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GENRE ANALYSIS: INVESTIGATION OF SAUDI EFL LEARNERS' PhD DESSEERTATION
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN THE FIELD OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS

Dr. Ahmed Khider Ahmed Othman

Dept. of English Languages & Translation, Faculty of Education & Arts, University of Tabuk

Email: aothman@ut.sdu.sa



Dr. Ahmed Khider
Ahmed Othman

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to analyze doctoral thesis acknowledgements written by Saudi EFL learners in English speaking countries in the field of Applied Linguistics. Acorpus of 15 PhD acknowledgements was downloaded randomly between (4001-2017) from Universities' website. To analyze the data, Hyland's three-tier-move structure was adopted. The results of this paper show that all the three moves were employed by Saudi EFL learners. Besides, there are some differences in the occurrence of moves, for example, *Thanking move* was found to be the highest percentage (55.5%) among moves, while both reflecting and concluding moves were found to be equal percentage (22.2%). In terms of gratitude expressions, Adjectives were used most frequently by EFL Saudi learners. This paper recommends that further research can be conducted on comparative studies in DAs in other disciplines produced by either undergraduates or postgraduates at different public universities in Saudi Arabia as an attempt to see whether DAs vary from one university to another.

Keywords: Genre Analysis, Moves, Dissertation Acknowledgements, Expressions of Gratitude Research Articles

1. Introduction

English language is regarded as one of the most important languages used around the world. Moreover, it has been viewed as a lingua franca since the late of 19th century and the early of 20th century. At the beginning of the 21th century, the role of English as an intentionally recognized means of communication has rapidly risen. In addition, it is the major element in most linguistic varieties and the major foreign language in several countries including Saudi Arabia. The wide usage of English language as the key means of global communication has led to extensive attention paid to academia in English language, Al- Khasawneh (2017).

Academic writing, as an important means of communication, has been playing a crucial role in academic discourse communities. This position of great centrality has enabled written academic discourse to be appreciated and analyzed from various aspects. Academic writing such as Research Articles is considered a separate genre. Besides, RA is identified as " a recognizable communicative purpose and by the presence of characteristic features with standard form, function, and presentation that are a part its general conventions". The ability to write academic research paper is not only concentrated on linguistic competence, but also on understanding of the rhetorical structures used in academic writing as acknowledged by the discourse community. Thomas & Hawes(cited in Aslam & Mehmood, 2014).

The term "genre" is defined by Swales (1990) as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes" (p.58). Genre first appeared in the field of ESP in 1980s. Some studies in area indicated that the difference influences on Genre Analysis such as "genre as a social action", and also genre as a new rhetoric (Paltridge, 2007). Genre analysis is a useful instrument in unfolding and connecting the linguistic features of a genre to their function and purpose. It provides a technique to identify moves and linguistic features found in genres. Genre analysis describes the way in which texts are built and organized (Hopkins, Dudley-Evans, 1988). Seemingly. This definition reveals that a genre is classified according to its communicative purpose. The description of rhetorical structure of genre moves plays significant role in the field of genre.

Move analysis is a genre-based approach which is used to recognize the structure of RAs, it has recently become an important area of research. Swales (2004,p.29) defines 'Move' in genre analysis as "a discursual or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse". According to Swale (2004, p. 20), "a 'Move', at one extreme, can be realized by a clause; at the other by several sentences. It is a functional not a formal unit".

Like abstracts, introduction and other sections, acknowledgments are important parts of research publications. Acknowledgements reflect gratitude for some personal, moral, financial, technical, intellectual, and conceptual support provided by some institutions, agency, peers, mentors, academics or family members, Mahmood and Rofess (2015,p.128).Dissertation acknowledgements as genre is widely used in academic discourse to express gratitude towards the contribution of individual or institution, thus, establishing favorable academic and social reputation, Mingwei(201094).

Hyland and Tse(2004) claimed that acknowledgements in theses and dissertations are distinct genre with a clear purpose and physical location. Also, they have become a common practice in writing theses or dissertations. They have been increasing and receiving attention by researchers. The importance of acknowledgements is highlighted by the results of surveys showing the frequency with which they occur in scholarly texts. They are particularly important for scholars to demonstrate their awareness of some central values such as modesty and gratitude. They are compound entities in which authors may thank colleagues for ideas, funding agencies for support, experts for suggestions to improve articles, Rattan (2014).Therefore, this paper investigates genre analysis of PhD dissertation acknowledgments which written by EFL Saudi learners who were graduate from English speaking countries.

