Corpus based Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Acknowledgement Section of Selected Pakistani PhD Literature and Linguistics Theses

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Abstract

Acknowledgement section of PhD thesis is often taken as the least read section in a thesis as compared to the serious research based content. However, while decoding the significance of acknowledgment section, the researchers have focused on the use of compliments and gratitude expressions. This study aims to present the oft neglected aspect of academic theses i-e acknowledgment sections of selected Pakistani PhD literature and linguistic theses to study how and why thesis writers use politeness strategies to express compliments and gratitude towards others. The study also links the use of politeness strategies with the cultural context of writers. The data has been taken from the acknowledgment sections of selected Pakistani PhD theses retrieved from HEC Pakistan's thesis repository. Leech (2005) and Bach and Harnish's (2005) model of politeness strategies is used as framework for analysis using corpus as a method. The study reveals that the Pakistani PhD thesis writers follow a God-supervisor-colleague-teachers-friends-family pattern while expressing gratitude to others. With reference to the cultural and religious norms, the Pakistani writer firstly expresses religious sentiments and then gives vent to the cultural and personal feelings of gratitude.

Introduction

Acknowledgement section of PhD thesis is an important academic genre through which one gets an idea of how thesis writers express gratitude and compliment using politeness strategies. Acknowledgment sections are common in academic books, thesis and research articles. These appear in all theses to show the credibility and worth of writer's feelings of gratitude expressed towards people who supported him or her in the completion of work. It also represents cultural norm of a specific society. In this paper, the emphasis is to identify patterns of gratitude expression in acknowledgement section and the way politeness principle is used for the same purpose. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses are designed in order to improve communicative practices of learners in academic writing. The politeness strategies in the form of gratitude of expressions are studied less than such topics such as nominalization (Dubois, 1982), voice (Tarone et al., 1981), tense (Lackstrom et al., 1973; Malcolm, 1987; Oster, 1981; Selinker et al., 1976, 1978; Swales, 1981) etc.

Using appropriate speech acts in academic writing such as apologizing, requesting, complimenting and thanking show pragmatic competence and also expresses culturally specific established norms of society. The acknowledgement section is an overlooked area that need to be researched especially acknowledgements to be found in Pakistani PhD theses. The selected theses are from the discipline of English Literature and Linguistics. In these theses, the patterns under analysis are based on principles taken from speech act theory.

Writing acknowledgement section is not very easy task especially for non-native speakers of English Language. There can be

many language faults in it in terms of parallelism or use of passive verbs etc. Since the speech act theory has mostly been used in the analysis of spoken discourse, the written discourse is ignored in this regard by linguists. Therefore, the current study is significant in contributing how the written discourse of linguistic and literature scholars express feelings of gratitude in PhD theses.

Significance of Study

Keeping in mind the growing academic needs of native and non-native learners of English, it is significant that learners must be proficient in their language skills especially at PhD level. In Pakistan, not much attention is given to the teaching of research skills. Majority of students have to depend on their previously attained communication skills to do academic writing. The need of academic writing skills demands that PhD level work must be appropriate and up to the mark. Therefore, using certain language strategies can help in becoming proficient writers of theses. The present study identifies and compares the patterns of politeness strategies used in acknowledgement section of Pakistani literature and linguistics PhD theses. It also highlights any discrepancies in acknowledgement writing so that possible suggestions could be made.

Review of Literature

Austin and Searle (1962, 1969) introduced the speech act theory that illustrates three acts a speaker produces at the same time. It includes locutionary act, perlocutionary and illocutionary. It also consists of utterance of a speaker, its actual act of doing it and its implication. Based on Austin's speech acts, Searle introduced five acts known as representatives, directives, commissives, expressive and declarations.

After speech act theory, many scholars emphasized specific speech acts such as compliments, blessings, complaints, disagreements, invitations, requests, suggestions, apologies and gratitude.

Thanking is one of most common communicative acts in communication. In speech act theory, it is defined as an expression of gratitude and appreciation (Searle, 1969). Eisenstein and Bodman's (1986, 1988, 1993) research suggests that thanking is a ritual of politeness that has its social effect in the form of acknowledgement of benefit. In the pragmatics of thanking, Aijmer (1996) studied the variables for the context of an utterance. He studied the difference between simple and intensified "thank you"/ "thanks". A research study was conducted by Li Lina (2004) on Chinese thanking speech act that consist of direct and indirect thanking. The study illustrated that the Chinese usually used mixed expressions.

The art of academic writing is embedded in larger socio-political context. It involves participant relationships. This has been explored previously by Lemke, Swales, Selinker etc. Many of these present grammatical components to specific rhetorical functions.

Myers (1989) used Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness model to enlist several different written linguist devices either positive or negative. He emphasized the use of personal pronouns as a positive politeness strategy. This study has garnered interest among researchers to explore linguistic features from a new perspective.

