

ARTICLE

Academic Group Discussions as a Ritual Frame: An Interactional Approach

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ABSTRACT

Academic group discussions were studied as a ritual frame by adopting the interactional approach in this research. The first aim was to examine how students reached alignment with university lecturers via speech acts (SAs) in group discussions based on the integrative SA model in the interactional approach. The second aim was to examine how the students avoided conflicts with university lecturers in the process of reaching alignment. A total of 61 Thai university students and two American university lecturers were involved in this research. The data consisted of naturally occurring group discussions: English was used as a lingua franca (ELF). Qualitative and quantitative methods were used for the analyses in this research. Following the interactional approach, a bottom-up analysis was employed to identify the SAs. The results revealed seven Exchange patterns that consisted of different Moves realized via the SAs in the academic group discussions, including the frequent uses of the SAs Request, Opine, Tell, and Resolve. The Exchange patterns indicated that academic group discussions constituted a ritual frame in which the seemingly erratic utterances had regular patterns. Furthermore, the students did not engage in conflicts with the lecturers due to the SAs Request, Resolve, and Opine including a Grounder. This finding indicated that the disagreements in the academic group discussions were regarded as having positive discourse functions for resolving academic problems.

Keywords: Ritual frame; Interactional Approach; Group discussion; Speech act; Disagreement; Institutional discourse

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1. Introduction

Recent institutional discourse in the academic field, such as classroom talk and group discussions at universities (Shimamoto, 2022; Toluei and Tahririan, 2023), has mainly been studied via conversation analysis (CA) to examine speech acts¹ (SAs; Searle, 1976) and politeness (Eslami et al., 2023; Z. Pan, 2024). These CA analyses revealed that different Searlean SAs were produced via different types of “turn-at-talk” (Edmondson et al., 2023, p. 26). One of the main focuses in the study of institutional discourse has been on examining disagreements between students and university lecturers (Shimamoto, 2022; Y. Pan, 2022). Some studies have developed disagreement as a type of Searlean SAs that have illocutionary force implied by the utterances (Shahrokhi and Khodadadi, 2023), while others have contended that disagreement is “a complex discourse function” (Cuenca, 2023, p. 1) that is realized via different linguistic cues, such as epistemic stance markers. These inconsistent viewpoints are due to the varied perspectives on disagreement in the different analytical frameworks. Nevertheless, there is consensus that the illocutionary force of an utterance and the use of CA should be based on the discourses and interactions in the examination of Searlean SAs (House and Kádár, 2023a, 2023b).

This research attempted to examine the academic group discussions at universities from a new perspective by adopting the interactional approach (Edmondson et al., 2023; House et al., 2021; House and Kádár, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b). It aimed to identify whether the academic group discussions can be regarded as a ritual frame that can be realized via SAs based on the taxonomy of SAs in the interactional approach (Kádár and House, 2020a, 2020b). In addition, as disagreements naturally occur in any type of group discussion (Shimamoto 2022), the students’ avoidance of conflict with the lecturers was examined in this research. The two research questions (RQs) are presented below:

RQ1. How do the students and the university lecturers use SAs to reach alignment in academic group discussions?

RQ2. How do the students avoid conflicts with university lecturers in the process of reaching alignment?

2. Literature review

2.1 Academic group discussions

Although institutional discourse in the academic field has been studied for decades from different perspectives, such as politeness, the naturally occurring language have not received as much focus since the discourse completion tasks (DCTs) have played a major role in studies of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) or as a lingua franca (ELF; Eslami et al., 2023; Z. Pan, 2023). Despite the convenience of DCTs and their efficiency for collecting data, there is doubt regarding whether the responses to the DCTs truly represent the naturally occurring language that EFL learners use in reality (Z. Pan, 2023). As the investigation of SAs in the interactional approach requires a bottom-up analysis in the field of corpus linguistics (House and Kádár, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b), naturally occurring language in academic group discussions must be highlighted in studies of institutional discourse. In this research, the academic group discussions refer to the group discussions between several students and a university lecturer in which both parties attempt to solve different problems about an assignment required by the course syllabus.

Disagreements occur in different types of oral communication, including institutional discourse (Boux et al., 2023; Y. Pan, 2022; Shimamoto, 2022). Disagreements are generally understood as “a complex discourse function by which the speaker expresses an opposing view” (Cuenca, 2023, p. 1). Disagreements can be categorized as “weak disagreement[s] and strong disagreement[s]” (Zhu and Wang, 2022, p. 3) by examining various linguistic cues. The interactants can express the level of disagreements via “direct and indirect speech acts performed by the same critical linguistic forms” (Boux et al., 2023, p. 40). Disagreements do not necessarily result in conflicts. Although the concepts of disagreement and conflict have not been differentiated clearly in the previous research, conflict may be understood as the escalation of a disagreement in which threats, attacks, curses, accusations, and impoliteness can be observed (Cuenca, 2023; Toluei and Tahririan, 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Zhu and Wang, 2022). By contrast, disagreements are characterized by rationality and the lack of verbal attacks between the interactants (Pietroiuști,

¹To avoid the confusion, the SAs classified by Searle (1976) will be illustrated as the Searlean SAs in this research. The individual term SAs used in this research refers to the SAs established by House and Kádár (2021b).

