INCoH 2017
The Second International Conference on Humanities

FACE EVALUATIONS DURING VIVA SESSIONS IN SELECTED IRAQI KURDISTAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This research explores how participants achieve and evaluate face in viva discussions in Iraqi Kurdistan universities. The tense relationships created by some participants, in particular examiners by using negative evaluation that characterizes a viva have negative consequences on the process of viva discussions and the participants, in particular candidates. Preliminary interviews with stakeholders in Iraqi Kurdistan universities who have participated in many vivas either as examiners, supervisors, or candidates reveal the existence of this problem. The research employs Arundale's Face Constituting Theory (2010) which conceptualises face as a phenomenon participant conjointly achieve as they conjointly achieve meanings and actions. The data is acquired from one doctoral viva session that took place at an Iraqi Kurdistan university. A selected segment of talk from the session was analysed by using Conversation Analysis to examine the ways participants achieve and evaluate face. The results of this study reveal that participants achieved much separation and slight connection which were evaluated as threatening to their relationships. It is hoped that these results will help participants in vivas to better maintain interpersonal relationships in order for the process of viva discussions to take place more smoothly.

Keywords: Face, Viva, Iraqi Kurdistan Universities, Face Constituting Theory, Conversation Analysis.

1. Introduction

The intent of this study is to examine how face is achieved and evaluated between participants in viva discussions in Iraqi Kurdistan universities.

Face has become an important concept in many fields like pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psychology, etc. and it was first introduced into academic discourse by Goffman (1955) who required participants in social interactions to consider both the needs of their own face and the needs of the faces of others (p. 213). Then Brown and Levinson (1987) applied it into politeness theory which was based on individual wants. This theory attracted the attention of many researchers. However, it came under numerous criticisms. The criticisms centred on its inapplicability in non-western cultures (Haugh & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2010). As a result, Bargiela- Chiappini (2003) made a call to revisit Goffman's understanding of face in studying social interaction. Many researchers who adopted the discursive approach postulate that face is discursively negotiated and constructed in interactions (Locher & Watts, 2005; Spencer-Oatey, 2005, 2007) Nevertheless, Goffman's conceptualisation was criticised for being intended to examine North American interaction and developed from a view of independent social actors (Bargiela- Chiappini, 2003). This led to a call for a closer examination of interactional aspects of face. That is, how face arises through interaction as a joint understanding of participants (Arundale, 2006). One attempt to account for face understood interactionally is Face Constituting Theory which explains the way in which face arises through interaction as a joint understanding of participants. (Arundale, 1999, 2006, 2009, and 2010). In this interactional approach, face is separated from politeness (Arundale, 2009, 2010) and it is suggested to be studied distinctly from im/politeness in its own right (Haugh, 2013). Among the activities and work done at universities and colleges is the viva. The phenomenon of face is affected by certain elements to high sensitivity in vivas. The negativity that characterizes vivas may negatively influence the interpersonal relationship between the participants (Izadi, 2012). Vivas are regarded as institutional talk (Drew & Heritage, 1992) since they function as an oral examination where the strong and weak points of a thesis are reviewed. Vivas are also places where interactants maintain and consolidate their interpersonal and professional roles and relationship (Swales, 2004). However, the relational phenomenon of face in vivas sometimes contradicts the institutional goals of the speakers. Therefore, the good deal of negative evaluation, disagreement, critiquing, and questioning that characterise a viva may negatively influence the interpersonal relationship between the participants and so it might be downplayed (Izadi, 2012).

