

## Schematic Structure of Letters of Recommendation Written by Lecturers of a Public University in Ghana

<sup>1</sup>Emmanuel Kyei\*

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Benjamin Archibald Afful

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### Abstract

A Letter of Recommendation (LR) is very important during the admissions process for higher education. Almost all universities require LRs for prospective students to be admitted to graduate programs. Using Genre Theory (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990), this study examined the schematic structure of 35 purposively sampled LRs written by lecturers from the Department of English of the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana. We used qualitative content analysis, supplemented with descriptive statistics. One significant finding was that UCC lecturers used a 6-move structure, namely: "purpose of writing," "context of knowing the candidate," "writer's credentials," "candidate's credentials," "candidate's personal values," and "closure. It was found further that Move 6 (closure) had the highest percentage of frequency of occurrence (i.e., 100%), while Move 4, "Candidate's credentials," occupied the greatest space. A further finding was that the sequence of moves did not depict any one standard sequence; instead, there were different sequential patterns in the dataset. The present study disagrees with the findings with Afful and Kyei (2020) that the LRs written for post graduate studies had five moves. The study concludes that writing the LR involves deploying disciplinary and genre-specific conventions as well as personal stylistic preferences of the writers. These findings have implications for the existing scholarship on LRs, professional development, and further research in particular within the Ghanaian academic context.

**Keywords:** Letters of Recommendation (LRs), Disciplinary, Discourse Community, Occluded Genre, Stylistic Preference

### 1. Introduction

As a field of study, genre analysis (GA) was initiated by Swales (1981), who examined the introductions of different research articles (RAs) from a number of disciplines. He analysed the rhetorical actions (structuring of the text) in those introductions and investigated the ways the writers in those disciplines wrote the RA introduction. Following this earlier work of Swales which was revised in 1990, considerable studies have been conducted on organizational patterns of different genres. Some studies have examined fundraising discourse (e.g. Bhatia, 2002; Fairclough, 2003), academic job advertisement, and course advertisements (Yongging, 2013), introductions (Afful, 2006), and memoranda of understanding and joint declarations (Mashuri, 2013). Other genres such as the research article (e.g. Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010), students' essays (e.g. Chen & Baker, 2010), grant proposals (e.g. Feng & Shi, 2004) and sales promotion letters (e.g. Kristina, Hashima & Hariharan, 2017) have also been investigated in the field of GA.

Within the university as an educational institution, there are written genres which facilitate its work, one of which is the letter of recommendation. LRs are produced by members of the institution

<sup>1</sup>Assistant lecturer, okykye09@gmail.com; Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Faculty of Education and General Studies, College of Agriculture Education, Asante-Mampong, Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED), Ghana.

<sup>2</sup>PhD, jafful@ucc.edu.gh Department of English Language, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana.

such as lecturers. They are not necessarily letters that promote teaching and learning because they do not add to the epistemological disposition of a particular discipline, but are part of the institutions' processes in selecting and recruiting future players into the academic world. Letters of recommendation play a major role in the evaluation of candidates at universities all over the world. When applying for admission, most universities worldwide require prospective students to submit one or more letters of recommendation. In certain cases, the letters are used to assess not only admissibility, but also eligibility (Bruland, 2009; Precht, 1998). In Ghana, almost all universities require LR for admission into graduate programmes. The practice is that a letter, which states the relationship between the writer and the person recommended, is normally attached to the admission forms. The credibility of the writer (who is usually known by the reader) seems to guarantee the qualities of the recommended person. The communicative purpose of these LRs is to convince the admissions' committee to accept the candidate's application. The LR, hence, presents the recommended person's educational qualifications, abilities, and skills (Afful, 2018).

## 2. Literature Review

Given the importance of LRs in academia, some studies (e.g. Bouton, 1995; Ebadi & Saedidovaise, 2015; Liu, 2007; Precht, 1998) have examined letters of recommendation written for further studies. Bouton (1995), for instance, compared 65 LRs written by American referees with 65 LRs written by referees from five Asian cultures, and found similarities in the two sets of texts as well as significant differences in terms of the content and implicature in the LRs. Her study revealed differences in length, specificity, and rhetorical appeals that were much more strongly related to candidates' acceptance status. Precht (1998) also examined 39 LRs, 10 each from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Eastern Europe and nine from Germany, and revealed significant differences in the organizational patterns and methods of support. Liu (2007) compared and contrasted LRs written by Chinese and English native speaker professionals. Liu (ibid) discovered similarities in macro discourse structure patterns as well as differences in content selection and organization in the two letters. According to the similarities, both writers carry out their recommending acts by stating the purpose, presenting their evaluation and prediction of the person, and recommending. Bouton (1995), Precht (1998) and Liu (2007) all affirmed the tripartite conceptual structure of these LRs (i.e. introduction, body, and closing). Ebadi and Saedidovaise (2015) further compared and contrasted fifteen English and fifteen Persian LRs recommending applicants for PhD programmes in American universities, and the Persian ones for universities inside Iran. They concluded that the English LRs had a rigid organization, were short, informal, and writer-responsible, while the Persian LRs were longer, more formal, more fluid in their organization and reader-responsible.

