

Article

Empirical Analysis of Lexico-Grammatical Features Used in Rhetorical Structure of the Statement of the Research Problems of Master's Theses

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine the empirical analysis of lexico-grammatical features used in the rhetorical structure of the Statement of the Research Problems of Master of Philosophy theses in the Faculties of Arts and Education at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Qualitatively, content analysis was adopted for this study. Theses from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education at the University of Cape Coast were selected for this study. These theses were selected from 2012 to 2022 academic years to ensure currency in terms of the stipulated lexico-grammatical features used in the statement of the research problem. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the university, two faculties (Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education) and postgraduate theses for the study. The two faculties were purposively sampled. Eighty (80) theses were simple randomly sampled (Forty (40) theses each from the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education). The main instrument used for data collection was content analysis. The data was analysed by the use of the interpretative technique based on the themes arrived at during the data collection of the statement of research problem from the post-graduate theses. The study indicated that integral citation was dominant in SRPs from the Faculty of Arts theses whereas non-integral citations were rather dominant in SRPs from the Faculty of Education theses. The use of adverbials to boost these claims was also found in only the SRPs from the Faculty of Arts theses. The use of hedging devices in SRPs from both Faculties to indicate a gap, and the use of simple noun phrases such as “*the problem*” and “*the need*” were mostly used to categorically state the research problem. It is recommended that a comparative study of theses in the two faculties in another university in Ghana be undertaken to identify how similar or otherwise the rhetorical structure and the lexico-grammatical features of the SRPs written by postgraduate students in the two faculties will be.

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1. Introduction

Many students who speak English as a Second Language (ESL) are pursuing postgraduate degrees worldwide, the idea of writing a thesis in English for most ESL postgraduate students is quite nerve-racking because, achieving the standard requirements for writing a thesis is challenging. This means that it may certainly be the longest writing task they have ever done, and many may feel nervous about how to cope with it [1]. A researcher noted that writing is an important academic activity, and poses a great challenge on writers, especially for student writers. He adds that the challenge is even exacerbated when students write in English as either a second or foreign language, as they not only have to appropriate themselves to the disciplinary discourse but have to

do it in a language whose rhetorical conventions are quite often different from that of their mother tongue [2].

In a quest to help ease the “fear” of the postgraduate student regarding thesis writing, many scholars have applied genre-based study in the analysis of the rhetorical units in research articles (RAs) and thesis, in order to bring out the conventions in writing it [3, 4]. Therefore, to offer assistance to students in writing their theses, scholars have shown a growing interest by gradually shifting from investigating the rhetorical structure of RAs to that of students’ academic writing, especially the theses, with pedagogical purposes. For instance, studies on theses have been conducted on such rhetorical units as the overall organization of the thesis, introduction, conclusion and literature review [3, 5-7]. Besides, other aspects of the thesis that have gained attention are metatextual references, citation practices, as well as disciplinary variations in terms of their rhetorical structure [4, 8, 9].

However, in spite of the scholarly attention recently given to the structure of the various sub-units of the thesis as a whole, little is known of the rhetorical structure of one such important unit as the “statement of the problem”, the exception being a study by other researchers who have been forthcoming in this direction [10]. Their study, which is in the domain of MA proposals and thesis in applied linguistics, is nevertheless outside the context of Africa in general and Ghana, in particular. During the proposals and thesis defence in the Department of English, it has been realized that some graduate students are not able to state the research problem well; this therefore has triggered the interest in studying the rhetorical structure of the statement of the problem section of already submitted theses. The purpose of this study was an empirical analysis of lexicogrammatical features used in instantiating the rhetorical structure of the Statement of the Research Problems of Master of Philosophy theses in the Faculties of Arts and Education at the University of Cape Coast in the central region of Ghana. The study was guided by this research question – What are the lexico-grammatical features adopted in instantiating the rhetorical moves in the “Statement of the Problem” section of masters’ theses?

