

## “Referral for re-submission” - The Case of EFL Applied Linguistics Doctoral Defense Sessions

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**Abstract :** An oral defense is the examination of a doctoral program in which the candidates display their academic capacity through sharing and disseminating the findings of their study and defending their position. In this challenging criticism-generating context, the examiners evaluate the PhD dissertation critically so as to confirm its scholarly merit or lack of it. To identify the examiners' expectations of the viva, this study used a conversation analytic approach for analyzing the data. The research is inductive in that it seeks to develop theory that is grounded in the data. The data comprised transcripts of the question and answer section of two applied linguistics doctoral defense sessions from two accredited Iranian state universities in 2019, both of which are among the top Iranian universities on the list of Times Higher Education World University Rankings. In spite of the similar shortcomings and deficiencies, for instance, in terms of innovation, development, sampling, and treatment, raised by the examiners, one of these defenses passed with distinction while the other was referred for re-submission. It seems that the outcome of a viva, in an EFL context, not only depends on adherence to the rules and regulations of doctoral research but is also influenced to a certain extent by the strictness of the examiners and the candidates' language proficiency and effective negotiation and communication skills in this confrontational communicative event. The findings of this study provide evidence for the issues determining the success or failure of PhD candidates in displaying their claims of scholarship during their defense sessions. This study has implications for both applied linguistics doctoral students and academics in EFL contexts who try to prove and authenticate the doctorateness of a dissertation.

**Keywords :** academic discourse, conversation analysis, doctoral defense, doctorateness, EFL

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