Article

On the moral grounds of professional argumentative talk: English-mediated talk in Iranian PhD dissertation defences

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Abstract
This paper reports on two anomalous cases of intervention in two English-medium dissertation defence sessions in Iran. The first is an intervention by a co-supervisor to take side against his co-supervisor as well as to adversely retort to an examiner, pulling rank over him. The second case echoes frequent interventions by an examiner to defend the candidate against his co-examiner. The paper argues that behind this manifestation of such stark disagreements lies a moral judgement that overrides other considerations. While such interventions pose great challenges to the participants' interpersonal relationships and lead to a great deal of face-loss and humiliation for the object of intervention, their practice is warranted by interveners to tackle a moral issue. The paper argues that invoking moral order in claims to specialised knowledge is an integral part of professional practice and are influential in the many ways that professional identities are co-constructed in situ.

Introduction

This is a case study, that argues for the moral grounds of professional practice. Professional practices are inextricably associated with the roles and identities in which expert/specialised knowledge plays a key role. In academia, for example, knowledge is the main requirements for academic practice (Locher, 2004) in any role or category

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(e.g. lecturer, supervisor, head, dean, scientist, researcher, examiner, etc) and in any discipline or specialisation (Biology, Sociology, Linguistics, etc). As members of the community/society, individuals are expected to possess and demonstrate the relevant knowledge, consistent with their role and expertise. Sociologists' contention that knowledge is socially co-constructed can be traced in the ways (among many others) individuals in an interaction take up different and sometimes competing knowledge positions relative to each other and through their positioning co-construct their professional identity in-situ (Taylor, 2015). This expectation is, however, tacit and is subject to the discursive construction and struggle; a process that at times involves discursive practices of confrontation, rebuttals, criticisms, argumentation, adversaries and the like. Many aspects of our professional practices are replete with such speech situations and events (e.g. political debates, academic argumentations, court arguments, etc.) (Blair, 2011), but they are more or less tolerated as they are a *raison d'etre* of such professional practices, and therefore, are considered as 'normative' practices within their relevant institutional settings. In academia, while argumentation is a common practice for academics to register and establish their different and even opposite epistemic statuses, and is featured in a variety of professional practices such as academic writing (Tannen, 2002) and peer reviewing, dissertation defences (Izadi, 2013a, 2013b, 2017a, 2017b), departmental meetings (Izadi, 2016) and conferences, conflictive talk is a non-normative practice, with serious negative consequences for interpersonal relationships; a practice that goes beyond the limits of normativity and the tacitly agreed-upon expectations of the institution. While argumentation is essentially based on disagreements, not every disagreement creates a conflict in the professional discourse. Disagreements can be either 'non-conflictual' or conflictual. The latter potentially jeopardises interpersonal relationships (Koester, 2017).

This study addresses the moral ground of conflictive talk in professional discourse, analysing the deviant, unconventional conflictive talk in dissertation defences. The analysis of deviant cases provides important insights into our understanding of the ways aspects of the moral order of the profession are foregrounded. Central to knowledge co-construction is the moral vices and virtues attached to it. Individuals develop certain 'believes' and 'speculations' about knowledge based on the 'moral order' (Goffman, 1981; Kádár, 2017) of the profession and these moral vices and virtues are often 'seen but unnoticed features of common discourse' (Garfinkel, 1967) unless they are violated.

Using unconventional, but morally loaded confrontational talk in English-medium dissertation defences in Iran, the study aims to demonstrate how issues of epistemic authority, or simply, claims to knowledge are negotiated and/or contested in professional talk about the theses and how the participants hold each other accountable for the infringement of the moral professional codes, by (implicitly or explicitly) negotiating the moral do's and don'ts of the profession. The study hopes to contribute to the understanding of how professional practices are discursively co-constructed, and how moral professional order is negotiated in talk-in-interaction. In what follows, I elaborate on the conceptual terms that theoretically inform the data analyses, and then move on to the analysis of the segments of my data, followed by discussions that represent epistemic and moral assumptions of argumentations. Finally, I draw my conclusions.

Invoking the moral order in argumentative talk

Arguments are about the situated knowledge claims which are normatively moral (Blair, 2011), which means that in professional discourses, they are characterised by (among many other issues) a 'conventional ascription of rights or entitlements over the possession and the use of certain kinds of knowledge' (Drew, 1991: 45; Enfield, 2011). In working with the enactment of various knowledge positions or the epistemic stance with regard to a knowledge domain in interaction, individuals routinely evoke a set of moral entitlements (rights) and responsibilities that are attached to the role, status or identity that they are momentarily enacting relative to each other (Enfield, 2011). In this regard, Enfield (2011) makes a clear distinction between source-based epistemic authority and status-based epistemic authority; a source-based authority refers to one's 'actual experience and what it enables' (p. 300); that is, one's actual access to a knowledge domain and consequently his/her claim and demonstration of that knowledge, while a status-based authority concerns what one is entitled, expected and supposed to know based on his/her official status (cf. Drew, 1991). If one does not demonstrate the knowledge expected of him based on his/her status, this leads to surprise or sanction in the subsequent turns (Enfield, 2011). Normatively, the two kinds of authority are in alignment, but sometimes they are not (Enfield, 2011: 300). Furthermore, as speakers are considered the agent of their propositions, they are also held accountable for what they say, including what epistemic positions they take in interaction. One's claim of knowledge (through asserting a proposition) is accountable, even if he/she reports the proposition in a narrative event (Enfield, 2011), and therefore, claims indirect authority to the epistemic grounds of that proposition.

