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Sub-disciplinary Variation and Rhetoric in Dissertation Acknowledgements Written by Education Students: The Case of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Abstract

Studies have revealed differences and similarities in the generic structure and the linguistic encoding of gratitude in dissertation acknowledgements (DAs) in different socio-cultural settings. Whereas some studies have highlighted the role of disciplinarity, not all disciplines have been given equal attention. This study explores disciplinarity in the rhetoric of the acknowledgement section of Master's degree dissertations in three sub-disciplines of Education, namely, Guidance and Counselling, Educational Administration and Management, and Science and Mathematics Education. The study adapts Hyland's (2004) model of rhetorical analysis to examine 20 DAs form each of the three sub-disciplines. The findings show a linear three-move-structure, consisting of an initial optional reflecting move, an obligatory thanking move, and an optional concluding move, across the three sub-disciplines. Second, there are some differences in the frequency of occurrence of moves and steps across the three sub-disciplines. Finally, the thanking move is assigned much textual space in all DAs, with very little sub-disciplinary variation in the textual space allocated to the three moves across the sub-disciplines. The study has implications for the scholarship on disciplinarity, rhetoric in academic writing, and further research.

Key words: *dissertation acknowledgement, disciplinarity, Education, genre, moves, rhetoric*

1 Introduction

Increasingly, research in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and other allied areas such as advanced academic literacy and Higher Education continue to pay attention to various academic genres in different settings. Whereas much attention has been paid to the research article (RA) because of its obvious prominence in knowledge production and dissemination in academia (Swales, 1981, 1990), in the last two decades, an observable change in focus has occurred. Learners' writing such as dissertations or theses have begun to receive considerable attention, given the fact that academic writing involves not only expert writing but also learner's writing

(Hewings, 2004). An interesting feature with regard to both kinds of writing (that is, expert writing and learner's writing), attention has shifted from the introduction and other rhetorical units like the literature review, methodology/methods, results and discussion, and conclusion to such apparent peripheral rhetorical units as the acknowledgement sections (e.g. Giannoni, 2002; Hyland, 2003, 2004).

Acknowledgement sections in different genres are characterised by different thanking strategies (Cheng, 2012). For example, acknowledgements in journal articles show the author's recognition and appreciation of academic assistance and financial support from colleagues and funding institutions. As Hyland and Tse (2004) suggest, authorial roles, individual purposes, and writer-reader relationships in DAs differ from those available in research genres. In general, DAs evince social, interpersonal, cultural and pragmatic realities.

The present study explores intra-disciplinary variation in Ghanaian Master's DAs, focusing on three sub-disciplines of Education: Science and Mathematics Education, Guidance and Counselling, and Educational Administration and Management. Two factors gave impetus to this study. First, the discipline of Education has not been given serious attention in previous research on DAs. The second is our curiosity to find out whether sub-disciplinary variations exist in the discourse of a particular discipline, following that a considerable number of disciplinary studies have focused on cross-disciplinary variation in academic discourse (e.g. Bazerman, 1981; Hyland, 2000; Samraj, 2002; Afful, 2005; Koutsantoni, 2007; Soler, 2007). To address the concerns of the study, we examine the rhetorical organisation of the DAs.

2 Literature Review

In this section, some key notions and pertinent previous studies are highlighted in order to provide a conceptual background for the study.

2.1 Key Notions in Academic Writing Research

Underpinning the present study are two key notions, namely 'Disciplinarity' and/or 'Disciplinary Variation', on the one hand, and Rhetorical Analysis of Academic writing, on the other hand.

2.1.1 Disciplinarity and Disciplinary Variation

Among English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) researchers, it is held that that disciplines differ not only in their content but also in how they communicate and the kind of linguistic elements they prefer in constructing knowledge. A discipline evinces its ideologies, epistemologies, practices, values and norms, which are community generated and community maintained. The notion of disciplinary variation, therefore, rests on the fact that there are varieties of disciplines in the scientific community and each discipline is marked by a distinct culture (Becher, 1989). Disciplines are categorised based on a number of factors such as differences in knowledge structure and norms of inquiry, different vocabulary, and different standards of rhetorical intimacy (Trowler & Becher, 2001).

The heterogeneity of culture in the scientific community gives rise to different discourse communities, which refer to communities of scholars who share common ideologies and common ways of speaking about things. That is, each discipline is viewed as a "rhetorical community" with certain norms, expectations and conventions with respect to writing and speaking (Hyland, 2000). The categorisation of different knowledge domains into discourse communities or rhetorical communities is a convenient way of creating less heterogeneous groups within the scientific community. Discourse communities are thus best conceptualised as systems in which multiple ideologies and practices overlap and intersect (Hyland, 2000) and, in the process, give rise to commonplace practices and values. The common values and practices are protected by the gatekeepers and trustees of the community (Canagarajah, 2002; Lillis & Curry, 2010). According to Hyland (2000), a disciplinary discourse community often consists of pluralities of practices and beliefs which accommodate disagreement and allows subgroups and individuals to innovate within margins of its practices in ways that do not weaken its ability to engage in common actions.

It is, therefore, obvious that the discipline of Education is heterogeneous, consisting of varied sub-disciplines, including *inter alia* Educational Psychology, Educational Economics, Curriculum Studies, Educational Administration, Science Education, Religious and Moral Education, and Sociology of Education. Although Education is considered to be a social science discipline, its sub-disciplines reflect the broad knowledge domains in the scientific community, namely, natural sciences, arts and humanities, technology and applied sciences, and social sciences. In the University of Cape Coast (UCC), from where data was collected, these sub-disciplines of education are organised into six departments and two institutes, comprising the

Departments of Arts and Social Sciences Education, Mathematics and Science Education, Educational Foundations, Vocational and Technical Education, Health, Physical and Recreational Education, Basic Education, and the Institutes of Education and of Educational Planning and Administration.

