Turn-Taking, Preference, and Face in Criticism Responses[1]

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Abstract

Vivas have multiple functions in academia, but their main goal is completing thesis evaluation. At the heart of this evaluation is a series of criticisms and their responsive turns by which participants talk vivas as institution into being (Heritage, 1997). Turn-taking is one of the many ways vivas are talked into being. This study drew upon conversation analysis to look into the turn allocation mechanism of criticism-response exchanges and their relationship with the notion of preference and dispreference in the context of Iranian English-medium vivas. It further investigated the relationship between turn-taking, preference structure, and the notion of face understood, following Arundale (2010) as the relational connection and separation. Findings and observations suggest a combination of turn preallocation, conciliatory turn negotiation, and adversarial turn competition of dispreference and preference as well as of the interactional achievement of slight connection and considerable separation in the discourse.

***Keywords*:** Viva; Turn-Taking; Preference; Face; Institutional Discourse

1. Introduction

This article drew upon conversation analysis (CA) to, first, examine the turn-taking system and the preference structure of criticism-response exchanges in talk in Iranian L2 English vivas. Second, it aimed to demonstrate how face (Arundale, 2010) is interactionally achieved through the interactional achievement of turn-taking. Following Arundale (2010), face is taken as "participants' understandings of relational connectedness and separateness conjointly coconstituted in talk/conduct-in-interaction" (p. 2078). This essentially means that face achievement is accomplished relationally as well as interactionally as an integral part of, but distinct from, meaning-action achievement.

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In Iran, a Ph.D. viva is an open ceremony that functions as complementing a doctoral dissertation evaluation. At the same time, it is a ritual event that marks the award of a Ph.D. to the successful candidate. Vivas generally go through six stages: (1) introduction, (2) candidate's presentation, (3) question and answer (Q-A), (4) marking, (5) results announcement, and (6) celebration. This study focuses on the third stage, which is Q-A or criticism-response exchanges between the examiners and the candidates supported by their supervisors. As goal-oriented institutions, vivas are 'talked into being' (Heritage, 1997), mainly through criticisms and their responses in the Q-A part. Some recent promising studies have adopted conversation or interaction analysis to examine talk in vivas in Iran to see how talk unfolds and how face is interactionally achieved in criticism-response sequences (Don & Izadi, 2011, 2013; Izadi, 2016a, 2016b). What is yet unaddressed is how turns of criticism responses are negotiated, what the preference structure of turns is, and how face is achieved through the practices of turn-taking. This study builds on previous research on talk and face in vivas by filling this research gap. The analyses are guided by the following three research questions:

1. How are criticism-response turns negotiated in talk in vivas?

2. What is the prominent preference structure of criticism-response sequences?

3. How is face interactionally achieved through turn-taking practices?

The study takes a CA approach to data analysis to show how participants jointly accomplish turn-taking as well as face. Basic to CA is that participants reveal what they achieve in talk, and the analysts must ground their interpreting in the talk itself, based on what is evident from the participants. In the remaining of this article, I first review some pertinent studies on turn-taking and its relevance to the notion of preference and dispreference. Then, I put forward the interconnection of turn-taking and face in section 3. In section 4, I introduce the data, followed by the analyses of representative excerpts from the data (section 5). Finally, I draw my conclusions in section 6.

2. Turn-Taking and Preference

Turn-taking is a fundamental structure of talk both in ordinary conversations and in institutional talk. Turn-taking has often been discussed in the CA literature (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Have, 1999; Sacks et al., 1974) in terms of its two main components: Turn allocation component (TAC) and turn construction component (TCC). The latter is an alternative term for turn construction unit (TCU) and turn design. Talk in every institution may have its own unique turn-taking system, not only different from ordinary conversations, but also from other forms of institutional talk. Drew and Heritage (1992) attribute three characteristics to

institutional talk: (1) The interaction normally involves the participants in specific goal orientations that are tied to the institution-relevant identities, (2) the interaction involves special constraints on what will be treated as allowable contributions to the business at hand, and (3) the interaction is associated with inferential frameworks and procedures that are particular to specific institutional contexts. Turn-taking is one important manifestation of these characteristics. Examining how turns are negotiated, then, is an important initial step in understanding how a particular institution is 'talked into being' (Heritage, 1997). In other words, in looking into the turn-taking mechanism of the Q-A part of vivas in Iran, we are interested in how the participants in talk achieve institutional goals under the affordances and constraints and in light of the inferential frameworks attached to the viva interactions. This study addresses the TAC of turn-taking in English-medium vivas in Iran.