2022; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020). Furthermore, disagreements are regarded as positive interactive activities in some cultures; as noted, “disagreeing with each other actually helped strengthen their relationship” (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020, p. 237).

Since the social distance and the power relations between students and lecturers are not equal, how the students manipulate the discourses to de-escalate the level of disagreement is worth examining (Akoto, 2023). Although conflicts may occur in group discussions, the students do not necessarily escalate disagreements to conflicts because the lecturer is an authority figure who determines their classroom and academic assessments (Y. Pan, 2022). Moreover, group discussions between students and lecturers aim to solve the students’ academic problems that are directly or indirectly linked to the results of the academic work that the lecturers assigned (Y. Pan, 2022; Shimamoto, 2022). Hence, previous research has found that students tended to use indirect Searlean SAs to indicate politeness or respect as epistemic stances when disagreeing with their lecturers (Boux et al., 2023; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020). According to these findings, academic group discussions have an intrinsic presupposition that the students need to be aligned with the lecturers to solve academic problems and to complete their assignments to pass the courses. In this regard, the students must be aware of the discourses that are occurring in group discussions when disagreements arise. Thus, the assumption that is proposed here is that the students may use recurrent discourse patterns in academic group discussions with their lecturers to avoid escalating disagreements to conflicts and eventually reaching alignment, which is where the ritual frame plays a role.

2.2 Ritual frame and interactional approach

Both the concepts of ritual and frame have been discussed in the sociolinguistic field. Ritual refers to “a communally oriented form of behaviour” (Kádár and House, 2020a, p. 143), while frame consists of “principles of organizations which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). Kádár and House (2020a, p. 143) proposed that a ritual frame refers to “a cluster of standard situations in which rights and obligations prevail.” Thus, a ritual frame has characteristics of both rituals and frames. A ritual frame involves a large group

of interactants, thus indicating that it is communally oriented. Each interactant is governed by overt rights and obligations based on the common regulations of the ritual frame in a given situation, such as a parliamentary conference (Cuenca, 2023), bargaining in the case of Chinese markets (House et al., 2021). Institutional discourse has been regarded as a ritual frame because it “allows limited choices of language resources and heightened use of procedures” (Y. Pan, 2022, p. 136). This viewpoint leads to conventionalization that intrinsically governs the interactions in any type of ritual frame (Kádár and House, 2020a, 2020b). Unlike the mundane conversations in daily life in which utterances are erratic, the interactions in a ritual frame must be governed by regulations, as pointed out above; thus, conventionalization is highly correlated with ritual frames. Previous research on classroom interactions has revealed that students naturally used indirect Searlean SAs and politeness linguistic cues for solving problems, responding the lecturer’s questions, and attempting to decrease the level of imposition on lecturers (Akoto, 2023; Shahrokhi and Khodadadi, 2023). In addition, Y. Pan (2022) used CA to investigate academic group discussions that were mainly framed at the turn-at-talk level. In line with the views of House and Kádár (2021b, 2023a, 2023b), despite the major findings regarding the linguistic units at the turn-taking level, utterances at the discursal level have generally been ignored in the frame concept; specifically, whether the ritual frame is reflected in the discourses and interactions. Hence, the interactional approach was developed to compensate for this gap in the existing research.

The interactional approach uses an integrative model that “brings together interactional structures, speech acts and ritual” (House et al., 2021, p. 1). This indicates that the model is primarily available for interactions in the ritual frame and combines SAs (House and Kádár, 2021b) and interaction levels. This integrative model, which is based on the earlier research by Edmondson (1981) and Edmondson and House (1981), consists of four units. The largest unit is Encounter, which determines the type of the ritual frame, such as bargaining in a market (House et al., 2021). In this research, the Encounter is the academic group discussions. Encounters consist of different Phases in which the Opening, the Core, and the Closing are managed sequentially. It is assumed that, in an academic group discussion, the students solve many problems with a lecturer before completing the

discussion. A final alignment regarding each problem should be reached before the students and the lecturer can proceed to the discussion of a different problem. Thus, a Phase in an academic group discussion refers to a series of discussions for solving a problem until an alignment between the students and the lecturer is reached; any interactant can open the Phase (Opening), discuss the problem (Core), and complete the Phase (Closing). Each Phase is characterized by different Exchange patterns in which the interactants respond consecutively to the previous utterance (Edmondson and House, 1981; Edmondson et al., 2023). Each utterance in an Exchange is a Move. Each Move is identified via the taxonomy of the SAs (Edmondson and House, 1981; Edmondson et al., 2023; House and Kádár, 2021a, 2021b), as illustrated in **Figure 1**.

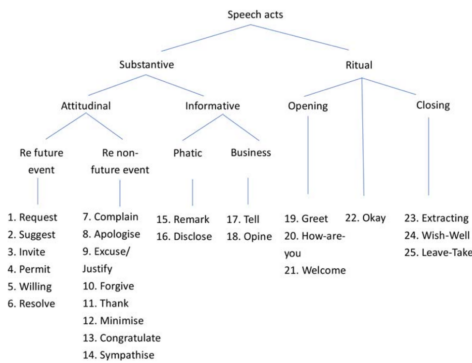


Figure 1. Taxonomy of SAs (House and Kádár, 2021b, p. 4).