Few studies have examined Ghanaian LRs. For example, Adam-Moses (2018) examined the textual organization of 42 LRs written by faculty from the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. After affirming the tripartite structure of the LRs, he added that *advance organisers*, *data integration*, *digression/linearity* and *textual symmetry* are the dominant rhetorical/discourse strategies in the letters. Akoto (2018) also analysed how academics through language manifest their professional ideologies in LRs and found that they project their professional ideologies through five semantic sublevels, namely: *topic*, *contrast*, *evidentiality*, *hedging*, and *actors*. Afful (2018), on the other hand, examined the generic structure of Grant LRs (that is, letters of support for applicants for grants to support their). Afful's findings revealed that the writers employed a seven-move pattern and that the distinctive rhetorical features were the use of evaluative lexis, personal pronouns, and disciplinary lexis. The present study is a development of our work (See Afful & Kyei, 2020) on LRs written for postgraduate studies. After conducting a content analysis of the LRs complemented by some descriptive statistics, Afful and Kyei (2020) found that the LRs were characterized by a five-move structure: purpose of writing (move 1), context of knowing the candidate (move 2), candidate's credentials (move 3), candidate's personal values (move 4), and closure (move 5).

This research, therefore, aims to extend the literature on the schematic structure of LRs, using the genre-based approach. In line with this focus, we formulated two research questions to guide the study:

**Research Question One:** What schematic structure (moves/steps) characterizes the LRs written by faculty from the University of Cape Coast?

**Research Question Two:** What lexico-grammatical resources are employed in the moves/steps?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Design

A qualitative research design was mainly adopted to analyse the rhetorical structure and communicative purposes of the genre. According to Dey (1993), a qualitative research design allows for the examination of the naturally occurring data and the breaking down of data into themes, patterns and relationship for the purpose of understanding human behaviour. We relied on the qualitative research method because it helped in accounting for the schematic structure and the linguistic resources that typified each move in their authentic form. Although the study is primarily qualitative in nature, the analysis was complemented by quantitative techniques such as percentages and frequency counts. The quantitative research design helped us to draw broad conclusions after analysing the numerical values of the occurrence of the rhetorical moves found and the textual spaces allocated to each of the moves. In the context of the study, content analysis, a method of qualitative research was used to analyse the research questions.

#### 3.2. Data Source and Size

We purposively sampled 35 LRs written by faculty from the Department of English, University of Cape Coast. The main reason for the choice of purposive sampling is “its potential in achieving the research purpose” (Afful, 2005, p. 102) and the fact that it allows the researchers to select a sample that is satisfactory to the specific needs. Hence, the LRs used in this study were only those attached to applications for graduate programmes (Masters and PhDs).

#### 3.3. Sampling Technique

The study employed a non-probability sampling procedure, particularly the purposive sampling method, for the selection of LRs for this study. That is, the researchers hoped that purposive sampling technique would help him to quickly achieve the expected data, namely those appearing within 2014-2019 to ensure recency.

#### 3.4. Data analysis

The analysis was based on the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Approach to text analysis, specifically the approach of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Following Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), we analysed any rhetorical section that performed a particular communicative function subservient to the overall communicative purposes as a move. The cognitive-semantic criterion was used in the determination of a move, rather than the grammatical criterion. Following Huttner (2010), we categorized a move with 90%-100% frequency of occurrence as an obligatory one; 50%-89% as a core one; 30%-49% as ambiguous; and 1%-29% as optional ones.

#### 3.5. Procedure

After collecting the data, the text analysis process followed a step-by-step procedure. First, the LRs were coded as Department of English (DE) 1, DE 2 ... DE 35 which aided the researchers' attempts to ensure anonymity and identification of the exemplars. After a thorough reading of each of the exemplar, we discussed the LRs to help find out how the moves were ordered to gain further insights in

identifying and labelling the moves/steps in them. The text divisions in the letters (e.g. paragraphs) and some keywords (e.g. classroom, courses, research, work, and academic) helped in recognising the moves/steps as well as the lexico-grammatical resources employed in the moves/steps.

**4. Results and Discussion**

*4.1. Moves and Steps*

This section discusses the schematic structure characterising the sample of LRs of the University of Cape Coast (UCC) written between 2014-2019. We first identified the moves/steps in the LRs. We then analyzed the frequency of moves/steps in the data set, followed by accounting for the textual space for each move, and finally analysed the sequence of moves that typified the LR genre. Table 1 below presents the various moves/steps identified in the LRs.

Table 1: Moves/Steps and their Descriptive Names in the UCC Data

Moves	Steps	Name (of Move)	Name (of Step)
Move 1		Purpose of writing	
Move 2		Context of knowing the candidate	
Move 3		Writer’s credentials	
	Step 3.1		Providing essential details of the writer
	Step 3.2		Indicating value of the writer
Move 4		Candidate’s credentials	
	Step 4.1		Academic achievement
	Step 4.2		Relevant skills and abilities
	Step 4.3		Classroom performance
	Step 4.4		Co-curricular activities
	Step 4.5		Work details
Move 5		Candidate’s personal values	
Move 6		Closure	
	Step 6.1		Offering strong recommendation
	Step 6.2		Expressing hope
	Step 6.3		Soliciting response
	Step 6.4		Ending politely

As noted from Table 1, the analysis of the data showed that LRs in the data set (total 7,120 words) were characterised by a six-move structure, namely: *purpose of writing*, *context of knowing the candidate*, *writer’s credentials*, *candidate’s credentials*, *candidate’s personal values*, and *closure*. Move 3 (*Writer’s credentials*) had two steps, Move 4 (*Candidate’s credentials*) had five steps, and Move 6 (*Closure*) four steps. Moves 1, 2 and 5 had no steps. These moves and steps are discussed subsequently.