While there are many ways we can relate issues of knowledge to the moral order, this study is about the cases that the two types of epistemic authority do not match (as revealed by the discourse participants themselves), and this mismatch leads to triggering a negative moral judgement, escalating the normative criticism-response exchanges in dissertation defence to the conflictive talk (Koester, 2017). In institutional interactions, the difference in source-based and status-based based authority has clear negative 'moral implications', if not serious institutional repercussions. An individual's failure to live up to the community' expectation in terms of knowledge and knowledge-related practices may lead to moral accountability regarding that failure by other (often senior) members of the community.

Recent works in discourse studies suggest that good evidence for arguing for the moral motivation behind a behaviour is an 'intervention' by unratified members of the community to deal with a moral issue (Kádár, 2017; Kádár and Márquez-Reiter, 2015). Kádár and Márquez-Reiter (2015) report on cases where a bystander witnesses a breach of moral code to the detriment of a victim, and consequently, intervenes to defend the victim and to punish the delinquent party. Similarly, Kádár and de la Cruz (2016) report on 'outspokenness' as a moral intervention ritually instantiated by a (usually more powerful) community member to warn a case of moral violation, and even to punish the violator. Kádár and Márquez-Reiter (2015) argue that intervention is a reaction and an intuitive emotion that something is 'right' or 'wrong' based on the intervener's culture, personal background and psyche. They continue that the moral work underlying the

intervention leads to 'face-loss' (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967) for the person against whom the intervention is made by way of humiliation.

Borrowing the term 'intervention' from Kádár and Márquez-Reiter (2015), I define intervention in a speech situation as 'a morally-accountable interruption of the ongoing talk by a non-interacting participant, ahead of or out of his/her institutionally-allocated turn to deal with a deemed 'moral trouble' in interaction'. While the moral trouble can be of multitude of types and cases, in the cases of the present study, the moral trouble underlies conflictive talks, representing opposite epistemic positions in the dissertation defence context in the following ways: (1) a supervisor has failed to carry out a prior knowledge-based professional obligation (supervision); and that failure has led to non-normative implications for the way subsequent relevant discourse proceeds, (2) an examiner's epistemic positions reflected in his evaluation of thesis is morally judged by a senior colleague as contaminating sanctity of knowledge with irrelevant personal and unconventional emotions and (3) an examiner fails to depict a knowledge that is expected of him/her, based on his/her role in the discourse (i.e. the difference in source-based authority and status-based authority), thus non-normatively affecting the trajectory of the discourse. Therefore, intervention is meant to deal with a morally loaded action. This study contributes to our understanding of the moral bases of confrontations in an academic context, and how divergent knowledge positions are discursively co-constructed vis-à-vis the moral order of the profession. The analyses are guided by the following two research questions:

1. How do Iranian participants in dissertation defences negotiate epistemics in the context of conflictive talk?
2. How do Iranian participants in dissertation defences invoke aspects of professional moral order in their negotiation of epistemics in the context of conflictive talk?

The data and context of the study

Description of the data

The data set is collected in dissertation defence sessions (hereafter DDs), which represent interactions among PhD candidates, examiners and (co)supervisors, who represent the discipline of English Language Teaching in Iran. The excerpts selected for the analysis represent two defence sessions in two universities and are part of a large corpus (amounting to 12 hours) of interactions in dissertation defence sessions created between 2010 and 2012. The sessions are held in front of a large audience, as it is conventional in Iranian dissertation defences. The data are video recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed for the analysis. The transcription conventions are appended at the end of the paper. For this study, I have chosen two anomalous cases: The first deals with a situation where a supervisor breaches the norms of supervision by aligning with an examiner in attacking the candidate resulting in the co-supervisor's intervention to clash with the supervisor. This interaction has previously been analysed in terms of face (Izadi, 2017a) and has been shown to represent a great deal of relational separation

(Arundale, 2010, 2020) between the co-supervisor, the examiner and the supervisor, leading to unconventionally adversarial confrontation. The second represents a case of an examiner arguing with another examiner to defend the candidate, again, an unconventional practice in DDs. It is unconventional both among the 12 DDs that were recorded and analysed for different research purposes (see section 3.2, below) and among the many other DDs that the researcher has observed and participated as a supervisor and an examiner. Although proponents of case study argue that case studies provide no weaker potential for the generalisability of the findings/observations compared with other social research methods (Forrest-Lawrence, 2019), I would still tend to mitigate the arguments put forward throughout the paper in terms of generalisability.

Normally, 3–4 examiners are invited from external institutions and the candidate's same institution to verbalise their evaluation of the theses. Examiners are assumed to be experts in at least one of the theoretical and methodological aspect of thesis produced by the candidate under the supervision of expert supervisors. The evaluation committee (the so called 'jury') sit facing the audience. Examiners' talk, coming after the opening of the session by the supervisor) has multiple recipients. Some examiners formulate their evaluations as an open lecture addressed to the audience, thus making the candidate and his/her supervisory team secondary recipients. More commonly, however, examiners' talk directly addresses the respective candidate, thus making the supervisory team and the audience secondary recipients. In Iranian DDs, supervisors chair the sessions and provide responses to the examiners' critical comments along with their supervisees. Supervisors are considered the secondary authors of the theses and are held responsible for the quality of the theses. According to the academic regulations for publications out of PhD theses, supervisors must take the correspondence with the journals and publishing houses. They are institutionally rewarded both financially (paid extra incentive) and intellectually (they benefit the 80% of the credits allocated to the papers derived out of their supervised thesis). The term co-supervisor in English can be applied to two roles of 'second supervisor' (with a contribution almost equal to the main supervisor) and 'counsellor' (with a minor contribution to the thesis). In DDs, the co-supervisor's contribution is proportionate to their degree of contribution in the supervision process. Their turn follows the examiners and supervisors', and as such, they have very little to say in the defence sessions.

