Examining the Generic Features of Thesis Acknowledgments: A Case of Iranian MA Graduate Students Majoring in Teaching Persian to Speakers of Other Languages (AZFA) and TEFL

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Abstract

Thesis acknowledgement is a written genre in which MA graduate students offer their gratitude to individuals, who have contributed to the completion of their study. The aim of the current study was to examine the thesis acknowledgements written by Iranian MA students in the field of Persian Language Teaching to Non-Persian Speakers (Amouzeshe Zaban e Farsi be Kharejian, AZFA) and TEFL in terms of their generic structures, linguistic choice, preferred authorial subject, and acknowledges. To this end, 41 (20 in AZFA and 21 in TEFL) thesis acknowledgement texts were selected. The corpus was analyzed with reference to Hyland's (2004) generic structure pattern, Hyland and Tse's (2004) linguistic choice framework, and Yang's (2012) category of the acknowledges and subject types. The results showed that, on the whole, Hyland's (2004) three-tier structure has been employed in both disciplines. However, five other moves/steps were discovered throughout this study, namely, praising God and His Prophet (PBUH), thanking God, blessing, closing/signing off. In both disciplines, the most acknowledged individuals were advisors. Both groups selected the first-person subject "I" to extend their thanks. Besides, both groups consented in using "nominalization" pattern as the linguistic realization of their gratitude. Although the texts analyzed demonstrated variations in the texts, the fixed conventions of theses genre systems suggest that teachers can help their students by raising their awareness of these conventions and showing them how to best construct their academic identity. Finally, additional studies are needed to complement this research.

Key words: Thesis acknowledgements, TEFL, AZFA, generic structure, linguistic choice, Acknowledgees

1. Introduction

Writing a thesis takes a great deal of planning and research. It often takes months to complete, and there are many people who not only assist in the research and writing of the paper but also provide mental, emotional, and even monetary supports. The acknowledgement section of thesis provides the students with the opportunity to offer their gratitude to institutions and individuals who have contributed to the completion of their study. The interest in thesis and dissertation acknowledgements in research in Applied Linguistics is quite recent. It has been of considerable interest to many genre analysts such as Giannoni (2002), Hyland (2003, 2004), and Hyland and Tse (2004). Some have focused

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on the acknowledgments written by the native speakers of English including Ben-Ari (1987), and McCain (1991); some others have been interested in the acknowledgments written by non-native speakers of English such as Al-Ali (2004, 2010), Hyland (2003, 2004), Hyland and Tse (2004), and Mingwei and Yajun (2010), Yang (2012). Likewise, some researchers like Giannoni (2002) and Lasaky (2011) have compared and contrasted acknowledgements written by native and non-natives speakers.

Variation in the findings of the previous studies is evidence for the dynamic nature of the genres used in acknowledgements. Besides, the results of some studies such as Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) are not conclusive. There is a crucial necessity for further research since, As Hyland (2004) asserts, insufficient knowledge in constructing acknowledgments may lead to "improper expressions of gratitude which may result in a reflection of an incompetent academic and social identity of the students completing their Masters and Doctorate degrees" (p. 308). Thus, more studies are needed to be done in different contexts to verify the previous findings or to add to the literature of this almost new area of inquiry. Furthermore, existing research on acknowledgements, particularly in Persian, has rarely taken a socio-cultural perspective in analyzing how thanks are expressed, who are thanked, and how the writers express themselves as the authors.

More importantly, compared with other sections of theses, dissertation or articles and books, acknowledgements have received less attention in pedagogical environment. Students most often copy what others have written with no good awareness of their purpose. Graduate students should be explicitly taught of the possible factors, which might affect how they employ thanking moves/steps, lexical, and grammatical choices. In addition, identifying keywords and structural patterns used in the theses acknowledgements can serve as a reference for the students to show them the possible word choices and structures. By revealing the generic structure, displaying how the writers formulate their thanking expressions addressed to the ones supported them in writing their theses, and comparing acknowledgments written by Persian native speakers and English non-native speakers, the researcher hopes to highlight the importance of the genre, add to the literature, and provide the students and their instructors with a comprehensive understanding of the genre, and finally help the students write impressive and proper acknowledgements.

Therefore, this study attempts to compare and contrast master's thesis acknowledgements written by native speakers of Persian (AZFA graduates) and non-native speakers of English (TEFL graduates) in terms of their generic structures, linguistic choice, preferred authorial subject, and individuals being thanked.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Acknowledgement

The purpose of acknowledgements is to offer credit to institutions and individuals, who have contributed to the dissertation in some way (Hyland, 2003). They are not a "simple catalogue of indebtedness" (Hyland, 2003, p. 244). Rather, they "offer insights into the persona of the writer, the patterns of engagement that define collaboration and

interdependence among scholars, and the practices of expectation etiquette that are involved" (Hyland, 2003, p. 244). Hyland (2004) adds that acknowledgements in theses and dissertations provide the opportunity for students to "demonstrate their awareness of some central academic values such as modesty and gratitude, establish their credibility, recognize debts, and achieve a sense of closure at the end of what is often a long and demanding research process" (p. 304).

Although acknowledgements have been part of scholarly writings since the 1960s (Bazerman, 1988, as cited in Afful&Mwinlaaru, 2010), little is known about the early history of the acknowledgement which goes back to the time when the "benevolence of the authors were a prerequisite for publication" (Giannoni, 2002):

As intellectual endeavor gained political and financial independence, the genre lost its original purpose but did not disappear; expressions of gratitude resurfaced in the preface …. And were eventually assigned a separate space at the beginning of books. (p. 4)

Currently, references to the external contributors have become embedded in the main body of the text or featured in the cover letter (Atkinson, 1999, as cited in Giannoni, 2002). Acknowledgement sections seem to be almost universal in academic books, research articles, and dissertations. Present acknowledgements consist of factual information about the article's history and recognition of personal rapport with colleagues and assistants and gratitude of academic scholarship (Giannoni, 2002).

