

**A STUDY OF ENGLISH ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS WRITTEN
BY EFL THAI LEARNERS**

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Abstract

This research investigates English acknowledgements in dissertations written by Thai PhD students, particularly the generic structure and linguistic patterns of gratitude expressions used in the acknowledgements. Following the line of the move analysis in acknowledgements of Hyland (2004), this article analyzed 70 acknowledgements accompanying PhD dissertations in the area of English language study. The study result shows that the generic structure comprises 3 moves: thanking, announcing, and signing-off. The first move is obligatory whereas the other two are optional. Various gratitude expressions are used in response to different assistance forms. Also, the study result reveals the aspects of politeness, social distance, and the family institution of the Thai culture.

Keywords: acknowledgement, gratitude expression, move analysis, genre analysis

Introduction

It can be said that nowadays acknowledgements have become a common practice in writing theses or dissertations and they have been increasingly paid attention to by researchers. Hyland and Tse

(2004, p. 260) claimed that acknowledgements in theses and dissertations are a distinct genre with a clear purpose and physical location. Even though it has become a common practice, writing an acknowledgement accompanying a thesis or dissertation is not a must for graduate students in many countries. In Thailand, on the other hand, an acknowledgement is an obligatory part of the thesis-writing format, either of regular or international programs (in regular programs, the thesis is written in Thai, whereas in international programs, it must be written in English). Despite the fact that it is an obligatory part of the thesis format, Thai students most of the time are left to their own devices and intuition when writing it and their acknowledgements have been little paid attention to by Thai linguistic researchers. As a result, little is known about its structure and linguistic pattern.

Based on my own experience and that of many of my colleagues (personal communication), we had no idea beforehand at all what elements an acknowledgement should comprise or normally comprises when we were in the final stage of completing our theses. Nobody told us how to write this part. The graduate school just said that your thesis/dissertation must contain an acknowledgement of at least one page. What we could do at that time was to study the acknowledgements in the previous theses/ dissertations of our seniors and then follow their format as a tentative model. What we did seems to show that we were (unconsciously) aware of the fact that, being part of an academic community, we should follow the convention that our predecessors had created. It was not free for us to write whatever we wanted in this section.

For students that have to write acknowledgements in foreign languages, the situation seems to be more troubling. Thai students have to learn by themselves not only how to use such a foreign language grammatically but also how to express their gratitude appropriately towards individuals and institutions that have assisted them in conducting their research in the Thai context. Moreover, they also have to learn how to acknowledge assistance that comes in different forms.

Currently, there has been an increase in international graduate programs of study in Thailand. Thai graduate students when studying in these programs have to use English as the *lingua franca* and also have to write their acknowledgements in English. However, little is known about the structure of their English acknowledgements. In this study, I propose to examine the generic structure (the combination of moves and steps) and linguistic patterns employed by Thai PhD students and also analyze the sociocultural beliefs and values that are conveyed in their acknowledgements.

The generic structure could reveal the conventions that are employed in writing acknowledgements in the ELT academic community, which can be considered as a sub-culture in relation to the entire academic community in Thailand. Also, the younger generation of EFL Thai learners can be taught how to write acknowledgements conforming to this practice so as to be part of this academic community.

Literature Review

The motivation for this study has come from the works of Swales (1981, 1990, 2004) on move analysis in discourse, which have been greatly strengthened and developed systematically. Swales has contributed it to the move analysis in research articles. Following his line of move analysis, Giannoni (2002) studied the acknowledgements that accompanied the articles published in journals. One group of acknowledgements was written in Italian by Italian researchers and the other group was written in English by American researchers, and it was found that they shared a generic structure which comprised two moves: the introductory move and the main move. Each move contains 3 possible steps. The main move, which is obligatory, contains the steps allocating credit to institutions, to individuals, and claiming responsibility. Interestingly, the structure of Italian scholars' acknowledgements in detail is different from that of the Americans in step 3 of the introductory move, where Italian scholars assert authorship (i.e. who wrote what), but Americans absolutely do not.

Another study that paid attention to the acknowledgments that accompanied research articles was that of Salager-Meyer et al. (2009). They studied 150 acknowledgements in medical research articles written in English and Spanish from three different geographical contexts: Venezuela, Spain, and the USA. The acknowledgements in their study were considered as “paratext” and were analyzed with the purpose of examining whether the publication context exerted an influence on the frequency, length, and content of the acknowledgements. Their study results showed that acknowledgements in the English language corpus were more significantly frequent and longer than those in Spanish and Venezuelan. Their study results also agreed with Giannoni (2002) in terms of the language-dependent character of acknowledgements. In other words, acknowledgers from different linguistic backgrounds, even though they study in the same field, express gratitude in different ways.

The acknowledgements in books and dissertations, on the other hand, are not a paratext which occupies only a little space, but have become commonplace or occupy a certain section. Also, the acknowledgements written in L2, especially those in dissertations, have been paid nowadays more attention to by language researchers. Hyland (2004), who should be credited as the pioneer analyst of acknowledgements in dissertations, studied 240 English acknowledgements accompanying dissertations written in a variety of disciplines by MA and PhD students in Hong Kong, whose L1 is Cantonese. The study results showed that their generic structure comprises 3 moves: the reflective move, the thanking move and the announcing move. The thanking move is obligatory, while the other two are optional. The reflective move concerns the writer’s comment on his or her research experience. The thanking move consists of 4 steps: presenting the participants, expressing thanks for academic assistance, thanking for resources, including data access, financial support, clerical and technical support, and thanking for moral support. The last move, the announcing move, concerns the author’s

responsibility for flaws and the dedication of the dissertation to someone.

