Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research

RESEARCH ARTICLE
Peer-reviewed | Open Access

Responding to Criticism as Realized in a Press Conference: The Case of Iranian Celebrities

Reza Samandar¹* and Yaser Hadidi²◆

¹,²*Department of English Language and Literature, University of Tabriz, Iran*

ARTICLE INFO

*Corresponding Author
Reza Samandar
E-mail: Rezasmn1@gmail.com

Co-Author(s):
Author 2: Yaser Hadidi
E-mail: hadidiy@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

A glimpse at the stock of pragmatics literature brings to light a serious lack of studies delving into the speech act of responding to criticism. Hence, with the view of broadening the scope of research, this study set out to probe into the strategies Iranian celebrities employ to respond to the criticisms leveled at them in a press conference. Using a qualitative method supplemented with quantitative analysis of the data, the present study selected Iran's largest annual film festival, Fajr International Film Festival, as the data collection source. 40 press conferences held within this festival were watched and the celebrities' responses were translated and transcribed. Drawing on a model proposed by El-Dakhs (2020), the responses were categorized into four broad categories of total acceptance, partial acceptance, total resistance, and digression. The result of the analyses revealed that the celebrities most frequently preferred total resistance strategies to unreservedly and straightforwardly wave away the criticisms they had received irrespective of the threat their responses may have posed to the face of the critics. The findings were interpreted in light of the celebrities' disinclination to adhere to Iran's conventional cultural norms regarding saving other people's face and the asymmetrical power relations that might have sanctioned the use of explicit and confrontational strategies.

Introduction

Responding to criticism, as the term amply indicates, occurs in reaction to a criticism, which is defined as "an illocutionary act whose illocutionary point is to give negative evaluation of the hearer's actions, choice of words, and products for which he or she may be held responsible" (Nguyen, 2005, p.7). With this definition in mind, one can safely claim that this speech act is prone to raise conflict in interpersonal relationships. Through criticizing, the speakers try to explicitly or implicitly convey their sense of dissatisfaction with the hearer's actions or behavior, exhorting them to take the necessary measures to improve their criticized behavior in the future.

In their seminal work on Politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) regarded the speech act of criticizing as face-threatening given that it poses a threat to the face wants of the interlocutor. To be more precise, the negative face of the addressee, the desire to be free from any impositions, is jeopardized. However, according to Cao (2005), criticizing can also be a potential threat to the positive face as it disregards the addressee's desire to be appreciated and approved. Therefore, as put forth by El-Dakhs (2020), responding to criticism should not be deemed an easy task because there are a number of factors at play, exerting their influence on the hearer's decision about how to react properly. Those factors include: the hearer's status with respect to the speaker, the history of the relationship, the severity and sincerity

---

◆Yaser Hadidi is currently a visiting professor at Khazar University, Azerbaijan.

of the content of the criticism, the audience present in the situation, etc.

As a form of institutional talk, press conferences are highly ritualized communicative situations providing journalists with access to public figures and the events surrounding them. Normally, there are several interviewers present, which quite often results in a fierce competition to ask questions. To keep things under control, there is usually a moderator managing the speaking turns as well as making the participants aware of the routines and procedural information. Choosing this specific genre for investigating the strategies celebrities use to respond to criticisms is consistent with Hiraga and Turner's (1996) view that the location of a speech act in a particular genre plays an integral role in determining its occurrence and interpretation. Moreover, according to Araujo (2012), when engaged in an interaction, the participants' actions are typified by a specific genre, which leads to the assumption that the realization of speech acts varies from one genre to another.

Drawing upon El-Dakhs (2020) as the source of inspiration, this study will attempt to identify the criticism-response strategies the Iranian celebrities employ in a press conference. It is hoped that the present study will be able to make a considerable contribution to the literature based on the following reasons. First and foremost, the speech act in question has received verily scarce attention in the literature. Thus, this study can, to some extent, help fill the gap in that regard. Second, the speech acts produced by Iranian celebrities have been rarely brought under scrutiny. Although celebrity is rapidly becoming a "performative practice", pragmatically grounded research on celebrity discourse is still in its infancy and there is much to explore (Zhang & Wu, 2018, p. 180). Third, this study examines naturally occurring speech produced by celebrities in a press conference, which, unlike other studies that use questionnaires or discourse completion tests, ensures the authenticity of the language. Hence, this study can broaden the scope of research and add to our understanding of the under-researched speech act of responding to criticism in the genre of press conferences.