Turns also have implications for the preference structure of talk in interaction. Heritage (1984) contends that dispreferred turns are generally delayed, qualified, or accounted. Preferred turns, however, are taken in overlap or with minimal pause with previous turns. In ordinary conversation, turns including actions like refusals, disagreements, and the like are considered dispreferred. Research in some kinds of institutional talk, however, has revealed the reverse of this pattern. For example, Greatbatch (1988) shows that in mediated news interviews, disagreements are preferred. Despite the preallocation and the mediation of turns, participants even interrupt the previous speaker's turn to disagree. Heritage (1984), drawing on earlier work, notes that following accusation and blaming the systematic privileging or structural preference is reversed criticism responses so that denial is more common. Whereas the preference structure of has not yet specifically been investigated, research on disagreements suggests that preference structure is complex and is largely dependent on contextual stipulations (Sifianou, 2012).

3. Turn-Taking and Face in the Literature

Heritage (1984) emphasizes that preference does not refer to the psychological proclivities of the participants, but to the internal structure of the talk. However, he relates preference structures to relational matters. In a similar vein, Lerner (1996) finds face in achieving turn-taking. He reports on the cases when participants anticipatorily complete the previous speaker's turn, thereby convert a dispreferred turn into a preferred one. He argues that as second-position speakers convert a dispreferred disagreement to a preferred agreement they avoid a threat to the face of the first-position speaker. Whereas Lerner's (1996) approach to conversational meanings and actions is interactional (in the CA sense), his approach to face is not compatible with the interactional achievement of meaning and action. He adopts the concept of face from Goffman (1967) and Brown and Levinson (1987), defined as a "public self-image" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 25) or one's

"positive social value" (Goffman, 1967, p. 45). This approach to face has often been criticized for its cognitive and individualistic orientation. Arundale (2010) argues that face *a la* Brown and Levinson, which is the adoption of Goffman's (1967) notion of face, is individualistic, and hence fails to methodologically fit into the CA enterprise, which focuses on the interactional achievement of meaning/actions and turn-taking. Alternatively, he theorizes face as a relational and an interactional phenomenon and defines it as relational connection and separation, which are conjointly coconstituted in talk in interaction (Arundale, 2010, 2013, Don & Izadi, 2011, 2013, Izadi, 2015, 2016a, 2016b).

Face encompasses a dialectic of relational connection and separation (Arundale, 2010), one of the three dialectics of the relational dialectic theory proposed by Baxter and Montgomery (1996). The interactional approach to face essentially moves away from the traditional conceptualizations of face as either "a public self image" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 12) or "a positive social value a person effectively claims for himself" (Goffman, 1967, p. 49). Rather, face is interactionally achieved through the interactional achievement of its two components, connection and separation. This view to face is compatible with the interactional achievement of meaning and action, along with the interactional achievement of conversational practices, such as turn-taking (Arundale, 2010).

Adopting the interactional approach to face in criticism-criticism response exchanges in vivas, Don and Izadi (2013) and Izadi (2016b) argue that criticisms and responses in the context of vivas "articulate with" (Arundale, 2010, p. 45) both separation and connection, although the amount of separation is higher than connection. This argument is supported by the observation that in vivas, examiners' criticisms of a doctoral dissertation, written by a candidate and supervised by, at least, a supervisor, are means of questioning the knowledge and research competence of the author(s), which has implications for not only some degree of relational separation between them and the recipients of the criticisms, but also for the recipients' relational separation from significant others (Izadi, 2016b). Despite this capacity, viva criticisms also "articulate with" slight connection, especially if delivered politically, because they are means to mutual engagement over a topic of interest, provide a learning environment for the candidate, and are intended to improve the quality of the thesis, which is in favor of the candidate (and secondary authors). This general observation is of course subject to variation in the minutiae of interactions. Conversational practices such as turn-taking offer interesting grounds for the interactional achievement of relational connection and separation because they are one important manifestation of participants' projecting and interpreting (Arundale, 2010) of criticisms and countercriticisms in each turn. As mentioned earlier, whereas these studies have investigated face in the design of the criticism-

responses turns, this study complements them by looking into turn allocation and negotiation in vivas.

