The Construction of Multiple Identities in the Acknowledgement Section of a Masters Dissertation

Dr. Joseph B. A. Afful   Mr. Isaac N. Mwinlaaru

Department of English   Department of English

University of Cape Coast   University of Cape Coast

Cape Coast, Ghana.   Cape Coast, Ghana.

Dr. J. B. A. Afful: Currently Senior Lecturer at the Department of English and Coordinator of Communicative Skills at University of Cape Coast, he received his doctoral education at the National University of Singapore. He was a Postdoctoral Mellon Fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. His research interests include Advanced Academic Literacy, Disciplinary Discourse/Variation, (Critical) Discourse Studies, Sociolinguistics, and The Interface between Postgraduate Pedagogy and Writing. He has published in leading international journals, such as *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, Sociolinguistic Studies, Language and Intercultural Communication, Nordic Journal of African Studies, The International Journal of Language, Society and Culture,* and *Nebula*.

Mr. Isaac N. Mwinlaaru: He is currently a Master of Philosophy student in the Department of English at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. His research interest areas include genre analysis, discourse analysis and writing and reading in English as a second language.

Abstract

Following the work of Hyland (2003, 2004), several studies have investigated the structural, linguistic, and socio-cultural features of dissertation acknowledgements (DAs). This research explores the interface between identity construction and the linguistic features of a Master's DA, written by a student of Literary Studies, using a two-pronged analytical framework. Three key findings emerged from the analysis. First, the paper observed a two-move generic structure adopted in the text under study. The paper also demonstrates that the writer of the acknowledgement systematically varies linguistic choices at the lexical, grammatical, and discoursal levels, in order to construct varying and different identities. The third point concerns the hybridization of the DA in terms of the incorporation of formal and informal linguistic elements. Based on these findings, it can be said that the paper has implications for the identity theory, academic (thesis) writing, and further research on DA.

Key words: dissertation acknowledgement, genre, identity, literary studies

Introduction

Acknowledgements in scholarly writing are a commonplace phenomenon. Their popularity is borne out of the obligation the academic community has latently imposed on its members to express gratitude for the assistance of others in the former's endeavours. Compared with the main sections (such as introduction, literature review, methodology, analysis and discussion, and conclusion) of scholarly works they are appended to, acknowledgements constitute an interactive rhetorical section which allows the writer to construct an identity located within a network of interlocking relationships. They offer "a unique rhetorical space" to writers to express "their genuine gratitude for assistance" (Hyland & Tse, 2004:259). It is not surprising then that

bibliometricians have explored the content of acknowledgment sections of research articles (RAs) in diverse fields of study to unearth the degree of collaboration and external influences on scholarly research. The interest in dissertation acknowledgements (DAs) in research in Applied Linguistics is quite recent. Taking a cue from Hyland (2003, 2004), several studies have investigated the generic structure and linguistic features of DAs.

This paper is a contribution to these studies. It explores the interface between identity construction and the generic structure and linguistic choices of a DA written by a postgraduate student of Literary Studies at a public university in Ghana, the University of Cape Coast (UCC), following a recent work by Al-Ali (2010b). We begin by presenting the conceptual framework undergirding the present study together with some empirical studies undertaken on acknowledgements in academic writing. Thereafter, we introduce the data and the analytical framework of the study. We then analyze and discuss the selected DA, followed by the conclusion.

Conceptual Framework

As stated earlier, in this section, we present the theoretical perspective of our study and review empirical studies on academic acknowledgements, with particular attention on DAs.

Theoretical Perspective

Given that the thrust in the present study is the construction of identity mediated through a DA, we found identity theory germane. We associate ourselves with the identity theory advanced by Stryker and his colleagues (e.g. Stryker, 1980; Serpe & Stryker, 1987) as well as Gee's (1997).

