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A GENRE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE DISSERTATION ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS IN A GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY

Abstract

In recent times, scholars and researchers in Applied Linguistics have increasingly shown interest in dissertation acknowledgements/thesis acknowledgements (DAs/TAs) in various settings (Anglo-American, Arabic, and Asian), leaving those from Sub-Saharan Africa under-researched. The present study seeks to examine the DAs of undergraduate students at a Ghanaian university, following Hyland (2003, 2004). A data set of 200 DAs was obtained from two departments, English and Entomology & Wild Life. The qualitative research design was used as the main approach, supplemented by some descriptive statistics, to analyze the schematic structure and lexico-grammatical choices in the data set. Two key findings were observed in the study. First, the analysis showed a three-move pattern across the two sets of data and a slight differentiation in terms of text length across the exemplars. Secondly, the DAs from both departments deployed gratitude-related terms and socio-culturally conditioned names, while hybridized forms (realized in sociolinguistic terms as code-mixing) were preferably used in the DAs from the Department of English. These findings have implications for research on DAs/TAs, genre studies, and undergraduate research writing pedagogy.

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Key words

dissertation acknowledgement, Ghana, undergraduate students, writing pedagogy.

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Sažetak

Naučnici i istraživači u oblasti primenjene lingvistike poslednjih godina iskazuju sve više interesovanja za zahvalnice u disertacijama/tezama u različitim okruženjima (anglo-američkom, arapskom i azijskom), pri čemu nema dovoljno radova o zahvalnicama u regionu potsaharske Afrike. Zasnovan na Hajlendovoj (2003, 2004) analizi, ovaj rad ima za cilj da istraži zahvalnice u diplomskim radovima studenata na jednom univerzitetu u Gani. Podaci su prikupljeni iz 200 diplomskih radova sa dva odseka, za engleski jezik i za entomologiju i divlje životinje. Kao glavni pristup korišćeno je kvalitativno istraživanje potkrepljeno deskriptivnom statistikom da bi se analizirala shematska struktura i leksikogramatički izbori u podacima. Dobijena su dva glavna nalaza: prvo, analiza je ukazala na troetapni obrazac u oba seta podataka, kao i izvesnu razliku u dužini teksta. Drugo, zahvalnice u diplomskim radovima sa oba odseka koriste izraze vezane za zahvaljivanje i socio-kulturološki uslovljene nazive, dok se hibridni oblici (realizovani sociolingvistički kao mešanje kodova) koriste u diplomskim radovima sa odseka za engleski jezik. Ovi nalazi imaju implikacije za istraživanje zahvalnica u tezama i disertacijama, proučavanja žanra, kao i za nastavnu praksu akademskog pisanja.

Ključne reči

zahvalnice u disertacijama, Gana, studenti dodiplomskih studija, nastava akademskog pisanja.

1. INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgements in scholarly writing are viewed as a frequent component of academic publications. Their popularity is borne out of the obligation the academic community has implicitly imposed on its members to express gratitude for the assistance received from others in the design, realization, and the writing up of their research project. Compared to the other rhetorical sections of the scholarly works they are appended to (that is, the introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion, and conclusion), acknowledgements constitute a more explicit interactive part-genre which allows writers to construct a network of interlocking relationships (Hyland, 2004). Gesuato (2003) argues that DAs serve to sustain positive social ties, with the addresser producing interpersonal meanings relative to the interactants' roles as partners in a previous exchange perceived as beneficial to the recipient. Indeed, a DA/TA can be counted as a re-entry set of thanks, as it re-enacts events and circumstances relevant to the

process of undertaking a research project, while it accompanies the written product of that project once the process is completed.

Recently, a growing number of studies have investigated, for instance, the schematic structure and linguistic features of DAs/TAs. This paper contributes to these studies by examining DAs/TAs in an under-researched linguistic-cultural context by analyzing the component moves and lexical choices of DAs/TAs written by Ghanaian undergraduates in English and Entomology & Wild Life. In what follows, I first review some studies on DAs/TAs and goal of the present research. Thereafter, I describe the method and analytical framework adopted in the study. I then analyze and discuss the selected DAs. Finally, I draw implications from my findings and make some recommendations for further research.

2. PREVIOUS STUDIES ON DAs/TAs

The history of acknowledgements goes back to the times when authors were dependent on the power of those in authority in order to publish their academic works (Giannoni, 2002). Though in time the reasons for including acknowledgements in academic papers have changed, they were always a component of published academic texts, whether appearing as a part of preface or as a separate section (Giannoni, 2002). They have elicited the serious attention of many scholars over the last few decades (e.g. Giannoni, 1998, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; Heffner, 1981; Karakas, 2010; Patel, 1973; Laband & Tollison, 2000; Salager-Meyer, Alcaraz-Ariza, Pabón, & Zambrano, 2006). Studies have examined both acknowledgements in research articles (e.g. Alcaraz, 2014; Brown, 2009; Coates, 1999; Cronin, 1995; Koley & Sen, 2013) and those in dissertations/theses (e.g. Basthomi, 2008; Mohammadi, 2013; Peng, 2010; Wang, 2012).

The scholarship on acknowledgements includes four main strands. First, some studies on academic writing have examined the ways native speakers of English articulate their thanks in DAs. Second, others have examined the ways non-native speakers of English articulate their thanks in DAs. A further set of studies has examined the ways native speakers of languages other than English articulate their thanks in DAs. The last strand of studies highlights the influence of disciplines on the construction of DAs.

