

Naming in Master's Thesis Acknowledgements within Two Ghanaian University Departments

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Abstract

Naming practices have been studied traditionally in non-academic contexts. Guided mainly by Brown and Gilman's (1961) influential study, the present study examines the naming practices adopted by postgraduate students in a Ghanaian university, when thanking addressees in their thesis acknowledgement sections.

The qualitative content analysis approach was applied to 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. 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 factors as social distance, politeness, and solidarity. These findings contribute to the scholarship on acknowledgements in thesis, the interface between onomastics and academic writing as well as research writing pedagogy for postgraduate students.

Key words: address terms, Ghana, naming practices, postgraduate students, thesis acknowledgement

Introduction

Naming practices, in general, and address terms, in particular, constitute undoubtedly an important verbal behaviour among humans. The commonest set of studies on naming has focused on familial settings. Such studies include Evans-Pritchard's (1948) on naming practices among the Nuer along the Nile in Egypt. Address terms have not only been largely examined in several socio-cultural settings (e.g. Goodenough, 1965; Fang & Heng, 1983; Fitch, 1991; Aceto, 2002), following the most frequently mentioned study by Brown and Gilman's (1960) work, but also been studied in social institutions and practices such as politics (Jaworski & Galasinski, 2000; Fetzer & Bull, 2004), and religion (Sequeira, 1993; Dzameshie, 1997; Wharry, 2003). Address forms have been studied in different languages (see, for example, Bates & Benigni, 1975; Brown & Gilman, 1960; Brown & Ford, 1961; Chandrasekhar, 1970; Cintra, 1972; Paulston, 1976; Ostor, 1982; Oyetade, 1995).

Admittedly, there are various studies that have dealt with communication in academic settings, focusing on such notable academic genres as research articles (e.g. Swales, 1990, 2004; Hyland, 2000), dissertations/theses (e.g. Parry, 1998), lectures (e.g. Gomez & Fortuno, 2005), conference proceedings (Ventola, Shalom & Thompson (2002), and thesis defence (Recki, 2005; Don & Izadi, 2011).

Yet, there have not been a corresponding number of studies on naming practices in these academic genres. There are, as far as we know, a limited number of studies on naming practices and, for that matter, address terms in academic settings (e.g. Dickey, 1997; Li, 1997; Kiesling, 1998; Afful, 2006, 2010). Hyland's (2003, 2004) studies of thesis acknowledgements draw tangential attention to naming (reference terms and address terms).

In what follows, we present the aim of the study in order to provide a sense of direction for the present research. We then review the literature on naming on one hand and the literature on acknowledgement on the other hand and attempt to synthesise the two sets of studies. The next section is devoted to a description of the methodology and analytical framework of the study. The analysis and discussion of data then follows, with the conclusion and implications closing the research.

Aim of the Study

Studies on acknowledgements in research articles (RAs) and theses/dissertations have become recognizably important in recent times. Earlier, Caesar (1992) and Cronin (1995) had observed that acknowledgements were included in over half of all published RAs and virtually in all those in the sciences (McCain, 1991). Several years later, and influenced by this observation, Hyland (2003, 2004) examined this assertion in relation to dissertation/thesis acknowledgements (DAs/TAs). However, none of these studies, as far as we know, has explicitly explored naming practices in TAs. The present study, therefore, seeks to examine names used by postgraduate students of Department of English and Department of French at the University of Cape Coast in designating their thankees in their TAs. To guide the study, the following research questions are asked:

- (i) What categories of thankees do postgraduate students in the two departments (English and French) acknowledge in their thesis acknowledgements?
- (ii) What names do postgraduate students in the two selected departments use in addressing their thankees in their TA texts?
- (iii) What account for the names used by postgraduate students in addressing their thankees in their thesis acknowledgements?

This section reviews the pertinent literature on the two related verbal behaviours (naming and acknowledgement) in order to provide a clear conceptual background to the study and to enhance the analysis and discussion of the data collected.

Naming Practices/Address Terms

Naming is part of every culture and names are very important to the bearer and giver. Among some societies, names are determined according to specific rules. In several African societies, children are given names through an elaborate ritual performance (Oyetade, 1975).

