

## **Acknowledgements in Doctoral Dissertations: A Cross-Cultural Genre Analysis of L1 and L2 English Writers**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33806/ijaes1162>

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Received: 14.8.2025

Accepted: 25.5.2026

Published: 7.6.2026

**Abstract:** This study analyses the acknowledgement section in doctoral dissertations written by first language (L1) and second language (L2) English writers. The study also aims to explore any gender differences in the construction of this genre. A corpus of 80 dissertation acknowledgements was compiled: 40 written by native English speakers and 40 by nonnative English speakers. Each group was further divided by gender (20 males and 20 females). Drawing upon Hyland's (2004) move structure model, we found that the two groups of writers did not adhere to the same move structure of acknowledgement. The English acknowledgements produced by native speakers consisted of four moves: Reflecting Move, Thanking Move, Announcing Move, and Signing off Move. On the other hand, the English acknowledgements written by nonnative speakers consisted of seven moves: Opening Move, Praising and Thanking Allah Move, Reflecting Move, Thanking Move, Invoking and Blessing Move, Announcing Move, and Signing off Move. Female native English writers emphasised Reflecting and Thanking for Moral Support, while males prioritised Thanking for Academic Assistance and Accepting Responsibility. Similarly, female nonnative writers focused on Opening and Academic Thanks, whereas males highlighted Moral Support and the Announcing Move.

**Keywords:** acknowledgement section, doctoral dissertation, gender, L1 English, L2 English, move structure

### **1. Introduction**

Doctoral dissertations interest linguists and researchers, focusing on elements like abstracts, introductions, acknowledgements, discussions, and conclusions. Writing a dissertation is vital for PhD students and involves support from various individuals and institutions. Including an acknowledgements section allows writers

to express gratitude and recognize contributions, maintaining research integrity. This genre has attracted scholarly interest, with Hyland (2004: 305) describing acknowledgements as possessing rhetorical sophistication and reflecting academic preferences. He emphasized their role as part of reciprocal gift-giving in academia, making them especially important for research students.

Expressing gratitude is common in academia, especially in dissertation acknowledgements (see Ghai and Alghazo 2024). Hyland and Tse (2004) argue that acknowledgements do more than list supporters; they provide a rhetorical space for students to convey genuine gratitude and promote a capable academic and social identity (p. 259). These acknowledgements serve as a platform for expressing appreciation and fostering an academic persona. The way authors express gratitude varies by cultural background (Hyland and Tse 2004), as different languages influence how gratitude is structured and expressed. Students can publicly express gratitude in their acknowledgements, but sociocultural ideas about appropriateness shape how they do so. Despite this growing body of research, the interaction between cultural norms and English academic conventions in Arab L2 acknowledgement writing remains underexplored. In addition, gender has received limited attention as a variable in shaping acknowledgement practices. This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative analysis of L1 and L2 acknowledgement writing while incorporating gender as an additional dimension of variation. By examining acknowledgement writing across L1 and L2 contexts while incorporating gender as an analytical variable, this study offers a more integrated account of how cultural and contextual factors shape rhetorical practices in academic discourse.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- (1) How is the acknowledgement section of doctoral dissertations constructed in L1 and L2 English?
- (2) Does gender affect the generic structure in writing the acknowledgement section in the two groups?

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Genre analysis is a discourse analysis approach focusing on genre as a key to understanding various texts. Swales (1990: 33) defines genre as “a distinctive category of discourse of any type, spoken or written.” Specific texts are linked to particular genres, with language serving specific purposes. This method helps differentiate texts by examining their structural patterns. Swales’ work laid the foundation for analyzing academic texts, characterizing genre as follows:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognised 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 the choice of content and style (Swales 1990: 58).

According to Swales (1990: 58), fundamental criteria can be used to define a genre. These criteria include the communicative purpose, selection of contents, schematic structure, and linguistic style. According to Swales (1990), the categorisation of the genre is mostly based on its communicative purpose. We can regard a genre as composed of structured moves put together to create the overall structure of the text and serve its communicative purpose. Other definitions of genre in English for specific purposes (ESP) were also provided. Bhatia (1993) provides a more detailed explanation of genre, as he posits:

A recognized communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or the academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often, it is highly structured and conventionalised with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form, and functional value (1993: 22).

Changing the 'purpose' alters the genre, while modifying other features creates a sub-genre. Swales (1990) introduced move structure in research article introductions, organizing texts into functional units for specific purposes. This approach has been widely used across academic genres. Hyland (2004) extended move analysis to dissertation acknowledgements, identifying three main moves: Reflecting, Thanking, and Announcing, each with communicative steps. Though systematic, this model is based on a specific academic context. Later research shows acknowledgment practices vary culturally and linguistically, affecting move realization. This study uses Hyland's framework flexibly to analyze L1 and L2 English, considering cultural and gender differences.

### **3. Literature review**

The following review traces how acknowledgement research has evolved across three intersecting lines of inquiry: the generic structure of dissertation acknowledgements, cross-cultural and contrastive studies, and research focusing specifically on Arab and EFL writers. While individually informative, these studies have largely operated in isolation from one another, and none has simultaneously addressed the Arab-English comparison at doctoral level with gender as an additional variable.