2.2 Genre Analysis

"Genre" is a French word meaning "kind". The term is widely used in "rhetoric, literary theory, media theory, and more recently linguistics, to refer to a distinctive type of text" (Chandler, 1997, p. 1). Genre in discourse analysis, as Swales (1990, as cited in Askehave& Swales, 2001) puts it, comprises

a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. (p. 58)

According to Tardy (2011), genres, as a category of discourse, have the following characteristics: They are "(a) primarily a rhetorical category; (b) socially conditioned; (c) intertextual; (d) carried out in multiple modes of communication; (e) existing structures of power" (p. 55). Since 1980s, the communicative purpose has been used as a main criterion to place a text in a particular genre. Swales (1990, as cited in Askehave& Swales, 2001) argues that it is difficult to identify the purposes of some genres and that the analyst cannot know at the outset what the purpose of text A and B are and to which genres they belong. Rather, "what is immediately manifested to the genre analyst is not the purpose but the form and content" (p. 200).

Tardy (2011) contends that it is not the linguistic form of a text that makes it a genre but rather its "rhetorical action in response to the dynamics of a social context" (p.56). In her view, the method of rhetorically analyzing a genre is "move analysis", first developed by Swales (1990). Analyzing a corpus of texts representing a genre, the analyst identifies the common moves or parts that "work to carry out distinct rhetorical functions" (Hyland &Paltridge, 2011, p. 56). As Tardy (2011) puts it, "the analysts count the presence of each move within the corpus to find out which moves are obligatory and which optional" (p.56).

Swales (1996, as cited in Hyland, 2003) classifies the academic genre into three groups: Primary or research-process genres developed for peer-communication, secondary or pedagogic genres, and occluded genres used for the "exchange of material, advice, and information between academics and publishers to support the research process" (p. 243). It seems that acknowledgements fall into the third category and "represent something of a Cinderella" genre (p. 243).

2.3 Previous Studies

Interest in thesis and dissertation acknowledgements in research studiesof Applied Linguistics is quite recent. They have been of considerable interest to many genre analysts such asAfful and Mwinlaaru (2010), AL-Ali (2006, 2010), Cheng (2012), Giannoni (2002), Hyland (2003, 2004), Hyland and Tse (2004), Khabsa,Koppman, and Giles(2012), Lasaky (2011), Mohammadi (2013), Scrivener (2009), and yang (2012). These researchers have studied both generic moves and linguistic features of acknowledgements.

Giannoni (2002) is the first genre analyst, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, who studied acknowledgements. He studies the socio-pragmatic construction and textualization of a corpus of 100 acknowledgements in English and Italian journal articles from a genre analytic point of view and identified a two-tier structure comprising of one main move and one optional introductory one, each of which can be divided into several steps as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A two-tier structure (Giannoni, 2002, p. 10)

Introductory move (framing)	Main move(credit mapping)
Step1.1(citing parent text or events)	Step 2.1 (acknowledging institutional support)
Step 1.2 (acknowledging those involved)	Step 2.2 (acknowledging individual contribution)
Step1.3 (asserting commonality/authorship)	Step 2.3 (accepting responsibility)

He concluded that generic structure of article acknowledgements reflects the differences in different disciplines as well as patterns of national disciplinary communities. Afterward, Hyland (2004) studied 240 MA and PhD dissertations from six academic fields written by non-native English speaking students at five Hong Kong universities to figure out their move structure. Extending Swales' (1990) CARS model to his study, Hyland has identified an optional reflecting move, a main obligatory thanking move, and an optional announcing

move as shown in Table 2. Since then, this model of three-tier structure of acknowledgements has become a framework employed by other genre analyst for explaining generic structure.

Table 2: Move structure of Dissertation acknowledgements (Hyland, 2004, p. 308)

1. Reflecting Move	the writer's research experience and the challenges that have been encountered and overcome
2. Thanking Move	
a. presenting participants	mapping credit to individuals and institutions introducing those to be thanked
b. thanking for academic assistance	Thanks for intellectual support, ideas, analyses feedback, etc.
c. thanking for resources	thanks for data access and clerical, technical or financial support
d. thanking for moral support	thanks for encouragement, friendship, sympathy, patience, etc.
3. Announcing Move	
a. accepting responsibility	statements delineating responsibility and inspiration an assertion of authorial responsibility for flaws or errors
b. dedicating the thesis	a formal dedication of the thesis to an individual(s)

Hyland's results support Giannoni's (2002) analysis concerning research article acknowledgements. However, the texts are generally composed of fewer moves with less recursion and show greater relative concentration on academic thanks (p. 311). Hyland and Tse (2004) further investigated the same acknowledgments texts for the lexico-grammatical patterns used to realize the three moves identified in Hyland (2004). Hylandand Tse (2004, as cited in yang, 2012) have categorized the patterns used to express gratitude in thanking acts into five main types, namely, nominalization, performative verb, adjective, passive and bare mention. As Yang (2012) reports, they found that the nominalization pattern was the most preferred linguistic choice of the acknowledgers to express gratitude. Further, they found out that "the first-person pronoun I was the most common authorial subject used by the students in their acknowledgements" (Yang, 2012, p. 29).

Employing the move structure analysis proposed by Hyland (2004), Al-Ali (2006) conducted a cross-disciplinary study on the generic structure of 100 acknowledgement texts randomly collected from PhD dissertation sections written in English by Arabic native speakers. His corpus generally followed Hyland's model. However, subtle differences were identified. Al-Ali's corpus indicated a Thanking Allah (God) step in the thanking move. This step was the manifestation of Muslims' attitudes toward their religious beliefs (AL-Ali, 2006, p. 38). His analysis also revealed that the main thanking move was an "expression of functional collaboration between scholars and a revelation of the writer insider's perceptions of how best to address and interact with peers" (p. 41). He also pointed out that the Reflecting and Announcing moves show "the personal identity of the writer and the degree of self-confidence when s/he asserts absolute authorial responsibility for the contents and any deficiencies in the dissertation" (p. 41).