Among the Akan (a dominant ethnic group in Ghana), names are taken from events which happen during the pregnancy of the mother or shortly after the birth of the child (Agyekum, 2006). Also Ewes in Ghana, for example, children obtain their names from totems and family trees of their parents (Atakpa, 1987). In general, in Ghana, several studies conducted by scholars among the different ethnolinguistic groups such as the Akan (Afful, 1998; Mensah, 2005; Obeng-Gyasi, 1997, 1998; Agyekum, 2003), Ga (Dakubu, 1981), Ewe (Egblewogbe, 1983), Nzema (Arde-Kwodwo, 2006), and Kokomba (Bisilki, 2011) have pointed to the influence of several socio-cultural factors on naming practices.

At this point, it is worth noting that address terms generally emanate from the naming practices of a speech community. In everyday communication, people are named, referred to or addressed when spoken or written to. Oyetade (1995) defines address terms as the term used to designate a person in a dyadic one-on-one interactive encounter. In the contemporary world where technology is greatly influencing various human endeavours, Oyetade's (*ibid*) definition requires modification to include virtual communities. Dickey (1997) explains that 'reference term', is often used without the person being designated present. Afful (2007) acknowledges that reference terms and address terms may have the same human referent. Afful (e.g. 1998, 2006, 2010) has variously and extensively investigated address terms in Ghana. The findings in Afful's studies have largely confirmed the findings of earlier studies such as Gu (1990) and Akindele (1993) that the choice of address forms is influenced by socio-cultural indices such as age, relationship, social status, solidarity and politeness.

In academic publications writers do name or refer to others, particularly in their acknowledgements. 'Terms of address', as used in this study, refers to names used by students variously seen as 'acknowledgers' or 'thankers' (e.g. Al-Ali, 2010) for their 'acknowledgees' or 'thankees'; that is, the persons being thanked. In the present study, the use of 'naming' in master's thesis acknowledgements takes account of both 'reference term' and 'address term'.

Acknowledgements in Academic Publications

Acknowledgements in academic publications are written forms of the speech act of thanking. Searle (1969) states that thanking is an expressive illocutionary act; that is, the speaker expresses gratitude to the hearer for his or her prior action that is beneficial to the speaker. Acknowledgements are intended to make the recipient feel good; that is, they recognize the positive face of the hearer.

Most cultures emphasise acknowledgment or thanking. It is, thus, a common verbal behaviour which enables a person to show his or her indebtedness to the thinker for performing an act which the thinker deems useful. It is a social verbal behaviour, failure of which may receive a sanction or rebuke. Bach and Harnish (1979) add that a genuine feeling of gratitude must meet social expectations.

Unsurprisingly, as a key human behaviour, acknowledgements appear in academic writings such as research articles, theses and dissertations. Cronin (1995) holds the view that acknowledgements are meant to express gratitude for a mixture of personal, moral, financial, technical, intellectual, and conceptual support provided by or received from institutions, agencies, peers, mentors, academics, family members, and experimental subjects. Swales and Feak (2000) are also of the view that the acknowledgement section is not only a display of gratitude but also an opportunity for the writer to show that he or she is a member of the academic community and has benefited from that membership and, therefore, establishes a credible writer ethos. In the view of Hyland (2003), completing a thesis is an exacting task of intimidating length. Thesis acknowledgements are presented through the written mode to show its relative formal nature. Moreover, TAs deal with a multitude of thanked addressees in a simultaneous fashion.

Several scholars have examined acknowledgements from cross-cultural, linguistic, rhetorical, and generic perspectives. Notable among them are Hyland (2003 & 2004), Hyland and Tse (2004), Nkemele (2006), Al-Ali (2010), Zhang and Jiang (2010), Cheng (2012), Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), and Afful (2016). Some studies on TAs (e.g. Hyland, 2003; Hyland & Tse, 2004) have focussed on the schematic organisation components and their linguistic features in acknowledgement texts. Cheng (2012) used a Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) approach to discuss the relationship between transitivity and thematic progression in a corpus of 15 acknowledgements in textbooks. She claimed that textbook acknowledgements have specific generic structures which reveal different features in terms of transitivity and thematic progression. She stated that the generic features are used by authors to fulfil their communicative purposes. Cheng's findings, thus, support Halliday's (1978) assertion that language is 'a social semiotic'.