Previous studies in dissertation defences

There is a promising line of research on dissertation defences, both universally and in the Iranian culture. Iranian defence sessions have been investigated in terms of a variety of topics, including speech acts (Izadi, 2013a, 2013b, 2018b), and the relational accounts of face and politeness (Don and Izadi, 2011, 2013; Izadi, 2017a, 2017b). Izadi (2018b) observes that talk in dissertation defences in general and criticism-response exchanges in particular feature an equilibrium between the effective delivery of messages (criticisms and disagreeing responses) and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships through paying respect, modulating negative acts, etc. Conventionally, examiners place a preface to their critical questions and comments, thanking the candidate and the supervision team and praising the work, disclaiming that their role as an examiner compels them to be

critical (Izadi, 2017a, 2017b). In the criticism proper turns, they try to balance out the effective delivery of the message and maintaining interpersonal relationships with their recipients (Izadi, 2017a, 2017b, 2018b).

Previous studies (Izadi, 2017a, 2017b, 2018b; Don and Izadi 2011, 2013) show that dissertation defences constitute actions (e.g. criticisms) that inevitably articulate with some measure of relational separation, as well as slight connection (Arundale, 2010), especially if they are modulated. The second position responsive turns often involve defensive actions that reflectively articulate with more separation. There are also studies that have focused on dissertation defences internationally from Systemic Functional Linguistics perspectives (Lau et al., 2021; Recski, 2005). Their results support the findings in Iranian DDs in that the language of examiners ambivalently reflects hedging and boosting, which attests to the desire for effective delivery of acts of criticisms and disagreements but in a manner that does not jeopardises the candidate's and other colleagues' face. We can, therefore, conclude that the non-conflictual disagreements, in Koester's (2017) terms, are conventional but conflictual disagreements are unconventional.

The Persian academic culture

To better contextualise the data in the overall cultural environment, both previous studies and the researcher's own ethnographic knowledge (acquired through his emic participant-observational technique) suggest that, in general, Persian culture places a huge emphasis and value on positive interpersonal relationships. In professional meetings, interactant exert a high measure of care to attend to each other's *shaxsiat* (personhood, identity, character: Izadi, 2017b) by attempting to avoid offending each other, to build rapport, and to consolidate their relationship. In DDs, this too much care about interpersonal relationships (collegiality) often overshadows their professional businesses, for example, examiners may simply pass off the task of review by withholding their true evaluation of the thesis for what is known in the Persian culture as *rudarbayesti* (a sense of diffidence and reservedness that prevents one to express his/her true feelings and desires: Izadi, 2016; Sharifian, 2007). In professional academic contexts, a person's obsession with his/her interlocutor's *shaxsiat* and consequently to their *aberu* (face) and the care to give it due consideration often precludes individuals to appear critical of each other, as often needed for the achievement of professional goals (cf: Izadi, 2016). This is part of an overall cultural practice, known as *taarof*, which is said to be the Persian ritual politeness system and is often referred to as the language of politeness and praise (Izadi, 2016; Beeman, 1976). *Taarof* is linguistically realised through formulaic honorifics that index both hierarchy-distance and connection-love and interactionally includes sequences of offer-response, compliment-response and invitation-response. Although it is originally a positive concept and practice, *taarof* often negatively extends to the professional discourses and affects the task-oriented institutional goals. Izadi (2016) demonstrates instances of sacrificing the business of thesis evaluation in favour of collegiality in Iranian DDs and argus for the over-politeness of such practices. In the following quote from an academic/examiner, who shared his true evaluation of the thesis he had reviewed with the current researcher, *taarof* and *rudarbayesti* surfaces in his talk; both in his

general comparison of thesis review in Iran with Australia (where he has received his PhD, and in his expression of accounts for accepting the thesis:

The thesis was really weak, . . ., it would be rejected if it were in Australia, works like this are easily rejected there, they have no *taarof* and *rudarbayesti*. However, here in Iran, it's almost impossible to reject a thesis, especially when you see the candidate's whole family are waiting to celebrate with a large bouquet of flowers (laughing). In *rudarbayesti* with his supervisor, I gave him that mark, but I also raised my concerns about the quality of the thesis.

The peculiarity of the excerpts of current interactions becomes more vivid when we are informed that in the hierarchical society of Iran, academics enjoy a high status and their behaviour is considered a paragon for the society. The two components of academic persona, including depicting a socio-morally approved behaviour as well as showing expected knowledge, are important resources in keeping the face of the profession (Izadi, 2017b) in front of those who are both outside the profession and of lower status (here the audience who comprises of students). We should remember again that the DDs in Iran are ceremonial events that occur in front of an audience, therefore, it characterises a 'staged performance' (Goffman, 1967), that requires everybody to be at his/her best. In such contexts, people often modulate the unwelcome effects of the acts that jeopardise the interpersonal relationship, and hence, do not often engage in direct confrontation. Educational settings, where knowledge is practiced, taught and learned, are traditionally considered sacred and honourable. In such a culture, conflictive talk itself is an immoral act, that should be avoided. This raises the question what makes the unconventional intervention of the participants to create a conflictive talk an interactionally valid and a morally relevant conduct?

This study, using both new excerpts from the data set represented above and published excerpts, builds on previous work by foregrounding the underlying moral order as related to the co-construction of knowledge in professional practices.