Studies that have examined the ways native speakers of English articulate their thanks in DAs include Ben-Ari (1987) and Gesuato (2004). Ben-Ari investigated the acknowledgements in two hundred anthropological ethnographies, defining them as

Formulations that take on an intermediate position between the internal contents of the Ethnography and the people and relationships outside it: they are both an introduction to an intellectual product and a reconstruction of the external contributions that have gone towards its realization. (Ben-Ari, 1987: 65).

Gesuato (2004) examined the textual structure of DAs written by 40 American graduates in terms of the lexico-grammatical features and the organization of information in this academic genre.

Pioneering studies on DAs by non-native English speakers were carried out by Hyland (2003) and Hyland and Tse (2004). Hyland (2003) explored the generic structure of 240 PhD and Masters DAs in six academic disciplines across five Hong Kong universities. His analysis showed how DAs offered their writers a unique rhetorical space to convey their debt for the intellectual and personal assistance they received as well as to promote their situated academic, cultural, and social identities. Analyzing the same data, Hyland (2004) found that DAs have a three-tier structure: an optional Reflecting Move, an obligatory Thanking Move, and an optional Announcing Move. Hyland and Tse (2004) focused on the linguistic patterns used to express the thanking move, showing how the three steps under this obligatory move were realized by a relatively restricted range of lexico-grammatical choices.

Drawing on Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004), a growing number of researchers (e.g. Al-Ali, 2006, 2009, 2010; Cheng, 2012; Cheng & Kuo, 2011; Lasaky, 2011; Zhang, 2012; Zhao & Jiang, 2010) have examined DAs/TAs written by Taiwanese, Chinese, Malay, Indonesian, Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, and English DAs. In particular, Al-Ali (2006) examined the generic structure of 100 DAs of doctoral Arab students from a university in Jordan. His findings differed from Hyland (2004) in relation to the type of constituent steps identified under the Thanking Move and the lexico-grammatical patterns described, which are used in expressing gratitude. For example, Al-Ali (2006) found ‘Thanking Allah (God)’ as one of the essential steps of the Thanking Move. He also found that writers employ “a more friendly and emotional tone to foreground their commitment to their kinships and the members of their extended family” (2006: 40). Al-Ali (2009, 2010) further drew attention to the construction of varied identities and socio-cultural elements doctoral Arab students utilized in writing their DAs. Other studies carried out in Arabic/Muslim contexts have reported similar findings (e.g. Abdollahian & Hashomi, 2013; Jalilifar & Mohammadi, 2014; Kuli & Rezaei, 2014). Lasaky’s (2011) study of DAs in the Applied Linguistics discipline written by NS and NNS Iranians found that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of constructing DA.

A further set of studies in non-European contexts involves those conducted among Chinese students. For instance, Zhao and Jiang (2010) investigated a set of 20 MA and PhD DAs composed by Chinese students with the aim of revealing their generic structure and lexico-grammatical features. Their findings showed that the Chinese student-writers largely followed the three-move structure and their component steps, as identified by Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004). However, divergences were found in relation to the lexico-grammatical features of the moves and the absence of some of the sub-moves indicated by Hyland and his colleague. Both Cheng’s (2012) and Yang’s (2012) investigations showed that

supervisors were always highly and firstly acknowledged by Taiwanese writers in DAs. Socio-cultural differences of supervisor-supervisee relationships in the two contexts contributed to this diversity. In a Confucian society such as the Taiwanese, the role of supervisors is always authoritative and powerful.

Cross-cultural studies such as Cheng (2012), Zhang (2012), and Afip, Ustati, and Dahan (2013) have further provided further insights into the construction of DAs. In particular, Cheng's (2012) comparative study involved 60 DAs written in English by Taiwanese and North American master students and observed differences that were attributed to different socio-pragmatic differences in the students' perceptions of writing this genre. Zhang's (2012) cross-cultural study involved three groups of MA students: Filipinos, Americans, and Chinese (and thus three varieties of English). Similar to the finding in Lasaky (2011), no Reflecting Move was found in Zhang's (2012) study. In terms of the lexico-grammatical features, it was observed that the Chinese writers preferred nominalization and performative verbs to express gratitude; the American English writers mainly deployed performative verbs and bare mention; and the Philippine English writers frequently used parallel constructions. Though several of the cross-cultural studies have tended to involve English and any other language, the study by Afip et al. (2013) is unique in focusing two groups of students with Malay and Chinese backgrounds. This study discovered that Malay students tended to be more expressive than their Chinese counterparts in conveying their gratitude.

There are also studies that highlight disciplinary specificities: Scrivener (2009), Yang (2012), and Cheng and Kuo (2011). Scrivener's (2009) study of History doctoral DAs in an American university found that librarians, libraries, and archivists ranked the second most frequently acknowledged persons in History DAs, following the dissertation committee chair or supervisors. On the other hand, Yang (2012) examined 120 texts from six different disciplines in an EFL context and found that subtle variations existed in soft science and hard science DAs as a result of factors such as area of research, language proficiency, and exposure to English. Using a pragmatic approach, Cheng and Kuo (2011) analysed 20 DAs by master students in Applied Linguistics in Taiwan, highlighting the meanings of the choice of different thanking strategies in relation to different addressees and their arrangement in DAs. They found that the Taiwanese MA students in Applied Linguistics employed explicit thanking strategies (96.93%) much more frequently than implicit thanking strategies. A very recent study by Alemi and Rezanejad (2016) has continued this disciplinary dimension by studying 503 Persian DAs from sixteen various disciplines including soft and hard disciplines. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in the complexity of DAs in hard and soft science disciplines.