1.1. Genre Theory

The genesis of genre analysis lies in earlier works of register analysis such as the study by Barber in 1962, and later the study of textualisation and the use of rhetorical devices by Swales in 1984 [11]. Later in 1981, Swales enhanced the analysis of genres with his study of 48 research article introductions from journals in the domain of electronics, chemical engineering, radiology, educational psychology, management and linguistics. His aim was to identify the rhetorical structure as well as the discourse organization of his data. The findings of a previous study resulted in a model that many researchers either adopted or tested in other disciplines. The findings presented a four-move structure model (*Establishing the research field*, *Summarizing the present research*, *Preparing the present research* and *Introducing the present research*) for writing introductions [12]. According to Swales each of the moves has its own typical intention that contributes to the achievement of the overall purpose. However, in 1990, the model was revised and modified as a result of criticisms, leading to a three-move structure (*Establishing a territory*, *Establishing a niche*, *Occupying a niche*) known as the Create A Research Space model (CARS), with individual steps observed in realizing the moves [12].

The essential unit of genre analysis is the “move” which enables the categorisation of sections of a text based on their archetypical communicative purpose. A “move” can be explained as an identifiable unit with a single purpose and analyzing a move is a top-down approach to investigating the discourse structure of a genre [13]. It is the communicative purpose which determines the schematic structure embedded in a genre. The goal of scholars in this sub-discipline of discourse analysis, despite their individual schools of thought, is not only to identify an approach to analyzing written, spoken and computer-mediated discourse but also to help apprentices to know the generic features

that typify specific genres like the research article, research paper and thesis. Thus, the study focused on Genre Theory.

1.2. Learners' Writing

Genre analysis of academic writing has not been associated with experts' writing only. Though students' writings have been in existence since the inception of tertiary education, quite recently, students' academic writing, especially the thesis, has also been the object of serious empirical investigations [2, 3-14]. Researchers have successfully analyzed the thesis as a genre, which in turn has sub-genres. Their focus in this development has been to provide a lens for understanding the rhetorical structure of either the whole or sub-sections of such academic texts. For instance, the thesis abstract has a six-move structure, which is introduction-purpose-method-product-conclusion-structure, making it informative both in content and structure [2]. The acknowledgement has also been found to have a "three-tier structure" with sub-divided steps as discovered by other researchers [14, 15]. Finally, the literature review has an Introduction-Body-Conclusion structure of which, Move 3, according to Swales' CARS model in 1990, appears least frequently [3]. The conclusion is a section where most students restate the purpose, consolidate research space with an array of steps, recommend future research and cover practical applications, implications or recommendations [4].

Specifically, the rhetorical structure of the introduction section of master's theses has been studied extensively by scholars, using Swales' model in 1990. In master's theses, the introduction consists of the background to the study, the purpose of the study, the hypothesis or assumption and the limitations and delimitations of the research work [6]. It is also in the introduction that the statement of the problem, which determines the research questions, is situated. Scholars, who have studied the rhetorical structure of masters' theses, have indicated that the existence of disciplinary variation in academia arises from languages and cultural differences in how their world is understood [9, 19]. Genre analysis of master's thesis introductions in Lebanon focused on variations across the Humanities and Social Sciences [17]. Structurally analyzing 12 master's theses (six each from humanities and social sciences), a researcher realized two sets of outcomes: overall structural organization of the texts and disciplinary variation in the construction of this genre [17]. The CARS model accounts for all the moves present in the thesis introductions, except for the use of subtitles in Social Sciences introductions. There is also the use of positive justification in introductions in the Humanities, due to the nature of the topic being new; thereby requiring extensive background information [17]. Furthermore, both the Humanities and Social Sciences observe move 1, realizing it by making topic generalisations of increasing specificity and observing move three (presenting the present work) but introductions in Social Sciences establish a niche whereas introductions in the Humanities do not establish a niche. The researcher then concludes that "not only are different disciplines, sub-disciplines and topic of study highly variable, but also requirements in the same field, in terms of content, may differ" [17].

In Spain, researchers analyzed a corpus of introductions drawn from 21 PhD theses written in Spanish on a variety of computing topics. The study was also carried out under the move-step tradition initiated by Swales and his CARS model for RA introductions and revised by Bunton for Ph.D. thesis introductions in English [16]. They revealed that the structure of the Spanish thesis introduction is complex because special care is taken by students in contextualizing the research and explaining the organization of the theses. Consequently, M1 (establishing the territory) and M3 (announcing the research) in the introductions are characterized by steps and sub-steps which describe the rhetorical functions of texts in Spanish Ph.D. thesis introductions. However, one striking feature is that Spanish Ph.D. thesis introductions do not make use of M2 (establishing a niche). Instead, the niche is either established at establishing the territory level or embedded in

occupying the niche level. Therefore, most of the introductions have moves unfolding in cycles and sequences of alternating moves, mostly the [M1-M2-M3] and [M1-M3] patterns [16].

