some cases, the command element is conveyed by a positive or negative evaluation of some course of action, rather than a straight-forward order.

#### 4.2.2 Survey Results

Evaluation of student response yielded rankings of the various positive and negative command forms, as shown in figures 12 and 13.

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<sup>3</sup>The actual wording of the survey asked the students to give high points to command forms which they felt could not be disobeyed, and lower points to the forms which seemed somewhat more flexible. The data was analyzed both in raw and adjusted forms, the latter consisting of a linearly ordered sequence (for example, if a student had rankings of 10,7, and 6, the adjusted form would be 10,9, and 8). No statistical significant differences were found between raw and adjusted forms.

Score	Word/phrase		Gloss
190	lɔŋ <sup>2</sup>	th'am	'must do'
180	cɔŋ	th'am	(+imperative particle) 'do'
157	th'a 2	th'am	'if [you] do it, there will be benefit'
148	ka <sup>2</sup> ru <sup>3</sup> na:	th'am	'it would be good to do this'
148	k <sup>h</sup> uan	th'am	'kindly do'
141	pro:t <sup>1</sup>	th'am	'should do'
137	cɔŋ	th'am	'please do'
136		th'am	'must do' (+polite particle)
136		th'am	'do it'
130		th'am	'it would be better to do it'
123	som <sup>4</sup> k <sup>h</sup> uan	th'am	'should do'
119	chuaŋ <sup>2</sup>	th'am	'help do' (+polite particle)
117	th'ammaj th'ug <sup>4</sup> maj <sup>2</sup>	th'am	'why not do?'
111		th'am	'do it' (+polite particle)
107	na: <sup>2</sup> ca <sup>2</sup> l	th'am	'certainly should do'
98		th'am	'do it' (+polite particle)
96	che:n	th'am	'[you] are invited to do'
95	lɔŋ	th'am	'try doing it'

Figure 12. Mitigation of Thai Positive Commands (Descending Order)

Score=points received out of a possible 190 total

Score	Word/phrase	Gloss
190	ha:m <sup>2</sup>	'[I] forbid [you] to do'
177	ja:1	'Do not do'
175	jut <sup>1</sup>	'Stop doing'
173	<sup>2</sup> a <sup>1</sup> nu <sup>3</sup> ja:t <sup>2</sup>	'Not allowed to do'
165	haj <sup>2</sup>	'Not allowed to do'
161	tog <sup>2</sup>	'Not have to do'
150	k <sup>h</sup> uan	'Should not do'
149		'Cannot do'
139	jut <sup>1</sup>	'Stop doing' (+polite particle)
132	ja:1	'Do not do' (+polite particle)
119		'It would not be good to do'
117	maj <sup>2</sup> cam pen t <sup>h</sup> i:2 ca <sup>1</sup> tog <sup>2</sup>	'It is unnecessary to do'
107	ja:1	'It would be better to not do'
101		'[You] can do it if you want to'
99	maj <sup>2</sup>	'It would be better not to do'
99	t <sup>h</sup> a:2	'If [you] do it there will be no benefit'
	si: <sup>2</sup>	
	si: <sup>2</sup>	
	sig <sup>1</sup> ni: <sup>3</sup> maj <sup>2</sup> di:	
	di: kwa:1	
	maj <sup>3</sup> t <sup>h</sup> am	
	di: kwa:1	
	læ:w <sup>3</sup> maj <sup>2</sup> mi: pra <sup>2</sup> jo:t <sup>1</sup>	

Figure 13. Mitigation of Thai Negative Commands (Descending Order)  
Score=points received out of a possible 190 total

The scores listed for each form on figures 12 and 13 indicate a sort of banding. Where positive forms are concerned, *toŋ<sup>2</sup> t<sup>h</sup>am* and *coŋ t<sup>h</sup>am* rank far above other commands, while *pro:t<sup>1</sup> t<sup>h</sup>am*, *coŋ t<sup>h</sup>am t<sup>h</sup>ə<sup>?</sup>*, and *t<sup>h</sup>am* show no statistically significant differences in strength. Similarly, *ha:m<sup>2</sup> t<sup>h</sup>am* ranks above any other negative command form, while *ja:1 t<sup>h</sup>am* and *ju<sup>1</sup> t<sup>h</sup>am* are near equals.

