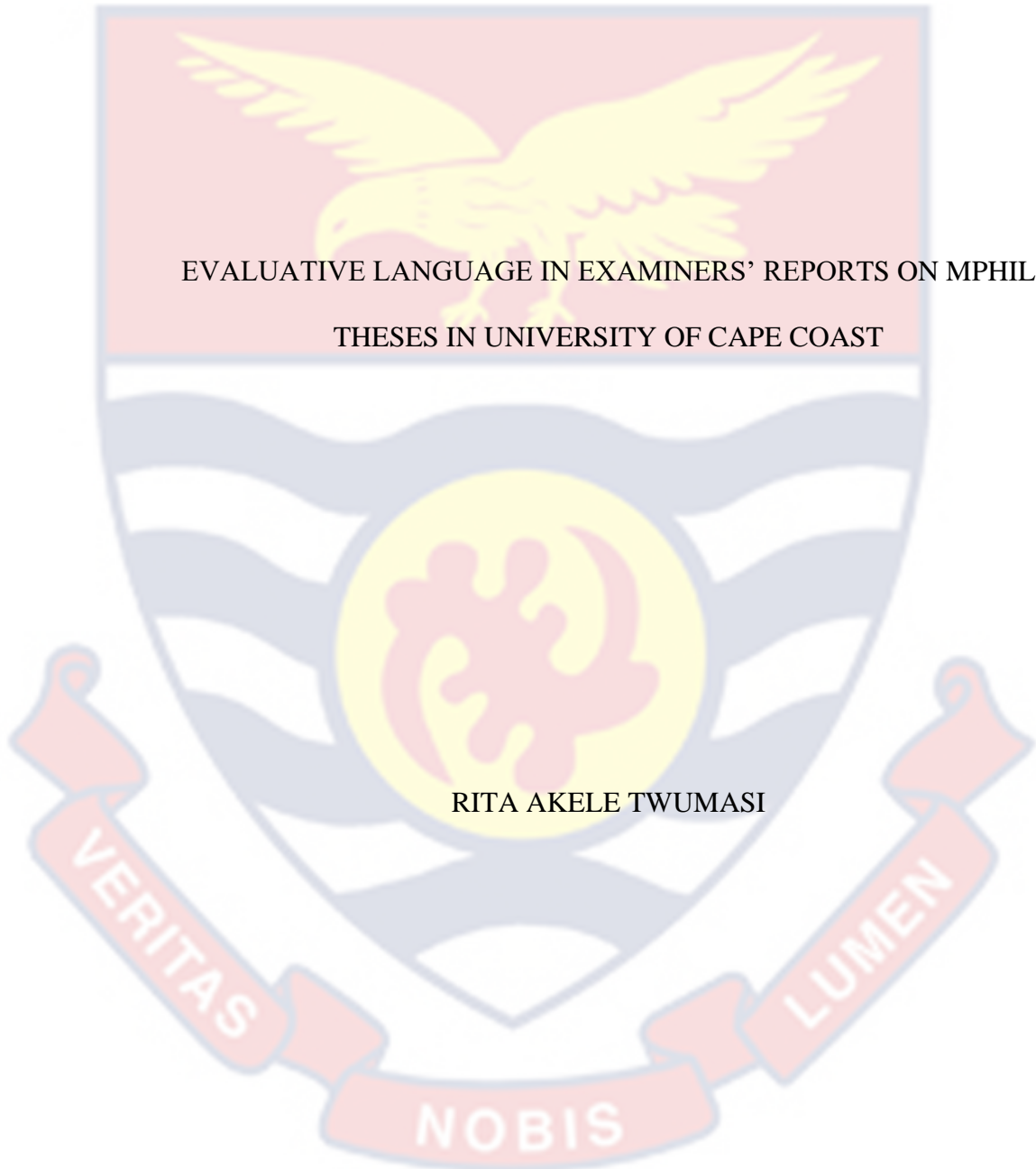


UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST



EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN EXAMINERS' REPORTS ON MPhil  
THESES IN UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

RITA AKELE TWUMASI

2021



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EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN EXAMINERS' REPORTS ON MPhil  
THESES IN UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

BY

RITA AKELE TWUMASI

Thesis submitted to the Department of English of the Faculty of Arts, College  
of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in  
English language

AUGUST 2021

## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Rita Akele Twumasi

### Supervisors' Declaration

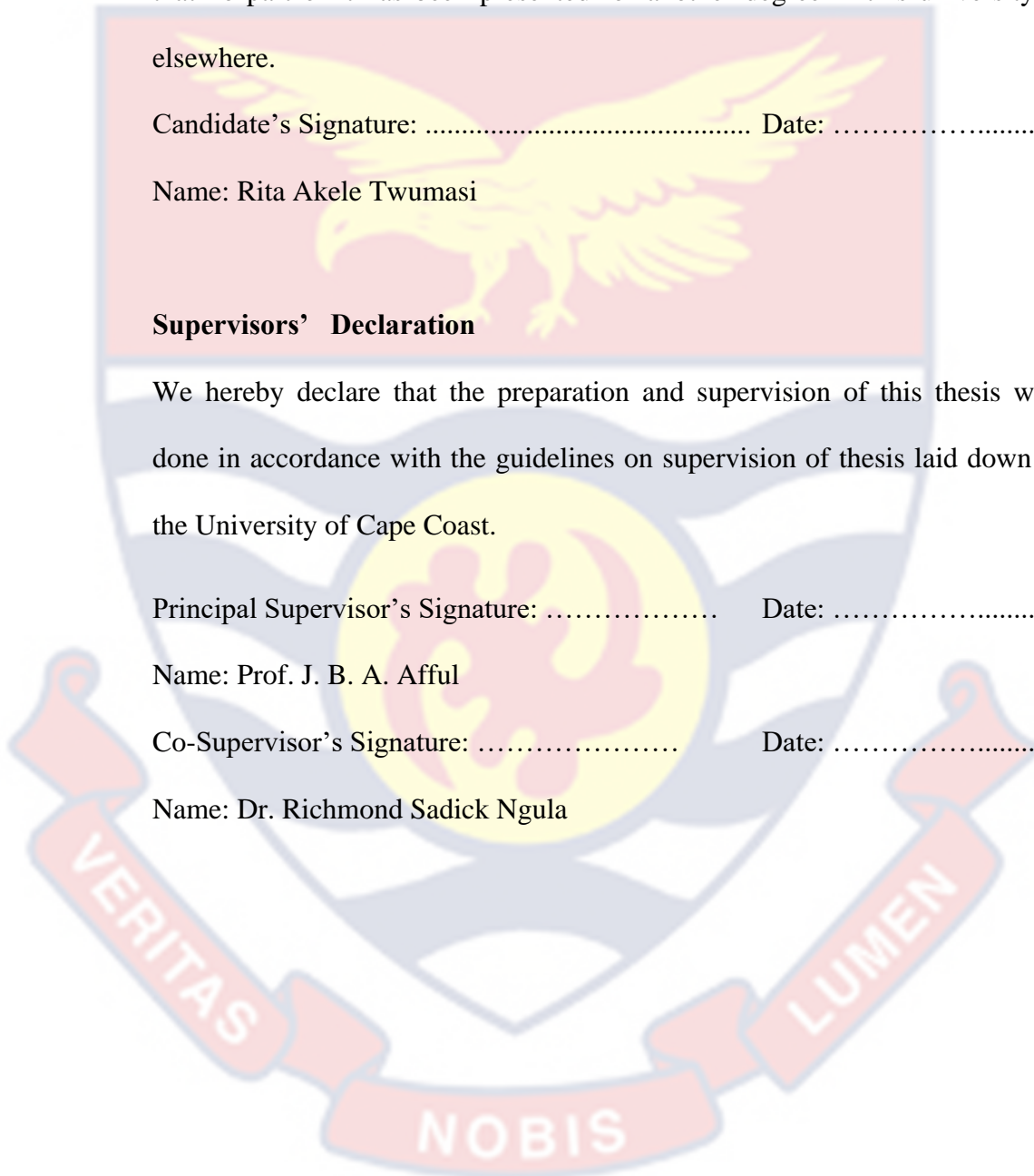
We hereby declare that the preparation and supervision of this thesis were done in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Prof. J. B. A. Afful

Co-Supervisor's Signature: ..... Date: .....

Name: Dr. Richmond Sadick Ngula



## ABSTRACT

Academic writing is not impersonal and objective; it is interactive and evaluative. The present study examined the evaluative language in examiners' reports on 100 MPhil theses purposively selected from four departments, namely English, History, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health, by, specifically, investigating the types of evaluative comments, evaluated entities, and examiner roles. The present study focused on the Theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and key concepts like 'Evaluation' and 'Feedback' together with adopted analytical framework by Holbrook et al. (2004a) and Starfield et al. (2017). Applying qualitative content analysis to the data set in University of Cape Coast, the study revealed three major findings. First, examiners employed more negative evaluative comments than positive evaluative comments. The negative comments, however, were mitigated, using such strategies as praise and criticism pairs, hedging devices, and personal pronouns. Second, the thesis and the candidate were the major entities evaluated in the data and these were realized largely in Material and Relational processes. Finally, aside their core mandates as examiners and evaluators of what the candidate had done, examiners assumed six other different roles. The study adds to the usefulness of SFL and analytical framework in interpreting evaluative language in thesis examiners' reports. The study, also, provides insights into the need for supervisors and students to situate their coaching and writing skills respectively to meet institutional and genre requirements.

**KEY WORDS**

Language of evaluation

Examiners' reports

Postgraduate education

Systemic Functional Linguistics

Written feedback





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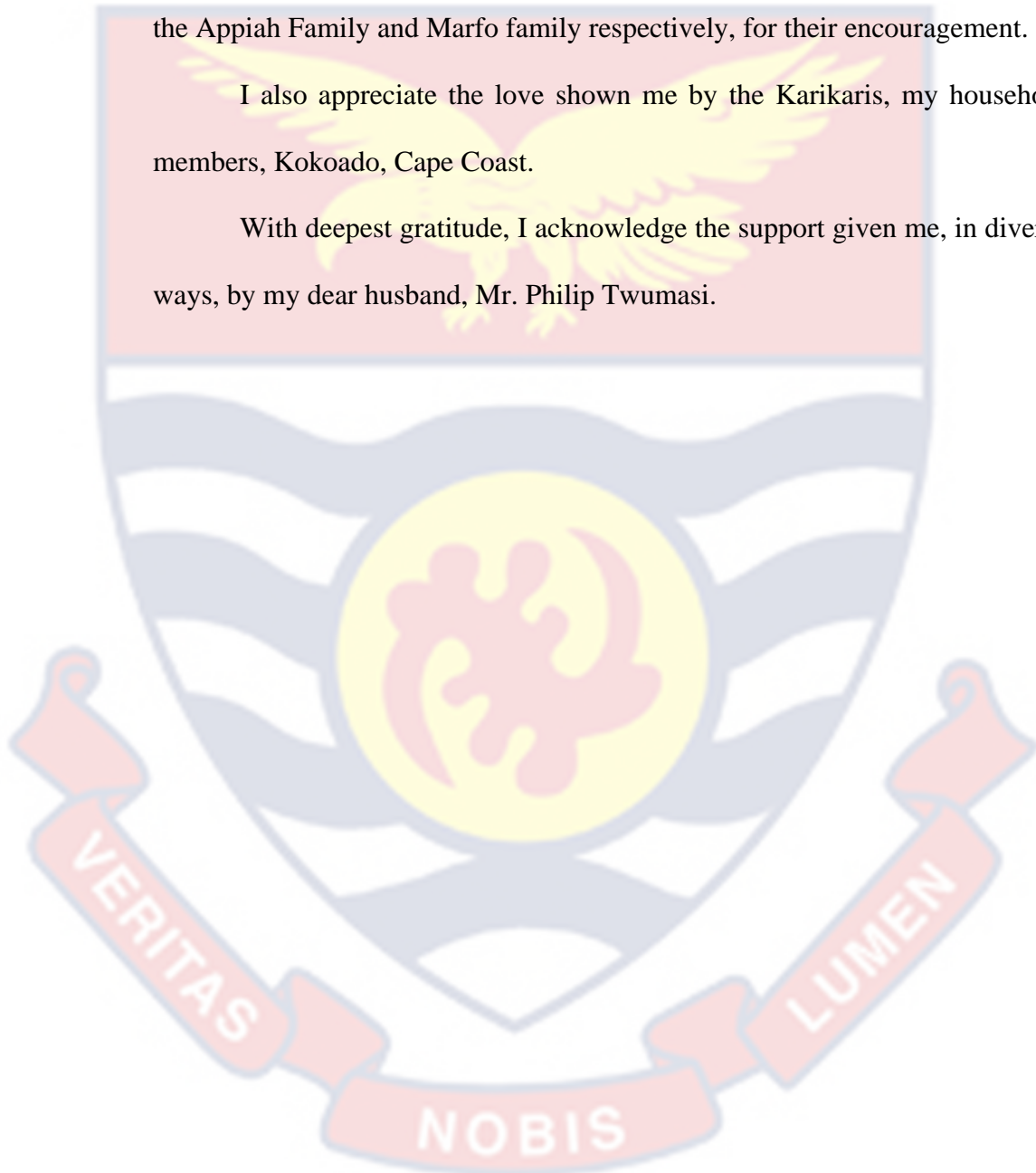


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## DEDICATION

To my children (Ama, Yaw, and Kofi), for their understanding and love



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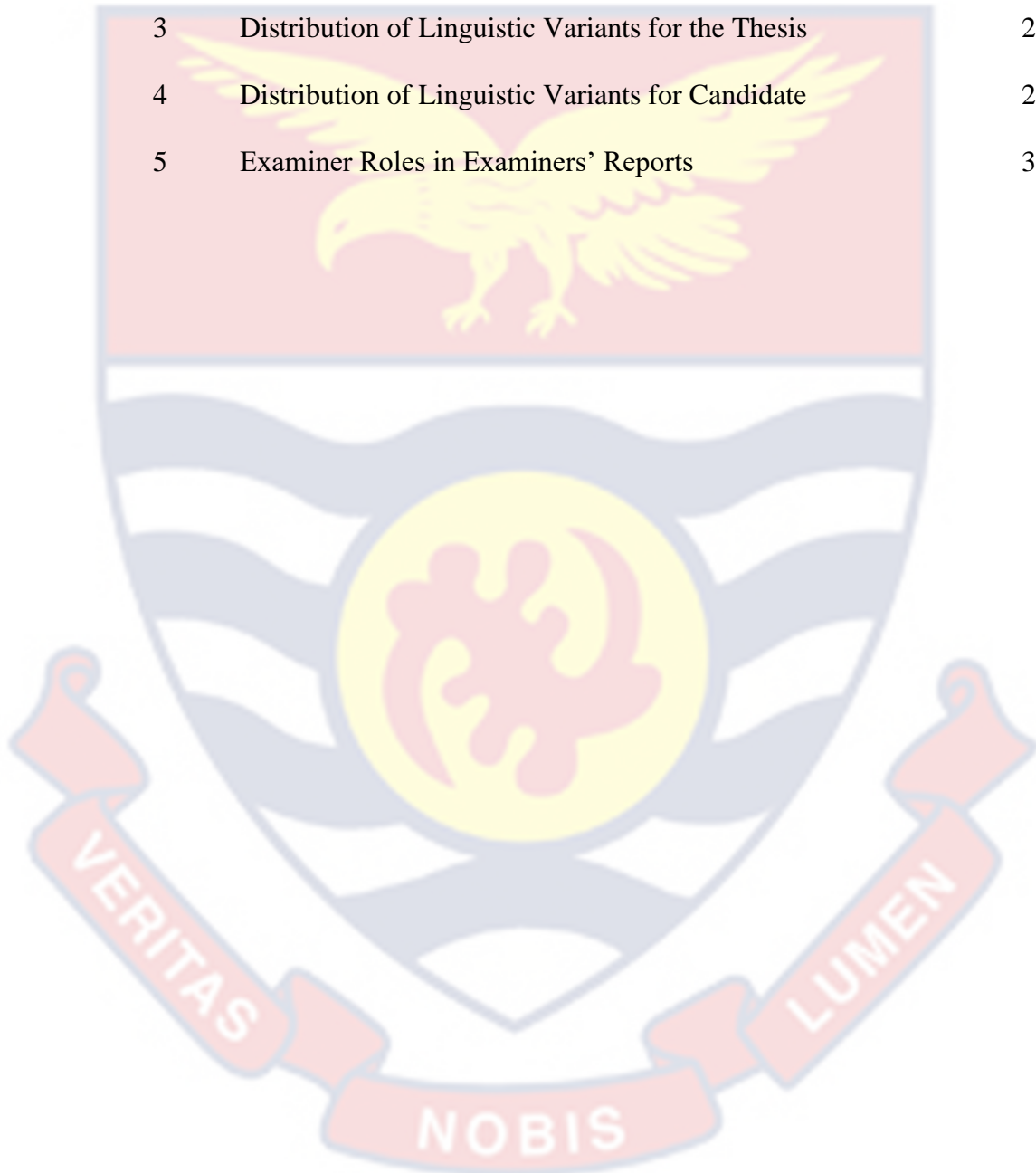
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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**


AC	Academic Community
AD	Academic Discourse
AW	Academic Writing
BR	Book Review
CARS	Create a Research Space
CR	Commentator Role
DC	Discourse Community
EC/s	Evaluative Comments
EE	Evaluated Entity
EE/s	Evaluated Entities
ENG	Department of English
ER	Examiner Role
EVR	Evaluator Role
EW	Expert Writing
EXR	Expert Role
FA	Formative Assessment
HIS	Department of History
HOT	Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management
IR	Institutional Role
LR	Literature Review
NC/s	Negative Comments
NSC/s	Negative Summative Comments
PC	Praise-Criticism

PC/s	Positive Comments
PCS	Praise-Criticism-Suggestion
POH	Department of Population and Health
PR	Proofreader Role
PS	Praise-Suggestion
PSC/s	Positive Summative Comments
RA/s	Research Article/s
RG/s	Review Genre/s
RR	Reporter Role
SA	Summative Assessment
SC/s	Summative Comments
SCP	Suggestion-Criticism-Praise
SFL	Systemic Functional Linguistics
SGS	School of Graduate Studies
TE	Thesis Examination
TER/s	Thesis Examiner's Report/s
TEr/s	Thesis Examiners
TA	Transitivity Analytical
TWF	Teacher Written Feedback
UCC	University of Cape Coast
WF	Written Feedback

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

This chapter gives a general introduction, which serves as the background to the whole study. It highlights the features of academic discourse (AD). This is followed by the statement of the problem, research questions, delimitation of the study, significance of the study, and a synopsis of the study. A summary of the chapter is also given at the end of the chapter.

#### Background to the Study

Language plays a prominent role in the production, dissemination, and evaluation of knowledge in academic discourse (AD). Hyland (2009) posits that AD is about the use of language in academia and how individuals advance their research in higher education. Duff (2010) also refers to AD as forms of oral and written language and communication— genres, registers, graphics, linguistic structures, and interactional patterns— that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalized or ritualized. They are usually evaluated by instructors, institutions, proofreaders, and others in educational and professional contexts. Duff (2010) adds that AD is usually connected with specific disciplines or professional areas and is embodied both in texts and in other modes of interaction and representation such as research articles, thesis, and review genres.

Academic discourse (AD) is, generally, grouped into spoken and written genres. Hyland (2006, p. 38) opines that “knowledge produced by the academy is cast largely in written language, spoken genres such as lectures,

seminars, peer discussions and conference presentations across disciplines”. In essence, the production of knowledge is either through spoken, written genres or a combination of both genres. Duff (2010) posits that oral AD is normally more spontaneous and public than written discourse, the latter often produced in relative isolation by a writer (student, professor)—although with a great deal of academic experience, leading to the writing, and, then, submitted to someone else for assessment or comment. She also identifies that spoken AD is less richly organized and contains less packed information because spoken language typically contains little subordination. It also has interactive markers, planning “fillers”, and other hesitation phenomena. Furthermore, Chodchoey (1988) stipulates that spoken language tends to be filled with generalized vocabulary and, sometimes, repetitions of the same syntactic forms.

With regard to written AD, Connor (1991) argues that writing is an interaction of persons (for instance, faculty and learners) within a particular discourse community (DC), and it involves more than the generation, translation and organization of ideas. In an academic disciplinary community, writing is influenced by the beliefs, values and norms. Pieces of ideas to be expressed have to meet the demands and standards of the DC. Therefore, written AD also has features that identify it from other written discourse types. In this discourse, the writer provides the text with a more formal and coherent structure, through the use of various linguistic, stylistic and rhetorical devices. Johns (1997) observes that explicitness, intertextuality, objectivity, emotional neutrality, appropriate genre requirement, metadiscourse, hedging, and disciplinary variation are important features that characterize academic writing (AW).



However, Duff (2010) stipulates that the two modalities, oral and written, are not completely distinct, as oral presentations or lectures typically draw on a variety of written texts and may also incorporate visual texts by means of PowerPoint, handouts, or other media, to facilitate communication.

Bakhtin (1981) postulates that genres are often loosely arrayed in a network as each interacts with, draws on, and responds to another in a particular setting. In essence, both oral and written texts do combine some features of each other. In this present study, consideration is given to written AD.

As observed by Dontcheva-Navratilova (2008), in academic writing (AW), writers report their research findings in order to persuade the readers to accept their (writers') claim and, at the same time, link their work to previous studies and project themselves as 'knowers'. Hyland and Diani (2009, p. 5) share this same assertion, arguing that "in academic contexts, writers instantaneously endeavour to argue a position, maintain rapport with readers and signal their allegiance to a specific positioning or group so that their findings may be accepted". Thus, it can be seen that AW is interactive and rhetorical (Hyland & Diani, 2009); that is, AW constitute an act of persuasion (Pascual & Unger, 2010).

Bakhtin (1981) and Swales (1990) believe that all communication is dialogic; that is, written texts of any kind comprise some interactions between readers and the writers themselves (Taki & Jafarpour, 2012). In AW, the author struggles to obtain and create space and negotiate consensus within the scientific community (Hood & Martin, 2005). Hyland and Diani (2009, p. 5) articulate that "the ability of writers to credibly represent themselves and their work by claiming solidarity with readers, evaluating their material, and

acknowledging alternative views is a defining feature of AW". For Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999), this projection is couched in the feelings, attitudes, judgments or assessments in that "academic writers use language to acknowledge, construct, and negotiate social relations in a variety of ways" including the use of possibility and tentativeness (Hyland, 1998), directives (Hyland, 2002a), self-mention (Hyland, 2001), and verbs (Hyland, 2000; Thompson & Ye, 1991).

In general, AD, and writing, in particular, are cast in or conditioned by genres (Mauranen, 1996). Genre is "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some common set of communicative purpose" (Swales, 1990, p. 58), a view shared by Bhatia (1997). In addition, genres share similar "structure, style, content and intended audience" (Swales, 1990, p. 58). It is a social activity of a specific DC realised in language (Mauranen, 1996). Genres are not fixed and uniformed but rather dynamic, flexible, and sometimes contested (Bhatia, 2008; Holmes, 2004). Therefore, "a genre may be understood in terms of a socially constructed typical constellation of form-function, representing a specific professional, academic, or institutional communicative construct, realizing a specific communicative purpose of the genre in question" (Bhatia, 2008). Lee (2001) explains that genres are simply seen as categories chosen on the basis of fairly easily definable external parameters. Genres also have a certain legitimacy as groupings of texts within a discourse community.

Swales (1990) intimates that genres are characterized by the purposes which they serve in a DC. Bhatia (1993) explicates that genres are conventionalized. The overall goals and the activities of the members of a

given DC are not subjected to rapid change, and so the matching genres tend to acquire certain well-known characteristics that reflect a text's purpose and enable members of the DC to identify and respond to them. Biber (1988) affirms that genres are determined on the basis of external criteria relating to the speaker's purpose and topic; they are assigned on the basis of use rather than on the basis of form. Swales (1990) explains that genres are "owned" and placed in particular discourse communities (DCs). Lee (2001) also notes that genres are assigned on the basis of external criteria such as intended audience, purpose, and activity type; that is, they refer to a conventional, culturally recognised grouping of texts based on properties other than lexical or grammatical (co-) occurrence features.

According to Swales (2009, p. 45), genres can be occluded, explaining that "academic occluded genres are, in part, those which support the research publication process but are not themselves part of the research record." He postulates further that these occluded genres support and validate the manufacture of knowledge, directly as part of the publishing process itself or indirectly by the underpinning academic administrative processes of hiring, promotion and departmental review. He adds that written occluded genres are mostly formal documents which remain on files, but they are rarely part of the public record. They are written for specific individuals and seriously concerned with representing their authors in a favourable professional light. These occluded genres are typically hidden or kept "out of sight" from the public gaze by the veil of confidentiality.

The thesis examiner's report (TER) can be described as an occluded genre. Crucially, the TER is an evaluation of a thesis. The purpose of TER,

according to Starfield, Paltridge, Bourke, and Fairbairn (2015, p. 132), is “to evaluate, either negatively or positively, the thesis ... so that the candidate can bridge the gap between the current state of their PhD and that of a PhD that is of international standard”. This is true of MPhil programmes as theses at this level are documents forwarded in support of a person’s candidature for degree in an institution of higher learning. According to Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat, and Dally (2004a), the TER exemplifies key features which include examiner and process, dialogic features, evaluation, assessable areas covered, and report organization. In a sense, evaluation is an integral part of the examination process and it should be reflected in the final TER.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the last two decades, there has been an increasing interest in the use of evaluative language on various aspects in AWs, both expert writings (EWs) (e.g. Hyland, 2005a; Hyland & Tse, 2005; Jiang & Hyland, 2015) and novice writings (e.g. Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2008; Love, 2006), cultural (e.g. Giannoni, 2005; Lores- Sanz, 2012; Wisker & Robinson, 2014) as well as disciplinary variation (e.g. Auria, 2008; Gardner, 2003; Taki & Jafarpour, 2012, Tutin, 2010). Of particular interest is feedback on various written academic products. Several studies (e.g. Bruno & Santas, 2010; Hughes, 2013; Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Stracke & Kumar, 2011) on the feedback on writings suggest the use of language of evaluation on students’ writing.

A form of written feedback is the thesis examiner’s report (TER), which clearly evinces the use of evaluative language (Starfield et al., 2015; 2017). The thesis examiners’ reports (TERs) have been studied from different



perspectives. Such studies have concentrated on institutional expectations (Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat & Dally, 2004b; Nightingale, 1984); philosophies that underlie the production of the reports (e.g. Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Simpkins, 1987); codification of practices and examiners' expectations (e.g. Golding, Sharmini & Lazarovitch, 2014; Holbrook et al., 2004a; Sankaran, Swepson & Hill, 2005; Wisker & Robinson, 2014); rhetorical sections of the reports (e.g. Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat & Fairbairn., 2007), and the language in these reports (e.g. Adika, 2015; Kosonen, 2014; Starfield et al., 2015; 2017; Stracke & Kumar, 2010).

With respect to the attention paid to the language in thesis comments, Kosonen (2014), for instance, how examiners preferred recommendations, general trends in modal verb usage and self-mention within this genre. Again, Starfield et al. (2015) adopted the Appraisal framework which is housed in SFL to analyze 142 TERs from a university in New Zealand. They found, in the reports, that theses were appreciated, the candidates were judged, and the examiner was affected. Starfield et al. (2017), drawing on SFL, examined 142 PhD TERs at an Australasian university. Their study identified 10 roles that examiners do assume for themselves in the reports.

While Holbrook and her Australian colleagues (e.g. Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat, & Dally, 2004a, b, Fairbairn, 2007; Lovat, & Fairbairn, 2008) have identified evaluative language, among other categories, as key in examination reports, its examination has remained an issue of interest to those in the Anglo-American, and European contexts. The point though is that postgraduate education has become a matter of serious engagement with all countries, developed and developing (including Ghana). Studies on thesis

examiners' reports have received minimal mentioning in Ghana (Adika, 2015; Afful, 2020) where postgraduate programmes are offered; these are examined, and reports are written; however, the practices of examiners are not well established, which may offer insights into examiner expectations, and help supervisors and students to respectively situate well their writing skills and coaching.

The kinds of evaluation, types of entities evaluated, and the roles examiners assume in these reports are not well established in higher education in Ghana, as far as I know, since they have not received extensive attention. Thus, the present study adds to existing scholarship (e.g. Dontcheva-Navratilova, 2008; Jiang & Hyland, 2015, Love, 2006; Starfield et al., 2015; 2017; Tutin, 2010) by investigating evaluative language in examination reports on MPhil theses submitted to a public university in Ghana. Specifically, the study explores the language of evaluation by focusing on a). types of evaluation, b). evaluated entities, and c). examiner roles.

### **Research Questions**

The study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What types of evaluative comments are contained in the examiners' reports of MPhil theses in selected departments in University of Cape Coast?
2. Which entities are evaluated in the examiners' reports of MPhil theses in selected departments in University of Cape Coast?
3. What roles do examiners enact for themselves in the examiners' reports of MPhil theses in selected departments in University of Cape Coast?



The first research question focuses on the use of positive and negative comments in the data. The second one centres on what objects (like thesis or candidate) have received evaluation in the reports while the last one considers the roles examiners assume for themselves such as supervisors and evaluators in the reports. In seeking to answer question one, I draw on Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) classification of examiner comments (ECs). Concerning question two, I adopt Transitivity Analytical (TA) approach from Systemic Functional linguistics (SFL) in the identification of evaluated entities (EEs) in the TERs. Starfield et al.'s (2017) description of examiners' roles in TERs will be useful in an attempt to answer the third question. An elaboration of these analytical approaches is later presented in Chapter Four of this work.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

To ensure a quite manageable scope for the present study, I consider four key issues: type of academic discourse (AD), genre to be studied, disciplines selected, and the level of programme selected for the study.

First, the present study pays attention to written AD and not spoken discourse, though the latter forms an integral part of academic discourse (AD).

As is evident in the literature on advanced academic literacies, both experts (including assessors) and learners (including graduate students) engage more often with written academic genres than spoken academic genres (Aful, 2018). Therefore, the researcher is hopeful of obtaining data for the study.

Again, the availability of more studies on written academic discourse will afford the researcher an opportunity for the interpretations of results to be obtained in the present study since the present study is on a written academic genre, TERs.

The second issue concerns the genre studied. The thesis examiners' report (TER) is selected for the study as it evinces a high sense of criticality including evaluation. Here, though according to Yates (2004), the examiner assesses the potential of the candidate as a peer (that is, the candidate's readiness to enter the AC), which may be cast as compliments/ praise or criticism, Wisker and Robinson (2014) assert that the examiner is a powerful gatekeeper who ensures that standards are maintained. Put differently, the claims (findings) of the research must be subjected to scrutiny to ascertain the extent to which that new knowledge meets existing standards within the academic community (AC). Besides, it is this rite-of-passage which produces either a stamp of approval or a refusal of entry for a piece of research. Thus, it is anticipated that the language of evaluation will be amply employed in this occluded genre.

Third, the study is limited to four disciplines selected from the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Social Sciences for the study. These disciplines are English and History, faculty of Arts; Population and Health as well as the Hospitality and Tourism Management, Faculty of Social Sciences. It must be noted that the study does not seek to tease out disciplinary variation in the use of evaluative language in the selected disciplines; rather, it aims to understand what the practices are, in general, in the examination of MPhil theses written by some students of UCC. The study aims to show how the data from each discipline contribute to our understanding of the language used by examiners in the examination of MPhil theses. First, English is selected for the study because, as Afful (2005a, p. 15) states, "English values language in general and writing in particular as powerful and fundamental tools of teaching and

learning”, and the Social Sciences disciplines acknowledge the usefulness of extended writing in the academy (Casanave & Hubbard, 1992). Again, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health are relatively emerging disciplines in the Faculty of Social Sciences, unlike the more traditional disciplines like Sociology and Economics, and have not been frequently featured in studies on the language of evaluation. Therefore, it will be insightful to examine how scholars or examiners in these relatively new disciplines also assess students’ theses.

Last, the study is restricted to the postgraduate level of study (precisely, Master’s), where students are provided an opportunity to specialize in their areas of study; therefore, they may be very familiar with the conventions associated with the genres that are to be produced. Again, works produced by Master’s students are most interpersonally loaded genres of the academy that are highly interactive and evaluative in nature (Hyland, 2006; Tse & Hyland, 2009). Master’s students are apprenticed to fit into the various disciplinary communities selected for the study.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant in four broad areas— testing theory, adding to existing scholarship, influencing postgraduate pedagogy, and serving as a reference material.

First, the present study will add to the usefulness of the overarching theory that underpins the present study— SFL. Several studies (e. g. Feng & Liu 2010; Kazemian, Behnam & Ghafoori, 2013; Mwinlaaru, 2012; Nur, 2015; Tabrizi & Nabifar, 2013; Ye, 2010) have employed SFL and have successfully managed, analysed, and interpreted their data in many areas like

TERs (Adika, 2015; Afful, 2020), students' writing (e.g. Afful, 2017a; Lee, 2015), and media (e.g. Amoah-Yeboah, 2013; Ifukor & Chiluiwa, 2015). Kazemian et al. (2013) adopted SFL to analyse nominalization in establishing ideational grammatical metaphors in scientific texts, identifying its frequency and process types. The adoption of this theory, in the present study, will confirm its usefulness in analysing large data and of an academic nature and interpreting the findings, with particular reference to the use of evaluative language.

Second, the study contributes to the growing scholarship on the language of evaluation around the globe. Many studies have indicated that the use of evaluative language in many dimensions: disciplinary settings (e.g. Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Taki & Jafarpour, 2012); expert writings, (e.g. Hyland, 2005a; Wang & An, 2013) and novice writings (e.g. Pascual & Unger, 2010). The present study, which seeks to examine the use of evaluative language in TERs on MPhil theses, will add to such studies on evaluative language, in general, as most of the studies on the use of evaluative language have been carried out outside Ghana, where English plays a prominent role and University of Cape Coast (UCC) which offers various postgraduate programmes. Thus, there is availability of data that have received minimal investigation.

Third, the present study gives implications for post graduate pedagogy. Precisely, the findings of the study will help supervisors and students gain insights into how well to tailor their writing and coaching skills respectively to meet institutional, international, and genre requirements within their disciplinary research fields. In addition, the study will provide insights into



how best the writing of a thesis can be taught and fashioned in the academic community in addition to the beliefs and anticipations of thesis examiners in grading theses since the TERs carefully examine the development of concepts, use of language, ways of organization, description of methodologies and other relevant issues in postgraduate education as well as the organization of skills, knowledge and abilities. Thus, the study will serve as a useful guide for developing pedagogical materials to enhance the teaching and writing of theses.

Finally, the study will serve as an invaluable source of reference for researchers in Ghana and elsewhere investigating the use of evaluative language in AW, specifically thesis examiners' reports (TER). As a result, the study can serve as a springboard for researchers who are interested in probing issues regarding AD, in general, and evaluative language, in particular, or who will be interested in reading about the use of evaluative strategies in TER.

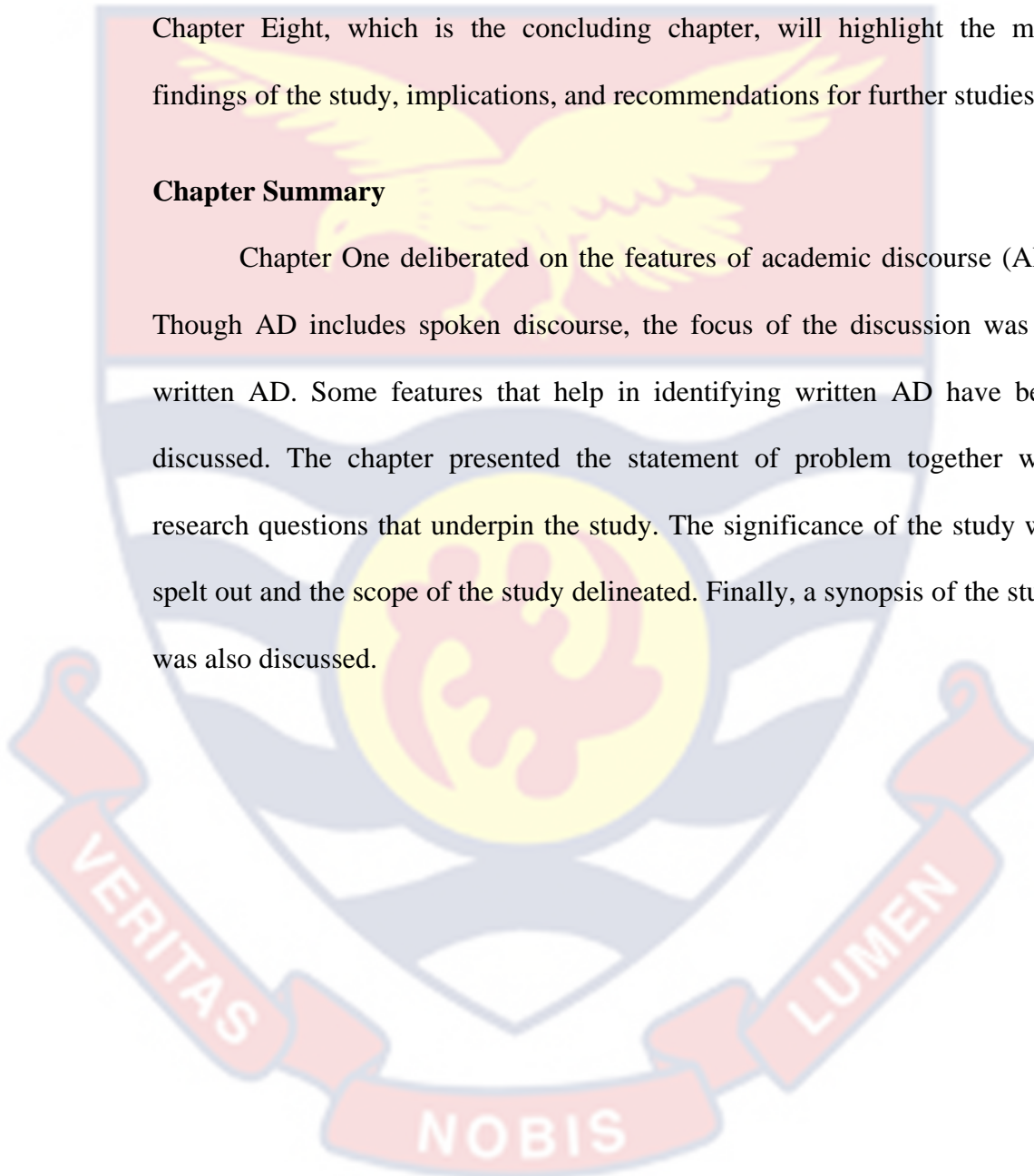
### **Thesis Synopsis**

The thesis is organized in eight chapters. Chapter One captures the general introduction of the study. It includes the background to the study, the problem of the study, research questions, significance of the study and delimitations. Chapter Two will discuss related literature under one heading: theoretical/conceptual framework while Chapter Three discusses related literature review on empirical studies on the topic of study. Methodology will be covered in Chapter Four. This will include the research design, educational setting, population and sampling, method of data collection and analysis, validity, and ethics. The analysis and discussion of the data will be presented in three chapters— Five, Six and Seven —under specific and appropriate

headings. Chapter Five will discuss the types of evaluative comments (ECs) used by examiners in the MPhil thesis reports. The entities that are evaluated in the selected data will be analysed and discussed in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven will examine the roles examiners assume for themselves in the reports. Chapter Eight, which is the concluding chapter, will highlight the main findings of the study, implications, and recommendations for further studies.

### **Chapter Summary**

Chapter One deliberated on the features of academic discourse (AD). Though AD includes spoken discourse, the focus of the discussion was on written AD. Some features that help in identifying written AD have been discussed. The chapter presented the statement of problem together with research questions that underpin the study. The significance of the study was spelt out and the scope of the study delineated. Finally, a synopsis of the study was also discussed.





## CHAPTER TWO

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/KEY CONCEPTS

#### Introduction

The literature is presented in two sections: theoretical/conceptual review and empirical review. The theoretical review that underpins the present study is discussed in Chapter Two, whereas empirical review is captured in Chapter Three. Together, both chapters provide a conceptual, analytical and interpretative framework for the study.

#### Section A: Theoretical Review

One key theory that underpins the present study is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). SFL is an approach to language developed mainly by M. A. K. Halliday in the United Kingdom (U. K.) during the 1960s, and later in Australia. O'Donnell (2011) explains that SFL built on previous works of influential linguists such as Malinowski and Firth. SFL has received many introductions, mainly by Eggins (1994), Martin (1992), Halliday (1994), Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), Martin, Matthiessen, and Painter (1997), Martin and Rose (2003), and Thompson (2014). In this section, I attempt to explain SFL, including how it sees language as a system of meaning, metafunctions, social contexts (Halliday, 1978), and the relevance of the theory.

SFL relates to language use in a social-cultural setting. Eggins (1994) asserts that SFL is concerned with a social-cultural account of language use by delineating the relationships between language and the social context in which it is used. Halliday (1985) elucidates that language construes the social

structures and social systems which form part of human life through an ongoing exchange of meanings. SFL systematically connects language to context through texts, considered to be authentic products of social interaction embedded in cultural and social contexts (Eggins, 1994). This connection is created when participants are immersed in an existing culture by being exposed through repeated experiences, which are simultaneously represented in events and in recognizably shaped texts (Halliday & Hasan, 1985)

In the view of Martin and White (2005), this use of language in a social context is meant to achieve particular goals. With reference to data, Martin and White (2005) maintain that SFL does not address how language is processed or represented within the human brain; rather, it looks at the discourses that are produced (whether spoken or written), and the contexts of the production of these texts. Because it is concerned with language use, SFL places higher importance on language function (what it is used for) than on language structure (how it is composed) (Martin & White, 2005). SFL deals with two concepts: language as a system of network and Metafunctions, to which I turn next.

### **Language as System Network**

‘System’ means a set of linguistic resources that present options to the language user. Each choice contributes something to the meaning of what is said; and by these choices, we understand the various resources of the language used in meaning construction; that is, for each opportunity of language use, the user is exposed to many options that he can choose from. A ‘systemic’ approach is, thus, one which views language in these terms, models language as a choice potential, with choices operating in a particular context

(Martin & White, 2005). A systemic approach allows one to focus on meaningful choices in language (e.g., active vs. passive) without the need to think of the particular structure that realizes it.

The system is made up of entry conditions and a set of other signs which open up other potentials for the user (Eggins, 2004; Halliday, 1978) such that if the entry condition is satisfied, one option, and one only, must be chosen. In a way, a system consists of an entry condition, system name, and terms in the use of language. That is, there is a range of choices; choosing one option opens up another set of choices. Thus, as noted by Thompson (2014), such choices become more delicate or specific, leading to realization of a desired function. The system network becomes more delicate as movement is made to the right. In other words, making one choice at any point, only the more delicate further choices in that part of the network are open to the user.

Hence, Eggins (2004) notes that a system network represents a set of linguistic choices available to the language user and specifies how these choices are realized as structure, which is a sequence of ordered linguistic items. In a way, meaning implies choices; that is, if there is no alternative to do something, then, it is not meaningful. The reverse is also believed to be true: if there is a choice in any context, then, that choice is meaningful. For instance, lexically we have a choice between “dad” and “father”. The use of the former, however, is meaningful in that it marks the situation as informal, and may say something about the socio-cultural background of the speaker, whereas the latter may suggest a more formal situation.

Again, as an example, an English clause selects one of the process types in the experiential component of the grammar. “Clause” is the entry

condition; “Process Type” is the system name; and the “Material”, “Mental”, and “Relational” (to be explained under Transitivity in this same chapter), for example, are the terms or features of the system. The system means that if the entry condition of “clause” is met, then, one and only one of the six process types is to be selected. The meaning potential, the numerous systems of meaning, out of which the language user makes a choice, becomes grammar (the phenomenon of grammar or part of the workings of language). The clause and the process types are illustrated under Transitivity later in this chapter.

In addition, SFL considers both types of relationships between signs, syntagmatic, and paradigmatic. In other words, it is known that it is the interconnection that results from signs which simultaneously enter into both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships that establish a system network (Egins, 2004). The syntagmatic relation is the structure which encompasses both linear relationship that exists in any structural sequencing of words and the collocation that exists among specific lexical items. The structure realizes the paradigmatic option by means of some lexico-grammatical or phonological configurations (Halliday, 1978). A paradigmatic relationship is the relation of opposition or choice that exists between linguistic features. Thus, through the aspects of wording, systemic terms are expressed (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In other words, the relationship between the structure and the system is one of realization. For instance, a Material Process is realized as Actor, Process: Material, Goal and Circumstance.

Egins (2004) explains that when language is considered as a choice, prominence is placed on paradigmatic relations. Thus, in textual analysis, consideration is given to linguistic choices made by writers or speakers within



the context of other potential choices that the user could have made. Consequently, it is when we relate what has been said to what a writer could have said that a better understanding of the meaning of the actual linguistic choices could be derived. For Eggins (2004), 'actual' refers to choices that are in a text and 'linguistic potential' to choices that could have been made but were not made.

### **Metafunctions**

SFL operates on three Metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. Thompson (2014) notes that the label for each of the metafunctions is reasonably transparent: the first (using language to talk about the world) is the experiential (ideational); the second (using language to interact with other people) is the interpersonal; and the third (organizing language to fit its context) is the textual. These metafunctions have a systematic relationship with the lexico-grammar of a language and enact language in a specific social context (Bloor & Bloor, 1995; Martin & Rose, 2003).

First, the ideational (experiential) function is a reflection or a representation of human experience through language (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004); that is, language is used to represent or encode experience and meaning. Simply put, we use language to talk about our experience of the world, including the worlds in our own minds, to describe events and states, and the entities involved in them (Thompson, 2014). It provides the potential for creating, maintaining, and revising knowledge in the form of meaning (Matthiessen, 1995). Martin and White (2005) observe that by construing experience, we pay attention to what is going on, including who is doing what to whom, where, when, why, and how and the logical relation of



one going-on to another. It can be seen that the ideational metafunction is about the ways in which perceptions, experiences, and realities are construed. The ideational function is the use of language to express content and to communicate information. Where content is the focus, the emphasis will be on transferring information clearly and effectively so that it can be comprehended quickly and easily.

The ideational metafunction is divided into two: experiential function and logical function. First, the experiential function emphasizes the idea that language is a representation of experience. Halliday (1978) adds that through this function, a user (writer) can encode, in language, his/her experience of the phenomena of the real world as well as his/her experience of the internal world of his/her own consciousness; his reactions, cognition, and perceptions and also his/her linguistic acts of speaking and understanding. Second, the logical sub-function concerns the logical relations that exist among the structural units of language. In other words, the logical metafunction looks at how the different clauses in the text relate to one another through logical correlation.

The ideational metafunction is of significance to the present study in that an aspect I seek to examine is the entities that are evaluated in the thesis examiners' reports (TERs) and the grammatical roles that these entities play in the data. Will the evaluated entities (EEs) be Sayers, Actors, Sensors, Behavers, Receivers or Goals which are determined by the processes (actions, events, states and relations) that are selected in the evaluation of these entities in the TERs?

The second metafunction of language is the interpersonal. Halliday (1978) explains that “the interpersonal component represents the speaker’s meaning potential as an intruder. It is the participating function of language, language as doing something”. This component “allows speakers to intrude into the context of situation, both expressing their own attitudes and judgements and seeking to influence the attitudes and behaviour of others”. Thus, the interpersonal metafunction is concerned with the role relationships associated with the situation, comprising the ones that are defined by language itself, of informer-doubter, questioner-respondent, etcetera (Martin & White, 2005; Matthiessen, 1995). It is a resource for enacting roles and relationships between speaker and listener/reader. Here, language is used to establish and maintain social relations.

Martin and White (2005), specifically, posit further that these “interpersonal resources are concerned with negotiating social relations”: “how people are interacting, including the feelings they try to share”. “Here, attention is on the use of language to interact with people, establish and maintain social connections, give and request information, and convey viewpoints, attitudes as well as beliefs about the world”. “The interpersonal metafunction suggests that when people are involved in a communicative event, they are not only transmitting and sharing meaning; rather they negotiate, establish and sustain relationships” (Martin & White, 2005; Thompson, 2014), using language to interact with other people to influence their behaviour, to express their own viewpoint on things in the world, and to elicit or change theirs.

Again, the lexico-grammar of interpersonal meaning does not only include Mood options. Thus, Martin and White (2005) explain that it is within the interpersonal meaning that the Appraisal Theory (AT) finds itself since AT further analyses the roles and attitudes taken up through interaction between participants in a text. Appraisal includes Affect as resources for construing emotion; Judgement as resources for judging behaviour in ‘ethical’ terms, and Appreciation has resources for valuing objects ‘aesthetically’ (Martin, 1997; 2002; Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005). Appraisal theory (AT) is one such tool which is regarded as the “most systematic” because it “offers a typology of evaluative resources available in English” (Hyland, 2005b, p. 174). Also, AT provides a discourse-semantic approach to the study of interpersonal meaning and has “the potential to be more specific than general, to be more closely tailored to the communicative concerns of a particular context of situation” (White, 1998, p. 73).

Broadly speaking, AT is about evaluation which is submerged in the interpersonal metafunction of SFL, and it seems a good choice for a study of this kind—evaluative language in examiners’ reports— as found in other studies like Starfield et al. (2015). However, it is not adopted for the analysis of the data because, as rightly argued by Starfield et al. (2017), the numerous roles could be made known by considering the assessors’ grammatical choices from transitivity, mood and theme. In other words, it is not only important in identifying lexical items in terms of judgement, appreciation, and affect, but it is equally good to understand what is being appreciated and who is being affected and judged. Furthermore, it is necessary to identify whether assessors are demanding or giving information, or services or goods, and whether their

interaction is done directly or indirectly so as to comprehend better how assessors take on numerous roles. Thus, the adoption of SFL as the main theory for the study as well as a framework for the analysis of the research question on entities and their roles in the thesis examiners' reports is found here. Again, the transitivity analysis of the examiners' criteria aids in the identification of the principal role of the examiners as construed in the reports (Starfield et al., 2017).

Again, the choice of SFL over AT stems from the fact that though examiners are to play the role of addressing particular criteria (Starfield et al., 2017), it is also understood that the evaluative criteria is derived upon both holistically and relationally, perhaps, and integrates expectations of standards and academic evaluation from a broader experience (Holbrook et al., 2014). It is expected that thesis examiners' reports will most likely reflect the actual persona of the examiner. These personae, they suggest, are reflected in the register of the thesis, which are realized in the grammar in the systems of transitivity, mood and theme.

The interpersonal metafunction is relevant to the present study since the study seeks to examine, as one of the research questions, the roles that examiners assume in their assessment of theses, represented in the thesis examiners' reports (TERs). More specifically, the study partly seeks to investigate whether examiners give or demand information in the different roles that they assume as well as the modals that are selected in the roles they assume, and the goods and services that they give or demand in such positions.

The last of the Metafunctions is Textual. This refers to the internal organization of information in a text; that is, the organisation of information



within individual clauses and across the whole text (Martin et al., 1997), establishing linkages. Thompson (2014) adds that, in using language, we organize our messages in ways that indicate how they fit in with the other messages around them and with the wider context in which we are talking or writing. Consequently, the textual meaning is in two folds: thematic structure is which is reflected in Theme and Rheme, and Information structure (New and Given). Textual is also realized in cohesive devices like reference, ellipsis and substitution, conjunction, and lexical cohesion, which are used for achieving effective intra and inter sentences and paragraphing linkages.

Although I do not focus on cohesive devices such as references, substitution and conjunctions, considering the scope of the present study, the textual metafunction is still of relevance to the present study in that the realization of thematic structure is important in identifying what information examiners seek to place in Theme or Rheme position in sentence. Thompson (2014) notes that these three categories are used as the basis to explore how meanings are created and understood because they allow the matching of particular types of functions/meanings with particular patterns of wordings to an extent that other categorizations generally do not. This idea of matching meanings and wordings is central as I am concerned with functional grammar (the study of linguistic forms in relation to the meanings that they express) rather than only semantics (the study of meaning).

### **Transitivity**

Transitivity is a way in which a user of the language represents his/her real experience of the world or of himself/herself, at the clausal level of language use (Halliday, 1978; 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). For



Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), the grammar sets up a discontinuity clearly between outer experience, the processes of the external world, and inner experience, the processes of consciousness. Transitivity is the lexicogrammatical resource to construe human experience, both outer and inner. It reduces countless experience into a “manageable set of Process Types” (Halliday, 1994). Thus, as rightly indicated by Eggins (1994), Transitivity is realized in the experiential component of the Ideational Metafunction of SFL.

Halliday (1978) espouses that Transitivity is the representation in language with its Processes, the Participants therein, and the Circumstantial features associated with them. That is, Transitivity is concerned with the three major components of a clause or what Halliday refers to as “transitivity process”: Process, Participants in the process; and Circumstances associated with the process— Participants are things and people; Processes are actions, events, relations and states, and Circumstances include extent, manner and location. Process is the nucleus of the experiential mode of the clause and is represented by the Verbal Group. The Participant is mostly realized by Noun Group. The circumstances occupy the adjunct element in the clause structure and are typically realized by preposition and adverbs. Notably, a choice of Process selects the Participant automatically. That is, if the choice of user of the language is Material Process (make, identify), then the Participant will be an Actor (doer). Figure 1 below presents a summary of Transitivity:

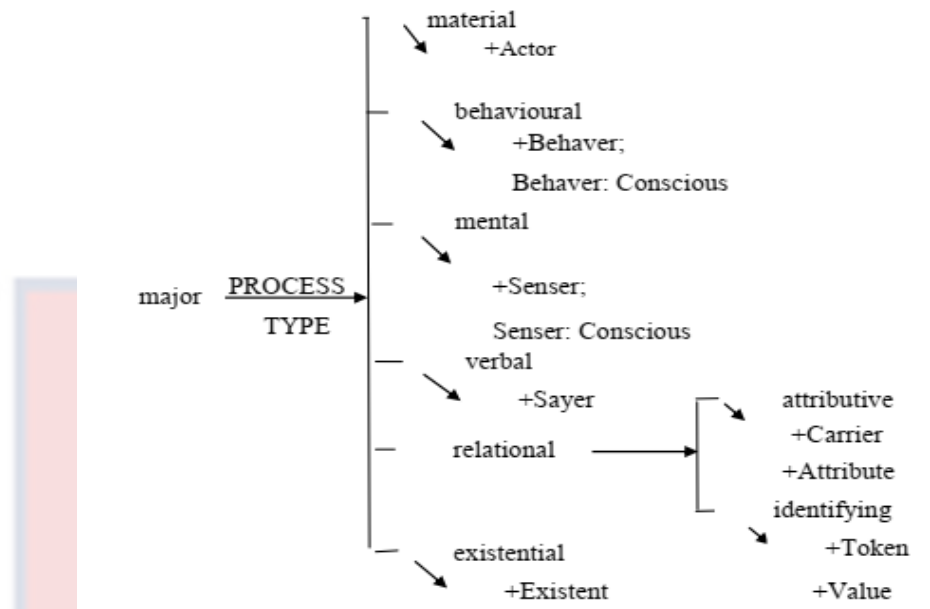


Figure 1: Transitivity (Adopted from Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004)

Figure 1 above represents Transitivity with its process types. It could be seen in the Figure above that Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) divide the system of transitivity or process types into six processes: Material, Mental, Relational, Behavioural, Verbal, and Existential. They consider Material, Mental and Relational as major, as they are mostly found in texts. They describe Behavioural, Verbal, and Existential processes as minor.

First, Material Processes are processes of ‘doing’; that is, they express physical experience. They express the notion that an entity does something – which may be done to some other entity. In the Material processes, there are two participant roles: Actor and Goal. The Actor is the entity that is responsible for the action in the clause. The Goal suffers or is affected by the actions in the clause. Another Participant is Scope which does not suffer from the actions in the clause but presents to us the summary of the Process or extent of that. The role of the Recipient is occupied by participants who receive an entity, which can either be concrete or abstract, from another

participant while the Client participant is the one to whom a service denoted by the process is done. Some of these roles are illustrated below, using the data of the present study:

1. <u>The study</u>	<u>Makes</u>	<u>modest contributions</u>	(ENG 25)
Actor	Process: Material	Goal	
Noun Group	Verbal Process	Noun Group	

2. <u>This particular work</u>	<u>has failed to provide</u>	<u>any serious analysis</u>	(POH 4)
Actor	Process: Material	Scope	
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Noun Group	

Second, Mental Processes are processes of sensing. They include: Perception (seeing, hearing, etc.), Affection (liking, fearing, etc.), and Cognition (thinking, knowing, understanding, etc.) In the Mental processes, there are two participants: Senser (the conscious being that is feeling, thinking, or seeing) and Phenomenon (which is sensed – felt, thought or seen). Below are examples of Mental Process:

3. <u>The candidate</u>	<u>confuses</u>	<u>the purpose of the study with problem</u>	(HOT 21)
Senser	Process: Material	Phenomenon	
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Noun Group	

4. <u>The candidate</u>	also <u>assumes</u>	<u>wrongly</u>	<u>that a bilingual in his</u>
Senser	Process:	Circumstance	<u>context, necessarily</u>
Noun Group	Material	Adverb	<u>speaks English and Ewe</u>
	Verbal		(ENG 13)
	Group		Projection

Third, Relational Process construes a relationship between an expression and its content, not between the interactants in a speech event. In

other words, the Relational Process establishes relationships between two entities. The Process is realized by a ‘Be’ type of verb and linking verbs. It uses the indefinite article and an adjective, and can be used for symbolizing, exemplification, definition, characterization and identification. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) distinguish among three types of relational process in the clause: Intensive ‘*x is a*’ (establishes a relationship of *sameness* between two entities), Circumstantial ‘*x is at a*’ (defines the entity in terms of *location, time, manner*), and Possessive ‘*x has a*’ (indicates that one entity *owns* another). Each of these comes in two modes: Attributive and Identifying. Attributive (‘*a is an attribute of x*’). In this mode, there are two participants: Carrier and Attribute. Carrier is assigned an attribute (value). In other words, Attribute participant indicates what the Carrier is, like, or has. The second mode is Identifying (‘*a is the identity of x*’). In this mode, there are two participants: Identified and Identifier. The Identified is defined with reference to another, the Identifier so that the two parts of the clause are co-referential. Relational Process is illustrated here:

5. <u>The piece</u>	<u>is</u>	<u>fairly</u>	<u>well written</u>	(HIS 11)
Carrier	Process:	Circumstance	Attribute	
Noun Group	Relational	Adverb	Noun Group	
	Verbal Group			
6. <u>The candidate</u>	<u>seems to have</u>	<u>a problem with et al.</u>		(POH 25)
Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute		
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Noun Group		

Next, Verbal processes are processes of saying. The participants of the processes are: Sayer, Receiver and Verbiage. Sayer is the participant who speaks or gives information. Receiver is the one to whom the verbalization is

addressed and Verbiage is the name for the verbalization itself or it represents the actual content of the message. There is, however, another type of Verbal Process, in which the Sayer is, in a sense, acting verbally on another direct participant, with verbs such as *insult*, *praise*, *slander*, *abuse*, and *flatter*. This other participant is referred to as the Target. The Target participant is the one that is cursed, praised, blamed, congratulated, or described. Examples of Verbal Process are these:

7. <u>The abstract</u>	<u>states</u>	<u>very succinctly</u>	<u>the purpose and</u>
Sayer	Process Verbal	Circumstance	<u>conclusions of the</u>
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Adverb	<u>thesis</u> (ENG 12)
			Verbiage
			Noun Group
8. <u>The candidate</u>	<u>discusses</u>	<u>Ghana's economic</u>	<u>well</u> (HOT14)
Sayer	Process: Verbal	<u>experience</u>	Circumstance
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Verbiage	Adverb
		Noun Group	

Moreover, Existential processes represent that something exists or happens. These clauses typically have the dummy subject, 'There', the verb *be*, or some other verbs expressing *existence*, such as *exist*, *arise*, and followed by a nominal group functioning as Existent (a thing which exists in the process). The existent may be a phenomenon of any kind, and is often an event. Some examples are found below:



9. <u>There</u>	<u>is</u>	<u>evidence of reasoning</u> (POH 5)
Existential	Process:	Existent
Adverb	Existential	Noun Group
	Verbal Group	
10. <u>There</u>	<u>are</u>	<u>no explicit research questions</u>
Existential	Process:	<u>provided</u> (HIS 11)
Adverb	Existential	Existent
	Verbal Group	Noun Group

Last, Behavioural processes stand between Material and Mental processes, and partly as a result of this, there may be difficulty in distinguishing between Behavioural process verbs and Material process verbs on the one hand, between Behavioural process verbs and Mental process verbs on the other. Simpson (2004) expounds and makes it clear by indicating that this process encompasses physical actions such as breath or cough or portray state of consciousness such as sigh, cry or laugh. Other behaviours such as stare, listen, dream or worry are included here. A behavioural process verb is Intransitive (it has only one *participant*) and indicates an activity in which both the physical and mental aspects are inseparable and indispensable to it. In this process, there is only one participant, namely: Behaver (the agent who behaves).

11. <u>Anita</u>	<u>wept</u>	<u>bitterly.</u>
Behaver	Process: Behavioural	Circumstance
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Adverb
12. <u>Kojo</u>	<u>gave</u>	<u>a loud sigh</u>
Behaver	Process: Behavioural	Behaviour
Noun Group	Verbal Group	Noun Group
		Phrase
		<u>in amazement.</u>
		Circumstance
		Prepositional

### Social Context

SFL represents the social context in which language functions in both context of culture and situation (Halliday, 1978). The main concern of SFL

placing higher importance on language function which is language use in context is related to register theory (Halliday & Matthiessen, 1999). Halliday and Hasan (1976) explains register as the linguistic features which are usually identified with a pattern of situational features. In other words, they explain that register is the set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns that are typically drawn upon under the specified conditions, along with the words and structures that are used in the realization of these meanings. Halliday (1978) differentiates variations according to use, in that every speaker, at different periods, has a variety of choices, and variations in language according to the user which is defined by variables such as geography, sex, social background, and age. In other words, a register is a variety of language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting. Thus, register is language variation which is defined, not by user, but by use, placing attention on the manner in which language is used in some situations, including the language of the thesis examiners' reports (TERs), court room, bed room, and etcetera. Consequently, different situations require different patterns of language, each being appropriate to its task, and adapted to suit the immediate situation of language use (Egins & Martin, 1997; Lee, 2001).

Register is constituted by three variables: Field, Mode, and Tenor. In explaining these variables, Halliday and Hasan (1976) assert that Field is concerned with the whole event, in which the text is functioning, including the subject matter or purpose of the communication. Field considers participatory roles, what is going on in the discourse, and actions that writers or speakers are engaged in, including the nature of the social action that is taking place, that is, what is it that the participants are engaged in, in which language

figures as an essential component? Second, Tenor refers to types of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved. The concentration is on the interactants in the discourse as well as the personal and social roles taken up by the interlocutors to the nature of the participants, their statuses and roles: what kinds of role relationship obtain among the participants and temporary relationship of one or another. The Mode of Discourse refers to what part the language is playing, what is it that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation; that is, the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel, and its genre, the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, narrative, didactic or phatic communication. Mode, essentially, concerns itself with the representative organization, the roles of language, and the medium through which the field and the tenor are transferred. The mode of a thesis is written. This mode creates distance between the writer and examiner as it prevents immediate response, and within this mode, language plays an essential role as it constitutes the social process and “is used to reflect on experience” (Eggins, 1994, p. 54). The spatial distance created by the written mode would make unequal availability of some information to the writer and reader.

Moreover, there is a logical relationship between the three sets of variables in the context of situation and metafunctions in the meaning of language: The Ideational metafunction relates to the Field of discourse, the Textual metafunction realizes the Mode of discourse, and the Interpersonal

metafunction is for the Tenor of discourse, giving us the “metafunctional hookup” (Halliday, 1978).

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), register is one of the two attributes of a text. That is, the three variables— Field, Mode, and Tenor — are, thus, the defining features for the linguistic characteristics of the text. A text is a passage of discourse which is coherent in these two regards: it is coherent with respect to the context of situation, and therefore, consistent in register; and it is coherent with respect to the text itself, and therefore, it is cohesive. The TERs, as a text considered in this study, has the “Field” or purpose of passing judgment on what has been produced by the candidate, the Mode is purely written, and the Tenor is traditionally to be vertical with examiner at the top of the relation and the candidate at the bottom of the line— unequal relationship where one wields power over the other. All these values are projected through the use of language, confirming Eggins and Martin’s (1997) view that the linguistic features selected in a text will encode contextual dimensions, of its immediate context of production (i.e., register). Again, in terms of register, the thesis examiner’s report (TER) is a register in the sense that, according to Holbrook et al. (2014), examiners write their reports in a style that reflects their disciplines, unique interests, and expertise as well as the criteria relevant to a particular judgement and the original nature of the topic.

A summary of the nature of theory for the present study is presented in Figure 2:



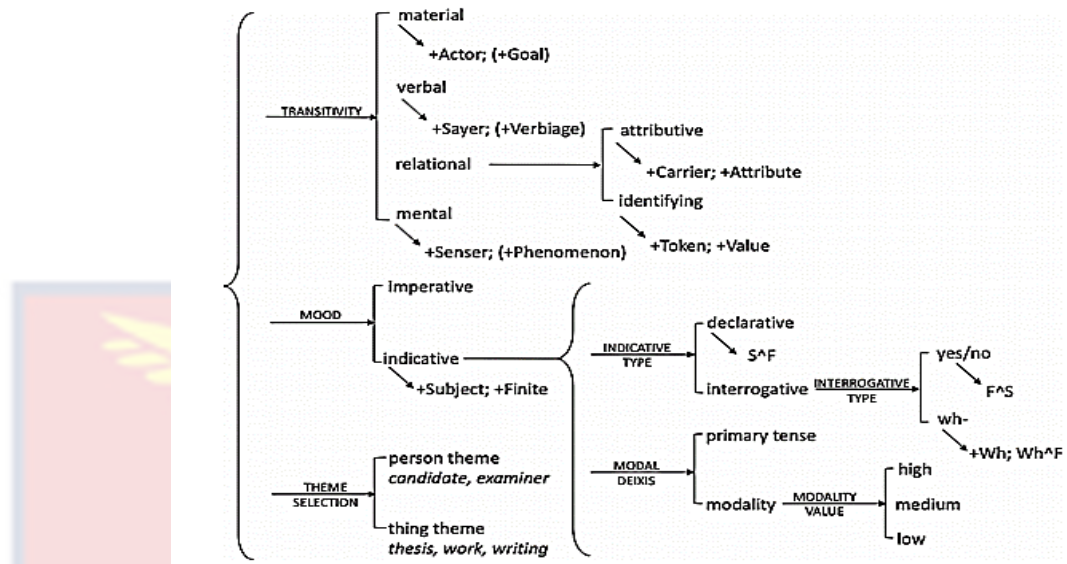


Figure 2: Nature of theory (Adopted from Starfield, Paltridge, McMurtrie, Holbrook, Kiley & Fairbairn, 2017)

To sum up, SFL has many strengths. First, it offers a comprehensive view of evaluative resources, including instances of attitude and positioning and the sources of these evaluative stances in discourse. For Hunston (2013), SFL metafunctions offer a clear agenda for analysis and it provides an explicit, multilayered, and detailed model for explicating a set of texts in relation to the social context they construe. SFL provides a model which allows us to systematically relate lexico-grammatical choices to the construction of different meanings on the basis of its theoretical principles. Hence, I adopt the theory in the present study since I seek to examine the use of evaluative language in TERs, focusing specifically, on the nature of the comments, the entities evaluated, and the roles performed by examiners in their assessment of submitted master's theses to School of Graduate Studies, UCC.

## Section B: Related Key Concepts

Closely related to the identified theory (that is, SFL) are the following concepts: evaluation, written feedback (WF) comments, 'thesis'/'dissertation',



and the evaluative criteria in MPhil/PhD thesis assessment in some institutions worldwide.

### *Evaluation*

This section of the review considers ‘evaluation’ as an interpersonal use of language. The section also makes reference to different scholars but dwells on Hunston’s (2011) discussion of evaluation because it is the most popular and earliest of the studies on evaluation.

Scholars and researchers such as Adel (2006), Adel and Mauranen (2010), Hyland (2005b), Hyland and Tse (2004), Mauranen (1993), Osei (2013), Thompson and Hunston (2000), and Vande Kopple (1985) have confirmed that AW is not exclusively impersonal and objective, yet it is interactive and evaluative. Hyland (2010, p. 116) posits further that AW should not be thought of as completely ‘author evacuated’ but rather, as consisting of evaluations and interactions. This interaction is a textual one which exists between the writer and readers, and writers manage these interactions through stance and engagement.

Hunston and Thompson (2000) proposed the concept of ‘evaluation’ which they explained as representing “the expression of the speaker or writer’s attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about. . .” (p. 5). Thus, Evaluation is concerned with interpersonal uses of language and how the subjective presence of the writer or speaker intrudes into communication to convey an attitude to both those they address and the material they discuss.

Hyland and Diani (2009) stipulate further that evaluation operates on two levels: statements which display assessments of value, roughly

corresponding to opinions along a good–bad axis and those concerning the likely accuracy of claims, relating to judgments of probability. Conrad and Biber (2000) refer to these as ‘attitudinal stance’ and ‘epistemic stance’ respectively. The first group has typically been studied in terms of ‘affect’ and whether the speaker feels positive or negative towards a text, which is an attitudinal dimension of evaluation that conveys value judgments of approval. Thompson and Hunston (2000, p. 3) observe that “this (value-laden evaluations) relates largely to things” and so evaluates nominal groups such as ‘good thesis’ and ‘satisfactory work’. The second group corresponds to ‘evidentiality’ and the degree of certainty or reliability that someone is prepared to publicly invest in a statement. It has been discussed in terms of hedging and modalization and relates to propositions; it, therefore, evaluates clauses such as ‘relevant literature is barely adequate’ and ‘the work can barely pass’.

Hunston (1994, p. 191) states that “expressing evaluation in a text involves both a statement of personal judgement and an appeal to shared norms and values”. In this sense, when an academic evaluates a claim or proposition, he or she contrasts this with what is considered to be a norm within the community. Norms are constructed from the community’s body of knowledge and epistemic understandings, what counts as appropriate methodologies, relevant literature, robust theories and effective practices (Hyland & Diani, 2009). These disciplinary variations, values, and the ways of seeing the world allow writers to position themselves and their work in relation to other members of their groups, negotiating and confirming their membership of particular communities (Bourdieu, 1977).

Hyland (2000) sees evaluation as an important feature of academic writing (AW) which novice and second language writers need so that they can maintain a successful interaction with their readers for research validation. Hyland (2005a) expresses the view that evaluation is critical to AW, as interaction in academic texts involves adopting a view to an issue. Also, according to Hunston and Thompson (2000), evaluation in texts is crucial in terms of expressing the speaker's or writer's opinion, and maintaining relations (i.e. to manipulate the reader, to persuade him or her to see things in a particular way, or to hedge by adjusting the truth-value or certainty attributed to a statement). It is, therefore, inherently comparative, subjective, and value-laden. Linguistically, it is realized through the use of lexis, grammar (i.e. the combination of lexis and grammar) and text (the build-up of values in a prolonged text).

'Evaluation' evokes other terms like 'stance', 'authorial voice', 'attitude', 'appraisal', 'metadiscourse' and 'interpersonal meanings'. Chang (2010) intimates that stance, authorial voice, attitude, and evaluation are concepts adopted by different theorists to refer, generally, to interpersonal meanings. He posits further that due to their correlation to other concepts, such as 'identity', and to grammatical functions, such as the use of first-person pronoun, these terms can represent very different notions. Broadly speaking, Chang (2010) observes further that these conceptual frameworks serve different goals and purposes. An attempt to explain what these terms are is presented below.

First, with reference to 'stance,' Thompson and Hunston (2000) explain 'evaluation' as an umbrella term which covers aspects such as the

speaker's or writer's expression of 'stance' or 'attitude' to mean entities discussed. Stance concerns the way in which writers present themselves and convey different kinds of opinion, attitudes, credibility, assessments, and commitments about propositional content (Hyland, 2008). Thompson and Alba-Juez (2014) offer a revised explanation of 'evaluation' and 'stance' to mean evaluation as the actual realization of the expression of the speaker's stance or attitude. In this way, 'stance' is thought of as an abstract and umbrella term. Hunston (2011) explains that, in the literature, there is two distinct use of the term 'Stance': in one sense, 'stance' is used in a way that matches to some aspects of evaluation. Conrad and Biber (2000), for example, consider stance adverbials in three different corpora. Biber (2006) equates stance to attributive markers. "Epistemic", and "attitudinal" stance projected by Biber (2006) refer to those "linguistic mechanisms used by speakers and writers to convey their personal feelings and assessments" (p. 97). Epistemic stance is associated with certainty, reliability, and limitations of propositions. Attitudinal stance concerns attitudes, feelings, or value judgments. Olivier and Carstens (2018) note that stance features are ways in which writers present themselves in their texts and convey opinions and commitments which include Attitude markers that express writer's attitude to proposition.

Du Bois (2007) propounded the 'stance triangle' to signify the act of stance taking in speech, comprising all three aspects of stance: evaluation, alignment, and positioning. Thus, according to Du Bois (2007), stance includes (1) evaluating an object; (2) aligning with the subjects, and (3) positioning of a subject (mostly, the self). Hunston (2011) posits further that evaluation entails assigning worth to an object. Evaluation shows our



perception of an object (ideological) and our attitude towards one another (interactional). Biber and Zhang (2018) sum up that ‘stance’ is an expression of explicit lexico-grammatical features, which is employed in corpus-based methods to generally describe different registers. They contrast this with ‘evaluation’ that is considered to be implicit and context-based, focusing on connotations or particular words and phrases or detailed descriptions of particular texts rather than on generalized descriptions of a register.