Given this heterogeneity in the epistemology of Education, it is assumed in this study that there will be subtle variations across its sub-disciplines in terms of the rhetorical or discursive choices that are made in a particular genre, in this case the DA. The next section discusses focuses on rhetorical analysis of academic writing.

2.1.2 Rhetorical Analysis of Academic writing

In this study, the term 'rhetoric' is used narrowly to underscore the generic structure or what Matsuda (2003: 20) calls 'organizational structure' of language use beyond the sentence, taking into account the three elements that are often alluded to in rhetorical studies, namely, purpose, context, and audience. This narrow definition steers away from both the manipulative or persuasive and flowery ramifications of the word 'rhetoric' (Afful, 2005).

A framework that is often mentioned in the scholarship on rhetoric is genre theory. The word, originating from the Graeco-Roman tradition, is used in Applied Linguistics to refer to a class of communicative acts with an overarching purpose, which is realizable through 'moves'. A move refers to "a discoursal or rhetorical unit that performs a coherent communicative function in a written or spoken discourse" (Swales, 2004: 229). The scholarship on genre studies indicates that what is designated as a move is not coterminous with a paragraph, sentence or clause, implying that moves are flexible in terms of their corresponding formal features (Lewin & Fine, 1996; Santos, 1996) and should be seen as functional units, and not formal ones (Swales, 2004). Besides, genre analysts have often adopted a two-way approach: schematic structure and lexico-grammatical features (Bhatia, 1997). The schematic structure relates more to the organizational pattern whereas the lexico-grammatical features attempt to identify the specific linguistic choices that are made in order to ascertain whether each move or rhetorical unit is distinguished by specific linguistic choices.

While some studies that have utilized the genre rhetorical approach combined the two approaches, it is often considered to be wieldy. Due to space constraint, we report our findings on the rhetoric of DAs in terms of only the move structure of the texts.

2.2 Previous Studies on Dissertation Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements constitute an essential rhetorical section in various genres of academic writing and have correspondingly attracted much attention among researchers. Earlier research on acknowledgements focused on the RA. Some bibliometric studies have explored acknowledgements in RAs as a lens to revealing various degrees of collaborations among scholars in scientific research and the extent to which researchers in varying disciplines differ in their dependence on institutional and financial support (e.g. Cronin, McKenzie & Rubio, 1993; Laband & Tollison, 2000; Salager-Meyer, Ariza, Pabón & Zambrano, 2006). Giannoni (1998, 2002) is known to have been the first to examine the linguistic organization of acknowledgements in RAs.

Following Giannoni's (1998, 2002) studies, interest in DAs among scholars in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and other allied areas has increased. For instance, Gesuato (2003) examines lexico-grammatical features and the organisation of information in DAs at the syntactic level. Hyland (2003) also explored the textualization of gratitude within the generic structure of DAs produced by Hong Kong postgraduate students and observed that acknowledgements offer writers a unique rhetorical space not only to express their graduate to other people for the intellectual and personal assistance they received but also to promote situated academic, cultural and social identities. Hyland (2004), in a further work, revealed that Hong Kong postgraduate students generally produce DAs with an obligatory thanking move, which is framed by an optional reflecting move and an optional announcing move. Hyland and Tse (2004) show that students construct DAs, using a relatively restricted range of lexico-grammatical patterns.

Following Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004), a growing number of studies from different geographical settings (e.g. Nkemleke, 2006; Al-Ali, 2006; Karakas, 2010; Kudordjie, 2010; Mingwei & Yajun, 2010) have examined DAs, revealing variations in different socio-cultural contexts. Al-Ali (2006, 2010a, 2010b) draws attention to the socio-cultural resources Arab students employed in constructing their DAs. Karaka's (2010) socio-cultural and pragmatic study of dissertation acknowledgements written in English involved native speakers of Turkish and American English whereas Cheng's (2012) work contrasts the thanking strategies used in 60 thesis acknowledgements written in English by Taiwanese and North American graduate students. Mingwei and Yajun (2010) compare Chinese mainland students' DAs with Hyland's

(2004) findings and note divergences in relation to the lexico-grammatical features of the moves and the absence of some of the steps indicated by Hyland (2004).

Moving from the Anglo-American, Asian and Arabic contexts, we observe a few studies conducted in the sub-Saharan African context. A notable study is by Nkemleke (2006) who analyses DAs produced by undergraduate students in a Cameroonian teacher training institution and concludes that the linguistic and generic patterning of DAs by the Cameroonian students is significantly influenced by the reverence for age and the community-centred culture of Africa. Following closely is Kudordjie's (2010) unpublished work which focuses on the linguistic resources underpinning the construction of undergraduate dissertations in a Ghanaian university. Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) also demonstrate that the acknowledgement section of a master's thesis provides a rhetorical space for constructing multiple social identities and relationships.

Although Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004) highlight some disciplinary variations in the DAs they studied and noted the need for further exploration in this regard, subsequent studies have not given prominent attention to disciplinarity in the construction of DAs. The notable exceptions are, perhaps, Scrivener (2009), who shows that thankees in History students' DAs reflect the epistemological disposition of the subject History as well as Kudordjie (2010) who investigated the acknowledgements section in undergraduate dissertations submitted to two different departments at a Ghanaian university.

Our review points to the fact that three approaches have often been used in studies on acknowledgements. The first is the genre analysis approach (e.g. Hyland, 2003, 2004); the second is the socio-cultural approach (Al-Ali, 2006; Cheng, 2012), and the third being the pragmatic approach (Cheng & Kuo, 2011). Our study is identified with the first in order to ascertain the extent to which DA can be said to be a distinct genre in the academic community, irrespective of the geographical setting.