As shown in figure 12, the particles *t<sup>h</sup>ə<sup>?</sup>* and *si<sup>3</sup>* serve to mitigate several high-ranked positive forms (*coŋ t<sup>h</sup>am t<sup>h</sup>ə<sup>?</sup>*, *t<sup>h</sup>am si<sup>3</sup>*, *t<sup>h</sup>am t<sup>h</sup>ə<sup>?</sup>*). Similarly, in figure 13, *si<sup>1</sup>* mitigates some high-ranked negative forms (*ju<sup>1</sup> t<sup>h</sup>am si<sup>1</sup>*, *ja:1 t<sup>h</sup>am si<sup>1</sup>*). The distribution of *t<sup>h</sup>ə<sup>?</sup>*, *si<sup>3</sup>*, and *si<sup>1</sup>* in normal usage, however, is limited to the commands with which they are identified above.

It is especially interesting to note the relative power of positive and negative evaluatory statements. Among the positive commands, the conditional *t<sup>h</sup>a:2 t<sup>h</sup>am læ:w<sup>3</sup> mi: pra<sup>?</sup>jo:t<sup>1</sup>* 'If [you] do it, there will be benefit [for you]' ranks very high, while *t<sup>h</sup>a:2 t<sup>h</sup>am læ:w<sup>3</sup> maj<sup>2</sup> mi: pra<sup>?</sup>jo:t<sup>1</sup>* 'If [you] do it, there will be no benefit [for you]' ranks at the bottom of the negative list. Similarly, *t<sup>h</sup>am siŋ<sup>1</sup> ni:3 di:* 'It would be good to do this' is quite powerful relative to other positive forms, while *maj<sup>2</sup> t<sup>h</sup>am di: kwa:1* 'It would not be good to do this' ranks quite low among other negative forms.

#### 4.2.3 Mitigation by Shift of Person Orientation

The survey also contained a section testing mitigation by shift of person orientation. Students were given sentences containing first person



(1p.), second person (2p.), and third person (3p.) pronominal subjects in the frame  $t\alpha\eta^2 tham$  and asked to rank on a scale of one to three the relative "effectiveness" of each sentence. The results are interesting, with no conclusive statistical differentiation between the first and second person forms:

	1p.	2p.	3p.
most effective	11	11	16
less effective	7	10	5
least effective	3	1	0
Total Participants	21	21	21

Table 2. Subject Orientation and Command Strength

This lack of conclusive evidence one way or another led me to attempt a second survey. Students were asked to rank on scales of one to five both the strength and probable effectiveness of a group of hortatory sentences were they spoken by the college president during a student assembly. The results show that commands with second person pronouns are considered stronger than their first person counterparts, but that the overall effectiveness of each of those forms is roughly equal. Essentially, then, the weaker form has as much of an effect as the stronger, while people's sense of command strength make the weaker form more desirable in certain mitigational situations.

		strength	effectiveness
$khun$	'you' ____	77	72
$nak^3 suk^1 sa:4$	'students' ____	68	61
$raw$	'we' ____	69	73

Table 3. Strength and Effectiveness of Select Command Forms in the Frame  $t\alpha\eta^2 chuaj^2 jo:nok^3$  'must help Yonok.'

### 4.3 Command Forms and Mitigation in Phra Phayom's Sermons

The purpose of this section is to briefly discuss the type of command forms utilized in Phra Phayom's sermons. In doing so, it should first be pointed out that the array of external factors which could cause an otherwise ordinary sentence to be interpreted as a command are many. Thus, I will limit myself to discussion of those forms which appear explicitly in the transcripts--the sort of general commands made during the course of a normal Phra Phayom sermon.