Literature Review

In comparison to other speech acts such as apologizing, complimenting, refusing, etc., the speech act of criticizing has not been exhaustively explored in the literature. A glance at the literature and the existing studies on criticizing indicates that two modes of communication,

written and oral, have been targeted by researchers. With respect to writing, there are a number of studies that aimed to scrutinize the evaluative language of book reviews (Araujo, 2012; Hyland ,2004; Itakura & Tusi, 2011), teachers' and peer feedback on student's homework (Hyland & Hyland, 2001,2006; Lee, 2009) and also criticizing by means of electronic communication (Hosseinzade & Moqadam, 2019; Lu, 2018). Regarding oral communication, some studies investigated televised talent competitions (Chen & Rau, 2015; Tang ,2016) and teacher-student interaction (Cao,2005; El-Dakhs, et al., 2019; Riekkien ,2010). In Persian, there are a few studies delving into the speech act of criticizing (Farnia & Sattar, 2016; Hosseinizadeh & Moqadam, 2019; Don & Izadi, 2013). The natural and inevitable consequence of this scarce attention paid to criticizing is a serious lack of studies examining responding to criticism (Nguyen, 2005). The extremely limited number of studies centering on the speech act of responding to criticism are outlined below.

Hiraga and Turner (1996) pioneered the investigation of responding to criticism. Their study involved drawing a comparison between Japanese and British student-tutor interactions in academic settings. It was noted that cross-cultural discrepancies existing between the two contexts played a major role in the formulation of the responses. Responding to the criticisms voiced by their tutors, the British students took their own face wants into consideration while their Japanese counterparts expressed more concern for the positive face of their tutors. Furthermore, there seemed to be a mutual concern for the negative face between the British students and tutors. On the contrary, the Japanese students and tutors displayed no concern for each other's negative face wants. The findings being interpreted in light of cross-cultural differences, it was concluded that the responses produced by British students represented the egalitarian relationship that exists between teachers and students in British academic settings while those of the Japanese demonstrated a relationship based on authority and asymmetry in Japanese academic settings.

In an attempt to explore the speech act in question further, Tuan (2010) set out to study Americans' and Chinese's responses to criticisms. A variable whose effect the researcher wanted to examine in determining the responses was the gender of the speaker. However, the statistical analysis of the data did not show any significant influence exercised by the speaker's gender. Surprisingly, however, the addressee's gender seemed to be more influential. There was a strong likelihood that the participants would produce harsher and less

mitigated responses in reaction to female critics whereas the male addressees, who represent more societal power and dominance, received much more mitigated and indirect responses. In addition, five broad categories of responding to criticism strategies were identified: apology, counterclaim, contradiction, challenge, and accusation.

In recent years, the institutional contexts of M.A. and Ph.D. viva sessions have triggered researchers' interest in examining criticism-criticism response sequences. Paying attention to a viva session as the context of study sheds light on "how criticism is accomplished in a speech event in which it is not only a common discourse function, but also a sanctionable form of behavior" (Don & Izadi, 2013, p.230). By way of example, Don and Izadi (2013) and Izadi (2013,2014,2017), showed that vivas consist of pre-allocated as well as negotiated turns. Furthermore, it was realized that there was a sort of smoothness down toning the criticisms expressed by the examiners in the beginning, however, the candidates' following responses to the criticisms in an attempt to defend their theses had an impact on the quality with which the subsequent turns took place. As the argumentation between the candidates and the examiners intensified, negotiating the turns in a collaborative manner faded, giving its place to a fierce and adversarial competition to take turns. It was also observed that this argumentation had an influence on the relational connection and separation between the examiners and the candidates. Establishing and strengthening the connection was obtained through employing mitigating strategies such as hedging, downgrading, and uncertainty. On the other hand, separation stemmed from using aggravating strategies like repetition, boosting, and emphasis.

To push the frontiers further, Hiraga et al. (2003) shifted the focus to interlanguage pragmatics. The study was designed to probe the pragmatic difficulties encountered by Japanese students studying in Britain with British tutors. The difficulties were accounted for by the cross-cultural variations that exist in tutor-student interactions in Japan and Britain. Regarding the students as full members of the discourse community, the British tutors encoded their face-threatening speech acts in implicit ways, expecting that the students would give voice to their own doubts and worries as well. However, their expectations were not lived up to as the Japanese students, accustomed to an authority-based academic setting, did not do much except submissively and carefully following the instructions. The study went further to bring to light another factor that might have played a part in the pragmatic difficulties hampering the Japanese students. The values based on which the students' performance and progress were gauged varied significantly between the Japanese and British contexts. As an example, the criterion of being analytical was associated with independent evaluation in Britain but with meticulous execution of assignments in Japan.