3 The Corpus of Dissertation Acknowledgements

The data set for the study is made up of a sample of 60 acknowledgements accompanying masters dissertations collected from the School of Graduate Studies and Research (SGSR) and the Faculty of Education Library, both in the University of Cape Coast. These dissertations were written between 1989 and 2009, a period of twenty years. Twenty (20) DAs were selected

randomly from each of the three sub-disciplines under study, namely, Science and Mathematics Education, Guidance and Counselling, and Educational Administration and Management.

Specifically, we first made photocopies of DAs that we had access to, which amounted to 105 DAs (40 from Science and Mathematics Education; 45 from Educational and 20 from Guidance and Counselling). Each DA was then assigned an identification label for easy reference. The label indicated the sub-discipline the DA belonged to and a numeral to differentiate it from other DAs of the sub-discipline (e.g. *ED-MS-01* for Mathematics and Science Education; *ED-AM-01* for Educational and Management and Administration; *ED-GC-01* for Guidance and Counselling). Twenty (20) DAs were then randomly sampled from each sub-discipline (particularly Science and Mathematics Education and Educational Management and Administration), using the lottery replacement method. Table 1 below presents the text length of the DAs in terms of number of words.

Table 1: Text Length in Terms of Number of Words

Sub-discipline	N	%	Mean	Shortest Text	Longest Text
Science/Maths	3, 548	32.7	177	72	346
Guid. & Counselling	4, 301	39.6	215	83	400
Adm/Management	3, 012	27.7	151	51	243
Overall Data Set	10,861	100	181	51	400

As shown in Table 1, the total number of words in the corpus of 60 DAs is 10, 861 words and the average number of words per each acknowledgement is 181. Guidance and Counselling has the largest number of words in the data set, with a total of 4, 301 (39.6%) words and an average of 215 words. The longest text in Guidance and Counselling has 400 words and the shortest has 83 words. Next in terms of text length is Mathematics and Science Education, which has a total of 3, 548 (32.7%) and an average of 177 words. The longest text in Mathematics and Science Education DAs has 346 words and the shortest has 72 words. Educational Administration and Management has a total of 3, 012 (27.7%) and an average of 151 words. The longest text in this category has 243 words and the shortest has 51 words. Generally, there is very little difference between the number of words across the sub-disciplines represented by the data set.

The length of DAs in this study is within the range of those reported by other studies. For instance, Hyland and Tse (2004) found the average number of words of DAs ranging between 132.2 and 385.9 words and Mingwei and Yajun (2010) found that DAs by MA students from Chinese mainland ranges from 81 to 243 words, with the average of 145.45 words. This observation suggests a relative degree of uniformity in the length of DAs as a genre, irrespective of geographical setting.

4 Data Analysis Approach

Hyland's (2004) model of the rhetorical analysis of DAs is adapted as the analytical framework for the study. This framework consists of a three-tier move-structure, comprising a reflecting move, a thanking move, and an announcing move. In addition, Hyland (2004) considers the frequency of the occurrence of moves. In this study, we use the term 'concluding move' in place of 'announcing move' owing to a slight variation in the steps in this move compared with Hyland's (2004) study. We modify Hyland's (2004) framework by also examining the sequencing of moves, and the textual space allocated to moves.

A triangulation of directed and summative content analyses is used in manually coding the DAs for moves and steps. With directed content analysis, the analyst uses existing theory or prior research to develop an initial coding scheme prior to beginning the analysis of data while with summative content analysis, the analyst begins with identifying and quantifying particular words or content (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999). In this regard, we first used Hyland's (2004) model in identifying moves and steps by focusing on the communicative functions performed by linguistic and discourse units in the DAs, as well as the presence of particular lexical items in these units (e.g. *encouragement*, *material support*, *data access*, etc.). Frequency counts and percentage distributions were then employed in quantifying the moves and steps identified, as well as the textual space allocated to moves in terms of number of words. To ensure anonymity in terms of personal names, we replace actual names in the data set with the symbol XXXX. In the next section, we present and discuss the findings of the study.

5 Findings and Discussion

The analysis and discussion focus, first, on the schematic structure of the dissertation acknowledgements by identifying and explaining the moves and their steps. This is followed in

the second section by a more elaborate description and explanation of these moves in terms of three variables: textual space, frequency, and sequencing.

5.1 Generic Structure of Dissertation Acknowledgements

The data reveals a three-tier structure, comprising an optional reflecting move, an obligatory thanking move, and an optional concluding move, as earlier noted by Hyland (2004) as well as other previous studies. The thanking move can further be sub-divided into nine steps, and the concluding move can also be divided into two steps. The general move structure is presented in Figure 1 below:

1. Reflecting move
2. Thanking move
   - 2.1 Thanking God
   - 2.2 Thanking for academic support
   - 2.3 Thanking for technical support
   - 2.4 Thanking for financial support
   - 2.5 Thanking for material support
   - 2.6 Thanking for moral support
   - 2.7 Thanking for data access
   - 2.8 Thanking authors of works cited
   - 2.9 Thanking for various forms of help
3. Concluding move
   - 3.1 Thanking all
   - 3.2 Accepting responsibility for errors

Figure1: Move Structure of Dissertation Acknowledgement
Source: Adapted from Hyland (2004:308)

The three moves and the steps that realise them are described in detail below.

5.1.1 Move 1: Reflecting Move

This move is introductory; it acknowledges the fact that the researcher has received assistance from a number of persons, either in the research process or the graduate programme and thus is obliged to thank them. Illustrations of this move are given below:

> *While on this graduate programme many were the people who were of immense assistance to me.* (ED-MS-08)

> *The completion of this work would have been a mirage had it not been for the tremendous support and encouragement of some individuals who deserve mention.* (ED-AM-19)

In undertaking this research, I received assistance from many individuals and groups whom I owe a debt of gratitude. (ED-GC-11)

This introductory move occurs in more than half (58.3%) of the 60 DAs. The content of this move is quite different from what Hyland (2004) identifies in his study in which students "contemplate the understandings they have gained as a result of the research experience and often recalls the struggles involved or the sense of accomplishment achieved" (p. 311). In the present study, this move allows the writer to reflect on the enormity of the task that has been accomplished and the fact that such a stressful task could not have been completed without the assistance of other people.

