THE GENERIC STRUCTURE OF ACKNOWLEDGMENTS IN PERSIAN DISSERTATIONS

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Abstract

Acknowledgments are vital since students/researchers can demonstrate their genuine appreciation through them and more importantly shape their (local/global) academic identity. In line with this significance, the present study examined the move patterns of 503 Persian dissertation acknowledgements from two major universities in Iran, from 1981 to 2014 and from sixteen various disciplines including soft and hard science disciplines. Overall, 65,323 words were analyzed. By and large, a careful examination and analysis of the corpus indicated that Iranian university students follow a three-tier moves pattern in writing a dissertation acknowledgments, namely a "Framing move" (including *six micro steps*), a main "Thanking move" (consisting of *nine micro steps*), and a "Closing move" (containing *four micro steps*). Moreover, the results indicated that the longest and shortest acknowledgments were 986 and 4 words respectively. The results also indicated that there was a significant difference in the complexity of acknowledgments in hard and soft science disciplines. The results of this study can hold valuable implications for both university students and professors who aspire an appropriate, coherent, and to the point display of scholarly competence and academic identity.

Keywords: Generic structure, Persian, dissertation acknowledgments

1. Introduction

In recent decades, many researchers have been immersed in studies done in the realm of genre analysis. Since the publication of Swales' *Genre Analysis*

(1990), the field has experienced a greater than ever scholastic interest in the generic analysis of the rhetorical structure of various types of scholarly texts such as research articles (Posteguillo, 1999; Swales, 1990), textbooks and educational materials (Hyland, 2002), research theses (Bunton, 2002; Thompson, 2001), conference papers (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002), grant proposals (Halleck & Connor, 2006), as well as book reviews (Nicolaisen, 2002).

Swales' (1990, 1996) taxonomy of academic genre (Table 1) divided the system of academic genre (i.e. texts produced for scientific purposes in educational or scientific contexts such as universities) into three broad categories. The categories were classed according to the audience type addressed by the text and took both oral and written forms of discourse into account. According to this taxonomy the first class is identified as *primary* or research-process genres and is employed for peer-communication, whereas the second class serving instructive purposes are named as *secondary*, derived, didactic, or pedagogic genres. There is still a third category called *occluded* genres which deal with confidential or semi-confidential exploit of texts in scholastic contexts. They are employed with the aim of exchanging subject material and information between the academia (e.g. researchers, students, professors, publishers, editors, & referees).

Table 1. The academic genre system (Based on Swales, 1990, 1996)

Primary genres	Secondary genres	Occluded genres
Research articles	Lecture	Grant proposal
Journal abstracts	Textbook	Recommendation letter
Conference abstracts	Introductory text	Request letter for material/advice
Oral presentations	Post-introductory text	Application letter
Thesis	Tutorial	Submission letter
Dissertation	Course description	Cover letter
Book		Research proposal
Monograph		Evaluation letter for tenure/promotion
Chapter		Referee's review of book or article
Case report		Referee's grant proposal review
Review		Memo to dissertation committee
Review article		Editorial correspondence

Nevertheless, considering the academic genre of gratitude and acknowledgment, Hyland (2003) couldn't fit them into any of the mentioned

categories. He claimed that acknowledgments belong to a different group called a *Cinderella genre*. Like the heroine in the children's fairy tale, acknowledgements are a taken-for-granted part of the background, a practice of unrecognized and disregarded value deserving of greater attention. Neither strictly academic nor entirely personal, acknowledgements stand outside the research record but have a considerable sociopragmatic relevance which makes them integral to it. They are central to the academic practice of reciprocal gift giving and for this reason are particularly important to students (p. 243).

This widespread pervasiveness of acknowledgments across various disciplines and over different fields of studies symptoms its "interpersonal significance" and also reflects "an increasingly collaborative environment and the acceptance of a community-oriented ethos" (Giannoni, 2002, p. 5). The point is even much more striking when one considers the optional and "non-mandatory nature" (Giannoni, 2002, p. 5) of acknowledgments in research papers, dissertations, and any other academic genre generally. As prospective candidates of the academic community in each country, post-graduate students are expected and required to build an intuitive awareness regarding the ethics and regulations in their specific academic context. In this study, the researchers discuss the generic framework and textualization of Iranian MA and PhD Persian dissertation acknowledgments over the time span of 1981 to 2014. To be more specific, the move structure of 503 acknowledgments written by Iranian university students is analyzed.

2. Review of Literature

Acknowledgments are currently regarded as one of the key features of scholastic interactions in academic communities and this is proved by their appearance in more than half of the whole published research papers (Cronin, McKenzie, & Stifler, 1992). Equating acknowledgments with apologies, condolences, greeting, or congratulations, Salager-Meyer, Alcaraz-Ariza, Briceno, and Jabbour (2011) state that acknowledgments in academic publications are in fact "illocutionary acts that occur in response to social expectations" (p. 764).

In a study, Cronin (1995) investigated the length and frequency of acknowledgements written in research articles found in nine diverse journals between 1971 and 1990. He mainly focused on three variables of "articles with acknowledgements", "acknowledgements of intellectual support", and "number of peers who were credited in acknowledgments". The results of his study revealed that interestingly the number of research articles with an acknowledgement section experienced a sharp increase between the mentioned years. Whereas an average mean of 42.9% of research articles in 1971 included a section devoting to thanking and acknowledging, in 1990 an average of 61.2% of research papers found in journals emphasized on the significance of putting aside a space for thanking.

