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**Engaged Listenership and Modality in English M.A. Theses
Defenses in Al-Qadisiyah University****A B S T R A C T**

This study examines how engaged listenership and modality are conveyed in thesis examinations based on two M.A. theses defenses examined in Al-Qadisiyah University. It aims at exploring examiners-candidates' conversation, interaction, and conversation in the sampled defenses. The study hypothesizes that candidates and examiners in M.A. theses defenses use several linguistic strategies in their interaction. To analyze the thesis defenses, a three-model analysis; Burton's (1980), Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974), and Sacks et al's (1974), was followed. These models are mainly concerned with conversational analysis in detail. Firstly, the thesis defenses were video-recorded, transcribed, and speaker-identified. Then, a complete model-based analysis was conducted to spot the linguistic strategies used. Later, conclusions and results were reached. The study finds that there are several linguistic devices used in thesis defenses, including minimal and non-minimal response tokens, overlaps, interruption, auxiliary modal verbs, gestures, multi-party talking, and turn-takings. Additionally, the examiners and candidates used minimal response items, agreement, non-minimal response items, tag-questions, overlap, interruptions, and modality, which are very common in spoken academic registers.

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الاستماع المتبادل والصيغة اللغوية في مناقشات ماجستير لغة إنكليزية في جامعة القادسية*

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الخلاصة:

على افتراض أن الطلاب وأعضاء لجنة المناقشة في مناقشات الماجستير يستخدمون أساليب وصيغ لغوية ولفظية مختلفة. وتهدف الدراسة إلى معرفة الصيغ اللغوية المستخدمة في هذا النوع من التفاعل اللغوي. ومن أجل تحليل المناقشات المذكورة فقد تم استخدام أداة تحليل مؤلفة من نموذج بيرتن (1980) و نموذج شيكلوف وجيفرسون (1974) و نموذج ساكس وآخرين (1974) كونها نماذج مختصة بتحليل المحادثة بتفصيل أكبر. في البداية تم اختيار مناقشتين ماجستير حيث جرهما تسجيلهما وتفرغهما صوتياً بتحويلهما إلى نص وتحديد المتكلمين في المناقشات. ثم جرى تحليل كامل للمناقشتين حسب أداة البحث من أجل رصد الأساليب اللغوية الظاهرة في المحادثات. وفي ختام البحث تم التوصل إلى بعض النتائج والاستنتاجات. وجدت هذه الدراسة أن الطلبة وأعضاء لجان المناقشة في مناقشات الماجستير يستخدمون عدة تراكيب و أساليب لغوية في أثناء المناقشة ومنها المقاطعة والأدور متعددة المتكلمين والتلميحات والإيماءات وقطع دور المتكلم وتبادل الأدوار وأساليب الطلب والمداخلة والتعليق والموافقة والتعقيب والرد الجماعي، وهي صيغ شائعة في التواصل اللفظي أو المنطوق في الوسط الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الخطاب الأكاديمي المنطوق، تحليل المحادثة، أساليب الكلام والتفاعل، مناقشات ماجستير.

1. Introduction and Related Literature

The conversation is a natural aspect of daily life by which individuals share knowledge, develop and sustain social relations. Yet, many learners of English find it difficult to understand conversational norms and patterns, making it difficult for them to maintain their conversation continuously. It has been proposed that conversational strategies can be used as an efficient method to overcome troubles to keep conversations ongoing (Nguyet & Mai, 2018, p. 33). Conversational strategies are elements inside the turn, however, a turns-taking organization to talk are essential to the conversation and other speech events such as meetings, interviews, discussions, ceremonies and so on (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 2004, p. 696). Several academics and researchers have expressed an interest in both written and spoken academic discourse in order to account for interaction in diverse academic settings. 'Spoken academic discourse' or 'academic speech' can be defined as 'the language used by professors in lectures', it means to this academic speech is 'the language which is used by discourse community of scholars and students in academic settings for academic purposes' (Lee, 2006, p. 51). The characteristics of spoken academic genres must be informal, contextualized, restricted as well as involved. Though oral academic discourse has not got much interest in relevant applied linguistics research as that in written discourse till now, the new research shows how cognitively, socially and discursively complicated and changeable a criterion oral activity could be, like oral presentation whether in the classroom context, conference, meeting room or dissertation or thesis defense environment (Duff, 2010, p. 183). Thesis defense or oral examination is a research genre because it is used mainly by the discourse community in academia. The current study examines how the panel members and candidates involved in oral

examination use various conversational strategies and linguistic devices such as minimal and non-minimal response items, overlaps, interruptions, modality, and so forth.