5.1.2 Move 2: Thanking Move

In the second move, the writers express gratitude to different individuals and groups of people for different forms of assistance they have received from them. This move occurs in all 60 (100%) DAs, indicating that it is an obligatory move. As Figure 1 illustrates, there are nine steps under this move, which are described below:

The first step (2.1) is 'thanking God'. Although this step very frequently occurs as the first step, in few cases it occurs towards the end of the text (before or after move 3), where it is introduced with the disjunct 'above all'. Examples are below:

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God for granting me wisdom, good health and the resources to bring this work to conclusion. (ED-AM-01)

I wish to express my appreciation to the Almighty God without whose grace, care, and love this work would never have been accomplished. (ED-MS-14)

I offer my sincerest thanks to the Almighty Jehovah for seeing me through this work. I acknowledge that without his mercies, I would not have come this far. May his name be praised. (ED-GC-19)

The occurrence of this step is interesting since the School of Graduate Studies and Research at UCC forbids the reference to supernatural or spiritual beings in the acknowledgement section of students' dissertations in its Graduate Brochure. This prohibition contradicts Ghanaian cultural values, which emphasise the need to show gratitude to God and other divinities in all accomplishments, recalling Mbiti's (1990) description of the African as 'incurably religious'. It

is, therefore, not surprising that many writers (25 out of 60) often explicitly thanked God in their DAs. Al-Ali (2006, 2010a, 2010b) observes that the prominence of 'thanking-Allah' in Arab students DAs is as a result of the fact that religion is inextricably linked with the social, and, for that matter academic, life of Arabs. Similar to Al-Ali's findings therefore, in the present study, writers' often shower praises on God:

> *He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty [whose power no foe can withstand]. I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God on Him I lean and rely, and in Him I [confidently] trust! God is the reason why I live and the centre of my focus. I submit to Him.* (ED-GC-17)

> *I offer my sincerest thanks to the Almighty Jehovah for seeing me through this work. I acknowledge that without his mercies, I would not have come this far. May his name be praised.* (ED-GC-19)

Again, dissertation writers in our data set do not hesitate to invoke God's blessings on their thankees:

> *May God bless everyone and all other people that helped me in one way or the other to bring this work to a successful completion.* *(ED-AM-36)*

The second step (2.2) is 'Thanking for Academic Support'. This step occurs in all 60 (100%) DAs and is thus obligatory. It shows gratitude towards academic assistance in the form of suggestion of ideas, criticisms, proof-reading, and thesis supervision. Focus here is on the dissertation supervisors so they are normally thanked first and take a much larger textual space:

> *I owe a great debt of gratitude specifically to XXXX of the Institute of Educational Planning and Administration who supervised my work. His useful suggestions and contributions helped a lot to complete the project*. (ED-AM-21)

> *It is with the greatest pleasure and gratitude that I express my indebtedness to my supervisor XXXX of the Counselling Centre, University of Cape Coast, who painstakingly and diligently read the manuscript and gave valuable professional comments and contributions that are impossible to beat*. (ED-GC-16)

Other thankees in this category include faculty other than the supervisor(s) and colleague students:

I am very much indebted to XXXX of the Counselling Centre whose doors were always wide open to assist me at any time. (ED-GC-03)

I am equally grateful to XXXX, XXXX, XXXX, XXXX and all PRACTICAL Project MPhil students, UCC, for their advice, suggestions, and contributions for the study. (ED-MS-29)

Apart from the supervisor (s), who appeared in all DAs in the data set, 42 writers thanked other people for academic assistance. Hyland and Tse (2004) also found that supervisors are mentioned in all DAs and teachers and friends are mentioned often. They also found that thanking for academic support is the only step of the thanking move that appears in all DAs in their data set.

Thanking for technical support (step 2.3) is the next step of the thanking move. The most recurrent technical support students thanked for is typing and similar clerical duties like binding and formatting. Forty-three out of the 60 DA writers acknowledged typing. Guidance and Counselling registered the highest in terms of frequency (18), while Educational Administration and Management and Science and Mathematics Education registered 14 and 11 instances respectively. Illustrations of step 2.3 are given below:

Finally, I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to XXXX, typist of Narh-Bita School of Nursing – Tema, for typing the manuscripts. (ED-AM-36)

XXXX gladly typed the script and XXXX and XXXX had it printed with minimum supervision and I cannot be ungrateful. God bless them all. (ED-MS-12)

The frequent occurrence of thanking for clerical support in step 2.3 is not very surprising since the acquisition and ownership of personal computers among Ghanaian university students is quite a recent cultural development, mainly around the beginning of the twenty first century. Thus, DAs written before the year 2000 and early 2000 are likely to contain more of step 2.3 because of inaccessibility to computers and/or lack of computer literacy. Since the coding or categorisation of DAs in our data set did not account for time variation, this observation could better be clarified by further research.

Other technical support thanked for was assistance in data analysis and the use of statistical instruments:

> *My appreciation to XXXX from the Centre for Development Studies, UCC. He did not think it inconvenience to take time off his busy schedule, clean up my laptop and reinstall the SPSS programme on it – and this for someone he just met. I appreciate it and I ask God's abundant blessing upon his life. I want to thank Yaw (XXXX) for being a good teacher. Without him, I could possibly not have analysed my work.* (ED-GC-17)

Peculiar to Science and Maths Education is thanking for the development of tools for experimentation:

> *I also appreciate the skills of XXXX of Cape Coast Technical Institute in the development of the physical models of atomic orbitals for teaching during data collection*. (ED-MS-13)

This finding reflects the epistemological concerns of science and mathematics, which put emphasis on experiments, and the development of models and scientific formulas.