Some studies have also been undertaken from socio-cultural (e.g. Nkemele, 2006; Al-Ali, 2010) and cross-cultural (e.g. Giannoni's 2002) perspectives. From a socio-cultural perspective, Nkemele found that students tended to use verbose and ornamental linguistic expressions in expressing gratitude. He concludes that the generic and linguistic patterning of DAs by Cameroonian students is greatly influenced by reverence for age and the community-centred culture of Africa. Also, Al-Ali's (2010) study of a larger corpus of 100 Arabic acknowledgements intimated that students expressed gratitude to Allah (God) and asked for his blessings for the addressees.

The writers do employ certain preferred address forms, social honorifics, and gratitude expression options to respond to different audiences. Giannoni's (2002) study on the acknowledgement texts written by English and Italian students revealed the socio-rhetorical and cultural generic variations such as generic staging and authorial responsibility that shape the writers' rhetorical preferences. Cheng (2012) also used a similar method to compare the acknowledgement texts written by Taiwanese and North American Students. She, however, noted that both groups of students vary in their arrangements of the addressees, thereby revealing their socio-cultural perceptions of expressing gratitude.

It is clear that several scholars have examined acknowledgement texts, using different approaches such as generic, socio-cultural, cross-linguistic, and linguistic perspectives. Following the socio-cultural perspective, the current study draws on Ghanaian onomastics (that is, naming practices) in order to show how distinct Ghanaian students present their DAs/TAs.

Methodology and Data Set

The study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach. This approach was deemed appropriate as it enabled an in-depth analysis of the naming practices we were interested in. This approach was applied to a corpus of 16 Masters' TAs written by postgraduate students from the Departments of English and French at the Faculty of Arts of the College of Humanities in University of Cape Coast between 1998 and 2010. Given that the researchers of the present study are members of the Department of English and the Department of French, it was not difficult accessing the theses across both departments. Moreover, these departments are two of the oldest departments at UCC since the inception of UCC in 1962. Interestingly, while the acknowledgement sections from the theses in the Department of English were in English, those from the Department of French were originally in French. For the purpose of the present study, those in French were translated into English. The study employed Hyland's (2004) three-move pattern (reflecting, thanking, and announcing moves) to help classify the addressees. The coding system for both corpora involved EA 1 up to EA 8 for the acknowledgement sections found in theses submitted to the Department of English and FE 1 up to FA8 were used for the acknowledgement sections found in the master's theses submitted to the Department of French.

Analysis and Discussion

In order to examine the names used in the TAs, we now identify the categories of thankers in the texts. Hence, the analysis of the data revealed that the thanked addressees can be grouped into eight: (i) ‘God’ (refers to supernatural entity), (ii) ‘supervisors’ (refers to the theses supervisors) (iii) ‘lecturers’ (refers to lecturers of the faculties and other universities); (iv) ‘other faculty members’ (refers to heads of departments, dean of Faculties and faculty officer); (v) ‘family members’ (refers to spouse, children, parents, siblings etc.); (vi) ‘colleagues/friends’ (vii) ‘participants’ (refers to informants or interviewees and those who helped in getting the participants) and (ix) ‘others’ (refer to anyone who does not fit into any of the categories above). Table 1 summarises the distribution of the occurrences of these categories.

Table 1: Categories of Thankees in TAs

Categories	English		French		Total
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	
Category 1. God	5 62.5		4 50		9
Category 2. Supervisors	8 100		5 62.5		13
Category 3. Lecturers	5 62.5		4 50		9
Category 4. Other Faculty	5 62.5		3 37.5		8
Category 5. Family Members	3 37.5		3 37.5		6
Category 6. Colleagues/Friends	5 62.5		5 62.5		10
Category 7. Participants	5 62.5		-		5
Category 8. Others	8	100	8	100	16

As can be seen in Table 1, among the students of English, the supervisors were mentioned always (100%). On the other hand, among the students of French supervisors were mentioned 62.5%; surprisingly, it was ‘others’ that received 100%. No ‘participants’ received mention for students in the Department of French.

For the students of French, their lack of 100% mention of thanks for their supervisors may stem from their dissatisfaction with the latter's support for their academic work. This may also be explained in terms of the general perception among French students at UCC that French is a more difficult discipline than English; thus, many students are unable to obtain high grades. Further, the fact that God was the second most frequently thanked entity is important, as it shows the relative importance students paid to God in their research and the production of their theses. This differs though from Al-Ali's (2010) work, which indicates the obligatory nature of making reference to 'Allah' (God). The lack of mention of 'Allah' in the present data set may be attributed to either the small sample size, as we observed that there are a respectable number of Muslim students on UCC campus or the perceived view that Ghana is a Christian country. It is also interesting to note that the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Cape Coast forbids students from making any references to any supreme being or deity in writing the acknowledgements section.

