COMMONALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: AN ANALYSIS

OF CONFERENCE PAPER TITLES OF FOUR SCHOLARS

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Abstract

In the last two and half decades, scholars and researchers in Applied Linguistics and other allied fields have shown an increasing interest in titles of academic publications. The place of style at the level of the individual language user has, however, been under-researched. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which titles of conference papers vary according to individual authors' preferences and disciplinary proclivities. A total of 78 conference paper titles of four scholars (two each from the disciplines of Education and Applied Linguistics) constituted the data set for the study. The titles of each scholar were analyzed, based on four variables, namely lexical density, length in words, structural organization, and syntactic encoding, using both quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches. The findings show that the titles of individual scholars within the same discipline vary considerably. Both similarities and differences between the two disciplines regarding the construction of titles are also observed. The study concludes that, in general, titles maintain discipline-constrained and generic characteristics; yet, these titles are considerably characterized by individual preferences of the scholars. These findings of the study have Implications for the scholarship on the interface between individuality and disciplinarity, academic writing and further research.

Key words: *commonality, conference paper title, discipline, individuality, lexical density*

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the last two decades of the twentieth century, interest in academic discourse among researchers in Applied Linguistics, in general, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), in particular, has gained considerable momentum. This zest was unarguably driven by Swales' emblematic publication on the genre analysis of research articles (RAs) first published in 1981 and revised in 1990. In this drive, there have been several studies on various rhetorical aspects of the RA such as the acknowledgement (Giananoni, 1998), abstract (Santos, 1996; Stotesbury, 2003; Martin-Martin & Burgess, 2004), results (Brett, 1994), discussion (Holmes, 1997, 2001), conclusion (Yang & Allison, 2003), metadiscourse (Dahl, 2004) and addressee features (Hyland, 2001); linguistic aspects such as subject (Gosden, 1993), collocation (Gledhill, 2000), transitivity (Martinez, 2003); and its historical evolution (Atkinson, 1993). This interest in the RA is not surprising, given that it is considered as the most prestigious genre of academic discourse; that is, the prototype of scholarship (Swales, 1990, 2004).

Apart from the RA, one genre which continues to attract considerable attention among scholars in Applied Linguistics, in general, and English for Specific Purposes ESP), in particular, is the dissertation/thesis. This 'school' or pedagogic genre has necessitated a flurry of research on its rhetorical features such as macro structure (Swales, 2004), acknowledgement (Hyland, 2004), introduction (Bunton, 2002), literature review (Kwan, 2006), discussion (Dudley-Evans, 1986a), conclusion (Hewings, 1993; Bunton, 2005), citation practices (Dong, 1996; Thompson, 2001; Charles, 2006; Pecorari, 2006), and metatext (Bunton, 1999). It is interesting to note that one of the earliest studies on the rhetorical features of the dissertation was Dudley-Evans' (1986b) work on titles. Clearly, this perceptible and increasing interest in such a school genre continues to provide both exciting and useful insights regarding the extent to which novices (learners) are appropriating disciplinary discourse.

Understandably, spoken academic genres, including conference paper (CP) presentations, have relatively received little attention, despite the fact that they remain an important oral academic activity among academics (Hood & Gail, 2005). Given the earliest work on conference presentations by Dubois (1980a, 1980b), this situation is surprising. It bears mentioning that a

CP paper differs from the RA in purpose, social setting, and language modality (Swales, 1990). The purpose of CP may be to test an idea or receive some feedback to rework it; it may present research at various levels of completion, from work-in-progress to post-publication dissemination, according to Hood and Gail (2005). The social setting of a CP may also vary from a large group and mixed in expertise to a small group of colleagues and fellow experts. And, as argued by Thompson (1997), because there is immediacy of audience in time and place, CP is more interactive.

In point of fact, however, writers of CPs or RAs are required to pay serious attention to a small but key 'front' rhetorical device, the title. Unsurprisingly, titles are increasingly receiving attention from scholars and researchers in Applied Linguistics and Information Science. An important role of the title lies in the fact that it is the gateway through which a reader enters the document it names. Generally, titles are constrained by space and the need to be informative. These fundamental constraints, among others, assign generic features to titles. Consequently, titles are usually short and condensed while containing enough information to announce the content of the publications they label.

Moreover, as a genre, the CP has a high tendency of showing individual stylistic colouring in its titles. It may be misleading to lump works in a particular genre or sub-genre together as "replication[s] of uniformity" (Bauman & Sherzer, 1974: 15). This will amount to denying the creative ability of individual authors and the fact that language use is a variation on a common linguistic repertoire. The title, as an independent product, could evince the individual author's creativity.

Aim of the Study

Research on titles in academic discourse (in particular, writing) in the last three decades has been focused on RAs. Most of these studies have investigated the relationship between linguistic, pragmatic or rhetorical variables and titles from the perspective of group dynamics such as discipline specificities (Buxton & Meadows, 1977; Yitzhaki, 1994; Fortanet *et al*, 1998; Haggan, 2004; Soler, 2007), genres (Gesuato, 2009), as well as languages and culture (Nord, 1995;

Busch-Lauer, 2000). However, as far as we know, no study has yet investigated the relationship between individual authors' preferences and the variations in titles of CPs, even though this phenomenon has been alluded to and speculated in the literature (Busch-Lauer, 2000; Gesuato, 2009; Swales, 2009). The study, therefore, aims, first, to identify variations which are due to individual preferences and, second, whether we can identify inter-disciplinary differences and similarities of these titles formulated by these selected individual scholars.

To clarify the aim of the study, the following research questions are asked:

1. To what extent do individual scholars' stylistic preferences account for the variations in titles of conference papers?

2. What similarities exist among conference paper titles of the selected scholars from Education and Applied Linguistics?

3. What differences exist between conference paper titles of the selected scholars from Education and Applied Linguistics?

We ask all three questions, taking into account such variables as lexical density, text length, structural organization, and syntactic encoding, drawing on Gesuato's (2009) work. (The selected variables are delineated in the analysis section in the paper.)