Analysis and discussion

I now move on to the analyses of two cases which conspicuously depict the violation of the contractual moral norms of the dissertation defence practice. I draw upon conversation analysis as a method of social enquiry, which requires me to be heedful to the evidence that participants themselves display of each other's behaviour and use that evidence to ground my interpretation (Arundale, 2010, 2020; Heritage, 2005; Levinson, 2012; Schegloff, 2007). Therefore, this paper does not offer a moral judgement over the contradictory issues that arose in the arguments in favour of or to the detriment of any participant vis-à-vis who is right or wrong. Furthermore, I am also theoretically informed by the notion of 'intervention' as a (linguistic) behavioural instantiation of some aspect of the moral order, the meta-pragmatic comments in the turn design (Kádár and Márquez-Reiter, 2015) pointing to 'moral accountability', as well as some aspects of epistemics theory (Enfield, 2011), as delineated in section 2. Although conversation analysis rarely deals with lengthy, multi-unit turns, due to the lack of the immediacy of the uptake in the subsequent turns, the analysis of synchronic paralinguistic uptake (including gaze) and audience response can be helpful in grounding the analysis in talk (Izadi, 2017b). More

importantly, the interruptive intervention is itself conversational evidence for a 'trouble in conversation that needs to be resolved'. The discussion of each case is presented subsequent to that case.

Case 1 Analysis: An argument in supervisor-co-supervisor-examiner interaction

I selected this excerpt because it exceptionally represents a 'conspicuous' example of violation of the 'contractual moral norms' (Mondada, 2011) of dissertation defences in terms of the grounding knowledge-based presumptions with serious implications for moral accountability. The excerpt involves a heated argument that has turned into a confrontation between the second external examiner (abbreviated as EX2) and the co-supervisor (abbreviated as CS). EX2 is male, assistant professor, in his 40s, and has once been the CS's student. CS is male, professor, in 50s. CS has had a counsellor role (see section 3) with minimal contribution to the supervision process and his turn is allocated last, after all the examiners have raised their critical evaluation and both the candidate and the main supervisor have provided responses to the examiners. EX2's critical remarks of the thesis under evaluation were bizarrely supported by the candidate's supervisor (male, associate professor, in 60s). The PhD candidate is male and in 30s.

In this 38-minute-long Q-A session, EX2 takes up the floor in the 20th minute. During prior actions, the first external examiner's Q-A round with the candidate involved major correction to the thesis. In the introduction to his review, the first external examiner even suggested that they hold a meeting in order to 'redefine the criteria and expectations of a PhD thesis', which is an implicit suggestion that the current thesis is far below the conventional expectation of a PhD. The suggestion was briefly responded by the supervisor in his 5-minute turn, implicitly rejecting the suggestion (data not shown). However, he accepted the main grounds of criticism of the thesis, suggesting the candidate that 'there is no need for being defensive' (data not shown). This leads to the candidate's muffled laugh, and the low whispering and giggling of the audience, both showing dissatisfaction with the supervisor's response to the examiner. He then addressed the large audience, discussing the implications of the examiner's criticisms and comments for the future defenders, while the choral giggling was soaring, which can be taken as a negative moral evaluation of the supervisor's remarks:

Excerpt 1: examiner criticises candidate for the uncritical adoption of theoretical framework
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624:   EX2:   . . . . . it is much better you know for
625:          you to analyze reanalyze redefine criticize this theory i think
626:          you did have some room ( )-
627:   C:     i criticized ( )-
628:   EX2:   but that criticism i think did not end up with anything new
                  ((lines omitted))
664:   EX2:   i mean you have incorporated everything in here i think bundle can be used
665:          then to anything in the language here you see the problem when you are
666:          talking about operational (.) let's say the definition of (.) uh let's say the terms an
667:          things when actually need to be markers you know all of these
668:          because you know that problem of falsifiability can be taken to this definition
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EX2's critical remarks canonically started after an introductory conventional thanking (Izadi, 2017a), but soon escalated to a criticism that called the whole PhD thesis into question in that it has uncritically adopted the theoretical and analytical frameworks proposed by two scholars in the field of genre analysis, Hyland and Biber (624). His suggestion of 'it is much better you know for you to analyze reanalyze redefine criticize this theory' reveals his assessment of the thesis as 'insufficient critique of the theory' (624–25), interpretable as a criticism that obligates a response in the next turn (Heritage, 2005). He relates this to the candidate's low self-confidence in criticising famous scholars rooted in his nationality as an Iranian (as becomes evident later). The candidate's preferred cut-off response 'i criticized ( )-', uttered in interruptive manner is interpretable as a rejection of EX2's stance over the domain in/sufficiency of the criticism of the theoretical framework (Don and Izadi, 2011). EX2 then supports his claim by providing accounts (data not shown).

Excerpt 2: Supervisor getting along with examiner

669:	C:	so, do you mean that people like Hyland and Biber have worked
670:		on a mistaken assumption?
671:	EX2:	>SURE as well as I can understand I can criticize<
672:		you know they are not gods are not lots of ( )
673:		they are people like others in the world (.)
674:		actually the only chance or advantage that they have is that
675:		they are living in English speaking country (.) and i know that this Hyland is
676:		very very skillful and competent in manipulating the language ( )(.)
677:		and <u>beyond</u> that (.) he is the editor in chief of the journal i think they have the
678:		chance to do all of these- (.) but i think they <they nee:d to be criticized>=
679:	C:	=not easy to criticize Biber and Hyland hhh not easy hh
680:	S:	IT I:S=
681:	C:	=because Biber actually coined the term himself
682:	EX2:	[and that's-
683:	S:	[you can actually find lots of er (.) lots of <u>deficiencies</u>
684:		in other people's findings=
685:	EX2:	=exactly=
686:	S:	=that is possible (.) and I ↑agree with aqaay ((Mr.)) Dr ((EX2M's last name))
687:		((Chuckling and low whispers from the audience))
688:	EX2:	unfortunately the word that i have in my mind is lexical jumbles
689:		>rather than< lexical bundles