2. Literature Review

Studies which we conducted on acknowledgements from genre analysis perspective are very few. However, some studies have been conducted to develop understanding of the generic components of acknowledgements section. Giannoni (2002) was the first genre analyst to systematically investigate the features and structure of research journal article acknowledgements. He analyzed 100 acknowledgements in English and Italian scholarly journal articles from a genre-analytic perspective.

Likewise, Hyland and Tse's (2004) conducted a study on which established the three-tier structure of acknowledgements in dissertations. It has become a reference model for the later similar research. Hyland collected 240 MA and PhD dissertations written by Hong Kong Chinese-speaking graduates (HKC) from six academic disciplines in order to analyze how the acknowledgements (AD) were structured to express gratitude. The results of the study show that three moves were established in DA (Hyland,2003). One obligatory move, namely, the thanking move, together with two optional moves and sub-divided steps, were identified in the following figure.

1. Reflecting move

2. Thanking move

2.1 Thanking God (Allah)

2.2 Thanking for academic support

2.3 Thanking for technical support

2.4 Thanking for financial support

2.5 Thanking for material support

2.6 Thanking for moral support

2.7 Thanking for data access

3. Announcing/Concluding move

3.1 Thanking all

3.2 Accepting responsibility for errors and flaws

Figure. 1: Move Structure of Dissertation Acknowledgement :Source: Adapted from Hyland (2004)

Moreover, a number of DA studies have been conducted by Arab researchers. For example, Al- Ali (2010) investigated 100 Arab PhD students' DA in several Middle Eastern countries and found that his participants frequently used performative verbs (e.g., *thank, appreciate or acknowledged*) to convey their gratitude. Most significantly, a new step was recognized, *namely thanking Allah (God)*. Al- Ali claimed that due to religious beliefs and the local academic and social conventions.

Similarly, another a study was conducted by Yang (a 2012). This study compared 60 PhD dissertation acknowledgements written by Taiwanese postgraduates in Taiwan, an EFL context, with another 60 written by Taiwanese scholars who obtained their doctorates in the United States, an ESL context. The results revealed that firstly, the participants in both contexts generally followed a three-tier structure when writing their dissertation acknowledgements, namely, reflecting, thanking, and announcing moves.

In Iran, Mohammadi(2013)investigated the generic structure of doctoral dissertation acknowledgements texts written by native speakers of Persians and native speakers of English. The result revealed a high degree of match between the two groups in exploiting most moves and steps. Also, the two groups employed the reflective move and accepting responsibility step in a statistically meaningful manner. In addition, a new step called "thanking God" step was discovered throughout this .

In addition to the above studies, Yang (b2012b) examined PhD dissertation acknowledgements (DA) written by EFL authors in an English-speaking context. A total of 120 texts from six different disciplines were collected as the study corpus. The study attempted to investigate whether or not the variable of discipline would exercise influences on the construction of DA in terms of their generic structure and linguistic choices made to modify thanking acts. It was found that subtle variations existed in employing strategies of writing DA between soft science and hard science PhD students.

Besides, Alemi and Rezanejad (2016) examined the move patterns of 503 Persian dissertation acknowledgements from two major universities in Iran, from 1981 to 2014 and from sixteen various disciplines including soft and hard science disciplines and analysis of the corpus indicated that Iranian university students follow a three tier moves pattern in writing a dissertation acknowledgments.

Also, a comparative study was conducted by Afip, Ustati&Dahan (2013).Their study examined the generic structure of acknowledgments and linguistic elements written by Malay and Chinese post graduates in M.ed. TESL program. The results reveal that the most prevalent items of Malay and Chinese way of writing acknowledgement derived from Thanking Moves namely thanking for academic assistance and thanking for moral support.

