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From Insult and Injury to Open Critical Thinking

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ABSTRACT

In this article the author outlines the conflict existing between the western heritage of open critical thinking and traditional Thai values. It is maintained that the issue of voicing critical thinking in Thai universities is not principally an intellectual dilemma, but rather a social one. He proposes that this problem is not insoluble and that revising local concepts of "argument" and other expository speech acts in the academic language game will promise an intellectually powerful yet socially harmonious outcome. He formulates an adoptable principle of intellectual integrity with maxims for academic debate.

I. LEARNING TO USE ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

If university students are to successfully join an academic community, not simply as passive receivers of transmitted knowledge, but as active participatory developers in a continually evolving dialogue, then they need to develop the same skills in argument as practiced by experienced professionals.

This means they need total *immersion* in the academic genre associated with their field of study and a *familiarisation* with the rhetorical-functional approach to essay composition. Study of the various genres in academia (Swales 1990) shows that

article writers commonly employ a variety of conventions to produce text: a summary of historical and recent developments in a subject, the application of theory to new data, and a synthesis of views from a variety of sources, to name a few.

Where contrary views are evident within the literature, or where new data challenges the stability of accepted theory, it is inevitable that critical reasoning skills will be called for to seek a resolution of contrary perspectives. This means that scholars must also participate in state-of-the-art discourse to estimate the strengths and weak-

nesses of various positions together with the results of their own independent enquiries. Open critical thinking is therefore an indispensable component for any satisfactory moves forward in the development of a subject discipline. To expect that students will be able to write essays worthy of a discriminating reader's attention *without* some evidence of critical thinking is, wittingly or unwittingly, to *retard* learners; to deny them a status as intelligent, worthwhile contributors; and to reduce their persuasive powers to little, if anything at all. Personally, I would dread to think that my students could be marginalized in this way. A teacher is not developing a learner's *full* potentiality if all that is expected is a dutiful and obedient repetition of facts that the teacher learnt herself, fifteen years ago, preserved in a static tableau of the past.

Of course, this is not to deny that a thorough acquaintance with the propositions that make up the canon of a subject is of mere secondary importance or that critical thinking can replace erudition. Students, like teachers, need to become thoroughly acquainted with a corpus of material as well as the discursive arguments that surround it. However, this assertion should never gain such an ascendancy that critical thinking can be regarded as *optional*, or worse, as dispensable, or even worse, as a socially destabilising threat to the status quo.

And yet, observing our current position in Thailand, critical thinking has been largely ignored as a pedagogic process, relegated to a position on the sidelines. Perhaps for social reasons it is regarded as educationally suspect, too much of a "hot potato" for young developing minds.

Nonetheless, young minds will soon become middle-aged minds. I would be sorry to leave Thailand without having made some contribution to stimulating the evolution of critical thought in higher education. It is an indispensable component to strong exposition and deserves a place equal to all other pedagogic considerations.

Throughout this article the terms "scholar," "academic" and "interlocutor" refer to any member of an academic community connected with teaching, research or learning (including students). "Discourse" and "text" refer to any language activity related to exposition in academia whether

spoken, as in lectures and seminars, or written, as in essays, books and articles.

Scholarship and convention: Socialization into the academic genre

Participating in spoken or written exchanges is a product of academic socialization. Learning is not the same as socialization. In learning we focus our minds for a short period on a topic and consciously engage our attention on a task for the purpose of developing a specific skill. Socialization involves a measure of learning, but it is not always overt or explicit. It is often acquired unconsciously. It represents an adaptive development combining cognitive processes with attitudes; internalising norms, values, beliefs and roles in society at large over a lengthy period (Bondon and Barricault 1982).

Although classroom instruction can do much to raise a second language writer's awareness of many of the rhetorical conventions accepted in the international arena, socialization into the *social practice* of these skills is a far more amorphous and time consuming process. Being socialised into conventions of human interaction requires time for reflection and experimentation with speech acts to discover the effect they have in a social context. There is no such thing as instant socialization.

Hence, socialization into conventions that govern the expression of ideas in an academic community is quite distinct from learning the systemic components of the language which conveys them. Learning grammar and vocabulary do not, in themselves, require significant changes in *role expectations* for an interlocutor. Where the systemic aspects of the language have a high pedagogic premium, it is often the case that little or no socialization occurs through classroom instruction. But English teachers often treat systemic considerations as the sole means of negotiating meaning in a discourse.