2. Problem Statement

In vivas held in Iraqi Kurdistan universities, relationships between the participants, particularly between examiners and candidates, sometimes become tense owing to the excessive use of criticisms, disagreements, questions and non-compliant responses. Preliminary interviews with stakeholders in Iraqi Kurdistan universities who have worked at a university for a period between eight to forty years and participated in many vivas either as examiners, supervisors, or candidates reveal the existence of this problem. The stakeholders interviewed indicate that the tense relationships created by some participants, in particular examiners, have negative consequences on the process of viva discussions and the participants, in particular the candidates. The discussions become non-academic in nature. With regard the candidates, the tense relationship that is created may affect their psychology. They may get confused and become

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unable to answer questions properly and explain things clearly. Candidates may become more defensive and provoke disagreements. Consequently, examiners may level aggressive criticisms against them and become less objective. The tense relationships may also affect the final results of the thesis. They may be judged unjustly and be given low marks.

This study addresses the problem of difficulty in maintaining face (interpersonal relationships) between participants in viva discussions in Iraqi Kurdistan universities as a result of the excessive use of negative meanings and actions. Thus, there is a need to develop a detailed understanding of face and to better know how face is maintained.

Previous research on face has focused on four main topics. A group of studies examined some of the oral aspects of academic discourse like classroom lectures or university seminars (Weissberg, 1993; Flowerdew, 1994; Bamford, 2000) and teacher-student counselling interactions (He, 1993; Limberg, 2007). The second group of studies explored dissertation defence settings (Grimshaw, 1989; Swales, 2004; Recski, 2005; Izadi, 2013a; Izadi, 2013b). Only a small group of studies (Don & Izadi, 2011; Izadi, 2012; Don & Izadi, 2013) investigated face in viva discussions. In these studies, face is examined during vivas held in Iranian universities. The fourth group of studies also examined face but in settings other than vivas (Haugh & Watanabe, 2009; Haugh, 2010; Chang & Haugh, 2011; Chang, 2013). They analysed face achieving and evaluating using Face Constitution Theory.

Izadi (2012) has suggested that further research should be conducted on face in vivas in different languages and cultures. As far as the researcher knows, face has never been examined between participants in vivas in Iraqi Kurdistan universities. Creswell (2012) states that gaps in previous literature may be found when topics may not have been tackled with specific groups, samples, or populations. Therefore, the present study can fill in this gap.

3. Research Questions

The current study addresses two questions:

1- How is face (relational connection and separation) achieved during vivas in Iraqi Kurdistan Universities?

2- How is the achieved face (relational connection and separation) evaluated during vivas in Iraqi Kurdistan Universities?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the current study is to explore the way face (relational connection and separation) achieved during vivas in Iraqi Kurdistan Universities. It also aims at examining the way the achieved face (relational connection and separation) is achieved during vivas in Iraqi Kurdistan universities.

5. Research Methods

This study explores the achieving and evaluating of face by following Face Constituting Theory (Arundale, 1999, 2006, 2009, and 2010).

For the purpose of analysis, this study will draw upon Arundale's Face Constituting Theory (2010). It will be used to analyse face as it is relationally and interactionally achieved. Moreover, in FCT, the

analysis of face is made from the participants' point of view instead of from the analyst's one (Arundale, 2010; Haugh & Bargiela- Chiappini, 2010; Haugh, 2009, 2010). Thus, the problem of biasness and subjectivity of interpretations from the analysis of face which discursive theorists of politeness and face mainly focused on will be overcome (Izadi, 2012).

Arundale (2010) studies face in its own right because face involves issues broader than politeness (Haugh, 2009). The current study will examine face separately from politeness. The current study also relies on CA, in particular, Heritage's (2005) CA-based model in analysing the phenomenon of face. The model focuses on turn taking, sequence organization and turn design which characterize talk in institutions like vivas. The data is obtained from one of a collection of twelve recorded Iraqi Kurdistan doctoral vivas.. Copies of the video-tapes were given by their owners, the PhD candidates. The data was transcribed following the transcription conventions proposed by Jefferson (2004) and those later added by others like Psathas (1995) and Liddicoat (2007). The transcription conventions used to transcribe the recording are as follows:

