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# The epistemic grounds of face in institutional argumentative talk-in-interaction

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## ABSTRACT

This article brings together the two notions of epistemics and face, understood as relational connection and separation (Arundale, 2010). It aims to demonstrate how participants interactionally achieve relational connection and separation through displaying, contesting and negotiating claims to knowledge along with the interactional achievement of pragmatic meanings and social actions in an institutional argumentative talk-in-interaction. The analyses, informed by Conversation Analysis and Face Constituting Theory (Arundale, 2010) reveal how participants orient to slight connection but extreme separation through orientations to epistemic differentiation created in differences in epistemic access and claims to epistemic primacy.

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## 1. Introduction

This article aims to demonstrate how the participants in two types of academic professional contexts interactionally achieve relational connection and separation or face (Arundale, 2010) through orientations to epistemic rights, responsibilities and obligations as they interactionally achieve social actions and pragmatic meanings. It argues for an articulation between epistemics and relational connection and separation by demonstrating how the two orders arise in talk along with, but distinct from, action/meaning making.

In conceptualizing face as relational and interactional Arundale defines it as one's interpreting of his/her relational connection and separation, which is conjointly co-constituted in interactions (Arundale, 2009, 2010, 2013). Face in this sense is no longer a purely cognitive, person-centered phenomenon in the sense of *image* or *concept* of self (as long assumed following Brown and Levinson, 1987), but it is interactionally achieved in conversations in the same way as social actions and pragmatic meanings are interactionally achieved. And 'relationship' is conceptualized in a 'strong' sense of "non-summative properties that arise in the interdependencies among two or more individuals" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2086), and therefore it is dynamically co-constructed in interactions. Arundale argues "face belongs to the dyad or social unit, and hence as 'our connection and separation' or 'our face'" (2010, p. 2090). Face emerges in relationships and is conjointly co-constituted in interactions (cf. also Don and Izadi, 2011, 2013; Izadi, 2015, 2016, 2017). Relational connection and separation are dialectically related and mutually define one another. Therefore, each conversational meaning/action can potentially be projected and interpreted to involve a certain degree of separation and connection simultaneously, while extreme separation (with little connection) or extreme connection (with little separation) is also possible.

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In interaction, as individuals frame and design utterances for their recipients, they project their recipients' 'normative' interpreting of meaning/action of them (Heritage, 2005). These projectings, however, are provisional and become operative and confirmed only when recipients provide 'uptake' and put their utterances adjacent to them (Arundale, 2010, p. 2080; cf. also Schegloff, 2007). The recipients' uptake provides evidence whether the speakers' first position projecting of meaning/action has been confirmed or needs modification. By the time the third position utterance is produced, both speakers' provisional projectings of their first position utterance have become operative, so they move the talk a sequence forward. This "three-position architecture of communication" (Arundale, 2010, p. 2102), which is grounded in three theoretical conversational principles of 'speaker designing', 'recipient design' and 'adjacency' (Heritage, 1984) operates the engine of communication. And as relational phenomena including connection and separation are endogenous to talk (Arundale, 2010), they are conjointly co-constituted in the same manner as social actions and pragmatic meanings but in an order different from them. As individuals conjointly co-constitute relational connection and separation in their interactions, they are also able to independently co-constitute relational connection and separation, as in observing others without engaging in interactions with them. This independent co-constituting can be extended to envisioning relational connection and separation in potential interactions (Arundale, 2013, p. 117; cf. Izadi, 2017).

