

# Pragma-Linguistic Features Of Masters' Theses Acknowledgements In A Nigerian University

Sade Olagunju

PhD, English Unit, Department of General Studies,  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology,  
Ogbomoso, Nigeria

*Abstract: The paper examines the structural and functional features of Master's theses acknowledgements in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria. It identified the patterns of progression of themes and rhemes in the texts and related the patterns to the functions of texts. Fifty acknowledgements were selected from each of the Faculty of Science and Faculty of Technology of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso. An analysis of thematic patterns (TP) in the texts was done via the framework of Functional Sentence Perspective as propounded by Danes (1970 and 1974). An insight was also gained from Searle's (1976) speech functions. The findings showed that two types of thematic progression patterns featured. They are the Constant TP pattern and the Simple Linear TP pattern. The Constant TP dominates the texts. The Constant TP pattern was realised largely by certain linguistic features such as pronouns (first and second person) and nominal phrases, which projected the messages of the texts.*

*Keywords: Theses, Acknowledgements, Thematic Patterns, Functional Sentence Perspective, Constant TP, Simple Linear TP*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Thesis writing is very important in the academic enterprise. It is one of the requirement for the award of any postgraduate degree in Universities. In the structure of the thesis as an academic genre, we have what Swales (1990) called the 'front matters' like dedication, certification, acknowledgement, abstract and table of content. The writing of acknowledgement in a thesis is very important. Acknowledgement bears the name (s) of some people who have contributed to the success of the research work. Though it is part of the "front matters", it still has to be well constructed in order to reveal the intention of the writer. This work intends to look at the thesis acknowledgement and see what accounts for the structure and what it is meant to achieve in the thesis as a genre.

Fifty acknowledgements of Masters' theses were sampled from the Faculty of Science and Faculty of Technology of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso. An analysis of the progression of themes and rhemes was done on

the elected acknowledgements mentioned. The analysis was done using the framework of the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) as propounded by Danes (1970 and 1974). Also, an insight was gained from Searle's (1969 and 1976) speech functions to link the messages of texts to the structural realization of the texts.

## II. STUDIES ON TEXT ANALYSIS

Scholars have considered different texts using different approaches. Adebija (1987, 1995) describes texts from the approach of pragmatics of discourse. Fries' (1995, 2001) description of text is based on conversational analysis. Osisanwo (1997 and 2001) utilize the stylistic approach and Adebite (1991 and 1995) describes texts utilizing both text grammar and discourse analysis and Olagunju (2004) analyses literary texts using the stylistic approach. Despite the different approaches utilized by these scholars, all of them aim at

analysing texts with the intention of explaining how a text can be understood, interpreted and constructed.

Several studies have been undertaken on the academic genre such as grant proposals (Connor and Mauranen, 1999; Connor 2000), discussion sections of research articles (Holmes 1997, Fallahi and Erzi 2003), abstracts (Hyland 2000), dissertation acknowledgements (Hyland 2003), 2004), editorial letter (Flowerdew and Dudley-Evans, 2002), academic book reviews (Motta-Roth 1995, Babaii 2003 and Ansary and Babaii 2004). The study by Ansary and Babaii (2004) is based on Swales' (1990) move-analytical tradition. The present study is not specifically on genre analysis but it acknowledges the fact that the acknowledgement is itself a text included in thesis writing as an academic genre.

Several studies have been carried out on thematic progression in texts. We have scholars who have analysed thematic progression in texts such as the medical text, bio-medical texts, journalistic texts, poetry, conversational text, instructional text and novels. Among these scholars are Nwogu and Bloor (1991), Dubois (1983), Fries (1991), Giora (1983), Adegbite and Ajayi (1995), Adegbite (2007) and Olagunju (2004). Dubois (1987) and Nwogu and Bloor (1991) have analysed TP patterns of the scientific text and both manifestation of Derived type makes the work different. Nwogu and Bloor (1991) observe that the Derived TP is represented in their research article data but not in their more popular medical texts. Dubois (1983), in the analysis of bio-medical research texts, finds one single instance of the Derived TP. She reduces Danes' three main patterns of TP into two, namely 'themic' and 'rhemic' each of which may be simple or multiple, contiguous or grapped. She (Dubois 1983) then subsumes Derived TP under the 'themic' type. Her account of TP deviates from Danes' own theory. Adegbite (2007) observes that all the TP patterns feature in the thesis abstract, although the Constant TP dominates. The present study benefits from all the works cited and they provide background information that is relevant to this study.