A further interesting observation from the table concerns the categories themselves which differ from other studies in different contexts. No institution or group was mentioned. This may attest to the highly individualistic nature of Humanities disciplines, as argued by Becher (1989). In other studies such as Hyland (2003, 2004), it was noted that there are institutions such as funding organizations and laboratories, especially, for the Science disciplines, which are recognized by the thankers.

Naming Practices and Reasons for Use in Thesis Acknowledgments

Names used to refer to the categories of thankees were identified as follows: *title plus full name*, *first name plus last name*, *title plus last name*, *first name*, *honorifics* and *kinship terms*. These names are discussed according to the order in which they are presented in Table 1. Personal names for the various categories of thankees used in the data are changed and pseudonyms used to ensure anonymity.

God

This category of thankees occurred 56.25 percent of all the 16 TAs analysed. It normally occupied the first position in the corpus whenever it was mentioned, as compared to the other categories, except in few cases where it occurred at the last or in the middle position. Some extracts from the corpora illustrate this:

Extract 1

To begin with, I must, first, express my gratitude to the Almighty God for his love protection and for making it possible for me to complete this research.
(EA 1)

Extract 2

Above all, to God who has made all things possible, I render glory and thanks.

(EA 2)

Extract 3

I thank the Almighty Jehovah for His guidance and protection during my quest for knowledge.

(FA 6)

In acknowledging the addressee in the texts, students expressed their gratitude to God for His protection, love, guidance, and favour for making the writing of the theses and completion of their MPhil programme possible. This is similar to Philippine MA thesis acknowledgements, where usually 'Jesus Christ' was thanked due to the majority of people in the Philippines being Catholic. (Zhang, 2010) Similarly, Al-Ali's (2010) study indicates that Arabic writers show gratitude and praise to Allah (God). Interestingly, the allusion to 'Allah' in Arabic contexts, as evidenced in Al-Ali (2010), is instantiated in two moves: 'Opening' and 'Praising and Thanking'. The Opening move which occurred 25%, in Swalesian terms, involves four steps: Qur'anic verse, Prophetic saying, Prayers on the Prophet, and Invocation. The second move was linguistically encoded as 'Praise be to Allah' and 'Thanks be to Allah' and these tended to be formulaic.

The data analysed showed that the students referred to God by different names such as 'God', 'Almighty God', 'Almighty Jehovah', and 'Lord', among Christians on one hand and 'Allah' on the other hand. The choice of these names clearly indicates the supremacy of God and the students' relationship with Him. The finding in the present work affirms the view in other studies that God is active in the affairs of humans and should be acknowledged. Hence, acknowledging God in TAs reveals the students' belief in God and the role God played in their academic life, especially in completing the thesis.

Supervisors

The supervisor category refers to the principal and co-supervisors of the theses. This category was obligatory in the texts written by students from the Department of English though the same could not be said of the French students. The extracts below illustrate the expressions of some of the students:

Extract 4

I wish to express my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. M. N. Tachie-Menson and Prof. T. O. Mason. Their enthusiasm, guidance and useful comments and suggestions enabled me to successfully complete this thesis.

(EA 4)

Extract 5

Neither shall I forget my ...and supervisor Prof. W. S. Bosiwah for his motivation and invaluable guidance, constructive criticism, suggestions and encouragement which inspired me throughout this research.

(EA 6)

The excerpts above show that most of the students recognised the roles played by their supervisors and so acknowledged them accordingly. That is, most of the students expressed their appreciation to their thesis supervisors for their scholarly influence and contributions of various kinds such as shaping the theses through their ideas and insights, providing books and other materials, and offering useful comments.

It also reveals a rich mixture of personal, moral, intellectual stimulation provided by intellectuals and conceptual support received from members of the discourse community (Al-Ali, 2010). The corpus showed that students consistently referred to the supervisors with their academic titles ('Prof' and 'Dr') and other social honorifics (such as 'Mr.', 'Mrs' etc), followed by their full names. Thus, none of the supervisors was mentioned without a title. Neither was any supervisor addressed by relational social honorifics such as 'father', 'sheik', 'teacher', and 'mentor', as reported in Al-Ali (2010).