2. Theoretical Background

Spoken academic discourse is a subgenre of academic discourse and there are several subcategories of spoken academic discourse. Engaged listenership involves minimal exchanged tokens or 'minimal response tokens' for instance, hm, mm, yeah, ok, no, yes, 'non-minimal response tokens', like right, really, good, fine, and overlap and interruption which are distinctive in speaker's turn (Farr, 2003, pp. 68-69). In a spoken academic situation, one participant acts as the main speaker and the other as the main listener, the latter produces a variety of signals verbal and non-verbal strategies which function to show that the listener at a certain point engages with the main speaker's talk.

Thesis defense is an academic formal institutional conversation involving degree-seeking candidates and examiners. It proceeds into four phases; opening (greetings, ceremonial introduction, and the official opening), the defense (the candidates' oral presentation, replying to questions, and exchanging with the examiners), in-camera session (the examiners' evaluation of the candidates' performance), and the closing segment (awarding of the degree).

Conversational strategies, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), are either to be routines that are ready formulated and automatic that work on an unconsciously level or strategies for correcting interactional errors and manoeuvring the others that are utilized consciously (Basturkmen, 1995, p. 58). According to Tomlins (1993), there are certain strategies used generally in academic conversation, such as "agreeing, disagreeing, persuading, expressing an opinion, stating criticism, introducing, giving an example, commenting, giving an explanation". Price (1979), additionally, listed "asking questions, interrupting, expressing general comments, agreement, disagreement, objections, expressing criticism, hesitation, doubt, and giving recommendations" (Vassileva as cited in Suomela-Salmi and Dervin, 2009, p. 224).

Minimal response tokens are represented by mm, yeah, hm, okay, yes, and no. Another situation is repetitions or 'double back channels' since their function as a single word, they are counted once, for example, 'yeah' (Farr, 2003, p. 74). Schegloff noted, multiple functions of response items, like "yeah"; not just convey confirm comprehension and acknowledgement and also mark agreement (McCarthy, 2003, pp. 38-42). During the production of mm hmm, the extended turn's recipient displays his or her understanding that another contributor has the role and the current speaker's floor is not complete till now, while in case of producing 'yeah' the recipient is displaying his or her understanding to consider the other turn of the speaker either being complete or coming to completed and so the producer of 'yeah' takes the role for a turn to transform from recipient's role to speaker's role (Guthrie, 1997, p. 401).

Non-minimal response items have certain functions during turn exchanges among participants, for example, "right" indicates to acknowledge receipt eventually and "really" acts as response marker. As doublets can be a repetition of the same response token and reinforcement of the convergence and satisfaction during progressing of the conversations, for example, 'great. Great'. They often occur with other tokens of pre-closure, like thanks, clarifications, checks,

salutations and confirmations, in situations of closures and pre-closures, both speaker and hearer may alternate their roles more quickly (McCarthy, 2003, pp. 51-58).

Overlap and interruption are featured by pauses and continuations. Overlap happens when the following speaker begins speaking at the end of the current speaker's turn, to exclude silence or gaps between the two turns. On the other hand, interruption occurs when a new speaker speaks during the present speaker's turn (Abbas, 2016, p. 4). An overlap involves certain simultaneous speech through this event (Farr, 2003, p. 79). According to Schegloff (2000), there are two forms of overlap: competitive and non-competitive. competitive overlap indicates parts of simultaneously talking that happen before the present participant has reached completion in her or his turn, and its function is to take the present speaker's turn by force. Whereas non-competitive overlap indicates the following speaker's unwillingness to take the turn from the present participant. Schegloff (2004) proposed four types of non-competitive overlapping: "Terminal overlaps", "continuers", "conditional access to the turn", and the concept of "chordal" overlapping talk of non-competitive. Laughter, as well as collective greets, leave-takings, and congrats in reaction to personal good news announcements, are examples of this type of behavior (Abbas, 2016, pp. 4-10).

Modality is the relationship between verb meaning and verb function. It includes such ideas as reality, possibility, necessity, and obligation, all of which operate on epistemic as well as deontic senses. The most common modals are those expressing prediction and volition (will and would). Permission, possibility, and ability modals (can and could) are also most common within spoken academic registers, in writing, possibility modals are very common. As for necessity and obligation modals (must and should), they are less common (Biber, 2006, pp. 95-97).

3. Research Questions

To highlight the problem of the research, two questions were posed;

1. What are the conversational strategies and linguistic devices used by the committee examiners and master students during thesis defense?
2. How do the committee examiners and candidates interact in the thesis defense?

