



**GENERIC STRUCTURE AND LINGUISTIC FEATURES
IN THESES' ACKNOWLEDGMENTS OF
GRADUATE STUDENTS**

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Abstract

This study examined the generic moves of the English-language acknowledgements in theses written by Filipino graduate students, with the aim of specifying the rhetorical preferences of these Filipino student writers in terms of moves and steps as well as the use of sentence patterns, modifiers and hedges employed in thanking acts and the choice of sentence subjects. The basic theoretical framework is from the pioneering studies of Hyland (2004) and Hyland & Tse (2004). For corpus analysis and move analysis, the researchers employed the simple frequency count, averages, and percentages to determine the total number of words in the corpus, length of words, occurrences of moves and steps in generic structure. The corpora were taken from the thirty (30) acknowledgement articles from theses of graduate students enrolled in different programs of Saint Columban College. The generic structure of the thesis's acknowledgements of the selected graduate students consisted of three moves: the reflective move, thanking move, and signing-off move. The signing off move was evident and considered as an additional move. Only the second move, the thanking move, was obligatory. Thanking God was added as part of the thanking move. Of all the moves, the thanking move got the highest frequency. Graduate students used more performative verbs than nouns. Thirty-nine (39) % of their thanking verbs were prefaced by a modal would like to while 10 or about 30% were mental state verbs like wish to and want to. Modifiers in thanking acts included adjectives (e.g. heartfelt, sincere, special, deep/est, most of all, and above all) and adverbs (e.g. humbly, sincerely, and heartily) which were often attached to thanking acts in the chosen graduate theses.

Keywords: *corpus linguistics, contrastive analysis, discourse analysis*

Introduction

In recent decades, there have been increasing scholastic interests in analyzing texts in academic and research setting. Different academic genres ranging from research theses (Thompson, 2001; Bunton, 2002) to research articles (Swales, 1990; Posteguillo, 1999), from textbooks (Hyland, 2000) to book reviews (Nicolaisen, 2002), and from conference papers (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002) to grant proposals (Halleck & Connor, 2006) have been the subjects of detailed analysis. Various approaches have been employed to unveil general characteristics of academic discourse as well as features of particular genres. These include, among others, the corpus-based "multi-dimensional analysis" (Biber, 1995) and the anthropological approach (Bazerman, 1988), the Systemic Functional Linguistics approach (Nwogu, 1990) and the move-based model (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993).

In terms of the aim of investigation, while one line of research has focused on the grammatical and stylistic aspects of particular genres, such as the use of tenses and aspects (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003), modalities (Vassileva, 2001), adjectives (Soler, 2002), nouns (Flowerdew, 2003), reporting verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991), another line of research has centered around the macro-organization of academic texts, including abstracts (Hyland, 2000; Samraj, 2005; Martin, 2003; Lores, 2004), introductions (Swales, 1981, 1990; Dudley-Evans & Henderson, 1980; Holmes, 1995), results (Brett, 1994; Williams, 1999), discussions (Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Holmes, 1997), conclusions (Yang & Allison, 2003; Bunton, 2002), and research paper titles (Haggan, 2004). The latter has been conducted mainly with reference to Swales' (1990) CARS (creating a research space) model, which "has had a tremendous influence on genre analysis in ESP and on the teaching of academic writing, both to international or L1 students, or to professional writers wishing to publish in international journals" (Dudley-Evans, 2000: 6).

As research in the field of genre analysis progressed, academic acknowledgements, part of the academic landscape in monographs, theses and dissertations and, even, journal articles, since 1990s, began to interest genre researchers. Giannoni (2002), for example, analyzed acknowledgements in English and Italian research articles for their sociopragmatic construction and textualization in terms of move structural pattern to unveil ways by which research article writers organize and express their gratitude for assistance.

