



Comparison of Gratitude across Context Variations: A Generic Analysis of Dissertation Acknowledgements Written by Taiwanese Authors in EFL and ESL Contexts

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Received: 18-07- 2012

Accepted: 01-08- 2012

Published: 03-09- 2012

doi:10.7575/ijalel.v.1n.5p.130

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/ijalel.v.1n.5p.130>

Abstract

Research on generic structures of acknowledgements in dissertations has gradually drawn attention in various contexts. However, there is relatively scant research on the ways in which acknowledgements are written by authors with mutually similar cultural backgrounds but in two different academic environments and language contexts. To fill this gap, this study compared 60 PhD dissertation acknowledgements written by Taiwanese postgraduates in Taiwan, an EFL context, with another 60 written by Taiwanese scholars who obtained their doctorates in the United States, an ESL context. The focus was on the generic structures and linguistic features of the writing styles of the two groups. The study aimed to investigate whether divergences existed in the two different academic and language settings, but with the writers sharing the same cultural and language background. If such divergences did exist, the likely causes would be explored. The results revealed that firstly, the participants in both contexts generally followed a three-tier structure when writing their dissertation acknowledgements, namely, reflecting, thanking, and announcing moves. However, academic conventions, institutional preferences and the language context, together with socio-cultural factors, affected their construction of moves/steps and their choice of linguistic elements. It was found that the rhetorical language in both corpora was relatively direct, emotional and precise.

Keywords: genre analysis, dissertation acknowledgements, generic structure, speech acts, rhetorical choices, contextual influences, keyword analysis

1. Introduction

Expressing gratitude in academia is a frequent practice and thus acknowledgements are commonly seen in different types of academic texts, especially in theses and dissertations (DA) (Note 1). DA offer authors a place to construct their personal identity and professional engagement, and to display disciplinary connections with those whom they wish to publicly recognise (Hyland, 2004b). Hence, for dissertation authors, DA are not merely a list of those individuals acknowledged² for their assistance during a long and demanding research process, but they also provide a means to “balance debts and responsibilities as well as to display their immersion in scholarly networks, their active disciplinary membership, and their observance of the valued academic norms of modesty, gratitude and appropriate self-effacement” (Hyland & Tse, 2004: 273). In writing DA, authors try to identify themselves with the appreciated parties, and they seek appropriate formal ways to recognise mutual interactions. Yet, researching DA is generally regarded as relatively marginal and peripheral to the central task of studying English for academic purposes (EAP) (Hyland, 2004b) compared to other sections of research journal articles or dissertations such as the introduction, literature review, methods, results, discussion and conclusion.

For researchers and postgraduate students, DA are not merely a list of those acknowledged (Note 2) for their assistance, but they also encourage authors “to express their interpersonal network explicitly and honestly in the academic community” (Cheng, 2012: 8). Unfortunately, many writers may have problems expressing gratitude adequately while composing this academic genre (Hyland, 2004). In particular, DA are not only rhetorically sophisticated and formatively complex but also have socio-pragmatic connections. A number of issues are involved in DA, such as how writers in various cultures and social contexts perceive and express their gratitude,



how socio-cultural and disciplinary preferences affect the presentation of those who are thanked, or how academic conventions and the use of English as an L1 or a foreign or second language in different social contexts influence the thanking strategies adopted and the linguistic choices made. That is, DA involve not only linguistic realisations but also social and cultural pragmatism (Cheng, 2012).

Previous investigations of DA have mainly focused on the expressions of gratitude and their generic structure used by a single ethnic group in one social context (Hyland, 2004b; Hyland & Tse, 2004; Zhao & Jiang, 2010), or the comparisons of DA written by native speakers of English (NS) and non-native speakers of English (NNS) in two different social contexts (Cheng, 2012; Lasaky, 2011). Research comparing DA written only by NNS writers who share the same culture but study in two different socio-cultural and language contexts (i.e., *EFL*, where English is used as a foreign language like Taiwan and China *versus* *ESL*, where English is used as a second language like Hong Kong) is still relatively understudied. Furthermore, none of the existing research on DA has analysed the keywords used in composing DA, whose ‘aboutness’ and ‘keyness’ are considered to help researchers identify the significant differences of DA from other genres and determine the key features of this genre and its style (Archer, 2009; Baker, 2009; Scott & Tribble, 2006). Therefore, this study aims to compare and contrast DA written by Taiwanese students in Taiwan (TW) and in the United States (US) in terms of their generic structure, linguistic features, the people who are thanked, strategies of expressing gratitude, keyword use, the possible causes of divergences if any, and implications for instructing writing DA. It is hoped that this examination can bridge the research and pedagogical gap in studying the reciprocal relationship between texts and contexts.

2. Background to the study

Genres consist of a series of goal-oriented communicative events formed out of schematic structures, and those who take part in these events share the same communicative purposes (Swales, 1990). A genre is highly structured and conventionalised, and has specific constraints such as lexis and moves exploited by the members in a community to achieve communicative purposes (Bhatia, 1993). Besides, genres tend to be connected with the organisation of culture and social purposes around language (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). Analysing a genre can help ESP practitioners and writers identify how texts are structured and distinguished in social and cultural contexts in order to realise their communication purposes (Hyland, 2004a). In addition, genre analysis also offers “explicit and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts” (Hyland, 2004a: 18), which helps writers acquire the specialist culture (Bhatia, 1997). Hyland (2007) advocates analysing genres from a broader (i.e., contextual) focus, while Paltridge (2001) suggests a narrower (i.e., linguistic) approach. Both Paltridge (2001) and Hyland (2007) recommend providing learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to communicate in particular situations, thus allowing them to gain access to socially powerful forms of language.

When conducting genre analysis on academic texts, researchers can adopt one of two main approaches, namely generic moves at a macro-level or linguistic features at a micro-level. A large number of studies have relied on macro-level analysis to investigate moves/steps in academic texts such as research/conference paper titles, (Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010a; Haggan, 2004), abstracts (Hyland, 2000; Lorés, 2004; Martin, 2003; Salager-Meyer, 1990; Samaraj, 2005), introductions (Bhatia, 1993; Dudley-Evans & Henderson, 1990; Holmes, 1997; Samaraj, 2002; Swales, 1981, 1990), results (Atai & Falah, 2005; Brett, 1994; Thompson, 1993; Williams, 1999), discussions (Atai & Falah, 2005; Holmes, 1997; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Nodoushan & Khakbaz, 2011), and conclusions (Bunton, 2002; Yang & Allison, 2003). Most of the above studies on academic genres either adopted or adapted Swales’ (1990) CARS model (creating a research space while writing introductions in research articles) to explore the issues of generic structures in academic texts.