(Number) The length of an interval in seconds

(.)   Very short pause

[[Simultaneous utterances

[Beginning of overlap

]   End of overlap

=   Latching or contiguous utterances

:   Prolonged sound

.   Falling intonation

,   Continuing intonation

<u>Word</u>   Stressed word

WORD   Spoken in high pitch

?   Rising intonation

↑   Marked rising shifts

↓   Marked falling shifts

° °   Lower volume than the surrounding

> <   Faster speech

< >   Slower speech

( )   Indecipherable speech

(( ))   Transcriber's description

The analysis involves two stages. Stage one demonstrates how participants interactionally achieve face between them as they interactionally achieve actions and meanings. Stage two demonstrates how the participants evaluate the achieving of separation and connection as threatening to their relationships, in stasis, and supporting. After the relational connection and separation is achieved, it is analysed against two more face interpretings: evolving face interpreting which involves the interpreting of the long-standing relationship participants have up to the present time and contextual face interpreting which is the

expectation of the interpreting participants have for their relationship in the current context (Arundale, 2010).

Face can be evaluated as supporting when the difference between the achieved face and evolving face (the proffered shift) matches the difference between the contextual face and evolving face (the situated shift) whereas face can be evaluated as threatening when there is no consistency between the two shifts. Face can further be evaluated as in stasis when the shifts involve neither connection nor separation (Ibid).

6. Findings

In Iraqi Kurdistan universities, vivas usually involve five main stages: Introduction, Candidate 's Presentation, Question and Answer, Evaluation, and finally the Result. This study analyses a selected segment of talk from from the third stage.

Consider the following extract of a viva discussion which is called "Documentation" between a 36-year-old female PhD candidate coded as FC and a 45-year-old male examiner coded as MEX held at one of the English departments in one of the Iraqi Kurdistan universities. The viva discussion is named "Documentation" because the examiner criticises the candidate for not documenting a paragraph:

1	MEX	Page 57.
2		[15.0]
3		57 err the the third paragraph. watching the play,
4		you may be fundamentally as symbolic act etc till the
5		end of the paragraph. (.) err, you know, this should
6		be (.) documented.
7		(3.0)
8	FC	what do you mean by [documenting.
9	MEX	[yani, this means
10	FC	it's mine. i am the source.
11	MEX	you are the source? =how. from where did you bring
12		this. =
13	FC	=from my from [my mind.
14	MEX	[from your imagination?=impossible.
15	FC	why impossible, sir. it's from my analysis or the
16		[preceding
17	MEX	[you are talking about the historical facts.
18	FC	historical?
19	MEX	yes. literary literary historical,
20	FC	i am specialized in [literature].
21	MEX	[yes, i know]. but(?) (.) yani
22		(.) you should (.)you should support this.
23	FC	i have been studying literature. I have been teaching
24		it for years.
25	MEX	yes. we are teaching it for (.)about thirty years. but

26		we(.)when we say such an important thing, we should(.)
27		support [or
28	FC	[how to support it when there is no source?=it
29		is mine.
30	MEX	you have read it [somewhere
31	FC	[you mean I had to lie and say this
32		belongs to another person? =it's mine. =
33	MEX	it is not yours=
34	FC	=it is mine. =
35	MEX	=not yours.
36		(3.0)
37	MEX	you should document this.
38	FC	how to document when it is mine.

6.1. The Achieving of Face

In this extract, face is accounted for along with meanings and actions. The examiner uses a pre-sequence "page 57" (line 1) which is projected to be interpreted by the candidate as a request to go to the page referred to and as a preface to a dispreferred criticism from the examiner's point of view. Then, the examiner reads out some lines from page 57 in order to provide evidence for his criticism (lines 1 - 6). The criticism is marked with hesitation "err" and an appeal for understanding it "you know" (line 5) (Yule, 1996: p.81). Then, the examiner ends his turn with an obligation expressed in the passive voice, "This should be documented." (lines 5 and 6). He uses the "diplomatic" passive voice in order to avoid assigning blame to the candidate, and eliminate the impact of the obligation on him (Wilbers, n.d.). It is noticed that the examiner softens his criticism by employing presequencing, hesitation, appeal for understanding his point, and the "diplomatic" passive voice. Thus, the examiner frames his turn with a few utterances that afford interpreting of criticism. The utterances also create an expectation of the utterances of a preferred second part of acceptance or a dispreferred second part of rejecting by the candidate (Yule, 1996: pp.77 and 79). This projectable interpreting remains provisional until the candidate provides an uptake. Here, the examiner orients to a high degree of separation and a slight degree of connection.