Over the past two decades, acknowledgment has gained scholars' attention, studied across languages and disciplines. Hyland (2004) analyzed the structure of 240 MA and PhD acknowledgements from nonnative English speakers at five Hong Kong universities, including interviews in Cantonese with students. His analysis identified a three-tier structure: a core Thanking Move with four steps—presenting participants, academic assistance, resources, and moral support—and two optional moves: Reflecting and Announcing, which involve accepting responsibility and dedicating the thesis. The results also revealed that writers of the soft disciplines constructed more complex acknowledgements, and that the hard disciplines writers' acknowledgements had fewer moves and showed more concentration on thanking academics. However, as this model was developed exclusively on Hong Kong data,

its broader applicability—particularly for Arab L2 writers—remains uncertain, highlighting the need for context-sensitive validation across linguistic settings.

Research has focused on how nonnative English writers structure acknowledgements. For example, Amara (2008) studied acknowledgements in Algerian MA dissertations using a mixed-method approach. The study applied Hyland and Tse's (2004) move pattern but found differences: two moves—Thanking (for assistance, resources, moral support) and accepting responsibility—were identified. This simpler structure raises questions about whether EFL writers are unaware of target-language norms or intentionally use L1 rhetorical patterns.

Yang (2012) studied PhD acknowledgements by EFL authors in an English-speaking country to show how discipline impacts their structure and language. Using Hyland's (2004) scheme to analyze 120 texts, Yang found that soft sciences candidates use more complex and frequent acknowledgment moves than hard sciences, such as the Reflecting Move twice as often. Family members are most acknowledged in soft sciences, while academic teachers are common in hard sciences. Participants are more acknowledged in applied linguistics, and institutions are more appreciated in hard disciplines.

Jaroenkitboworn (2014) studied English acknowledgements in dissertations by Thai PhD students using Hyland's (2004) model on 70 acknowledgements. The structure includes three moves: Thanking Move with six steps, Announcing Move with two steps, and Signing-off Move (author's name). Taken together, these studies suggest a shared reliance on the Thanking Move as the core organisational principle of acknowledgements, while revealing substantial variation in how this structure is realised across contexts. While Hyland's (2004) model provides a foundational framework, subsequent studies (e.g., Amara 2008; Yang 2012; Jaroenkitboworn 2014) demonstrate that L2 writers frequently adapt, simplify, or expand this structure in response to disciplinary norms and local academic practices. This convergence and variation indicate that acknowledgement writing is best understood as a flexible genre shaped by contextual rather than universal conventions.

The literature includes contrastive research on acknowledgements' structure. One of the earliest works was by Giannoni (2002), who examined English and Italian research articles' acknowledgements, focusing on social and pragmatic aspects via genre analysis. Using a corpus of 100 acknowledgements from humanities (economics, sociology, linguistics) and sciences (mathematics, biology, medicine), the study found a two-tier structure: a Main Move and an optional Introductory Move, each with subunits. English and Italian acknowledgements differed mainly in fields; Italians elaborated more, with more steps. Step 1.3 (asserting commonality/authorship) was unique to Italians, but Italian texts lacked Step 2.3 (accepting responsibility) in science.

Studies like Kuhi and Rezaei (2014) examined how acknowledgements are structured across different academic genres, analyzing 80 sections written by native and non-native English speakers using Swales' move analysis and systemic functional linguistics. They found acknowledgements generally include a Thanking Move, with optional Reflecting and Announcing Moves in theses, textbooks, and

research articles, shaped by genre and cultural factors. Cross-generic and cross-cultural differences influence the structure, linguistic choices, and functions of acknowledgements. Across contrastive and cross-cultural studies, a consistent pattern emerges: acknowledgement practices are shaped by sociocultural norms, religious influences, and institutional expectations. Studies comparing different linguistic groups (e.g., Giannoni 2002) demonstrate that writers draw on culturally embedded models of expressing gratitude, resulting in systematic variation in both move structure and rhetorical emphasis. At the same time, cross-generic analyses (Kuhi and Rezaei 2014) suggest that these variations are further mediated by genre-specific conventions. Together, these findings position acknowledgement writing at the intersection of genre, culture, and context.

These studies show acknowledgment structure varies with disciplinary, cultural, and contextual factors. They often treat culture as a single variable and overlook gender, rarely comparing native English and Arab doctoral writers. This study fills these gaps by considering cultural identity and gender as key factors in genre variation.

#### 4. Method

This section describes the corpus collected for the study and provides insight into the procedures the researchers followed during corpus collection and analysis.

##### 4.1 Corpus of the study

The corpus includes the acknowledgements sections of 80 PhD dissertations. Within each corpus, 20 acknowledgements are written by females and 20 by males. The first corpus comprises acknowledgements from English doctoral dissertations written by native English speakers. The second corpus comprises acknowledgements from English doctoral dissertations written by non-native speakers of English. Table 1 includes information on the size of each corpus.