Metadiscourse, on the other hand, according to Hunston (2011), is prioritized as the interface between reader and writer and evokes a dissimilarity between informative discourse (which is primary) and interactional discourse (which is secondary). For instance, Crismore and Farnsworth (1990, p. 119) define “metadiscourse” as “an author’s overt or non-overt presence in the discourse in order to direct rather than to inform readers”, which is in consonance of Vande Kopple’s (1985) classification of metadiscourse, that includes ‘attitude markers’ which express the interpersonal mode of metadiscourse. Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 157) give this definition: “Metadiscourse is . . . the linguistic resources used to organise a discourse or the writer’s stance towards either its content or the reader”.

Metadiscourse consists of interactive resources and interactional resources. Linguistic resources for interactive resources cover indicators of semantic relations between evidentials, texts, and clauses. Interactional resources are attitude markers, boosters, hedges, and clear mentionings of either the reader or the writer (Hyland, 2004a; Hyland & Tse, 2004). Interactional resources, discussed by Thompson (2001), signal the other voice (‘reader-in-the-text’) in academic texts. For Hyland (1998b), ‘Evidentiality’



refers to the writer's commitment to the truth of propositions and their strategic manipulation for interpersonal goals. 'Affect' involves a range of attitudes, including emotions, perspectives and beliefs. "Relation" concerns the extent to which writers choose to engage with readers, and their degree of intimacy or remoteness.

Thus, stance and engagement are components of the interactional dimension of Hyland's metadiscourse model. Stance is writer-oriented interaction (Hyland, 2008) and represents the writer's textual voice or community recognised personality (Hyland, 2008). Stance comprises four elements: hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. Engagement, on the other hand, is reader-oriented interaction (Hyland, 2008), which allows writers to rhetorically acknowledge their readers in the discourse. Its principal importance lies in seeking solidarity with the reader and influencing and preparing readers to consider propositions by anticipating possible objections. It can be seen that Metadiscourse subsumes stance and engagement.

In addition, a term close to evaluation is 'Voice'. Chang (2010) explains that when aligned with stance or evaluation, voice concerns the deployment of evidence and the construction of a convincing argument. Bakhtin (1981) indicates that voice is expressed both in written discourse as well as spoken discourse. Voice reveals the intention and perspective of a writer or speaker to the audience. Matsuda (2001) considers voice as a metaphor for capturing, among other things, a feature in written discourse that can be perceived by readers, but is not readily recognizable as a single linguistic or rhetorical feature. Cheung (2017) intimates that since stance is considered to be an individualised assessment from the writer that conveys

personal evaluations and commitment (Hyland, 2008), Voice subsumes Stance in that the voice of a particular social group is articulated as instances of stance as personal voice. Again, he notes that the discursive features realising voice and stance display personal attitudes, negotiate affiliations and identities, and engage with the readership. The concepts of voice and stance, therefore, encompass the individual, social, and dialogic dimensions, an assertion which is shared by Olivier and Carstens (2018).

For Olivier and Carstens (2018), voice is mainly associated with Engagement Framework, with its dialogical and communicative dimensions, explaining that the Engagement system deals with the linguistic resources available to writers to provide the means for the authorial voice to engage with other voices and to adopt alternative positions in the communicative context (Martin & White, 2005). Olivier and Carstens (2018) distinguish between (1) individualised voice which is stance, echoing Elbow's (1994; 2007) view that voice is a feature that captures the sound of the individual on the page, and (2) socialised voice which is intratextual and intertextual voice since Olivier and Carstens (2018) see writing as a subject to and result of social context.

Lastly, evaluation of entities can also be realized through appraisal which is housed in SFL. Appraisal has been defined as “the semantic resources used to negotiate emotions, judgments and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations” (Martin, 2000, p. 145). For Martin and Rose (2003), at the heart of the Appraisal Theory (AT) is the system of interpersonal meanings whose resources writers and speakers of a language use as evaluative resources to negotiate their social relationships, by telling their listeners or readers how they feel about things

and people. Appraisal deals with how writers make up identities for themselves in texts, how they present themselves in relation to their readers, and how they construct an audience for their text. Appraisal further analyses the roles and attitudes taken up through interaction between participants in a text.

Martin and White (2005) divide Appraisal into Attitude, Graduation, and Engagement. Using slightly different terms, Martin and Rose (2003) also divide appraisal into three categories: Attitudes, Amplification, and Sources. In Martin and Rose (2003), Amplification refers to Graduation (Martin & White, 2005) which is the intensity of the evaluation. Martin and Rose (2003) simply refer to the Sources of attitudes whereas Martin and White (2005) refer to it as Engagement which is who is doing the evaluation and how these evaluations are presented to the reader. By Attitude, both Martin and Rose (2003) and Martin and White (2005) refer to feelings, judgments and evaluations. The Attitude Strand has three divisions—Affect, Judgment and Appreciation. Affect as resources for construing emotion; Judgement as resources for judging behaviour in ‘ethical’ terms, and Appreciation has resources for valuing objects ‘aesthetically’ (Martin, 1997; 2000; Martin & Rose, 2003; Martin & White, 2005). AT provides a discourse-semantic approach to the study of interpersonal meaning and has “the potential to be more specific than general, to be more closely tailored to the communicative concerns of a particular context of situation” (White 1998, p. 73).

In sum, for Hunston (2011), these terms which refer to analogous areas of language use (stance, appraisal, affective language or attitudinal, evaluation, and metadiscourse) are largely equivalent. For her, the differences

in the terms lie in the conception of ‘evaluation’; thus, she offers the following options:

First, ‘Evaluation’ is an activity undertaken by a person, which may be, wholly, unexpressed and private (making it an unresearchable issue in language) or it may involve language. Englebretson (2007, p. 3) observes that ‘stance-taking’ denotes that “stance is something that people actively engage in”, appealing to existing traditions like conversation analysis which regards interactions, explained by Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008, p. 12) as “the sites where people accomplish social activities”.

Second, ‘Evaluation’, or other terms like ‘appraisal’, ‘stance’, and ‘attitude’, is the set of words and phrases which express evaluative meaning. She expounds this concept further by alluding to Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 157), who define metadiscourse as “the linguistic resources used to organize a discourse or the writer’s stance towards either its content or the reader”. Conrad and Biber (2000, p. 57) define stance as “a cover term for the *expression* of personal feelings and assessments”, using Corpus Linguistics that considers linguistic resources such as words, phrases, and other grammatical categories as its subjects of study.

Third, ‘Evaluation’ is a group of meanings expressed in a text, employing a range of language items. Hunston (2011) observes Martin and White’s (2005, p. 42) appraisal as a “system of meanings” available to a writer or speaker and to which that writer/speaker may employ to “approve and disapprove, enthuse and abhor, applaud and criticise, and . . . position their readers/listeners to do likewise” (p.1). She asserts that, by this, Martin and



White agree with Du Bois in his stance triangle. However, Martin and White admit they align with the SFL tradition.

Hunston purports further that 'Evaluation' is viewed as a function done by a part or whole of a text. This treats the text as an agentive entity, independent of its interactants. She cites Hoey (2001), for instance, who explains sentences using features of text patterns. Hunston (2011) offers a framework for the consideration of what functions evaluation achieves in a group of academic texts. Thompson and Hunston (2000) deliberate fully on evaluation and its functions. Thus, the differences present here offers various approaches to examining language in account of the concept of evaluation.

Furthermore, Hunston (2011) advocates a three-move evaluative act: (1) identification and classification of an entity to be evaluated, (2) subscription of a worth to that entity, and (3) recognition of the relevance of that information. Each of these moves differs from the other. Again, these entities are prepositions which are predominantly epistemic and discursal, including using questions, offering information, and summing up of issues, and such entities could be traced throughout a piece of text. The worth ascribed to entities is heavily based on context, and it is cumulative and implicit. Construing the value in a text may entail anything ranging from a clause to paragraphs.

Next, Hunston (2011) identifies six points of consensus in these terms. According to her, the first point of consensus is that evaluation is intersubjective and subjective, expressing personal opinion. For Thompson and Hunston (2000, p. 1), evaluation is "positive or negative opinions" and for Martin and White (2005, p. 42), it is 'ways of feeling.' Evaluation is private,



personal, and subjective. Consequently, evaluative utterances are recognised mainly by the speakers.

Secondly, evaluation evokes an ideology that is understood between speaker and hearer, or writer and reader. Though evaluation is subjective and personal, it is understood within an ideological and social framework, situated within a system of value even when there is a level of disagreement. Hunston (1993) explains further that in academic writing, some evaluations are interpreted through ideological standings which are related to the construction of knowledge. The likely inferences are drawn on known ideological assumptions. Contrary, implied evaluation is found in a text since writer and reader have common assumptions. Also, writers and speakers do use some kinds of evaluation as a result of their ideological stands and what they think their interactants have.

Third, Hunston identifies a range of lexical resources for evaluative meaning. She indicates that although differences exist in what researchers term as 'evaluation', limiting the concept to something such as desirable or undesirable, point to many areas of agreement. Evaluative resources cover adjectives such as 'bad' or 'wonderful', which may not pose problems to readers even when taken out of context. However, evaluative resources are so many that it will be pointless in listing them, but they usually cover adverbs, nouns, adjectives, and phrases. Most prominently, evaluation is implied than stated.

Furthermore, evaluation is cumulative and contextual. Evaluation is heavily dependent on context such that devoid of context, meaning cannot be ascertained. Teubert (2003) explains that a word has a meaning only when it is

met in context and not in isolation. A length of a concordance line from 80 to 500 characters help ascertain whether a word is negative, neutral or positive. Also, evaluation is cumulative which is the clustering of meaning in evaluation. If evaluation is greatly hidden, accumulation makes it obvious, and repetition is needed. Thus, accumulation and context work hand in hand.

The fifth is that evaluation includes a source and an object or a target, which is important to the Du Bois's (2007) stance triangle and to every other consideration of the concept of evaluation. The source is attributed to the speaker or writer such that the object is evaluated by that person. Essentially, the nature of the object influences the kind of evaluation. This is captured succinctly by Hunston (2000a, p. 199): "the status of something constrains the criteria or grounds on which it can be given value". Evaluations themselves might be attributed to speakers other than the author of the text under discussion.

The last and sixth point, according to Hunston (2011), is that excluding other items from evaluative resources is difficult, with the task of evaluation identification. She furthers the argument by indicating that ideological beliefs and subjectivity pervade in even discourses that are considered objective enough. Consequently, all utterances and texts are evaluative, "so that the phenomenon itself disappears, to be replaced simply by 'language'". Thus, researchers could contend on a distinction between evaluation and non-evaluation or consider the all-emcompassing nature of evaluation, ignoring the peripherals.

The present study adopts 'Evaluation' over the related terms just discussed above. As pinpointed by Suárez-Tejerina (2005), evaluation, the use

of language in expressing opinion, is a neutral term which sees the combination of approaches to its study and involves a number of parameters (Thompson & Hunston, 2000). Again, evaluation has three functions which are expressing opinion, maintaining relations between the writer and the reader, and organising the discourse. The first is the main function, the second function which is manipulation relates to hedging and politeness, and the third is linked to the idea that evaluation in writing/speech tends to occur at the boundary points in a discourse, thereby providing a clue to monitoring its organization (Thompson & Hunston, 2000).

In sum, this section has considered ‘evaluation’ as an interpersonal use of language. Because of its slippery nature, evaluation was discussed in relation to other terms such as ‘stance’, ‘attitude’, ‘appraisal’, and ‘metadiscourse’. The section also made reference to different scholars but dwelt on Hunston (2011) for her discussion of how evaluation differs from and relates to the other analogous terms.

### ***Written Feedback***

This section discusses another key concept which is related to the present study—Written Feedback (WF). The conceptualization of written feedback involves a discussion on its nature, functions, and types.

Chappuis and Chappuis (2008) aver that feedback in an assessment of learning context occurs while there is still time to take action, and it avoids marks or comments that judge the level of achievement or imply that the learning journey is over. Chappuis and Chappuis (2008) intimate further that effective descriptive feedback focuses on the intended learning, identifies specific strengths, points to areas needing improvement, suggests a route of

action students can take to close the gap between where they are now and where they need to be, takes into account the amount of corrective feedback the learner can act on at one time, and models the kind of thinking students will engage in when they self-assess. For Hughes (2014), effective feedback on student writing mirrors a conversation with students/writers and their ideas. In short, Sadler (1989) states that feedback is information given to the student about the quality of performance. It can be seen that feedback is information provided on a work that has been produced, particularly, by a student or candidate, in the context of the present study.

Stracke and Kumar (2010) group feedback into three broad areas. First, they propose that feedback closes a gap between current and desired performance (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Parr & Timperley, 2010). Ramaprasad (1983) notes that information about the gap between the actual level and the reference level of a system parameter which is used to alter the gap in some way is crucial to the learning process. Both Black and Wiliam (1998), and Hattie and Timperley (2007) suggest that feedback gives students information about their performance in relation to specific and clear goals; helps them to identify the causes of the gap between the desired and the actual level they are at, and acts to fill that gap. Sadler (1989) had earlier indicated that what is essential in feedback is that it has to be active, in the sense that once the gap is identified, it has to be closed.

Stracke and Kumar (2010), further, recognize feedback as the provision of developmental experiences and encouragement of self-regulated learning. They observe that feedback provides opportunities for students to practise skills and to consolidate the journey from a zone of current



development to a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978); that is, students move from being a novice to becoming experts in a specialised fields of study, especially, at doctoral level, and achieve the tenacities of self-regulated learning. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the main aim of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings, performance, and a goal. The focus in feedback is on specific aspects that need improvement—both supervisors and examiners may provide such feedback, with the examiners providing the last stage of supporting the candidate's learning experience.

Finally, feedback is often referred to as a form of communication (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2001). Hughes, Wood and Kitagawa (2014) also highlighted the dialogical role of feedback. They argue that feedback should lead to discussion, clarification and negotiation. Nicol (2009a) argues that effective feedback is associated with partnership, requiring actions by teachers and students. In this sense, feedback should be arrived at fairly promptly and must be understood and actually used by students. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), feedback is usually thought of as information provided by an agent (e.g. teacher, peer, book, parent, self, experience) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding. A similar explanation is given by Hughes et al. (2014) who assert that feedback is information from instructors or peers that is provided to students about written assignments. Feedback includes both information about the product (the paper or the assignment) and the process of writing. Nicol (2009a) mentions that in higher education, it is usual to think about the instructor as the initiator and provider of feedback. Nicol (2009a) argues further that while teachers engage with ideas and



arguments, they must analyse signals, have genuine interest, respect identities, and have strengths and potential in written papers in order for them (teachers) to give appropriate feedback. The teacher, in that expert role, offers feedback to students, which is aimed at supporting learning and to help students achieve higher levels in the learning process. Stracke and Kumar (2010) observe that through feedback, supervisors engage with supervisees. They explain that his or her engagement could be in the form of interactions that range from referential utterances which provide information, directive utterances which try to get the hearer (writer) to do something or, finally, expressive utterances which express the speaker's (supervisor's) feelings.

Feedback has an agent that completes the process. Nicol (2009b) postulates that while the quality of teacher (that is, supervisors, examiners etc.) comments is important, engagement with and use of those comments by students is equally important. Nicol (2009b) advances that numerous feedbacks may be provided by a teacher but these may yield nothing unless the student responds appropriately to these feedbacks, processing and acting upon the feedbacks.

In terms of the nature of feedback, Wood, Wood, and Middleton (1978) argue that a teacher's feedback cannot be perfect but what is expected is a consistent active adjustment to teacher feedback, based on the understanding of the learner. They argue that copious iteration, specificity or detail is not enough in any sense than to offer feedback that meets the needs of students, though achieving this can be difficult with large student numbers, sometimes. Nicol (2009b) proposes that in order to make feedback more sensitive to individualistic needs, students ought to indicate their preference

for the type of feedback needed in their assignments. For instance, a teacher may indicate to students to demand feedback, to add questions to their submissions, indicating areas that they may need help (which may include problems with the process of writing and use of concepts). Teachers, then, may tailor their comments to address such concerns.

Nicol (2009b) also observes that it is important that feedback is not too narrowly considered as something that happens after the student has produced a work. Feedback is not always backward looking and a consequence of action, but it can also be forward-looking. To enrich feedback and make it more meaningful to students, first, Nicol (2009b) indicates that feedback must be matched to the needs of the student. Second, teacher feedback must be varied in many ways and from many sources including student's peers to enable students examine their own writings from multiple perspectives to aid understanding and development of capabilities. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) posit that significant learning benefits can be achieved when teachers harness peer feedback and build on informal feedback processes such as generation of student's own feedback in essay or report writing. Thirdly, feedback must help students consolidate their own abilities to be able to judge the quality of their works as the sole aim of feedback is to help wean students off their teachers. Lastly, teachers must create conditions that motivate students to enthusiastically pursue and use feedback, which is dependent on the realization of the other three factors already mentioned.

With regard to types of feedback, Haines (2004) identified regulatory instructions, advisory comments, descriptive observation, rhetorical questions, direct criticism, praise, and correctness as the various forms that feedback

could manifest itself. However, Haines (2004) asserts further that praise and descriptive observation must be increased; direct criticism should be handled carefully if positive results are to be achieved. Consequently, feedback should be sandwiched in that people seem to cope better with the good news first, then, the bad news. One way to do this is to use the feedback sandwich that has three features: First, strengths are identified (praise), weaknesses (development needs) are recognised, and options for improvement are explored.

Written Feedback (WF) is both helpful and desirable (Ferris, 2003; Goldstein, 2004; Lee, 2008). Feedback plays an intervention role in the writing process (Kumar & Kumar, 2009). Stracke and Kumar (2010) posit that in the writing process, feedback provides checks to the writer to reach negotiated goals. Bruno and Santos (2010) also affirm that one way to support students' learning is by using feedback. Teacher written feedback raises students' awareness of the reader's expectations (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) also think that WF is clearly crucial to students' growth as writers because it is considered to be the best way for communication with each student on a one-to-one basis. Feedback is formative if it effectively helps students to master their difficulties (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994)

In the event of providing information about students' learning or skills (feedback), a value is placed on these learning procedures, which relate to evaluation. In this sense, evaluation can narrowly be seen as the process of judging or putting a value on a procedure, the degree to which knowledge or skill has been gained. The TERs serve both the purpose of gathering

information on what has been learnt or produced, and placing a value or judging what has been produced (the thesis).

Feedback does not end with providing information about student's learning or skill acquisition in order to plan future learning goals and to enhance behaviour and skills; rather, it involves gathering information in order to make a determination about a student's learning, and that is assessment. Assessment is categorized into summative and formative. Summative assessment (SA), sometimes, referred to as assessment of learning (Bruno & Santos, 2010), typically, documents how much learning has occurred at a point in time; its purpose is to measure the level of student, school, or programme success. In other words, SA results are used to make judgment, such as to determine what grade a student will receive on a classroom assignment, measure programme effectiveness or determine whether a school has made adequate yearly progress. Ketabi and Ketabi (2014) support Chappuis and Chappuis (2008) by expressing that SA summarizes what students learnt during a course and it is usually done at the end of the semester (Brown, 2004). This kind of assessment shows what objectives have been accomplished, but it lacks feedback or any suggestion to improve performance.

Final exams or proficiency tests are examples of SA (Brown, 2004). Alderson (2005) associated SA with long traditional tests which were so stressful to students. Alderson (2005) argues further that any kind of test which lacks further feedback and the only possible use of it is gathering scores in the eyes of students can be summative even if teachers have primarily designed the test to facilitate learning and teaching. Bruno and Santos (2010)



are of the view that SA, or assessment of learning, is one-dimensional, separate from the curriculum, and drives an inauthentic, context-independent and inflexible teaching. The thesis examiners' reports (TERs) can be described as having an aspect of summative in that the results are used to make some judgments, such as to determine what grade a student will receive for a thesis. It also recapitulates what the students have learnt over a period of time which is reflected in the kind of thesis a student has been able to produce, whether the skills were learnt well or otherwise during the period of the student's candidature.

On the other hand, formative assessment (FA) can be defined as "every intentional proceeding act on learning mechanisms that directly contributes to the progression and/or redirection of learning" (Santos, 2002, p. 77). In other words, FA is offered to help the student improve upon existing knowledge. Bruno and Santos (2010) also maintain that FA, or assessment for learning, is multi-dimensional, integrated in the curriculum, authentic, context-embedded and flexible. FA does not interrupt, but rather goes along with the learning process, and takes place during learning and is aimed to help learning and teaching by giving appropriate feedback (Lewy, 1990). Lewy (1990) explains that FA is based on a communication process in which feedback can be fundamental to the activation of the students' cognitive and meta-cognitive development.

Nitko (1993) named two purposes of FA: (a) selecting or modifying learning procedures, and (b) choosing the best remedies for improving weak areas in learning and teaching. Gattullo (2000) characterized FA as these: "(a) it is an ongoing multi-phase process that is carried out on a daily basis through



teacher–pupil interaction; (b) it provides feedback for immediate action, and (c) it aims at modifying teaching activities in order to improve learning processes and results.” (p. 279). Most classroom assessments are formative and students form their knowledge by analyzing and internalizing teachers’ comments (Brown, 2004). FA seems to echo what feedback does, that is, closing a gap. If the information given to close a gap has an immediate impact for learning, it can be considered as FA or feedback. Both the teacher and the student use FA results to make decisions about what actions to take to promote further learning. It is an ongoing, dynamic process that involves far more than frequent testing, and measurement of student learning is just one of its components. Here, the supervisee and supervisor use information on the TERs to shape the thesis for a ‘better’ product later.

I agree with Stracke and Kumar (2010) that TERs at the doctoral and Master’s levels consist of two components: firstly, summative assessment (SA) where a judgement is made about whether the thesis has met the standards established by the discipline for the award of the degree; and, secondly, the developmental and formative component, where examiners provide feedback to assist a candidate to revise the thesis for final submission. I focus on this dual task of providing assessment and feedback, seeking to examine the kind of evaluative response expressed by examiners in the TERs, assessment of entities and processes, and roles of examiners in the TERs on MPhil theses. Thus, both SA and FA are relevant to the present study.

### ***Thesis / Dissertation***

In this section, I attempt to explain ‘thesis’ and ‘dissertation’, showing their regional variations. The formats of thesis/dissertation are discussed.

Thereafter, I differentiate ‘Master’s thesis’ from ‘PhD thesis’. The candidate, supervisor, and the examiner, who are the main personalities in thesis writing, are highlighted, alongside the readership of the thesis. Finally, I elaborate the thesis/dissertation examination, all aimed in situating the work conceptually.

Weijers (2005) explains that a ‘dissertation’ or a ‘thesis’ is a manuscript submitted in partial fulfillment of a student’s candidature for professional qualification or an academic degree; it contains the researcher’s findings. Ross (1928) reveals that ‘thesis’ comes from Greek (θέσις), which is ‘something put forth’, and it denotes an intellectual proposition. ‘Dissertation’ is from Latin ‘dissertātiō, which is ‘discussion’. The first theorist to define the term ‘thesis’ was Aristotle (Ross, 1928); a ‘thesis’ means an assumption of a certain important philosopher that clashes with the general opinion. According to Aristotle, a thesis was a supposition specified in incongruity with the universal opinion of other philosophers. A supposition is a statement or opinion that may or may not be true, depending on the evidence and/or proof that is offered. The purpose of the dissertation is, thus, to outline the proofs of why the author disagrees with other philosophers or the general opinion. Originally, the words ‘dissertation’ and ‘thesis’, according to Weijers (2005), were not interchangeable, by explaining that, in prehistoric universities, when the lector completes his lecture, there will conventionally follow a ‘disputation’, at which students may argue some points. Therefore, the thesis was the angle from which a disputation was made, and the dissertation was the arguments offered in support of that position.

However, in contemporary times, mostly, the differences in the meaning of dissertation and thesis are expressed in terms of their locations,

thereby bringing regional differences in the use of ‘thesis’ and ‘dissertation’. In some contexts, the word ‘thesis’ or a cognate is used for part of a bachelor's or Master's course while ‘dissertation’ is normally applied to a doctorate. However, in other contexts, the reverse is true. In the United Kingdom (the UK), the term ‘thesis’ is mainly reserved for doctoral/PhD, and Master's degrees by research while ‘dissertation’ is used for Master's degree by taught work or a degree for undergraduates. In other European countries, a dissertation is a simple form of writing which precedes a thesis; a thesis is a more detailed form of writing which includes empirical research. The opposite applies to the American educational system structure. A thesis in American colleges is for a Master's degree while a dissertation is for a doctorate. In Australia, the thesis is an extended written piece which reports on the results of a three-to four-year programme of research (the writing component is called a dissertation, in some other countries).

In Canada, a longer paper or essay presented for the completion of bachelor's degree is called a ‘Major Paper’. However, high-quality research papers presented as empirical study of postgraduate consecutive bachelor with honours or baccalaureatus Cum Honore degree are called ‘thesis’ (Honours Seminar Thesis). Major papers presented as the final project for a Master's degree are normally called thesis and major papers presenting the student's research towards a doctoral degree are called theses or dissertations. In New Zealand, a thesis is for Masters and dissertation is for PhD.

The length of thesis differs from one department/faculty to another and are determined by universities on their own. Also, the quality, complexity of a dissertation or thesis, and duration of study vary greatly by programme,

university or country (Bitzer, 2014; Bourke, Hattie & Anderson, 2004; Bunton, 1998; Holbrook, 2008; Pitkethly & Prosser, 1995). Although the academic system of UCC is tailored towards that of the British, and warranting the use of ‘dissertation’ for Master’s and ‘Thesis’ for Doctorate, it seems in Ghana, in general, and UCC, in particular, thesis is used for both Masters and PhD research work, and Dissertation reserved for other degrees like MBA. Now, the words ‘dissertation’ and ‘thesis’ are interchangeably used in the present study. Consequently, I will also use ‘thesis’, qualified, sometimes, by Masters or PhD.

In addition, the thesis can be structured in different formats: monograph thesis, thesis by publication/compilation, and thesis by creative works. First, a thesis (or dissertation) may be arranged and referred to as a monograph with or without appended papers, respectively, though many graduate programmes allow candidates to submit a curated collection of published papers. In addition, the monograph thesis, also known as traditional, classical, or standard thesis is up to 100, 000 words in length for PhD (or 60, 000 words for an MPhil. Geng (2015) avers that a traditional perception of the staging organization is an extended format of the ‘IMRD [Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion] structure’ of research articles (Swales, 2004). Bunton (1998, p. 106) revealed other patterns specific to some disciplines, such as, theses of ‘topic-based’ structure which “report and discuss their analyses in multiple chapters (ranging from three to seven) with topic-specific titles”. A monograph contains a title, table of content, an abstract, as well as many other chapters like introduction, methodology, results and discussion. A reference or bibliography list is then added. The monograph differs in its



structure in line with the various different areas of study (Social Sciences, Humanities, Sciences, Technology and etcetera). There is introduction chapter which introduces the research topic, its significance and scope; a literature review that considers pertinent literature and helps situate the work; the methodology explains the design of the research including population, data and its analysis; an analysis and discussion analyses and discusses the findings in the light of the related literature; a finding chapter outlines the findings of the work. A conclusion summarises the study and makes recommendations.

Also, article-based/publication/ the multi-part / manuscript / compilation format is an effective method of organization when research has been performed in two or more areas that cannot be combined into a single presentation. A thesis by compilation may include works that are sole (i.e. single) or joint authored (i.e. co-authored) and accepted for publication. The compilation can include works which have been explicitly prepared for publication but not yet accepted. It is expected that a thesis by compilation has a linking text and a foreword to each chapter (which is an article) as well as chapters with an introductory and inclusive review of the attached unpublished and published articles. This format is only appropriate if the thesis or dissertation will contain two or more separate, but related essays. Each chapter may end with its own bibliography and appendix (if needed); or all references and appendix material may be combined and placed at the end of the document.

On the other hand, the thesis by compilation will have front matters that have title, abstract, acknowledgment, table of content, and list of figures. A declaration that states publication status and authorship of all papers is



included. Chapter 1 as introduction follows. Foreword to Chapter 2 is presented; then, Chapter 2 which is the exact text of the first paper, is preferred in the Portable Document Format (PDF) supplied by the journal. A similar structure is used for Chapters 4 and 5. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 can include chapters not yet accepted, submitted or never intended for publication. Final chapter, which is the conclusion, ends the structuring of the thesis. In Ghana, and in UCC, specifically, the article-based thesis was not recognised except the monograph/classical though the sciences did produce the article-based thesis unofficially. About two years ago, the article-based thesis format was accepted in UCC alongside the monograph thesis format (*Policy Guidelines for article-based thesis at UCC, 2018*).

There is another thesis structure: creative works (See *Thesis & Dissertation, 2020*, Newton Gresham Library Sam Houston State University). A thesis by creative works can include a multimedia or digital work, a film, an exhibition, a performance, a musical composition, a novel, a play, a series of poems, creative art work or other works as agreed by the candidates and the university. This work can be accompanied by an exegesis (commentary and interpretation of the work) or a dissertation (on the topic related to the work) and written work accompanying a thesis by creative works must be substantial; between 30, 000 and 60, 000 words for a PhD and between 15, 000 and 30, 000 for an MPhil. The exegesis specifies the development of the creative work over the duration of the course of study, and provides the broad context for the ideas and precedents which inform the development of the research project. The candidate, through the exegesis, presents an account of the research by demonstrating how the work addresses the objectives of the

approved research project, and how the topics of the thesis informed the creative work-based research. The final presentation of the work could be a public presentation, an exhibition, recital, lecture or some other form agreed with the supervisor and the university. The creative thesis requires title page, approval page, an optional dedication, abstract, optional acknowledgements, table of content, introduction, creative section, list of reference and vita. It is worth noting that the data for the present study is based on the monograph thesis format.

Degree-awarding universities may define their own house style that candidates should follow when writing a thesis. Also, there exists a number of field-specific, national, and international standards and recommendations for the presentation of theses. Some house styles prefer the use of Roman numerals for front matters such as abstract and table of content, which is different from the numbering used in the main work (referred to as the book design). However, some house styles prefer Arabic numerals which starts with 'i' for the first page to avoid the confusion of numbering all pages of a text unceasingly from first page. Presentation of document includes layout, pagination, colour, size, and type of paper (acid-free paper), citation style and order of components, which are to be vetted page after page before the acceptance of the thesis. School of Graduate Studies (UCC) outlines these specifics in *Guidelines for preparing and presenting project work, dissertation and thesis (2016)*.

Apart from the regional variation in the meaning of 'thesis' and 'dissertation', and thesis formats, differences exist between what constitutes thesis at the Master's and PhD levels. Though both PhD and MPhil theses

have similarities like following a systemic process where there is researchable problem, literature to support and contextualize the problem, data collection methods, analysis of data, discussion, and conclusions based on the results of study, these levels are not the same. Trafford and Leshem (2011) argue that amidst its variance, there are generic features of doctorateness that transcend disciplines, institutions, and procedures which examiners often refer to as the ‘gold standard’ of the doctorate. When standards at the PhD level are met, they constitute doctorateness, which is what is expected to be displayed in doctoral theses (Halse & Malfroy, 2010). To achieve doctorateness, Bitzer (2014) contends that doctoral candidates are expected to progress beyond merely reporting facts since the doctorate represents a level of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that involve intellectualising, conceptualising and contributing to existing knowledge. Bitzer (2014) affirms that the doctorate can, thus, be described as being different from other academic degrees due to the length of study, level of scholarship, size and level of the finished output and method of examination.

The distinctive difference between the doctorate and other degrees lies in the concept and nature of doctorateness itself. Trafford and Leshem (2011) establish that doctorateness combines the issues of understanding research, research processes and research techniques into a single notion. As a result, the notion of doctorateness is pluralist as it combines both ‘doing and achieving’ a doctorate which contains critical elements of doctoral research that interest examiners. Quality that makes up doctorateness is the notion of making knowledge contribution (Wellington, 2012). Kennedy (2017) notes that originality is an obvious criterion for a PhD thesis examination, but it is

not a specified standard for passing a Master's thesis. Nonetheless, examiners anticipate that a Master's thesis, in a way, will contribute to the literature. This lack of expectation or originality in Master's thesis has been maintained institutionally. Bourke and Holbrook (2013) hold that although Master's theses might contribute to knowledge in the discipline, there were limitations in that these new researchers needed to align themselves with research-mindedness. However, the best Master's dissertations will be original though that originality may not be essential at the Master's level (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013). Examiners adopt the same criteria for PhD and research Master's theses, in that all indicators are considered to be important. The issue of originality which distinguishes a Masters' thesis from a PhD thesis may be described as intrinsic. There are more extrinsic features. In the ensuing paragraph, I draw attention to some extrinsic features that distinguish a Master's programme from the PhD one.

A key extrinsic difference between the PhD and the MPhil is the number of people involved in the process of both supervision and examination. For the MPhil, a candidate may work with only a supervisor as it is the case in UCC now. The work is examined by the external and internal (from a cognate department) examiners; however, at the viva, the external examiner is excluded. On the contrary, for the PhD, the external examiner is part of the panel for the viva. In other institutions, PhD examining committee has chairperson, and two, three or, sometimes, four other faculty members who serve as readers. In UCC, viva for PhD is conducted by a Panel of six examiners comprising the dean of School of Graduate Studies or her/his representative as the chairman, the head of department, the external examiner,



the internal examiner, principal supervisor or co-supervisor, and one other member from the department or a cognate department. Where the dean of School of Graduate Studies is him/herself the principal supervisor, his/her representative is appointed chairman of the panel of examiners.

Furthermore, the focus or purpose of the study creates a distinction between MPhil and PhD theses. Bui (2014) explains that the Masters' study stems from applied research where theories are tested to determine their usefulness in solving a practical problem. The PhD thesis, however, has a broader and theoretical focus. Though both will have implications, the MPhil is narrower, and the PhD is a more complex and sophisticated form of the MPhil thesis. Again, while the Master's thesis provides knowledge about learning, PhD contributes new knowledge, theories, or practices in the field of study. Thus, while a Master's thesis shows criticality about topic and in-depth analysis of information, in the PhD, the field of research is broader, with extensive coverage and depth of investigation. At the Master's level, the researcher can be said to learn the basics of scientific research while the doctorate integrates, deeply, scientific research useful within its field.

Also, the PhD thesis requires more depth and/or breadth, including a theoretical or conceptual framework that relates to the problem, in developing, or refining, or challenging a theory which may not be required at the Master's level (Bui, 2014). The MPhil thesis may require less sample size, for instance, but the PhD may demand much of this and richer analysis; thus, making the length of the study and pages of MPhil less than that of the PhD. The PhD thesis (100, 000 words) is longer than the Master's thesis (60, 000 words), though thesis length at both levels is institutionalized. However, Peters (2018)



argues that there are rare cases where a dissertation occupies only few pages, and this happens in cases where the PhD thesis introduces the solution of a famous problem or extends known results in some significant way, citing these two works: Elkies (1987) and Martens (1962) of being 7 journal pages and 12 pages respectively. These facts, notwithstanding, the PhD is, generally, lengthier than the Master's thesis because a PhD involves in-depth background information, literature review, methods, and analysis and discussion of findings. The Master's thesis may have the traditional five chapters but the PhD goes beyond these traditional chapters.

In sum, intrinsically and extrinsically, a number of features differentiate a Master's thesis from a PhD thesis in terms of breadth and depth of knowledge, contribution to knowledge, publishability, originality, and text length (number of pages, chapters, and words). Obviously, the Master's thesis is not the same as the PhD thesis. Thus, the examination of a Master's thesis and the PhD thesis are not expected to be the same. My data consist of examiners' reports from the Master's theses since more studies exist on PhD thesis reports (See Chapter Three: Empirical Reviews), to the neglect of the Master's thesis examination reports.

Having discussed the meaning of thesis and dissertation in terms of their regional differences, thesis format, and the nature of a Master's thesis and that of the PhD, I devote the subsequent paragraphs in this section to specific issues that are related to Master's thesis, which include key personalities, readership and thesis examination.

Paré, Starke-Meyerring, and McAlpine (2009) explain that a dissertation contains differences on a number of discrete sub-genres (the

essay, literature review, experimental article). Thesis writers need to demonstrate their ability to understand and expand disciplinary knowledge in a way that meets the expectations of their discourse community (Carter, 2011; Shaw, 1991). Knowledge construction in theses varies across disciplines (Carter, 2011; Parry, 1998, 2007; Swales, 2004), which could be understood from the perspective of register. The dissertation which is the final school-based display of skills and knowledge is the ultimate student paper, and it is the first significant contribution to a disciplinary conversation (Paré et al., 2009), responding to innumerable exigencies and performing a variety of social actions in many different contexts, comprising the thesis committee, supervisory dyad, the disciplinary community, the academic department, and the research setting. Thus, it is its service in these settings and this simultaneous response that makes dissertation to be described as a ‘multi-genre’. To Paré et al. (2009), the dissertation may be thought of as a move towards a deeper and a more essential involvement of the students in a disciplinary engagement.

The thesis is variedly-mediated, involving writing centres, proofreaders, writing consultants, peers, supervisors, and examiners, who all play critical roles in ensuring that the finest form of the thesis is produced, being classified by Luo and Hyland (2017) as those that are directly involved in the production of a text who are not authors. While Lillis and Curry (2010) describe these as ‘literacy brokers’ who are vested with power, and are more commanding and dominant members of the dyad, Luo and Hyland (2017) prefer the term ‘text-mediators’, claiming that while inequalities may occur in the mediation itself, these are not predetermined by the institutional position or

different knowledge bases of the participants. Thus, the rigid structural hierarchy is negotiated or mediated. Luo and Hyland (2017) recognise that the text mediators' agentic power originates from their expertise, which may crucially shape their textual changes. Text mediation is necessary in that structures impose constraints and offer resources but human beings are active agents with the ability to make a difference, in social practice (Luo & Hyland, 2017).

Kennedy (2017) recognizes three key personalities in the writing of a thesis, notwithstanding the efforts of peers, writing centres, etcetera: the candidate who writes the thesis; the supervisor who guides the student in the writing process, and the examiner who assesses what the candidate has produced, recommending a pass or otherwise of the completed text. The candidate and the supervisor are discussed briefly here while the examiner is discussed later, in this same section, under 'Examiner Expectations'.

First, for the candidate or student, a dissertation is a genre situated in a genre set (Devitt, 1991) that a candidate learns on the job, with the direction of a supervisor/s. To them, learning to produce the dissertation is a crucial path in the process of increasing disciplinary in the genre set, with chains of rhetorical strategies that may comprise course work, grant applications, comprehensive examination, proposals, and viva. The Master's student makes a persistent movements between planned and unanticipated learning in the academic environment, including a number of teachers—a situation Paré and Le Maistre (2006) call 'distributed mentoring'.

Also, Paré et al. (2009) observe that students receive support from supervisors, committees, members of faculty, students in study, classmates,

administrators, writing groups, secretaries, and other support staff. Also, lessons are substantially varied, from the extremely practical (grant application) to the indescribable (making a presentation). Again, they point out that some postgraduate learners occupy many positions concurrently: student, researcher, teacher, colleague, classmate, member of department/faculty/university, and disciplinary apprentice as well as projecting identities such as partners, parents, and members of affinity groups (which are not simultaneous to one another but different from one another), and these activities may be in conflict with others. Moreover, these students are highly noticeable products of supervisors' own knowledge work, and such supervisors have a vested concern in the successful passage of these students into members of the discipline. Thus, the Master's student seeking disciplinary membership should find him/herself in a textually instituted community.

Perkins (2006) suggests that, at least, three conceptions of knowing are expected of university students: a possessive conception, whereby knowing is seen as knowledge to be retained and applied consistently in routine situations; a performative conception, where knowing is considered as a capacity to talk and think about something in a personalised way and to use in a variety of situations, and a proactive conception, where knowing is seen as applying knowledge actively, creatively and imaginatively in a variety of ways, forming the basis for further inquiry. Perkins (2006) thinks that students should be open-minded, curious, concerned with evidence/to be alert, engaged and willing to venture beyond the comfortable and the known. This purpose of knowledge construction is often noted as a "common commitment" (Swales,



2004, p. 113) or “generic performance” (Carter, 2011, p. 730) shared by all academic disciplines.

The second key participant in the thesis writing process is the supervisor. Green (2005) explains that the supervisor plays a dual task: supervisor as a representative of the discipline and the academy. This important and critical dyad function of the supervisor is the most closest and crucial educational relationship (Paré et al., 2009). As Kamler and Thomson (2006, p. 144) assert, “the supervisor embodies and mediates institutional and disciplinary cultures, conditions and conventions”. Paré et al. (2009) aver that many of the advice given by supervisors come from an inexpressible, deep, and discipline-specific discourse knowledge. Although supervisors themselves attempt to get associates to express the standards to which they hold their students, sometimes, even the most knowledgeable supervisors are indeterminate.

Paré et al. (2009) add that the administrative logistics of university, faculty, and departmental practice are a good focus of advice and anxiety: deadlines, suitable paperwork, number of external examiners and committee members needed, layout and binding regulations. Supervisors reassure learners of the normalcy of such experiences, recounting stories of their own, non-thesis related dialogues about life which is exterior to the academy; based on supervisors’ experience and that of their colleagues. They explain that supervisors consider these chats about children, hobbies and current affairs as crucial in creating working relationships between supervisors themselves and students. For Paré et al. (2009), supervisors change from one reading/role to another and, in the process, place the student/writer in different situations,

using “multirhetorically” to describe the multiple locations, situations, and exigencies evoked by the supervisor and experienced by the student. The readership of the thesis is elaborated next.

The dissertation as a multi-genre responds to multiple exigencies, functioning in multiple rhetorical situations, and addressing multiple readers, making Mathes and Stevenson (1976) postulate that diverse readers of the same text generate rhetorical complexity in even ordinary institutional discourse. What differentiates this pattern is the supervisor’s enactment of manifold readers, describing a diversity of readers from the specific to the general, the implicit to the implicated—from the unmentioned and invisible reader, to the known reader to whom the thesis could have severe consequences.

Geng (2015) observes that this student-examiner and novice-expert relationship has implications for the readership of the thesis and, consequently, complicates the thesis writer’s task of managing interpersonal meanings. One view is that the typical primary readership of theses and dissertations is the examiners (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). However, Shaw (1991) identified two types of the ‘imaginary reader’: first, ‘the non-specialist with background knowledge’, and second, ‘the subject specialist’ about the actual reader of examiners (p. 193). This unclear understanding of readership confuses students about what should be presented in a thesis (Shaw, 1991). This problem may also make thesis writers struggle with how the content should be presented in order to appeal to the reader, requiring strategic deployment of interpersonal resources (Geng, 2015).

Pare, Starke-Meyerring, and McAlpine (2009) identified five readers/readings: implied reader, every reader, evoked reader, disciplinary reader, and implicated reader. For a researcher, first, implied reader must be assumed, even though both the supervisor and student may have a strong sense of it; occasionally, it could be any reader. Here, candidates are instructed to delete, reduce, and move sections with unclear reference to any reader; that is, without any rhetorical justifications. At other periods, supervisor may have a definite individual or kind of reading in mind. The reader does not emerge but lurks, implying a reader as well as a rhetorical function. Thus, the implied reader could be a general one like a reader of English or specific as an expert in a discipline. Second, there is Every reader who refers to *some* reader who may chance upon the text. Here, with such readers comes some rhetorical justification where movement or spatial metaphors are used to define textual association, who could be a disciplinary member, and the reading that is being performed may be a specialized reading, demonstrating how knowledge becomes procedural but not declarable. Thus, learners perform acts of disciplinary writing and reading with no obvious instruction, and genres are common sense.

Evoked reader is the third type. These are readers who have defined needs and expectations that are recognised and the provision of needed information is, thus, necessary. A perplexed or an unpersuaded reader is evoked, and rhetorical action is endorsed. Some readers evoked, specifically, are disciplinary members, though the focus is not on disciplinary knowledge. With this evoked readership, the supervisor does not try to help the writer position him/herself vis-a-vis the field's current conversation (Paré et al.,

2009). The fourth of the readers is disciplinary reader and reading, with which a discipline's rhetoric is positioned well (Paré et al., 2009). With this kind of reading, writing instructors are trained to offer that 'think-aloud reading' that discloses the 'reader's meaning-making process', or the reading supplemented by commentary. Here, the supervisor helps learners to situate texts in a community's discourse, giving rhetorical validations for the addition of certain kinds of information; indicating rhetorical truth about disciplinary knowledge-construction. The last is the implicated reader, the non-disciplinary but actual readers who are portrayed in the study or have interest in the results of the study, such as agency, hospital, the school, community centre or other research locations which are activity systems that the learner might have taken subject positions and in which the rhetorical stakes could be significantly higher than in the proportional safety of that academy.

Paré et al. (2009) conclude that the thesis's multiple outcomes and exigencies, or lamination of activities (Prior, 1998), help supervisors speak in the readers' mind or perform many readings; thus, rhetorical awareness is raised, even without clear explanations. As supervisors show confusion, evaluate interpretations, question assertions, think aloud, and demand for more information, learners are led to many mis-readings. They revise text to the standard that becomes acceptable in different settings to actual readers (Paré et al., 2009). However, Hyland (1996) pointed out, "no matter how clearly, convincingly and appropriately reader-centred material may be expressed, the writer's ability to influence the reader's response is severely restricted" (p. 436). For Geng (2015), although Hyland's statement can be somewhat



discouraging to writers on one hand, it further implies how crucial it is for thesis writers to master the strategic deployment, on the other hand.

Furthermore, the issue of thesis/dissertation evokes the thesis examination committee. Powell and Green (2007) and Kyvik (2014) indicate that the process for assessing postgraduate (including Master and PhD) theses and the examination of the candidates differ across countries in terms of the composition of the examination committee. Again, whether the examination is public or private; whether the committee can award the degree on the condition of amendments or revision being made to the thesis; whether pass or fail is the only thesis examination outcome, there is always an examination committee. This examination committee is different from the supervisory committee. The supervisory committee mostly oversee the preparation of the thesis before the final product is submitted.

The examination committee mostly assume duty when the thesis is to be examined. For example, in the USA, these committees usually consist of a primary supervisor or advisor and two or more committee members, who supervise the progress of the dissertation and may also act as the examining committee or jury at the oral examination of the thesis. In most universities, the committee is chosen by the student in conjunction with his or her primary adviser, usually after completion of the comprehensive examinations or prospectus meeting, and may consist of members of the committee. The committee members are doctors in their field (whether a PhD or other designation) and are asked to read the dissertation, make suggestions for changes and improvements, and sit in the defence. Sometimes, at least, one member of the committee must be a professor in a department that is different

from that of the student. The number of members varies between five (USA), three (Sweden and Norway) and two (Ireland, UK).

The thesis examination, normally, embraces the written and oral examination (*viva voce*). Although a thesis and a viva constitute the two final stages of postgraduate education (Swales, 2004), the precise role that each plays in the award of a degree can vary between contexts. Although the viva is an important aspect of assessment, many examiners make judgements before the oral presentation upon reading the thesis, and the viva confirms this assessment (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001; Kyvik, 2014). For Golding et al. (2014), the most important aspect of examination is carried in the reading of the thesis (See Jackson & Tinkler, 2004; Tinkler & Jackson, 2008 on an elaborate discussion on the functions of the viva). However, because the present study focuses on the written aspect of the examinations, examiners' reports, attention is given to the written rather than the spoken examination, the viva.

In other countries, like Australia, an examination of a thesis usually comprises of two or three examiners who read the thesis, write a report, and commend a result (Holbrook et al; 2004a, 2004c, 2004d; 2007; Starfield et al., 2017). In New Zealand, oral examination or a *viva voce* is used in addition to examiners reading a thesis, which is similar to that of Ghana. In relation to the examination committee, in the USA, all the members who constitute mostly the PhD committee normally come from the same university as the PhD candidate. In the UK, one of the members must be from another university. In Norway and in Sweden, usually, one of the members comes from abroad. In Ghana, one of the examiners, external, must be from another institution, and

not necessarily from abroad while the internal must be in the university of either a cognate or the same department of the candidate.

Kyvik (2014) clarifies that the status of the thesis when submitted for assessment also varies across countries. While in the UK and the USA, the examiners may request the candidate to make few (minor) amendments or larger revision of his or her thesis before its final approval (and publication), in Norway and Sweden, the committee must either fail or pass the thesis. In Ghana, specifically, UCC, the examiner has to indicate a pass or fail of the thesis with either a grade or class point on what has been assessed, which paves way for the Viva voce—this, too, the candidate must pass; then, suggested corrections are done and submitted finally (See Chapter Three of this same thesis, for more information on the appointment of Committee members, and supervisors especially, the examination in SGS, UCC).

The next issue to be discussed is the examination of a thesis, particularly in relation to what examiners expect or do. Johnston (1997) and Bitzer (2014) affirm that most students are mystified by the processes of examination, which is antagonistic to right assessment process established by Biggs and Tang (2011), and Brown and Knight (1994). Sometimes, thesis students have no idea what examiners look for in a research. Golding et al. (2014) explicated that supervisors and examiners are less perplexed about examining a thesis, but most of the examining processes are concealed and candidates lack knowledge of examiner practices that are mostly guided by personal experiences of examining theses, like supervision. Holbrook et al. (2007) suggest that personal knowledge is incomplete and partial. Kennedy (2017) laments: “I have sent thesis students through the examination gauntlet,

but is their experience typical? I know how I examine a thesis, but am I typical? I know how a thesis should be assessed, but are they actually examined this way?” Denicolo (2003) indicates that there could be a disturbing difference between supervisors’ expectation and examiner practices.

Moreover, assessors look out for many issues when they are assessing a thesis—which have been foregrounded by some studies, looking at these examiner expectations from different perspectives. Hodgson (2017) presents a synthesis of attributes of examiner expectations and Golding et al. (2014) found eleven of these expectations. Trafford and Leshem (2011) list the areas of assessment. What the first two authors (Golding et al., 2014; Hodgson, 2017) advance are intrinsic features which allowed the examiners to make decisions on their own regarding the value of the thesis being assessed, which can be subjective in nature. The last one, Trafford and Leshem (2011), is what is presented by the institution to objectify the marks of examiners. All these studies, here, help establish the quality of the thesis that is examined. A brief introduction of Hodgson (2017) and Trafford and Leshem’s (2011) assessment areas is presented here, followed by the eleven examiner expectations as outlined by Golding et al. (2014).

First, Hodgson (2017) presents a synthesis of policy, curriculum, and empirical work discussed on examiner expectations across the globe (specifically, Australian Qualification Framework Council, 2013; Bourke & Holbrook, 2013; Holbrook et al., 2004d; 2007; 2014; 2015; Kemp & Mcguigan, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Stracke & Kumar, 2010; The Group of Eight, 2013, and The Quality Assurance Agency



for Higher Education, 2008). Hodgson's (2017) synthesis identified recurring concepts, themes, and ideas in the empirical literature that aligned well with the statements made from policy and curriculum documents. In essence, he compares statements on what examiners expect from a thesis as reported in the literature to statements about thesis objectives and purposes expressed in the curriculum and policy literature, as shown in the integral citations above. Hodgson (2017) derived seven main themes from the synthesis, which he refers to as attributes of PhD examiner expectations. These attributes are explained further.

First, mastery/command includes comprehensive and exhaustive coverage and understanding of the subject. Mastery considers extensive and exhaustive treatment of relevant literature (empirical, theoretical, and methodological). Also, there should be understanding and engagement in pertinent criticism, debates and alternative views in literature. Second is argument which considers an overarching point which is well explained and defended. Argument and claims must be supported with evidence, logic, and warrants. Coherence shows consistency and clear links between parts and the whole; that is, Coherence considers systematic and complete discussion of theory as well as consistent use of ideas, concepts and terminology. Independence explicates original interpretations, adaptations, or applications of knowledge. Criticality, on the other side, considers evaluation of existing knowledge and self-evaluation of one's own work, including interrogating and critiquing knowledge, ideas, theory, concepts, and literature. In addition, depth/breadth looks at thoroughness and completeness of work with sufficient detail. Depth/breadth expects that coverage of different literature is

comprehensive and substantial, and up-to-date bibliography is presented in the thesis by the candidate. Last, Clarity/accuracy is about thesis that is correctly written and sources accurately cited as well as unambiguous writing.

However, it must be mentioned that though there may be disciplinary (Carter, 2011; Holbrook et al., 2014; Parry, 1998; 2007), national (Kyvik, 2014; Nerad, 2008; Pitkethly & Prosser, 1995) and institutional differences (Tinkler & Jackson, 2000; 2004) in the performance of assessment and defence of theses, Hodgson's (2017) categorization considers what attributes examiners expect to be demonstrated in the thesis, which, he suggests, that supervisors should help their candidate to come to terms with these attributes. Though Hodgson (2017) does not explicitly outline the rhetorical sections of the thesis, what he does cuts across all the rhetorical sections in quite a broad form.

Second, Trafford and Leshem's (2011) conclusion of areas of assessment by examiners are these: gap in knowledge, clear research questions, conceptual framework, good research design, suitable methodology, right data collection, perfect presentation, theory engagement, convincing arguments, answered research questions, theoretical conclusions, and advancement of knowledge. Trafford and Leshem's (2011) observe that each represents an essential element of research activity that has to be accounted for and explained in a thesis. The interconnectedness between the 12 (twelve) research-related items implies that each one depends on all the other items in order to produce high-quality research, showing that candidates (including Masters) have to grasp and handle a network of issues—all of which have equivalent importance. This makes Bitzer (2014) state that to be literate in

terms of high-quality research projects (MPhil, doctorate) requires more than a simple summation of the components that comprise the research process in that if there is dependency between these separate components, then, it is the nature of their inter-dependencies that will determine their collective and overall effectiveness.

Third, the other eleven expectations are discussed below. The first of these eleven expectations is that examiners are consistent when a number of examiners are involved in assessing a thesis amid differences in instructions from institutions (Holbrook et al., 2007), disciplines (Lovat et al., 2008), degree levels (Bourke & Holbrook, 2013), nationality (Pitkethly & Prosser, 1995), and examiner experience (Kiley & Mullins, 2004). This consistency is seen when one or two examiners recommend “accept or accept with minor corrections” while one or other examiners recommend “revise and resubmit or fail”. The content of the report revealed some consistencies (Holbrook et al., 2008). The second is that examiners expect a thesis to pass. Lovat et al. (2008) found that fewer examiners (1% ) commend a fail. Also, Holbrook et al. (2004a) found that just two examiners gave a grade of fail out of the 301 reports examined, and there were rare cases of resubmission as well, confirming what has been established earlier in other studies, that examiners have positive attitude towards the examination of a thesis (Jackson & Tinkler, 2001; Johnston, 1997; Mullins & Kiley, 2002). Third, examiners often judge a thesis by the end of the first or second chapter. Examiners make an initial judgement about the quality of a thesis early in their reading, at least in the first two chapters, abstracts, table of content, conclusion, deciding whether it is possible to be a chore or a pleasurable read, a delight or a fortitude of test

(Carter, 2008). Fourth, examiners read a thesis as a normal reader and an academic reader (Johnston, 1997); that is, examiners are to enjoy what they read. Examiners use the evenings to read when they may be tired, and may use four or less days to over two to three weeks (Carter, 2008; Mullins & Kiley, 2002) while others read severally over a thesis.

Next, examiners favour a coherent thesis that has flow and focus, and an explicit and logical structure that incorporates the many parts of the thesis and offers a good direction for the reader. Thus, summaries and signposts that pre-empt readers on what to expect or has been done are deemed important. Other expectations are that examiners like engagement of the literature in a thesis (Holbrook et al., 2007) in addition to convincing research design; mostly, experienced examiners are opened to different research designs (Mullins & Kiley, 2002), and a thesis that discusses the findings rather than a mere listing of what the study found (Holbrook et al., 2004c). Here, “candidate must interpret, analyse, and critically appraise the findings, draw conclusions from them and show the implications for the research questions or problem” (Holbrook et al., 2004c).

Examiners expect a thesis to add original contribution which may open up further areas of research, recast existing issue, and apply well-known methods, concepts, and theories in different areas, as well as gather fresh data that may reveal findings and some conclusions, provide new interpretation or synthesis of recognised theories, data or conclusions (Winter, Griffith, & Green, 2000). Lastly, examiners give summative and formative feedback. Examiners’ main job is to assess the worth of a thesis, but examiners give constructive feedback to improve thesis (Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar &



Stracke, 2007; Stracke & Kumar, 2010). Examiners are gatekeepers who uphold the standards for a doctorate or a Master's (Mullins & Kiley, 2002). They offer summative feedback, including a grade and evaluation (Holbrook et al., 2004a). They offer a praise if expectations are met in the thesis, but if it falls short of such expectations, examiners give advice on how to improve it. In sum, examiners pay attention to all the rhetorical sections of the thesis, ensuring their interconnectedness to weave a complete whole. In addition, examiners have other expectations which go beyond the rhetorical sections of the thesis.

This section has discussed the differences that exist between 'thesis' and 'dissertation', showing regional variations. Also, an attempt was made to differentiate Master's thesis from PhD thesis in addition to describing thesis formats. The candidate, supervisor, and the examiner who are the main personalities of the thesis writing process were discussed in addition to readership of thesis. Last, the nature of examination committee, examination of thesis, and examiner expectations were also elaborated. The discussion in this section helped situate the work conceptually.

#### ***Evaluative Criteria of Thesis Examination***

This section of the study examines the evaluative criteria of thesis examination (TE) in some universities in Ghana and across the globe to show how national the evaluative criteria used in SGS (UCC) are and how they align with worldwide practices (See Appendix D for a sample of SGS (UCC) Assessment Sheet).

First, the survey of the evaluative criteria in thesis examination reveals that institutions, local and international, emphasize adequate statement of the

problem plus strong research objectives/hypotheses situated in a well-crafted background/introduction. Also, the theoretical /conceptual background is key in situating a present study in previous ones. In addition, the methods with its accompanying tenets like research design, sampling, instrument, and data are considered in thesis examination since analysis which gives rise to findings can only be generated when data have been obtained (Hofstee, 2006). Again, analysis and discussion which includes the interpretation of data and reporting of findings is principal in the examination criterion. A befitting conclusion, with recommendations is also required in a research report (Hewings, 1993; Bunton, 2005). Lastly, institutions expect that attention be paid to presentation which includes visuals, grammar and punctuation, formatting, and referencing. Local and international institutions require that the Title of the thesis be stated but none, explicitly, indicated that title nor abstract be evaluated, which is a bit surprising since the title (e.g. Afful, 2005b; Haggan, 2004; Hartley, 2005; 2007) and the Abstract (e.g. Dunleavy, 2003; Jordan, 1991; Samraj, 2005) as front matters provide first point of contact for readers, determining whether texts have to be read or not. Besides, these ‘front’ elements— title and abstract— have attracted immense attention as evidenced in the enormity of reference developed above. The evaluative criteria in thesis examination (TE), especially at the Master’s level, consider all the various aspects of the thesis, which include originality and relevance in the introduction as well as theories, methods, data analysis and discussion. Therefore, it is very important that each aspect of the thesis is given due attention. Also, the evaluation of the thesis is based on the provisions in the evaluative criteria which yield the examiner report, the data for the present study.

Moreover, the survey of the evaluative criteria revealed some uniqueness in the assessment. Locally, a comparison is made between UCC and KNUST because a reading of the *Handbook for Doctoral Studies and Regulations Governing Graduate Study and University examination*, SGS, (2014) University of Ghana, and that of University of Education, Winneba on *SGS Thesis/Dissertation/Project Handbook* (2018) did not reveal explicit criteria for the evaluation of a thesis/dissertation. First, locally, when the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC) are compared with those of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, KNUST (See page 36-39 of *Guide for Preparation and Evaluation of Higher Degree Research Thesis*, 2016, KNUST), the issues to be evaluated by examiners are similar, with the same sequencing of information such as problem statement, first, and presentation, last for each of the institutions. However, differences exist in the mark allocation for the sections to be examined. While SGS (UCC) allocates more marks (20%) each to Data Analysis and Findings, KNUST allocates its highest mark (25%) each to Data Analysis, and Literature review, rather, showing, perhaps, where its interest and ultimate priority rest. Literature review and Design have 15% each for SGS (UCC) while KNUST has 20% for Design of the study. Problem Statement, Presentation, and Conclusion attract the least mark of (10%) each. Further, while KNUST has different evaluative criteria for MPhil and PhD theses, UCC has the same evaluative criteria for MPhil and PhD theses. As shown in the previous section, the MPhil thesis is different from the PhD thesis; thus, the expectations at these levels differ. Why then are the evaluative criteria the same? I would like to suggest that the SGS (UCC) should consider sectionalizing the evaluative criteria so that there

will be one for MPhil and another to be used for PhD examination, each specifying the expectations and mark allocation for each of the higher research degree in a clear and detailed manner to ease the work of examiners. Thus, at each level of examination, the examiner can easily ascertain what is expected at each degree level in relation to the rhetorical sections of the thesis to be examined. When the evaluative criteria is sectionalized, it will help guard against disagreement between examiners since examiners may not rely on tacit knowledge about what a PhD as well as MPhil in their discipline should be like (Kemp & MCGuigain, 2009).

Beyond the borders of Ghana, the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC) are compared with other studies done in Australia (since it leads in studies on thesis examiners' reports, see chapter 3 of this same study), United Kingdom (since UCC tends to follow the British curriculum), China (which is in Far East), and Africa (where the present study is situated). First, a comparison of areas of assessment of SGS (UCC) with Bourke and Holbrook (2013) and Holbrook et al. (2004a, c, d; 2014) show that the areas of assessment are similar, reflecting all the rhetorical sections of the thesis. Also, there is indication for pass or fail of the thesis on the assessment procedure of Australia as indicated on the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC). However, the resubmission of thesis either with outright failure or minor or major corrections associated with Australian thesis examination procedure is missing on the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC). Perhaps, this may be explained with SGS's (UCC) use of viva as part of the examination of a thesis. Notwithstanding these differences, the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC) can be said to be international enough since they capture similar areas of



assessment as found in the studies on thesis assessment internationally such as issues on originality, theory, problem statement, literature review, methodology, findings and conclusions, and presentation which are captured on SGS (UCC) evaluative criteria, which are the findings in other studies on thesis examination beyond the African continent (Bao & Leiken, 2013; Golding, 2017, Golding et al., 2014; Holbrook et al., 2007; 2014; Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Stracke & Kumar, 2010).

Also, Tonks and Williams' (2018) study based in the United Kingdom has such criteria for the award of PhD/MD and MPhil as, problem statement, literature review, methodology, results, and conclusion. The criteria emphasise originality and disciplinarity, which are missing from the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC). However, the areas of assessment outlined by Tonks and Williams (2018) are not presented under broad headings in relation to aspects of the thesis, and they exclude specific mentioning to presentation and mark allocation as found in SGS (UCC). Also, although a differentiation is made between the criteria for award for PhD and MPhil, "the format of assessment and the reports are the same, regardless of the award being examined" (Tonks & William, 2018, p. 174), which is similar to the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC).

Last on the international front, in China, the evaluative criteria used by Man, Xu, Chau, O'Toole, and Shunmugam (2020) in a more recent study that investigated the focus and criteria that 40 examiners used in assessing the Master's dissertations in a Chinese university outlined the following: topic and literature review (15%), contribution (30%), theoretical foundation and specialized knowledge (20%), research capacity (20%), and research ethics

and writing (15%). Differences exist in the captions of the areas of assessment and mark allocations when the items listed by Man et al. (2020) are compared with the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC), with ‘contribution’ as high as 30%. Also, ‘Topic’ and ‘Research ethics’ as found on this evaluative criterion in China are not explicitly indicated in the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC).

In Africa, Mulinge and Arasa’s (2013) study of examination reports drawn from 10 universities across the Eastern, Western, and Southern African universities revealed that examiners comment on original and valuable contribution to knowledge, packing and presentation, and dissertation and thesis content including title, table of content, problem statement, objectives, research methods, key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. These identified issues are not far-fetched from the practices of SGS (UCC). Specifically, in Uganda, Nimulola (2018) adopts Bourke & Holbrook’s (2013) identification of assessment criteria to study Master’s dissertation at an Islamic university. It was established that the examiners’ reports attracted comments on abstract, background, hypothesis, significance, literature review, theoretical framework, research design, data analysis, and competence and expression, at varying levels. In South Africa, *Procedures for Master’s and Doctoral degrees* (2015, p. 21), University of South Africa (UNISA) has it that “examiners may compile their reports as they fit, but their reports should include the following...”: scientific academic standard of research, scientific and academic quality of processing and presentation, language and editing, technical presentation and layout, and indication of examiners as to whether they regard parts and/or the substance of the dissertation/thesis as publishable. Their “scientific academic of research” includes research procedures and

techniques, methodology, demarcation and scope of research, theoretical substantiation, grasp of field of research, footnotes and bibliography. Scientific and academic quality of processing and presentation comprise processing, presentation and analysis of data, structure and logical development/arrangement of content (internal coherence and classification), critical findings and recommendations. The key difference between these evaluative criteria of UNISA and SGS (UCC) is the sectioning of the area of assessment which can be seen to be a bit scattered since what is captioned, for example, as 'language and editing' and 'technical presentation and layout' is what is concisely captioned as 'Presentation' for SGS (UCC). While 'research procedures and techniques' and 'methodology' seem to address one particular section of the thesis, Methodology, 'theoretical substantiation' and 'grasp of field of research' also point to Literature Review section of the thesis. A further scrutiny of UNISA (2015) reveals that the evaluative criteria do not seem to mention statement of the problem nor research questions/objectives/hypotheses, a feature adequately captured in SGS (UCC). Notwithstanding all these, the evaluative criteria of UNISA include publishability which is missing on SGS (UCC).

Lastly, in Africa, *the Postgraduate Assessment Guide* (2013, pp. 11-14), University of Zululand, outlines issues to be assessed by examiners, which align with the specific sections of the thesis as found with SGS (UCC). The evaluative guide has two separate forms for MPhil and PhD levels, though both present similar issues. These issues are presented under clear headings and specific details meant to guide the examiners. It has 'Title' which is not found on SGS (UCC). One other outstanding issue in this evaluative guide for

University of Zululand is the reference to ‘Technical and ethical issues, which, though, adequately addressed in *Guidelines for preparing and presenting project work, dissertation and thesis, SGS (UCC)* (2016, p. 9), is missing on the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC). However, one caption in the evaluative guide is ‘Research’, covering ‘research objectives/aims/hypothesis, scope of the study, and focus of the study which should be consistent with the aims and objectives of the study’, which fits into Introduction of a thesis. With such listed areas under ‘Research’, one would have expected a mentioning of statement of the problem, as it is mostly captured in the Introduction of a thesis, but it was not stated here nor captured under any of the other sections in the evaluative guide. The criterion also lacks a separate heading on Presentation as found with SGS (UCC), but this has been infused into ‘Technical and ethical issues’. Last, the evaluative guide does not have marks allocated to the different sections of assessment as done in SGS (UCC).

In sum, the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC) have been compared with those of Australia, United Kingdom, Asia and other parts of Africa. Though variations exist in some captions, sectioning, wording, and mark allocation in the areas of assessment, the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC) meet international standards. Rhetorical issues such as title, abstract, and disciplinarity could be made more specific on the evaluative criteria for examiners to comment on.

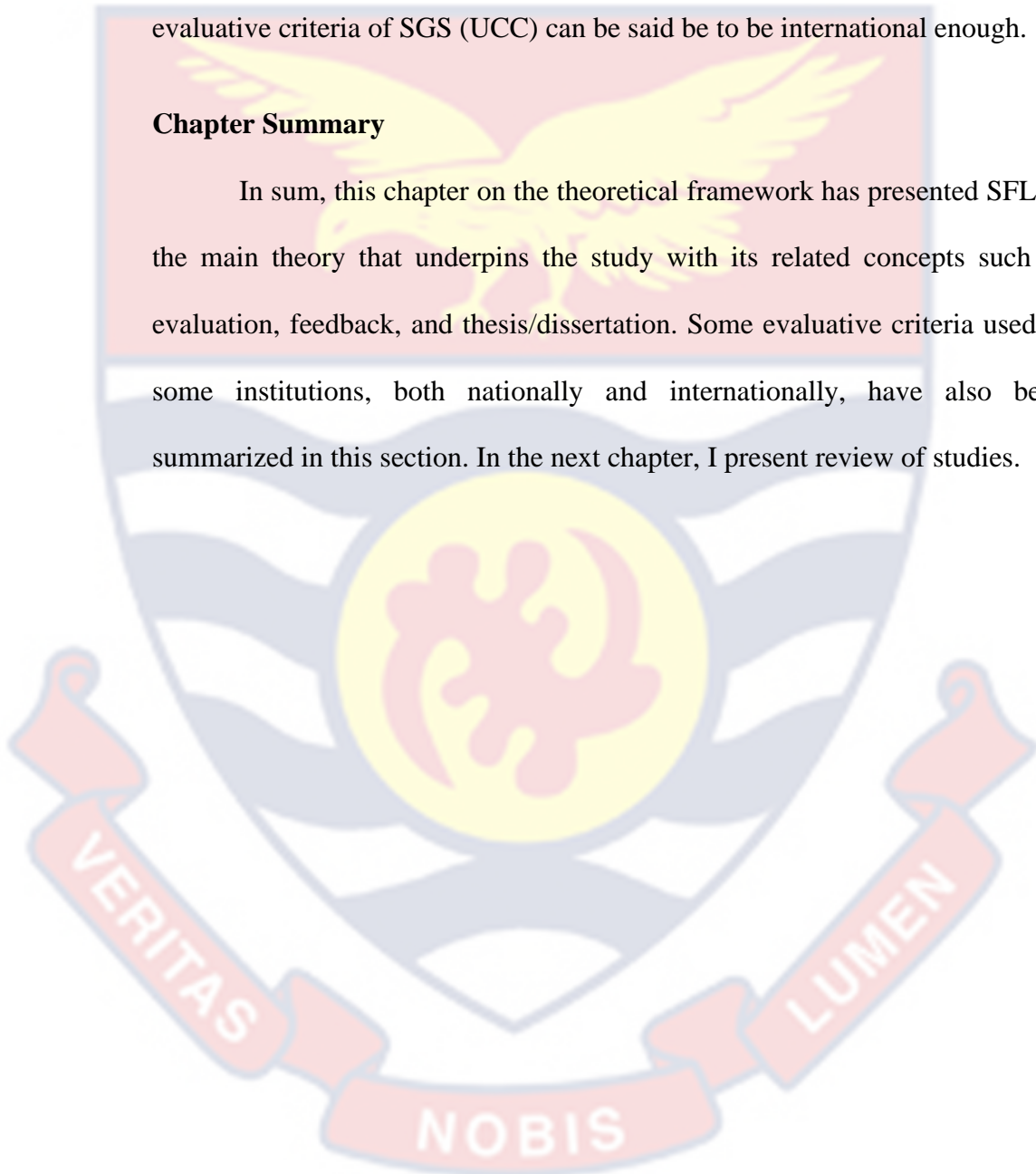
In its entirety, this section has discussed the evaluative criteria as a yardstick for evaluating postgraduate theses. The section surveyed some local and international evaluative criteria, and showed that there were similar issues which institutions expected examiners to consider. These issues included



problem statement and research objectives in Introduction, theoretical/conceptual frameworks, methods, analysis and discussion, conclusion, and presentation. However, some differences with regard to grading, locally, and headings, internationally, were also established. Thus, the evaluative criteria of SGS (UCC) can be said to be international enough.

### **Chapter Summary**

In sum, this chapter on the theoretical framework has presented SFL as the main theory that underpins the study with its related concepts such as evaluation, feedback, and thesis/dissertation. Some evaluative criteria used in some institutions, both nationally and internationally, have also been summarized in this section. In the next chapter, I present review of studies.



## CHAPTER THREE

### EMPIRICAL REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter of the thesis presents a review of relevant studies so as to establish the relationship between previous studies and the present work; identify the gap, and the need for the present study to occupy that niche. In this chapter, specifically, I review studies under these headings: language of evaluation in thesis examiners' reports (TERs) and some review genres (RGs), written feedback (WF), and language of evaluation in academic writing research in Ghana.

#### Thesis Examiners' Reports and Some Review Genres (RGs)

Review genres (RGs) in academic discourse community are diverse. Gesuato (2009) divides academic RGs into public and occluded. The former includes book blurbs, book reviews, book review articles, review articles or state-of-the-art papers. The latter set comprises academic reviews, anonymous peer review of research articles (RAs), review of conference abstracts, thesis examination/review reports, and self and other-evaluation reports. I focus, now, on the thesis examination report, given its utmost relevance to the study

As a review genre in the academic community (AC), TER has been studied in many directions. Such studies have concentrated on language use in these reports (Adika, 2015; Kosonen, 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2011; Starfield et al., 2015; 2017); rhetorical sections of the reports (Holbrook et al., 2007); codification of practices and examiners' expectations (Golding et al., 2014; Holbrook et al., 2004a; Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007;

Sankaran et al., 2005; Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Wisker & Robinson, 2014); philosophies that underlie the production of the reports (Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Simpkins, 1987), and institutional expectations (Holbrook et al., 2004b; Nightingale, 1984).

First, studies have investigated the language of the TERs. For instance, Kumar and Stracke (2011) investigated the nature of TERs on Master's and doctoral theses. Specifically, they aimed to gain insights into the connection or potential disjunction between feedback and assessment in six TERs. Their study suggested the crucial role of feedback in postgraduate thesis examination practice. They assert that, without feedback, there was little impetus for the candidate to progress, to close the gap between current and desired performance, and to attain the level needed to become a member of the scholarly community.

Kosonen (2014) also studied evaluative language of introductory remarks of assessors in the English as Lingua Franca in Academic Set (WrELFA) corpus, considering how examiners offered recommendations, in relation to the use of modals and self-mention. The findings showed that the Social Sciences and Humanities preferred engagement, an agreement of stands and thoughts. Nonetheless, with Natural Sciences, consideration was given to data, methods, and findings and not the recipients of the information, accounting for the higher use of self-mention and modals in the soft disciplines.

Likewise, Starfield et al. (2015) investigated the examination criteria established by a university in New Zealand, adopting the Appraisal Theory to analyse 142 TERs from that institution. They, specifically, used the Attitude

and Engagement systems in studying the TERs, and extended the framework by suggesting more delicate options within the Appreciation and Judgment strands, and introduced two new concepts, ‘covert judgement’ and ‘embedded judgement’. It was also revealed in the analysis that the theses were appreciated in the reports, the candidates were judged, and the examiners were affected. In other words, the theses were appreciated for the aesthetic values, the candidates’ behaviours were judged ethically, and examiners brought their emotions to bear on what they assessed.