4. Data

The data come from transcriptions of 20 Ph.D. and master's audio- and video-recorded Q-A sections of defense sessions, comprising 16 hr and 19 min of talk. All the vivas represented the discipline of English language teaching and were recorded throughout 2009 and 2010 in five Iranian universities. Sixty-five academics of both genders, enacting as examiners (Ex), (co)supervisors ((co)S) and Ph.D. and master candidates (C) participated. They e aged between 27 and 65. Both master's defense sessions (DDMs) and Ph.D. defense sessions (DDPs) are numbered, and the participants are identified based on their role and sex. For example, DDP11EX2M stands for the second examiner, male, in the Ph.D. defense session number 11. This study only uses examiner-candidate interactions in the Ph.D. vivas for the turn-taking analysis. The transcription convention appears at the end of the paper.

5. Analysis

It would be ideal to present the analyses of the whole Q-A interactions between all the participants, but due to space limitations, this study only focuses on examiner-candidate exchanges in the Q-A part of vivas. Also, this paper only deals with the analysis of the TAC of turn-taking. CA is adopted as the overall approach to data analysis. A basic analytical procedure in CA is the turn by the turn analysis of the sequences to investigate how meanings/actions and conversational practices are jointly accomplished between the interactants. Analyses must be grounded in the observations that are congruent with what the participants interactionally achieve in talk-in-interaction and crucial to these observations is the evidence that is provided by the recipients of first turns in their responsive uptakes.

5.1 Initial Observations

Q-A proper is the most important stage not only in the Q-A section but also in the whole viva. This phase is where the nature of *defense* is justified. In terms of the structure of talk, two distinct trajectories of talk were observed in the data of the present study, depending on the conventions of the university where the vivas were held. The two distinct trajectories are detailed here:

Trajectory 1: Here, the examiners raise their critical comments and ask questions in a series of long multiunit turns, in a single long multiunit turns, or in a series of short turns. The candidates answer the questions and criticisms either on a one-to-one basis, that is, each question/critical point is answered and dealt with before going to the next or in a gloss manner, that is, the candidates wait for the

examiners to raise all of their comments, and then provide answers for all of them. The interactions between the examiners and the candidates can possibly be disrupted by the (co)supervisors' incomings, when the talk reaches an impasse, that is, the two parties cannot come to any resolution, or the arguments are so severe that the (co)supervisors feel the need to mediate the talk before their turn is due. After the rounds of question/criticism responses between all of the examiners and the relevant candidate are over, the (co)supervisors' supportive comments for the candidate are delivered. These last comments may be raised in a single turn without interruption. Alternatively, they may be interrupted by the examiners to form a multiturn argument.

Trajectory 2: Here, the structure of Q-A proper is slightly different from trajectory 1 in that the supervisors' supporting comments for the candidate are put adjacent to the candidates' answers. Unlike trajectory 1 in which the supervisors' comments are postponed to the last turn, in trajectory 2 supervisors support the candidate immediately after he or she has provided the answer, especially when the candidate's answer is found not adequate. In fact, in this trajectory, the role of the supervisors is more vivid than the previous one, not only in supporting the candidate, but also in mediating the interactions between the examiners and the candidate. These two trajectories have different implications for the preference structure and for the face constitution of the turn-taking mechanism. In trajectory 1, the supervisors' incomings to defend the candidates are preferred because their turn is instituitionally preallocated after the round of Q-A between examiners and candidates. In trajectory 2, however, the supervisors are institutionally preallocated the turn immediately after the candidate's response, so the preference structure gets more complicated as it depends on how they take up the floor.

The most important constituent of the viva discourse is a series of questions/criticisms/suggestions and their respective responses between the examiners and the candidates. An important feature that turns a viva into an institutional context is the pre-existence of asymmetries which assigns the examiners the pregiven right and obligations to question and criticize and candidate and (to a lesser extent) his or her supervisor has been given the same rights and obligations to answer (Drew & Heritage, 1992; Have, 1999; Heritage, 1997). This is well observable in the data of the present study. The initial observation of Q-A parts reveals that this section features a combination of preallocation of turns and impromptu turn negotiations and even turn competition in the moments of talk. Similar to many institutional settings (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Greatbatch, 1988; Have, 1999), the turn-taking system in the Q-A part of vivas is restricted in terms of both turn and turn-type preallocation. Turn preallocation characterizes viva, in general, and Q-A, in particular, because it involves the participants who have

legitimate predetermined rights and obligations to speak at particular points in talk. In terms of turn-type preallocation (Have, 1999), examiners are preallocated the right to take questioning or criticizing turns while the candidates have the obligation to provide the secondary acts of responses to the examiners' questions (Don & Izadi, 2011, 2013; Izadi, 2016b). Examiners initiate sequences, control the topics, and set the agenda for the candidate.