Both generic moves and linguistic features have recently received equal attention from genre researchers in their analysis of acknowledgements in academic settings. Giannoni (2002) was the first genre analyst to systematically examine the features and structure of research journal article acknowledgements. He analysed 100 acknowledgements in English and Italian scholarly journal articles from a genre-analytic perspective, paying attention to the issues of generic complexity and staging, personal involvement and peer-reference, authorial responsibility and pragmatic appropriateness. His research concluded that generic structures of acknowledgements in journal articles not only reflect the differences of the various disciplines, but are also affected by the patterns of national disciplinary communities. However, it was Hyland’s (2003, 2004b) and Hyland and Tse’s (2004) studies that precisely established the three-tier structure of acknowledgements in dissertations, which has become a reference model for later similar research. Hyland collected 240 MA and PhD dissertations written by Hong Kong Chinese-speaking postgraduates (HKC) from six academic disciplines in



order to analyse how the acknowledgements (DA) were structured to express gratitude. The results of that study demonstrated that DA not only “play an important role in promoting a competent, even rhetorically skilled, scholarly identity“ of the acknowledgers, but also reveal the social and cultural characteristics of DA in situated settings (Hyland, 2003: 266). One obligatory move, namely, the *Thanking Move*, together with two optional moves and several sub-divided steps, were identified in DA as outlined In Table 1 (Hyland, 2004b).

Table 1. Moves/steps of DA

Moves/steps	Description
1. Reflecting Move	Introspective comment on the writer’s research experience
2. Thanking Move	Mapping credit to individuals and institutions
2.1 Presenting participants	Introducing those to be thanked
2.2 Thanking for academic assistance	Thanks for intellectual support, ideas, analyses, and feedback, etc.
2.3 Thanking for resources	Thanks for data access, clerical, technical, and financial support
2.4 Thanking for moral support	Thanks for encouragement, friendship, sympathy, patience, etc.
3. Announcing Move	Public statement of responsibility and inspiration
3.1 Accepting responsibility	An assertion of authorial responsibility for flaws and errors
3.2 Dedicating the thesis	A formal dedication of the thesis to one or more individuals

Examples of these moves and steps selected from the two corpora in this study are:

Move 1 This dissertation is a record of my formative years at NTU, and is the outcome of a dream fulfilled by an ambitious but unfledged dreamer.

Move 2

Step 2.1 I ought to thank a lot of people for the coming into existence of this dissertation.

Step 2.2 To Dr. C and Dr. C, my advisors, for their wisdom, guidance, intellectual challenge, encouragement, and patience throughout my life.

Step 2.3 Most importantly, I thank him for his financial support to me during these years so I can take care of my PhD study and my family at the same time.

Step 2.4 I am greatly indebted to my parents for their selfless love and full support for my study, my career and family life.

Move 3

Step 3.1 Of course, any mistakes that remain are my own.

Step 3.2 Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to those who support my study with generous help, encouragement and enlightenment.

Hyland and Tse (2004) further examined the linguistic features used to realise the thanking move. The results reveal that nomination patterns (e.g., *My sincere thanks to Prof. W.* or *My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Y.*) are the commonest expressions used to convey gratitude. The acknowledgers tend to use adjectives and adverbs to intensify their gratitude, and most of the authors are comfortable using the first person pronoun *I* as the authorial subject (e.g. *I am deeply grateful for their understanding and patience during the past seven years.*).

These three studies opened a window for subsequent research to scrutinise DA in more detail. Some researchers have made comparisons of DA written in different contexts, some have searched for new moves/steps, while others have integrated discussions of the influences of culture and society on DA language use. For instance, Zhao and Jiang (2010) followed Hyland’s (2004b) and Hyland and Tse’s (2004) models to explore China Chinese-speaking postgraduates’ (CNC) DA by collecting 20 MA and 20 PhD dissertations from language-related disciplines such as applied linguistics, English language and literature. They compared the similarities and differences in the DA of HKC and CNC in terms of their generic structure, gratitude expressions



and the modifiers used in the thanking acts. Their conclusion was that even though the participants in both cases were Chinese speakers, and generally their DA followed Hyland's three-tier structure, some major differences still exist. These include "the absence of reflecting and announcing moves, especially step 3.2 of the latter [and] the excessive use of bare mention form and modifiers in thanking acts" (e.g. *Dr. R. deserves to have many words of gratitude from me*). Modifiers such as *sincere, special, heartfelt, or hearty*) (Zhao & Jiang, 2010: 108) are used in the CNC' DA due to the cultural and academic differences in the two contexts. Yang (2011) further compared DA written by CNC, HKC and Taiwanese Chinese-speakers (TWC), and found that the authors in the three contexts generally followed the same three-tier structure in writing DA. However, contextual factors such as academic, socio-cultural or geographical differences in the three settings also affected their construction of moves and choices of linguistic elements. For example, it was found that the rhetorical language was relatively direct, emotional, and definite in the DA written by Taiwanese. Moreover, a new step called *Making a Confession* (e.g., *Meanwhile, I want to give the most heartbreaking apology to my husband and kids for the family time sacrificed by my study*), which was not reported in the other two settings, was identified in the TWC' DA.

In addition to the settings of Chinese culture, a number of DA studies have been conducted in Muslim settings such as Arabs. In these studies, in addition to analysing the generic structures and linguistic features of DA, much emphasis is placed on how social and cultural factors affect the formation of moves/steps and identities. For example, Al-Ali (2006, 2010) investigated 100 Arab PhD students' DA in several Middle Eastern countries, and found that his participants frequently used performative verbs (e.g., *thank, appreciate, or acknowledge*) to convey their gratitude. Most importantly, a new step was identified, namely *Thanking Allah (God)*. Al-Ali claimed that due to religious beliefs and the local academic and social conventions, the Arab acknowledgers tended to use specific contextualised components to realise their thanking acts. Thus, they were scrupulous about their rhetorical choices, naming practices and organisation conventions in their DA. Al-Ali's research indicates that DA do not just list the assistance received from the acknowledgees, but also reveal how writers perceive different selves in their interaction with their peers according to culture-specific preferred conventions. In other words, genres are dynamic and can be shaped and appropriated to accommodate newly accepted practices and to generate new constructions (Al-Ali, 2010; Bhatia, 2004).