Using title plus full names (TFNs) for the supervisors revealed the social relationship between the students and the world of academia. It, therefore, signals the distant relationship between the students and their supervisors. In the view of Holms (2008), using 'title plus last name' or 'title plus full names' signifies social distance and negative politeness. It, thus, implies that the relationship between students and their supervisors in the present study is distant. Hence, the choice of these names by students to refer to their supervisors can be said to be influenced by the status of the supervisors and the institutionally conferred power they hold in the academia.

Other Lecturers

Students showed appreciation for all kinds of assistance received from lecturers from their faculties and other institutions. This assistance comprises proof reading and editing, tuition, guidance, encouragements, analyses, as well as providing books and moral support. This is evident from the extracts below:

Extract 6

I am grateful to all the other lecturers in the Department of English, UCC: Dr C.A. Amihere; Mr E.A.T. Ghunney, Mr. Abakah, and Prof. Naana Owusu-Bempah for their inspiring work, tuition, and assistance given me.
(EA 8)

Extract 7

Special thanks to all lecturers at the Department of French, University of Cape Coast for their key roles in shaping my life intellectually.
(FA 3)

The data showed that the names used by the students to address lecturers were similar to the names used for the supervisors. For example, they used names such as title ('Prof', 'Doctor', 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', etc.), followed by full names: Prof. plus full name (*Prof. N.N. Kwofie*), Dr. plus full name (*Dr. C.A. Amihere*), Mr. plus full name (*Mr. E.A.T. Ghunney*). The use of title plus full names, as noted above, signals distant relationship between students and their respective lecturers.

This is also as a result of the position of the lecturers in academia. Peng (2012) also noted that intellectuals in Chinese universities are usually addressed by students in their TAs either by their professional titles such as *jiaoshuo* (professor) or simply *laoshi* (teacher). However, addressing the thanked addressees by the term *shifu* (my master) or *a'yi* (ma'ma) shows the level of their contributions to the research work and using title to address supervisors is out of respect and formality. In reference to Holms (1995, 2008), we can say that students' choice of these names to refer to their lecturers indicates a distant relationship and shows negative politeness.

Additionally, the references to several lecturers apart from the supervisor/s evokes Zhang's (2012) name-dropping of people who may have had only a marginal contribution to the development of the thesis in the Chinese and Philippine English data. In agreement with Zhang, we argue this name-dropping may be a rhetorical device to win the protection of respected lecturers in either the department or the faculty.

We also observed that some acknowledgers used phrases such as ‘all lecturers’ or ‘all other lecturers’. The use of these reference terms could be due to either space constraint or their relative unimportance in the work.

Other Members of the Faculty

This category includes deans of faculty, heads of departments, and other faculty officers. That is, the data showed that students recognised the roles played by these people towards their studies at the university. This is evident by the following extracts from the corpora:

Extract 8

We equally acknowledge Professor D. F. Quarshigah, the Head of the Department of French and also a co-supervisor of this project work, for his suggestions and words of encouragement.

Extract 9

Our special acknowledgement, sincerely from our heart, goes to Professor G.S. Baidoo, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

Most of the students expressed their gratitude for the moral support, encouragement, and care offered them by these people during their period of study at the university. The analysis again showed that the names used to refer to these people are not different from those used for supervisors and other lecturers. These names were often followed by appositives. The use of these names, as noted above, signifies distant relationship, respect, and formality (Al-Ali, 2010). Heads of departments and deans of faculties hold certain positions in the academia; hence, their position could influence the students’ choice of names for them. This is confirmed by Akindele’s (1993) findings that people with higher occupational status are usually addressed by their subordinates with title plus last name or title plus full names.

Mates/Friends

The data analysed showed that students show great indebtedness for various forms of support they receive from their mates and friends during their period of study, especially in writing their theses. Surprisingly, many students in our data set used *title plus full names* and unsurprisingly used *first name plus last name* when naming both their mates and friends. Some examples from the corpus are:

Extract 10

Our sincere acknowledgement equally goes to our friends Mr. Wilfred Arkorful, Mr. William Settor, Mr. John Donkor, and Mrs. Christina Kwofie for their help and encouragement.