4.1.1. Move 1: Purpose of Writing

The first move of LRs written by UCC Lecturers was “Purpose of Writing”. This move communicates the reason for writing the letter, the institution the applicant is applying to, and the intended programme of study (Afful & Kyei, 2020). The writer usually states that he/she is writing to recommend the candidate for admission, as in:

1. I am writing in support of AAA's application to enter the graduate programme in MSc in Human Resource Management in your institution. – (DE 1)
2. BBB... has asked me to say a few words about him, as he seeks to pursue postgraduate education in your reputable university. – (DE 2)
3. CCC... has asked me to say a few words about him, as he seeks to pursue postgraduate education. –(DE 3)

The examples above (1-3) are instances of the LRs which imply a particular organizational pattern, i.e. announcing the purpose of the writing. This structural pattern is what Precht (1998, p. 250) referred to as 'frame'. Writers here explain the reason why they are writing: to recommend the candidate for the programme. Precht (1998) considers stating the purpose as a type of advance organizer, in that it gives advance notice to the reader of the order of topics to be discussed, or gives other signals of text organization to the reader.

In the data set, announcing the purpose of the letter was conveyed using words such as recommend (two letters), support (11 letters i.e. DE 1, DE 5, DE 6, DE 7, DE 8, DE 10, DE 11, DE 12, DE 17, DE 25, and DE 28), say (14 letters i.e. DE 2, DE 3, DE 9, DE 13, DE 15, DE 16, DE 18, DE 19, DE 20, DE 21, DE 22, DE 23, DE 26, and DE 35), introduce (one letter i.e. DE 31), offer (two letters i.e. DE 14, and DE 24), reference (one letter i.e. DE 27) and on behalf of (one letter i.e. DE 30). Generally, the words used to convey the writers' purpose agree with the findings of Bruland (2009). However, while Afful and Kyei (2020), and Bruland (2020) found that 'recommend' was predominantly used, the present study revealed that 'say' was most frequently used to convey the writers' purpose; the latter use seemed to be more general. Also, Bruland did not find the use of 'offer' or 'introduce'. Interestingly, the current study, like Bruland's, found that 'support' was the second most frequent word used in announcing the writers' purpose.

#### 4.1.2. Move 2: Context of Knowing the Candidate

Move 2 provides the author's relationship with the applicant; that is, how he/she knows the applicant, the number of years, and other related details. According to Liu (2007), providing the writer's relationship with the candidate gives a very strong basis for the writer to speak about the person. In some of the LRs examined, the writers explicitly indicated that the applicant was a former student whereas, in others, readers can deduce the relationship from the writers' use of phrases such as 'my student', 'in my class', 'during lectures', 'in class', etc.; The following are some examples of this move in the data set:

4. I have known AAA since 2001 when in his final academic year, he was in three of my courses: Oral Literature, American Literature and Literature Criticism. – (DE 1)
5. BBB, a former student whom I have known for the past eleven years. – (DE 2)
6. CCC, a former student whom I have known for the past eleven years. – (DE 3)

The examples above (4-6) indicate a particular organizational pattern, where the writer describes the relationship with the candidate, the number of years he/she has known the candidate or the year he/she first met the candidate. Seventeen LRs directly referred to the candidate as 'a former student', and the other eight as 'the candidate'.

Precht (1998) suggests that this is also a part of the 'frame', and its communicative purpose is to establish the context of knowing the candidate. According to Bouton (1995), this move shows the relationship between the writer and the candidate and, thus, makes the writer a credible source. In the words of Bruland (2009, p. 413), this move serves to establish 'good sense', or the writer's qualification to evaluate the candidate accurately. Trix and Psenka (2003) also added that, given that the purpose of LRs is to share the writer's evaluation of the candidate, it is expected that LRs will include relationship of the recommender with the candidate. It has been further noted that the writers emphasised the extent

of their relationship with the candidate. The analysis of the UCC data revealed that in the 25 LRs where the writer indicated his/her context of knowing the candidate, the relationship with the candidate was woven throughout the letter.

#### 4.1.3. Move 3: Writer's Credentials

*Writer's credentials* is the third move that was used in the data set of the study. To Bhatia (2004), establishing credentials is a source of persuasion. The writer typically attempts to establish his/her own credentials. This move was realized by two steps: "providing essential details of the writer", and "indicating value of the writer".

##### Step 3.1: Providing essential details of the writer:

The writer provides details such as his / her position and rank, as in:

7. I am a lecturer and in the English Department of English at the University of Cape Coast. – (DE 1)
8. I am a lecturer and academic counsellor at the Department of English, University of Cape Coast. – (DE 2)

##### Step 3.2: Indicating value of the writer:

The writer adds other distinguished achievements:

9. I have twice been a Fullbright Scholar in Residence (CAU, Atlanta, 1988 – 1990; GUSUS Allendale, 1990 – 1991). As well, I am a fellow of the Korea Foundation. – (DE 1)
10. I have twice been a Fullbright Scholar in Residence (Clark Atlanta University, 1988 – 1990; Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Michigan, 1990 – 1991). As well, I am a fellow of the Korea Foundation. I have taught in various universities worldwide, including State University of New York at Oneonta, USA, and Innsbaick University, Austria, I am also a Distinguished Visiting Professor in African Literature at Portland State University, Oregon. – (DE 2)

The examples above (7-10) indicate an organizational pattern where the writers establish their own credentials. In Step 1 of this move, the writer provided details such as professional ranks (e.g. as a lecturer) and positions (e.g. as an academic counsellor), while in the Step 2, the writer added other outstanding academic achievements. It can be appreciated from the view of Bruland (2009) that mentioning the writer's credentials carries a persuasive weight and indicates an enthusiastic endorsement of the candidate. Bruland is also of the view that recommenders include their credentials to establish their own expertise.

Of all the LRs of the UCC examined, however, it was noted that only one lecturer used Move 3. One key implication, therefore, is that individual stylistic preferences exist in the ways lecturers create and shape the LR genre. It can, hence, be noted that LRs reflect individuality in the way that the same intention is expressed within the same discipline. The indication is that LRs themselves can vary to a certain degree even within the same cultural context.