Apart from the studies that focus on students with English, Chinese, Malay, Taiwanese, Filipino, and Arabic backgrounds, others have been conducted in an under-researched region in the world. Nkemleke (2006) examined the DAs of 200 Diploma students in Department of English of a Cameroonian teacher-training

institution. He found that the students tended to use verbose and ornamental linguistic expressions in expressing gratitude, which appeared to be greatly influenced by the reverence for age and the community-centered culture of Africa; this revealed that the students' use of lexical choices was culturally conditioned. Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) focused on only one postgraduate student and showed how linguistic choices at the lexical, grammatical, and discoursal levels serve to construct varying and different identities. Conducted in the same setting as the present study, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012) explored the writing of DAs from three sub-disciplines as Guidance and Counselling, Educational Administration and Management, and Science and Mathematics Education and observed some disciplinary influences.

In sum, the studies reviewed have shown that a number of factors can affect the construction and the strategies and the linguistic realizations used in DAs, such as the relevant discipline, cultural expectations, language background, social norms, and academic conventions.

3. AIM OF THE STUDY

The review of literature shows that there are only a few studies on African DAs. Thus, the present study aims to partly fill this gap by examining texts from one geographical region out of the many not (fully) explored yet. The present study focuses on DAs by undergraduate students at a public university in Ghana, in the disciplines of English and of Entomology & Wild Life by applying Hyland's (2004) approach. The two disciplines represent different scientific areas – the social sciences and the natural sciences – and are characterized by different research topics and goals.

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

- How do undergraduate students from the selected departments structure their DAs?
- What lexico-grammatical choices do undergraduate students from the two selected departments make in their DAs?

4. DATA AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The data for this study were 200 DAs (a hundred from the Department of English and a hundred from the Department of Entomology & Wild Life) submitted by undergraduate students from 2006 to 2009 at UCC. I first carried out a manual search on a catalogue of dissertations submitted in the 2006-2009 years, and after arranging the results alphabetically, I selected and photocopied the first 25

dissertations from each year (that is, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2009) from each department. The DAs from the Department of English as well as the Department of Entomology & Wild Life were coded ENG DA and ENW DA respectively, and numbers were assigned to distinguish one DA from another in the same department.

As indicated by many researchers (e.g. Crooks, 1986; Lores, 2004), lacking uniform standards in move identification is the major flaw of genre analysis and causes a validation problem. In general, to exercise judgment in determining textual boundaries for the moves, the cognitive-semantic criterion was used, in line with established practices and published advice (Paltridge, 1994; Swales, 1981). Hyland's (2004) three-move structure, which was adopted and adapted in this study, is presented below:

| MOVE TYPE | DEFINITION |
|--|---|
| 1. Reflecting Move | Introspective comment on the writer's research experience. |
| 2. Thanking Move | Mapping credit to individuals and institutions |
| 2.1. <i>Presenting participants</i> | Introducing those to be thanked |
| 2.2. <i>Thanking for academic help</i> | Thanks for intellectual support, ideas, analyses, feedback, etc. |
| 2.3. <i>Thanking for providing resources</i> | Thanks for data access and clerical, technical or financial support |
| 2.4. <i>Thanking for moral support</i> | Thanks for encouragement, friendship, sympathy, patience, etc. |
| 3. Announcing Move | An assertion of authorial responsibility for flaws or errors |

Figure 1. Hyland's (2004) three-move structure of DAs

The goal of the application of Hyland's move structure was to check whether, and, if so, how often, this structure is also used by students in a different geographical setting.

After the application of the top-bottom approach in identifying the generic structure, I followed the approach by Gesuato (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004) in identifying linguistic expressions indicating the thanking patterns in DAs, by examining only explicit thanking expressions. Implicit forms of thanking such as "X was kind/supportive" – which in the texts always follow an explicit thanking expression and which indicate the reason of gratitude – were not considered (e.g. *I would like to thank Prof. X for her support during the past year with guiding me through the development and completion of this thesis. She always had time to listen to and critique my ideas, concerns, and progress; added emphasis*). Cases of indeterminacy were resolved by seeking a 'second opinion' from two coders. These coders had similar educational backgrounds: they both held masters' degrees in Applied Linguistics and were PhD students in the Department of English. I organized a coding training session for them and then, individually, the coders proceeded to identify moves and steps in their copies of the 200 DAs by applying the coding scheme they had received.

The identification/classification scheme involved three issues, following earlier genre analysts such as Swales (1981, 1990) and Bhatia (1993): first, establishing the frequency of occurrence of the moves; next, determining how long each move/step is in number of words; and finally, determining the sequencing of the moves. Following Crooks (1986), the two coders' reliability was found to be 85; the coders then discussed the cases where their judgments had been different until they reached an agreement.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and discussion of data based on the two research questions posed earlier.

5.1. Schematic structure

I first consider the structure of the DAs from the Departments of English and Entomology & Wild Life; that is, the textual space occupied by and the sequencing of their component moves, as well as the frequency of occurrence.