Although good grammar, from a certain simplified viewpoint, is vital for producing coherence (meaning) and cohesion (sticking together), such concerns operate mainly on the sentence level of text and have no power to control the macro-organisation of arguments. Grammar has no power, in itself, to create sense out of complex

concepts or develop the *rhetorical* force of a paragraph in a text. It has no power to articulate ideas in an orderly arrangement of arguments nor to satisfy the requirements of a discerning reader who demands guidance and persuasion before acceding to the views of the writer (Widdowson 1984; Swales 1990). These aspects are learned through an ongoing exchange of ideas with discerning reader/listeners. They are a *social* product.

The study of academic texts shows that successful academic writers plan the development of their arguments not only through grammar but also by using a skillful combination of subject knowledge and top-level episodic structures (Carrell 1987; Swales 1990, Chap. 5). The term "expository speech act," specific to linguistics, covers a range of language functions which "affirm, deny, state, describe, class, identify, remark, mention, interpose, inform, apprise, tell, answer, rejoin, ask, testify, report, swear, conjecture, doubt, lecture, accept, concede, withdraw, agree, demur to, object to, or adhere to," to name a few (Austin 1962: 162-3).

Yet the *manner* in which such speech acts are performed will usually be the result of *socialization* in the community setting where they were originally encountered. This means we may expect difficulty in transferring to the conventions of another society when such acts are attempted in a foreign language. This is because a language classroom, although full of instruction, does not comprehensively reproduce the target culture as a social reality.

Acculturated interlocutors will be familiar with the social use of rhetorical devices which provide for the development of a good argument. This can be observed in Thais who have studied abroad. Successful communicators must also be sensitive to the *needs* of their audiences (Widdowson 1984; Flower and Hayes 1980). Significantly for us in the academic world, high proficiency with text will involve displays of criticism and a diplomatic handling of different viewpoints. Yet this cannot flourish in Thailand without a measure of academic acculturation to a model which contains such behaviour as a recognised norm.

Academic integrity

As a principle of academic integrity, academics

should owe their first loyalties to the advancement of learning. Most western academics agree that diligence, truthfulness, openness, and sincerity are the hallmarks of good scholarship and that reasoning and discussion are the best means by which knowledge is developed. Originality and initiative should also be rewarded. But principles of academic integrity are often threatened by partisan influences. All over the world power and influence can manipulate knowledge for its own ends and academics can prosper or decline through a surfeit or lack of political acumen. None of us are strangers to this, nor untouched by it. Even so, most academics would heartily agree about integrity and regard it as a principle that defends the interests of good scholarship.

In the western world the development of this integrity, together with rhetorical moves of exposition, have their origin in a history spanning over two thousand years, beginning with the Greeks and filtering through all levels of European literate society (Wilson 1993). This process of *dialectical reasoning* is much in evidence in most forms of expository text in the West, though this has not always been the case. Western-styled principles of debate and concepts of integrity are notably different from some cultures which may have preferred deference to authority as the principle means of knowledge transmission (ibid).

The dialectical approach, on the other hand, has been described as "an ongoing process of enquiry" (Warnick and Inch 1989: 12-13)

not deciding on a position or course of action until all aspects of the question have been thoroughly explored, a dialectical approach to argumentation searches for significant issues, identifies alternatives, generates standards or criteria for selection and uses them to test proposals. The dialectical perspective focuses on and enhances *a candid, critical and comprehensive examination* of all positions relevant in a topic. It makes *a concentrated effort to seek out all points of view*. Argumentation viewed from a dialectical perspective focuses primarily on the goal of reaching the best conclusion, which is the one selected *after all possibilities of view* have been carefully considered and discussed (ibid, my italics)

However "a candid critical and comprehensive examination" may not be possible in some cultural contexts where "a concentrated effort to seek out

