

Hyland Three Tier Structure Of Acknowledgement: Does It Reflect Malaysian Or American University Students?

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the postgraduate dissertations acknowledgement has become the center of empirical study among linguistics. The argument is that these dissertation acknowledgements portray one of the most significant communicative personal tools for postgraduate students to express their gratitude upon completion of their dissertation. This study is a qualitative study using a sample of 4 Masters Theses/Dissertations acknowledgements which have been selected randomly from Google Scholars and Science Direct. The study utilizes three generic tier Hyland's structure of acknowledgement to make comparison between dissertation acknowledgements of Malaysian and American postgraduate university students. Findings indicate that Malaysian postgraduates' students have the tendency to begin their acknowledgement by "Thanking God" which is completely absence among the students from American universities' dissertation acknowledgement. Additionally, Malaysian students follow the sequence of Hyland's three tier of acknowledgment. However, both groups exhibit similarities of the Hyland's model for the "Thanking Move" but the students from American universities omit Step 3 of the Hyland "Thanking for resources". Most importantly, both students' acknowledgements from American universities include "Reflective Move" which considered as optional in the Hyland's model. The main contribution of this study is that dissertation acknowledgement reflects conviction, moral obligation, modesty, and responsibilities on the part of the author as an academic scholar. Hence, the study in this area should not be taken for granted by linguistics researchers.

Keywords: Hyland, Acknowledgement, Postgraduate dissertation, Language and linguistic.

INTRODUCTION

For the past few decades, postgraduate academic writing has become the centre of empirical study among the linguistics. One of the areas of studies is pertaining to generic structure of the PhDs' and Masters' dissertations and theses acknowledgements. Acknowledgements in postgraduate theses and dissertation review as an essential part for the students in demonstrating their language ability and credibility as well as expressing their appreciation to all the people involved in assisting them to complete their research study. This is evident by Scrivener (2009) who claimed that acknowledgement is a section of an expression of intellectual or professional personal appreciation in return for assistance and debt granted both emotionally and physically. In accordance with this, Ali (2006) stated that:

"Acknowledgements in theses and dissertation are part of the academic practice that enables students to show the gratitude from the help received from others during the process of writing"

However, Hyland (2004) claimed that the study on acknowledgement section which is considered as the most personal communicative tool as compared to the others have been more often than not being ignored by the linguistic researchers. In accordance with this, Scrivener (2009) emphasized that, the study of academic acknowledgements is a new area of study especially in the academic discourse that needs to be further explored. Therefore, this study attempts to investigate and analyze the master's and theses/dissertation acknowledgements written by Malaysian and American postgraduate university students based on Hyland Three Tier Structure of Acknowledgement. Further, it would be interesting to examine especially the students from Malaysian university to be compared with those from American university since English is considered as a second language for Malaysian students and as such, they need to be aware and careful when writing their acknowledgement section (Swales & Feak, 2000).

Objective of the study

There are several objectives, which were identified for the purpose of this study. The objectives are as follows:

- i. To analyze the variations of Masters Theses/Dissertation acknowledgements of Malaysian and American postgraduate university students based on the Hyland three generic structure of acknowledgement
- ii. To identify the differences and similarities between Malaysian and American university students' generic structure of Masters Theses/Dissertations acknowledgements.
- iii. To identify the Masters Theses/Dissertations acknowledgement(s) that reflects Hyland generic structure of acknowledgement.

Research question

In accordance to the above objectives three research questions were developed. The research questions are:

- i. What are the variations of Masters Theses/Dissertation acknowledgement(s) of Malaysian and American postgraduate university students?
- ii. Are there any differences/ similarities between Masters Malaysian and American Postgraduate university students' Theses and Dissertation acknowledgement(s)?
- iii. Which Masters Theses/Dissertation acknowledgement(s) reflect Hyland Generic Structure of acknowledgement?

Methodology

In gathering the data, 4 Masters Theses/Dissertations acknowledgements have been selected randomly from Google Scholars and Science Direct as samples for this study.

