

Back-channeling Behavior in Telephone Conversations among Native Khmer and Native English Speakers: A Comparative Study

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In the study of back-channel behaviors, many theories or models have been developed by scholars in the field, but no one has actually applied them to Cambodian context. While a good number of studies have been conducted to examine back-channel behavior among many languages, the present study has its niche in investigating the similarities and differences in back-channel behaviors by native Khmer speakers (NKs) and native English speakers (NEs), specifically along the dimensions of frequencies, types, locations and functions, and to find out, if any, the relationship between gender and back-channel behaviors. In particular, this study is designed to explore the relationship between types and functions of backchannels of NKs and NEs.

A case study approach was employed in this study. The number of selected research participants included 20 NKs and 20 NEs pairs. The data were gathered from 6 hours of telephone conversation. The first five minutes of the conversations were ignored to avoid the effect of participants' being aware that their conversations were recorded. Only the next ten minutes of each conversation were transcribed. One NK and one NE checked the accuracy of the transcribed Khmer and English conversations.

The results indicate that NKs used backchannels more frequently than NEs did but difference existed only between the male groups. The overwhelming majority of backchannels of NKs and NEs fell within the short utterance category. Also, the location where backchannels appeared the most in both NKs and NEs was at clausal unit. The study also found that in both NKs and NEs the most frequently displayed function of backchannels was understanding. The results reported in this thesis can be expected to have implications and recommendations for foreign language pedagogy as well as for future research.