In general, Stryker's theory focuses on how social structure influences one's identity. This paper utilizes Stryker's (1980) version since our aim is to illustrate that language-in-use, a form of social behaviour, is influenced by social structure. Social psychologists who are sociologically oriented see persons as always acting within the context of social structure in which others and themselves are labelled in the sense that each recognizes the other as an occupant of positions or roles in society (Stryker, 1980). Thus, one assumes a role identity, thereby merging the role with the person (Turner, 1978). Identity theorists further argue that the self consists of multiple identities, each of which is based on occupying a particular role (Desrochers *et al*., 2002). One has an identity, an "internalized positional designation" for each of the different positions or role relationships one holds in society (Stryker, 1980: 60). Thus, being a father is an identity, as is being a colleague, a friend, and any of the other myriad of possibilities corresponding to the various roles one may play.

Even though the individual has multiple identities, it is not all his/her identities that are always relevant. In every interaction, the individual carries with him/her, a constellation of identities. However, the identity he/she constructs or enacts depends on the context of the interaction. Interaction is thus not between whole persons, but between aspects of persons having to do with

their roles and memberships in particular groups or organizations; that is, their identities (Stets & Burke, 2003)**.** Thus, any identity is always related to a corresponding counter-identity (Burke, 1980). When one claims an identity in an interaction with others, there is an alternative identity claimed by another to which it is related. For example, a husband identity is enacted as it relates to a wife identity and a teacher identity is played out in relation to a student identity. In each of these cases, there are issues that are not talked about because they are not relevant to that identity, and there are issues that are more likely to be talked about, given the identity that is currently being claimed (Stets & Burke, 2003). Stets and Burke (2003) observe that there are various styles of interaction that are appropriate in each situation for each identity. Clearly, identities are constrained by social structure, but they also maintain and facilitate the further development of social structure (Stets & Burke, 2000, 2003).

Applied to discourse studies, identity theory is better articulated in terms of Gee's (1999) 'situated identities', which he defines as "different identities or social positions we enact and recognize in different settings" (Gee, 1999:12). According to Gee, individuals use linguistic resources to enact and project different identities and roles under different circumstances and as they engage in different activities. An utterance has meaning only if and when it communicates a *socially-situated identity,* that is, "the kind of person one is seeking to be and enact here and now" *and* a *socially situated activity* "that the utterance helps to constitute" (Gee, 1999:13). This idea of socially-situated identity gives rise to *social languages*, which refers to the different styles of language that we use to enact and recognize different identities in different settings (Gee, 1999). Each social language is characterized by different lexico-grammatical resources

appropriate for the context. Every individual, according to Gee (1999), controls many different social languages and switch among them in different contexts. The boundaries between social languages are not neatly drawn. People often mix them in complex ways to achieve specific purposes. This hybridization of social languages may be a common switch from one social language to the other, but it could also be a systematic mixture of two social languages in a way that a new social language may emerge from the process (Gee, 1999). It can be observed that the hybridization of social identities reflects also the fact the individual is made up of multiple identities and more than one of these identities may be salient in achieving a single communicative purpose.

In DAs, which represent a form of discourse, writers express their gratitude to various people who helped them in undertaking their studies. Given that the writers have different kinds of social relationships with the people named in this section, it is expected that they will use different *social languages* to reflect, create and maintain corresponding (situated) identities with the different parties.

Previous Studies on Acknowledgement

Though acknowledgements have been part of scholarly writings since the 1960s (Bazerman, 1988), it is quite recently that they have become objects of serious empirical investigations. Many studies have focused on acknowledgments in research articles (RAs) as a lens to unveiling various degrees of collaborations among scholars in scientific research and the extent to which researchers in different disciplines depend on institutional and financial support (e.g. Patel, 1973;

Heffner, 1981; Laband & Tollison, 2000; Tiew & Sen, 2002; Cronin, McKenzie, & Rubio, 2003; Salager-Meyer, Ariza, Pabón, & Zambrano, 2006). Gianonni's (1998, 2002) studies are probably the only notable studies that focus on a systematic linguistic description of acknowledgements in RAs.