While Hyland and his colleague's pioneering work has unveiled the common generic structure of the academic acknowledgments as a genre, the significance of Al-Ali (2006) lies in its findings of cross-cultural similarities and differences in such texts. For example, "Thanking Allah (God)" has been identified as a peculiar feature of the Arab writers, who were also found to "tend to use a more friendly and emotional tone to foreground their commitment to their kinships and the members of their extended family" (Al-Ali, 2006: 40), a value also highly appreciated in the Philippines and other Filipino communities in the world. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine academic acknowledgments written by Filipino writers to reveal the generic structure of these texts and the lexico-grammatical patterns they use to realize the moves and steps.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine, with reference to pioneering studies of Hyland (2004) and Hyland & Tse (2004), the generic feature of the English-language acknowledgements in theses written by Filipino graduate students, with the aim of specifying the rhetorical preferences of these Filipino student writers in terms of moves and steps as well as the use of sentence patterns, modifiers and hedges employed in thanking acts and the choice of sentence subjects. While attempting to demonstrate that scientific discourse is culture-specific, rather than universal, and that socio-cultural factors may condition the preference for certain rhetorical strategies by the members of different scientific communities, this research has an underlying pedagogical motivation as it also attempts to help Filipino English for Academic Purposes (EAP) academics write effective English acknowledgements in a way that meets the international scientific community's expectations.

The motivation for this study has come from the works of Swales (1981, 1990, and 2004) on move analysis in discourse, which have been greatly strengthened and developed systematically. Swale has contributed it to the move analysis in research articles. Following his line of move analysis, Giannoni (2002) studied the acknowledgements that accompanied the articles published in journals. One group of acknowledgements was written in Italian by Italian researchers and the other group was written in English by American researchers, and it was found that they shared a generic structure which comprised two moves: the introductory move

and the main move. Each move contains 3 possible steps. The main move, which is obligatory, contains the steps allocating credit to institutions, to individuals, and claiming responsibility. Interestingly, the structure of Italian scholars' acknowledgements in detail is different from that of the Americans in step 3 of the introductory move, where Italian scholars assert authorship (i.e. who wrote what), but Americans absolutely do not.

The acknowledgements in books and dissertations, on the other hand, are not a paratext which occupies only a little space, but have become commonplace or occupy a certain section. Also, the acknowledgements written in L2, especially those in dissertations, have been paid nowadays more attention to by language researchers.

Hyland (2004), who should be credited as the pioneer analyst of acknowledgements in dissertations, studied 240 English acknowledgements accompanying dissertations written in a variety of disciplines by MA and PhD students in Hong Kong, whose L1 is Cantonese. The study results showed that their generic structure comprises 3 moves: the reflective move, the thanking move and the announcing move. The thanking move is obligatory, while the other two are optional. The reflective move concerns the writer's comment on his or her research experience. The thanking move consists of 4 steps: presenting the participants, expressing thanks for academic assistance, thanking for resources, including data access, financial support, clerical and technical support, and thanking for moral support. The last move, the announcing move, concerns the author's responsibility for flaws and the dedication of the dissertation to someone.

Hyland and Tse (2004) furthered the study with focus on the linguistic devices employed by graduate Hong Kong students from 6 different academic fields. They studied the linguistic features particularly in the thanking move, ranging from step 2 to step 4, which addressed the different participants that had contributed to the completion of the research. Their study results showed that in general all thanking steps contained five patterns of gratitude expression: nominalization, performative, adjective, passive voice, and bare mention. Out of 1414 acts of thanking, nominalization, for instance, *My sincere thanks to*, occurred 476 times; performative, for example, *I thank (someone)*, occurred 469 times; adjective, for example, *I am grateful to*, occurred 218 times; passive voice, for instance, *Appreciation is given to*, occurred 155 times; and bare mention, where the acknowledger simply talked about the feeling of being grateful to someone or described someone's help, for example, *X has been helpful*, occurred 96 times.