In a similar vein, Nguyen (2005) studied the L2 pragmatic development as evidenced in Vietnamese EFL learners' criticisms and responses to criticism. A huge difference was observed between L1 and L2 speakers in carrying out the two speech acts. It was also revealed that proficiency had a negligible effect on L2 speakers' pragmatic development. Drawing on Hiraga and Turner (1996), Nguyen (2005) also created a model of criticism-response strategies, which included the broad categories of total acceptance, partial acceptance, and total resistance.

Taking the speech act of responding to criticism to a new context, El-Dakhs (2020) examined the realization of responding to criticism strategies within Egyptian televised interviews. Having transcribed and thus analyzed a total of 146 female and male celebrities' responses to criticism, the study attempted to develop an adapted model of responding to criticism strategies suiting the context of media interviews. As the secondary aim of the study, the author intended to examine the role of gender in the celebrities' responses. The results revealed that the celebrities deployed explicit strategies to respond to the criticisms directed at them. The strategies included: disagreement, providing counter-evidence, and justifying the criticized action while steering clear of confrontation. Moreover, the result of the analyses failed to reveal any significant differences in the celebrities' responses across gender. As for the occurrence of considerably high percentage of explicit and total resistance strategies (92%), it was argued that the findings were at odds with the previously conceived notions about Arab culture favoring implicit messages as well as its being categorized as a collectivistic culture. Contrary to these notions, when placed in televised interviews, the Egyptian celebrities preferred to preserve their own positive public image through employing explicit strategies.

Inspired by the work of El-Dakhs (2020), the present study aims to examine the speech act of responding to criticism in the context of press conferences, a new and under-researched context for studying the speech act in question, especially when it comes to the Iranian context. As far as we managed to check, there hasn't

been much focused research looking into how Iranian celebrities do this, which provides grounds and impetus for undertaking the current research. In line with El-Dakhs, it is the researcher's firm belief that a genre or an institutional context of a specific kind plays a major and vital role in typifying the participants' actions and behavior. Hence, it is recommended that speech acts be examined within specific genres. In light of this, the present study hopes to provide answers to the following questions:

(1): What are the criticism-response strategies Iranian celebrities employ in press conferences?

(2): What are the frequencies with which the strategies occur?

Methodology

Context of the study

As mentioned previously, the present study will, using a qualitative method supplemented with quantitative analysis of the data, examine responding to criticism strategies in the press conferences held within the largest annual film festival in Iran, Fajr International Film Festival, from 2018 to 2022. This Festival event was selected as the context of the study due to the fact that, by all folk and professional appraisals, it represents the most authentic and conventionally recognized platform for this genre and discourse community and, therefore, would have provided the most representative and reliable picture of discourse and pragmatic reality as intended in the current study. 40 press conferences held within this festival were watched on Aparat, the Iranain video-sharing service, and the celebrities' responses to criticisms were transcribed. The festival has been held every February and April in the capital city, Tehran, since 1982. Every year a number of feature films are submitted to the festival, competing for awards for several categories as outlined in the festivals' rules and regulations. After each film is displayed to the audience that mainly consists of the cast and crew and a litany of journalists from various news agencies, a press conference is held in which the director and their cast and crew respond to the journalists' questions, compliments, and criticisms with respect to the film that has been watched. As is the norm with press conferences, there is a moderator who initially introduces the film and its director. Afterward, he invites the director and their entourage to come onto the stage and have seats across from the journalists. Having exchanged pleasantries, the moderator asks the journalists to raise their questions

and comments. It must be noted that in order to maintain discipline and order, the journalists have been assigned turns prior to the commencement of the conference. In some of the conferences, the questions and comments were written on a piece of paper and then given to the moderator to be read to the celebrities. In some other, however, the journalists were granted a microphone so that they could raise their questions and criticisms orally. It is noteworthy to mention that the conferences were always broadcast online, providing people with the opportunity to follow them on social networking sites and other relevant websites.

Data collection

Aiming to analyze the speech act of responding to criticism in a naturally occurring context, the present study drew upon press conferences to fulfill that aim. To this end, 40 press conferences held within the Iranian Fajr International Film Festival were watched on Aparat, an Iranian video-sharing service. The length of each conference ranged from 40 to 60 minutes depending on the number of questions and criticisms expressed by the journalists. While watching each conference, the criticisms expressed by the journalists and the responses given by the celebrities were properly translated into English and then transcribed. A total of 118 responses to the criticisms were observed in 40 conferences, which accounts for approximately 3 instances of criticism-criticism response sequences per a conference. It is crucial to mention that the recorded analysis underwent textual and content analysis.