Conceptual Thrust

The conceptual thrust of this study is underpinned by Swales' (1990) concepts of discourse community and genre as well as Crystal and Davy's (1969) notion of style. Each of these concepts in its own right sheds light on the present study.

The term 'discourse community' refers to a community of scholars who create, transmit and/or share knowledge through a normative use of language. Far from being homogeneous, discourse community can be viewed as a universal set consisting of subsets of discourse communities. That is, each discipline has norms, expectations and conventions with respect to the creation, sharing and dissemination of knowledge (Becher, 1989). Thus, the norms of one discipline-specific community such as Applied Linguistics or Education will not necessarily be the same as those of another discourse community such as Chemistry or Business Management. Swales' (1990)

'discourse community' is usually contrasted with Hymes' (1974) 'speech community'. The latter is more general, encompassing people who naturally share a common linguistic framework and sociolinguistic behaviour. While one is born into or naturally belongs to a speech community, Swales (1990) notes that one chooses to join a particular discourse community based on personal motivations. It is the conventional use of language within the discourse community that gives rise to the term 'genre'.

Generally speaking, 'genre' evokes the Aristotelian classification system of literary forms. It has over the years down to the twentieth century come to include works in register studies, as exemplified by Halliday (1974) and Swales (1981), and lately been popularized by several other scholars. In Applied Linguistics a genre is characterized by several factors; namely, its communicative purpose, content, form, intended audience (who are either members of a professional or academic community) and medium (spoken or written). However, the communicative objective a genre is intended to achieve is its central defining feature since it is this objective that influences the organization of language and the internal structure of the text (Bhatia, 1993; Shehzad, 2005). It is thus seen as an institutionalized rhetorical template which allows users to accomplish a communicative purpose. According to Shehzad, 2005: 30), echoing Bhatia, a genre "… has certain conventional linguistic and rhetorical features that reflect the social motivations and cultural ideologies of the community that produced them". Yet, a number of genre theorists (e.g. Bhatia, Swales, 2009) agree that genres allow for individual choices while admitting constraints.

The third concept to consider in this research is 'style'. Style encapsulates the variation of language according to use and user in terms of dialect, communicative purpose, nature of interaction, field of discourse, text type and medium of communication (Crystal & Davy, 1969). In other words, style is the variation in language at the level of the idiolect, taking account of the communicative purpose, text type and field of discourse. The recognition of individual preferences is central to the concept of style in this study. Style views the language of a speech community as an approximation or aggregate of the linguistic variations of the individuals who make up the community; it views the language of every individual member of the community as

a variation on a common/shared linguistic framework (Hyland, 2008). The point to note is that there is a common repertoire of linguistic resources from which every member of the community chooses to perform a communicative event. Consequently, different individuals might produce similar linguistic patterns in fulfilling the same communicative purpose. Yet, these patterns could still be characterized by individual stylistic preferences or features that have become characteristic of the user.

In this study, the CP is considered a genre of the academic community; its title a sub-genre; and Applied Linguistics and Education, from which the data set is drawn, are the discourse communities under consideration. It is expected that the CP titles from these two discourse communities will considerably maintain discipline-specific as well as generic characteristics of CP titles; and yet they could be significantly characterized by individual stylistic preferences of the scholars.

Some Empirical Studies on Titles

Much research has been conducted on the titles of various academic genres from several dimensions, including variations across disciplines, languages/cultures, and genres. In some cases, however, these overlap within a study. In the following section, we draw attention to these trajectories identified in the literature in order to highlight the uniqueness of the present work.

As far as we know, the earliest study on titles of academic publications that adopts a cross-disciplinary perspective in this review is the work by Buxton and Meadows (1977), who examined RAs from the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences. They found that titles in Natural Sciences had higher information content than those in the Social Sciences and that in most disciplines there had been an increase in the number of content words. This increase in informativity (that is, the frequency of content words) was attributed to the widespread use of nouns and to readers' need for easy retrieval of information as a result of the prolific publication of papers. Yitzhaki (1994), on his part, examined the titles of RAs of Science, Social Sciences and Humanities, measuring title informativity and its possible correlation with the number of authors. In the scientific fields, there was relatively a moderate positive correlation between the

number of authors and the number of content words. However, in the Social Sciences the correlation was low and relevant to only a few of the titles considered. There was mainly a negative correlation in the Humanities. The positive correlation in the Sciences was attributed to the high rate of multiple-authored articles in science journals.

Still, taking a cross-disciplinary perspective, Fortanet *et al*. (1998), Haggan (2004) and Soler (2007) reported differences and similarities in the syntax of titles. Fortanet *et al*. (1998) analyzed 200 titles of RAs in Computer Science, Applied Linguistics, Business and Economics, and Chemistry and found that the most common syntactic structure of titles was 'premodifier + head + postmodifier'. Specifically, combinations of heads were more frequent in Linguistics and Business and Economics, while combinations of pre- and postmodifiers were more frequent in Chemistry and Computer science. Linguistics and Business and Economics titles displayed a majority of –ing forms while Chemistry and Computer Science showed a balanced distribution between –ing and –ed forms. Finally, the Linguistics, Economics and Business titles favoured the use of definite articles, while the Chemistry and Computer Science titles showed an even distribution of definite and indefinite articles. Haggan (2004) compared over 700 RA titles in Literature, Linguistics and Education and found that similar syntactic and structural choices were made. She also identified important inter-disciplinary differences in terms of content and rhetorical effects, which were independent of the structural-syntactic encoding of the titles. Soler (2007), on the other hand, examined 480 journal review papers and 90 RA titles in Biological and Social Sciences. Four main structural constructions, namely nominal group, compound, full-sentence and question titles were identified. The most common construction across disciplines and genres was the nominal group. The full-sentence construction was a generic and disciplinary peculiarity of Biology RAs; the question construction was infrequently used, but more common among the review papers. The length of the titles varied across disciplines, with the average number of words in titles being 10.89, 7.98, 14.98, and 15.48 in the Social Sciences, Linguistics, Natural Sciences, and Medicine respectively.