Two Masters Malaysian postgraduate students' theses/dissertation acknowledgements were selected and analyzed. The first thesis/dissertation acknowledgement was written by postgraduate student from Faculty of Education, Universiti Teknologi MARA and the latter was written by postgraduate student from Faculty of Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia.

On the other hand, for sample from American Universities, the first thesis/dissertation was written by postgraduate student, Master of Science Degree from University of Winconsin-Stout. The second thesis/dissertation acknowledgement was written by postgraduate student, Masters of Arts from Georgetown University.

These theses/dissertations acknowledgements were analyzed and examined based on Hyland Three Generic Structure. The analysis focused especially on the Moves and Steps as recommended by Hyland.

Hyland (2004), in his study on the generic structure of acknowledgement has identified three tier structures of student acknowledgements namely Reflecting Move (optional), the main Thanking Move and Announcing Move (optional). These three moves are further divided into sub-units or steps. The details of the Moves and steps are as illustrated in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Hyland three tier structure of acknowledgement

1. Move 1: Reflecting Move	Introspective comment on the writer's research experience
2. Move 2: Thanking Move 2.1: Presenting Participants 2.2: Thanking for academic assistance 2.3: Thanking resources 2.4 : Thanking for Moral Support	Mapping credit to individuals and institutions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing those to be thanked • Thanks for intellectual support, ideas, analyses feedback, etc. • Thanks for data access, clerical, technical and financial support • Thanks for encouragement, friendship, sympathy, patience, etc.
3. Move 3: Announcing Move 3. 1: Accepting responsibility 3. 2 : Dedicating the thesis	Public statement of responsibility and inspiration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An assertion of authorial responsibilities for flaws or errors. • A formal dedication of the thesis to an individual(s)

Results and Analysis

Table 2. The Moves, Steps and the Ordering of Moves and Steps for Malaysian Postgraduate Universities Students (MS1&MS2) and American Postgraduate Universities Students (AS1&AS2) theses/dissertation acknowledgements; Hyland Generic Structure

	Move 1	Move 2				Move 3		Thanking God	Ordering of Moves and Steps
		2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2		
MS 1	X	X	/	/	/	X	X	/	Thanking God, (2.3),(2.2), (2.4),
MS 2	X	X	/	/	/	X	X	/	Thanking God, (2.2),(2.3),(2.4)
AS 1	/	/	/	X	/	X	X	X	(1), (2.1), (2.4),(2.2)
AS2	/	/	/	X	/	X	X	X	(1),(2.1),(2.4),(2.2)

Table 2 illustrates the Moves, Steps and ordering of Moves and Steps of four postgraduates' theses/dissertations acknowledgements (MS1, MS2, AS1 and AS2). Based on the table, it is found that both Malaysian university postgraduate Masters theses/dissertations acknowledgements are similar in terms of Moves and Steps but different in terms of ordering.

MS 1: Thanking God, (2.3), (2.2), (2.4)

MS 2: Thanking God, (2.2), (2.3), (2.4)

On the contrary, for the American universities postgraduates Masters theses/dissertation acknowledgements they are similar in Moves, Steps and ordering.

AS 1: (1), (2.1), (2.4), (2.2)

AS2: (1), (2.1), (2.4), (2.2)

In comparing between the Malaysian and American universities, both postgraduates' acknowledgements are different in terms of Moves, Steps and ordering.

However, for Malaysian universities postgraduates, in terms of the ordering they begin the acknowledgement by "Thanking God" which is absence in the Hyland three generic structures and totally unavailable in the students from American universities Masters theses/dissertation acknowledgements; followed by Step 2.2 (thanking for academic assistance) or 2.3 (thanking for resources) and 2.4 (thanking for moral support), which is quite consistent and follow similar sequence with the main obligatory move of Hyland "Thanking Move".

MS 1: Thanking God, (2.3), (2.2), (2.4)

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious and the Merciful who has given me the endless strength, endurance and courage to complete this M.Ed. TESL Programme."