Table 1. Distribution of the total number of words in the corpus/ acknowledgements

Sub-corpora	No. of Diss	No. of words
NSE	40	24898
NNSE	40	12054
Totals	80	36952

The substantial difference in corpus size between the two groups (24,898 words in the L1 corpus versus 12,054 in the L2 corpus) suggests that variation may not only lie in the range of moves employed, but also in the extent to which these moves are rhetorically elaborated. This aspect is explored further in the results and discussion sections.

The English data were collected from the online libraries of several universities in native English-speaking countries, and the non-native English data were collected from the online libraries of some Arab universities.

## 4.2 Data collection

The researchers searched online university libraries for English PhD dissertations by native and Arab students. They verified writers' identities through biographical info and selected 80 acknowledgements- 40 by each gender- from 1997 to 2022, all in Linguistics to minimize disciplinary influences. The corpus contains 36952 words, with acknowledgements from 106 to 1406 words. Texts were printed, coded, and manually analyzed using Hyland's (2004) structure: Reflecting, Thanking, and Announcing Moves. Many moves, especially Thanking Moves, were repeated; their frequency was recorded. Researchers read each text carefully, identifying gratitude moves, steps, and patterns, marked with numbered brackets and colored sticky notes.

## 4.3 Method of data analysis

The study used a mixed-methods approach to analyze gratitude in acknowledgement sections in Arabic and English. The researcher combined quantitative and qualitative methods; Creswell (2022: 2) notes that combining statistical trends with personal stories offers a better understanding than either alone. This approach helps address the research questions comprehensively. The structure of acknowledgement sections was analyzed using Hyland (2004), focusing on the main thanking move and optional reflecting and announcing moves, which are broken down into sub-units as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The move structure of dissertation acknowledgements (Hyland 2004: 308)

1. Reflecting move	introspective comment on the writer's research experience
2. Thanking move	mapping credit to individuals and institutions
<i>a. presenting participants</i>	Introducing those to be thanked
<i>b. thanking for academic assistance</i>	Thanks for intellectual support, ideas, analysis feedback, etc.
<i>c. thanking for resources</i>	Thanks for data access & clerical, technical & financial support
<i>d. thanking for moral support</i>	Thanks for encouragement, friendship, sympathy, patience, etc.
3. Announcing move	public statement of responsibility and inspiration
<i>a. accepting responsibility</i>	accepting responsibility: An assertion of authorial responsibility for flaws and errors
<i>b. dedicating the thesis</i>	a formal dedication of the thesis to an individual (s)

Frequencies and percentages were used. Additionally, the Chi-Square goodness-of-fit test, a nonparametric test, was utilised. To determine a good fit, the researcher can assess if the observed cell numbers significantly differ from the expected cell count by calculating the chi-square statistic and comparing it to the critical value of the Chi-Square distribution.

To ensure coding reliability, a subset of 20 acknowledgements (25%) was systematically selected. A coding sheet based on Hyland's (2004) move structure was prepared. Both the researcher and an independent coder received the texts, framework, and blank sheet to identify moves independently. Their decisions were compared, and Cohen's Kappa was used to measure agreement. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved, resulting in a satisfactory Cohen's Kappa of 0.74, indicating acceptable reliability.

## 5. Results

This section presents findings from move analysis of L1 and L2 English corpora. Hyland's (2004) framework describes acknowledgements with a three-tier structure: a main Thanking move, framed by optional Reflecting and Announcing moves, each with sub-steps. New moves and sub-steps also appeared, to be discussed later. The move and step order reflects their typical placement in acknowledgements. This analysis highlights genre structure and moves in each corpus. To facilitate readability, the results are presented at two levels: first, a macro-level comparison of move structures across the two corpora; and second, selective illustrative examples that represent the most salient patterns. Rather than presenting all instances exhaustively, examples are used sparingly to highlight representative tendencies.

Overall, the results show three main patterns. Differences between groups are mainly in how shared moves are elaborated and culturally framed, not in structure. First, L2 English acknowledgements have a more elaborate move structure, especially with culturally-bound moves like religious openings and blessings. Second, both rely heavily on the Thanking Move, but with different emphasis across steps. Third, differences are mostly distributional rather than structural, with few significant contrasts.

As shown in Table 3, we can notice similarities and differences between the two groups. Starting with (*Opening Move*), the first move in L2 English acknowledgements was found in the non-native texts with a percentage of (1.38%), with no statistically significant difference at the level of this move or its forms, as highlighted in Table 4:

Table 3. Results of differences in moves found in L1 English and L2 English corpora

Moves	Frequency				Ch <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	L1 English		L2 English			
	No	%	No	%		
Opening Move	0	0	3	1.38	3.243	0.072
Praising and Thanking Allah Move	0	0	9	4.15	11.613	0.001*
Reflecting Move	10	4.10	5	2.30	1.667	0.194
Thanking Move	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Presenting participants</i>	20	8.20	11	5.07	2.613	0.106
<i>Thanking for academic assistance</i>	73	29.92	71	32.72	0.028	0.868
<i>Thanking for resources</i>	65	26.64	61	28.11	0.127	0.722
<i>Thanking for moral support</i>	63	25.82	45	20.74	3.000	0.083
<i>Thanking the reader</i>	1	0.41	0	0.00	1.026	0.311
<i>Conclusion of thanking</i>	1	0.41	8	3.69	5.444	0.020*
<b><i>Invoking and Blessing Move</i></b>	0	0	2	0.92	2.105	0.147
<b><i>Announcing Move</i></b>	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Accepting responsibility</i>	3	1.23	1	0.46	1.000	0.317
<i>Dedicating the thesis</i>	5	2.05	0	0.00	5.714	0.017*
<b><i>Signing off Move</i></b>	3	1.23	1	0.46	1.000	0.317
Total	244		217		1.581	0.209