(FA 5)

Extract 11

Thanks also to all my colleague graduate students at the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, especially Ishmael Karikari Ghartey and Margaret Bilson, for the assistance and encouragement they gave me as I worked on this thesis.
(EA 2)

The use of *title plus full name* and *first name plus last name* for mates and friends constitutes about 90 percent of this category in the texts. Few first names such as *Regina and Georgina* were, however, mentioned. Interestingly, no nicknames or diminutives were used. The absence of nicknames and diminutives in the present data set suggests the postgraduate students' understanding of thesis acknowledgements as a formal text. In other words, referring to colleagues and friends by full names in the TAs means that the postgraduate students recognise the role of the TAs as a formal written genre which is meant to be read by a specific audience largely in the academic domain. It further implies that the students are aware of the social conventions of the academic discourse. Elsewhere, Afful (2006) has argued that interlocutors use full names when addressing their friends in both formal and informal contexts to express mood, excitement or surprise. It is also a way of showing respect for older colleagues.

The use of the first names for colleagues and friends, however, shows solidarity and reflects the student's sense of belonging and further reveals intimacy between the students and their colleagues. Peng (2010), for example, observes that Chinese students prefer to use the 'shi-prefixed terms' such as 'shixiong' (elder male fellow student), 'shijie' (elder female student) and 'shimei' (younger male fellow student) to address their fellow students in their TAs. The use of these shi-prefixed names, he says, makes them feel closer to one another, academically and emotionally.

Family Members

The frequency of occurrence (37.5%) of family members in TAs revealed the social commitment extended by family members (e.g. wife, children, father, mother, sister, and brother) to their relatives towards their studies. The fact that about one third of the students acknowledged this category of thankees indicates that TAs are not meant for only members of academic communities. The extracts below illustrate some of these examples:

Extract 12

My thanks go to our family especially to brothers Kofi Essuman and Kofi Appiah, who gave me the morale in times of discouragements as well as my sisters, wives and mothers.
(EA 6)

Extract 13

We wish to heartily thank our brother Kojo Antwi, our sisters Araba Ghunney, Mary Andam, and Rosemond Dadzie and our parents Mr. Daniel Wilmot and Catherine Ennin for their diverse supports without which this work would not have materialized.
(FA 4)

Extract 14

Most especially, to my wife, Deborah, for her support.
(FA 7)

In everyday conversations, speakers refer to family relations by kinship terms such as father, mother, brother, sister, uncle, niece, and cousin in order to show biological and social relationships apart from addressing them by names. In the same way, the data showed that students referred to their family relations by various terms such as: 'sister', 'mother', 'wife' or just *first name*; or *title plus last name*, or *first name plus last name* or *title plus full name*. As can be seen from the extracts, the references to kinship terms (brothers, parents, sisters, and wife) are almost always followed by the personal name to make clear who the acknowledgees are and to deepen their deictic signification.

The reasons for the choice of these names are complex. The choice of first names or kinship terms signifies solidarity, affection, and intimacy. Akindele (1993) also notes that the use of FN signifies intimacy and mutual relationship. However, the choice of *title plus full name* for one's relation is rather influenced by formal contexts of the texts and also signifies a distant relationship and shows politeness. Holms (2000), for example, notes that addressing one's relation by his or her first name in a formal context, especially if the addressee is older, could be regarded as impolite. Ben-Ari (1987), further, argues that acknowledgements are formulations that take on an intermediate position between the internal contents of the ethnography and the people and relationships outside it.

Participants

This category of thankees includes all the participants (interviewees and questionnaire respondents) and all other people who assisted the students in contacting the participants for the study. These include chiefs; linguists; heads and tutors of educational institutions; pastors; community leaders; and opinion leaders. The data analysed showed that only few students from both departments mentioned this category of thankees in their acknowledgements.

The names used to address these acknowledgees depend on their social status and their relationship with the students. Thus, social honorifics such as 'Mrs.', 'Mr.', 'Madam', and 'Miss' were followed by full names or last names. Chiefs were addressed by social honorific 'Nana' or 'Togbe', plus their full names. However, the title 'ɔkyeame' followed by full name was used when referring to linguists while 'Papa' and 'Opanyin' followed by full names were used to address other elderly people. The choice of these social honorifics plus full names and title plus full names again signals distant relationship. In Ghana, chiefs are addressed by their chieftaincy titles such as 'Togbe' by the Ewe and 'Nana' by Akan while linguists are addressed as 'ɔkyeame'. Elderly people could be addressed as, for example, 'Opanyin (older person)'. All these signal respect.