In Cameroon, Nkemleke (2006) applied sociolinguistic and cultural-based approaches, and the co-operation principle (Grice, 1975), to investigate 200 DA collected between 1990 and 1999. The results reveal that Cameroonian writers tend to use nativised deferential strategies and nominal phrases to display good manners to supervisors and seniors under the influence of the cultural belief that one's success or achievements come from the collective efforts of an extended community. Thus, he ascertained that culture plays a crucial role in shaping non-native English texts such as DA and "understanding texts produced in a specific non-English culture setting may therefore involve a proper appreciation of the expectations of the people there" (*ibid.* pp. 181). In contrast, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010b) did a case study on the DA of one MA student from Ghana, in which they discovered that the writer systematically applied various lexical, grammatical and discursal elements while constructing his identities and relationships with the acknowledgees, and only *Thanking* and *Reflecting Moves* were identified in the data. Depending on the status of different parties, the writer exercised a hybrid discourse in his DA. Hence, Afful and Mwinlaaru claimed that hybridism was a key feature of that particular DA. Their finding that writers use different linguistic items to express their gratitude in thanking acts has been confirmed in other studies (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Zhao & Jiang, 2010). However, the use of a single DA to come to the conclusion that there are only two moves in Ghanaian DA is rather sweeping, since this one example could reflect no more than the personal preferences of the single informant.

The most recent research on DA has been by Lasaky (2011), Cheng and Kuo (2011) and Cheng (2012). Lasaky also relied on Hyland's (2004b) framework to compare DA in PhD dissertations written by native English speakers (NS) and non-native English-speaking Iranian students (NNS) majoring in applied linguistics. His results show that generally both of the groups followed Hyland's scheme and there was no statistical difference between the two in terms of constructing DA. Imitation or verbatim copying may be one reason why DA are seldom formally taught (Hyland, 2003; Scrivener, 2009). Similarly, Lasaky also identified the step of *Thanking Allah (God)* in the NNS group as the previous studies found in a similar context, that is, the Muslim students in Al-Ali's studies (2006, 2010). However, in contrast to Hyland's corpus, an extra separate dedication page was found in both groups' dissertations, and further, the DA of the NNS group lacked a *Reflecting Move* or *Accepting Responsibility Step*, both of which appeared in the DA of the NS group. Lasaky explained that this was for cultural reasons, that is, Iranian students usually perceive writing a dissertation as their own duty, while



accountability is not given importance in their culture. In Taiwan, Cheng and Kuo (2011) studied 20 master's DA, and found that Taiwanese writers tend to express their thanks explicitly, using overt thanking words. Also, advisors were always appreciated first, using more complex strategies compared to those used for the other acknowledgees. Furthermore, Cheng (2012) in another contrastive study concluded that subtle differences exist between Taiwanese students' and native English speakers' DA due to the embedded socio-pragmatic perceptions of writing this genre.

In contrast to the above studies, Scrivener (2009) used a diachronic approach to investigating 219 DA written by history PhD students at one university between 1930 and 2005. Firstly, she noticed that, in her corpus, libraries, librarians, and archivists were the second most commonly acknowledged group, after the thesis committee. This may be because history students rely on libraries and archives more than students from other disciplines. Secondly, it was found that formality in language has decreased over the past 70 years; therefore, the exclusive use of the first person pronoun *I* as the authorial subject increased dramatically from 42.9% in the 1930s to 100% in 2005, while the use of the third person and passive voice decreased from 57.1% in the 1930s to 0.0% in 2005. Students are now also more willing to acknowledge the moral support received from fellow students, academic colleagues, friends and family members, and they expect to gain professional attention by associating with and expressing gratitude to superiors. She concluded that this change reflects history PhD students' current life in that they are not 'lone scholars' as they once were. Rather than depending on cultural influences to explain the differences, Scrivener portrayed the evolution of DA and then inferred details of the writers' lives from the perspective of the societal changes reflected in their academic writing. In other words, a DA is not merely a form, but mirrors a life and a way of living through interaction and communication (Bazerman, 1997).

In sum, most of the research discussed above followed Hyland's (2003, 2004b) scheme of the three-tier structure to study the generic moves and linguistic features of DA used to realise thanking acts. Socio-cultural factors, which were not included in Hyland's studies, have received much attention from genre researchers in their analysis of this particular genre. Thus, new steps such as *Thanking Allah (God)* were found to occur in Arab cultures, and in Taiwan, a newly identified step is *Making a Confession* (e.g., *Meanwhile, I want to give the most heartbreaking apology to my husband and kids for the family time scarified by my study or My only apology goes to my two little ones, Albert and Victoria*). This tendency corresponds to the claims that firstly, genres are not fixed, but are dynamic and open-ended; thus, lexical and generic elements along with cultural preferences will shape a new generic frame (Bhatia, 2004; Frow, 2006). Secondly, merely focusing on identifying moves is no longer sufficient; the roles of writers and the expectations of their communities must also be considered (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002: 465).

The majority of the studies discussed above either investigated DA in a single context, or compared and contrasted acknowledgements across different settings of the same culture, or compared those written by NNS and NS. Most confirmed that socio-cultural factors affect how a DA is structured, and that linguistic elements are applied to realise the thanking acts. However, a comparison of DA written by writers sharing the same culture but influenced by different contextual factors such as English status and academic conventions has not as yet been carried out. Besides, no existing study explicitly addresses the issue of the keywords used in writing DA and their *keyness* and *aboutness* for this genre. In order to fill this gap, the present exploratory study investigates doctoral DA written by Taiwanese authors in Taiwanese universities (TWU-TWC) and in American universities (USU-TWC). It examines whether the academic environments and English context (i.e., EFL vs. ESL) are also factors affecting generic structures and language choice in writing a DA, or whether cultural background prevails over these two factors to decide move construction and linguistic preferences as well as keyword use. Furthermore, to obtain a holistic view of how cultural factors affect DA in various academic environments and English contexts within the same culture, the results of Hyland (2003, 2004b) and Hyland and Tse's (2004) studies in Hong Kong (an ESL context), as well as those of Zhao and Jiang's (2010) study in China (an EFL context) are also duly compared and contrasted with the findings of the Taiwanese writers in this study.

3. Corpora and Procedures

In Taiwanese universities, dissertations written in English are generally only required in English-related disciplines; thus, the 60 DA collected for this study all came from English linguistics (LIN), English language education (ELT) and English literature (LIT) departments, and were selected from a search of the database of the National Library Digital Theses and Dissertations in Taiwan. To make a compatible comparison, DA written by TWC in American universities were selected from the same three disciplines, using the ProQuest Digital Dissertations database. To ensure that the dissertations were written by Taiwanese, four criteria were applied as



gatekeepers to confirm the authors' nationality: setting the keywords to limit the topics to those related to Taiwan only, checking the author's name spelling system (Note 3), reading the author's curriculum vitae, and screening based on the content of the abstracts and acknowledgements. Twenty PhD DA were selected from each discipline. Thus, in total, 60 DA written by TWU-TWC and another 60 by USU-TWC were collected as the two corpora for this study. The USU corpus consisted of 23,676 words, while the TWU corpus consisted of 23,274 words, with an average text length of 394.6 words and 387.9 words, respectively. This was similar to the length of the texts in Hyland's study (i.e., 385.9) but was shorter than those in Zhao and Jiang's (i.e., 437.9) by around 50 words.