Table 4. Forms of the *Opening Move*

Forms of the Opening Move	Frequency				Ch <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	L1 English		L2 English			
	No	%	No	%		
Opening Move	0	0	3	1.38	3.243	0.072
<i>Quranic verse</i>	0	0	1	0.46	1.026	0.311
<i>Prayers on the Prophet</i>	0	0	2	0.92	2.105	0.147

*The Praising and Thanking Allah Move* is the second move in L2 English texts, accounting for 4.15 percent. It shows a significant difference for non-native writers, with a Chi2 value of 11.613, significant at 0.05 or less. These moves are absent in the L1 English corpus, likely due to Arab culture. Quranic verses, prayers for the Prophet, and praise of Allah are specific to Muslims. Arab writers' culture and religion influence their writing in other languages. According to Cheng (2012), gratitude expression in acknowledgements reflects sociocultural perceptions. This discussion focuses on culturally-bound moves related to the Opening Move; other moves like Reflecting and Thanking are covered elsewhere. In L1 texts, Thanking is the second move; in L2, the fourth. Almost all steps are used, except for "Thanking the reader," which is absent in L2 acknowledgements.

As for the steps, *Presenting participants and Thanking them* for moral support were found to be more frequent in L1 English texts than in L2 English ones. The L1 English texts had the highest rate of (8.20%) and (25.82%), respectively. L2 English writers, however, recorded a lower rate (5.07%) and (20.74%), respectively.

L2 English writers outperformed L1 writers in steps of thanking for academic assistance and resources, with rates of 32.72 percent and 28.11 percent versus 29.92 percent and 26.65 percent. However, L2 writers used the thanking step less often (0.41%) than L1 writers. Despite these differences, no significant variances were found. Table 5 details the distribution of thanking forms for resources at the step level.

This marked difference may reflect not only rhetorical preference but also underlying differences in institutional funding structures and in how financial support is conventionally acknowledged across academic contexts.

At the "Thanking for resources" step, two statistically significant differences emerge: financial support is more frequent in the L1 corpus, whereas technical support is more frequent in the L2 corpus. The Chi2 value was 4.455, significant at the 0.05 level or less.

Table 5. Forms of *Thanking for Resources*

Forms of Thanking for Resources	Frequency				Ch <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	L1 English		L2 English			
	No	%	No	%		
Thanking for resources	65	26.64	61	28.11	0.127	0.722
<i>Access to data</i>	38	15.57	39	17.97	0.013	0.909
<i>Clerical support</i>	9	3.69	9	4.15	0.000	1.000
<i>Financial support</i>	15	6.15	1	0.46	12.250	0.000*
<i>Technical support</i>	2	0.82	9	4.15	4.455	0.035*
<i>Access to resources</i>	1	0.41	0	0	1.026	0.311
<i>Access to references</i>	0	0	3	1.38	3.243	0.072

Non-natives outperformed natives in the conclusion of thanking step, using it 3.69 percent of the time versus 0.41 percent. Chi-square analysis showed a significant difference between native and non-native writers (Chi2 = 5.444,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). The Invoking and Blessing Move occurred twice in the L2 corpus at 0.92%, with no significant difference. This may reflect Arab writers' adherence to their native language conventions, influenced by socio-cultural factors.

Regarding the "Announcing Move," it ranked third among natives and sixth among non-natives in acknowledgements. Natives slightly used "Accepting responsibility" more (1.23%) than non-natives (0.46%), and only natives (2.05%) used "Dedicating the thesis," while none of the non-native writers did. A significant difference was found in using "Dedicating the thesis" (Chi2 = 5.714,  $p \leq 0.05$ ). For the final "Signing off" move, natives again outperformed non-natives (1.23% vs. 0.46%), but the difference was not statistically significant (Chi2 = 1.000,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Overall, there was no statistically significant difference between native and non-native writers regarding move use, as the value of Chi2 was 1.581, which is not significant at the significance level (0.05) or less. Table 7 presents gender differences within the L1 English corpus. the

To summarise the key findings of the analysis above, we notice that the generic structure of the L1 English acknowledgement section produced by native English speakers consisted of four moves: Reflecting Move, Thanking Move, Announcing Move, and Signing off Move.