The SAs in **Figure 1** represent the formal realization of the SA of each utterance in the conventionalized interactions in the ritual frame (Almusallam, 2023; House and Kádár, 2023a, 2023b; Xia et al., 2023). For example, a formal realization of a Request using a wh-interrogative may be used to complain in a given context (Edmondson et al., 2023; House et al., 2021). Therefore, disagreements are regarded as the discourse functions in this research (Cuenca, 2023), which are realized via SAs in academic group discussions. It is assumed that students’ recurrent SAs can be found in the academic group discussions, while disagreements will occur in each Exchange if the academic group discussion between the students and the lecturers is a type of ritual frame.

In any given situation, the first Move, such as a Request, is labeled an Initiate. If the Request is accepted, the Move in acceptance of the Request is labeled Satisfy. If the Request is refused and the requester accepts this refusal, this Move involving the refusal of the Request is labeled Contra, but

it is still Satisfy because the Exchange has been completed. **Figure 2** demonstrates these two simple Exchange patterns. If the Request involves a disagreement that must be followed by further discussions, this Move is labeled a Counter that does not meet the conditions for Satisfy. Thus, more Moves will follow until a state of Satisfy is eventually achieved.

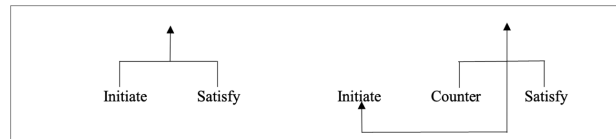


Figure 2. Simple Exchange patterns adapted from Edmondson et al. (2023).

Following the integrative model of the SAs and the interactional approach, the Moves realized via the SAs in academic group discussions can be identified through bottom-up analyses in the field of corpus linguistics. The disagreements in each Exchange can be realized via the Moves. If recurrent Exchange patterns occur in Phases, this will indicate that the academic group discussions between the students and the lecturers follow a ritual frame and will demonstrate the students’ use of conventionalization via SAs (Xia et al., 2023). Hence, using the integrative model of the SAs and the interactional approach, academic group discussions between students and lecturers at universities can be framed based on the perspective of the students and the lecturers’ use of SAs in this research.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and data collection

A total of 63 participants were involved in this research, including 61 Thai student participants and two university lecturer participants. The Thai student participants were sophomores who were studying two different majors that were not language majors in two international programs at two public universities in Bangkok, Thailand. All the Thai student participants attended different English courses in each semester, as required by their programs’ curricula. The selected Thai student participants had been in a group in an English course with several other participants who were involved in this study prior to the data collection. In addition, as two English lecturers with American nationality were involved in this study, ELF was used in each group discus-

sion. Both the lecturers taught one of the English courses to the participants who were involved in this research during the data collection period. The English levels of the participants were at the intermediate level based on their valid international English examination scores and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2020). There were 45 males (74%) and 16 females (26%), but sex was not considered as a variable in this study. Each student participant's first language (L1) was the Thai language. They had studied EFL at schools in their home countries for thirteen to fourteen years prior to the data collection.

Each participant consented to this research. The researcher finally selected the eligibility of the potential participants based on the research requirements, such as ELF must be used in the group discussions between the EFL learners and the lecturers, and the English lecturers must not speak the L1 of any of the participants involved in the research. In total, 14 groups were involved in this study; each group consisted of four to five Thai student participants who were attending the same English course during the data collection. Each group was requested to audio record a group discussion with an English lecturer involving the completion of an assignment or a task that was required in the syllabus of the corresponding English course. Each participant and the two English lecturers had consented to the data collection for this research before being recorded. To ensure that the data consisted of naturally occurring group discussions and to confirm the validity of the research, the researcher requested the participants to behave in the same way as they had in all the previous group discussions with their lecturers. The researcher finally received a total of 14 audio recordings of the group discussions, accounting for approximately 6.75 hours of audio recordings. The spoken data were transcribed as written data using the ELAN Program MacOS Version 2023, which allows for different layers of annotations to the written transcriptions of the audios and videos based on the XML format.

3.2 Data analysis

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used for the analyses in this research. Following the interactional approach, a bottom-up analysis was employed to identify the SAs. Based on the written transcriptions and the audio

recordings, two raters annotated the SAs in each utterance guided by the taxonomy of the SAs, as illustrated in Figure 1 above. The disagreements were annotated as discourse functions after the two raters had completed the SA annotations of the written transcriptions derived from the audio recordings. Since prosody has been found to be a factor that may indicate conflicts (Cuenca, 2023), the prosody that was recorded in the audio assisted both of the raters to identify weak disagreements, strong disagreements, and conflicts. The inter-rater reliability was tested, and it was determined that the intraclass correlation coefficient was 0.946 for the identification of the SAs and 0.913 for the identification of the weak disagreements, the strong disagreements, and the conflicts, which indicated high rater reliability. Any discrepancies in the two raters' findings were discussed until consensus was reached.