Years later in a well-known study, Hyland (2003) analyzed a corpus of 240 M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations from different fields of studies by nonnative English speaking students at five universities from Hong Kong. The corpora were later analyzed and coded through a concordance program named MonoConc Pro, along with interviews with two M.A. and Ph.D. students from each discipline. Hyland divided the main results of his study into two major sections of "participants acknowledged (classified as: academic, friends, family, organizations, and others) "Activities acknowledged (classified as academic, access, mora, other)". The results of the study indicated that students of all fields of studies, whether M.A. or Ph.D., acknowledged the significance of gratitude and thanking, with some degrees of more appreciation among students of hard sciences.

In addition, Salager-Meyer, et al. (2011) focused on the spread and existence of acknowledgments in research papers published in the discipline of medicine. Their corpus originated from five different countries, namely, Spain, France, Venezuela, UK and also USA, covering a time period of years between1950 to 2010. Their study was conducted with an eye to the different generic features of three selected genres: research papers, reviews and case reports. Eighteen papers from two medical journals for each category, i.e. an overall number of 54 papers, was selected and analyzed.

In one of the most recent studies, Rattan (2014) examined the generic structure of acknowledgements (along with their frequency distribution, types, and acknowledgements per article) which appeared in the DESIDOC

Journal of Library & Information Technology (DJLIT) between the years 1998 to 2013. The texts were analyzed using the typologies proposed by previous researchers (Cronin, 1995; Koley & Sen, 2013; Tiew & Sen, 2002). The results indicated that the practice of acknowledgements was not that much widespread in the aforementioned journal as only 9.04% of the research studies included acknowledgements. Nevertheless, the highest number of acknowledgements was related to "Peer interactive communication support" (29.16 %), followed by "Moral support" (26.04%), "Unclassifiable" (13.55 %).

Nevertheless, regarding the studies focusing on Persian dissertation acknowledgments, although some studies have focused on Persian dissertation acknowledgments, to the best of the researchers' knowledge no study has ever been considerably specific and meticulous regarding the moves. Previous studies either examined a small corpus, fewer than a hundred dissertations (e.g. Jalilifar & Mohammadi, 2014; Lasaky, 2011), or mainly relied on previous established frameworks (e.g. pattern proposed by Hyland, 2004) and tried to configure matches and mismatched (e.g. Lasaky, 2011; Mohammadi, 2013).

It is as well noteworthy that the entire above-mentioned studies investigated the acknowledgment sections of a limited set of disciplines. They at most focused on five or six fields of studies in general. What remain to be added to this list is a more comprehensive analysis of the Persian dissertation acknowledgments in a much wider scope regarding the disciplines, along with a more detailed, shrewd, and vigilant attention to their very generic framework and schematic moves and sub-moves. Moreover, a second focus of this study, neglected in previous ones, would be examining discrepancies in hard science and soft science disciplines. Therefore, in response to the mentioned niche in the literature, the following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

(1) What generic structure do Iranian Persian dissertation acknowledgments from soft science and hard science disciplines adhere to?

(2) Is there any significant difference in the complexity of dissertation acknowledgments from soft science and hard science disciplines?

3. Method

3.1 Corpus and procedure

Care was taken to collect a wide range and highly representative sample of acknowledgements from soft and hard science disciplines. The corpus for the present study was brought together from the two most prominent universities of Iran, namely *"University of Tehran (UT)"* and *"Sharif University of Technology (SUT)"*.

Table 2. Spread of texts over years

Year	Number of dissertations	Percentage
1981-1990 (1360s)	6	1.19%
1991-2000 (1370s)	31	6.16%
2001-2010 (1380s)	94	18.68%
2011-2014 (1390-1394)	373	73.95%
Total	503	100%

Overall, sixteen disciplines were selected, half from soft science disciplines and half from hard science. The soft science disciplines constitute: "Accounting (UT)", "Geography (UT)", "Physical Education (UT)", "History (UT)", "Art (UT)", "Law (UT)", "Management (SUT)", and "Theology (UT)". In addition, the eight disciplines from hard sciences included: "Electronic Engineering (SUT)", "Computer Engineering (SUT)", "Petroleum Engineering (SUT)", "Agriculture Engineering (UT)", "Aerospace Studies (SUT)", "Physics (SUT)", "Energy Engineering (SUT)", and "Materials Engineering (SUT)". Table 3 depicts the number of texts taken from each field of study. In addition, the frequency of dissertation acknowledgments from different year spans is depicted in Table 2. As illustrated the corpus came from years between 1981 and 2014. Each dissertation acknowledgment was analyzed individually through recursive readings and figuring out a detailed scheme of the steps used by the writers. The point is that in the entire dissertations observed, the type of help received and the reason for thanking was clearly evident and that made the

steps explicit. However, Hyland's (2004) move structures of dissertation acknowledgments was used as a basic model to guide the study. Moreover, in order to make sure of the inter-coder reliability, some samples of texts were also coded by a second rater.