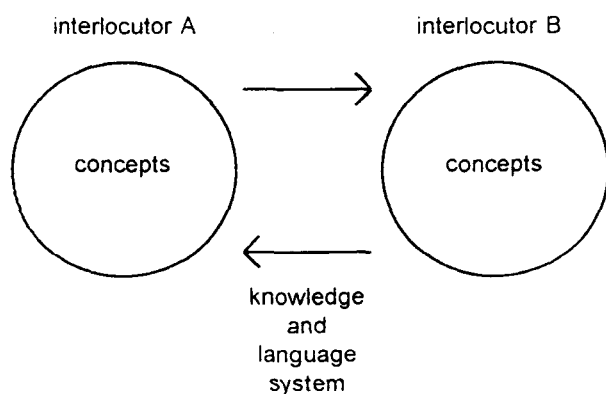
all points of view" may pose social problems in terms of power relations and interactive roles. Before we consider this, we should review some theoretical constructs which help to build a relevant model of exposition in the academic world.

Conceptual worlds and communication: The linguistic perspective

Widdowson's (1984) model of spoken interaction proposes an engagement of two kinds: a knowledge of linguistic rules and a knowledge of the world as fact and social convention. An interaction is successful and complete when interlocutors have used their knowledge of the world and a language system to negotiate congruence within their respective conceptual worlds (see Fig. 1). Negotiation of meaning ends when the interlocutors are satisfied that they know enough of each other to fulfill the purpose of the discourse (Widdowson 1984: 55-57).

Where the interlocutors' worlds are conceptually remote or linguistically disparate, protracted negotiation will be required. In an academic context, this will require profuse expository language until interlocutors are satisfied they understand each other and can reach a mutually satisfactory measure of agreement. It is worth noting that *agreement* can herald the arrival of silence — one has nothing more to say.

Figure 1 Widdowson's model of communication

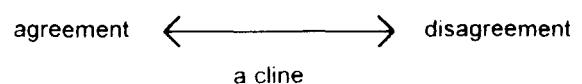


I would like to append an additional dimension to Widdowson's model by pointing out that not only does agreement (which presupposes understanding) end in silence but also its opposite (disagreement) "ends" in silence if participants find they cannot even *begin* to agree, or under-

stand each other, concerning social norms, value considerations or the notional premises for any topic inside the discourse field.

This situation is, perhaps, well exemplified by the current position of U.S. proponents and opponents of personal choice in reproductive rights. Although they possess a common language system, neither side can find agreement on elementary premises, so communication between the two factions is minimal. Here, the force of Widdowson's arguments takes a new aspect in terms of the possibility of (or willingness for) a convergence of conceptual worlds. Negotiation of meaning now only takes place when interlocutors are placed *somewhere* on a cline of agreement (see Fig. 2); that is, within the willingness to *develop* a dialectical framework, either a *measure* of agreement (congruence of conceptual worlds) or a *measure* of disagreement (disparity between conceptual worlds) provides the requisite conditions for a dialogue to take place. Where either polarity is extreme, communication either breaks down or is pre-empted. In the "reproductive rights" case, confrontation of value systems (themselves the product of conceptual divergences) discourages the interactive process. In other cases where the interlocutors are in "complete" agreement, negotiation soon becomes unnecessary. These polarities suggest it is not always the "filling in" of a knowledge gap that encourages discourse so much as the common perception of a discrepancy in agreement with the desired goal of *reaching* it. This configuration has social volition. It provides a dynamism for generating text.

Figure 2 A cline of agreement for conceptual worlds



This model will have interesting consequences when we seek to apply it inside the academic world. A notable consequence is that dissimilar viewpoints provide the dynamism to encourage debate and discussion in a subject area where a measure of disagreement between academics is necessary, healthy and engaging.

Consider what options academics have when they disagree. Firstly, they have the choice of ignoring each other or getting into a fight (much like

reproductive rights activists) — or, secondly, they may seek to resolve the issue through increasingly clever and convincing forms of argument, hoping to discredit or win over the opponent. If a scholar aspires to become a prominent academic in the West, he must attempt the second alternative. During the process of academic debate, other interlocutors participate in the interaction, and, over the years, make contributions to a developing knowledge frame at conferences and in journal articles. Towards the final stages of a public debate and analysis, most scholars in the field will have made up their minds about which perspectives are most convincing. These perspectives, over time, will become institutionalised — they will have become part of accepted theory and be reflected by an academic *status quo*. The theory of continental drift in geology and “big bang” theories in cosmology testify to this process.