The candidate's biased question (Koshik, 2002) of 'do you mean that people like Hyland and Biber have worked on a mistaken assumption' (669–70) evidences his rejection of the EX2's criticism and challenges the epistemic (knowledge) position of EX2, displaying his incongruent epistemic stance (Mondada, 2011). The 'do you mean' question here makes relevant in the next turn either a transparent radical stance against the two key figures of genre studies or a modulation and repair (Sacks et al., 1974) of the previous claim by EX2. EX2's response to the question is an emphatic 'SURE' (671), indexing his certainty to his prior assertions, and displaying his orientations to 'extreme case formulation' (Pomerantz, 1986) of assessment of Hyland's work to be based on a mistaken assumption. He then goes so far as to discredit the two authors, saying that their works

have little academic value, but have gained favour because they are native speakers of English and relates one of the author's (Hyland) success to his position as an editor-in-chief, which in Iranian academic culture is conventionally interpretable as being in the position of manipulating the review process to gain personal favour (671–678). What EX2 does in this turn is an extreme judgement (Robinson, 2001) of Hyland, prefaced and supported by 'I know' (675), evidencing his explicit, direct source-based epistemic authority (Stivers et al., 2011).

The candidate's latched response to the criticism challenges the upgraded epistemic authority of EX2 and displays his incongruent epistemic stance in that EX2's criticism of the scholars is not justifiable, since it is 'not easy to criticize Biber and Hyland' (679) and 'because Biber actually coined the term himself' (681). This justification, unexpectedly, receives the candidate's own supervisor's preferred and emphatic disagreement 'IT I:S' (680) 'you can actually find lots of er (.) lots of deficiencies in other people's findings' (682), followed by his explicit agreement with EX2: 'that is possible (.) and I ↑agree with aqaay ((Mr)) Dr ((EX2's last name))' (686). The supervisor's agreement with EX2 elicits choral whisper and chuckling from the audience (687), which is interaction-internal evidence for their disapproval of the supervisor's response, and for their attributing moral accountability to the supervisor for his orientation to an unconventional action. The interactional consequence of both EX2's critical behaviour and the supervisor's support of EX2 rather than the candidate occasions further actions: an unconventional *intervention* of the co-supervisor (CS) in advance of the position conventionally allocated to him to defend the candidate against the critical points made by EX2, who was once his student. The very intervention is a good reason to argue that CS sees a 'moral trouble' in need of ratification. EX2's courage to be too severe as a result of the supervisor's failure to defend his student as well as his criticism of uncritical adoption of Hyland and Biber's framework, culminated in discrediting the authors' academic achievements triggers this intervention.

Excerpt 3: Co-supervisor's intervention
703: CS: [doctor ((EX2's name)) I'm sorry but (.)
704:          ((choral whisper fades down, EX2 turns head left and gazes CS))
705:          you see:m to be engaged in what we call storm in a tea cup (..)
706:          in the first place (.) ((C's name))'s use of epistemic (.)
707:          in relation to expressions of < i think (.) is one branch of
708:          epistemic modality> (.) there is absolutely nothing wrong
709:          with that (..) unlike you (.) i'm not going to criticize john
710:          lyons out of existence (.) because we do believe that (.)
711:          there are scholars in this world (.) that should be respected
712:          (.) and. this is not at least (.) for people like ME (.) .to call
713:          them into question (..) we're not going to indulge in iranian jingoism(.)
714:          ((EX2's gaze off))

CS's reactive intervention involves meta-pragmatic elements in his turn that explicitly bring into the surface of talk not only his interpreting of EX2M's turn unwarranted criticism of the candidate but also his moral evaluation of EX2's evaluation of the thesis at hand. In his turn, CS displays orientation to radical disagreement with EX2's grounds of

criticism of the thesis. He responds to EX2's criticism of inadequate theoretical critique which evolves into mocking the thesis title by saying 'you seem to be engaged in what we call storm in a teacup', interpretable as making fuss over an unimportant thing. He makes recourse to his epistemic authority to provide accounts for his accusation (706–707), paying full commitment to the veracity of his propositions in 'there is nothing wrong with that' (708). And, in responding to EX2's downplaying the academic value of Hyland's works and attributing his success to his status as a native speaker of English and as the editor of some journals, CS accuses EX2 of jingoism, and supports this by invoking a moral code of 'respectability of scholars' in 'unlike you (.) i'm not going to criticize john lyons out of existence (.) because we do believe that (.) there are scholars in this world (.) that should be respected (.)'. The modal 'should' and the inclusive pronoun 'we' are linguistic devices for CS's orientation to the moral code as a socially agreed academic convention. He then expands on the accounts of accusation and hence on the moral code by implying that EX2 is not in a position to be able to call big figures of knowledge into question in 'this is not at least (.) for people like ME (.) to call them into question (..). The accusation culminates in the overt delivery of the word 'jingoism' in 'we're not going to indulge in iranian jingoism (.)' (709–13), leading to EX2's gaze off.

Later in his turn, CS returns to the same accusation and supports his action by explicitly delivering moral propositions such as 'we can't call people like hyland they don't know anything and we iranians know everything it's not true (.) that's against spirit of knowledge (.). JINGOISM in scientific context has NO place' (data not shown for brevity).