Table 3. Acknowledgment corpus in hard and soft sciences

Hard Science Disciplines		Number of texts	Soft Science Disciplines		Number of texts
	Accoun	24		Ener	30
	Geog	32		ElecE	28
	Phy Edu	31		CompE	30
	Hist	32		CHE	34
	Art	31		AgrE	30
	Law	33		Aero	33
	Manag	33		Phys	38
	Theo	31		MaterE	33
	Total	247		Total	256

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The generic structure of acknowledgments

The thorough analysis of the acknowledgments indicated that the Iranian MA and PhD students follow a basic three-tier procedure in order to allocate credit and thank to all individuals who by some means made a contribution to their research project. The acknowledgments observed were classified into three broad categories, each dividing into some more sub-steps shown in Table 4. The point is that, these moves or sub-steps were seen in most of the acknowledgments. However, only in three cases the texts included all moves. As the figure illustrates, the three general moves include: 1) Framing move, 2) Thanking move, and 3) Closing move.

Table 4. The move structure of Persian dissertation acknowledgments

A. Framing move
A-1. In the name of God
A-2. Title
A-3. Dedication
A-4. Literary/Qur'anic verse
A-5. Reflection
A-6. Emphasizing necessity of thanking & presenting participants

B. Thanking move
B-1 Who?
B-1-1. Thanking Allah (God)
B-1-2. Committee members
B-1-3. Family members
B-1-4. Organizations
B-1-5. Friends, classmates, and roommates

B-2 What?
B-2-1. Academic support
B-2-2. Moral support
B-2-3. Technical support
B-2-4. Financial support

C. Closing move
C-1. Invoke a blessing
C-2. Offering an Apology
C-3. Accepting responsibility
C-4. A signature

A. Framing move

This beginning section may seem rather marginal and insignificant to the main body of acknowledgments. However, it seems that this move functions as setting the scene for the next section of thanking to come forth. It resembled a place to show one's personal beliefs, attitudes, and views. Like the whole acknowledgment texts, this section may also be a reflection of social and cultural backgrounds of the writer in their language choice (Hatipoğlu, 2007). One's social, intellectual, and cultural background may well play a leading role not only in the type of language one would choose (e.g. syntactic structures, lexicon, & sentence formations), but also would affect one's priorities and norms in representing one's attitudes and beliefs. It seems that in this move graduates tried to demonstrate their focal beliefs in life. They craved to declare my dissertation is not the sole significant obsession in my life and that I still have several more vital things to be

presented first. In the following section, each sub unit in this move will be discussed in detail.

A-1. In the name of God. It is argued that research is "firmly embedded within its discourse community" (Giannoni, 2002, p. 9). In the same lines, the undeniable influence of religious norms is evident in this sub-step. The corpus in this study was collected from an Islamic society and in this culture people strongly believe that by starting each activity with the name of God, they would surely attain better results and achieve success.

This sub-step occurred in 5.76% (Table 4) of case. However, the point is that this belief in beginning tasks by the name of god may have different manifestations and can be illustrated in various ways. The most evident manifestation goes back to the main thanking move of the acknowledgments. The students may have not started the actual acknowledgment with an expression like "In the Name of God", but in the other main or sub sections of their acknowledgement they would approve their gratitude and thankfulness to God for all his help and assistance. That may in fact be the reason for not observing this move in its explicit form throughout all the acknowledgments.

A-2. Title. In the majority of (76.54%) dissertation acknowledgments observed, writers preferred to opt for a title for their acknowledgment page. The titles evidently indicated the foremost intentions of the page and the main considerations and mind obsessions of the writer. They were all synonymous Persian words meaning acknowledging and thanking, namely "Sepagozari", "Taghdir", "Taghdir va sepas", "Tashakkor va ghadrdani". The titles were placed either in the right margin (as in Persian we write from right to left!) or in the middle of the page over the main text of acknowledgment. This step is regarded as particular to Persian acknowledgments. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no other study in any language has ever reported the existence of such step.

A-3. Dedication. In the next stage, writers had a chance to escape the restrictions of academic writing policies and take a more informal and kind language to show their appreciation to their beloved ones. 61.82% of graduates from different fields of studies (46.48% hard science and 77.73% soft science) mostly used a very nice literary language when dedicating their

dissertation and even sometimes used a different font or color to emphasize this section. They even occasionally underlined the ones they dedicated their dissertation to in order to emphasize more on their significance in their life and career.

Parallel to our study, in 46% of cases, Chinese students in the study done by Yang (2012) were prone to dedicating the thesis to their favoured ones. Hyland (2004) also reported that 4% of acknowledgments by hard and soft science students were allotted to dedication.

An interesting point observed in this sub-step, which seems to be exclusive to Iranians, is their own downgrading of the whole work. Surprisingly, in some cases, the writer stated that this work may not be that worthy to be dedicated. They continued they would like to dedicate their dissertation if it's worthy and valuable. In fact, in several cases the Persian writers downgraded the work in order to show "Shekasteh-nafsi" (i.e., modesty in English; the term introduced by Sharifian, 2005). Being humble is in fact a sign of politeness in Iranian culture and people try to show their modesty in different ways, one of which is relegating their own work, even when they know their work is valuable and precious.

This is indeed very analogous to another somewhat complex cultural schema particular to Iranians, namely "Taarof" (Rezanejad & Rezaei, 2013). We Iranians try to observe courtesy, politeness, civility, and respect to social positions through both social behaviors of "Taarof" and "Shekasteh-nafsi". In the same lines, Alemi, Eslami, and Rezanejad (2014) also indicated that Iranian EFL students observed the principles of "Taarof" and "Shekasteh-nafsi" while responding to compliments. They tended to reject compliments or accept them with hesitation in order to be polite, respectful, and humble.