In the same year, in the USA, a study analyzed the discourse of a master's thesis across three disciplines (Biology, Philosophy and Linguistics) focusing on the introductions [18]. Analyzing the introductions, a researcher focused on the discourse structure, the use of first-person pronouns in the creation of authorial presence and the use of citations to construct intertextual links to previous research [18]. As a result, the analysis reported an absence of a homogeneous set of texts in the introductions of master's theses but the introductions reflected some disciplinary variations both in the structural organization and in citation use. For instance, structurally, Biology theses consistently have the traditional structure (IMRD) ascribed to research articles, Philosophy theses always portray the topic-based organization and theses from Linguistics contain most intradepartmental variation. With respect to citation, the three sets of texts that were explored also differed in the foregrounding of the students' voices and the voices of authors of previous research [18].

Studies of introductions of theses have made it clear that a crucial rhetorical function of introductions is to justify the study being reported and that the rhetorical structure of a particular genre may be determined by many considerable factors [6, 12-17]. Others also think that different languages and cultural differences could also influence the rhetorical structure of a genre [19]. Moreover, each discipline is characterized by peculiar key concepts and language for the description of how their world is understood. While it cannot be denied that all these studies conducted into the introduction of students' academic writing have contributed to our understanding of disciplinary variations, very little is known about the rhetorical structure and lexico-grammatical features of the statement of the problem section of masters' theses introduction, which is a key rhetorical aspect acknowledged in thesis writing. A researcher noted that all relevant literature on how to structure the statement of the problem section consists of handbooks and guides written to help graduate students [5]. In conclusion, the review of studies in the introduction section shows that the focus of scholars has gradually shifted from experts' writings to students' academic writing. It has also provided evidence of the existence of disciplinary variation in academia and though scholars have played a significant role in assisting graduate students in becoming expert writers in academia, more empirical studies need to be done. One of such study in this direction is the present research on the statement of the problem section situated in master's thesis introductions.

2. Materials and Methods

Qualitatively, content analysis was adopted for this study, the use of a qualitative approach was germane in achieving the purpose of identifying the stipulated conventions and the lexico-grammatical features that postgraduate students observe in stating their research problem. Data was gathered from the Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education, which are part of the University of Cape Coast and they offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select the university, the two faculties (Faculty of Arts and Faculty of Education) and the postgraduate theses for the study.

These two faculties are considered to be among the oldest faculties in the university and are therefore known to have practised such conventions in academic writing for a long period of time. The choice of theses submitted from 2012 to 2022 is a choice to ensure currency concerning the stipulated conventions, values and beliefs. Eighty (80) theses were simple randomly sampled (Forty (40) theses from the Faculty of Arts and forty (40) theses from the Faculty of Education). Simple random sampling was used to ensure that each thesis had an equal chance of being selected once.

Coding the data was done perfectly to safeguard against unwanted exposure of the authors. For instance, SRPs from the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Arts were labelled as FE and FA respectively, with their appropriate numbers. Therefore, the data has labels such as FA1, FA2, FE1, FE2 etc. The data was analysed by the use of the interpretative technique based on the themes arrived at during the data collection of the statement of research problem from the post-graduate theses. Therefore, considering the data that was sampled to represent all the areas of study in these faculties, the result of the present study will be a true reflection of the stipulated conventions in the University of Cape Coast in stating the research problem in the postgraduate thesis.

3. Results and Findings

3.1. Lexico-Grammatical Features

This section analyses the lexico-grammatical features used by students in achieving the rhetorical structure of the SRPs of master's theses. First, the analysis of the lexico-grammatical features in the SRPs of the Faculty of Arts theses is presented. This is followed by the analysis of lexico-grammatical features in the SRPs of Faculty of Education theses. For each faculty, samples from the data are given as evidence for a better understanding of the findings. It must be mentioned that the study does not explain a writer's choice of a particular linguistic feature but only makes some assumptions concerning the choice of the particular linguistic features.