In accordance with previous research (Edmondson and House, 1981; Edmondson et al., 2023; House et al., 2021; House and Kádár, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b; Xia et al., 2023), the recurrent Exchanges were identified by the Moves from Initiate to Satisfy. In the academic group discussions, an Exchange was considered to have been completed when an alignment between the students and the lecturer was reached, and they could proceed to another Exchange. The term "alignment" was used in the present research following Pan (2022, p. 132) for two reasons. First, alignment signifying the completion of an Exchange can be distinguished from agreement between the students and the lecturer SAs during the problem-solving process. Second, alignment may not be always in favor of the lecturer in the academic group discussions, as alignments in favor of the students were also found (Pan, 2022; Shimamoto, 2022). With the support of the interactional approach, the recurrent Exchange patterns will be presented to answer RQ1.

The frequently used SAs in each Exchange were examined to answer RQ2. Since strong disagreements that indicate tensions among the interactants have a greater likelihood of escalating into conflicts (Cuenca, 2023; Shahrokhi and Khodadadi, 2023; Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020; Toluei et al., 2023), consecutive strong disagreements may easily result in conflict. The researcher examined the use of the SAs carefully when each disagreement occurred.

4. Results and discussion

Seven types of Exchange patterns were identified in the academic group discussions that were conducted in ELF between the students and the English lecturers in this research. In this section, each Exchange pattern will be presented individually to demonstrate that the academic group discussions between the students and the lecturers were a ritual frame in which the students used recurrent patterns to reach alignment. One point that should be noted here is that the Opening and the Closing in different Phases in the ritual frame are typical rituals. For example, in an Opening, the SAs Greet and How-are-you are used, while the SAs Extracting or Wish-Well are used in a Closing (House et al., 2021; House and Kádár, 2021b; Xia et al., 2023). The same conditions were found in the academic group discussions in this research, while no other conditions were found. Thus, the following analyses and discussions will mainly be based on the Core in a Phase to illustrate the discussions about academic problems that involved the students and the lecturers. Based on the data collected from this research, the conversation between a Thai student participant and the lecturer frequently occurred in a group discussion while other participants in the same group were the hearers. Hence, the examples demonstrated in this research often illustrate a dialogic context between a Thai student participant and the lecturer.

4.1 Simple alignment

This was the simplest Exchange pattern, as no disagreement was found. In this pattern, one of the students produced a SA Request to start the discussion as an Initiate, followed by a short presentation, as demonstrated in (1) below.

- (1) P12 (00:05:16)
 <P12 key="Request">
 1 *Teacher can we ask a question?*
 <Lecturer key="Permit-Satisfy">
 2 *Certainly.*
 <P12 key="Tell">
 3 *Uh the we used the [the strength in the middle of the present.*
 <P12 key="Request">
 4 *Do you think it's right?*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Satisfy">
 5 *Yeah of course.*

In this Exchange pattern, as in the example described above, the students attempted to solve an academic problem by using Tell and Request SAs in lines 3 and 4. The lecturer simply made a Move in the Satisfy phase by using Permit and Opine SAs to complete this Exchange. The alignment in this Exchange was overtly in favor of the students, since the lecturer agreed with what the students intended to do. Based on the Exchange structures identified in the previous research (Edmondson and House, 1981; Edmondson et al., 2023; House et al., 2021), the interactional structure of this Exchange pattern can be visualized as shown in **Figure 3**.

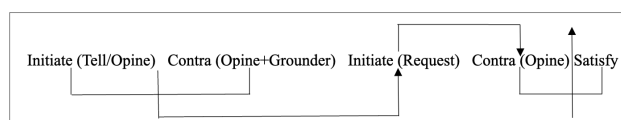


Figure 3. Exchange pattern 1.

This Exchange included a Pre-Exchange involving a Request for permission followed by Pre-Responding. The Moves that the Initiate introduced via a Tell and Request and a Satisfy realized via Opine completed the initial Request in this Exchange pattern. In this case, the lecturer agreed with the students without raising any issues or providing suggestions.

4.2 Giving suggestions

In this Exchange pattern, the students did not know how to execute some of the steps in the assignment or were unsure about some of the steps. Hence, they prepared questions to elicit suggestions from the lecturer, as illustrated in (2) below:

- (2) P04 (00:12:35)
 <P04 key="Tell">
 1 *In this way we can manage the result uh in the best way.*
 <P04 key="Tell">
 2 *But I don't know if [if uh I must write this part first for the formal language.*
 <P04 key="Request">
 3 *Can you give us some advice teacher?*
 <Lecturer key="Suggest-Counter">
 4 *Um perhaps you make a plan first and then see where we are.*
 <P04 key="Resolve-Satisfy">

5 *Oh of course we can do that to make a plan for you later.* fourth paragraph anyway.

Unlike the first Exchange pattern, this Exchange pattern overtly displayed the importance of the SA Suggest triggered by the SA Request for a suggestion in line 4 (Edmondson and House, 1981; Edmondson et al., 2023). In addition, the lecturer’s suggestion was actually a Counter because it did not fully satisfy the previous Tell, as the lecturer did not reject any of the information in the previous utterances as Contra. Thus, the lecturer’s suggestion can be regarded as a negotiation in favor of both parties. The final alignment regarding the problem in this Exchange could simply be an Opine, a Thank, or a Resolve, as demonstrated in (2). The interactional structure of this Exchange pattern is presented in **Figure 4**.