4. Methodology

The approach is a conversational analysis, following a model that is based on Burton's (1980), Schegloff and Jefferson's (1974) and Sacks et al.'s (1974). These models are concerned with conversational analysis in detail where various modes, strategies, and moves of interaction, interruption, turn-taking, and overlap are discussed.

5. Limits, Data, and Source

This study is limited to the oral or conversational interaction in two English M.A. theses defenses (linguistics and literature) examined at the Department of English, College of

Education, Al-Qadisiyah University, throughout the academic Master course 2020-2021. The researcher obtained the two M.A. candidates' approval to gather and analyze their examinations, after which the researcher attended the two examinations and recorded them. Thesis defenses were video-recorded, transcribed by internet transcription software, and speakers were identified.

6. Analysis

The analysis starts with moves and each move is exemplified in the two thesis defenses.

6.1 Acknowledge

It is achieved by "ok", "Yes", and "Uhuh". Its function is to understand the information and appreciation of its importance have been shown.

Extract 1 (From TD No.1)

Cand: *I mean this explanation according to the definition of text types, as we explain it, we can say that the limited number of text type is based on internal textual data, while the definition of the genre follows different external data as we I mean this, as we as I stated in the previous paragraph.*

Ex.2: *ok thank you.*

Ex.2 produced the minimal response item 'ok' indicates a token of acknowledgement. That means the preceding Informative is understood by the examiner as well as he appreciated and evaluated the appropriate response of the candidate. Ex.2 said *ok thank you*. It means, he accepted and appreciated the candidate's appropriate answer. This act is called **Acknowledge**. Additionally, the type of move which occurs here is called **Supporting move** which is described by Burton as "Supporting Moves exist after the other kinds of moves have been completed. Realizing these moves relies on a framework of discourse and the move's interactional expectations". The function of this move is to support or reinforce the previous move. In this extract Cand refers in her speech to the previous paragraph, she said *I mean this, as we as I stated in the previous paragraph*. As well as for the examiner, he supports the previous candidate's Informative by saying *ok, thank you*.

Extract 2 (From TD No.2)

Ex.3: *Yeah, this is what used to happen. And she herself has presented it on the same way or the same level of the other writers isn't it. So it is not something that is completely new or the perspective is, I'm not after that I actually, after the idea of this semiotic analysis of these, you know, things when I refer to the Bosnian War,*

The examiner produced the minimal response item 'yeah' like other items 'mm, well and oh'. These items occur with a higher frequency in the initial position turn-in responses of the listener. Yet, the item 'yeah' acts as a tool of confirmation, agreement and convergence. So, the examiner produced the item 'yeah' to show her understanding and appreciation of the previous Informative. This act is called **Acknowledge**. Moreover, the examiner added and extended additional information to the point. She presented more clarification about the works of the writer.

6.2 Accept

It is achieved by a limited class of elements like "ok", "Yes", "I will", "Uhuh", and "No". its purpose is to indicate that the member has perceived and got the prior utterance as well as its compliant.

Extract 3 (From TD No.1)

Ex.1: *Ok, thank you very much assistant professor Dr. T, all your comments are much appreciated and believe that B will take all of them in her consideration in revising your thesis. Ok, Now the turn is for assistant prof Miss R to provide her suggestion as well as comment.*

Ex.3: *yes, thank you very much.*

Ex.3 accepted the request of the head of the committee, she said *yes, thank you very much*, which means that Ex.3 has heard and understood the chairperson's request and agreed. This act is called **Accept** which is identified by Burton as "Accept is achieved by a limited class of elements like "ok", "Yes", "I will", "Uhuh", and "No". its purpose is to indicate that the member has perceived and got the prior utterance as well as it's compliant".

6.3 Directive

It is achieved by a command. Its purpose is to elicit a nonverbal response.