On their part, Fortanet *et al*. (1997), Anthony (2001), and Afful (2004a) investigated the structure and wording of titles. Fortanet *et al*. (1997), in examining RAs in Computer Science,

Applied Linguistics, Business and Economics, and Chemistry, observed that the Chemistry and the Linguistics titles contained the highest and the lowest number of words respectively. Anthony (2001) studied the length, word frequency, prepositions, and punctuation marks in the titles of various Computer Science sub-disciplines. The average title length was 9 words, with most titles ranging from 6 to12 words. On average, 2-unit titles, with the colon separating them, made up about 13% of the data. The two most frequent semantic relationships holding between the two parts of a title were 'name: description' and 'topic: scope', but with considerable variation across RAs. There were statistically significant differences among the RA titles in relation to the frequency of specific words showing the sub-disciplinary content specificity. On his part, Afful (2004a) explored the variations of dissertation titles in English Studies and Engineering based on a corpus of 798 titles. The variables studied included text length, text structure and the use of prepositions. He recorded both differences and similarities between the titles of the two disciplines. Important to the present study is the fact that he observed that dissertation titles in English were slightly longer than those in Engineering.

The studies of Dillon (1982) and Hartley (2007) focussed on the use of colons in titles. Dillon (1982) explored titles of 1,150 RAs in Education, Psychology and Literary Criticism roughly from 1880 to 1980 and noticed a steady increase in the use of colons across these disciplines. Fortanet *et al.* (1997) had also observed that the colon, semicolon, and full stop were the most frequent punctuation marks in Business and Economics titles, and the least common in Computer Science titles. These punctuation marks are used to mark two information units indicating either the general framework of the article and the specific topic or the topic and the method, occurring in their respective order in the title. Hartley (2007) found that disciplinary differences exist in the use of colons with a greater use in the Arts than in the Sciences. In a similar vein, Lewison and Hartley (2005), among other issues, investigated the use of colons in titles. It was also found that titles with colons were longer and more informative than those without colons.

Besides the majority of studies on academic titles that have taken a cross-disciplinary approach, there is a second set of studies in our review that have been conducted in mono-disciplinary contexts (e.g. Dillon, 1981; Whissell, 1999; Forray & Woodilla 2005; Wang & Bai, 2007;

Gesuato, 2009). Gesuato (2009), the most recent discipline-specific focused study in this second set of studies under review, examined the differences and similarities of titles among four genres, namely books, RAs, dissertations, and proceedings papers (which originate as CPs). She considered the extent to which the titles of these four genres in Linguistics vary along the following lines: length in words, lexical density, syntactic encoding, structural organization, sub-phrasal syntax, content analysis and information sequencing. She observed that the similarities among the titles of the genres outweighed the differences and attributed this phenomenon to the commonality of the genre, linguistic encoding and communicative goals of titles and the fact that the genres she studied belonged to the same discipline.

Whissell (1999) found that on average titles in Psychology RAs were 12 words long while Wang and Bai (2007) observed that in Medical RAs, the average length of the titles was 10.9 words, with 99% of them being realized as nominal groups and 75% characterized by the presence of single heads. Ninety-eight percent were without subtitles and 68% were accompanied by post-modifying prepositional phrases. Forray and Woodilla (2005) explored ways in which temporality is invoked and represented in Management RA titles and observed that temporality manifested itself in punctuation and word choice, among others. Goodman *et al*. (2001) examined the content of the titles of 420 peer-reviewed medical RAs and queried editors of the journals on editorial policies and practices in relation to titles. They noted that editors occasionally modified titles to increase their clarity and informativity, and the only journal having a policy on titles addressed the issue of title length only.

In our final set of studies on academic titles, we allude to Nord (1995) and Busch-Lauer (2000). who investigated the cultural (here taken as language variations) in titles from different perspectives. Nord (1995) examined the functional value of 12,000 titles across various academic publications in English, French, German and Spanish. She noted the display of the same frequency hierarchy of what she called the optional functions of titles and lack of culture-specific variations in genres like poems and scholarly articles. Busch-Lauer (2000) assessed a relatively smaller number of 150 German and English titles in Linguistics and Medicine collected from RAs and CPs, and 25 English titles written by German researchers. He observed that Linguistics

titles were shorter than Medicine titles and German titles shorter than English ones. Also, Medicine titles written in the English language preferred a mono-structure format, while those in German preferred a title-subtitle structure. In general, the Medicine titles were long, precise, and informative while the Linguistics titles were short, vague, abstract, catchy and reflected individual stylistic preferences

In summary, the above review of the related literature research has shown that titles of academic writings vary and at the same time maintain similarities across a number of factors and in several dimensions including structure, syntactic encoding, length, wording, the use of punctuation marks, informativity, functions, information sequencing. The review of the related literature also shows that CP titles have been under-researched. The notable exception is Campagna (2008), who focuses on CP titles, with Busch-Lauer (2000) and Gesuato (2009) using CP titles as part of their data set. In particular, Campagna (2008) considered conference handouts, which were reproductions of PowerPoint presentations, and observed that CP titles were similar to that of RA titles in content and structure. More importantly, the issue of individual style has received very little attention, the notable exception being Hyland's (2008) work on the style of the eminent scholar and genre analyst, John Swales, which nonetheless was silent on his titles. Busch-Lauer (2000) cursorily identifies individuality as a characteristic of Linguistics titles. This study will argue that individual style is an influential factor in the variation in titles, not only in the discipline of Linguistics but also Education.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

The study is based on the analysis of CP titles of four scholars at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana; two each from the Departments of English and Educational Foundations. The purpose of selecting scholars from two different disciplines was to keep the study within manageable limits without having the outcome affected by several extraneous factors. The selected scholars from the Department of English have specialization in Applied Linguistics while those from the Department of Educational Foundations have specialization in Educational Measurement and

Evaluation. The scholars were selected as they were accessible to the researchers and willing to have their CP titles used as part of the data set.