Reflecting Move

This move allows writers to publicly share their understandings and the experiences they have gained from their research:

(1) It is with the greatest joy that I have been able to bring this work to an end.
(ENG DA2)

(2) It is very difficult for one person to successfully produce a project work of this Nature. (ENW DA1)

When this move appeared in a DA in our data set, it usually occupied the text-initial position (Hyland, 2004; Al-Ali, 2006). For each of the two disciplines under study (that is, English and Entomology & Wild Life) only the DAs included the Reflecting Move, which revealed that the students demonstrated a measure of reflection over what they had produced. Similarly, Yang's (2012) study also indicated that 26% of doctoral Chinese students utilized this move. Likewise, this move occurred in more than half (58.3%) of the sixty MA thesis acknowledgements observed by Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), in which students mostly emphasized the significance of assistance of other people in decreasing the stress of writing a dissertation. Moreover, in the study by Karakas (2010), it was reported that while only 6% of native Turkish students used this move in their acknowledgements,

native American students used it in 32% of their acknowledgements (i.e. six times more than Turkish students). Generally, there was no marked difference with regard to the two disciplines under study, suggesting that the influence of genre tends to be greater than the influence of disciplinary context.

Thanking Move

The Thanking Move occurred in all the texts. As in Hyland's (2004) study, it comprised four steps (i.e. presenting participants, thanking for academic assistance, thanking for resources, and thanking for moral support). As in several other studies (e.g. Gesuato, 2008; Scrivener, 2009; Yang, 2012), this move is the core of the acknowledgement genre.

Step 1. Presenting Participants

This step occurred in 34 out of the 200 DAs (17%) and it was particularly frequent (20) in the DAs from the Department of English (10%). It was mostly found at the beginning of the Thanking Move and it usually occurred in lengthier acknowledgements. This step is typically short, not more than two sentences in length, as illustrated below:

(3) This work will not be complete without admitting the contribution made towards it by a number of personalities. (ENG DA3)

(4) In the course of this study, many people have been of great help to me. I cannot but acknowledge their assistance and contribution. (ENW DA2)

(5) The attainment of academic laurels is not the effort of an individualthat this long essay is a success is a collaboration of efforts... (ENG DA4)

(6) This work has been carried out successfully not only through the prowess and the instrumentality of the researcher, but also with the active involvement of a good number of people. (ENW DA3)

As can be seen from the examples above, students from both disciplinary communities acknowledged the contribution of various people in general terms. The success of the students was thus attributed to a collective effort, although it can be argued that the initiative had come from the student-researcher. This move served as a kind of introduction to the entire text.

Step 2. Thanking for Academic Help

This is the core step in the Thanking Move and the only one that was found in all the DAs analysed. This comprised thanking persons for various forms of assistance such as imparting knowledge, giving criticisms and suggestions, supervising the work, and assisting with analysis and discussion. The people usually acknowledged are Supervisors, Lecturers, Heads of Departments, and Academic Counselors, e.g.:

(7) I am very grateful to Prof. XXX, The Director of School of Biological Science of the University of, who supervised this work. Despite his heavy schedules, he patiently read through all the scripts. His constructive criticisms and useful suggestions helped to remove most of the errors and omissions which would have rendered this work useless. (ENW DA4)

(8) I want to thank my academic counselors Professor XXX ... Prof. XXX..., Mr. XXX..., Mr. XXX ..., and my supervisor Mr. XXX. (ENG DA7)

In the examples above, we see that whereas the ENW DA writer is profuse in explaining the kind of assistance offered, the ENG DA writer is scanty in his/her remarks on the kind of support. This seems to be a common pattern. By mentioning these academic figures, the writer foregrounds the activities which structure his or her intellectual experiences during the research, but such mentions also represent rhetorical choices related to getting the thesis accepted, a strategy which becomes more apparent when it is extended to examiners and scholars in the student's field of research (Hyland, 2004). As argued by Giannoni (2002), this profuse reference to scholars in the research community provides the acknowledgee with due recognition by underlining his or her status to the reader while also signalling deference to the academic community by recognizing its norms. It is also interesting to note that some students also recognized the help of their mates and the authorities of the University who might have provided some help of academic nature, similar to the finding by Zhao and Jiang (2010).

Step 3. Thanking for Providing Resources

The kind of assistance that receives appreciation in the DAs includes financial support, access to information, technical support and clerical assistance. Below are excerpts mentioning these various types of assistance:

(9) I also owe much gratitude to my family especially My Mum, Mrs. XXX and Mr. XXX for their unfailing support financially. (Financial, ENG DA5)

(10) I am also thankful to Mr. XXX (Kumasi Zoo Manager) and Mr. Mohammed [...] for their help in providing information for this topic ... (Access to data, ENW DA6)

(11) My sincere thanks go to Miss XXX who helped and the time she always spent proof-reading my scripts. And XXX who volunteered to type this work. I am indeed grateful. (Clerical, ENW DA7)

(12) I want to show my deepest appreciation to Dr. XXX, for granting me the privilege to carry out my analysis at their laboratory and providing facilities for the study. (Technical, ENW DA8)

Thanking for technical support was frequent in the DAs from the Department of Entomology & Wild Life, and this is not surprising, given that the discipline deals mostly with laboratory experiments. The number of instances of clerical assistance in the DAs of both departments was low, possibly due to the fact that most students are computer literate and can, therefore, type their works. The disciplinary influence on the kind of support received by the acknowledger is confirmed by Scrivener (2009) who avers that librarians and archivists are the second most frequently acknowledged group in her study.