Data coding

The celebrities' responses were subsequently coded according to a model proposed by El-Dakhs (2020), which was an adaptation of Nguyen's (2005) model of criticism-response strategies. The model consists of four broad categories: total acceptance, partial acceptance, total resistance, and digression. It is noteworthy to mention that El-Dakhs' (2020) proposed model was used since it is considerably convenient to use. Furthermore, it fits the context of criticism-response strategies that occur in a press conference. No modifications were needed to be applied to this model as the present study, similar to El-Dakhs (2020), examined natural and authentic language. While coding the responses, it was realized that in quite few cases more than one strategy was employed by the celebrities to shape a response to the criticism they had received. This being the case, the total of 118

responses yielded 154 criticism response strategies. The following section will shed light on these strategies.

Results

This section will proceed according to the research questions guiding the current study. As to the first question, what are the criticism-response strategies Iranian celebrities employ in press conferences, the responses were categorized into four broad categories. The first category, total acceptance, included 3 strategies: agreement, explanation, and offer to repair. When using agreement, the participants indicated their approval of the criticism. Explanation allowed the celebrities to justify their criticized action. Offer to repair entailed a promise on the part of the celebrities to alter their course of action in the future. The following examples are drawn from the data to help us have a clearer understanding of the strategies.

Example (1): agreement

Journalist: I think the film is too long and therefore a little bit boring.

Celebrity: Yes, you are right. We need to leave out some parts of it.

Example (2): explanation

Journalist: The ending of your film was too sudden and unpleasant.

Celebrity: If we had a clear and gradual ending, the film would lose its attraction and that would easily be considered a weak point of our film.

Example (3): offer to repair

Journalist: The movies that you direct never have a clear ending. You seem to enjoy confusing your audience!

Celebrity: I will do my best to see to it in my future works.

The second broad category, partial acceptance, was, in line with El-Dakhs (2020), realized through merely one strategy: agreement to only one part of the criticism. The following example illuminates the point.

Example (4): agreement to only one part of criticism

Journalist: The setting of the film was too flashy and unrealistic.

Celebrity: Only in some parts. We did our best to paint a more realistic picture throughout the rest of the film.

With regard to the third category, total resistance, 10 strategies were observed. The strategy of disagreement involved rejecting the criticism. Using the strategy of correction, the speaker was able to correct the erroneous information provided by the critic. Provision of counter-evidence entailed that the speaker provide evidence aimed at contradicting the critic's remarks. As another way of waving the criticism away, the strategy of indicating a standard involved the speaker in stating a principle, often accomplished through a common saying such as mentioning a proverb. The other strategies included criticizing the critic openly, justifying the critic's comments, justifying the speaker's actions, expressing irony to reject the criticism, expressing surprise at hearing the criticism, and seeking evidence. In the following, each strategy is illustrated using an example drawn from the data.

Example (5): disagreement

Journalist: I believe that the film was really vacuous and dull. It does not seem to be able to attract a large number of audiences in the future. Do you agree?

Celebrity: No, I do not. It is my firm conviction that it is exciting and has the potential to gain popularity.

Example (6): correction

Journalist: It appears that you have blatantly disregarded the Iranian life style in your film.

Celebrity: On the contrary, it was very Iranian. We tried to create the characters and their lives in a way that is tangible for our people.

Example (7): provision of counter-evidence

Journalist: Why do your films do not have a clear ending? They almost always leave the audience in the dark.

Celebrity: I think they do have a clear ending. For example, in today's film, the protagonist had the child released from the hospital and he adopted the child as his son.

Example (8): indicating a standard

Journalist: Why didn't you put more time and energy on the script? There was a notable lack of dialogues and communication between the actors.

Celebrity: If you watch action films made in different countries around the world, you will see that it is perfectly normal. Action films do not lay much emphasis on dialogues.

Example (9): criticizing the critic

Journalist: The film was based on a true story, but you seem to have distorted the real story.

Celebrity: You are ignorant of what has really happened. Watch it more carefully.

Example (10): justifying the critic's comment

Journalist: Your film does not deserve to be present in this festival. Even the TV channels that have few audiences

Figure 1. Celebrities' criticism-response strategies in press conferences
Source: El-Dakhs(2020)

would not deign to show this film. How did you manage to submit it to this grand festival?