Adika (2015) examined thirty-five (35) assessors’ reports of graduate theses submitted to the University of Ghana, School of Graduate Studies (UGSGS), comprising nine from the Sciences and twenty-six from the Humanities. The study revealed that students used Research Acts reporting verbs (e.g. classify, examine, and develop), but the Discourse Acts (e.g. mention, explain, and intimate) were missing in the data. Another finding in Adika’s (2015) study was that candidate’s credibility was doubtful; and accountability profile considerably discredited since the communicative style of the candidate assessed was neither reflective, analytical nor dialectic enough, resulting in less use of evaluative words in the data. In another study, Starfield et al. (2017) identified examiner roles. They based on SFL to examine 142 PhD TERs on theses submitted at an Australasian university. Their study identified 10 roles that examiners assume for themselves in the reports, and their implications for candidates, supervisors and the departments/institutions. They found that each of these roles could co-exist in one report.



Studies have investigated the nature of examiners' reports and not only language, as seen above. First, Mulinge and Arasa (2013) analysed the quality of postgraduate research produced by 10 universities in Africa in the Eastern, Western and Southern African regions, by examining the TERs of the external moderation of 92 Master's and 8 doctoral dissertations. A content analysis of the various reports showed that the bulk (63.0 %) of the dissertations examined were of low quality; only 37.0 % was rated 'excellent' or 'good'. These tended to be plagued by a variety of weaknesses, including the inability to adequately contribute original and valuable knowledge, poor packaging and presentation that left many of them reading like raw drafts that required the attention of a supervisor more than the services of an examiner, and contents that left a lot to be desired in terms of depth, clarity, sequencing and coherence, among others. It was concluded that the quality of the dissertations and theses produced in African universities has been declining. As such, there was an urgent need for universities to create environments that were supportive of research achievements and suitable for the production of quality postgraduate research.

To ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of the Master's minor theses, Bao and Leikin (2013) analysed 47 reports from examiners of students' M.Ed. minor theses written by graduate students at Monash University in Australia. The choice of a suitable topic and overall quality of presentation were found to be addressed relatively well while data analysis, interpretation and literature review appeared to be the most difficult. Lack of critical thinking was identified as a common weakness, and writing quality played a significant role in deciding the outcome. There was generally a good level of

consistency in assessment practices across different reports. Nimulola (2018) also investigated the prevalence and nature of examiners' comments on the appropriateness of 300 draft M. Ed dissertations at Islamic University in Uganda. Content and thematic analyses were conducted on the reports which were interpreted using Bourke and Holbrook's (2013) indicators for assessment of Master's thesis quality. Findings revealed that under Contribution, 'originality' attracted few neutral comments as well as 'literature coverage' (Literature review). 'Substantive' and 'advancement of knowledge' (Contribution) 'accuracy' and 'application' categories (Literature Review), and 'research design' (Approach/Methodology) were ascertained as appropriately done. However, 'sampling', 'validity' and 'reliability', 'qualitative data analysis', and 'interpretation' in Approach/Methodology, and 'quantitative data presentation' in Analysis/Findings were found inappropriate. Concerns were also raised on Presentation, 'communicative competence' and 'expression'. It was recommended that the university should engage Master's students more in seminars and workshops on research methods and scholarly writing.

In a most recent work, Afful (2020) investigated the discourse of thesis assessment reports, with the view to gaining insights into their form and content in a Ghanaian university. Thirty-four (34) written assessment reports of 19 Master's theses from the Department of English in the University of Cape Coast constituted the data set. A qualitative content analysis, supplemented with descriptive statistics, was adopted. The three key findings that emerged from the analysis of the data were these: First, there were varying structural patterns adopted by assessors, thereby evincing individual

preferences. Concerning the form of the thesis assessment reports, there was a great deal of variability in terms of individual text format, structure of title of the report, text length, visual features, and other personal idiosyncrasies. Second, with the content of the thesis reports, discrete emphases in the assessors' reports were identified. The overwhelming emphasis was on 'literature review', followed by 'analysis and reporting', and 'statement of the problem'. Substantial comments were also made on presentation issues. The contribution of the thesis was surprisingly mentioned sparingly. Another area of least comments in the assessment reports were on the methodology. Third, these assessors largely adhered to institutional guidelines in terms of the evaluative criteria. Similarly, Man et al. (2020) investigated the focus and assessment criteria of 40 examiner reports on Master's dissertations in translation studies at a Chinese university. The results indicated that examiners structured their reports in four rhetorical moves: 'preparing the candidate for a decision', 'expressing an evaluation', 'conveying the decision', and 'making recommendations'. The examiners placed more emphasis on the expression of ideas, rather than on the accuracy and originality of those ideas. Also, they apparently adopted flexible working criteria, assessing the dissertations based on institutional requirements and on their own experience.

Turning from the examination of the traditional thesis, Sharmini and Kumar (2018) presented perceptions about the nature of commentary that examiners provide on doctoral theses that include publications. Data were obtained from examiners who had experience in assessing publication-based theses (PBTs) over the past ten years at a research-intensive university in New Zealand. Data analysed qualitatively indicated that examiners provided a range

of feedback and assessment commentary. The findings showed that examiners provide similar amounts of comments as likened to traditional theses. Examiners of PBTs provided related comment, more formative than summative assessment, both positive and negative evaluations, more referential and directive types of feedback and anticipated changes on chapters that were published. In spite of the fact that parts of a thesis have been published and quality guaranteed by the peer review process, examiners continued their role as 'gate keepers' to provide formative feedback and considered a PBT as work in progress.

Holbrook et al. (2007) did not focus on the directions of earlier studies; theirs was an examination of the rhetorical section of a thesis. They investigated the expectations of examiners in relation to the literature review (LR) in PhD research. They focused on TERs on 501 candidates (1310 reports) in five Australian universities. The study showed that one-tenth of TERs was dedicated to the LR, and examiners provided details about types of errors, coverage, and use of the literature. Also, examiners identified critical appraisal of the body of literature, working understanding, connection between literature and findings, and disciplinary perception as important indicators of performance in a candidate's use of the literature. In addition, it was found that while examiners anticipated that all these elements in the thesis, they were prepared to accept less for a barely passable thesis, but pushed for, at least, some display of critical assessment. The various rhetorical sections of theses (e.g. statement of the problem, methodology, and discussion and analysis) are considered in the present study, not in terms of examiners' expectation but with reference to the use of evaluative language.



Nightingale (1984) reviewed TERs and university regulations relating to the various degrees. She established that recent practices of thesis examination (TE) were dis-empowering in that they did not clarify the criteria by which a thesis would be evaluated. She recommended that explicit assessment criteria be made available to both students and examiners. However, Holbrook et al. (2004b) had different findings from what Nightingale (1984) observed in her study, and the disparity may be that with time comes improvement. Holbrook et al. (2004b) analysed TERs on 400 candidates, by examining the disparities between examiner recommendation and institutional decision, and attempted to identify what have triggered the discrepancy. It was revealed in the analysis of the data that specific instructional emphasis and qualities in the examiner comments appeared to influence the recommendations offered. Also, Simpkins (1987) examined TERs to determine whether examiners subscribed to common thinking about theses and research. The study revealed that, overall, there was a common construct of critical evaluation. Simpkins suggested that examiners expected a research thesis to draw on established methods of investigation, and that there was also a willingness, at least, of the examiners in his study, to accept some of the assumptions expressed in the new research traditions. This was a significant move towards making explicit examiner assessment criteria.

Employing a qualitative approach, Schulze and Lemmer (2019) examined data from a purposeful sampling of expert informants and relevant documents from six South African universities. The study was informed by Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice theory. The findings indicated challenges in appointing examiners; vague criteria for auxiliary

requirements to the thesis; and discrepancies in the quality of examiner reports and examiner recommendations, which delayed graduation. Variation in quality of reports and discrepancies in the category chosen by the examiner to indicate the final decision regarding a thesis was problematic. There was variation in length, scope and rigour of examiners' reports. General vague reports which only summarised the thesis or could be applied to another number of theses were problematic. Recommendations were made for a more transparent examination process and supervisor training in the examination process.

Besides, Mullins and Kiley (2002) reported on a study of the processes that experienced examiners go through, and the judgements they make before writing their reports. A sample of 30 experienced examiners (defined as having examined the equivalent of, at least, five research theses over the last five years), from a range of disciplines in five universities was interviewed. In their study, clear trends emerged with regard to: the criteria used by examiners and the levels of students' performance expected by them; critical judgement pointed in the examination process; the examiners' perceptions of their own role in the process; the influence on examiners of previously published work, the views of the other examiner(s) and their knowledge of the student's supervisor and/or department, and the level of perceived responsibility between student and supervisor. Lessing (2009) relied on individual and focus group interview schedule to examine the views of examiners of dissertations and theses on the issue of examining postgraduate studies. It was found that experienced examiners followed a definite structure in the examination of postgraduate studies. The examination process does not always run smoothly

and remuneration was mentioned as a problem. Experienced examiners followed clear self-developed guidelines in the examination of postgraduate studies. Also, the overview of the thesis was reached by studying the table of contents. After gaining this initial background, the report was read and evaluated carefully in terms of the research problem, research objectives, context and conclusions. Integration of information, coherence of themes, the relationship between objectives and findings, logical thinking, scientific formulation and sound argumentation were factors that experienced examiners took into account. This was followed by reading and comparing the first and last chapters in order to determine whether the research question had been answered and the aims of the study had been met. Examiners also checked references to sources and the bibliography. A poor thesis was characterised by sloppiness which included typographical errors, mistakes in calculations, referencing and footnotes. These studies reveal the various attitudes and beliefs that directly or indirectly and greatly influence the preparation of TERs.

On the other hand, Holbrook et al. (2004a) neither paid attention to the institutional expectations nor philosophies that underpinned the writing of TERs. They outlined the processes used in an analysis of TERs for 101 PhD candidates in disciplines in an Australian university. They used Qualitative Research Software (QSR) and outlined three stages of findings. First, they identified five coding categories: the structure of the reports, the subject matter of the thesis, the ways in which examiners communicate, their comments on their role and the examination process, and the characteristics of examiners' evaluative comment. The second relates to the frequency of the identified

categories. The third level centred on the use of the reports that examiners assumed definite roles such as supervisor-instructor, mentor-colleague and assessor-arbiter. Of particular relevance to the present study are the characteristics of examiners' evaluative comment identified in their study, looking at the summative and formative comments that examiners gave in the TERS. Again, the present study follows the line of previous studies by attempting to examine the roles examiners assume in the TERS. The studies also provide a guide for the codification of the data of the present study.

Sankaran et al.'s (2005) work was about procedures and the codification processes although their attention was on individual experiences of examiners in the area of thesis examination (TE). They coded the experiences of thesis examiners (TErs) within the Australian academic system, who formed a "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to try to resolve some of the issues that they faced as examiners. In their study, they adopted a storytelling inquiry method that involved telling their practitioner stories, firstly to each other and then to a wider audience through their paper. They, then, identified issues that they believed were relevant to other TERS. Some of the issues that they established were that candidates did not understand or were not prepared for the examination process; candidates and examiners were not informed about the criteria/process for choosing examiners by all universities. Also, while the supervisors recommended examiners based on certain criteria (for example, content or methodology), the examiners were not told by the Higher Degrees Committee why they had been selected as examiners, and that candidates, universities, and other examiners do not know the criteria examiners used in the assessment of theses.



Stracke and Kumar (2010) provided insights into the doctoral journey of a supervisee by analysing written feedback (WF) provided by supervisors and thesis examiners (TErs). An aim of doctoral education is to train scholars to become independent researchers, that is, highly self-regulated learners, and the study paved the way for an understanding of the link between written feedback (WF) and the self-regulated learning process. Based on an analysis of speech functions, WF provided by two supervisors and three examiners were classified into three main categories: referential, directive and expressive. The results indicated the value of expressive feedback for the development of self-regulated learning in doctoral supervision.

Again, Golding et al. (2014) aimed to identify examiners' practices like Sankaran et al. (2005), Kumar and Stracke (2011), and Stracke and Kumar (2010). However, Golding et al. (2014) examined 30 articles, triangulated their findings and identified 11 practices of examiners, which were different from the story telling approach used in the other study. Their study observes that TErs in research higher degrees tended to be broadly consistent in their practices and recommendations; they expected and wanted a thesis to pass, but they noted that earlier impressions were also greatly important in the assessment of theses. Again, these examiners read both as normal readers and with academic expectations. In addition, TErs are distracted by and annoyed with presentational errors, desiring for a coherent thesis. Furthermore, examiners favoured a thesis engages the literature and the study's findings. They also required a thesis can be published. Finally, examiners gave summative (grades) and formative comments (advice and instructions) aimed at improving the thesis and for future publications. They

hoped that these expectations would clarify the, often, hidden process of assessing a thesis, and guide, reassure, and encourage students in the writing of theses. Tonks and Williams (2018) employed mixed methods to identify training needs for students, relying, specifically on independent comments from postgraduate research candidate thesis and oral examination to identify unmet research training needs. Seven key areas were identified by examiners for improvement: quality of scientific writing, presentation, statistics/data analysis, understanding/critical appraisal, experimental design, language and supervision.

Similarly, Mafora and Lessing's (2014) investigation of TERs also focused on the expectations of external examiners with the aim of improving supervision of dissertations. They focused mainly on themes provided by the College of Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA), such as exposition of the topic of research, theory, empirical investigation, conclusion and recommendations, and language and editing. The findings were used to develop guidelines for supervisors and students. These findings included lessons research topic, theory, empirical investigation, conclusions and recommendations, and language and editing of the dissertation, showing that examiners commend and expect quality in dissertations but they frown on poor quality dissertations. Mafora (2018) also investigated the scholarly attributes expected by external examiners, with a view to infusing these expectations in postgraduate supervision guidelines. A qualitative interpretive analysis of examiners' reports of Master's dissertations in a College at the University of South Africa was employed. The analysis uncovered a pattern in examiners' quality expectations, concerns and commendations. Specifically,

the study found subjectivity and lack of consistency in examiners' reports. Also, examiners scholarly expectations to students included some aspects of the thesis policy: research topic, study background and aims; theoretical framework; empirical investigation; format, language and editing; and conclusion and recommendation, which, Mafora (2018) thinks, should be infused in UNISA policy on graduate learning.

Wisker and Robinson (2014) also explored ways in which examiners perceived and took culturally-sensitive approaches to responding to, enabling and rewarding the quality of culturally inflected doctoral theses. Using a small-scale qualitative research with experienced examiners, they specifically addressed the tensions in definitions, encouragement, and recognition of diversity in theses, and balances of power in supervisor, student and examiner relationships which were involved in doctoral achievement. These studies on the codification of experience reveal insights into what examiners do with regard to the assessment procedures. Some of the findings were that examiners expected well cited and referenced, theorized work in a dialogue with the student's own. Also, while some examiners expressed that methodology should be taught, others felt there were no differences culturally, but other examiners believed culture may impact upon appropriate methodologies.

In sum, several studies have investigated evaluative language, in general and TERs, in particular; however, generally, there are not extensive studies on TERs produced in Ghana and UCC, that also run various Master's programmes and assess these academic products; thus, the practices and expectations of examiners are not well established.

The TERs are not the only RGs that have captured the attention of scholars. Such studies on other review genres have focused on reviews genres in general (Giannoni, 2002; Giannoni, 2009; Hyland, 2000); research articles (Auria, 2008; Hyland & Tse, 2005; Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Jalilifar, Hayati, & Mashhadi, 2012; Tutin, 2010), book reviews (Alcaraz-Ariza, 2010; Diani, 2009; Lores-Sanz, 2012; Mackiewicz, 2007; Tse & Hyland, 2009; Wang & An, 2013), grant proposals (Pascual & Unger, 2010), and journal description (Hyland & Tse, 2009). This section is devoted mostly to RAs and book reviews (BRs), and a mentioning to grant proposals and journal descriptions.

First, review genres, in general, which are experts' writings, reveal the use of evaluative linguistic resources, though in varying degrees and aspects. For instance, Hyland (2000) investigated eight disciplines of the use of positive and negative remarks by writers. His study showed that positive remark was mostly preferred in relation to parts book evaluated as well as content matters. Writers also criticized specific issues and praised more global features. Giannoni (2002) studied EWs through identification of "a number of rhetorical strategies associated with expressions of praise and criticism in English software reviews". The findings were that "though mostly downtowners, seven of the rhetorical strategies served to make negative evaluation more poignant": criticism enhancers, stigmatizing fault, first-person responsibility, emotive language, stressing incompleteness, stacking and irony. Negative evaluation may be less frequent but it was clearly more interpersonally sensitive than positive or neutral claims: its verbalisations are well-worth considering, not only in different disciplines but also (as attempted below) in different language settings.



Giannoni (2009) also examined how explicit judgements of academic value are realized in a range of review genres (RGs) instrumental to the reception and appraisal of four recent monographs in Applied Linguistics and found that, among the six evaluative options posited, all but one (comparative deductive evaluation) was confirmed by the data; thereby, revealing the highest concentration of explicit evaluative acts in book blurbs and expert reviews. Again, the analysis of the data showed that deductive evaluators (such as 'not new' and 'lacks order') are preferred to additive evaluators only for negative judgements in expert reviews. In addition, positive comments were prevalent in most texts, where it was encoded almost exclusively by additive evaluation. Negative comments were entirely absent in publisher's descriptions and blurbs but prevalent in BRs.

These findings are not surprising in that the data set, RGs of Giannoni (2009), lend itself to the use of explicit language of evaluation. RGs involve an assessment or judgment done by an expert on a 'product' to ensure that standards are met; therefore, the use of these evaluative comments (ECs) in varying degrees authenticates what a review should be. Besides, reviewers are experts who are familiar with the practices of their communities. Thus, positivity was prevalent in most texts, where it was encoded almost exclusively by additive evaluation because, the reviewers, in their judgement, maintain, and save the face of themselves and colleagues whose works are under review.

On linguistic items, Hyland and Tse's (2005) exploration of the frequencies, forms and functions of the evaluative 'that' in two corpora of 465 abstracts from published RAs and Master's and doctoral dissertations written

by L2 students established differences and similarities in how these groups used the structure by considering what writers evaluate, their stance, attribution, and the expression of evaluations. In a similar vein, Tutin (2010) who examined scientific adjectives such as ‘scientific artifacts’, ‘scientific observables’, ‘relations’ and ‘qualities’ in a corpus which was made up of texts such as RAs, theses, and course books found that axiological evaluation is not very common, contrary to more neutral evaluative types such as novelty, importance, time, comparison, and complexity. In addition, it was found that evaluative adjectives are more frequent in Economics than in Linguistics and, especially, for those expressing importance and novelty.

Auria (2008) studied the semantic and syntactic profiles of stance adjectives in RA introductions in the Soft Sciences and found that while stance adjectives share relatively similar semantic and syntactic profiles, the rhetorical analysis of stance adjectives showed different discipline-specific conventions. Focusing on nouns in expert writings (EWs), Jiang and Hyland (2015) explored the frequencies, forms, and functions of noun complement structure in a corpus of 160 RAs across eight disciplines. Developing a new rhetorically based classification of stance nouns, they showed that the structure is not only widely used to express author comment and evaluation, but also to exhibit considerable variation in the way that it is used to build knowledge across different disciplines.

Focusing on expert writings (EWs) but adding a cultural dimension to it, Jalilifar et al. (2012) applied the Appraisal Theory (AT) to analyse introduction sections of 80 RAs which are written by Iranian writers. The study revealed that international writers, compared to the Iranian writers,

deployed more explicit Attitude and Graduation resources. This finding is not surprising in that the international writers used in the study have adequate knowledge of the language; therefore, they are better placed to employ evaluative comments.

Diani (2009) adopted a linguistic approach and considered a corpus-based approach in analysing reporting clauses in English BR articles. It was revealed that there was a considerable use of reporting clauses with a *that*-clause complement in contexts where the reviewer's position was an issue. The analysis also showed that reporting is not only used in referring to the reviewed book author's discourse through citation, but also to the reviewer's own views on the issues discussed. It can be seen that there are variations in the use of evaluative language. The frequent use of the discourse act verbs such as 'argue' and 'suggest' in her data is in line with what is in the literature (Charles, 2006; Hyland, 1999; Schembri, 2009). Again, Alcaraz-Ariza (2010) aimed to identify the evaluative speech acts, either positive or negative in a corpus of 30 English-written medical BRs published in *The British Medical Journal* in the period, 2000-2009. Also, the study analysed the linguistic-rhetorical strategies used to convey evaluation. The analysis revealed that many mitigating approaches were adopted soften negative remarks in addition keeping communal togetherness and unity with these evaluators.

Mackiewicz (2007) also surveyed the level that approval and disapproval in book reviews in publications which are related to Business and Technical Communication were carried out, but he introduced another variable, gender. The data set selected for the study was appropriate because embedded in BRs is the idea of evaluation, which can be either positive or

negative. A finding was that evaluators approved texts more than they disapproved texts, but balanced their compliments and criticisms more, indicating how members of a community would like to maintain face at each point in time. Mackiewicz (2007) found that the criticisms by these reviewers were mitigated as well. He also found that works of female authors received more compliments. The reviewers who gave more compliments to the female authors might think of the fact that females tend to use “refined” language. But this gendered finding in Mackiewicz (2007) contrasts what Tse and Hyland (2009) found in their study; they investigated the role of gender and discipline in the construction of an academic identity by examining a corpus of 56 reviews of single-authored academic books in leading journals in Philosophy and Biology together with interviews with reviewers and editors in those fields. The study showed that men and women use broadly similar resources; males employed more evaluative devices in each category, with the exception of attitude markers. Analysis of the sub-corpora suggested, too, that both males and females employ more features when reviewing female authors. Here, both females and males were found at the same level in terms of the use of evaluative language, unlike Mackiewicz (2007) who found that the female authors were favoured.

Adding a cultural dimension, Lores-Sanz (2012) analysed 60 BRs from British and Spanish History journals in terms of the entities and aspects evaluated and the polarity (negative/positive) of the evaluation. It can be seen that though the data set used (History) by Lores-Sanz (2012) was different compared to the other studies mentioned above (e.g. Alcaraz-Ariza, 2010 used Medical reviews), there were differences in the distribution of positive and



negative evaluations, indicating that positive evaluation was more frequent, whereas in Spanish BRs negative evaluation was almost non-existent. Wang and An (2013), who investigated the rhetorical and stylistic features of 30 Chinese academic BRs, found that in most of the positive evaluations, contractive engagement expressions were employed by the reviewers to express their praises while, for the negative comments, the reviewers used expansive engagement expressions.

Apart from BRs, other genres such as grant proposals (GPs) have attracted attention in the use of evaluative language. For example, Pascual and Unger's (2010) investigation of how GP writers position themselves in relation to other researchers and theorists in key obligatory moves of this genre found that the proposals were highly heteroglossic. Moreover, a variety of Engagement resources were used. The instances were predominantly expansive, suggesting that authors tended to invite rather than challenge their colleagues' views. Also, Hyland and Tse's (2009) examination of a corpus of 200 journal description (JDs) showed evaluation as a key feature of this genre, influencing both lexical choices and rhetorical structure. They also found that the information in JDs combines evaluation, promotion, and caution so that the excesses of the commercial world are held at bay by a regard for the scepticism of the academic community.

The above studies, though few, are very relevant to the present study in that they provide insights into the use of evaluative language from the perspective of semantics and lexico-grammar. Again, these studies bring to the fore the variability of evaluative language in different genres—thesis

examiners' reports (TERs), research articles (RAs), grant proposals (GPs), book reviews (BRs), as well as journal descriptions (JDs).

### Written Feedback Comments

Written feedback comments have extensively been studied from various perspectives, which include novices (e.g. Bruno & Santas, 2010; Hyland & Hyland, 2001; Hyland & Hyland, 2006) and experts (e.g. Hughes et al., 2014). In this section, I review studies on both perspectives, novice and experts.

Studies on feedback on novice writing have concentrated on the functions of feedback, effects of feedback (Razali & Jupri, 2014), and students' reactions to feedback (Kumar & Kumar, 2009). Hyland and Hyland (2001) gave elaborate description of WF offered by two tutors to non-native learners of aptitude subject, considering positive, negative and recommendations. The study's findings were that praise was the most frequently employed function in the feedback of these two teachers, but this was often used to soften criticisms and suggestions rather than simply responding to good work. Many of the criticisms and suggestions were also mitigated by the use of hedging devices, question forms, and personal attribution. They explored the motivations for these mitigations through teacher interviews and think-aloud protocols and examined cases where students failed to understand their teachers' comments due to their indirectness. While recognising the importance of mitigation strategies as a means of minimising the force of criticisms and enhancing effective teacher–student relationships, they also pointed out that such indirectness carried the very real potential for incomprehension and miscommunication.

In another study, Hyland and Hyland (2006) examined feedback on L2 students' writing, towing a different line from the earlier study (Hyland & Hyland, 2001) which was devoted to textual analysis of the written feedback (WF) by only two teachers. Hyland and Hyland (2006) explored the role of feedback in writing instruction and discussing current issues relating to teacher written and oral feedback, collaborative peer feedback, and computer-mediated feedback. Their exploration revealed that the research into feedback on L2 students' writing had increased dramatically in the last decade. However, they found that there were uncertainties concerning the most effective ways of responding to different text features, the role of context, personal preference, and interpersonal factors in giving and responding to feedback, and the best ways were to employ peer and oral feedback. Again, there was the need to understand the long-term effects of feedback on writing development. Positively, they realized that feedback studies had moved away from a narrow obsession with the effectiveness of error correction and the practice of peer feedback to embrace a new range of issues, so that they were now more aware of the potential of oral conferencing and computer-mediated feedback, of the importance of exploring student preferences and responses to feedback, and the role of wider social, institutional and interactional factors on feedback and its uptake.

Razali and Jupri (2014) also examined the use of praise, criticism, and suggestion in feedback but termed them as 'effects', which is different from Hyland and Hyland's (2001) study of feedback in proficiency courses. Razali and Jupri (2014) investigated the effects of teacher WF on undergraduates' writing in an English L2 classroom at Universiti Malaysia Perlis, a local

university in Malaysia. Their study explored the use of three types of feedback— suggestion, criticism, and praise— and which type of feedback from these three encouraged student revisions. The study revealed that all types of teacher written feedback encouraged student revisions. In addition, their findings showed that criticism resulted in revisions that were more successful as it was more specific.

Also, on the functions of feedback, Lee (2009) examined WF produced by students in an EFL AW programme in the University of Tokyo, Japan. He limited his study to peer feedback, unlike Hyland and Hyland (2006) who included teacher written and oral feedback as well as computer-mediated feedback. The study found that students had an exceptionally high tendency for using suggestion-feedback and least tendency for praise-feedback.

Awiah, Gborsong, and Appartaim (2018) investigated the “nature and location of teachers’ written feedback comment on sixty-two (62) students’ project essays selected from four Colleges of Education in Ghana”, to, specifically, “ascertain the syntactic/linguistic form of comments written by the teachers”. Their study adopted Ferris et al.’s, (1997) discourse analysis model of teacher written feedback commentary. They found that the frequent linguistic form was the statement (116, 34.5%), which is exemplified in giving information comments and asking for information. The imperative syntactic form, (115, 34.2%) was second in frequency. Teachers’ comments were also mitigated, and mostly comments were found in margins and end points of the projects.

Apart from the functions of feedback, Kumar and Kumar’s (2009) exploratory study provided a window into two important thought processes of



a writer's repulsiveness and noticing, which had pedagogical implications. Concurrent verbal protocol data, which formed the main source of data, were supplemented by data in the form of written teacher feedback, written texts, and a questionnaire survey. The study found that while attending to feedback, Wendy (the subject) recursively moved back and forth in no set order from written comments to her written text constantly. During that process, Wendy went through several thought processes before she either accepted or rejected feedback. In the first approach of accepting teacher feedback, she either justified herself first or made plans before she accepted feedback. She also indicated the changes that she intended to implement in her rewrite. They concluded that other studies involving many students could help in establishing the claims found in their study.

Conversely, Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) did not limit their study to one participant, as found in Kumar and Kumar's (2009) study; instead, Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) investigated EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their teacher's written feedback (TWF). In addition, the study focused on contextual factors that might influence students' reactions to and perceptions of their TWF. Data were collected using multiple methods that included semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, TWF, and students' written essays. Results of the data analysis revealed that EFL students showed some variations in their affective reactions to their TWF. The students perceived their TWF as useful and very important for the development of their writing skills. Again, the students wanted their teachers to focus on all aspects of written texts when they provide WF. The study concluded that contextual factors such as students' past experience, teachers'

wording of WF, students' acceptance of teachers' authority, and teachers' handwriting impact on EFL students' affective reactions to and perceptions of their TWF.

No clear correlation between a person's ability to tolerate ambiguity and his or her attitude toward scholarly writing was found when Hughes (2013) investigated student writings but not essays, as found in the earlier studies. Hughes (2013) examined what Master's students and their faculty mentors knew and understood in the writing process by investigating the practices and perceptions of a group of Master's level faculty members and graduate students. Student-participants, generally, were confident about their writing abilities; they were motivated to improve with assistance from their mentors, and held the belief that feedback was an important part of the writing process. These beliefs were present both in terms of providing formative assistance and for guiding the overall learning in the writing process.

Bruno and Santos (2010) studied the characteristics of written comments on assignments as well as the process of writing them. They also added interviews of three case-study middle school students, observation of lessons and content analysis of their assignments as data, excluding questionnaire. Bruno and Santos' (2010) study showed that features that promoted learning were: comments located next to what needs revision must be reviewed; use of topics to discriminate tasks; vocabulary familiar to students; short and direct comments when involving simple competencies, but supplying strategies when complex competencies were involved. Teachers felt difficulties related to: lack of space to write, selection of what to comment on and, occasionally, avoiding to give part of the answer. Being aware of

students' competencies, giving timely feedback, using feedback systematically and student motivation were other factors that determined comments' efficacy.

Studies on feedback abound in the higher education literature. However, what has been reviewed here indicates that feedback (1) performs different functions, (2) is practiced differently by teachers and students, and (3) is very much appreciated by students in their writings as well as the features that promote learning. It must be said that the thesis examiner's report (TER) is a form of a written feedback though it has been given little attention in terms of its evaluative language. I seek to add to these studies on written feedback (WF) by investigating the use of evaluative language through the lens of SFL, focusing on the types of evaluation, evaluated entities, and the evaluator in TERs.

### **Language of Evaluation in Academic Writing Research in Ghana**

As already indicated, evaluation is a slippery term; encompassing other terms such as 'stance', 'metadiscourse', 'politeness', 'hedging', and 'appraisal'. All these different terms show writers' or users' attitude and position about a proposition or an idea, indicating that language use in academic discourse (AD) is not neutral or impersonal but encompasses a phenomenon of 'stance'. In Ghana, the setting of the present study, there is an emerging scholarship on the language of evaluation, whether explicit or implicit. Such studies go beyond academic attitude and move from one genre to another.

First, evaluation resonates the concept of Metadiscourse which "reveals the ways writers project themselves into their discourse to signal their attitudes and commitments" (Hyland 2004a, p. 133). Metadiscourse, an

emerging area in evaluation research, has received attention in Ghana. Osei (2018) examined the use of metadiscoursal devices in the introduction chapters in 20 English Language and Sociology Master's theses, drawing on the modified version of Hyland's Metadiscourse model. The results revealed that there were cross-disciplinary quantitative differences across the metadiscoursal subcategories (contra attitude markers). Regarding interactive subcategories, except for frame markers, the rest were more frequent in English Language Introduction Chapter (ELIC) than in Sociology Introduction Chapter (SIC). Another finding of the study was that hedges ranked first across both disciplines, and except booster and attitude markers which interchanged positions in the two disciplines. Again, adopting Hyland's (2005) interpersonal metadiscourse theory as both the theoretical and analytical frameworks, Osei (2013) investigated Metadiscourse use in the Introduction and Literature Review (LR) sections of the theses selected from English and Sociology masters thesis in a Ghanaian university. The analysis revealed that hedges, engagement markers, self-mention were used more in the Introduction while the LR recorded more of evidentials, boosters and attitude markers in both English and Sociology thesis. However, English thesis writers used more code glosses, evidentials, endophorics, frame markers, engagement markers, self-mentions than theses selected from Sociology. The findings on the use of hedges and other engagement markers appeal to the interpersonal node of SFL. However, evaluation is not only about maintaining interpersonal relationship with readers (here, metadiscourse) but also about the evaluator and the evaluated (Du Bois, 2007), which were missing in Osei's (2013; 2018) studies, and which the present study seeks to occupy.



In signalling their attitudes and commitments (Metadiscourse), writers/speakers hedge in their propositions so as to maintain solidarity with readers. Hedging as a politeness strategy for solidarity has triggered attention (e.g. Agbaglo, 2017a; Musa, 2014) from many different perspectives, specifically, in Ghana. Agbaglo (2017a) studied politeness strategies in the Analysis and Discussion sections of 20 RAs produced by faculty from Department of English, University of Cape Coast. Using Brown and Levinson (1978) and Myers' (1989) models for the analysis, the study found that lecturers used politeness strategies in their RAs. The analysis showed that negative politeness strategies were used more than positive politeness strategies. It was established that lecturers used positive politeness strategies (i.e. certainty adjectives, speculative expressions, imperatives and creating rapport) to emphasize solidarity and involvement with colleague researchers, and negative politeness strategies to emphasize the independence of the reader. Negative politeness strategies included modals, hedging, passive voice, impersonal construction and tentative verbs. The use of these strategies appeals to the interpersonal node of SFL.

On graduate writing, unlike Agbaglo (2017a), Musa (2014) analysed the communicative purposes of hedges in Chemistry and English postgraduate theses in UCC. Using a triangulation design, the investigation yielded three communicative purposes: assertions that are accompanied by degrees of uncertainty; avoidance of criticism, and rediction of reader satisfactory through assertions. Again, the analysis revealed that the frequency of hedges used in Chemistry was higher than that of English. Researchers in Chemistry seemed

to have a deeper concern for the level of certainty or uncertainty regarding their propositions, thereby showing how reliable their claims could be.

Still on graduate writing, like Musa (2014), Edusie (2015) studied hedging approaches among English postgraduate students. Her study was devoted to academic writing in Ghana in three institutions— KNUST, UEW and UCC. She analysed MA theses from these selected institutions and supplemented the data with ICE-Gh Academic Writing, differing from Musa (2014) and Agbaglo (2017a) who relied solely on one data set. A key finding was “epistemic/non-epistemic use” of hedging tools, with many discourse purposes and “complexity levels”. Again, the study showed that differences existed in the use of hedging devices, depending on the level of proficiency of the Advanced L2 users of English. Epistemic nouns were least used in the study. Modals (may, might), adjectives (possible, probable), adverbs (usually, probably), evidential verbs (seem, appear), judgement verbs (suggest, think) and nouns (likelihood) were also found in the analysis of the data, this revealing different nuances to evaluation.

Venturing into a different linguistic realization of evaluation, Agbaglo (2017b) investigated the use of reporting verbs in RAs written by lecturers in the Department of English, UCC, using Hyland’s (2002) classification of reporting verbs as the theoretical framework. The study found that Discourse Acts type of reporting verbs were preferred by lecturers, as compared to the Research Acts category of reporting verbs and the Cognitive Acts category of reporting verbs. Agbaglo’s (2017b) finding on the use of more Discourse Acts verbs is similar to the findings of Twumasi (2012) who focused on graduate writings, and not expert writings. Twumasi (2012) investigated citation

practices of graduate students' theses at a Ghanaian university. As one of its research questions, the study focused on the kinds of reporting verbs used at the LR section of MPhil theses in the disciplines of English and Curriculum Studies, UCC. The analysis showed that Curriculum Studies students used Discourse Act verbs more whilst Research Acts and Cognitive Acts were found to be used more by English. The Discourse Act verbs involved verbal expressions which were appropriate in qualitative argumentation schema, allowing for explicit interpretation and signalling reluctance of writers to commit themselves to distinctive position towards the viewpoints of others. Cognitive and Research Act verbs, on the other hand, stressed the role of reasoning in argumentation and the construction of knowledge.

In cross-disciplinary study (Sociology, Economics and Law), Ngula (2017) focused on epistemic modal verbs in RAs, using corpus linguistics methods to investigate the extent to which Ghanaian scholars' use of epistemic modal verbs differed from international scholars' use of the same devices in terms of depth of use, diversity of use, phraseological patterns and degrees of epistemic strength. The findings of the study were that international scholars used more epistemic modal verbs than their Ghanaian counterparts, suggesting that Ghanaian authors were more direct and overly categorical in the ways that they presented their research claims. Again, the modal verb *may* as a mitigating device for research claims was the most common epistemic resource. Also, Ghanaian writers used *will* more than *would* which portrayed politeness. Next, international writers preferred *might*, more than *could*, to express epistemic claims; Ghanaian writers, on the other hand, used *could* more than *might* for this purpose. Last, strong epistemic claims (boosters) like

the modal verbs *will* and *must* showed a high level of confidence in the truth of the proposition expressed by these writers, but *weak* epistemic claims (hedgies) used the modal forms *may*, *could*, *might* to reduce significantly the level of commitment to the proposition.

Focusing on the Results and Discussion section of 20 MPhil theses in Health Sciences and English, and on an aspect of evaluative verbs, Abdullah (2016) examined types of tense. The study employed mixed method approach, and found that the simple present and simple past tense occurred most frequently in the results and discussion section of the MPhil theses in both disciplines. More relevant to the present study was the fact that commentary and evaluation, signalling, and references to previous research were some functions of the tense forms identified in the study. In addition, the study identified that author's point of view affected the choice of tense form.

Although the present study seeks to analyse verbs, it will be to ascertain the nature of grammatical roles associated with the verbs (Processes) from the point of view of Transitivity (SFL) since it is important to identify what/who is judged, what emotions are expressed, and what value is appreciated. Furthermore, it is significant to identify if examiners give or demand information, goods or services, and if they communicate, circuitously or non-circuitously, so as to understand well how examiners assume multiple roles.

Another point of divergence from the present study is that Agbaglo (2017b) and Ngula (2017) focused on RAs while Abdullah (2016), Musa (2014), and Twumasi (2012) focused on the thesis, a graduate genre, with attention placed on some part-genres as, Introduction, LR, and Results and



Discussion. Studying evaluative words in different sections of either the thesis, and or RAs, in general, is revealing but the thesis examiners' reports (TERs) neither focuses on Literature Review, Results nor Discussion only, considering the evaluative criteria provided by the School of Graduate Studies (UCC). Thus, it will be interesting to investigate the practices across the entire sections of the reports, in relation to the types of evaluative comments found; the entities evaluated and their grammatical roles through an analysis of the verbs (Process), and the roles examiners assumed for themselves in these reports.

Again, the studies considered above (e.g. Agbaglo, 2017b; Twumasi, 2012) considered evaluation from pragma-linguistic and rhetorical perspectives, concentrating on politeness, hedging, reporting verbs and metadiscourse. However, there are other studies that have considered evaluation from different linguistic perspectives. Afful (2017a), for example, carried out a linguistic analysis from the point of view of Appraisal Theory, specifically, using the Engagement strand. He employed a cross-disciplinary approach to examine the literature review (LR) section of 45 theses across three disciplines in University of Ghana: Linguistics (LIN), Geography (GEO), and Nutrition and Food Sciences (FAN). The study aimed to identify how MPhil students used engagement resources to show commitment to propositions made, and to dialogically contract or expand the discursive space in LR, using the engagement strand of the Appraisal theory. The study showed that postgraduate students in the Sciences used more contractive engagement resources than their mates in the other two disciplines. Again, the study revealed that the sciences (FAN theses) used more expansive resources than

those in the social sciences (as seen in GEO theses) and Humanities (as seen in LIN theses).

Bisilki and Bisilki (2017) investigated evaluative speech acts in critical review written by graduate students at the University of Cape Coast (UCC).

Adopting the content analysis approach, the study revealed that the reviews of the graduate students contained more positive comments than negative evaluative speech acts. Again, the students focused on the text rather than the author reviewed, but the critical comments were mitigated to reduce the full import of the criticism or the negative comments. Bisilki and Bisilki's (2017) work is close to the present study, in that, as one of its research questions, the present study seeks to examine the types of evaluative comments contained in examiners' reports, and not only critical comments as done by Bisilki and Bisilki (2017), though both data sets constitute an evaluation of written academic genres. While Bisilki and Bisilki (2017) investigated graduate writing, the present study dwells on expert writings like Adika (2015) but with a focus on the whole report, and not some aspects.

Other studies have employed a genre analytic approach in addressing evaluation. First, Adika (2014) takes a genre approach (CARS model) to analyse 59 introductions of RAs published in the *Legon Journal of the Humanities*, from 2005 to 2010. Specifically, Adika sought to examine the space that the contributors to the journal allot to themselves through the linguistic devices used in signalling gap statements, along with the extensiveness of references to previous work as a way of situating and mainstreaming their research. The findings revealed that the authors of these RAs did not exploit Step 3 (reviewing items of previous research) under Move

1 in order to reinforce the research niche being claimed in Move 2. Thus, it can be said that the evaluative language which would have accompanied this review was missing since that step (Step 3) was missing, too, in the analysis of the data.

Similarly, Daniels (2017) adopted the genre approach in examining forty MPhil research proposals written by graduate students of English Language Studies (ELS) and Agricultural Science (AG) in a public Ghanaian university. Using Halliday's SFL, too, the study revealed that, first, the ELS researchers use six Moves while the AG researchers use five. Again, the ordering of the Moves in both sets of data did not follow a linear pattern, but the ELS researchers used more textual space than the AG researchers. More importantly, the students of the proposals studied employed stance in Move 1, establishing a territory, when reviewing items of previous studies, indicating the research author's position on the findings or claims. The authors used stance to make counter-claims, indicate the gap, and allow themselves to continue in traditions (which were all realized in Move 2, establishing a niche).

Although Afful (2005a) took a cross-disciplinary approach like Daniels (2017), he focused on undergraduate writing. He studied the introductions like Adika (2014) but added conclusions in his data sets across three disciplines (English, Sociology, and Zoology), using an adapted form of Swales' (1990) Create a Research Model (CARS) model. The introduction captured the purpose of the essays and the conclusion which summed up the main purport of the essay. Typically, he considered the frequency of moves, textual space allocation, sequencing of moves, and the linguistic features with each move in

180 examination essays written by second-year undergraduates. Sixty essays were collected from three departments: Zoology, Sociology, and English, University of Cape Coast, but used interview as supplementary data. Of relevance to the present studies is the finding that, linguistically, English students differed from their Zoology and Sociology counterparts in their use of verbal processes, personal pronouns and metatextual expressions in instantiating Move 3 (previewing). Previewing inherently exhibits expression of attitudes towards previous studies or researchers. Sociology students differed from their Zoology and English counterparts in the usage of attribution in Move 2 (engaging closely with issue). Sociology and English scripts differed in the use of evaluative resources in Move 1, modalized processes, which are used to express epistemic stance towards propositions in Move 2, and personal pronouns to show writer/author visibility in Moves 1 and 2.

Focusing on the introductions of 120 examination essays, Afful (2012) examined the rhetorical choices made by second-year undergraduates in Literature-in-English and Sociology courses in a Ghanaian public university. Using Swales' rhetorical move approach and Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar, the study revealed that, first, the Sociology introductions differed from the English introductions in the deployment of definitions in Move 1. Second, the English introductions differed from the Sociology ones in the use of verbal processes in Move 2 and the use of personal pronouns, discourse verbs, and purpose expressions in Move 3. Further, both Sociology and English introductions utilized lexical repetition as a principal rhetorical feature for emphasis.



Genre studies of experts (Adika, 2014), graduate students (Daniels, 2017) on the verge of becoming experts, or novice/undergraduate writings (Afful, 2005a; 2012) reveal the use of evaluative language. The reference to previous studies mostly invited the use of evaluative language, which was made evident in the linguistic choices like verbs, adverbs and adjectives. Though the present study does not adopt a genre approach, the studies on genre studies offer insight into the use of evaluative language across all levels of writings— experts, undergraduate and graduate writings, and the Moves in such genres.

Other studies, however, do not directly appeal to the language of evaluation as established above, but aim at investigating genres such as Titles (Afful, 2017b) and Dissertation Acknowledgement (e. g. Afful & Awoonor-Aziaku, 2017; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010), to establish language use in making persuasion in these genres and to establish their rhetorical differences. Indirectly, their investigations show evidence of the use of the non-neutral nature of language especially in academic settings. For example, Afful (2017b) explores the title length, syntactic structure, and informativity of conference paper titles (CPTs) in Applied Linguistics, using a corpus of 689 CPTs and a mixed method approach. The analysis revealed three findings: the study found that the specific lexical items frequently used in the data set included verbal expressions, 283(21%). Of relevance to the present study, also, are the findings on the use of verbal expressions, one of which is the metaphorical use of verb forms in the titles to create a mental picture of an activity being performed; thereby enhancing the comprehension of CPTs. The use of these verbs which may be referred to as activity verbs rests in the

Material Process of Transitivity (SFL), an approach employed in the analysis of the present study. Again, Afful (2017b) offers a spring board for the interpretation of evaluated entities and their grammatical roles (Process types) at the different sections of the examiner's reports to be employed in the present study.

Another genre that sees the use of evaluation, indirectly, is the acknowledgement section of theses and dissertations. Issues such as identity construction, disciplinarity, and naming practices have been foregrounded in acknowledgments sections. Writers employ language to enact different identities in expressing their gratitude to other individuals who have directly and indirectly contributed to the successful completion of their theses. Again, in this genre, politeness is employed. Specifically, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) explored the interface between identity construction and the linguistic features of a Master's dissertation acknowledgement (DA), written by a student of Literary Studies, using a two-pronged analytical framework. The paper established that the writer of the acknowledgement systematically varied these linguistic choices at the lexical, grammatical, and discoursal levels in order to construct varying and different identities. The use of complex vocabulary for enacting superior-subordinator relationship was formal. Also noticeable was the use of politeness markers as a hedging device and adjective to maintain a distant relationship with the reviewer. Last was the hybridization of the DA in terms of the incorporation of formal and informal linguistic elements.

Still on the same genre, thesis acknowledgement, as done by Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010), Afful and Awoonor-Aziaku (2017) examined the naming

practices adopted by postgraduate students in a Ghanaian university. In contrast with Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010), Afful and Awoonor-Aziaku (2017) used a corpus of 16 acknowledgement texts of Master's theses submitted to two departments (English and French) in the last decade. The analysis of the data revealed, first, that drawing on naming practices in the Ghanaian socio-cultural milieu, postgraduate students addressed eight groups of thankees, such as God, supervisors, and family members, who were both academic and non-academic. Second, they mainly drew on a lexicon of six address terms (title plus full name, full name, title plus first name, first name, kinship terms, and honorifics) in the texts. Third, the choice of these address terms was influenced by such interpersonal factors as social distance, politeness, and solidarity, showing that the language used in the acknowledgement sections was not neutral or impersonal. These features are likely to influence the writing of thesis examination reports, the data for the present study.

Also, adding a cross-disciplinary dimension, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012) explored disciplinarity in the rhetoric of 20 acknowledgement section of Master's dissertations in three sub-disciplines of Education: Guidance and Counselling, Educational Administration and Management, and Science and Mathematics Education. The findings showed 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, consistent with the findings in Hyland (2003; 2004). Another key finding was that the obligatory thanking move was made to different individuals and as such, there was variation in the choice of language to establish these different identities.

Last, focusing on undergraduate students, but cross-disciplinary in nature as Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), Afful (2016) examined the DAs of undergraduate students at a Ghanaian university. Using a mixed method approach, the study analysed the schematic structure and lexico-grammatical choices in 200 DAs from two departments, English, and Entomology and Wild Life. The two key findings observed in the study were that, 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 examined cases, which contrasts the finding of Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010), but confirms that of Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012). Second, the DAs from both departments deployed gratitude-related terms and socio-culturally conditioned names, while hybridized linguistic forms (realized in Sociolinguistic terms as ‘code-mixing’) were used in the DAs from the Department of English, as established in earlier studies like Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010), and Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012). Far from a neutral standpoint, the lexico-grammatical choices reflect various interpersonal elements— formal and informal as well as politeness.

Thus, the above studies show that evaluation is employed, in the Ghanaian context, both at the postgraduate and undergraduate levels when writers express gratitude to individuals for the assistance offered. Politeness strategies in identity construction and naming practices to enact and maintain relationships with addressees were also employed. They provide credible evidence of the interactive, personal and evaluative nature of academic writing in an under-researched area in Kachru’s Outer Circles.

In sum, this section has considered the emerging scholarship in evaluation in academic writing in Ghana. These studies have explored issues



such as evaluative speech acts, engagement resources, reporting verbs, metadiscourse, modal verbs, politeness strategies and pertinent lexicogrammatical on sections of writings on genre analysis to show that language use in academic discourse community is not neutral and impersonal but personal, interactive, value-laden and evaluative. These studies, directly or indirectly, are rooted in the interpersonal SFL which considers language as a system of choices, a key concept appealed to in the present study.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed studies on evaluation by concentrating on the language of evaluation in thesis examiners' reports (TERs) and some other review genres (RGs), written feedback (WF), and the language of evaluation in written academic research in Ghana. The review indicated that though extensive studies have been conducted on the language of evaluation across some genres and levels of studies, the TERs which is a form of written feedback and rich in evaluative linguistic resources because it is an assessment of an academic product has received less attention in UCC which runs many postgraduate studies. The present study occupies this niche by examining the types of evaluative language, the entities evaluated, and the roles of examiners in TERs.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter explains where, how, and what data for the present study were gathered. Specific attention is devoted to the description of the selected research design, research site, sampling technique, sources of data, data collection, and procedures of analysis together with the analytical framework adopted for the study. In addition, issues on ethics and validity, and challenges encountered are presented in this chapter.

#### Research Design

The study employed, generally, the qualitative approach. While Muijs (2004) thinks that qualitative research uses non-numerical data which are not analysed statistically, Creswell (2003) asserts that qualitative research takes place in a natural setting, with the qualitative researcher often going to the site of the participants to conduct the research. This enables the researcher to obtain detailed information about the research participant, place, and event or entity and to be highly involved. Qualitative research is more nonlinear and cyclical. Neuman (2007) sums up the features in qualitative research by indicating that qualitative researchers often rely on authentic interpretations that are sensitive to specific social-historical contexts, which is also noted by Fraenkel and Wallen (2000). The qualitative researcher interprets to "translate" or make the originally gathered data understandable to other people.

The qualitative approach chosen in the present study is content analysis (specifically, textual analysis). Neuman (2007) describes content analysis as a technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material (e.g., pictures, movies, song lyrics, etc.), allowing the researcher to observe the content (i.e., messages, meanings, etc.) in a source of communication (i.e., a book, article, movie, etc.). Further, Neuman (2007) explicates that content analysis is nonreactive because the process of placing words, messages or symbols in a text to communicate to a reader or receiver occurs without influence from the researcher who analyses its content.

By investigating the messages or words, and clauses used in the thesis examination reports, I attempt to examine the nature of the thesis assessment, the people or things evaluated and their grammatical roles, as well as the roles performed by the examiners as found in their choice of language. Again, the TERs have been produced already and the researcher does not have any influence on its production. In all, content analysis was used in the present study to explain, describe, and interpret the evaluative language that was used in the TERs on submitted Master's theses to the SGS (UCC) in a Ghanaian university.

### **Academic Setting of the Study**

The study was carried out in a Ghanaian public university, specifically, University of Cape Coast (UCC). The university is in the Central Region of Ghana, in the southern part of the country (A map and a picture of the university can be found in Appendices F and G respectively). According to the University of Cape Coast 2020 Dairy, University of Cape Coast is one of the rare sea front universities in the world. It was established in October, 1962 as a

result of the recommendation of an international commission appointed by the Ghana Government in December, 1960 to advise on the future of University Education in the country, and the possibility of establishing a third university at Cape Coast.

The university was established with the original mandate to train graduate professional teachers in Arts and Sciences but especially in the latter for the secondary schools, teacher training colleges, polytechnics and technical institutions in Ghana. Currently, the university has restructured its degree programmes by de-coupling the study of professional education courses from the main degree courses. This was done to allow flexibility and choice in its course offerings and, thus, cater for specific needs of students while still focusing on its traditional mission of producing highly qualified and skilled manpower in education.

The university has five colleges headed by Provosts (e.g. College of Humanities and Legal Studies), eighteen faculties headed by Deans (e.g. Faculty of Arts), ten schools headed by Deans (e.g. School of Graduate Studies, SGS), institutes (e.g. Institute of Educational Planning and Administration), and one hundred and five departments (e. g. Department of English) alongside other units.

From an initial student enrolment of 153 in 1962, the University of Cape Coast, by 2018/2019 academic year, had a total student population of 79,037: 20, 067 Regular Students; 9,153 Sandwich Students; 44,370 Distance Learning Students; 5,466 Institute of Education Sandwich Students, and 17 Part-Time Students. The university is well esteemed in the country, and runs many postgraduate programmes; hence, its selection in the present study.



The SGS (UCC) came into being on 1st August, 2008. It began as a Committee on Higher Degrees, with a mandate to advise Senate (now known as Academic Board) on the university's graduate policy and recommend the award of postgraduate degrees for approval. In 1992, the Committee on Higher Degrees was transformed to a Board of Graduate Studies. This Board, a sub-committee of Academic Board (AB), was entrusted with the responsibility for administering graduate education in the University, until its status was elevated to a School on 1st August, 2008. Currently, the School has the mandate to co-ordinate all graduate level academic programmes in all Colleges, including College of Humanities and Legal Studies (CHLS), which is featured in the present study. It also regulates and offers advice on graduate programmes of university colleges or other tertiary institutions affiliated to UCC.

The vision of the SGS (UCC), from the school's website, is to become "the hub of an outstanding multi-disciplinary context for graduate training and research for advancing the socio-economic development of Ghana". The mission of the School is "to create a facilitating environment for teaching, learning and training of graduate students and researchers in the fields of the Sciences and Humanities, equipped with initiative and leadership in key sectors of international endeavour".

To achieve its vision and mission, the School has a four-fold function: a). draft regulations for all higher degrees with a view to ensuring that acceptable academic standards are maintained. b). receive reports and consider recommendations pertaining to higher degrees and graduate diplomas from department and faculty committees of graduate studies. c). determine

results of higher degrees and graduate diplomas. d). make recommendations to Academic Board for the award of higher degrees and graduate diplomas. It is within this school that postgraduate programmes are housed, theses are assessed and degrees awarded upon the completion of one's study. Of particular interest to the present study is the second function which is about receipt of thesis examination reports and award of degrees, giving us the examiners' reports that served as data for the present study. Thus, completed theses are forwarded by SGS for examination. After the examination of a thesis, the examiner writes report, outlining his/her impression about the thesis and recommending the award of a degree sought or otherwise in the same report. Thus, this function is key in producing postgraduate students in UCC.

Before a thesis is completed and sent for assessment, a supervisor assists in the preparation of the thesis for examination. Pages 34-36 of the *Academic Policies and Regulations for Graduate Studies, UCC (2016-2020)* outline guidelines for the appointment of supervisors. Initially, research students are assigned advisors until supervisors are assigned, and these advisors help in the preparation of students' research proposals. At the MA/MBA/M.Sc /M.Ed level, only a supervisor either from that department or cognate one is appointed. At the MPhil level, a student is assigned a Supervisor, but at the PhD level, a student is assigned a Principal Supervisor and a Co-Supervisor. While a Supervisor at the MPhil level must be of, at least, a Senior Lecturer Rank, it is required that at the PhD level, the principal supervisor must hold a PhD in addition to being at the professorial rank or as senior lecturer. The co-supervisor should also be a PhD holder and, at least, a confirmed lecturer. Specifically, in terms of responsibility, the supervisor

guides the student on the technical aspects of research, which includes the research design elements, structure, content, and organization of the report, including, literature, methodology, and specialized knowledge, and provide periodic feedback.

In addition, after its completion, the thesis is examined internally and externally. External examiners are nominated by the department and appointed by the Academic Board on the recommendation of the Board of the School of Graduate Studies. One external and one internal examiner are appointed to examine each MPhil/MCom/MN/PhD thesis. After the examiners have submitted their reports, and both examiners have passed the thesis, the candidate is required to defend the thesis at a viva voce, the oral examination. The viva voce for MPhil/MCom/MN is conducted by a panel of four (4) examiners comprising the Head of Department as chairman, the principal supervisor or co-supervisor, the internal examiner and one other member from the department or a cognate department. However, where the head of department is him/herself the principal supervisor, another academic is appointed chairman of the panel of examiners. Viva voce for PhD is conducted by a panel of six (6) examiners comprising the dean of the School of Graduate Studies or his/her representative as chairman, Head of Department, the external examiner, the internal examiner, the principal supervisor or co-supervisor, and one other member from the department or a cognate department. Where the dean of the School of Graduate Studies is him/herself the principal supervisor, his/her representative is appointed chairman of the panel of examiners. The Head of Department, then, submits a report of the viva voce to the dean of the School of Graduate Studies.

Thus, as in many universities that run postgraduate programmes, UCC has a very structured and hierarchical system that takes care of the pre-preparation (proposal) through the drafting of the thesis to the examination and defence of the completed thesis, till finally, the candidate is awarded the degree in this highly respected institution, UCC.

### **Sampling Technique**

Purposive sampling technique was considered in the selection of the thesis examiners' reports (TERs). Miles and Huberman (1994) state that purposive sampling technique is primarily used in qualitative studies, for selecting units (individuals, groups of individuals, cases etc.) based on a specific purpose associated with answering a research study's questions. Palys (2008) further explains purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which particular settings, persons, and events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be obtained from others. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) also mention that purposive sampling involves selecting certain units or cases based on a specific purpose rather than randomly. Simply put, purposive sampling allows the researcher to obtain data that allow the objectives of the study to be met.

This sampling technique allowed me to select examiners' reports on MPhil theses from the English and History departments, plus Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health because of the overall objective of the present study, that is, to examine the use of evaluative language in examiners' reports on MPhil theses. More specifically, in selecting the data, for the sake of recency, I considered TERs submitted to the departments from 2006–2016. The data were collected in 2016 when I needed



to do a preliminary analysis for the proposal defence. I was also attracted to a text with, at least, two sentences on a specific issue, so that I could ascertain the use of evaluative language at play. Again, a report was selected if it addressed all the rhetorical sections of a thesis, like problem statement, literature review, methodology, and analysis and discussion since these are the core components of a thesis and SGS (UCC) also expected examiners to comment on them. I was also interested in reports on MPhil theses since programmes at this level have long been running in the departments, and, thus, it was anticipated that the reports would be available.

### **Data Sources and Collection Procedure**

The data for the study were obtained from examination reports on MPhil theses (See Appendix E for a sample of thesis examiners' reports) that had been submitted to the English and History departments, and Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health. Consideration was given to 25 TERs from each of the selected departments, making the total hundred (100), to determine if a reasonable rate of engagement would emerge from the coded data (Holbrook et al., 2004a). Again, Sarantakos (1998) explains that a sample of 30 is enough to make a case; thus, choosing hundred TERs in the present study was adequate, with the possibility of achieving results in terms of the issue to be investigated. The data were solicited from these departments because they ran postgraduate programmes, and they were willing to release the data for the study (considering the confidential nature of the data).

To commence with the collection of data, I submitted an introductory letter to the departments (See Appendices A, B, C for copies of these letters)

and explained the purpose of the study to the heads of the department. The administrators of the departments were asked by these heads to make the reports available to me, after I had explained the specifications to the administrators. The received reports were photocopied, and the originals were returned to the departments. Later, the photocopied reports were tagged and put in envelopes, ready for analysis. The names of examiners and candidates that came with text (that is, thesis examiners' reports, TER) were erased so as to conceal the identities of these individuals; thereby, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

### **Analytical Framework**

The present study adopted a combined analytical approach. Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) classification of evaluative comments (ECs) of positive and negative, Halliday's Transitivity in analysing the entities as who and what is being evaluated, and Starfield et al.'s (2017) description of examiners' roles in examination reports were used. This adopted approach is explained in the succeeding paragraphs.

First, in relation to Question One on the types of evaluative comments (ECs) contained in the examiners' reports of MPhil theses in the selected departments in the University of Cape Coast, consideration is given to Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) identification of positive and negative ECs (summative). They explain that summative comments (SCs) stand-alone and concisely sum up the examiner's expectations about the thesis in whole or a section of it. These comments pinpoint the qualities or a quality of the theses, for example, 'this is a seminal thesis', 'this is a well-engaged literature review', 'the analysis is inadequate', and other general reports about the thesis

as a whole. Such statements could be positive, neutral or negative. Positive comments pinpoint strengths. On the other hand, Negative SCs pinpoint (NSC) deficiencies and failings.

Holbrook et al. (2004a) explain that the neutral summative comment occurs when an examiner balances the comments, by giving positive and negative SCs at the same time, and that an examiner attempting to communicate a neutral position in a summary way may provide guarded praise skirt around direct criticism by using an oblique turn of phrase. This strategy is what Hyland (2000) describes as a 'mitigation strategy'. So, this neutral comment by Holbrook et al. (2004a) was not adapted but such comments were discussed under the mitigation strategies used to soften criticisms (Hyland, 2000). Drawing from Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) typology of ECs discussed above, I worked with SCs which were both positive and negative.

Again, attention was given to how negative evaluations were mitigated in the study, which is still embedded in the first research question. Mostly, examiners used these strategies as a means of minimising the force of criticisms and enhancing effective teacher–student relationships (Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Hyland (2000) outlined approaches including praise and criticism duos, personal responsibilities, hedging, and questions that are used in mitigating the effects of the evaluative acts in the TERs. These adopted approaches were used to ascertain how negative evaluative remarks were attenuated in the present data.

In relation to Research Question Two, I examined entities that were assessed in the TERs of Master's theses in selected departments in UCC, and the grammatical roles that they performed in these TERs. It was expected that

the candidate and the thesis would be evaluated in a thesis (Holbrook et al., 2004a) but in terms of roles, the candidate, the examiner as well as the thesis could perform different grammatical roles (Starfield et al., 2017). The Transitivity model by Halliday was used in the analysis of the grammatical roles performed by the entities; this has been elaborated in Chapter Two, under the theoretical concept that underpins the study. The analysis followed a two-pronged approach: that is, when, an entity is selected, the various linguistic variations in which it could be realized were examined. Second, the grammatical process associated with this evaluated entity was presented.

The third research question examined what roles examiners enacted for themselves in the thesis examiners' reports (TERs) of MPhil theses in the selected departments in the University of Cape Coast. Here, I adopted the explanation of roles by Starfield et al. (2017) that roles are the many social roles we apportion to ourselves grounded on our language choices, like mentor and advisor. Holbrook et al. (2004a) outlined that examiners used the report, in five approaches: to instruct, judge, mentor, amend, and approve membership of the academy. However, they noted that the uses were associated to certain roles. These roles include mentor-colleague, assessor-arbiter, and supervisor-instructor. First, what characterises mentor-colleague is a peer-type recognition and involvement, which is the desire to help by providing crucial support that aims to encourage personal growth and independence of the candidate. Second, supervisor-instructor role involves teaching that brings the candidate to a proper standard, where outcomes can be controlled through some measures. Last, assessor-arbiter is associated with traditional examination role, detached and calculated, with attention on



correctness and incorrectness, accuracy and inaccuracy, and application of specified criteria. This role accepts the reality of in-built limitations in the examination situation (that is, that some judgements and decisions cannot be changed).

Recently, Starfield et al. (2017) have expanded these roles identified by Holbrook et al. (2004a) and described ten roles of the examiner. I adopted this framework because of its currency and the breadth of the linguistic realizations of the roles which include examiner, expert, institution, editor (proofreader), peer, supervisor, evaluator, commentator, reporter, and viva examiner. How these roles are linguistically realized are clarified below.

Linguistically, first, the Examiner role (ER) has relational clauses (identifying), imperatives with action verbs, and the candidate is presented as the 'candidate', 'the author', 'she' or 'he'. Second, Institution role (IR) involves the examiner citing verbatim with answer the criterion by the institution. Besides, the Expert role (EXR) gives disciplinary facts, corrects factual errors, defines terms, and cites prominent theorists, establishing his/her authority as an examiner, and displaying expertise in content and structure of a thesis. The Editor (Proofreader role, PR) concentrates on spelling, amalgamation, capitalization, formatting, punctuation, and grammar. In addition, the Supervisor role (SR) gives formative comments, uses low modality, lexical items like supervisor, personal pronoun I, imperatives with Mental Process, uses either/or, yes/no, and multiple choice questions and the candidate is referred to as 'you'. Peer role uses low modality as well, with third conditionality, and lexical item 'publishable'. Also, when the student is assigned the grammatical role of Token or Carrier, and with evaluative

adjectives, both predicative and attributive, then, the examiner is Evaluator (EVR). Furthermore, the Reporter (RR) uses verbal processes, quotation marks, and headings, and restates what is in the thesis by giving a synoptic overview of the thesis, sections and chapters of the report. The next point which may be reserved for examiners of doctoral theses is Viva Examiner that employs wh-questions and makes reference to viva. The last of these roles, Commentator (CR), uses the personal pronoun 'I' as Senser (Mental Process), modal adjuncts, attitude markers, and third conditional.

The framework, with the corresponding identified roles, was adopted in the analysis of data to determine the roles enacted by examiners in the reports presented to the SGS (UCC), on their assessment of MPhil theses. However, with the Editor (Proofreader) role, what Starfield et al. (2017) outline as Editor role is best categorized as Proofreader because editing is done at structural and content level as associated with the expert role, but proofreading is associated with surface level issues (Afful, 2009; Kroll, 2003; Swales & Feak, 1994). Hence, the analysis will use 'Proofreader' instead of 'Editor'.

In sum, Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) classification of evaluative comments (ECs) of positive and negative, Halliday's Transitivity in analysing the entities as who and what is being evaluated, and Starfield et al.'s (2017) description of examiners' roles in examination reports were adopted for the analysis of the data.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

In this study, a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed for the data analysis. According to Denzin (1970; 1978),

triangulation refers to the use of more than one approach to the investigation of a research question in order to enhance confidence in the findings. Bryman (2004) postulates that triangulation enhances the credibility and persuasiveness of a research account. Olsen (2004) points out that there should not be a contradiction between the two modes of analysis; rather, it should be possible to combine them to shed light on any chosen Social Sciences research topic. Steckler, McLeroy, Bird, and McCormick (1992, p. 4) also stipulate that “each method is based on different yet complimentary assumptions and each method has certain strengths that can be used to compensate for the limitedness of the other”. The issue of integrated approach should be looked at from the angle of how the combined methods can produce more effective evaluative strategies.

This combined research approach of analysis was influenced by Steckler et al. (1992). They identify four models for this integrated approach: (1) qualitative methods are used initially to help develop quantitative measures; (2) quantitative and qualitative results are used to help interpret and explain the quantitative findings; (3) quantitative results are used to help interpret predominantly qualitative findings; (4) the two approaches are used equally and in a parallel manner. The results from each approach are used to cross-validate the study findings.

The third model is adopted in this study because the present study is predominantly a qualitative study but the quantitative analysis enhanced presentation and interpretation of the findings of the study. This mixed approach was employed to ensure easier and clearer presentations of data analysis. The simple frequencies and percentages presented in tables helped to

determine the pattern of themes in the analysis of the data, catering for the levels of frequencies of the occurrences of types of evaluative comments (ECs), evaluated entities (EEs) and roles of examiners observed in the data.

In addition, the present study adopted a textual approach. In coding the documents, data were numbered (1-25) for each department. For example, the first History data was labelled “HIS 1”; next “HIS 2” till the final one, “HIS 25”. “HOT” to represent Hospitality and Tourism Management; “ENG” signified English, and “POH” meant Population and Health. Tagging the reports helped in the easy identification of the uniqueness of the many evaluative resources in the reports for analysis. The discussion was structured around the patterns that were established. Further, the established patterns were presented in reduced evolving forms. For an illustration, a labelling scheme signifying the various sub-themes under the model of ECs by Holbrook et al. (2004a) was used in analysing the data as an attempt to find an answer to the first research question. The features were grouped according to the emerging similar themes in the analysis of the data.

Again, in order to ensure that the identified themes were accurate, the coded items were left unattended to for some days and were revisited to check for consistency in the coding of the items in the data. Thereafter, the coded items were given to a senior member (lecturer) of the Department of English who is experienced in linguistic analysis to seek confirmation or otherwise of the identified items. Where there were discrepancies in the coded items, further deliberations with this member aided in the clarification of issues.

Furthermore, to conceal the identities of candidates, concepts /topics/ issues in the data that may point to identities of such candidates, such were



replaced with either X, Y or Z where necessary in the extracts. For example, X was used for 'citation practices' in an English data to prevent readers from tracing that to the candidate assessed in that report. Also, the terms 'study', 'work', and 'thesis', as well as 'candidate', 'researcher' and 'writer' were used interchangeably in the presentation of the analysis of the data for the purpose of variety. Again, the findings were supported with evidence from the data. Interpretations of these data were given, and they were related to what pertained in the literature. Also, 'critical comment' was used interchangeably with 'negative comments/evaluation'. Moreover, the data were made to stand as they were without any corrections of errors. Thus, extracts taken from the data with such errors were made to remain as they were without corrections.

Furthermore, in general, where evidence of an issue in the data was found to be many, extracts from each department were mostly presented to show that the phenomenon cut across all the selected data, not necessarily in establishing any disciplinary variation but to showcase an attempt of what the practices were with reference to evaluation. On the contrary, where there is scarcity of the extracts, the available ones were used. The discussion was done, following the arrangement of the sub-headings which have been listed above.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Creswell (2003) considers reliability and validity as important benchmarks in both qualitative and quantitative research designs. For Duff (2008), reliability and validity refer to "the consistency, dependability and trustworthiness of the research process and interpretations" (p. 108). The

following steps helped in ensuring reliability and validity of data and the analysis in the present study.

First, a triangulation of qualitative and quantitative techniques was employed for the data analysis. Steckler et al.'s (1992) third model where quantitative results are used to help interpret predominantly qualitative findings was used. Their third model is adopted in this study because the present study is predominantly a qualitative study but the quantitative analysis enhanced presentation and interpretation of the findings of the study.

Second, in ensuring trustworthiness of the present study, the research site was 'heavily' described (Geertz, 1973) to paint an accurate and clear picture of the setting of the present study, and to offer a strong foundation for comparing other related studies, as explained by Merriam (2001).

The third step to ensure the reliability of the present study was the support sought from different people at varied stages of the work. This was necessitated by the apparent complex analytical framework employed for research questions two and three. The consultation with a colleague and my supervisor helped shape the coding of items and the development of these into themes.

The fourth approach in ensuring the credibility in the present study regards the collection of the text for analysis. Given that four departments were included in the research, certain factors were persistent: the same genre (examiners' reports of MPhil theses), the same quantity (25 reports selected from each department, totalling 100) and the same time frame of submission of reports (from 2006-2016). These four measures helped to establish the reliability and validity of the present study.

### **Ethical Issues**

Another central consideration was ethics with regard to the data collection (Jackson, 2003). A voluntary participation from prospective departments was important for the success of the present study. A letter was sent to the department (English). I was, then, given an introductory letter to be taken to the heads of the four selected departments and the School of Graduate Studies (SGS, UCC) to seek formal consent for the collection of the data (see Appendix for sample of such letters). Once I attained the consents, I was committed to keeping confidentiality and anonymity in the specific use of the data.

### **Challenges in Collecting and Analysing Data**

The collection of data posed some challenges to me. First, the initial departments selected from the Faculty of Social Sciences to have been included in the study were Economics and Sociology. The heads of these departments did not give me access to the documents, explaining that it was SGS (UCC) that kept such documents. Another challenge was that SGS (UCC) accepted to assist in retrieving the data for me; however, the person charged with the responsibility to assist with retrieving the data indicated that such documents were not kept on departmental basis; thus, retrieving them would waste time, on her part though I indicated my willingness to assist in that regard. Upon consultation with my advisor then, who is now the Principal Supervisor, the new departments, namely, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health were selected to replace Sociology and Economics.

In terms of analysing the data, identifying the grammatical roles posed a very great challenge to me. I sought the assistance of one of the language lecturers at Department of English, and the concepts were explained to me. Then, I coded the data, selected some extracts and had lengthy discussions on them with the lecturer who clarified issues for me. Thereafter, I contacted him frequently for confirmation or otherwise on some grey areas.

In relation to the concepts used in the analysis, I read the adopted approaches over and over again, and read other similar articles when I was unclear about how to code certain issues. Sometimes, too, coded items were left unattended to for some days, and revisited for accurate identification of the issues, especially, with research question three, examiner roles. In addition, in some situations, I contacted my principal supervisor for clarification, especially, on how to outline the presentation of the analysis and discussion of data.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the research approach and the academic setting in the study. The procedures that were used in collecting and analysing the data have also been explained in this chapter. The Chapter further focused on the analytical framework and approaches that were used in analysing the data. The rest of the chapters (chapters 5, 6, & 7) present the analysis and discussion of the findings of the data in line with the research questions.



## CHAPTER FIVE

## TYPES OF EVALUATION IN EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**Introduction**

Having considered how the data for the study were collected in the previous chapter, I now report on the analysis and discussion of the data, thesis examiners' reports (TERs) in response to Research Question 1 which is on the types of evaluative comments (ECs) used in the TERs. The present chapter is divided into four broad sections. Section A considers the distribution of evaluative comments in these examiners' reports. Positive comments and their realization in the different aspects of the thesis are presented in Section B. Section C pays attention to the negative comments on the different aspects of the theses. Mitigation strategies in the critical comments are discussed in Section D.