In the two sub-corpora, altogether, financial support and clerical support are, respectively, the most frequently mentioned (104) and the least frequently (26) mentioned kinds of assistance (see Table 1).

| Type of assistance | ENG | | ENW | | TOTAL |
|--------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | |
| Access to data | 17 | 19% | 40 | 26% | 57 |
| Clerical support | 11 | 12% | 15 | 10% | 26 |
| Financial support | 48 | 53% | 56 | 37% | 104 |
| Technical support | 15 | 16% | 42 | 27% | 57 |
| Total | 91 | 100% | 153 | 100% | 244 |

Table 1: Distribution of steps in thanking for providing resources

Step 4. Thanking for Moral Support

Thanking for Moral Support offers the writer the opportunity to thank God, religious leaders and organizations, and family (people outside the academic sphere) for their encouragement, advice, prayers, patience, care, and friendship. It is interesting to note that several DAs in this study contained thanking for moral support. A total of 195 (97.5%) of DAs contained allusions to God or Allah. This reference to religion is illustrated below:

(13) God had declared his promises and surely it has come to pass and to him alone be all glory, honour and power forever and ever. (ENW DA9)

(14) I cannot afford not to mention my pastors, Rev, and Pastor Mrs. XXX, Pastor XXX, Pastor XXX, Pastor XXX, Pastor XXX, Mama XXX and the entire membership of Alabaster House Chapel especially the “Daughters of Virtue” for their prayers, support and concern. (ENG DA8)

Given that Ghana is usually touted as a Christian country, it was not surprising that such references to God, religious persons, and religious organizations were often rooted in Christian settings rather than Allah and Islamic organizations, as noted in Al-Ali’s (2006, 2009, 2010) studies. This high frequency of reference to religion confirms Hyland’s (2004: 337) finding that “references to God, church fellowship and social associations occur frequently” in non-native English DAs. However, it must be pointed out that in many of the studies conducted in Arabic contexts, references to Allah were more elaborately supported by quotations from the Quran.

Announcing Move

The move in which the author assumes responsibility for flaws in the work occurred in only two ENG DAs and in two ENW DAs. By clearly stating their responsibility for possible shortcomings in the data, results, and ideas in a dissertation, writers sought to not only absolve their supervisors and collaborators of blame for any deficiencies but also asserted their ownership of the product (Hyland, 2004):

(15) I would, however, want to say that no one mentioned above is responsible for the shortcomings of this work, if any, they are solely mine. (ENG DA10)

(16) Although many people have assisted me in the work, I would like to say that I am solely responsible for any errors to be found. (ENG DA17)

(17) I do not blame any persons for the mistakes that might be found in my research though I tried very hard to reduce their occurrence. (ENW DA9)

(18) Despite all the attempts made to remove errors, omissions, inaccuracies and any other mistakes that will devalue this work, traces of them will sneak into this work. In the event of any of these creeping into this work, I have no one to blame, but myself. (ENW DA11)

This step is not very frequent, and this may be as a result of the fact that in Ghana, assuming responsibility is taken for granted; hence, there is no need to state it. This sparse assuming of responsibility in the two corpora finds support in Jenkins, Jordan and Weiland’s (1993) study in which engineering faculty admitted to writing this step in over 25% of their L2 students’ dissertations. Unlike the corpus

analysed by Hyland (2004) and Yang (2012), the DAs in this study did not have a step where the dissertation was dedicated to an individual or an institution. This is because in UCC, dedication is supposed to be done in a different section of the dissertation, on a separate page.

5.1.1. Textual space

Table 2 shows the number of words allocated to the reflecting, thanking, and announcing moves in the two sub-corpora, on one hand, and the distribution of moves, on the other hand.

| Moves | ENGDA(No.) | ENGDA (%) | ENWDA(No.) | ENWDA (%) |
|----------------|---------------|------------|---------------|------------|
| Reflecting | 28 | 0.2 | 63 | 0.5 |
| Thanking | 14,249 | 99.5 | 12,487 | 99.0 |
| Announcing | 42 | 0.3 | 58 | 0.5 |
| Total | 14,319 | 100 | 12,608 | 100 |
| Average | 143.19 | | 126.08 | |

Table 2. Number of words in moves

As shown in Table 2, on average, the ENG DAs were lengthier (143.19 words) than their ENW counterparts (126.08 words). The ENG DAs contained 28 words (0.19%) in the Reflecting Move, while the ENW DAs had 63 (0.50%) in the Reflecting Move. The Thanking Move in ENG DAs contained 14,249 words (99.5%) and 12,487 words (99.0%) in ENW DAs. The Announcing Move had the lowest number of words in both sub-corpora.

Overall, more textual space was allocated to the Thanking Move than the Reflecting and Announcing moves in the DAs from the departments under study. This suggests that the writers attach more importance to the Thanking Move, the one that explicitly fulfills the communicative purpose of showing appreciation to benefactors (e.g. Gesuato, 2003; Hyland, 2004; Nkemleke, 2006). Indeed, the literature recognizes that Move 2 (Thanking) is often an obligatory component in DAs (Giannoni, 2002; Hyland, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Zhao & Jiang, 2010).