The candidate delays in providing the uptake when an insertion sequence intervenes; she initiates a repair, "what do you mean by documenting" (line 8) and the examiner attempts to repair the problem, "yani" (this means) (line 9). However, the candidate seems to have repaired the problem herself. She frames her turn with a dispreffered action of disagreement, "it's mine. I am the source." (line 10) which reveals her interpreting of the examiner's comment as criticism and holds him accountable for that. Now, as there is consistency in meaning and/or action between the examiner's provisional projecting and the candidate's uptake, the examiner's provisional projecting becomes operative (Arundale, 2010, p.2082). Moreover, the candidate's utterances also reveal that she provisionally anticipates an interpreting of disagreement by the examiner. Here, the delay in response created by the insertion sequence (Yule, 1996, p.78) displays the orientation of a higher degree of separation than connection as delay in response shows that the immediate expected answer is unavailable (Ibid).

The examiner's adjacent turn (lines 11 and 12) makes this projecting operative. The examiner's new turn projects being interpreted as a more serious disagreement and questions her answer. He levels a critical question. The examiner's projected interpreting becomes operative when the candidate frames her turn with another disagreement. She produces a repeated response to emphasise her stance that the writing comes from her mind by repeating the phrase, "from my from my mind" (line 13) which evidences the candidate's orientation to a high degree of separation.

This defensive act which is projectably interpreted as disagreement does not please the examiner who interrupts the candidate and designs a new turn to question her answer and more seriously disagree with her. The interruption, the question made using a rising tone, "from your imagination?" and the negative adjective "impossible" (line 14) all   reveal   orientation to a higher degree of separation.

This disagreement creates another disagreement expressed by the candidate which makes the examiner's disagreement operative and projects an interpreting of disagreement by the examiner. She asks about the reason why it is impossible that the writing is hers. Here, the candidate orients to a high degree of separation. However, she softens her disagreement by addressing the examiner as "sir" and giving an explanation of the actual source of ideas (line 14). This reveals the interpretation of a higher degree of connection.

The examiner interrupts the candidate and designs another turn to frame another disagreement by saying that the information presented is a historical fact which requires documentation (line 17). Again, this turn is provisionally projected being interpreted as disagreement by the candidate.

The second pair part is delayed as the candidate initiates a repair by asking the examiner to repeat the previous speech as she has not got the examiner's point (line 18) and the examiner clarifies his point and repair the problem (line 19). Again, the delay in response created by the insertion sequence (Yule, 1996, p.78) displays the orientation of a higher degree of separation than connection.

Then, the candidate provides the second pair part or the uptake for the last criticism of the examiner and makes the examiner's interpreting as projected. She comes back to defend her point and frames her turn with another disagreement which is projected provisionally to be interpreted as disagreement and continues giving reasons why she is the source of the writing (line 20). Here, the candidate provides an orientation to a high degree of separation. However, giving reasons contributes to softening the impact of the disagreement and so orienting to a slight degree of connection.

Although the examiner conforms to the candidate's justification and shows understanding of it by using, "you know", he continues to frame disagreement against the candidate and emphasises his previous criticism (lines 21 and 22). This time the examiner uses the active voice "you should …" and becomes less diplomatic. In responding, the candidate keeps rejecting the disagreement and continues to give the same reasons (lines 23 and 24).