Table 6. Forms of *Signing off Move*

Forms of Signing-off Move	Frequency				Ch <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	L1 English		L2 English			
	No	%	No	%		
Signing off Move	3	1.23	1	0.46	1.000	0.317
<i>Name + Date</i>	0	0.00	1	0.46	1.026	0.311
<i>Date</i>	2	0.82	0	0	2.105	0.147
<i>Date + place</i>	1	0.41	0	0	1.026	0.311

### 5.1 Reflecting move

It is the first move in the English PhD acknowledgement section written by natives. The reflective move is all about the researcher's experience. This move gives writers a chance to reflect publicly on the knowledge they have gained from their research experience and frequently brings back memories of the challenges they faced (Hyland 2004: 311).

- (1) *Working through a PhD is one of the loneliest processes I have endured, but it was made all the better when surrounded by good friends (M).*
- (2) *This dissertation brings a long journey in graduate school to an end. I am glad in many ways that I took the scenic route, as I learned something new at every turn (F).*

This move was used more significantly by females with (8) instances compared to males with (2) instances. To present\talk\express\narrate, writers recall their struggles or challenges as highlighted in Examples (1) and (2) above.

### 5.2.2 Thanking move

This is the second and main move found in our data, as it occurs in all acknowledgements. It consists of six steps. In this move, writers present and thank individuals and/or institutions involved in one way or another in the accomplishment of the thesis.

#### 5.2.2.1 Presenting participants

This step introduces people and institutions that the writer thanked in the following steps.

- (3) *The work presented in this dissertation would not have been possible without the help of numerous people. I wish to extended my sincere appreciation to all those individuals and organizations who impacted this research. This dissertation would not exist without you all (M).*

- (4) *I am grateful to many people who have helped in various ways to make this dissertation a reality* (F).

Males used such a step more, with (13) instances compared to (7) instances for females. The importance of this step lies in its role as a link between the previous move and the current one.

### 5.2.2.2 Thanking for academic assistance

This step was used by all native English writers and was present throughout all three corpora. This step allows writers to thank those who offered intellectual support through ideas, comments, discussions, and feedback, especially supervisors, committee members, teachers, colleagues, and students.

- (5) I am extremely grateful to my adviser, S.L. I came to Georgia State to work with S because her work had been a major influence on my thinking, and I hope that influence is evident in this dissertation. S has also read thousands of pages of my writing over the past five years and endured its oppressive lack of commas and subheadings. She has had a hand in nearly every success I've had at Georgia State. I look forward to continuing to work with her on our many projects already underway and the others to come (M).
- (6) First of all, *I had four outstanding committee members*. G.C, A.O.H, and J.O all *contributed creative ideas, insightful feedback, and positive support* throughout the process. And W.D has been *an ideal advisor, mentor, and friend*. He has always gone out of his way to listen, encourage, and actively help me succeed. I have particularly appreciated his high standards, and the amount of time he has spent responding to the details of my various endeavours. *I am deeply indebted to him for his professional, academic, and personal support throughout the years* (F).

In this step, and the Thanking Move in general, natives were more expressive and produced lengthier thanking moves than the other groups. Such a step was used more by females, with (38) instances compared to (35) instances for males.

### 5.2.2.3 Thanking for resources

In the following examples, the writers thank those who provided them with direct assistance, including data or information, clerical assistance, financial support, technical help, and resources.

#### 5.2.3.1 Access to data

In soft disciplines, the researchers' data comes from the subjects they study or from the corpus shared by other researchers. So, the writers find themselves with a sense of obligation to thank these people. This type of resource was more prominent than other types in our corpus.

- (7) I would have no dissertation at all, of course, without *the 120-odd anonymous residents of Upstate New York (many of them anonymous even to me) whose vowels are discussed in these pages*. Thanks are due in

particular to the individuals identified pseudonymously within as A.F., C.G., J.K., S.L., and T.M., as well as to J.G (not herself one of my interview subjects), all of whom aided my research by putting me in contact with additional *willing interview subjects when I needed to increase my sample* (M).

- (8) *My colleagues at WIDA Consortium have been incredibly helpful in providing access to data for this study.* I am particularly grateful to E.C for her assistance and support. I am so glad I was able to design a study that bridged my academic and professional interests. Working on the WIDA project has been a wonderful part of my professional life, and it was a pleasure to extend this work as part of my dissertation (F).

Thanking for data access was performed more (20 instances) by males than by females (18 instances).

### 5.2.3.2 Clerical support

Clerical help can be offered by general office staff, proofreaders and family typists.

- (9) *S.S and A.F, of course, deserve the credit for helping my essential paperwork navigate the labyrinth of Penn bureaucracy* (M).

- (10) I particularly want to acknowledge the support offered to me when I lost use of my hands during the homestretch of the dissertation and job hunt. *A.B, C.B, J.S, thank you for your help with typing and preparing power points.* M.H, I simply would not have a job if not for you. Thank you helping me take baby steps and never letting me quit. A.C, a special thanks for carrying me through the home stretch of revisions of the dissertation (F).

Thanking for clerical support was used more by females with 6 instances, compared to 3 for males.

### 5.2.3.3 Financial support

Writers thank and occasionally list the funding agencies that provided them with financial support

- (11) This doctoral thesis project was made possible through *the generous financial support of the Bilinski Educational Foundation through their Russell J. and Dorothy S. Bilinski Dissertation Fellowship Program*, which allowed me to focus on my research for the past year, and through *the financial and institutional support of the Linguistics Program at the University of South Carolina* (M).