History shows that this process has happened repeatedly. Astronomy, biological evolution, gender theory — are just a few famous examples of this developmental process. Yet throughout this process academics need to acknowledge a socialised set of rules for interaction — an “academic language game” which is invoked during the search for significant issues, alternatives, and so on, to reach a consensually satisfactory conclusion. These rules will govern the *manner* in which academics interact with each other. They also implicitly control academic text (as social interaction) evidenced in rhetorical styles presenting coolness, objectivity, thoroughness, erudition, and so on. These (unwritten) rules have evolved so that debate and verbal contrasts may avoid emotionalism, idiosyncrasy, overt partisanship, dilletantism, or personal conflict, so as to assist a developing discourse that can lead a community forward past the periphery of recent developments. As procedural norms, these conventions are welcomed in the search for enlightenment and a satisfactory consensual outcome.

Of course, these norms have not always been universally accepted. Four hundred years ago, Galileo was summoned to Rome to “curse and abdure” his doctrines by a powerful church that would not tolerate unorthodox theories which conflicted with religious canon. Changes in the direction of scientific views have always been ac-

companied by some measure of hostility. It is to our credit that in most parts of the world today scholars can settle their disagreements according to academic convention without too much outside pressure, bullying or recriminations.

Disagreement plus some rules of interaction are essential prerequisites for the creation of text. Unless we are verging on absolute agreement/disagreement, a measure of dissent should actually generate the impetus needed as a platform for the eventual victory or demise of a given position. This will have far-reaching implications for anybody engaged in dialectical thinking as an academic enterprise.

Firstly, it shows that, from the dialectical perspective, dissent is indispensable. Instead of being an impediment to progress, as we may have once imagined, it now emerges as the driving force *behind* any kind of progress. The dynamism of contrary tendencies, coupled with discrimination and some commonly agreeable set of premises, actually ensures the possibility of an eventual clarification.

Secondly, it now becomes evident that in order to get anywhere with an argument, we will need to *prepare* ourselves for opposition in whatever form it may arise. If our argument is ultimately a worthy one, it should withstand the test of powerful opposing forces and emerge all the stronger. Thus criticism becomes an asset in the hands of the intellectually powerful.

Thirdly, we need to prepare ourselves for a socially moderated discussion (in speech or print) which seeks a consensual conclusion. We need to become familiar with the rules of interaction.

II. ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: THE PLACE OF CRITICISM

The social analysis of academic language use in Thailand should begin with a glance at Grice’s very influential remarks about language and human interaction. Grice put forward a theory of language use as social interaction where a set of umbrella assumptions govern the procedure of conversation as a social activity which demands cooperation from participants in order to achieve their desired ends. His cooperative principle advises:

make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1967)

Grice maintained that these exchanges must be subject to maxims ensuring truth, evidence, informativity, relevance, clarity, brevity and orderliness as essential components in a cooperative exchange.

In the context of academic discourse, we should be prepared for *more specialised* conventions to apply regarding an "accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange" involving some of the requirements previously quoted from Warnick and Inch, such as exploring all aspects of a question, generating standards or criteria for selection, testing proposals in a candid and critical manner, encouraging different points of view in the search for the best conclusion, and so on.

In the western academic community, these procedures have evolved to become *independent* of the social status of participants. That is, subjectivity, pride, social prestige and emotional preferences are put to one side for the sake of arriving at a consensual judgment. We might add that there is something inherently democratic about this kind of discussion. Anybody is invited to participate, whether they are socially prominent or not, provided they can defend their position adequately, according to the evidence and sound reasoning. Hence, social hierarchies are also temporarily forgotten while the desire to find an intellectual solution is paramount.

Participants at lectures, conferences and seminars realise this. They know that the interests of finding the best conclusion is paramount and that any extraneous activity which detracts from this search should remain subservient while this search is active. This is why open criticism is not only tolerated but encouraged — it helps to reach the goal. Hence, one will find students, junior lecturers, professors and researchers, all equally involved in an active, egalitarian, critical repartee at question time.