Though Gesuato (2003) had earlier examined the socio-pragmatic meaning of linguistic patterns and structural organization of dissertation acknowledgments, it is Hyland (2003, 2004) and Hyland and Tse, (2004) whose studies are often considered the most influential studies on DAs. Hyland (2003) explores the textualization of gratitude within the generic structure of 240 PhD and Masters DAs in six academic disciplines across five Hong Kong universities. His analysis demonstrated how DAs offer writers a unique rhetorical space not only to convey their debt for the intellectual and personal assistance they received but also to promote a situated academic, cultural, and social identity. Hyland (2004) analyses the same data, focusing on the move structure of DAs. He found a three-tier structure which is sub-divided into a number of steps: an optional reflecting move, an obligatory thanking move, and then an optional announcing move. Hyland and Tse (2004), still using the same data, focus on the linguistic patterns used to express the thanking move. The results reveal that the three steps under this obligatory move are realized by a relatively restricted range of lexico-grammatical choices. They also found that students often accompanied the act of thanking with an adjective or adverb to intensify the extent of the writer's gratitude with words such as *special* and *sincere* occurring often with the core word 'thank' to supervisors and more intense forms of words, such as *deeply* and *heartfelt*, reserved for family members.

Drawing especially on Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004), a growing number of scholars and researchers (eg. Nkemleke, 2006; Al-Ali, 2006; Scrivener, 2009; Mingwei & Yajun, 2010; Kudjordjie, 2010) have examined DAs. Al-Ali (2006) examined the generic structure of 100 DAs of doctoral Arab students. While the three-move structure emerging from his data corresponds with Hyland (2004), there are differences between the two studies in relation to the type of constituent steps under the thanking move and the lexico-grammatical patterns used in expressing gratitude. For example, Al-Ali (2006) found 'thanking Allah (God)' as one of the essential steps of the thanking move. He also found that writers employ "a more friendly and emotional tone to foreground their commitment to their kinships and the members of their extended family" (Al-Ali, 2006: 40). He concludes that students appropriate the generic structure of DAs to build and sustain academic and personal identities as well as social relations. Al-Ali (2010a,b) has further drawn attention to the socio-cultural elements doctoral Arab students utilized in writing their DAs. The more recent work of Al-Ali (2010b) is pertinent to the present study because it explicitly explores the interface between identity construction and the dissertation acknowledgement of a group of students from a cultural setting different from the student in our present study.

Scrivener (2009) investigates History doctoral dissertation acknowledgements in an American university (Oklahoma University) over a period (1930-2005). This study is significant in two respects: It adopts a diachronic approach (given that several other studies on DAs have taken a synchronic perspective); and, secondly, it is conducted in a mono-disciplinary context. Another

key finding in Scrivener's work is that librarians, libraries, and archivist are the second most frequently acknowledged thankees in History DAs, ranking behind the dissertation committee chair. This is understandable, given the epistemological disposition of History, which makes it necessary for researchers to largely depend on either library materials or archival materials. Moreover, History DAs, since 1930, have tended to move from a more impersonal tone (use of the passive and the third personal pronoun) to a more personal tone, which is in contrast with Giannoni's (2002) finding that RA acknowledgements tend to use more impersonal tone such as "the authors are grateful..").

In a more recent study in a non-Anglo-American setting, Mingwei and Yajun (2010) investigated 20 MA and PhD DAs composed by Chinese students with the aim of revealing their generic structure and lexico-grammatical features. The results show that Chinese writers largely follow the three-move structure and their sub-divided steps, as observed by Hyland (2004) and Hyland and Tse (2004). However, divergences were found in relation to the lexico-grammatical features of the moves and the absence of some of the sub-moves indicated by Hyland and his colleague.