However, the average length in our data set was shorter than the PhD DAs analysed by Hyland (2004). This difference may be attributed to the fact that the DAs in the present study are undergraduate DAs, whereas Hyland's data involved postgraduate DAs. Moreover, more people and institutions might have been involved in the doctoral research, all of whom require being thanked. It is also clear that English DAs tended to be longer than the ENW DAs, confirming Becher and Trowler's (2001) view of the Humanities disciplines being more expansive than the Science disciplines.

5.1.2. Sequencing

The sequencing of moves allows us to see the linearity, cyclicity, and embeddedness of the moves/steps (Dudley-Evans, 1994; Hyland, 2004; Swales, 1990). A typical DA in my data set consists of a three-move configuration: Reflecting Move → Thanking Move → Announcing Move. Table 3 presents the sequencing of steps in the Thanking Move.

| <i>Sequencing of Steps</i> | <i>ENG DAs</i> | | <i>ENW DAs</i> | |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | <i>Freq</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>Freq</i> | <i>%</i> |
| 2.1→2.2→2.3→2.4 | 29 | 14.8 | 34 | 17 |
| 2.2→2.3→2.4 | 43 | 21.5 | 56 | 28 |
| 2.1→2.3→2.1→2.4 | 28 | 14 | 10 | 5 |
| Total | 100 | 100% | 100 | 100% |

Table 3. Sequencing of steps in the Thanking Move
Key: 2.1 (Presenting persons); 2.2 (academic support); 2.3 (resources); 2.4 (moral support)

According to Table 3, the second sequencing pattern was the most frequent, followed by the first and finally the last. The following texts give an idea of what DAs from a Ghanaian university look like, focusing on the sequencing:

I would like to acknowledge some distinguished people who helped me to complete this work successfully. /(Move 1)

The greatest form of appreciation goes to Jehovah God who has brought me this far. I know without this blessing He showered on me, I would not have completed this work successfully.

I also owe it to my supervisor, Dr. XXX, who painstakingly had the patience and time to meticulously read through my work and make constructive criticisms on every aspect of my work. Again, it would not have be fair to leave out XXX and XXX, my good friend, who out of their busy schedule always made time to proof read my work and made some corrections where needed.

Next, I express sincere appreciation to my parents, Mr. XXX and Mrs. XXX, and my siblings, XXX, XXX. XXX, XXX,XXX, XXX, and XXX for the prayers and generous support they gave me even when it had not been sought. I say thank you for helping me come this far. Indeed, life without some loved ones to cheer one on is extremely difficult. It is for this reason that I would want to show appreciation to my dear ones, XXX and XXX for the concern, love, encouragement and attention they showered on me. Further, I would want to show appreciation to my friends XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX, XXX, and XXX./(Move 2)

Finally, although my gratitude goes to all who in various ways have contributed to my work and stay on this campus, I am responsible for any errors still found in the work. (Move 3) (ENG DA 24)

Figure 2. Sample of DA written by a Ghanaian undergraduate

The undertaking of this exercise was a daunting task, but the assistance of certain distinguished people made it fairly easy for which I would wish to recognize them. / (Move 1)
 Firstly, I extend my sincere thanks to the almighty God for seeing me through this project successfully. Beyond this, I wish to express a special appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. XXX who through his patience, direction and encouragement, assisted me through this work.
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 Finally, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my family whose constant support and prayers helped me to make this study a reality. Without them, this research would not have been a success./ (Move 2)
 I am however responsible for mistakes that may be in the work, as I am only human./ (Move 3) (ENW DA 17)

Figure 3. Sample of DA written by a Ghanaian undergraduate

The sample data above (Figures 2 and 3) thus suggest Ghanaian students typically begin their DAs with a reflection on the contribution made by various persons. This often includes God before those who offered academic support. The references to other people who did not actively participate in the research such as groups, churches, and friends may suggest the socio-cultural arrangement of the Ghanaian setting that places premium on the communal bonds that the people share.

5.1.3. Frequency

The overall frequency patterns of the moves and steps identified are given in Table 4.

| <i>Move</i> | <i>ENG</i> | | <i>ENW</i> | | <i>Total</i> | |
|--|------------|----------|------------|----------|--------------|-----|
| | <i>No</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>No</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>No</i> | |
| 1. Reflecting move | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | |
| 2. Thanking move | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 200 | |
| Step 2.1. Presenting Participants | 20 | 20 | 14 | 14 | 34 | 17 |
| Step 2.2. Academic attention | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 200 | 100 |
| Step 2.3 Resources | 94 | 94 | 98 | 98 | 192 | 96 |
| Step 2.4 Moral support | 97 | 97 | | 95 | 192 | 96 |
| 3. Announcing move | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 8 | |

Table 4. Frequency of moves in DAs

As can be seen from Table 4, the thanking move occurs in all the DA/TAs, (100%) followed by the Announcing move (8%) and Reflecting move (4%). This finding is in accordance with several studies conducted in different regional contexts (e.g.

Hyland, 2003, 2004; Lasaky, 2011; Zhang, 2012). We now turn attention to the analysis and discussion of data in relation to the second research question.