Hyland and Tse (2004) furthered the study with focus on the linguistic devices employed by graduate Hong Kong students from 6 different academic fields. They studied the linguistic features particularly in the thanking move, ranging from step 2 to step 4, which addressed the different participants that had contributed to the completion of the research. Their study results showed that in general all thanking steps contained five patterns of gratitude expression: nominalization, performative, adjective, passive voice, and bare mention. Out of 1414 acts of thanking, nominalization, for instance, *My sincere thanks to*, occurred 476 times; performative, for example, *I thank (someone)*, occurred 469 times; adjective, for example, *I am grateful to*, occurred 218 times; passive voice, for instance, *Appreciation is given to*, occurred 155 times; and bare mention, where the acknowledger simply talked about the feeling of being grateful to someone or described someone's help, for example, *X has been helpful*, occurred 96 times.

For the subject position or authorial pronouns, the first person pronoun *I* was mostly found (66%), whereas the second most-preferred subject was a noun phrase prefaced by the first person possessive adjective *my* (6%). Some acts of thanking contained no subject (16 %), 8% were non-authorial subjects, and 4% used *the author*.

For the modification of the act of thanking, Hyland and Tse (2004) found that adjectives and adverbs were used to intensify gratitude varying from participant to participant. The adjectives *special* and *sincere(ly)* were more often used with thanks to supervisors, whereas more intense forms such as *deeply* and *heartfelt* co-occurred mostly with gratitude to family members and friends.

Following the line of analysis of the pioneering studies of Hyland (2004) and Hyland & Tse (2004) on dissertation acknowledgements, Mingwei and Yajun (2010) investigated the English-language acknowledgements accompanying 20 MA and PhD dissertations composed by students in Chinese mainland, with the

aim of revealing the generic structure and lexico-grammatical patterns used to realize the moves and steps. Their data were restricted to only those written by graduates that had applied for degrees in the fields of English language and literature, linguistics, and applied linguistics. The results showed that the Chinese writers largely followed the “three tier structure” discovered by Hyland and his colleague. However, divergences have also been found which have shown the difference in the academic practice between mainland and Hong Kong Chinese graduates.

In comparison to Hyland’s study, Mingwei and Yajun (2010: 99) found that in step 3.2, the announcing move, thesis dedication occurred at an apparently lower frequency, indicating that Chinese mainland students felt far less easy in dedicating their work. Particularly, none of the MA graduates expressed the dedication of their theses to anyone. When interviewed, some said that their work was definitely no great accomplishment in any sense, thus not worth dedicating to others. However, steps 2.1 (presenting participants) and 2.4 (thanking for moral support) in Chinese mainland acknowledgements occurred at a higher frequency than their counterparts in Hyland’s study.

In Hyland and Tse’s (2004) research, gratitude was expressed mainly by means of nominalizations and performatives, each accounting for about one-third of all the pattern types, which were followed by adjectives and passives, accounting for 15.4% and 11% respectively, while bare mention was the least-used type (6.8%). The Chinese mainland students’ preference for bare mention was more than evident, while, rather surprisingly, much fewer passives (4.6% vs. 11%) and nominalizations (16.45% vs. 33.6%) were employed. The occurrence frequencies of adjectives (26.6% vs. 33.2%) and performative verbs (17.65% vs. 15.4%) were fairly similar across the two corpora. According to Mingwei and Yajun (2010: 104), when it comes to expressing feelings and emotions, Chinese mainland students tend to be more reserved compared to Hong Kong students, who are more exposed to the Western culture and academic practices.

Following Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006) studied English acknowledgements written by 100 Arabian students. His study results showed that the acknowledgements had the same generic structure, comprised 3 moves: the reflecting move, thanking move, and announcing move. The second move, the thanking move, was obligatory, whereas the other two moves were optional. The thanking move consisted of 6 steps: thanking Allah, presenting the participants, thanking supervisor(s) and other academics, thanking for data access, clerical and technical support, thanking for financial support, and thanking for moral support. Unlike Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006) classified thanking for financial support as a separate step, not included in the step of thanking for resources, as it was mentioned rather often and the financial support came from different sources.

In 2010, Al-Ali turned to study acknowledgements written in Arabic by 100 PhD students that were native Arabians studying the soft sciences. His study results were different from those in 2006. He presented his study of the generic structure by classifying the moves into 8 moves: opening, praising and thanking Allah (God), thanking supervisor(s) and other academics, acknowledging access to resources, thanking for moral support, invoking and blessing, closing, and signing-off. Only the third move, thanking supervisor(s) and other academics, was obligatory, occurring 100% of the time, whereas the others were optional. The second move, though it was optional, occurred at a high percentage of the time at 70%.