Consequently, 78 titles were selected for the study. The following categories of titles were eliminated from the study: titles of co-authored papers; titles of works presented to audience outside the authors' disciplines or professional communities; and bibliographical information with no explicit formulation of a title. Thus, only titles of single-authored works and titles of papers presented at academic conferences, seminars, symposia and workshops that involved audience from the relevant disciplines were included in the study. Specifically, 13 titles were selected from one of the Linguistics scholars and another 14 from the other Linguistics scholar. The two Education scholars separately provided 18 and 33 titles. Although the data set (that is, a total of 78) might appear to be small, it is intended to provide preliminary insights for a wider study.

Data Analysis Procedure

Each title selected for the study was given an identification label for easy reference. The label indicates the discipline, the initials of the scholar's name, and number to differentiate one title from another. All this is to uphold the notion of anonymity, an important ethical requirement in research. In the rest of the paper, the following identification labels are used in place of the names of the scholars: Edu-YKE and Edu-FKA (for the faculty in Education) and Lin-YSB and Lin-JAB (for the faculty in Linguistics). Examples are offered below:

(1) Grant Proposal Writing – Edu-FKA-11
(2) The Use of ITEMAN in Item Analysis of Test Items. – Edu-YKAE-11
(3) English Education in Ghana: Challenges and Prospects – Lin-YSB-11
(4) A Lexico-grammatical Analysis of Dissertation Titles – Lin-JAB-11

Each scholar's selected list of titles (see Appendix) were analyzed independently based on four variables; namely, lexical density, length in words, structural organization and syntactic encoding. This framework of analysis is adapted from Gesuato (2009), who studied the variation of titles across four genres in Linguistics.

Further, the study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis in a complementary manner. The quantitative procedures are purely descriptive statistics and include mean distributions, percentages and frequencies. Given that the number of titles per scholar varies, the comparison made quantitatively among them in the study is presented in terms of percentages and average distributions, rather than frequency. Concerning, the qualitative analysis, the data were coded and organized into themes, patterns, and relationships; these have a potential in enhancing interpretation of the study's findings.

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

Lexical Density

Lexical density is the proportion of lexical words to the total number of words in a text stated as a percentage. In other words, it is the amount of information conveyed by a text as a function of the number of lexical words used. The higher the lexical density of a text, the more informative it is; the lower the lexical density of a text, the less informative it is. In measuring the lexical density of titles in this study, all the words in the titles of each scholar were counted. The function words were then also counted and the number of the function words subtracted from the total number of words to arrive at the number of lexical words. This was followed by calculation of the proportion of the lexical words to the total number of words, as illustrated below:

$$\text{Lexical density} = \frac{\text{Number of Lexical Words}}{\text{Total Number of Words}} \times 100$$

As far as the data set was concerned, the following, on one hand, were considered to be function words: articles, conjunctions, prepositions, and possessive determiners. On the other hand, nouns, adjectives, and verbs were considered lexical words. Other word class items apart from these were not found in the data. Primarily, the orthographic criterion was used in the counting of the words. Thus, a linguistic item preceded and/or followed by a space or a punctuation mark (with the exception of the apostrophe) was counted as one word. The syntactic-semantic criterion was occasionally used. For instance, hyphenated words, proper nouns and nominal groups which refer to a geographical demarcation were considered single words. An acronym, together with its full form (where applicable), was also counted as a single word. Generally, words which were separated by spaces but together could function as a single constituent in a clause or phrase were

counted as a single word. Again, when reference is made to a title of another publication, it is counted as one word. The following illustrations give an idea of the application of these criteria:

(5) Modes of Address in Social Discourse: The Case of the University of Cape Coast – Lin-JAB-14 (11 words)
(6) An Analysis of Kwasi Yankah's Use of African Language Elements in Woes of a Kwatriot- Lin-YSB-08 (11 words)
(7) Causes of Low Academic Performance of Primary School Pupils in the Shama Sub-Metro of Shama Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) in Ghana. -Edu-YKE-12 (16 words)
(8) Scoring Essay-type Tests. -Edu-YKE-14 (3 words)

Table 1 summarizes the measures of lexical density of the titles of each scholar.

Table 1: Measures of Lexical Density

Word Counts	Edu-YKE	Edu-FKA	Lin-YSB	Lin-JAB	Total
Lexical words	225	86	65	106	482
Function words	109	29	33	63	234
Total words	334	115	98	169	716
Average lexical words per title	6.8	4.8	5.0	7.6	6.2
Average function words per title	3.3	1.6	2.5	4.5	3.0
Percentage of lexical words	67.4%	74.8%	66.3%	62.7%	67.3%

As can be seen from Table 1, the titles analyzed have high lexical densities, ranging from 62.7% to 74.8%. Edu-FKA's titles have the highest lexical density of 74.8%, a difference of 7.4% from Edu-YKE's, whose titles have the second highest lexical density of 67.4%, and 12.1% from Lin-JAB, whose titles have the least lexical density of 62.7%. Generally, the titles in the data set register a lexical density of 67.3%, indicating the characteristic high lexical density of titles. It was observed from the data that Edu-FKA uses a lot of lexical words. Seven (38.9%) out of his 18 titles have only one function word, while 4 (22.2%) of them occur without a function word. Examples are as follows:

(9) Quantitative Data Collection Technique –Edu-FKA-04 (no function word)
(10) Research Proposal Writing and Budgeting –Edu-FKA-06 (1 function word)
(11) Improving Educational Quality in Ghana: Preliminary Research Results – Edu-FKA-07(1function word)

(12) Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures –Edu-FKA-13 (no function word)

(13) Issues <u>in</u> Educational Assessment Standard Setting–Edu-FKA-15 (1 function word)

Though there are occasions where the phenomenon illustrated by the examples above occurs in the titles of the other scholars, it is not striking and consistent as it is in Edu-FKA's. Two (6.1%) of the total number of Edu-YKE titles had no function word while 4 (12.1%) of his titles had 1 function word. Lin-YSB has only 2 (15.4%) titles, with one function word and Lin-JAB has more than one function word in all his titles. Examples of similar occurrences in the titles of these scholars are given below:

(14) Phonetics and Poetry - Lin-YSB-02 (1 function word)

(15)Teaching Language through Literature - Lin-YSB-13 (1function word)

(16) Scoring Essay-type tests -Edu-YKE-14 (no function word)

(17) Planning Classroom Achievement Tests -Edu-YKE-30 (no function word)

(18) The Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Student and Program-Linked Budgeting. – Edu-YKE-26 (1function word)

Title Length (in terms of number of words)

In this section, the criteria used in identifying a word in order to measure the lexical densities were applied. Table 2 shows the average number of words per title for each of the four scholars.