Excerpt 4: co-supervisor's overt epistemic and experience claim to support his oppositional stance

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715:  CS:     so (.) what he said in relation to epistemic functional language
716:          >because i have written two articles on epistemic <(.) published in reputed
717:          journals (.) i know about the stuff (.) so the .main theme of epistemic (.) is to
718:          use verbs like< i think (.) i belie:ve (.) i know (.) and has NOTHING to
719:          do with ontology in philosophy (.) it is part of (.) your
720:          attitudinalization (.) and attitudinalization is ALSO part and
721:          parcel of epistemic knowledge (.) so (.) i would take issue
722:          with you on that particular topic? BUT (.) back to the: (.)°
723:          you know° storm in a tea cup (.) doctor ((CM's name)) has
724:          already delineated a position I'M going to focus on this
725:          particular topic AS defined by people like HYLAND who
726:          are internationally reputed figures (.)
              ((lines omitted))
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In the next part of his turn, CS displays orientation to outright explicit epistemic claim over the contested domain, which is interestingly 'epistemics'. Inviting support and citing the source of knowledge is a common technique in argumentation (Arundale, 2020; Izadi, 2018a), especially for upgraded epistemic stances and here CS draws upon his direct experience in publishing on the topic and thereby orients to first-hand knowledge (Pomerantz, 1988) or epistemic primacy (Heritage and Raymond, 2005) relative to EX2. This outright claim of knowledge seems to be relevant not only in supporting the

accusations, which makes him highly accountable, but also in prefacing an aggravated disagreement marker 'I would take issue with you on that particular topic' (722). He then returns to the accusation of storm in a teacup (722–26), which was left unelaborated earlier to deal with jingoism. By reminding moral principles of academic practices, CS displays his interpreting of EX2's criticism of the candidate as involving a moral trouble with regard to knowledge and scholars.

Except 5: co-supervisor disagreeing with supervisor in addressing the candidate
733:   CS: ((turning to C)) and DO NOT agree
734:               with your SUPERVISOR (.)
735:               ((pointing his index finger to S, S gazing off the audience))
736:               who LEFT you in the middle of the roa:d?
737:               ((audience clapping: 9secs, CM looks at the audience smiling))
                   ((lines omitted))

A few moments later, CS's turn marks a shift of address to the candidate (visible in his turn of head to him) and a reference to the candidate's supervisor. His orientation to direct disagreement with the supervisor in 'and DO NOT agree with your SUPERVISOR (733-4), while pointing the blame finger to him and holding him accountable for failing to accomplish the conventional task of supervision: who LEFT you in the middle of the roa:d (736), elicit both the candidate's pleased smile and more importantly the audience's clapping. The audience support is good interactional evidence for their alignment and agreement with CS in his moral evaluations of the supervisor. Both CS and the audience allude to the moral code that underlies a supervision task that 'supervisors should not leave the candidates in the middle of the road', which is metaphorical way to criticise the supervisor for not defending the candidate as it is conventional in Iranians DDs.

Excerpt 6: Co-supervisor's wrapping up remarks and the audience uptake
744:   CS: but <what you CANNOT DENY (.)
751:               I repeat (.) what YOU CANNOT DENY> (.) is that (.) he has
752:               taken an initial step (.) towards a very important field within the
753:               discipline .>which is called applied linguistics< (.) °thank you very much°
754:               ((floor clapping: 12 seconds))

CS quells his turn by a bunch of emphatic extreme case formulations (Pomerantz, 1998) in defending the candidate that he has taken an initial step towards a very important field within the discipline (752–3). He orients to his defensive action as an undeniable fact, addressing directly to EX2 (and possibly other examiners) in 'you cannot deny' (744). This extreme case is formulated not only through a grammatically constructed pseudo-cleft format (what you cannot deny is that. . .), which places emphasis on the phrase after what+be, but also through repetition of 'YOU CANNOT DENY', both prefaced by the phrase 'I repeat', and intoned in emphatic pitch. Epistemically, this Turn Constructional Unit (TCU), not only supports his previous accusations, but also is evidence for his orientation to full commitment to the propositional grounds of his assertions, making him highly accountable. The last TCU in CS's turn is a ritual thanking by which he ends his

remarks and passes the floor. The audience reacts to the CS's contribution once more by a long applause, evidencing their support of CS.

Discussion of case 1

CS's accusations, although masqueraded in the form of moral advice, have serious implications for EX2 and CS interpersonal relationship (Izadi, 2017a), and are procedurally consequential in creating a conflictive talk, since they rule out the appropriate scientific bases and the skill required for thesis review, and thus attributing him a professional incompetence (Izadi, 2017b). However, this stark disagreement is not the only motivation for CS's intervention. His remarks meta-pragmatically evidence his evaluation of EX2's criticisms as 'going too far', bare and inappropriate, indexed in 'storm in a teacup'. Moreover, his accusation of 'jingoism', unpacked as 'there are scholars in this world who should be respected' and 'it's not for people like me to call them into questions' and his exaggeration of unlike you, 'I'm not going to call John Lyons out of existence' points to a violation of a moral code of 'respecting fellow (especially senior) scholars', a common moral practice in academic discourse. His remarks also explicitly reveal his moral judgement that EX2 has damaged the spirit of knowledge by bringing in a non-scientific emotion (jingoism). These two moral concerns underlie the intervention to deliver his conflictual disagreements (Koester, 2017) and override the concern for interpersonal relationships as well as the concern for conformity with the turn-allocation system of the institution.