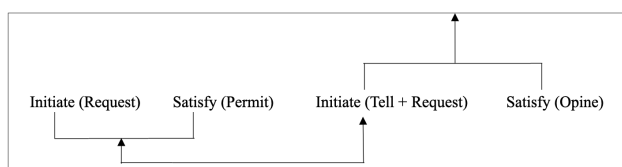


Figure 4. Exchange pattern 2.

In many instances, the students continued to request suggestions until the alignment was reached and the on-going problem was resolved. The square with the dashed lines that encompasses the SAs Request and Suggest in **Figure 4** means that this pair of Moves will occur more than once in this Exchange pattern in many situations, as illustrated in (3) below:

- (3) P02 (00:24:57)
 <P02 key=“Tell”>
- 1 *We provide some uh suggestion in this part and [and end the second paragraph.*
 <P03 key=“Tell”>
- 2 *And we are not sure if we can write our experience here.*
 <P03 key=“Request”>
- 3 *What do you think teacher?*
 <Lecturer key=“Suggest-Counter”>
- 4 *Well I would not suggest you should write down all the experiences.*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Grounder”>
- 5 *It might be too long here I suppose.*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Grounder”>
- 6 *I mean you guys will write here this part in the*

<P02 key=“Request”>

7 *Uh yes but uh do you think I don’t need to write it in here?*

<Lecturer key=“Suggest-Counter”>

8 *Well you can write some simple examples here.*

<P02 key=“Thank”>

9 *Oh thank you teacher.*

Example (3) was extracted from the same group as example (2). Two rounds of Request and Suggest occurred as Counters, wherein the first round is from line 1 to line 6, and the second round is from line 7 to line 9. The lecturer provided the opinions as a Grounder to support the suggestions (House et al., 2021; House and Kádár, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b).

4.3 Bargaining on the part of the students

The broader concept of bargaining that encompasses “negotiation in many different types of transactions” (House et al., 2021, p. 7) was observed in this research; this suggests that bargaining is not limited to business transactions, as people bargain with each other for their own benefit in different fields, such as legal studies (House et al., 2021). A finding in this research was that the students used certain SAs in an attempt to bargain with the lecturers during the discussions, as shown in (4) below:

- (4) P45 (00:16:09)
 <P45 key=“Request”>
- 1 *Can I ask if the language is ok?*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Counter”>
- 2 *Um it’s how do I put it a little bit ambiguous.*
 <Lecturer key=“Tell-Grounder”>
- 3 *You need to make this part clear enough so you can support the argument.*
 <Lecturer key=“Tell-Counter”>
- 4 *And of course there are some grammatical errors here and uh here.*
 <P45 key=“Apologize”>
- 5 *Sorry teacher.*
 <P45 key=“Request”>
- 6 *Can I can we get a higher score if we have new ideas?*
 <P45 key=“Tell-Grounder”>
- 7 *Teacher we can have more ideas but we don’t write it very good.*

<Lecturer key="Opine-Counter">

8 *Well I'm not that serious about your language part but more ideas always help.*

<P45 key="Thank">

9 *Thank you very much teacher.*

As the example above shows, the formal realization of the SAs actually had an illocutionary force in this specific context (Xia et al., 2023). The Initiate that was realized via the SA Request in line 1 and the Move that was realized via the Opine and Tell SAs from lines 2 to 4 were a request for information and a response to the request. The student (P45) used the SA Apologize to convey an apology in line 5 for the grammatical errors that the lecturer had mentioned. Following the apology, P45 then used the SA Request for permission and provided support in lines 6 and 7. Although the formal realization of the SA was Request, the illocutionary force of this Request was intended to bargain with the lecturer with the aim of being given a higher score for an assignment by providing more ideas in a situation which they may not have used the English language as well as required by the lecturer. The lecturer's response in line 8 indicated that P45's bargaining may not have been fully accepted and would depend on new ideas and the frequency of the grammatical errors. The student accepted the lecturer's Opine because the Exchange concluded with the SA Thank. Hence, the final alignment in this Exchange was based on bargaining that involved the SAs Request and Tell. This alignment entailed an adjustment between the students and the lecturer since both parties offered a compromise (Y. Pan, 2022). The interactional structure of this Exchange pattern is presented in **Figure 5**:

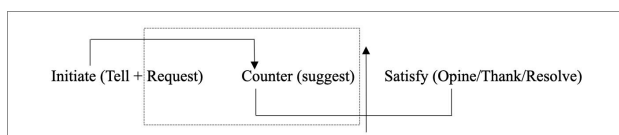


Figure 5. Exchange pattern 3.

It was noted that the bargaining Moves could be repeated in this Exchange pattern until a final alignment was reached. Apart from using the SA Request to start the bargaining, the students also used Tell and Opine with Apologize as a Re-Initiate and a Grounder to provide support. The final Satisfy could be the SA Thank with Resolve or Opine.

Thus far, the three Exchange patterns did not include any strong disagreement. However, a weak level of disagree-

ment can be observed in examples (3) and (4), such as the lecturer's utterance "well I would not suggest you should write down all the experiences" in (3), and the utterance "well I'm not that serious about your language part but more ideas always help" in (4). It was noted that there was no tension between the students and the lecturer when weak disagreements were expressed using different SAs. Another four Exchange patterns in which disagreements clearly occurred will be presented in the following sections.