- (12) First and foremost, *I thank the university of Pennsylvania for its generous support through the Fontaine Fellowship program.* I could not have completed my graduate study without that financial support (F).

Males integrated thanking for financial support slightly more than females did, with a total of (11) instances compared to (4) for female writers.

#### 5.2.3.4 Technical support

Technical support can be provided by technicians, lab assistants and computer experts. Thanking for technical support appeared only twice in the corpora and was performed by female writers.

- (13) Back at Penn for the final haul, *I would not have made it without the technical assistance and generosity of P.M, E.D.M and A.F* (F).

#### 5.2.3.5 Access to resources

Another form for resources in the L1 English corpora is exemplified below:

- (14) *I would like to thank D.M, who has been extremely supportive of my work by providing numerous resources and excellent feedback on manuscripts* (M).

Thanking for resources was found only once in the corpora and was performed by a male writer. This step helps writers present themselves as independent intellectuals deserving of respect (Hyland 2004: 319).

#### 5.2.4 Thanking for moral support

Writers offer their gratitude for the encouragement, friendship, love, patience, and care provided by family, spouses, children, friends, colleagues, and supervisors.

Examples

- (15) My greatest *thanks go to my wife, R.M*, an amazing person who has *encouraged me through the highs and lows*. It goes against all logic to believe that I could have done this without *her support and love*. And to R.P and A.R, my two beautiful daughters: everything I do is for you (M).
- (16) *Thank you also to my family, who cheer me on, and to dear friends in DC, Atlanta, Oklahoma, and beyond. You have cared for me and picked up my spirits on many occasions*. My brother A taught be about resilience. V.N has been my coach and best cheerleader. M and K.S cared for me so well along the way (F).

This step was used significantly more by female writers, (36 instances) than male writers (27 instances).

Writers may also express gratitude to their pets, which is common for authors in US acknowledgements (Hyland 2004: 321).

Examples

- (17) The other person that needs a huge thanks is *our dog, Sherlock*. He is quite literally the reason I get up in the morning (M).
- (18) Finally, I thank my loved ones who have supported me on a daily basis throughout this process. Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy, *my faithful dog*. He alone sat up all night with me through those terrible nights (F).

This step portrays writers as sociable individuals. (Hyland 2004: 320).

### 5.2.5 Thanking the reader

One student included this step:

- (19) Of course, *I would also like to thank you, the reader*, for taking the time to read and reflect on this thesis (M).

This step appeared only once and was performed by a male writer

### 5.2.6 Conclusion of thanking

This step acts like a restatement of the first step, emphasising the Thanking Move as a whole.

- (20) Thank you all (F).

This step appeared once in the corpus and was performed by a female writer.

## 5.3 Announcing move

This move consists of two steps: Accepting responsibility and Dedicating the thesis. Notably, these two steps were never located in the same text.

### 5.3.1 Accepting responsibility

Writers confirm their responsibility for any possible errors in their dissertation.

Examples

- (21) I should point out that *any errors in what follows are my own* (M).

- (22) The blots and gaps which unfortunately remain are *my own responsibility* (F).

Males used this step more slightly (2 instances) than females (1 instance).

### 5.3.2 Dedicating the thesis

Here, writers dedicate their work to special individuals like family members.

- (23) *This thesis is dedicated to my family* (F).

This step appeared in five texts, all written by female writers.

## 6. Signing-off move

Authors confirm their ownership of the acknowledgement section in this move (Al-Ali 2010: 16). They may also provide information about the date and place of writing

### 6.1 Date

There are two examples regarding the use of date:

- (24) July 20, 2019 (M).

- (25) January 2012 (F).

This form appeared once by a female writer and once by a male writer.

## 6.2 Date and place

- (26) Bath, New Hampshire  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
April 2003 (F).

This form was used once by a male writer.

## 7. Acknowledgement by Arab English learners

The typical structure comprises seven moves: Opening, Praising and Thanking Allah, Reflecting, Thanking, Invoking and Blessing, Announcing, and Signing off.

### 7.1 Opening move

Arab English learners' acknowledgements can be realized with religious options.

#### 7.1.1 Quranic verse

One writer began her acknowledgement with a holy Quranic verse.

- (27) (هود:88) "وما توفيقى إلا بالله عليه توكلت وإليه أنيب"

"And my guidance cannot come except from Allah, in Him I trust and unto him I repent" (The Holy Qur'an, 11:88, translated by Khan and Al-Hilali) (F).

This opening option was used once in the corpora by a female writer.

#### 7.1.2 Prayers on the Prophet

- (28) .....and *peace and blessings be upon his mightiest messenger Mohammed* (M).

- (29) .....and *peace be upon Mohammed and his companions* (F).

This option was used once by a female writer and once by a male writer.

### 7.2 Praising and thanking Allah (God)

Muslims thank Allah (God) before thanking anyone else, representing the convention of their first language (i.e. Arabic) in L2 English writing.

- (30) First and foremost, *all praise be to Allah*, the Almighty, who empowered me to accomplish this research (M).

- (31) *All thanks to Allah* the lord of the heavens and Earth (F).