**Section A: Distribution of Evaluative Comments in Examiners' Reports**

A summary of the findings in relation to evaluative comments (ECs) are presented in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: Types of Evaluative Comment in Examiners' Reports**

Types	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Positive	575	30.1
Negative	1334	69.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>1909</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data (2016)

As can be seen in Table 1 above, negative comments (NCs) were more than positive comments (PCs) with 1334 (69.9%), which is more than half of the total evaluative comments in the data. The use of more NCs than PCs contradicts the findings of Giannoni (2009), Hyland (2000), Lores-Sanz

(2012), and Mackiewicz (2007), where positive comments (PCs) were more than negative comments (NCs), or NCs were entirely missing in the data. The use of less negative comments in these previous studies could be explained that these previous studies worked with expert written genres like book reviews (BRs) and publishing information; hence, the authors of these books and the reviewers were considered to be members of the communities who had internalized the norms of the community well. Thus, minimal errors would be recorded. Again, as explained by Mackiewicz (2007), reviewers maintained face so that the few critical comments were mitigated, and more positive comments were offered. For Alcaraz-Ariza (2010), data on EW showed the use of more positive comments with less critical comments that were mitigated by reviewers so as to maintain social harmony and solidarity with the reviewees. In the present study, however, because candidates are yet to gain entry into the community, examiners tended to give more critical comments than positive comments, since the core mandate of examiners as gatekeepers allows for that scrutiny. Again, the use of more NCs confirms the findings of Starfield et al. (2015) who studied examiners' reports and found that candidates were judged in the examination of the theses, a finding not so different from the findings of Kumar and Stracke's (2011) feedback, that mostly negative, allowed candidates to close the gap between current and desired performance, and to attain the level needed to become a member of the scholarly community. Also, Holbrook et al. (2004c; 2007) also found that instructive or formative comments were devoted to close a half of every report.

## Section B: Positive Summative Comments

The thesis examiners' reports (TERs) abound in the use of summative comments (SCs), both positive and negative. Holbrook et al. (2004a) explain that SCs stand-alone and sum up, succinctly, the examiner's feelings of a specific section of the thesis or the whole thesis. Positive comments identifies strengths while Negative comments pinpoint deficiencies and failings. In this section, the positive comments are presented. The data analysis indicated that positive comments (PCs) were given on different components of the thesis, namely topics/titles, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion, conclusion, and presentation.

### *Whole Thesis*

The positive comments were made on the whole thesis. In other words, judgment was passed on the entire thesis that had been submitted for assessment. Extracts are presented below to substantiate the above claim:

Extract 1

The dissertation itself is logically structured. (ENG 14)

Extract 2

This is a sign of good scholarly work and must be encouraged. (POH 3)

Extract 3

The work is seminal. (HIS 1)

Extract 4

I find the thesis a good one meriting a strong Upper to First Class pass (79%). (HOT 8)

In Extract 1, using the adverb, 'logically', the examiner remarked that the dissertation itself has a logical structuring, employing the use of a reflexive, pronoun, 'itself' to show emphasis in that direction. Extract 4 also

expresses the worth of the thesis; the examiner does not only describe the thesis as ‘good’, an attributive adjective, but also goes further to specify how good the thesis is deserving an ‘Upper to first Class pass of 79%’. This is, indeed, a very positive comment that pinpoints the quality of the thesis. The examiner gives the class and even adds the percentage, probably, to express his/her conviction and showcase to audience/readers what s/he means by indicating that the thesis is good. In all these extracts, the examiners employed adjectives (‘good’, ‘scholarly’, ‘seminal’, ‘strong’), adjectival phrase (‘logically structured’), and verb (‘meriting’) which have been highlighted, through underlining, in the extracts above (3-6). The reference to logical structuring confirms the assertion by Johns (1997) that the structure of a text is a central issue in text processing and production. Again, Johnston (1997) found that examiners appreciate well-written, interesting and logically presented arguments. Also, the assertion of the examiner on the good nature of the thesis confirms what Atkinson and Curtis (1998, p. 17) identify that academic writing at an advanced level is, therefore, more than “just getting ideas down on paper” and being sure that they are in “good English” but being able to organize information well for effective communication of ideas. Expressed differently by Dong (1998, p. 369), the writing challenge is not only demonstrating knowledge related to the research but also using that knowledge to “argue logically and coherently the meaning of the research results.”

### ***Topic/Title***

Examiners commented positively on the topics/titles of the theses. Unfortunately, although it is the first point of contact for the entire work itself,



-serving as a summary matter (Jalilifar, 2010), the topic/title of the thesis did not always receive mentioning, much less positive comments:

Extract 5

It addresses a very interesting topic. (HOT 5)

Extract 6

This is a worthwhile study of an interesting topic. (ENG 20)

In Extract 5, there is a recognition that the topic/title investigated is interesting but in Extract 6, this recognition comes with a reference to the whole study that is ‘the worthwhile study has an interesting topic’, where the examiner has employed an adjective, ‘worthwhile’ as a pre-modifier and a prepositional phrase, ‘of an interesting topic’ as a post-modifier to express the nature of the ‘study’. It is quite worrying that the topics which sum up what the entire theses are about received very few positive comments, confirming the findings of Boa and Leikin (2013) that examiners commented relatively small on the topic.

The topic is mostly embedded in the title, which Afful (2017b) describes as ‘front’ rhetorical device. For Haggan (2004), through titles, writers provide the first point of contact for readers, determining whether texts have to be read or not. Afful (2017b) adds that titles catch the attention of readers before the content of the text is actually read. Titles create distinctiveness for such a text, and appeal to readers or otherwise (Afful, 2005b; Hartley, 2005; 2007).

Interestingly, the specification of School of Graduate Studies (SGS), UCC, to examiners in the assessment of theses excludes comments on the topic/title; thus, probably, warranting their avoidance of comments on it. Besides, perhaps, examiners felt that providing a good topic/title for the work

is natural, ordinary, ‘given’ and that without commenting on its appropriateness, nothing will be lost.

### *Abstract*

The abstract of the thesis also attracted positive evaluative comments.

It is within the abstract that important facets of the thesis are highlighted. Bhatia (1993), citing ANSI’s (1979, p.1) definition of abstract, states that it is “an abbreviated, accurate representation of the contents of a document”, and he proposes a four-move structure: (1) introducing purpose, (2) describing methodology, (3) summarizing results, and (4) presenting conclusions (IMRC structure). It is noted that the abstract contains key issues of the work like the purpose of the study, research questions, theories, methodology, findings and implications of the study (Samraj, 2005). Examiners remarked on the abstracts in varied ways, as shown below:

Extract 7

The abstract clearly states the substance of the thesis. (ENG 11)

Extract 8

The abstract is satisfactory attempt in setting out clearly what was intended in the investigation and summary of the observations and conclusions reached. (ENG 23)

Extract 9

The abstract states very succinctly the purpose and the conclusions of the thesis. (POH 9)

Extract 10

The abstract is an adequate statement of the thesis. (HOT 11)

As can be seen from Extracts 7-10, the examiners find something worthwhile about the abstract, a key component of the thesis, using the attributive adjectives ‘satisfactory’ (Extract 8) and ‘adequate’ (Extract 10) as well as

adverbs ‘clearly’ and ‘very succinctly’ in Extracts 7 and 9 respectively. The examiners point out that the substance of the theses is clearly captured in the abstract. Here, the abstract has a clear purpose, methodology, conclusions and findings and probably recommendations; hence, warranting a positive comment that the abstract carries the ‘substance of the thesis’. A similar assertion is found in Extract 10, where the examiner is of the view that the abstract amply reports on what the thesis is about. Clearly, the examiner expected a good abstract to comprise the objectives, or problem plus the findings and conclusions that were drawn from the findings of the study. This finding confirms the assertions of Myers (1990) and Feng (2006). Myers (1990, p. 42) explains that the abstract gives reviewers “a good first impression, of tantalizing them into further reading, and of persuading them”. For Feng (2006, p. 2), the abstract is “more than a statement of intent, or a summary of the main text; rather, it is like goods on display, showing the buyers the sparkling points and encouraging them to make positive decisions.”

The abstract commented on by examiners can be seen to be performing the communicative function of promoting the researcher and the research on the one hand, and displaying professional credibility on the other, as reported by Bazerman (1994) and Bhatia (2004), who classify abstracts as part of the genre colony of academic introductions. Again, extracts 7-10 above suggest that the abstracts contain elements of the Introduction-Method-Results-Discussion (IMRC) structure of abstracts, as found in other studies like Lores (2004) and Samraj (2005). As explained by Ahmad and Mehrjooseresht (2012), the abstract cannot be divorced from the thesis since researchers use it

to situate their work in the academic community (AC); hence, the comments from the examiners.

The evidence provided on the nature of the abstracts in the theses reveals that while some examiners are interested in the writing process, others are preoccupied with the understanding and using of concepts which will give the final product; that is, how well the abstract has been written in addition to how well the candidate demonstrates an understanding of what it means to produce a good abstract. The gatekeepers are seen to be at work, pinpointing the good qualities or worth of that piece. This expression of judgment on the writing process and understanding of concept is in line with what Nicol (2009a) notes: some (judgement/feedback) centres on the writing process, but others concern themselves with understanding and using concepts, and this is done by an agent, the examiner (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding (Evans, 2013).

### ***Introduction***

Another aspect of the thesis that elicited positive comments was the Introduction. The Introduction is key to setting out the research questions in a study (Hyland 2002b). Afful (2005a) articulates that, structurally, the introduction chapter is recognised as the first out of a number of chapters. Again, the introduction performs the function of pre-empting readers about the body of the text. The introduction includes background to the study, statement of the problem, and scope of the study.

Much attention was not given to the introduction of the thesis, though, in its totality. The examiners did not positively comment much on the introduction of the thesis. Maybe, it was considered that since the whole of



chapter one of the thesis is deemed to be the introduction (though it has other sections like introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, and scope of the study), it will be inexpedient to take the sections independently and assess them; probably, placing them together and evaluating them presented a better option. So, in the data, some of these sections of chapter one were not autonomously appraised.

On the other hand, some examiners might have considered background of the study as giving introductory information that prepares the reader for the discussion of the actual issues in the thesis later. Notwithstanding this, some examiners remarked positively on the introduction either as Chapter One or part of chapter one:

Extract 11

Candidates' introduction of the study provides a fitting contextualization for understanding the entire work. (ENG 13)

Extract 12

The candidate has provided a very good background to the study raising key issues in connection with tourism. (HOT 4)

Extracts 11 and 12 illustrate the positive comments received on the introductions of the theses. In Extract 11, the introduction given by the candidate is deemed by the examiner to be 'a fitting contextualization for understanding the entire work'. The examiner, by employing the adjective 'fitting', portrays adequately what the introduction is. An introduction should provide a context for the rest of the sections of the thesis. By achieving this, the proper grounding of the other chapters or sections of the thesis is guaranteed. Lawe-Davies (1998) argues that the 'introduction' is a text opener with cataphoric signification, giving information and directing forward to its

complete development in the body. Consequently, with Extract 12, the examiner perceives that ‘the candidate has provided a very good background to the study’ by raising key issues which connect with Tourism. In a sense, the background information adequately links key issues in the work to the bigger concept of Tourism, which is probably what the whole work is about. This confirms Afful’s (2005a) view that the introduction places readers in a state of anticipation, preparing readers to reunite this background information with what is provided in the body of the text and presenting readers with their first actual contact with a text and, consequently, foremost impressions of what is to follow.

Other aspects of the Introduction or Chapter One including statement of the problem and research objectives/questions are considered next. Whereas the statement of the problem presents the underlying niche which a present study may want to occupy, research questions do state the specific issues that are to be investigated, in the form of questions (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Evidence of the positive remarks on the statement of the problem is presented below:

Extract 13

The candidate was lucid in his problem statement. (HIS 14)

Extract 14

The research problem was defined well to a large extent. (POH 22)

Extract 15

The problem to be investigated has been clearly and carefully spelt out. (ENG 3)

In Extracts 14 and 15, the problem statement is identified to be well defined to a great level; it is judiciously captured. The examiner, in Extract 13, uses a predicative adjective ‘lucid’ to sum up his/her estimation of the statement of

the problem given by the candidate. There is a demonstration of an evaluative summary of what the candidate has learnt, or produced and the examiner's judgment of that, which is summative assessment (Brown, 2004; Chappuis & Chappuis, 2008; Ketabi & Ketabi, 2014). In Extract 15, there is a positive evaluative comment of the statement of the problem through the use of adverbs of manner, 'clearly' and 'carefully'. The ability of the candidate to express the statement of the problem as expected confirms Lunenburge and Irby (2008) and Calmorin and Calmorin's (2007) assertion that the statement of the problem for the thesis must be succinct and clear. For Bui (2014), the establishment of the statement of the problem is the actual part of writing Chapter One, Introduction. Thus, statement of the problem is an essential section of the thesis as it allows the writer to justify to the reader why it is necessary for the topic to be studied (Bui, 2014).

Examiners also expressed satisfaction with the research questions in the data. To avoid occupying too much space in the analysis, research hypotheses and research objectives were combined with the research questions in ECs in that whereas, in general, the research objectives are cast in declarative sentences, the same issues are often presented in question forms for the research questions. Ardale (1992) points out that research objectives are statements of purpose for which a research is conducted. Thus, research objectives drive the investigation in the research process. Examples of comments from the data analysed are presented below:

Extract 16

These questions were sufficiently focused to be investigated. (HIS 2)

Extract 17

The research objectives are reasonably well stated and dealt with satisfactorily in the work. (HIS 7)

Extract 18

The hypotheses were satisfactorily tested. (POH 19)

Extract 19

The objectives of the study were specific and achieved at the end of the study. (POH 20)

In Extracts 16-19, examiners express their satisfaction with the research questions/objectives/hypotheses. So, in Extract 16, the examiner, using an adverb, 'positively', observes that the questions were 'sufficiently focused'. In Extracts 17 and 19, the objectives of the study were 'reasonably well stated' and 'specific', respectively. In addition, these questions in the thesis were handled adequately in the study. In Extract 17 alone, the examiner clarifies his/her value of the research questions through the use of multiple adverbs: 'reasonably', 'well', and 'satisfactorily'. There is also evidence in Extract 18 that the hypotheses used in the thesis were judged favourably, as 'satisfactorily tested'. Calmorin and Calmorin (2007) explain that the research objectives are to be stated specifically in simple language for ease of measuring the instruments in the research process, and this the candidate has done, warranting that positive remark from the examiner.

### ***Literature Review***

A major component of the thesis that attracted examiners is the literature review (LR) section; this consists of the theoretical framework, key concepts, and relevant empirical studies. The LR is an important part of research writing since it identifies, synthesises, analyzes and evaluates previous studies which deal with a topic and identify 'the gap' in the literature



that the research aims to ‘fill’ (Akindele, 1995; 2008; Lynch, 2014; Twumasi, 2012). Shaw and Green (2002) hold that the methodical acquisition and understanding of the extensive body of knowledge is mostly an established outcome of a thesis. The LR is a critical indicator of the quality of the thesis, as it should demonstrate mastery of knowledge of the field; relationship between past studies and the present study; sense of criticality/voice; argumentation; gap in the existing literature, and varied referencing skills (Hart, 1998). According to Holbrook et al. (2004b), examiners determine the quality of a thesis as a whole using the literature review as a ‘litmus test’. A pass requires coverage and a working understanding of the literature. The data abound in positive comments on the LR. Here are some extracts to substantiate this claim:

Extract 20

The candidate’s knowledge of pertinent literature on the area studied is satisfactory. (HIS 4)

Extract 21

The researcher demonstrated extensive knowledge on the relevant literature on the research topic. Most of the references cited were current and relevant to the study. (POH 9)

Extract 22

The candidate demonstrates a good acquaintance with the literature in the field and quotes extensively from authors of seminal works. (ENG 17)

Extract 23

The framework was reviewed critically by the researcher by assessing the strength and weaknesses of the framework. The framework sufficiently guided the study. (HOT 15)

From the above extracts (20-23), we find confirmation of the propitious statement on the LR of the theses examined. Here, knowledge of the candidate

with reference to the LR was expressed adjectivally as ‘exceptional’, ‘satisfactory’ and ‘good’. It may mean that what the LR is, that is, it being an examination of scholarly articles, books and other sources (dissertations, conference proceedings) carried out on a particular topic or relevant to a particular issue, area of research, or theory (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007) has been a success. Afful (2020) identified that examiners comment at most on the LR in the examiners’ reports. Nimulola (2018) also found examiners’ comments on application and accuracy of literature review to be appropriate.

Akindele (1995) avers that the LR is designed to identify related research, to set the current research project within a conceptual and theoretical context. As a result, an effective LR should describe, analyze, and synthesize material from a range of sources. Hence, the examiner who is a gatekeeper examines this aspect of the thesis and concludes that the LR has achieved what it is supposed to do. In Extract 22, the examiner comments on the organization of the whole section in addition to the nature of the sources/materials included in the LR; that is, the candidate has ‘a good acquaintance’ with the literature in the area and quotes ‘extensively’ from ‘authors of seminal works’. In a sense, the LR is not merely any set of other materials but those that are important and influential in nature, affirming Holbrook et al.’s (2004a; 2007) finding that examiners restrict their recognition of a good literature review to appropriate coverage in terms of depth, breadth, recency, and adequacy. Also, examiners identified working understanding, critical appraisal of the body of literature, connection of the literature to findings, and disciplinary perspective as key indicators of good performance in a candidate’s use of the literature (Holbrook

et al., 2007) and the candidate achieves this in Extract 23 by critically reviewing literature. Holbrook et al. (2004a) also found that examiners comment on students' understanding and application of the literature, including contribution to theory, and that examiners favours a thesis that engaged the literature and the findings (Golding et al., 2014).

### ***Methodology***

Hofstee (2006, p. 107) asserts that “a result can only be accepted, rejected, checked, replicated or even understood in the context of how you got there”— that is, the methodology. In other words, the methodology of a thesis offers the ways in which a study was carried out, outlining the design, setting, data, sample, and analytical framework. If there ought to be a replication of the study, the method of the study will tell. Find below approval of the methodology by some examiners:

Extract 24

Analytical framework adopted for the study is worthwhile. (ENG 23)

Extract 25

The research design is well explained. (HOT 14)

Extract 26

The data on which he bases his conclusions are adequate. (POH 18)

Extract 27

The candidates' methodology is in line with historical research.

He relied on primary and secondary sources. (HIS 6)

We find instances of positive comments on the methodology of the thesis, as shown in Extracts 24-27. These extracts illustrate that the examiners are satisfied with what the candidates have done or exhibited. For example, the examiner, in Extract 27, acknowledges that ‘the candidate’s methodology is in line with historical research: He relied on primary and secondary sources’.

Specific aspects of the methodology are favourably judged by the examiners, thereby conveying approval of what has been done. So, in Extract 25, the research design is also favourably commented on, which is evident in the use of ‘well explained’, an adverbial phrase. The predicative adjective ‘worthwhile’ in Extract 24 and ‘adequate’ in Extract 26 are used to show positive appraisal, realizing the purpose of research methods which help researchers obtain valid and reliable outcomes (Nimehchisalem, 2018). These positive remarks by the examiners suggest that the methods are deemed worthwhile for the study and that acceptance of the findings of the study is not a problem.

Examiners favoured a thesis with a categorical research design; experienced ones are opened to different research methods (Mullins & Kiley, 2002). Nimulola (2018) also found appropriate use of design in approach/methodology. Contrary to the findings of the present study, Afful (2020) and Holbrook at al. (2004a) found that examiners commented, not much, on the research approach and its relevance. It must further be mentioned that although the present study does not seek to establish any disciplinary, the analysis revealed that there is discipline-specific nature of presentation of methodology in thesis and a possible discipline-specific nature of examiner comments, as shown below in History:

Extract 28

The research was well designed. He used archival data as well as information from secondary and oral sources. He demonstrates that he understood what he did. He managed to interview people from the different areas involved for the purposes of authentication and balance. (HIS 2)



From Extract 28 above, there is evidence of a combined approach in the collection of data, primary and secondary, for that study. It runs through almost all the History data where qualitative History inquiry was employed by almost all the candidates, without any quantitative approach. Examiners did not request for any statistical analysis. Dunne, Pettigrew, and Robinson (2016) note that historical inquiry starts with choosing a period or theme, focusing on a specific event, presenting an overview of the topic, asking historical questions, locating, analysing historical sources to establish historical evidence. This, the candidates in History, followed to establish their discipline-specific demands. This candidate adheres to Lea and Street's (2006) view that academic literacies are socially situated within disciplines as well as within specific education settings (e.g. institutions, departments) and are subjected to instructors' expectations.

### *Analysis and Discussion*

Analysis and Discussion also caught the attention of thesis examiners. Samraj (2005) identified that the discussion section of the thesis contains the background, report, commentary, interpretation, comparison with other research, explanation, evaluation, summary, evaluation of the results/findings as well as limitations, significance/advantage of the study, evaluation of the methods, evaluation of the field, deductions from the results, research deductions and applied deductions.

Against the background of what is normally expected in the analysis and discussion section of a thesis, below are some positive comments (PCs) on the discussion section of some theses:

Extract 29

Generally, the flow of discussion was logical.

(HIS 9)

Extract 30

The analysis and interpretation have been well done; it is extremely impressive. (POH 10)

Extract 31

The analytical arguments are quite sound, justifiable, objective and adequate in terms of the problem that has been investigated. (ENG 13)

Extract 32

The findings are largely in sync with the objectives and the literature is well suited to the topic. (HOT 18)

Generally, the comments above (29-30) cover the issues of logic and soundness in the analysis. The examiner expresses satisfaction with the candidate's reasoning and concludes that it is logical and the analysis of the data is critical (Extract 30). Again, in this same extract (30), the examiner employs adjectives to provide a more detailed description of what he/she feels about the analysis: 'sound', 'justifiable', 'objective', and 'adequate'. A similar case is realized in Extract 32, where the examiner finds the discussion to be logical. These comments on soundness— on logic and soundness— are in line with Paltridge and Starfield's (2007) position that the candidate should be able to interpret results and give assertions about the meaning and relevance of findings. Again, they noted that a good candidate should compare the present findings and previous studies so as to validate the methods used in the work, bringing to the fore their strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, data did not reveal any positive comment on the applicability of this assertion. That is, the examiner comments did not show any comment on candidate's ability to link findings of present studies to previous studies. Perhaps, the examiners assumed it was 'given' for candidates to establish that link. However, a positive comment on candidate's ability to link findings with objectives was found (Extract 32).

What the candidates have done with the analysis and discussion section is also in line with Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) observation that reporting of results must be clear and adequate. Holliday (2007) explicates that the discussion should be well structured, using themes and headings to convey the finding from the data analysis and how the data provide evidence for what has been done. Lynch (2014) adds that the discussion should help relate data in the discussion to the research literature by taking care of the degree of certainty in expressing the reasons for the findings.

### ***Conclusion***

The penultimate section of the thesis to be discussed in relation to the use of positive comments (PCs) in the data is the conclusion chapter of the thesis, which encompasses summary of findings, implications of the study, and recommendations for further study. Hewings (1993) and Thompson (2005) observe that typically the conclusion recapitulates the purpose and research questions; presents findings, implications, and recommendations for future research. Paltridge and Starfield (2007) assert that it is in the concluding section of the work that the summary of the whole study is presented. Evans and Gruba (2002) also note that conclusions are derived from the arguments in the Discussion section. Also, this chapter may be either presented alone or added to the discussion section.

In the analysis of the data in the present study, the conclusion was observed to be separated from the Discussion section. Evans and Gruba (2002) further state that the conclusion must not contain any additional discussions. The conclusion should respond to the aims that were stated in the first chapter. In terms of textual space, often, a conclusion chapter is only a few pages long,

as opposed to the discussion chapter which is very long and more extensive in its elaboration and reference to prior research as noted by Paltridge and Starfield (2007). Hess (2004) indicates that drawing of conclusions should be supported by data. Illustrations of the use of positive comments (PCs) on the concluding chapter are presented below:

Extract 33

Undoubtedly, the candidate makes valid conclusions which are borne out of fact. (HIS 10)

Extract 34

Adequate recommendations were offered by the researcher. (POH 4)

Extract 35

The recommendations were generally good. (HOT 9)

Extract 36

The arguments (conclusion) are well articulated and logically linked. (ENG 18)

The extracts (33-36) variously present either the satisfaction of the examiners in relation to this section of the thesis or the good qualities that can be identified with this section of the work. In Extract 36, the examiner finds merit in what the candidate has done, observing that valid conclusions which are based on facts have been outlined by the candidate. Some examiners passed comments on both conclusions and the recommendations as shown in the examples below:

Extract 37

Reasonable conclusions have been drawn with recommendations that are very relevant with policy implications which are practical for implementation. (HOT 17)

Extract 38

The recommendations and conclusions are well substantiated and justifiable and logical. (POH 25)



## Extract 39

I find the conclusion and recommendations validly deduced from the research findings. (ENG 7)

Again, these examiners attempt to save space, and prefer to write in a terse language. In some of the reports, the practice was for examiners to tick from provided options and even if these examiners wanted to write, the space provided was limited; hence, the style of combining these sections in single sentences made up of many clauses. For example, in Extract 37, the conclusion is deemed 'reasonable' and the recommendations 'very relevant' in addition to the policy implications which are 'practical' for implementation, confirming the assertion by Holliday (2007), the recommendation which is a necessary component of the final chapter in the conclusion should point to further research or action policy change. Similarly, in Extract 38, both recommendations and conclusions are noted to be 'well substantiated', 'justifiable', and 'logical'. The examiner assesses the qualities of the conclusion chapter, using adjectives such as 'justifiable' (38) and adverbs such as, 'validly' (39). In sum, the concluding chapter is supposed to summarize the whole study (Hewings, 1993; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007), and to be derived from the issues in the discussion section (Evans & Gruba, 2002).

***Presentation***

The last of the issues to be discussed under positive comments is the presentation of the thesis. Inclusive in this are the references, lay out, figures and tables, heading and subheading, language and formatting, as observed in the analysis of the data. Examiners assess the suitability or otherwise of the quality of presentation of the thesis. Examiners convey a sense of pleasure,

relief or surprise if they encounter a well-presented thesis (Johnston, 1997).

Some of the positive comments are shown below:

Extract 40

Additionally, the write up was not a mere narrative, but was also analytical, descriptive, thematic and chronological, thus making the work exceptional (under quality of presentation). (HIS 2)

Extract 41

The researcher writes very well. (HOT 13)

Extract 42

The thesis is clearly presented by the candidate and is consistent with academic format. I believe it is consistent with what is provided by the Department and Graduate School (quality of Presentation) (POH 9)

Extract 43

The thesis is cohesive and coherent, making it reader-friendly. (ENG 4)

In Extract 40, the examiner uses multiple adjectives to evaluate the work: ‘analytical’, ‘descriptive’, ‘thematic’ and ‘chronological’. The examiner sums up how s/he feels about the presentation of the thesis, and concludes that the candidate writes ‘very well’ (41). Perhaps, this evaluation of writing ‘very well’ relates to skills in the development of paragraphs, and the use of good grammar at the word and sentence levels, which aid in comprehension of the text (Hinkel, 2004; Kroll, 2003; Swales & Feak, 1994; 2012).

Besides, if a reader is assisted through the use of summaries, logical sequencing, signposts and the removal of excessive repetition, as maintained by Johnston (1997), it makes a researcher a good writer. Also, on a broader view, these extracts (40-43) confirm what Holbrook et al. (2004a) identified in their study of examiners’ reports that examiners regard thesis as ‘high’ in quality as, for example, showing significance of the research topic, use of

literature, the design of the study, writing of the thesis, and logicity and clarity of the reporting and discussion of findings, among other things. Clarity and logicity are essential in writing, as indicated by Silva and Matsuda (2001) and Afful (2009), and these the examiners found worth commenting on.

A good reference list takes care of the currency of information given, the sequencing of sources in the thesis; that is, the organizing principle for the sources, and the nature of sources included in the work, either as journals, peer reviewed articles or books which may be classic in that discipline etc. (Akindele, 2008; Case & Higgans, 2000; Holbrook et al., 2004a; Mullins & Kiley, 2002). Again, in Extracts 44 and 45, we are presented with positive summary feedback on the quality of the references found in the theses:

Extract 44

As well, the referencing of the dissertation is good, given the reference sections of recent theses/dissertations I have recently assessed and read. (ENG 14)

Extract 45

The references of the work are well placed in the work and their details given in the footnotes. (HIS 13)

Extract 46

References have also been very well arranged. (POH 21)

Extract 47

Most references were well cited in text and bibliography. (HOT 18)

In Extract 44, the examiner captures that the referencing is good and even compares that with previous ones that have been assessed recently. The examiner judges the thesis in terms of the quality of presentation, indicating that the references are 'well placed in the work' and adds that explanations are found in the footnotes (45). It can be deduced from the above statement that it

is not always enough to get all the current, classic materials in an area of study, and use them in a work, but also their appropriateness in terms of the time of their introduction in the work counts a lot.

Furthermore, the quality of presentation of the thesis is also substantiated through comments made on the use of language in the thesis.

Here are some positive comments on language use in some theses:

Extract 48

The dissertation is well written in good grammatical English and has no major faults. (HIS 18)

Extract 49

The language is precise, clear, fluid and readily understood. (ENG 2)

Extract 50

The candidate demonstrates a reasonably high command of the English language. (ENG 4)

Extract 51

I am impressed with the level of language use. The candidate has used language which is appropriate for academic research work. (POH 12)

The examiner, in Extract 48, uses the adverb, ‘well’ and the adjective, ‘good’ to sum up his/her evaluation of the language used in the dissertation, adding that the dissertation has ‘no major faults’, a noun phrase. In Extract 49, there is evidence of positive comments through the use of these adjectives (‘precise’, ‘clear’, ‘fluid’) and ‘readily’ as an adverb which modifies the verb ‘understood’. An examiner observes the use of noun phrase ‘good grammatical English’ and ‘no major faults’ in the thesis. Good grammar ensures fluid reading which aids comprehension of concepts in the thesis, and it is important in communicating knowledge to audience. In the view of Dunleavy (2003), thesis writers must manage reader expectations and always write with the reader in mind. Good grammar, as observed by Johnston (1997)



and Golding et al. (2014), contributes to the coherence in a thesis as the grammar gives meaning to sentences and sentences are used in development of concepts.

The nature of typing found in a thesis also attracts comments from the examiners. Some examiners exhibit their approval of the nature of the typing in the work:

Extract 52

The typing is good and the proofreading is scrupulous. (ENG 6)

Extract 53

The typing has been neatly done. (POH 4)

Extract 54

Typing is competent and proof reading satisfactory. (HOT 7)

Extract 55

The typing has been done well. (HIS 11)

In Extracts 52 and 54, examiners describe the typing as ‘good’ and ‘competent’, and proofreading is described as ‘scrupulous’ (52) and ‘satisfactory’ (54). In Extract 53, the examiner comments that the typing has been done ‘neatly’. These comments extol the value of clarity. Editing and proofreading make writing acceptable to a discourse community, and demand careful and close reading (Afful, 2009; Hamp-Lyons, 1991). Editing, generally, deals with structure and content; proofreading considers surface issues like punctuation and spelling.

The last items concerning presentation relate to the layout, use of visuals and chapterization in a thesis. Some examiners gave positive feedback, summarizing their approval of the use of these features in the thesis, as shown in the extracts below:

Extract 56

The layout of the thesis is acceptable. (HOT 18)

Extract 57

The presentation is neat and well-structured. (ENG 20)

Extract 58

Effective use of visuals in presenting quantitative data (POH 21)

Extract 59

I found the chapters to be tight and concise. (HIS 24)

The examiner comments on the ‘acceptable’ way in which the layout has been done; this may refer to the thesis’ pagination, font size and type, spacing and all the other features that make a good write-up, physically and visually acceptable (56). Similarly, in Extract 57, the examiner comments that the presentation of the work is ‘neat’ and ‘well-structured’. In another Extract (58), the visuals like tables, diagrams, and graphs are deemed ‘effective’. Last, in Extract 59, the chapter used in the thesis is found to be apt, compact and straight forward, which is captured in the predicative adjective ‘tight’ and ‘concise’. The above comments (Extracts 56-59) show that the examiners are contented with the quality of presentation of the work; hence, they variously endorse these features, using noun phrases, adjectives, and adverbs. These presentation features aid understanding, as observed by Johnston (1997) who admit that readers require assistance to understand the work, and that they feel distracted and irritated by poorly presented work. Golding et al. (2014) mention that candidates may consider presentation errors are insignificant, as only editorial, since it is just the research that matters. However, doubts about the quality of research are raised if there are numerous spelling or typographical errors.

Overall, this section has examined the use of positive comments (PCs) in thesis reports. The analysis and discussion of the data indicate that these evaluative comments (ECs) cover almost every aspect of a thesis which are in line with SGS's (UCC) requirement. From the above, it is noticed that positive comments are expressed on various components of the thesis; that is, judgment is passed on the quality of the thesis in whole, some aspects of the thesis, and the candidate, in particular. These conclusively give credit to the candidate in displaying specific abilities.

### **Section C: Negative Summative Comments**

This section concentrates on negative comments in the examiners' reports (TERs). These negative comments highlight deficiencies or failings found in the theses that were examined. The examiners summarized how they felt about thesis or the candidate. In other words, examiners judged the worth of the theses, considering them as finished products, and not as works in progress that need some modifications or suggestions. Negative summative comments were found on the whole thesis and across almost all sections of the assessed theses, such as the title/topic, abstract, introduction, research objectives/hypotheses/questions, literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion, conclusion, and presentation.

#### **Whole Thesis**

To begin with, only two negative comments were found on the whole thesis, as presented below:

Extract 60

The thesis is therefore just ordinary. (POH 9)

Extract 61

The thesis is far from ready.

(HOT 9)

In Extract 60, the examiner concludes that the thesis is ‘just ordinary’, employing an adverb and adjective respectively, disconfirming the finding of Lovat et al. (2008) that examiners are more keen to give formative feedback than they are to condemn the insufficiencies of a thesis, that is, examiners regard a thesis as a work-in-progress and offer advice and instructions irrespective of the thesis’ quality. The use of ‘just ordinary’ is necessitated by the candidate’s inability to test any hypothesis and apply statistics to the study. There concludes that “the thesis is therefore just ordinary.” In Extract 61, the examiner describes the thesis as being ‘far from ready’. Perhaps, the development of concepts, the organization of ideas and the general presentation of the thesis are inadequate. Calmorin and Calmorin (2007) explain that a research should be innovative in that though replicability in conducting research is allowed, a research should be novel, original and unique to attract the attention of researchers and readers and contribute to previous studies. It could also be said that the examiner was too harsh with the comment since a thesis benefits from the supervision of another member of the research community who is socialized in the community to take up such duties, and may be a gatekeeper in that direction. Albertyn, Kapp, and Frick (2007) argue that such a comment may have an effect on the labour of both the student and supervisors that often spans two to four years of intensive and expansive work. Again, not every aspect of the thesis may be well accepted by an examiner but to lump everything together and conclude that a thesis is ‘just ordinary’ may be a terrible indictment on the supervisor who supervised such



a work in the sense that, as Nimehchisalem (2018) explains, research involves a systematic way of determining a problem and collecting and analysing relevant data to solve the problem. The comment by this examiner (60) suggests none of the issues outlined by Nimehchisalem (2018) was found. The next section of the thesis to be discussed is the title/topic, which receives negative summative comments (NSCs).

### ***Title/Topic***

Dunleavy (2003, p. 200) asserts a “title should introduce the central analytic concepts used or the major argument/themes developed”. In other words, the title of the thesis must capture the essential thoughts of the work. The analysis of the data in the present study indicated that some examiners were not satisfied with the titles of either the sections of the work or the entire thesis. Below are extracts from the data which capture examiners’ negative comments:

Extract 62

Title of chapter Five X looks rather odd. (HOT 17)

Extract

The title should be specific on Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast (HOT 4)

Extract 64

The title to the thesis lacks direction. (POH 23)

Extract 65

The current title is too short enough to be accommodated. (HIS 17)

The data (Extracts 62-65) above have only one instance of negative comment that touches on a specific aspect of the thesis, which is a chapter of the whole thesis (Extract 62). Here, it is revealed that the title of a chapter looks very ‘odd’. Probably, the examiner had expected that sequencing of information would follow a certain style as the titles of other chapters might have been.

For instance, all the titles of the chapter should be questions, statements, phrases or clauses or each title of the chapter should capture the essence of that chapter. Besides, the candidate might have adopted a different chapter heading at variance with SGS, (UCC) requirements for a traditional five-chapter thesis for MPhil thesis. Here, the candidate is seen deviating from what Soler (2011, p. 1) explains “Titles are succinct descriptive labels of texts and are meant to fulfil different purposes, such as to individualize a publication, summarize its content and appeal to its audience, among others”. Besides, Extract 65 suggests the examiner’s dissatisfaction with the title length. The examiner had expected a longer title, asserting that the thesis title ‘lacks direction’ (Extract 64), meaning that the focus of the thesis, as seen in the title, is indeterminate, contrasting Swales and Feak’s (1994) edict that a title should indicate the scope of the research, introduce the topic of the research, and be self- explanatory. Perhaps, the title in question does not give enough insight as to what is to be encountered in the thesis. As observed by Goodman, Thacker and Siegel (2001), a good title should help readers to familiarize themselves with issues in the research, and show the kind of study yet to be read.

Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) found differences in title length, attributing this to individual preferences. Afful (2017b) established that the average title length of conference proceedings (CPs) in Applied Linguistics was 10.4 words. Also, the dominant syntactic structure was the noun phrase. Lexical items such as domain-specific words, research-related words, verbal expressions and country/local references were used in titles that he studied. If titles are constrained by space, as espoused by Afful (2017b) and other

titlelogists; then, there is the need for information which carries the substance of the text to be captured in titles. So, if a title falls short of these, then, the examiners may be justified, in passing such negative comments as encountered in Extracts 62-65. Next to be discussed under the negative summative comments (NSCs) is the Abstract.

### ***Abstract***

As indicated earlier, an abstract provides a brief overview of the work, summarizes essential elements such as introduction, statement of the problem, research questions, theories that underpin the study, methodology and key findings (Samraj, 2005). Below are NSCs on the abstracts in the data:

Extract 66

The abstract does not read like an abstract. (HIS 19)

Extract 67

The result component of the abstract is very scant(sic) (HOT 20)

Extract 68

At the moment the abstract is dominated by recommendations.(POH 7)

Extract 69

The candidate is advised to re-work her key findings and implications in the abstract to make the abstract more informative. (ENG 17)

The extracts (66-68) variously indicate the examiner's dissatisfaction with how the abstracts were presented. Extract 66 indicates the candidate's writing ability. The abstract possibly lacks the features of a good abstract as noted by Samraj (2005), or perchance, it is not presented in a summarized form, faithfully reflecting the main substance of the actual work. Consequently, it is not surprising that in Extract 67, it is stated, 'The result component of the abstract is very scant(sic)', whereas in another vein, it is stated, '...the abstract is dominated by recommendations' (Extract 68). It can be seen that a fair

representation in terms of textual space of the components of the abstract is needed so that other key aspects can be captured in the abstract. As explained by Dunleavy (2003), the abstract is key in presenting the main argument to readers; it is a key part-genre of a thesis that publicizes its content to the outside world (Holtz, 2011). Therefore, there is the need for examiners to critique it as a part-genre in thesis writing (Hyland, 2004b; Swales & Feak, 2009). The abstract, as a part-genre or 'special narrow genre' (Jordan, 1991, p.1), is within the wider genre description, acting to motivate readers to read a text in front of them and to persuade readers that the writers can be trusted to adequately discuss such issues/topic within the scientific academic community (Hyland, 2004b; Swales, 1990). Thus, novices must demonstrate awareness of this part-genre using extensive noun compounding, complex nominalizations, impersonality, passive voice, third person pronoun, and present tense (Lores, 2004).

### ***Introduction***

The Introduction of the thesis was not left out in the negative summative comments (NSCs) given by examiners. The introduction includes the background information to the whole of that chapter, the statement of the problem, research questions, scope of study, significance of the study as well as chapter synopsis. However, not all these features were commented on in the examiners' reports analysed. Those included in the reports were the introduction (background to the study), statement of the problem and research questions/objectives. The data provided evidence of negative summative comments (NSCs), as presented below:

Extract 70

The critical information is absent in the background. (HOT 5)



Extract 71

The introduction seems rather long. (ENG 22)

Extract 72

The introductory background to the study is weak. (POH 6)

Extracts 70-72 differently display examiners' discontentment with the presentation of the introduction section of the work, including background to the study, statement of the problem and research questions/objectives. The extracts show deficiencies in the nature of the introduction (background to the study). In Extract 70, the examiner laments the lack of critical information in the Background. Again, in Extract 71, the introduction was considered rather long. The problem often stems from the fact that students may not know what should be included and what should be reserved for the LR with reference to previous studies, as indicated by an examiner below:

Extract 73

The introduction requires tightening. Too many things are said here; these could either be placed in the next chapter or be substantially reduced.... (ENG 10)

In Extract 73, the examiner's use of the verb 'requires' denotes that the introduction is not in the best state; that is, the candidate is mandated to re-work the introduction. We observe that the examiner is unhappy about the length of information provided here, ('Too many') and suggests that some of the items could be removed or, better still, be moved to the LR section. In this way, as Dudley-Evans (1986) and Bunton (1998; 2002) stipulate, the organizational structure of the introduction can move from a fairly general overview of the research terrain to particular issues under investigation through three key moves which capture the communicative purposes of the

introduction. Again, it can be seen that the communicative purposes of the Introduction, according to Swales and Feak (1994), which are to establish a research territory, to identify a niche or gap in the territory; and to signal how the topic in question occupies that niche are also left hanging.

Negative comments were also made on the statement of the problem:

Extract 74

The statement of the problem was very poorly done. (ENG 19)

Extract 75

The discussion of the statement of the problem is inadequate. (POH 10)

Extract 76

The statement of the problem is not clear. (HIS 7)

In Extract 74, not only is an adverb of manner ('poorly') used, but also the intensifier 'very' is used to explain the inadequate nature of the statement of the problem. Expectedly, the statement of the problem should capture what has been done already in the area, what is left to be covered and the significance of the present study in filling that gap. Failure of a candidate to articulate this meticulously may warrant such a comment in the sense that standards have not been met. Similarly, it is seen that the manner in which the statement of the problem was discussed was unacceptable and insufficient (Extract 73). Presumably, some essential issues were ignored in the development of this crucial aspect of the introduction. Centrality claims which are seen by "assertions about the importance of the topic being discussed" (Samraj, 2002, p. 4) are much needed in the formulation of the statements of the problem; its absence in the present data made the examiner think that the discussion there was inadequate. Allison, Cooley, Lewkowicz and Nunan (1998) noted that a key shortcoming in thesis writing of the non-native

speakers of English at their university is their inability to create a research space.

The last item in the introduction is the research questions/objectives. Perrin (2004) explains that the objective must be a well-focused brief statement that presents information on the topic in a very clear and specific form. If it is a research question, then, the statement has to be changed into a question form, as its name suggests. Examples in NSCs on research questions/objectives are presented below:

Extract 77

There is/are no explicit research questions. (HIS 14)

Extract 78

For the type of degree that the candidate is seeking, the objectives are not focused. (HOT 20)

Extract 79

The objectives of this project is less clearly expressed. (ENG 10)

Extracts 77, 78, and 79 are examples of negative comments on the nature of the research questions/objectives. In Extract 77, it is understood that the research questions are not clear, using the negator, 'no': either the wording is not good enough or the questions do not reflect the purpose or the core of the thesis. Also, in Extract 78, the objectives were not well directed. For the examiner to add that, 'For the type of degree that the candidate is seeking, the objectives are not focused' is, perhaps, such a strange comment since whether it is in a first degree, second degree or even at the PhD programme, a badly stated objective is still bad since objectives should convey clearly the essence of the work and stated specifically in simple language (Calmorin & Calmorin, 2007). Thus, the statement of purpose (research objectives) for which the investigation is to be conducted (Ardales, 1992) is missing. Stracke and

Kumar (2010) also identified that examiners often had problems with research objectives but accepted the thesis if this error was minimal.

### *Literature Review*

The analysis of the data revealed that literature review/conceptual framework was also negatively evaluated by the examiners. LR, according to Hart (1998), is a body of knowledge on the research topic, explaining that it helps in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the topic, of what has already been done on it, how it has been researched, and what the key issues are. Again, it provides evidence of the understanding of previous research on the topic. This amounts to showing that a candidate has understood the main theories in the subject area and how they have been applied or developed, as well as the main criticisms that have been made on the topic. Akindele (1995) explains further that, as a genre, the LR is one genre that requires the writer to justify for his/her own research by critically evaluating previous research. It involves both a statement of personal judgment and an appeal to shared norms and values. Shown below are examples of NSCs in the data:

Extract 80

The knowledge displayed of the relevant literature is barely adequate. (POH 6)

Extract 81

He does not use other scholarly works such as published academic works and articles. (HIS 4)

Extract 82

The framework was unsuccessfully applied in the work. (ENG 14)

Extract 83

The work was not adequately informed by the existing body of knowledge on the subject in the field of tourism. (HOT 19)



In Extract 80, the examiner laments the inadequacy in the use of information at the literature review section, describing it as ‘barely adequate’, using an adverb and an adjective. A similar comment is found in Extract 83, where the examiner indicates that information on the existing literature was not enough, employing the adverb ‘not adequately’. Per the examiners’ expectation and, as expressed by Hart (1998), the quality of LR means appropriate breadth and depth of issues; that is, a candidate should be able to express, deeply, the main concerns related to the issue under investigation in a very adequate manner. Thus, in Extract 81, the examiner feels that certain types of materials should have been included in the LR: works such as ‘published academic works and articles’. The examiner might have been of the opinion that since published works are reviewed before they are published, the information contained in such works can be trusted. In addition, such published works, especially, research articles (RAs), do contain more recent information compared to books that might take a while to be published, and thus, may contain some dated information at the time of their publication, sometimes. Consequently, a candidate’s failure to include information which captures extensive use of materials in his or her field of study/research can attract such negative comments. Akindele (2008) postulates that the LR is designed to identify related research, to set the current research project within a conceptual and theoretical context. As a result, an effective LR describes, analyses, and synthesizes material from a range of pertinent sources. Dong (1996) observed that students were accustomed to using citations for knowledge telling, that is display of knowledge, and, therefore, encountered numerous difficulties when using citations to make new claims.

Examiners' comments on the LR, also, questioned the relevance of some information, as indicated in Extracts 84-86:

Extract 84

The fundamental flaw I observe in this chapter is that the model the candidate proposes does not appear to be in sync with the main thesis of the literature review which essentially posits a relationship between the three constructs of X, Y AND Z. (HOT 18)

Extract 85

X theory is irrelevant and has no link to the study. (ENG 12)

Extract 86

Indeed, there is no effort at all to show how relevant the discussion is to the research issues. Thus, in many places, the material appears clearly irrelevant and unrelated to the topic. (POH 14)

For example, in Extract 84, the examiner prefaces the evaluative comment with the noun phrase, 'the fundamental flaw' which presupposes that the work is not in its best form. The examiner anticipated that the model adopted in the study by the candidate would be in line with the main propositions of the work, but this was not achieved. Extract 85 indicates clearly that the theory used in that study was of no relevance, employing the predicative adjective, 'irrelevant' and noun, 'no link'. Similarly, in Extract 86, it was observed that the candidate fails to establish the relevance of argument in the review to the topic of the research, using similar linguistic elements such as noun, 'no effort'; adverb, 'clearly'; the adjective, 'irrelevant' and 'unrelated'. Thus, in many places, the material lacks clarity, and relevance. The last of the issues captured in the comments on the LR deals with the irrelevancy of some materials. Again, Hart (1998) believes that LR must show rigour, consistency, clarity, and brevity and effective analysis and synthesis; that is, the use of these ideas in the literature review section to justify the particular approach to

the topic, selection of method, and demonstration that this research contributes something new. However, the analysis of some of the data reveals something different— some information included in the review was rather irrelevant. It is worth evoking Hart (1998), who argues that the LR is integral to the success of academic research. He explains that it is the progressive narrowing of the topic, through the LR that makes most research a practical consideration. He adds that to examine literature on a topic involves understanding the standpoint (moral and ethical) and perspective (political and ideological) an author has used. Essential techniques such as analysing an argument, thinking critically, and mapping ideas are important here (Hart, 1998).

For Krishnan and Kathpalia (2002), an effective review of existing literature adds to the “wealthworthiness” of one’s writing and “provides authoritative support for statements or claims that might otherwise be interpreted by readers as a mere uncorroborated opinion” (p. 187). It was expected that the candidate would manage the materials included in the LR in a strict manner so as to help in achieving the standard expected (Hart, 1998).

The comments given indicate that the candidate’s LR falls short of a good one. Holbrook et al. (2007) also identified examiner comments on errors in the LR section of the thesis, relating to clarity, relevance, and criticality. In sum, the LR is an important aspect of the thesis which is used to explain research, and not just to show what other researchers have done. The present analysis here has shown candidates’ weakness in the clarity, relevance, relatedness and usefulness of the LR.

### *Methodology*

Methodology is another critical aspect of the thesis. Holliday (2007) and Lynch (2014) observe that the methodology is where a researcher discusses alternative methodological approaches, justifies the chosen research method, and describes the process and participants used in the study. For Weissberg and Buker (1990), voice and tense usage are critical. Weissberg and Buker (1990) explained that, for instance, simple past tense is expected to be used in describing procedures in the methodology section of the thesis, while the reporting of standard procedures calls for the use of present tense. Also, the passive voice is preferred in describing the procedure in order to depersonalise the information, omit the agent from the sentence, and place emphasis on the procedure. The analysis of the data showed that examiners remarked negatively on some methodological issues of the theses. Some excerpts are given below:

Extract 87

There are some gaps, sealable though, in the methodology. (HIS 2)

Extract 88

The design of the work does not make for a very profound analysis. (ENG 23)

Extract 89

There are some inconsistencies in the description of the research design. (POH 11)

Extract 90

The main problem with the methodology is the sampling procedure which is not clear. (HOT 6)

The examiner observes that there are some gaps in the methodology though these could be corrected, employing the noun phrase 'some gaps' (87). Also, with Extracts 88 and 89, the problems were with the designs that were



employed in the different theses, using the negator in verbal phrase, ‘does not make’, and the noun phrase, ‘some inconsistencies’. A good design allows for the quality of analysis in that the type of instruments, sample size, and sampling procedures influence the data to be collected and the type of analysis to subject such data to. King and Mackey (2016) and Nimehchisalem (2018) hold that research methods offer authentic ways to elicit useful data based on informed decisions; thereby, paving way for issues such as objectivity and non-bias, basic values of research methodology to be attained. Again, we are presented with comments on the nature of the sampling technique, which is deemed to be ‘not clear’ (Extract 90), a finding of Nimulola (2018). Inappropriate sampling technique does not allow for valid data that could offer deep insights, ensuring the richness of the analysis and discussion.

Last, we also find negative comments on the nature of the scale adopted by the candidate in the thesis:

Extract 91

The wrong scale was used to gauge perceptions of X projects. (HOT 7)

Extract 92

I find the section on the Likert scales to be shallow. (POH 14)

From Extracts 91 and 92, we see that the examiners identified inadequacies in how the candidates handled some specific methodological issues. In Extract 91, the adjective ‘wrong’ speaks to the erroneous nature of the kind of scale for the research. Similarly, ‘shallow’ in Extract 92 depicts the superficial nature of the scale, which will adversely affect the quality of analysis, in general. Hofstee (2006) explains that the research methodology is the ‘map’ of the work by which readers can follow this to trace how conclusions were

drawn in the study. Hence, the design, the sampling techniques and the scales can lead to a problem with the entire study.

Overall, the appropriate application of research methods and techniques as a requirement by institutions was not achieved by the candidates (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007) as shown in some of the data. Contrary to the findings of the present study, Holbrook et al. (2004a) found that examiners did not, lengthily, comment on the research approach and its suitability.

### *Analysis and Discussion*

Another key section of the thesis is the Analysis and Discussion. Sometimes, the analysis section is separated from the discussion; they may be combined, too, (See Bunton, 1998). With SGS (UCC), the chapter heading is 'Results and Discussion' but reference is made to 'discussion section' as well. In this present study, a combination of the two sections is discussed since the reports consider them combined, and is simply referred to, here, as 'Discussion'.

Hess (2004) explains that the discussion section should state the major findings of the study, explaining their meanings and significance. The findings should be related to previous studies, and acknowledgment of the limitations of the study. The results are not to be over-interpreted, with unwarranted speculations and exaggeration of the importance of the findings. Sanli, Erdem, and Tefik (2013) add that the discussion section must be presented in a concise language. Also, the discussion should show how results extend knowledge about the field, making clear links to the literature reviewed earlier in the study, to allow for a demonstration of the value of the study; mere summary is to be eschewed (Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). The analysis of the

data reveals some inaccuracies in the presentation of the Discussion, necessitating the examiners to comment critically on these, as exemplified below:

Extract 93

The reporting of data and discussions are not thorough enough. (POH 24)

Extract 94

The analysis is not complete. (HOT 9)

Extract 95

Although the work was comparative in nature, the discussion was not in comparative form. (ENG 17)

Extract 96

Analysis only explained how data were grouped but without any justifiable reasons. (POH 5)

From the above, in Extracts 93-96, we see negative summative comments (NSCs) on the Discussion section of the theses, displaying the various defects. In particular, in Extract 93, the examiner observes that the discussion is not exhaustive enough, using the negator 'not', which is also found in Extract 94. It is that such details as reporting of key findings, relating new findings to previous studies, and interpreting of the finding, as put forth by Hess (2004), were lacking. This might have warranted the remark that the analysis of the study was not complete (Extract 90) or, as shown in Extract 96, that there was no justification for the grouping of the data. Also, the use of the adverb 'only' in Extract 96 indicates some inadequacies in the analysis. For Dudley-Evans (1994, p. 225) while 'Results' involves numerical values, and 'Findings' are expressed in words. In this way, whether results or findings, the discussion is not complete without any supportive evidence (Sanli et al., 2013). The salient points needed in the analysis might were not covered, which is at variance

with the observation of Swales (2004) and Paltridge and Starfield (2007) that the discussion section should highlight how the study reflects, differs from and extends current knowledge of the area in which a study is situated.

Again, the examiner in Extract 95 laments the non-comparative nature of the discussion even though the work was comparative in nature. The examiner expected that since the work was a comparative one which was seen right from introduction through to methodology, the discussion section would have embraced this feature; however, the discussion failed in this regard. Bitchener and Basturkmen (2006) found that students had less shared understanding of the content and functions of the discussion section than did their supervisors. Bloor and Bloor (1995) suggest that student writers' problem with the Discussion section may be traceable to insufficient knowledge of the conventions and practices of the academic discourse community in respect of writing the discussion chapter and their lack of adequate linguistic resources.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the discussion Sections of the theses examined needed critical attention (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Swales, 2004) and candidates were required to uphold standards. Examiners did not hesitate in registering their displeasure through their critical comments, as captured in the TERs.

### ***Conclusion***

The conclusion allows the writer to assess what he/she sets out to do in the introduction; the writer gives his/her impression about the work, and which, sometimes, becomes the basis for other researcher's judgement. Again, through the conclusion, closure is brought to a thesis/dissertation work



(Hewings, 1993; Holliday, 2007). Sekyi-Baidoo (2003) asserts that, structurally, with most theses, the conclusion is the last chapter and it includes the summary of the study, recommendations which are based on the findings of the study, implications of the study as well as general conclusion on the whole study.

Extracts from the data analysed are selected as evidence of the existence of this subsection, the last chapter of the thesis—Conclusion. These cases in point from the data are shown below:

Extract 97

The summary section is too heavy and has to be visited. (HOT 11)

Extract 98

The summary is poorly written. (POH 17)

Extracts 97 and 98 illustrate the use of negative comments on the conclusion section of the thesis, indicating that examiners were unhappy with how the conclusion of the thesis was organized. For example, extracts 97 and 98 reveal that the summary of the study is not satisfactorily done by the candidate. From one angle, the examiner feels that the summary is dense in that it occupies too much space in the work (Extract 97). In another vein, the summary is considered ‘poorly written’ by the candidate (Extract 98). A basic feature of a summary which is its recapitulation of the salient issues discussed earlier in the thesis is missing; hence, the examiners’ comment. For Stracke and Kumar (2010, p. 211), such examiner comments are referred to as assessment “where a judgement is made about whether the thesis has met the standards established by the discipline for the award of the degree.” Again, Mullins and Kiley (2002, p. 385) found that experienced examiners are careful to check for links between the introduction, in which students state their intentions, and the

Conclusion “where the intentions should have been realised.” Tonks and Williams (2018) also found in their study of examiners’ reports that examiners had problems with the conclusions of the theses presented for assessment.

Furthermore, we see from the extracts below that the Conclusion is not exempted from these negative comments:

Extract 99

She does not forcefully declare her conclusion about the origin of X in view of the existence of diverse traditions and speculations. (HIS 23)

Extract 100

The conclusions are scanty and just a rehash of some of the findings. (ENG 19)

Extract 101

Some of them (Conclusion and recommendation) need to be fine-tuned to reflect some of the comments made in this report. (POH 21)

The conclusion of the study lacks lucidity; that is, the examiner does not see, in a very straight forward manner, what the conclusion is about, leading to its inability to communicate properly. The examiner, thus, captures the inadequacy in the verbal phrase that contains the negator, ‘does not forcefully declare’ (99). Similarly, the scanty conclusion attracts a negative comment from the examiner as the conclusion is seen to be a mere repetition of some findings of the study (100).

The next issue in the conclusion that elicits negative comments relates to the nature of the recommendation, as found in the thesis:

Extract 102

The recommendations are not exhaustive. (ENG 22)

Extract 103

Additionally, some of the recommendations do not flow from the findings. (POH 5)

## Extract 104

The researcher recommends a comparative linguistic analysis of X and Y based on Z but this is a suggestion which is loaded with so many problems as to be not even worth entertaining. (ENG 7)

While one examiner considers the recommendation to be inexhaustive (Extract 102) using the negator and adjective ‘not exhaustive’, another thinks that some of the recommendations included do not arise logically from the findings (Extract 103), using the verb phrase plus the negator, ‘do not flow’. In Extract 104, the examiner regards the recommendations problematic, and ‘not even worth entertaining’. In other words, the recommendations are not properly presented, falling short of the expectation of Holliday (2007): it should point to further research, action policy change; thus, making it adequate.

The last of the issues presented under the conclusion hinges on the candidate’s ability to link the study to the broader research community; in other words, the candidates are expected to state the significance of the study.

Find below some critical comments:

## Extract 105

The study missed the opportunity to interrogate national development policy and its effect on rural development. (POH 11)

## Extract 106

I find the absence of the contribution of the study disappointing. The conclusion was an opportunity for the candidate to advertise the importance of her study, but she allows it to elude her. (ENG 23)

The use of the verbs, ‘missed’ and ‘elude’, and the noun, ‘absence’ denote negativity contextually in Extracts 105 and 106. Thus, in Extract 106, the examiner comments that the student fails to question the national policy and its effect on rural development. This omission, on the part of the candidate, in

the implications of the study, thereby elicits the examiner's negative comment. This omission recalls the assertion by Holliday (2007) that conclusion should point to further research, action policy change; thus, making it adequate

This section of the thesis reported the analysis and discussion of negative summative comments (NSCs) on the Conclusion of the thesis. The discussion indicated that many aspects of the conclusion such as summary, recommendations, and implications of the theses or its entirety failed to meet the expectations of the examiners, and were variously commented on in the reports, using a range of evaluative linguistic resources like adjective, verbs, and adverbs.

### ***Presentation***

The Presentation of a thesis, generally, covers the overall excellence in the arrangement and management of information. It can also be said to be the communicativeness of the entire thesis. This includes the layout of the thesis, figures and charts, references, language use, and formatting. The analysis of the data pinpoints examiners' dissatisfaction with aspects of the presentation of the thesis, as presented in the extracts below:

Extract 107

The organization of the work leaves much to be desired. (HIS 1)

Extract 108

The table of content is poorly set out and needs to be redone. (HOT 5)

Mention is made of the nature of the organization of the work, which 'leaves much to be desired' (Extract 107). This may be attributed to deficiencies in how chapters, paragraphs, and sections are structured. More specifically, in Extract 108, the examiner bemoans the table of content of the thesis which is 'poorly set out'. Similarly, Johnston (1997) found that examiners were



particularly interested in the general impression and overall presentation of the thesis. The table of content is required to faithfully reflect the proper sequencing of chapters, sections and parts in the main work so as to allow for easy cross-checking of headings and other themes in the work together with the pagination. The failure on the part of the candidate to effectively manage these leads to the NSC from the examiner (108), who requests the table of content to be 'redone'. The table of content can be regarded as a front matter placed at the onset of the whole text, serving as a summary matter (Jalilifar, 2010; Jalilifar, Simin, & Fazli, 2016; Rath, 2010; Soler, 2007). Compared to headings and titles, the table of content is supposed to concisely and precisely introduce the subject of any given piece of text (Swales, 1990). Thus, a careful outlining of the table of content is necessary.

A key issue in the presentation of the thesis that attracted further NSCs was the reference list. Below are some comments:

Extract 109

The reference section requires some 'cleaning up'. (POH 2)

Extract 110

My major concern with this thesis is the referencing. It is so badly done that one gets the impressions that a) either the candidate is extremely careless; b) or she has no idea how to handle citations and c) or she intends to cheat by merely listing works she never consulted. (ENG 13)

Extract 111

There is ample evidence that the reference section has been done in haste. The result is that it contains several blemishes (relating to inconsistency, omissions, misspelling, formatting problems and non-adherence to conventions of the chosen house style etc). This is unacceptable. (ENG 19)

For the examiner, the referencing needs ‘cleaning up’ (Extract 109), suggesting that there are defects with logicity in the sequencing of the names of authors, dates and style in the presentation of the other information on the materials sourced as well as the house style that the candidate was required to utilize. Extract 111 provides more details regarding the problems in the referencing: inconsistencies, omissions, spellings, formatting, and lack of adherence to house-style issues. These blemishes detract from a good thesis. Thus, in Extract 110, the examiner speculates that the candidate is either careless, lacks knowledge in citation practices, or is just an academic cheat. Borg’s (2000) comparison of writings of native and non-native students revealed that both native and non-native students have difficulty in using citations, resulting in frequent errors and inconsistencies. Issues in referencing in thesis such as consistency and internet referencing were also identified by Stracke and Kumar (2010). Lessing (2009) and Tonks and Williams (2018) also identified sloppiness in referencing.

Improper referencing may be attributed to academic dishonesty, ignorance and carelessness, all leading to plagiarism. Pecorari (2002; 2003) stresses that plagiarism is a heinous crime within the academic community, which may be explained by poor language learning, incorrect source attribution, or plagiarism in the transitional phase in one’s socializing process into the target discourse community (Lei, 2010). Yongfang (2008) identifies cultural conditioning, academic pressures, lower language abilities, lack of prior knowledge and ignorance of proper citation conventions to be the major reasons of plagiarism in academic discourse.

Supervisor support is crucial in addressing issues such as improper referencing (Adika, 2015; Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007; Petric, 2005). Petric (2005) observed that some supervisors found it essential to provide their supervisees with initial guidance, providing them with information on relevant sources, and coaching students in the appropriate use of sources. Sometimes, too, supervisor feedback helps students to overcome such errors. Also, courses in academic writing (e. g. Adika, 2015; Afful, 2017c) could be of immense benefit.

A further weakness identified in NSCs of thesis examiners concerning presentation relates to language use. This is instantiated in Extract 112-114 below:

Extract 112

The work is replete with a lot of grammatical errors. (HIS 15)

Extract 113

This section needs serious proofreading as there are too many typographical and grammatical errors (see the correction in the document). (HOT 8)

Extract 114

Use of punctuation mark is also defective. (POH 9)

So, in Extract 112, the examiner denounces the thesis on account of several grammatical errors. The addition of, specifically, 'replete' to 'a lot of grammatical errors' suggests excessive grammatical errors, which is very disparaging. Similarly, the notion of excessive errors is also captured in Extract 113; thereby, making the examiner call on the candidate to proofread the work so as to correct grammatical and typographical errors in the thesis. To add to these language errors, the punctuation marks found in the work are also wrongly used (Extract 114). Generally, language is an important tool in

the communication process (Connor, 1991; Duff, 2010; Hyland, 2009; Sekyi-Baidoo, 2003), and lack of its accurate use will thwart the overall communicative purpose of thesis writing. The finding of Johnston (1997) resonates here in that examiners approach reading a thesis with an air of expectation and even enthusiasm, but this disappears if the thesis is not reader-friendly because of grammatical errors, a finding confirmed by Kumar & Stracke (2011)

The last concern raised in relation to the quality of presentation of thesis writing, as presented in the examiners' reports, is the use of visuals. Tables, figures, and other forms of visuals, as headings, give a summary of findings of the study before the actual discussion of these findings (Jalilifar, 2010; Jalilifar et al., 2016). The presentation of these tables and figures in terms of placement in the work and their general outlook is important in aiding understanding of the study. A defect in the presentation of these creates problems in the work, adversely affecting the beauty of the work and overarching communication purpose of the study:

Extract 115

Table 14 is inappropriate. (HOT 10)

Extract 116

Tables appear long and often spill over to the next page. (HOT 11)

Extract 117

No firm figures are quoted. (POH 1)

According to Extracts 115-117, the tables used in the work were 'inappropriate', and long, often spilling over to the next page. The insertion of tables which did not enhance the argumentation in the thesis will be described as 'inappropriate'. Also, the lack of skills in appropriately squeezing tables to



allow the reader to make quick references to information on the table will result in this ‘spill over’.

Examiners also comment that the numbering system presented in the work is not properly aligned:

Extract 118

Numbering not properly aligned. (ENG 20)

Extract 119

The numbering system has not been done well. (POH 17)

Extracts 118 and 119 are examples of NSCs on the inadequacies found with the numbering system in the theses. In Extract 119, the examiner comments that the numbering is not arranged well, which could adversely affect comprehension of information in the study, in that, often, the numbering systems do not reflect the various subdivisions contained in the thematization of information in the study. These errors preclude readers from understanding the text (Johnston, 1997; Kumar & Stracke, 2011). In all, the presentation elicited negative remarks by the examiners, indicating that the assessed theses have been judged, and values placed on them. Issues such as inappropriate use of table of content, referencing, tables and visuals, grammar and numbering systems were identified. In other studies (Mafora & Lessing, 2014; Mulinge & Arasa, 2013; Nimulola, 2018; Tonks & Williams, 2018) examiners expected presentation to be improved.

Furthermore, the analysis of the data reveals that the examiners, sometimes, combined the rhetorical sections, and commented on them, probably, in an attempt to save space or to make the writing terse, instead of commenting on each section differently. Some examples of such NSCs are presented below:

Extract 120

The objectives and methodology of this project are less than clearly expressed. (ENG 2)

Extract 121

The biggest short coming however, has to do with the failure to link the findings with the conceptual framework while the build-up to the statement of the problem is rather weak, scanty and inadequate. (HOT 16)

Extract 122

The problem definition is not clear and candidate failed to draw implications from the findings for policy discussion. (POH 9)

We can see that the examiner (in Extract 120) combines the objectives of the study and the methodology and comments on them. Referring to the evaluative criteria by SGS (UCC), the rhetorical sections are presented individually, suggesting that, for the sake of clarity, examiners are expected to address one criterion (rhetorical section) after the other. However, some examiners did otherwise, reiterating Mullins and Kiley's (2002) point that some examiners fail to adhere to the institutions' instruction.

Also, some comments sounded negative, compared to the norm of other disciplines, but these comments were positive, signifying candidates' abilities to keep to the community's expectations. Though such comments were not found across all the disciplines included in the present study, there was the need to comment on them so as to bring to the fore the fact that not all sentences cast critically meant dissatisfaction from the examiner. After all, Hunston (2011) establishes that evaluation is context-based. Here are some occurrences in the data:

Extract 123

The candidate, in conformity to standard practice of historical writing, did not make any recommendations. (HIS 9)

Extract 124

There are no recommendations. This however **does not take anything away from the work of history.** (*Bold included in original text*) (HIS 12)

Extract 125

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are not used in history and in line with this, the candidate has no theoretical or conceptual framework in this dissertation. (HIS 13)

Here, we see that these comments (123-125) overtly seem negative because of the presence of the negator, ‘no, and not’. On the contrary, the examiner approves of this omission since standard practices of the discipline-specific community demand that recommendations are not made in History theses. It can be said that the candidate has internalized the value systems of his/her research community. The comments show that the candidate has mastered the practices of the discipline and used them well, confirming Adika’s (2015) assertion that disciplinarity is required in research writing. Holbrook et al. (2014) also found that examiners write their reports in a style that reflects their disciplines, unique interests, and expertise as well as the criteria relevant to a particular judgement. Also, in Extract 125, the absence of a theoretical or conceptual framework in these dissertations is not considered a shortcoming since historical studies do not call for its use. We find in Extract 124 that the candidate did not make any recommendations, which is a vital component of the thesis for many disciplines (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Tardy (2005, p. 326) explains that researchers need “advanced academic

literacy not only for linguistics ability but ‘rhetorical insight’ into their disciplinary community’s ways of building and disseminating information”.

From the discussion so far, it can be ascertained that the negative comments were found on almost all the sections of the thesis, indicating that some candidates had not mastered the art of writing the thesis, as confirmed in other studies (e.g. Holbrook et al., 2004b; 2007; Johnston, 1997; Starfield, et al. 2017; Kumar & Stracke, 2011). The attraction of negative comments on almost all sections of the theses in the data set confirms the findings of Kumar and Stracke (2011) that issues such as reformatting of chapters, improvement in declaration of research objectives or statements, insertion of missing references, amendment of inaccurately cited references, improvement in spelling, grammar, syntax, and presentation require serious attention in their study. This suggests that either the candidates might not have been well socialized into the practices of the academic community (AC) or they have difficulty applying these (Lei, 2010; Yongfang, 2008).

The use of negative evaluative acts helps structure a text in expected ways (Hyland & Diani, 2009). Also, according to Hunston (2011), critical evaluation figures an ideology that is mutual between the writer and reader, projecting the subjective nature of evaluation. She explains further that this ideological value becomes possible since the writer and the reader, in the act of evaluation, are positioned within a value system (though they may be thought of as disagreeing). The use of negative evaluative acts has been substantiated in the numerous extracts above (Extracts 60-125).



## Section D: Mitigation of Negative Examiners' Comment (ECs)

The practice of outright negative evaluative comments can depress the learner as well as damage social interactions. In sustaining social interactions, critical remarks are, occasionally, softened in the TERs — which are presented in this section of the analysis. In this section, I considered Hyland's (2000) classification of approaches including “praise-criticism pairs”, “questions”, “hedging”, and “personal responsibilities” that are used in mitigating the effects of negative evaluative acts. Some of these strategies, as found in the present data, are discussed below.

### *Praise-Criticism (PC) Duos*

The first strategy identified and presented for discussion is “praise-criticism” duo. Hyland (2000, p. 55) describes this as a situation where “Praise is subordinated to criticism, but their adjacency serves to create a more balanced comment, slightly softening the negativity of the evaluation.” That is, positive remark fronts the negative remark, and it is added so that the full force of the negative comment is reduced, to enhance social relations with either the candidate or, maybe, the supervisor. Samples of “Praise-Criticism” from the data are found below:

Extract 126

The candidate has done a very insightful and interesting study, but the quality of presentation is rather poor. (HIS 1)

Extract 127

Certainly, the candidate has a section entitled ‘Findings’, which has a semblance of discussion, but it is scanty and too pedestrian for my liking. (ENG 4)

Extract 128

The presentation is logical, systematic, and detailed. However, the main body of the writing is plagued by a lot of infelicitous items of expression unfit for this level of writing. (POH 18)

Extract 129

Many materials have been collected for this work; however, unfortunately, the style of reasoning does not flow including a lot of repetition and textbook stuff. (HOT 4)

Considering Extract 126 above, the assessor prefaces the statement, “the candidate has done a very insightful and interesting study”; he or she adds later that “the quality of presentation is rather poor”. The examiner’s main message is that there is a problem with the presentation, but but there is a supplementary comment (the praise statement) which mitigates the total weight of the critical remark (Hyland, 2000). Similar studies (like Alcaraz-Ariza, 2010; Gborsong et al., 2018) realized in their study that the extenuation of negative comments assisted in keeping image, mostly, and not only to moderate censure, ultimately sustaining solidarity with audience.

Again, with Excerpt 128, the examiner fronts the whole statement with a positive comment but adds a negative comment. The examiner places emphasis on the use of language in the write-up, not matching up to the standard required of the student. The presence of the metaphorical language, plagued, figuratively signifies “distastefulness” of language employed in the thesis. Also, the evaluative adjectives, ‘unworthy’ and ‘infelicitous’ denote flaws in the work. Assuaging this critical remark, a praise statement precedes the negative comment. By employing this strategy to mitigate the full force of the negative comment, the examiner reiterates Crick’s (1990:49 as cited in Hyland, 2000) remark:

... if you have something critical to say about a piece of scientific work, it is better to say it firmly but nicely and to preface it with praise of any good aspect of it. I only wish I had always stuck to this useful rule.

Crick (1990) submits that critical remarks of any academic or scientific writing must be stated intensely, yet respectfully, by shielding a praise statement in a critical statement.

Also, this PC approach was realized with other parts of the study, including the thesis itself and LR:

Extract 130

Sufficient empirical data were presented to support the claims; yet, the researcher could not adequately identify the gaps in the literature.

(POH 4)

Extract 131

The candidate demonstrated good knowledge of the subject through literature review and is also commended for the justification of the study; however, the reporting of data and discussions are not thorough enough.

(HOT 24)

Extract 132

The candidate included all material on the methodology, but some aspects were badly executed such as the data collection or fieldwork.

(ENG 8)

Extract 133

The study is readable and interesting but there is repetition of information through the thesis.

(HIS 4)

With excerpts 130-133 respectively, while an examiner adds praise to criticism to indicate the insufficiency in the literature review, another examiner employs same PC strategy in addressing methods, with the critical statement precisely on 'the data collection procedure'. Thus, with excerpt 132,

dual positive remarks that centre on ‘the subject matter’ and ‘justification of the work’ lead the negative statement that focuses on the discussion, where new findings are buttressed with evidence (Lynch, 2014).

Aside the “praise-criticism” structure discussed above, other duos that lessen the force of critical comments are acknowledged by Hyland and Hyland (2001): “criticism-praise” (CP), “praise-criticism-suggestion” (PCS), “praise-suggestion” (PS), and “criticism-suggestion” (CS). With the present analysis, these duos by Hyland and Hyland (2001) were found, and deliberated further.