3.1.1. Faculty of Arts

Establishing a niche

Claiming Centrality

In this step, students highlight the phenomenon under study as the focus of researchers. In this, the use of these verb phrases (*have been considered, have drawn attention to, has already been identified*) was dominantly used in instantiating this move. These were used by students, in the Faculty of Education, to discuss the findings of other researchers concerning the phenomenon under study. The verb phrases that were identified are in the past participle form, which students used to show that other researchers, scholars and critics have already drawn attention to different aspects of the phenomenon under study. Below are some extracts:

Extract 1...The New Apostolic Church in Ghana has already been identified as a kind of Neo- Neo-Mission-Related religious movement still emerging in a class of its own... (FA 31)

Extract 2...The sociolinguistic implications of these languages (pidgin and creole) have been considered lately by Sociolinguists, Social workers and Educationists... (FA36)

In addition, in claiming centrality, students do not discuss these relevant findings with the use of these verb phrases in isolation. Students also use adverbials such as *lately* and *up to about twenty years ago*, in an attempt to confidently maintain the fact that the phenomenon under study has been of interest to many scholars for a period of time.

Making Topic Generalization

In this step, general information about the subject of study was presented. Students use more complex noun phrases (*the early contact, a considerable percentage of Christians, a veritable source of material*, etc.) which present the general facts about the

phenomenon under study. Some examples of this move achieved with such noun phrases have been presented below:

Extract 3...and therefore one expects a considerable percentage of Christians to exhibit and practice love, peace and unity...the conduct of some Christians... leaves much to be desired... This situation weakens the church...(FA5).

Extract 4... The early contact with the Europeans led to some Ghanaian elites shunning their custom and practices which were variously described by the Europeans and the missionaries as unworthy of human practice... (FA 8)

Extract 5...As folksongs, they constitute a veritable source of material... They also reveal important aspects of language behaviour... (FA 37)

It can therefore be seen from the above extracts that commentary markers (*one expects, you may not agree that one might want to* etc.) were also used alongside the noun phrases in order to directly address readers and to draw their attention to the propositions being made concerning the phenomenon.

Reviewing items of previous Research

In this step, students review relevant studies concerning their object of study, in order to get readers through the trajectory of studies that have been done on the topic of study. Findings of scholars are thus presented in detail through the use of what Hyland (2005) calls attributors (*Sey 1973, Engels et al 1969, Leech 1996, according to Dolphyne, 1995*). These attributors consist of the name of the author(s) with the year of publication in brackets. They are used by researchers to authenticate their propositions as they associate these findings with scholarly sources. Below are some extracts from the data:

Extract 6...Engels (1969), Rogers (1984) and Dolphyne (1995), for instance, argue that women are putting up with indignity and degradation of households... (FA 1)

Extract 7...Sey (1973) mentions that Ghanaian English is generally difficult to comprehend...According to him, the "Educated Ghanaian" does not only have the tendency to use learned and archaic forms...Leech (1996) asserts that "advertising material is simpler than news material..." (FA 34)

In addition, students also enhance their positions on the findings of other researchers by claiming the support of credible sources through the use of reporting verbs (*mentions, argues, asserts*, etc.). For instance, in the five per cent of the data that reviewed items of previous research, the reporting verb, "asserts", was used more than the other reporting verbs. The use of reporting verbs involves the expression of arguments which allows writers to discursively explore issues while carrying a more evaluative element in reporting others' work [20]. Such verbs also determine the stance of researchers on a particular issue, which students claim to support or not.

Establishing a niche

Indicating a gap

The results of the analysis also indicated that students in the Faculty of Arts achieved move two with move two step 2B (*indicating a gap*). This step was instantiated through simple noun phrases such as *the need, the lack, the problem, one lacuna*, etc., which indicate that there is either an insufficiency of study on that topic or a gap that needs to be filled. Of note is the noun phrase "**the research problem**" which was used in eighteen

percent of the Faculty of Arts SRPs which indicated a gap. Moreover, the use of negatives (*no, do not, does not, has not*, etc. were also identified in the SRPs as used by students to make clear the absence of research on their topic.

*Extract 8...There is **the need** to examine and establish factors that promote children's memory for music... (FA 15)*

*Extract 9...Therefore, **the problem** that this work seeks to grapple with is how the concept, understanding and attitude towards war in the Old Testament influenced Israel's relationship with God... (FA 28)*

*Extract 10 ...Asafo songs **do not appear** to have received much scholarly attention... (FA 37)*

In all these, there was the use of hedging as well. Thus, some linking verbs such as *seem, appear*, and modals such as *may, might*, etc. were found accompanying these propositions that inadequate or no research has been done on their topic. A researcher posits that the greater use of *hedging* underlines the need for caution and opens up arguments. This implies that the use of hedging devices by students in indicating a gap depicts students' position when it comes to identifying a gap in the literature [20].