For the subject position or authorial pronouns, the first person pronoun *I* was mostly found (66%), whereas the second most preferred subject was a noun phrase prefaced by the first person possessive adjective *my* (6%). Some acts of thanking contained no subject (16%), 8% were non-authorial subjects, and 4% used the author.

For the modification of the act of thanking, Hyland and Tse (2004) found that adjectives and adverbs were used to intensify gratitude varying from participant to participant. The adjectives *special* and *sincere(ly)* were more often used with thanks to supervisors, whereas more intense forms such as *deeply* and *heartfelt* co-occurred mostly with gratitude to family members and friends.

In comparison to Hyland's study, Mingwei and Yajun (2010: 99) found that in step 3.2, the announcing move, thesis dedication occurred at an apparently lower frequency, indicating that Chinese mainland students felt far less easy in dedicating their work. Particularly, none of the MA graduates expressed the dedication of their theses to anyone. When interviewed, some said that their work was definitely no great accomplishment in any sense, thus not worth dedicating to others. However, steps 2.1 (presenting participants) and 2.4 (thanking for moral support) in Chinese mainland acknowledgements occurred at a higher frequency than their counterparts in Hyland's study.

In Hyland and Tse's (2004) research, gratitude was expressed mainly by means of nominalizations and performatives, each accounting for about one-third of all the pattern types, which were followed by adjectives and passives, accounting for 15.4% and 11% respectively, while bare mention was the least-used type (6.8%). The Chinese mainland students' preference for bare mention was more than evident, while, rather surprisingly, much fewer passives (4.6% vs. 11%) and nominalizations (16.45% vs. 33.6%) were employed. The occurrence frequencies of adjectives (26.6% vs. 33.2%) and performative verbs (17.65% vs. 15.4%) were fairly similar across the two corpora. According to Mingwei and Yajun (2010: 104), when it comes to expressing feelings and emotions, Chinese mainland students tend to be more reserved compared to Hong Kong students, who are more exposed to the Western culture and academic practices.

Following Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006) studied English acknowledgements written by 100 Arabian students. His study results showed that the acknowledgements had the same generic structure, comprised 3 moves: the reflecting move, thanking move, and announcing move. The second move, the thanking move, was obligatory, whereas the other two moves were optional. The thanking move consisted of 6 steps: thanking Allah, presenting the participants, thanking supervisor(s) and other academics, thanking for data access, clerical and technical support, thanking for financial support, and thanking for moral support. Unlike Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006) classified thanking for financial support as a separate step, not included in the step of thanking for resources, as it was mentioned rather often and the financial support came from different sources.

In 2010, Al-Ali turned to study acknowledgements written in Arabic by 100 PhD students that were native Arabians studying the soft sciences. His study results were different from those in 2006. He presented his study of the generic structure by classifying the moves into 8 moves: opening, praising and thanking Allah (God), thanking supervisor(s) and other academics, acknowledging access to resources, thanking for moral support, invoking and blessing, closing, and signing-off. Only the third move, thanking supervisor(s) and other academics, was obligatory, occurring 100% of the time, whereas the others were optional. The second move, though it was optional, occurred at a high percentage of the time at 70%.

The following are the specific questions the study sought to answer:

1. How do SCC graduate students structure their theses acknowledgments?
2. What lexico-grammatical features are employed in their writings?

This study employed the generic structure used by Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004) on notion of move analysis with modifications and additions of certain moves. The moves and steps are described in Table 1 and 2 below.