### III. FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

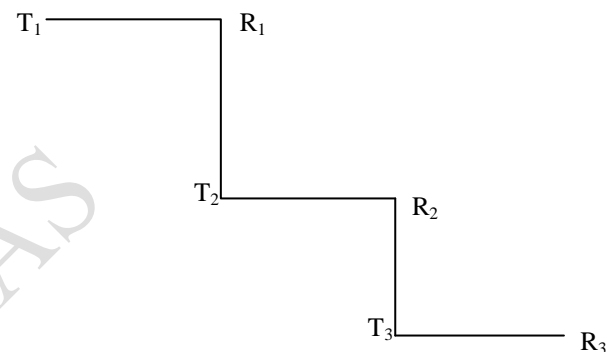
In analysing the text or discourse, the concept of theme and rheme are often used and this work is also employing them. There are two schools of thought that are very crucial to the discussion of theme and rheme and the analysis of textual organization in general. We have the systemic school led by M.A.K. Halliday and the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) associated with Jan Firbas, Christen Mathesius, Frantisek Danes and others. The two schools of thought aim at making resounding contributions to how best textual structure can be analysed.

The framework herein adopted for this study is that of the FSP, which came as a result of the Prague school's efforts in providing functional explanations of the grammatical structures in textual materials. Downing (2001) opines that the FSP theory of language deals with how the sentence function is fulfilling the communicative purpose intended. Nwogu (1991) also states that the FSP is a model for explaining how information is organized in a sentence or an utterance,

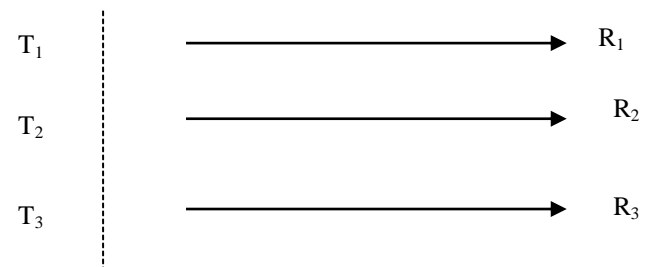
discourse or text in accordance with how language functions in situational contexts.

The concepts of theme, and rheme and TP are very central to the FSP, which examines coherence in texts of its structure and meaning. Many definitions of theme and rheme have been given by scholars who describe the theme as "what come first in the clause", "what is being talked about", "the point of departure of the clause as a message", "that which the clause is concerned" while rheme is seen as "what comes after the theme" or "the remaining parts of the clause". Four types of TP have been identified by Danes (1974). He defines TP as the choice of ordering of utterance themes, their mutual concentration and hierarchy, as well as their relationship to the hyper-themes of the superior text unit (such as paragraph, chapter and others to the whole texts and to the situation. Danes (1974) illustrates the four thematic progression thus:

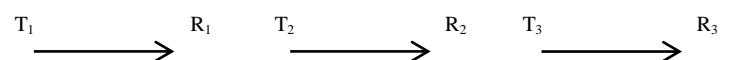
- ✓ The Simple Linear pattern: Each rheme becomes the theme of the next utterance. In Danes (1974: 18), this pattern is considered the most elementary or basis TP. It is represented graphically thus:



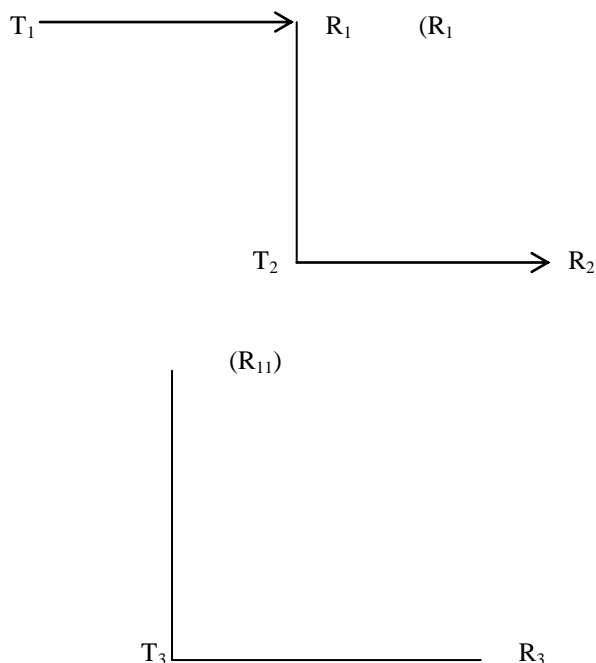
- ✓ Constant/Continuous TP. This is the pattern of TP in which the same theme appears in sequence in a series of utterances, though not necessarily making use of identical wording.