The samples were analysed from two perspectives, generic structure and linguistic features. Firstly, the generic structure of the 120 texts was examined manually according to Hyland's (2004b) scheme. This examination was performed by the researcher and one NNS colleague. To ensure that there was a consensus of categorisation of moves and steps, two randomly-selected texts from each major from the TWU and the USU corpora (giving a total of 12 texts) were examined and compared, and inter-coder reliability of 86% was achieved. Secondly, the choices of sentence patterns, modifiers, hedges, acknowledgees and keywords used in the thanking acts, and the use of authorial subjects, were studied. WordSmith Tools v 5.0 (Scott, 2008) was used to conduct the corpus analysis. In addition, a *t*-test was used to determine if any statistically significant differences existed between the two corpora.

4.1 Results and Discussion

4.1 Generic structure

Table 2. Relative frequency of steps in each text by discipline and context

	US-based				Taiwan-based				
	ELT	LIN	LIT	All	ELT	LIN	LIT	All	Total
1. <i>Reflecting</i>	0.2	0.2	0.15	0.18	0.25	0.25	0.1	0.2	0.19
2. <i>Thanking</i>									
Step 2.1	1.1	0.55	0.55	0.73	1	1.55	0.85	1.13	0.93
Step 2.2	4.2	4.4	4.2	4.26	3.95	4.85	3.6	4.13	4.19
Step 2.3	1.4	1.8	1.6	1.6	2.3	1.6	1.3	1.73	1.66
Step 2.4	4.1	2.6	3.15	3.28	4	4.75	3.35	4.03	3.65
3. <i>Announcing</i>									
Step 3.1	0	0	0.05	0.01	0	0.1	0.1	0.06	0.03
Step 3.2	0.4	0.5	0.45	0.45	0.65	0.25	0.25	0.38	0.41
Average per text	11.4	10.05	10.15	10.53	12.15	13.35	9.55	11.65	11.09

Note: ELT: English language teaching, LIN.: Linguistics, LIT.: Literature. T-test: All US vs. All TW, $p=0.4700$

Table 3. Percentages of acknowledgement with each step by discipline and context

	US-based				Taiwan-based				
	ELT	LIN	LIT	All	ELT	LIN	LIT	All	Total
1. <i>Reflecting</i>	25	20	15	20	10	20	10	13	17
2. <i>Thanking</i>									
Step 2.1	55	60	55	57	95	65	55	71	64
Step 2.2	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Step 2.3	80	95	60	78	90	65	55	70	74
Step 2.4	100	90	90	93	100	100	90	96	95
3. <i>Announcing</i>									
Step 3.1	0	0	0	2	0	10	10	6	4
Step 3.2	35	40	35	37	65	25	25	38	38

Note: ELT: English language teaching, LIN.: Linguistics, LIT.: Literature. T-test: All US vs. All TW, $p=0.4805$



Tables 2 and 3 show the relative frequency of steps and the percentages of each step by discipline and context. As can be seen, the Taiwanese authors in both contexts took nearly identical numbers of steps in their DA, that is 10.53 (US) vs. 11.09 (TW), and a *t*-test found no statistically significant difference ($p=0.4700$) between the number of steps taken by the two groups. There were also no significant differences found between the two groups for the distribution of the average number of sentences per text (18.65 US: 17.55 TW), the average number of words per sentence (21.19: 22.38), and the average number of words per text (394.6: 387.9). These correspondences between the two groups may indicate that, in general, Taiwanese writers studying in Taiwan and in the US followed a similar pattern of composing acknowledgements, and that the different academic environments or English contexts (i.e., ESL vs. EFL) did not obviously affect the content length or number of structural steps taken in their DA. It is likely that their experiences of learning English in Taiwan can account for this situation. Taiwanese English learners are always given strict guidelines concerning word length which they are required to meet in order to fully display their English writing ability in school tests, official university entrance examinations, or English proficiency tests. These experiences may have imperceptibly disciplined and influenced these students, particularly since they are PhD students, who would be even more willing to strictly follow any rules for composing essays in order to obtain higher grades. Such an ingrained habit cannot be altered immediately, even when studying abroad.

Despite the similarities between the DA of the TWU and USU students, and the fact that both groups largely followed Hyland's three-tier structure, a number of differences still exist between the two groups. First, the percentage of the occurrence of the *Reflecting move* in the US-based group is nearly twice as high as that in the TW-based group. The Taiwan-based PhD candidates tended to directly express their gratitude. It can be assumed that those who studied abroad may have confronted more hardships during their study and thus required more assistance than those who were studying in their home country. It seems natural that the US-based group would be inclined to be more introspective about their research life. Second, while the use of step 3.1 (claiming responsibility for shortcomings) was relatively low for both groups, the TWU-TWC used it three times more than the USU-TWC. Hyland (2004b) argues that in claiming responsibility for shortcomings in dissertations, writers use a two-pronged strategy: on the one hand, they absolve their advisors and collaborators from any deficiencies, and on the other hand they claim ownership of the dissertation. The reason for the low percentages of the usage of this step could be that the buoyant statements of gratitude in Move 2 might be seen by examiners to have "undermined the student's claim to have independently created an original contribution" (Hyland, 2004b: 321). As to the difference between the two groups, the possible explanations could be that firstly, writers in Taiwan may have modelled their writing on other Taiwanese DA, or secondly, perhaps they believed that it is polite to maintain their advisor's authority and academic professionalism, that is, *to keep face* in the case of any faults being identified later. Saving face for superiors is an important cultural value in Confucian societies such as Taiwan. Perhaps those students studying in the US were aware that it is not such an important issue in American culture, and so they did not feel it was quite so necessary to claim responsibility for the shortcomings of their research and thus save face for their supervisors. This may explain the US-based students' less frequent use of this particular step.