Furthermore, what enthralled the researchers regarding this step was the position of dedications in dissertation acknowledgments and also their extent. With regard to the first factor, it appears that in almost all previous studies (e.g. Hyland, 2004; Yang, 2012a), it was observed that this sub-step is placed in the very last section of the acknowledgment. However, in the case of Iranian Persian acknowledgments it could be observed that in more than 96.43% of cases, writers preferred to place this sub-step at the beginning of their acknowledgment page or in a separate page previous to

the main acknowledgment page. They first preferred to offer their work to their beloved ones (e.g. God, religious figures, family members, professors, or friends) and then show their gratitude and thankfulness to different people who were involved in their research project in some direct or indirect ways. Though in many cases those to whom the dissertation was dedicated to were also thanked again during the thanking move. Merely in eighteen cases (3.57%) of the dissertations, the dedication section was placed at the end of the acknowledgment page.

Pertaining to the second point, i.e. the extent of dedication step, it was observed that the dedication entailed either broad or specific categories. They were either dedicated to a very broad concept such as the whole world or society or dedicated to a very small group such as a sister or an old friend. The dissertations were dedicated to different ones namely, God, spiritual and religious figures, faculty members, parents and siblings, and also friends. In some cases the writers insisted much on the inclusion of all their loved ones in the dedication section which resulted in too long and wordy texts, neglecting the other moves and steps of writing a standard acknowledgement. This attitude was even evident in the title they selected for their acknowledgment page. Such students preferred titles such as: Dedication and Thanking [Taghdim va Tashakkor] or Gratitude and Dedication [Sepasgozari va ehda].

A-4. Literary/Qur'anic verse. In 12.12% of dissertations writers frequently mentioned a short poem, a famous quote, or as in many cases a short verse from Quran. What needs to be mentioned is that the main theme of all these pieces of writings was thanking and gratitude. In nearly half of such cases, writers tried to show their belief in a famous Prophetic saying. According to a famous saying by Prophet Mohammed, we Muslims are highly encouraged to express thank and gratitude to others. The saying is as follows:

"He who does not thank people, would not thank Allah"

In several cases, the students from different fields of studies referred to this saying and tried to legitimize their wordings through referring to this prophetic saying. Once more the obvious and noticeable role of culture,

social norms and values, and religious principles was conspicuous in this step.

In the same lines with our study, Al-Ali (2010) also found a similar trend in the opening section of Jordanian Arab PhD dissertations. That is to say, 8% of the Arab dissertations started with a Qur'anic verse followed by a 5% utilization of Prophetic sayings. A point worth mentioning is that both groups of students in these two studies enjoy the same religion (i.e. Islam) and this may be the main rationale for such resemblance.

A-5.   Reflection. Acknowledgments and gratitudes shape a "metatextual, reflective commentary" on the whole research which somehow aim at "retracing its development and pointing to the author's personal history" (Giannoni, 2002, p. 8). In this sub-step the writers had a chance to contemplate on their dissertation writing experience, the whole Masters or doctoral educational period, and even in some cases their whole educational moments since primary school. It sounds as if the writers tended to share some of the experiences they encountered while writing the dissertation in order to implicitly let the readers see and feel the complexities of writing a dissertation and the challenges they had to overcome. This step occurred in 16.5% of the observed acknowledgments.

In accordance with our study, Yang's (2012a) study indicated that 26% of doctoral Chinese students were allocated to this step. Likewise, this step occurred in more than half (58.3%) of the sixty MA thesis acknowledgments observed by Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), in which students mostly emphasized on the significance of assistance of other people in decreasing the stress of writing a dissertation. Moreover, in the study by Karakas (2010), it was reported that while only 6% of native Turkish students used this move in their acknowledgments, native American students used the same step in 32% of their acknowledgments (i.e. six times more than Turkish students).

Nevertheless, our findings in this section are still in contrast with Lasaky (2011) who denied the existence of any such step among Persian ELT students writing English acknowledgments. This contrast might have originated from the discrepancies in the suggested format of dissertations presented to the students by the universities. Different universities may

follow different procedures and students mostly follow them exactly. Moreover, the role of imitation cannot be denied. Observing a zero percent occurrence of a step may be originated from the fact that usually students try to imitate other dissertations provided by libraries.

A-6. Presenting participants and emphasizing necessity of thanking. This step was typically not much extended, frequently one or two short sentences. Although not present in all texts, this sub unit enjoyed a non-negligible nature as it occurred in more than half (52.28%) of the whole corpus. This step is the last step in the framing move and seems to be functioning as a bridge between this move and the next move of thanking. In this step writers not only presented and introduced the ones to be thanked, but also explicitly emphasized on the inevitability of thanking those to be thanked. Hyland's (2004) study was also in line with our results. He also reported a 28% occurrence of this step in 240 dissertations. In the same lines, 58% of doctoral dissertation by Chinese students in Yang's (2012a) study was allotted to this step by presenting participants to be thanked in the acknowledgment.

B. Thanking move

According to Gesuato (2004, p. 311) "the semantic richness of the acknowledgments (which clusters relevant concepts around each benefactor's act of kindness) shows that the writer remembers, values, and likes what he has received and who he has received it from". In order to have a better analysis of the thanking made by students, this study made an effort to have a new contribution and so focused on two distinct aspects in the thanking move namely, the person thanked and the reason for thanking. Each of these two sub-steps was further classified into some more sub-units. Our overall investigations of Persian dissertations largely indicated that university students insisted on thanking five focal groups for four key reasons.

B-1. Who to be thanked?