Table 2: Average Words per Title

Author	*Average words*
Edu-YKE	10.1
Edu-FKA	6.4
Lin-YSB	7.5
Lin-JAB	12.1
Global	9.2

Table 2 shows that Lin-JAB has the longest titles with an average of 12.1 words per title while Edu-FKA has the shortest titles with an average of 6.4 words per title. The difference between the average number of words per title of Edu-YKE and Edu-FKA is 3.7. This difference between

them is further widened by other observations in the data. Edu-YKAE comparatively has very long titles with the longest having 20 words and the shortest three words, as illustrated below:

(19) The challenge of low academic achievement in rural junior secondary schools in Ghana. A case of Shama Sub-metro in the Western Region -Edu-YKE-10 (longest title)

(20) Scoring Essay-type tests -Edu-YKE-14 (shortest title)

Among all scholars, Edu-FKA has relatively very short titles with condensed information. His shortest titles are also three words each and these make up 22% of his titles. His longest title has 14 words and is made up of two units. Each of his longest 1-unit titles, which make up 11% of his titles, is 11 words long. These occurrences are illustrated below:

(21) Improving Educational Quality in Ghana: The English Language Proficiency Level of Primary School Children –Edu-FKA-05 (longest title; 2-units)

(22) The Provision of Quality Education in Basic Schools and Its Indicators –Edu-FKA-08 (longest 1-unit title)

(23) Assessment of students –Edu-FKA-02 (shortest title)

The longest title of Lin-YSB has 12 words and the shortest has 3 words as below:

(24) Phonetics and Poetry - Lin-YSB-02 (shortest title)

(25) Developing Children's Creativity and Linguistic Competence through Drama: A First – Cycle School's Experience - Lin-YSB-03 (longest title)

The longest title of Lin-JAB has 19 words while the shortest has 6 words:

(26) A Study of Introductions in Examination Essays: The Case of Three Disciplinary Communities in an English-medium University in Ghana – Lin-JAB-09 (longest title)

(27) A Lexico-grammatical Analysis of Dissertation Titles – Lin-JAB-11 (shortest title)

Structural Organization

To determine the organizational pattern of the titles, two categories of titles were distinguished: 1-unit and 2-unit titles, following Gesuato (2009). The boundary between units was identified by the presence of a colon or a comma. It was also ensured that each unit was syntactically independent of the other and could function as an independent clausal constituent. Examples of titles identified as 2-units are given from the data below. The boundaries are marked with a slash:

(28) The Akan Phrasal Verbs, / Meaning and Discourse - Lin-YSB-09

(29) Rhetorical analysis of introductions: /The case of undergraduates of Sociology – Lin-JAB-07

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of each of the two categories of titles per scholar.

Table 3: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Unit Categories per Scholar

Scholar	*1-Unit titles*	*2-Unit titles*
Edu-YKE	31 (93.9%)	2 (6.1%)
Edu-FKA	16 (88.9%)	2 (11.1%)
Lin-YSB	9 (69.2%)	4 (30.8%)
Lin-JAB	3 (21.4%)	11 (78.6%)
Global	59 (75.6%)	19 (24.4%)

Table 3 shows that apart from Lin-JAB, who mostly (78.6%) uses 2-unit titles, all other scholars use mainly 1-unit titles. Indeed, the number of 2-unit titles of Edu-YKE and Edu-FKA is relatively insignificant.

Again, apart from Lin-JAB, there seems to be no stylistic significance in the sequencing of information in the 2-unit titles of the other scholars. Thirty-six percent of the 2-unit titles of Lin-JAB state a research topic in the first unit and specify the context of the study in the second unit and 18% state a specific topic in the first unit and a general topic in the second unit. The following 2-unit titles of Lin-JAB illustrate the sequencing of information. (Colon (:) is used to show the boundary between two information units while the plus sign (+) is used to indicate a combination of two information units in the same title.)

(30) The Politics of Citation: An Analysis of Doctoral Theses across Disciplines -Lin-JAB-02 (General Topic: method + Specific Topic)
(31) Rhetoric in Academic Writing: The Case of Introduction, Literature Review, and Conclusion – Lin-JAB 03 (General topic: Specific Topic)
(32) Introductions and Conclusions in Graduate Thesis Writing: Some Reflections – Lin-JAB-04 (Topic: description)
(33) Ghanaian Address Terms and the Ghanaian-English Contact: A Study of Linguistic Variation – Lin-JAB-12 (Specific Topic: General Topic)
(34) Rhetorical Analysis of Introductions in Examination Essays: The Case of Students

of English Studies– Lin-JAB-08 (Topic: Context)
(35) Dissertation Titles: A Comparative study of Two Departments in an English-medium University – Lin-JAB-10 (Topic: Method + Context)

Syntactic Encoding

We use the term syntactic encoding, following Gesuato (2009), to refer to the syntax of the words found in the title units. It was observed from the data that title units are primarily realized as noun phrases (NPs) and ing- clauses. Table 4 presents the distribution of title units according to these two categories.