To begin with, there is the “Criticism-praise” duo, where criticism precedes a positive remark. The difference between the “Praise-criticism” identified earlier in the study and “Criticism-praise” is that the former has praise (positive comment) at the beginning of the structure while criticism (negative comment) is fronted in the latter. The basic discourse purpose achieved through these pairs is the reduction of the the complete force of the critical comment. Here are instances of the “Criticism-praise” duos identified:

Extract 134

Although the second chapter was not necessarily historical in its approach, chapters 3 and 4 are the major contributions to Ghana’s history and the candidate must be praised for that. (HIS 15)

Extract 135

Though I have outlined a few queries, the presentation is commendable and good. (ENG 15)

Extract 136

The reporting of the data and discussion are not thorough enough. These errors notwithstanding, the candidate showed good understanding of the topic. (POH 19)



Extract 137

Though the study design employed in the work was not the best and ought to be revisited, the qualitative approach employed for the study is relevant and the data collected were appropriate. (HOT 19)

Displayed in the examples above, extracts 134-137, are CP pairs that served as mitigation strategies for lessening the critical comments in the data. In Extract 136, we notice that the student's presentation was not detailed and thorough enough in handling the analysis; notwithstanding, the student is applauded for proving 'an understanding of the topic' studied. This negative remark will not be satisfyingly welcomed, yet the addition of positive remark that indicates 'satisfaction of an output' mitigates the total effect of the critical remark. In these excerpts, evaluators employed many lexical features to reach the result of reducing the negative remarks like the use of innate negative expressions like, 'not the best', 'not necessarily', 'not thorough enough' and 'few queries'; the concessive clause that has 'though', 'although', and 'notwithstanding', and adjective, 'relevant' and 'appropriate'; noun phrases such as, 'commendable', "major contributions", and "good understanding", then, verbs, "praised". The lexical features, positive and negative, combine to give the flavour of mitigating the negative comments; thus, keeping harmony with audience of the reports (supervisor and candidate) (Halliday, 1978; Martin & White, 2005).

Another strategy is the "Praise-Suggestion" (PS) duo that is a 'praise' is given; then, a 'suggestion' follows. Here, there is something the examiner is not satisfied about, and which could have been said bluntly, but to reduce the full effect of this, praise is offered, and the suggestion which is motivated by

the inadequacy found in the work is added. Instances of PS in the data are as follows:

Extract 138

The level of data analysis is acceptable but could have been better. For example, the between years (2003 and 2008) trends in the data could have been compared and differences explained. (POH 23)

Extract 139

The problem guiding the study is well formulated but can be improved. (HOT 17)

Extract 140

The work I must admit is well researched, well written and supervised and one of the few good theses I have examined in recent past. However, first sentence of the third paragraph on p. 61 needs rephrasing. (ENG 13)

Extract 141

Generally, the candidate has paid much attention to the use of language and used the appropriate phraseology required for the topic selected. A few instances of misuse of capital letters should be corrected. (HIS 20)

With excerpt 138, the evaluator, through the use of the adjective, 'acceptable', commends the candidate for the kind of analysis done, but he or she continues that there is need for improvement. An instance is quoted further to reinforce that claim that there is a need to improve upon the current nature of the work. Besides, Extract 139 shows the examiner's appreciation with the 'well formulated' problem of the study. However, there is a follow up comment, that the work 'can be improved' by re-working the statement of the problem, introduced by the concessive, 'but'. The examiner draws attention to the long nature of the statement of the problem, and suggests a tightening of some paragraphs to achieve conciseness of that section of the thesis. The

employment of the PS pair does not devastate the candidate compared with what a complete negative remark might have caused to the candidate. Hyland and Hyland (2001) observe that this statement, openly, supports knowledge acquisition and produces the interactive situations in which this acquisition might ensue. Also, Hyland and Hyland (2001) note that suggestion is inclined to be useful pedagogically.

A further method recognised to mitigate the potency of criticisms was the “Praise-Criticism-Suggestion” (PCS) duo. Here, the mitigating approach begins with a positive statement that indicates an approval; a critical statement that expresses a disapproval, and a recommendation that will assist in developing the current state of the thesis or its part-genres. This strategy of mitigation is exemplified below:

Extract 142

The specific objectives of the study are consistent with the topic investigated. However, there is disconnection between the research topic and the main objective. This needs to be addressed. (ENG 2)

Extract 143

The mixed method employed for the study is appropriate and the data collected were relevant. However, the researcher seems to confuse the interview schedule with in-depth interview. This aspect has to be revisited. (ENG 7)

Extract 144

The objectives were specific and achieved at the end of the study. However, even though the researcher stated at page 16, line 3 hypothesis, it could not be identified in the text. I suspect, it was omitted and that it should be inserted to make the study complete.

(HOT 20)

Extract 145

The conceptual framework of X that explains behaviour and health services utilization was appropriate but its adoption was poorly

constructed and explained. The subcomponent of the original model should be well explained and points of departure in this new study vividly outline(sic) and justified. (POH 18)

From the above, excerpt 143 shows a mixed approach plus the appropriate data gathered for the research was relevant. Contrary, the subsequent comment specifies an incongruity in the thesis in relation to the instrument, employing the lexical element, “seems to confuse”. A revision is suggested here. Also, while positive remark is expressed for the selection of a ‘suitable framework’, its use is not “explained” and “poorly constructed” too, employing a verbal element attached to adverbial phrases correspondingly (Extract 145). The assessor suggests this should be explained well, and areas of departure in the current study to be outlined vividly and justified too. Hyland and Hyland (2001) advise instructors and evaluators to frequently evaluate the selection of remarks to achieve a range of pedagogic, informational, and interpersonal goals concurrently; else, critical comment may have a damaging effect on writer’s motivation and confidence; consequently, the employment of this strategy to weaken negative remark in the reports.

Last but one, a key mitigating approach that the analysis revealed was “Criticism-Suggestion” (CS) duo. Here, a critical remark is offered; then, a recommendation follows. The complete potency of the negative remark is softened by the other one of the duo. Selected uses of “Criticism-Suggestion” approach are shown here:

Extract 146

Aspects that relate to conclusions and recommendations were not treated adequately and have to be improved. (HOT 17)



Extract 147

The methodology was presented poorly. The candidate should re-work the chapter convincingly and systematically. (POH 1)

Extract 148

The findings of the study are scanty. A comprehensive list of all findings should be presented in the conclusion and summary chapter. (POH 22)

Extract 149

The tables used in the study are too many. Some have to be merged to reduce the number (31). (ENG 23)

These extracts (146- 149) above reveal that the suggestions are prefaced with criticism to soften the import of the earlier criticisms. Extract 147 expresses a criticism, which is the poor construction of the methodology, necessitating a redrafting of the chapter. Equally, in Extract 149, the examiner specifies that there are too many tables in the work, a critical appraisal, and that tables could be merged.

Apart from the other approaches recognised in the reports, the present analysis further revealed an added style: “Suggestion-Criticism-Praise” (SCP) duo. Some examiners employed this to mitigate critical remarks made about the thesis or the candidate. Hyland and Hyland (2001) did not outline this approach, indicating the relevance of “context in language use” (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin & White, 2005). Illustrations of SCP are found below:

Extract 150

The significance of the study has to be improved and expanded. The practical value of the research work is missing, even though the problem statement which emphasizes on poor performance of travel intermediaries is good. (HOT 12)

## Extract 151

The candidate should highpoint the outstanding deduction from the figures. If we examine the figures in pg (sic).120, for example, which particular variety...stands out for X, Y and Z. However, this observation does not detract from the fact that this is an impressive analysis of the data. There is clear evidence that the candidate has a good deal of control of the tool of analysis. (ENG 6)

## Extract 152

The problem guiding the study can be improved. It is too long. But both the main and specific objectives of the study are consistent with the topic investigated. (POH 4)

## Extract 153

Kindly effect all the corrections indicated in the main thesis. The major problem you have here is that many in-text citations are not in the reference list. However, generally, the candidate spent time to work on the report and the language as well as the overall quality is quite commendable. (POH 5)

Excerpt 150 has the recommendation that the significance of the study could be improved, suggesting that the thesis is not standard yet. The disapproval which highlights the imperfection noted in the suggestion shows that “the significance of the work” is missing. The apparent critical effect of this remark is softened by a positive remark that ends this excerpt, praising the student for the effort to have soundly stated “the problem of the study”. Moreover, with Excerpt 151, the student is requested to indicate the relevant conclusions that can be be inferred from the statistics, and the candidate is asked a sort of question about the type of variety employed for X, Y and Z. Notwithstanding these deficiencies, the discussion is said to be sufficiently remarkable— a positive remark used to assuage the critical remarks offered previously. As “Suggestion-Criticism-Praise” was not outlined by Hyland and Hyland (2001),

the approach could be described as culturally specific and “non-native”. Conversely, it is quite incongruous to have suggestion followed by the criticism, then, a praise; however, with all other mitigating approaches, establishing and sustaining interactive roles is worth it. Also, the statements revealed in the data, directly and indirectly, contribute to learning; thus, receivers of the examiners’ reports must be encouraged and motivated to be very self-assured.

To sum up, the analysis revealed that the attenuated critical remarks happen when a positive remark is shielded in suggestion and criticism, generating “criticism-praise”, “praise-criticism”, “praise-suggestion”, “criticism-suggestion”, “praise-criticism-suggestion”, and “suggestion-criticism-praise” duos. Critical remarks that are connected to suggestions help convert ‘a blunt criticism’ into ‘a proposal for improvement’ (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). The approaches together with other associated lexical resources like adjectives, verbs, adverbs, and nouns, replicate a good association (Hyland, 2000; Martin & White, 2005) between the recipients of the reports (supervisor/candidate), and the author (evaluator).

### ***Hedging***

Hedging was used in the data to soften negative comments and to reflect a positive, sympathetic relationship with student-writers (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Hyland (1998a) describes hedges as linguistic resources used to show the desire not to express that commitment emphatically or an absence of full obligation to the certainty of a statement. Hedges can be considered as the attitude of a writer or speaker attempting to protect him/herself from possible rejection on the part of a discussor or speaker (Boncea, 2014).

The primary meaning of hedges used in the analysis is neither its functions such as affective and epistemic meanings nor the suggestion of probability (Boncea, 2014; Musa, 2014), but the mitigation of the negative comments that may destroy social interactions. Hedges are marked in kinds such as “lexical forms”, “indefinite quantifiers”, “modal verbs”, and “usuality devices” (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). These devices were employed as a means to attenuate the full force of negative comments offered by examiners.

To begin with, modals were used to mitigate critical comments. The most widely found modals in the data were ‘may’, ‘would’ and ‘could’. Find examples below:

Extract 154

Pilot work could have helped to design a structured interview and thereby making it possible to analyse the data quantitatively. (POH 10)

Extract 155

He could make a list of the intellectual writings of some of the subject's contemporaries. (HIS 7)

Extract 156

Another issue is that the candidate, with the support of his supervisors, may have to slightly alter the title in order to cover the demands of the two research questions. (ENG 4)

Extract 157

I would, however, ask the candidate to engage more deeply with the extant literature (HOT 7)

In examples (154-157) above, the modals mark, tentatively, the negative remarks. With excerpt 155, through the use of the modal auxiliary ‘could’, it is recommended that the candidate prepares a list of the modern writers. The assessor is uncertain as he selects to make tentative his or her assertion of the



needed list of contemporary writings. Also, in Extract 156, the statement is indeterminate by the use of 'may', offering a suggestion but not mandating the candidate. Ngula (2017) considered the use of 'may', 'would' and 'could' as medium and weak epistemic claims (hedges used to reduce significantly the level of commitment to the proposition). According to Hyland (1995), examiners' use of hedging devices supports the growth of a strong writer and reader bond, ensuring cooperation and deference to get reader to confirm assertions.

Not only modals but the "imprecise quantifiers" such as 'little' and 'some' help in reducing the damage of negative comments to social interaction. For Boncea (2014), these imprecise quantifiers are employed when the exactitude of an element is unspecified or indeterminate; thus, leading to "fuzziness" (Lakoff, 1972). Find some occurrences below:

Extract 158

There is very little to suggest that the third research question has been addressed. (ENG 20)

Extract 159

She recapped and interpreted, within that final chapter, the findings of the work with little reference to the ideas and positions of other authorities or authors. (HIS 25)

Extract 160

Some of the issues raised in the "Background to the study" can be incorporated to enhance the discussion of the problem statement. (POP 12)

Extract 161

Some key concepts/variables in the CF particularly namely, level of knowledge... and tourism contacts have not been tested relative to their assumed ability to shape perceptions of tourism impacts, and support for tourism. (HOT 12)

With Example 159, the assessor makes tentative the assertion by signifying that other sources have been cited, but these are considered ‘little’. In another vein, although the evaluator signifies that a synthesis of information at the background of study could be done to beef up the discussion of the statement of the problem (160), not all the issues are to be considered but some. Evidently, evaluators employ these “imprecise quantifiers” to avoid full commitment to a remark, which, then, helps to lessen the complete force of critical remarks and help establish or sustain interpersonal relations with the audience of the reports.

Furthermore, a strategy that Hyland and Hyland (2001) refer to as “usuality devices”, with resources like ‘sometimes’ as well as ‘often’ to denote ‘typicalness’ and ‘habituality’ was employed in the data. In this case, the “usuality devices” indicate the candidate’s accustomed way of doing things, suggesting that it may be a slip which can be pardoned or ignored or he/she is often found doing this. Some illustrations are given below:

Extract 162

The candidate writes well but, sometimes, he uses complicated expressions that make the meaning of what he wants to say uncertain. (HOT 20)

Extract 163

Most of the tables suggest that the data are comparative in nature but often the two sets of data are lumped together without the reader being made aware of the disciplinary differences. (ENG 25)

Extract 164

At times, the candidate fails to identify how government is informed by the outbreak of infectious diseases within communities. (HOS 3)

Extract 165

At times, this revisionist challenge by the candidate resulted from the agenda to rewrite the history to gain upper hand in local and inter-state conflicts. (HIS 17)

In Excerpt 162, the student “writes well”; nevertheless, sporadically, there are words that have unclear meanings, and these are occasionally recorded when candidate does literal translations of Twi ideas into English (consider Extract 164). Negative in nature, these are problems that express the examiner’s discontent with the construction done by the student. Conversely, the full effect of this critical comment is attenuated with this type of hedges, usability devices. Also, both in extracts 164 and 165, ‘at times’ is used for similar effects. The use of the usability device in relation to the irregularity means that it is just done parsimoniously.

Furthermore, hedges manifest in the employment of lexical softeners such as adverbs, verbs, and adjectives. The analysis of the present data reveals that lexical softeners abound in the use of verbs and adverbs but less of adjectives. Below are some extracts that contain lexical softeners that show tentativeness:

Extract 166

Everything seems to have been so neatly done that we do not get to know of the challenges that the candidate faced in, for instance, the analysis and how they were handled. (ENG 4)

Extract 167

The problem statement is somewhat expressed. (ENG 19)

Extract 168

The analytical arguments are quite sound, justifiable, objective and adequate in terms of the problem that has been investigated. (HOT 6)

Extract 169

The analysis and discussion of data has been fairly accomplished with respect to all five research questions in varying degrees. (ENG 17)

Whereas Example 166 employs verbal item ‘seems’, extracts 167, 168 and 169 deploy adverbs, denoted as somewhat, quite, and fairly, correspondingly. Falahati (2006) affirms that the linguistic resources allow assessors to express doubt or certainty to remarks, and to indicate the level of sureness invested in claims. In Excerpt 169, in saying that the analysis and discussion done by the student is fair, the assessor hedges and prevents the use of a definite comment that may destroy interpersonal roles. Thus, the identified resources here permit assessors to make certain allowance for readers to reason, building writer-reader connections in the text (Bakhtin, 1981; Falahati, 2006).

Observed above (extracts 166-169), certain circumventing strategies complemented praise comments. The examiners meant to point out certain flaws; nevertheless, in preventing the reader from carrying the full weight of the negative remarks, hedged words are moderately preferred. For instance, in Extract 167, the assessor indicates that ‘the problem statement is somewhat expressed’, bearing in mind what constitutes a good statement of the problem. Thus, this statement is the finest anticipated, yet to state that the expression of the problem statement is poor could damage interpersonal roles; hence, ‘somewhat’ is opted in the structure.

In addition, hedges occurred in negative ECs as shown in the data below:

Extract 170

The background information appears jumpy and not logical. (HIS 21)

Extract 171



The knowledge displayed of the relevant literature is barely sufficient. (ENG 10)

Extract 172

The scope of data used is rather limiting as no room is made for comparison between two or more periods of data. (POP 6)

For instance, with Excerpt 170, the scattered and illogical presentation of information at the background of the study demonstrates an inadequacy. Again, in Extract 172, the assessor thinks that the delimitation of the study is rather limiting as no provision is made for comparison of the selected data, in terms of periods, indicating some expectations. These insufficiencies, negative in nature, are sheltered in hedging items, ‘appears’ and ‘rather’, adding an amount of uncertainty or fuzziness to the expression (Boncea, 2014; Lakoff, 1972).

The last of the hedging tools identified in the report was the conditional sentence. An “if” or conditional clause exhibits hesitation in asserting a claim (Boncea, 2014). In this case, the assessor is reluctant in describing current matters as definite but as a postulation, allowing the candidates to save their face. Thus, the critical comments with their complete effects are avoided since the conditional remark is treated as an assumption. Instances of hypothetical clauses are found in the ensuing excerpts:

Extract 173

If these are done then the soundness of the discussion, which is lingering behind the cloud of those concerns will appear well and become glaring. (HIS 20)

Extract 174

The context as stated in the abstract is good however the context can be stronger if the selection of the year 1883 as the starting point and 1951 as the cut off point is justified. (HIS 24)

Extract 175

However, it would enhance the quality of the work if this is done. (HOT 4)

Extract 176

If the idea of a one and free Gold Coast nation was sacred and naturally given then why did the National Liberation Movement (N.L.M.) and other ethnic based political groups preach secession? (HIS 25)

The evaluator indicates, in Extract 174, that efforts are needed to maintain the complete composition of the abstract. It can be deduced from the above that, presently, the abstract is faulty, but the assessor, employing the conditional clause, hedges to decrease the severity of the negative statement. In Extract 175, the examiner thinks that the quality of the work could be enhanced when the candidate expresses issues differently. The if-clause expresses uncertainty, paving way for the candidate to continue with the thinking— a proposal not a command; hence, letting the candidate to keep that respect.

To this level, there was the inclination to have multiple hedging in just one evaluative statement, which was quite interesting:

Extract 177

Sometimes, candidate's work appears to be more of X than a study situated in World Englishes. (ENG 20)

Extract 178

In addition, the candidate sometimes makes conclusions that are rather unacceptable. (ENG 6)

## Extract 179

The use of simple random sampling technique would have been most appropriate if the researcher had given us some the sample frames so as to avoid bias in the sampling technique. (HOS 4)

## Extract 180

What would rather be more relevant is a review of literature on indigently and the clashes it has with conventional systems (in all spheres) in post-colonial societies. (POP 3)

For illustrations, while Extract 177 has ‘sometimes’ and ‘appears’, Extract 178 contains ‘sometimes’ and ‘rather’. Other extracts comprise ‘would’ and ‘if’ (179) together with ‘would’ and ‘rather’ (Extract 180). Hyland and Hyland (2001) call them “clusters” while for Boncea (2014), these are “constellation of hedges”. These clusters of hedges are inclined to strengthen one another, serving to achieve the overall purpose of eliminating the sting further from the negative comment (Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Moreover, the hedges were realized on the whole work as well as on the many different parts of the work:

## Extract 181

The narrative is fairly well presented. (HIS 6)

## Extract 182

The candidate indicated fair knowledge of the subject through literature review. (ENG 17)

## Extract 183

The analysis is quite well done. (HOT 3)

## Extract 184

The conclusions are fair but could be improved with better reporting of results. (POP 20)

The above statements, 181-184, allude to the variously hedged parts of the theses, comprising the whole of the study (excerpt 181), LR (excerpt 182), analysis (excerpt 183), and conclusion (excerpt 184). Generally, the excerpts are captured in positive remarks added to the mitigating resources. Excerpts 181-184 indicate that the concerns are not captured well. The negative comments are variously mitigated by adding hedged items to the praise statements.

Additional thesis part-genres that were hedged include the following:

Extract 185

The coverage of referencing is seemingly adequate and fairly acceptable. (HIS 11)

Extract 186

Generally, his recommendations, though logical and satisfactory, should have been detailed. (ENG 21)

Extract 187

The mixture in tenses makes comprehension quite difficult. (POP 3)

Extract 188

The presentation is fairly well organized but the study has some serious defects. (HOT 4)

Part-genres of the thesis that recorded hedging devices are found in Extracts 185-188 above. We have other part-genres such as Referencing (Extract 185), Recommendations (Extract 186), Language (187), and Presentation (188). In terms of language use, the resources employed, here, were, mostly, adverbs: 'seemingly', 'generally', 'quite', and 'fairly'. Furthermore, the different part-genres being hedged confirms Falahati's (2006) observation that examiners can use hedging devices to describe methods, results, findings, and conclusions. However, this insight challenges that of Hyland and Hyland



(2001), who noted that hedging was used on only “content issues”, possibly, since instructors, mainly, offered feedbacks meant to improve assignments.

The foregoing argument concludes that expressing tentativeness is a real tool used in TERs. The analysis revealed that many strategies including “imprecise quantifiers”, “modal verbs”, “lexical forms”, “usuality devices”, and “hypothetical forms” were employed. Sometimes, constellations of hedging tools were employed to eliminate the sting from the negative comment or for solidification. Besides, the hedging tools were used, totally, in part-genres of the work, using positive and negative evaluative acts. Thus, as explicated by Hyland (1995), hedges help treat readers as intellectuals, with ability to decide on issues, and specify that statements are conditional, awaiting acceptance by one's peers, and that this interpersonal mode is strengthened by institutionally protected obligations that concern the need to engage in and defer to in arguments within the scientific community.

### *Question Forms*

The use of question forms is the third mitigation approach found in the data. In this case, examiners employed questions as a way of attenuating the full weight of criticisms in the data. Hyland and Hyland (2001) illuminate that questions are a means of foregrounding knowledge limitations, and can be employed to mitigate the effect of a statement by making it tentative to an author's state of knowledge. Whereas they, mostly, seek to elicit and engage a reaction from the reader, questions also show the author's ignorance or doubt and, hence, can reduce the imposition of a criticism or suggestion. They explicate further that questions are also beneficial when an individual wishes to protect him/herself or readers from the full potency of what might be

thought of as serious assertions. Interrogatives mitigate a definitive reading of a suggestion, and as a result, questions can, in some instances, be considered as attempts to suppress full commitment from the likely implications of a comment. Falahati (2006) explicates further that assessors use questions to initiate a dialogue with readers. This may be considered of as a form of invitation for the reader to contribute to the ongoing dialogue. Find illustrations of the use of question in the reports below:

Extract 189

If Africans were practicing slavery and slave trade before European intrusion into Africa, how could you challenge as ‘erroneous’ ‘contentions that Africans willingly offered themselves to be enslaved or were sold by their own brothers’? (pp. 110,121). (ENG 18)

Extract 190

There is section heading 'observations' on pp 112 & 123. What are these? Are they findings? (HIS 15)

Extract 191

X is gun-toting warrior who fights in a war and, more significantly, rejects marriage. Her courage is admirable, but is she the model of the new African woman? (ENG 8)

Extract 192

There are some inconsistencies in your description of the research design. Is your research qualitative (p.62)? Purely qualitative p.? Mixed? What is it? (POP 5)

The examination of the data also discloses that most of the interrogatives were presented in WH-forms. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) state that such interrogative forms, mostly, request a reply which gives an element of information: that is, what they term as interrogative words (Q-words). The question forms with the Q-words or Wh words are employed since the assessors desire to engage and stimulate a response from the reader more in addition to exhibit their doubt or ignorance, and, consequently, weaken the

imposition of a criticism or a suggestion (Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Also, there is a distinction between close-ended questions and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions permit respondents to give elaborative respond in the form of explanations, elaborations or exemplification. Closed-ended questions restrict respondents to answer yes/ no or from other provided options like A, B or C, preventing the respondent from offering more thoughts.

These questions, in various forms (Wh,- questions, and open-ended form), seek information from the reader, purporting somehow that the interrogator (examiner) is ignorant or doubtful of the issue, reducing the full effect that a direct criticism may have on the reader, were a direct form be employed. Thus, in Extract 189, the allegation made by the student with regard to Africans practising slavery before the advent of the Europeans is challenged by the assessor. The assessor could have simply and unswervingly indicated that a candidate's viewpoint in connection with the practice of slavery by Africans was erroneous; however, by employing the interrogative form, the examiner desires the candidate to think through the matter. Again, in Extract 190, the assessor is unclear with what the candidate presents, whether it is 'observation' or 'findings'. Obviously, the examiner knows which option is better and correct, but s/he rather poses a question that demands a response. An attempt to provide this response will, somehow, invite the candidate into the discussion, thereby mitigating the effect by just employing a direct criticism. By employing the questions, the examiner's visibility is realized in the reports (Petch-Tyson, 1998). Again, the examiner employed the questions to invite readers (candidate) into the text (Hyland, 2002a). Hyland (2002a) explains further that Questions are the strategy of dialogic involvement par

excellence, often functioning to express an imbalance of knowledge between participants, but also working to create rapport and intimacy. Hyland (2002a) espouses further that questions occur where writers seek to explicitly establish the presence of their readers in the text: inviting engagement and bringing the interlocutor into a discourse arena where they can be led to the writer's viewpoint. By extending engagement, interrogatives accentuate the fundamentally dialogic nature of a discourse (Bakhtin, 1981). In other words, through interrogatives, writers highlight the interests, perceptions, and needs of a prospective audience into their ongoing argument. Hence, interrogations serve as an invitation for readers to respond; to orientate themselves in a certain way to the argument presented. Thus, in the present analysis, the examiner, by employing these questions (extract 189-192), seeks to invite the candidate into the discussion since the candidate ought to provide responses to these 'invitations' in one way or the other.

### ***Personal Responsibility***

Aside the use of criticism-praise (CP) duos, hedging as well as questions employed in the reports, the last key device in reducing the effect of negative remarks was the employment of personal responsibility. This is used to present a writer's own interpretation and opinion of an existing material, and to weaken the force of intentions (Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2001). Some examples are given here:

Extract 193

I cannot identify the study area from the title of the thesis. (HIS 24)

Extract 194

The study relied solely on secondary data from X which I consider as insufficient for this degree. (POH 4)



Extract 195

I do not find her references to studies in X to be appropriate. (ENG 7)

Extract 196

I think this aspect of the study has not been well fashioned out.(HOT 4)

Observed above (193-196) are illustrations of the use of personal mentioning to mitigate criticisms in the data. The occurrence of 'I' with other corresponding forms in the reports specifies what the assessor sees or feels in that manner, but for some readers may not record a defect or a fault. The assessor detects a fault that must be corrected; however, he or she refuses to present the problem emphatically; instead, it is shielded in a subjective feeling to prevent the student from the feeling of censure through that remark. Precisely, in excerpt 193, the assessor stresses he/she the title of the thesis does not capture the area of study. Nevertheless, the assessor bears the duty of the shortfall, signifying that, perchance, there is a study area but he or she does not perceive that, saving the student of the weight of the inability to present a good work.

Hyland (1995) elucidates that the presence of personal pronoun, I (as an assessor) submits that the statement must be thought of as a substitute idea and not a conclusive statement of the truth, which implies a subjective belief that needs validation. The presence I, according to Petch-Tyson (1998), assists assessors to interfere as well as present themselves visibly in the texts. Giannoni (2002) also identified, in his study, the presence of personal responsibility by way of attenuating critical remarks. Personal Responsibility is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven of this same thesis, specifically, under Commentator Role.

Examiners mitigate critical comments in the reports for many reasons. In a similar study, Hyland and Hyland (2001) offer explanations that necessitate the attenuation of negative remarks. First, assessors attempt not to destroy students by condemning all issues found in the thesis. The candidate may be devastated, and crippled in future attempts. Second, assessors desire to project themselves as readers rather than persons who are the upholders of all facts in the area under study. Hence, in an effort to critique a piece of writing, there is the need to mitigate such critical comments. A third reason attributed to the use of mitigation strategies in TERs was the need not to usurp or appropriate learners' text. In other words, according to Brannon and Knoblauch (1982), candidates are to own their writings. Knoblauch and Brannon (1984, p. 118) explained that student writings could be stolen from them through evaluator's remarks. Hence, they propose that if learners apply referential feedbacks thoroughly, learners cannot develop their writing abilities and cognitive skills well; however, they will only reproduce writings to mirror instructor's expectations. Mitigating negative remarks will prevent instructors from unnecessary intrusion in learners' texts.

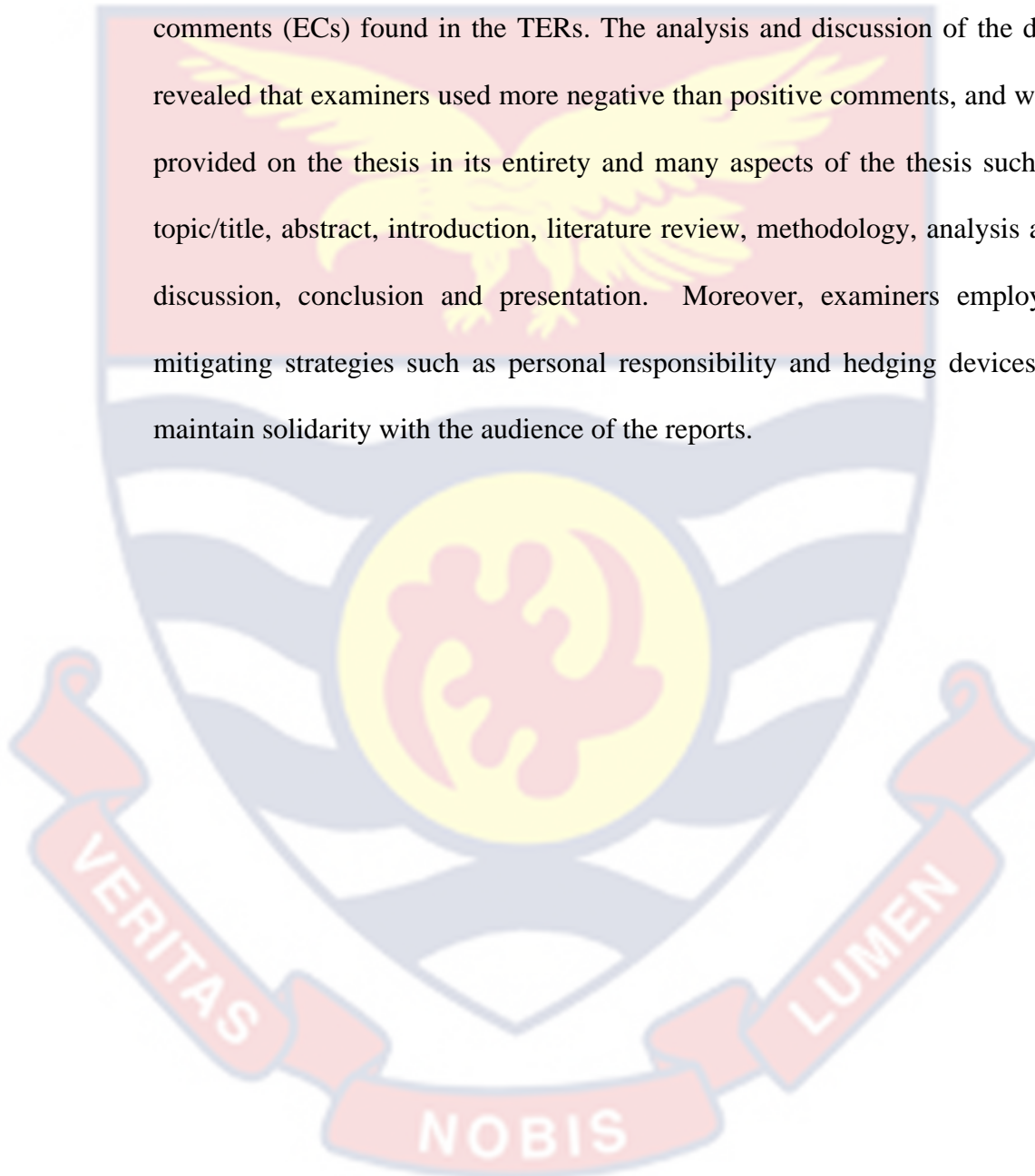
Furthermore, critical comments are softened to save the 'public self-image' or face of students. A subtle approach rather than a direct comment is employed to save the face of these students. Goffman (1966) holds that "face" is the confident self-respect that an individual keeps in communication. Because "face" is neither permanent nor intrinsic, when a "positive face" is given, that person senses an obligation to keep that respect. Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 66), further, developed the idea of "face" by specifying that "face" is "something that is emotionally invested, and can be lost,

maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction”. Obeng (1996) observed: “Akans (one of the major ethnolinguistic groups in Ghana) use proverbs in the management of face, mitigating to reduce the offensive intent of ‘difficult’ utterance, and showing a speaker’s humility or acknowledgment of the addressee’s sensibility” (p. 521). In the examiners’ reports, the “face” of the assessor, negative or positive, is endangered, yet to keep that “face of being accepted” by other individuals whereas preventing distraction by others, the assessors’ comments are, occasionally, softened through devices such as hedges, questions, and personal responsibility. Finally, in extenuating negative acts, assessors regularly think of developing or maintaining better associations with the students in that interpersonal relationships or social relationships could be damaged when the remark one receives, in an interaction, is just harsh comments, killing self-confidence and damaging the student’s sense of worth.

The discussion, so far, has shown that negative/critical comments made by assessors in thesis examiners’ reports were attenuated through the praise- criticism pairs outlined, hedging strategies, questions, and personal responsibility. Also, examiners mitigated criticisms because, first, they wanted to be regarded as readers not persons that were the upholders of facts in the study area; next, assessors prevent devastating the students by negatively critiquing all concerns that the write-up has; also, it is necessary that examiners do not usurp or appropriate student’ work; next, to save the “public self-image” or face of assessors; finally, for reasons of developing or maintaining better connections with students.

## Chapter Summary

Chapter Five has examined the use of positive and negative comments in examiners' reports (TERs) in an attempt to answer the first research question set out in the present study, which is on the kinds of examiners' comments (ECs) found in the TERs. The analysis and discussion of the data revealed that examiners used more negative than positive comments, and were provided on the thesis in its entirety and many aspects of the thesis such as topic/title, abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion, conclusion and presentation. Moreover, examiners employed mitigating strategies such as personal responsibility and hedging devices to maintain solidarity with the audience of the reports.





## CHAPTER SIX

## EVALUATED ENTITIES IN EXAMINERS' REPORTS

## Introduction

Having reported on the analysis and discussion of the types of examiner comments (ECs) used in the thesis examiners' reports (TERs), in the preceding chapter, I now examine the evaluated entities (EEs) in the data. The distribution of the evaluated entities and their corresponding process types is presented first. The linguistic variants of these entities, captured in the data, are then presented, with evidence from the data. Added in this chapter is the analysis and discussion of the grammatical roles of these evaluated entities (EEs).

## Distribution of Evaluated Entities (EEs) in Examiners' Reports

A summary of the findings on evaluated entities in TERs is presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Evaluated Entities in Examiners' Reports

Entities	Process Types					Total
	Material N (%)	Relational N (%)	Mental N (%)	Verbal N (%)	Existentia I N (%)	
Thesis	371	303	0	41	78	793 (37.4)
Candidate	556	455	78	177	56	1322 (62.4)
Supervisor	0	1	0	3	0	4 (0.2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>927 (44)</b>	<b>759 (36)</b>	<b>78 (4)</b>	<b>221 (10)</b>	<b>134 (6)</b>	<b>2119 (100)</b>

Source: Field data (2016)

In Table 2, the candidate was evaluated more than the thesis, with a total occurrence of 1322 (62.4%). The least frequently EE was the supervisor, with a total occurrence of 4 (0.2). It can also be seen that, in terms of the frequency of occurrence, Material Process for both the Thesis and the

Candidate was 927 (44%). Relational Process placed second with 758 (36%). The least frequently occurring process for the three EEs was Mental, 78 (4%). Material Process was more since the thesis and the candidate engage in activities, as found by Afful (2017b) which showed that the metaphorical use of verb forms in titles creates a picture of an activity. What the candidate has done is being evaluated, and the result of that activity is the thesis. With the Relational Process, the qualities of the thesis and the candidate are identified with other attributes as being good or bad; hence, the frequency of Relational Process in the data. Considered separately, the Material Process for the thesis occurred most frequently (371 for frequency), followed by the Relational Process. The least was Mental, with no occurrence. It is not surprising that the Thesis as an EE did not have any occurrence for the Mental Process because the Thesis is –human; so, it cannot engage in mental actions.

For the candidate, the least frequency occurring process was Existential. Still, Material was first and Relational Process placed second for Candidate. The EE, Supervisor, recorded zero for the processes except for Verbal Process, 3, and Relational Process, 1, occurrences. The main process for the supervisor, Verbal, indicates what is said about the supervisor because she/he is not the direct object of the evaluation of the thesis. Each evaluated entity with its process types is discussed one after the other in the subsequent paragraphs.

Studies on Transitivity have shown the frequent occurrence of Material Process in the different data employed for analysis. Iwamoto's (2008) analysis of a male character in a literary text showed that that character was mainly involved in Material Process. Rodrigues (2008) also found the most frequent

use of Material Process. While Relational Process was least in Rodrigues (2008), it was the second highest in the present study. Perhaps, the data used for the present study, academic writing, allow for the values and attributes to be evaluated but the literary text used in Rodrigues (2008) allows for conversation/dialogue; hence, the use of more Verbal and Mental processes but least of the Relational Process, confirming Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) that Relational and Mental processes are characteristic of conversation. Here, with Verbal process, the examiner is seen to be engaging in a dialogue with the reader, but Mental Process is less in the present study because the recipient of that ‘conversation’ is not physically present in the discourse to reveal his/her subconscious feelings and thinking.

#### **Thesis as an Evaluated Entity (EE)**

This section examines the thesis as an evaluated entity (EE). The discussion is presented in two folds. First, attention is given to the various referents to the word ‘thesis’. Second, the various grammatical processes associated with the thesis as an evaluated entity are discussed.

First, the thesis as an EE was referred to in different forms, such as ‘Thesis’, ‘Study’, and ‘Research’ in the reports. A summary of the distribution of the different linguistic forms for the thesis is presented in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Distribution of Linguistic Variants for the Thesis**

Linguistic Variants for Thesis	(N)	(%)
Research	498	27.2
Thesis	360	20
Work	338	18.5
Study	200	10.9
Text	158	8.6
Dissertation	112	6.1
Write up	92	5.0
Document	39	2.1
Piece	24	1.3
Narrative	06	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1827</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data (2016)

As seen in the Table 3, 'Research' was the highest with frequency of occurrence of 498(27%), which was more than a quarter of the total frequency. The second and third highest linguistic variants were 'Thesis' 360(20%) and 'Work' 338(18.5%) respectively. The least to occur was 'Narrative' 06(0.3%). 'Document' (39, 2.15%) and 'Piece' (24, 1.3%) were sparingly used in the data.

Examples of these linguistic forms for the Thesis are presented below, first, for the 'thesis':

Extract 1

The thesis is of good quality, with good language layout and referencing. (HIS 14)

Extract 2

Thesis maintains a good balance between X, Y and Z. (POH 15)

Extract 3

The thesis is far from ready. (HOT 23)



Observed from the above, Extracts 1-3, are instances of the various representations of the Thesis as an EE. The thesis is viewed as a document forwarded in support of requirement for a degree. It is a presentation of an author's research findings. Thus, it can be seen as an extended written essay submitted for a university degree; that is, a written composition of considered length, exploring a particular issue or subject. A high level of proficiency is expected in presenting this research, requiring that certain values and skills are to be existent in the thesis. Because the thesis is submitted in fulfilment for the award of a certain degree, the university, before accepting the thesis and awarding the degree, expects a certain standard to be achieved in the thesis. For example, we find the use of 'thesis' in Extracts 1-3 as well as expression of the examiners' satisfaction or otherwise of it. In Extracts 1 and 3, the use of the definite article 'the' creates a known knowledge between the examiner and the reader whereas the absence of the article seems to distance the examiner from the thesis, confirming Adika and Denkabe's (1997) use of 'referring terms' consisting of definite and indefinite.

Second, there was the use of 'dissertation' in reference to the EE, thesis. The use of 'dissertation' here does not differ from the 'thesis' discussed above. It is also a formal exposition of a subject, especially, a research report written by students as a requirement for the completion of a degree. In some instances, the use of 'dissertation' is reserved for the doctoral education or degree or qualification as well as a 'thesis'. However, examiners do interchange the use of 'Thesis' and 'Dissertation'. (Refer to Chapter Two for differences in the use of 'dissertation' and 'thesis'). The examiners, in this research, use the term in reference to the research report of MPhil level:

Extract 4

The dissertation is acceptable and merits a pass. (POH 1)

Extract 5

The dissertation itself is logically structured. (ENG 16)

Extract 6

The dissertation is not well organised. (HOT 4)

We find the use of ‘dissertation’ in Extracts 4-6. While an examiner thinks of it as being ‘acceptable’ in addition to meriting a pass (employing the use of a predicative adjective), another finds this to be ‘logically’ structured (also employing the use of adverb). These are positive comments that exude the appreciation of examiners towards the EE. The examiner weighs the dissertation against the evaluated criteria and concludes that it is not well organized (Extract 6). Perhaps, the sequencing of information, including its structuring, does not meet best practices for the award of that degree. What the examiner does with respect to the comment given on the dissertation is appropriate in that the dissertation is usually a lengthy and systematic discourse on a subject accepted as worthwhile by members of the research community, suggesting that there are ways of composing the dissertation. Hence, institutional or departmental expectations must be adhered to in the presentation of a good dissertation which includes structuring.

Next is the use of ‘work’ as a variant lexical term for ‘Thesis’ as an EE. By employing ‘work’, examiners recognise the ‘Thesis’ as an epitome of an intellectual production. Hence, ‘materials’, process, knowledge, and skills must be employed to ensure its success. So, this intellectual production will require the use of ‘materials’, depending on the discipline, such as the following: RAs, textbooks, archival document, Hansard, government

document, conference proceedings, and festschrift, and data which must be described, reviewed, synthesized, analysed and presented. The production may also involve various stages like pre-writing, writing and post writing, as noted in writing pedagogy. It is, therefore, required of the candidate to master these practices to produce an acceptable intellectual product. Consequently, an effort will yield a specific type of production:

Extract 7

The work is done in a language that is easy to read. (HIS 22)

Extract 8

A thorough, sound piece of work, well researched and very well presented. (POH 19)

Extract 9

This particular work has failed to provide any serious psychological analysis. (HOT 3)

Whereas in Extract 7 above, the language of the work is described as easy to read, using the Noun Group for the evaluation, in Extract 8, the work is described with the Attributive adjective ‘thorough’ and ‘sound’ in addition to ‘well’ and the intensifier ‘very’. These highlight the good qualities of the work. While Extract 7 has an NP made up of only a determiner, ‘the’ and the head, work, Extracts 8 and 9 present a complex NP. The modifiers that describe ‘work’ are pre-modifiers with adjectives ‘thorough’, ‘sound’ (Extract 8), and ‘particular’ (Extract 9). In Extract 8, ‘work’ is used as object to the preposition, ‘of’. The use of work in relation to thesis and dissertation is very general, and does not talk to an activity in academic.

Another linguistic referent to this EE, ‘thesis’, in the data was ‘Study’. Study also relates to academic document that has been produced through the effort of investigating a subject. Systematic efforts are required for the

examination and production of such a product, which calls for careful identification and understanding of the subject under consideration. Below are examples of the use of ‘study’ in reference to ‘thesis’ in the data:

Extract 10

The study presents interesting relationship between X and Y. (ENG 5)

Extract 11

The study makes modest contributions to knowledge X. (POH 4)

Extract 12

The study has serious defects. (HIS 24)

We also find in Extracts 10-12 the use of ‘Study’. ‘Study’ is presented in a simple noun phrase with the definite article, ‘the’ and the head of the phrase, ‘study’. Again, the entity is evaluated with the use of attributive adjectives, ‘interesting’ and ‘modest’ (Extracts 10; 11).

Another variant of the EE, Thesis, is ‘research’. ‘Research,’ like ‘Study’ discussed above, also involves a systematic inquiry into a subject or of a material, and establishing facts and presenting found conclusions in an acceptable manner to members of a research community. Thus, the application of this system involves the collection of data through discipline-approved methods, analysis, and interpretation of data:

Extract 13

A useful research on practical dimension of X and Y (HOT 15)

Extract 14

The research succeeded in achieving those Goals. (POH 8)

Extract 15

The research was well designed. (ENG 1)

Shown in Extracts 13-15 are examples of the reference to the thesis as ‘Research’. The entity is presented in simple noun phrases. Except for Extract



13 which has an attributive adjective, ‘useful’ in addition to the determiner and the noun/head, Extracts 14 and 15 have only determiners, ‘the’ and the headword, ‘research’. These extracts display positive remarks about the research that the examiner has assessed. In Extract 13, the examiner finds the research ‘useful’ in terms of practical dimension of X and Y. A research may be conducted in order to test hypotheses, share knowledge gained in a certain field, and make appropriate recommendations for further studies. If a researcher achieves such purpose, positive remarks such as those found in Extracts 13-15 are recorded in the TERs.

Furthermore, other forms that were found in the analysis of the data included the use of ‘piece, ‘write-up’, ‘narration’, ‘text’ and ‘document’.

Instances of their uses are given below:

Extract 16

The piece is fairly written. (HOT 2)

Extract 17

A good write-up with fairly good referencing and layout (ENG 24)

Extract 18

The narrative itself is not a product of chance. (HIS 6)

Extract 19

There are typographical errors in the text which have to be corrected. (POH 14)

Extract 20

The entire document suffers from serious grammatical and structural errors. (HIS 11)

The EE, Thesis, is referred to as a ‘piece’ (Extract 16). Perhaps, the examiner views the Thesis as a composition that is made up of different parts and crafted or woven into a nice artefact. Also, in Extracts 18, we find the use of ‘narrative’ in reference to the Thesis. This, the examiner thinks of as a recount

of events which are presented in an orderly manner to help the reader appreciate what has happened in the past, and having a bearing on the present, perhaps to help extend the frontiers of knowledge. Hence, it was not surprising that the use of 'narrative' was found in reports written by examiners in the area of History. Another linguistic form for the thesis is 'text' (Extract 19). Examiners used 'text' in reference to the discussion presented for evaluation or a manuscript or a document to be assessed. Here, we find that the examiner has a problem with the typing, asking for a correction of this error. If such an error is not corrected, comprehension will be impeded. For Dunleavy (2003), thesis writers must manage reader expectations and always write with the reader in mind, appealing to the notion of writer responsibility which is very helpful in the structuring of their writing. The last of the reference to the Thesis was 'document' (Extract 20), with the pre-modifiers, 'the' and 'entire'. Extract 17 gives an example of Adika and Denkabe's (1997) indefinite referring terms, consisting of the use of the indefinite article, 'a'.

Pronouns were also used to represent the EEs, as found in the discussion of the thesis as an EE in the data. Pronouns mostly help avoid unnecessary repetitions.

Extract 21

It addresses a very interesting topic which has been under-researched. (POH 12)

Extract 22

It is well presented and structured and makes easy reading and comprehension. (ENG 20)

Extract 23

The narrative itself is not a product of chance. (HIS 6)

Here, all the Extracts, 21-23, presented above use 'it' as a pronoun in place of the EE, thesis. A pronoun replaces a noun by the function the noun is performing in a sentence to avoid monotony or unnecessary repetition. Other forms of the pronouns like 'she', 'we' and 'he' would not have been appropriate here since the 'thesis' is neuter- specific gendered personal pronoun, placed in a subjective position in the structure. The pronoun has an anaphoric relation with an antecedent, and it is an important linguistic item in co-text (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

Though the thesis as an EE is referred to differently in the data, these different linguistic forms do not adversely affect the data analysed for the present study. It may be said that these linguistic variants reflect individual differences of examiners who try to distinguish between what a Thesis is and is not alongside what a dissertation is and is not, confirming the findings of Afful (2020) that differences exist in the structural patterns in the examiners' reports, which shows individual differences. In essence, these linguistic forms are lumped together for the analysis under the grammatical roles since the focus of the work is on the product or agent that has been evaluated. Whether 'dissertation', 'document', 'text', 'study', 'thesis' or 'research', they all refer to the product that is being evaluated. The variants reveal rich semantic implications, with the varied connotations to show how each examiner conceives the thesis; each of these terms seems to have shades of meaning. However, the level of research and writing skills expected from students are similar such that the length of work, topic under consideration, methodological and theoretical approaches required do not render one form (thesis, work, research, study etc.) more important than the other. Also, these various

referents demand the use of appropriate rhetorical sections such as Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Analysis, and Conclusion (Lynch, 2014). Again, these forms of writing should be clear, concise, and aim to be objective and respectful of others' opinions (Krishnan & Kathpalia, 2002). In other words, whether thesis, work, study or research, examiners appreciate well-written, interesting, and logically presented arguments (Johnston, 1997). Atkinson and Curtis (1998, p. 17) observe that academic writing at an advanced level is, therefore, more than “just getting ideas down on paper” but being able to organize information well for effective communication of ideas.

Furthermore, it can be said that these different linguistic forms in reference to the thesis as an EE may be a play on words, probably for the avoidance of monotony or a showcase of individual preferences. There are instances in the data where an examiner employs ‘research’, ‘work’, and ‘text’ to refer to the ‘Thesis’ in the same report. This confirms the finding of Lovat, Holbrook, and Hazel (2011) that examiners’ choice of section structure, reporting technique, and writing style varies greatly.

In sum, the section has examined an aspect of the Thesis as EE, which is the different referents to this entity. It was seen that among the distribution (Table 3), ‘Research’ was the highest. ‘Thesis’ and ‘Work’ placed second and third respectively. The least occurrence was ‘Narrative’. Again, the analysis revealed that these references were presented, using mainly the simple nouns as well as complex noun phrases, accompanied by determiners and adjectives.



### Grammatical Roles of the Thesis as an Evaluated Entity

This section reports the analysis and discussion of the grammatical roles associated with the thesis, as one of the evaluated entities (EE) in the data. The grammatical analysis of this entity considers the process types and their corresponding Participants in the clauses. The various process types give us categories such as Material, Relational and Mental. The first process type to be discussed is the Material Process followed by Relational Process, Verbal Process, and Existential Process. The statistics on the process types associated with the evaluated entity are summarized in Table 2 of this same chapter of the present study.

#### *Material Process*

Material Processes express the notion that an entity ‘does’ something – which may be done ‘to’ some other entity. In the Material Process, there are two participant roles, namely Actor and Goal. Material Process in relation to the EE, Thesis, had a frequency of 371, the highest occurrence for all the processes for ‘Thesis’. Instances of their use in the data are these:

Extract 24

The work presents interesting relationship between X and Y. (POH 1)

Extract 25

The study makes modest contributions to knowledge X. (ENG 25)

Extract 26

The study utilized a multi-staged sampling technique well. (HOT 23)

Extracts, 24-26, represent the doings that are associated with the EE, thesis.

First, the Actors in the Extracts presented above are mainly rendered as Noun Group (NG), which is made up of determiners plus nouns, and Pronoun. In Extracts 24-26, we have the NG with ‘the’ as the determiner, and ‘study’ or

‘thesis’ as the head word. Likewise, there is the use of determiner ‘this’ and noun, ‘work’. The Actor in the Material Process which is, the ‘thesis’, ‘study’ or ‘work’ has the power to initiate an activity so it is not passive in the whole evaluation Process, but a very active agent in determining the value (as in positive comments) or otherwise (negative comments) in the evaluation Process.

Next, the Goal in the extracts (24- 26) above are also mainly Noun Group, consisting mainly of an adjective, and a noun and, sometimes, a prepositional phrase which acts to show the relationship between two or more entities. For example, in Extract 24, we observe ‘interesting relationship between X and Y’ where ‘interesting’ is the adjective and ‘relationship...’ is the Noun Group. Again, in Extract 25, we find a similar situation in which the Goal is Noun Group which consists of an adjective, ‘modest’ and a noun, ‘contributions’ and the Prepositional Phrase, ‘to knowledge X’ indicating that the Actor ‘study’ does something which is to add to existing studies. The use of the Goal here for the Thesis confirms the findings of Iwamoto’s (2008) study which revealed Stefan de Vaux, the male character, involved mainly as an Initiator or an Agent in a Goal-directed material process. Though the data set is different, similar findings have been identified. The Goal, whether Thesis in the present study or Stefan de Vaux, the male character in Iwamoto’s (2008) study controls what is happening in the discourse.

In Extract 26, the Goal is presented with a Noun Group, ‘a multi-staged sampling technique’ and Circumstance (Manner), ‘well’. Here, the Circumstance adds more value to what the Actor did, that it was ‘well’.

Again, the Actor, still the thesis, is represented by a Noun Group in the form of a pronoun:

Extract 27

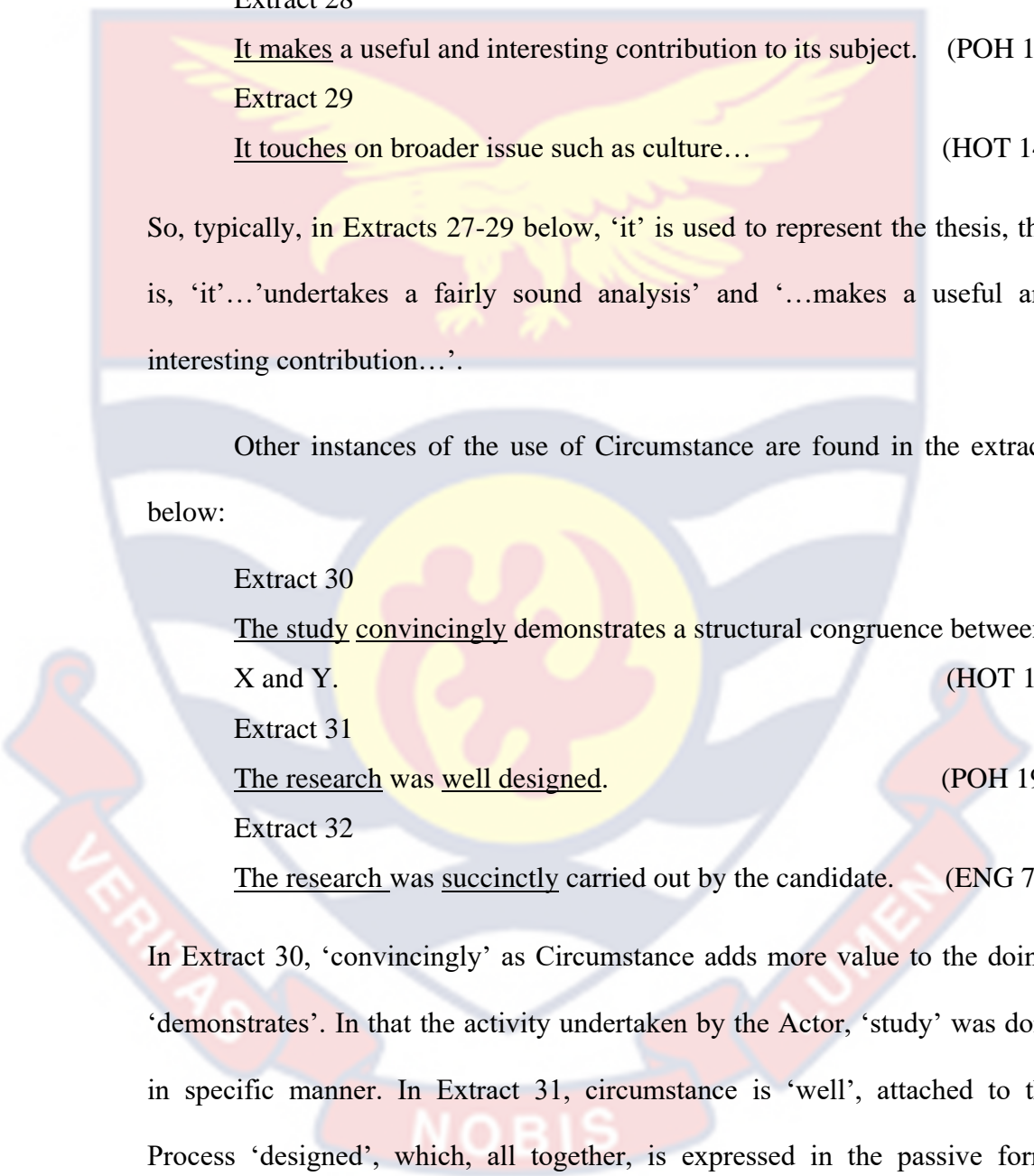
It also undertakes a fairly sound analysis of X. (HOT 15)

Extract 28

It makes a useful and interesting contribution to its subject. (POH 11)

Extract 29

It touches on broader issue such as culture... (HOT 14)

So, typically, in Extracts 27-29 below, 'it' is used to represent the thesis, that is, 'it'...'undertakes a fairly sound analysis' and '...makes a useful and interesting contribution...'.  


Other instances of the use of Circumstance are found in the extracts below:

Extract 30

The study convincingly demonstrates a structural congruence between X and Y. (HOT 11)

Extract 31

The research was well designed. (POH 19)

Extract 32

The research was succinctly carried out by the candidate. (ENG 7)

In Extract 30, 'convincingly' as Circumstance adds more value to the doing, 'demonstrates'. In that the activity undertaken by the Actor, 'study' was done in specific manner. In Extract 31, circumstance is 'well', attached to the Process 'designed', which, all together, is expressed in the passive form, fronting and playing in theme position, 'the research'. A similar use of circumstance, 'succinctly' is presented in Extract 32 with a passive construction, showing how careful and deeply the research was undertaken.

The use of Circumstances in the data confirms that in Ideational Metafunction, which is about encoding experiences and meanings, circumstantial features like (location, extent, time and space, manner, cause) are very important (Halliday, 1979).

There were other instances in the data where the Goal was presented in passive constructions, foregrounding the 'Thesis' but obfuscating the candidate. Examples of these are found below:

Extract 33

The thesis is clearly presented by the candidate. (HIS 1)

Extract 34

The study was well designed by the researcher. (HOT 13)

Extract 35

The work is well presented by the candidate. (POH 22)

By presenting the 'Thesis, 'Study', and 'Work' in a Theme position, the examiners shift attention from the candidate to the thesis, suggesting that it is the Thesis that is under consideration, and not the candidate. In other words, the product (that is, the thesis) and other variant terms merit the attention of the examiners, and that is what it was to be examined and has been examined. The candidate in this agentive passive construction is like Claire, the female character in Iwamoto's (2008) study who is mostly internalised and passivized and do not affect external events or other participants.

In addition, the analysis revealed that the passive construction that presented the Thesis as Goal in Theme position came without explicit mentioning of the candidate (agentless passives). This finding is similar to Starfield et al. (2017), who observed in their study where the candidate is covertly evaluated and the thesis is overtly evaluated. It was assumed that the



candidate is known; thus, by not mentioning it, it does not affect the meaning of the construction in any sense since the focus is still on the thesis and not the candidate. Some examples are found below:

Extract 36

The thesis did not provide a conceptual framework to guide the data analysis. (HOT 4)

Extract 37

The thesis has been well presented in the right manner. (HIS 20)

Extract 38

The data has been successfully analysed in the dissertation. (POH 13)

We see in Extracts 36-38, the ‘thesis’ which is the Goal presented in Theme position plus a Material Process, avoiding the mentioning of the candidate. Added to this participant is Circumstance, ‘in the right Manner’ and ‘successfully’ respectively (Extracts 37 and 38), realized in prepositional phrase, and adverb. Also, the identified Manner above gives information that sums up the Process (Thompson, 2014), and adds to the value laden in the entity. In Extract 36, the examiner observes that the conceptual framework is missing, which should be mentioned for the candidate to address. As Kumar and Stracke (2011) rightly noted, examiners consider the thesis as work in progress and not as a completed text. Thus, feedback is provided for the candidate and this labels the examiner as feedback provider and an assessor (Starfield et al., 2017) since both summative assessment (SA) and formative feedback are provided here in these extracts (Holbrook et al., 2004a; 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2011). In Extract 38, however, though the candidate is obfuscated, it is the ‘data’ that becomes the Theme and not thesis; that is what is rather given prominence is an aspect of the thesis, ‘The data’. This sheds light on the fact that, sometimes, examiners are not interested in judging the

thesis as a whole but some specific aspects of the whole. This confirms Moreno and Suárez's (2008) view that evaluative acts are functional units, irrespective of their lexico-grammatical realizations, the requirements being that they contain both the aspect commented upon and what is said about it. It makes sense since these individual components actually make the whole. (For more discussion on this, please refer to Chapter Five).

Material Process was not realised only in terms of Actor, Process and Goal but also as Actor, Process, and Scope. The Scope, unlike the Goal, receives no impact from the Process (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2014), but the action which is the Process ranges over the Scope rather. Thus, the Scope is an extension of the Process. Some cases found in the data are these:

Extract 39

The thesis addresses a very critical issue in X. (ENG 17)

Extract 40

The work however sheds some light on the independence movement in Ghana. (HIS 15)

Extract 41

This particular work has failed to provide any serious analysis (POH 4)

Extract 42

The study did not address the effect of safety on X. (HOT 12)

Extracts 39-42 above are instances of Scope associated with the Material Process in the data. In the Extracts above, it can be seen that mostly, the Scope is a Noun Group, with noun and adjective. With Extract 39, which is positive evaluation, we are presented with Actor 'The Thesis', Material Process 'addresses' and the Scope 'a very critical issue in X'. The Scope is composed of a determiner, 'a', an intensifier, 'very', an adjective 'critical', the noun

‘issue’ and a prepositional phrase, ‘in X’. Together, we get the Noun Group for the Scope. The Scope presents to us the summary of the Process or extent of that (Halliday, 1994; Thompson, 2014), that is, what did the thesis address? It addressed ‘a very critical issue in X’. We find, in Extract 41, the use of another Scope cast in a negative light: ‘has failed to provide any serious analysis’. This is seen as an extension of the Process’ has failed to provide’.

In addition, the Scope also appeared in subject positions as Theme in passive constructions. Some instances are found below:

Extract 43

The problem has been clarified. (HIS 14)

Extract 44

The work was not adequately informed by the existing body of literature. (ENG 8)

Extract 45

Current wide range of literature has been revealed. (POH 21)

Extract 46

The study is not adequately informed by empirical works. (HOT 3)

Extracts 43-46 give evidence of Scope in theme position in the sentences. By fronting the Scope, the examiners place more value on the range of the Process, rather than the other elements that accompany evaluated entity. In essence, it is ‘the problem’, ‘the work’, and ‘the current wide range of literature’ that merit the attention of the examiners (Martin et al., 1997).

Another observation made in the analysis was that the thesis as an EE can be said to be personified. Thus, the thesis is placed in an agency position to do something though it is the candidate that is to undertake those duties and not the thesis as presented in the data, as exemplified by the Material Process in the Extracts above. For example, in Extract 39, we find ‘the thesis addresses

a critical issue in X'. The fact is that a critical issue has been addressed in the thesis by the candidate. By placing 'the thesis' in Theme position, the candidate is relegated to the background, and the focus of the discussion now centres on the thesis, making it a +human that is able to address a critical issue; hence, the use of the personification.

Pronouns were included in this discussion. Some examples illustrating this are presented below:

Extract 47

It also undertakes a fairly sound analysis of X. (HOT 15)

Extract 48

It makes a useful and interesting contribution to its subject. (POH 11)

Extract 49

It touches on broader issue such as culture... (HOT 14)

In Extracts 47-49 above, we see that 'It', that is, the thesis 'undertakes a fairly sound analysis of X' (Extract 47). This sentence could have still read, 'a fairly sound analysis of X was seen or presented in the work by the candidate' and the import of the message would have still been intact. By casting the clause, the other way, as found in the extract, the examiner sought to foreground the thesis as against the candidate, making 'the Thesis' the main point of attention in the sentence. This is an example of personification since 'the thesis', in its – human state cannot 'undertake' any analysis. The presentation of the Thesis as engaging in activities confirms Halliday's (1979) explanation of the ideational Metafunction that language is used to encode experiences and meanings, and experience is represented in terms of entities which participate in the happenings, including inanimate objects, Thesis.



Hamilton (2002) articulates that we personify when we metaphorically ascribe agency to mostly inanimate objects, changing non-existent or imaginary entities into realistic Actors or agents. Hamilton explains that personifications can be linguistically realized as metaphors or as similes, but Dorst (2011) maintains that verbs such as ‘give’, ‘get’, ‘take’, ‘make’, ‘go’ and ‘come’ have human basic senses. However, the role of conventionality uses many verbs of motion and possession in combination with non-human subjects. Bowdle and Gentner (2005) have shown that derived metaphorical senses of a word can become so conventional that they are no longer experienced as metaphorical by language users, and are normally accessed directly (i.e. via categorization) during processing— referred to as ‘dead personification’.

It can be deduced from the above discussion that the Material Process is truly of the Ideational Metafunction, specifically, the experiential component since it is this component where language is used to encode experiences and meanings. Again, experience is represented “directly” in terms of happenings (events, actions, relations, and states), entities that partake in these happenings (persons, inanimate and animate objects, abstractions, and institutions) and circumstantial features (location, extent, space and time, manner, cause, and so on) (Halliday, 1979, p. 59). Thus, the Thesis, as an EE, engages in actions, Material Process, like ‘make’ and ‘undertakes’, attached to Circumstances that add value to such processes. Again, this EE also displays grammatical roles such as Actor, Goal, and Scope, and realised in both active and passive constructions. Last, the Thesis as EE was personified.

*Relational Process*

Relational Process is the next to be discussed; it construes a relationship between an expression and its content. The Process is realized by a 'Be' type of verb and linking verbs. It uses the indefinite article and an adjective, and can be used for symbolism, exemplification, definition, characterization and identification. The analysis of the data revealed that only the Attributive form was employed by examiners in their reports. In other words, the Identifying category was not found in the data. Per the evaluative nature of the reports, examiners would ascribe quality to an entity—Attributive, rather than to select one entity out of a set—identifying. Relational Process placed second to Material Process, 303 occurrences in the evaluation of the Thesis and second in the entire data with 758(36%). Illustrations of the use of Attributive Relational Process from the data are presented below:

Extract 50

The work is a good one. (ENG 22)

Extract 51

The piece is fairly well written. (HIS 11)

Extract 52

On the whole, the work is a very good one. (POH 7)

Extract 53

The dissertation itself is logically structured. (HOT 3)

Extracts 50-53 contain Relational Processes cast in a positive sense in that they express the examiners' admiration for what has been presented in the theses and of the theses themselves. These examples are Attributive Relational Process; hence, the Participants are Carrier and Attribute. In Extract 50, for instance, 'The work' as a Carrier is a noun, Process type is Relational which is

realised in a Verbal Group and ‘a good one’ (Noun Group) is the Attribute. The Attribute, ‘a good one’ ascribes a quality to the work which is the Carrier or the bearer of that characteristic. Similar structures are found in Extracts 50 and 52, where we find Carrier (Noun Group), Relational Attributive for the Process and a Noun Group to represent the Attribute.

The Relational Process is also expressed negatively, indicating that the examiners were, in some situations, not so thrilled with the state of the thesis. Instances in the data are found below:

Extract 54

The practical value of the research work is missing. (HIS 4)

Extract 55

The study has serious defects. (POH 14)

Extract 56

The study is barren of a theoretical framework. (ENG 13)

Extract 57

A low point of the work is that the objectives of the research have been presented in the same way that they were in the proposal of the research. (HOT 2)

Extract 58

This is worthwhile study of an interesting topic. (POH 12)

These Extracts, 54-57, are Relational Process where qualities have been assigned to entities, expressed in the negative sense as the examiners are dissatisfied with either a part or parts of the theses or in their totality. Though the negator ‘not’ is not explicitly found in the Extracts, 54-57, above, the words used there connote negativity. The use of ‘missing’ denotes a cherished quality absent in the work. Again, ‘serious defects’ in Extract 55 signals a problem in the work. In Extract 64, ‘barren’ is the expression of the content, the study. In other words, the study does not possess the quality of having

theoretical framework, at the moment. Also, the Carriers in the clauses above are Noun Group. Whereas in Extracts 55 and 56, we have the determiner, 'the' and a noun 'study', in Extract 54 and 57, the Carrier is a complex Noun Group which is made up of a determiner, 'the'; adjective, 'practical'; noun, 'value', and prepositional phrase, 'of the work' as a post modifier (Extract 54). Here, the 'practical value', as placed in Theme position by the examiner, cannot be ascertained. The Carriers in the EE receive the values expressed. Apart from the Noun Group functioning as Carriers, Pronoun also plays a role in representing the entity that receives the ascribed value as presented in Extract 58 above.

Furthermore, the Relational Process comes with the process itself which is recognised as a Verbal Group. The Relational Process serves as a bridge that connects the feature or attribute to the entity. Expressed differently, the relationship that is set up between the two concepts, Carrier and Attribute, is made possible through the Process. For example, in Extract 56, the barrenness of the theoretical framework is associated with the study through the use of the Relational Process, the Verbal Group, 'is', signalling the existence of the relationship.

Attribute is a feature of Relational Process. In Extracts 55 and 56, the Noun Group comprises the Attribute that gives the value to the Carrier. So, we find 'serious defects' which is characteristic of the 'study' as well as 'barren of a theoretical framework' which marks the study as not being in its best. Sometimes, the Noun Group is made up of an adjective, which may be considered as a reduced form of the Noun Group. A typical example is



‘missing’ found in Extract 54 above. Other instances of this reduced Noun Group, adjective are found in these extracts:

Extract 59

The dissertation itself is logically structured. (ENG 2)

Extract 60

The quality of the thesis is high. (HIS 21)

Extract 61

The work is replete with citations in the body of the text that are not in the references. (HOT 6)

Displayed above in Extracts 59-61 are Attributes in the form of adjectives. In Extract 59, the adjective is a participial, ‘logically structured’ which is modified by an adverb, ‘logically’, but we have ‘high’ as a predicative adjective, functioning as an Attribute in Extract 60. These ascribe value to the thesis. On the other hand, in Extract 61, the adjective, ‘replete’ is modified by a prepositional phrase, ‘with citations...’ that define further what the adjective assigns to the Carrier.

Again, the Attributes occur in multiple adjectives too; probably, for emphasis and a deeper understanding of the value laden in the Carriers. Below are some cases in point:

Extract 62

The study is interesting and readable. (ENG 12)

Extract 63

The thesis is very insightful and well written. (HOT 9)

Extract 64

On the whole, the thesis appears quite well written and structured. (POH 24)

Extract 65

In terms of substance, the research is reasonably impressive and rich in insight. (HIS 14)

Demonstrated in Extracts 62-65 above are instances of multiple Attributes that ascribe value to the evaluated entity, the Thesis. So, in Extract 62, we see ‘interesting’ and ‘readable’. That is, the Carrier, ‘the study’ does not display the feature of just being interesting but readable as well. Again, moving to Extracts 64 and 65, we observe that even when the disjuncts are ignored, ‘on the whole’, and ‘in terms of substance, respectively,’ which seek to add more information to the nature of the research, we still find that the Carrier (Extract 65), ‘the research’ has more than one Attribute, ‘reasonably impressive’ and ‘rich in insight’. Importantly, the examiners employ this strategy of using double Attributes for a Carrier not only for emphasis on the quality of the Carrier but to save space and to ensure brevity and compactness. Thus, it will be a sign of immaturity, in writing, to expand the clauses so that, for instance, Extract 63 becomes ‘The thesis is very insightful’ and ‘The thesis is well written’; hence, the coordination of ‘insightful’ and ‘well written’ attached to the Carrier, ‘the thesis’.

The last issue about the Attribute in the Relational Process is that, in some cases, the examiners used prepositional phrases. Prepositions help determine the relationship that exists between two entities. Similar to the Relational Process, a preposition helps determine the association that one entity has with another entity. Examples from the data are these:

Extract 66

The work is of good quality. (HOT 25)

Extract 67

The thesis is of good quality. (HIS 24)

Extract 68

The work is in its best at the discussion section. (POH 3)

Extract 69

The thesis is far from ready. (ENG 12)

In Extract 67, the Attribute, 'of good quality' expresses the value of 'the thesis', the Carrier. It is through the prepositional phrase that the worth of the thesis is ascertained, making this statement a positive one. In Extract 69, however, the use of the prepositional phrase which gives the Attribute of the Relational Process helps us to estimate the state of the thesis, that is, it is not in its best. Inherently, the examiner is not pleased with the current state of the thesis and concludes that it is 'far from ready'.

Furthermore, the analysis indicated that some clauses were made up of double Relational Processes whereas others had the Relational clauses in addition to other Process types. As observed by Starfield et al. (2017), examiners' choice of grammatical options which lay outside the university's criteria gives rise to this multiple, co-present, and overlapping roles (here, Processes) in the TERS:

Extract 70

The dissertation is well-written in good grammatical English and has no major faults. (HIS 15)

Extract 71

The dissertation is acceptable and merits a pass. (HOT 4)

Extract 72

The work is able to establish X and it was well designed. (POH 14)

Extracts 70-72 present instances of multiple Relational Processes that co-occur in a single sentence, giving us two clauses. In Extract 70, for instance, the first part of the sentence gives us the clause structure, Carrier, the dissertation'; Relational Process, 'is'; an Attribute, well-written in good grammatical English'. The second part of that same sentence in Extract 70

also gives us Carrier which is the same as that of the first clause, and the Relational Process is, 'has' and the Attribute is 'no major faults', Noun Group. These two Relational Processes are cast in a positive light. Both Attributes are Noun Groups, with the first being reduced Noun Group which is an adjective.