#### 4.1.4. Move 4: Candidate's Credentials

The fourth move, "Candidate's Credentials," provides details about the candidate's credentials. This move refers to the well-established nature of the applicant. Here, the writer tends to glorify the credentials of the applicant. In that respect, our analysis showed that there were five major linguistic realizations of the move, *Candidate's credentials*: "academic achievement", "relevant skills and abilities", "classroom performance", "co-curricular activities", and "work details". The steps of the move confirm the findings of Schmader, Whitehead and Wysocki (2007) in that LRs include language

that stresses the candidate's ability, achievement, and research. This move shows the abilities of the applicant in the courses taken, the applicant's achievement in the courses, and the writer's experience with the applicant. To Liu (2007), this move makes the reader rely more on the LR, and highlights the characteristics deemed to be relevant to the specific application.

#### Step 4.1: Academic achievement

This step attempts to provide a solid background for the writer's recommendation and knowledge of specific academic qualities of the candidate. Liu (2007) argues that listing academic achievements shows the applicant's academic preparedness for the intended study. Bouton (1995) adds that mentioning the candidate's academic strengths or commenting on the academic traits and achievements of the candidate is a common feature of the LR genre. The author, hence, details the year the candidate entered university and completed his/her programme of study, courses taken, class obtained, etc. as in the following:

11. BBB was enrolled in the BA (Arts) Programme in 2007 at the University of Cape Coast and successfully completed the programme in 2011 with a Second Class Upper. – (DE 2)
12. CCC was enrolled in the BA (Arts) Programme in 1999 at the University of Cape Coast and successfully completed in 2002. (DE 3)
13. DDD enrolled in the BA (Arts) programme at the University of Cape Coast in August, 2009. She has taken a number of courses in English Department which include "Principles in Prose Fiction", "The Techniques of Poetry", "Studies in Shakespeare", "Literacy Criticism", and several other courses. – (DE 4)

As Examples 11-13 indicate, the writers usually mention the year the candidate entered the university, the year of completion, the programme studied, some courses taken, and sometimes, the class obtained. That is, the writers discuss the candidates' academic background, showcasing the prowess and academic achievements or records of the candidates.

#### Step 4.2: Relevant skills and abilities

This step provides significant skills and abilities of the candidate including his/her communication skills, team work skills, and proficiency skills in both spoken and written English. This step aims to offer insights into the applicant's abilities and skills related to the chosen field of study. Below are some examples:

14. While in my "The Arts of Speaking within the African Context" (a liberal course) class, he demonstrated clear understanding of concepts and critical acumen, necessary for undergraduate work. – (DE 3)
15. In all the courses that DDD has taken, she has demonstrated a sense of critical analysis, an eagerness for knowledge, some independence of thought and a clear grasp of concepts. – (DE 4)
16. She also has advanced proficiency skills in both spoken and written English. Considering that English is the official medium of instruction and communication in all formal settings in Ghana and in the University of Cape Coast, EEE has been well prepared to engage in any academic work where English is the medium of instruction. (DE 5)

The above examples (14-16) exhibit a considerable number of the skills and abilities of the candidate. The writers provided details about the candidates' proficiency skills, communication skills, critical thinking skills, research skills and other academic abilities which are necessary for the successful completion of their proposed programmes of studies. These may also include skills reflecting the needs of the job market, given the marketization of higher education.

Step 4.3: Classroom performance

This step mentions the applicant's positive classroom performance, score, award, behaviour and activities, as in the following:

17. I remember vividly his insightful contributions as well as thought-provoking questions during lectures and tutorials. – (DE 2)
18. As an undergraduate student, she worked very hard to attain the remarkable grades she got. She also showed enthusiasm in learning. EEE has acquired a good foundation in academic work and can enrol in a Graduate Programme related to her field of study. (DE 5)
19. In class, she was diligent and serious-minded, she participated fully in discussions and her submitted assignments reflected a growing and curious mind. – (DE 6)

As noted from Examples 17-19, the writers provided details about the candidates' marked interest in studies and research, and overall behaviour in class to indicate that they have not only acquired a good foundation, but also been particularly prepared for further academic career. The writer often mentioned the candidate's performance (e.g., DE-18), score (e.g. DE-2) and positive behaviours (e.g. DE-17, DE-18; and DE-19). Quite unexpectedly, the writers did not mention the behaviours of the candidates with regard to how regularly they attended classes. This may not have been deemed to be very important.

Step 4.4: Co-curricular activities

This step mentions some co-curricular activities that the applicant participates or participated in. The author mentions these activities to demonstrate the applicant's ability to engage in other activities aside the curricular ones and his/her ability to influence others. The authors added some leadership positions held; aiming to demonstrate the applicant's leadership skills, good interpersonal skills, and as being a team player:

20. Outside the classroom, I noted his immense interest in extra-curricular activities during his undergraduate days at the University of Cape Coast. – (DE 2)
21. Added to his academic life, PPP found time in his undergraduate days for co-curricular activities. He was the Entertainment Chairperson for Kwame Nkrumah University Hall JCR (2012 - 2013), Chairperson for the Hall Week Planning Committee, and a member of the SRC Welfare Committee. – (DE 16)
22. While pursuing his undergraduate studies at UCC, he was Secretary (2010 – 2011) and President (2011 – 2012) of Dormaa Students' Union. – (DE 20)

The examples above (20-22) employed by writers, suggests that the candidate was considered an all-rounder.