Another step under the thanking move is thanking for financial support (step 2.4). This step occurs less frequently across the three sub-disciplines. In all, it occurs in 10 of the 60 DAs, three each in Mathematics and Science Education and Administration and Management, and four in Guidance and Counselling. However, while the thankees of the Mathematics and Science DAs are always an institution (e.g. PRACTICAL Project and UCC), those of the Guidance and Counselling and Administration and Management are family members and friends:

> *I thank the management of the PRACTICAL Project and the University of Cape Coast, for the financial assistance, which made it possible for me to complete this research*. (ED-MS-27)

> *I also want to express my heartfelt appreciation to XXXX (Uncle XXXX) of the Department of Educational Foundations for his immeasurable help. I want to thank him for being a counsellor, a big brother, an uncle and a friend and for the loan of his family as well.* (ED-GC-17)

> *I am greatly indebted to my darling husband, XXXX and children, XXXX, XXXX and XXXX for their time, understanding and for providing financial and emotional support*. (ED-AM-13)

The variation in the thankees for Science and Mathematics Education DAs and other two sub-disciplines suggest that Science students are more likely to be given institutional financial

assistance in their research projects more than students in the soft disciplines like Administration and Management. This situation could be due to the fact that research in the natural and applied sciences directly or readily serves the interest of funding institutions more than research in the soft disciplines does.

The next step to be considered is thanking for material support (step 2.5). This includes thanking for research articles, text books, electronic devices and other forms of literature:

> *I am indebted to the Librarians of the following institutions: UCC. ATTC, UNIC, UNDP, UNICEF, NCWD and British Council – Accra for allowing me to use their facilities*. (ED-AM-01)

> *I also owe him many thanks for lending me a great number of research articles related to this work.* (ED-MS-04)

> *I am also indebted to UNAIDS Information Centre (Geneva-Switzerland) for supporting me with literature and two CD-ROMs on HIV/AIDS.* (ED-GC-18)

As the examples above demonstrate, the thankees in this step include family members, lecturers, libraries and organisations. In other words, the thankees are individuals, groups, and institutions or organizations. This step occurs in 14 DAs in the data set.

Thanking for moral support (step 2.6) is another prominent step of the thanking move. This step includes thanking for advice, emotional support, love, care, encouragement and commitment. Thankees in this category are normally supervisors, friends, family members and spouses as well as mates:

> *I am also grateful to my wife and children as well as my brothers and sisters for their encouragement all throughout the period of my course*. (ED-MS-12)

> *To all my course mates, XXXX, XXXX, XXXX and XXXX, I say thanks for your encouragement in diverse ways*. (ED-GC-12)

The prominence of this step (2.6) is shown by the fact that it occurs in 55 of the 60 DAs. This step is significant, given that the Graduate Brochure of UCC categorically indicates that the only persons that could be included in the DAs are those who directly contributed to the research process. Thus, the fact that the family members, especially wives, husbands, children, sibling and parents are mentioned reflects the importance Ghanaians attach to familial relationships. Al-Ali (2006) also observes that thanking family members for emotional and moral support in DAs

corresponds to the importance the Arabic culture attaches to family members. Further, Hyland (2004) notes that two-thirds of DAs by Hong Kong postgraduate students thanked various persons for moral support. Hyland (2004) concludes that the value of DAs goes beyond simply a political strategy to provide "writers with the opportunity to extend gratitude beyond the public world of the academy to private forces which shaped their research experience" (p. 319).

Thanking for data access (step 2.7) is the next step to be described. In this step, the writer shows appreciation for data sources, and thankees mainly include respondents, who are often students and teachers and also directors of education and heads of schools who give permission for data collection:

> *I am equally indebted to the Asikuma District Directorate of the Ghana Education Service for granting me the permission for the study. To the headmasters and respective class teachers I say a big thank you.* (ED-MS-19)

> *The headmasters, staff, guidance co-ordinators and students of the schools deserve my deepest gratitude for their co-operation and support offered me in the course of data collection.* (ED-GC-14)

> *To the staff and students of Asikuma Senior Secondary School, I say thank you for your cooperation in responding to my questionnaire*. (ED-AM-05)

This step is relatively prominent in the data set. In all, it occurs in 47 (78.3%) of the 60 DAs. This step indicates the importance Education students in our data set attach to research data. The success of education research depends on the co-operation of students and teachers in providing information. The fact that the thankees in this step are students and educators thus reflects the epistemological focus of the discipline of Education.

Another step worth considering is thanking authors of works cited in the dissertation (step 2.8). Illustrations of this move are given below:

> *Finally, I wish to record my gratitude to authors of textbooks, research papers, magazines, newspapers and periodicals that I consulted during the research*. (ED-AM-24)

> *Finally, I acknowledge the debt of gratitude that I shall forever owe the community of mathematics educators whose works I have cited .....* (ED-MS-12)

This step is less frequent though. It occurs in 5 (25%) of Guidance and Counselling DAs; 4 (30%) of Administration and Management and 1 (5%) in Mathematics and Science Education DAs. The paucity of this step in the Science and Mathematics Education DAs seems to support the assumption that Science as a discipline emphasises the common ownership of knowledge and gives less acknowledgement to individual contribution to scientific truths that has passed the test of years of experimentation and verification. This observation is further supported by the fact that the only Science and Mathematics Education writer who includes this step in his/her DA uses the expression "the community of mathematics educators" to refer to authors whose works s/he consulted. Overall, this step occurs in 10 (16.7%) DAs in the data set. Generally, however, by thanking previous authors in their DAs, novice researchers identify themselves with a scholarly community of researchers, presenting themselves are responsible new comers.