Similarly, Mingwei and Yajun (2010) investigated 20 MA and PhD dissertations composed by student writers in Chinese mainland, to determine their generic structure and lexico-grammatical patterns used and specify the moves and steps, including acknowledgees, gratitude expressions, modifiers in thanking acts, choice of authorial subjects. Despite variations noticed in the academic practices of mainland and Hong Kong writers, the results revealed that Chinese writers extensively pursue the three-tier structure of Hyland's (2004) and Hyland &Tse's (2004) acknowledgements moves and steps. On the other hand, Yang's (2012) study on 120 soft and hard sciences' PhD dissertation acknowledgements written by Taiwanese EFL students studying in the US indicated that academic communities are thanked for their intellectual support, ideas, analysis, and feedback, and non-academic individuals are acknowledged for their encouragement, friendship, sympathy, and patience. Regarding the individuals acknowledged, course instructors were most frequent ones followed by family members, committee members, colleague, advisors, friends, institutions, participants, and religious beliefs. The performative verb pattern was the most commonly used pattern of expressing gratitude.

It is worthy of note that Lasaky (2011) was the first Iranian researcher- to the best of the researcher's knowledge- who, employing Hyland's (2004) model, compared and contrasted PhD theses acknowledgments written by native (English) and nonnative(Iranian) students majoring in Applied linguistics. He, like Al-Ali (2006), came up with the thanking Allah step in nonnative students' acknowledgements. In another study, Razali (2011) specified the generic structure of dissertation acknowledgements, moves, and steps used by postgraduate students at the Faculty of Education, further investigated the representation of gender differences in the acknowledgements. The results of the study showed that the acknowledgement structure of the theses resembled the one determined by Al-Ali (2006). As for the gender differences, the findings revealed that the structure of acknowledgements and linguistics patterns of the thanking acts differed across gender.

Recent evidence suggests that, in most dissertation acknowled gements, thanking expressions, socio-culturally conditioned names, and code-mixing are used extensively (Afful, 2016; Afful&Mwinlaaru, 2012; Gesuato, 2008; Scrivener, 2009; Yang, 2012). This section has provided a systematic review of the literature on genre analysis and introduced the theoretical framework on which the researcher developed her conceptualization of genre analysis. In fact, the discussion of these major themes in the literature allowed the researcher to conceptualize the field and determine framework of the study.

3. Purpose of the Study

The present study aimed to investigate the thesis acknowledgements written by AZFA and TEFL students in terms of their generic structures, linguistic choice, preferred authorial

subject, and acknowlegees. To this end, the study was to find the answer to the following questions:

1. How are the generic moves realized in the acknowledgement section of Iranian MA graduate students' theses majoring in AZFA and TEFL?
2. To whom do MA graduate students express their gratitude in their acknowledgements?
3. What are the AZFA and TEFL students' preferred choices of authorial subjects to express their gratitude?
4. What are the AZFA and TEFL students preferred linguistic choices to express their gratitude?

4. Methodology

In this section, the researcher starts with an overview of the theoretical framework employed in the study. Then the corpus is introduced. Having described the data collection procedure, the author terminates the section by providing some information on the data analysis process.

4.1Corpus

The study was based on a corpus of 41 randomly selected theses' acknowledgements (totaling 6976 words), written by MA Graduate students at Allameh Tabataba'i University. The text corpus consisted of the acknowledgement sections in 20 MA theses written by students majoring in Teaching Persian to speakers of other languages (8 males, 12 females) and 21 MA theses written by TEFL students (10 males, 11 females). The detailed information about the corpus is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Detailed information about the corpus

Discipline	Texts	Words	Average
TEFL-F	11	2056	186.90
TEFL-M	10	1783	178.3
AZFA -F	12	1900	158.33
AZFA -M	8	1237	154.62
Total	41	6976	678.15

It is worth mentioning that the theses were written in Persian and English by students majoring in AZFA and TEFL respectively.

4.2 Data Collection Procedure

The objective of the Present study was to evaluate the thesis acknowledgements, written by AZFA and TEFL students, in terms of their generic structures, linguistic choice, preferred authorial subject, and acknowlegees. The criterion for data collection for the present study was the accessibility of the data. Therefore, the corpus was collected from the thesis section of the library of Allameh Tabataba'i University. The researcher, first, explained the aim of her study to the librarian to get her permission. Afterward, the researcher randomly selected

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41 theses from TEFL and AZFA shelves and took some photos of the acknowledgement sections of each. Subsequently, the photos were transcribed to be analyzed.

4.3 Data Analysis Framework

All of the acknowledgements texts, which had been photographed, were first transcribed using Microsoft word 2010. Each text was then coded for the analysis of the generic moves by the researcher herself based on Hyland's (2004) generic structure pattern (see appendix A). Hyland`s analysis is based on Swals's (1990) genre moves for article introductions, which has been extended by genre analysts to other academic genres. This coding scheme includes one obligatory and two optional moves, each of which consisting of some steps.

After coding the moves, they were tabulated and the quantitative analysis of their frequencies was performed. Afterward, the generic structure of the acknowledgment texts, written by the students of the two majors, was analyzed to see if they follow the same pattern as Hyland's. Further, the researcher analyzed the texts in detail to classify the acknowledgees and investigate the AZFA and TEFL students' preferred choices of the authorial subjects. To identify the individuals acknowledged and the choice of authorial subject, the researcher employed the categorizations made by Yang (2012). The acknowlegees' categorization includes advisor, other teacher, committee, colleague, family, institution, friend, participant, religion, and not mentioned by name. The authorial subject choices are classified into I, my, no subject, non-author, and the author. Hyland and Tse's (2004, as cited in Yang, 2012) framework of linguistic patterns- including nominalization, performative verb, adjective, or passive pattern, or bare mention patterns- was also employed to investigate the preferred linguistic choices of the corpus.

5. Results and Discussion

Genre analysis was used here to find out the generic moves and linguistic patterns of the acknowledgment texts written by Iranian AZFA and TEFL students as a part of their MA theses. The way AZFA and TEFL MA students expressed their gratitude, their preferred authorial subject, and the acknowlegees were also investigated in this study. The following sections present the results in terms of the research questions of the study.

5.1 How are the generic moves realized in acknowledgement section of Iranian MA graduate students' theses majoring in AZFA and TEFL?