Roungtheera (2010) studied French acknowledgements written by 30 Thai MA and PhD students by using Swales' move analysis approach (1990, 2004). His results show that the generic structure consists of two moves: the thanking move and announcing move. The first move, the thanking move, was obligatory, whereas the other was optional. Unlike in Hyland (2004) and Al-Ali (2006), the announcing move contained only one step: dedicating the thesis to someone. And there was only one out of all of the data that had a dedication of the thesis. As with Mingwei and Yajun (2010: 99), the frequency of the dedication of the thesis was very low: only one out of 30. Roungtheera (2010: 162) contended that the dedication of the thesis

has not yet become traditional nor is a practice in the Thai academic community. On the other hand, the thanking move consists of 6 steps: presenting participants, thanking for academic assistance, thanking for data access, clerical support and editing, thanking for financial support, thanking for moral support, and conclusion of thanking. According to Rongtheera (2010: 162), the last step, the conclusion of thanking, which is not found in either Hyland (2004) or Al-Ali (2006), was to repeat the whole thanks of this move so as to make it more formal and to emphasize the importance of the aforementioned persons. Most of the core content in this step can be generally translated as “Without these people, this research could not have been completed” Regarding the sociocultural aspect, Rongtheera (2010) did not find any move or step thanking Buddha, unlike some previous research in which the acknowledgers following a theistic or monotheistic religion tended to thank God or Allah. According to Rongtheera (2010: 164), as Buddhism is a humanistic religion, which believes in the power of human being, the results conform to the teaching of the Lord Buddha—that we should rely on ourselves instead of depending on a supernatural power. Showing gratitude towards other helpful or respected people is, on the other hand, very important as it is one of the 38 virtues taught by the Lord Buddha. Regarding the step of thanking for moral support, his study shows the Thai culture of living in extended families including grandparents and other relatives, even though there is an upward trend of having a nuclear family.

To sum up, previous studies on acknowledgements, particularly those accompanying theses or dissertations, have shown that acknowledgements in a particular academic community have a certain structure and linguistic patterns which are partly influenced by the culture in which the acknowledgers are involved. Writing acknowledgements in L1 and in one particular area of study can reveal clearly that the writers belong to one academic community and society, as clearly shown in Al-Ali (2010), while writing acknowledgements in L2 has shown that the acknowledgers, even though they may have to conform to the conventions held in common

in the L2 academic community, may be influenced by their L1 culture, especially when they write L2 acknowledgements in the L1 context, as clearly shown in Rountheera (2010).

In this paper I propose to study the English acknowledgements written by Thai PhD students whose major is English language study, excluding English literature (which is normally considered as another particular field that has its own method of study). On the one hand, EFL Thai students have to learn the practice of writing acknowledgements in their academic community, which is restricted to the group of people, mostly non-native English or Thai learners, that are involved particularly with English Language learning and teaching, unlike the large academic community in Hyland's sense (2004), which covers a variety of disciplines studied in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, they have to use English to thank many people appropriately in the Thai context. Thus, it is interesting to explore the generic structure, linguistic features, and sociocultural aspects of their acknowledgements so as to compare them with previous studies in terms of cross-cultural study and different academic community practices.

Data and Methodology

The data comprise 70 acknowledgements with a total length of 24,389 words or an average text length of 348.41 words. The longest acknowledgement contains 654 words, while the shortest one contains 100 words. The data were collected from the ThaiLis database, which has just been created by the Commission on Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Thailand. This database comprises both MA theses and PhD dissertations submitted by all Thai universities in electronic PDF files. While searching for the data, the researcher limited the search with key words that concerned only the field of English language study. The key words included "English," "English language study," "EFL," "ELT," and "applied linguistics."

Only PhD dissertations were collected for the data in this study as they can be good representations of EFL Thai advanced learners. The MA thesis was excluded, since the average acknowledgements

were normally half those of the PhD dissertation. Additionally, MA students normally tend to have less research experience than the PhD students; therefore their acknowledgements may not be good enough to be data of the same status as those written by PhD students.

In Thailand, there have been so far only two universities that offer a PhD program with a focus on English language study: one is Chulalongkorn University (CU), offering English as an International Language (EIL) program, and the other is Suranaree University of Technology (SUT) with its English Language Study Program. The table below shows the number of acknowledgements of the two universities that the researcher could collect from the ThaiLis database. However, as the two programs are international, it was found that some dissertations were written by foreign students, such as Chinese and Vietnamese students, so their dissertations were excluded from this research.

Table 1: Number of acknowledgements in dissertations of CU and SUT

University	No	Words
CU	49	16,508
SUT	21	7,881
Sum	70	24,389
Average		348.41

Following Swales (2004) and Hyland (2004) regarding their notion of move analysis, the data in this research were analyzed to find out their generic structure: moves and steps. The identification of each move was based on the acknowledger's purpose or a verbal act with a particular function such as to thank someone or to dedicate the thesis to someone. The order of move and steps was arranged on the basis of their frequency of occurrence.¹

¹ As acknowledgements are a genre that is not involved in any special science that requires another expert to create an inter-coding, the data in this research were analyzed alone by the researcher. However, if some statements in the data appeared to be too unclear to code, other EFL lecturers were consulted.

Then the analysis of linguistic features was carried out to find the language patterns of gratitude expression and also the data were analyzed for the sociocultural aspects that they may convey. For the sake of research ethics, any real first or last names of people mentioned in the data were substituted by X and Y respectively.

Generic Structure

In this section, the study results of the generic structure, the combination of moves and steps, of English acknowledgements written by Thai PhD students are presented. The linguistic devices commonly employed by the students will be, on the other hand, illustrated and discussed later in the next section.

The study results show that the generic structure of English acknowledgements by EFL Thai PhD students consists of three moves: the thanking move, announcing move, and signing-off move. The first one comprises 6 steps. The second one contains 2 steps, whereas the last one contains only one step.