On the other hand, Extracts 73-75 below are samples of Relational Process plus other Processes:

Extract 73

This study straddles X and Y studies and it is a sound critical engagement with X. (ENG 9)

Extract 74

The thesis is a solid sound piece of work, thorough and logically presented. (ENG 14)

Extract 75

It is a well written piece and it is well edited and presented. (POH 18)

Typically, in Extract 74, the Relational Process is found in the first clause of the sentence, which has a Carrier, 'the thesis'; Relational Process, 'is'; Attribute, 'a solid piece of work'. The second part of the sentence is the Material Process type which has been presented in the passive form. With this passive structure, the Goal, 'the Thesis' is explicitly evaluated since it is placed in Theme position, but the candidate (Actor) is implicitly evaluated, being covert in that direction. The Process is a Material one made up of a Verbal Group.

The paragraphs above have examined the Relational Process associated with the EE thesis in the data. It was revealed in the analysis that the Carrier could be a Noun Group or pronoun, which takes the value expressed. The Attribute, on the other hand, could be a Noun Group reflective of a noun or an adjective, and the Attribute could also occur in multiple forms. The last is that



the Relational Process could be doubled in the same structure or combined with other Process types.

### *Verbal Process*

Verbal Processes are Processes of saying. The participants of the Process are: Sayer (participant who speaks), Receiver (the one to whom the verbalization is addressed), and Verbiage (a name for the verbalization itself). Though the Verbal Process was not many in the data (44 occurrences for the Thesis), it was observed that the ones examined in the data were cast in relation to aspects of the work, and not in reference to the thesis in totality.

Illustrations of Verbal Process are presented below:

Extract 76

The research problem is somewhat stated. (ENG 13)

Extract 77

The research design is well explained. (POH 5)

Extract 78

The sampling procedure is clearly explained. (HOT 22)

Extract 79

These study findings are largely unexplained. (HIS 25)

Extract 76 gives us Verbiage, ‘The research problem’; the Process which is Verbal, ‘is...stated’; Manner, ‘somewhat’. Also, the extracts, 76-79, above show that the examiners placed in Theme position some aspects of EE, the thesis: ‘the research ‘problem’, ‘the research design’, ‘the sampling procedure’, and ‘study findings’. By fronting these aspects of the theses, examiners emphasise what has been evaluated. With Extract 77, for example, the Verbiage, the focus of the sentence is ‘the research design’ which has been ‘well explained.’ This is an expression of a positive statement. However, in

Extract 79, the 'study findings' are found 'unexplained', which is negative in orientation.

In addition, it can be seen that examples of the Verbal Process are presented in the passive form, highlighting agentless passive forms. In this way, the examiners could have still added the Sayers, but they omitted them, perhaps, to show their 'insignificance' at that moment. In other words, the evaluation really centred on the Verbiage, rather than the Sayer; that is, the examiners were inclined to discuss what has been done well, and not who acted. In Extract 78, the examiner could have presented the clause like 'The sampling procedure is clearly explained by the candidate'. By omitting the Sayer, which is the candidate, an assumption of common knowledge is created; that is, eventually, it is the candidate that will explain or do the otherwise of what we find in the extracts above. Also, in the analysis, these extracts were taken under the different subheadings of the report rather than under the General comments section of the reports. Extract 77, for instance, was taken directly under the subheading, 'Research Questions'. The examiner's comment under this heading indicated that it was 'somewhat stated', suggesting that it was either not done so well or it was not impressive enough, though, there were, at least, traces of what can be termed as 'research questions'.

Lastly, for the Verbal Process, it was realized in the analysis that a part-genre was made to assume the position of a Sayer; that is, by using an active construction, the examiner fronts this section by bestowing upon it a '+human' activity:

Extract 80

The abstract states very succinctly the purpose and conclusions of the thesis. (ENG 12)

Extract 81

The abstract clearly states the substance of the thesis. (ENG 7)

Extract 82

The abstract does not read like an abstract. (ENG 15)

In the two extracts (80- 82), the ‘abstract’ is the Sayer. It is the entity that expresses the Verbiage, ‘purpose and conclusions of the thesis’ (Extract 80) and ‘the substance of the thesis’ (Extract 81). It was also observed in the analysis that this structure was given by a particular examiner in the data from the Department of English, perhaps as a reflection his/her own style.

The use of the part of a thesis to represent a Sayer is similar to the concept of ‘meronymic agency’ coined by Simpson (2004) in which a part of the body of a character or some other aspects of the character is assigned agency in the clause. Though Simpson (2004) explains that meronymic agency is a dominant stylistic technique in prose fiction, the concept of meronymic agency is applicable to the present analysis since Transitivity is about human language (Mwinlaaru, 2012), and the examiners’ reports can be said to contain human language. Assigning agency to parts of the thesis confirms the use of agency for parts of the human body to represent the character in studies like Adika and Denkabe, (1997), Iwamoto (2008), and Mwinlaaru (2012). Similar to the finding of Mwinlarru (2012), with his reference to Sam, meronymic agency used in the present study is active and effective.

As shown above, the Verbal Process has the element of saying something, giving us the participants: Sayer and Verbiage. The analysis of the data showed that there were few instances of this Process. The available ones

were also not specifically on the thesis but on some aspects or sections of the thesis. These were placed in Theme position to shift attention from the candidate to the sections of the thesis that had been evaluated. Also, in some special cases, examiners chose to make these sections of the thesis the Sayer of the clause, giving a +human Attribute to them.

### *Existential Process*

The last Process with reference to the evaluation of the thesis is Existential which construes existence. This Process has Existent participant and Existential 'There'. Though it is mostly used in casting hypothesis (Thompson, 2014), the analysis of the data revealed that this Process also discussed many different issues in the reports. There were instances of this Process in the data (78 occurrences) though not as many as the Material and Relational Processes presented in the earlier part of this chapter. Below are some uses of Existential Process in the data:

Extract 83

There is an appreciable knowledge displayed in the thesis. (ENG 17)

Extract 84

There is evidence of proof reading in the work. (HIS 10)

Extract 85

There is evidence of reasoning. (POH 5)

Extract 86

There are minimal grammatical errors and that makes reading interesting in the thesis. (HOT 13)

Extracts 83-86 are examples of Existential Process in the data. The Existential Process is made up of mainly Existential 'There', the Process and the Existent. The Existential 'There' is found in all the extracts, 83-86. The Process is also mainly of the 'Be' family verb plus the 'have' verb. Whereas some of the



extracts contain singular forms of the verb, others contain the plural forms for grammatical reasons since the nature of the Existent determines the nature of the Process. In other words, if the Existent is singular, the Process selected automatically becomes singular too, and vice versa. For instance, Extracts 83-85 have singular forms of the verb, 'is' and Extract 86 displays the plural form of the verb, 'are' because the Existent is in the plural form, 'minimal grammatical errors'. These are all positive statements that portray the positive appraisal of the examiner for that Existent; that is, the examiner finds value in these Existents.

There were, however, other structures that carried negative evaluation, as found in the Extracts shown below:

Extract 87

There is disconnection between the research topic and the main objectives. (ENG 7)

Extract 88

There is no analysis to validate the four hypotheses posited on page 7. (HOT 12)

Extract 89

There have been no attempts to explain the fluctuating trends in Table 3 with regard to the level of education. (POH 18)

Extract 90

There are some weaknesses in the chronology in the sections of the narrative. (HIS 16)

Extracts 87-90 are cast in the negative sense in that the examiner is dissatisfied with what the candidate has done. In Extract 87, the examiner finds a disconnection existing between the research topic and the objectives of the study, which should not be so (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). Also, while Extracts 87 and 88 have the singular verb, 'is' because the

Existential Process takes after the nature of the Existent, in Extracts 89 and 90, there is the plural form of the verb, 'are' since the Existents are plural, as in 90, 'some weakness...', for instance, warranting the use of the plural verb.

The Existents are mainly of a Noun Group, which helps construe that being, as indicated by Halliday (1994) and Thompson (2014). It was observed that some extracts were in simple Noun Groups for the Noun Group whilst others were in complex forms with post modification, mostly prepositional phrases. Thus, in Extract 82 above, for example, there is the Noun Group, 'an appreciable knowledge displayed', which mainly consists of a determiner, an Attributive adjective, head word of the Noun Group and an adjective. Almost all the Existents of the displayed extracts have Noun Group with a noun and a prepositional phrase; typically, we see in Extract 83, 'evidence' and 'of proof reading', giving as the Existent. Another example is found in Extract 90: 'some weaknesses' plus the prepositional phrase, 'in the chronology in the sections of the narrative'. This shows the place where the weakness can be identified or found in the text. In essence, the prepositional phrase modifies further what the noun entails. So, if 'there is evidence' then, it has to be evidence of something which is 'of proof reading'. Another realization of the Noun Group is the use of the noun plus a '-that relative clause' as post-modifier, as shown below:

Extract 91

There are, however, statements that need literature support in the work. (POH 4)

Extract 92

There are, however, avoidable typographical and grammatical error that could have been corrected through effective proofreading. (HIS 5)

Extract 93

However, there are a number of structural and format errors and inconsistencies that need to be resolved to enhance the document.

(HOT 1)

So, in Extract 91, for example, the noun group has a noun 'statements' and a post-modifier 'that need literature support in the work' which is the 'that' relative clause meant to explain further the nature of the statement.

Lastly, the clause that construes existence co-occurs with other Process types:

Extract 94

There are subheadings throughout the text but they are not captured in the table of content.

(HOT 25)

Extract 95

There are not many typographical errors and these could be corrected.

(HIS 17)

Extract 96

There is considerable volume of literature which the candidate has accessed but are not used in the discussion.

(POH 22)

As displayed above, Extract 94 shows the use of an Existential Process, and a Material Process. Thus, the sentence construes an existence and an activity. In a way, if the 'subheadings' are there, then they should be made visible through an activity of capturing them.

All in all, the Existential Process which construes an activity has been presented above. Through the Existential Process, the examiner presents the thesis and its part-genres as existing or not existing in terms of qualities. The analysis showed that all the clauses begin with the Existential 'There' but no case of the Existent placed in Theme position in the clause was captured in the analysis. Besides, the Process itself could be either singular or plural, taking

after the nature of the Existent. Again, the Existent occurred in Noun Groups with either adjective and noun, or a noun plus a prepositional phrase or relative clause as a post modifier. Lastly, Existential Process co-occurring with other Process types was identified in the data.

This section on the EEs in the data and their grammatical roles has focused on the thesis as an evaluated entity (EE). The thesis was represented with either a noun or a pronoun differently as ‘study’, ‘thesis’, ‘work’ and parts of the thesis such as LR. In terms of the grammatical roles, the thesis was couched in Material, Relational, Verbal and Existential Processes. The least of the Process was the Verbal whereas the dominant ones were the Material and the Relational Processes. The candidate as an EE in the data is presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

### **Candidate as an Evaluated Entity (EE)**

This section discusses the candidate as an evaluated entity (EE) in the data. The section examines the different appearances, and the grammatical roles of this entity; that is, this section discusses the different linguistic realizations of this EE, candidate and the associated Processes to help portray the outer and inner experiences of the candidate as manifested through the examiner comments.

The first main point in the analysis is that thesis examiners (TErs) used various tags in evaluating the candidates. Whereas some TErs used ‘Candidate’, others deployed ‘Researcher’ or ‘Student,’ etc. The distribution of these linguistic variants in the data is presented in Table 4 below:



**Table 4: Distribution of Linguistic Variants for Candidate**

Linguistic Variants for Candidate	(N)	(%)
<b>Candidate</b>	975	70.6
<b>Researcher</b>	155	11.2
<b>Student</b>	127	9.2
<b>Writer</b>	89	6.5
<b>Author</b>	31	2.2
<b>Applicant</b>	04	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>1381</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data (2016)

Table 4 shows the distribution of linguistic variants for the Candidate as an Evaluated Entity (EE) in the examiners' reports (TERs). The highest variant was 'Candidate', with 975(70.6%), which is more than half of the total occurrence of all the other linguistic variants in the data. This finding is not surprising since a Candidate is somebody who is being examined or somebody seeking to earn a degree. Again, 'Candidate' is what is mostly used in the literature (Holbrook, et al., 2004a; 2004b; 2007; Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2011; Starfield et al., 2015; 2017; Stracke & Kumar, 2010). The least frequent variant was 'Applicant', 4(0.3%), followed by Author, 31(2.2%). A discussion of each of these linguistic variants in Table 4 with examples from the data is presented in the subsequent paragraphs.

By choosing a certain referent for the candidate, examiners unconsciously or consciously create a certain identity for the Candidate; that is, examiners maintained a certain uniqueness for the Candidate for others to consider him/her in that direction. Examiners, first, used the linguistic variant 'Candidate' as presented in the examples below:

Extract 97

Candidate admirably shows deep understanding and knowledge of the extant literature. (ENG 17)

Extract 98

The candidate demonstrated that he understands social research methodology and was able to apply them in this study. (HOT 8)

Extract 99

The candidate has poorly stated the problem that he investigated. (HIS 23)

Extract 100

The candidate has provided a thorough and comprehensive review of the pertinent literature. (POH 25)

By referring to this EE as ‘Candidate’ (Extracts 97-100), the examiners may either have in mind, first, somebody who is being examined or second, somebody applying for a position (degree). The first option is more applicable, considering the idea that the examiner has to assess the Candidate through the thesis to consider him/her fit for the degree being sought.

Closely related to the concept of ‘Candidate’ is the use of ‘Applicant’:

Extract 101

The applicant writes excellently. (ENG 9)

Extract 102

The applicant provides detailed information on the steps taken. (ENG 9)

Here, the candidate is thought of as applying for either a position or a degree. What this means is that certain criteria must be used, and the applicant must meet certain requirements. Thus, the examiner is there to ensure that both ends are met. It is not surprising for an examiner to assess the applicant and conclude that ‘the applicant writes well’ (Extract 101). That is, considering the expectations of the department, institution or the School of Graduate Studies

(SGS), the examiner thinks that the ‘writing’ of the applicant is superb. The examiner expresses his/her feelings about what the applicant has presented, and it is an example of what Kumar and Stracke (2007) refer to as expressive utterances as a form of feedback. Expressive utterances allow the speaker (supervisor) to express or communicate his/her feelings since it is not all the time that examiners’/ supervisors’ engagements will be referential utterances which provide information nor directive utterances which try to get the hearer (writer) to do something (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). In the whole data, there were few uses of ‘applicant’ in reference to the candidate. Sometimes, we do restrict the meaning of the applicant to the job market or more, specifically, job interviews.

Another referent for this EE in the data is ‘Researcher’. Some examiners consider this entity as someone who investigates conscientiously and meticulously in order to come out with findings or truths of a sort, constituting in this case, the thesis:

Extract 103

The researcher has demonstrated adequate evidence of understanding of the area of research. (HIS 13)

Extract 104

The researcher shows fairly extensive knowledge of the pertinent literature. (ENG 20)

Extract 105

The researcher is also silence(sic) on the meaning of the findings. (POH 2)

Extract 106

The presentation and discussion of the results were very well handled by the researcher. (HOT 18)

In Extract 103, the examiner views the researcher as having achieved something (thesis) by demonstrating adequate understanding of the research

area. If a research requires thoroughness and diligence, then, an understanding of the research area is key to achieving good results, seen in a product, the thesis, (Hyland, 2000); the examiner demonstrates that the researcher has done well. This is a positive comment which is in consonance with Haines (2004), who suggests that students are not given all the bad points, as this can be demotivating. Paltridge and Starfield (2007) explain that universities expect, in the writing of a thesis, that a researcher will: a). show an awareness and understanding of relevant previous research on the topic; b). display a critical appraisal of previous research on the topic; c). demonstrate a clearly defined and comprehensive investigation of the topic; d). the appropriate application of research methods and techniques; a thorough presentation and interpretation of results. Paltridge and Starfield (2007) outline further that, in writing a thesis, a researcher should develop appropriate conclusions and implications that are linked to the research framework and findings; a high standard of literary quality and presentation, and show a contribution to knowledge on the particular topic. Logicity and coherence aid in the processing and production of arguments in a text, and effective communication of ideas (Atkinson & Curtis, 1998; Johns, 1997; Johnston, 1997). Golding et al. (2014) explain that when there is no coherence, a thesis appears unstructured and badly written, and can cause confusion to the examiners.

Again, there was the use of 'Writer'. To the examiner, the Candidate has tried to produce an output which is the thesis. Since writing is essentially a social act (Gergen, 1985; Katerm, Devise, Flament & Loots, 2004) in which the writer needs to construct meaning in a manner conventional in a particular community (Twumasi, 2012), it means that some consideration of what to



include and exclude is necessary in ensuring the finest piece. Planning is also needed. Again, each stage of the 'production' is very important, with emphasis on certain procedures such as pre-writing, drafting, evaluating, and revising (Hyland, 2003; Kpolugbo, 2006; Nordin & Mohammad, 2006). Some extracts on the use of the 'writer' in reference to the candidate as an EE are provided below:

Extract 107

The writer sets out clearly the problem for research and delimits the area of investigation. (POH 18)

Extract 108

The writer has a good grasp of the issue at stake. (HOT 11)

Extract 109

At times, the writer falls into the problem of literally translating Twi concepts into English. (HIS 12)

Extract 110

The writer mixes English and Twi spellings for non-English words. The writer should be consistent and use Anglicised spelling. (HIS 16)

By setting out clearly the problem of the research (Extract 107), a strong foundation is laid for the completion of this piece, and even in addition to delimiting the area for investigation (Allison et al., 1998; Samraj, 2002; 2008; Swales & Feak, 1994). By being provided with feedback, the writer is helped to achieve negotiated goals (Stracke & Kumar, 2010) Also, this reference to the writer means that the candidate be knowledgeable about writing, coherence, cohesion, etcetera. Also, the writer must show disciplinarity and knowledge about research writing (Adika, 2015; Paré et al., 2009; Prior, 1998).

Closely related to the linguistic variant ‘Writer’ is another linguistic referent ‘Author’, for the Candidate as an EE. Examples of the use of ‘author’ are provided below:

Extract 111

The author also needs to clarify culture-induced etiquette and codes of conduct from ethical standards. (HOT 15)

Extract 112

The author’s understanding about the Akan political system should be honed. (HIS 12)

Extract 113

The author must consult the manuscript which I reviewed and find some of the comments that I made. (HIS 12)

Extract 114

The author should use double inverted commas (“ ”) for quotation and sensitive terms like ‘modern’. (HIS 12)

The “Author’ who ‘composes’ a masterpiece, such as the thesis considers factors such as disciplinary variation, rhetorical sections, and requirements of genre, language, and visuals. Thus, in Extract 111, the ‘author’ is reminded to illuminate the ‘culture-induced etiquette’ used in the ‘composition’, study, as well as codes of conduct. Similarly, in Extract 114, the author is advised on how to use the double quotation marks in order to reflect the practices of the community. In other words, a masterpiece must evince effective use of language (Duff, 2010).

The word ‘Student’ was also used to refer to the candidate. A student may be thought of as someone who is under training or being enculturated to fit into a community—in this case, the academic community (AC):

Extract 115

The student also details his methodology and shows clearly in the analysis the thesis of his work. (ENG 2)

Extract 116

Student mixes the objectives with what appears to be her understanding of the statement of the problem. She must be able to delineate these two areas and concepts. (HOT 12)

Extract 117

The student did not adequately discuss the study results. (POH 3)

Extract 118

The student should rethink her opinion in p. 141 that the chiefs and so-called educated elite ignorantly accepted the British form of government. (HIS 22)

The student is commended for the description of the methodology, and his/her ability to establish the substance of the study (Extract 115). In Extract 117, the student can be seen not to have mastered the presentation of the results in that its adequacy was missing in the thesis. Kumar and Stracke (2011) see the supervisee on a journey and that training is needed for such learners to become independent scholars (Afful, 2009). In a sense, this self-regulated learner finds value in expressed feedback. The developmental and formative component where examiners provide feedback to assist the candidate to revise the thesis for final submission (Kumar & Stracke, 2011) is key to a learner— a student. Thus, through the feedback, supervisors/examiners engage supervisees/ candidates (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). By this socialization, a student is exposed to the norms and practices of this community, and it is assumed that by the end of a certain period, the student may be familiar with these practices, and exhibit skills and knowledge. It must be noted that the exhibition of these acquired skills and the knowledge does not come with perfection. As Duff

(2010) asserts, the AD is a site of internal and interpersonal struggle for many people (both learners and faculty; native and non-native) and, especially, for newcomers or novices. Thus, it was not surprising that the student could not discuss the study results (Extract 117). The point though is that after going through the socialization process, one's inability to discuss the results of a study is quite serious since that is the core of the whole study that has been undertaken. Here, the examiner does exactly what Haines (2004) suggests by telling the student exactly what is wrong so that the student, in a way, can feel secure and see the opportunity for improvement. Besides, students can use feedback from their supervisors/examiners to learn how to self-assess and set goals, and increase ownership of their own success.

Hence, the examiner, providing feedback for the student, affirms Bruno and Santos' (2010) observation that one way to support students' learning is by using feedback. Again, teacher WF raises students' awareness of the reader's expectations (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994). Mahfoodh and Pandian (2011) also think that WF is crucial to students' growth as writers because it is considered to be the best way for communication with each student on a one-to-one basis. Feedback is formative if it effectively helps students to master their difficulties (William, 1999). The supervisee and supervisor use information on the TERs to shape the thesis for a 'better' product later.

The last and different realization of the candidate as an evaluated entity (EE) in the discussion of the data in the present study is pronouns. These are used mostly in place of nouns in grammatical constructions to avoid



unnecessary repetition of the noun under discussion, and to remove boredom.

Some examples from the data are provided below:

Extract 119

She shows an appreciable sense of criticality and makes a conscious attempt at identifying the gap in the literature in order to make her own work relevant. (POH 21)

Extract 120

He has been able to confirm his hypothesis through the analysis of the data. (HOT 7)

Extract 121

She does not include a considerable number of texts that critique the colonial order. (HIS 12)

Extract 122

He shows great understanding of his data and is able to discuss fully in relation to his research questions and also existing data. (ENG 2)

In Extracts 119-122, we see the use of pronouns; these include both the feminine and masculine forms of pronouns, suggesting that both genders engage in the writing of thesis. The use of these pronouns creates cohesion both intertextually and intratextually (Halliday & Hasan, 1976).

In sum, examiners used different linguistic forms to refer to the candidate as an EE. Either the choice of any of these names in the evaluation of the candidate was done deliberately because supervisors were aware of what their meanings were, or the choices were made unconsciously, maybe, for the sake of variety to avoid monotony or for individual preferences. Again, it must be mentioned that not every use of 'Student', 'Candidate', 'Writer', 'Author', or 'Researcher' in the study came with a negative comment; some came with positive comments, as seen in the ECs above.

### Grammatical Roles of the Candidate as an Evaluated Entity

This second section considers the various grammatical process types that are identifiable with the Candidate as an evaluated entity (EE), helping present the outer and inner experiences of the candidate as made evident in the examiners' comments. These include Material, Relational, Mental, Verbal and Existential. These are discussed below:

#### *Material Process*

In this section, I examine Material Process used in the data. As alluded to earlier on under the Evaluation of the Thesis, the Material Process involves doings or happenings; that is, the Process uses action verbs or verbs of undertakings. The process helps establish the activities that the candidate engaged in the writing of the thesis, and what activities examiners have assigned to the candidate in the reports. The various participant roles such as Actor, Verbiage, Goal and Scope are examined as well as their placement as Theme or Rheme position in the structure. This Process dominates in the data. Illustrations are found below:

Extract 123

The candidate did a painstaking and meticulous work in the area of data generation through coding. (ENG 15)

Extract 124

The researcher developed specific and appropriate problem statement to guide the study. (POH 1)

Extract 125

The candidate posited two hypotheses which she was able to validate with data. (HOT 21)

Extract 126

The candidate consulted diversified sources to secure information that helped to reduce subjectivity. (HIS 3)

Presented above (Extracts 123-126) are some examples of Material Process in the data. These are activities that were undertaken by the candidate, particularly, associated with the writing of the thesis. This Process which consists of Actor, Process, Goal and or Scope are all found in the present data but the displayed extracts above (123-126) consist of Actor, Process and Goal. First, the Actors in these extracts are Noun Groups and Pronouns. Noun Group names entities and entities can undertake activities; hence, their availability in the Actor position in the clause. The Noun Group is chiefly made up of a determiner and a noun without any post modification. We find above the Noun Groups 'the candidate' (Extracts 125, 126) and 'the researcher' (Extract 124). Pronouns are also placed in a subjective position to control what is said in the sentence, and it comprises, both, masculine and feminine forms:

Extract 127

He has laid out the reasons for the choice of the discourse representational theory. (ENG 25)

Extract 128

He spent too much time on the history of Asante from 1700 until the advent of the missionary era in the nineteenth century. That enterprise kept the study out of focus. (HIS 17)

Extract 129

She has displayed a good knowledge of the theoretical issues in sexual and reproductive health needs of male adolescents which is highly commendable. (POH 6)

Extract 130

She made a conscious effort to have a representative sample involving Ghanaian and non-Ghanaians by applying and justifying the use of non-probability sampling approach. (HOT 2)

Above (Extracts 127-130) are examples of pronouns placed in Actor positions. While Extracts 127 and 128 give the masculine use of the pronouns, Extracts 126 and 130 have instances of feminine pronouns placed in the subjective case as entities being talked about in the clauses. The pronouns allow for variation and avoidance of repetition, helping to create cohesion in the text by making anaphoric reference to the nouns (such as 'candidate', 'student' and 'researcher') used in the text.

Next, the Process consists mainly of Material, construed by Verbal Group. The verbs used in the Material Process were several in the data, and came in variant forms, concrete and abstract. The few shown in the extracts above include simple verbal forms like 'did', 'developed', and 'posited' (Extracts 123, 124, and 125 respectively). As the verbs are in the simple past form, they depict actions that the Actors of the clauses undertook when writing the theses plus what the examiners also assigned to them when they were assessing the theses. Apart from the simple past tense forms, there were other Verbal Groups found in the data, as seen in Extracts 127 and 129 ('has laid out', and 'has displayed'), showing the events that had happened in the past but has relationship with the present. It describes a completed whole rather than from within the event as it unfolds (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973; Wiredu, 1998)

Also, some examiners combined more verbs in a single clause, perhaps to explain, in more specific terms, what the candidate did as shown below:

Extract 131

Candidate provides sound arguments and makes relevant deductions...

(HIS 11)



Extract 132

The candidate chooses and describes her research in clear and systematic manner. (POH 3)

Extract 133

He relates existing literature to the current work and demonstrates clearly the points of convergence and divergence. (ENG 14)

Thus, in Extract 131, two clauses have been combined in a single construction. Both Processes are in the Material form. Depicting an activity by combining these processes, the examiner might want to foreground the various activities that were undertaken by the candidate, on one hand; and on the other hand, to show maturity in writing by using compound sentences rather than simple sentences which will mean splitting the construction into two different parts. Slightly different from Extracts 131 and 133, Extract 132, has a common Actor, but with two verbs, giving us the Material Process, ‘chooses and describes’—these, too, are Material Process, expressing the specificity in relation to what the candidate did. Otherwise, a single verb could have been adequate for that Process.

Furthermore, the Goals in the clauses were mostly Noun Groups which came in different forms. In Extract 123, the Goal consists of a determiner, ‘a’; paired adjective, ‘painstaking and meticulous’; the head word, ‘work’, and a prepositional phrase, ‘in the area of data generation through coding’. We see that what the candidate has done here is worthwhile. In Extract 125, the Goal is also a Noun Group that comprises an Attributive adjective, ‘two’, head word, ‘hypotheses, and a relative clause as a post modifier, ‘which she was able to validate with data’. This one, too, is a positive mark on the activity undertaken by the candidate. However, in Extracts 127 and 129, we find that

the head words are immediately followed by prepositional phrases: whereas ‘the reasons’ has ‘for the choice... (Extract 127), ‘a good knowledge’ has ‘of the theoretical...’ (Extract 129). These post modifiers seek to explain further what the receivers or sufferers of the process are, the Goals.

By far, it can be said that, in the analysis presented on the Candidate, in some circumstances, the examiners emphasized who undertook the activity rather than on what was undertaken. In essence, examiners, through these examples, fronted the candidates in the clause by making the candidates Theme in the clause. It is laudable in the sense that whether the thesis receives a positive or negative comment, it is the candidate that has struggled to produce this academic piece.

Furthermore, on the candidate as an EE, on the Material Process, some examiners, however, placed the Goal in Theme position in the clause; thus, obfuscating the candidate and emphasizing what has been achieved, the product, rather than who undertook that action, the Actor. Some instances in the data are as follows:

Extract 134

The thesis has been well presented in the right format. (HIS 22)

Extract 135

The research was well designed. (ENG 22)

Extract 136

The problem guiding the study is well formulated. (POH 8)

In Extract 134, the examiner fronts ‘the thesis’, giving attention to ‘the thesis’ which has been presented in the ‘right’ Manner. However, it is the candidate that presented the thesis in that right manner. Perhaps, the examiner thinks that that is given information; hence, the attention is rather placed on the thesis,

which was also a finding of Kosonen (2014) that examiners cared more about procedures, data, and results than the actors who were doing the interpretation. More specifically, in Extract 136, the focus is on an aspect of the thesis rather; that is, ‘The problem guiding the study’, which the examiner assesses and finds that it has been ‘well formulated’. Consequently, the Actor is relegated to the background.

The Material Process analysed in the data was not only with Goals but with Scope as well. The Scope is not impacted by the Process, but it shows the range of the Process. Unlike the Goal discussed above, the Scope were used in the data probably because the examiners were interested in elaborating the range to which actions have taken place or been done. Instances of the use of Scope in the data are presented below:

Extract 137

The candidate has exhibited enough justification for the methodology he has used in data collection. (ENG 16)

Extract 138

The candidate has amply demonstrated extensive background knowledge to the area of X. (POH 5)

Extract 139

He enhanced the quality of his work by gleaning information from such key texts. (HIS 6)

Extract 140

He does not throw much light on how he inspected the data and embarked on the analysis. (HOT 25)

Most of the examples on Scope are Noun Group with either pre-modifiers of adjective or post modifiers of prepositional phrases. Characteristically, Extract 137 has the Scope which is a Noun Group that consists of an Attributive adjective, ‘enough’; headword, ‘justification’ and post modifier, a

prepositional phrase, ‘for the methodology...’. These combined pre-modifier and post-modifier indicate the extent of the Process. In fact, it will be insufficient for the examiner to end the construction at the Process, but an addition of the range which is the Scope is very much appreciated.

Conversely, the Scope in Extract 140 has quite a dissimilar structure in that it consists of compound sentences, ‘how he inspected the data’ on one hand, and ‘embarked on the analysis’ on the other hand. The use of simple sentences which are combined helps the examiner to elaborate what ought to have been done and was not done by the candidate.

Furthermore, with some occurrences of passive constructions in the data, the Scope occupied subject position in the clause, and thus, became the

Theme of the clause:

Extract 141

Adequate recommendations were offered by the researcher. (ENG 2)

Extract 142

The presentation and discussion of the results are were very well handled. (POH 21)

Extract 143

A good attempt is made by the researcher to relate studies in the area with his own investigation. (HOT 13)

Extract 144

The rich literature reviewed provided a very strong framework within which the analysis was done. (ENG 1)

In Extract 141, ‘recommendations’ which are ‘adequate’ is an expression of what the candidate has done, expressing the range of the Process, ‘offered’. In Extract 142, the extent of the Process, ‘handled’ is ‘the presentation and discussion’. The candidate who is anticipated to have initiated these activities expressed in the Processes is relegated to the background, through the use of



the passive constructions used in casting these clauses found in Extracts 141-144. Thus, prominence is given to the Scope by placing them in Theme position.

The analysis also revealed that the Material Process was projected, sometimes. Perhaps, examiners preferred to concisely state the idea rather than to state the point and project that again in the clause. Here are some examples:

Extract 145

Candidate clearly indicates that her study is a library research.(HIS 19)

Extract 146

The candidate has clearly indicated that her study covers a missing area of researching in X. (POH 3)

Extract 147

He has also proved that it is possible for second language to influence a first one. (ENG 12)

In the instances (145-147) shown above, ‘that her study is a library research’ (Extract 145) is the projected clause, and it is a second–order use of language (Thompson, 2014) in that this Projection has been alluded to earlier on in another clause of the same structure. In other words, what the ‘Candidate clearly indicates’ is realised in the second clause, which is the projected one, ‘that her study is a library research. Similar instances of projected clauses are found in Extract 146, ‘that her study covers a missing area of researching in X’, which is second-order of the ‘indicated’ and Extract 147, ‘that it is possible for second language to influence a first one’, which is the second-order of ‘prove’.

In addition, the realization of the Material Process was found with Circumstances which are realized by circumstantial Adjuncts. Thompson (2014) explains that Circumstances included in clauses encode the background

against which the Process takes place like time, place, and manner which are the most frequently used ones. For Thompson (2014), Circumstance come in different forms but, with the present data, the commonest one was Manner. Manner expresses quality which mostly occurs as ‘-ly’ adverbs. It could also be realised as a means, comparison or degree. Instances of its occurrence in the data are displayed below:

Extract 148

The candidate has set out clearly and adequately the statement of the problem. (HOT 10)

Extract 149

Candidate is unable to explicitly and closely show how register theory informs her study. (ENG 15)

Extract 150

The researcher writes well. (HIS 8)

Extract 151

The candidate has not satisfactorily indicated how X is done. (POH 13)

The displayed examples, 148-151, above are instances of the use of Circumstance in the data. The examples show that the use of the adverbs with ‘ly’ endings abound in the data. The use of ‘explicitly and ‘closely’ in Extract 149 indicates a quality which should have been exhibited by the candidate but it is missing at the moment. This demonstrates the background for the Process, that is, the ‘show’ which is that the Process was not done in the best of state. A similar use of this Manner is found in Extract 148, but this is cast in a positive sense in that the candidate has ‘clearly’ and ‘adequately’ set out (Process) the statement of the problem. In both cases of the use of Manner (Extracts 148 and 149), it can be said that examiners use double expression of Manner to deepen the context for the construction of the Process. Extracts 150 and 151 use single

words to set the context for the use of the Process; hence, we see ‘well’, ‘satisfactorily’, and ‘properly’ which depict good qualities for the expression of the Processes.

Lastly, some examiners presented the Candidate as a modifier to the item being evaluated. Simply, the Candidate, in this instance, functioned as a possessive, describing other elements in the clause. These are some examples from the data:

Extract 152

The researcher’s attempts strengthen existing knowledge of the general area. (ENG 18)

Extract 153

The candidate’s language is clearly understood for the most part of the thesis. (POH 7)

Extract 154

Candidate’s introduction of the study provides a fitting contextualization for understanding the entire work. (HIS 1)

Here, the evaluation, in general terms, is about the candidate but its specificity relates to what the candidate has done. In Extract 152, for instance, the structure can be recast to be ‘The researcher has strengthened existing knowledge of the general area’. The ‘attempts’ added in the clause shows, in specific terms, what has brought that achievement. By attaching the Candidate to the item which is being evaluated, ownership is created, here. Similarly, in Extract 153, we see ‘the candidate’s language’ and in Extract 154, we have ‘the candidate’s introduction’, as instances of Candidate as possessive, describing other elements in the clause.

In summing up the discussion in relation to Material Process, it can be seen that this Process depicts doings and happenings, and it comes, sometimes,

with Actor, Process, Goal, Scope, and Circumstances. The analysis and discussion revealed that all these participant roles of the Material Process were present in the data, though in varied forms and to different extents. The next subsection of this chapter concentrates on Mental Process.

### *Mental Process*

Mental Process deals with Processes of sensing, wanting, perceiving, and feeling. With this process, the examiner brings to the fore the thought processes of the candidate, which are perceived to be correct or incorrect. The present analysis recorded few instances of the use of this Process (78 out of the 1322 occurrence of process types for the Candidate). Those that relate to the candidate were few. However, there were the uses of other Mental Processes which were directly not linked to the candidate but to the examiner (as an entity, and not role, as it would be discussed in Chapter Six of this study), like 'believe' and 'think'. First, we consider those Processes that are related to the candidate:

Extract 155

The candidate confuses the purpose of the study with problem of the research. (ENG 5)

Extract 156

She understands what she has read. (HIS 10)

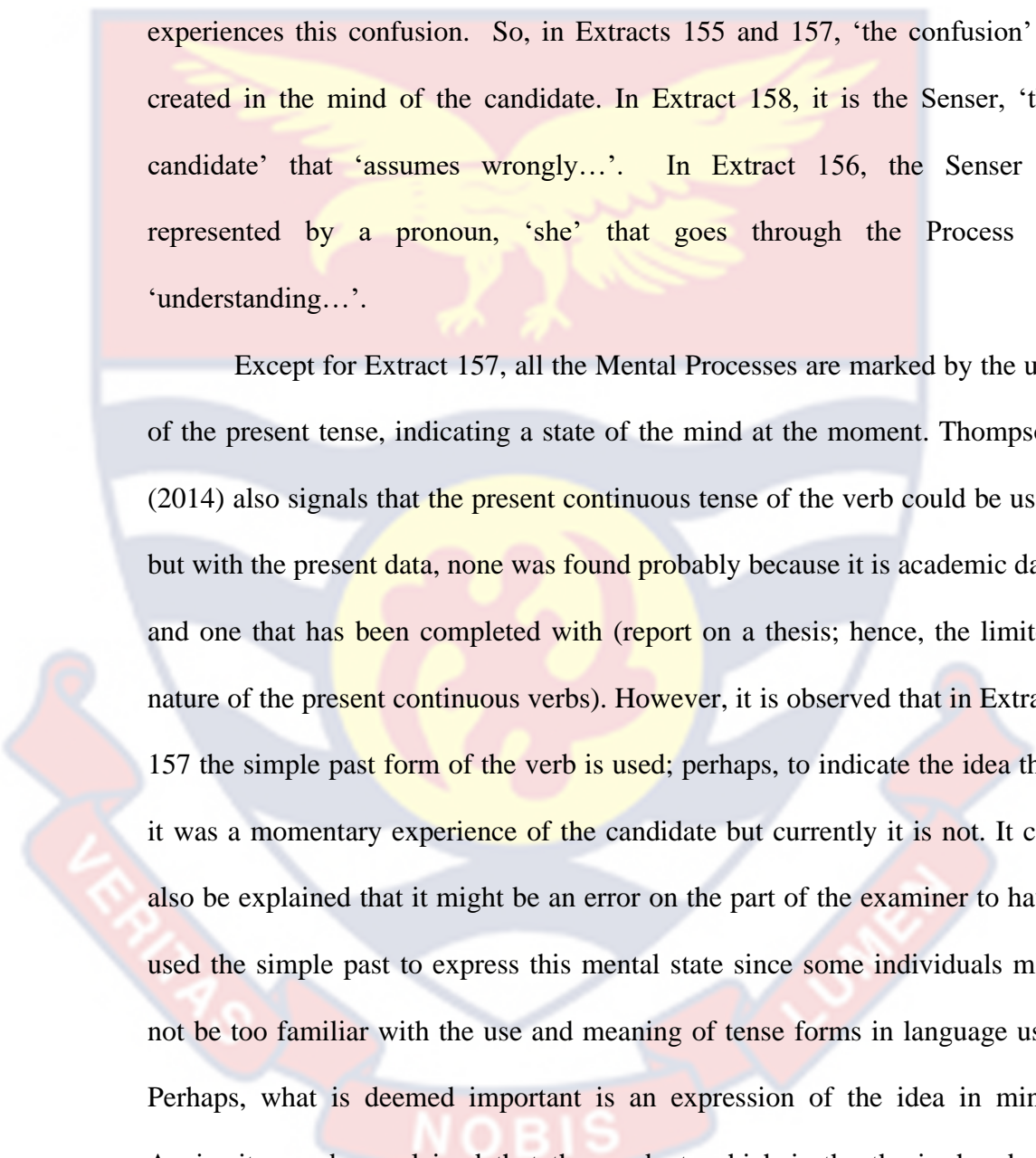
Extract 157

The candidate confused R. A. Freeman a white British official who authored the book with T. B. Freeman, the mixed-race Methodist missionary. (HIS 7)

Extract 158

The candidate also assumes wrongly that a bilingual in his context, necessarily speaks English and Ewe. (ENG 13)



Shown above in Extracts 155-158 are examples of Mental Processes in the present data. The Senser is the Candidate, which is represented with either a Noun Group made of a noun or a pronoun. The Senser is the entity whose mind the Mental Process occurs. In other words, it is the animate entity that experiences this confusion. So, in Extracts 155 and 157, 'the confusion' is created in the mind of the candidate. In Extract 158, it is the Senser, 'the candidate' that 'assumes wrongly...'. In Extract 156, the Senser is represented by a pronoun, 'she' that goes through the Process of 'understanding...'.  


Except for Extract 157, all the Mental Processes are marked by the use of the present tense, indicating a state of the mind at the moment. Thompson (2014) also signals that the present continuous tense of the verb could be used but with the present data, none was found probably because it is academic data and one that has been completed with (report on a thesis; hence, the limited nature of the present continuous verbs). However, it is observed that in Extract 157 the simple past form of the verb is used; perhaps, to indicate the idea that it was a momentary experience of the candidate but currently it is not. It can also be explained that it might be an error on the part of the examiner to have used the simple past to express this mental state since some individuals may not be too familiar with the use and meaning of tense forms in language use. Perhaps, what is deemed important is an expression of the idea in mind. Again, it may be explained that the product, which is the thesis, has been completed; hence, any reference to any part of the work or the candidate must be in the past tense rather than the simple present tense, which helps to express the state of being at the moment.

The other Participant Role, which is the Phenomenon, comprises facts which can be sensed, felt or perceived but cannot do anything or have anything done to (Thompson, 2014). This was also in the form of a Noun Group. So, with Extract 155, the Noun Group comprises a noun, ‘the purpose’ with post modifier which is a prepositional phrase ‘of the study’ and another one, ‘with problem of the research.’ Here, this Noun Group is what is sensed, showing the state of mind of the candidate.

However, in Extract 158, after the Senser, ‘Candidate’ and Process, ‘assume’, there is a Projection of another clause instead of a Phenomenon, ‘that a bilingual in his context, necessarily speaks English and Ewe’. This is a second-order use of language, suggesting that what is found in this Projection has been alluded to earlier in the clause; that is, what is assumed is that a bilingual necessarily speaks English and Ewe.

The analysis further revealed that there were other Mental Processes recorded in the data but these were associated with the examiners themselves. In other words, it was the examiners themselves who were the Senses in these clauses. Some cases in point are illustrated below:

Extract 159

I believe that the researcher did not understand what he read or did not read the entire thesis. (POH 15)

Extract 160

I believe he was not abreast with current issues in the area. (HOT 6)

Extract 161

I do not think that the chief was afraid of women. (HIS 7)

Extract 162

I also think that the second research question requires a closer attention in order to foreground the two variables in question.... (ENG 4)

We find in almost all of the extracts (159-162) that the Senser which is represented by 'I' alludes to the examiner, the writer of the reports. It can be said that what the examiners do, here, is to express their personal opinion or feelings of the phenomenon. This can be seen as a hedging strategy (Boncea, 2014; Hyland, 1998; Hyland, 2000; Lakoff, 1972; Musa, 2014; Namasaraev, 1997). Although the examiner actually wants to say that the candidate has done or has not done something, he/she says that indirectly through what the examiner personally thinks or perceives. For example, in Extract 159, the statement could have just been presented categorically as 'the researcher did not understand what he read or did not read the entire thesis'. By avoiding this direct expression of what he/she has in mind, the examiner saves his/her face and that of the candidate. By using this hedging strategy, an option is presented to the candidate as to whether to accept or reject what might be thought of as an expression of somebody, which may be the entire truth or otherwise of the situation (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Kitamura, 2000). This approach underscores the idea that the lexico-grammatical choices used for constructing discourse and, in particular, for constructing stance or position, have unquestionable effects on the act of communication (Pascual & Unger, 2010). These are metaphorical expression of modality or what is termed as modality through grammatical metaphor. Thus, in most of the excerpts, here, it can be seen that right after the Senser and the Process, the next item in the clause mentions the candidate either directly or indirectly.

Also, these excerpts (159-162) almost invariably project other clauses. Thus, in a clause, an aspect is the Senser and the Process, and another is the projected clause which is placed after these two Participant Roles, Senser and

Process. For instance, Senser, 'I'; Process, 'do not think', and the projected clause, 'that the chief was afraid of women' (Extract 169). In actual sense, what the examiner thinks is that the chief was not afraid of women. That is, the second clause is a Projection of what has been indicated in the first clause.

This is in line with Pazderova's (2006) view that our thoughts are influenced by the language because the language "channels our mental experience of the world". Through language, the examiner expresses what is in his/her mind. As explained by Petch-Tyson (1998), too, examiners make themselves visible in the reports by employing verbs which denote Mental Process.

Considering the few occurrences of the Mental Process in the data, we observe that enough space is not given to the candidate to go through this Mental Process of sensing and feeling etc. of him/herself. What is seen here is that the examiner ascribes these Mental Processes to the candidate, and since the examiner cannot move into the mental world of the candidate, few of this Process are realised in the data. It is not surprising that the Mental Processes counted in the data mainly were about the examiners themselves and what their perceptions were in relation to issues in the data.

In this section of the chapter, attention has been given to the Mental Process in relation to the candidate. It was observed that this Process occurred sparingly in the data, but out of those available ones, most relate to the examiners themselves, serving as a hedging strategy to save their faces and that of the candidates. The Senser, Verbal Process, Mental, Phenomenon and Projections were realized with this Mental Process.



*Relational Process*

The Relational Process sets up a relationship between two concepts namely Carrier and Attribute. The verb (Process) signals the existence of a relationship. The examiner, through this process, assigns qualities and values to the candidate. The analysis revealed that this Process abound in the data but the frequent occurring type was the Attributive Type, probably, because with this type of Relational Process, an object is ascribed an Attribute, a value. Thus, by judging the thesis and candidate, directly or indirectly, positive or negative, values are assigned to entities. Some examples are presented below:

Extract 163

The candidate has a very good grasp of the topic. (ENG 24)

Extract 164

Candidate shows fairly extensive knowledge of the pertinent literature. (HOT 7)

Extract 165

The candidate seems to have a problem with et al. (POH 25)

Extract 166

The researcher is silent on the meaning of the findings. (HOT 5)

In these extracts (163-166), we observe the use of Relational Processes. These are examples of Attributive Relational Process which assigns a value to an entity. Here, the Carrier of the Attribute is the Candidate, a human entity, as expressed in Extracts 163-166. The Carrier is a Noun Group which is represented by a determiner and a noun. However, with Extracts 167 and 168 below, we see the use of pronoun as Noun Group used as Carriers of the Attribute, expressed in the Process:

Extract 167

He exhibited great passion about the subject studied. (ENG 12)

Extract 168

She has a thorough discussion of the findings. (HOT 20)

Also, the Process (verb) displayed in the Extracts above 163-168 is Relational, signaling the existence of the relationship between the Carrier and the Attribute. With Extract 166, a relationship is seen between the Carrier, 'the researcher', and the Attribute, 'salient on the meaning of the findings', and this is achieved through the Process, the verb 'is'. In the analysis, it was seen that the 'be-family verbs' abound in the data as compared to other forms of verb that express Relational, such as the linking verbs and/ or the copular verbs like 'seem', 'have', 'show' etc.; perhaps, the be-family verb, a process, is handy in helping signal the existence of relationship between an object and a quality.

The next participant role in the Relational Process is the Attribute, with respect to the Attributive type of the Relational Process. The Attribute which is a feature of the entity or the value assigned to the Carrier occurs after the Process in the Extracts. For example, Extract 163 gives us 'very good grasp of the topic'. This is made up of a Noun Group which is made up of a determiner (an definite article), 'a'; intensifier, 'very'; adjective, 'good'; the head word, 'grasp', and a post-modifier which is a prepositional phrase, 'of the topic'. Again, there is a similar structure of the Attribute in Extract 164 which is also a Noun Group, consisting of the pre-modifiers, 'fairly' and 'extensive' and prepositional phrase as a post-modifier, 'of the pertinent literature'. These specify the nature of the values ascribed to the Carrier in the clause.

Besides, these Attributes in the Relational Process are also non-reversible compared to the reversible forms found in Identifying clauses of the

Relational Process. In other words, the position of the Carrier and the Attribute in a clause cannot be interchanged. Unlike the Identifying Relational Process where an aspect is created from a whole, it is possible to let the positions of the Identifier and the Identified be reversed since it is the same entity being talked about. However, the situation is different in terms of the Carrier and the Attribute in that one gives the value and the other element receives or carries the value.

Hence, the Attribute is not made the Theme of the sentence and the Carrier the Rheme of the sentence; that is, the focus of the sentence is and should be the Carrier which is being described by the Attribute, and not the other way around. Thus, in Extract 163 above, 'the Carrier, 'the Candidate', has the value of showing 'a very grasp of the topic' (Attribute). The relevance of the Attribute is determined in the existence of the Carrier. Exchanging the position of the Carrier for the position of the Attribute is a bit awkward. So, if this Extract were reversed to, 'A very good grasp of the topic has the candidate' or 'A very good grasp of the topic is shown by the candidate', it would not be a preferred sequence.

Again, it was observed that it was not only the Noun Group with a noun and other modifiers that made up the Attribute. Instances were recorded in the data where the Attribute was adjective which is a reduced form of the Noun Group. Illustrations are given below:

Extract 169

Candidate is well read.

(POH 11)

Extract 170

The candidate was rather exhaustive to a fault almost bordering on repetitiveness.

(HIS 15)

Extract 171

The candidate has been extremely impressive in the discussion of the related literature. (ENG 25)

Extract 172

He is highly commendable as it enhanced the accuracy of the historical data. (HIS 10)

Thus, we see in the above extracts (169-172) some examples of adjective, a reduced form of the Noun Group, functioning as Attributes in the Relational Process. For instance, Extract 170 contains ‘exhaustive...’ which is the value that is assigned to the Carrier, ‘the Candidate’. This predicative adjective describes, in value terms, the nature of the Carrier. Similarly, in Extract 171, the candidate is described as being ‘extremely impressive in the discussion of the related literature’. It is this Attribute, the predicative adjective that apporions significance to the Carrier in the Theme position, which is the focus of the discussion.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that, in some circumstances, the EE, the candidate, served as a determiner, modifying some other elements in the thesis:

Extract 173

The candidate’s knowledge on pertinent literature on the area is satisfactory. (POH 20)

Extract 174

The candidate’s problem solving and logical reasoning were problematic. (HOT 3)

Extract 175

The candidate’s title seems to also combine suggestions for further studies. (HIS 1)



## Extract 176

The candidate's strength remain(sic) a sharply focused research thrust, well-conceived and presented methodology, clear language and effective use of visuals in presenting her quantitative data. (ENG 23)

In other words, the candidate served as a possessive element, describing the nature of some aspects of the work. Perhaps, this was done by some examiners to indicate who is being evaluated. Thus, in Extract 173 above, the level of knowledge displayed in relation to the pertinent literature is deemed satisfactory. This knowledge is displayed by an entity, explaining the modification of that notion with the Candidate. In Extract 174, there is an identified problem with the nature of solving problem and logicity in reasoning, but this is actually a fault of the candidate; hence, the attachment of this identity to the structure.

In all, the Relational Process establishes a connection between two entities, which is made possible through the Process, the verb. The discussion on the Relational Process has shown that the Process displays the use of Carrier which is the candidate and which is, sometimes, accompanied by a determiner, the definite article, 'the'. Also, the Process itself consists mainly of the 'Be' family and other copular verbs. In addition, the Attribute, the value ascribed to the entity was chiefly noted to be Noun Group which was either with pre-modifiers or post-modifiers, and or adjectives. Lastly, the EE, in some cases, served as determiners modifying the main concepts that was judged. Verbal Process is presented in the ensuing section.

### Verbal Process

Verbal Process involves clauses of saying which include ‘say’, ‘noted’, ‘observe’ etc. Verbal Process relates to the transfer of messages through language. The examiner brings to the fore the sayings of the candidate, from the inner experience to the outer experience. The participant roles associated with this Process are Sayer, Receiver, and Verbiage. Sayer gives information as in answering the question ‘who told you so?’. Receiver is the one to whom the saying is addressed. Verbiage is the message itself which is a nominal group functioning as a participant in the Process. The analysis recorded cases of the use of Verbal Process in the data. Some are displayed in the extracts below:

Extract 177

The candidate discusses Ghana’s Economic experience development well. (HOT 14)

Extract 178

The candidate has stated the problem that he investigated fairly well. (HIS 1)

Extract 179

The candidate has not explained the theory properly. (ENG 1)

Extract 180

The candidate has poorly stated the problem that he investigated. (HOT 19)

The displayed extracts (178-180) show the use of Sayer, the Process itself which is Verbal and Verbiage. Some cases of Circumstances can also be identified in the extracts. First, the Sayer, in these extracts, is mainly the candidate which is represented by a determiner and candidate. Surprisingly, other referents to this evaluated entity like ‘researcher’, ‘applicant’ etc. were

not used with this Process but the pronoun, in place of the Noun Group, was used as found in Extracts 181-183 below, 'He' and 'She' respectively.

Extract 181

He has explained satisfactorily the qualitative research that undergirds his work. (POH 17)

Extract 182

She has succinctly stated the justification of the study. (ENG 15)

Extract 183

He did not explain the precise significance of the book for his work. (HIS 19)

Extracts 181-183 show the use of pronouns as Sayer. Extract 181 indicates that 'he', a masculine singular pronoun placed in the subjective case, has explained the research design well, which is a positive remark. In Extract 183 the statement is negative in that the Sayer, 'he' did not explain the relevance of the material used in the study.

Again, Verbal Process consisted of verbs of saying, which give information. In the data, both tenses were used by the examiners, both in the positive and negative senses. Thus, in Extract 177, there is the use of the present tense, 'discusses', which indicates the current state of discourse. The simple past is used in Extract 181, 'alleged' to indicate that the candidate has made the assertion already. The rest of the extracts are cast, using the present perfect aspect; thus, in Extract 178, we find 'has stated'; 'Discuss', 'State' and 'Explain' were chiefly used for the Process.

Next, this Process consisted of the use of Verbiage. This Participant Role was very common in the data compared to the other Participant Roles of the Verbal Process like Target. The Verbiage consists mainly of a Noun Group which is made up of a noun, as head word in addition to a determiner which is

a pre-modifier, and post-modifiers like ‘that relative clause’. In Extract 179, the message of the Verbal Process is presented in simpler form. It consists only of a determiner, ‘the’ and the noun, ‘theory’. In Extract 174, however, the Noun Group is made up of a determiner, the head, and a prepositional phrase that seeks to explain further the nature of the head word of the Noun Group, ‘of the study’. Thus, in the Verbal Process ‘the justification’ has been stated succinctly, and it is the study’s justification that is being described here. Compared to Extract 186, the Verbiage, ‘the problem that he investigated fairly well’ is a bit complex. Here, the Verbiage comprises ‘the determiner, ‘the’, indicative of the fact that it is given and that there is knowledge of the ‘problem’ being discussed now (See Adika & Denkabe, 1997; Nesfield, 2008; Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973; Wiredu, 1998). The actual purport of the Verbiage is ‘the problem’ the head word of the Noun Group. This is what the candidate has stated well, and it has been modified with a relative clause which specifies further what the examiner is talking about at the moment, ‘that he investigated...’. In totality, what has been stated well is the problem investigated by the candidate and that is the Verbiage, the message itself. Similar situations are found in Extracts 183 where the ‘that relative clause’ functions as a post-modifier of the head word of the Noun Group, all together functioning as the message of the Verbal Process.

Also, there were other cases found in the data where ‘the candidate’ was placed in Theme position but this did not serve as Sayer but as Targets in the clause. In other words, these are recipient of the Process and do not necessarily carry the message themselves, that is, the Verbiage. Some examples are these:



Extract 184

The candidate is also to be recommended for the presentation of inferential statistics in her attempt to provide answers to her research questions. (POH 17)

Extract 185

The candidate is to be recommended highly for her use of sociolinguistic interview. (ENG 20)

Extract 186

The candidate is commended for the use of current literature. (HIS 3)

Extract 187

The candidate should be congratulated for a work well done. (ENG 13)

Here, a positive remark is made about the Target, in that, per the examiner's estimation, 'the presentation of inferential statistics' (Extract 184) was appropriate, attempting to answer the research questions posed in that study. Consequently, the candidate is to be congratulated. Similarly, in Extract 185, the examiner commends the candidate for the successful use of 'sociolinguistic interview' in the study. Perhaps, the difficulty involved in getting informants in qualitative data collection compelled the examiner to congratulate the candidate on that achievement.

Again, the Verbal Process came with the use of Circumstances, Manner. Manner labels as the summary of the message in that it gives additional information about the message:

Extract 188

She does not in a strong way state the real essence of the year in the statement of the problem and the abstract. (HIS 2)

Extract 189

Candidate does not clearly and adequately state the problem of the thesis. (ENG 21)

Extract 190

He carefully explains how he collected information from wide range of people. (HOT 11)

Extract 191

The candidate has fairly well stated the problem that she investigated. (POH 15)

Considering the extracts provided above, there is abundant evidence of the use of Manner associated with this Process. Whereas some are expressed in the negative sense (Extracts 188, 189), others are cast in the positive sense (Extracts 190, 191). Also, while in some extracts, there are instances of Manner (Extracts 188, 190), in others, there is more than one Manner recorded in a single Extract (189, 191). The Circumstance is cast chiefly in adverbs, as found in ‘well’, ‘forcefully’, and ‘carefully’. Reference is made to what can be found in Extract 188. Here, the examiner uses a prepositional phrase in expressing the whole value of what has been said; that is, the relevance of the message is not expressed ‘in a strong sense’.

Another major point to be presented under the Verbal Process is the use of Projection. In some circumstances, examiners projected other parts of the clause, which is a second – order use of language in that this Projection has been alluded to earlier on in the other part of the clause of the same structure. Instances of the use of this element in the data are the following:

Extract 192

This, she observes, is so because in the .... (POH 25)

Extract 193

He acknowledges that much of the literature is written in French and he endeavours to get the important ones translated. (HIS 16)

Extract 194

The candidate argues well that similar studies have been undertaken in other communities. (HOT 10)

Extract 195

The candidate reported that she devised effective data collection tools. (ENG 4)

The projected clauses (Extracts 192-195) above are the ‘that’ clauses after the verb, depicting what the Process seeks to portray. Thus, in Extract 192, though we find the use of a ‘that zero clause’, what ‘she observes’ is ‘this...is so because...’. However, the projected clause, “represents a second-order phenomenon, something that is itself a representation, ‘a metaphenomenon” (Halliday, 1994, p. 252). In other words, projection brings to bear meaning (“idea”) or a world of wording (“locution”) and takes away the involvement of human consciousness. Similarly, Thompson (2014) also observes that the relationship between projecting clause, like ‘he acknowledges’ (Extract 193) and the projected, ‘that much of the literature’ is not that of one element being part of a bigger component. Explaining this further, he exemplifies this with the relationship between a picture (projected clause) and its frame (the projecting clause). Together, they make up a single complex unit, but neither is actually part of the other. In essence, what ‘the candidate argues’ plus ‘that similar studies have been undertaken’ make a single complex unit for making meaning (Extract 194).

Furthermore, some clauses were cast in the Passive voice, placing the Verbiage in Theme position, and the Sayer (stated explicitly or implicitly) in Rheme position. With this structure, examiners emphasize the message, rather

than the author of that message. In other words, the Verbiage is given primacy over the Sayer. Illustrations are given below:

Extract 196

The problem statement was satisfactorily stated by the researcher (HOT 5)

Extract 197

The research problem was clearly and succinctly stated. (ENG 10)

Extract 198

The conclusions have been clearly stated. (HIS 4)

Extract 199

The problem under investigation was well defined. (POH 17)

We see examples (196-199) of the use of passive voice in the Verbal Process displayed above. The just displayed extracts (196-199) above show that aspects of the thesis are rather communicated on rather than its producer. In Extract 196 above, the Verbiage which is ‘the problem statement’ has been fronted, capturing the focus of the clause. However, the Sayer, ‘the researcher’ is included in the clause through a by-phrase. Contrary to the introduction of the Sayer through a by-phrase, sometimes, the passive constructions were introduced in the data without the Sayer (Agentless passive). As explained earlier, by structuring the clause like this, examiners shift attention to the message. It is assumed that the identity of the candidate is given knowledge; thereby, this is ignored or taken for granted since everything in the thesis that is being assessed comes from the candidate. Typically, instances are found in Extracts 204-207, displayed above. Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) postulate that the importance of the passive form lies in reversing the normal order of *agentive* and *affected* elements, and adjusting clause structure to end-focus and end-weight. They explain that end-focus has



the tendency to place new information towards the end of the clause and end-weight as the tendency to reserve the final position for the more complex parts of a clause or sentence, as evident in the extracts above (196-199).

Lastly, under the Verbal Process, it was also observed in the data that there were Verbal Processes that had the Sayer, not as the candidate but the examiners themselves. With this, the candidate becomes the Target of the clause rather. Illustrations are these:

Extract 200

I must admit the candidate has done a very good job. (ENG 20)

Extract 201

I must congratulate the candidate for a good work done. (ENG 1)

It can be seen in Extracts 200 and 201 that the Sayer is the examiner himself/herself, 'I'. The examiner is impressed and feels obliged to say that the candidate has done well. The analysis of the data did not record any negative statement from the examiner, in this direction. This particular structure with the examiner as the Sayer came from one particular examiner in one out of all the four departments included in the study. Perhaps, the candidate did a very extraordinary work which greatly impressed the examiner because in that particular report, the examiner indicated that the thesis was 'one of the few good works examined recently'.

In sum, this section has provided evidence of the use of Sayer, the Process itself, and Verbiage. There were cases of the use of Target as well. In some instances, aspects of the thesis were placed in Theme position in addition to examiners themselves functioning as Sayers, making the candidate the Receiver. Projection clauses were also analysed under the Verbal Process in the evaluation of the candidate.

### *Existential Process*

The analysis revealed the use of Existential Process in the data. The Existential Process construes existence. The presence of this process type in the data help establish that something exists or does not exist. The main Participant Roles as the Existent Participant and the Existential 'There'. The occurrences of this Process are few in the data (56 out of 1322 for the candidate), as compared to the Material and Relational Processes which have been presented earlier under the grammatical roles and the candidate in this work. Some examples of the use of Existential Process are provided below:

Extract 202

There is considerable volume of literature which the candidate has assessed. (ENG 25)

Extract 203

There is evidence of reasoning and an apparent reflective dialogue between the candidate and her data. (HOT 9)

Extract 204

There is adequate basis for the conclusions and recommendations as they clearly derive from the analysis and discussion. (POH 12)

The Existential Process, shown in Extracts 202-204, is cast in positive forms. While Extract 202 mentions literature, Extract 203 hinges on the methodology, specifically, the data. In Extract 204, the examiner finds adequacy in the basis upon which the candidate draws conclusion and makes recommendations. The Negative clause, on the other hand, expresses the dissatisfaction of the examiner in relation to what has been presented in the thesis or done by the candidate, as shown in Extracts 205-207 provided below:

Extract 205

There are some weaknesses in aspects of the line of reasoning of the researcher. (ENG 22)

Extract 206

There are other statements in the work that the student has made without critically analyzing their veracity. (HIS 14)

Extract 207

There is no evidence of logical reasoning by the candidate. (POH 19)

We see the use of Existential Process expressed negatively in Extracts 205-207 above. For example, in Extract 205, the examiner notes that the line of reasoning is defective, suggesting that the candidate must work on it. In Extract 206, too, the examiner construes that the candidate makes unsubstantiated statements, while in Extract 207 the examiner observes lack of logicity in the arguments of the candidate.

Furthermore, all the clauses shown above have the Existential 'There', which is an adverb that helps in construing existence. The Process itself is mainly of the 'Be family' verb and it is used both in the singular and plural forms. While Extract 202 instantiates the use of the singular verb, 'is', Extract 205 has the plural form of the verb, 'are'. This is made possible because the selection of the verb is based on the nature of the complement that succeeds the verb; that is, the verb takes after the nature of the verb. Thus, in Extract 202, the Existent (complement) 'considerable volume of literature...' is singular; therefore, the verb 'is' is singular as well. This ensures concord between the verb and the complement. Again, the Existential Process is cast in the present tense.

In relation to the nature of the Existent, it was mostly realized in Noun Group; typically, with nouns that have been pre- and post- modified, in some instances. Generally, the pre-modifiers in the Existent consisted of determiners and adjectives. We find, 'adequate' in Extract 204 and 'some' in Extract 205,

as examples of an adjective and determiner or quantifier respectively. Except for Extracts 202 that has relative clause as post-modifiers, the post-modifiers were prepositional phrases which serve to show relations between the selected items in the Existent. For example, in Extract 207, ‘...of logical reasoning’ and ‘... by the candidate’. These modifications help make more explicit the nature of the Existent that is being construed. Furthermore, the Existent was embedded in projected clauses, as shown below:

Extract 208

There is clear evidence that the candidate has a good deal of control of the tools of analysis. (POH 24)

Extract 209

There is evidence that the candidate has good grasp of the subject matter. (ENG 17)

Extract 210

There is indeed abundant evidence to show that the candidate is familiar with the relevant reference texts in the area. (HOT 19)

Displayed here (Extracts 208-210) are instances of projected clauses functioning as Existent in the data. A look at these extracts indicates the use of ‘evidence’ in all the clauses, construing the existence of something that the candidate has achieved, cast in a positive sense. This ‘evidence’ is explained in the projected clause. We find in Extract 209, for example, that the ‘evidence’ is that ‘the candidate has good grasp of the subject matter’, a projected clause. Again, in Extract 210, the ‘abundant evidence’ is that ‘the candidate is familiar with the relevant references in the area’, a projected clause. These Existents have been construed through the help of the Process, ‘is’ and the Existential ‘There’.



Furthermore, some of the Existential Processes were cast, relegating the candidate to the background and giving prominence to the Existent, which is in some aspects of what the candidate has done. The structures were presented in the passive voice, as illustrated below:

Extract 211

In total, though, there is an appreciable level of knowledge displayed. (ENG 4)

Extract 212

There is a clear identification of the problem which has been reasonably justified. (POH 16)

Extract 213

There are no explicit research questions provided. (HIS 11)

Extract 214

There is evidence of careful proof-reading. (HOT 2)

Above in Extracts 211-214 are examples of passive constructions that foreground aspects of the theses rather than the candidates who engaged with these aspects of the thesis. In some instances, the passive constructions do occur with the doer of the action through a by-phrase. However, here, it can be seen that the candidate as doer or Actor in the clause has been omitted entirely (Agentless Passive), leaving only the Existent which is for some aspects of the thesis, which include 'knowledge displayed', 'problem' and 'research questions'. This finding on the evaluation of or comments on aspects of the thesis, especially Research Questions, contrasts the finding of Hansford and Maxwell (1993) who found in their study that research questions were rarely commented on in their data.

In summary, as regard the Existential Process, an existence is construed for the candidate through the Existential Process and this is realized

through the Existential ‘There’, the Existential Process which is Verbal Group, and the Existent. Passive constructions were also found with this Process. The evaluation of the candidate has also been presented. It was shown that the candidate was judged both positively and negatively. These judgements were both on the potentials of the researcher and the quality of the research. Here, the examiners fulfil what Holbrook et al. (2014) perceive as the principal duties of examiners. In relation to the grammatical roles, with reference to the candidate, it was established that the candidate goes through the process of Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal and Existential but most of these processes were the Material and the Relational. The analysis revealed that the Behavioural Process was excluded from the evaluation of this entity, perhaps, because the data are on an AD; hence, no room is made for the expression of physiological features which are associated with this behavioural process. Again, evaluative adjectives, verbs, adverbs, nouns and prepositional phrases were largely used in the process, alongside some projected clauses. This confirms the finding of Lorés-Sanz (2012) who identified that evaluation was with word classes, adjective, verbs, adverbs and nouns. Another finding of the present study that relates to Lorés-Sanz (2012) is that the evaluation of candidates touched on the intellectual capabilities and other general qualities of the candidate who had undertaken tasks related to the studies such as Literature Review and Discussion.

### **Supervisor as an Evaluated Entity**

Apart from the Thesis and Candidate that were identified as evaluated entities (EEs) in the data, the analysis also identified the supervisors as another entity evaluated in the report. This confirms the finding of Lovat et al. (2011)

that examiners share information with candidates and their supervisors as well. Again, it can also be said that these examiners do not essentially adhere to ‘the institution–specific criteria’ in judging the quality of the thesis, as observed by Mullins and Kiley (2002). What is to be judged is the thesis and candidate, and not the supervisor. To other examiners, though the evaluation of the supervisor may not only align with an institution’s expectation, this may be deemed important in the eyes of the examiner (Delamont, Atkinson & Parry, 2000; Starfield et al. 2017). Unfortunately, this was not given enough attention in the reports, in terms of space. A few examples of comments on the supervisor are provided below:

Extract 215

I must congratulate the supervisors for a good work done. (ENG 5)

Extract 216

I also highly commend the supervisors. Well done. (ENG 1)

Extract 217

The work, I must admit, is well researched, well written and supervised. (ENG 13)

Extract 218

The supervisor has done well in ensuring such success in the thesis. (POH 17)

Extracts 215-218 are the four instances of evaluation of the supervisor in the data. Unfortunately, the analysis of the data did not show any linguistic variants of the supervisor. Hence, only ‘supervisor’ was used in all four instances of the evaluation of the supervisor. The process types in relation to the Supervisor, as an EE is discussed. Extract 218 shows a Relational Process, construing a relationship between, ‘Supervisor’, the Carrier, and the Attribute, ‘done well’. The Process that helps establish the quality between that object,

supervisor and the quality, 'well' is 'has done'. Extracts 215 and 217 evince a Verbal Process. In Extract 215, the Sayer is the examiner, 'I'. The Verbal Process, 'must congratulate', suggesting that this is a positive assertion and the examiner finds value in what has been done by the supervisor. The presence of 'must' in the clause indicates that the examiner feels obliged to congratulate the supervisor, for 'must' is a strong epistemic modal for making claims (Ngula, 2017). Extract 216 evinces Verbal Process, 'I also highly commend the supervisors', and Relational Process, 'Well done'.

Probably, considering the volume of the 'thesis' plus its quality, the examiner is awestruck; hence, he/she thanks the particular supervisor who goes through the pains to ensure such success. As explained by Holbrook et al. (2004a), examiners are supervisors themselves, and all examiners must have been supervisors before. It cannot also be said that other supervisors failed to do a good work that was why they were not mentioned. Perhaps, the examiner who might be a supervisor recognised the agony in supervising a thesis; thus, he is compelled from that perspective to congratulate the supervisor on such a good work done. This illustrates Afful (2020) and Lovat et al.'s (2011) assertion that examiners' written thesis reports are idiosyncratic and individualistic documents, despite efforts to standardize or structure them.

The Target is the 'supervisor' who receives that recommendation. The Verbiage which is the message is 'for a good work done.' This is a prepositional phrase that gives reason for the celebration of that entity, the supervisor. This confirms the assertion that values and ways of seeing the world allow writers to position themselves and their work in relation to other



members of their groups, negotiating and confirming their membership of particular communities (Bourdieu, 1977).

In sum, the Supervisor was evaluated positively in the data, but this EE did not have any linguistic variant. The four instances revealed the use of Verbal Process and Relational Process.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has attempted answering the second research question of the study which was on the evaluated entities (EEs) (the Thesis and the Candidate) in the data, and a minor one was the Supervisor. The various roles with their associated processes for these EEs have also been discussed, and those found were the Material, Existential, Mental, Verbal and Relational Processes. It has been proven in the analysis that the grammar sets up a discontinuity clearly between outer experience, the processes of the external world, and inner experience, the processes of consciousness (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). Thus, the external world is revealed through the processes such as Material and the inner experience through the Mental process. As discussed in this Chapter, through entities, an evaluation of what is acceptable and unacceptable according to the norms of the community is presented. The Process and Participant analysis, presented in this Chapter, has revealed the way examiners utilize language to present their perceptions of reality (Bloor & Bloor, 1995).

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## EXAMINER ROLES IN EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**Introduction**

The previous two chapters, Five and Six, discussed types of evaluative comments (ECs) and the evaluated entities (EEs) used in the data respectively. Chapter Seven reports the analysis and discussion on examiner roles in the data; this relates to the evaluator in the evaluation process. This is an attempt to answer the last research question posed earlier in Chapter One. The distribution of the roles in the data is presented first; the various roles found in the data, with relevant illustrations are, then, discussed.

**Distribution of Examiner Roles**

The analysis of the data revealed that eight (8) roles were assumed by examiners in their submitted reports on assessed theses. These included Evaluator, Examiner, Commentator, Proofreader, Expert, Reporter, Supervisor, and Institution. The findings on the use of these different examiner roles in the data are presented in Table 5 below:

**Table 5: Examiner Roles in Examiners' Reports**

<b>Examiner Roles</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Evaluator</b>	435	20.6
<b>Examiner</b>	397	18.8
<b>Commentator</b>	352	16.7
<b>Proofreader</b>	313	14.8
<b>Expert</b>	230	10.9
<b>Reporter</b>	201	9.5
<b>Supervisor</b>	136	6.5
<b>Institution</b>	46	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>2110</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data (2016)

According to Table 5, eight roles in varying proportion were identified in the data. Evaluator role was the highest, 435 (20.6%). The frequent use of the evaluator role is not surprising as the core duty of the examiner is to evaluate what the candidate has produced, determining whether it is good(positive) or bad (negative) so as to allow entry or otherwise of that academic output, the thesis. Evaluator role was followed by Examiner role 397 (18.8%). The least occurring role was Institution role, with 46 (2.2%).

Following Holbrook et al. (2004a), I also notice that while some of the roles are associated with examiner involvement with the duty of report writing (report organization and dialogic elements) such as Reporter and Proofreader, others are associated with expectations underpinning examination and knowledge base (such as examiner, expert, and supervisor). Thus, it can be seen that examiners may fulfil several different and, possibly, conflicting roles, as they give feedback: sometimes, acting as teacher, proofreader, facilitator, gatekeeper, evaluator, and reader at the same time (Leki, 1990; Reid, 1994). In all these eight roles, there were Summative comments (SCs) that clearly depict judgment, and formative comments which anticipated higher standards to aspire to (Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; 2011; Starfield et al., 2017; Stracke & Kumar, 2010).