B-1-1. ***Thanking Allah (God).*** Dissertation acknowledgment explorations revealed that 40.35% of the writers (41.79% of hard science and 38.86% of soft science students) employed this step. It, reflecting

Muslim's attitude toward their religious beliefs and conceptions, allowed the writers to demonstrate their gratitude for the spiritual support and aid they received from God in accomplishing their dissertation. As the texts were collected form a predominantly Muslim society (though with people from different ethnic groups) and with an eye to the interdependence of religious laws and personal and social life, most of the writers considered God as their source of inspiration without whom they would have never finished the thesis. This sub-step may not be the most dominant one in this move, but whenever it occurred in the gratitude, it was placed at the beginning of the list of those to be thanked.

Castleton (2006) believes praising and thanking God occurs a lot in academic texts because of its high frequency in other daily activities in the community. The recurrent practice of these expressions "derives from reflections on and responses to Allah's influence over every aspect of human life" (p.76). He further continues that "as a direct result of the deep connection they feel to their religion and creator, native Arabic speaking Muslims look at the events of daily life in terms of God's relationship to that event or interaction" (p.77). Allah is considered to be "the source of inspiration, health, patience, perseverance and strength. According to the Qur'anic prescriptions, thanking and praising Allah for his munificence result in increasing the graces of Allah and getting very close to His mercy." (Al-Ali, 2010, p. 20).

This finding is in line with Al-Ali (2010) who also observed this sub-step in 70% of the dissertation acknowledgement written by Jordanian Arab students. Hyland (2004) also reported some references to God and his moral support among graduate's gratitude. Moreover, in the study by Afful and Mwinlaaru (2012), 25% of MA students in three sub-disciplines of Education at Ghana University thanked God in the main thanking move of their thesis acknowledgments. The following excerpt may give a clearer picture of this sub-step:

B-1-2. Thanking committee members. Through acknowledgments, hidden incentives are rested for the writers "in terms of prestige (when the acknowledgees are prominent scholars or organizations) and celebrity (since modern scholarship is *per se* collaborative)" (Giannoni, 2002, p. 8). Persian

master's and doctoral students didn't miss this boat and insisted on thanking their professors, advisors, supervisors, and even examiners and in some cases dean of the faculties and principals at the university in the best imaginable way in this sub-step.

Thanking committee members enjoyed the highest percentage of occurrence in the acknowledgments. Overall, 95.62% of the acknowledgments (99.21% of hard science and 91.90% of soft science students) enclosed thanking committee members mainly for academic support (74.90%). This finding is in line with some previous studies (Hyland, 2004; Cheng, 2012) who also reported the highly concurrent nature of this step in dissertation acknowledgments. Graduate students attempt to achieve credit, create good impression, pay off their intellectual debts, and somehow pave the way for their future accomplishments through being polite and naming all their professors and senior professionals in the acknowledgment page.

Moreover, these committee members are in fact those who are going to be involved in the marking procedure. Students may assume thanking their advisor, supervisor, and even examiners may have an impact on the future mark assigned to their dissertation. This assumption was proved in the study done by Hyland (2004). In the same vein, studies on Chinese students by Cheng (2012) also confirm our findings. They also found that advisors and supervisors were the most acknowledged ones in dissertations. Nonetheless, Yang's (2012) results were not in tandem with our findings. Surprisingly, advisors and supervisors in his study were among the least thanked people. Only 10.32% of the 120 PhD dissertation acknowledgements written by native Taiwanese students included thanking advisors.

An interesting point observed in this step relates to the specific viewpoint held by Iranian students toward their professors. It may seem that an advisor's first and foremost responsibility is providing the supervisees with guidelines and help. This is to some extent similar to the current views in western academic culture, in which "advisors are regarded as joint partners rather than authorities" (Yang, 2012). However, Persian graduate students considered this a very big favor from their professors and tried to be grateful to them in the best possible way like by calling them in their full

name with all their titles (e.g. Doctor, Professor, Engineer, Ayatollah, Mr., and Mrs.) in a very respectful way. This trend may be attributable to the very specific cultural and religious beliefs of Iranians which is to a great extent influenced by Arabic culture. There is a very well-known saying by Imam Ali in Islamic culture which says: "I would always be enslaved by one who has taught me one word". This saying is very famous in Iran and used a lot in school books or even by ordinary people.

B-1-3. Thanking non-committee members. This sub-move was in some way or another considered to be a place for the students to show a warm, cordial, and heartfelt gratitude to their relational partners namely father, mother, siblings, wife/husband, children, and even relatives. Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 269) believe that thanking parents and family members is a sign of "intrinsic commitment" done by the writers. Overall, 41.15% of the students tried to be polite and show curtsy and their affection and love to their beloved ones through some praises, compliments, and also explicitly mentioning all their help and support throughout the long and burdensome process of completing their dissertation.

Graduate students thanked their family for tolerating all the difficulty and also all their encouragements. Interestingly in some cases, even parents were thanked before advisors and supervisors. When thanking family, parents came first. Fathers and mothers, whether alive or dead, were the first ones to be thanked. This was evident in virtually all dissertations observed.

Such finding can be justified by reference to the Iranian's social, cultural, and religious norms and principles coming from Holy Quran which have been injected into students' minds since their very beginning formal educations at schools. Islam believes that parents are to be treated in the best possible way at all times. Here is an excerpt pointing the belief from Holy Quran:

"Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and ye be kind to your parents." (Qur'an, 17. V. 23)

B-1-4. Organizations. Organizations were the next to be thanked in Persian acknowledgments (18.88%). Ministries, institutes, schools, universities, libraries, or laboratories can for sure be of great help to the graduate students in perusing the accomplishment of the dissertation.