In general, the analysis of the generic structure of the corpus has shown that Hyland's (2004) three-tier structure has been employed in both disciplines. However, the texts analyzed demonstrated differences in the number and frequency of moves as well as the type of component moves included. Besides, five other moves/steps were identified, namely, praising God and His Prophet (PBUH), thanking God, blessing, closing/signing off

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(name and date). The individual components of the genres in the acknowledgements are presented in Table 4. The frequency of each component is also presented.

Table 4: Number of move components for Iranian TEFL and AZFA students

Component Moves of acknowledgements	TEFL n: 21	%	AZFA n: 20	%	Total N: 41	%
I. Reflecting Move	1	4.7	0	0	1	2.43
II. Thanking Move						
1. Praising and thanking God and Prophet	2	9.5	9	45	10	24
2. Presenting Participants	14	66	7	35	21	51
3. Thanking for Academic Assistance	21	100	20	100	41	100
4. Thanking for Resources	15	71.4	4	20	19	46
5. Thanking for Moral Support	16	76	10	50	26	63
6. Blessing	0	0	5	25	5	12
I. Announcing Move						
1. accepting responsibility	3	14	0	0	3	7.3
2. dedicating the thesis	2	9.5	0	0	2	4.8
II. Closing/Signing Off						
1. Name	1	4.7	3	14	4	9.7
2. Date	1	4.7	1	5	2	4.8

5.1.1 Reflecting Move

This move refers back to the writer's research experiences s/he has gained and the challenges that have been encountered and overcome during research. Hyland (2004) considers this move as "peripheral to the main purpose of the genre" (p. 311). It occurred in 20% of Hyland's (2004), 26% of Yang's (2012), and 58.3% of Afful and Mwinlaaru's (2012) corpus. In the present study, the only instance of this move occurred in acknowledgments written by one of the TEFL students, 4.7 % of the TEFL texts. The following sentence exemplifies this move, which occurred only once in the whole corpus.

> *If it doesn't kill you, it'll make you much stronger. I assume that whoever has completed a thesis agrees with this statement about the nature of thesis and thesis writing. Thesis writing is drudgery, i.e., boring, hard work, which requires tremendous patience to cope with the ambiguities and bewilderment.*

No instance was found for this move in the thesis acknowledgements of AZFA. This finding further corroborates the results of Lasaky (2011), who came up with no occurrence of such a move in writing acknowledgments of Iranian EFL students.

5.1.2 Thanking Move

This obligatory move is the genre's main communicative purpose. This is a move entailing "four steps which enables the writer to introduce and thank individuals and institutions for

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various kinds of support" (Hyland, 2004, p. 313). However, the present study approved to be realized by six component steps, i.e., thanking and praising God, presenting participants, thanking supervisor and other academics, thanking for data access and clerical and technical support, thanking for moral support, and blessing.

5.1.3 Thanking and Praising God

This step contains expressions of gratitude and praise to Allah (God) for his favors, one of which is making the completion of the thesis possible. As Al-Ali (2006) proposed, this step reflects the Muslims' attitudes toward their religious beliefs. According to the holy Qur`an, thanking and praising Allah for his munificence results in increasing the graces of Allah and getting very close to his mercy. This move mostly occupied the first position in comparison with other moves. According to Al-Ali (2006), it implies "a form of gratitude to Allah (God) who is believed by Muslims as the source of inspirations, strength, and confidence, which makes the completion of this task possible" (p. 38).

On the whole, 9.5 and 40 % of TEFL and AZFA students thanked God respectively. This step occurred in 19% of the acknowledgements of AL-Ali's (2006) study. In Lasaky's (2011) study, this step occurred in 3.3 % of the native writers' acknowledgement texts and 26 % of non-native students' texts. Hyland (2004) has also claimed that non-native speakers of English in various disciplines in their gratitude make some references to God and his support. There was no occurrence of praising God in the acknowledgements written by TEFL students. However, 5% of AZFA students praised God and His prophet, and 15% of the AZFA text contained thanking and praising God together. In one example (5 %), the Prophet (PBUH) was also praised. The following excerpts demonstrate the expressions of gratitude and praise to Allah in both fields.

1. *SepasAfaridegarirakelotf-e bi-payanash bar hamejarivavojudmehrbanashtekyegah-e haromidvarist.*
   Thank goes to The Creator whose endless favor to everyone continuous And His Compassionate existence is a support for every hopeful man.

2. *First and above all, every one presents his eternal gratitude to the Compassionate Lord and I don't feel I'm an exception in that regard.*

5.1.4 Presenting participants

"The purpose of this step is principally textual, to introduce the people to be thanked who are then often named in the following steps" (Hyland, 2004, p. 313). This step was present in 51% of the whole corpus, 66% of the TEFL texts and 35 % of the AZFA acknowledgments, while only 28% and 60 % of Hyland's (2004) and Lasaky's (2011) papers respectively, presented this step. It usually occurred initially or followed the 'Praising and Thanking God' step when it did occur. These samples reveal how the writers presented this step.

1. *This thesis could not have been completed without the help from a number of people. Here I would like to express my sincere, heartfelt thanks to those who have figured prominently in the course of this undertaking.*

2. *Tahghighpisheruhasel-e azxodgozashtegi-ha vatalash-haiegoruhiastkeaghlabnatanhadarmodat-e do salpajuhesh, kedartamamtul-e zendegi-e negarande ta konunyarigaroobudeh-and.*
   (Present study is the result of the devotion and effort of a group who often, not only during the two years of research but in all phases of the writer's life, have helped him.)

5.1.5 Thanking for Academic Assistance

This step can be considered an "obligatory constituent and the backbone of this genre" since it is the only step that has been found in all texts (AL-Ali, 2006). In this step, the writers express their gratitude for any kind of academic assistance, intellectual support, ideas, analyses feedback they received from members in the academic community such as advisors, readers, examiners, committee members, instructors and teachers. Thus, it is reserved for "individuals who have been influential in stimulating or nurturing the reported research, and for those who have shaped the reported work through their ideas, insights, feedback, or critical analysis" (AL-Ali, 2006, p. 707).