Of all the command forms shown in figures 12 and 13, only those shown on table 4 are found in "Solve Greed." These, in turn, are divided into direct commands (commands directed at the audience), indirect commands (commands that are not directed at the audience--quotations, for example), and non-commands (occasions when a command form is not used as a command). It is interesting to note that positive commands far outnumber negative commands, some of the most harsh of the latter never even being used in the course of the sermon. Similarly, *chua<sup>2</sup>*, *thə<sup>?</sup>*, and *lɔŋ*--forms which rank relatively low among positive command forms--are among the handful of explicit commands used in "Solve Greed."

Word/phrase	Direct	Indirect	Non-command	Total
<i>tɔŋ</i> <sup>2</sup>	10	5	18	33
<i>ja</i> :1	7	5	2	14
<i>chua</i> j <sup>2</sup> —	7	0	24	31
— <i>thə</i> ʔ	2	0	0	2
<i>lɔŋ</i> —	1	0	0	1
<i>coŋ</i>	0	1	1	2
<i>maj</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>khuan</i>	0	1	0	1
<i>khuan</i>	0	0	5	5
<i>maj</i> <sup>2</sup> <i>thɔŋ</i>	0	0	1	1

Table 4. Direct, indirect, and non-command usages of surveyed command forms in "Solve Greed."

It is also interesting to note the places in which these commands occur. All of the instances of *tɔŋ*<sup>2</sup> and *ja*:1 "Solve Greed" are recorded in figure 14. More than half of the direct occurrences of both words are found in connection with material unrelated to any main themes of the sermon as a whole. The use of "we" as the preferred object of direct commands indicates mitigation by shift of person orientation from 'you' (see 4.2.3).

*တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

### Direct

\*Aw *la!* At this time Thai society and we ourselves need to watch carefully so that we do not allow ourselves to become victims of --Ay--being controlled by greed.... (77). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup> and *ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

Thus you have to decide to do good, you know (91).

\*We have to both give and receive, you know. We have to have both giving and receiving (126). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup> (two occurrences)

It is not enough to spread just a little mercy around; you must do it as I've just said (224). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

\*Nowadays we must help many people like this (239). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

\*Aw *la!* Our group must clean things out every day (254). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

We have to believe that every kind of oppression breaks dhamma commandments (280). [Therefore smoking is bad.] *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

Now then, whatever the case, we, well, must help together. Do not let them smoke, become addicted, and become all terribly decrepit (283). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>, *ja:*<sup>၁</sup> and *chua:*<sup>၂</sup>

Thus, what can be done to help cure the habits of --Ay-- the 'Foolish is Cool' [smokers] group? We have to join together to help and fight on and on (307-308). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup> and *chua:*<sup>၂</sup>

### Indirect

\*Aw! Thus at this time, what are Thai people in the process of having to cut out (42)? *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup> (two occurrences)

Nowadays I have to be willing to pay--pay and even waste money (225). [for people coming to his temple without money] *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

\*She did not know that we need to help the poor (199). *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup> and *chua:*<sup>၂</sup>

\*So is this the root of sadness? Do we have to cut it out (247)? *တၢ်*<sup>၂</sup>

*ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

### Direct

Really, as I said before, don't go punish the people of Supan[buri] alone (57). *ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

Laymen, if you don't have a naughty, drooling child don't be proud of your kid (136)!! *ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

\*Aw!--this here-- how to sum it all up?--The next time you make merit don't pray for a long time, o.k. (158)? *ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

Don't make the monk stand and wait as his legs shiver and the mosquitos bite --since he can't slap them (160). *ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

Don't oppress and make life sad, lonely, a receptor of karma, a hardship of the type that we have already passed through (331). (In terminus) *ja:*<sup>၁</sup>