Nevertheless, they cannot be that much named or appreciated in the main body of the research and still the students feel so much indebted that in some cases they admitted without their cooperation their research would not have been possible in the first place. Students also tried to be very specific in many cases by giving the exact names of the heads and organizers. 3.96% of hard science (nearly twofold) and 1.78% of soft science students applied this step, which sound logical due to the nature of the specific fields of studies.

B-1-5. Friends. Friends, roommates, colleagues, and classmates were another group to be thanked. 26.64% of acknowledgments contained this sub-step. The list mostly included the friends and classmates at the graduate course. But in some cases even more were to be appreciated. Friends were like hidden angels supporting the dissertation writer through various procedures. They were cordial, understood the writer, had experienced similar trends, and were cooperative through typing, data collections, and even in some cases data analysis.

B-2. What to be thanked for?

B-2-1. Academic support. 81.25% of hard science and 68.42% of soft science acknowledgments were dedicated to thank for the academic support provided by the academia, mainly through naming senior professors. Though not exclusively, but this step was to a large extent allocated to thanking the advisor and supervisors. Overall, in 74.95% of acknowledgments, advisors were thanked for accepting the guidance of the dissertation, introducing novel topics in the field to be worked on, as well as providing the students with feedback, guidelines, and critical comments on the dissertation.

Our finding is in harmony with Hyland (2004) who also asserted the acknowledgment of senior professionals was far more prevalent in the PhD texts in the sciences and engineering where, because of increasing specialization of both research and funding, the mentoring tradition seems stronger. Here, winning the protection and goodwill of established figures is often vital for gaining post-doctoral grants, a lab to work in, or a teaching position.

Similarly, thanking the academia for academic support was more apparent among the hard science students of the present study. Moreover, Yang's (2012) study demonstrated 100% occurrence of thanking for academic support among 120 Chinese doctoral students.

B-2-2. Moral support. Demonstration of commitments to family and friends was the next most frequent concern of the Persian students. In this step students tried to offer their gratitude to different people, though mostly family members, for their patience, understanding, encouragements, psychological and spiritual support, and all their kindness. Overall, 57.25% of acknowledgments (nearly half shared between hard and soft science disciplines) contained thanking for moral support.

Graduate students, especially PhD graduates, seemed so desperate in the final stages of writing their dissertation and were seeking an opportunity to thank all their beloved ones for tolerating the different self they were experiencing through writing the dissertation. They thanked family members for providing them with a silent atmosphere to be able to concentrate and overcome the difficulties of the work and that way felt indebted to them. Nevertheless, such thanking was not exclusively dedicated to family members. In many cases even advisors and supervisors were thanked for their moral support and encouragements throughout the accomplishment of the research project.

In the same lines, 61% of dissertations analyzed by Al-Ali (2010) also showed the existence of moral support in the gratitude. Similarly, in the study by Tiew and Sen (2002), it was observed that 13% of acknowledgments were allocated to thanking for moral support. Accordingly, the study by Rattan (2014) revealed that 26.04% of journal article acknowledgments thanked for moral support. In addition, all (100%) of Chinese students in Yang's (2012) study thanked their acknowledgees for their moral support.

B-2-3. Technical support. Throughout the acknowledgments, 17.69% of graduate students needed to also thank specific people or institutes for providing some technical support, i.e. access to data bases, along with provision of necessary facilities and equipment. This thanking could also be as specific as thanking a friend or a family member for typing or

proofreading the dissertation or even assisting statistical analyses. Interestingly such people were called for a little bit more informally through some more informal titles. They were sometimes called as "brothers" or "sisters" who came forth to help the writer.

It is worth noting that this finding does not seem to be in agreement with previous ones which reported a greater involvement of this step. For instance, Al-Ali (2010) reported the occurrence of this step in 62% of Arab doctoral dissertations. Moreover, Hyland (2004) also reported that thanking for resources was done by 66% of master's and doctoral students. Similarly, 99% of dissertation acknowledgements by soft and hard science students in Yang's (2012a) study thanked for the provision of resources.

B-2-4. Financial support. As depicted in Table 4, merely 0.79% of the acknowledgments based their thanks on provision of monetary support. Though a very little number, the percentage was a little bit higher in hard science (1.17%) than the soft science (0.40%) disciplines. This might in fact be attributable to the very different nature of the two groups, as research studies done in the domain of hard science may require some equipment and facilities. The results are contrasting Tiew and Sen's (2002) and Rattan's (2014) findings who reported 12% and 5.21% of acknowledgments, respectively, were concerned about thanking for financial support. Similarly 66% of acknowledgments in Hyland's (2004) study were allotted to this step.

C. Closing move

C-1. Invoke a blessing/making a wish. In 22.66% of the acknowledgments, a different step to thank the acknowledgees was observed. In such cases, all attention was turned to Allah and his almighty power in invoking blessing and happiness to the ones to be thanked. This step could be considered as reinforcement of the students' religious affiliation and their belief in God and his powers. As a sign of being thankful and grateful, the acknowledgers asked the acknowledgees' health, success, and prosperity from God. Moreover, some acknowledgers were apt to make a wish either regarding the acknowledgees or the fulfillment of the major aims of the dissertation in the context of the society.