Just like Al-Ali (2006), in Hyland (2004), Lasaky (2011), Mingwei and Yajun (2010), Cheng (2012), and Yang's (2012) studies, this step occurred in 100 percent of the texts. In the corpus, advisors were mentioned before the doctoral committee members and other academics followed by the readers, which reveals, as Hyland (2004) put it, "the intellectual, and often emotional, obligation writers often feel towards them" (p. 314). The following excerpts from the corpus illustrate this.

1. *First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr T, who encouraged and supported me generously throughout this study, and for his untiring effort to help me finish this project…….. I would like to express my appreciation to my reader, Dr. M, Her contrastive input during the final stages of writing this thesis was of critical and utmost value to me in finishing this thesis.*

2. *Azzahamat-e ostad-e mohtaramrahnema, xanum doctor R. keazebtedaiekar ta entehahamrahvahamgambudehvabamaneshvalavatosi'iebehengam, tahamoldoshvariharasade mi-nemudand, samimanehghadrdani mi-konam.*
   (I sincerely appreciate the distinguished advisor (professor), (Mrs.) Dr. R., who have accompanied and collaborated with me from the beginning to the end and whose noble character and timely advice made me tolerate difficulties easily.)

3. *Hamkari-haieostadmohtarammoshaver, jenabxanum doctor Sh. nizdarteiemodat-e anjampajuhesh, hamvarehjari bud kebedinvasilehazaltaf-e bi-darigheshanxalesanehsepasgozari mi-nemayam.*

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(The respectable reader (professor), Mrs. Dr. sh.'s cooperation has been continued during the conduction of the study. Hereby I sincerely thank him for his generous favor.)

5.1.6 Thanking for Resources

This component includes thanks and gratitude for support received from colleagues, participants, and those who avail or provide access to the data, clerical, technical or financial support, use of institutional facilities, including equipment and libraries, and embrace access to clerical support including typing and proofreading (Al-Ali, 2006; Hyland, 2004; Yang 2012). This step was presented in 46 % of the texts analyzed, which had a low frequency compared to other studies. This step occurred in two thirds of Hyland's (2004) acknowledgements, while it was found in 70%, 70%, 75% of, respectively, Al-Ali's (2006), Yang's (2012) and Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) corpora.

In this step, the difference between TEFL and AZFA students was significant. This step occurred in 71.4 % of the acknowledgements written by TEFL students, while only 20 % of the AZFA texts contained it. The following examples illustrate this step in Persian and English texts.

1. *I owe much of appreciation to my colleagues at S English institute, who helped me with data collection.*
2. *Hamcheninazsarkarxanum-e M., karshenas Amar, vasarkarxanum-e P, karshenasarshad-e AmuzeshzabanEnlisi, kedartadvinpayannameazrahnemaeyeshanestefadekardam…..tashakorvagadrdani mikonam.*
   (I also thanks and appreciate Mrs. M., statisticians, and Mrs. P., MA in TEFL, whose guidance I used in composing the thesis.)

In contrast to earlier findings (Rattan, 2014; Tiew&Sen, 2002), neither TEFL nor AZFA students were concerned with monetary or financial support of the institutions in their expression of gratitude.

5.1.7 Thanking for Moral Support

In this part, the writers seize the opportunity to thank their parents for their love, supplications; their wife/husband for patience, sacrifice, love and care; their children for patience; siblings for love and moral support; and friends for help, psychological support etc. This step occurred in 63 % of the texts with parents, if thanked, coming first in the list. This can be explained with reference to religious affiliations as the first thing that Allah (God) enjoins upon man is to show gratitude to Him and to one's parents as he says:Show gratitude to Me and to thy parents: to Me is (thy final) goal (Quran 31:14). Two thirds of Hyland's (2004) corpus, 13% of Tiew and Sen's (2002), 26% of Rattan's (2014), and 84%

of Al-Ali's (2006) acknowledgements contained this step as well. Similarly, there was a difference between TEFL and AZFA acknowledgements in terms of frequency of this step. 76 % of TEFL texts contained this move, and in 50 % of the cases, AZFA students expressed their appreciation for moral support. These features can be noticed in the following excerpts.

1. *Last but not least, my deepest thanks go to my parents for their unconditional love and support and for their endless sacrifice and encouragement.*

2. *Dar payanlazem mi-danamazhamsaramtashakorkonamkebatahamol-e duri-haiebandevabeduncheshmdashtmasuliyat-e xanegivatarbiat-e farzandamratamamvakamal be janxaridandvahamishelavazemrahativaferaghatbande era mohayakardand.*
   (Finally, I have to thank my wife who tolerated my absence and who, without any expectation, fully accepted the responsibility of our home and our children training and who always provided me with convenience and ease.)

5.1.8 Blessing

This act includes asking Allah to bestow divine favor on the addressee and wish them happiness and progress. This can be attributed to Iranians' culture. Most often Iranians opt for a composite thanking followed by Blessing. The writers included this component to supplement the "Thanking Move", particularly thanking supervisors and academics. This step was not observed in Hyland's (2004), Al-Ali's (2006), Lasaky's (2011) and other studies reported. Blessing was present in 25 % of AZFA students' acknowledgement. However, it was totally absent in TEFL students' texts.

1. *Dar payanbaraiehame'ie in dustanarezuyesa'adat, beruzivapiruzidaram.*
   (Finally, I wish all of these folk's happiness, prosperity and success.)

2. *....va tofigh-e ruzafzunshomaraazIzad-e Mannanxastaram.*
   (.....And I ask The Beneficent God for your ever-increasing success.)

5.1.9 Announcing Move

Announcing move includes two steps; the first step refers to accepting responsibility for any errors and flaws that occur during writing thesis. The second one is dedicating the thesis to someone. Just like the reflection move, this move had a low frequency of occurrence. This move was present in 12 % of the texts. Similarly, it occurred in only 11% of texts in Hyland's (2004) corpus and 15% of Al-Ali's (2006).