The last step of move 2 is thanking for various forms of help (step 2.9). This mainly includes areas where the benefit thanked for is not explicitly stated by the writer:

> *I am extending my sincere thanks to XXXX and his Secretary XXXX both of the W.A.E.C Regional Office, Cape Coast, for their immense help in the preparatory period of the study*. (ED-MS-08)

> *XXXX, I would have erred if I had forgotten you. Thank you for everything. God richly bless you*. (ED-AM-40)

This step occurs in 33 (55%) of the 60 DAs. The fact that students do not explicitly state the benefit received from thankees in this step may imply that they consider the contributions of these thankees tangential to the research process. The relatively high frequency of occurrence of this step is, however, interesting, given that almost all previous studies on the rhetorical structure of DAs (e.g. Hyland, 2003, 2004) do not include this step in the schematic structure. This variation may be due to socio-cultural differences. It may also be as a result of practical differences between the categorisation of steps in this study and that of previous studies.

5.1.3 Move 3: Concluding Move

This concluding move has two steps, namely, thanking all (step 3.1) and accepting responsibility of errors (step 3.2). In step 3.1, the writer generally expresses thanks to all those who assisted him/her, but whose names were not mentioned. In step 3.2, the writer accepts that s/he is responsible for any errors in the dissertation. As Hyland (2004) notes, by explicitly

acknowledging responsibility for error, writers do not only seek to absolve their advisors and collaborators of blame for any deficiencies, but they also assert their ownership of the research product. They project their identity as responsible members of a research community.

Generally, move 3 occurs in 20 of the 60 DAs, with almost the same frequency across disciplines (i.e. 7 in both Science and Mathematics Education and Educational Administration and Management; and 6 in Guidance and Counselling). Step 3.1 occurs in 15 DAs in the data set while step 3.2 occurs in 9 DAs, with Guidance and Counselling being the highest (6; 66.7% out of the 9). Thus, the two steps very often occur alternatively. It is only in 2 instances that both steps occur together as the illustrations below show:

> *Without doubt, all those mentioned above including many others who cannot be mentioned individually for lack of space and time, have contributed to the success of this research study. To them I say, once more, a big thank you* (step 3.1). *However, any shortcomings concerning this study remain entirely mine* (step 3.2). (ED-MS-04)

> *I would also like to thank many others who I have not named specifically, but who contributed in diverse ways in making this work a success* (step 3.1). *I am, however, solely responsible for any deficiencies that may be detected in this work* (step 3.2). (ED-AM-37)

Hyland (2004) reports that the two steps of the announcing move identified in DAs by Hong Kong students never occurred together. There is, however, a slight variation in the steps identified by Hyland (2004) and those recorded in this study. In place of 'thanking all' as one of the steps of move 3, Hyland (2004) found that, in addition to accepting responsibility of errors, Hong Kong students employed move 3 in dedicating their thesis to individuals. In the present study, students do not dedicate their theses to any person, most probably because all the dissertations from which data was drawn for the study have an entirely separate section for dedication, as the graduate brochure prescribes. However, only one writer employed move 3 to mention the significance of the study s/he conducted (i.e. *It is sincerely hoped that researchers will find the work acceptable and academically usable*).

It must be noted that not all the moves and steps described above were present together in one acknowledgement. Also, they occurred with varying frequency. Below is the dominant

generic structure of the DAs. These include moves and steps whose frequency occurrence is 50% or more in the data set.

1. Reflecting move
2. Thanking move
    a. thanking for academic support
    b. thanking for technical assistance
    c. thanking for moral support
    d. thanking for data access
    e. thanking for various forms of help

Figure 2: Dominant Move Structure of Dissertation Acknowledgements

The relatively high frequency of these moves and steps shows the importance students attach to the benefits they thank for in these moves and steps. With the exception of 'thanking for various forms of help', these moves and steps are recorded in students' DAs by several researchers (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Al-Ali, 2006; Mingwei & Yajun, 2010). Generally, the three sub-disciplines have relatively the same schematic structure for DAs. We now move to the more specific issues of frequency, textual space, and sequencing of moves in the next section.

5.2 Description of Moves

5.2.1 Frequency of Moves

One key aspect of the rhetorical organisation of DAs to consider is frequency of moves. We, first, present the frequency distribution of moves across the three disciplines in Table 2 before we proceed to discuss them.

Table 2: Frequency Occurrence of Moves

Move	Science/Maths		Guid/Counselling		Adm/Mgt		Overall Data Set	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1: Reflecting	9	45	15	75	11	55	35	58.3
2: Thanking	20	100	20	100	20	100	60	100
3: Concluding	7	35	6	30	7	35	20	33.3

As shown in Table 2, all three moves occur in the data set of all the three sub-disciplines with relative frequency. Move 2 is an obligatory move, as it occurs in all the DAs in the data set while moves 1 and 3 are optional moves for authors in all three sub-disciplines. There is also no

considerable variation in the percentage distribution of move 3 across the three sub-disciplines. The move which shows considerable variation in terms of frequency across the sub-disciplines is move 1. In general, it occurred in 35 (58.3%) of the 60 acknowledgements. The sub-discipline with the most frequent occurrence is Guidance and Counselling, in whose data set it occurs in 15 (75%) DAs. The difference of 30% between the frequency of move 1 in the Guidance and Counselling data set and Science and Mathematics Education data set, on the one hand, and of 20 % between the frequency of its occurrence Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management is relatively large. That is, DA authors in Guidance and Counselling construct move 1 in their DAs more than authors in Science and Mathematics Education or Educational Administration and Management.