Question Raising

Similarly, in achieving move two, some students observed step C of move two. In this step, students used mostly WH questions in order to point out the fact that there is a gap that needs to be filled. The WH questions were used in different ways: direct and indirect questions. The direct questions (*what are these family-level factors...?, what are the causes of...?, what factors give rise to...?, etc.*) stated categorically the question(s) the student wants to answer with the study. On the other hand, the indirect questions (*this research is to find out why divination has persisted..., it will be interesting to find out what influences the maintenance of ...*) were used to guide readers to infer from the questions the niche the study seeks to fill. Below are examples of questions found in the SRPs establishing a niche:

Extract 11...The statement of the problem for this thesis therefore is: What are the causes of the conflict between the Ga Traditional Rulers and a section of Christian churches?... (FA 13)

Extract 12...Do women really need liberation and from what? To what extent do women really suffer discrimination...?... (FA 19)

Rhetorical questions (*but do women really need liberation...?, are they students capable of responding to the expressive qualities...? etc.*) were also identified in the SRPs. Students used the rhetorical questions not to demand answers from readers but rather to orient readers to appreciate and comprehend the niche that has been identified and the need for such a study.

Continuing a Tradition

In achieving this step in move two, words that indicate some kind of interaction between the writer and the reader were used. This was done in order to assure readers that the study is just a continuation of the arguments concerning their object of study, which they already know has been going on for some time. Examples of such moves are as follows:

Extract 13...The study seeks to verify how women perceive their own roles in households, in spite of what Rogers (1984:24) said that women's domestic work is obscured as a natural part of their biology... (FA 1)

Extract 14 ...If this is how theology evolves as McAfee expounds, then it can be argued that refugees' explanation of their peculiar experiences in the light of their belief in God is the basis of the evolution of a particular kind of theology. It also follows that this kind of theology can be described, systematized and classified... (FA 39).

From the above extracts, expressions such as *then it can be argued that...*, *it also follows that...*, *in spite of what...said...*, were used in instantiating the move. Extract fifty-nine explains the need to describe, systematize and classify a theory to better explain what someone has already said about the phenomenon under study. In extract sixty, the student rather aims to use the research to authenticate what another researcher has found about the object of study.

Occupying a niche

Outlining Purpose

In realizing this step as move three, it was identified that simple noun phrases that represented or described the students' work such as *the research*, *the study*, and *this thesis* were used by students to refer to their research. However, "*the study*" and "*the research*" were used more (30% each) than the other noun phrases to refer to the research report. The common thing in these phrases is that they indicate the fact that the work is a process and things will be done systematically. Some examples of SRPs outlining purpose(s) have been presented below:

Extract 15...This thesis seeks to unveil in practical and realistic terms some problems that women suffer... (FA 19)

Extract 16...This work seeks to find out the factors responsible for these state affairs and to apply philosophical analysis... (FA 23)

Extract 17...This study sets out to find out the role and significance of sacrifice in the moral life of the Dagaras. The research aims at finding out to what extent one can assert that sacrifice is the mainstay of Dagara morality... (FA 25)

Moreover, these phrases were accompanied by goal announcers, which are also noun phrases, to present the intention(s) of the research. Therefore, phrases such as *the outlining purpose...*, *the main focus...*, *the concern...*, *the purpose...* etc. were identified from the data. In addition to these phrases were also verbs (*seeks*, *sets out*, *is intended*, *aims* etc.) that pointed to specifically what the research hoped to achieve.

Announcing Present Research

In achieving this step in move three, students used the to-infinitive form of the verb to indicate exactly what will be done with the research. Therefore, to announce what exactly the present study is about, the to-infinitive verbs such as *to investigate*, *to examine*, *to describe*, *to observe*, *to compare* etc., were used to announce what the research sets out to do. Among the to-infinitive verbs, "*to-examine*" was identified in twenty-one percent of the SRPs in the Faculty of Arts that announced present research. Examples of such moves are presented below:

Extract 18...The researcher conducted a quasi-experimental study to compare the effectiveness of using the local language... (FA 8)

Extract 19...The thesis is intended to critically analyze the Borbor Mfantse Funeral libation text to reveal its literary richness... (FA12)

These verbs not only announce what the researcher wants to do but also make readers aware of the type of strategy adopted for the analysis of the data. From these verbs, a study may be identified as descriptive, prescriptive or comparative.