- ✓ TP with Derived themes. Themes are derived from hyper-theme as super-ordinate terms to which all themes relate. Danes (1974: 114) represents it thus:



- ✓ The Split Rheme TP pattern. Danes (1974: 120) ascertains that the combination of patterns 1-3 gives birth to the fourth one, which is called the Split Rheme TP. It is illustrated thus:



The speech act theory, a prime anchor for textual functional considerations, was developed by J.L. Austin. According to Thomas (1995:51);

Austin originally (1962:52) used the term ‘speech act to refer to an utterance and the total situation in which the utterance is issued’. Today, the term ‘speech act’ is used to mean the same as ‘illocutionary act’ – in fact, you will find them term speech act, illocutionary force, pragmatic force or joist force, all used to mean the dame thing- although the use of one rather than the another may imply different theoretical positions.

The speech act theory was developed in reaction to the belief of the logical positivists like Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore and others that language is imperfect and illogical, and that the illogicalities should be refined and an ideal language created. Austin posits in his posthumously published book *How to do things with words that* instead of getting rid of languages illogicalities and imperfections, it is necessary understand how it is that people manage with it as they do. Austin stresses further that when we speak, we perform certain action(s). He perceives such as performatives. Austin’s performative is described as when certain verbs correspond to certain actions. Other verbs are seen as descriptive verbs. The differences between performatives and constatives (which Austin also dwelled on) are seen in terms of truth-values. Constatives are believed to have truth values because they can be true or false while performatives do not have this value.

Furthermore, Austin elaborates on the speech act theory by concentrating on its three components: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. The locutionary act has to do with the exact utterance of the speaker. Illocutionary act refers to the specific intention of the speaker, while perlocutionary act is the effect of the speech on the hearer. For instance, a word uttered may have the intention to serve as a warning, request, persuasion, threat, greeting, etc. Austin goes further to classify illocutionary acts into five groups; namely,

“verdictives”, “excercitives”, “behabitives”, and “expositives”.

Searle (1969) develops his speech act theory based on Austin’s (1962). Searle (1976:27) discussed five main speech acts as

- ✓ Representatives, which are used in making assertions, conclusions, claim;
- ✓ Directives, which are used in commanding, begging, requesting and asking the hearer to do something;
- ✓ Commissives, which require commitment from the speaker like promising, vowing, offering, threatening;
- ✓ Expressives, which concern the psychological states of the speaker such as thanking, welcoming;
- ✓ Declarations, which have to do with declaring, marrying, firing etc.

Many other scholars have given these functions different names, all in an attempt to describe the functions of language in use. These scholars include Jacobson (1960:350-377) and Adegbite (1991:47) who utilized their own functions of texts for the analysis of poetry.

Searle’s (1976) functions will be utilized in this study because its role in supplying the speech functions of utterance will serve as a good complement to the theme-rheme analysis. The study will also utilize Searle’s (1979) speech functions because the relationship of linguistic thematic patterning to the messages/themes of the texts is an arbitrary one. So, Searle’s functions will serve as a link between them. This functional category also has a great value for this kind of structural and functional linguistic analysis.

#### IV. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MASTERS’ THESES ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The table below shows the frequencies of the TP patterns that feature in the texts.

	CTP	SLTP	DTP	SRTP
Acknowledgements from Faculty of Science	322	58	-	-
Acknowledgements from Faculty of Technology	306	34	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>92</b>	-	-

Table 1: Structural Analysis of Masters’ Theses Acknowledgement

From the table, it was discovered that the Constant TP and the Simple Linear TP feature. The Constant TP pattern dominates the acknowledgements from both faculties. The difference in the frequencies may be as a result of varying lengths of the acknowledgements. Different linguistic items realize the themes of the sentences. We have the use of pronoun ‘I’ (1st person singular) ‘He’ (3rd person singular) and ‘they’ (3rd person singular pronouns). These pronouns, especially the personal pronoun ‘I’, appear in sequences most of the time and are associated with the Constant TP patterns. We also have the use of these phrases ‘special thanks’, ‘my gratitude’ etc. the writers employed different linguistic items to write the themes of the sentences. The use of these

linguistic items cut across all the acknowledgements from the two faculties. Below are examples of the Constant TP pattern.