Table 4: Frequency and Distribution of Units across Syntactic Categories

Scholar	NP	- ing clause
Edu-YKE	28 (80%)	07 (20%)
Edu-FKA	18 (90%)	02 (10%)
Lin-YSB	16(88.9%0)	02 (11.1%)
Lin-JAB	25 (100%)	0 (0%)
Total	87 (88.7%)	11 (11.2 %)

As shown in Table 4, there is a relatively uniform preference for NPs among all four scholars. All the title units in Lin-JAB are NPs and, overall, NPs form 88.7% of the title units in the data. This preference for the NP in titling among all four scholars may be due to its characteristic function of naming or labeling. The -ing clauses that occur in the data are expanded through complementation and often subsequent post-modification of the heads of the noun phrases that complement them:

(36) Improving Assessment in Schools. -Edu-YKE-21 (V-ing with a post modified NP expansion)
(37) Teaching Language through Literature. -Lin-YSB-13 (V-ing with 2 complements)

The NPs are expanded through pre- and/or post modification and coordination of the heads:

(38) Evocative and Discourse in Akan - Lin-YSB-07 (NP with coordinated heads + postmodification)
(39) Adjectival Use and Meaning in English - Lin-YSB-12 (NP with premodification, coordinated heads and post modification)
(40) A Lexico-grammatical Analysis of Dissertation Titles – Lin-JAB-11 (NP with

pre- and post-modification)

The expansion of the NP is through post-modification very often by prepositional phrases headed by *of* or *in*. These prepositional phrases are often used recursively, normally embedding one in the other:

(41) An Analysis of Kwasi Yankah's Use of African Language Elements in <u>Woes of a Kwatriot</u>- Lin-YSB-08 (NP post-modified by 3 PPs)
(42) The Role of Violence in Nation Building in Africa–Edu-FKA-18 (NP post-modified by 3 PPs)

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of the findings reported in the previous section focuses on the three research questions. (Please refer to the statement of the problem section.) In this regard, we focus on a) individual style b) similarity and disciplinarity, and c) differences and disciplinarity.

Individual Style

The data reveal stylistically significant differences between the titles of scholars within the same discipline. Concerning Education, the titles of Edu-FKA are more informative than those of Edu-YKE. Thus, the titles of Edu-FKA have a lexical density of 74.8%, which is 7.4% more than the lexical density of the titles of Edu-YKE. Unlike Edu-YKE, Edu-FKA consistently employs one or no function word in his titles; 61.1% of his titles account for this phenomenon. Comparatively, on average, the titles of Edu-YKE are 3.7 words longer than those of Edu-FKA. In addition, the longest title of Edu-FKA, though a 2-unit title, is four words fewer than the longest title of Edu-YKE, which is a 1-unit title. This observation partially contrasts the findings of Lewinson and Hartley (2005) that 2-unit titles are longer and more informative than 1-unit titles. Here, Edu-FKA's 2-unit titles are shorter than some of the 1-unit titles of Edu-YKE though longer than his own 1-unit titles. It can, therefore, be observed that 2-unit titles are relatively longer than 1-unit titles. Edu-FKA more than Edu-YKE condenses information in his titles.

There is no sharp difference between the two scholars in terms of their preference for 1-unit or 2-unit titles. Both scholars have high percentages for 1-unit titles though Edu-YKE has the highest percentage of 93.9%, a difference of 5% from that of Edu-FKA. The implication is that Edu-

YKE has a higher tendency of using 2-unit titles than Edu-FKA. Again, this observation does not support Lewinson and Hartley's (2005) finding that 2-unit titles are more informative than 1-unit titles. Though Edu-YKE has a higher percentage of 2-unit titles than Edu-FKA, his titles are less informative than Edu-FKA's. Similarly, both scholars have high percentages for titles that are realized as NPs. The difference of 10% is, however, quite significant. This shows that Edu-YKE has a higher tendency of using -ing clauses in formulating his titles than Edu-FKA.

With regards to titles of the two Linguistics scholars, a difference of 3.6% exists between their lexical densities, implying that the titles of Lin-YSB, who has the highest density among the two, are more informative than those of Lin-JAB. On the other hand, the titles of Lin-JAB are averagely 4.6 words longer than those of Lin-YSB. On average, the titles of Lin-JAB are characteristically longer than those of the other three scholars and it is evident from the data that there is correlation between the length of titles and lexical density. The fewer the average words per title of each of the four scholars, the higher the lexical density. This implies that relatively the shorter a title, the more likely it is for it to have few function words. The difference of 47.8% between Lin-YSB and Lin-JAB in terms of the distribution of unit categories is very significant.

About eighty percent (specifically, 78.6%) of the titles of Lin-JAB are 2-unit titles while 69.2% of those of Lin-YSB are 1-unit titles. Among the four scholars, Lin-JAB's preference for 2-unit titles is exceptionally high. The difference between the titles of Lin-JAB and Lin-YSB supports Lewinson and Hartley's (2005) finding that there is correlation between the length of a title and the number of units the title has. On average, Lin-JAB has a higher percentage of 2-unit titles and longer titles than Lin-YSB. However, the observation that 2-unit titles are more informative is again not supported since the titles of Lin-YSB though primarily 1-unit titles are more informative than those of Lin-JAB, which are primarily 2-units. Finally, though both scholars have high percentages for title units realized as NPs, Lin-YSB has a higher tendency of using –ing clauses than Ling-JAB. There is no single –ing clause in the 25 title units of Lin-JAB. That is to say, Lin-JAB is exceptionally committed to the use of NPs.

Given that the differences observed above are between scholars within the same discipline, they cannot be attributed to influences of the disciplines studied. They are traceable to individual stylistic preferences.

Similarities and Disciplinarity of Titles of the Four Scholars

Titles in the data set of the present study are generally very informative. After all, the purpose of titles is to inform potential or prospective readers of the content of the scholarly work they name (Afful, 2004a). In a sense, titles perform an advertising function and needs to be informative as much as possible (Gesuato, 2009). The overall lexical density of the titles in the data is 67.3% while the lexical densities of the individual scholars range from 62.7% to 74.8%. The implication is that titles relatively make less use of function words. The high informativity of titles is conventional since editors do, though occasionally, modify them to increase their informativity (Goodman *et al*, 2001).