There are obviously a number of ways we orient to connection and separation or face (Arundale, 2010) in talk in interaction, varying across a range of affective and cognitive domains. One important ground of face relates to the participants' orientation to knowledge-work; a topic that is emerging in discourse and conversation analysis as epistemics (Heritage, 2009, 2012; 2013; Stivers et al., 2011; Heritage and Raymond, 2012; van Dijk, 2012). Put differently, epistemics is interconnected with aspects of our relationships, particularly our relational connection and separation, or face. Territories of knowledge are an integral part of our social and professional practices, and are central in constructing, maintaining and establishing relational connection and separation. In the context of argumentation individuals' different epistemic statuses ground their disagreement acts in interactions and are consequential for the achievement of relationships between them. Recent studies on the morality of knowledge in conversation (Stivers et al., 2011) suggest that knowledge-related issues such as epistemic access, authority, primacy, etc are important resources that the participants invoke in their interactional achievement of meaning and action, and that they are consequential for the participants' joint accomplishment of social relationships. Of the socio-relational issues that have been discussed so far vis-à-vis epistemics are alignment and affiliation (Stivers et al., 2011). This creates a gap for exploring other relational phenomena like face, understood as relational connection and separation. On the other hand, previous studies that explore face in terms of connection and separation in argumentative academic interactions, although do not take up epistemics as (part of) their agenda, implicitly suggest that matters of epistemics play a crucial role in relational connection and separation (cf. Don and Izadi, 2011, 2013; Izadi, 2015, 2016, 2017). Therefore, working on an articulation between the two is a matter for continuing investigation. I build on the emerging field of epistemics by looking at the mechanism of epistemics of action and meaning formation and ascription and by demonstrating how orientations to epistemic claims ground relational connection and separation or face in a type of argumentative academic professional interaction. The data reflect a hot debate over a poet and his poetry between two academic colleagues, which occurs in the Lecturers' Room (LR) in an Iranian university. In what follows, I briefly introduce previous arguments on epistemics. Next I argue for an articulation between epistemics and face with reference to the Persian-specific understanding of face. Following methodology section, I analyze actual professional talk-in-interaction to show how the two orders of epistemics and face arise. Finally, I draw my conclusions.

## 2. Epistemics in conversation and institutional talk

Epistemics deals with knowledge-related issues; they essentially include what we know, how we know, what we are (or are not) entitled to know, how certain we are in what we know, etc, relative to others. Recent studies have argued for the ways we orient to different knowledge positions in interactions (Heritage, 2009, 2012; 2013; Stivers et al., 2011; Heritage and Raymond, 2012). Heritage (2012) distinguishes between epistemic stance and epistemic status. Epistemic status reflects one's relative position with regard to access to knowledge in a given epistemic domain (Heritage, 2009, 2012; 2013; Heritage and Raymond, 2012). It also deals with one's rights, obligations, authorities and responsibilities regarding that knowledge. Epistemic statuses are put into operation in the push and pull of the interactions through epistemic stances that deal with the moment-by-moment interactional achievement of epistemic statuses in the design of turns at talk (Heritage, 2012, 2013; Mondada, 2011, 2013). Interactions are, therefore, the foci to display, contest and negotiate relative knowledge positions starting from absolute knowing (K+) to absolute not knowing (K-).

Heritage (2012) argues that "in general, speakers act so as to preserve, on the one hand, consistency between the epistemic stance they encode in a turn at talk and the epistemic status they occupy relative to the topic, and on the other hand, congruence between the expression of that status and the epistemic status of the recipient" (Heritage, p. 559). However, there are many ways that speakers dissemble epistemic status, and as research suggests, there is a delicate picture of negotiating epistemics in interactions (Raymond and Heritage, 2006; Stivers et al., 2011; Sidnell, 2012; Heritage, 2013; Mondada, 2013). Mondada (2013) demonstrates how differential epistemic stances are negotiated in turns, despite the pre-allocation of certain epistemic rights and obligations to one party and the lack thereof to the other based on the roles each party takes up in tour-guide-guided interactions. Her examples indicate the cases when epistemic status is not compatible with epistemic stances.

Thanks to the growing body of research on epistemics, we are informed that participants in conversation jointly work to display their own and recipients' knowledge positions, using a variety of linguistic and pragmatic indexicals. For example,

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