**EXAMPLE 1**

I / thank the Almighty God, the fount of wisdom and knowledge for hi infinite mercies and protection till this period ... Also, I / am expressing my sincere and immense appreciation to everybody who has contributed either directly or indirectly to the success of this study. Mr. Okunsami, my supervisor/ is of special importance.

(Excerpt from the Faculty of Science)

From the above example, the constant TP is used by the author to express his thanks and appreciation to God and individuals who have contributed to the success of the work. Another example of the Constant TP from Faculty of Technology is given below;

**EXAMPLE 2**

I / acknowledge with profound thanks the contribution of my supervisor – Prof. I.A. Adeyemi towards the successful completion of this works. I / also appreciate his sincere academic guidance without which the quality attained would have been difficult. The good Lord / shall continue to bless and prosper you.

Here are also some examples of the Simple Linear TP from the acknowledgements:

**EXAMPLE 3**

I / am expressing my profound gratitude to my supervisor Prof. R.O. Ayeni for his encouragement, advice, patience and readiness to assist throughout the work. He / is indeed my role model and a father. I / will forever be grateful to him.

(Excerpt from the Faculty of Science).

**EXAMPLE 4**

My indebtedness / also goes to the Head of Department, Dr. J.O. Olajide. He / encouraged me in several ways particularly of mention is his keen interest on this work and my life at large. I / am equally grateful to Prof I.A. Adeyemi, Dr. (Mrs) Akintunde and Mr. M.O. Oke, my very good friend.

**V. FUNCTIONS PROJECTING THE MESSAGES OF THE TEXTS**

The messages of the texts serve the uses of thanks, appreciation, gratitudes and prayers and these are mediated by two types of functions.

	Rep.	Exp.	Dir.	Comm.	Dec.
Acknowledgements from Faculty of Science	123	229	-	-	-
Acknowledgements from Faculty of Technology	165	203	-	-	-

Total	288	432	-	-	-
-------	-----	-----	---	---	---

Table 2: Functional Analysis of Masters' Theses Acknowledgements

The functions expressed are representatives and expressive, while directives, commissives and declaratives did not feature. The expressives are used to reveal the emotional feelings of the writers of these acknowledgements as thanks, appreciations and prayers. For example:

**EXAMPLE 5**

My sincere gratitude also goes to the Dean of faculty of Pure and Applied Science LAUTECH, Prof. R.O. Ayeni... and Prof. A. Adediran, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, from their concern and help at all times.

(Excerpt from Faculty of Science)

The author here expresses his/her heartfelt gratitude towards the contributions and concern of the listed individuals. Here is another example of the expressive that indicates a prayer:

**EXAMPLE 6**

I pray that Almighty God will continue to shower his blessings on you all for the various roles you have played in ensuring my successful completion of this programme.

We also have situations where the authors express their appreciations and thanks in the acknowledgements, for example:

**EXAMPLE 7**

Thanks and appreciations go to the Almighty God for giving me opportunity to undertake this research work and to end it in good time ...

(Excerpt from the Faculty of Technology.)

Furthermore, the representatives that feature are used in giving information. We have examples of texts from both Faculties of Science and Technology as follows:

**EXAMPLE 8**

I should not forget my colleagues in class. I will always remember the time we had together. They have all made history in my life.

(Excerpt from the Faculty of Science)

Another example of the representative from the Faculty of Technology is given below

**EXAMPLE 9**

In fact, words are not enough to express my appreciation to everybody that has contributed to the success of this work. The roads have really been very rough but for your support I have been able to weather the storm...

The functions of the acknowledgements are described here in terms of the purposes, they serve as link between the thematic patterning and the messages of the acknowledgements analysed. The functions that realize the TP patterns of the texts are interwoven. At times, we have mainly



the expressive realizing the constant TP that dominate the texts and at another time, it may be a combination of expressive and representatives. The observation is the same for the Simple Linear TP that features across the corpus. We can only ascertain that from the structural analysis, it is the Constant TP that dominates the text while from the functional analysis, the expressive functions predominate.

## VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Having gone through the structural and functional analysis of the Masters' theses acknowledgements, it was discovered that the constant TP predominates the text. The dominance of the Constant TP is supported by the expressive functions with respect to the message of the texts analysed. The study thus shows that the Constant TP characterizes the acknowledgements written in the Masters' theses of Ladoké Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, and these perform the functions of expressive.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Adegbija, E. (1987) Speech Act Functions. Dimensions of Communication and Meaning in the English Language in Nigeria. *ITL Review of Applied Linguistics* 76, 43-62.
- [2] Adegbija, E. (1995) 'I, Major-General X': Discourse Tacts in Military Coup Speeches. *TEXT* 15:2, 253-270.
- [3] Adegbite, W. (1991) "Some Features of Languages Use in Yoruba Traditional Medicine." Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan.
- [4] Adegbite, W. and jayi, B. (1995) Thematic Progression and the Structure of Yoruba Diviantory and INCANTATORY Texts in Adediran, B. (ed.) *Cultural Studies in Ife*, pp 175-192.
- [5] Adegbite, W. (2007) "Thematic Patterns and Progression in the Research Abstract" Mimeo, Department of ENGLISH, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria
- [6] Amirian, Z., AND Tahririan, M. H. (2003) Analysis of E-mail Genre: A New Perspective to EAP Writing, *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 6(1), 21 – 39.
- [7] Ansary and Babaii (2004) The Generic Integrity of Newspaper Editorials: A Systemic Functional Perspective. *Asian EFL Journal*, pp. 1-28.
- [8] Austin, J. L (1962). How to do things with words, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- [9] Connor U. and Muranen, A. (1999) Linguistic Analysis of Grant Proposals: European Union Research gransts. *English for Specific Purposes* 18(1), 47-62.
- [10] Danes, F. (1970) FSP and Organization of Text. In Dnaes, F. (ED). *Papers in Functional Sentence Perspective*. Prague: Academia
- [11] Danes, F. (1974) Functional Sentence Perspective and the Organization of the Text. In Danes, F. (Ed.) *Papers in Functional Sentences Perspective*. Prague: Academia/The Hague: Mouton, pp. 106-128.
- [12] Downing, A. (2001) *Thematic Progression as a Functional Resource in Analyzing Text*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [13] Dubois, B. L. (1987) A Reformulation of Thematic Progression Typology *TEXT* 7:2 89-116.
- [14] Fallahi, M. M. and Erzi, M. (2003) Genre Analysis in Language Teaching: An Investigation of the Structure of the Discussion Section of Language-Teaching-Journal Article. *Iranian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 6(1), 69 - 81.
- [15] Firbas, J (1964), On Defining Theme in Functional Sentence Analysis. In *Travaux Linguistic de Prague* Vol. 1, 267-280
- [16] Firbas, J (1974) Some Aspects of the Zechoslovak Approach to the Problem of Functional SENTENCE Perspective. In Danes, F. (Ed) *Papers in Functional Sentence Perspective*, Prague: Academia
- [17] Flowerdew, J. and Dudley-Evans, T. (2002) Genre Analysis of Editorial Letters to International Journal Contributors. *Applied Linguistics* 23(4), 463-489.
- [18] Motta-Roth, D. (1995) "Book Reviews and Disciplinary Discourse. Defining a Genre" Paper Presented at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages, Long Beach, CA.
- [19] Nwogu, K. (1991) Thematic Progression and Structure of Text: Implication for Academic Writing, *Systemic Functional Linguistic Forum* VOL. 1 No 1, 44-50.
- [20] Nwogu K. and Bloor, T. (1991) Thematic Progression in Professional and Popular Medical Texts. In Ventola, E. (Ed.) *Functional and Systemic Linguistics: Approaches and Uses*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter
- [21] Olagunju Sade (2004) "Themes and Rhemes in Femi Ojo-Ade's *The Almond Tree and Dead End*" Unpublished M.A. Thesis Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
- [22] Osisanwo, W. (1997) A Linguistic Analysis of English-Medium Soccer Commentary on Radio. In Lawal A. (Ed.) *Stylistic in Theory and Practice*. Ilorin: Paragon Books, pp. 70-92.
- [23] Osisanwo, W. (2001) Textuality and Nigerian Newspaper Editorials: the Example of the Guardian. *Ife Studies in English Language* Vol. 5,1-9.
- [24] Searle, J.L. (1969) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- [25] Searle, J.L. (1976) A Classification of Illocutionary Acts. *Language in Society* 5:1,1-
- [26] (1990) *Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings*. Cambridge University Press.
- [27] Thomas, W. (1995) Meaning in Interaction: *An Introduction to Pragmatics*. London and New York: Longman.
- [28] Wales, K. (1989) *A Dictionary of Stylistics*. London: Longman