Furthermore, different academic conventions between the two contexts could also result in different orders of steps. In the Taiwan-based group, the dedication step 3.2 always appeared in the main acknowledgements page and strictly followed Hyland's (2004b) generic order; however, many of the US students listed their dedications on a separate page, the *dedication page*, placed before the acknowledgements page. Moreover, 5% of the original selected dissertations in the US-based group which were discarded from the corpus did not include any acknowledgements at all. Also, in the Taiwan-based group, a new step, *Making a confession*, was identified (Yang, 2011) (e.g., '*Meanwhile, I want to give the most heartbreaking apology to my husband and kids for the family time sacrificed by my study*', and '*My only apology goes to my two little ones, Albert and Victoria*'). However, this step was not found in the US-based corpus. Apparently, the first two divergences result from the different academic conventions in the two contexts, as writers in certain American universities followed their house styles of writing acknowledgements and dedicating dissertations. However, the third difference could be due to both academic conventions and cultural factors. For the US-based group, 'acknowledgements' may have been taken to mean purely a statement of expressing thanks, making a personal confession inappropriate; yet, for the Taiwan-based writers, these extra remarks can be thought of as an implicit way of showing appreciation for others' assistance, tolerance or sacrifice. Rather than expressing gratitude boldly, some writers prefer to adopt a veiled way of expressing thanks to their family members.

Table 4. Relative frequency of steps in each text by discipline with reference to Hyland's corpus

	US-based PhD	TW-based PhD	Present average	Hyland's
1. <i>Reflecting</i>	0.18	0.2	0.19	0.4
2. <i>Thanking</i>				
Step 2.1	0.73	1.13	0.93	0.5
Step 2.2	4.26	4.13	4.19	2.1
Step 2.3	1.6	1.73	1.66	1.5
Step 2.4	3.28	4.03	3.65	1.6
3. <i>Announcing</i>				
Step 3.1	0.01	0.06	0.03	0.1
Step 3.2	0.45	0.38	0.41	0.1
Average	10.53	11.65	11.09	6.3

Note: differences in summed totals due to rounding; Zhao & Jiang's study did not offer this information; Hyland's (2004b) data came from the average of MA and PhD in applied linguistics disciplines. T-test: US vs. TW, $p=0.4700$; Present corpora vs. Hyland's, $p=0.2214$

Table 5. Percentage of PhD DA moves and steps with reference to Hyland's and Zhao and Jiang's results

Present corpora	Hyland's	Zhao & Jiang's	
1. <i>Reflecting</i>	17	24	40
2. <i>Thanking</i>			
Step 2.1	64	43	75
Step 2.2	100	100	100
Step 2.3	74	100	90
Step 2.4	95	84	95
3. <i>Announcing</i>			
Step 3.1	4	13	35
Step 3.2	38	11	10

Note: Hyland's (2004b) data came from the average of MA and PhD in applied linguistics disciplines. T-test: Present corpora vs. Hyland's, $p=0.4543$; Present corpora vs. Zhao & Jiang's, $p=0.3514$

When the present two corpora were compared with those of Hyland (2004b) and Zhao and Jiang (2010), as shown in Tables 4 and 5, there were no significant statistical differences between any of the four datasets, that is the two Taiwanese groups, the HKC and the CNC. This implies that the writers in the four contexts largely followed similar generic patterns while writing their DA. However, the Taiwanese authors still had the highest percentage use of step 3.2 while having the lowest percentages for Move 1, and steps 2.3 and 3.1. In Zhao and Jiang's (2010) study, they reported that the CNC students "feel far less easy to dedicate their work" (p. 99), believing that it was not a great achievement, or worthy of dedication to anyone. Thus, they asserted that CNC exercised the modesty maxim of the politeness principle (Grice, 1975), and this tendency could possibly explain why CNC had the highest percentage occurrence of step 3.1, perhaps feeling a greater obligation to save face for their supervisors. In contrast, the Taiwanese authors valued their work more and thus dedicated it to others, including their research participants, advisors, family members, God, and even their pets. These disparities further suggest that firstly, TWC prefer to express thanks more openly in their DA than do their HKC and CNC counterparts, implying that TWC are more direct in both their writing style and perhaps also in their personality. Secondly, the low percentage of use of step 2.3 implies that the Taiwanese PhD candidates were provided with fewer institutional resources while studying for their doctorates either in Taiwan or in the US when compared to their HKC or CNC counterparts.

To conclude this section, Hyland's generic model describing DA was adopted by all of the Chinese-speaking PhD postgraduates across the different contexts. Academic conventions in different institutions and cultural factors in different settings can also affect how generic structure is shaped to fit contexts. Nevertheless, the English context (i.e., EFL vs. ESL) does not influence the construction of generic structure to an obvious extent in this study.



4.2 Acknowledges

Table 6. Percentages (%) of gratitude expressions toward different acknowledgees compared to Zhao & Jiang

	AD	OT	CM	CO	FM	IN	FD	PT	PA	RL	WR
PhD											
Zhao& Jiang	100	90	/	100	90	25	/	/	/	/	/
TW-based	98	91	95	60	90	21	65	3	28	8	6
US-based	82	72	82	43	78	35	63	0	52	8	2
Total											
Present	90	82	89	52	84	28	64	2	40	8	4

Note: (1) AD: Advisors, OT: Other teachers, CM: Committee, CO: Academic Colleagues, FM: Family, IN: Institutions, FD: Friends, PT: Pets, PA: Participants, RL: Religions, WR: Writers; (2) Hyland's (2003) results are calculated differently and so are not listed for comparison.

Table 6 shows the percentages of expressions of gratitude toward the different people acknowledged, compared to those reported by Zhao and Jiang (2010) (Note 4). One major difference is that not all the writers (Note 5) thanked their advisors in the present two corpora, in contrast to Hyland's (2004b: 307) finding that supervisors appeared in all DA. Surprisingly, the US-based group acknowledged their advisors ten times more frequently than did the TW-based group. One possible reason for this might be that, while the writers based in the US expressed their thanks to many people, probably including their advisors, in their DA, they did not clearly specify their relationship with those acknowledged by stating their title or position. This made classification awkward, so finally all of these cases were categorised as 'other teachers' to avoid ambiguity. This US-based peculiarity also indicates that in US academia it is more commonplace or acceptable to name superiors without stating their titles or positions than it is in the Taiwanese context. However, the possibility of intentional avoidance cannot be rejected, either. Both possibilities are believed to be very uncommon, but these writers' choices disregarded the principle concerning who should be thanked the most, and the first, in their DA.

Another apparent divergence between the two corpora was the percentage of those thanking their research participants. The US-based group acknowledged their participants almost twice as frequently as did their Taiwan-based counterparts. In the Taiwan-based group, most acknowledgements of participants were found in the DA from the ELT department (13 out of 20 ELT DA, 3 out of 20 LIN DA, and 1 out of 20 LIT DA); however, in the US-based corpus 16 out of 20 linguistics DA thanked their participants, followed by ELT (14 out of 20) and LIT (2 out of 20). The greater propensity of the US-based group to thank their participants suggests that the US-based Taiwanese PhD students studying linguistics preferred empirical to theoretical research, which could be interpreted to mean that a genre such as DA will be affected by preferred practices in different academic communities.