These names recall the observation made by Al-Ali (2010) about Arabic TAs, when he noted that Arabic students used social honorifics to address thanked addressees in their PhD and Masters' dissertations. Referring to chiefs, linguists and elderly by these titles plus their full names in the present study is influenced by the formal context of the text and also signifies politeness.

Others

This category of thankees contains a lot of people such as typists, research assistants, mechanics, and those whose identities are not clearly stated in the texts. As evidenced from the analysis, all the texts contain, at least, one of these persons. In other words, apart from the categories of thankees or acknowledgees mentioned above, the student recognised the roles of other individuals whose contribution towards writing of the theses were worth mentioning.

As indicated in the data, the students used various linguistic expressions to address these people, depending on their social or academic status. These included both academic titles and non-academic titles ('Prof', 'Dr.', 'Mr.', 'Mrs.', 'Miss') followed by either their full names or last names and also, full names without title. Few examples are illustrated below:

Extract 15

*To Mr Robert Biney, we say a big thank you for all the services you rendered to us.
We are also grateful to Dr. Theodore Ocran and Dr. Francis Aryeetey.
(EA 2)*

Again, the choice of these names signals social distance between the addressees and the respective students. It is possible that the relationship between the acknowledgees and acknowledgers is distant and the students are aware of the formality of the acknowledgement as an academic sub-genre.

Conclusion and Implication

The study sought to understand the naming practices employed by postgraduate students in their TAs, focusing on two departments (that is, English and French) in the College of Humanities and Legal Studies at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The findings of the study and their implications are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

The study revealed that in TAs students express gratitude to various categories of entities, both in (i.e. academic staff) and outside (non-academic or other people) academia. They included God, supervisors, lecturers, other faculty members, family members, colleagues/friends, participants and others. The thankers (that is, students) used a range of names such as *title plus full name, full name, title plus last name, first name, honorifics and kinship terms* to address their thankees in the TAs. The choice of names was influenced by social distance and solidarity, formal context, and politeness. In other words, the variations in naming the entities, therefore, implies that in writing, students pay attention to contextual variables, formal conventions of writing, and the roles of the contributors and their relations with the students.

These findings from the study add to the existing scholarship on TAs, in particular, as well as student academic writing and writing pedagogy, in general. Earlier studies of TAs had focused on the rhetorical (move analysis), linguistic, discipline-specific (Scrivener, 2009; Lasaky, 2011; Yang, 2012), and cross-linguistic (Mohammedi, 2013) perspectives. The present study adds to the socio-cultural perspective (Al-Ali, 2010) on TAs by focusing on naming practices. These names point to Ghana as a multicultural as well as a postcolonial country. Further, the findings of the study provide some useful insight on postgraduate writing by drawing attention to a tiny aspect of student writing, which has since Hyland's (2003, 2004) works continued to receive attention.

The pedagogical implication of the study is that these findings can be utilized by supervisors when discussing the writing of the acknowledgement section with their students. It appears that students from both departments do not have any specific form of writing TAs. Consequently, some of them did not state clearly the thanked addressees. Swales and Feak (2000, 2004) noted a poor impression may be made about the acknowledgement if written inappropriately since it comes at the beginning of the thesis. Hyland (2004) also observed that student-writers often receive little instruction on the acknowledgement section, and they look at other theses or dissertations to obtain ideas for structure, expression, and content. Academic writing teachers in universities in Ghana and elsewhere could thus use these findings for their classroom teaching.

The findings are also important in so far as they have implications for future research. Given that this study was textual, it is suggested there should be more qualitative research based on interview data in order to ascertain views of the students on the writing of TAs. This will reveal the students' intention for acknowledging only certain individuals in their TAs and help to understand why some students do not acknowledge, for instance, their supervisors. Additionally, studies on TAs could focus on thesis supervisors so that we can know the kind of acknowledgements they perceive as appropriate or not appropriate. Since the study focused mainly on naming in the TAs of students in the Departments of French and English, further studies can be extended to other departments of the university to examine how students from such departments also name their thankees in TAs while enlarging the sample size.

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