Hyland and Tse (2004) report that Hong Kong students in the soft sciences (i.e. Public Administration, Business Studies, and Applied Linguistics) constructed generically more complex DAs and used a greater variety of patterns than Science and Engineering students. Hyland (2004) elaborates further that two-thirds of all reflections and closing moves in the DAs occurred in the soft disciplines. This observation is relatively supported by the fact that move 1 is less frequent in the Science and Mathematics data set than those of Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management. However, the same cannot be said in respect of move 3, the closing move.

It is worth considering the frequency distribution of the steps of move 2, the thanking move, and move 3, the concluding move, in more detail for variations across the three sub-disciplines. Table 3 shows the frequency occurrence of the steps of move 2.

Table 3: Frequency Occurrence of Steps of the Thanking Move

Step	Science/Maths		Guid/Counselling		Adm/Mgt		Overall Data Set	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2.1 God	2	10	8	40	5	25	15	25
2.2 Academic	20	100	20	100	20	100	60	100
2.3 Technical	12	60	18	90	14	70	44	73.3
2.4 Financial	3	15	4	20	3	15	10	16.7
2.5 Material	4	20	6	30	4	20	14	23.3
2.6 Moral	20	100	19	95	16	80	55	91.7
2.7 Data access	13	65	15	75	19	95	47	78.3
2.8 Authors	1	5	5	25	4	30	10	16.7
2.9 Others	14	70	9	45	9	45	32	53.3

Again, as Table 3 illustrates, all the steps of move 2 are present in all the three sub-disciplines, albeit in relative degrees of frequency. It can be observed from the table that thanking for academic support is an obligatory step of move 2 since it occurs in all 60 DAs. Also thanking for technical support, thanking for moral support and thanking for data access occur with relatively high frequencies across the three sub-disciplines, accounting for 73.3%, 91.7% and 78.3% respectively in the overall data set. The high frequency of step 2.6, thanking for moral support, in the DAs corroborates Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) finding that 97.5% of DAs by Chinese mainland students thank for moral support.

There are considerable variations in the frequency distribution of these three steps (2.3, 2.6, and 2.7) among the sub-disciplines. DA authors in Guidance and Counselling have a higher tendency to thank for technical support more than authors of the other two sub-disciplines. The difference between Guidance and Counselling and Science and Mathematics Education in the frequency distribution of this step is 30%, and 20% between Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management. On the other hand, both Science and Mathematics Education authors and Guidance and Counselling authors have a higher tendency to thank for moral support than Educational Administration and Management authors. That is, while thanking for moral support is 100% and 95% in Science and Mathematics Education and Guidance and Counselling DAs respectively, it occurs in 80% of DAs by Educational Administration and Management authors, at least 15% less than its occurrence in the other two sub-disciplines.

However, DA authors in Educational Administration and Management are more likely to thank for data access than both Science and Mathematics Education authors and Guidance and Counselling authors. That is, step 2.7, thanking for data access, occurs in Educational Administration and Management DAs 15% more than it occurs in Science and Mathematics Education and Guidance and Counselling DAs. Hyland (2004) notes the prominence of thanking for data access in DAs by Hong Kong students, comprising over half of the DA in his data set. Contrary to the findings of the present study, Hyland (2004) also observes that clerical help did not feature prominently in his data set. In our study thanking for clerical help, especially typing, featured very frequently. This difference may be due to the different socio-cultural circumstances of Ghanaian and Hong Kong university students. That is, as indicated earlier, until the twenty

first century, many Ghanaian post graduate students did not own personal computers and, as well, lacked the appropriate level of proficiency to type their own dissertations.

Hyland (2004) again reveals that two-thirds of all DAs thanking for financial and technical assistance occurred in the hard sciences. Surprisingly, in the present study, the Science and Mathematics writers record the least instance of thanking for technical assistance. This situation may, however, be understandable, given that clerical services form a greater part of what is considered technical support in the present study, and that science students are likely to be more proficient in computer literacy and technology than students in the soft disciplines.

Further, Guidance and Counselling authors are more likely to thank God in their DAs than those in the other two sub-disciplines. Between Science and Mathematics Education and Educational Administration and Management authors, the latter tend to thank God in their DAs more often. It is difficult to hazard any interpretation for this verbal behaviour.

Concerning steps 2.8, thanking previous authors, and 2.9, thanking for other forms of help, there is no considerable difference between DA authors in Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management. However, the fact that there is only one occurrence of the thanking previous authors step in the Science and Mathematics Education data set shows that authors in that discipline are less likely to construct this step in their DAs. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, Science and Mathematics Education authors are more likely to include thanking for other forms of help step in their DAs than the other two disciplines.

In sum, the general picture regarding the frequency of the steps under the thanking moves is that relatively many Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management writers are more likely to include many steps in their DAs than Science and Mathematics Education writers. Table 4 proceeds to illustrate the frequency occurrence of the steps of move 3.

Table 4: Frequency Occurrence of Steps of the Concluding Move

Step		**Science/Maths**		**Guid/Counselling**		**Adm/Mgt**		**Overall Data Set**	
		N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
3.1	Thanking all	5	25	0	0	6	30	15	25
3.2	Accepting Responsibility	1	5	6	30	2	10	9	15

Table 4 shows that there is no significant variation in the frequency occurrence of step 3.1 in the Science and Mathematics Education and Educational Administration and Management data set. This step does not occur in DAs produced by authors in Guidance and Counselling. On the other hand, step 3.2 records the highest frequency in the Guidance and Counselling data set, in which it occurs 20% more than the Educational Administration and Management data set and 25% more than its occurrence in the Science and Mathematics Education data set.

On the whole, the discussion in this section has revealed that concerning the frequency occurrence of the three moves and the steps of the thanking move, more Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management DA writers include many rhetorical patterns in their DAs than Science and Mathematics Education writers do. On the other hand, both Science and Mathematics Education and Educational Administration and Management authors include more patterns in their concluding move than Guidance and Counselling writers do. The next section proceeds to discuss the textual space allocated to the three major moves.