Nkemleke's (2006) study introduces Sub-Saharan Africa into the scholarship on DAs by examining 200 DAs of Diploma students in a Cameroonian teacher-training institution from a socio-pragmatic perspective. He found that students tend to use verbose and ornamental linguistic expressions in performing the act of thanksgiving, a similar finding in Al-Ali's (2010b) work. He also found a dominant four-move structure, with the first three moves corresponding with Hyland's (2004) and Hyland and Tse's (2004) Move 2. Nkemleke concludes that the

linguistic and generic patterning of DAs by the Cameroonian students is significantly influenced by the reverence for age and the community-centered culture of Africa. In a more recent, Kudjordjie's (2010) unpublished work takes a cross-disciplinary perspective by comparing a total of 200 DAs written by undergraduates in the departments of English and Entomology and Wildlife in a Ghanaian public university. Her finding largely confirms the use of Hyland's (2004) three-move structure. Moreover, while the DAs in the English department were lengthier than those from Entomology and Wildlife, the lexical choices employed by the two groups of students were largely similar.

In sum, though previous studies have acknowledged the significance of identity in composing DAs, especially with regard to cross-cultural and disciplinary differences, no study has explicitly explored the influence of identity construction on the linguistic choices and patterning of text in DAs. The exception remains Al-Ali (2010b) who investigates DAs written by Arab doctoral students. In the next section, therefore, we illustrate the interface between identity construction and linguistic organization in a postgraduate DA.

Data Source and Analytical Framework

The data source used in the present study is a single DA provided by a postgraduate student of the University of Cape Coast, a public university in Ghana. This DA was provided in an MPhil dissertation entitled 'The Dilemma Tale as an Interpretative Space for Reading the Narrative Techniques of Achebe's Arrow of God, Anthills of the Savannah, Beloved and Paradise.' Find below the DA, with the identification of the moves provided in bold in parentheses:

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A work of this importance and at this level cannot be complete without the support of someone who understands and appreciates not only the issues at stake but also the enormity of the task at hand. This is why I wish to express monumental gratitude to Dr. Kwadwo Opoku-Agyeman of the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, my principal supervisor and mentor, for the pains-taking effort he took to review the drafts and make useful suggestions that have enormously contributed to the completion of this work. It was my good fortune to have been a student of Dr. Agyeman's course " Oral African Literature" that has provided the basis for my preoccupation with the thematics, stylistics and theoretical foundations of oral expressive forms in contemporary African and African-American literary discourse. This work should be viewed as my contribution to the issues and debates on the interface between orality and contemporary Black fiction in our quest for knowledge and theory. (**Sub-move 1: Thanking the supervisor**)

I wish to also express my profound gratitude to Dr. R. N. Osei of the Classics and Philosophy Department, University of Cape Coast. I benefited immensely from his insightful critique of the draft and the various suggestions he proffered for the advancement of this work. (**Sub-move 2: Thanking a reviewer**)

In addition, I wish to thank the following for your contributions during the various stages of this work: Prof. Naana Opoku-Agyeman, Prof. Lawrence Owusu Ansah, all of the University of Cape Coast; Dr. Ronald Paul and Dr. Hans Lofgren all of the Department of English, Goteborg University, Sweden. (**Sub-Move 3: Thanking other lecturers**)

Furthermore, I thank my dear wife, Diana, and my children who gave me all the encouragement to go on. How can I forget my parents Seth Yeguo and Grace Mensah and all my siblings particularly Gabriel! I thank you for the support and understanding during moments when my attention was focused on this work. This is the fruit of your support. (**Sub-Move 4: Thanking family**)

Finally, many thanks go to the following course mates who provided the intellectual and creative atmosphere that allowed for the free exchange of ideas on campus: Joseph Kodjo Nomo, Kwesi Quayson, Rev. William Owusu Boateng, Tospino, Owusu Ansah and Daniel Amoah. (**Sub-Move 5: Thanking colleagues**)

  I am indebted to you all.
  Qui non profit deficit. (**Move 2: Reflecting move**)

For clarity of presentation, we first employ Swales' (1990) rhetoric move analysis, following Hyland (2003,2004) and several others who have investigated DAs, to explore the generic structure of our text. Following that, we draw on a discourse analytical approach in analyzing the text. In this light, we identify linguistic features at the vocabulary, grammatical and discoursal

levels of the text that give clues to the construction of different identities. We conclude that the variability of language at these three levels of linguistic analysis is a marker of multiple identities as well as hybridization of language use.