Furthermore, these Examiner roles appeal to the interpersonal metafunction of SFL, specifying the use of language in interacting with people to establish and maintain social connections, giving and requesting information, and conveying viewpoints, attitudes as well as beliefs about the world. This means that when people are involved in a communicative event, they do not only transmit and share meaning but they also negotiate, establish,

and sustain relationships (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Martin & White, 2005; Thompson, 2014). So, examiners do not only use language to assign value or express dis/satisfaction about an entity but also use language to establish and maintain social relations as experts who wield power and place the candidate in a subservient position or supervisors who nurture relationship by regarding the candidate as a peer who is capable of thinking and making decisions for him/herself.

Lastly, the assumption of multiple roles in the data is in consonance with Lovat et al. (2002), Holbrook et al. (2004a), and Starfield et al. (2017) who found that examiners assume a range of roles when composing the written report; that is, examiners take on specific roles, positioning themselves in many ways. However, in the present study, these identified roles exclude peer role and viva role, as found by Pitkethly and Prosser (1995), Holbrook et al. (2004a), and Starfield et al. (2017). In the ensuing paragraphs, starting with Evaluator, each role is discussed independently. However, this ordering for the discussion does not mean that some roles are more important than others since all these roles are collectively geared towards ensuring that the finest form and quality of the work is produced. Evidence from the data in support of these findings is provided.

### **Evaluator**

First, in performing the evaluator role (EVR), the examiner uses evaluative adjectives, which are both predicative and attributive, for the candidate, assigning the candidate the grammatical role of Token or Carrier. In other words, these comments do not directly refer to what the examiner was tasked to do which is contained in the assessment form. These comments are



usually the examiners' appreciation or approbation regarding the thesis or the candidate's abilities. I will briefly discuss those comments on the theses, followed by those on the candidate since most of the issues have been discussed extensively in Chapter Five of this present thesis.

First, examiners in their evaluator role (EVR) appreciate the thesis both positively and negatively. Some examples in the data are these:

Extract 1

The thesis is of good quality. The write-up is very good, utilizing appropriate grammatical language and logical reasoning. The layout and general presentation is very good while the quality of the referencing section is also commendable. (HOT 2)

Extract 2

In terms of substance, the research is reasonably impressive and rich insight. (HIS 14)

Extract 3

The thesis is very insightful and well written. (POH 9)

Extract 4

The thesis is cohesive and coherent, making it reader friendly. (ENG 12)

The extracts above, 1-4 show evidence of EVR in the data, and these relate to the thesis. In Extract 1, the evaluator appreciates the thesis, using a predicative adjective, 'good' to describe the thesis. With Extract 2, perhaps, the breadth and depth of the thrust of the thesis make the evaluator conclude, positively, that the thesis is 'reasonably impressive' and 'rich insight'. Thus, the thesis is deemed good to the evaluator. Another examiner also judges the thesis in terms of coherence, which fosters effective reading (Extract 3).

Evaluators did not employ only predicative adjectives but also attributive adjectives; here, the adjective occurs in a noun phrase. Some cases in the data are found below:

## Extract 5

A good quality thesis, well written out using clear and unambiguous language and expressions. (POH 14)

## Extract 6

A useful research on practical dimension of tourism and hospitality industry in Ghana ... (HOT 17)

## Extract 7

This is a good work which is well researched and well-structured. (HIS 16)

## Extract 8

This is an erudite and original piece of work which makes a significant contribution to the reading of modern African and African-American literature. (ENG 7)

Demonstrated above in Extracts 5-8 are instances of evaluation using attributive adjective. For example, an evaluator sees the ‘thesis’ as ‘good’ (Extract 5) and another, the ‘research’, as ‘useful’ (Extract 6). Thus, these are the values that are placed on the work, and they show evaluators’ appreciation or satisfaction with what is contained in the theses, but the specifics that resulted in these evaluations of these theses have not been indicated in the displayed extracts above. It can be seen that these comments which relate to the EVR are cast positively, confirming the findings of Johnston (1997) and Holbrook et al. (2004a) that examiners, in their quest for fulfilling their roles, judge the thesis in terms of quality. Again, the extracts are examples of Relational Process that establishes relationship between an entity and its quality (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2014). Again, the evaluator role touches on general comments expressed on thesis, using evaluative adjectives, either predicative or attributive.

Next, the EVR, in relation to the thesis, was expressed in negative comments. In a sense, examiners as evaluators do not approve of the nature of the thesis. Some examples are given below:

Extract 9

The work is replete with citations in the body of the text that are not in the references. (HOT 6)

Extract 10

The practical value of the research work is missing. (HIS 4)

Extract 11

The study has serious defects. (POH 14)

Extract 12

The study is barren of a theoretical framework. (ENG 13)

In Extract 10, for instance, the evaluator concludes that the practical value of the work cannot be ascertained, without detailing what is amiss in the work. Again, with Extract 11, the evaluator observes that the work has ‘defects’ which are ‘serious’. What can be deduced from this is that the candidate does not present issues in the required manner; hence, the evaluator assessed the current state of the product and believed it had ‘serious defects’. The evaluator role judges the work and leaves no room for corrections or improvement. In other words, the evaluator comments on the present state of the thesis and leaves it as it is, using summative comments and not formative comments (Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; 2011; Stracke & Kumar, 2010).

Furthermore, the evaluator also refers to candidates by judging them either positively or negatively. Examples of evaluation of candidates, both positive and negative, in the data are as follow:

Extract 13

He exhibited great passion about the subject studied. (ENG 12)

Extract 14

The candidate was lucid in his problem statement. (HIS 14)

Extract 15

The candidate was rather exhaustive to a fault almost bordering on repetitiveness. (HIS 15)

Extract 16

The researcher is silent on the meaning of the findings. (HOT 5)

Extracts 13–16 are examples of positive comments expressed by the evaluator while Extracts 15 and 16 are instances of negative comments in relation to the evaluator role, which are all in reference to the candidate. With Extract 13, the candidate is described as exuding ‘great passion’ about the subject studied. Perhaps, how the candidate handles the chosen topic in the thesis leaves no option for the evaluator, except for him/her (the evaluator) to indicate that the passion demonstrated by the candidate is ‘great’. Similarly, in Extract 14, the evaluator announces that the candidate articulates the problem statement in a ‘lucid’ manner for the present work to fill that gap. Thus, the evaluators find that the studies have been carried out well. The candidate’s capability to express the statement of the problem as expected confirms Lunenburge and Irby (2008), and Calmorin and Calmorin’s (2007) observation that the statement of the problem for the thesis must be succinct and clear. In the view of Bui (2014), the establishment of the statement of the problem is the actual part of writing Chapter One, Introduction. Thus, the statement of the problem is an essential section of the thesis, as it allows the writer to justify to the reader why it is necessary for the topic to be studied (Bui, 2014).



On the contrary, an example of negative comment in relation to the evaluator role is found in Extract 15 where the evaluator ruminates that the candidate repeated himself many times, making the examiner describe the candidate as being ‘exhaustive to the fault... of repetitiveness’. An evaluator will make such an assertion when it is found that particular words, expressions, phrases and concepts are repeated unjustifiably and without any attempts to use synonyms which can equally serve similar purposes. Sometimes, too, occurring themes and findings in the analysis may be over stretched or overly presented. The examiner as an evaluator may find this as ‘exhaustive to a fault’.

Lastly, the evaluator alluded to many parts of the thesis (This has been discussed extensively in Chapter Four of this present study). Some of these aspects include topic and pertinent literature, and some examples are found below:

Extract 17

The candidate has a very good grasp of the topic. (ENG 24)

Extract 18

Candidate shows fairly extensive knowledge of the pertinent literature. (HOT 7)

Extract 19

The discussion on the ‘background to the study’ is too long (9 pages). (POH 1)

Extract 20

A very well-articulated problem statement which is presented in clear and terse language. (HOT 2)

Extract 21

The candidates’ reasoning was logical and his data was also critical.  
Generally, the flow of discussion was logical. (HIS 9)

Extract 22

The analysis and interpretation have been well done; it is extremely impressive. (POH 10)

These extracts (17-22) illustrate the EVR displayed while the examiner comments on different sections of the thesis. The Evaluator's use of 'a very good grasp' is in reference to the topic (Extract 17). Thus, the evaluator finds value in what the candidate has done in relation to framing the topic well as a front matter (Afful, 2005b; Dunleavy, 2003; Soler, 2011). Whereas Extract 18 touches on the examiner's admiration for the candidate's display of extensive knowledge of the literature, Extract 19 is on the background information provided for the work— which is negative. Given that the background to the study serves as an eye opener to readers (Samraj, 2008; Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994), it is supposed to be suitable, brief and concise. So, by including other issues which may be considered 'irrelevant', and that may let the background be 'too long', the evaluator did not leave that to pass by. The Evaluator also mentions logicity in reasoning (Extract 21) and 'impressive' presentation of analysis and interpretation (Extract 22).

Apart from those sections of the thesis presented above, other areas that featured EVR included the conclusion, language use, typing, presentation and visuals. These are illustrated below:

Extract 23

His conclusion that X has Y is incontrovertible. (HIS 11)

Extract 24

The language is precise, clear, fluid and readily understood. (ENG 2)

Extract 25

The typing is good and the proofreading is scrupulous. (POH 6)

Extract 26

The presentation is neat and well-structured. (HOT 20)

## Extract 27

Effective use of visuals in presenting quantitative data (POH 21)

Shown above in Extracts 23-27 are instances of the use of EVR which were highlighted at different sections of the theses. In Extract 23, the evaluator finds the conclusion drawn between two constructs as irrefutable, confirming the finding of Mullins and Kiley (2002, p. 385) that experienced examiners are careful to check for links between the Introduction, in which students state their intentions, and the Conclusion “where the intentions should have been realised”. Also, another examiner finds the language used to be ‘precise’, ‘clear’, ‘fluid’ and ‘readily’ understood (Extract 24); this is what a language used in a thesis should look like since it is through language that experiences are construed. Hence, if the language is not clear, meaningful conclusions about such experiences cannot be drawn. Besides, the use of multiple adjectives helps define the nature of the language used. Thus, clear, exact, coherent and unambiguous language ensure better comprehension of the import of the thesis (Hinkel, 2004; Kroll, 2003; Swales & Feak, 1994; 2012). Examiner’s comment on the clear use of language confirms the finding of Johnston (1997) that general impression and overall presentation of the thesis seem particularly important to the examiners.

In sum, this section has examined the EVR of examiners in the data. Both positive and negative comments were employed by the evaluator. Again, the thesis as well as the candidate was evaluated. Lastly, the EVR featured in different aspects of the thesis such as the Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology, employing evaluative adverbs, adjectives, and nouns.

## Examiner

Apart from the Evaluator Role (EVR), there is the Examiner Role (ER). The ER requires mandatory action to be taken by the candidate. Again, the ER is identified with the field of degree, emendations or recommendations since the examiner is deemed an authoritative figure that exerts power (Starfield et al., 2017). As a result, it can be said that this role is about knowledge base and expectations underpinning the examination (Holbrook et al., 2004a).

First, the examiner, in this role, evaluates the thesis in relation to originality, coherency, methodology, presentation, and knowledge, which have also been established in other studies such as Holbrook et al. (2004b) and Pitkethly and Prosser (1995). Examiners assumed this role, using both positive and negative comments. Examples of Examiner role can be found in the extracts below:

Extract 28

The thesis addresses a very critical issue in X. (ENG 17)

Extract 29

The study is adequately informed by empirical works. (HOT 20)

Extract 30

The methodology is well-structured and addresses all salient issues relating to the methods here. (POH 4)

Extract 31

The work however sheds important light on the independence movement in Ghana. (HIS 15)

In Extract 28, the examiner determines the relevance of the work by its ability to address ‘a very critical issue in X’. The examiner determines the originality of the work and the general importance of the work in contributing to existing



knowledge. This is made clearer when we consider Extract 31, where the examiner says, in specific terms, what this knowledge is about, in that, more light is thrown unto the independence movement in Ghana. These extracts have been positively evaluated.

The ER also highlighted some negative comments shown in the extracts below:

Extract 32

Candidate is unable to explicitly and closely show how register theory informs her study. (ENG 15)

Extract 33

The biggest flaw however has to do with the appropriateness of the conceptual framework employed and even worse the inability of the candidate to make a single reference to it during the data analysis. What, then, was the relevance of choosing a framework for the study? (POH 16)

Extract 34

The study did not address the effect of safety on X. (HOT 12)

Extract 35

I find the absence of the contribution of the study disappointing. The conclusion was an opportunity for the candidate to advertise the importance of her study, but she allows it to elude her. (ENG 23)

The inappropriateness of the conceptual framework which is tied to the theoretical framework or literature review (LR) is alluded to in Extract 33. Since it is required of the examiner to ensure that the assessment criteria are met, anything that falls short of that must be reported. Thus, a candidate who chooses an appropriate framework, in the first place, and second, fails to integrate this into the analysis is not spared the examiner's whip. In addition, a candidate's study is required to contribute to knowledge, which is mostly captured in the Significance of the Study section or Implications found in the

Conclusion section (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). The absence of this contribution is ‘disappointing’ to the examiner (Extract 35), describing the situation as an opportunity for the candidate to have advertised the work. In essence, the candidate falls short of the expected outcome of the finished product—the thesis. These findings echo the finding of Golding et al. (2014) that examiners read both with the expectations of the academic of a ‘normal’ reader. As academic readers, examiners favoured a thesis with a convincing framework that engages the literature as well as findings.

In addition, it was observed that in performing these roles, examiners provided background to the comments in the form of explanation of the situation before the final comment, either positive or negative was given. This way, the examiner prepares the background for the final comments given. Examples of this Examiner role and the accompanying strategy are illustrated below:

Extract 36

Problem solving /logical reasoning/data analysis

The data has been analysed employing factor analysis, ANOVA, T-test and Chi-square test. Various relationships among selected variables have been explored and these explorations have led to the drawing of some definite conclusions on the issues investigated. The discussion have been well thought out and logically presented. (HOT 21)

Extract 37

Design of the research /data collection methods

The study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches of data collection; an interview schedule used to collect data from household heads have been selected through the use of systematic sampling method. An interview guide was also employed to collect data from key informants in the community. These methods are appropriate and useful for the purpose for which they have been applied. (POH 2)

## Extract 38

There is ample evidence that the reference section has been done in haste. The result is that it contains several blemishes (relating to inconsistency, omissions, misspelling, formatting problems and non-adherence to conventions of the chosen house style etc). This is unacceptable (ENG 19)

Extract 36 relates to Problem Solving. While Extract 37 addresses research design, Extract 38 focuses on referencing. In Extract 36, the examiner precedes his or her summative judgement with information on the type of tools used for the analysis like T-test. Such a comment provides background information in relation to key issues in the assessment procedures. What the examiner does here is to merely recount what can be found in the thesis. The actual evaluation comes when the examiner declares that the discussion is well thought of and presented logically. It is inferred from the earlier statements contained in this Extract (36) that there exists a connection among the variables used in the study, allowing for valid conclusions to be drawn on the issues investigated.

Apart from the examiner role (ER) expressed in both positive and negative comments, there was the use of imperatives which relate to fix-in or prescriptive comments. Examples are found below:

## Extract 39

Delete the specific objectives found under the sub-title summary. (HOT 17)

## Extract 40

Link the findings about the profile to findings that have been made by other authors. At least, I know of Akyeampong (2007). (HIS 11)

## Extract 41

Justify the use of systematic random sampling technique. (POH 1)

Extract 42

Remove the irrelevant information from the background of the study area. Many of these have been highlighted in the text. (ENG 14)

In Extracts 39-42, the examiners employ the base form of the verbs ‘delete’ and ‘Link’, ‘Justify’, and ‘Remove’ to request candidates to make amendments to what has been done already in the theses. By using imperative sentences, examiners are presented as authoritative figures who wield power to request candidates to do something. Hyland (2002b) explains that directives (imperatives) undermine the harmony of such audience relationship since they dictate to the reader to execute an action or consider things in a way that the writer determines. For Petch-Tyson (1998), the use of imperatives is a means for examiners to indicate visibility in the reports.

As explained by Holbrook et al. (2004b), the examiner anticipates something to be enhanced or added but is not intelligently engaged with the content, suggesting that the reader is working to an implied minimum standard or to a preferred formula. In this mode, the pedagogy is rule-based and examiners expect compliance and agreement, not serious engagement. Interpersonally, the examiner role establishes a relationship with the candidate that is vertical, with the examiner on top of the hierarchy and the candidate at the bottom of the hierarchy. Such comments were found in the studies of Holbrook et al. (2004b) and Starfield et al. (2017). Holbrook et al. (2004b) explain that ‘Prescription’ leaves readers in little doubt about what examiners expect them to do. ‘Prescriptive’ comments provide ‘fix it like this’, ‘band-aid’, kind of directions without the expectancy of negotiation or challenge. Also, such comments bring quick closure to the thesis, which contrasts more development.



In Extracts 43-46 below, however, examiners issue commands not using the base forms of the verb, but employing a structure that inherently obliges the candidates to do something, which is not hedged or mitigated in any form:

Extract 43

The subheading 'NGOs in tourism development' is voluminous. It spans 10 pages and most of it is background information on the contributions of NGOs to Tourism Development in Ghana. It must be reduced drastically. (HOT 19)

Extract 44

However, there is disconnection between the research topic (leisure participation among people with disability in Kumasi) and the main objectives (to assess leisure experience of PWDs in the Kumasi metropolis of Ghana). This needs to be addressed. (HOT 20)

Extract 45

First, too much attention has been paid to the conceptual aspect of the literature review. I observed that in terms of textual space, 27 pages had been devoted to the conceptual part while only 9 pages had been devoted to the empirical studies; this is rather lopsided. I ask for a reversal of this situation. (ENG 10)

Extract 46

A better representation of the adopted framework is imperative. (POH 8)

Thus, in Extract 45, the examiner, upon identifying that the textual space allocated to the empirical studies is less compared to the conceptual framework, demands that the prevailing rhetorical situation be changed. No room for negotiation is allowed since no mitigation strategy is employed; the unmitigated declarative sentence, found here, is similar to a finding of Starfield et al. (2017).

Notwithstanding the above use of imperatives and unmitigated declarative sentences, occurrences of examiners issuing imperatives but with politeness markers of ‘please’, and ‘kindly’ were found in the data:

Extract 47

On page 49, the candidate states that there is a school of thought that holds the view that satisfaction is antecedent to service quality and vice versa (who are they, please provide references) (HOT 1)

Extract 48

Kindly effect all the corrections indicated in the main thesis. The major problem you have here is that many in-text citations are not in the reference list. (POH 9)

Extract 49

Please revisit all the references, check and effect all the corrections throughout the dissertation and the list of references provided. (HOT 5)

Here, examiners use imperative sentences which are meant to redirect the candidates on how certain issues in the theses must be handled, but these imperatives are mitigated with some politeness markers such as ‘please’ and ‘kindly’, as found in Extracts 47-49 above. Hyland (2000) explains that the mitigation of the directives helps maintain relationship and reflects a positive relationship between the reader (candidate/supervisor), and the writer/author (examiner). Thus, the examiner, through the use of the politeness markers, does not relegate the candidate to the background, wielding too much power over him/her nor place him/her in a subservient position.

Furthermore, examiners, in this role, use personal pronouns to establish their identity as authority figures, which are used both positively and negatively. Petch-Tyson (1998) and Recki (2012) consider the use of personal pronoun/ personal reference as a feature of writer/reader visibility employed to

express personal feelings and attitudes and to interact with readers. Instances of their use in the data include the following:

Extract 50

The work, I must admit, is well researched, well written and supervised and one of the few good theses I have examined in recent past.

(ENG 10)

Extract 51

On the whole, I have found the results are based on the research findings. The findings are presented in statistical detail and therefore, they can be easily verified.

(POH 17)

Extract 52

I am impressed with the level of language use. The candidate has used language which is appropriate for academic research work.

(HIS 5)

Extract 53

I have difficulty in appreciating the variables that were used for the formative assessment. There appears to be a case of unto-correlation. It appears the same factors were used to explain the same perceptions.

(HOT 14)

In Extract 52, through the personal pronoun, 'I', the examiner is able to show that he/she is impressed with the level of language use in the thesis. Without the use of 'I', a likely structure devoid of the examiner's feelings would be: 'The language used is good'. However, by attaching 'I' to the comment, the attitude or feeling of the examiner has been made visible to the reader. This use of the personal pronoun accentuates the assertion that examiners bring themselves to bear on what they are assessing (Lovet, Holbrook, & Hazel, 2011), expressing their preferences or styles. This can be seen as a hedging strategy too (Hyland, 1998; Hyland, 2000; Namasaraev, 1997).

The last of the features of the ER is his/her offering of recommendations. Because of the power bestowed on the examiner in

indicating the quality of the thesis, the examiner has the authority to indicate a failure or pass of the thesis based on evidence found in the thesis, and these are seen in the recommendations given either at the beginning of the report or mostly at the end of the report. Presented below are some examples:

Extract 54

I am willing to award a pass. (ENG 20)

Extract 55

The work can barely pass but the candidate has to do considerable corrections to bring it up to standard. (HIS 19)

Extract 56

Decision: This and other shortcomings notwithstanding, I find the work to be scholarly and scientific to merit an above average pass at this level. (*underlining used in data*) (HOT 16)

Extract 57

I recommend that the thesis be passed subject to the corrections (List of corrections attached). (POH 9)

Displayed above in Extracts 54-57 are some examples of recommendations that emanate from the examiner role. In this regard, the examiners are able to make passes and declare them in the reports because of their responsibility which comes with a certain amount of power bestowed upon them by the institution. The recommendations examiners make in the report are different from the recommendations candidate make in the theses. The examiners decide on what a good thesis is or otherwise, which confirms the findings of Mullins and Kiley (2002). With Extract 54, the examiner declares that he/she is willing to award a pass; that is, having presumably considered issues such as originality, literature review, methodology and knowledge, and careful scrutiny of every chapter and its contents, the examiner states the thesis has passed, which paves the way for the viva voce. The use of 'willing' is a rank



of inclination in the modality system (Halliday, 1985, 1994) which is modality orientation that relates to modal responsibility which tends to show how much explicit responsibility the speaker takes for his attitudes (Ngula, 2017; Thompson, 2014). In Extract 55, what the examiner states is not very pleasant, considering the adverb 'barely' which is found in that extract, and that 'considerable corrections' have to be done. In its current state, the thesis is not up to its best. The use of recommendations in the present study is in line with Golding et al. (2014), who found in their studies that thesis examiners (TErs) tended to be broadly consistent in their practices and recommendations; they expected and wanted a thesis to pass. Johnston (1997) found that examiners read with enthusiasm and curiosity, anticipating a good thesis and expecting to find their task enjoyable and rewarding, bearing in mind that years of energy have gone into a thesis, and it has been judged valuable by supervisors; hence, they expect it will pass, and even desire it passes (Kiley & Mullins, 2004).

The analysis of the present study also showed that examiners did not recommend outright failure which will require resubmission, contrasting the finding of Becher (1993) that examiners' demand for resubmission was quite common. However, the finding of the present study is closer to Holbrook et al. (2004a), who found that only two examiners gave a grade of fail out of the 301 reports examined and there were rare cases of resubmission as well, confirming what has been established earlier in other studies, that examiners have a positive attitude towards the examination of a thesis (Johnston, 1997; Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Tinkler & Jackson, 2000).

In some cases, the examiners tend to be more specific by attaching the grade earned to the pass to present clearer issues to readers:

Extract 58

Final Mark= (65% ) C+ (ENG 12)

Extract 59

Overall Assessment: A (81%). (HIS 3)

Extract 60

I find the thesis a good one meriting a strong Upper second to First Class pass (79%). (HIS 20)

Extract 61

I recommend that the thesis be passed with a B Grade, (71%) subject to the corrections indicated per the attached and also in the thesis itself. (POH 23)

Extracts 58-61 above show examiners exercising their powers by assigning grade or numerical value to the assessed thesis. In Extracts 58 and 59, the examiners attach grade and the numerical value in percentages. So, we get a final mark awarded to the candidate after the thesis has been assessed to be 'C+' but in numerical value, in percentages, 65 % (Extract 58). Though this mark is not the best compared to the other grades found in Extracts 59, it makes it clearer to the reader the value placed on the thesis. In Extracts 60 and 61, however, it is not only the grade and the numerical value that the examiner quotes but also the comment is clothed in other words. In Extract 60, for example, the examiner indicates how 'good' the thesis is; he states further that it merits not just an Upper Class but a 'strong' one to a first class that passes with (79 %). In Extract 61 above, the examiner recommends that the thesis be passed with B grade and 71%, but subject to the corrections. With this one, we can see that there is a condition attached to the pass. In other words, if the condition, which is the corrections, has not been fulfilled, the thesis will not be passed. In a way, if the condition is satisfied; then, the thesis will be passed. This is an example of Type 1 conditional clause which is probable and true,

provided the conditions are met. Thus, it was found in the study that declarations could be made with or without conditions. Without conditions, the examiner could simply write:

Extract 62

Unconditional pass (ENG 13)

Extract 63

Unconditional pass (ENG 19)

With these extracts, 62 and 63, above, the examiners state that the candidate has passed, not subject to any condition. Though this pass is indicated this way in the report (no condition), in the actual work which is the thesis, the examiners would have indicated some issues that ought to be addressed before the submission of the work. These corrections may not be major ones and do not affect the passing of the thesis in any sense. Hence, the unconditional pass.

With conditions attached to the pass, examiners simplify issues by just presenting these:

Extract 64

Conditional pass (typographical and other errors to be corrected). (ENG 13)

Extract 65

Conditional pass (minor typographical errors). (ENG 17)

Extract 66

Conditional pass. I am willing to award a pass. (ENG 20)

In Extract 64, the condition expressed is typographical errors while in Extract 65, it is described as a minor typographical error. However, in Extract 66, the examiner states 'conditional pass'. Then, he utilizes another sentence that he is willing to award a pass without specifying what the conditions are. The corrections may have been indicated in the text (the thesis) itself and the

nature of the conditions specified earlier under some subheadings provided in the reports. Also, with Extracts 64 and 65, the examiners tick what has been specified in the assessment form, and this style relates more to the IR whereas with Extract 66, the examiner, here, does not choose from options outlined in the assessment form but writes his own assumption of what the situation is.

However, some of the conditional passes were expressed in longer sentences, paving way for the examiners to comment on other issues a bit:

Extract 67

I recommend that the thesis be passed with a C grade (61%) subject to the substantial corrections indicated above and also in the thesis itself. (POH 18)

Extract 68

The thesis should be accepted after the corrections have been made by the candidate. (HIS 7)

Extract 69

The candidate must correct all these mistakes and others indicated in the text before the thesis is passed. (HOT 10)

Extract 70

The thesis is passed subject to effecting the corrections highlighted. (ENG 11)

The above extracts (67-70) illustrate conditional passes expressed in longer sentences. The pass is captured in a grade, percentage, and expression of the condition. With Extract 67, we note that the examiner recommends that the thesis be passed with a grade of C, a percentage of 61 and a condition, substantial correction to be effected in the work. With Extract 69, the focus of the sentence, placed in theme position is that unless the necessary corrections are made, the work cannot be passed. The use of ‘must’ expresses a requirement from the examiner to the candidate— which is a rank of



obligation in the modality system where we see how much explicit responsibility the speaker takes for his attitudes (Ngula, 2017; Thompson, 2014).

Moreover, some examiners, in their quest to make recommendations which indicate whether the theses have been passed or not, assume other roles before settling on their core business as examiners. This allowed the examiners to provide background information in which the examination will be situated. In other words, we find the ER cramped in a string of sentences; examiners try to either explain before or after, what has warranted certain conclusions and actions to be drawn or undertaken:

Extract 71

The candidate's strength remain a sharply focused research thrust, well-conceived and presented methodology, clear language and effective use of visuals in presenting her quantitative data. These overshadow instances of ineffective structuring and lack of details for some aspects of the thesis. Thus, I award a Pass (B: 71). (ENG 12)

Extract 72

Given the above comments made on the various aspects of the work, I have no reservation in recommending a pass. This is a very worthwhile study of an interesting topic. I enjoyed reading the work and indeed do expect that more of our students will adopt such an approach in their literary studies. I also highly commend the supervisors. Well done! (ENG 4)

Extract 73

I am happy to recommend a clear pass. This is the first time I have assessed a thesis in socio-phonetics, a departure from what I have been reading. The thesis makes an invaluable contribution to studies in socio-phonetics. The candidate is to be highly commended for her use of the sociolinguistic interview. However, there are some issues the

candidate can easily fixed and others that ought to be dealt with the help of her supervisors. Congratulations! (ENG 17)

Extracts 71-73 show ER in relation to giving recommendation. The recommendations are positioned differently in the above extracts. Whereas in Extract 73, the recommendation of the pass begins the sentence followed by other comments, in Extract 71, the pass ends the sentence, serving as a concluding sentence that sums up all that has been explained earlier in that paragraph. The first sentence of Extract 72 contains the recommendation but the recommendation itself is seen in the main clause of that sentence. This recommendation is skirted in other comments including the personal feeling of the examiner in relation to the thesis assessed, his or her experience with other assessments already done and evaluation of the whole process and encouragement to others. In Extract 71, the examiner evaluates the strength of the candidate and quality of the thesis in terms of the methodology, language, and visuals that accompanied the quantitative data which, in its entirety, eclipsed some errors in the work. From this point, the examiner makes his/her pronouncement that the thesis has passed. Here, we observe that the reasons for the awarding of the pass precedes the actual recommendation that gives the pass so that readers will, right from the onset, come to terms with what evidence the examiner has for making such a recommendation.

In Extract 72, the examiner, making reference to the comments he/she had already made, which supposedly may be good, awards a pass unreservedly. This is followed by an evaluation of how he/she feels about the work, that it was an interesting topic which was worth studying. Again, the examiner adds to these comments by expressing his/her personal attitude of

how he/she enjoyed reading the work, and encouraging other students to follow suit in a similar style of carrying out the research. Also, he/she praises the supervisors for a good work done. It can be said that all these do not fall under the criteria provided by the university, and Lovat et al. (2002) observe rightly so when they articulate that examiners hardly compiled their reports in a form that conformed to university's guidelines. This extract ends with a congratulatory message 'well done'; perhaps, to the supervisors or the candidate or both. Holbrook et al. (2004a) describes such statements that congratulate as other judgement since they are celebratory in nature.

Lastly, there were also cases where the examiners did not explicitly recommend a pass or otherwise, but commended the candidate for the efforts put in ensuring a good work. Here are some extracts:

Extract 74

These shortcomings notwithstanding, the candidate must be commended for such a high-grade work and more importantly having the presence of mind to attempt revisiting the conceptual framework relative to the findings made. Although I have some fundamental differences with the type of framework employed, this is a sign of good scholarly work and must be encouraged. (POH 3)

Extract 75

In spite of all the shortcomings pointed out in this report and in the text itself, I believe the candidate has worked hard to arrive at the position that he takes in the thesis. (ENG 21)

Extract 76

I commend the author for the brave and honest scholarly appraisal about the colonial enterprise and institution of chieftaincy when it became an accomplice to the colonial regime. (HIS 12)

For instance, in Extract 76, the examiner praises the candidate for his/her bravery and honesty in the evaluation of chieftaincy in Ghana. Perhaps, the

examiner feels that power rests with the chiefs; thus, an evaluation of their practices in being co-conspirators in the colonial regime will constrain the candidate in the expression of truth as it is, without biases as well. Hence, the examiner sees that the objective way of discussing such a delicate matter needs a commendation—the candidate is described as being brave and honest in this regard. The focus of the discussion here is that examiners do not always recommend a pass with just grades, percentages, phrases but include explanations to the decision arrived at and evaluation and comments on other issues that do not directly have a bearing on the recommendation given. All these help readers to appreciate the efforts put in by candidates, supervisors and examiners themselves in the research process.

Examiner role (ER) is featured in comments that point to issues such as originality, methodology, literature view, and knowledge. The examiner, in this role, deploys imperative and unmitigated declaratives as well as recommendations that either pass or fail the candidate. These recommendations do come with grades, percentages, and structures that openly indicate these passes. It was also revealed that examiners commend candidates on their achievements in writing the thesis.

### **Commentator**

The examiner as a commentator is neither prescriptive, summative nor formative, but the role “emerges as examiners voice opinion” (Starfield et al., 2017, p. 8). Indeed, Commentator role (CR), mainly, intrudes on the message without giving summative, prescriptive, or formative feedback, and this appeals to the interpersonal metafunction of SFL, which represents speaker’s meaning potential as an intruder, both expressing their own judgements and



attitudes, and seeking to impact the behaviour and attitudes of others (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). In the view of Hyland and Hyland (2001), Commentator role is reflective; seeks to nurture ideas, but do not attempt to be dictatorial. Starfield et al. (2017) explain that though such comments can be evaluative and address the evaluative criteria, they can be disregarded without any effect on the result of the thesis. The analysis of data revealed that Commentator comments included such linguistic items as first-person singular pronoun as a Senser and the perfective aspect used for expressing Type 3 conditional clause. However, the present analysis did not record other semiotic features like multiple punctuation marks (e.g. ‘??’ or ‘!!’) and markers/comment adjuncts (e.g. ‘frankly’), and formulaic expressions (e.g. ‘What on earth’), as listed by Starfield et al. (2017).

Foremost, CR intrudes on the information through the use of the first person singular pronoun, ‘I’ which is, generally, a Senser in Mental Process, and is said to be non-committed to the information (Martin & White, 2005). Fløttum (2012) notes that the first pronoun, ‘I’, is a key feature of voice, and the most overt expressions of stance (Gray & Biber, 2012, p. 22). Examples are given here:

Extract 77

I think that the candidate has done a good job on two research questions. (ENG 15)

Extract 78

I believe that the researcher did not understand what he read or did not read the entire thesis. (HIS 16)

Extract 79

I also feel that the candidate misses an opportunity to ‘sell’ the work, when he merely alludes to ‘one major implication, which is further

study. In the revised thesis for final submission, candidate may consider the implication in respect of the following. (ENG 25)

Extract 80

The candidate is advised to re-check the accuracy of the name of the paramount chief of the Juabeng traditional area on page 47, line 14. I doubt whether what is written in the text is the correct name. (HOT 6)

We find above extracts (77-80) that indicate CR, using the first person singular pronouns. The pronouns found in the above extracts, using grammatical roles, are a participant in Mental process, and they are about the examiner rather than the candidate. As explained by Starfield et al. (2007), the use of these Senser pronouns makes the examiners uncommitted to the comments and, thus, are considered as CR in the sense that the given comments may be true or untrue but in the examiner's estimations, that is what he thinks. For example, in Extract 77, the examiner observes that the candidate has done well, but by casting the statement using the Senser I, the examiner creates an assumption that makes the comment not to belong to the EVR but to the CR; that is, left to the examiner alone, the candidate has done well on the two questions, making him not committed to the comment, an example of personal responsibility discussed under the mitigation strategies in Chapter Four of this same thesis. Again, in Extract 78, the examiner intrudes in the evaluation that the candidate did not understand what he/she read well. The Senser 'I' signifies that this is his/her view of the issue, rendering the comment as an example of CR. Equally, in Extract 80, given the fact that examiners are selected based on their expertise in the discipline, the examiner could have indicated that the name of the paramount chief provided by the

candidate is wrong, making the claim absolute; rather, the examiner intrudes in the message by indicating that he ‘doubts’ whether it is the correct name.

The extracts (77-80) seen above in relation to the CR using first person singular pronouns were expressed in the positive sense. However, negative forms were also found in the data:

Extract 81

I am not sure what the difference is between ‘conclusion’ and ‘key findings’ at least not from the way they have been presented here. Further, I don’t find the conclusion related to the third research question. (POH 7)

Extract 82

I do not think there is a need for hypothesis testing. Clearly, this is not a correlative study. (ENG 11)

Extract 83

I also raised an issue with studies related to error analysis as I do not think they are useful to any great extent. (ENG 12)

Extract 84

I do not think that the chief was afraid of women. (HIS 7)

These (Extracts 81-84) are examples of CR that were expressed in the negative form. Here, too, it can be seen that ‘I’ alludes to the examiner who engages in a Mental Process as a Sensor. What the examiner does here is to express his or her personal feeling of the phenomenon in the negative sense, not directly coercing the candidate to make changes. In Extract 81, the examiner hedges by indicating that he is unsure of what the candidate has done in relation to the conclusion and the key finding. This could have been presented in a summative form, ‘The conclusion is bad’, making it EVR but by expressing this as his own personal view/responsibility, renders the comment as one that could be ignored. Likewise, in Extract 82, the examiner, instead of directly

asserting that the hypothesis should not have been tested here, presents this as his/her own thinking. Thus, not as summative comment, prescriptive nor formative but as his version of what he thinks, making it a CR. The examiner is seen intruding into the message by expressing what his/her personal feelings are.

Again, the examiner intrudes in the message not only in the first-person singular pronoun in the subjective form but also in the possessive form as well, presenting a phrase. Examples are these:

Extract 85

Another issue is that the candidate, with the support of his supervisors, may have to slightly alter the title in order to cover the demands of the two research questions. My understanding of the research questions is that the work is focused not only on characterization as a literary variable. (ENG 1)

Extract 86

This in my opinion is an oversimplification of the original ...(HIS 22)

Above are Extracts 85-86, showing expression of personal opinion in CR, not in the subjective case but possessive pronouns which also show how examiners intrude in the message, rendering it as an expression of a personal feeling rather than a summative judgement on what the candidate has done. The examiner by indicating that his/her understanding of the research question is that characterization is not the only issue considered by the candidate has meddled with the message making it a non-committal one, and as such can be ignored by the candidate.

Furthermore, the CR is also expressed, using other hedging devices that make the examiner claim personal responsibility for the comment, rather making the candidate be the bearer of the assertion found in the statement.



This makes the statement to be regarded as a provisional one (Hyland, 1995), appealing to readers (candidate) to make decisions on them:

Extract 87

I cannot identify the study area from the title of the thesis. (HIS 24)

Extract 88

I find it difficult to comprehend the rationale behind finding out the religious background of the study respondents. (POH 13)

Extract 89

I have difficulty with the organizing principle of the arrangement of studies on X and Y. (ENG 23)

Extract 90

I find something wrong with asking managers about the views of motivational techniques that they implement. Will there not be bias? (HOT 15)

We see examples of CR expressed in examiners' claim of personal responsibility for the actions embedded in Extracts 87-90. For example, the examiner claims in Extract 87 that he cannot identify the study area in the title of the thesis. Here, the examiner expresses that, imaginably, the study area can be identified from the title (Dunleavy, 2003), but he cannot retrieve it from there. Thus, it is open for the readers to either accept or reject this position, making it a CR. A more summative evaluative comment would have been that 'The title of the thesis does not contain the study areas', committing the candidate to work on it. Also, in Extract 87, the examiner intrudes in the comment by claiming responsibility for what is expressed in the statement that he fails to see the study area in the title. This hedging strategy renders the comment provisional, pending the acceptance of the reader, and this makes it a CR since the candidate is not obliged to take any action. Petch-Tyson (1998)

regards the use of personal pronoun as a means for writers (examiners) to make themselves visible in the text, TERs.

Furthermore, the CR includes 'personal musing statements'. These are speculative statements expressed by the examiner which do not actually commit the candidate to undertake an action. Some examples in the data are found below:

Extract 91

An attempt has been made to discuss the results in relation to the objectives of the study. While interesting, I wonder what some of the correlations were meant to achieve. A correlation found between d3 and d4, hand washing after feeding a child and before eating, will have no explanation. (POH 17)

Extract 92

As regards the 'findings' (p. 118), I have been wondering what the discussion here is all about. What does she say here that she has not said earlier? I suggest that she expunges all this from the work. (ENG 23)

The Extracts, 91 and 92, above show the use of personal musing statements as a realization of CR. In Extract 91, a non-committal statement is that there is a wondering of what some of the correlations were meant to achieve. The examiner can be said to be absorbed in his/her personal thoughts, contemplating on the meaning of the 'correlations'. If the examiner required the candidate to work on these correlations, a more prescriptive comment would have been made, but this statement does not demand such action, and it is, thus, classified as a CR.

Lastly, the CR was cast, using the third conditional sentence which expresses a very hypothetical condition that it is now too late for the condition to be fulfilled. Two forms of the third condition sentence were used in the

data. One was the ‘could’ plus the perfective aspect, and the other was ‘would’ plus the perfective aspect. Examples of the ‘could’ form are given first; followed by, the ‘would’, form as showed below:

Extract 93

By limiting herself to the Likert format of questioning, the candidate has lost a golden opportunity to collect very useful data that could have been more relevant than the status quo in which no explanation is given for the choice of answer. (HOT 16)

Extract 94

The research questions are too many. There are no less than ten of them. The implication is that if each of them is given sufficient attention, the final product will be unwieldy. The work could have been more focused if there were fewer questions that could have been investigated in-depth. (HIS 11)

Extract 95

The format and style of presentation of study results and discussion, Chapter 4 are both acceptable—using table and charts. It could have been complemented by photographs of various disease conditions. (POH 18)

Extract 96

The candidate could have explored other multivariate statistics like T-test, Spearman Rank Correlation, Factor Analysis for ordinal data etc to compare the 2003 and 2008 data and analyse relationships between the dependent variable and the various independent variables. This could have established relationships between anaemia and a combination of the dependent variables. (POH 20)

These extracts, 93-96, show CR realised in the third conditional clause. In actual sense, the thesis has been completed and submitted for assessment, making the suggested ideas too late to have been addressed or inculcated into the work. The examiner’s desire that some issues could have been addressed differently at this stage is viewed as a comment expressed—CR. In Extract 93,

the examiner indicates that more relevance could have been created if useful data were collected through other means other than the Likert scale, but the reality is that the Likert scale was not adopted, and this prevented the candidate from utilizing that useful data that could have enhanced the quality of the work. Possibly, if future publication were to be considered by the candidate; then, such a comment would be helpful. Similarly, in Extract 95, the examiner expresses the view that photographs could have been added to the tables used for the analysis so as to provide readers with reality of the various disease conditions, which could have assisted readers' understanding of concepts in the thesis (Johnston, 1997). The examiner rightly asserts that visuals really do aid better understanding of issues presented in only theoretical forms. Unfortunately, the comment comes in here later when the thesis has been submitted and assessed; thus, it is considered as CR.

Also, the third conditional clause for the CR was expressed not only with the 'could' plus the perfective aspect of the verb, but with 'would' plus the perfective aspect which functions equally as the 'could' form identified above. Examples of the 'would' plus the perfective aspect of the verb used for the conditional clause in expressing CR is given below:

Extract 97

The actual discussion is carried out in two chapters, three and four. The first of these chapters titled 'thematic analysis of texts' focuses on marriage which the researcher sees as an arena in which the main female character grows and develops. The second of the major chapters presents a character analysis of the major characters to explore 'the developmental features employed by the author'. It is obvious that the two chapters overlap significantly and that a different design would have been more useful. (ENG 10)



Extract 98

It probably would have been more profitable if the students had been made to write an essay in Ewe and proceed to identify the cohesive devices used and compared them with their English equivalents. This way, we may discover fresh insights into how Ewe does this business. Some of the positions taken could be re-examined. (ENG 21)

Extract 99

The copious description of 'cocoa production in Ghana'; (see page3-7) is appropriate here, especially the list of processes involved. A source of reference would have been adequate enough, yet not cited by the candidate. (POH 2)

Extract 100

A graphical pattern for Ghana similar to Figure 1 would have been useful, even though table I seemingly appears to do so. (HOT 3)

We see examples of 'would' conditional clause above (Extracts 97-100). These also express commentator roles in that it is now late for the situation expressed to be realised, making it very hypothetical in nature. Thus, the candidate is not obliged to take any necessary action at the moment since it is not indicative in the comment. We consider Extract 98, for example, where the examiner wishes that the candidate should have written the essay in Ewe for a better comparative analysis. Conversely, the data have been collected already, analysis has been done, and the thesis submitted for examination. Thus, the examiner is described as performing a CR.

Lastly, on CR, it was observed in the present analysis that examiners combined personal reference (Senser) with third conditional clauses in the comments. This finding was absent in Starfield et al. (2017)'s study, suggesting that context conditions the use of language. Perchance, examiners employed these double features of the CR so as to make the statement more

intrusive rather than requiring the candidate to act in a specific manner. These are some examples from the data:

Extract 101

The problem has been further clarified in very specific terms through the research questions as well as the hypotheses. I thought though that the number of hypotheses could have been in line with the number of research questions. This may be a small point, I believe. (ENG 12)

Extract 102

The statement of the problem is, in general, well presented. The candidate attempts to clarify the problem through the purpose of the study and research questions. I thought though that the candidate could have presented a more concise 'statement of the problem'. I also think that the second research question requires a closer attention in order to foreground the two variables in question. (ENG 4)

Extract 103

I feel though much could have been done on both the conceptual background and empirical studies to make them more rigorous. As they stand now, I find some overlapping. For instance, in the conceptual part of the literature review, I find clearly unmotivated separate treatment of sections such as 'the concept of class', the concept of gender, the concept of style and sociolinguistics. (ENG 17)

These extracts (101-103) above are examples of examiners employing two features of the CR at the same time. First, it has been established earlier on with this role that examiners intrude in the comment by employing the Senser 'I' so as to make the message non-committal. Again, the third conditional clause was also employed to express what the examiners wished could have been done in the thesis but was not done since, now, it is late for the thesis to be modified in that direction. By employing these double features, examiners make such comments more intrusive and more non-committal. In Extract 101, the examiner was of the view that the number of hypothesis could have

corresponded to the number of research questions posed in the study. This is even made more provisional when the examiner comes in again to say that this is a small point, still in the mental state, 'I believe'. The examiner is not mandating the candidate to make corrections but the comment can be seen as an expression of the examiner's own sentiments. Also, it can be observed in the extracts (102-103) above that the simple past form of the Mental Process, 'thought', is used, relating the activity to the past as well as the present tense of the Mental Process, 'believe', 'think', and 'feel', displaying the current state of mind set of the examiner, but they both make the comments tentative, provisional and non-committal.

From the discussion, we see that the CR is recognized when the examiner intrudes in the message because the candidate is not committed to take any action. It was seen in the analysis that such comments include personal pronouns, personal responsibility through hedging, personal musing statements, and third conditional clauses. Also, a combination of these techniques, first, person pronoun and, second, third conditional clause was simultaneously employed by examiners in their intrusion of the comments in the reports.

### **Proofreader**

Another role identified in the data is the Proofreader (PR). While Holbrook et al. (2004) use the expression, 'Editor Role', Hyland (1995) sees the examiner in this role as a Proofreader. In the present analysis, I prefer using Proofreader Role (PR) since the issues discussed under this role relate more to proofreading than editing of content issues which is a preserve of Expert Role (EXR). Starfield et al. (2017) explain that the examiner adopting

this role deals with matters of spelling, formatting, punctuation, and grammar. Golding et al. (2014) also found that examiners recorded errors in presentation. Again, the Proofreader, through this role, informs the student of the error and, generally, supplies the correction after, and this was mainly accompanied by a page number and/or a line. Holbrook et al. (2004a) explain that editorial comments in the examiner roles seek the correction of typographical, referencing or mechanical errors, and the examiner, mostly, supplies the exact correction.

Examiners' comments on proofreading errors were also recognised by Noble (1994), and these errors and presentation issues occupy a big space in the examiner's comment (Holbrook et al., 2004a), explaining further that such comments may not be necessarily critical but are prescriptive and negative in nature. While Golding et al. (2014) observe that such errors annoy examiners and distract them (examiners), Holbrook et al. (2004a) notice that these errors carry frustration with weaknesses in style or communication throughout the thesis. Also, in line with Hansford and Maxwell (1993) and Johnston's (1997) finding, examiners, in the present study, commented on editorial issues. Besides, in the present study, this role does not only occur in the last stage of the TERs in a list form, as found by Starfield et al. (2017), but in the main report itself as well. The key issues identified with this role are discussed here.

First, Proofreader role (PR) points to issues that bother on spelling which the candidate is obliged to correct to bring the work to the best form since some of these errors tend to impede understanding of what the candidate wants to convey to readers. Again, it was observed in the analysis that though these errors are prescriptive, they do not border on content issues; else, they



would have been Expert roles. Because they relate to proofreading the work for a better form, they relate to PR. As trivial as these errors seem, they really speak about the lack of seriousness of the candidate and the poor quality of the thesis in totality. A few examples are provided below:

Extract 104

Portable water p 61 line 3 from bottom. Spelling should be potable water. (POH 4)

Extract 105

The word on page 57, line 7, that has been underlined in red is 'bordered' not 'boarded'. (POH 10)

Extract 106

Spelling mistakes eg. Literature is spelt 'litreature' in the table of content and chapter heading. (ENG 7)

Extract 107

The word 'sanctuary' is wrongly spelt on page 1 of the thesis. (HOT 6)

Extract 108

The word 'accurate' is wrongly spelt on table 2 on page 77. This has been underlined in red on the page. (HIS 2)

What we see here (Extracts 104-108) are examples of errors that pertain to spellings. It can be seen in the extracts above that examiners specify where the candidate can identify the errors, making it easier for the candidate to refer to and take the necessary actions. So, we see page numbers listed 'p 61 line 3 from bottom' in Extract 104 while other specifications like 'table of content and chapter heading' in Extract 106. In Extract 105, however, the examiner specifies, further, by indicating that the error has been underlined in red, added to the page numbers and line specification. All these suggest retrieval of the errors for the necessary actions by the candidate.

Besides, in Extracts 105 and 106, the spelling errors identified there can be related to the issue of homophone, where a word is pronounced the same as another but with different meanings. A more plausible explanation will be that these spelling errors may relate to the pronunciation style of the individual in that English pronunciation does not always correspond to orthography (Cruttenden, 2001; Gimson, 1962; Roach, 2009). Also, wrong pronunciation may lead to wrong spelling. Perhaps, in Extract 104, the insertion of 'r' /ɹ / sound in the word makes it wrong. The examiner, in PR, corrects this by removing this sound entirely. What we find in Extract 106 is an example of an error that relates to typography. Thus, a reader is capable to easily envisage the intended word to have been used by the candidate. By careful editing, this spelling error could be corrected. In Extracts 107 and 108, the nature of the error, though related to spelling, has not be specified. In other words, we are not presented with the error itself but the correct form is given. Thus, we cannot conclude that the spelling error results from either homophone or typography. Thus, it is found here, too, that examiners in the present study specify the page or line and supply the corrections, as found in other studies (Holbrook et al., 2004a; Golding et al., 2014; Starfield et al., 2017).

In addition, examiners identified errors at the word level but with reference to the spacing provided in between the words or the wrong amalgamation of these words. Spacing of individual words which helps determine successive units in a grammatical structure (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973) is important in the interpretation of the meaning of words. Some examples of this error in the data are these:

Extract 109

Also, decision-making not 'decision making'; honeymoon not 'honey moon'. (HOT 7)

Extract 110

On page 29, line 17, the word there is 'limelight' one word not lime light two words. (HOT 6)

Extract 111

The word on page 19, line 22 is 'downgrade' not down grade. That is one word not two words. (POH 10)

These examples (Extracts 109-111) border on errors that relate to spacing at the word level. Spacing helps identify one word from another word (Wiredu, 1999). Spacing, again, is used in word formation process to identify compound words, whether the word appears first, as Solid where compounds are seen together as one word like 'classroom'; second, hyphenated which is presented with hyphen e.g. 'court-martial'; third, two/three-word/separate words e.g. 'gold watch'. In the extracts above (109-111), the compound words found above relate to two-unit words, where free and lexical morphemes are combined to create a new word. Specifically, in Extract 109, the examiner prefers the hyphenated compound, 'decision-making' to the presentation of the word as separate words, 'decision making' (an example of adjective compound). In the same extract, the examiner prefers the solid compound 'honeymoon' (an example of noun compound) to the separated form, 'honey moon'. Such comments are prescriptive in that the examiner commits the candidate to take actions, with that 'fix it' form. No room is created for negotiation where the examiner could have presented this correction with any of the hedging devices. With this, the candidate is placed in a subservient position, with no space of his own.

Again, examiners in PR point candidates in the direction of appropriate word usage. In other words, these errors are related to neither spelling nor spacing, but to the vocabulary usage. The selection of appropriate words is required here. Some cases of these errors are presented below:

## Extract 112

- i. 'disvirgined' p 76 is an unusual expression
- ii. 'carrier woman' p 162 should read 'career woman'
- iii. 'medieval knight errand' p 176 should read '... knight errant'. (ENG 10)

## Extract 113

See p.65 Kankani is not civil cat. Do you mean civet cat.(sic) Akrantsi is hedgehog not hedgehod. Kokosti, not Kototi, is wild boar not wild bear. I wish to suggest that 'heritage' as in heritage of the colonial rule should be changed to 'legacy'. (HIS 12)

## Extract 114

Page 1, paragraph 2 line 7-change 'large' to 'larger'. (POH 9)

## Extract 115

The candidate should review the last sentence on page 141 and substitute hospital with 'hospitalities'. (HOT 2)

Extracts 112-115 are examples of wrong usage of words that the PR points out to the candidate to effect the changes. The words, in themselves, have not been spelt wrongly but their use in such contexts is not deemed appropriate (Afful, 2009; Kroll, 2003) by the examiner who, as a gatekeeper, ensures that standards are kept; thus, he/she demands a change of such a word. In Extract 112, the examiner points that 'disvirgined' is an odd expression, which requires a change. Similarly, in the same Extract, the examiner requests that 'carrier' be changed to 'career'. Lastly, in that Extract, 'medieval knight' is to be replaced by 'knight errant'. In all these, the page numbers where the errors can be identified are indicated for easy cross-checking by the candidate.



The next form of error identified by the examiner in PR relates to word specification; that is, grammar/syntax. This particular one is the preposition. In the data, the Proofreader draws attention to the correct use of preposition, as in either preposition selection for certain words or redundancy in the use of some prepositions. This is illustrated below:

Extract 116

We take 'advantage of' something not 'Advantage off' something. The candidate should correct this mistake on page 93, line 8. (HOT 4)

Extract 117

On page 52, on the first sentence, - is it 'resonate the argument' or 'resonate with the argument' the candidate should check on the appropriateness of the use of the word 'resonate' in this context. (ENG 10)

Extract 118

p 11. line 2, 'in' is missing before 'its'. (HIS 20)

Extract 119

Paragraph 3; NB: you draw up a plan/constitution. But you draw a picture/map!! (HOT 1)

We see above in Extracts 116- 119 instantiations of the wrong use of prepositions in the data. As explained by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), a preposition expresses a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement. The wrong use of it will not clearly represent a relation. Also, some words require the use of a specific preposition in order for the required meaning relations to be created. So, in Extract 116, the examiner corrects the use of 'advantage' with 'off' by indicating that the correct form is 'advantage of'. In Extract 117, however, the examiner requests the preposition to be dropped as the examiner feels that the word 'resonate' does not agree with 'with' or, possibly, its use will rather be

redundant. In Extract 119, it can be seen that the use of the preposition with the verb will rather result in a phrasal verb that denotes an activity rather than a relation between the entities; thus, an indirect request that the candidate drops the use of 'up' as in, 'draw up a plan/ constitution' as against 'draw a picture/map'.

The use of punctuation also attracted comments by the examiner in his/her PR. Punctuation marks are used to indicate pauses, questions or emphasis (Wiredu, 1998), and these help in the interpretation of ideas inherent in grammatical structures; in that, there are several ways in which a single structure can be punctuated, and the use of each punctuation mark assigns a particular meaning to the sentence in that direction. According to Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), punctuation serves two main purposes: separation and specification. First, there is the separation of successive units such as sentence periods, or items in a list by commas whereas included units are seen when parentheses mark off an interpolated phrase or clause. Second, punctuation serves specific functions of language, as when an apostrophe indicates that an inflection is genitive. Some examples of comments on punctuation errors are found here:

Extract 120

Page 35 line 12 to 14 personal communication with respondents should be in inverted commas. Repeated on page 36, paragraph 3, line 6. Page 69-good use of direct quotes to illustrate findings but these quotes should be in inverted commas. Responses from respondents are captured in this chapter in direct quotes, personal communication, but are not put in inverted commas. Direct quotes should be in inverted commas, '. This should be corrected in this chapter 4. (POH 9)

Extract 121

Health center's p 48. Remove apostrophe to read 'health centers (sic). (HOT 12)

Extract 123

p. 10 construction; line 5 from significance of study; 'it's' should change to 'its'. (HIS 15)

Extract 124

p.8. 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph; I suggest you leave out the semi-colons altogether. Put a full stop after 'underdevelopment' since that sentence is not a question. Then you can say, 'other questions are ...and list them with numbers. (HIS 20)

There is reference to wrong use of inverted commas or quotations in Extract 120, and wrong use of apostrophe in Extract 121. The inappropriate use of semi-colon is commented on in Extract 124. The candidates are to correct these wrong forms. Thus, by changing 'it's' to 'its', the reader is to interpret it as genitive form rather than a contracted form, 'it's'.

Another aspect of language use that examiners prescribe amendment is tense. Tense can be explained as a form of the verb which distinguishes when an action or state of being occurs or exists; thus, we can have present tense or past tense (Nesfield, 2008; Wiredu, 1998). The wrong use of tense does not properly communicate the moment within which an activity takes place. Some examples of wrong tense are given below:

Extract 125

Avoid the use of future tense 'will', you are at the report stages of the dissertation. At this stage you are dealing with what has been done. (HOT 20)

Extract 126

p. 20; chapter two; change the tenses of the verbs after 1951 to the past tense. (HIS 20)

Extract 127

Use of wrong tense. Some parts of the methodology are presented in future tense. (ENG 7)

These extracts, 125-127, contain comments on errors relating to tenses that the Proofreader points out in the report, requiring the candidate to change them. In Extract 125, for example, the Proofreader explains that, at the reporting level of research, the futuristic aspect, 'will' is not needed; hence, there is the need for the candidate to use the simple past form of verbs at the reporting stage. Mostly, at the proposal stage of the research, 'will' is preferred but when the actual work has been done and the candidate is reporting on it, then, this 'will' which is indicative of something yet to happen is dropped.

Examiners cast in the role of Proofreaders identified other errors beyond the word; this error relates to longer strings of words or structural forms, seen as being incomplete, wrong or inappropriate. Illustrations are given below:

Extract 128

p. 86, line 4 from bottom. The sentence: when to use particular family planning method with partners 3% of the respondents is incomplete. Should reconstruct. (POH 4)

Extract 129

p. 127: line 3 from bottom 'nothing to write home about' another colloquial expression not needed in a serious work like this. (HIS 20)

Extract 130

Wrong expressions... to explore what tourists look out for in arts and crafts, not '... to explore the factors tourists look out for in arts and crafts' page 7; ....bazaars and fairs are periodically staged in Accra ... not 'it organizes bazaars and fairs periodically page 54; significance level not 'significant level pages 71, 81. (HOT 7)



Extract 131

'Holds water', candidate should consider deleting it. It sounds too informal. (ENG 20)

Extract 128 evinces the Proofreader's antipathy, which is found to be incomplete sentence. Incomplete sentences which are considered as sentence fragments do not express full ideas. Here, it can be seen that the candidate only presented a subordinate clause whose meaning can only be realised when it is attached to a main clause. By leaving the structure as it is, a reader finds it difficult to ascertain the full import of the intended message. Thus, the proofreader obliges the candidate to correct that. In Extracts 130 and 131, the proofreaders allude to the wrong use of expression. Expressions centre on the face value of language use, where appropriate and correct use of language is determined. For the examiner, the expression 'holds water' is informal in the context of written language; hence, the need for the candidate to use a more formal one in that context. Swales and Feak (2009, p. 14) explain that 'a formal research report written in informal, conversational English may be considered too simplistic, and even if the actual ideas and/or data are complex'. Thus, texts need to be written 'academically', which is formal (Swales & Feak, 2009).

Moreover, examiners in the role as PR commented on the construction of reference list. An acknowledgment of used sources in a text is very important in AW. In the academic communities (AC), every utterance transforms, addresses and accommodates earlier utterances in some way (Bakhtin, 1981; Hyland, 2006). The wrong citation in terms of failure to cite sources or cite improperly detracts from scholarly writing. Comments on wrong referencing practices are provided below:

## Extract 132

References: most of the references are not presented in APA format, especially, the online sources. Also, some of the in-text citations did not include the year of publication e.g. Gordon on page 2. UNESCO need not be written in full. The candidate seems to have a problem with et al., see pages 29, 34, and 101. It should be followed by a full stop before the brackets i.e. Oviedo-Garcia et al. (2014). However, if it is brackets, the full stop should be followed by a comma i.e. (Oviedo-Garcia et al., 2014). (HOT 7)

## Extract 133

Referencing/bibliography are adequate and presented in the acceptable convention. However, there are some conformity of references and citation lapses. For example, the following authors: Abraham, B. (1975), Baker H. A. (1980)...were included in the bibliography/reference list but have not been cited in the body of the thesis at all. Also, the writer cited Arewa, (1966), P.41, Awoonor, K. (?) p. 45 ...all in the text but are not in reference list/bibliography. The writer must consider including them in the reference list. (ENG 3)

## Extract 134

There are instances where the citations in the body of the text are not in the reference. For example, Karoline et al. 2009 (page 10); Population Reference Bureau, 2008 (page 17), Macnair 2005 (page 21); Kumbi, Melkanu and Yeneneh 2008 (page 30); Mandrira et al. 2014 (page 34); GSS, 2013 (page 47). (POH 11)

In Extracts 133 and 134, the examiners observe that there are problems with both in-text and out-text citations; that is, while some sources are found in the text, they are not included in the references and vice versa (See Twumasi, 2012 on citation practices). So, the examiner demands that these must be corrected. In Extract 132, however, the examiner comments on the house style, indirectly requiring that the candidate adopt APA style in presenting the references. In addition, the Proofreader demands for the inclusion of the year

of publication as well as the proper use of ‘et al.’. All these are to ensure that candidates produce the finest form of the thesis. Similar to the findings of Holbrook et al. (2017), many examiners allocate long segments of their reports to editorial issues from 2-3 pages, especially with referencing.

Another issue PR comments on is formatting, which is the layout of the document in terms of the form of presentation. If the presentation of a thesis is poor, it adversely affects the comprehension of what is covered in the whole text, the thesis. Therefore, a careful presentation seen in a neat layout helps readers to quickly relate one level to another level in the work. Formatting includes issues such as the positioning of tables and figures, alignment, spacing, and indentation. Examples of such errors are presented in the comments below:

Extract 135

Indent the paragraph under dedication (HOT 18)

Extract 136

Also, spacing in that sentence should be reviewed. (POH 6)

Extract 137

Numbering not properly aligned. (ENG 20)

Extract 138

Margins should be 2 inches to the left and 1 inch to the right. The candidate should observe these rules of layout in the final presentation of the dissertation. (HIS 8)

Formatting issues range from indentation (Extract 135), spacing (Extract 136) and alignment (Extract 137), to margins (Extract 138). By addressing the issues raised by the proofreaders, candidate will improve upon the present arrangement of their theses. It can be seen that, with all these extracts, the examiners are dissatisfied with formatting, in general, and specify what should

be done. In Extract 138, the examiner indicates that the margins should be 2 inches to the left and 1 inch to the right. If the final form of the thesis is to be submitted, enough space will be left for comb-binding the thesis and the writings will not be pushed into the margin. Left in its current form, the margin creates difficulty for readers since some texts have to be squeezed out from the corner of the work.

Lastly, concerning the PR, examiners also do not only specify the nature of the comments as detailed above but also offer general comments as to what is expected of the candidate, in relation to editing. This covers the presentation in its general form, which is about the overall arrangement and management of information in the thesis, which is likely to include spelling, spacing, layout of the thesis, references, language use, and formatting, in general. Some examples of these general comments on editing are as follows:

Extract 139

The work needs thorough editing in terms of spacing, indiscriminate use of capital letters and also that the study recommendations are not innovating and far reaching enough. (POH 21)

Extract 140

The organization of the work leaves much to be desired. (HIS 1)

Extract 141

This section needs serious proofreading as there are too many typographical and grammatical errors (see the correction in the document). (HOT 8)

Extract 142

There are a few instances of grammatical errors which can be eliminated through thorough editing. (ENG 2)

In the extracts (139-142) above, the examiners do not mention the specific issues that should be edited, but make general assertions that the theses have to



be edited, which may include spelling, tenses, word usage, language structuring and formatting; thus, examiners require that more could have been done to enhance to the quality of the theses, confirming the finding of Johnston (1997) that there is a deep concern with students' poor communicative skills.

In sum, the thesis examiners (TErs), in Proofreader role (PR), identify deficiencies with both the exterior and interior forms of the theses that ought to be corrected to improve upon the quality of the work. Such issues do not pertain to the substance and arguments of the thesis, but surfaces issues such as spelling, alignment, spacing, referencing and language at the word, phrase, clause, and sentences levels. These prescriptions, if followed by the candidate, should enhance the overall communicativeness of the work since such minor issues, as they seem, do interestingly and greatly impede the reading and interpretation of issues in theses.

### **Expert**

The examiner as an Expert shows suitable research experience at a great level, meaning that the examiner has expertise and academic credibility applicable to the research field (Starfield et al., 2017). As Adika (2015) avers, academic discourse communities thrive on the expertise of its members, and that individuals who join the community must bring their expertise to bear, which is exhibited through the command of disciplinary practices in the production of appropriate discourse types. In the thesis examiners' reports (TErs), the Expert role (EXR) is displayed when the examiner, according to the disciplinary expectations, gives facts; corrects the candidates' factual

errors; defines concepts and cites prominent theorists; establishes his authority as expert, and displays expertise in content and structure of thesis.

The analysis of the data in respect of the examiner in the Expert role did not record the use of the lexical item 'expert' which contrasts the findings of Starfield et al. (2017). Perhaps, though examiners are selected based on their knowledge, experience and expertise in the field, they may think that the thesis, in whatever form that has been submitted for assessment, was supervised by somebody who, at least, has considerable knowledge in the area or related to the area. Thus, repeating or using 'expert' in the reports may render the supervisors as not experts or not having worked well. Also, the core mandate of the assessor is to examine the thesis and not to show, in explicit terms, how expert she/he is, though the use of 'expert' could be alluded to, indirectly, in the report, as shown above. Also, there was no evidence found in the data of examiners mitigating their authority as examiners, as established by Starfield et al. (2017).

In the present study, examiners give facts pertaining to the selected disciplines or areas of specialization. The examiner, through the EXR, enlightens readers on concepts or general issues that fall under his or her domain of expertise. Some examples of comments revealing the examiner as expert are shown below:

Extract 143

Remarks on the significance of the horn are irrelevant. This belongs to the background discussion. At this stage of the discussion, there should be little room for further background analysis discussion; this has been adequately dealt with already. It is in-depth analysis of each text that is called for at this stage. This is what is required by the formalist theory:

the texts must speak for themselves to elucidate the researcher's thesis. (ENG 18)

Extract 144

The candidate's claim on pg (sic) 85 that there is 'positive' relationship between meal and recommendation of restaurant is based on some statistical flaws and therefore, null and void. Firstly, the paired variables (recommend, revisit, alternative) should have been treated as nominal and not ordinal variables. Candidate should remember that ordinal variables have the same level or order over each other. Consequently, a 'disagree' answer is not necessarily lower than a 'neutral' answer. Consequently, how can an association between an ordinal and nominal variable be positive? At any rate, statistically positive relationships should show interrelated movements between the variables in questions increase or decrease together. That is why we hardly talk about the direction of relationships when dealing with nominal /ordinal data. (HOT 18)

Extract 145

The candidate did not make any recommendation but this is an acceptable practice within mainstream historical studies. (HIS 2).  
Theoretical and conceptual frameworks are not used in history and in line with this, the candidate has no theoretical or conceptual framework in this dissertation. (HIS 8)

The above extracts (143-145) are instances where examiners explain facts or give information in the reports. These are usually lengthy since the examiner seeks to explain issues that broaden the knowledge horizon of the candidate. Such comments cannot be described wholly as formative assessment (FA) since they are basically meant to help the candidate gain further insights and deeper understanding of the issues already found in the work. It can be said that these are not only for the benefit of the candidate only but, perhaps, to any reader of the reports. The expert approach helps the examiner to present norms

and knowledge construction in the discipline, in specific terms, and to knowledge construction, in general (Adika, 2015). In Extract 143, the examiner, in his/her EXR, sheds light on the inappropriateness in the placement of the 'horn' at the discussion section, and throws light on what is needed at the actual discussion section which is a focus on the data (text) selected for the analysis, mentioning that it is the requirement for the selected theory for the study. Thus, we find that the concepts (key) relevant to the study are to be explained in the background or conceptual frameworks, and not at the discussion section where data analysis is expected. Holbrook et al. (2004a) also found in their study that examiners added something new and possibly in detail to what the candidate had done. It can be seen here, as explained by Lovat et al. (2008), that examiners deliberately position themselves in relation to knowledge—what it is to be known, how they are known, what it is important to be known, and the why.

Also, in Extract 144, the examiner, in his explanation to the candidate, enlightens readers of the true nature of the variables selected in the study. First, the variables should have been considered as nominals and treated as such. Again, the examiner touches on the sameness of the options presented to the respondents, that disagree and neutral weigh same, and explaining further that 'statistically positive relationships should show interrelated movements between the variables in questions, increase or decrease together'. The examiner clarifies issues in this direction because of his/her position as an expert in the field. With Extract 145, normally, the practice of candidates in other disciplines is to offer recommendations for further studies in the concluding chapter of the study. We find this absent in History, but the expert



explains that that is an acceptable practice since in mainstream historical studies, recommendations and theoretical concepts are not used. By not giving recommendation in this discipline, the candidate follows a norm rather than deviates from normal practices, as expected in other disciplines. It takes an expert to establish this! The finding of examiner assuming EXR is in consonance with Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) comment that examiners present their reports in a style and sequence that reflect their unique interests, their discipline, and their expertise in addition to the criteria appropriate to a specific judgement and the exclusive nature of the topic. Thus, an expert, by concentrating on the text at hand, reveals best practices associated with the discipline.

In addition, an expert does not only give information but also corrects erroneous facts. As intimated by Mullins and Kiley (2002), examiners are considered gatekeepers, keeping disciplinary standards. Thus, the EXR seeks to maintain standards in relation to accuracy of knowledge. Thus, examiners, possibly, find it essential to front their role as custodians and experts of the body of conventional and technical knowledge (Lovat et al., 2008). Instances of experts correcting erroneous facts are given below:

Extract 146

The candidate does not seem to know the difference between the legislative council of the colonial regime and the legislative assembly which came into existence in 1951. On page 8, paragraph 2, lines 6, and 9, he talks of Quist as being the speaker of the legislative council. Sir Emmanuel Quist was made president of the legislative council and not its speaker. The same mistakes are repeated on page 9, paragraph 1, and the last line of paragraph 3 of the same page. The candidate should note these errors and correct them. I have indicated the corrections for him in the right hand margins. (HIS 8)

## Extract 147

He also averred that ‘the first staff members were Europeans’. They were coastal Africans. Even the Wesleyan Methodist School which was established in Kumasi was headed by an Asante, Master J. K Appiah who was educated at the coast. There is a lot of misinformation on pages 90 and 98. (HIS 19)

## Extract 148

On page 103, the candidate stated that Baafour Akoto was educated at the government boy’s school but the fact is he was self –taught. A lot of information provided in the work need to be carefully crosschecked. This will be a historical record that will be consulted by future researchers. Accuracy is essential. (HIS 19)

The above extracts, 146-148, show the experts correcting blunders made by the candidates in their theses. These corrections are considered necessary since the examiner as a gatekeeper ensures that standards are maintained in the discipline; hence, a scrutiny is made of every ‘product’ before it is given entry to the community. In Extract 147, the examiner makes this emphatically clear: ‘this will be a historical record that will be consulted by future researchers’; thus, ‘accuracy is essential’. In other words, if these mistakes are not corrected, and they remain in the shelves of libraries, individuals who make future reference may take every bit of information contained in them as the whole truth. Since that particular work has been examined and a degree awarded, it is presumed that correct information has been documented, per the time of the assessment. Thus, the examiner’s reputation will be questionable, as explained by Ballard (1996) that examiners are mindful of the point that their reputations that are mirrored in the worth of the report are at stake; hence, the need for factual errors to be corrected.

Similarly, in Extract 146, the expert corrects the claim made by the candidate that Sir Emmanuel Quist was not the speaker of the Legislative Council; he was rather the president. Perchance, the candidate did not read wide enough or the sources conducted gave such inaccurate information. The expert establishes this fact clearly, and the candidate is instructed to correct this error in the work. The expert specifies, further, where the corrections have been made in the thesis for easy reference by the candidate. Equally, in Extract 147, the expert corrects the candidate's assertion that the first staff members were not Europeans but were coastal Africans, citing, further, an example of Master J. K. Appiah who was educated at the coast. This misinformation does not augur well for a piece of research that may be referenced later by other researchers. Thus, we find the expert supplying new information which is in line with Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) finding that experts' comments extend past the particular subject matter of the thesis and present new information from the examiners' own body of knowledge, recent reading, and methodological skills.