These conventions, which have evolved over the centuries for the sake of academic progress, form a model for normative behaviour in academia. Values which prize the attainment of intellectual enlightenment above all other consid-

erations promote such conventions and stabilise a form of social behaviour which has specific goals shared by all members of that community.

An act of criticism, therefore, has no derogatory connotations about a previous contributor. It is made solely for the sake of the argument and, whilst remaining inside the academic discourse field, does not imply any personal attack.

Academic discourse in Thailand: The place of criticism

It is arguable that the apparent dispensability of open critical thinking for Thai academics lies in the fact that academic texts, as represented by international books and journals published in English, are in fact representative of cultures foreign and extrinsic to the Thai world of learning. That is, one could extract the factual content from these texts whilst ignoring a participation in the rhetorical frames they sprang from.

These published works are the products of "achieving" societies (Komin 1991) where aggressive, rationalistic, egalitarian and individualistic values have created a climate where "good manners" can be dispensed with in a free-for-all struggle for intellectual power and ascendancy. It would be no surprise to the Thai academic that open critical thinking flourishes in such societies where everybody is seeking to compete with everybody else in an independent, competitive and thoroughly rude manner.

Thai society is the opposite. Respectful, subjective, hierarchical and mutually dependent, the Thai world abhors any kind of activity that sets the interests of the individual above those of the group. Open critical thinking is not "affiliative." It promotes impropriety and disintegration of the group and should therefore be avoided.

Clearly, the Thai values system is internally coherent and has its own special merits. But what should follow when we realise that Thai society has *already* imported a significant quantity of elements from the "achieving" societies? Technology and the fruits of modern industrial capitalism are as advanced in Thailand as in any other country in the modern world. In universities, the adoption of a western-style curriculum together with libraries having half their stock in English

shows that Thailand is well on its way to integrating "intellectual imports" into its own academic culture. How, therefore, will it be possible to participate effectively in the international arena without adopting those same standards of debate?

In Thai society criticism is regarded as an affront to personal composure. It is "face-threatening" and disapproved of. Open criticism and impoliteness can be regarded as one and the same. It will therefore be very difficult for a Thai to engage in open critical discussion of another person's point of view without prompting accusations of impropriety. At best, criticism should only take place in private and, even then, when the original speaker is absent.

The central contention of this article is that, even though refraining from criticism is a prudent method of preserving social harmony in Thai society, it may prove counterproductive for a dynamic development of scholarship in the academic world. As we have seen, disagreement is volitional: it creates discussion. But how can this dynamism flourish in Thailand? We face a problem of reconciling norms of public behaviour with purposeful advancement in the academic field.

Does the one exclude the other? My explanation will demonstrate that this is neither desirable nor necessary. We can be critical academics and maintain cordiality, but we must modify some of our rules of interaction in specific situations to further the cause of progressive scholarship. This will involve some changes in perception regarding roles and values in the academic universe of discourse.

Certain kinds of human activity cannot progress without a measure of seemingly face-threatening behaviour. An interesting game of chess would never progress very much without some kind of opposition, a TV discussion programme would soon get boring if everybody expressed the same point of view. Yet, Thai society is remarkable among nations for its avoidance of open opposition or criticism in discussions — even of an academic nature.

In her book *Psychology of the Thai People*, Suntaree Komin eloquently describes the position of criticism avoidance in Thai society:

it is very difficult for the Thai to dissociate one's ideas and opinions from the 'ego' self. This is why strong criticism to the expressed ideas is often automatically taken as a criticism to the person holding those ideas ... Even in academic seminars where intellectual criticism has a legitimate place, the Thai still try and avoid direct strong criticism if possible. (pp. 135-6)

Here we can say that the prospect of open criticism approaches a breach of "kreng jai" — correct social behaviour which shows consideration for the feelings and self-esteem of others. Even so, much like chess, the interest level of academic debate is much reduced when an antagonistic element is completely absent.

Consequences of the uncritical viewpoint

Where criticism is socially problematic, we might ask, what would be the consequences of *never* using open critical approaches to analysing academic subjects?

Firstly, whatever we communicate, we will not connect effectively with anything especially new. Although new information will come to light and can be added to a corpus of existing works through research, this information needs interpretation and critical analysis before it can find its place in the new conceptual frame. Absence of critical thinking reduces all propositions to the same level of saliency — ideas easily become bland and lacking distinction.