Analysis and Discussion

Generic Structure

Two moves are used by the writer of the DA provided above. These moves are the Thanking Move and Reflecting Move, contrary to most of the findings in earlier studies on DAs that tended to adopt a three-move structure (that is, announcing move, thanking move, and taking responsibility move).

While the scholarship on genre studies indicates that what is designated as a move is not coterminous with a paragraph (Levin & Fine, 1996; Santos 1996), we found that in the text under consideration, each move was coterminous with a paragraph, though it could be argued that the first three sub-moves actually deal with one issue: thanking faculty. The fact that in this study each paragraph is coterminous with a paragraph may be sheer coincidence. Consequently, for ease of the analysis, each paragraph is considered as either a sub-move or a move, as the case may be. We identify the various units within the first move, which is the dominant move, as sub-moves or steps, and the second move as Reflecting on thankees' support. Find these observations presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Moves in Data Set

MOVE	NUMBER OF WORDS	PERCENTAGE
Move 1 (Thanking Move)		
Sub-move: Thanking the supervisor	160	44
Sub-move: Thanking the reviewer	45	12.4
Sub-move: Thanking other lecturers	48	13.2
Sub-move: Thanking family	60	16.5
Sub-move: Thanking mates	41	11
Move2 (Reflecting Move)	10	2.74
	364	100

As shown above in Table 1, out of the two moves, the Thanking Move had the greater textual space in terms of number of words (354), constituting about 97 %. The second move, Reflecting Move, constituted a mere 2.74%. Moreover, the text length in terms of words was 364 words.

According to Table 1, out of the five sub-moves or steps in the dominant move, the greatest space was taken by the sub-move 'Thanking the supervisor' (44%), confirming the finding in other studies (e.g. Hyland, 2003, 2004; Scrivener, 2009; Kudjordjie, 2010). This is not surprising as the thesis committee chair/supervisor, all things being equal, is the one who is expected to provide the necessary intellectual or academic guidance. It is worth noting that the Reflecting Move in the present data set followed the Thanking Move, contrary to several other studies (Hyland, 2003, 2004; Al-Ali, 2006; Mingwei & Yajun, 2010), where the Reflecting Move occurred before the Thanking Move.

Concerning text length, our data (the DA of a postgraduate student) neither accords with the average text length of MA and PhD dissertation acknowledgements in Mingwei and Yajun

(2010)'s work, which were 145.45 and 437.85 words respectively nor the average text length of the MA (117 words) and PhD (204.5 words) dissertation acknowledgement section in Hyland (2004). One way of explaining the different text length of the present data set is to say that the disciplines involved are different.

Linguistic Features

Move 1: Thanking various persons

Sub-Move 1: Thanking the supervisor

In expressing his gratitude towards his supervisor, the writer uses complex vocabulary such as 'importance', 'appreciates', 'enormity', 'monumental', 'gratitude', 'principal supervisor', 'pains-taking', 'enormously', 'suggestions', 'contributed', 'completion', 'preoccupation', 'thematic', 'stylistics', 'theoretical', 'foundations', 'oral expressive', 'contemporary', 'interface', 'orality', and 'knowledge'. These lexical items are complex not only because they are polysyllabic but also because they are mainly Latinate. These and other words in the text are also specific and in essence explicitly states the particular way in which the supervisor contributes to the work as the following sentence illustrates:

> …I wish to express my monumental gratitude to Dr. Opoku-Agyemang …
> for the pains-taking effort he took to *review* the drafts and *made useful*
> *suggestions* that have enormously contributed to the completion of this work
> (emphasis mine)

These complex and specific vocabulary items make this paragraph a very formal one, thereby establishing a highly formal relationship between the writer and the supervisor. Here, the writer projects himself as a mentee addressing his mentor and thus carefully chooses his words to reflect this relationship. Nkemleke (2006) notes how students use linguistic embellishments and

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flattery to deify their supervisors as a sign of deference. Worthy of note is also the complexity of

sentence structure and the vocabulary of Literary Studies that the writer highly draws on to give

this move a scholarly touch:

> It was my good fortune to have been a student of Dr. Agyemang's course
> *"Oral, African Literature"* that has provided the basis for my
> preoccupation with the *thematics*, s*tylistics* and *theoretical foundations of
> expressive forms in contemporary African and African-American literary
> discourse*. This work should be viewed as my contribution to the issues
> and debates on the interface between *orality* and *contemporary Black
> fiction* in our quest for knowledge and theory.

These discipline-specific words, coupled with the complexity of sentence structure, do not only

raise the level of formality of the text, but essentially demonstrate the writer's appropriation of

language to construct another identity different from, but related to, the mentee-mentor

relationship. That is, he promotes a "competent scholarly identity" (Hyland, 2004: 303) by

displaying his immersion in the disciplinary community of Literary Studies.

At the discoursal level, the writer employs indirectness to perform the speech act of

thanksgiving, thereby maintaining distance between the supervisor and himself: "I wish to

express monumental gratitude to Dr. Kwadwo Opoku-Agemang …." This expression is very

polite and enacts the superior-subordinator relationship that is characteristic of the mentor-

mentee relationship maintained in this move. Such indirection is also observed in Hyland and

Tse (2004).The use of the adjective 'monumental' to amplify the gratitude corroborates the

findings of previous studies (e.g. Hyland & Tse, 2004; Nkemleke, 2006). The address form used

for the supervisor, as is given below, consists of Title + Full form of Name (TFFN) and is

heavily post-modified with locative and descriptive phrases: "Dr. Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang of

the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, my principal supervisor and mentor". This

corresponds with Brown and Ford's (1961) observation that the address form, Title + Last Name (TLN), is used by speakers for their superiors. By this address form, the writer defers to the supervisor and thus assumes a role identity of a subordinator or a mentee.

Sub-Move 2: Thanking a reviewer

The writer of the DA in our present study uses equally complex vocabulary, both polysyllabic and Latinate, to express his gratitude to the lecturer who offered a critique of his dissertation, as is demonstrated in the extract below:

> I wish to also express my *profound gratitude* to Dr. R. N. Osei ... I *benefited, immensely* from his *insightful critique* of the *draft* and the various *suggestions,* he *proffered,* for the *advancement* of this work

Again, the sentence pattern here is complex. The address form used for this lecturer is Title + Name (TN). However, compared to that of the supervisor, it is less heavily post modified: "Dr. R. N. Osei of Classics and Philosophy Department, University of Cape Coast". A politeness marker is again used to perform the speech act of thanksgiving and the gratitude is again amplified with an adjective, *profound*, as is given below; "*I wish to also express my profound gratitude* to Dr. R. N. Osei ...." The honorific academic title 'Dr.' together with the initials 'R' and 'N' together with the reviewer's forename is suggestive of formality while it also gives individuality to the reviewer. The reviewer is not faceless or nameless. The language used in this context is also generally formal and reflects a subordinator-superior relationship. The writer projects himself as a student interacting with a lecturer, someone who has expertise and thus has the capacity to critique his work.