  CS's intervention is also motivated by another 'moral trouble', initiated by the candidate's supervisor in violating the supervision norms. In fact, the audience has already intervened by their whispering and chuckling, and their voice had already created some problem for the progressivity of the interaction. The CS's intervention is the second, but more consequential for the trajectory of the interaction. CS's evaluation of the supervisor's behaviour as morally loadable violation is a reason for his intervention as a moralising act (Kádár, 2017), despite endangering their relationship. The audience's support of CS makes evident that not only do they agree that EX2 has gone too far from the defence conventions in his critical talk but also that they too are holding the supervisor accountable for his failure to defend his supervisee, which is rooted in his lack of required knowledge.

Case 2 Analysis: Examiner running against another examiner

This is again an unconventional case of an examiner producing conflictual disagreements with a co-examiner. In the context of DDs, disagreements may arise between any member of the discourse, as it is an academic context, but such disagreements are generally momentary and non-conflictual (Koester, 2017), and rarely escalated into a conflictual argument as is the case here. In this PhD defence, EX2F (second examiner, internal, female, assistant professor in her 40s) displays her modulated (as far as I know) epistemic claim that triangulation is not concerned with methodology, but with data collection, which is in contrast with CM's (candidate, male, in 30s) knowledge. EX1M (first examiner, external, male, associate professor in his 50s) who has already finished a

severe round of Q-A with the candidate asks for permission to come in to defend CM
(631–2). Having been granted the permission, he displays a 'well'-prefaced disagreeing
response with EX2F in defending CM, indicating his disagreement with her and agree-
ment with him. The very intervention of the examiner, in violation of the pre-allocated
turn taking conventions, is evidence for the moral judgement and for their interpersonal
relationship.

Excerpt 7: triangulation
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627:  EX2F:   if i were you I wouldn't use triangulation (.) because it makes ( ) that you have
628:          obtained data from different sources but in fact you have not
629:  CM:     i think triangulation is also concerned with methodology
630:  EX2F:   as far as I know it's concerned with data collection
631:  EX1M:   ((to supervision team)) may i have a word of defense here?
632:  EX1M:   ((to EX2F)) sorry may i have a word of defense for him @
633:  EX2F:   sure
634:  EX1M:   >well< TRIANGULATION is referred to both methods and data sources (.)
635:          so as lo:ng as you just changed data source to methodology that's quite
636:          justifiable (.) sorry
637:          ok no problem . . ..
```

A few minutes later, EX1M's interruptive attempt to seek permission from the supervi-
sory committee to defend CM fails (data not shown for brevity). The following repre-
sents the third time of EX1M's intervention.

Excerpt 8: factor analysis
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816:  EX2F:   . . .some items sure measure some things (.)
817:          but they can't be called a factor (.) the factor is grammar (.)
818:          grammar knowledge
819:  CM:     [so you mean that we should not relationship between- (.)
820:          [because the purpose of factor analysis is to reduce the number of factors
821:  EX1M:   [   ((nodding head left and right))                            ]
822:  CM:     doctor ((EX1M's last name)) has a word of hh defense hh i guess
823:  EX1M:   may i?
824:  EX2F:   sure
825:  EX1M:   well yes i recall a thesis dissertation from ((name of a university))
826:          (.) sorry thesis where reading was the core of the study
827:          and (.) they came up with (.)° if i'm not mistaking° thirty five sub traits
828:          so MY justification for his finding was that (.)
829:          he has the knowledge of grammar as a trait (.)
830:          and THAT TRAIT has got a number of SUB TRAITS (.)
831:          for example i i may be quite good at passivization (.)
832:          whereas (.) i might not be able to use cohesive ties at discoursal level (.)
833:          uh i would justify his idea that (.) you have the trait or (.) so called construct
834:          for which you have a number of subtraits so uh (.)
835:          >to my understanding< grammar CAN be divided into a number of subtraits=
836:  EX2F:   =sub traits (.) but not factors (.) because when we want to say FACTORS (.)
837:          then there is no point in doing factor analysis=
```

838:   EX1M: [↑=U:::H   ]
839:   EX2F: [each item can have especially-]
840:   EX1M: enough for me enough for me (.) ↓>°because it takes time°<

The point of epistemic divergence is the statistical procedure of data analysis in the candidate's thesis. EX2F designs her turn as a criticism for CM and she reveals her assessment that grammatical items cannot be taken as a factor in doing factor analysis (816–818). The candidate's defensive response (819), which is structurally preferred (Izadi, 2017a) is not successful, as the EX2F does not give up the floor to provide further accounts for the epistemic position she has taken: because the purpose of factor analysis is to reduce the number of factors (820). This account leads to a disagreement by EX1M (the other examiner) who demonstrates this by the gesture of nodding head left and right (821), which means 'no' in the Iranian culture. CM notices the gesture and takes advantage of EX1M's disagreement to naughtily seek support from him: 'Dr. [EX1M] has a word of defense I guess' (822). CM's invitation leads to EX1M's seeking permission to defend him (may i?: 823). Having been granted the permission (sure: 824), he displays orientation to modulated incongruent epistemic claim hidden in a narrative he narrates, displaying his source of knowledge to be a PhD thesis (825–35). His conclusion of 'grammar CAN be divided into a number of sub traits' (835), echoing a divergent status from EX2F's, latches onto her partial disagreement of 'sub traits but not factors' (836), followed by her reasoning that 'when we want to say FACTORS (.) then there is no point in doing factor analysis' (836–7). Her utterance makes evident that she is still standing on her previous epistemic stance, and provides further reasoning for that position. Her position, however, does not convince the examiner. Conversely, it leads to EX1M's display of a prosodically emphatic disagreement marker U:::H (838), but an abrupt withdrawal from the argument due to the lack of time (840). EX1M's display of epistemic incongruence and his unconventional intervention to assert his opposing epistemic stance is especially consequential in halting the progressivity of EX2F's talk and putting her in the defensive second position.