External and internal examiners take up the floor after the chair's introduction to start their Q-A round with the candidate. Each examiner in his or her turn produces a number of TCUs with the candidate. When each examiner finishes his or her round of Q-A with the candidate, the next speakership is introduced by the chair as already preallocated. The candidate is responsible and has the obligation to answer the questions and criticisms brought up by any of the jury members in any turn. In the sequences of talk between each examiner and the candidate, when a TRP is achieved, the three possibilities of previous speaker selection, speaker self-selection, and speaker continuation (Schegloff et al., 1977) are likely to be practiced. The first two were very common, with the third happening rarely in the data. The following three excerpts from the data are meant to exemplify the previous speaker selection, self-selection, and speaker continuation, respectively. Excerpt # 1 indicates a TCU ending with a question, which elicits a response and hence is previous speaker selection:

Excerpt # 1: DDP07

052	DDP07EX2M	[y' know my own
053		question is (.) that why did you concern yourself to do
054		that(.) you are a student of literature(.) or or erm or L2
055		learning or teaching?
056	DDP07SM	erm because my work starts from classrooms ( ) the
057		students as I [said-

In the following excerpts, however, when the two participants interactionally achieve a transition relevance place (TRP) at the end of TCU1, the next speaker (the examiner), self-selects his turn (268). In excerpt # 2, the self-selection is done by the examiner with no gap, whereas in excerpt # 3, there is a two-second pause before the candidate self-selects his turn:

Excerpt # 2: DDP02

266	DDP03CM	but computers cannot <u>produce</u> tables(.) <u>WE</u> produce
267		them=
268	DDP03EX1M	=but they have an <u>outcome</u> don't they?

Excerpt # 3: DDP05

| 608 | DDP05EX2F | would you please <u>define</u> it to me:? |
| 609 | DDP05CM | (..) yeah there is a er <u>i: think</u> er (.) definition for triangulation |

Speaker continuation is another possibility to occur at TRP, even though it was very rare in the data, as in the following:

Excerpt # 4: DDP09

195	DDP09EX2F	u:h so for example (.) what do you <u>mean</u> by field of study?
196		what do you mean by <u>self-rating</u>? what do you mean by
197		linguistics <u>achievements</u>?(.) <u>even</u> by gender (.)some of
198		these might not require a <u>theoretical</u> definition but they at
199		least require <u>operational</u> definition (.) and by the way you
200		haven't provided <u>operational</u> definitions any way (.) you
201		know <u>even</u> ↑<u>gender</u> (.) an' gender vs. <u>sex</u> (.) and how do
202		you differentiate (.) between gender and sex (…)
203		uh (.) would you mind <u>telling</u> me what is the difference
204		between gender and <u>sex</u>?(.)
205		why you chose to use the word gender and <u>no:t</u> sex?
206		(..) any particular reason?
207	DDP09CF	°no°

Here the examiner constructs her turn with framing four rhetorical questions (195-197) in support of her criticism of not giving operational definition of certain terminologies by the candidate in her thesis. At the end of her TCU (lines 201 and 202), she turns the last rhetorical question into a real one, affording it being projected by the candidate as a real question to be taken for response. There is a three-second pause in the TRP (203) and the candidate does not take up the responsive next turn, showing either interpretation of the question about gender as rhetorical and/or not knowing the answer.

Consequently, the examiner who finds her projecting of the candidate's interpreting of TRP inconsistent with hers, continues the turn to clarify the question as a serious nonrhetorical one (203 and 204) and affords another TRP. Again at the second TRP, the next turn is not taken. After two seconds pause, the examiner,

projecting that the candidate requires more time to think over the answer, continues the turn by reformulating her question (204). Despite the first TRP, this time we have evidence that the candidate has interpreted the TRP, but she has no answer for the question, as she eventually provides a hesitant low-toned 'no' (206).