Secondly, we might find that some of our new data *contradicts* the findings of previous scholars. What should we do about that? Pretend it did not happen and ignore it? This choice does not bode well for the homogeneity of a subject field. What happens when a contradiction is noticed?

Thirdly, we will find that when we get involved in exposition, the activity is largely mimetic. That is, we are simply *repeating* what has been said before and it is little more than a verbal reformulation of previous positions. What is the point in doing that? Would it not be better just to read the original writer?

Fourthly, an absence of critical commentary in our exposition will present an account which is monochrome and rather dull. All voices "agree,"

contradictions cannot be reconciled in practice, and we soon run out of topics for development. This means that the previously mentioned energy and dynamism that is generated in critical discussions will be absent. There may be little purpose or goal in what we are saying. We have nothing to react against and proceedings soon wind down.

From the foregoing, I hope it is evident that the consequences of excluding critical analysis from exposition invites the cessation of communication I described in Part One. There is not much future for expository discourse when it does not engage the interlocutor in thought-provoking reflection aiming at the resolution of incompatible viewpoints. Where will the progress of our ideas lead next? There will be nothing to look forward to apart from repetitions and echoes of the past. And if this is good enough, why bother with more exposition?

Towards a solution to the problem of open critical thinking in Thailand: An argument by analogy

Dynamic expository discourse needs a measure of opposition to create development. How can this translate into acceptable behaviour in Thailand? One solution involves a reappraisal of the *rules* of behaviour in academic debate.

A boxer in a fight does not call the police because his opponent has just punched him on the nose. Why not? A chess-player does not accuse his opponent of rudeness when he makes a threatening advance. Why not? Both boxers and chess-players appreciate the rules of the "boxing game" and the "chess game." (If a boxer was punched on the nose at the cinema, or a chess-player were to lose his "queen" at a disco-party, things might be different. The rules of "the games" of going to the cinema and taking women to discotheques are totally unlike boxing and chess.)

Similar differences may also be applied in the academic world. Although in many circumstances it is impolite to criticise (for example when being offered a gift or when accepting an invitation), it is nevertheless possible to criticise openly in other situations. Learners are often criticised by teachers, motorists by policemen, athletes by their coaches.

In the intimacy of the *international* academic area it is also possible, and expected, that scholars will often disagree even when one occupies a more prestigious position than another. In the West this has been happening for centuries: this situation developed through an academic language game which evolved its own rules of interaction. The expression of this language game is evident not only in print but also in classrooms, debates, seminars and conferences today.

Origins of the term "language game"

The notion of a language game originally came from the philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1955). His view was that many uses of language can be described in the same way that games are described. Wittgenstein wanted to show that human beings also use language in a game-like way (Wittgenstein 1955) with "rules" of interaction. Pragmatics as a branch of linguistics continued with Austin (1967), who initiated the study of speech acts – events in language which perform acts of social significance also determined by rules and expectations (e.g. promising or pardoning).

Different language games will have different rules. For example, *irony* has the function of stating the opposite of a situation for humorous or disparaging purposes. It is significant for us that many cultures do not recognise irony as a language game – they simply do not use it and do not comprehend irony when offered by somebody from another culture (Levinson 1983: 109). In order to understand irony, one has to immerse oneself in an irony-using culture, find out what the rules of its application are, and experiment with ironic observations to check the effect they have on other people.

Illocutionary force (the unstated meaning carried by a speech act) will vary from culture to culture. "Tough" speech acts cause some Australians to see serious argument as less of a threat to their personal relationships than do other cultures (Lee and Peck 1995: 46). In this case the rules for using tough speech allow *apparent* rudeness between friends or members of the same language community in which tough speech occurs. Following such modifications, we could allow different interpretations for the illocutionary force of

"doubt," "criticise," "oppose," and "argue" which will depend on the social and cultural *context* in which they occur. Significantly, the word "argument" already has more than one meaning in western culture. The *Collins Cobuild Dictionary* lists the following:

a set of statements in support of an opinion or proposed course of action[;] a disagreement over a particular matter between two or more people sometimes resulting in shouting angrily. (p. 65)