In addition, the results also suggest that the Taiwanese writers in both settings expressed their gratitude to a broader range of people when compared with the Chinese students in Zhao and Jiang's (2010) study. Other than those most commonly acknowledged (e.g., *advisors, committee members, other teachers, colleagues, institutions or parents*), appreciation was also shown to religious figures (e.g., *God*), non-human companions such as pets, and the authors of literary works (Yang, 2011). English literature majors' dissertations usually depend greatly on literary works, and this heavy reliance leads to a perception that it is essential to express thanks to the authors of those works. The fact that differences in disciplines affect who should be thanked in DA has also been confirmed in Scrivener's (2009) study of history PhD students' DA. Another significant difference was that Zhao and Jiang reported 48% more thanking of colleagues and classmates than was found in the present study. One possible explanation for this difference is that this study separated colleagues/classmates/friends into academic colleagues and non-academic friends, while Zhao and Jiang combined them into one single category.

4.3 Gratitude expressions

According to Hyland and Tse's (2004) analysis, the patterns used to express gratitude in thanking acts in DA, that is, *Move 2 and its four steps*, could be mainly classified into five types: nominalisation (e.g., *My sincere thanks goes to...*), performative verb (e.g., *I thank...*), adjective (e.g., *I am grateful to...*), passive voice (e.g., *Appreciation is given to...*) and bare mention (e.g., *X was very helpful in...*). Yet another common expression (i.e.,



To X, you + non-thanking verbs... e.g., To Alex, you accompanied me through this sweet and bitter journey) identified in the present corpora was categorised as ‘bare mention’ as it can be regarded as being similar to the pattern ‘To X who was helpful in V-ing...’.

Table 7. Patterns expressing gratitude in PhD DA between the Taiwan-based and US-based groups

Patterns	Occurrence frequency (%)					
	Taiwan-based			US-based		
	ELT	LIN	LIT	ELT	LIN	LIT
Bare mention	6.1	11.5	17.0	12.6	5.7	23.9
Performative-verb	47.1	50.0	43.9	52.3	58.8	44.3
Adjective	22.0	19.4	17.8	15.8	17.7	19.3
Nominalisation	21.5	16.3	19.5	17.4	14.2	10.9
Passive	3.0	2.6	1.6	1.5	3.4	1.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Differences in summed totals due to rounding; ELT: English language teaching, LIN.: Linguistics, LIT.: Literature

Table 8. Patterns expressing gratitude across different corpora

Patterns	Occurrence frequency (%)				
	US-based PhD	TW-based PhD	TW Average	Hyland & Tse	Zhao & Jiang PhD
Bare mention	14.4	10.8	12.6	6.8	44.4
Performative-verb	51.6	47.4	49.5	33.2	26.3
Adjective	17.6	20.0	18.8	15.4	15.1
Nominalisation	14.2	19.0	16.6	33.6	12.7
Passive	1.9	2.5	2.2	11.0	2.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Hyland and Tse’s (2004) is the average of MA and PhD DA; differences in summed totals due to rounding. T-test: US vs. TW, $p=0.5000$; average vs. Hyland & Tse’s, $p=0.4976$; average vs. Zhao & Jiang’s, $p=0.4905$

Tables 7 and 8 compare the different corpora by discipline and setting. Although there was no statistically significant difference between the two groups, some agreement and dissimilarities are still worth noting. For instance, the TWC in both contexts generally used the five patterns in similar rank order except for ‘bare mention’ and ‘nominalisation’. In addition, both groups used ‘performative verb’ patterns most often (up to 50% on average), a finding similar to that of Cheng and Kuo (2011), whereas only 2.2% used the ‘passive’ pattern in the present study. Using the ‘performative verb’ pattern always requires the subject *I*, suggesting a very direct authorial voice, which is “particularly marked in the science and engineering texts,” that is, the hard sciences (Hyland & Tse, 2004: 266). However, all the disciplines represented in our two corpora belong to ‘the soft sciences’. The excessive use of this pattern may result from Taiwanese EFL learners’ experiences of learning English, in which they are often reminded of the importance of using and identifying verbs when approaching English texts. In an EFL context such as Taiwan, English is more likely to be taught by separating the language into several segments such as words, phrases, clauses or sentences, and thus learners learn to differentiate them and memorize rules for combining them grammatically. Studying in the US apparently cannot sway the deeply rooted habit of relying on previous English learning experiences when writing their DA.

Another explanation may be cultural. If overtly using ‘bare mention’ implies that the CNC were more reserved when expressing their feelings and emotions, as Zhao and Jiang (2010) suggest, then Taiwanese may be much less reserved, wherever they study. Nkemeke’s (2006) study may also support such an inference, as only one percent of the thanking expressions used the ‘performative verb’ pattern in that study’s sample DA. This may result from a cultural expectation that great homage should be paid to acknowledgees, especially to supervisors, suggesting that they are “all-knowing” or “all-wise”. If choice of thanking expression is affected by culture, then it is not difficult to understand why only 2.2% of the expressions of gratitude used the passive voice in all of the TWC’ DA. Another possible reason for this low usage can be that “Chinese is a language without voice category

since its passive voice is mainly expressed in a covert way rather than a marked way...That may cause the students to feel uneasy in employing the passive form in English acknowledgements” (Zhao & Jiang, 2010: 105). In short, personal experiences of learning English, and contextual factors affect the choice of expression, but academic conventions and the English context evidently do not exercise much influence on this particular aspect of language use. Still, these factors should be further explored from a deeper qualitative perspective.

4.4 Modifiers in thanking acts

Most of the modifiers used to intensify emotions in thanking acts are subjective language such as emotional, commentary and axiological adjectives or adverbs, and are mainly found in steps 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4. However, the degree of intensification also changes in accordance with the status of the acknowledgees. When the Taiwan-based group thanked their advisors, they frequently used honorific and exaggerated words, especially superlatives, in expressions such as *best*, *deepest*, *foremost*, *earnest*, *sincerest*, *warmest*, *everlasting* or *eternal* in order to show respect for those who are symbols of absolute authority, power, and seniority in the academic hierarchy. This exaggerated use is very common in Chinese and Arab cultures (Lee, 2002; Al-Ali, 2010). However, this tendency was not as apparent in the writing of the US-based group. Superlatives were used less frequently and were applied equally to different acknowledgees such as advisors, participants, friends and family members. The use of subjunctives is also an exaggerated form of expressing gratitude, especially to advisors and family members.

