

someone refer to themselves as ເຮົາ or ກູ ໃນ ທ່ານ. If you do, it could mean you're in imminent physical danger, and that it's time to leave as quickly as possible. If it doesn't mean you're in danger, it most likely at least means that the person using the terms is quite drunk. At any rate, use of these terms indicates such a high assumption of high social power or class on the part of the speaker, that it's quite rare that any Lao person would use them with a Westerner.

Like it or not, almost all Westerners are regarded by most Laos as being of quite high social status, not the kind of person you use these terms with. Though you may very well hear yourself referred to as ມັນ ("it") in the third person; this is not nearly as strong or potentially dangerous as use of the two pairs of pronouns we've been discussing here. And they'll probably only use ມັນ to refer to you if they don't know you speak Lao!! Ask your instructors for more on this if you like, but be prepared for many Lao people to be uncomfortable even discussing these pronouns with you in the abstract. Many Lao people even deny using them themselves, even when you've heard them using them. This is called "cultural gatekeeping," and means they're trying to protect outsiders from seeing what may be perceived as a "rude" or dark side of their culture and language.

Grammar Notes

G.1 ໃຫ້ as an Auxiliary Verb

Whenever you're learning a new language, there's always the danger of trying to assign one meaning to a given word, when in fact the word in question may have multiple meanings/ uses depending on the context in which it appears. This is perfectly natural; it's part of our tendency as humans to try to "make sense" of novel experiences and information, to try to interpret and locate that information within a familiar, comfortable framework. So we tend to think that in the new language we're learning, every word we encounter simply must have an exact equivalent in our native language.

Unfortunately, this is very often not the case. This situation is further complicated by the fact that in order to not over-whelm or confuse you, a given word in the new language may be initially introduced by your teacher (or textbook) as "meaning X," when in fact the "X" meaning of the word is only part of the picture, a fact you're surprised with later. That's exactly the case with the

verb ໃຫ້, which up until now you've probably thought simply meant "to give." It does mean that, but it means oh so much more, or rather, it's used in some very different ways other than simply describing the act of giving. It's our fault--your instructors and your textbook author--that you were "misled" this way, but trust us, we were doing it for your own good! Now we're going to forget about ໃຫ້'s function as the verb "to give" momentarily and consider its very important role as an auxiliary or "helping verb" when combined with certain other verbs.

The good news is, we can break down these auxiliary functions of ໃຫ້--and there are several--into three different types (how's that for being good little sense-making humans?!), AND we can place those three functions along a kind of continuum, which I'll call the "continuum of benevolence and power." It works like this: on one end of the continuum, we have the cases in which ໃຫ້ is used with another verb to indicate that the subject of the verb phrase in question is pretty much ordering someone else to do something. Therefore, the subject of the verb phrase is on the upper end of a power imbalance with the object of the phrase, however small. So we can think of the subject of the verb phrase--the person doing the "ໃຫ້-ing, if you will--as potentially not being very nice, as "bossing the other person around." (Of course, in reality, a person trying to get someone else to do something is not necessarily "not nice" at all, especially in the context of traditional Lao culture, I'm just helping you create a memory device for making sense of the auxiliary uses of ໃຫ້ ...just try to bear with me for a few minutes here!)

In the middle of the continuum, we have the situation not a person doing the ໃຫ້ - ing, but rather a verb: one verb is done so that a second can occur, and it's the particle ໃຫ້ which links the two. "Power" and "benevolence" are both neutral here.

Then we come to the other send of the continuum, in which the ໃຫ້ -er or subject of the verb phrase is actually doing a service for the object! They're being totally benevolent, and placing themselves at the lower end of the power relationship--again, however small. Take a look at the graphic on the next page to see how this all looks...

First, by way of review, here are your phrases again from Audio Track 60:

High level of power for subject/low level of benevolence:

ໃຫ້ໄປ to have [someone] go; to make someone go

ໃຫ້ຈອດ to make or order [someone] to stop (a vehicle)

ໃຫ້ຖ້າ to have [someone] wait

Medium level of power for subject/medium level of benevolence

ບອກໃຫ້ຮູ້ to inform

ເວົ້າໃຫ້ຟັງ to verbally relate a story or incident to someone

Low level of power for subject/high level of benevolence

ຊື້ໃຫ້ to buy for [someone]

ເຮັດໃຫ້ to do [something] for [someone]

low level of benevolence; high power

ໃຫ້ + verb (“making someone do something”)

neutral level of benevolence; neutral power

verb #1 + ໃຫ້ + verb #2 (“doing one thing so another can occur”)

verb + ໃຫ້ (“doing something for someone”)

high level of benevolence; low power

Note that this whole “continuum” concept and all this talk about “power” and “benevolence” is simply my creation, an attempt at a mental tool to help you organize and process some new information (namely, the use of ໃຫ້ as an auxiliary verb in Lao), because this information is so new and unlike anything that exists in English grammar. Feel free to come up with your own memory aids/ways of conceptualizing these grammatical structures in Lao...whatever it takes to get it to make sense to you and stick in your head.

Now, that said, we're going to take my whole "benevolence continuum" just a little bit further, with some actual visual images of real live people using these structures, and at the same time you're going to get some concrete examples of how ໃຫ້ is used as an auxiliary:

Audio Track 72



ໂອ ເຂົ້າໝົດແລ້ວ ຂໍ ໃຫ້ ຜົວໄປຊື້ອີກ

"Oh, we're out of rice. I'll have my husband go buy more."





ຂ້ອຍບໍ່ເຂົ້າໃຈ

"I don't understand."



ຂ້ອຍຊົ່ວະທົບາຍ ໃຫ້ ເຈົ້າຟັງ

"I'll explain it to you [so you understand]."



ບໍ່ເປັນຫຍັງ ຂ້ອຍຊິເຮັດ ໃຫ້

"No problem, I'll do it for you."

Note that the above examples also show, for each of the three different structures, where the object (in this case, the person being addressed) goes in the construction. Ask your instructor for more examples, and let your instructor know if any of this isn't clear to you.

You can hear audio to go along with the photos for these examples on Audio Track 72.