MS 2: Thanking God, (2.2), (2.3), (2.4)

"First and foremost, my utmost gratitude goes to God Almighty for His kindness in blessing me with good health, strength and most importantly endurance to successfully complete my work on time."

On the other hand, for American universities postgraduates' students, they begin the acknowledgements with Move 1 (Introspective comment on the writer's research experience), Move 2 Step 1 (presenting participants), Move 2 Step 4 (thanking for moral support), Move 2 Step 2 (thanking for academic assistance) in which it is quite consistent with Hyland Move 1 and Move 2.

AS 1: (1), (2.1), (2.4), (2.2)

AS2: (1), (2.1), (2.4), (2.2)

In terms of Moves and Steps, it is found that students from Malaysian universities omit reflective move in their acknowledgements as compared to acknowledgements written by students from American universities. In addition, it is also identified that for the "Thanking Move" students from Malaysian universities further used "Step 3" which is thanking for resources such as to the financial support and extending gratitude to the school and students for the information and data provided that help the researcher completed the study.

MS 1: Thanking God, (2.3), (2.2), (2.4)

"I would like to convey my utmost appreciation to the present Dean for Faculty of Education Dr. Zainab Haji Mohd. Noor and the former Dean, Professor Dr. Hazadiah Mohd. Dahan; for enabling me to get a sponsorship for my studies in UiTM under the UiTM Young Lecturer's Scheme."

MS 2: Thanking God, (2.2), (2.3), (2.4)

"I am deeply grateful to the Principal of SMK Hamid Khan for granting me permission to carry out this study in school. I am also grateful to my 42 students who were willing to participate in this study. My special thanks also goes to the ten students who participated in the pilot study. All these students have given me useful insights in language learning."

Similarly, it is also found that all the four Masters theses/dissertations acknowledgements do not consist of Move 3 “Announcing Move” (optional), but consist of Move 2 Step 2 (thanking for academic assistance) and Move 2 Step 4(thanking for moral support). For “Thanking for Academic Assistance”, it is found that both students from American universities expressed their gratitude to their supervisor at the concluding paragraph and the supervisors are the last person that they expressed their gratitude to, which is contrasted to the students from the Malaysian universities.

AS 1: (1), (2.1), (2.4), **(2.2)**

AS2: (1), (2.1), (2.4), **(2.2)**

MS 1: Thanking God, (2.3), **(2.2)**, (2.4)

MS 2: Thanking God, **(2.2)**, (2.3), (2.4)

As for the “Thanking for moral support”, it is identified that the focus group such as parents, family, spouse, friends and colleagues are the parties that the students thanked for in this step in all the acknowledgements.

Discussion

Basically, this study attempts to address the differences and similarities between students from Malaysian universities and American universities by using Hyland three-tier structure of acknowledgement. Based on the analysis on the finding, one of the most distinct features between the different samples of acknowledgements (Malaysian and American universities students) is that the acknowledgements of Malaysian universities students have “Thanking God” step. According to Ali (2006), the “Thanking God” which occupy in students’ acknowledgements symbolized the authors attitude, believe, and devotion towards their religion.

In addition, the acknowledgements of Malaysian universities students ignored Move 1 (Reflective Move) and Move 3 (Announcing Move) which is regarded as optional by Hyland (2004) in his study on generic structures of theses/dissertation acknowledgement. On the other hand, both groups also exhibit similarities of the Hyland for the “Thanking Move” but the students from American universities omit Step 3 of the Hyland “Thanking for resources”. Finally, yet importantly, both students’ acknowledgements from American universities include “Reflective Move” which Hyland considered as optional.

Conclusion

Acknowledgement represents complicated lexical personal communication expression. It plays a significant role as a way of showing appreciation and gratitude to those relevant parties who have assisted the authors directly or indirectly. It reflects moral obligation, modesty and responsibilities on the part of the author as an academic scholar. Therefore, it should not be taken for granted and by the postgraduate theses and dissertation writers. As suggested by Hyland (2004), it is recommended that more research should be conducted to take into account other factors such as gender, age, social and cultural aspects in order to enrich the literature and obtain significant evidence in the area of academic discourse.

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