Unlike Hyland (2004), no reflective move was found and surprisingly the steps in announcing the move were in reverse order. Thanking for financial support, on the other hand, was classified as a separate step similar to that found in Al-Ali (2006) and Rongtheera (2010), as it was mentioned rather often since the financial aid came from different sources. Also, this study found a step for the conclusion of thanking like that in Rongtheera (2010). For the last move, signing-off, it was found to be the same as that in Al-Ali (2010), where the students wrote their first and last name at the end of their acknowledgements.

Table 2: Generic structure

1 Thanking Move	
1.1 Presenting participants	Introducing those to be thanked
1.2 Thanking for academic assistance	Thanks for intellectual support, inspiration, comments, etc.
1.3 Thanking for data and documentation work support	Thanks for data access, subjects' cooperation, editing, clerical & technical support
1.4 Thanking for financial support	Thanks for financial aid in various forms
1.5 Thanking for moral support	Thanks for encouragement, love, care, friendship, etc.
1.6 Conclusion of thanking	Repeating the thanks to the aforementioned persons and institutions as a whole
2 Announcing Move	
2.1 Dedicating the dissertation	A formal dedication of the dissertation to an individual or individuals
2.2 Accepting Responsibility	Showing responsibility for flaws or mistakes in the research
3 Signing-Off Move	
3.1 Giving Author's name	First name and family name

Next, the frequency and percentage of each step in the three moves are presented. Only the first move, the thanking move, was obligatory, while the second and the third move—the announcing move and signing-off move—were optional. The thanking move consisted of 6 steps, of which only step 2 occurred in every text of the data, while the other two moves comprised two steps and one step respectively.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage

1 Thanking Move	Frequency	Percentage
1.1 Presenting participants	45	64.3
1.2 Thanking for academic assistance	70	100
1.3 Thanking for data and documentation work support	68	97.1
1.4 Thanking for financial support	40	57.1
1.5 Thanking for moral support	69	98.6
1.6 Conclusion of thanking	1	1.4
2 Announcing Move		
2.1 Dedicating the dissertation	15	21.4
2.2 Accepting responsibility	4	5.7
3 Signing-Off Move		
3.1 Giving the author's name	21	30

To illustrate each move and its step (s), a simple, non-recursive structure is presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Illustration of moves and steps

1 Thanking Move	
Step 1	This dissertation has been completed with a lot of assistance from many people.
Step 2	I am grateful to Professor Dr. X, my advisor, who heartily devoted her time to guide me and gave me encouragement.
Step 3	I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. X Y and Mr. X Y for the English correction of this thesis.
Step 4	Deepest gratitude to the Royal Thai government and Kasetsart University for the financial support they provided for my study.

Table 4: Illustration of moves and steps (continued)

1 Thanking Move	
Step 5	Lastly, a thank you from the heart to all the people in my family who always supported and provided enormous encouragement to cheer me up throughout my study, especially my dearest 'Nong X,' whose love has made so many things possible.
Step 6	This thesis could not have been finished without help and support from many people who are gratefully acknowledged here.
2 Announcing Move	
Step 1	With all my love and respect, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to them.
Step 2	All errors and omissions are mine alone.
3 Signing-Off Move	
Step 1	First Name and Last Name

Next, each step in the moves, starting with those in the thanking move, will be further discussed and clearly illustrated with examples.

Step 1.1 Presenting the Participants

As in previous research such as that of Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006), and Rountheera (2010), this step represented the introduction of individuals and institutions, who will be thanked in the next step due to their contributions to the completion of the dissertation. Let us consider some examples.

- (1) This dissertation could not have been completed without the guidance, advice, and support from many people.
- (2) I am indebted to many people who substantially provided me with guidance, suggestions, comments, support, and encouragement to produce this dissertation.

As can be clearly seen in example 1, it ends with the words “many people,” which then leads to an expression of gratitude to individuals. Most expressions in this step tend to be short, being produced in one sentence, and followed immediately by the first person to be thanked. However, there are also a few students devoting an entire paragraph to this step. Let us consider an example.

- (3) There are many people to whom I would like to express my gratitude. This dissertation results largely from the generous support that many individuals and institutions extended to me both in Thailand and the United States of America, including mentors, advisors, colleagues, friends, and family members.

Step 1.2 Thanking for Academic Assistance

As can be clearly seen in Table 3, step 1.2 occurs 100% of the time, and the person that is the first one to be thanked in this step is the advisor, followed by the dissertation committee members and/or experts in the particular field. Others are their instructors, institutions (either the university where the acknowledgers were studying or the one they were working for and affiliated to), and their colleagues. Examples are illustrated below.

- (4) First of all, I would especially like to thank my advisor, Asst. Prof. Dr. X Y, for his generous time, commitment, and unlimited patience. Throughout my doctoral work he encouraged me to develop independent thinking and research skills. He continually stimulated my analytical thinking and greatly assisted me with scientific writing.
- (5) I am grateful to Professor Dr. X Y, my advisor, who heartily devoted her time to guide me and gave me encouragement. I am also grateful for the help and wonderful device given by Associate Professor Dr. X Y. My special thanks to Professor Dr. X Y, who kindly gave valuable suggestions for my test. I also would like to thank all dissertation committee members for devoting their time to read my work and for their valuable suggestions.