Moreover, experts tend to cite key theorists in their area of specialization. Sources that can help the candidate to improve upon the existing nature of the work are mentioned, as illustrated below:

Extract 149

Candidate claims that Ghana is one of the few African countries that consider Tourism as a route to economic development. While this may be true of Ghana, it is false to say the countries that engaged in this are few. Especially when we know from the World Bank (2007), Mitchel and Ashley (2007) that 80% of the world's poor countries have included tourism in their developmental strategies. Many of Africa's

countries are considered poor so obviously, those considering tourism cannot be only few. (HOT 11)

Extract 150

The candidate demonstrated adequate knowledge of literature on the history of Ghana generally. The only shortcoming of the candidate was his failure to examine the works of Dr. Kwabena Adu Boahene and Dr Kwame Kwarteng which are specifically on Brong Ahafo. Besides, out of the so many published works on colonization of the Gold Coast by the British, the candidate relied only on the account of Lord Hailey without acknowledging or referencing the others. (HIS 13)

Extract 151

The background section lacks important information on the roles of poverty, illiteracy etc on hygiene behaviour. These are the issues that help explain hygiene behaviour of adult population. My 2002 book on 'linking sanitation, hygiene and health in rural north Ghana is instructive and must be reviewed. This book is available in the IDS library. (POH 6)

Extracts 149-151 shown above are examples of examiners as experts citing key theorists in the area. Conceivably, because of the knowledge of the examiner and his/her exposure to different perspectives of issues in the related discipline, s/he is afforded the opportunity to make references to key theorists and works which can be of immense benefit to the candidate. In Extract 150, the examiner was surprised that a study on Brong Ahafo did not cite names like Dr. Kwabena Adu Boahene and Dr Kwame Kwarteng whose works are also in the area. By mentioning such names, the candidate's attention is drawn to the need to include such names in the study. In the research process, certain domains of study have some names associated with certain concepts, whether classical or contemporary. Thus, an expectation that such names will be used is high, but failure by the candidate to achieve this creates a problem. Hence,



the examiner is mandated to ensure that the work is brought to the required standard by indirectly asking the candidate to include such names. Again, the candidate's attention is drawn to other texts that could have enhanced the quality of the thesis. Also, the examiner, in citing further reference, alludes to his own work in the area that could have helped explain the concepts of 'poverty' and 'illiteracy', and their influence on attitudes of hygiene. Examiners' dual role is at play here: as gatekeepers to the academic profession and as educators. Tonks and Williams (2018) explain that as gatekeepers, examiners ensure that the thesis meets the requirement of the degree. As educators, examiners teach and help the candidate improve the thesis and suggest further research; their teaching identities were manifested through the feedback (comments) that they provided.

Lastly, examiners, in an EXR, do not comment on only content issues but, also, structural issues, which was observed as well by Starfield et al. (2017). The examiner is to ensure that quality thesis is produced by the candidate. Instances are given below:

Extract 152

The style of the work does not conform in many places to what is expected in a formal piece like a thesis. It is too author-fixated as a cursory reading shows too easily. (ENG 21)

Extract 153

The section on significance of study is replete with one-sentence paragraphs and does not also show the gap in knowledge that the study intends to fill. (POH 17)

Extract 154

The abstract does not read like an abstract and needs to be written to give an idea about the objectives of the thesis, the methodology and the main findings. (HIS 7)

Extract 155

Similarly, each section should be provided with a little summary. For example, the section on nature of conflicts ends abruptly on page 88 without any summary. This runs throughout the work and must be rectified. (HOT 8)

In Extract 153, the examiner observes that a one-sentence paragraph is used to present the significance of the study. A paragraph used in espousing an idea is usually more than a sentence since issues like topic sentences and supporting evidences are used in making clearer an idea (Gborson, 2011; Nesfield, 2008; Sekyi-Baido, 2003). Also, it is in the Significance of the Study section that the value of the thesis is highlighted (Hess, 2004; Sanli et al. 2013). With this, using one sentence paragraph to express the relevance of the work is found to be woefully inadequate; a more elaborate paragraph is, thus, needed here. In addition, the examiner comments on summaries that should have been provided at the end of sections so that a firm conclusion is provided on what has been done in the whole section (Extract 155). The expert's comments on the structure of the theses are to ensure that the candidate takes required steps to bring the thesis to its best form. Thus, expert role places the student in a subservient role (Lovat et al., 2008).

The examiner as an expert provides facts in the thesis that relate to his/her discipline. Also, candidate's factual errors are corrected as well as experts pointing to further reference in the work offered. Lastly, the expert comments included content, structural, methodology, academic writing conventions and discipline language (register) issues, which also help to raise the quality of the whole thesis.

## Reporter

The examiner as a Reporter restates what is in the thesis by giving a synoptic over view of the thesis, chapters and sections of the report (Starfield at al. 2017), as observed by Holbrook et al., 2004a). Again, the reporter, through Verbal process, uses logico-semantic resources of projection like 'reports' and 'states'. Quotation marks are also employed in this role. The reporter also uses candidate's subheadings and headings. Because of the lengthy nature of the related extracts to this role, in some cases, few relevant ones which help illustrate each point well will be used. This may be different from the approaches used in the other roles where about three to five extracts were mostly selected for a better illustration of a point under discussion.

Foremost, examiners as reporters summarize what the candidates have done in their theses without any form of evaluation. In a way, the examiner repeats, if not in the exact words of the candidate, the salient issues covered in the thesis without any taint of evaluation. Here, the entire extract is the focus of the discussion, representing the RR. This is illustrated below:

### Extract 156

The study concluded that although tour guiding practices in Ghana face a lot of challenges, tour guides are able to satisfy tourists with their services and that tourist's satisfaction is not necessarily determined by professionalism of the tour guiding institution. (HOT 4)

### Extract 157

The study established that various socio-demographic and determinants affect malaria prevalence in Ghana. It was recommended that the ministry of health, Ghana health service, UNICEF and who are to target under-five children in rural areas and urban poor in slums for any effort at reducing malaria prevalence in Ghana. (POH 6)

## Extract 158

Candidate bases her discussion on the comparative analysis of the trickster and dilemma tales with special reference to an African-Rattary's for example- and Toni Morrison's re-working of the tale in her novel *Tar Baby* to see the convergence and divergence between the three forms of the Tar baby story. (ENG 4)

## Extract 159

Three competing theoretical frameworks- the symbolic interaction theory, social perception approaches and the person perception communication model were considered in the work and the person perception communication model was selected as the conceptual framework to guide the work. (POH 22)

These (extracts 155- 159) are examples of summaries provided by examiners on what the candidates have done in their theses. These comments are seen on different aspects of the theses, like conclusion, discussion, and literature review. Here, the examiners do not provide summative comments as the theses being good or bad, nor is there any evidence of prescriptive comments given, as in 'do this' or 'do that' in the theses, which was also a finding of Schulze and Lemmer (2019) that examiners gave general vague comments that only summarised the thesis. Formative comments aimed to improve the work are also missing in this context. What is found here rather is a report of what can be found in the thesis; so, in Extract 156, the examiner reports on the conclusion of the study, and it can be seen that though the examiner could have indicated further whether such conclusions drawn were valid or invalid, in line with disciplinary practices, this was not done. Further, if these were invalid, he could have offered advice or suggestion as to how best these conclusions could have been reworked. We are only presented with what is in the thesis. While Extract 157 reports on findings and recommendations,



Extract 158 is based on the comparative analysis of the literary texts. In Extract 159, the examiner reports on the nature of the theoretical frameworks.

It cannot be said that such examiners, possibly, are not conversant with how to examine a thesis, as indicated earlier in this work. The point is that examiners are selected based on their expertise, experience and skills that they possess (Holbrook et al., 2007; 2014; Starfield et al., 2017). Again, examiners may be described as members who have long been socialized into the practices of their communities, and are expected to be very familiar with what the requirements are in relation to certain practices engaged in the community. In addition, per the title, ‘examiner’, the person assessing the thesis is to examine it by indicating what is good or acceptable as against what is bad or unacceptable, and not merely report on what the thesis contains. Thus, the examiner goes contrary to the evaluative criteria provided by the SGS (UCC). Again, the examiner as a reporter does not appeal to the higher level of thinking of Bloomfield’s taxonomy, especially, Evaluating, that calls for making judgement based on criteria and standards through checking and critiquing (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), but to only lower skills of thinking like Remembering (Knowledge) and Understanding (Comprehension).

Lessing (2009) observes that examiners are not trained to examine postgraduate reports but gain their expertise through experience; thus, “experienced examiners who had developed their own guidelines on examining postgraduate studies could act as mentors for inexperienced examiners” (p. 270). This is scaffolding, which Bitzer (2014) explains, is a process whereby people who have developed their knowledge and skills assist colleagues in the same environment or institution to acquire similar levels of

knowledge and skills. Also, developmental workshop opportunities for supervisors across disciplines and universities can be of great help (Bitzer, 2014).

In addition, extracts 156-159 shown above presented shorter forms of this reporting. Longer forms are seen in some cases as well. An example of the latter is provided below:

Extract 160

Major findings and soundness of conclusion

Conclusions and recommendation

The conclusions emanating from the study include the following

- a. The perceptions of guests concerning services rendered by hotels in the region appeared mixed as they were noted to be happy with certain aspects of services while they were unhappy with others
- b. Nationality played an important role in guests perception with specific service quality attributes as opinion expressed by non-Ghanaian guests were different from those expressed Ghanaian guests.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations have been made:

- a. The need for hotel managers and operators in the region to pay more attention to the reliability aspects of service quality in their hotels
- b. There is also the need for investors hoteliers and managers to pay more attention to the physical facilities especially by the provision of modern equipment, appealing physical facilities and aesthetic qualities as well as general environmental improvements and
- c. Training of staff is required in effective service delivery and communication skills.

(HOT 2)

Extract 160 above is an example of RR on major findings and the soundness of the conclusions. The conclusions and the recommendations come with no evaluation. It can also be seen that the examiner lists all the conclusions which could have been presented as summative evaluation. Maybe, the examiner wanted readers to see what conclusions have been derived in the work. Comments presented in the form of reporting can be described as neutral comment, as the examiner does not indicate whether the conclusions were good (positive) or bad (negative). Again, this neutral comment indicates that the examiner, maybe, does not want to take sides, but allow readers to make judgements for themselves.

However, where items were reported without evaluation, it becomes difficult for readers to ascertain whether the work meets required standards, in that, if it does, then, a mark of satisfaction realised in positive comments should have been given. On the contrary, if the work had not met required expectation; then, an expression of dissatisfaction here would have been preferred. This can, then, be followed by prescriptive comments constraining the candidate to take the needed action or formative comments that would encourage candidates to help improve upon the existing nature of the work. With the current state of 'no evaluation', ways for improving the work cannot be ascertained. As argued by Lessing (2009), the examination of dissertations and theses finally determines the quality of postgraduate research reports. It is the examiners' perspective or expectations that serve as indices of the quality of the dissertation (Kyvik & Thune, 2015; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004). Consequently, "examiners need proper guidelines and training to enable them to be of the expected quality" (Lessing 2009, p. 270).

In addition, RR, through the Verbal Process, used projections which usually come with the Verbal Process itself and the 'that clause' as the projection (see Chapter Six of this present work for more elaborations).

Examples are shown here:

Extract 161

The candidate explained that her analysis was based on information derived from primary and secondary sources including interview, archival documents, newspapers and brochures. (HIS 12)

Extract 162

The candidate reports that she encountered some challenges during the data collection process. Among them was the difficulty in the data collection process due to the period covered in the study 1883-1951. Which meant that eyewitnesses were not available in most cases and therefore, she often had to rely on second generation informants. (HIS 12)

Extract 163

Design of the research/data collection methods

The candidate explained that the approach used was the qualitative methods of historical enquiry aimed at establishing the link between the immediate and remote past. She further explained that due to the nature of her subject matter and approach she used, she relied on both primary and secondary sources including interviews.... The candidate acknowledges the rich Archival data which she collected from depositories in Accra, Cape Coast and Sekondi and used for crosschecking information from oral sources and published works. She also explained that she collected oral traditions and histories formal and informal interviews and discussions with such key informants as Amanhene, Ahenfo, Akyeame and Mpanyinfo, scholars and laymen who are knowledgeable in the subject under discussion. (HIS 19)



The extracts (161-163) above are some cases of Verbal Process with projected clauses in the data. There is a report given on an approach selected, nature of subjects, and data, both secondary and primary sources, without any evaluation as to whether the examiner is satisfied or otherwise of what has been done and how it has been done (Extract 161). The examiner reports on what the candidate has done, but assigns participant role of Sayer to the candidate. In this way, the Verbiage is projected and the examiner does not continue to evaluate the statement. While Extracts 161 and 162 record instances of single Verbal Process with single projections, in Extract 163 alone, a total of four (4) projections related to Verbal Process was given in a single subheading. With these, too, no evaluation is given in that section, and they just report on what the candidates have done.

Lastly, the RR was realised in quotation marks which are mostly used to enclose the actual sayings of a speaker. In a way, it depicts that the statement does not belong to the reporter but that the speaker/writer has been quoted. Thus, the reporter neither modifies the message nor gets the opportunity to intrude in the message. Some examples of the use of quotations in RR are these:

Extract 164

Knowledge of relevant literature, theoretical framework

The candidate did not explicitly provide any theoretical or conceptual framework. He proceeded on the premise that 'the establishment of political hegemony over groups of peoples whose social structures and cultures were radically different from that of the metropolitan power' created a situation that led to the growth of national consciousness and the need for indigenous leadership that could help end foreign dominance while retaining the essentials of indigenous culture'.(HIS 4)

## Extract 165

There were a few subjective statements. For example, in paragraph 1 of page 13 without any evidence of careful research, he states, 'most importantly, it , scattered secondary material, does not address how these facilities helped bridge the gap between Ghanaians and western healthcare delivery.' (POH 3)

## Extract 166

On page 80 candidate asserts that males are less likely to enjoy the meal experience: 'the odds of a male having good meal experience is 3.312 less than that of a female (pg 80 line 4)'. (HOT 16)

Shown above (164-166) are extracts of quotation marks used by the examiner in his role as reporter. In Extract 164, the examiner provides a subsection of the thesis under consideration at the moment, literature review. Before the introduction of the quotation, the examiner provides a summative comment that no explicit theoretical framework was given but as to whether this was the best practice or not, it was not stated. The examiner, then, proceeds with what the candidate rather did, and this is where we see the use of the quotation. The premise on which the whole work was based is quoted to the end but the examiner's appreciation of this or otherwise is not indicated. Thus, readers are left wondering whether what the candidate has done is the norm or otherwise. Presumably, the examiner could have left the whole quote out and rather commented on the appropriateness or otherwise of the premise, which could have even served as a guide to further corrections.

In summary, this section has discussed the RR in the data. It was found that the examiner as a reporter commented on the thesis, chapters or sections of the work by giving neither summative, formative nor prescriptive comments. Again, it was found that reporters in the data used Verbal Process

with projections and quotation marks to assign the candidate authorship of such messages. It was also found that the examiner as a reporter commented on almost all aspects of the thesis which is at variance with the finding of Holbrook et al. (2004a) that examiners paraphrased or quoted what the candidate claims to be the scope of the study and they occasionally summarized the whole study which even surprised them in that as they remarked, “it is what examiners go on to say about the components of the thesis and their relative strengths that will give a sense of the contribution they identified” (p. 130). Again, they asserted that such comments were generally brief, but these comments, in the present study, were found not to be brief, signalling how context determines the use of language.

### **Supervisor**

Supervisors guide their supervisees in their research and writing of theses to conform to right standards (Lovat et al., 2008; Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007); thus, signifying that the major role of the supervisor was a custodian one. The examiner adopting the role of a supervisor gives formative comments aimed to improve the thesis. Such comments come in forms such as questions that are thought provoking, advice and suggestions, which are all aimed to improve upon the existing condition of the work. The lexical item ‘supervisor’ as an identity marker was not employed in the present study, which is in contrast to the findings of Starfield et al. (2017). Possibly, the examiners feel that once the thesis has been submitted, the work of the supervisor is over; therefore, there is no need to reiterate identities like ‘supervisors’. Consciously or unconsciously, this role

was alluded to in the data, however. The forms in which Supervisor is assumed are discussed below:

Supervisor role was assumed when examiner posed thought provoking questions that did not resemble confrontational interrogations, and by adopting metaphors of modality. Some examples of Supervisor role in the data are as follows:

Extract 167

The candidate should provide a basis for sampling of data in the various communities. Respondents' inability to provide answers to some question does not call for researcher's own estimation. Can you provide a scientific basis for your estimates? (POH 8)

Extract 168

Why do you think the British took over the sovereignty of the peoples of the area that became their colony? (HIS 12)

Extract 169

Will the original level analysis not be more useful to the decision maker than analysis at the ecological level? What do you think? (HOT 11)

Extract 170

What do you think is the justification for recoding 'single' to include never married, widowed, divorced and not living together? At least, table 2 which provides background information should have given the reader more information by keeping each marital status category separate. Recoding can be done at the analysis stage when the need arises. (POH 3)

Shown in Extracts 167-170 are examples of examiner adopting Supervisor role by posing questions that are meant to be reflected upon by the candidate. Here, the candidate is not confronted as to why or what was done but is offered an opportunity to reflect on what has been done. In this way, the candidate is not placed in a subservient position and the supervisor is not seen wielding too



much power over the candidate. Rather, the supervisor seeks to help the candidate ponder over the questions, and see how best they would help improve upon the work. Green (2005) is of the view that the supervisor plays a dual role: the supervisor represents the academy as well as standing in for the discipline itself. In Extract 168, instead of the examiner to have asked the question like this, which highlights power at play, ‘Why did the British take over the sovereignty of the people...?, the examiner rather posed the question this way, ‘why do you think...’. With this, a certain space is created for the candidate to operate in. Similarly, in Extract 169, the candidate is asked what he/she thinks of the level of analysis and its benefit to the decision maker. These are thought-provoking- questions which do not bear a resemblance to direct confrontation; there is, therefore, the use of metaphor of modality, ‘do you think’.

Xu (2009) explains that metaphor of modality is a usual method to scheme modality and allocate modal responsibility. Pragmatically, it foregrounds objectivity and subjectivity, in addition to conveying cohesion and politeness in text. It helps to create interpersonal relationship with readers. Here, modality refers to peoples’ opinion, and relevance of modality to judgment on possibility. He explains further that metaphor of modality was introduced by Halliday, to refute the view that modality is mainly reflected by modal auxiliaries in traditional grammar, where modal verbs and other parts of predicates are used. This is regarded as a congruent form which is recessive and unmarked. Metaphor of modality is an expression of modality extended from vocabulary to clauses by adding projecting clauses such as clauses,

nouns, verb phrases and prepositional phrases which can be employed to express modality. This incongruent form is dominant and marked.

Second, examiners adopt Supervisor role when they advise candidates in a bid to help improve the work. Jackson and Tinkler (2004), and Mullins and Kiley (2002) observed that examiners defined their role as gatekeepers, with a responsibility to maintain standards. However, Starfield et al. (2017) explain that the wish to set the bar high is mitigated by the desire to instruct and encourage (advisor and mentor). Examiners become supervisors when they encourage the candidate. Examples are these:

Extract 171

The analysis may be broadened to include these observed differences in the data. No references were made to test of significance, though this is reflected in appendix 1. Use this to establish real statistical differences. (POH 23)

Extract 172

The student may also consider doing same to the page of list of Figures. The figures are already in and part of the text. They do not stand on their own. (HIS 12)

Extract 173

He may consider sectionalizing the study to make easy reference. Some corrections have been made in the body of the text. (POH 25)

Extract 174

The title is too general the candidate should consider revising it to indicate that it is resident's perception of tourism projects by RC in Butre. (HOT 19)

We see that Extracts (171 -174) show examiners, as supervisors, offering advice to the candidate. The extracts are typically presented in two to three sentences that give more explanation to what is to be done; that is, more details surrounding what is to be done are given. First, it was found in the

extracts that examiners use low modality in offering this advice to the candidate. In Extract 171, the examiner intimates that the analysis may be broadened. By employing ‘may’ the examiner does not require that the candidate does this, though the candidate, by heeding to the advice of the examiner, can improve the current state of the work. Again, the examiner uses the modal verb, ‘may’ plus the verb ‘consider’ in his/her advice to the candidate, confirming Hansford and Maxwell (1993) and Lovat et al.’s (2008) findings that examiners, severally, give advice about how a student can develop or progress as a researcher, even when the thesis is of the uppermost quality. Thus, in Extract 173, the candidate is to think of sectionalizing the thesis, and the reason is that it will make easy reference. This is true, in that, with subsections and headings, readers are able to navigate their way easily through what they are reading, making connections between what has been read already and about to be read, and this appeals to the information discourse/interactive resources of metadiscourse (Adel, 2006; Adel & Mauranen, 2010; Hyland, 2004a; 2005b; Vande Kopple, 1985). In totality, the subsections and headings support in discerning the overall purpose of the study (Afful, 2009; Jalilifar et al., 2016; Silva & Matsuda, 2001).

The use of low modality in the present study to project the Examiner as Supervisor confirms Starfield et al.’s (2017) finding that examiners as supervisors employ low modality in addition to first and second pronouns, explaining that this assists to develop the Supervisor role as steward, and to create a more cordial relationship between the candidate the supervisor than between the candidate and the examiner, whose distant relationship, contrastively, is noticed by employing the third person. This creation of

relationship is situated in the interpersonal mode, which becomes a resource for the enactment of roles and relationship between, here, examiner and candidate (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2014). Also, the use of 'consider' in the advice highlights this Supervisor role of the examiner. Starfield et al. (2017) explain that 'consider' does not dictate to the candidate to revise the thesis, but it inspires the candidate to think critically. Its optional nature places it within the SR. In addition, 'consider' places the candidate in the Mental Process as Senser, capable of engaging and expressing thoughts.

Another form of advice understood in the data was Supervisor advising the candidate what would be best for the work, and it was mostly recognized in 'would' form:

Extract 175

It would also be meaningful to compare the performance travel intermediaries Ghana (sic) with their counterparts in Africa. ie(sic) Kenya, South Africa, Morocco, Tunisia or Gambia. (HOT 23)

Extract 176

While some of the information is quite relevant, the detail provided is unnecessary. What would rather be more relevant is a review of literature on indigeneity and the clashes it has with conventional systems, in all spheres, in post-colonial societies. (POH 3)

Extract 177

It would also be helpful to address the question of balancing normative ethics and applied ethics with the real situation on the ground in the hotel industry. (HOT 18)

Extract 178

The findings are related to the research questions. This has a way of ensuring coherence of the thesis. I would like the candidate to engage more deeply with the extant literature in his attempt to interpret his



findings when revising his work. This, I believe, is not too much to ask for. (ENG 4)

Above are Extracts (175-178) showcasing examiners as Supervisors advising the candidate on what would be best for the work. All the extracts (175- 178) display the use of ‘would’, and this is sometimes used to express desire/opinion or to make polite request (See Nesfield, 2008; Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973). It is also used in the second conditional type to express hypothetical conditionals which are unreal or untrue where, the auxiliary ‘would’ is invariable accompanied by the main verb which is in the base form. In Extract 175, the examiner is of the view that comparing performance to some other countries will be meaningful. This is not a command, as it can be considered as an expression of an opinion or a wish, intended to help the candidate to improve the work. The anticipatory, ‘it’ plus ‘would’ and the base form of the main verb, ‘be’ are used here. In Extract 178, we see the expression of a polite marker, ‘I would like’ requesting the candidate to engage more deeply with the literature, which would be best for the work.

Furthermore, in the Supervisor role, the examiner leads by example. The candidate is expected to follow suit and rework the thesis. In such a situation, Holbrook et al. (2004a) observe that examiners may offer the answers to their own questions, in part or in whole – pointing the candidate to that direction:

Extract 179

The arrangement of the findings needs some more work. Owing to the poor categorization many useful findings have been obscured. ...All of these anomalies have led to a situation where the findings were unidimensional instead of being multi-perspectives. ...For example, enforceability should have been looked at from all the perspectives

present instead of from the view point of just the chiefs. I would go for three general subheadings (which can be reworked to replace the objectives)—Ideology, nature and processes of indigenous courts; Usage and utility; Obstacles faced by indigenous courts in the administration of justice. (HIS 20)

Extract 180

In my opinion, I would expect the other approach—where the candidate would discuss the basis for arriving at the results, after which the t-test analysis are done. (ENG 11)

Extract 181

The literature review is comprehensive and addresses the pertinent issues relating to the objectives of the study. However, on page 20, she indicates that souvenirs have ‘sign value’ and ‘use value’. In my opinion, I expected some explanation as to how those terms mean. (HOT 7)

These (extracts 179-181) are instances of lead-forms offered by the Examiner as Supervisor to the candidate. The structure is of the singular personal pronoun ‘I’ which is typical of lead-form, followed by, sometimes, ‘would’, depicting the lead taken by the examiner. In this way, the candidate is expected to step in the shoes of the examiner. This structure also comes with other forms of personal reference to the examiner. In Extract 179, the background information to the actual ‘lead’ is the improper arrangement of the findings, which has obscured some important information. To correct the anomalies and shape the work, the examiner explains what his own approach would be, three general headings. With this, the candidate is expected to follow this approach and revise the work to an enhanced form. This approach of the examiner confirms Holbrook et al.’s (2004a) views that examiners often assume a Supervisor Role, endeavouring to guide the candidate through improving the thesis. The supervisor is seen scaffolding, where forms of

support are used to move learners (candidates) gradually towards a deeper understanding and greater autonomy in learning. Scaffolding helps close gaps between what the candidate has displayed and what is expected of him/her (Zakaria, Care, & Griffin, 2016). Green (2005) contends that supervision is better regarded ‘ecosocially’, as a whole environment within which activities associated with postgraduate study is appreciated, and this depiction of ‘nested contexts’ assists in capturing the multifaceted ecology of the postgraduates. Each activity system, each context—discipline, society, university, department, faculty—wields an influence on the others.

Lastly, Examiners as Supervisors offer suggestions by employing the performative verb, ‘suggest’, and this can be considered as a form of advice which does not compel the candidate to act in any form. Because the supervisor assumes the social role of one who nurtures, fosters, and inspires the student, the use of language is not abusive, but it is reassuring (Starfield et al., 2017). The performative verb ‘suggest’ is explicitly used. Some examples in the data are given below:

Extract 182

If I may suggest, the thesis can do without the research question.

(HOT 5)

Extract 183

I suggest, therefore, that at appropriate sections in the work, the candidate can relate the ideas to the study. In other words, there is the need for a link to the issue of gender indicators in language. (ENG 1)

Extract 184

Candidate does not state clearly what she aims to study. What she states as her purpose is not what we find in her overall discussion. This is surprising because the research questions she posits adequately cover the research objectives. I suggest that she reformulates her

objectives by referring to the research questions.  
(HOT 11)

Extract 185

A lot of works cited in the reference section cannot be found in the text proper. When I counted, there were about 34 citations which cannot be located in the text. I suggest that the candidate goes through the thesis to ensure that all the cited works are listed in the reference. (POH 23)

The extracts above (182-185) show that apart from Extract 182, which is cast in a conditional form, the others (extracts 183-185) are presented in Verbal Process with clause Projections, 'I suggest that...'. The examiner is the Sayer, 'I', who offers the suggestion/advice, and the candidate indirectly is the Target. The Verbiage is the suggestion itself that carries what should be done to shape the thesis. So, in Extract 183, the examiner suggests that the concept of gender should be linked to the whole study. This is cast, using the low modality, 'can' while 'may' is found in Extract 183. In that same Extract, 182, the examiner makes the Supervisor role clearer by indicating that, 'If he may suggest'. In a way, the candidate is viewed as the one who owns the work and suggestions of changes from outside should come as a form of advice, which does not coerce the candidate to revise the thesis. In the view of Kumar and Stracke (2011), it is essential that feedback has positive interpersonal features to encourage effective correction. Thus, a good relationship between a candidate and an examiner in written text can be created through the use of linguistic resources that construe equal power, cordiality, engagement and involvement, and this is what the Supervisor Role does in this data. Thus, examiners also consider themselves as supervisors, mentors or teachers, directing the candidate by giving formative comments that include instructions, guidance and advice (Holbrook et al., 2004a).



To recapitulate, this section has discussed the examiner assuming a Supervisor role. In this role, examiners are seen as custodians who nurture the candidate to improve upon the existing condition of their work. This role is identified when examiners pose non-confrontational questions, offer advice that will help the candidate, lead by examples, and offer suggestions, as shown in the analysis and discussion of the data set.

### **Institutional**

The last role to be discussed is the Institutional Role (IR). Examiners perform this role by quoting criteria questions verbatim and providing answers to them (Starfield, 2017). Analysis of the present data revealed that IR role was minimal (2.2%), compared with the other roles undertaken by the examiners. However, both the findings of the present study and Starfield et al. (2007) contrast that of Lovat et al. (2008) that recorded 61% of this role. This finding confirms that of Starfield et al. (2017): “examiners hold an imaginary dialogue between themselves and the institution” (p. 6). Afful (2020) notes that assessors adhered to institutional guidelines. In other words, examiners engage directly with the institution by quoting directly what is contained in the assessment criteria. Examples of examiner performing Institutional role (IR) in the data are these:

Extract 186

ABSTRACT

Is it an adequate statement of the substance of the thesis? Yes.

The abstract is an adequate statement of the substance of the thesis. (ENG 19)

Extract 187

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Is the problem researched for the thesis?

- i. Clearly stated? Yes
- ii. Adequately stated? Yes

The problem researched for the thesis has been clearly and adequately stated. (ENG 18)

Extract 188

#### REVIEW OF BACKGROUND

Is the literature reviewed as background to the subject of the thesis?

- i. Relevant? Yes
- ii. Comprehensive? Yes

The literature review is very relevant and comprehensive. (ENG 14)

The extracts above (186-188) indicate the use of similar structures by the examiners, where sections of the theses were indicated; preambles to questions were stated, and/or main questions were posed and with sub ones that introduced the 'yes' or 'no' structures. So, in Extract 186 above, for instance, we see that the section, 'Abstract' is introduced in caps so as to attract the attention of readers as it is the focus of discussion at the moment. This is, then, followed by the question, 'Is it an adequate statement of the substance of the thesis?'. The examiner comes with an answer in an affirmation by providing, 'Yes', indicating that the examiner finds value in what the candidate has presented for the abstract; thus, treating the thesis as an end to itself or as a product (Johnston, 1997; Pitkethly & Prosser, 1995).

Similarly, in Extract 187, the section of the thesis under consideration is presented in caps as well, followed by the main questions and the questions that present the 'yes' answer. A slight difference realized in Extract 188 is that the sub-questions under the main question come in two folds: the relevance of the literature review and, the other, on comprehensiveness. Each sub-question is answered in the affirmative manner, 'yes'. The divisions in that section were

possible because the LR covers such a huge area in the research work, centring on issues like adequacy, recency, accuracy etc (See Krishnan & Kathpalia, 2002). Again, examiners expect that candidates will show understanding and systematic acquisition of extent body of knowledge in a thesis (Shaw & Green, 2002). Also, the LR is a critical indicator of a quality of a thesis; the candidate is expected to grasp the full range and implications of the relevant literature (Holbrook et al., 2004a).

Also, in Extracts 186-188 presented above, one can see that the examiners were not only quoting verbatim what the institution specifies, but, also, filled in answers to questions posed in the assessment form; that is, in the assessment form, questions were posed and examiners were asked to choose applicable ones by ticking. Thus, examiners can be said to have followed the institution's guidelines, as found by Johnston (1997), but disconfirmed in Mullins and Kiley's (2002) where examiners created their own criteria, and did not use the provided guidelines. In the present case, examiners performed IR role by providing 'yes' or 'no' to the questions posed in the assessment form rather than writing an entirely new report. Hence, examiners are able to provide summative ECs which are the strongest statements about a thesis (Holbrook et al., 2007).

Furthermore, in other situations, examiners commented on the chosen answer by repeating exactly the content of the question in addition to the specified answers. These, usually, were provided in some three to four spaces left after the plausible questions before the introduction of an item of assessment on the assessment sheet. The examiners add their comments to what has been specified on the form already; but these comments may be

described as a summary of what the examiners have already indicated under the 'yes' or 'no' section and it relates to the findings of Starfield et al. (2017) that short statements directed to one or more facets or elements of the thesis are also given by examiners in this direction. Some examples include these:

Extract 189

**HYPOTHESIS/EXPLANATORY ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE THESIS**

- i. Do they derive from the literature? Yes
- ii. If no, how rational are the hypothesis?
- iii. Are they relevant to the subject matter of the thesis? Yes
- iv. Are they adequate? Yes

The hypothesis is derived from the literature reviewed, is rational and relevant and adequate. (ENG 16)

Extract 190

**DATA COLLECTION**

- i. Is the method of data collection/ experimental design justified? Yes
- ii. Is the data collected adequate? Yes
- iii. Is the data collected relevant to the problem investigated? Yes
- iv. Is the data collected relevant to the hypothesis/explanatory assumptions stated? Yes

The method of data collection is justified. The data is adequate and relevant to the problem investigated. (ENG 18)

Extract 191

**CONFIRMATION TO KNOWLEDGE**

Your assessment should include comments on at least the following as well:

- i. correct existing information? Yes
- ii. Strengthen/confirm existing information through use of new arguments? Yes
- iii. Present new theory?



This work adds fresh perspectives to the existing literature on resistance to slavery in Northern Ghana. (ENG 17)

The underlined sentences in Extracts 189-191 above are the summaries in the form of extra comments provided by the examiners, which add to the 'yes' answers provided under each section. These additional comments are not entirely different from what the examiner asserts in the earlier answers given. So, in Extract 189, for instance, after the 'yes' answers, the examiner repeats the focus of the question in the extra comments that the hypothesis is rational, relevant and adequate. Essentially, these constitute the main substance of the questions which have already been answered by the 'yes'. Perhaps, the examiner feels that once a space has been provided, it must be filled with some comments.

On the other hand, the provision of comments in addition to the 'yes' answer can be described as multiple source of feedback (Nicol, 2009a) which helps students (readers) a lot since students vary in their reactions to and understanding of feedback. Nicol (2009a) explains further that teachers' feedback must be complemented by feedback from other sources, exposing students to the interaction of a greater diversity of feedback reactions. Diverse sources of feedback assist students understand their work from different perspectives, thereby enhancing understanding and capability. The readers of the report are afforded the opportunity to interpret the feedback contained in the report from different angles.

However, other examiners left the provided space empty by just writing 'N/A' across the space. It can be concluded that this style limited the examiner in his or expression of the values ascribed to the EEs in the reports,

which echoes the observation of Lovat et al. (2002), and Holbrook et al. (2004a) that examiners are idiosyncratic and individualistic in writing their report, despite efforts to standardise or structure them, resonating with the earlier finding by Noble (1994) that there is a lack of clear standards for the thesis, though it may seem that examiners are employing different standards and criteria of some sort (Holbrook et al., 2004a).

In addition, other different approaches in the realization of this IR were adopted by the examiners. It was revealed in the analysis of the data that there was one form where the examiner stated the subsection of the thesis under consideration, introduced the colon and then provided his/her evaluation of the item. This can be seen as a form of listing:

Extract 192	
<u>Background: Fairly good</u>	(ENG 18)
Extract 193	
<u>Review of Related Literature: Good</u>	(ENG 18)
Extract 194	
<u>Theoretical Framework: Adequate</u>	(ENG 18)
Extract 195	
<u>Data Analysis and Discussion: Satisfactory</u>	(ENG 18)

We see in Extracts 192-195 above that the examiners provided the aspect of the thesis evaluated. For instance, in Extract 192, though the examiner indicated that the 'Background to the study' was 'fairly good', it would have been clearer if some sentences had been included to explain that fairness. As it stands now, readers do not obtain all the required information that called for that conclusion to be drawn by the examiner. Similarly, in Extract 194, the theoretical framework is simply said to be adequate without any further explanation. This approach prevented the use of commentary on the work or

the reporting of what is actually contained in the thesis or done by the candidate. Providing extra direction to the candidate which came in the form of formative comments is found missing. This style of providing summative feedback on student work defeats the assertion by Kumar and Kumar (2009) that a feedback plays an intervention role in the writing process. By providing only SCs, examiners do not create the opportunity of raising students' awareness of the reader's expectations (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994), helping students to effectively master their difficulties (William, 1999). In essence, feedback does not end with providing information about student's learning or skill acquisition in order to plan future learning goals and to ameliorate behaviour and skills, rather it involves gathering information in order to make a determination about a student's learning.

Moreover, this IR was realized in all written aspects of the thesis, from the abstract to the reference list. In other words, in performing their IR role, examiners commented on the sections of a thesis; thus, confirming the findings of Hansford and Maxwell (1993), Johnston (1997), and Holbrook et al. (2004a). Extracts 186-195 provided above show sections such as Abstract, Literature Review, and Methodology that realised this role. The other areas not captured in the earlier extracts include Analysis and Discussion, Style/Presentation, and Bibliography and References, which are given below:

Extract 196

ANALYSIS /DISCUSSION

- i. Is the experimental/research procedure adequately described?  
Yes
- ii. Are the analytical techniques/arguments used appropriate/valid? Yes
- iii. Is the discussion of results of analysis

- a. Adequate? Yes
- b. Logical? Yes
- c. Objective? Yes

Are the conclusions/implications drawn from the analysis?

- i. Logical/justifiable? Yes
- ii. Adequate in terms of the problem investigated? Yes
- iii. Objective in terms of the facts available? Yes

Are recommendations made

- i. Justifiable? Yes
- ii. Substantiated? Yes
- iii. Adequate? Yes

The argument and analysis are detailed, comprehensive and sound.

(ENG 12)

Extract 197

#### STYLE /PRESENTATION

- i. is the language precise or verbose?
- ii. Is the language clear and readily understood? Yes
- iii. Are there many serious typographical errors that need to be corrected? Yes

The language is good and mature

Are all the illustrative materials (sketches, diagrams, graphs, maps, photographs)

- i. relevant? Yes
- ii. Properly captioned? Yes
- iii. Error-free? Yes
- iv. Properly placed in the text of thesis? Yes

The pictures of the researcher, the war warriors and their regalia add colour to the topic.

(ENG 8)

Extract 198

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCE

Are they:

- i. Adequate? Yes
- ii. Properly set out? Yes
- iii. Properly cued into the text of the thesis? Yes



The references are adequate and properly set out. (ENG 19)

Extract 199

#### RESULT OF THESIS EXAMINATION

Please place a tick against one of the three

- i. Unconditional pass (√)
- ii. Conditional pass (major typographical and other errors to be corrected)
- iii. Referred (portions of the thesis to be re-written)
- iv. Fail

Grade: B+ (ENG 18)

Though the extracts (196-199) provided above may be considered lengthy, they were meant to paint a clearer picture of the actual nature of the comments when examiners assumed IR. The extracts (196-199) show that the examiners summed up their comments by ticking what represents their evaluation of the section. From Extracts 196 to 199, we see evidence of IRs, that is, examiners providing 'yes', 'no' or 'ticks', without further explanations. In Extract 199, for instance, we have 'Results of thesis Examination'. The examiner could have commented further by even explaining what went into the 'Unconditional Pass' or the 'B+' as the final mark. Perhaps, these comments have been given in the actual work and the report, in the examiner's estimation, should contain only the summative comments (SCs).

In summary, there were cases, too, where examiners ticked 'yes or no' without any further elaborations on the ticked answers. In other words, though spaces of about four to six lines were provided, the examiners chose to write, at most, two sentences in reference to each section evaluated. Perhaps, the ticked answers clearly summed up their appreciation or otherwise of the evaluated entity (EE). This approach was applied to all the different aspects of

the theses. Again, it was observed that this particular approach was peculiar with one department. It seemed that a prepared assessment form was given to examiners to input their comments. Also, examiners associated with this approach were the older generations of the department, 2009. Newer reports from 2010 contained several sentences spread over different chapters. Also, Examiners provided answers in the spaces provided on the evaluation form. Typically, the assessment form contained the various sections of the theses to be assessed. Then, a question was posed on the nature of that section and the examiner was given the option to tick either 'yes' and 'no'. Later, after this tick, a few dotted spaces of about five to six lines were provided. The examiner, then, repeated mainly what was captured in the 'yes' or 'no' questions.

Contrary to all the ten roles outlined in the Analytical Framework (Methodology) of the present study, the analysis of the data did not reveal the use of Viva Role and Peer Review Role as identified by Holbrook et al. (2004a). The absence of Viva role is a bit surprising though, in that, in Ghana, the thesis is not the only proof of the candidate's skills development and learning. Through the viva, the candidate is examined orally of the thesis that has been presented. Perhaps, the absence of this role in the present data is so because of the differences in the data used in this study and previous studies. For the present study, the MPhil theses were used whereas Starfield at al. (2017) analysed reports of doctoral theses. In the doctoral thesis examination, the examiner of the thesis is expected to be present at the viva/ defence; hence, the candidate may be asked questions that will be answered during the viva. Again, at this level, the candidate's publication is a requirement; hence, the

examiner guides the candidate as to how best publishing dream can be realised by pointing to the candidate what issues can be considered at that stage; hence, the use of the peer role in the report since publications highlight importance of the study and are a definite type of contribution of the study (Holbrook et al., 2004a). On the contrary, Pitkethly and Prosser (1995) used MPhil theses, but they did record the use of peer role which relates to publications. Perhaps, their assessment form makes provision for comments that relate to publications whereas the institution for the present study is silent on issues of publication at the MPhil level.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has attempted to answer Research Question 3 (three) posed earlier in Chapter One of the present study, considering types of role assumed by examiners in the TERs on MPhil theses. The study revealed that examiners, apart from the peer role and viva role, assumed all the other roles identified by Starfield et al. (2017), though to varying degrees. Such roles include Institutional, Examiner, Supervisor, and Evaluator. Whereas some roles positioned the candidate in a subservient position and the examiner as wielding more power (such as Examiner and Expert role), others placed the candidate on equal scale with examiner, where the examiner saw the candidate as capable of engaging in critical thinking and reaching decisions for him/herself (such as Supervisor and Commentator roles).

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the analysis and discussion of examiner roles in the data which comprised MPhil theses in four selected departments of the University of Cape Coast, a public university in Ghana. This final chapter offers a summary of the entire study, and highlights the findings and discussion of data of the present study. It, then, discusses implications of the findings of the study, followed by recommendations for further studies.

#### Summary

The purpose of the study was to investigate the use of evaluative language in examiners' reports (TERs) of MPhil theses in four selected departments from a leading Ghanaian university. Specifically, the study, first, sought to examine types of examiner comments (ECs) in the study, and how critical comments were mitigated. Second, the study investigated the kinds of evaluated entities (EEs) in the data and the grammatical roles associated with these EEs. Lastly, kinds of examiner roles adopted in the reports were also examined. Drawing on the theory of SFL and key concepts like 'Evaluation', 'Written Feedback', 'Thesis/Dissertation', and 'Evaluative Criteria in Thesis Examination', the study focused on 100 TERs purposively selected from four departments: English and History, Faculty of Arts; Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health, Faculty of Social Sciences, which served as the data for the textual analysis. The present study, which is



generally, qualitative, adopted a combined analytical approach from Holbrook et al.'s (2004a) classification of evaluative comments (ECs) of positive and negative, Halliday's Transitivity in analysing evaluated entities (EEs), and Starfield et al.'s (2017) description of examiners' roles in examiners' reports (TERs).

### **Main Findings**

First, with reference to the research question, "What types of evaluative comments (ECs) are contained in the examiners' reports of MPhil theses in selected departments in the University of Cape Coast?", it was evident from the analysis of the data that both positive and negative comments were employed in summing up the value of the theses produced by candidates. More negative ECs were employed than positive comments, contrasting the findings of previous studies (Giannoni, 2009; Hyland, 2000; Lores-Sanz, 2012; Mackiewicz, 2007). Linguistic forms such as evaluative adjectives, stance adverbs, verbs, nouns, and prepositional phrases were employed. Again, it was realized that examiners mitigated critical comments to reduce the full effect that these might have on the candidates, the supervisors or even the disciplines that the candidates have been 'trained in', in an attempt to maintain harmonious interpersonal relations by appreciating the efforts of the supervisor and the candidate (Hyland, 2000; Hyland & Hyland, 2001).

Considering Research Question 2, 'Which entities are evaluated in the examiners' reports of MPhil theses in selected departments in the University of Cape Coast?', it was found that the thesis and candidate were the main evaluated entities in the present study, confirming the findings of Holbrook et al. (2004a) and Starfield et al. (2017). However, there was a minimal

mentioning of the supervisor, judging both on the potentials of the researcher and the quality of the research (Holbrook et al., 2004a; Starfield et al., 2017). The EEs were realized in different grammatical roles. It was found in the analysis that the Thesis engaged more with Material and Relational but none with Mental Processes. The Candidate, on the other hand, also engaged more with Material and Relational but less with Existential. In totality, the Material Process was more in the data, confirming the findings of Iwamoto (2008) and Rodrigues (2008). Material process was followed by more in Relational, in terms of frequency, contrasting the findings of Rodrigues (2008). In other words, while the present study revealed more use of Material and Relational, Rodrigues (2008) had more use of Material but less use of Relational Process, indicating that activities were many in the data than the recognition of value or qualities.

Lastly, findings also showed the roles that examiners assumed in writing the reports on the MPhil theses, and this relates to Research Question 3, “What roles do examiners enact for themselves in the examiners’ reports of MPhil theses in selected departments in the University of Cape Coast?”. Adopting types of roles outlined by Starfield et al. (2017), the study showed that examiners assumed eight roles. Evaluator role was the most dominant, followed by Examiner role, and Commentator role. The least in relation to the frequency of occurrence of the roles was Institutional role. The other roles, Expert, Supervisor, Proofreader and Reporter were neither used too frequently nor sparingly in the data. Again, it was established in the analysis that while roles such as Reporter and Proofreader were associated with examiner involvement with the mandate of writing the report (report organization and

dialogic elements), other roles such as Examiner, Expert and Supervisor captured features which were associated with expectations underpinning examination and knowledge base (Holbrook et al., 2004a). All in all, examiners gave not only summative comments, but also advice and instruction to rework the theses (Golding et al., 2014), presenting the candidate as not having internalised the norms of the community well.

### **Implications**

Based on the findings, the study has some implications for the study's contribution to existing scholarship, theory, and postgraduate pedagogy, and professionalization, which are now discussed.

First, the study has contributed to the growing literature on the language of evaluation in academic writing around the globe. Many studies have examined evaluative language in many directions since Hunston (1993; 1994; 2011): disciplinary settings (e.g. Jiang & Hyland, 2015; Taki & Jafarpour, 2012); expert writings (e. g. Hyland, 2005a; Wang & An, 2013), and novice writings (e.g. Pascual & Unger, 2010). The present study which examined the use of evaluative language in examiners' reports on MPhil theses has also added to such studies on evaluative language, in general, and written assessment feedback, in particular, by establishing that more negative comments were found than positive evaluation comments in the data. Besides, the present study revealed that the Thesis and the Candidate were mostly evaluated. Also, examiners assumed different roles in their quest to examine the academic products. Again, most of the studies (such as Holbrook et al., 2004a; 2007; Starfield et al., 2015; 2017) on the use of evaluative language in thesis reports were carried out outside Ghana, where the present study is

conducted. These studies have extensively studied TERs at the doctoral level, examining variables such as gender, part-genre of thesis (like literature review) and examiner roles. In Africa, we are only beginning to show interest in thesis examination reports. In Ghana, though universities run postgraduate programmes, and theses are written and examined, little research has been done on these reports. The present study has consequently unearthed, specifically, that examiners in a leading university in Ghana, University of Cape Coast, also employ evaluative language in many and varied ways to express their estimation of the worth of the theses, positive and negative, and by judging the potential of the candidate, employing many grammatical processes, and also, assuming different roles in the process which highlight their relationship with the candidates, as peers or authoritative figures. Specifically, with reference to the roles assumed by examiners, the study has established the relevance of context in language use in that whereas other studies mainly in Australia (e.g. Holbrook et al. 2004a; Starfield et al. 2017) have indicated the use of Peer role and Viva role in their studies, the present study did not find the use of these roles in the data, indicating the importance of context in language use. Also, the level of study explored in the studies might have influenced the differences in findings; that is, while Starfield et al. (2017) examined TERs at the PhD level, I used TERS at the MPhil level, and as established already in this study, expectations at each of these levels of study are, clearly, not the same.

Second, theoretically, the present study adds to the usefulness of the theory that underpinned the present study— SFL which emphasises ideational, interpersonal and textual. Several studies (e. g. Feng & Liu, 2010; Kazemian,



Behnam & Ghafoori, 2013; Mwinlaaru, 2012; Nur, 2015; Tabrizi & Nabifar, 2013; Ye, 2010) have employed SFL and have successfully managed, analysed and interpreted their data in many genres/levels like TERs (e.g. Starfield et al., 2015; 2017), students' writing (Afful, 2017a; Lee, 2015), media (Amoah-Yeboah, 2013; Ifukor & Chiluwa, 2015) and literary texts (Iwamoto, 2008; Mwinlaaru, 2012; Rodrigues, 2008). First, research on evaluation deploying SFL has focused on the Appraisal system developed by Martin and White (2005). The present study explores a framework in SFL that is often neglected in evaluation research, namely the System of Transitivity. Thus, the present study extends the applicable potential of SFL by providing a model of using the System of Transitivity in examining evaluation. Second, the adoption of this theory in the present study adds to the usefulness of the theory in interpreting the findings, with particular reference to the use of evaluative language, highlighting the entities that are evaluated and the processes associated with these EEs (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2014). Again, the theory has unearthed the information examiners choose to focus on by placing such information in Theme position like 'Thesis', 'Candidate' and some parts of the thesis like 'Abstract', 'Literature' and 'Methodology'. In addition, assessors not only offer remarks as they consider appropriate but also keep relationships by assuaging negative statements, employing devices like hedges, and praise and criticism duos. Thus, the present investigation endorses the assertion in SFL that users of language select systematically from the systematic association of language for the realization of meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004).

Third, the study has effects on pedagogy at the post graduate level. Precisely, the results of the present study give insights into the kinds of value that are placed on the thesis and the candidate in written thesis examiners' reports (TERs). These findings offer understandings to candidates and supervisors on appropriate methods to position their writing and coaching abilities correspondingly to meet institutional and genre specificity within their communities. In terms of writing skills, examiners expect candidates to particularly and clearly present what constitute each part of the thesis. For example, while examiners expect a thesis to demonstrate understanding and systematic acquisition of considerable body of knowledge (Shaw & Green, 2002) in the Literature Review, Methodology is also expected to include all necessary details since Hofstee (2006, p. 107) asserts that "it is through the methodology that results can only be accepted, rejected, checked, replicated or even understood in the context of how all these were achieved". Not only are these (parts of the thesis) but the quality of presentation is of relevance here. Thus, issues such as grammar and typing are evaluated by the examiner. Consequently, candidates must master these "writing skills" (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). In addition, the analysis paves way into how well the writing of a thesis can be taught and produced in the academic discourse community in addition to the expectations and practices of examiners in rating theses since the examiners' reports carefully examine the development of concepts, use of language, ways of organization, description of methodologies and other relevant issues which are carefully examined in reference to what exists in the literature (Johnston, 1997; Kumar & Stracke, 2011; Mullins & Kiley, 2002). Thus, the study serves as a useful guide for developing

pedagogical materials to enhance supervision/ teaching and writing of theses, and, in some way, assist supervisors and the candidates in the interpretation of the reports so as to enhance the production of quality theses.

Finally, the analysis of the data indicates that examiners adopt multiple roles in compiling their reports, some of which do not directly express examiner's appreciation or otherwise of the candidate and what has been produced, the thesis, bringing their persona to bear on the reports they write. Thus, the study may serve to create an awareness for departments and the school (graduate school), in particular, or the institution, in general, about the need to provide more categorical guidelines for examiners and sensitize examiners, perhaps, to more clearly differentiate the purposes of their comments in drafting their reports, considering the very tacit nature of examiner judgments. As observed by Starfield et al. (2017), the linguistic choices that examiners make (consciously and unconsciously) when construing their evaluations have consequences and potential meanings. Therefore, seminars and workshops could be organized for beginner and middle examiners and supervisors on how best to examine and to supervise theses so that standards can be attained in such practices. In the view of Bitzer (2014), developmental seminar opportunities for supervisors from different disciplines, and institutions can help greatly, explaining that these workshops should be meant for inexperienced supervisors who had completed their doctoral degrees and are co-supervising postgraduate candidates. Again, seminar activities could include how developmental activities and opportunities may be cascaded in universities. Also, there could be the introduction of a course, 'Teaching in higher education', for all faculty to

enable them to discharge their core duties of tutoring, supervising, examining, and researching. Though some examiners may feel comfortable doing what they do as evinced in the Reporter and Commenter Role, examiners can be trained to become better (Johnston, 1997; Sankaran et al., 2005). Holbrook et al. (2007) assert that the skills and understandings needed from a scholarly investigation are developed through undertaking research in a defined field(s), typically through a research programme/degree. Even so, these capabilities, especially the skill to assess research and write in an intelligible way about it, are not easily accessed or attained. They demand time and socialization or enculturation in research activities to develop and form. Thus, it may be concluded that with more examination and more acquaintanceship with the practices in the community, such mere reporting will be reduced if not eradicated entirely.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

It is recommended that further studies be conducted by paying attention to other areas related to the findings of the present study.

First, though the present study employed four different disciplines (English, History, Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health), I aimed to only establish threads in the use of evaluative language, and not establish any disciplinary variations in the evaluative language in thesis examiners' reports (TERs). It is, therefore, recommended that further studies be conducted, employing different disciplines (such as Economics, Chemistry and Finance), aimed at establishing disciplinary variations in TERs. This will help establish how different disciplines engage in the process of



evaluation and the value they place on entities in the reports as well as what roles examiners assume.

Second, future studies could consider the use of evaluative language in particular sections of the MPhil theses in the TERs (such as methodology, analysis and discussion, and conclusion), as done in other studies (Holbrook et al. 2004a) or on whole report on doctoral thesis, in helping establish the linguistic features associated with these rhetorical sections and level of study.

The present study employed textual analysis to investigate evaluative language in TERs. Further research could employ a dualistic approach by adopting a combined textual analysis and interviewing the thesis examiners who write reports, to understand the motivation behind their values and practices in the assessment of theses, as done in other studies (e.g. Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Simpkins, 1987).

Finally, it is recommended that since the present study drew on expert, though occluded writing which is thesis examiners reports (TERs), in examining the use of evaluative language, it is suggested that future research could consider evaluative language in novice writings such as postgraduate critical reviews or term papers to ascertain the use of evaluative language, perhaps, as a way of establishing how students in their writings have internalized the idea that academic writing (AW) thrives on issues such as stance, voice, and criticality.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, academic writing (AW) is not just an entity but a social, cognitive, and rhetorical process and an accomplishment, a form of enculturation, social practice, positioning, representation, and stance-taking

(Duff, 2010). The use of evaluative language in the TERs confirms the assertion by Duff (2010) and establishes the fact that academic writing (AD) is conventionalized or ritualized, and, therefore, it is usually evaluated by instructors, institutions, proofreaders, and others in educational and professional contexts to check for the appropriateness of this discourse. A candidate has to imitate how the various components of the thesis are woven together for a fine piece. If that is achieved, then, a positive comment is given by an examiner; however, if the candidate falls short of this expectation, then, a negative comment is passed by an examiner. All these evaluations are given by an examiner in educational and professional contexts, signifying the hierarchical relationship that exists between the two interactants, the examiner and the candidate. Sometimes, examiners employ language that aims to foster equal relationships and to nurture the candidate. It is, therefore, important that examiners clearly articulate what they expect candidates to do, and candidates, on the other hand, also judiciously consider these comments with all seriousness, all with the aim of producing a fine academic artefact, the thesis.

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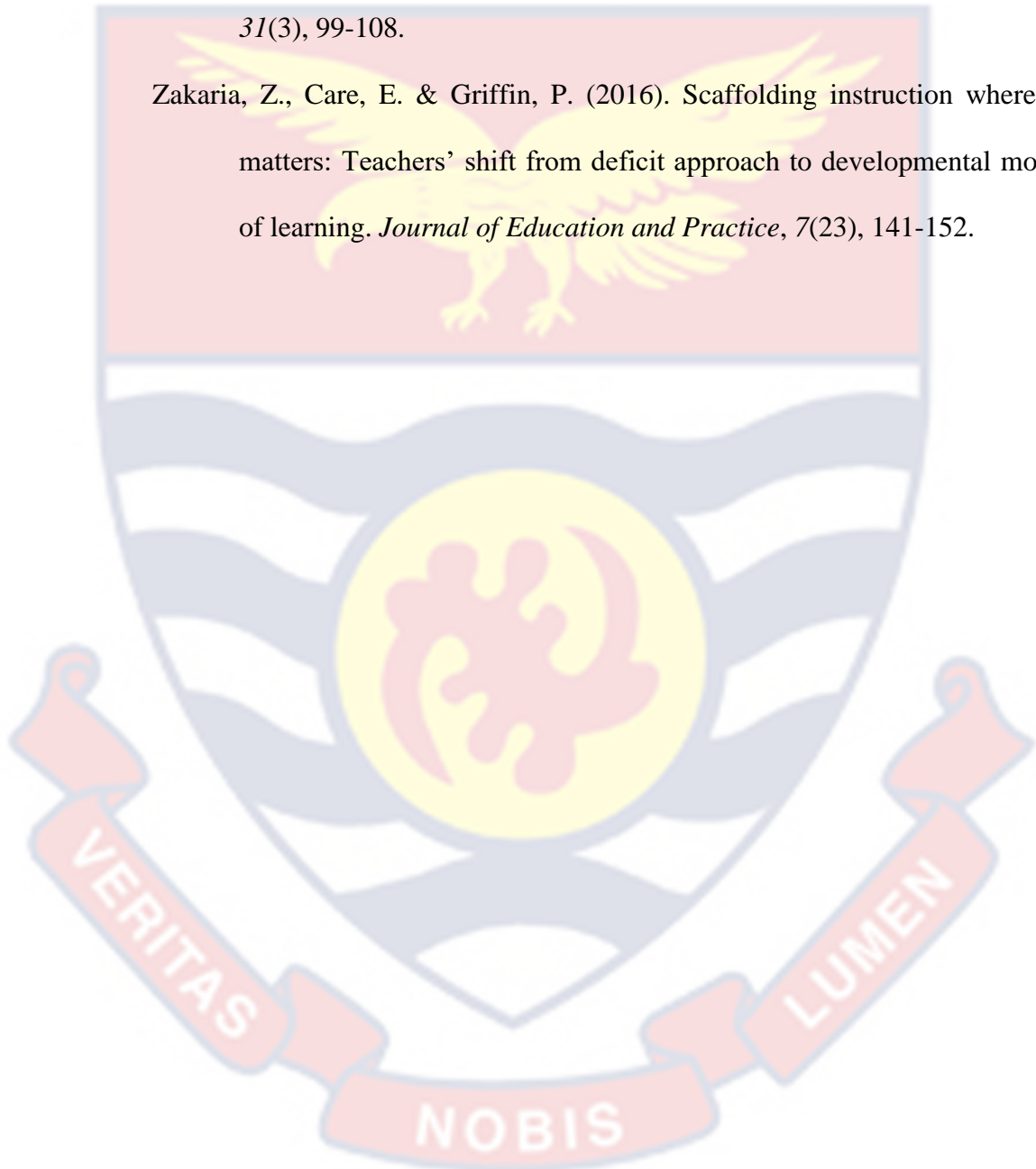


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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

## Letter of Introduction from Head of Department, English (UCC)

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

TELEPHONE: +233-3321-30942, EXT. 230

FAX: +233-3321-32485  
Email: englishdepartment53@gmail.com

OUR REF: ED/T2V0L2/

YOUR REF:



University of Cape Coast  
Cape Coast, Ghana

16<sup>th</sup> June, 2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam.

INTRODUCTORY LETTER: MS. RITA AKELE TWUMASI

The Department of English would like to introduce to your office Ms. Rita Akele Twumasi, a PhD student with the registration number AR/DEN/14/0001 of the Department of English. She is undertaking her thesis title: *The Use of Evaluative Language in Thesis Assessment Reports*.

We would appreciate it very much if you could offer her any assistance she may require at your office. We would like to assure you that the data she is collecting will be treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes.

We count on your cooperation.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. B. A. Afful'.

Prof. J. B. A. Afful (PhD)  
Head of Department

## APPENDIX B

## Letter to SGS (UCC) for Permission to Access Data

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND LEGAL STUDIES  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

TELEPHONE: +233-3321-30942, EXT. 230

FAX: +233-3321-32485  
Email: englishdepartment53@gmail.com

OUR REF: ED/T/2Vol.2/

YOUR REF:



University of Cape Coast  
Cape Coast, Ghana

14<sup>th</sup> July, 2016

Dean  
School of Graduate Studies  
UCC

Dear Sir

**INTRODUCTORY LETTER: MS. RITA AKELE TWUMASI**

The Department of English would like to introduce to your office Ms. Rita Akele Twumasi, a PhD student with the registration number AR/DEN/14/0001 of the Department of English. She is undertaking her thesis titled: *The Use of Evaluative Language in Thesis Assessment Reports*.

We would appreciate it very much if you could offer her any assistance she may require at your office. We would like to assure you that the data she is collecting will be treated confidentially and used only for academic purposes.

We count on your cooperation.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JBA'.

Prof. J. B. A. Afful (PhD)  
Head of Department



APPENDIX C

Re: Introductory Letter from SGS (UCC)

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
School of Graduate Studies  
Dean's Office

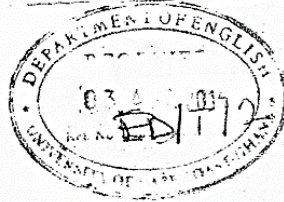
TELEPHONE: +233 3321 32440-9 & 32480-9 Ext. 237  
DIRECT: +233 3321 35351 & 028 9670793-4



UNIVERSITY POST OFFICE  
CAPE COAST, GHANA

Our Ref SGS/6^V.7/49  
Your Ref:

26<sup>th</sup> July, 2016



The Head  
Department of English  
UCC

RE: INTRODUCTORY LETTER: MS. RITA AKELE TWUMASI

We refer to your letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2016, with reference ED/T/2Vol.2 on the above subject matter.

The School of Graduate Studies is ready to accord Ms. Twumasi the needed assistance to enable her to write her thesis.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

(Joseph C. Sefenu)  
DEPUTY REGISTRAR

*Handwritten notes:*  
PAA  
write a letter to ...  
SGS's response  
5/25/16

## APPENDIX D

## SGS (UCC) Assessment Sheet



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST  
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

SGS F2 - EXT

EXAMINATION OF THESIS

(Ph.D./M.Phil./M.COM/MN)

**Details of Candidate**

Surname: _____	
Other Names: _____	
Registration Number: _____	
Ph.D. <input type="checkbox"/> M.Phil. <input type="checkbox"/> M.COM <input type="checkbox"/> MN <input type="checkbox"/>	Area of Specialization
Degree Sought	
Title of _____	
Thesis: _____	

**Assessment**

Area of Assessment	Score	
	Maximum	Awarded
1. Problem specification/research objectives/questions/hypotheses	10	
2. Knowledge of relevant literature/theoretical/conceptual framework (whichever is applicable)	15	
3. Design of the research/data collection methods (whichever is applicable)	15	
4. Problem Solving/Logical reasoning/Data Analysis (whichever is applicable)	20	
5. Major findings and soundness of discussion	20	
6. Conclusions and recommendations	10	
7. Quality of presentation (Appropriate and grammatical use of language, layout, referencing, etc.)	10	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	

**Recommendation**

Please indicate your overall assessment of the thesis by ticking appropriate boxes.

Pass <input type="checkbox"/>	(a) No corrections are required <input type="checkbox"/>
	(b) Corrections are required (Give details on a separate sheet). <input type="checkbox"/>
	Grade: A (80%-100%) <input type="checkbox"/> B+ (75%-79%) <input type="checkbox"/> B (70%-74%) <input type="checkbox"/> C+ (65%-69%) <input type="checkbox"/> C (60%-64%) <input type="checkbox"/> Mark: _____
Fail <input type="checkbox"/>	Specific sections of the thesis require substantial changes or revision. (Give details on a separate sheet.)
The thesis must be re-submitted for assessment within three months.	Below 60% Mark: _____

Please note that by the regulations governing Graduate Studies of this University, any grade below C (60%) is referred. It will therefore not be appropriate to award any grade below Grade C and recommend that the thesis be "passed subject to corrections" at the end of your report.

**Detailed Report**

Please attach a detailed report on a separate sheet. In the report, comment on each of the Areas of Assessment outlined above as well as the relevance and importance of the findings and original contribution to knowledge made, especially, for PhD thesis.

**Details of Examiner**

Name: _____	Signature: _____
Postal Address: _____	
Email: _____	Tel: _____
Date: _____	



**APPENDIX E****A Sample of Thesis Examiner's Report**

Name of Candidate:

Degree Sought: MPhil...

Topic:

General Comment

On the whole the general thesis appears quite well written and structured. The findings are largely in sync with the objectives and well suited to the topic. The biggest short coming however, has to do with the failure to link the finding with the conceptual framework and Hypothesis. All the same the thesis is passed subject to effect the corrections highlighted.

The specific comments follow:

Chapter 1

The build-up to the settlement of the problem is rather weak, scanty and inadequate. The arguments made here appear rather one-sided and repetitive. There is an overbearing emphasis on impacts to the detriment of other issues that have been captured in the objectives. For example, the issue of participation is the in the work but surprisingly it is never mentioned in the background.

This section should therefore be upgraded by adding a page or two that covers the following issues:

- The issue of community participation
- The conversation-livelihood debate and the dynamics of creating Protected Areas with their attendant implications for vulnerability etc

- Ecotourism in Ghana or Issues of community – attraction relationship in Ghana

Candidate claims that Ghana is one of the few African countries that consider tourism as a route to economic development. While this may be true of Ghana, it is false to say the countries that are engaged in this are few. Especially when we know from the World Bank (2007), Mitchel and Ashley (2007) that 80% of the world's poor countries have included tourism in their developmental strategies. Many of Africa's countries are considered poor so obviously; those considering tourism cannot be only a few.

Pg 6: Modify Hypothesis 2b to read: Resident's perceived benefits of tourism do not differ by their background characteristic. As per the way it has been stated in the work, the impression the reader gets is that the researcher is seeking difference between background characteristics and perceived benefits but it should rather be differences in the perception as shaped by the various background characteristics.

Pg 7: The statement in paragraph 3 line 2: "Through this study residents will be enlightened on the essence of community participation". This is not the focus a scientific study. That statement should be removed.

- Replace the word 'envisage' with envisaged and make the similar grammatical corrections that have been highlighted throughout the text.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter is well-written and organized. The literature covers both the empirical and theoretical aspects dimensions of the phenomenon



There is however no befitting summary to the chapter. Candidate must rewrite the existing summary and add details about the key variables the literature has provided that are relevant to the work.

### Chapter Three: Methodology

Remove irrelevant information from the background of the study area.

Many of these have been highlighted in the text and can be found on pages 46 and 47

Pg 48: The justification for the choice of Bobiri Forest is not convincing and must be restated.

Pg 52: Describe the simple random sampling process that used to select Nobewan and Krofofrom

Pg 52: Justify the use of systematic random sampling technique

Pg 55: Explain how the Kakum National Park represents a similar environment to the BFBS.

Pg. 57 Replace Chi Square Test of Independence

Pg 74; interpretation of Table 7. The figures quoted (53%, 50.5%) cannot be interpreted to mean there was uncertainty. They mean that roughly half of the respondents thought in a particular direction. This change should be effected.

Pg 76: Table 8: What is leakage? And how was the question pertaining to it asked?

Pg 82: Table 10. I have a difficulty in appreciating the variables that were used for the FA. There appears to be a case of auto-correlation. It appears the same factors were used to explain the same perceptions.

Pg 91: Candidate points out differences in the perception by place of residence. But this finding does not mean much without information about the

spatial dynamics. Which of the two towns is closer to the tourism core, which we know is often the measuring point for understanding perception? In essence, why Kubease and Nobeam different from Krofofom in terms of perception on costs?

Pg 91: candidate should rephrase the paragraph before Table 12. It appears clumsy

Pg 94: I think Plate 2 is inappropriate labelled

Use of phrase: in support of pg (96) should replace “in support for”

Pg 101. The reference attributed to Amuquandoh (2006) does not appear to influence the ensuing discussion in any way. Otherwise, previous experience should have also been factored as a variable into Table 15. If this cannot be done then I suggest the candidate deletes this reference.

Pg 104 Replace has with have

Conceptual framework has not been addressed or discussed in any way. There appears to be a disconnect between the main finding and the conceptual framework. Some key concepts/ variables in the CF (see fig 4, page 41) particularly namely, level of knowledge, community participation/power of decision making , community attachment, economic role of tourism and tourism contacts have been tested relative to their assumed ability to shape perceptions of tourism impacts, and support for tourism.

Save for page 95 where it is only mentioned, it is never discussed or even referred to in the whole of the data analysis chapter. This is unacceptable for an M.Phil and must be rectified. Candidate should introduce at least 1-2 page section just before the summary on how well(or )

Chapter Four: Data Analysis.

The chapter is generally well presented.

Pags66-67: The candidate attempts to profile a certain group. However this is not done properly.

There is a problem with Tables 4. As it stands it says really nothing about those involved in tourism decision making. This is because, a close look at the table shows that it is the dominant categories of the general socio-demographics that that been merely repeated. Interestingly, it is the same categories that have the largest categories that repeated themselves. This is not the way to profile. In profiling we look at the relative proportion/densities. So the original figures should have been maintained and rather the proportion of decision makers in each category juxtaposed against those who are involved. What the candidate should have compared is Kubease's percentage of decision makers of its own population verses Nobewam's percentages of its decision makers relative to its own population. In that way we would be comparing oranges and oranges and not otherwise. As it stands now dominant categories are likely to remain so and this is what has largest happened in the table. In effect, no profiling has been done. Profiling should lead to exclusivity and identification but in this case it has not happened

This flaw leads to erroneous conclusion drawn on page 67 and as per the interpretation on that page, there is no difference in categories by participation and this cannot be true. For example, author avers on pg 67 that both indigenes and non-indigenes participated in making decisions concerning the management of the forest of the forest sanctuary, therefore, contradicting Afenyo's (2011) work. But in reality if her findings had been interpreted properly they would have rather confirm the earlier assertion. I understand the

percentages given to mean that indigenes tend to be more likely to participate in decision making than non-indigenes. And this is exactly what the general trend of literature (including Afenyo 2012) points to.

Candidates should therefore reconstruct Table 5 using format similar to that found in Table 13 (pg 27)

Pg 68-69: Table 5 are the summarized scores and means the total or the average?

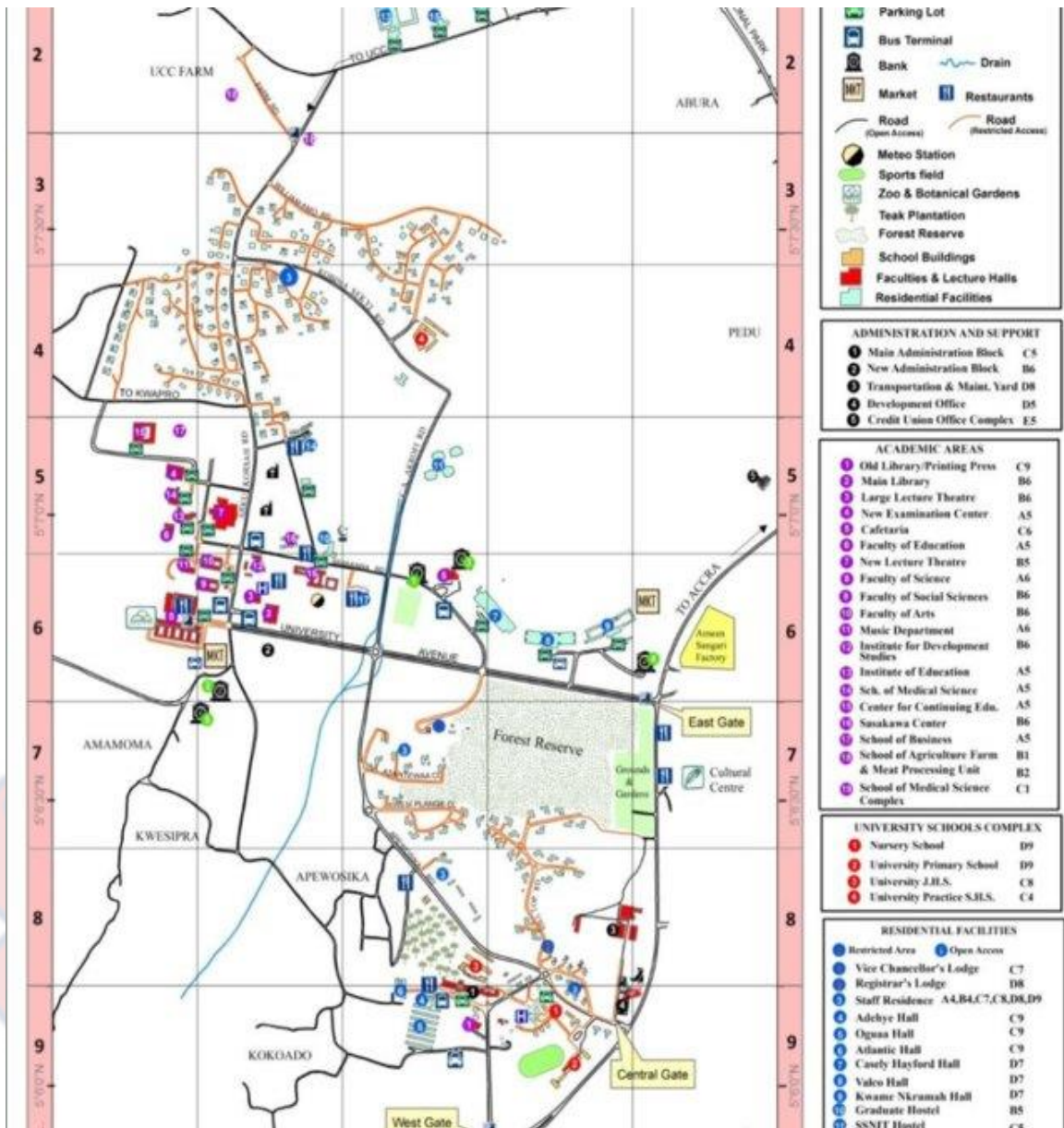
Pg 71: the attribution of low levels of participation to absence of legal rights and ignorance is contestable. It appears to be more an issue of weak capacities.

pg 71: Barriers to participation: How was Table 6 generated? The measurement is not very clear. Were the barriers predefined already or they were generated from responses to an open ended question. Either way there should be a line or two explaining how this data was generated. The same query is raised for Challenges facing tourism Development on Page 91 and Respondents' expectations from tourism on page 99-100



APPENDIX F

Map of University of Cape Coast (UCC)



APPENDIX G



A Picture of University of Cape Coast (UCC)