5.1.10 Accepting Responsibility

As Al-Ali (2006) indicates, this move reflects the "personal identity of the writer and the degree of self-confidence when s/he asserts absolute authorial responsibility for the contents and any deficiencies in the dissertation" (p. 41). Further, the writers can assert their ownership of the study. This step was absent in AZFA corpus, while it constituted 14 % of TEFL students' acknowledgement. In Lasaky's(2011) study, this step occurred in 3.3

% of non-native writers' texts but none of the native writers used this move. Some examples are provided, representing this step.

1. *Needless to say, any possible flaws of this research remain to be my own responsibility.*
2. *Of course, any shortcoming or limitations are mine.*
3. *Any shortcomings remain, of course, solely my own.*

5.1.11 Dedicating the Thesis

The writer formally dedicates the thesis to an individual(s), mostly parents. Those who include this step in this genre feel "they have something of great value to offer, if only symbolical, for the 'addressee' as a reward for a unique effort" (AL-Ali, 2006, p. 40). Just like "accepting responsibility", this step was absent in AZFA students' acknowledgements and was present in 9.5 % of TEFL ones. In Lasaky's (2011) study, this step occurred in 10 % of native writers' acknowledgement texts and 6.6 % of non-native ones. The reason for low or non-occurrence of this step may be attributed to the fact that there is a separate page in most theses for dedicating the study.

1. *Finally, I want to dedicate this thesis to my family and especially to my husband who has always been a great support for me.*
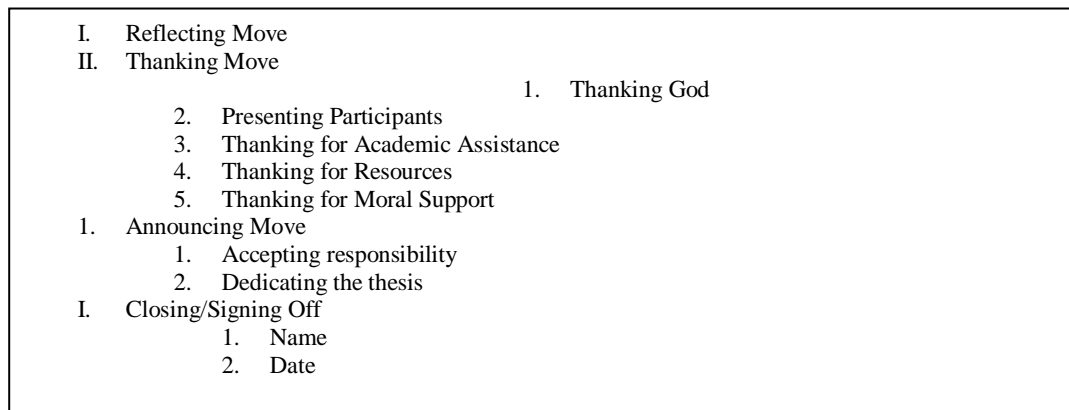2. *I like to dedicate this thesis to my parents for their lifelong encouragement and love.*

5.1.12 Closing or Signing off

There was a new move which, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, was not present neither in Hyland (2004) nor Al-Ali's (2006) or other studies the researcher has reported. This move, closing move, consists of two steps, namely, the acknowledger's name or signature and the date. It reflects the conventions of Persian professional letters. 4.7 % of TEFL acknowledgements contained this move. 14 % of AZFA students used the first step but only 5 % inserted the date.
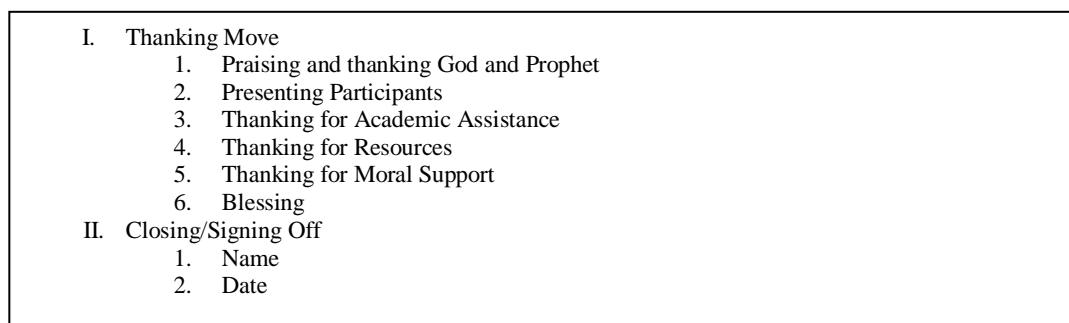
1. *S. S.*
   a. *Jun 2006*
2. *A. O. N. G.*
   a. *Zemestan 1385 (winter 2006)*

Similar to Lasaky's(2011) corpus, three new schemes were discovered in this study. The first model is common between native and non-native speakers as indicated above. The second scheme ofnon-native (Iranian) English writers majoring in TEFL and the third one is that of the native Persian speakers majoring in AZFA. In the TEFL model, the acknowledgers employed all the moves and steps observed in Hyland (2004) in addition to presenting a closing move. AZFA model ignored the use of the announcing move, while added some new moves and steps such as praising God, Blessing, and closing. The schematic models of the two disciplines are presented below (Figure 1).

TEFL acknowledgement model:

I.   Reflecting Move
II. Thanking Move
1.   Thanking God
2.   Presenting Participants
3.   Thanking for Academic Assistance
4.   Thanking for Resources
5.   Thanking for Moral Support
1.   Announcing Move
1.   Accepting responsibility
2.   Dedicating the thesis
I.   Closing/Signing Off
1.   Name
2.   Date

AZFA acknowledgement model:

I.   Thanking Move
1.   Praising and thanking God and Prophet
2.   Presenting Participants
3.   Thanking for Academic Assistance
4.   Thanking for Resources
5.   Thanking for Moral Support
6.   Blessing
II.   Closing/Signing Off
1.   Name
2.   Date