The acknowledger in example 4 devoted an entire paragraph to thanking his or her advisor, while the other in example 5 talked about his or her advisor in one sentence, but a rather complicated sentence, embedding a long relative clause.

Other academics, even though they have no academic rank, are also thanked and prefaced with the Thai term “Ajarn,” which means ‘teacher’ or ‘lecturer’ so as to show respect to them as well. Let us consider an example.

- (6) Also my special thanks go to three English native speakers who assisted in doing the web-based C-Test: Ajarn X Y and Ajarn X Y from Chulalongkorn university Language Institute; and Dr. X Y, my EIL friend.

This reference term “Ajarn,” which is spelt on the basis of Thai phonological transliteration, is often used to refer to a native Thai lecturer that does not have a doctoral degree or any other academic rank. As in Thai culture, students do not, or are not allowed to, refer to such a lecturer with the title Mr./Ms. so as to make it formal as in the English culture, so, the term “Ajarn” is a better choice. It can be said that this term is similar to “Professor” used in American convention in the sense of ‘lecturer’, not an academic rank. Thus, the use of this term not only makes the act of showing gratitude become formal like those that have academic rank in examples 4 and 5, but also culturally show respect for the teaching profession in the Thai culture. Similar to spoken language, Thai students normally address or refer to their teachers with this term. In contrast to western culture, Thai students do not, or are not allowed to, call or address a teacher with a bare name no matter how close their relationship is.

Also, this study’s results are similar to those of Rongtheara (2010), where FFL Thai learners formally treat teachers and instructors with respect for their profession by referring to them with full academic titles, unlike French native students that normally refer to academics in this step with a full title only when the particular one has the highest rank, that is, Professor. However, there was no

mention in Rountheera (2010) that those who have no academic rank will be referred to or entitled with the Thai term “Ajarn.” Therefore, it can be said that there is a slight different practice between the two groups of people, even though they both study foreign languages in the Thai context.

Step 1.3 Thanking for data and documentation work support

This step contains thanks for data access, subjects’ cooperation, editing help, and clerical and technical support. This type of thanking does not directly refer to academic work, but is related to the process of data collection and the production of the dissertation in terms of documentation. The people that provide data and permission for data collection or offer help, cooperation, or service for the sake of convenience and accuracy in producing the thesis to the author are thanked in this step. Let us consider some examples.

- (7) I owe a particular debt and would like to extend my sincere thanks to my friends and all participants in multinational organizations who provided me with the valuable data for my analysis.

- (8) I would like to give special thanks to Mr. X Y and Mr. X Y who also devoted their time to proofread my dissertation. It is appropriate to acknowledge my debt to the academic staff at the Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Lanna, Tak Campus for their cooperation in conducting the research, especially Mr. X Y, the Head of the Faculty. I would like to extend my thanks to RMUTL engineering students in the academic year of 2005, who participated in my study.

In this step, there are both gratitude expressions for many people as a group with a common noun in plural form such as “my friends,” “all participants,” and “organizations” like those in example 7, and gratitude expressions for particular people with proper names plus titles as can be clearly seen in example 8. The English title such as Mr. and Ms. preceding a proper name is also used by the

acknowledgers when referring to acknowledgees that do not have an academic rank but a high position or administrative rank.

There are also a few PhD students that preface the proper Thai names of the acknowledgees with the Thai term “Khun,” phonetically pronounced /khun/ with a short vowel sound, which is a unisex and polite title in Thai culture used both when addressing and referring to a particular person. Let us consider an example.

- (9) I am also thankful to Khun X Y, for her professional management in helping me throughout this study.

As can be clearly seen, the acknowledgees with proper names mentioned in this step are recognized and given respect for their assistances with formal titles. It appears that they are formally acknowledged at the same level as those in the step of thanking for academic assistance, even though their help is not the core of the acknowledgers’ research. Actually, to be formal in English, the acknowledger should use the title Mr./Ms. when referring to people with proper names. However, as their research or dissertations were conducted in the Thai context, some acknowledgers may assume that most of their readers are non-native, or Thai, so they used this title “Khun,” which is formal in the Thai context.

Step 1.4 Thanking for Financial Support

As mentioned earlier, this step is classified separately from the previous step due to its frequent occurrence and different sources of funding or financial aid, including the state agencies in charge of human resource development, the universities for which the acknowledgers were working, the university where they were studying, some international foundations, and also their families or family members. Some examples are given below.

- (10) Deepest gratitude to the Royal Thai government and Kasetsart University for the financial support they provided for my study. Also I wish to thank the Fulbright Foundation who provided me with a

scholarship to gain greater experience both academically and socially in the U.S.A.

- 11) This study could not have been undertaken in its entirety without the financial aid from Kasem Bundit University and my wife to support me throughout the study.

Moreover, the financial aids mentioned in the data are not restricted to only the scholarship for the whole program. For instance, a grant to present their work overseas was also mentioned and the grant provider was acknowledged. An example is illustrated.

- (12) I am also grateful to the Graduate School of Chulalongkorn University. With their grant for conference participation, I had an opportunity to present my research at an international conference in Korea, and received good comments from other participants, which were useful in writing my dissertation.

Step 1.5 Thanking for Moral Support

Like previous research, love, care, and encouragement are thanked for in this step. The participants or acknowledgees include mostly friends and family members. Let us consider some examples.