Celebrity: It seems your soul motive is to belittle my work and my efforts. Therefore, I have no response for you.

Through this strategy the celebrity tries to reveal the true reason why the critic has attacked them.

Example (11): justifying the speaker's actions

Journalist: Your role in this film did not have anything new. It was all too cliched.

Celebrity: I'm an actor, and I play any roles offered to me. It doesn't matter If I have played a similar role before. If I happen to like the director and the script, I accept the role.

Example (12): expressing irony

Journalist: Did you have any reason for making this film other than wasting the audiences' time?!

Celebrity: No. That was exactly my main goal!

Example (13): expressing surprise

Journalist: The role of Parvaneh was really inferior to other characters. It seems not a good deal of thought has gone into creating this character.

Celebrity: Parvaneh being inferior to other characters? I really can't understand how you arrived to that conclusion!

Example (14): seeking evidence

Journalist: The quality of your film is too low to have required such a great amount of budget. It is definitely a low-budget work.

Celebrity: How do you know it is low-budget? Do you have any expertise in film-making industry?

In addition to the three broad categories outlined above, there was a fourth broad category of digression that the celebrities employed in few cases. This strategy allowed the speakers to digress from the criticism and evade
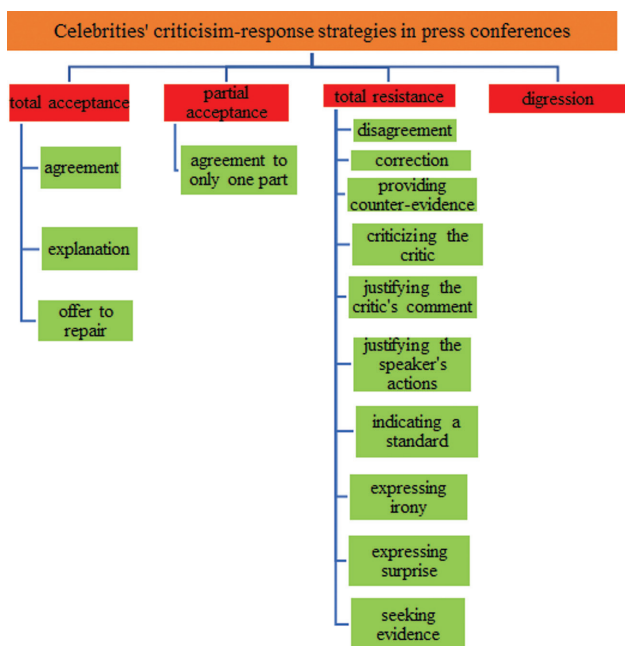
the response to it. The following example illustrates the point.

Example (15): digression

Journalist: The final sequence was really meaningless and it left us totally baffled.

Celebrity: I really appreciate your attention and your efforts to help us hold this conference.

Figure 1 offers a graphic representation of the criticism-response strategies employed by the Iranian celebrities in press conferences.

As to the second research question, what are the frequencies with which the strategies occur, the number of employed strategies were respectively counted and the percentages were subsequently calculated. Table 1 represents each strategy with its frequency of occurrence. Akin to El-Dakhs (2020), the strategies belonging to the broad category of total resistance

Table 1. Frequency of criticism-response strategies

Strategy	Number	Frequency
Total acceptance	**25**	**16.02 %**
agreement	3	1.92 %
explanation	20	12.82 %
offer to repair	2	1.28 %
Partial acceptance	**2**	**1.28 %**
agreement to only one part	2	1.28 %
Total resistance	**114**	**73.07 %**
disagreement	41	26.28 %
correction	16	10.25 %
indicating a standard	6	3.84 %
providing counter-evidence	9	5.76 %
criticizing the critic	9	5.76 %
justifying the critic's comment	1	0.64 %
justifying the speaker's actions	21	13.46 %
expressing irony	5	3.2 %
expressing surprise	3	1.92 %
seeking evidence	3	1.92 %
Digression	**15**	**9.61 %**
Total	**156**	**100 %**

Source: *El-Dakhs(2020)*

enjoyed the highest frequency in this study (73.07%). Total acceptance strategies accounted for 16.02 % of the whole data. The least frequently used broad category was partial acceptance with 1.28 %. The fourth broad category, digression, accounted for 9.61 % of the data. It is worth to mention that the strategy of 'disagreement', which belongs to the broad category of total resistance, was the most frequently employed strategy in the present study (26.28 %), followed by 'justifying the speaker's actions' with 13.46 % of all the strategies.