Males used this move (6 instances), twice as much as females did (3 instances).

### 7.3 Reflecting move

Arab learners of English present their experiences as PhD students who face challenges.

Examples

- (32) *Mind-bogglingly exacerbatng, and physically as well as emotionally draining though the journey*, I am well and truly done (M).

- (33) The writing of this dissertation is *the most significant and difficult academic challenge I have experienced* (F).

Females used this move slightly more (4 instances) than males (1 instance).

## 7.4 Thanking move

The Thanking Move consists of five steps, namely: presenting participants, thanking for academic assistance, thanking for resources, thanking for moral support and conclusion of thanking.

### 7.4.1 Presenting participants

Students introduce individuals who helped them.

(34) *My sincere thanks to the many people who have helped with this research* (M).

(35) *Without the support, patience, and guidance of many people, this study would have never been completed. It is to them that I owe my greatest gratitude* (F).

Males used this step 6 times and females 5 times.

### 7.4.2 Thanking for academic assistance

This step solely appeared all the L2 English writers in their English acknowledgements.

Examples

(36) *I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness and gratitude to Prof. Dr. M.M, Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Oran for his supervision of this work and sharing his considerable expertise on foreign language education* (M).

(37) *My recognition goes to the members of the jury who accepted to appraise my research* (F).

Males used this step in 37 instances and females in 34 instances.

### 7.4.3 Thanking for resources

Writers offered the gratitude for access to data, clerical support, financial support, technical support and access to references.

#### 7.4.3.1 Access to data

The data of L2 English writers mostly came from the participants in their investigation

(38) *I am so thankful to my colleagues who, kindly and without the slightest hesitation. Accepted to be recorded and tested. I will not forget, of course, to express my gratitude to all my colleagues who filled in the questionnaire. I am grateful to my students without whom this work would not have been possible* (M).

(39) *I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to the Middle School and the Secondary School teachers for responding to my questionnaires and for showing sharing ideas* (F).

Females thanked for access to data more often, with 21 instances compared to 18 for males.

### 7.4.3.2 Clerical support

Writers offer their thanks for clerical support from colleagues in proofreading and translation.

- (40) *From the university of Navarra, again, I am thankful to my Irish Colleague Dr. O.C, director of Instituto de Idiomas, for proofreading essential parts of this work (M).*
- (41) *My thanks also extend to.....and Dr. M.C for her translations (F).*

Males thank for clerical support more often (8 instances) than females (1 instance).

### 7.4.3.3 Financial support

This resource had a low frequency of occurrence in L2 English corpora.

- (42) *I also thank the Ministry of Higher Education for offering me the "luxury" of 18 months leave to work on this project (M).*

Only one male mentioned financial support in his acknowledgement.

### 7.4.3.4 Technical support

Technical support was another resource that writers benefited from.

- (43) *It would remiss of me not to express my gratitude to A.K and M.K for their contribution in the development of a software (M).*
- (44) *My thanks also extend to Mr. A.B for his great technical support (F).*

Males expressed gratitude for technical support slightly more frequently than females. In other words, males used 5 instances to express gratitude for technical support; whereas females used 4 instances.

### 7.4.3.5 Access to references

Students struggle with limited access to references while working in dissertations; they acknowledge those who helped them.

- (45) *I also wish to acknowledge my gratitude to professors C.M and J.D for providing me with unlimited access to relevant and recent bibliographical references (M).*
- (46) *I owe thanks to Prof. J.P.N-C at Sorbonne Nouvelle University for providing me with valuable references (F).*

Two females offered thanks for access to references; whereas only one male did.

### 7.4.4 Thanking for moral support

Writers offer gratitude for their families and friends for encouragement, love, and patience.

- (47) *I am also deeply grateful to my brother G for his moral support. His encouragements have always been a good drive to me to accomplish this work (M).*

(48) Special thanks go to all *family members and beloved parents* for their encouragement and support. *I am utterly grateful to all friends and colleagues for their encouragements, suggestions, help and moral support* during the pursuit of my research (F).

Such a step was used more by males with 26 instances compared to 19 for females.

#### **7.4.5 Conclusion of thanking**

L2 English writers tend to thank once more all those thanked in the previous steps.

(49) Thank you all (M).

(50) *I would like to thank all the people* who have had any role whatsoever to play in conceiving, writing and binding this thesis.

This step was used slightly more by females, with 5 instances compared to 3 for males.

#### **7.5 Invoking and blessing move**

Religious markers appear throughout the acknowledgements in this move. The writers request from Allah to reward the acknowledgees.

(51) *May the Almighty God bless her, keep her and reward her with long life so that many people will continue to benefit from her vast knowledge and experience* (F).

This move was used only by two females.

#### **7.6 Announcing move**

The “Dedication” step was absent, as writers may prefer to separate their dedications from the acknowledgements. The Announcing Move involved the responsibility of any shortcomings.

##### **7.6.1 Accepting responsibility**

The writer stated his responsibility for the flaws found in his work.

(52) *I am solely responsible for all the flaws and mistakes found herein* (M).

This step was used only once by a male writer.