### Indirect

\*I ask that in the next life he not be a greedy person. Let him not be a greedy or selfish person in any way (95). (Prayer quoted) *ja:*<sup>၁</sup> (two occurrences)

\*[A child's mother and uncle] taught him one thing: 'Don't be greedy. Don't take other's things and make them yours. Don't be ignorant and greedy. Don't gaze after the things of others in the hope of getting them for yourself' (187-188). *ja:*<sup>၁</sup> (three occurrences)

\*denotes commands directly related to main themes of the discourse

Figure 14. Occurrences of Explicit Command Forms in "Solve Greed."

#### 4.4 Hortatory Realization

How, then, is Phra Phayom's goal of positively affecting audience behavior realized? How can his sermons be labelled "hortatory speech" if, in the course of an hour-long oration, he uses only a handful of commands--many or most of which are not related to any of the sermon's main themes?

The answers to these questions can perhaps be found in the results of the survey cited above. The fact that positive conditional ("If you do it, you will benefit") and evaluatory ("It would be good to do this") statements seem to have a great deal of strength leads me to conclude that the hortatory realization of Phra Phayom's sermons is intimately linked to his use of documentary (embedded narrative) material--material which act as large scale, implicit conditional or evaluatory statements.

As discussed in chapter six of this thesis, nearly 50% of the paragraphs of a typical Phra Phayom sermon are dedicated to such storytelling. These stories, many of which are true, well-publicized news items, illustrate with great clarity the benefits of heeding Phra Phayom's points, as do the short, declaratory judgements/morals generally found preceding and following the stories. After all, who would want to be ridiculed in all the newspapers (as were the people of Supanburi mentioned in "Solve Greed"), mocked as being stupid (as are smokers in "Wealth"), or socially condemned as one committing the ultimate crime of killing one's own parents for insurance money (as are several individuals in "Solve Greed")? Why not be a good person like Phra Phayom, one who has sacrificed all personal possessions in order to help those in need and has, in the process, become a well-known, meritorious, much-admired public figure (this since

many of the positive stories in Phra Phayom's sermons are autobiographical)?

The power of these stories in getting Phra Phayom's hortatory point across is shown in the way many Thai people react to them. For example, one of my language assistants said that he felt extremely embarrassed when Phra Phayom talked about smoking in "Solve Greed" (indeed, Phra Phayom's jokes about the benefits of smoking--not needing to get hair cuts since nicotine slowly kills hair, not needing to have a guard dog to bark at robbers since smokers cough (bark) all night, etc.--seem to do more good for some people than abstract medical lectures about cancer, etc.). These feelings made the language assistant make (or at least state) a resolution to kick the habit.

In the real world, it is stories, events, occurrences that motivate response. A thirteen year old girl cannot find work and decides to commit suicide. The media picks up on the story and Phra Phayom hears of it. Thus, Phra Phayom decides to set up a job-training program for the down and out. An event, a story, results in action.

Storytelling allows people to vicariously live through an event. An excellent storyteller will be able to subtly, sometimes unconsciously, work on his or her audience's thoughts and emotions to the point that formal commands are unnecessary, clear-cut delineations of the pros and cons of a certain course of action redundant. So it is that Phra Phayom's stories both capture audience interest and serve his hortatory goals.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the concept of mitigation and its various manifestations in Thai. In examining Phra Phayom's sermons, it becomes evident that explicit command forms are used sparingly, and that the most straight-forward commands are frequently found in tertiary (off the mainline) material. This lack of explicit commands, however, does not mean that Phra Phayom's sermons are not hortatory in nature, that they do not try to change the behavior of the listeners. In fact, the numerous stories told by Phra Phayom during the course of a given sermon function as mitigated commands. Certain types of behavior are endorsed while others are wholeheartedly condemned. Thus, Phra Phayom's hortatory goals are realized less by explicit commands than through the evaluatory nature of his illustrations.