Sub-Move 3: Thanking other lecturers

Though the complexity of vocabulary is reduced in the third sub-move, where the writer expresses gratitude to lecturers other than the above two, the writer still maintains a formal tone nonetheless. The politeness marker "I wish to thank the following…" is again used here for lecturers the writer addresses in this paragraph. However, 'thank' is substituted for 'gratitude' and there is no adjective to intensify the act of thanking. It nonetheless reduces the deferential tone of this sub-move. The change here may be due to the fact that the writer puts less value on the contribution of these lecturers than his supervisor and the reviewer. Though the writer uses the personal pronoun, *your*, to address the lecturers in this sub-move, its pragmatic effect of projecting a conversational tone is weakened by the preceding hedging in the act of thanking as is evident below: "… *I wish to thank the following for your contributions* during the various stages of this work…"

The TN address is still maintained, followed by the identification of departments and institutions of the lecturers thanked, as he did for the supervisor and the reviewer in the previous sub-move. Illustrations are given below:

> Prof. Naana Opoku-Agyemang, Prof. Lawrence Owusu Ansah, all of the
> Department of English, the University of Cape Coast; Dr. Ronald Paul
> and Dr. Hans Lofgren all of the Department of English, Goteborg
> University, Sweden.

The reference to two departments of English, one in Ghana and the other in Sweden, is interesting. There is a hint at a possible collaboration between these two departments, with the faculty member from Sweden being a visiting professor. More importantly, the mention of

faculty from Sweden may be a deliberate persuasive strategy of the DA writer to press home the 'international' character of his work.

Whether the faculty being thanked here are of national or international repute, the fact remains that the writer continues to project a role identity of a student addressing his lecturers or superiors. The hedging distances the writer from the act of thanking as well as his addressees. Though Hyland and Tse (2004) speculate that hedging in showing gratitude in DAs by Hong Kong students may be an L2 deficiency, it is here identified to be a marker of identity. Further analysis of DAs this way may help clarify our understanding of the linguistic features of DAs by L2 writers.

Sub-Move 4: Thanking his family

In contrast with the earlier sub-moves, the writer uses characteristically less complex vocabulary in addressing his family:

> … I thank my dear wife, Diana, and my children who gave me all the encouragement to go on. How can I forget my parents Seth Yeguo and Grace Mensah and all my siblings particularly Gabriel! I thank you for the support and understanding during moments when my attention was focused on this work. This is the fruit of your support.

The lexical items used here are mostly general and everyday words. For instance, the writer is less specific about the kind of 'support' his mother and siblings made to his work than he is about the contributions of, for instance, his supervisor. This may be because the writer sees their family) support as not directly academic in nature and hence the need not to flag it here. With regards to sentence structure, the constructions are comparatively short and less complex and

everyday chatty expressions. Worthy of notice is the exclamative the DA writer uses in addressing his parents and siblings. Together, again, with the use of the second person pronouns *you* and *your* to directly refer to his addressees, a more personal and conversational tone to this move is presented. This gives this part of the text an emotional and a more interactive colouring, thus corroborating Al-Ali's (2006) finding that Arab student-writers employ "a more friendly and emotional tone to foreground their commitment to their kinships and the members of their extended family" (p. 40).

At the discoursal level, the DA writer addresses his wife with a passionate descriptive epithet, *my dear wife* and her first name (FN). He also addresses his brother by his FN and his parents just by their full names. The indirectness used previously to perform the speech act of thanksgiving is now replaced with direct conversational expressions. The overall picture is that the writer enacts the role of a family man, that is, a husband, a father, a son and a brother. The filial bond that exists between his family and himself is clearly expressed here. There is no evidence in this data set to suggest a patronizing tone Scrivener (2009) notes in referring to wives.