5.2 Examiners' Introductory Turn: Preamble to Criticisms

Before the examiners start questioning and criticizing, they place an introduction to their first criticism turn and also subsequent turns and sequences of talk with the candidate. Therefore, their first turn can be divided into two parts: introduction and questions/critical points. The introduction can, sometimes, be very long. The lengthiest introduction was found to be 3 min long. Usually, this first turn starts with a long pause. This is due to the time spent in setting of microphone, ostensibly offering their turns to colleagues (Izadi, 2016a), and the preparation required to take up the floor. Upon taking the floor, the examiners initiate the introduction to the their first turn, which comprises several units: Starting in the name of God, expression of feelings, thanking and complimenting the candidate and his or her supervisors for the completion of the thesis, and most importantly, a disclaimer emphasizing the mandate of their professional role to be negative are the most common constitutive units of examiners' introduction. Starting in the name of God is not uncommon in Moslem societies. This was a typical starting behavior of one of the participants who acted as an examiner in three vivas, and three more examiners. The examiners' expression of feelings about their role as an examiner is another common unit in the examiners' introductory remarks, as in "It gives me pleasure to be among my colleagues at ((name of university)) (EX1FDDP09), or "I'm very happy for being given the opportunity to read this dissertation (EX1MDDP10). The third unit of the introduction, however, is ubiquitous in all vivas. If an introduction includes only one unit, that unit is Thanking, as in excerpt # 5:

Excerpt # 5: DDP07

001 002 003	DDP07EX2M	thanks aghay ((CM's last name)) aghay ((CM's first and last name)) i enjoyed not reading this ((tapping the thesis))but i enjoyed your presentation

Complimenting is another common unit of turn at this stage. Usually, compliments accompany the expression of positive points of the thesis in the first turn. Complimenting the supervisors is even more vivid in this part as in "it's not easy to question a thesis done under the supervision of doctor ((SM's last name))" (EX1MDDP01). Thanking and complimenting in the first turn preface the essential

part of talk. They function as 'hedging' to the proceeding talk which is projected to have an unwelcome consequence to the relationship of the participants and hence to be interpreted as separation:

Excerpt # 6: DDP11

004	DDP11EX1M	u:h (.) thanks to everyone (..) especially the presenter(..)
005		who is going to (..) get Ph.D. SOO:N (.) i mean that's a-
006		<u>thanks</u> to your committee

The examiners' concern about their interpersonal relationship with the candidate and their supervisors, moreover, surfaces in the 'disclaimer' they provide in emphasizing their professional role. After expressing certain amount of pleasantries and good words of thanking, complimenting, and other pleasant acts, they shift the topic of talk to do the business talk. The disclaimer is usually signalled by a transition such as a cohesive device, for example, *however*, the conjunction *but*, or the pragmatic marker *well*. The disclaimer implies that while examiners appreciate the work, their professional role demands them to be critical, as evident in the following excerpts:

Excerpt # 7: DDP03

| 004 | DDP03EX1M | (.) however I'm invited here to |
| 005 | | ask <u>questions</u> rather than (.) to praise and encourage |

Excerpt # 8: DDP11

006	DDP11EX1M	uh (.) well uh (.) this is the nature of pee ech <u>dee</u>
007		dissertation °you know° we have to go through <u>details</u> (.)
008		i hope you won't take it as <u>interrogation</u> °you know° (.)
009		so merely questions just for <u>clearing</u> up my own mind

Excerpt # 9: DDP02

545	DDP12EX2M	
546		however as an external- (.) or as an <u>examiner</u> i need to go
547		to the <u>negative</u> si:de (.) of let's say (.) the things here (.)
548		and i have to be <u>absolutely negative</u>

Excerpt # 10 is an example of a humorous disclaimer. The subject of the humor is the delay in the payment of the wage of the examination. The examiner

continues to justify his position as an examiner by saying that he will be paid only for the criticisms:

Excerpt # 10: DDP05

014 015 016 017	DDP05EX1M	uh (.)i would like to start with a number of positive points about the work (.) and the negative points (.)maybe which will be paid (.)may be three years from now @ presentation (.) u:h well I'm not paid for (.) the positive points i'm trying to raise but for the negatives ones (.)