The examiner's next turn reveals interpreting of a high degree of separation which is evidenced in interrupting the candidate's utterance, using the contradictory conjunction "but" and placing responsibility of documentation on the candidate when he uses the "undiplomatic" active voice (lines 21 and 22). Nonetheless, the examiner projects a slight degree of connection when he shows conformity to the candidate, "yes" and understanding of the candidate's utterance, "I know" (line 21).

Similarly, in spite of conforming to the candidate's justification, the examiner repeats his previous disagreement and requires the candidate to support his writing preceded by the negative conjunction "but" (lines 25-27). Here, the examiner orients to a lesser degree of separation but shifting the address from "you" to "we" also contributes to softening the impact of the obligation (lines 26-27). Thus, the examiner projects a slight degree of connection. The candidate interrupts the examiner and provides the uptake of another disagreement that the writing is hers (lines 28 and 29). This evidences the candidate's orientation to a high degree of separation. The long series of disagreements between the examiner and candidate continues. The examiner levels a serious criticism at the candidate about the source of her information (line 30). This shows the examiner's orientation to the interpretation to be of a higher degree of separation compared with the previous turn. The candidate interrupts and strongly rejects this criticism. Thus, the criticism is interpreted by the candidate as it is anticipated by the examiner. In the end, she repeats her previous defensive claim (lines 31 and 32) and interprets the examiner's turn as it is projected by him to be of a greater degree of separation compared with has been achieved in previous turns. Once again, the examiner rejects the candidate's claim (line 33) and the candidate insists on her copyright (line 34). Here again both interactants orient to a higher degree of separation compared with has been achieved in previous turns. Then, the examiner repeats his criticism (line 35) and again orients to a high degree of separation. Three seconds pass before the examiner concludes his criticism against the candidate and repeats asking the candidate to document her writing (line 37). Here, the examiner again uses the active voice, "you should ... "and becomes less diplomatic. Here, the examiner orients to a higher degree of separation compared with the previous turns. The final uptake of the candidate reveals that she has interpreted the final obligation as disagreement as projected and she insists on framing her final rejection (line 38). The candidate's uptake displays the same orientation. In the end, the discussion is not resolved.

In conclusion, the two interactants have achieved a high degree of separation and a slight degree of connection.

6.2. The Evaluating of Face

Here, the evaluation of the achieved projected/interpreted face will be accounted for. It has been shown that the achieved projected/interpreted face that the two participants have achieved involves much separation/slight connection. Much separation is due to the criticisms and disagreements raised between the participants, and slight connection is due to the mitigated devices participants have employed. Concerning the evolving face, there is moderate separation/moderate connection since there have been a few mitigated critical points in the previous issue discussed between the examiner and candidate. The critical points project a moderate separation whereas mitigation leads to a moderate connection. As far as the contextual face is concerned, it involves interpreting connection and separation that applies to the current context which participants invoke at the present time. The contextual face involves moderate separation/moderate connection because in the previous issue, the two participants have established a context where the two participants used mitigated criticisms and responses (Izadi, 2012). So, there is nothing brought into play in the existing context that proposes a difference between expectations of separation /connection and those participants have had before. As there is more connection in the projected/interpreted face than in the evolving one, the proffered shift is diverging. However, as no

difference is observed between their evolving face and contextual face, no divergence emerges in the situated shift.

If the two shifts are compared, it can be found that they do not match. Therefore, the face the participants have achieved is evaluated as threatening. It is noted that there is an excessive use of unmitigated negative acts of disagreements between the examiner and candidate which projects an interpreting of a high degree of separation. However, there is very limited use of mitigated acts which orients to a slight degree of connection. The candidate uses very fewer mitigated devices than the examiner in spite of power differential between the two parties. It is also noted that the discussion ends without being resolved.

7. Conclusion

It can be concluded that face is achieved through a continuous series of exchanges of disagreements between participants during Iraqi Kurdistan vivas. The participants achieved much separation and slight connection which were evaluated as threatening to their relationships.

It is hoped that these results will help participants in vivas to better maintain interpersonal relationships in order for the process of viva discussions to take place more smoothly.

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