5.2. Lexical choices

In this section, I present three sets of lexical choices made by the authors of DAs; gratitude-related words, socio-culturally conditioned names, and hybridized expressions in the form of code-mixing. First, I report the findings concerning the gratitude-related words, drawing on Gesuato (2004).

| GENERAL CONCEPT CONVEYED | LEXICON | WORD CLASS | ENG DAs | ENW DAs | TOTAL | % |
|------------------------------|-----------------|------------|---------|---------|-------|--------|
| Public recognition | Acknowledgement | Noun | 2 | - | 2 | 0.23% |
| | Acknowledge | Verb | 21 | 18 | 39 | 4.49% |
| Favourable evaluation | Appreciate | Verb | 15 | 13 | 28 | 3.22% |
| | Appreciation | Noun | 21 | 59 | 80 | 9.22% |
| | Appreciative | Adjective | 2 | - | 2 | 0.23% |
| Indebtedness | Indebted | Adjective | 34 | 11 | 45 | 5.19% |
| | Owe | Verb | 17 | 11 | 28 | 3.22% |
| | Indebtedness | Noun | 6 | 4 | 10 | 1.15% |
| Glad acceptance | Grateful | Adjective | 76 | 74 | 150 | 17.30% |
| | Gratitude | Noun | 102 | 80 | 182 | 20.99% |
| | Gratefulness | Noun | - | 2 | 2 | 0.23% |
| Favourable attitude | Thank (verb) | Verb | 62 | 38 | 100 | 11.53% |
| | Thankful | Adjective | 10 | 3 | 13 | 1.49% |
| | Thanks | Noun | 71 | 112 | 183 | 21.10% |
| | Thankfulness | Noun | - | 1 | 1 | 0.11% |
| Obligation | Beholden | Adjective | 1 | - | 1 | 0.11% |
| Praise | Commendation | Noun | - | 1 | 1 | 0.11% |
| Total | | | 440 | 427 | 867 | 100% |

Table 5. Distribution of gratitude-related words

The findings indicate that gratitude formulas are built most frequently around not only nouns but also around adjectives and verbs, as in Gesuato (2004). More specifically, as can be seen in Table 5, nouns in the data set occurred the most frequently (53.17%), followed by adjectives (24.33%) and verbs (22.49%). The same trend was identified in the two sub-corpora, although the occurrence of nouns in ENW (60.6%) was higher than in ENG (45.9%). In particular, nouns such as *gratitude* and *thanks* occurred with a frequency of 20.99% and 21.10%

respectively. The most frequent adjectives and verbs are *grateful* (17.30%) and *thank* (11.53%), respectively. The words *acknowledgements* and *acknowledge*, which encapsulate the essence of DAs are the least frequent (4.72%). Nouns were qualified by adjectives as in: *immeasurable gratitude*, *sincere gratitude*, *sincerest thanks*, *heartfelt thanks*, *immense appreciation*, and *utmost gratitude*. The qualifiers – *immeasurable*, *sincerest*, *immense*, and *utmost* – are used to show the intensity of writers' gratitude for the benefits received and thus to convey sincerity. Laudatory adjectives (*helpful*, *insightful*, *invaluable*, *generous*, etc.) are used in the two corpora to refer to the help provided by the acknowledgees, similar to Salager-Meyer, Alcaraz-Ariza, and Maryelis (2010). Moreover, 20% of gratitude-related nouns used are expanded by possessives, which identify the thanker:

(19) I wish to express my deepest gratitude... (ENG DA24)

(20) My heartfelt thanks go to XXX. (ENW DA23)

Apart from gratitude-related words, address terms of benefactors were observed. Some of the benefactors were addressed by their honorific titles (*Dr. Prof.*, *Rev. Father*), first names (*Stephen*, *Monica*, *Kwesi*, *Rashida*), and in some cases, their nicknames were used. Benefactors (that is, both individual and institutions) were, as was to be expected, identified through noun phrases realized as given names (of either English or Ghanaian origin), titles and full names, determiners and common nouns or simply nouns, e.g.: *Rev. Fr. Stephen Kwasi Gyan*, *Hamida*, and *my grandmother* (ENG DA25); *Oguaa Hall 2005/06 JCRC Executive*, *friends*, and *girlfriend* (ENW DA26). These naming practices reveal a multicultural Ghanaian society, with names from the English-speaking society (e.g. *Stephen* and *Monica*) as well as those from the Ghanaian setting (e.g. *Kwesi*, *Gyan*, and *Oguaa*). In particular, the use of titles in the naming practices in these DAs suggests the recognition of status and deference.

(21) I am indebted to all my friends, especially... Margaret, Prince, Leila Gertrude (ENG DA17)

(22) To my friends, Edwe, K4, Olu (ENW DA20)

(23) To my Hommies: Innocent (Ainno) Kate, Jeff, Naana, Vivian, Kwaku Gyasi (sa-pinto), Prof (Yaw) I thank God for your lives. (ENW DA21)

Nicknames included *Sa-pinto*, *K4*, and *Edwe*, suggesting an informal relationship between the DA writers and some of their benefactors. In Ghana, as in other countries, students tend to use nicknames among themselves (Afful, 2006). The references to the mates of the student-writers indicate a horizontal relationship which bothers on camaraderie, collegiality, and solidarity.

Benefactors' names and titles are sometimes realized as sequences of noun phrases, with one noun phrase acting in apposition to the other, such as *The Head of the English Department, Prof. XXX* (ENG DA26) and *Head of Entomology Division, Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana, Dr. XXX*. (ENW DA 27). They are also realized by prepositional phrases: *To XXX of the Department of English* (ENG DA28) and *To my sister, Mrs. XXX, and all my friends* (ENW DA28). This was consistent with Hyland's (2004) finding.