Step 4.5: Work details

Lecturers from the UCC presented the candidate's work-related abilities, using past and current work performance, such as teaching, National Service (a mandatory service rendered to the Republic of Ghana as a patriotic act), and other details. This demonstrates the applicant's involvement and experiences in the chosen field or profession (Liu, 2007), as in the following examples:

23. She has offered her voluntary services to a number of organizations which include AIESEC Ghana, AIESEC South Africa and Life-Link Ghana for the past six years. Her ultimate aim is to be a philanthropist. – (DE 4)
24. Since 2013, FFF has been doing her National Service at the Ministry of Education. – (DE 6)



25. She is currently doing her National Service at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration in Accra, Ghana, and she is doing some marvellous work there. She is working there under the IT team. – (DE 14)

As evident from the examples (23-25) above, LRs sometimes include the candidate's workplace if he/she is no longer at the university (Bouton, 1995). This step tends to show the candidate's experience and overall work-related abilities, using past and current work performance, such as teaching, service, or other ability.

#### 4.1.5. Move 5: Candidate's Personal Values

LRs written by lecturers from the UCC provide the details of the candidate's personal characteristics, including his/her integrity, ethics, motivation, honesty, leadership skills, and his/her strengths. The authors detail these characteristics to show that the applicant can complete his/her proposed studies on time; that is, when given the opportunity to enrol in the programme. These characteristics are presented in the extracts below:

26. In all his dealings, he was observed to be amiable, pleasant, passionate and preserving. He has emotional stability and optimistic disposition in life, which should enable him to complete his proposed studies on time. – (DE 16)
27. Added to his academic life, SSS is pleasant, passionate and preserving. He has emotional stability and optimistic disposition in life, which should enable him to complete his proposed studies on time. – (DE 19)
28. Further WWW is hardworking, preserving, and highly focused. He has emotional stability and optimistic disposition in life, which should enable him to complete his proposed studies on time. – (DE 23)

The above examples (26-28) show a particular rhetorical unit which details the candidate's personal characteristics, such as integrity, ethics, motivation, honesty, dependability, reliability, decision-making, and adaptability. As Qanbari, Nemati, and Tohidian (2014) put it, since "the overt intention of LRs" (p. 316) is evaluating candidates, evaluation occurs through the interpretation of data which generally focuses on the candidates' personal values.

#### 4.1.6. Move 6: Closure

UCC authors concluded the LRs with the last move, *Closure*. This move had four (4) steps: "offering strong recommendation," "expressing hope," "soliciting response," and "ending politely". Bruland (2009), on the other hand, found that the *Closure* was realized by three steps: (1) a summative recommendation of the candidate (i.e. *offering strong recommendation*), (2) a prediction of the candidate's success in the programme and/or profession (i.e. *expressing hope*), and (3) an offer on the part of the recommender to be of further service (i.e. *soliciting response*) (p. 417).

##### Step 6.1: Offering strong recommendation

Here, the author shows his/her strong vote of support, and states explicitly his/her level of recommendation. That is, Move 6 (*closure*) has a step where the recommendation is made as shown in the examples below:

29. I give my total recommendation for XXXX for the programme she is applying for. – (DE 20)
30. Given ZZZ's abilities as well as his selflessness, dedication and commitment to work, I highly recommend him to your institution for admission. – (DE 26)
31. I have no hesitation in recommending him for admission. – (DE 28)

As evident in the examples (29-31) above, the writers expressed commitment by aligning themselves with the candidates. In line with the findings of Bruland (2009) and Akoto (2018), the present study found that the UCC writers included some amplification (boosting) in terms of recommendation, such as "without reservation," "have no hesitation," (as in 31); "total recommendation," (as in 29) and "highly recommend" (as in 30). Akoto (2018) adds that boosting) is another ideological resource that favourably shows the writers' commitment to their proposition.

#### Step 6.2: Expressing hope

Here, the writers show strong and positive beliefs and hopes in the candidates. This step shows that the writer is certain that the candidate will succeed in his/her intended graduate studies. UCC writers, thus, alluded to the future success of the candidate in the proposed study. As Liu (2007) and Precht (1998) revealed, this indicates the writer's certainty that the candidate will succeed in his/her chosen field. This step is similar to what Liu (2007) referred to as "predictions" or "expressing predictions". It coordinates with Move 1 (Writer's purpose) and aims at making a deeper impression upon the reader to probably influence the reader's decision-making. The following examples serve to illustrate this point:

32. I am confident that if she is offered a place, she will not disappoint and might even do better than your expectation. – (DE 10)
33. Given PPP's academic qualification, abilities as well as his social graces, he will not disappoint when he is offered admission into the postgraduate programme requested. – (DE 16)
34. Given RRR's academic qualification and abilities, I believe that she will not disappoint when she is offered admission into the programme requested. – (DE 18)

The above examples (32-34) show that Move 6 (*Closure*) contained predictions of the success of the candidate. They indicate that the writers of LR's voiced their "hopes", intended to persuade the admission committee to "consider seriously," "accept," and "welcome" the candidate; or "urge" the admission committee to give the candidate a chance to shine in the programme (Bruland, 2009). This finding affirms that of Range, et al. (1991) that LR's normally indicate the writer's closing positive remarks. This step was often expressed by using conditional markers such as 'when' or certain modal auxiliaries like 'will' and 'can'. It can also be observed from the examples (31-34) above that the writers presented their personal opinions or evaluation of the candidate's potential or ability to succeed in the chosen field. To add to the credibility of the letter, the author used the personal pronoun, "I", followed by a verb like "believe" or the verb phrase "can assure" or the verb "be" with the adjective "sure" such as "I believe (34)," and "I am confident (32)". This affirms Afful's (2018) finding that distinctive rhetorical features include the use of personal pronouns although his observations relate to grant LR. Akoto (2018) referred to the use of such personalized structures as "ideological hedging", implying that the applicant is evaluated per what the recommender knows, not what others know. Akoto argues that this enables writers to defend themselves against any counter-claims that may be presented against the way the candidate has been projected.