Table 9. Frequencies of subjunctives used in the PhD dissertation acknowledgements

Patterns	TW-based	US-based
...would not have...if...	15	37
...would never...if...	34	18
...would be im/possible...if...	8/22	5/36
Total	79	96

Table 9 shows the frequency of use of the subjunctive in the two corpora. The Taiwanese authors in the US used noticeably more subjunctives than their Taiwan-based counterparts. Though the US-based group did not use many superlatives to modify their thanks to their advisors, they did use more conditionals. Hence, the two groups may have followed different academic conventions or DA samples to achieve the same purpose.

For other teachers and committee members, words such as *resourceful*, *thoughtful*, *grateful*, *exceptional*, or *special* were widely used in the Taiwan-based corpus, while *sincere*, *special* or no modifiers were used by the US-based group. These adjectives (esp. *-ful*) are not so often used in colloquial language and thus make the acknowledgements more formal (Hyland & Tse, 2004). When thanking their families, the writers in the Taiwan-based group chose less formal words such as *dear*, *deep*, or *especially*, while the US-based group preferred to use stronger words such as *deepest*, *endless*, *tremendous*, or *extreme*. This suggests that the family’s support for those studying abroad may be relatively more important, thus affecting their choice of modifiers. Yet, in both corpora, very few modifiers were used to express gratitude to friends, and the pattern ‘performative verb’ (e.g. *I thank all the friends...or I would like to thank my friends...*) was thus repeatedly used to convey a very direct and less formal tone. The variation in these linguistic choices, depending on the relationship and geographical locations of the acknowledger and acknowledgees, also illustrates the fact that acknowledgement is a complexly interwoven form of discourse, and the hybridism of the tone could be a feature of DA (Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010b).

Many ‘performative verb’ patterns in thanking acts also include hedging modals or mental state verbs (e.g., *wish*, *would like*, *should*, *shall*, *must*, *have to*, or *want to*) to express the writer’s strong intentions. This use is found in 35.6% of the present corpus, compared with 69.7% in Zhao and Jiang’s study, and 52% in that of Hyland and Tse (see Table 10). The other two studies both explained that these words were used not to mean extrinsic obligation to obey but because of the intrinsic necessity to convey irresistible strong needs to thank those who had offered assistance (Hyland & Tse, 2004: p.269). Nevertheless, TWC used the least performative verbs, regardless of where the author was studying. This may indicate that rather than maintaining a definite demarcation between acknowledger and acknowledgees, TWC writers might blur the differentiation of seniority and authority. Probably, the value-laden beliefs (as expressed in the Chinese proverbs *Like teachers, like friends* or *Once taught, forever parented*) affected the TWC more than they did the HKC and CNC. Relationships with advisors, in Chinese culture, can be both teacher-student relationships as well as parent-child-like relationships.



Table 10. Percentages (%) of modals and state verbs

Hyland & Tse's	Zhao & Jiang's	TW-based PhD	US-based PhD	TW average
52	69.7	34	37.1	35.6

Note: Hyland & Tse's and Zhao & Jiang's included both MA and PhD acknowledgements.

4.5 Choice of authorial subject

Table 11. Subject types in postgraduate dissertation acknowledgements (%)

	<i>I/my</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>non-author</i>	<i>the author</i>
Hyland & Tse	74.7	11.9	13.3	0.0
Zhao & Jiang	56.6	16.6	26.8	0.0
TW-based	68.2	14.0	17.8	0.0
US-based	75.2	11.1	13.7	0.0
Present average	71.7	12.5	15.8	0.0

Note: T-test: TW vs. US, p=0.5000; Present study vs. Hyland & Tse, p=0.4995; Present study vs. Zhao & Jiang, p=0.5000

As shown in Table 11, the choice of authorial subject of the DA in the present two corpora was generally in accordance with that in Hyland and Tse's (2004) and Zhao and Jiang's (2010) studies, and thus was not found to be significantly different according to a *t*-test. In contrast to their preferred use of impersonality in writing dissertations, the writers in the four settings were comfortable with using first person pronouns to emphasise "their commitment to their words, set up relationship with their readers, and establish their personal sincerity in thanking various people" (Hyland & Tse, 2004: 271). Nevertheless, this tendency was opposite to the findings of Giannoni (2002), who reported a preponderance of the *I-avoidance* strategy in writing journal article acknowledgements, but corroborates Scrivener's (2009) results showing an increase in exclusive use of *I* from 24.9% in the 1930s to 100% in 2005. Differing from Giannoni's finding, however, all of our data suggest that, for our Taiwanese subjects, writing a DA can be less formal, and more personal and emotional.

According to the data, 7% more of the Taiwanese authors in the US tended to be more confident with using *I/My* than those in Taiwan, while the HKC had the highest percentages for this usage. Based on Scrivener (2009), it can be inferred that the more Anglo-Americanised a context is, the more comfortable the authors are with using *I/My* in their DA. A direct voice of claiming authorship seems to be more acceptable in power-distributed and self-orientated communities such as many Western societies than in power-concentrated and group-oriented communities such as some Asian settings where thrift, ordered relationships, politeness, obedience and respect for superiors are valued (Dimmock & Walker, 2000a, b; Hofstede, 1991, Lu, Rose & Blodgett, 1999; Yang, 2003). Thus, presumably the cultural setting will affect authors' choice regarding authorial subject.

4.6 Keywords in writing acknowledgements across the two different settings

As discussed previously, how to write an appropriate DA has been less addressed by researchers and less taught than other sections of academic papers; thus, most writers model their writing on existing examples. However, this paper argues that if writers can be taught the keywords (Note 6) and genre knowledge of language and context, then they would probably be able (or willing) to compose their own personalized and candid acknowledgements with choices and constraints provided, rather than copying a sample verbatim. Hence, two keyword lists (Note 7) were generated in this study (see the excerpt in Appendix 1).

Table 12. Keywords in the two sources

Keywords	TW-based	US-based
Total distinct words (DW)	3,430	3,846
Overused keywords	358	334
Underused keywords	41	44
Total keywords (KW)	399	378
DW/per 100 words	14.73	16.24
KW/per 100 DW	10.43	8.68

Note: The keywords were generated with reference to BNC; KW/per 100 DW refers to overused keywords in every 100 distinct words only.

The statistics of keywords from the two corpora are summarized in Table 12. Both the Appendix and the Table provide clear evidence of diverse preferences of the lexical choices in the two groups. For instance, Table 12 suggests that, though the number of distinct words used by the Taiwan-based group is smaller than that of their counterparts in the US, there are more keywords in their DA. This means that they tended to use less commonly used words, while their US-based counterparts were more likely to use more common words, as evidenced by the smaller number of keywords identified in their corpus. In other words, the US-based group seemingly had a greater choice of lexis at their disposal, mostly common words, whereas the Taiwan-based authors used relatively fewer unique words but preferred to use more obscure academic words. It can be inferred that in an EFL context, high level English users may intentionally use difficult words to display their superior English proficiency. In an ESL setting, however, it could be assumed that the students have begun to adopt a more natural and native form of expression in their writing.