Figure 1. Schematic representation of acknowledgements in TEFL and AZFA

5.2 To whom do MA graduate students express their gratitude in their acknowledgements?

On the whole, 256 individuals were acknowledged. With advisors to be the most mentioned ones, who were appreciated in 37 of the texts (90.2%). However, just like Yang's (2012) corpus, not all the students thanked their advisors in the present study which, according to her, is contrary to Hyland's (2004) finding. "Supervisors appeared in all acknowledgements of Hyland's corpus" (as cited in Yang, 2012, p. 34). Supervisors were also "the single one category of acknowledgees" that were mentioned in all acknowledgements in the Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) corpus (p. 100). In most cases, advisors were the first individuals to be thanked. The predominance of advisors in the acknowledgements is perhaps due to their "greater involvement in the students' experience of graduate research" (Hyland, 2003, p. 254). Mingwei and Yajun (2010) consider it "vitally face-threatening if a student did not express his or her gratitude first and foremost to his or her supervisor for instructions, let

alone totally neglect such help in dissertation acknowledgments" (p. 100). Of course, in 19.5 % of the cases, students have started with thanking God. In addition, four students (9.7%), thanked their parents before anyone else.

47 committee members including the readers, examiners, and heads of the department have been thanked in 34 acknowledgement sections; 82.9 % of the whole corpus. 63 teachers, instructors, and professors have also been acknowledged by 24 students (58.5%). Colleagues seemed to be the less mentioned individuals, who have been appreciated by only 3 TEFL acknowledgers and none of AZFA graduate students; whereas, in 61% of Yang's (2012) corpus, the writers expressed their thanks to their colleagues. Table 5 displays the number and percentage of gratitude expressions provided for different acknowledgees.

Table 5: The number of gratitude expressions toward different individuals

Acknowledgees Discipline	AD	OT	CM	CO	FM	IN	FD	PA	RL	Not mentioned
TEFL	20	40	25	8	39	3	8	11	2	0
Number of texts (n: 21)	20	14	18	3	16	3	7	7	2	0
AZFA	17	23	22	0	19	4	5	8	6	7
Number of texts (n:20)	17	10	16	0	11	2	3	4	6	4
Total	37	63	47	8	58	7	13	19	8	7
Number of texts (n:41)	37	24	34	3	27	4	10	11	8	4
%	90.2	58.5	82.9	7.3	65.8	9.7	24.3	26.8	19.5	9.7

Note: AD: Advisor, OT: Other teacher, CM: Committee members, CO: Colleague, FM: Family, IN:

Institution, FD: Friend, PA: Participant, RL: Religion

Fifty-five family members including parents, siblings, wife, husband, and children have been acknowledged in 27 texts (65.8%). Ten writers (24.3%), expanded their thanks to their friends, including their classmates. As Hyland (2003) claims, thanking friends and family members suggests that "the genre is not simply an opportunity for political strategizing. Acknowledgements also provided these students with the chance to mention what they considered to be decisive influences on the processes of completing their research" (p. 261). He further adds that "Here, writers are able to present themselves as individuals with lives and relationships outside the pages of their manuscripts" (p. 264).

Only 7 Institutes were mentioned in 9.7% of the texts, and 19 participants, including students and teachers who have contributed in data collection, have been acknowledged by 26.8% of the students. 9.5% of the students majoring in TEFL and 30% of the students majoring in AZFA have expressed their gratitude toward God. Finally, 20% of AZFA students have acknowledged 7 individuals without specifying their relationship with them.

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5.3 What are the AZFA and TEFL students' preferred choices of authorial subjects to express their gratitude?

On the whole, there were 203 authorial subjects in the corpus. Unlike the use of third person in most research bodies, 76.7% of the writers of the present study have used the first-person pronouns to express their gratitude. Likewise, first person pronouns, I/my, enjoys a "lion's share" of 76.6% of all thanking acts occurred in Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) corpus. The reason may be that they want "to emphasize their commitment to their words, set up relationship with their readers, and establish their personal sincerity in thanking various people" (Hyland &Tse 2004, as cited in Yang, 2012). The frequency and percentage of TEFL and AZFA students' choices of authorial subject are presented in Table 6. As shown, TEFL students used more subject pronoun 'I' than AZFA students, 46.7 % vs. 29 %.

Table 6: Subject types in postgraduate dissertation acknowledgements

	I/	%	My	%	No subject	%	non-author	%	the author	%
TEFL	95	46.7	16	7.8	11	5.4	1	0.4	0	0
AZFA	60	29.5	1	0.4	18	8.8	0	0	1	0.4
Total	155	76.2	17	8.2	29	14.2	1	0.4	1	0.4

It is worth mentioning that Persian is a pro-drop language. Therefore, in analyzing the corpus, the researcher had to count the omitted pronouns.

1. *Dar payanazxanevade'ambexater-e hamrahieshansepasgozaram*
2. *Finally (I) thank my family for their cooperation.*

A significant difference between TEFL and AZFA acknowledgements was in terms of using the possessive adjective "my" as an authorial subject. As indicated, the possessive adjective "my" occurred 16 times in TEFL corpus, while there was only one instance of "my" in AZFA acknowledgements. There was only one (0.4 %) instance of non-author subject type, which occurred in TEFL corpus. It should be noted that only 9.3 % of Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) students used non-authorialsubject sentences. None of the acknowledgements in Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) corpus used noun forms like the author or the writer to refer to themselves. Similarly, the only example of "the author" subject occurred in AZFA corpus:

1. *Every one presents his eternal gratitude to the Compassionate Lord and I don't feel I'm an exception in that regard.*

2. *Negarande in payan-name bar xodvajebmidanadazzahamat-e hameiekasanikedarsheklgiri-e pajuhesh hazer naghshdashte'andghadrdanixishrae'lamnemayad.*

3. *The author of the thesis feels obliged to express her gratitude to all those who have played a role in conducting the present project.*

1. **5.4 What are the AZFA and TEFL students preferred linguistic choices to express their gratitude?**

According to Hyland and Tse's (2004) framework, there are five main types of patterns used to express gratitude in thanking acts, namely, nominalization, performative verb, adjective, passive, and bare mention. On the whole, there were 218 expressions of gratitude; 59% of which belonged to TEFL students. The frequency and percentage of the patterns of expressing gratitude among the two disciplines are presented in Table 7.