Hyland (2004) has identified the move structure of the acknowledgements in 240 PhD and MA dissertations written by non-native speakers of English. He finds out that thanking move is the nucleus of the acknowledgements. The thanking move contains four steps: presenting participants, thanking for academic assistance, thanking for providing resources, thanking for moral support. Hyland

(2004) discusses the patterns of expressing gratitude according to which there are five groups such as nominalization, performative verb, adjective, passive and bare mention. Caesar (1992) presents acknowledgement as a form of knowledge that has a warm glow of a close conversation.

The current study identifies that expression of gratitude is directed towards hearer/ reader group. In addition, it also focuses on the reasons of directing gratitude on others and highlights cultural acts used to express politeness principle.

Statement of Problem

The use of politeness principles especially the use of gratitude expression in writing has been previously studied with reference to spoken discourse by various researchers. However, the academic discourse has been neglected in this regard. This study investigates the gap by focusing on the politeness patterns used by Pakistani PhD theses writers in English Literature and Linguistics and identifies the patterns of politeness expressions as well as cultural context of the writers in terms of expressing gratitude and compliments.

Research Objectives

In order to carry out the study, the following objectives have been included.

1. To identify the writer's target audience as well as the pattern used for expressing gratitude and compliment in acknowledgment sections of Pakistani PhD Literature and Linguistics theses.

2. To observe the reasons and cultural context used by the acknowledgement writers while expressing gratitude and

compliments in acknowledgment sections of Pakistani PhD Literature and Linguistics theses.

3.   To highlight the frequency difference of polite expressions such as gratitude or thankfulness using corpus based approach.

Research Questions

The following research questions describe how the expression of gratitude and compliment has been realized in acknowledgment section of Linguistics and Literature PhD theses.

1.   What pattern do Pakistani PhD theses writers follow while acknowledging the support of various agents? Towards whom do Pakistani PhD thesis writers express their gratitude and compliment?

2.   What are the reasons and cultural context behind expressing gratitude and compliments by Pakistani PhD theses writers in acknowledgement section?

3.   What is the frequency of polite expressions such as gratitude or thankfulness using corpus and what differences exist in frequency between Literature and Linguistics theses?

Delimitation of Study

The following study is based on 10 linguistics theses and 10 literature theses of Pakistani PhD writers of various universities. The framework for analysis has been taken from Leech as well as Bach and Harnish's model of politeness strategies given in 2005. The data was used in the form of corpus using Antconc to generate a frequency list of gratitude words.

Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative analysis has been used in this study. 10 Literature theses and 10 Linguistics theses were randomly selected and downloaded from HEC Pakistan's thesis repository. The acknowledgment section was then selected from pdf files and was converted into text files using readiris software. A corpus was made using antconc. Next, a frequency list was generated based on list of gratitude words used in this corpus. Then the corpus was studied for politeness strategies based on the model given by Leech (2005) and Bach and Harnish (2005).

Thanking or paying compliment to someone is an illocutionary act made by a speaker based on a past performance by the reader/hearer that has been beneficial. From Searle's point of view (1969), the force of an utterance depends on certain set conditions that relate to beliefs and attitudes of speaker and hearer and also on the comprehension of use of linguistic devices for better communication. Thanking as speech act is taken as felicitous. It must depend on certain conditions as expressed in the following table.

Table 1

Felicity conditions for thanking as speech act

Propositional content condition	Past act A done by H.
Preparatory condition	A benefits S and S believes A benefits S.
Sincerity condition	S feels grateful or appreciative for A.
Essential condition	Counts as an expression of gratitude or appreciation.

Lakoff (1973) defined politeness from a pragmatic point of view. Politeness was taken as a device that reduced friction in personal relationships. Instead of giving clear information, politeness is taken to emphasize good social relationships. One of the rules discussed by Lakoff includes making others feel good.

Leech (1983) used the politeness principle given by Lakoff based on the idea of using politeness strategies in order to maintain social relationships. Politeness involves self and others. It also refers to speaker and other, probably a hearer but in written discourse, it is the reader. This reader can be present or absent or it can be a third person. In his work The Pragmatics of Politeness, Leech describes the Principle of politeness. It is "a constraint observed in human communicative behaviour, influencing us to avoid communicative discord or offense or maintain or enhance communicative concord or comity" (p.87).

Leech presented the concept of Grand Strategy of politeness in 2005 by modifying his previous model. He presents the following 8 points while emphasizing politeness.

S expresses or implies meaning which places a high value on what pertains to O or place a low value on what pertains to S.