4.4 Simple disagreement

A total of 93 instances of the explicit disagreement were identified via SAs in the interactional approach in this research. The explicit disagreements were mainly initiated by the lecturer, who initiated a Move to express disagreement with the students' ideas. A simple disagreement Exchange pattern is illustrated in example (5) below:

- (5) P08 (00:09:24)
 <P08 key="Tell">
 1 *When we try to give some uh some example here we use the example from online.*
 <P08 key="Opine">
 2 *I think it is enough.*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Contra">
 3 *No that's not enough you know.*
 <Lecturer key="Tell-Grounder">
 4 *Cause I can give you other examples to show an opposite direction.*
 <P08 key="Resolve-Satisfy">
 5 *Oh uh ok teacher I will add something more here.*

Example (5) reflects the lecturer's explicit disagreement in the utterance "no that's not enough" as the SA Opine, followed by a Grounder as a support for the lecturer's comment. The student, P08, did not disagree further with the lecturer's opinion, and stated that he would revise a section as a Resolve in Satisfy. This Exchange pattern reflects a simple disagreement. This disagreement was not followed by further disagreements, as the students accepted the lecturer's opinion. Hence, the alignment in this Exchange pattern was in favor of the lecturer. The interactional structure of this Exchange pattern is presented in **Figure 6**:

As shown in the Exchange pattern in **Figure 6**, Contra, which indicates a complete rejection of a previous utterance, was used to indicate the disagreement in a Move. In this re-

search, the lecturer’s disagreements were usually supported by the provision of plausible reasons as the Grounder. The lecturer’s Move may be considered to be a de-escalation of the disagreement because lecturers, who are regarded as authority figures, can provide reasons to persuade students to accept the lecturers’ opinions (Z. Pan, 2024).

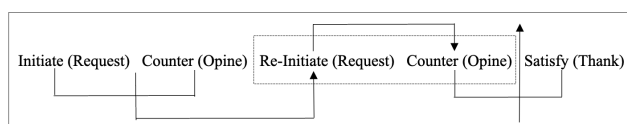


Figure 6. Exchange pattern 4.

4.5 Requesting more information

Despite the opinions, suggestions, or reasons that the lecturer provided, the students continued to request more information pertaining to the lecturer’s feedback (181 instances), as illustrated in example (6) below:

- (6) P54 (00:28:12)
 <P54 key=“Tell”>
- 1 *Then the opinion here uh I will present it at the beginning.*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Contra”>
 - 2 *Um well I don’t think you should present this part at the beginning here.*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Grounder”>
 - 3 *You see we often use these data as the strong supports in the body part.*
 <Lecturer key=“Suggest”>
 - 4 *Perhaps you can combine um these two no three parts here.*
 <P52 key=“Request”>
 - 5 *Teacher can I add some examples at the beginning then?*
 <P52 key=“Opine-Grounder”>
 - 6 *Otherwise there is very uh not many information in this part.*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Counter”>
 - 7 *If you have the examples.*
 <P52 key=“Opine-Satisfy”>
 - 8 *Yeah I think it will help.*

In example (6), the core of the problem was how to manage the beginning part of the presentation. Following the lecturer’s previous disagreement in lines 2, student P52 made a further request for permission in line 5. The lecturer

inserted an “if-condition” as a Counter to reply to the student’s previous request in line 7. The Satisfy was produced by the student with a positive confirmation using the SA Opine. The interactional structure of this Exchange pattern is presented in Figure 7:

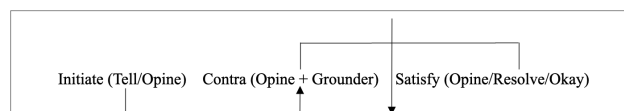


Figure 7. Exchange pattern 5.

In this Exchange pattern, further requests following the lecturer’s disagreement until the final alignment is reached can occur repeatedly. These further requests can pertain to an on-going problem as in (6), or can be used to seek confirmation of the lecturer’s previous suggestion. Such further requests reflect the problem-solving process despite the occurrence of disagreements (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020).

4.6 Double disagreements

Unlike the Exchange pattern 4 in which only one disagreement occurred and the Exchange pattern 5 in which a Counter followed a further Request after the sole disagreement, the lecturer uttered a second disagreement in response to the further Request (45 instances), as in shown in (7) below:

- (7) P53 (00:34:52)
 <P53 key=“Tell”>
- 1 *The last will be here in the end here.*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Contra”>
 - 2 *No it’s too simple too short.*
 <Lecturer key=“Suggest”>
 - 3 *You want to add some implications.*
 <P54 key=“Request”>
 - 4 *Uh can this part have more examples?*
 <Lecturer key=“Opine-Contra”>
 - 5 *No I don’t think so you guys.*
 <Lecturer key=“Tell-Grounder”>
 - 6 *This part will be concise and no need to bring more examples.*
 <P53 key=“Thank-Satisfy”>
 - 7 *Oh yes Thank you teacher.*