Table 1. Generic structure (Hyland and Tse, 2004)

1. Reflecting Move	Introspective comment on the writer's research experience
2. Thanking Move	
2.1. Presenting participants	Introducing those to be thanked
2.2. Thanking for <u>academic</u> assistance	Thanks for intellectual support, inspiration, comments, etc.
2.3. Thanking for data and <u>documentation</u> work support	Thanks for data access, subjects' cooperation, editing, clerical and technical support
2.4. Thanking for financial support	Thanks for financial aid in various forms
2.5. Thanking for moral support	Thanks for encouragement, love, care, friendship, etc.
2.6. Conclusion of thanking	Repeating the thanks to the aforementioned persons
3. Announcing Move	
3.1. Dedicating the dissertation	A formal dedication of the theses to an individual
3.2. Accepting responsibility	Showing responsibilities

Table 2. Linguistic pattern of gratitude expression

Forms	Examples
Nominalization	"Special thanks to..."
	"My thanks go to..."
Performative	"The writer thanks..."
	"The researcher would like to thank..."
Adjective	"The researcher is grateful to..."
	"I am indebted to..."
Passive Voice	"X is thanked for..."
	"Appreciation is given to..."
Bare Mention	"I have benefited from...."
	"Y helped me...."

Methodology

This study utilized the quantitative-qualitative method of analysing the data. For corpus analysis and move analysis, the researchers employed the simple frequency count, averages, and percentages to determine the total number of words in the corpus, length of words, occurrences of moves and steps in generic structure. For in-depth analysis of descriptive data, a qualitative method was used.

As shown in Table 3 below, the data comprised of 30 graduate thesis acknowledgments with a total length of 7,249 words or an average text length of 243.13 words. The longest sub-corpus contains an average of 346.4 words (MA-Guidance and Counselling), while the shortest one contains an average of 204.4 words (MAED-English). The corpora were taken from the selected theses of graduate students enrolled in different programs of Saint Columban College namely: Master of Arts in Guidance and Counselling, Master in Library and Information Science,

Master of Arts in Education (MAED) majors in: Educational Management, English, Mathematics, and Science.

Table 3. Average length of acknowledgments in theses of Saint Columban College

Sub-Corpora	No. of Texts	Words	Average
MAED			
Educational Management	5	1,117	223.4
English	5	1,022	204.4
Mathematics	5	1,159	231.8
Science	5	1,027	205.4
MA			
Guidance and Counselling	5	1,732	346.4
MLIS	5	1,237	247.4
Total	30	7,294	243.13

Following Swales (2004) and Hyland (2004) regarding their notion of move analysis, the data in this research were analyzed to find out their generic structure: moves and steps. As acknowledgements are a genre that is not involved in any special science that requires another expert to create an inter-coding, the data in this research were analyzed by the researchers themselves. Then the analysis of linguistic features was carried out to find the language patterns of gratitude expression and also the data were analyzed for the sociocultural aspects that they might convey. For the sake of research ethics, any real first or last names of people mentioned in the data were coded respectively.

The researchers used the **Antconc** software to determine the total number of words and average text length per sub-corpus.

Results and Discussion

The results show that the generic moves of English acknowledgements of the selected graduate students consists of three moves: the reflective move, thanking move, and signing-off move. Unlike Hyland (2004), no announcing move was found. The signing off move was evident and considered as an additional move. Only the second move, the thanking move, was obligatory. Thanking God was added as part of the thanking move.

As indicated in Table 4, the highest frequency of 29 or 96.6% are thanking for academic assistance and thanking for moral support which are considered as an obligatory step while conclusion of thanking, dedicating the dissertation, and accepting responsibility posted as the lowest with no used or 0%. The frequent steps employed under thanking moves are presenting participants, thanking for data and documentation, and thanking God with 27 or 90% respectively.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Moves

Moves	Frequency	Percentage
1. Reflecting Move	6	20
2. Thanking Move		
2.1. Presenting participants	27	90
2.2. Thanking for academic assistance	29	96.6
2.3. Thanking for data and <u>documentation</u> work support	27	90
2.4. Thanking for financial support	8	26.6
2.5. Thanking for moral support	29	96.6
2.6. Conclusion of thanking	0	0
2.7. Thanking God	27	90
3. Announcing Move		
3.1. Dedicating the dissertation	0	0
3.2. Accepting responsibility	0	0
4. Signing-off Move	22	73.3

Reflecting Move. Based on Hyland’s (2004) research, this move presents the introspective comment of the writer’s experiences while conducting the study. However, only 6 or 20% of the selected corpora employed this move. According to Hyland (2004), reflecting and announcing moves are optional. This can be inferred that announcing move might also optional to Filipino conventions of writing. The result is also in agreement with the study conducted by Mingwei and Yajun (2010) wherein reflecting move was one of the lowest frequencies.