1)   Place a high value on O's wants

2)   Place a low value on S's wants

3)   Place a high value on Other's qualities

4)   Place a low value on Speaker's qualities

5)   Place a high value on Speaker's obligation to Other

6)   Place a low value on Other's obligation to Speaker

7)   Place a high value on Other's feelings

8)   Place a low value on Speaker's feelings

According to Leech, 1), 3), 5), 7) refers to hearer-oriented group while the rest are speaker-oriented.

Thanking or expressing gratitude is also a cultural speech act in which social and cultural backgrounds influence act performers. Different cultures have different notions about appropriate ways of polite thanking. In this study, acknowledgment by Pakistani writers is analyzed from cultural perspective to find out reasons of using thanks as speech act.

Bach and Harnish (1979) gave analysis of thanking speech act in the following: In uttering the expression, S thanks H for D if S expresses:

1)   gratitude to H for D, and

2)   the intention that H believe that S is grateful to H for D, or

3)   the intention that his utterance satisfy the social expectation that one express gratitude at being benefited, and

4)   the intention that H takes S's utterance as satisfying this expectation

In uttering E, S thanks H for D if S expresses:

1)   gratitude to H for D, and

2)   the intention that H believe that S is grateful to H for D, or

3)   the intention that his utterance satisfy the social expectation that one express gratitude at being benefited, and

4)   the intention that H take S's utterance as satisfying this expectation.

Thanking, according to Leech falls under the convivial category of speech act which is polite and courteous. One can modify it by using positive politeness. Positive politeness is achieved through boosting, or using prosodic or intensifying adverbs. A boosting thanking is the expression thanking you very much. This comes under polite phrase showing sincerity of gratitude. Whenever a speaker acknowledges a debt

to the hearer, the act produces a debt of gratitude. Brown and Levinson call it a face threatening act.

Thanking as an academic act is also significant as it helps the writers in accepting the credibility of those who provided support in any way. The process of completing a thesis is quite laborious but it, including acknowledgement writing, ask graduates to follow some rules in academic context. It offers a way in which role of supervisor and others are appreciated. Also, it enables to convey sincerity of emotion. Ben-Ari (1987) observes that acknowledgements contribute as intellectual product as well as a reconstruction of external contribution. (p.65) Expressing thanks is also a cultural act in which interpersonal communication has a significant role to play. Since these aspects are defined by cultural norms, therefore it is expressed according to cultural context.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Based on the framework proposed by Leech, the data is analyzed in the following way. The first point is about the acknowledgees to whom the writers address and the second point to illustrate is the reason behind the use of gratitude and its specific cultural context.

While acknowledging people, the writers always first think of the people involved in academic activity such as supervisors, academicians, thesis coordinator, deans or thesis committee. Majority of PhD theses of linguistics and literature have placed supervisors at the top of the list of acknowledgees. One such acknowledgement section consists of gratitude words such as sincere thanks and sincere gratitude in the following words.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to all those who helped make this study possible, including but

certainly not limited to the following. My sincere gratitude goes to my worthy supervisor, Prof.Dr. Raja Nasim Akhtar, for his unfailing support, patience and guidance throughout my PhD journey. ....the 'light at the end of the tunnel' which did not let me go astray... (AK 001)

The writer uses poetic and idiomatic phrases to define the role of the supervisor, establishing his credibility worth consideration and a source of inspiration. The acknowledgment also emphasizes the impossibility of completion of work without the supervisor's role. One other culturally specific act that has been used by thesis writers is the praise to God. Being culturally and religiously sensitive, Pakistanis owe all success and toil to God. The trustworthiness and blind faith in the divinity expresses the cultural emphasis that is placed on God during the process of acquiring knowledge. It also expresses humbleness on the part of the writer which also fits within the cultural context. Here the 3, 4 and 5 constituent of the model given by Leech is applied. It shows that a high value is being placed on other's ability and qualities and the speaker (in this case the writer) places low value on himself.

Apart from the supervisor and God, the next list consists of friends and family who are more intimate in relationships. The writer while acknowledging them uses more intensifiers such as profound thanks, wholehearted gratitude, sincere gratitude, etc. In an acknowledgment taken from linguistics thesis, the speaker's role is emphasized by giving it a high value and expressing it as his duty and that too a pleasant one. The purpose was to acknowledge his friend for helping him. One such instance is given in these words.

It is my pleasant duty to thank Mr. Liaqat Iqbal, my best friend, for reading and giving his valuable feedback on this thesis. (AK002)

In another thesis, the writer uses an intensifier such as highly 'indebted' to express thanks and compliment. The most usual pattern followed in most theses is the God-supervisor-academic -colleagues-friends-family pattern. The sincerity and essential conditions are seen in theses from both Literature and Linguistics. Felicity conditions for thanking as speech act as shown in table 1 suggest that both the feeling of gratefulness and expression of gratitude under the umbrella of essential conditions are realized in both literature and linguistics theses. For instance, such words as "incontrovertibly failed to find words of gratitude for reverend supervisor" or " my special gratitude to my supervisor" expresses these two conditions.