Discussion

The current study was designed to provide answers to two questions regarding the criticism-response strategies employed by Iranian celebrities in the context of press conferences. The first question concerned the identification of the strategies as evidenced in naturalistic data gathered from the press conferences held within Iran's largest annual film festival. Drawing upon the model proposed by El-Dakhs (2020) for criticism-response strategies, the celebrities' responses were categorized into four broad categories of total acceptance, partial acceptance, total resistance, and digression, with each category including one or more strategies. It is crucial to mention that El-Dakh's (2020) proposed model was selected given its versatility and strength in explaining the data here. Moreover, the present study was in line with El-Dakhs (2020) in terms of analyzing naturally occurring data. Typically, some modifications are applied when adopting a model to suit the context of the study. However, in the present study, no modifications were needed to apply to El-Dakhs' model as the genre of both studies was quite similar and they both involved celebrities responding to criticisms in naturally occurring speech situations.

The second question aimed to examine the frequency with which the observed strategies were put to use by the celebrities. It was found that the broad category of total resistance and its respective strategies dominated the scene with 73.07 % of occurrence. The strategy of 'disagreement' prevailed over all the other strategies (26.28 %). Through this often-occurring strategy, the celebrities chose to openly and straightly wave aside the criticism leveled at them. This unmistakable preference for explicitly and unreservedly rejecting a criticism is not consistent with the notion of Persian being categorized as a high-context culture (Hosseinizade & Moqadam, 2019). In an attempt to accentuate the role of contexts in shaping the nature of communication and behavior

of the members of a particular community, Hall (1976) categorized cultures into high-context and low-context. With respect to the former, a great portion of the information lies in the physical context or is internalized in the person while the coded, explicit and transmitted part of the message conveys very little information. On the contrary, in the latter type of context, a considerable amount of information is carried in a direct and explicit way.

In addition, according to Hofstede (2011), cultures can also be compared on an individualistic-collectivistic continuum. As the term indicates, in individualistic cultures individuals and their desires and interests take precedence over those of a group. Conversely, in collectivistic cultures the interests of a group are given topmost priority. Furthermore, individualists prefer communicating in a direct and plain style while collectivists display a proclivity for being indirect. In line with many Eastern cultures, Persian is known to be a collectivistic culture with its people regarding each other as members of a community and relying on each other for support (Koutalki,2002; Eslami-Rasekh, et.al,2004). Nevertheless, the high frequency of 'disagreement' in the present study indicates the celebrities' disinclination to adhere to this conventional categorization.

The comparatively high frequency of total resistance strategies can be explicated through the following underlying reasons. First, it appears that the celebrities' responses were most likely driven by their need to maintain and enhance their positive public image. Followed and admired by thousands or even millions of fans, the celebrities are always striving to present a flawless sheen of themselves in all aspects of their lives, painstakingly superimposed and kept tacked on top at all times. Thus, when encountering a criticism before large audiences, they move to openly refute it so that this sheen of an image remains untarnished and they are rendered capable of achieving more "social and economic capital" (Gou & Ren, 2020, p.2). This does not come in line with Leary and Kowalski's (1990) argument that "the more public one's behavior, the more likely one is to be concerned with how it appears to others" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 38). Through another channel of comparison, however, this finding is congruent with El-Dakhs (2020) in which Egyptian celebrities most frequently opted for total resistance strategies to respond to criticisms (92%). However, in that study, the most confrontational strategy of 'disagreement' was used less frequently in comparison to less confrontational strategies such as 'providing counter-evidence' or 'justifying the speaker's actions'.

The second factor contributing to the high frequency of total resistance strategies is the asymmetrical power relationships existing between the celebrities and the journalists present in the conferences. Having a higher status, thus more power, relative to their addresses, the celebrities seemed to be willing to attack the hearer's face by explicitly and unreservedly rejecting their criticism without compunction. In fact, according to Austin (1987), the existence of power relations in all pragmatic exchange between individuals can never be written off or downplayed. It is the degree of power, Austin argues, not its presence or absence, that ought to be taken into account; its ubiquitous existence is undeniable. There are a number of studies that have examined the influence of power on native Persian speakers' choice of strategies through interactions. For instance, this study aligns with Farnia and Sattar's (2015) study in which it was found that Persian participants favored direct criticism strategies when placed in a position of higher status relative to the interlocutor. Other studies that focused on highlighting the same point include: Slamani Nodoushan (2008) Behnam and Niroomand (2011); Ghafar Samar, et al, (2013); Tamimi Sa'ad and Mohammadi (2014); Hadidi and Samandar (2022).

Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore Iranian celebrities' strategies in responding to public criticism in an under-researched genre of press conferences. To this end, Iran's largest annual film festival, Fajr International Film Festival, was selected as the data collection source. Drawing on El-Dakhs's (2020) model, the celebrities' responses were categorized into four broad categories: total acceptance, partial acceptance, total resistance, and digression. In terms of frequency of occurrence, it turned out that total resistance strategies were employed most frequently (73.07 %), a significant and important picture that speaks a lot about how the social structure impacts pragmatic real-life exchange all the time, moment to moment.

The hope is that the current study will go some way towards contributing to the literature on a few levels. First, the potentially culture and social structure-sensitive speech act of responding to criticism has not received adequate attention so far in the literature and is still in its infancy. This study was an attempt in the direction of partially broadening the scope of research on this speech act. Second, there is a marked dearth of research on the speech acts produced by Iranian celebrities, and a commensurate lack of enough insight into social and pragmatic structures of use in Persian, in different contexts and by different

speech communities and participants. Finally, the present study examined naturally occurring speech in press conferences in order to extract the criticism-response strategies, which, unlike some other studies that draw upon questionnaires or discourse completion tests, would hopefully have been a better guarantee of linguistic, discursive and pragmatic authenticity.

The study, however, was not without its limitations. Firstly, caution must be exercised when taking the results into consideration. Focusing on only 40 press conferences due to practicality issues means that the generalizability of the results must be taken with a pinch of salt, as is the case with any similar study in actual rough-and-tumble of language use. Second, given its scope, the study did not attempt to balance or consider the gender issue, for the primary focus was only identifying the strategies. As a result, future studies could take the gender variable into account and see if it exerts any influence on shaping the celebrities' responses to criticism. As another line of inquiry, and as implicitly suggested by the tenor of this work, follow-up research could also examine the speech act of responding to criticism in a cross-cultural light. By way of example, the similarities and differences between Iranian and American celebrities' responses would yield interesting results

Acknowledgements

Funding

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article. This article is the sole work of the author and has not been presented or published elsewhere.

References

Arajou, A. D. (2012). *Academic genres in university contexts: An investigation of students' book reviews writing as classroom assignments.* New York: Parlor Press.

Austin, J. M. P. (1987). *The dark side of politeness: A pragmatic analysis of non-cooperative communication.* University of Canterbury: New Zealand

Behnam, B., & Niroomand, M. (2011). An investigation of Iranian EFL learners' use of politeness Strategies and power relations in disagreement across different proficiency levels. *Canadian Center of Science and Education, 4(*4).

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Cao, J. (2005). *A pragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticizing in primary and junior high school Chinese lecturer-student talk Master's thesis*. Northeast Normal University, China.

Chen, Y.& Rau, V. (2015). Compliments and criticisms given by judges on a singing competition series in Taiwan. *Studies in English Language Literature, 35*,1-19.

Don, Z. M., & Izadi, A. (2013). Interactionally achieving face in criticism-criticism response exchanges. *Language and Communication,33*, 221-231.

El-Dakhs, Dina A. S., Ambreen, F., Zaheer, M., & Gusarova, Y. (2019). A pragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticizing in university teacher-student talk: The case of English as Lingua Franca. *Pragmatics, 29*(4), 493-520.

El-Dakhs, Dina A. S. (2020). How do celebrities respond to criticism in media interviews? The case of an Egyptian TV show. *Cogent Arts & Humanities, 7*(1).

Eslami-Rasekh, Z., Eslami-Raseskh, A.& Fattahi, A. (2004). The effect of explicit metapragmatic instruction on speech act awareness of advanced EFL learners. *Teaching English as a Second Language Electronic Journal (TESL-EJ), 8*(2),1-12.

Farnia, M., & Sattar, H. Q. A. (2016). A sociopragmatic analysis of the speech act of criticism by *Persian native speakers. International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2*(3), 305-327.

Ghafar Samar, R., Abaszadeh, A., & Pourmohammdi, F. (2013). Investigating disagreements through context-specific approach: A case of Iranian L2 speakers. *Applied Research on English Language, 3*(1).

Gou, Y., Ren, W. (2020). Managing image: The self-praise of celebrities on social media. *Discourse, Context, and Media,38,* 622-659.