3.1.2. Faculty of Education

Establishing a niche

Claiming Centrality

Claiming centrality was observed in thirteen per cent of the data and was instantiated through the use of evidential and in-text citations. The evidentials were in the forms of verb phrases in the past participle form (*have been numerous, has received, have encountered* etc.) These were used to indicate the fact that the phenomenon under study has already gained the attention of many researchers for a period of time. Another feature identified was the use of non-integral citations, citations put in brackets, outside the quotation and integral citations, that is, citations which include the author's name in the sentence structure [21, 22]. Examples are as follows:

Extract 20...The importance of school climate in promoting student achievement has received widespread support... Research has established that a healthy school climate promotes high student achievement... (FE16)

Extract 21 ...Research studies... have shown that before students enter the science classroom, the student may have encountered the word "energy" in a number of different situations... students may either find it difficult to accept what is taught to them or confuse it with the ideas that have been formed outside school... (FE 34)

Both the integral and non-integral citations were used to attribute the ongoing studies to the scholars involved in that field of study. The integral citations were indicated with reporting verbs such as *argues, comment, believes, expound*, etc. However, the non-integral citations were used in claiming centrality more than integral citations. The frequent use of non-integral citations in SRPs in the Faculty of Education theses is of variance with a study of citation analysis in MA theses and RAs in Applied Linguistics, where integral citations outnumbered non-integral citations in the MA theses [23].

Making Topic Generalization

Again, some students in the Faculty of Education observed move one by making topic generalisations. This move was instantiated through expressions that gave general information concerning the topic of study. Below are examples from the data:

Extract 22 ... they decided to redeploy workers of all the sectors...who were believed to be under-utilized... The educational sector was affected...Teachers, especially those in the Teacher Training Colleges believe and often complain that they are overburdened with work. They argue that apart from normal classroom teaching... and performing other co-curricular activities..., other teachers complain that teachers in some subject areas are under-utilized... (FE 8).

Extract 23...it appears that most professional teachers and senior secondary school graduates are desirous of furthering their education...other matured applicants apply to these universities...and even write their matured entrance examinations...a few of them gain admission... (FE 12).

Students gave such information about their object of study as a way to get readers to acquaint themselves with the topic as well as what the research is about. Mostly, definitions and general facts about the phenomenon under study were explained and examples were sometimes also given for emphasis. Students go on to also express their views concerning the topic.

Establishing a niche

Indicating a Gap

However, in realizing this move, students in the Faculty of Education use expressions that point to the fact that there is a need for the research to be done. Also, these expressions either show that what has been done concerning their topic is not enough or their topic has not actually gained the attention of researchers at all. Examples of such expressions are *the need to, not however known, none of the literature, little is known*, etc.

Extract 24 ... The approach that has not been put to enough empirical test in Ghana is cooperative learning. The few studies that have been developed,.., do not adequately explain... academic performance of pupils and students.

FE 5 – ...However, no study has been conducted on teacher retention in the new senior secondary schools in Ghana... (FE 17)

Extract 25...The inadequate related research conducted in Ghana coupled with the urgent need to link the already identified foreign perceptions...was a vibrant rationale for this study... (FE 32)

In addition, these expressions were found to be accompanied by hedging devices (*seem, appears, may*, etc.). The use of these hedging devices to indicate a gap points out the degree of confidence of the writer and its direct involvement in the text while opening a discursive space for readers to dispute interpretations [20].

Question-Raising

Upon analysis of SRPs in the Faculty of Education, some students in the Faculty also established a niche by raising some questions. From the data, both direct and rhetorical questions were identified. This has been illustrated below with some extracts from the data:

Extract 26...One key question that emerges out of the casual complaint by the training college teachers is, are the teachers actually being overworked?... is it all the teachers that are being overworked?... (FE 8)

Extract 27...How is distance education currently serving as a means of expanding access to tertiary education for teachers in Ghana? Will it be possible to adequately expand access...for these qualified applicants?... (FE 12)

Extract 28...Stated in a question form the research problem is: To what extent do tutors of social studies in Teacher Training Colleges use the affective objectives...?... (FE 28)

To instantiate this step as move two, the direct questions (*What extent do tutors... Are teachers actually being overworked* etc.) were frequently used as well as rhetorical questions (*Do women still experience... Do students dispute some ideas... etc.*). These series of questions raised by students depicted a lacuna, to which the findings of their

research would provide answers to. They were also used in a way to determine the boundaries of the research.