The above illustrated lexical choices, especially in the naming practices, reveal both the authors' concern for the status of the benefactors (see the use of titles) and need to convey gratitude (see the use of endearment terms, nicknames, and first names (see Afful, 2006) when addressing their mates. Such combined traces of formality and informality show that the DA is not seen as highly formal. It is seen as a peripheral rhetorical site and, therefore, some informal elements are allowed. This confirms Hyland's (2003) view that acknowledgements are neither strictly academic nor entirely personal. Closely related to the benefactors was the instantiation of the benefits. The benefits were expressed in the form of phrases and clauses: *Unfailing financial support, fervent inspirational messages, who helped me with the identification of the various species..., who offered suggestions and mindfully supervised this project* (ENW DA29) and *XXX who has nurtured and supported* (ENG DA29).

A further observation in the use of linguistic expressions was the hybridized linguistic forms. A few DAs (e.g. ENG DA6, ENG DA9, ENW DA14) contained expressions in some Ghanaian languages (code mixing), as evidenced in:

(24) *I say a big "meda hom ase"* (translated as "I thank you all") (ENG DA4)

(25) *To you I say "Ayeeko"* (meaning "Well done") (ENG DA6)

There were also sentences in French in two of the ENG DAs:

(26) *Merci et que Dieu vous bénisses* (meaning "Thank you and may God bless you") (ENG DA3)

(27) *Monsieur, je vous suis très reconnaissant* (translated as "Sir, I am very grateful to you") (ENG DA20)

The writers might have had French as one of their courses or might have been addressing someone who understood French. (Indeed, there is a Department of French in the Faculty of Arts at UCC; this is not surprising as Ghana is surrounded by French-speaking neighbours). Interestingly, these instances of code-switching or code-mixing were only found in the Department of English DAs, suggesting not only a disciplinary difference but the daring nature of the Humanities students.

Generally, the choice of lexis reveals how writers feel obliged and sometimes compelled to acknowledge people they deem instrumental not only in writing the dissertation but also in their life, in general.

6. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to examine DAs from two departments (English and of Entomology & Wild Life) in a public English-medium university in Ghana. The specific research questions sought to ascertain the textual organization and lexico-syntactic choices in the DAs written by undergraduate students. In relation to the first research, the corpus displayed a three-move pattern, with the DAs from the Department of English being slightly lengthier than those from the Department of Wild Life & Entomology. Secondly, the DAs from both departments displayed similar lexical choices such as gratitude-related expressions and socio-culturally conditioned names, while hybridized forms (realized in sociolinguistic terms as code-mixing) were more utilized in the DAs from the Department of English.

The findings have implications for the existing scholarship on DAs, genre studies, and undergraduate research writing pedagogy. First, the findings contribute to the scholarship on DAs/TAs. Several studies conducted on DAs/TAs have been at the master's and doctorate levels. The present study, however, focused on DAs at the undergraduate level. In particular, the study revealed that, with regard to structure, the DAs from the two selected departments followed the three-move structure proposed by Hyland (2004) and observed by several other studies. This was in contrast to the four-move structure by Nkemleke (2006) and the eight-move structure identified in Al-Ali's (2009) work. Concerning lexical choices, the study also revealed that there were similarities between the two sub-corpora in the use of gratitude-related words. The gratitude-related words were similar to those found in Gesuato (2004). ENG students also tended to display some creativity in their lexical choices as they employed code-mixing and informal elements. This study suggests that, though the academic rules, regulations and conventions might constrain writers' choice of thanking expressions to more uniform forms of thanking across cultures (cf. Al-Ali, 2010; Hyland, 2003, 2004; Karakas, 2010), the social and cultural background of writers still have an effect on their language choices (cf. Hatipoglu, 2007).

Second, these findings have some implications for the use of genre theory in textual studies. This study upholds the usefulness of the move-step theory proposed by Swales (1990) as well as the usefulness of Hyland's (2003, 2004) model on DAs. The various moves and steps within the moves with their lexico-syntactic features make it possible to understand how such texts such as DAs are constructed by students. While a move structure analysis approach to texts is certainly useful – as confirmed in previous studies – it also needs to be flexible as a

tool for textual analysis – e.g. because of differences in content and style across different varieties of English, fields of study (disciplinary contexts), and cultures.

The findings in the present study also have implications for undergraduate research writing pedagogy, as it may provide teachers in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) with some useful information when teaching thesis/dissertation writing, in general, as well as DAs/TAs, especially in African universities and elsewhere at undergraduate level. First, students need to refer to reliable sources such as Hyland's proposed schematic structure of DA so that they know how to structure their DAs. Second, the findings on linguistic choices indicate that EAP instructors or supervisors can teach their students that appreciation for who (e.g. *nouns*), what (e.g. *nouns*), and how (e.g. *verbs, adjectives, and adverbs*) is generally expressed in DA. Third, as had been stated by Al-Ali (2006), lecturers need to create clear and standardized guidelines of the practice for the students to follow, to facilitate more efficient and regular use of acknowledgement. In agreement with Yang (2012), EAP teachers can explicitly instruct students how to write purposeful and interactional acknowledgements.

Finally, the study may serve as inspiration for further research. It is recommended that further research be conducted on DAs from other faculties of UCC such as Education and Social Sciences, given the large student numbers there. Further research can also be conducted into DAs produced by either undergraduates or postgraduates from other different public universities in Ghana to see whether DAs vary from one university to another. These suggestions for further research can indeed be applied to other English-medium universities elsewhere.

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