C-2. Offering an apology. From among the 503 dissertation acknowledgments inspected, a new step was discovered particular to Persian students. To the best of researchers' knowledge, no other study on the generic structure of dissertation acknowledgments has ever reported this step, named "offering an apology". In 2.18% of Persian acknowledgments (2.73% of hard science students and 1.61% of soft science students), writers felt it is a must to apologize their family members for all troubles they experienced during the years of their studies and specifically writing the dissertation. These apologies were more conspicuous (nearly twofold) among hard science students as well as in PhD degrees. This may have been originated from the very different nature of the two fields. For sure, students in hard science disciplines experience longer periods working on their dissertations due to nature of their discipline.

Besides, this step was more evident and cordial in cases where the writers were fathers or mothers, especially in doctoral degrees. Father and mother post-graduate students were inclined to principally thank their children, in some cases babies as little as a year, for being patient and in some way or another apologized for not dedicating all their time and energy to them. Moreover, the observed cases indicated that these apologies were more frequent among women than male students. Seemingly, these writers were mothers considering their main duty being a mother and taking care of their babies. They were remorseful they couldn't do this responsibility in the best possible way and were seeking a chance to apologize their family, especially children and husband.

C-3. Accepting responsibility. As depicted in Table 4, only a handful of Persian students observed this step. Merely 0.39% of the writers demonstrated their inclination to accept the responsibility of any probable mistake and drawback in the thesis. To be more specific, this step was solely observed in two dissertation acknowledgments in the field of management, equally shared by male and female students. Obviously, the very nature of the courses these students undergo may have influenced their basic foundational viewpoint and attitude toward their deeds. Management students are excessively reminded of the probable outcomes of a right or

wrong decision and are implicitly or explicitly taught to be a good manager by accepting responsibilities.

In the same lines, Lasaky (2011) also found that Iranian non-native English students didn't observe this move while writing PhD dissertation acknowledgments. Of course this result concerns Persian students writing an English acknowledgment. Furthermore, Yang (2012a) also found a zero percentage for this step among doctoral Taiwanese Chinese students in hard and soft sciences. The results concerning this step are nonetheless in tandem with Hyland (2004) who reported a 7% occurrence of this step

C-4. Signature. In more than one tenth of cases (12.32%), Persian students preferred to end the acknowledgments with their own full name along with the exact date they finalized their dissertation acknowledgment. It seems that through this signing off, the students were prone to act politely, still in an academic manner. The resemblance of this step to how we would finish a formal letter, may suggest that such writers considered the genre of acknowledgment a formal one which requires a formal style of writing. Interestingly, Al-Ali (2010) as well reported a 40% occurrence of something like a signature at the end of the acknowledgments. Some of the Arab writers used to write their own name at the end as some type of signing off and claiming the ownership of the dissertation.

To wrap up this section, Table 5 below depicts the frequency and percentage of acknowledgments with each step in hard and soft science disciplines.

Table 5. Acknowledgments in Hard and Soft science

Moves	Hard Science		Soft Science		Total
	F	P	F	P	P
A-1	13	5.07%	16	6.47%	5.76%
A-2	205	80.07%	180	72.87%	76.54%
A-3	119	46.48%	192	77.73%	61.82%
A-4	25	9.76%	36	14.57%	12.12%
A-5	36	14.06%	47	19.02%	16.5%
A-6	144	56.25%	119	48.17%	52.28%
B-1-1	107	41.79%	96	38.86%	40.35%
B-1-2	254	99.21%	227	91.90%	95.62%
B-1-3	114	56.25%	93	37.65%	41.15%
B-1-4	68	26.56%	27	10.93%	18.88%
B-1-5	76	29.68%	58	23.48%	26.64%
B-2-1	208	81.25%	169	68.42%	74.95%
B-2-2	154	60.15%	134	54.25%	57.25%
B-2-3	60	23.43%	29	11.74%	17.69%
B-2-4	3	1.17%	1	0.40%	0.79%
C-1	56	21.87%	58	23.48%	22.66%
C-2	7	2.73%	4	1.61%	2.18%
C-3	0	0%	2	0.80%	0.39%
C-4	38	14.84%	24	9.71%	12.32%

4.2 Complexity of dissertation acknowledgments

Previously, it was argued that the length of a particular text can be linked to its actual complexity. That is to say, longer acknowledgments are perhaps more complex, comprehensive, and elaborate (Gesuato, 2004). Moreover, it is believed that through putting more effort and energy into writing a text, authors of longer acknowledgments are about to prove how important an acknowledgment is to them among the different sub-parts of a dissertation (Hyland, 2004; Hyland & Tse, 2004). Such acknowledgments are replete with various names and titles (e.g. parents, professors, colleagues, friends) to be thanked for a diversity of reasons. Accordingly, number of words per text in each discipline along with the average word frequency of that field is presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Word frequency in different disciplines

		texts	Word	Average			texts	Word	Average
Soft Science disciplines	Accoun	24	2611	108.79	Hard Science disciplines	Ener	30	3257	108.56
	Geog	32	5372	167.87		ElecE	28	3080	110
	Phy Edu	31	5471	176.48		CompE	30	2879	95.96
	Hist	32	4101	128.15		CHE	34	5307	156
	Art	31	3090	99.67		AgrE	30	6862	228.74
	Law	33	4142	125.51		Aero	33	3045	92.27
	Manag	33	3981	120.63		Phys	38	5067	133.34
	Theo	31	2624	84.64		MaterE	33	4434	134.36
	Total	247	31392	127.09		Total	256	33931	132.54

However, the point is that the length of the acknowledgments may be somewhat misleading. We couldn't solely rely on the number of words in order to decide over the complexity of the acknowledgments written by the students. Therefore, in the next stage we decided to focus on the frequency of the moves and steps used by the students in each group. The results concerning this phase are depicted below in Table 7.