Sub-Move 5: Thanking colleagues

Finally, the writer raises the level of formality from everyday family discourse to semi-formal academic discourse that is used among colleagues in discussing common academic pursuits in the last sub-move, where he turns his attention to his course mates. This is illustrated below:

> … Many thanks go to the following course mates who provided the intellectual and creative atmosphere that allowed for the free exchange of

> ideas on campus: Joseph Kodjo Nomo, Kwesi Quayson, Rev. William
> Owusu Boateng, Tospino, Owusu Ansah and Daniel Amoah

The expressions *intellectual, creative atmosphere, exchange* and *campus* are Latinate and give the text a formal colouring. However, the address forms used for the mates are primarily names, only *Rev. William Owusu Boateng* is given TN. Perhaps, the writer is operating in two identities in relation to Rev. Owusu Boateng in that Rev. Owusu Boateng is both a colleague and a pastor. This may be attributed to the reverence to religious leaders in the Ghanaian culture. All the other names are either multiple names made up of forenames and surnames (e.g. *Joseph Kodjo Nomo* and *Kwesi Quayson*, *Daniel Amoah*), compound name (e.g. *Owusu Ansah*) and a nickname (*Tospino*). Generally, however, the identity of the writer enacted in this move is that of a colleague.

Move 2: Reflecting on thankees

> I am indebted to you all.
> *Qui non profit deficit*

The second move in our data set is significant for its brevity and the inclusion of a saying. The presence of this move is consistent with Hyland's (2004: 8) view: "Writers in the soft fields were far more likely to offer a reflection on their experience of research…." Interestingly, the writer of the DA under study places his Reflecting Move after the first move (that is, Thanking Move). This could mark an individualizing trait of the writer. There is no study that has such a brief move. Other studies such as Hyland (2004) and Mingwei and Yajun (2010) allocate 24% and 22.5% textual space respectively to the Reflecting Move. It is worth noting again that in this second and last move, the writer quotes a saying in Latin (which means 'He who does not

progress, retrogresses'), thus switching from English. This deliberate switch may be to exhibit his scholarliness, given that Latin and Greek had long been seen as a language of scholarship.

Conclusion

In this paper, we applied identity theory from Social Psychology and social language from Applied Linguistics in analyzing the acknowledgment section of a masters' dissertation in Literary Studies. Both theories are pertinent in this study. Our concern in using these theories was to show how at both generic and linguistic levels the writer of a DA enacts various identities.

First, it has been demonstrated that contrary to the findings in most studies on DAs (Hyland, 2003, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004, Al-Ali, 2006, 2010a,b; Kudjordjie, 2010), the writer of our DA adopts a two-move structure: a) Thanking various people and b) Reflecting on various forms of support offered by thankees. Second, the writer uses different *social languages*, which vary at vocabulary, grammatical and discoursal levels, in performing and projecting different identities relative to the five parties he addresses in the text. To his supervisor he is a mentee; to the other lecturers, he is a student; to his family, he is a husband, a father, a son and a brother; and to his course mates, he is a colleague. These identities are, in essence, enacted in relation to the social structure. That is to say, the mentee, student, familial and colleague identities of the writer become salient because there is/are a mentor, lecturers, family members and course mates that he relates to in the discourse. The third finding concerns the overall picture of a complex interwoven hybrid discourse. The hybridization of social languages, ranging from formal to through semi-formal to informal, in the DA may not be a mere code-switching among different

social languages, as Gee (1999) might put it, but a construction of a new social language by appropriating different already existing social languages.

This paper has a number of implications. First, it has implications for the theories of identity and social languages inasmuch as it confirms the fact that identity construction is a multilayered dynamic process embedded in social structure and enacted in discourse. Thus, in writing, students (as well as experts) construct various identities. Second, this paper is potentially a valuable contribution to the growing studies in DAs. In particular, it helps to widen the scope of such studies by including a study from Africa. It further demonstrates that hybridism is a key characteristic feature of the DA, given that its communicative purpose is to express gratitude to people that the writer has different relationships with. It will, however, be naïve to make a conclusive statement about this characteristic of the DA before substantive studies are undertaken on the issue. Thus, this paper ultimately provokes further studies to look at the interface between identity and DAs with more DAs in other universities across the globe, especially as one DA was used for the purpose of the present work.

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