The quantitative analysis is based on frequency list generated by using Antconc. The data is collected from acknowledgement section of both Literature and Linguistics theses and is used as text files (txt) to create a corpus. The frequency list generated show that the highest frequency word used in this corpus is "thanks" occurring 34 times in Linguistics theses and the word thankful occurred 19 times in Literature theses. Same frequency of 21 occurrences is found in both Literature and Linguistics theses with respect to the word "grateful". The frequency listed for other words include gratitude 28 times, acknowledge 14 times, grateful 1 time, indebted 14 times, sincere 11 times, helpful 2 times in Linguistic theses. On the other hand, words like grateful appeared 21 times, thankful 19 times, acknowledge 14 times, sincere 11 times, cooperative 1 time, thanking 1 time, appreciation 6 times and supportive 3 times in Literature theses. It is also observed that the gratitude expression "indebted" and polite expression of appreciation such as "helpful", "accommodating" and "facilitating" only appeared in linguistic thesis.

Table 2

Frequency list of the most occurring gratitude and appreciation expressions found in corpus of acknowledgement section of Pakistani PhD theses.

Gratitude words in corpus of acknowledgement sections	Literature		Linguistics		Total	
	f	%	*f*	%	*F*	%
Grateful	21	0.9	21	0.5	48	0.7
Thankful	19	0.8	19	0.4	38	0.6
Acknowledge	14	0.6	14	0.36	28	0.0001
Sincere	11	0.4	11	0.28	22	0.36
Appreciation	6	0.2	-	0.15	6	0.09
Heartfelt	4	0.18	4	0.10	8	0.13
Supportive	3	0.13	-	0.07	3	0.04
wholeheartedly	2	0.09	2	0.05	4	0.06
Wholehearted	2	0.09	2	0.05	4	0.06
Accolades	1	0.04	1	0.02	2	0.03
Achievement	1	0.04	-	0.02	1	0.01
acknowledgment	1	0.04	1	0.02	2	0.03
cooperative	1	0.04	-	0.02	1	0.01
thanking	1	0.04	-	0.02	1	0.01
warmth	1	0.04	-	0.02	1	0.01
thanks	-		34	0.87	34	0.5
gratitude	-		28	0.72	28	0.4
indebted	-		14	0.36	14	0.17
helpful	-		2	0.02	2	0.03
accommodating	-		1	0.02	1	0.01
facilitating	-		1	0.02	1	0.01

As shown in Table 2, the highest frequency of both linguistics and literature thesis is 48 for the word grateful. The word grateful has

appeared 0.7 % in both literature and linguistic thesis. With reference to individual corpus of literature, the most frequent word used by the writers is grateful that has occurred 0.9 %. In the corpus of linguistic thesis, the most frequent word used by the writers is thanks with a frequency of 0.87 %. The results reveal that as compared to literature thesis, gratitude expressions are more used in linguistic thesis.

With reference to cultural context, the cultural specific phrases such as "special thanks to God" for giving courage and consistency are used to express humbleness towards the process of thesis completion. From Bach and Harnish's (1979) thanking speech act, the above mentioned phrases reveal that the utterance of a writer is according to the social expectation. It expresses gratitude that the writer is being benefited. Similarly, in leech's conceptual framework, sincerity condition is applied on the use of being indebted to one's supervisor.

With reference to cultural context, it is expected from students to remain humble and respectful towards their teachers. The gratitude expression towards family and friends suggest that Pakistani society is close-knit society that values interpersonal relationships. That's why the acknowledgment section carries the flavour of sentiments and emotions more than any other section of theses.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is revealed through the corpus based study of acknowledgement section of Pakistani PhD theses that in both linguistics and literature, the writers use speech act of gratitude to express their feelings towards the people who support them. In the study of speech act pattern, it is revealed that all theses focus on supervisor-colleagues/teachers-friends-family pattern to express thanks. Secondly, intensifiers such as adverbs wholeheartedly or nouns such as sincere or

adjective such as deep have been used to show high value associated with meaning of such words. Similarly, the sincerity and essential condition as given in felicitous condition of thanking act is used to show appreciation of the other. With reference to Leech's model, the politeness principle of placing a high value on other's qualities especially of the supervisor is frequently used. Lastly, with reference to cultural norms and its impact, the writers have expressed the humbleness and respect for the omnipotent God. This perhaps suggests close association with societal and religious norms of owing all success to God. Thus, acknowledgement section provides a picture of speech acts in the form of positive politeness principles that correlates with writers' cultural and religious context and expresses the fact that personal feelings are associated with values based on modesty, commitment, sympathy, appreciation and humbleness. This also provides affirmation of ethical and moral consideration on the part of researcher in an academic setting and highly values what the academic community demands from researcher the world over.

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