- (13) My heartfelt appreciation goes to Asst. Prof. Dr. X Y, a true friend, who has supported me all the way and provided me with countless pep talks throughout the five years. I am truly thankful for her time and patience. Last but not least, I am deeply grateful to my dearly loved parents, my family, who have always been there for me unflinchingly.
- (14) My great special thanks are for my beloved father, Mr. X Y, who is now peacefully watching me and my success in heaven. Without his inspiration, I would never ever have achieved this goal. I wish he could be here with me to celebrate this happiness. "You are my greatest Dad. I love you." And finally, I would like to thank my supportive husband, "Mr. X", my dearest son "X," my dearest daughter "X," my

kind mother, and dear friends who endured this long process with me, always offering support and love.

As shown in example 13, even a friend is presented with a title and academic rank if that particular person is a lecturer in a university. In example 14, on the other hand, not only the people that are alive, but also a dead person is acknowledged. So, family members here include not only the author's husband and children, but also parents. Parents are mentioned in every dissertation (in this research) that recognizes moral support.

Other relatives are also mentioned. Let us consider an example.

- (15) Last but not least, I thank my parents who are now in heaven for giving me life in the first place and for educating me to be able to pursue my study. Sincere thanks to my cousins and relatives who supported and encouraged me during my study. My son and my significant others whose love and understanding helped me pass through the hardship of doing this research.

In addition to parents, the author in example 15 also acknowledges his or her cousins and relatives. The term "relative" can cover many people, such as uncles and aunts. Moreover, example 15 is also a good illustration of gratitude to parents according to Buddhist belief. To give birth to a person is considered in Buddhism as a great virtue and benevolence that the children have to be grateful for and they are obliged to take care of their parents in return.

Apart from human beings, animals or pets were also acknowledged by a Thai PhD student. However, in terms of order, they are acknowledged as the last person, which may signal that it is not the most important acknowledgee.

- (16) Most importantly, I owe a great debt to my beloved family who is always there for me. I am incredibly grateful for their unconditional love, support, understanding and encouragement provided by my greatest parents, sister, brother, and relatives. With all my love and

respect, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to them. Finally, special thanks for my pets who helped reduce my tension towards the dissertation and usually sat along with me during the writing process.

As there is only one acknowledgement in which the author thanked his or her pets, it cannot be said that this is common in Thai academic practice in writing English acknowledgements.

More interestingly, this study has found two gratitude expressions that concern religions in the moral support step, unlike what was found in Rountheera (2010). Let us consider the two gratitude expressions which occurred at the end of this step after the authors had thanked the other participants. One expressed gratitude to God or Allah, while the other to the Lord Buddha.

(17) Most of all, “Alhamdulillah” – all praise belongs to God for the success I have achieved.

(18) Last but not least, I am truly grateful to the Lord Buddha for giving me patience, strength, and wisdom to complete this thesis.

As the frequency of its occurrence is very low, only 2 out of 70 acknowledgements, it cannot be considered to be a common practice in writing English acknowledgements in the Thai academic community.

Step 1.6 Conclusion of Thanking

Similar to Rountheera (2010: 162), this step occurs apparently like a restatement of step 1.1, but actually in a form of repetition or emphasis of the thanking move as a whole.

(19) This thesis could not have been finished without help and support from many people who are gratefully acknowledged here.

However, it occurred only once, or 1.4% of the time, unlike that found in Rountheera (2010), which occurred 33.33% of the time.

Therefore, this may not be so common for EFL Thai learners, but rather is common for FFL Thai learners when writing acknowledgements.

Step 2.1 Dedicating the Thesis

Unlike Rountheera (2010: 162), who contends that a dedication of the thesis has not yet become conventional in the Thai academic community as there was only one piece out of his entire data that contained this step, EFL Thai students enjoy higher frequency of thesis dedication. However, the words thesis or dissertation tend to be substituted by other words such as *work* or *success*. Let us consider some examples.

- (20) Last but not least, my most special and deepest appreciation goes to my beloved mother, my first school teacher, X Y, for her endless patience and encouragement during the completion of this study; I dedicate this work to her.
- (21) I owe a great debt to my beloved family. Thanks go to X, my funny sister, who was very proud of her help in producing “only one” illustration used in this dissertation report. I also thank my father for giving me support and boosting my confidence. Above all, I would like to dedicate all my success to my mother. For her, I cannot think of any words that are good enough to say.

In this step, authors dedicated their theses mostly to their mothers. Other acknowledgees include fathers and supervisors.

Step 2.2 Accepting Responsibility

As mentioned earlier, even though the announcing move contains the same steps as discovered by Hyland (2004), the order of the two steps is different. EFL Thai graduate students tend to dedicate their thesis or dissertation first and then accept the responsibility; otherwise, they just show responsibility right after the moral support, omitting the dedication. Let us consider some

examples where the italic sentences (which were made by the researcher) show the authors' responsibility.

(22) I dedicate this work to my father. May he rest in peace. *All errors and omissions are mine and mine alone.*

X Y

(23) My special appreciation is dedicated to my beloved father and mother, who have nurtured and implanted in me all virtues. I thank them for all of their unlimited love, encouragement, and moral support. *All errors and omissions are mine alone.*

X Y

Although EFL Thai students show responsibility for their errors, the number of their occurrences is very low, only 4 out of 70. Therefore, it might be too early to conclude that the showing responsibility step is a common practice in the Thai academic community when writing acknowledgements.