Table7: Percentages of the patterns used to express gratitude

Discipline Form	TEFL	%	AZFA	%	Total	%
Nominalization	74	33,9	36	16.5	110	50.4
Performative Verb	21	9.6	29	13.3	50	22.9
Adjective	26	11.9	19	8.7	45	20.6
Passive	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bare mention	9	4.1	4	1.8	13	5.9
Total	130	59.6	88	40.3	218	100

As shown, students of both disciplines preferred using nominalization pattern, constituting half (50.4%) of the all gratitude expressions, with TEFL students using 33.9% and the AZFA students using 16.5%. In the same vein, in Hyland and Tse's (2004, as cited in Mingwei&Yajun, 2010) corpus, nominalization pattern occurred in 33.6% of the expressions. In contrast, Mingwei and Yajun's (2010) students preferred bare mention pattern (34.7 %) than any other pattern. Moreover, 56.5 % of Yang's (2012) MA students expressed their gratitude using performative verb patterns.

There is a disagreement between the two disciplines in terms of the second common patterns of expressing gratitude. Hereupon, the TEFL students favored "adjective" pattern, which was present in 11.9% of the expressions, whereas AZFA students preferred to use "performative verb" pattern (13.3 %). Similarly, performative-verb pattern (33.2 %) ranked second in Hyland and Tse's (2004, as cited in Mingwei&Yajun, 2010) study. However, nominalization (22.4%) was found the second preferred pattern by Yang's (2012) students. In the present study, "performative verb" pattern constituted 9.6% of TEFL acknowledgements, whereas "adjective" pattern (8.7%) was the third favored pattern found in AZFA corpus.

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Bare mention pattern was used in only 4.1% and 1.8% of acknowledgements, written by TEFL and AZFA students respectively. Evidently, using "bare mention", as Yang (2012) put it, implies that the writers are more reserved when expressing their feelings and emotions. One interesting result of the present study is that none of the gratitude expressions were expressed using "passive voice". The possible reason for this may be the fact that in Persian active voice is used as a dominant pattern, i.e., passive voice rarely occurs in Persian expressions.

It is worthy of note that while all of the English acknowledgements had the title of "acknowledgements", the headings of the Persian acknowledgements had not been presented uniformly in terms of naming conventions. Various titles were used in the Persian acknowledgement sections, including Sepasgozary (acknowledgement, 35%);sepas o tashakor (gratitude and thanks, 15%); sepas(Thanks, 5%); tashakorvaghadrdani (Thanks and Appreciation, 10%); sepasname (a word of thanks, 10%); basepasaz (thanks to..., 10%); taghdirvatashakor (appreciation and thanks, 120%); no title (5%). Compared to English acknowledgements, Persian texts had more verity in font sizes employed. In addition, in comparison with AZFA, TEFL students wrote longer and more complex acknowledgments. Generally, in the earlier studies on generic features of acknowledgments, it has been revealed that in the field of humanities students write longer (Hyland, 2004; Hyland &Tse, 2004) and more complex acknowledgements (Giannoni, 2002; Yang, 2012). This finding further supports the idea of Gesuato (2004), who stated that higher complexity and elaboration is seen in longer acknowledgements.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The aim of the current study was to examine the theses acknowledgements written by Iranian MA students majoring in AZFA and TEFL in terms of their generic structures, linguistic choice, preferred authorial subject, and acknowlegees with reference to Hyland's study on English dissertation acknowledgements, Hyland and Tse's (2004) linguistic choice framework, and Yang's (2012) category of the acknowledgees and subject types. Although further research is absolutely required due to the limited corpus size and scope of the study, the results were quite informative. On the whole, Hyland's (2004) three-tier structure has been employed in both disciplines. However, the texts analyzed demonstrated differences in the number and frequency of moves as well as the type of component moves employed. Besides, five other moves/steps were identified, namely, praising God and His Prophet (PBUH), thanking God, blessing, closing/signing off. These can be attributed to the socio-cultural as well as religious norms of the Iranian students as a Muslim. In Iranian culture, everyone usually starts his/her work by the name of God and finishes it by thanking God, so it is natural to observe it even in their dissertation acknowledgements.

Besides, most often Iranians opted for a composite thanking followed by a blessing which again lies in the deep-rooted cultural environment where they were brought up. The writers

usually gave their blessing to their supervisors and to those who were of help in providing access to the data. The absence of this step in TEFL acknowledgments may be attributed to the influence of English language culture on the students, thus cross-cultural differences can be the cause of such variations. The closing move, which was present neither in Hyland (2004) nor Al-Ali's (2006) or other studies the researcher has reported, reflected conventions of Persian professional letters in which the writer terminates his letter signing his name and inserting the date. In both disciplines, the most acknowledged individuals were the advisors. Both groups selected the first person subject pronoun "I" to extend their thanks. Besides, both groups made use of "nominalization" pattern as the linguistic realization of their gratitude.

The findings of this paper support Yang's (2012) claim that this particular genre is dynamic, changeable, and is able to be manipulated. However, as shown, the fixed conventions of theses genre systems suggest that teachers can help their students by raising their awareness of these conventions and showing them how to best construct their academic identity since, as Hyland (2004) puts it, "effective instruction can assist learners not only to convey their genuine gratitude for assistance, but also their immersion in scholarly networks, their active disciplinary membership, and their observance of the valued academic ideals of modesty, gratitude, and appropriate self-effacement" (p.323).

The findings of this study can provide the students and their instructors with a comprehensive understanding of the generic features of acknowledgments. The results can guide the teachers to identify and teach basic items in their classes and help the students write impressive and proper acknowledgements. Further, the framework can serve as a reference for the students to show them the possible word choices and structures being used in acknowledgements.

However, additional studies are required to complete the findings of this research. In fact, more thesis acknowledgements from different disciplines and universities can be analyzed. Similarly, a comparative study of thesis acknowledgements written by English native speakers and Persian speakers majoring in TEFL and AZFA can be conducted to examine their similarities and differences. Finally, to gain a better understanding of the graduate students' practice of writing thesis acknowledgements, other methods of data collection such as interviews can be recommended.

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