The context of the above extract was from the same group discussion as the context in (6). The lecturer’s utter-

ance of two disagreements are demonstrated in lines 2 and 5. The first disagreement occurred in the same situation as in (5) and (6). The lecturer used the SA Opine to produce a Contra to P53's first utterance in (7). Similar to the previous examples, the lecturer provided a suggestion after the Contra in line 3. It is interesting to note that another student, P54, who did not respond directly to the lecturer's suggestion, proposed a request by asking if more examples were needed in line 4. The second disagreement was expressed via another SA Opine by the lecturer, thus indicating that the lecturer did not require the students to do anything other than follow the lecturer's suggestion. The Satisfy was realized using the SA Thank to indicate that the students understood the lecturer's meaning. The interactional structure of this Exchange pattern is presented in **Figure 8**:

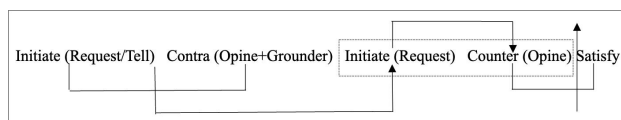


Figure 8. Exchange pattern 6.

As demonstrated in (7), the students' further requests following the lecturer's first disagreement may not have been directly related to the lecturer's suggestion or opinion, but may have been due to the students' limited English proficiency since it was possible that they had not fully understand what the lecturer had said (Eslami et al., 2023; Shahrokhi and Khodadadi, 2023). For example, the student (P54) in (7) may not have understood the literal meaning of the word "implications" in line 3; thus, P54 attempted to make a request to indirectly confirm what the lecturer had said. On the other hand, the intention underlying a further request may be to negotiate something with the lecturer; in (7), P54 attempted to add more examples as negotiation terms rather than adding more implications. Notwithstanding the two disagreements, no severe tension or escalation of the disagreements occurred.

4.7 Consecutive disagreements

In contrast to all the previous Exchange patterns, the last pattern consists of consecutive disagreements on both sides in which escalated tension was revealed by the lecturer's speed of producing the utterances when addressing the students (5 instances). However, neither of the raters in

this research considered that there was any conflict in this condition, as demonstrated in one of the examples below:

- (8) P23 (00:17:49)
 <P23 key="Opine">
 1 *I think this opinion is important in our presentation.*
 <Lecturer key="Minimize-Contra">
 2 *I'm sorry to say this but this opinion is not that important here.*
 <P23 key="Request-Counter">
 3 *Why not?*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Grounder">
 4 *As I have informed all of you many times you need to focus on your argument.*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Grounder">
 5 *This one here this opinion does nothing with your argument here.*
 <P23 key="Opine-Contra">
 6 *It does it does with our argument.*
 <P23 key="Opine-Grounder">
 7 *It uh it show need of people for real of something in reality.*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Contra">
 8 *No it's not.*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Grounder">
 9 *The evidence you state here is useful but it does not support your argument.*
 <P23 key="Opine-Contra">
 10 *But I think it support teacher.*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Contra">
 11 *I said no.*
 <Lecturer key="Opine-Grounder">
 12 *I've already told you the reason young man.*
 <P23 key="Resolve-Satisfy">
 13 *Uh [uh alright I will see it again later.*

In example (8), a total of five Contras reflecting five consecutive disagreements occurred between a student (P23) and the lecturer. The escalated tension on the part of the lecturer can be identified in the different SAs. The lecturer produced the first disagreement using the SA Minimize starting with "I'm sorry to say this but" in line 2, indicating that the lecturer was attempting to ease the tension at that moment. The lecturer may have provided a Grounder, as in other examples, but P23 immediately requested a reason after the lecturer uttered the Contra in line 3. The second

Contra was produced using the SA Opine by the student via a Grounder after the lecturer gave the reason in lines 6 and 7. The disagreements gradually escalated until the lecturer finally uttered “I said no” with a supportive Grounder in lines 11 and 12. P23 finally acknowledged the lecturer’s authority and used the SA Resolve to result in Satisfy. The interactional structure of this Exchange pattern is presented in **Figure 9**:

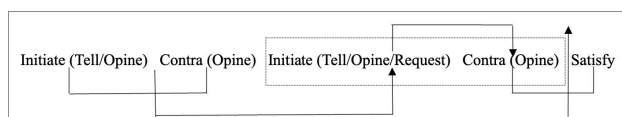


Figure 9. Exchange pattern 7.

The two raters did not label any conflict in (8) for two reasons. First, as illustrated in the example, both parties used a particular SA (Minimize) or provided a supporting Grounder to weaken the level of each disagreement as much as possible (Cuenca, 2023; Edmondson et al., 2023). Furthermore, despite the more severe tensions observed in the last two disagreements, based on the audio recording, both parties uttered the last two Contras with similar prosody to the previous ones. The lecturer had an overtly soft tone when uttering the last Contra, “I said no”, thus indicating the intention to avoid further conflict with the student.

In this Exchange pattern, the Initiate and the Contra occurred repeatedly until final alignment was reached. The Contras were usually supported by a Grounder to provide plausible reasons and to indicate sensible arguments rather escalating the disagreements to conflicts in the academic group discussions (Pietrousti, 2022). In addition, this Exchange pattern needs to be differentiated from all the other previous patterns because an escalation of the tension between the students and the lecturer was observed.