Related to this is the fact that the titles analyzed in the data set are generally short. The average words per each of the titles in the data are 9.2, a figure almost the same as the average length of 9 words which Anthony (2001) found to be characteristic of Computer Science sub-disciplines. Though titles need to be informative, they are usually short in order to capture the attention of potential readers at a glance. In the case of conferences, where papers are presented orally sometimes supported by a PowerPoint presentation, titles should be such that the audience can decode them in a flash or a glance. It is evident from the data that on average titles of CPs range from 6.4 to 12.1 words. Similarly, Anthony (2001) observed that in the Computer Sciences most titles clustered around 6 to 12 words. The range of these figures is not very different from what Soler (2007) and Whissel (1999) quote for the Social Sciences and Psychology respectively.

Seventy-five percent of the titles in the data are 1-unit titles while 24.4% are 2-unit titles. The low rate of preference for 2-unit titles, especially those separated with the colon, is also reported by Anthony (2001) for the Computer Sciences. Also, generally, CP titles in our data set are realized as nominal structures, specifically NPs and –ing nominal clauses. The data show a very high preference for NPs. Titles realized as NPs account for 88.7% of the titles in the data. This

characteristic use of nominal structures in the formulation of titles has been noted by several studies (e.g. Busch-Lauer, 2000; Hagan, 2004; Soler, 2007; Wang & Bai, 2007). It is not surprising that titles tend to use nominal items because the function of titles is to name a product of scholarship and nominal structures are characteristically naming elements. It is observed that NPs are usually expanded through coordination as well as pre- and/or post-modification, as reported in some studies (Soler, 2007; Wang & Bai, 2007).

Differences and Disciplinarity of Titles of Scholars

The CP titles by the selected scholars in Education are comparatively more informative than those of the scholars of Linguistics. This is supported by the fact that the CP titles of the scholars of Education have higher lexical densities than those of the scholars of Linguistics. The fact that both scholars in Education have lexical densities which are higher than the lexical densities of each of the Linguistics scholars shows that the difference is not due to chance. In addition, the scholars of the CPs in Linguistics have a higher tendency of using 2-unit titles than scholars in Education. The difference between the percentage of the 2-unit titles of Lin-YSB, the Linguistics scholars with the least percentage of 2-unit titles, and that of Edu-FKA, the Education scholar with the highest percentage of 2-unit titles, is 19.7%. This difference is significant.

Generally, titles in Education have relatively insignificant percentages of 2-unit titles. It must be noted that this study is not a comparative study of the titles of Linguistics and Education CPs. The focus here is to find out the extent to which the CP titles of individual scholars vary on the common features of these titles. The two disciplines are used here to control for disciplinary variations. However, these observations can serve as an impetus for a detailed study of the titles of the two disciplines with a larger data set.

Conclusions and Implications

Three main conclusions are drawn from the present study. First, CP titles are, to a considerable extent, characterized by individual preferences of scholars. The data reveal that the titles of individual researchers within the same discipline vary in terms of lexical density, length in words, structural organization and syntactic encoding. Second, differences exist between the titles of scholars in the disciplines of Education and Linguistics. Conference paper titles of the

two Education scholars have higher lexical densities and a higher tendency of being realized as –ing clauses than those of the Linguistics scholars. On the other hand, the Linguistics scholars have a higher tendency of formulating 2-unit titles than their Education counterparts. Thirdly, titles from the two disciplines share generic characteristics: They are highly informative, relatively short and realized as nominal structures. They share these characteristics with titles of other genres of academic discourse.

These conclusions largely support the concept of style – that the language of an individual in a discourse community is a variation on a common core of linguistic resources, a view shared by Hyland (2008). Examining some writings of the eminent Applied Linguist, John Swales, Hyland argues that the creation of an individual's voice or persona is clearly an act of personal choice, confidence, experience, and ideological preference. Indeed, apart from upholding Hyland's view, the use of CP titles demonstrates "a balance between constraint and choice" (Swales, 2009:148). In this light, it can be argued that the CP titles analyzed in this study considerably maintain generic characteristics of titles of academic discourse, or what we allude to in our own RA title as a 'commonality'; and yet they are significantly characterized by individual stylistic preferences of the scholars.

Besides adding to the scholarship on individuality and disciplinarity, the findings in the present study adds to the ever-widening scope of scholarship on academic discourse, in general, and academic titles, in particular, by focusing on a less explored written-to-be spoken academic genre such as the CP. It suggests that CP is worth investigating alone, without making it play a second fiddle to other genres, as has often been the case in Applied Linguistics research. These findings usefully add to the large body of research on academic discourse, which has seen an increasing interest in the last two decades. Thus CP titles offer us another way of understanding individualized voice, persona, and identity (Ivanic 1998; Hirvela & Belcher, 2001) in academic discourse, here writing.

The efforts in this study will be rewarding if the findings outlined above provoke further studies into CP titles. The papers presented at conferences (local, international; general or discipline-specific) are multi-faceted, comprising review papers, essays, lectures, and research papers. Some of the variations observed above may well be attributed to these differences. Other studies may concentrate on variation in the titles of these sub-genres of the CP among individuals. Comparative studies of CP titles of the disciplines (or sub-disciplines) of Linguistics and Education is also recommended. Finally, more studies should be conducted on the characteristics of CP titles since this genre compared to the RA is less explored.