Table 7. The frequency of the moves and steps in each discipline

Soft Science disciplines		MA	PhD	Total	Hard Science disciplines		MA	PhD	Total
	Accoun	5	8	6.5		Ener	5	4.6	4.8
	Geog	7.5	**9.4**	8.4		ElecE	6.9	7.7	7.3
	Phy Edu	6.1	8.6	7.35		CompE	6.2	6.8	6.5
	Hist	5.9	7.5	6.7		CHE	6.4	7.6	7.04
	Art	4.3	6	5.1		AgrE	5.6	9	7.3
	Law	5.1	7.6	6.1		Aero	5.2	**4**	4.6
	Manag	5.4	5.8	5.6		Phys	5.2	6.2	5.7
	Theo	6.8	7.8	7.34		MaterE	8	8.7	8.3
	Total average frequency		6.63			Total average frequency		6.44	

As can be seen, doctoral dissertations from the field of geography enjoyed the most complex acknowledgments. The average frequency of moves in this discipline was 9.4. Moreover, it was found that the least complex dissertation acknowledgment was written by PhD students of aerospace field of study with average frequency of 4 words. Furthermore, the results depicted that by and large dissertation acknowledgments from soft science disciplines were more complex than their counterparts in hard science.

The findings of our study, in this section, corroborate some previous studies. For instance, Giannoni's (2002) study on acknowledgments found in research articles also indicated that humanities students were prone to use more complex forms of thanking than science students. In addition, the same results concerning the complexity of acknowledgments were discovered by Hyland and Tse (2004). They also asserted that soft science students were more apt to write more complex gratitude than the hard science students. Similarly, Yang (2012) illustrated that dissertation acknowledgments from soft science disciplines tended to contain more moves and sub-steps than the hard science acknowledgments.

In addition, we were interested to probe the existence of any significant difference in the complexity of the investigated Persian dissertation acknowledgments among hard and soft science students. To this aim the statistical procedure of chi square was run. As depicted in Table 8, the results indicated that there was a significant difference (X^2=63.09, df (18),

p<.05) in the complexity of acknowledgments in hard and soft science disciplines.

Table 8. Chi-square results

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	63.093[a]	18	.000
Likelihood Ratio	64.782	18	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	15.675	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	3199		
a. 4 cells (10.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .95.			

5. Conclusion and Implications

As graduate students, being aware of the specific conventions attributed to generic structures in the academic community is one of the indisputable necessities. The generic structure of the acknowledgements is of momentous values since "it reveals how each component of the text contributes to the overall communicative function of conveying gratitude and thankfulness" (Al-Ali, 2010, p. 22). The main purpose of the present study was examining the generis structure, i.e. the overall organization, of Iranian Persian dissertation acknowledgments written by students at hard and soft science disciplines in MA and doctoral levels. The results indicated that Persian acknowledgments follow a three-tier procedure in order to thank their acknowledgees. The steps were overall grouped in three macro levels of "Framing move", "Thanking move", and "Closing move", each embracing some more sub-steps.

Moreover, our investigation revealed some situational and cultural-specific features in the generic, lexical, and structural components taken by the Persian graduate students. Whereas some moves were just as prevalent as other previous studies, there were also steps particular to the Persian context. To mention some, it was observed that they were prone to commence the very beginning of acknowledgments with "In the Name of God", set a "Title" for the page, and carry on with some "Qur'anic verse", along with placing "Dedication" in the introductory section. Persian writers

also followed their own particular arrangements and orders in thanking five main groups for four chief reasons. In addition, in the closing section, they were inclined to end with "Invoking a blessing" upon acknowledgees to prove their genuine gratitude. Besides, some Persian students thought it was imperative to "Offer an apology" to their adored ones for any inconvenience due to their studies.

Further, lack of existence of some steps and moves (e.g. Move C-3) in Persian acknowledgments is indeed really alarming. The point is that, the existence of each move is to a great extent dependent on the educational system of the country. For instance, the Iranian students were not willing to thank any organization or university for providing resources of any kind especially grants and financial support. Unfortunately only 0.23% of graduate students thought it would be necessary to thank the academia for financial support. The foremost motive of course goes back to a genuine absence of such funding.

Appropriate selection of suitable language while thanking in the academia can be of an undeniable significance in maintaining social relationships. By nature, thanking and acknowledging is regarded a face-enhancing act. Nevertheless, through ignoring social and contextual factors, personal elements, status, degree, role of power, and an improper use of language, it can transform into a face-threatening act functioning vice versa causing the hearer or reader get irritated or even offended.

That is why we are greatly concerned with raising awareness of Iranian graduate students toward the significance of the dissertation acknowledgment genre and encouraging them to compose more comprehensive, well-organized, and better worded acknowledgments, through which their very own identity will be manifested by their sincere appreciation and thanking. Our main concern regards the necessity of a uniform education for all the academia regarding the various genres and generic conventions particular to the relevant discourse community. We presume such dearth of enough information on generic conventions can be a prodigious hamper for the students, scholars, and academics pursuing their scholastic adventure toward efficacious academic communication.

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