Hadidi, Y. & Samandar, R. (2022). *An investigation of the role of power and gender on Iranian EFL learners' use of politeness strategies in disagreement* [Paper presentation]. First Conference on Psychology, Social Sciences, Educational Sciences, and Humanities. https://civilica.com/doc/1406712

Hall, E.T. (1976). *Beyond Culture*. New York: Anchor Brooks / Doubleday

Hiraga, M. K.,&Turner, J. M. (1996). Differing perceptions of face in British and Japanese Academic settings. *Language Sciences, 18*(3-4), 605-627.

Hiraga, M. K., Fujii, Y., & Turner, J.M. (2003). L2 pragmatics in academic discourse: A case study of tutorials in Britain. *International Communication Studies, 12*(3), 19-36.

Hofstede, G.H. (2001). *Culture's consequence: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hosseinizadeh, S.H., & Moqadam, H.R. (2019). Criticism strategies and their underlying cultural Norms in online interactions: A study of native speakers of Persian and English. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 12,*267-287.

Hyland, K. (2004). *Disciplinary discourse: Social interactions in academic writing*. London, UK: Longman.

Hyland, F., & Hyland, K. (2001). Sugaring the pill: Praise and criticism in written feedback. *Journal of Second Language Writing,10*, 185-212.

Itakuri, A., & Tusi, A. B. M. (2011). Evaluation in academic discourse: Managing criticism in Japanese and English book reviews. *Journal of Pragmatics, 43,*1366-1379.

Izadi, A. (2013). Politeness in spoken review genre: Viva voce context. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 21*(4),1327-1346.

Izadi, A. (2014). Mixed messages in criticisms in Iranian PhD dissertation defenses. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice, 11*(3),270-291.

Izadi, A. (2017). Turn-taking, preference, and face in criticism responses. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistics, 8*(1), 72-88.

Koutlaki, S. A. (2002). Offers and expressions of thanks as face enhancing acts: Tæ'arof in Persian. *Journal of Pragmatics,34*(12), 1733-1756

Lee, N.S. (2009). Written peer feedback by EFL students: Praise, criticism, and suggestion. *Komaba Journal of English Education, 1*, 129-139.

Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R.M. (1990). Impression Management: A Literature Review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin,107*(1), 34-47.

Nguyen, T. T. M. (2005). *Criticism and responding to criticism in a foreign language: A study of Vietnamese learners of English language* (Doctoral thesis). University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Salmani-Nodoushan, M.A. (2008). Persian requests: Redress of face through indirectness. *International Journal of Language Studies, 2(*3), 257-280.

Tamim Sa'ad, S.H., & Mohmmadi, M. (2014). A cross-sectional study of Iranian EFL learners' polite and impolite apologies. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 10 (1)*, 119-136.

Tang, C. (2016). Managing criticism in US-based and Taiwanese-based reality talent contests: A cross-linguistic comparison. *Pragmatics, 26*(1).

Tuan, J.H. (2010). Gender differences in responses to criticisms: A cross-cultural study of American and Chinese. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 6*(2), 47-63.

Zhang, M., & Wu, M.M. (2018). A cross-cultural analysis of celebrity practice in microblogging. *East Asian Pragmatics, 3*(2), 179-200.

Biographical Statement of Author(s)

Reza Samandar was born in 1998 in Tabriz, Iran. He received his B.A. in English language and Literature from the University of Tabriz, Iran in 2020.

He is currently an MA student of Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) at the University of Tabriz, Iran. His research interests include pragmatics and politeness.

He has recently published articles in the area of speech acts, particularly the speech acts of disagreement and self-praise.

Mr. Reza Samandar
Department of English Language and Literature
University of Tabriz
Iran
E-mail: rezasmn1@gmial.com

Yaser Hadidi is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran. He has presented many graduate and postgraduate course lectures in Applied Linguistics sub-disciplines including: Discourse Analysis, Linguistics and Cognitive Linguistics, English for Specific Purposes, Syllabus and Curriculum Design, Literary Linguistics and Stylistics, and Translation Studies.

His PhD in Applied Linguistics concerned Grammatical Metaphor as evidenced in Prose Fiction and scientific texts.

He is currently Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics and English at the University of Tabriz, Iran, and a visiting professor to Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan.

Dr. Yaser Hadidi
Assistant Professor
Department of English Language and Literature
University of Tabriz
and
Visiting Professor
Khazar University, Baku, Azerbaijan
Iran
E-mail: hadidy@hotmail.com