#### Step 6.3: Soliciting response

This step invites the reader to contact the writer for any further information or enquiries on the applicant. Here are examples:

35. .... and do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information on her. – (DE 4)
36. In case you have any further queries for which I must be contacted please e-mail: [zzzzz@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:zzzzz@ucc.edu.gh). – (DE 10)
37. ...and do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information on her. My e-mail address is [xxx@ucc.edu.gh](mailto:xxx@ucc.edu.gh). – (DE 24)

The examples above (35-37) show a rhetorical pattern that suggests to the admission committee to freely contact the writer in case of doubt. The authors generally presented their email addresses and phone numbers to the admission committee to contact them for further information. It can be said that, since the email addresses reflected the institution of the writer, it adds to the credibility of the writers. In the words of Bruland (2009), this step provides an offer on the part of the recommender to be of further service. The author provides his/her email address or a phone number, and requests the admission committee to contact him/her when the need arises.

#### Step 6.4: Ending politely

The UCC writers often ended the letter politely. “Thank you” was used in all the instances that this step occurred in the data set. This may reflect not only a tactical gesture but also a pressure tactic from the writer.

#### 4.2. Frequency of Occurrence of Moves/Steps in the UCC Data

The study sought to provide a quantitative analysis of the frequency of occurrence of each of the moves/steps in the LRs written by faculty from the UCC, the textual space allocated to each of the moves, and the sequencing of the moves. This analysis was necessary to identify whether moves/steps were either core, obligatory, or optional. After analysing the frequency of occurrence of each move/step, I indicated the move status, based on Huttner’s (2010) framework. Table 2 presents the frequency of occurrence of moves/steps of the LRs written by faculty from the UCC.

Table 2: Frequency of Moves/Steps in the UCC Data

Moves	Description of Moves	Steps Description	Freq. of Occurrence N=35	% of Occurrence	Move Status
1.	Purpose of writing		32	91.42	Obligatory
2.	Context of knowing the candidate		25	71.43	Core
3.	Writer’s credentials	1. Providing essential details of the writer	5	14.28	Optional
		2. Indicating value of the writers	5	14.28	Optional
4.	Candidate’s Credentials		34	97.15	Obligatory
		1. Academic achievement	33	94.28	Obligatory
		2. Relevant skills and abilities	23	65.71	Core
		3. Classroom performance	22	62.86	Core
		4. Co-curricular activities	5	14.28	Optional
5.	Candidate’s personal values	5. Work details	11	31.45	Ambiguous
			25	71.43	Core
6.	Closure		35	100	Obligatory
		1. Offering strong recommendation	33	94.28	Obligatory
			22	62.86	Core

2. Expressing hope	8	22.86	Optional
3. Soliciting response	19	54.29	Core
4. Ending politely			

Note: 100% = Moves occurred in all LRs of the UCC data

Table 2 shows that the Move 6 (*Closure*) had the highest percentage of the frequency of occurrence (100%). This was followed by the move of *candidate's credentials* which had 34 (97.15%) occurrences. The steps of both *academic achievement* and *offering strong recommendation* occurred 94.28% of the time whereas the frequency of occurrence of *purpose of writing* was 91.42%. Both the move of *Context of knowing the candidate* and the step of *candidate's personal values* showed a percentage of the occurrence frequency of 71.43%, but *relevant skills and abilities* occurred 65.71% of the time. Both steps of *classroom performance* and *expressing hope* had the frequency of 22 (62.86%). The step, *ending politely*, had 19 (54.29%) occurrences, while the step of *soliciting response* had 8 (22.86%) occurrences. Finally, the move of *writer's credentials* and its steps *providing essential details of the writer*, and *indicating value of the writer*, as well as *co-curricular activities* had 5 (14.28%) occurrences each.

The frequency of occurrence of both *academic achievement* and *offering strong recommendation* (i.e. 94.28%) affirms the views of Bouton (1995) and Range, et al. (1991) that a LR involves a body where academic traits and achievements (or worthy accomplishments) are noted, and a closing section where the recommendation is made. On the other hand, while Bouton's view suggests that the context of knowing the candidate dominates in the introduction section, the present study found that the UCC writers frequently stated the reason for writing the letter in the introduction section. The frequency of occurrence of *closure* also agrees with the findings of Precht (1998) who found that all the British LRs had predictions, also referred to as *conclusion* (Ebadi & Saedidovaise, 2015; Liu, 2007).

As seen in Table 2, of the steps in Move 6, *offering strong recommendation* had the highest frequency of occurrence, which suggests its relative importance among the steps in Move 6. Liu's (2007) view that the *conclusion* normally ends the LR with the writer's prediction of the candidate's future success in the proposed programme, however, contradicts the findings of the present study. This study suggests that, of all the steps in *the closure*, "Step 1: Offering strong recommendation" is what the writers often used. "Step 2: Expressing hope" was the second highest (in terms of frequency of occurrence) which disagrees with Liu's (2007) view. Similarly, in the present study the frequency of occurrence of *expressing hope* (i.e. 8 occurrences, indicating 22.86%) contradicts Ebadi and Saedidovaise (2015) who found that all the English LRs contained predictions of the future success of the candidate.

Additionally, the present study also seems to contradict both Ebadi and Saedidovaise's (2015) and Liu's (2007) views (and classification) that *Closure* is generally *predicting the future success of the candidate*. The present study indicates that, in the *closure*, the UCC writers often explicitly stated that they are writing to recommend the candidate. This finding is not surprising because the LR genre in this CP aims to recommend the candidate for admission.