Thanking Move. As in previous research such as that of Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006), and Rongtheera (2010), this step represented the introduction of individuals and institutions, who will be thanked in the next step due to their contributions to the completion of the theses or dissertation. Let us consider some examples.

- (1) The researcher would like to extend her appreciation and gratitude to the following people who have supported her throughout this academic endeavour, to wit: (EM-004)
- (2) The writer would like to express her grateful thanks, and real appreciation to the following individuals for their worthwhile contribution and assistance in making this research possible. (ENGL-001)

As clearly shown in the given examples, Filipino students seem to prefer to enumerate first all acknowledgees followed by the discussion of any assistance in details. This indicates that they conform to the deductive style of writing moving from general to specific- a pattern they learned from their writing lessons in undergraduate programs.

Thanking for data and documentation work support. This step contains thanks for data access, subjects’ cooperation, editing help, and clerical and technical support. This type of thanking does not directly refer to academic work, but is related to the process of data collection and the production of the thesis or dissertation in terms of documentation. The people that provide data and permission for data collection or offer help, cooperation, or service for the sake of convenience and accuracy in producing the thesis to the author are thanked in this step. Based on the data, this step occurred 27 times or 90%. It appears that they are formally acknowledged at almost the same level as those in the step of thanking for academic assistance, even though their help is not the core of the acknowledgers’ research. Let us consider some examples.

- (3) Special gratitude to the school heads/principals of the six public elementary schools in X City for allowing the researcher to administer the survey questionnaire necessary in gathering data. (LIS-003)
- (4) The author also extends her sincere gratitude to all her Grade-9 students of SY 2014-2015, who honestly answered the questionnaires and survey forms. (Math-003)

Thanking for financial support. As shown in Table 4, step 2.4 posted 8 occurrences or 26.6%. It appears that only few of the total acknowledgers expressed their gratitude to those who financially supported them. Unlike other studies where different sources of funding or financial aid, including the state agencies were mentioned, the result show that the financial support of the writers mainly came from their parents and family members. Only one acknowledger expressed her gratitude for availing scholarship from her sending institution.

Some examples are given below.

- (5) To Ms X, the researcher's sister, for her financial support extended to the researcher in order to finish this study. (Sci-004)
- (6) My parents, X and Y..... for the financial assistance, encouragements, words of wisdom, and for their upbringing. (GC-005)
- (7) A heartfelt gratitude to Z University administration, for granting scholarship to the researcher. (LIS-003)

Thanking for moral support. Like previous research, love, care, and encouragement are thanked for in this step. The participants or acknowledgees include mostly family members and friends. Let us consider some examples.

- (8) Family, friends and colleagues, for their constant support, encouragement, patience, inspirations, and faithful prayers. (GC-002)
- (9) To her parents, husbands, brothers, sister-in-law, relatives, friends, and colleagues, for their support and encouragement from the very start of this thesis till its completion. (Engl-003)
- (10) Family and friends who are constantly there, providing moral support and inspiring words to keep her moving. (Math-005)

Thanking God. As mentioned earlier, this step is added because of its frequent occurrence in the study. It occurred 27 times or 90% which ranked next to thanking for academic assistance contrary to the study of Rountheera (2010). This proved that Filipinos are truly religious who believed in God as Provider of every need. Thus, He is worthy of praise, thanks, and gratitude.