Likewise, Aditama (2014) analyzed the Generic Structure of Acknowledgement in Indonesian and English Undergraduate Thesis Acknowledgement. The results of this research show that in Reflecting Move, Indonesian Acknowledgement data got 2% and English data 0%.This study also discovers that there are some similarities and differences between English and Indonesian acknowledgements.

Moreover, Abdollahian and Hashemi (2013) conducted a study on generic structure of doctoral dissertation acknowledgement texts written by Persian native and English non-native (Iranian) PhD students. The results showed that there were some differences but these differences were not statistically significant. In addition, two new steps called " thanking God" and " opening" steps were discovered throughout the study and the difference in using these steps between Iranian students writing in Persian and English was statistically significant.

Also there was a study done by Afful and Mwinlaaru (2014). They explored the rhetorical moves of the acknowledgement section of Master's degree dissertations in three sub-disciplines of Education, namely, Guidance and Counseling, Educational Administration and Management, and Science and Mathematics Education. The findings show a linear three-move-structure, consisting of an initial optional reflecting move, an

obligatory thanking move, and an optional concluding move, across the three sub-disciplines. Second, there are some differences in the frequency of occurrence of moves and steps across the three sub-disciplines. Thus, most of the previous studies followed Hyland (2004) three move's structure to investigate general structure of thanking patterns of dissertation acknowledgements. In Saudi EFL learners where no such study has been previously conducted, this study mainly focuses on genre analysis of Saudi EFL learners' doctoral thesis acknowledgements in the field of Applied Linguistics. Moreover, it will enhance the importance and awareness of genre, enabling Saudi EFL learners to organize their acknowledgements.

3. Statement of the Problem

The researcher as an assistant professor of Applied linguistics at the University of Tabuk, noticed that there are some Saudi EFL learners who were graduated from English speaking countries have some difficulties in writing their PhD acknowledgements, moreover, he observed that some of acknowledgements are not compatible to the model of move structure of dissertation acknowledgements by Hyland (2004) Therefore, the researcher wants to investigate whether the Saudi EFL learners adopted Hyland move structure model or not.

4. Research Objectives

This paper aims to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To analyze the linguistic features (gratitude expressions) found in Saudi EFL Learners' doctoral dissertation acknowledgements.
- ii. To find out whether the structural components of moves patterns are compatible to analysis model of Hyland's (2004) Move structure of dissertation acknowledgments.
- iii. To find out the most frequently rhetorical moves as well as gratitude expressions used by Saudi EFL learner's doctoral thesis acknowledgements.

5. Research Questions

- I. What linguistics features (gratitude expressions) choices do Saudi EFL Learners apply in their selected doctoral dissertation acknowledgments?
- II. Are the structural components of steps / moves patterns written by Saudi EFL learners compatible to genre analysis model of Hyland's move structure of dissertation acknowledgments?
- III. Are there any differences between type and frequency of steps / moves in doctoral dissertation acknowledgements written by EFL Saudi Learners in the field of applied linguistics?

6. Research Methodology

The present study intends to analyze a corpus composed of 15 doctoral thesis acknowledgements in the field of Applied linguistics. These samples of acknowledgements were downloaded and collected randomly by the researcher from different universities' websites. Moreover, these thesis acknowledgments were written by Saudi EFL learners who were graduated from English-speaking countries. Besides, the sample of acknowledgments was published from 2001 to 2017. The corpus of this study consists of 3998 words with the average of 266.5 words in each acknowledgement text. To analyze the moves, gratitude expressions as well as their frequency, the researcher employed the move structure analysis employed by Hyland (2004) which was already adapted from Swales' (1990) well-known CARS (Creating a Research Space) model for article introductions. The below table illustrates the corpus.

Table.1: The corpus of PhD DA written by Saudi EFL learners in Applied Linguistics

Corpus	Year of publication	Name of University	Length of words
1	2001	University of Leicester	405
2	2004	University of Durham	230
3	2007	University of Leicester	205
4	2011	University of Leicester	241
5	2012	Newcastle University	228
6	2012	Victoria University	396
7	2014	University of Technology	200
8	2014	University of Salford	168
9	2014	University of Leicester	271

10	2015	University of San Francisco	433
11	2015	Oklahoma University	226
12	2015	Flinders University	392
13	2016	University of Kansas	130
14	2016	University of Sterling	239
15	2017	RMIT University	234
Total	(2001 -2017)	Total of words	3998
Average			266.5

7. Discussion and Findings

The present study investigated a corpus composed of 15 doctoral thesis acknowledgements in the field of applied linguistics. The doctoral thesis acknowledgements were written by Saudi EFL learners who were graduated from English speaking countries. The tables and charts below show the analysis in terms of frequency and percentage of every move. Table 2 presents the percentage of moves in doctoral acknowledgements.