It needs to be made clear in the Thai academic context that we are invoking the first use and not the second and that there is no irritation or conflict of personalities implied when we do so. This is sometimes further clarified by textbook writers:

When we talk about arguments in this book, we do not mean quarrels and debates. Indeed, that kind of argumentation is usually counterproductive in professional settings and should generally be avoided. Rather, an argument is simply a claim that something should be believed or done, plus proof or good reasons for believing or doing it. (Huckson and Olsen 1991: 72)

If open discussion is to evolve in Thailand without rancor, we need to establish rules of behaviour – a special set of language game assumptions — which show that argument in the international academic context is "simply a claim that something should be believed or done" and keep this separate from associations with the personalities involved and the possibility of insult or injury arising from an inappropriate interpretation of the rules.

Why should the academic language game be keen to include rules of this type? The main reason open disagreement in academic discourse is tolerated (and encouraged) in the West is that, historically, it has been shown that interaction through disagreement is a very effective way to arrive at recognisable truths and a satisfactory conclusion. As we have seen, disagreement creates dynamism and eagerness to find the best solution.

Like boxing or chess the international academic language game has provided its own (unwritten) rules which operate at all levels of discourse. If articulated, one rule could show that it is quite permissible to disagree with another

scholar; but that this disagreement is still subject to constraints regarding attitudes to *persons*. Some *manners* of disagreement would not be tolerated. For example it would be unacceptable behaviour in the West (as in Thailand) to disagree with a writer by saying "these ideas are stupid" or "this writer is a fool and does not know what he is talking about." That kind of argument, as in Thailand, is a personal attack on a writer's "ego" personality which would provoke anger, conflict and counterproductive consequences for the argument at hand.

Criticising arguments — not people

So, it is perfectly possible for a scholar to disagree with another by attacking *the argument* (and not the person) by saying "these *ideas* can be shown to be incomplete" or "this speaker has not taken proper account of contrary *evidence*." This form of disagreement is quite permissible and, in western culture, both the original and commenting scholars know it. They know objections and calculated dissent are part of the rules of the academic language game and, like the chess player, allow for this kind of "attack" without feeling offended.

Of course, a scholar may be *privately* annoyed that somebody is seeking to weaken his position as a contributor and may get grumpy about it as when we see we are being outmanoeuvred in a chess game. But exaggerated expression of this annoyance may, in turn, have social consequences the player would rather avoid. Like the chess player, scholars keep these feelings of annoyance to themselves and channel their emotions into strategy to improve their position.

To sum up, we can say that in the same way as the chess player does not take threatening moves as a personal insult, so too the academic should not feel injured when critics disagree with his work. Indeed, an academic may even be pleased others are discussing his topic critically; it shows that interest has been generated and new developments may ensue to his credit. Moreover, he is as free as his colleagues to come back with ever more powerful forms of argument in the hope that he may eventually "win the day." As it happens, most forms of criticism do not involve a wholesale rejection of scholarly ideas. More often,

scholars are involved in disputes about lesser details, adjustments or changes in perspective. Nonetheless, the principles are the same.

We may outline rules for the academic language game as follows.

Principle of intellectual integrity

Academics owe their first loyalties to the advancement of learning. Diligence, truthfulness, openness, and sincerity are the hallmarks of good scholarship. Reasoning and discussion are the means by which knowledge is developed. Originality and initiative should be rewarded.

We should note that this is a statement of value and not an extension of individual subject disciplines themselves.

Maxims for the academic language game

1. All participants accept the principle that the most powerfully constructed arguments will become the most acceptable by virtue of good evidence, clarity and force of reasoning.

2. All participants agree that an orderly development of clear and powerful arguments is the best way to resolve a dispute in intellectual affairs.

3. In discussion, facts have priority over feelings.

4. Criticism is offered for the sake of making progress and development within a topic frame. This is independent of the personalities of the discourse participants.

5. When criticism is offered it is given as a critique of ideas and not of a person.

6. Verbal attack is permitted, provided it is relevant to the discussion and does not, independently, seek to antagonise the personality of another participant.

7. Anybody who has some background knowledge and can argue convincingly is welcome to join the discussion.

8. The rules of the academic language game do not necessarily apply to other social situations.

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