More importantly, these 4 PhD graduate students are all from Suranaree University of Technology. None of Chulalongkorn University's graduate students created this step.

Step 3.1 Signing-Off Move

For the last move, which contains only one step, signing-off, it was found to be the same as that in Al-Ali (2010), where the students write their first and last name at the end of their acknowledgements. As can be clearly seen in example 22 and 23 above, at the end of their acknowledgements the authors gave their first and last names, which are substituted by X and Y respectively.

Linguistic Pattern of Gratitude Expression by EFL Thai Learners

Out of the data of 70 acknowledgements, 821 acts of gratitude were found being used to realize steps 1.2 to 1.6 in the thanking move. Following Hyland and Tse (2004), the gratitude expressions

can be classified into 5 major ways as shown in table 5. Most of the thanking steps contain overt expressions of gratitude realized with a nominalization, a performative, an adjective, and a passive voice construction, whereas a few expressed through a bare mention, which is not an explicit thanking. For example, they simply mentioned the name of the acknowledgees and described how they had helped them, or in the other way round, they described what they had benefited from the acknowledgees.

However, EFL Thai learners use many more performative verbs than nouns, unlike what was revealed in Hyland and Tse (2004), in which the uses of noun and verb patterns were almost the same in terms of quantity.

Table 5: Linguistic pattern of gratitude expression

Forms	Examples	Occurrences
Nominalization	"My thanks go to ..." "Special thanks to..."	173
Performative	"I thank" "I owe a debt to"	343
Adjective	"I am grateful to ..." "I am indebted to ..."	164
Passive Voice	"X is thanked for ..." "Appreciation is given to..."	12
Bare mention	"I have benefited from ..." "X helped me ..."	129
Total acts of gratitude		821

Out of the total performative 343 acts, about two-thirds of their thanking verbs were prefaced by modal and mental state verbs, such as *would like to*, *have to*, *must*, *wish to*, and *want to*.

Table 6: Verb patterns of gratitude expression

Forms	Examples	Occurrences
Performative verb	"I thank" "I owe a debt to"	108
Modal & Mental	"I would like to express my gratitude ..."	235
State Verb	"I wish to thank ..."	
Total acts of gratitude		343

Overall, there was a strong preference for the subject *I*. Unlike previous researches, none of EFL Thai acknowledgers used the noun *author* to refer to themselves. Therefore, all of the verb patterns have *I* as the subject before the performative verbs, either the ones with strong force such as *thank* or those with modal preface such as *would like to (thank)*.

- (24) I thank Assoc. Prof. X Y, the chair of my academic committee and Asst. Prof. Dr. X Y, the chair of the committee at my proposal defense.
- (25) I would like to thank Associate Professor X Y, PhD., the Chairperson, for her valuable advice and insightful comments. I would also like to thank my committee members, Assistant Professor X Y, PhD., Ajarn X Y, PhD., and Assistant Professor X Y.
- (26) I wish to express my appreciation to the faculty and staff of Liberal Arts and Science, Kasetsart University for their support.

As the frequency of modals, plus mental state verbs, was very high, the illustration of the linguistic pattern distribution in the next table consequently separates them as another category on their own. Therefore, the distribution of thanking expressions across the steps in this research is different from that in Hyland and Tse (2004).

Table 7: Distribution of gratitude expressions across steps (%)

Step	Noun	Verb	Modal	Adjective	Passive	Mention	Total
1.2 Academic	18.12	11.01	32.11	21.79	0.69	16.28	100
1.3 Data & Doc	32.06	11.45	24.43	19.85	0.76	11.45	100
1.4 Financial	7.14	7.14	42.86	16.67	14.29	11.90	100
1.5 Moral	27.22	25.00	16.67	17.78	1.11	12.22	100
1.6 Conclusion	0	0	0	0	0	100	100

As can be clearly seen, modal patterns occur the most in steps 1.2 and 1.4 in comparison to other patterns. Modal patterns are used to express gratitude to academics, including advisors, committee members, instructors, and experts as well as to institutions that financially support the acknowledgers.

- (27) First of all, I would like to express my eternal gratitude to my thesis advisor, Assistant Professor Dr. X Y, who has always been a guiding light and a shining example of a kind and caring supervisor.
- (28) I would especially like to express my appreciation to many professors who kindly helped in validating the research instruments.
- (29) I would like to thank Rajamangala University of Technology Phra Nakhon for the scholarship and support throughout my study.
- (30) I would like to express my gratitude to the Office of Higher Education Commission, Thailand, according to the Strategic Network Project for Production and Development of High Educational Institution Instructors in the Domestic Doctoral Degree Program for financially supporting my study.

My findings, especially in the step of thanking for academic assistance, seem to contrast with those of Hyland and Tse (2004: 268), who said that with such modal and mental state verbs the full

illocutionary force of the statements are weakened. In this study, however, I do not think that the force of the thanking act is diminished, since many statements with the modal pattern are found to contain an object or gratitude that is modified or intensified with strong forms such as *eternal*, *deepest* and *sincerest*, especially when expressed to advisors.