Table. 2: The percentage moves in PhD Acknowledgements

Move	Frequency	Percentage %
i. Reflecting move	6	22.2
ii. Thanking move	15	55.6
iii. Announcing/ Concluding move	6	22.2
Total	27	100 %

As displayed in Table.2 above, it is realized that the reflecting move in DA recorded 6 frequencies producing about 22.2% of the total acknowledgments . Also, the thanking move reported 15 making about 55.6% of the overall moves of the acknowledgements. Figure.2 shows the percentage of moves in functional unit 1 of the introductions (N-15).It shows the frequency and percentage of the acknowledgements' moves.

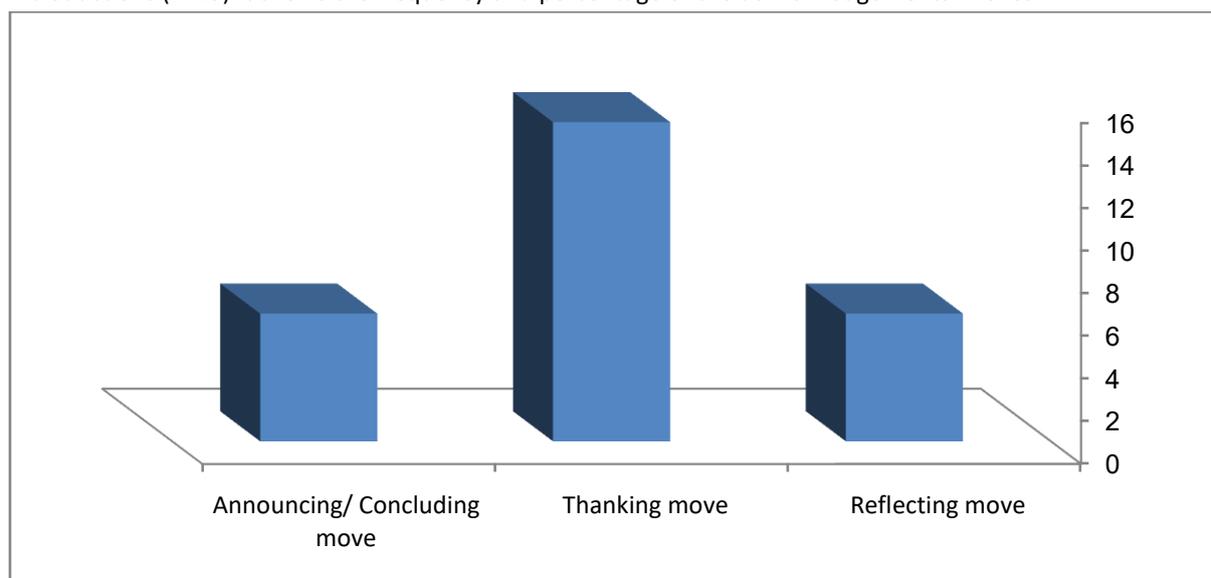


Figure. 2: The frequency moves in PhD acknowledgements

As shown in Figure.1 it indicates that the thanking move frequented 15 times scoring 55.6% and occurred in all the DA and this move is considered the highest frequent move occurred in this corpus. It is followed by reflecting move frequented 6 times scoring 22.2% which is less than the thanking move. The concluding move frequented 6 times scoring 22.2% which is equal to the reflecting. It is obvious that from above table, most of the Saudi EFL learners who were graduated from English speaking countries adopted Hyland's moves structure.