       All in all, in the introduction of their first turn of criticisms, examiners generally spend some time to build some connection with candidates and their supervisors as they project that their criticism turns will be interpreted as separation. In terms of structural dis/preference, as it is evident from these examples, the first turn criticisms are delayed and hence are dispreferred. Examiners are conscious about the contingencies of their acts to involve a great deal of separation with the recipients; therefore, they project that this introduction would occasion some degree of connection. The shift from the positive words to first turn criticisms is generally smooth, and the first turn criticisms are generally modulated and expressed conciliatorily. The next section deals with criticisms and their responses.

5.3 Criticisms and Their Interruptive Responses

       The real business talk, that is the Q-A round between the examiners and the candidates, starts from the second part of the first turn and is linguistically signalled by a transition marker (e.g., *however*, *but*, pragmatic markers, addressing the candidate, and so on). The trajectory of talk after this phase largely depends on the examiners' preference in turn design in terms of either questioning (interrogative syntax) or criticizing (using declarative statements). In the questioning style, candidates are selected by the first speaker (examiners) to take the responsive turns. In the criticism style, however, more variety of next speaker selection is observed. Either way, depending on how talk unfolds, there is the possibility of overlapping and interruptions, even within the specific turn preallocation. The candidates' response to the first turn criticisms has significant bearing on how the examiners probe their criticisms, which to a large extent, determines the trajectory of talk. Vivas feature both conciliatory, modulated Q-As as well as adversarial, heated arguments. The possibilities of interruptions increase when noncompliant, defensive responses are provided to the criticism turns. The candidates' responses, in turn, can lead to the examiners' interruptive turns, which are, in fact, responses to responses, to either reformulate and strengthen their criticisms or to close down the sequences. Excerpt # 11 exemplifies an interruption by a candidate:

Excerpt # 11: DDP02

116	DDP02EX1	all right(.) uh no (.) given the points that <u>you</u> raised (.)
117	M	then i think you need to do something about these
118		<u>problems</u> (.) number o:ne <u>unsystematic</u> selection of
119		<u>journals</u> (.) you just
120		told us in your presentation and also it is in your
121		dissertation (.)that it was< <u>DI:FFI:CULT</u>>for me to choose
122		other
123		journals (.) this is* not a @good justification@* you could
124		call us(.) any of us in other departments of °you know° the
125		universities and we could provide with other journals °you
126	DDP02CM	[know-°
127		[my decision for journals was <u>not</u> haphazard it was
128		based on some <u>factors</u>(.) choice of applied linguistics for
129		examples(.) i also talked with some- i i specially was in
		touch with ken hyland <u>himself</u> and <u>he</u> recommended a
		number of <u>journals</u> and it was <u>not</u> suggested by myself

In this turn, the examiner implicitly demands major revisions made to the thesis by asking the candidate to include more data to the point of adequacy. He qualifies his dispreferred actions of criticisms and imperatives by the pragmatic markers *all right*, *uh*, and *now* (116) and a preface showing that he has taken the candidate's defense in the previous turn into consideration. He, then, asks the candidate to revise by hedging it to "do something about these problems" (117), which he enumerates. In his elaboration of the first problem, he refers the candidate to his justification for not including more journals, that it was difficult for him, in a sarcastic and mocking manner, paralinguistically realized through emphasis on the word *difficult* along with a mocking small laughter (120 and 121), which makes it projectable to severe upbraid. The candidate's interruption reveals his interpreting of the examiner's mocking remarks as involving high amount of separation, which is evident in his sudden change of emotional status. He had a smile in his lips up to this point in talk but suddenly showed serious facial expression, shook his head left and right, which is an indication of aggravated disagreements, expedited his pace of speech, and directly expressed his opposite views (125) in response to the examiner. All are indicative of the preference of his response and the interactional achievement of relational separation.