Similarly, the Appendix also confirms that *I/My* were frequently used in both corpora, which also explains the high percentage of those using ‘performative verbs’ and the first personal pronoun as the subject of thanking acts. Moreover, thanks for moral support appears more frequently than thanks for academic assistance because words such as ‘encouragement’ and ‘support’ have higher keyness than those such as ‘comments’ and ‘suggestions’. In addition, from the high-ranking use of *Dr.*, it can be seen that the title *Dr.* is more commonly used than *Professor*.

These keywords reveal the fact that appreciation for who (e.g. *nouns*), what (e.g. *nouns*), and how (e.g. *verbs*, *adjectives*, and *adverbs*) is generally expressed in DA. Therefore, in a pedagogical application such as EAP, teachers can use these keywords to explicitly instruct writers when and how words can be used in this genre and then to write an appropriate DA. In other words, keyword lists can systematically and informatively scaffold EAP learners to construct the main moves/steps of a DA.

Table 13. Different adjectives used to modify thanks in the two DA keyword lists

Adjectives	TW-based	US-based
<i>-ed</i>	15	16
<i>-ing</i>	10	9
<i>-ful</i>	5	6
<i>-able</i>	2	4
<i>-tive</i>	2	3

Besides, in Hyland and Tse’s (2004) analysis, the adjectives used to express gratitude typically ended in *-ful*. This form is more formal than colloquial usage, as is appropriate for DA. The keywords ending with *-ful* in the present corpora also have much higher keyness, similar to Hyland and Tse’s (2004) findings. Yet, as Table 13 shows in the two keyword lists, the adjectives ending in *-ful* only ranked third in terms of frequency but had higher keyness, after the first-ranking *-ed* and the second-ranking *-ing*, that is, participles. Participles used as adjectives are relatively common in everyday use, and thus their use in acknowledgments suggests that DA written by TWC have a less formal tone. This diversity may come from different academic conventions or contextualised factors such as experiences of learning English, as mentioned in the preceding discussion.

5. Conclusions

With reference to Hyland’s (2003, 2004b), Hyland and Tse’s (2004), and Zhao and Jiang’s (2010) studies on DA written by Chinese speakers in Hong Kong and mainland China, the present research investigated 120 PhD DA in English-related disciplines written by Taiwanese Chinese-speaking writers in Taiwan and the US, compared the generic structure and linguistic features in these two settings, and examined the keyword use in this genre. The results reveal that subtle differences clearly exist in constructing moves/steps and choosing linguistic elements, though all the authors shared very similar (Chinese) cultures. Academic conventions, experiences of learning English, contextualised values, individual dispositions, personal relationships with acknowledgees, the English context, individual writing styles or even the geographical locations of acknowledgees could all account for the diversity found. Thus, the findings of this paper support what the previously-cited research argues, which is that genre could be complexly interwoven, dynamic, changeable, able to be manipulated, socio-pragmatic and then situated to fit a specific setting with its preferred choices or conventions. Furthermore, in terms of pedagogy, this research suggests that EAP teachers can explicitly instruct students how to write purposeful and interactional



acknowledgements by analysing keywords and the context of a genre.

Indeed, additional research is required to complement this study. DA written by authors in the hard sciences can be compared to this analysis of DA in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, DA written by overseas Taiwanese postgraduates studying in other English-speaking contexts such as the UK, Canada or Australia can be collected in order to examine whether these settings exercise a similar influence on writing DA as that of the US. Similarly, a comparison study of DA written in the two different contexts by their respective native speakers (e.g. *Taiwanese EFL vs. English L1 speakers*) can be conducted to examine if the status of English use in a context will affect how a structure is formed and what linguistic choices are made. Finally, to better confirm the reasons why writers choose certain forms and lexis in different contexts of English use and to learn how they perceive themselves as writers of DA, continued investigations such as interviews or ethnographic methods need to be integrated into projects that concentrate on corpus analysis.

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Notes

Note 1. In this study, the term *dissertations* is used to refer to PhD dissertations/theses in different contexts.

Note 2. To be concise, *acknowledgees* is used to refer to the people who are thanked, and *acknowledgers* are those who express gratitude.

Note 3. Mostly Taiwan uses the Wade-Giles Romanisation system to transcribe Chinese proper nouns, which is noticeably different from the (*Hanyu pinyin*) system used in mainland China.

Note 4. Hyland (2003) offered similar information but used different calculation methods; therefore, the data cannot be compared here.

Note 5. The exceptions come from a PhD candidate in the Taiwan-based group and 10 writers in the US-based group.

Note 6. Keywords are the words with unusually high frequency in a genre text. These words are significant in telling the 'keyness' and 'aboutness' of the genre text and thus precisely reflect what the text is about (Scott & Tribble, 2006).

Note 7. In this study, the DA keyword lists were generated using WordSmith by separately using the two sets of 60 texts as the study corpus, and BNC as the reference corpus.



Appendix 1

Excerpt of top 30 keywords in different corpora with reference to BNC

Corpus:	TWU-TWC	USU-TWC	Both TWC
1	MY	MY	MY
2	DISSERTATION	DISSERTATION	DISSERTATION
3	DR	DR	DR
4	ME	ME	ME
5	PROF	THANK	THANK
6	THANK	I	I
7	GRATITUDE	GRATITUDE	GRATITUDE
8	I	ENCOURAGEMENT	PHD
9	PHD	PHD	ENCOURAGEMENT
10	PROFESSOR	SUPPORT	PROFESSOR
11	THANKS	GRATEFUL	THANKS
12	ADVISOR	AM	PROF
13	STUDY	THANKS	GRATEFUL
14	ENCOURAGEMENT	EXPRESS	SUPPORT
15	AM	STUDY	AM
16	GRATEFUL	AND	STUDY
17	UNIVERSITY	PROFESSOR	ADVISOR
18	DOCTORAL	APPRECIATION	DOCTORAL
19	SUPPORT	DOCTORAL	EXPRESS
20	INDEBTED	ADVISOR	AND
21	SUGGESTIONS	INSIGHTFUL	APPRECIATION
22	INSIGHTFUL	TAIWAN	INSIGHTFUL
23	EXPRESS	SINCERE	TAIWAN
24	ALSO	GRADUATE	ALSO
25	ACADEMIC	RESEARCH	UNIVERSITY
26	COMMENTS	GUIDANCE	SUGGESTIONS
27	APPRECIATION	WRITING	WRITING
28	TAIWAN	FRIENDS	GUIDANCE
29	AND	ALSO	COMMENTS
30	THEIR	PATIENCE	INDEBTED