5.2.2 Textual Space Allocated to Moves

Table 5 presents the frequency distribution of textual space in terms of average number of words allocated to the three moves across sub-disciplines.

Table 5: Textual Space of Moves in terms of Average number of words

Move	Science/Maths	Guid/Counselling	Adm/Mgt	Overall Data Set
1: Reflecting move	23	22	28	24
2: Thanking move	159	198	129	160
3: Concluding move	21	14	27	22

Table 5 shows that there is no considerable difference among the three sub-disciplines in relation to the degree of prominence they assign the various moves. In all the sub-disciplines, move 2 is most prominent and thus is assigned more textual space than moves 1 and 3. Move 1 is next in

prominence and in the overall data set, it accounts for 24 average number of words, which is only two words more than the textual space allocated to move 3 in the data set. As far as textual space is concerned, there seems not to be significant sub-disciplinary variations in the construction of DAs among Ghanaian Education students.

5.2.3 Sequencing of Moves

Table 6 shows the frequency distribution of the preference for sequencing of the moves in the DAs in the data set.

Table 6: Frequency Distribution of Sequencing of Moves

Move	Science/Maths		Guid/Counselling		Adm/Mgt		Overall Data Set	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1>2>3	3	15	5	25	3	15	11	18.3
1>2	6	30	10	50	8	40	24	40
2>3	4	20	1	5	4	20	9	15
2	7	35	4	20	5	25	16	26.7

As shown in Table 6, Education DA authors prefer a linear move structure. It also reveals that authors relatively prefer a move 1 and 2 combination. Though the choice of move 2 only is more frequent than the combination of move 1 and 2 in the Science and Mathematics Education DAs, this difference is not much. For Guidance and Counselling authors, the least preferred pattern is 2>3 while for Science and Mathematics and Educational Administration and Management authors, the least preferred pattern is 1>2>3. Generally, there is more consistency in the percentage distribution of the move patterns between the Science and Mathematics Education and Educational Administration and Management data sets than between Guidance and Counselling and these other two sub-disciplines.

We now proceed to consider the sequencing of the steps of moves 2 and 3 in some detail (move 1 is made up of only one step). The steps of move 2 do not always follow a regular logical pattern, but the tendency is for them to follow the pattern presented in Figure 3.

Thanking God
Thanking for academic support
Thanking for technical support

Thanking for financial, material, and moral support
Thanking for data
Thanking previous authors
Thanking for various forms of help

Figure 3: Sequencing of Thanking Move

As has been noted above, not all the DAs in the data set have a linear sequencing of the steps of move 2 as has been neatly presented in Figure 3. In a few instances, some of the steps are combined in one sentence. Typical combinations normally comprise academic and moral support (especially when the dissertation supervisor is the thankee, e.g. *... I acknowledge the special encouragement given me by my supervisor, XXXX, and his invaluable comments given on the strengths and weaknesses of the materials*), moral and material support (e.g. *To the Director ... and all my colleagues at the Division, I wish to express my profound gratitude to you all, for support and encouragement, especially, in providing me with the necessary documents ...*), and material, academic and moral support (e.g. *I wish to thank XXXX for his reading materials, suggestions and encouragement*). Mingwei and Yajun (2010) report a more profound and characteristically irregular patterning of DAs among Chinese mainland MA students.

An obvious interpretation of this phenomenon in our data set is that many students organised the thanking move according to the prominence of the thankees rather than the kind of assistance that is received. This observation is supported by the fact that steps of move 2 are often arranged cyclically (e.g. thanking for technical assistance + thanking for moral/material support + thanking for technical assistance), with each thanking unit dedicated to a different thankee. Regarding the steps of the concluding move, in most cases, only one is present, but when both occur together, the tendency is for step 3.1 (thanking all) to be placed first.

6 Conclusion and Implications

This study has explored the rhetorical organisation of DAs written by Ghanaian master students of Education at UCC. The interest of the study was to ascertain the extent to which intra-disciplinarity affects the writing of DAs. To accomplish this task, the analysis focused on the generic structure of DAs, frequency occurrence of moves, textual space allocated to moves, and sequencing of moves.

The study reveals that DAs in the data set generally followed a three move-structure, comprising an obligatory thanking move framed by an optional reflecting move and an optional concluding move. There is relatively the same degree of preference for the three moves across sub-disciplines. An examination of the frequency of the steps of the thanking move, however, revealed some differences across the sub-disciplines. Generally, it was found that Guidance and Counselling and Educational Administration and Management students more than Science and Mathematics Education students included many rhetorical patterns in their DAs, particularly with reference to the three-move components and the steps of the thanking move. On the other hand, the concluding move in Guidance and Counselling DAs was realised by only one step, accepting responsibility of error, while many of the DAs of students of the other two sub-disciplines consisted of two steps. It was also found that students generally prefer a linear structure in sequencing moves: 1>2>3. Further, the thanking move was allocated much textual space across all sub-disciplines, with very little sub-disciplinary variation in the textual space allocated to the three moves across the sub-disciplines.

Given the above findings, the present study has some implications. First, it contributes to studies on disciplinarity in student academic writing, in general, and DA writing, in particular. The study has demonstrated that subtle variations could exist in the socio-rhetoric of student academic writing. In addition, there is the need to further explore sub-disciplinary variations in DAs in other disciplines and in other socio-cultural contexts. Admittedly, by focusing on only one discipline, the present study is limited in scope and the findings reported here can be supported by further exploration across disciplines that have not featured in the scholarship on DAs. Further research is also needed to examine the possible influence of time variation on the rhetorical organisation of postgraduate DAs in Ghanaian universities. These studies will broaden the scholarship on the construction of DAs by graduate students in general.

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