In excerpt # 12, the candidate is responding to the examiner's previous criticism. But her response is interrupted by the examiner (374) to disagree with her point. As we see, this disagreement, which is a reinforcement of his criticism, is preferred. Relationally it indicates the examiner's interpreting of the candidate's

remarks as separation and in turn projects separation (created in the interruption) with slight connection due to the hedging *I think*:

Excerpt # 12: DDP4

373	DDP04CF	but if change is <u>accepted</u> easily(.) that would be [fortu-
374	DDP04EX1M	
375		[but i think that (.) <u>change</u>(.) °i mean° CHA:NGE is
376		[inevitable

In the following, however, the candidate's attempt to take turn (142) is not successful, although it halts the progressivity of the examiner's talk. The examiner does not give up the floor and continues his turn, rising his tone of voice (144). The candidate's unsuccessful interruption is evidence for the preference of the criticism response and the relational separation he has been interpreting. Likewise, the examiner's reluctance to cede the floor indicates his orientation to the preferred criticism, which increases the amount of separation already interactionally achieved:

Excerpt # 13: DDP10

141	DDP10EX1M	but i think i think the <u>function</u>[so-
142	DDP10CM	[even with-
143	DDP10EX1M	[↑ the function of the section is
144		to provide a <u>justification</u> (.) for what you did ok?

Excerpt # 14: DDP02

200	DDP02EX1	Why not? uh (.) i as a reader@ actually- umm@ (.)
201	M	because you are saying that erm <variations <u>within</u> the
202		discip[line>-
203		[but between published writing
	DDP02CM	

In excerpt # 14, the candidate's response to the examiner's criticism occasions a blunt disagreement ("why not"). He justifies his criticism by referring to the candidate's title of his thesis "variations within the discipline" (201-2). But this is halted by the candidate's opposite view. Here again, we see both participants interactionally achieving separation in the preferred criticism and response exchange. Similarly, in excerpt # 15, the candidate's remarks in disalignment with the examiner (266) latch onto a disagreement modulated with a tag question. As we

see, there is no qualification or delay in taking turns, which shows the preference of these turns. And relationally, both criticism and responses are consequential for the achievement of a good deal of separation:

Excerpt # 15: DDP02

266 267 268	DDP03CM DDP03EX1M	but computers cannot <u>produce</u> tables (.) <u>WE</u> produce them= =but they have an <u>outcome</u> don't they?

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how turn-taking is negotiated, what the preference structure of the turns is, and how face is interactionally achieved in the criticism-response exchanges of Iranian English-medium dissertation defense sessions. The analyses reveal that there is a delicate turn negotiation and even turn competition in talk despite the partially preallocated turn mechanism of the Q-A rounds in vivas. Vivas favor a combination of preallocated and negotiated turns. In terms of preference, it was observed that there is a stark difference between the first turn criticisms (the criticisms immediately follow the introduction) and the subsequent criticisms. The criticism turns generally start smoothly with significant qualification, but as the talk moves forward, the responses affect and determine the quality of the subsequent turns. The structure of criticism-response turns, therefore, starts with dispreference, but moves to preference, as examiners probe, reinforce, and reformulate their criticism in the subsequent turns. The responses, on the other hand, become preferred, as the nature of the viva involves the candidates to defend their positions against the criticisms. When the talk morphs into a heated argument, adversarial competition over the turns takes precedence over collaborative negotiations of them.

With regard to relational connection and separation, or face, as we move from introduction towards the business talk of criticism responses, we see the participants interactionally and incrementally achieving more separation than connection. This is especially the case when talk morphs into argumentation, which at times can get very heated. Given the nature of talk in vivas in which criticisms are sanctioned and given that criticisms articulate with more separation than connection, one can argue that some degree of relational separation is sanctioned in the discourse. As the (dis)preference structure of criticisms and their responses move from dispreference to preference, the amount of separation increases, which is partly evident in the participants' competition over the turns.

The study is meant to raise our awareness of how vivas as an institutional discourse is talked into being in the push and pull of (at times argumentative) criticism responses and in the ways turns are negotiated. There are certainly limitations as to the generalizability of the findings and observations of this study. English-medium vivas are only specific to the discipline of the English language in Iranian universities and should not be generalized to Persian-medium vivas. Also, with regard to face, it is very important to note that this new conceptualization of face as relational connection and separation is very complex, and this study does not delve into the evaluations of relational connection and separation as either threatening or supportive of face (Arundale, 2010).

Transcription Conventions

[   ]   overlapped voice starts

=   latching

:   elongation of previous sound

-          cut off sentence or word

Word   stressed word in the sentence/clause

WORD   spoken in high pitch

?   rising intonation

↑   sudden rise in intonation

↓   marked fall in intonation

(.)   pauses in seconds

° °   words between degree sign are soft words

< >   sotto voce

> <   faster voice

@   laughter

(( ))   transcriber's description

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