4.8 Avoidance of conflict

No conflict between the students and the lecturers was identified in this research, as no threats, accusations, cursing, or attacks occurred between the students and the lecturers (Wang et al., 2022). In total, 408 disagreements at the interactional level were identified in the different SAs, of which 324 disagreements (79%) were introduced by the lecturers. This phenomenon is considered to be normal because lecturers use their knowledge to assist students to solve academic prob-

lems by using the discourse function disagreements, which is a teaching and learning process (Akoto, 2023; Shimamoto, 2022). In the responses to the lecturer’s disagreements, a total of 178 (55%) utterances were the SA Request to express the students’ further requests for more information, which accounted for the highest frequency in the academic group discussions. As shown in the examples in the previous sections, the SA Request was used for different purposes. In this research, 117 out of 178 SA Requests (66%) entailed the students asking permission to do something, as demonstrated in the utterance “Teacher can I add some examples at the beginning here” in (6), while 61 SA Requests (34%) aimed to elicit the lecturer’s suggestions or opinions, as seen in the utterance “Can this part have more examples” in (7). The students used the SA Request to ask the lecturers for further information, suggestions, or opinions, which indicated that the students had trust in the lecturer’s authority and attempted to solve their academic problems in order to pass the assignments.

In addition, 117 (36%) responses to the lecturers’ disagreements were expressed via the SA Resolve, as shown in the utterance “I will add something more here” in (5). The utterances including the SA Resolve indicated that the students accepted the lecturer’s disagreements and attempted to revise their original strategies in favor of the lecturer’s suggestions or opinions that usually followed the disagreements. The Move enacted via the SA Resolve reflected the students’ positive spirit of cooperation with the lecturers. Both of the SAs mentioned above led to a de-escalation of the disagreements, as no further disagreements or conflicts ensued.

Conversely, 29 responses to the lecturer’s disagreements (9%) were expressed using the SA Opine, as shown in (8). Unlike the first two SAs mentioned above, the SA Opine may lead to an escalation of the tension in an argument and result in conflict (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020; Wang et al., 2022). However, the students who used the SA Opine mainly included a supporting Grounder to make the disagreements more rational, thus avoiding the escalated tension that the lecturers could potentially interpret as conflict, as the student (P23) did in (8). In this case, a supportive Grounder expressed via the SAs Opine and Tell was used when the students consecutively shared their subjective opinions to disagree with the lecturers in the academic group discussions. This Move further confirms the differences between disagree-

ments and conflicts in that disagreements are rational and can be resolved, while conflicts are irrational and may remain unresolved (Pietroiusti, 2022).

The interactional approach in which the SAs, the interactions, and the rituals were integrated revealed that the students attempted to avoid conflicts with the lecturers by using the SAs Request, Resolve, and Opine with a supporting Grounder. Overall, the students attempted to cooperate with the lecturers despite the lecturers' disagreements while providing support for their own opinions. The avoidance of conflict with the lecturers followed the main principle of the students intending to solve their academic problems and pass their assignments to ultimately pass the course. As previous research has shown, disagreement is "culturally-bound"; as revealed in this research, "the context is also an important factor when examining disagreements" (Wang et al., 2022, p. 2). Based on the findings in this research, Thai university students do not disagree with foreign lecturers frequently and do not have conflicts with them when using ELF in academic group discussions.

5. Conclusions

Academic group discussions were examined in this research as one type of institutional discourse between Thai university students and foreign lecturers in the ELF context. The results revealed that academic group discussions can be regarded as a ritual frame characterized by seven Exchange patterns related to the frequent uses of SAs, including Request, Opine, Tell, and Resolve. As the different SAs revealed, disagreements occurred during the discussions. The students used Request, Resolve, and Opine with Grounders to avoid conflicts with the lecturers. The interactional approach provided an opportunity to investigate beyond the linguistic cues pertaining to disagreements that were discussed in previous research, such as the honorific "teacher", the mitigator "I'm sorry but" (Boux et al., 2023; Toluei and Tahririan, 2023). This finding ascertains that certain genres of spoken interactions follow an interactional regulation in the situational context (House and Kádár, 2023a).

Moreover, the use of the interactional approach in this research further confirmed that disagreements "should be understood not as a single speech act but as a situated activity" (Spencer-Oatey and Kádár, 2020, p. 235). Depending on

the situational context, disagreements occurring at different levels ranging from weak to strong can be expressed via various SAs in different Moves. The Exchange patterns can be categorized based on having the same or similar Moves. The Exchange patterns identified in this research shed light on the understanding of academic group discussions as ritual frames in which the seemingly erratic utterances actually had regular patterns whereby the students avoided conflict. Future research should examine more spoken genres from an interactional approach to expand the studies of the ritual frame in the pragmatic field.

Author Contributions

The author was in charge of all the aspects of this research.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data used in this research is limited to the author based on the ethics committees of the affiliation of the author. Should anyone inquire the data, please contact the author for further consideration.

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This research was approved by the ethics committees of the affiliation of the author. The researcher obtained all the written consent form from all the participants.

Nomenclature

ELAN conventions used in this research.
All participants' names are pseudonyms.

◇	XML format for decoding information
[repetition of the same word
key=	marking a SA
(00:00:00)	the start time of the example

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