Occupying a niche

Outlining Purpose

Outlining purpose is also a step used by some students in the Faculty of Education to instantiate move three (*Outlining Purpose*). The data revealed the use of noun phrases such as *the study, and the research* to refer to the report of the study written by the student. But “the (this) study” was used in almost eighty percent of the SRPs that outlined purpose(s). Below are some instances from the SRPs in the faculty:

*Extract 29...It is in this respect that **this study aims to investigate the contributions of WVG ...** (FE 10)*

*Extract 30...**This study therefore seeks to find out the impediments to communication flow among the internal publics of the University of Cape Coast...** (FE 11)*

*Extract 31...**This study therefore sought to investigate the level of proficiency of observation students currently in JSS, one to three, in one of the sub-metros in Accra metropolis make...** (FE 27)*

These phrases were accompanied by verbs such as *seeks, sought, aims* etc. These verbs are used to indicate what the study is pursuing as well as what students wish to inquire. Moreover, what the research seeks to achieve is presented in noun phrases beginning with the definite article “the”. The use of the definite article is an indication that what they seek to find out or investigate is not an abstract thing but something concrete and visible.

Announcing Present Research

The analysis of the SRP in the Faculty of Education theses also indicated that some students announced their present research as a way to occupy the niche. Expressions used in instantiating this move indicated specifically what the research would do in order to get the findings to fill the identified gap. This is illustrated in the extracts below:

*Extract 32...**The proceeding issue has prompted the researcher to conduct an investigation to find out the perception of teachers... in Basic Schools in the Krachi District...** (FE 19)*

*Extract 33...**The study is, therefore, an evaluation of the vocational programmes offered in special schools for children with mental retardation in Ghana...** (FE 23)*

*Extract 34...**An attempt was made by the researcher to design and develop new instruments to assess the laboratory skills of students in the Senior Secondary School Physics topics in Mechanics...** (FE 24)*

The to-infinitive form of verbs is used by students in the Faculty of Education to spell out the specific processes and procedures that were adopted for the study. Examples of the to-infinitive form of the verbs are *to investigate, to test, to design and develop, to evaluate*, etc. but “to investigate” appeared in forty-four per cent of the SRPs that announced present research.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study indicated that integral citation was dominant in SRPs from the Faculty of Arts theses whereas non-integral citations were rather dominant in SRPs from the Faculty of Education theses. The use of adverbials to boost these claims was also found in only the SRPs from the Faculty of Arts theses. In instances where students made topic generalization(s) to establish a territory, complex noun phrases with accompanying commentary markers, which gave detailed information about the phenomenon under study, were used in SRPs from both faculties. Specifically, general facts about the phenomenon were given in SRPs from the Faculty of Arts theses whereas more definitions and examples pertaining to the phenomenon under study were found in SRPs from the Faculty of Education theses. In SRPs in the Faculty of Arts theses, attributors were used in reviewing items of previous research as move one. These attributors, consisting of the name of the author and the year of publication, were used with appropriate reporting verbs to review the findings of scholars. To establish a niche, expressions indicating a dearth in the literature on the phenomenon under study are used in addition to hedging devices such as “*seem*” and “*appear*” in order to indicate a gap. The use of hedging devices in SRPs from both Faculties to indicate a gap, the use of simple nouns phrases such as “*the problem*” and “*the need*” were mostly used to categorically state the research problem. In raising questions to establish a niche, rhetorical questions as well as direct and indirect questions were used in SRPs of theses from both faculties. The study also revealed that, to occupy the niche, simple noun phrases, such as “*the research*” and “*the study*”, referring to the research report, in addition to goal announcers, were used in outlining purpose(s) as move three in SRPs of theses from both faculties. However, in the case of announcing present research to occupy a niche, the to-infinitive form of verbs such as “*to investigate*” and “*to examine*” was used by students in both faculties. These verbs were used to indicate the processes and procedures adopted for the study. It is recommended that a comparative study of theses in the two faculties in another university in Ghana be undertaken to identify how similar or otherwise the rhetorical structure and the lexico-grammatical features of the SRPs written by postgraduate students in the two faculties will be. This can further be compared to the findings of the present study and earlier studies to confirm their findings or otherwise.

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