Discussion of case 2

The examiner's anomalous frequent interventions to defend a candidate against a co-examiner, despite the institutional allocation of a role to do the opposite, indicates his assignment of moral and institutional accountability to his co-examiner. While disagreements or even opposite stances over a domain of knowledge is common among academics even the ones taking the same roles in the discourse, such interventions are unconventional, and can only be warranted by the intervener's negative moral evaluation of an interactant's prior-position remarks. EX2F's failure to defend her points against EX1M, due to his withdrawal created uncomfortable emotional moments for EX2F, as became evident in her subsequent turns with the candidate, tipping the power balance in favour of the candidate (data not shown). Given EX1M's higher status relative to EX2F, such instantiations of opposite epistemic stances morally question the appropriateness of EX2F's criticisms against the thesis, holding her morally accountable for depicting lack of sufficient knowledge required of her to fulfil her role. EX1M's withdrawal in

continuing the discussion with EX2F increases her emotional discomfort, as becomes evident in her later turns, which has serious implications for their interpersonal relationships.

While the EX1M had the option of opting out of the argument with his co-examiner (without any incurred threat to her face), his intervention makes evident that, beyond expressing his opposing views, he has been assigning some moral accountability to EX2F, for her lack of relevant knowledge. Another moral motivation for the intervention could be the commitment to do justice to the candidate (from the examiner's point of view), who invites him to 'judge' the credibility of the EX2F's epistemic views against his defensive argument. These moral judgements override other considerations (her face) in motivating him to take the risk of intervention to defend the candidate.

Conclusion

The analyses of the data in this study revealed how Iranian participants in dissertation defences negotiate epistemic work in creating a context of conflictive talk and how they invoke aspects of professional moral order in that context. The business of thesis review or evaluation which is the main goal of defence sessions can at times involve conflictive practices that would endanger the positive rapport between the discourse participants (Koester, 2017). While the professional actors situate themselves relative to one another to co-construct their professional identity, they display their epistemic positions as well as the underlying moral vices and virtues that are attached to those epistemic positions. The departures from institutional conventions reflect a mismatch between source-based authority and status-based authority (Enfield, 2011). Such a mismatch is not always tolerated by other community members and motivates them to intervene and respond to the violation of a moral norm to satisfy the moral common sense of the community vis-à-vis knowledge. This study particularly demonstrated how the moral evaluations underlie epistemic positions, and how failure to fulfil a professional task based on the institutional expectations led to morally grounded interventions. Domains of knowledge are co-constructed in light of the morally ordered affordances and restrictions of the institutions. However, these different orders are normatively unnoticed unless they are violated. As we observed in this study, the violation of any moral base behind a particular behaviour (linguistic or otherwise) is marked. Intervention is a reaction to a morally loaded action by which the intervener acts in line with a prior moral judgement to reinstate the aspect of the moral order, which, according to the intervener's viewpoint, is breached, despite the high risk that it poses on the intervener (cf: Kádár and Márquez-Reiter, 2015).

The study demonstrated two cases where non-interacting participants intervened to solve a moral problem regarding knowledge production and representation. The co-supervisor's intervention in advance of the position allocated to him to create a non-normative conflictive talk and to bizarrely disagree with the supervisor (conventionally supervisors and co-supervisors are in the same camp) is indicative of his negative moral judgement of the two colleagues as 'violators of knowledge-based moral and professional norms' of supervision and examination, which are knowledge-based professional tasks. Likewise, an examiner's anomalous frequent interventions to defend a candidate against a co-examiner, despite the institutional allocation of a role to do the opposite,

indicates his assignment of moral and institutional accountability to his co-examiner. It is important to note that in a culture which places high values to *taarof* (ritual politeness: Izadi, 2015, 2016; Beeman, 1976; Koutlaki, 2002) and *aberu* (face: Izadi, 2017b, 2018a; Sharifian, 2007), such a high-stake intervention endangers the intervener's relationship with his colleagues. However, this paper shows that the moral ethos attached to one's professional identity overrides one's concern for positive relationships. This partly answers the question of why conflictive talk breaks out in professional practices, while human being is pro-social and values positive rapport and relationships.

This paper is hoped to contribute to our understanding of how moral vices and virtues underlie representation, claim and utilisation of knowledge, which are *sine quine non* of professional practices, and what implications they have for interpersonal relationships in a professional discourse. We observed three cases of 'assumed violation of moral order in terms of knowledge' which led to interventions by a present (senior) discourse participant to deal with the moral trouble; two cases represented instances of showing insufficient knowledge (supervisor in the first session and EX2F in the second session), and one case reflected an 'assumed' (by the intervener) lack of sufficient respect to pioneering scholars and manipulating the thesis review convention by going too far (EX2). This is not, of course, to argue that it is the only way that we can relate moral order with issues of knowledge, but only one way out of many that we can think of the morality of knowledge in professional practices. (Specialised) Knowledge-work and its underlying moral contingencies is an important practice by which professional actors construct, negotiate and redefine their professional identity as supervisors, examiners and the like.

Transcription conventions

[ ]	overlapped voice starts
(. . .)	long pauses up to 3 seconds
(..)	medium-long pauses up to 2 seconds
(.)	tiny gap between or within utterances
=	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
hh	smiling voice
° °	words between degree sign are soft words
< >	sotto voce
> <	faster voice
( )	undecipherable voice
(( ))	transcriber's description

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