Extract 4 (From TD No.1)

Ex.2: *go to Page Number 48 please last paragraph is to start with*

[**Cand:** *Yes, Atac Ex.2: yes Cand: states that Ex.2: yes*

Cand: *the descriptive writing is relatively simple Ex.2: yes*

Cand: *in fact, the descriptive writing you are not progressing argument*

Ex.2: *good*

Cand: *you only see the background by which the argument can be developed, you introduced//*

Ex.2 said, *go to Page Number 48 please last paragraph is to start with*, Ex.2 orders the candidate to go to page 48 to request a non-verbal response. It means that Cand must perform the non-linguistic action with no need to provide a linguistic response. But here the situation is different since Ex.2 passes his incomplete turn to the candidate. he starts the utterance and gives it for completion to the candidate. so, this is one type of non-competitive overlapping talk in turn-taking that is called **conditional access to the turn** which is defined by Schegloff as "current speaker passes on his or her incomplete turn to the next speaker, during which the listener is invited to assist the present speaker in finding words that s/he cannot recall, and the

constructions of collaborative utterances, in which the current speaker starts an utterance and gives it for completion to a recipient". Because of this, Cand responds verbally and does the action of reading the text. Moreover, when Cand read the text, Ex.2 produced the item 'yes' every time, which means that Ex.2 does not have a desire to take the turn from the candidate, he wants Cand to complete her turn. this one type of overlap is called **non-competitive overlap** which is identified by Schegloff as "the following speaker's unwillingness to take the turn from the present participant".

6.4 Elicitation

is achieved by questions. Its primary purpose is to demand a verbal response It's occasionally achieved by a command that requests a verbal answer. This act is completed by **Reply** which is defined by Burton as "Reply is achieved by the question, statement, command, substitutes of non-linguistic like nodes and moodless item. Its purpose is to provide a verbal answer that is proper to the previous elicit utterance".

Extract 5 (From TD No.1)

Ex.2: *Ok, third 'you' what do you mean by this 'you' you you you repeated this 'you'*

Ex.2: *I mean a reviewer ...so I*

Ex.2: *A reviewer?*

Cand: *yes.*

Ex.2 produces the item 'ok' indicates that he has a topic to be introduced. Ex.2 asked the candidate about the repetition of the pronoun 'you' third times in the same paragraph, he wants Cand to provide a linguistic response. This act is called **Elicitation** which is defined by Burton as "Elicitation is achieved by questions. Its primary purpose is to demand a verbal response It's occasionally achieved by a command that requests a verbal answer". Yet, Cand replies with an appropriate verbal response, she said I mean a reviewer ...so I, this act is called **Reply** which is defined by Burton as "Reply is achieved by the question, statement, command, substitutes of non-linguistic like nodes and moodless item. Its purpose is to provide a verbal answer that is proper to the previous elicit utterance". Ultimately, the type of move that had shown here is called the **Focusing move**. As its function is to get attention. Ex.2 draws the attention of the candidate towards a specific area, that is the repetition of the pronoun you.

6.5 Blamer Strategy

Extract 6 (From TD No.1)

Ex.1: *the quality of the language should be more reflective of a serious academic undertaking of a study done in the area of academia, the wrong many instances of serious language, inconsistent consistencies, that need attention to our thesis a level of grammatical accuracy fluctuated quite acutely, between sections of text of a meeting for very laborious, really, you*

know, laborious reading, really, your thesis fall in laborious reading. We can't understand it easily. This is the problem as I told you, for this calling needs a needs attention, numerous glaring spelling errors were detected through our thesis

Ex.1 shows a large number of grammatical mistakes. Therefore, she blames the candidate because of many instances of wrong of serious language. She said *the quality of the language should be more reflective.....*, Ex.1 reminds the candidate about the quality of language should reflect the academic study. Ex.1 used modality (modal verb should) which express a weak sense of obligation. In general, the models' auxiliaries in their meanings of epistemology convey the situation of knowledge, belief or opinion of the speaker about the propositional truth as well as modality is the level of certainty. Here, the speaker asserts the quality of language should be more reflective of a serious academic study. In this regard, the examiners' style will affect the confidence of the students as well as their presentation because they participate in some kind of power discourse. It is possible to call this act 'Blamer' or 'Recaller', which can be added to Burton's model as this model needs update and extension.

7. Conclusions

The research finds that:

1. The examiners and candidates in the sampled thesis examinations use minimal response items, such as *yeah, yes, ok* and non-minimal response items like *good, well, right*, and modality, like *should* and *must*, probably to show authority in conversation. These strategies are further embodied in conversational sub-moves, including acknowledge, accept, directive, elicitation, reply, blamer, clarification, competitive and non-competitive overlaps. Additionally, there are inter-turn moves, such focusing and supporting.
2. The examiners in the two thesis defenses overlap in conversations, in which case multi-party turns increase. The examiners are often given time-restricted roles which they rarely stick to, in which case the next examiner interrupts the current speaker (examiner), and this increases overlaps.
3. Inter-examiner interruptions increase in pre-closing conversations, shortly before the examination finishes, as examiners are set to congratulate the M.A. candidates for degree awarding.

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