Following Huttner's (2010) classification, the frequency of occurrence of moves in Table 2 reveals that there are three (3) obligatory moves (i.e. "purpose of writing," "candidate's credentials," and "closure"), two (2) core moves (i.e. "candidate's personal values," and "context of knowing the candidate") and one (1) optional move (i.e. "writer's credentials") in the LRs of the present data. This indicates that there are five (5) typical moves and one optional move of LRs written by lecturers from the UCC. This finding differs from Liu's (2007), who found that a typical LR has four (4) moves: (1) *Purpose*, (2) *Context of knowing*, (3) *Topicality*, and (4) *Future success of the recommendee*. Generally, the typical moves found in the LRs written by faculty in the UCC agree with the findings of Range, et al. (1991) that LRs normally indicate the writer's association with the applicant, the applicant's skills

and ethics, interpersonal skills, supervision behaviour, and worthy accomplishments, and closing positive remarks.

The analysis of the LRs of the UCC also indicates that Move 3 (*Writer's credentials*) could result from expert members' creativity and consideration; that is, Move 3 (*Writer's credentials*) may not be considered a typical feature of the LR genre and that the writer considered and created it in some situations. This finding reflects language variation according to individual use. As Liu (2007) noted, the reader may look for the writer's credibility. Sheehan, McDevitt, and Ross (1998) also argued that since LRs help fill in the blanks, name recognition or prestige of the writer of the letter can contribute to the importance of LRs. In a similar vein, Nicklin and Roch (2009) revealed that institutions place more weight on letters written by a well-known or renowned individual from a prestigious institution or organization.

#### 4.3. Sequence of Moves in LRs

Sequencing of moves is the order of moves in a text. Table 3 shows the order of the moves in the LRs.

Table 3: Sequencing of Moves in the Data Set

Kind	Move Patterns	Frequency	Total	%
1	<b>9 move sequence</b>		<b>6</b>	17.14
	2->1->4->4->4->4->5->6->6	3		
	2->1->4->4->4->4->5->6->6->6	2		
	2->1->4->4->5->4->6->6->6	1		
2	<b>8 move sequence</b>		<b>12</b>	34.29
	1->3->3->2->4->4->6->6	2		
	2->1->4->4->4->4->5->6->6	2		
	1->3->3->2->4->4->6->6	1		
	1->4->2->4->5->6->6->6	1		
	1->2->4->4->5->4->6->6	1		
	1->2->4->4->4->5->6->6	1		
	1->4->4->4->4->5->6->6	2		
	3->3->2->4->4->5->6->6	1		
	2->4->5->4->6->6->6->6	1		
3	<b>7 move sequence</b>		<b>8</b>	22.86
	1->4->2->4->5->4->6	1		
	1->4->4->4->6->6->6	1		
	2->1->4->4->5->6->6	3		
	1->2->4->5->6->6->6	1		
	1->4->4->5->4->6->6	1		
	4->2->4->4->6->6->6	1		
4	<b>6 move sequence</b>		<b>7</b>	20
	1->4->4->4->6->6	1		
	1->3->3->2->6->6	1		
	1->2->4->4->6->6	1		
	1->4->4->5->6->6	1		
	1->4->4->4->6->6	1		
	2->1->4->4->5->6	1		
	4->4->5->6->6->6	1		
5	<b>5 move sequence</b>		<b>2</b>	5.71
	2->1->4->5->6	1		
	1->4->4->6->6	1		

<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
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Table 3 shows that not all the moves always appeared in a fixed predictable order. The analysis revealed five (5) different move patterns in the LRs written by faculty from the UCC. The ordering of the Moves ranged from a 5-move sequence to a 9-move sequence. Of all the different patterns, the most frequently used was the 8-move sequence, and it occurred twelve (12) times, indicating 34.29%, of the 35 LRs examined. The second most frequently employed was the 7-move sequence, and its frequency of occurrence was eight (8), indicating 22.86%. The third most frequently employed pattern was the 6-move sequence, with the frequency of occurrence of 7 (20%), followed by the 9-move sequence, with the frequency of occurrence of 6 (17.14%). The least used pattern was the 5-move sequence, and it had a frequency of occurrence of 2 (5.71%). 18 (51.43%) of the UCC LRs began with Move 1. 14 (40%) of them also began with Move 2. 2 (5.71%) began with Move 4, while one (2.86%) began with Move 3. The means that Move 1 was mostly found introducing LRs written by faculty from the UCC.

A careful observation of Table 3 also shows that the UCC writers predominantly used the 2->1->4 sequence, which occurred thirteen (13) times, followed by the 1->4->4 move sequence which occurred seven (7) times out of the total UCC data. The move sequence, 1->2->3->5, had a frequency of two (2). The predominance of the 2->1->4 sequence in UCC LRs suggests that UCC writers preferred to first indicate the *context of knowing the candidate*, followed by the *purpose of writing*, and then the *candidate's credentials*. Finally, a close observation of Table 3 shows that Move 6 had a constant position of occurring at the end of the data. This implies that Move 6 always maintained its position in all the data.

From the discussion above, it can be said that the sequence of moves, as far as UCC LRs are concerned, does not follow a regular sequence. As noted from Table 3, the sequence of moves did not show any standard formats. It can, however, be argued that Move 1 was usually found introducing the LRs written by faculty from the UCC, and Move 6 constantly occurred at the end of the data. It has also been noticed that the UCC authors preferred to first, provide the context of knowing the applicant, followed by the purpose of writing, and then the candidate's credentials.