- (31) I would like to express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to my advisor, Professor Dr. X Y, who wholeheartedly gave me endless encouragement and illuminating guidance all the way through my research.
- (32) First, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to my advisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. X Y, for her encouragement and insightful advice throughout my research work

The graduates that wrote part of the data were interviewed about the reasons why they preferred the modal pattern. The interview was conducted in Thai for the sake of clarity as it is their L1 and then was translated into English as follows:

To me, it sounds more polite than saying just “I thank” which is brusque. To extend the statement a bit longer like, say, “I would like to thank” or “I would like to express my gratitude,” the statement becomes softer. I didn’t think at that time when I wrote it that my intention to thank someone could be weakened. I was just concerned about politeness.

CU Graduate, interviewed on 16 Mon 2013

To me, it is sort of a formal language feature. And it’s appropriate to address people who are of higher social rank or more powerful like the advisor who is not an intimate friend of the same social distance. Also, there is a distance between me and the reader. I don’t know who will read my thesis in the future, so it’s better that I make it formal with this pattern.

SUT Graduate, interviewed on 16 Mon 2013

Based on the interview and the occurrences of strong forms of intensifiers, it can be concluded that EFL Thai learners used the modal pattern to mark politeness and formality. This can be said to be related to the Thai culture, or perhaps the Asian culture as well, which are different from the western or English cultures. English native speakers may consider that being direct and expressing something straightforward is good to show their strong intention and sincerity, whereas EFL Thai learners consider this as rough and brusque. Being a little more indirect with a longer sentence is good to show respect, politeness, and formality.

The noun phrases or nominalization patterns turned out to occur more frequently in step 1.3 (thanking for data and documentation work) compared to other patterns in the same step. In step 1.5 (moral support), on the other hand, the occurrence percentages of noun patterns and verb patterns were almost the same in terms of quantity. More interestingly, the percentage of the verb patterns is higher than the modal one. It might be because most acknowledgees mentioned in this step were different from those in step 1.2 in terms of intimacy. As they are mostly friends and family members, there is probably a shorter social distance; therefore, the need for a formal language feature was lower.

(33) I really appreciate my family support from Mrs. X Y, who has passed away, my daughter and son and everyone who encouraged me a lot throughout the study and research at Suranaree University of Technology.

X Y

34) My heartfelt thank goes to P' X for his love, understanding, and support, which helped strengthen my mind and encouraged me to cope with many difficulties during the period of my study. Moreover, he was very patient with reading many of my messy drafts. I owe a great debt to my beloved family. Thanks go to X, my funny sister, who was very proud of her help in producing "only one" illustration used in this dissertation report. I also thank my father for giving me support and boosting my confidence.

Discussion and Implications

As mentioned earlier in the introduction part, based on the present author's own experience and my classmates' that we had no idea in the first place how to write the acknowledgements accompanying our theses or dissertations, and we had to study the acknowledgements which had been written before as a model, the study results of the generic structure of English acknowledgments in this paper could be hopefully beneficial to be taught to or learned by any newcomers in this area of English language study.

Since this study is limited to only one area, English language study, the academic community is also limited to a group of Thai people or Thai scholars that learn and teach English as a foreign language. To be part of this community, what an acknowledger writes is not a free-style or personal performance, but is in relation to the convention in the community, such as generic structure and certain linguistic patterns.

Even though this research adopted Hyland's work (2004) as a guideline, the results are different. For example, no reflective move was found in the English acknowledgements written by EFL Thai learners. However, this might be an unbalanced comparison, since Hyland (2004) studied dissertation acknowledgements in 6 different fields. The generic structure he found belongs to a larger academic community, which has different conventions.

It would be better to compare these study results to other studies of a smaller scale and with the same academic community, that is, a group of people or scholars involved in a similar field—which is foreign language study. The generic structure of EFL acknowledgements in this study began with a similar move, as found in Rountheera's work (2010), that is, a thanking move, which was followed by an announcing move. However, the EFL acknowledgements in this study also contained a signing-off move, which does not exist in FFL acknowledgements. And in detail, each move of the two studies contains different steps. This study results imply that if the acknowledgers, even though they use the same L1, study in different fields of foreign languages, they write

acknowledgements in different ways which could reflect that they belong to different academic communities. In other words, different academic communities of different foreign language studies have different conventions in writing acknowledgements, even though the acknowledgers use the same L1 and live in the same context.

Conclusion

To sum up, the generic structure of the acknowledgements written by EFL Thai PhD students comprises three moves: the thanking move, the announcing move, and the signing off move. Only the first move, the thanking move, is obligatory, while the second and the third moves—the announcing move and signing off move—are optional. In the first move, many participants are addressed with different linguistic devices, which apparently indicate the complex relationship between the acknowledgers and their addressees.

Similar to previous studies, the acknowledgements in dissertations by EFL Thai learners have certain structures and preferred linguistic features that conform to their socio-cultural context. The study results of EFL Thai learners' acknowledgements also reflect that the Thai culture is different from the English culture in terms of the way in which it shows sincerity and views of politeness, and way of living of the family (extended vs. nuclear family). Therefore, it can be said that, even though written in English, acknowledgements, as a genre, have to be in harmony with the socio-cultural context where they are generated. This study can be another work that strengthens the definitions of genre as a socio-cultural practice (Bhatia, 2004) as well as the variety of Englishes that accompany a particular genre.

Research Limitations

This research is purely a linguistic analysis, which relies heavily on the researcher's linguistic background knowledge without having an interview with a considerable number of acknowledgers. Since this research was conducted after all of the PhD students had graduated, only a few graduates could be reached by the researcher.

Should there be an interview of all acknowledgers, the study results could be more perfectly convincing.

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