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APPENDIX

List of Titles Analysed

Edu-YKE

1. Learning Achievement and the Cycle of Poverty across Urban and Rural Districts in Ghana (Edu-YKE-01)
2. Using Multiple-choice Tests in Assessment in Higher Education (Edu-YKE- 02)
3. Purposes of Assessment in Higher Education' and the Use of Multiple-choice and Essay-type Tests in Higher Education (Edu-YKE- 03)
4. Purposes of Assessment in Higher Education and Principles of Achievement Test Construction (Edu-YKE- 04)
5. Primary School Teachers' Standard of Test Construction and Administration in Ghana (Edu-YKE- 05)
6. Teacher Educators' Effectiveness in General Test Construction and Administration and Scoring of Essay Tests in Ghana (Edu-YKE- 06)
7. Pre-service Teacher's Knowledge of Continuous Assessment Techniques in Ghana. (Edu-YKE- 07)
8. The Role of the Classroom Teacher in Ensuring Effective Assessment System for Creative/Productive Teaching and Learning Outcomes (Edu-YKE- 08)
9. Improving Classroom Instruction Through Educational Objectives and Tests (Edu-YKE-09)
10.   The Challenge of Low Academic Achievement in Rural Junior Secondary Schools in Ghana: A case of Shama Sub-metro in the Western Region (Edu-YKE-10)
11.   The Use of ITEMAN in Item Analysis of Test Items (Edu-YKE-11)
12. Causes of Low Academic performance of primary school pupils in the Shama Sub-Metro of Shama Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) in Ghana (Edu-YKE-12)
13. General Principles of Classroom Achievement Testing and Test Construction (Edu-YKE-13)
14. Scoring Essay-type Tests (Edu-YKE-14)
15. Pre-service Teachers' Motives for Choosing Teaching as a Career in Ghana (Edu-YKAE-15)
16. Improving the Quality of Education in Ghana through Interactive Radio Instruction (Edu-YKAE-16)
17. Improving the Quality of Education in Ghana through Literacy Strategies (Edu-YKAE 17)
18. Causes of Poor Academic Performance in the Shama Sub-metro of SAEMA (Edu-YKE-18)
19. Assessment Criteria, Feedback, and Evaluation (Edu-YKE-19)
20. Establishing Rapport during the Registration Process (Edu-YKE-20)
21. Improving Assessment in Schools (Edu-YKE-21)
22. Introduction to SPSS for Windows (Edu-YKE-22)
23. A Meta-analysis of Gender Differences in Students' Attitudes toward Mathematics (Edu-YKE-23)

24. Teachers' and School Administrators' Perspectives and Use of Standardised Achievement Tests: A Review of Published Research (Edu-YKE-24)
25. Gender Differences in Guessing Tendencies in Multiple Choice Tests (Edu-YKE-25)
26. The Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Student and Program-linked Budgeting (Edu-YKE-26)
27. The Use of Essay tests in Assessing Students' Academic Performance (Edu-YKE-27)
28. The Role of the Specification Table in Test Construction (Edu-YKE-28)
29. The University's Role in Promoting New Orientation in Assessment and Entry Requirements into Educational Institutions (Edu-YKE-29)
30. Planning Classroom Achievement Tests (Edu-YKE-30)
31. The Use of Multiple-choice Tests in Assessing Academic Achievement (Edu-YKE-31)
32. Major Purposes of Assessment in Higher Educational Institutions (Edu-YKE-32)
33. Guidelines in Constructing Multiple-choice Tests (Edu-YKE-33)

Edu-FKA

34. Education in Ghana (Edu-FKA-01)
35. Assessment of Students (Edu-FKA-02)
36. Assessment of Students' Achievement and Performance (Edu-FKA-03)
37. Quantitative Data Collection Technique (Edu-FKA-04)
38. Improving Educational Quality in Ghana: The English Language Proficiency Level of Primary School Children (Edu-FKA-5)
39. Research Proposal Writing and Budgeting (Edu-FKA-06)
40. Improving Educational Quality in Ghana: Preliminary Research Results (Edu-FKA-07)
41. The Provision of Quality Education in Basic Schools and Its Indicators (Edu-FKA-08)
42. Constructing Data Collection Instruments and Data Analysis (Edu-FKA-09)
43. Norm-and Criterion-referenced Testing of School Achievement (Edu-FKA-10)
44. Grant Proposal Writing (Edu-FKA-11)
45. Western Education in Ghana as Part of the Triple African Heritage (Edu-FKA-12)
46. Quantitative Data Analysis Procedures (Edu-FKA-13)
47. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures (Edu-FKA-14)
48. Issues in Educational Assessment Standard Setting (Edu-FKA-15)
49. Assessment of Students Achievement and Performance (Edu-FKA-16)
50. Thesis Proposal Writing (Edu-FKA-17)
51. The Role of Violence in Nation Building in Africa (Edu-FKA-18)

Lin-YSB

52. The Teaching and Assessment of English at the Basic Level *(*Lin-YSB-01)
53. Phonetics and Poetry *(*Lin-YSB-02)
54. Developing Children's Creativity and Linguistic Competence through Drama: A First – Cycle School's Experience *(*Lin-YSB-03)
55. Literature and Language Development in the Teacher Training College (Lin-YSB-04)
56. Multiple Faces of Exile: Analysis of Abena Busia's <u>Testimonies of Exile</u> (Lin-YSB-05)
57. The Language Student: Scholar, Linguist or Practitioner (Lin-YSB-06)
58. Evocative and Discourse in Akan *(*Lin-YSB-07)

COMMONALITY AND INDIVIDUALITY IN ACADEMIC WRITING: AN ANALYSIS OF CONFERENCE PAPER TITLES OF FOUR SCHOLARS
Dr. Joseph B. A. Afful, Mr. Isaac N. Mwinlaaru

59. An Analysis of Kwasi Yankah's Use of African Language Elements in 'Woes of a Kwatriot' (Lin-YSB-08)
60. The Akan Phrasal Verbs, Meaning and Discourse (Lin-YSB-09)
61. English in Domestic Language Policy in Ghana (Lin-YSB-10)
62. English Education in Ghana: Challenges and Prospects (Lin-YSB-11)
63. Adjectival Use and Meaning in English (Lin-YSB-12)
64. Teaching Language through Literature (Lin-YSB-13)

Lin-JAB

65. Address Terms and Social Identities among University Students in Ghana (Lin-JAB-01)
66. The Politics of Citation: An Analysis of Doctoral Theses across Disciplines (Lin-JAB-02)
67. Rhetoric in Academic Writing: The Case of Introduction, Literature Review, and Conclusion (Lin-JAB-03)
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