#### 4.4. Textual Space of Moves of LRs

In this section, we discuss the textual space of each move identified in the LRs of the UCC. As argued by Afful (2005), the textual space allocated to each move determines its importance. In identifying the textual space of the words in each move, we manually did a word count of each move. The results of the analysis of the textual space are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Textual Space of Each Move in the UCC Data Set

<b>Data</b>	<i>Move 1</i>	<i>Move 2</i>	<i>Move 3</i>	Move 4	Move 5	Move 6	Total
DE 1	24	44	27	37	0	19	151
DE 2	13	20	0	102	28	30	193
DE 3	17	13	0	63	32	28	153
DE 4	15	0	0	176	33	20	244
DE 5	17	0	0	193	0	21	231
DE 6	8	20	84	36	0	11	159
DE 7	17	0	0	190	0	21	228
DE 8	8	20	88	30	0	11	157
DE 9	21	13	0	66	32	29	161
DE 10	17	40	0	112	59	50	278
DE 11	16	39	84	0	0	11	150
DE 12	17	36	0	47	0	12	112
DE 13	35	0	0	139	37	25	236
DE 14	21	18	0	188	68	28	323
DE 15	13	20	0	92	32	35	192
DE 16	13	20	0	125	34	35	227
DE 17	17	0	0	184	0	7	208
DE 18	14	18	0	56	0	22	110
DE 19	11	21	0	94	31	23	180
DE 20	21	10	0	113	27	14	185
DE 21	20	10	0	127	27	30	214
DE 22	25	11	0	117	50	25	228
DE 23	10	25	0	74	28	28	165
DE 24	17	23	0	144	81	67	332
DE 25	17	0	0	76	35	24	152
DE 26	9	27	0	158	86	39	319
DE 27	17	0	0	93	0	11	121
DE 28	0	13	43	146	57	12	271
DE 29	25	0	0	148	38	77	288
DE 30	26	0	0	137	52	27	242
DE 31	6	14	0	130	50	27	227
DE 32	0	45	0	52	42	46	185
DE 33	0	25	0	88	0	40	153
DE 34	0	0	0	106	11	28	145
DE 35	23	13	0	101	34	29	200
<b>Total</b>	<b>530</b>	<b>558</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>3740</b>	<b>1004</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>7120</b>
	<b>(7.44%)</b>	<b>(7.84%)</b>	<b>(4.58%)</b>	<b>(2.53%)</b>	<b>(14.10%)</b>	<b>(13.51%)</b>	<b>100%</b>

The results, as presented in Table 4, show that Move 4, *Candidate's credentials*, occupied the most space in the UCC LRs. It occupied more than half (i.e. 52.53%) of the data. Table 4 also illustrates that Move 5, *Candidate's personal values*, occupied the second largest textual space. The results, as indicated in Table 4, reflect the CP of the LRs. Given that a LR seeks to convince an admission committee to consider the applicant for further studies, it suggests that enough evidence needs to be given to establish the candidate's credentials. The writer needs to make an effort to persuade the reader(s) to grant the applicant the admission, and *establishing credentials* indicates that the candidate is the most suitable and also ready for the proposed study.

This finding supports Akoto's (2018) view that writers need to provide enough evidence that they know the candidate academically, and, thus, focus on characteristics considered to be relevant to the application (Liu, 2007). According to Bhatia (1993), the applicant's candidature needs to be established by asserting his or her most important strengths. The finding that the writers assigned the most textual space to Move 4 also affirms the view of Afful (2005) that the textual space allocated to each move determines its importance. Thus, given the importance of this move, writers provide enough textual space for the academic themes of the candidate, including performance in course work, research ability, teaching potentials or abilities, speaking and writing skills (Akoto, 2018). Bouton (1995) also indicated that a LR involves a body where academic traits and achievements are noted. After all, Precht (1998) argued that the task of the recommender is to evaluate the qualifications and potential of the candidate.

## 5. Conclusion and Limitation

As regards the limitation of this study, the researchers admit that the current study is limited to textual data and did not consider other forms of data collection such as ethnographic methods (interview, participants' observation and focus group discussions) which could have provided justifications for why some Moves or steps, for instance, were not utilized. An interview with some of the faculty members could have provided clarifications on issues that were not clear in the course of labeling the Moves.

The present study is a report on a genre analysis of LRs for a graduate programme written by faculty from the University Cape Coast, Ghana between 2014 and 2019. The LRs were analysed to determine their schematic structure as well as linguistic resources that signalled each move. This study has demonstrated how the LR genre is structured and interpreted to serve the community of practice (CP) shared by lecturers who constantly take part in this genre. The study found that faculty from UCC preferred a six-move sequence, involving three (3) obligatory moves (i.e. *purpose of writing*, *candidate's credentials*, and *closure*); two (2) core moves (i.e. *candidate's personal values*, and *context of knowing the candidate*); and one (1) optional move (i.e. *writer's credentials*). The present study disagrees with the findings with Afful and Kyei (2020) that the LRs written for post graduate studies had five moves. The study, concludes, that LRs do not only share generic characteristics and maintain discipline-constrained features, but are also characterised by individual preferences of the writers.

The findings have implications for the existing scholarship on LRs, professional development, and further research in three ways. First, the present study contributes towards the understanding of the generic structure of LRs, which is an important part of the constellation of genres in the application of postgraduate students. Second, the study offers English for Academic Purpose (EAP) teachers, valuable insights which can be applied and taught to lecturers. Finally, the findings of this study serve as a fertile ground for further research in genre studies, in general, and LRs, in particular. It is, hence, suggested that future researchers could add other forms of research instruments such as interview to provide enriched understanding and insights into the ways the LR genre is constructed.



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