Most expressions of gratitude to God appeared both in the first and last paragraphs of the corpora. For expressions of thanks to God in the first paragraph, it reveals the Filipino belief that God should be the first place in all things. Filipinos, especially the Christians, believed that God as the creator and source of all things should be the first place in all things.

For expressions of thanks to the Almighty God in last and final paragraphs, it appears that Filipino writers followed the ascending degree of importance in developing a paragraph which starts from the least important to most important ideas. This is proven in the used of devices such as *above all*, *most of all*, and *most importantly*. Consider the following examples.

- (11) The researcher would like to heartily express her gratitude and appreciation first and foremost to our Almighty, Jesus Christ who showered His blessings and wisdom that made the researcher able to work and face all the challenges while working and preparing this research paper, and to the following who contributed much of their expertise, talents, and time to make the research endeavour possible. (GC-001)

- (12) The researcher is above all grateful to the Almighty God, Merciful and Loving God for the Gift of life, good health, strength, knowledge, wisdom, enlightenment, guidance, inspiration and providing all the resources and all the blessing bestowed upon her. (LIS-003)
- (13) Above all, to the Almighty God, the Great Provider, for all the grace, blessings, and strength. (EM-004)
- (14) And most of all the Almighty God, the source of everything, for His divine mercy, love, protection and guidance, giving the researcher the courage, vitality and perseverance to hold on. (Math-004)

Signing-off Move. For the signing off move, which is an addition or modification of Hyland's (2004), it was in agreement to the results of study of Al-Ali (2010), where the students write their first and last name at the end of their acknowledgements.

As indicated in Table 4, signing off move occurred 22 times out of 30 or 73.3 %. It means that more than half of the writers employed the signing off move.

Out of 33 performative acts, 13 or about 39 % of their thanking verbs were prefaced by a modal *would like to* while 10 or about 30% were mental state verbs like *wish to* and *want to*. Ten out of 33 or about 30% of thanking acts were expressed in the active form of verbs. Consider the following examples.

- (1) The researcher heartily expresses his sincerest thanks and appreciation to those who contributed their priceless support and cooperation in completion of this thesis. (EM-003)
- (2) The researcher would like to acknowledge with deep gratitude the assistance of the following persons in the accomplishment of this work. (Engl-003)
- (3) The writer wishes to express his deep appreciation and gratitude to all those who in one way or another helped make the undertaking a reality. (SCI-005)

Modifiers in thanking acts include adjectives (e.g. *heartfelt, sincere, special, deep/est, most of all, and above all*) and adverbs (e.g. *humbly, sincerely, and heartily*) which are often attached to thanking acts in their theses.

Most modifiers are found to be confined to steps 2.1 to 2.7 in this corpus. Most of them are appended to presenting the participants; for thanking God; and for moral support from parents, other family members, and friends. The results show that most Filipino writers appended intense modifiers in the presentation parts of thanking. This is different from other studies wherein most modifiers are appended in step 2.2 or thanking for academic support.

Conclusion

To sum up, the generic structure of the acknowledgements written by SCC graduate students comprises two moves: the reflecting move and thanking move. Unlike Hyland (2004) and other related studies, no announcing move was found. Another move, the signing off move was evident and considered as an additional move. Only the second move, the thanking move, was obligatory. Thanking God was added as part of the thanking move.

Similar to previous studies, the acknowledgements in theses of SCC graduate students have certain structures and preferred linguistic features that conform to their socio-cultural context. The acknowledgements also reflect Filipino culture in terms of the way in which it shows religiosity which is proven in the frequent occurrences of thanking God and placing acts of gratitude to God in its highest importance. Another unique feature which was present in the corpora was the use of intense modifiers in thanking act in step 2.1 or presenting participants.

Therefore, it can be said that, even though written in English, acknowledgements, as a genre, have to be in harmony with the sociocultural context where they are generated. This study can be viewed as another work that strengthens the definitions of genre as a socio-cultural practice (Bhatia, 2004) as well as the variety of Englishes that accompany a particular genre.

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