Table.3:The percentage of gratitude expressions in PhD Acknowledgements

Form	Frequency	Percentage %
i . Nominalization	40	26.5
ii. Performative verb	34	22.5
iii. Adjective	67	44.5
iv. Passive	5	3.5
v. Bare-mention	4	3
Total	150	100 %

As depicted in Table.3 earlier, it realized that adjectives in gratitude expressions recorded 67 frequencies producing about 44.5% of total doctoral acknowledgements. Moreover, Nominalization reported 40 frequencies, making about 26.5% from the total of the acknowledgements. In addition, performative verb scoring 34 frequencies which represented 22.5% from the acknowledgements. Also, passive frequented 5 times which represented 3.6% while bare-mention frequented 4 times which represented 3% from the total doctoral acknowledgements. It is clear that from Table above, adjectives and performative verbs were used most frequently by Saudi EFL learners in comparing with other gratitude expressions.

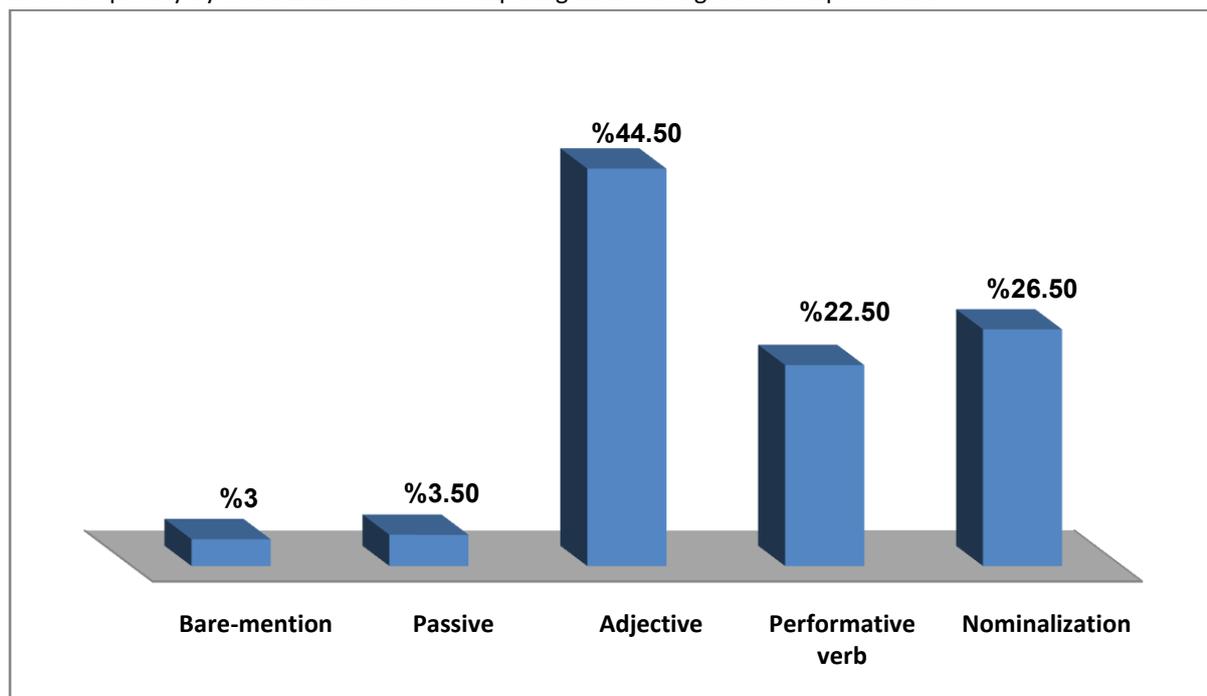
**Figure. 3:**The frequency of gratitude expressions in PhD AD

Fig.3 displays the occurrence percentages of patterns expression gratitude in the present study. Adjectives and nominalization were used most commonly while both passive and "bare-mention" were used the least by Saudi EFL learners.

In Conclusion, depending on the questions of the study, the researcher found that doctoral acknowledgements which written by Saudi EFL learners who were graduated from English speaking countries are well-structured in terms of moves structure. Also, the study showed a number of moves corresponds to Hyland (2004) three move structure. In terms of frequency, a lot of adjectives were found in doctoral acknowledgements. The research recommends that further research can be conducted on comparative studies in DAs in other disciplines produced by either undergraduates or postgraduates at different public universities in Saudi Arabia to see whether DAs vary from one university to another.

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