#### **7.7 Signing off move**

This move is “Signing off Move”, and it was executed by signing off the student’s name and date.

##### **7.7.1 Name and date**

The writer who performed this step, signed off using his full name (first and last name) plus the date when he wrote the acknowledgement.

(53) Ali. BAICHE, November, 2008 (M).

This move was used only once by a male writer.

### 8. Gender and move structure

The study examined gender differences in the move structure between the two corpora. This section introduces the relationship between the gender variable and the generic structure of the three corpora. The results of the statistical analysis show how gender affects the generic structure of the English acknowledgements composed by native speakers of English.

Table 7. Results of differences in moves used according to gender in L1 English acknowledgements

Moves	Frequency				Ch <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	Female		Male			
	No	%	No	%		
Reflecting Move	8	6.25	2	1.72	3.600	0.058
Thanking Move	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Presenting participants</i>	7	5.47	13	11.21	0.180	0.180
<i>Thanking for academic assistance</i>	38	29.69	35	30.17	0.123	0.725
<i>Thanking for resources</i>	30	23.44	35	30.17	0.385	0.535
<i>Thanking for moral support</i>	36	28.13	27	23.28	1.286	0.257
<i>Thanking the reader</i>	0	0.00	1	0.86	1.026	0.311
<i>Conclusion of thanking</i>	1	0.78	0	0.00	1.026	0.311
Announcing Move	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Accepting responsibility</i>	1	0.78	2	1.72	0.333	0.564
<i>Dedicating the thesis</i>	5	3.91	0	0.00	5.714	0.017*
Signing off Move	2	1.56	1	0.86	0.333	0.564
Total	128		116		0.590	0.442

Table 7 indicates females used the Reflecting Move more often than males (6.25% vs. 1.71%), though this was not statistically significant (Chi<sup>2</sup> = 3.600, p = 0.058). In the Thanking Move, males slightly outperformed females in steps such as presenting participants (11.21% vs. 5.47%), thanking for academic assistance

(30.17% vs. 29.69%), resources (30.17% vs. 23.44%), and thanking the reader (0.86% vs. 0%), but none of these differences were statistically significant. Females outperformed males in thanking for moral support (28.13% vs. 23.28%) and concluding with a thank-you (0.78% vs. 0%), yet these differences also lacked significance ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 1.286$  and  $0.126$ ).

The first step (Accepting responsibility) in the third move (Announcing Move) was slightly more used by males (1.72% vs. 0.78%), but this difference was not significant ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.333$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The only significant difference was in the Dedication step-move, where females had a higher rate (3.91% vs. 0%,  $\text{Chi}^2 = 5.714$ ). Females also used the Signing-off move more than males (1.56% vs. 0.86%), but this was not statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.333$ ). Table 7 showed no significant gender differences in move use within the L1 English corpus ( $\text{Chi}^2 = 0.590$ ). Table 8 presents the statistical analysis of gender effects on the structure of acknowledgements by Arab learners.

Table 8 compares move differences between genders in English acknowledgements by Arab learners. Females slightly used the Opening Move more (1.96% vs. 0.87%), but this was not statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2=0.333$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Males used the Praising and Thanking Allah move more (5.22% vs. 2.94%), yet again no significant difference ( $\text{Chi}^2=1.000$ ). Females used the Reflecting Move more significantly (3.92% vs. 0.87%), but this was not statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2=1.800$ ). In the Thanking Move, percentage variations between genders were observed in presenting participants, thanking for resources, thanking, and thanking for moral support; however, none were statistically significant ( $\text{Chi}^2$  values of 0.091, 0.41, 1.089). Females outperformed males in thanking for academic assistance (33.33% vs. 32.17%) and concluding with thanks (4.9% vs. 2.61%), but differences weren't significant ( $\text{Chi}^2=0.127$  and  $0.500$ ). Only females used the Invoking and Blessing Move (1.96%), but this was not significant ( $\text{Chi}^2=2.105$ ). The Announcing and Signing off moves were used only by males (0.87%), with no significant gender difference ( $\text{Chi}^2=1.026$ ). Overall, no significant differences existed in move use between genders ( $\text{Chi}^2=0.779$ ).

Table 8. Results of differences in moves used according to gender in L2 English acknowledgements

Moves	Frequency				Ch <sup>2</sup>	Sig
	Female		Male			
	No	%	No	%		
Opening Move	2	1.96	1	0.87	0.333	0.564
Praising and Thanking Allah Move	3	2.94	6	5.22	1.000	0.317
Reflecting Move	4	3.92	1	0.87	1.800	0.180
Thanking Move	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Presenting participants</i>	5	4.9	6	5.22	0.091	0.763
<i>Thanking for academic assistance</i>	34	33.33	37	32.17	0.127	0.722
<i>Thanking for resources</i>	28	27.45	33	28.7	0.41	0.522
<i>Thanking for moral support</i>	19	18.63	26	22.61	1.089	0.297
<i>Conclusion of thanking</i>	5	4.9	3	2.61	0.500	0.480
Invoking and Blessing Move	2	1.96	0	0	2.105	0.147
Announcing Move	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Accepting responsibility</i>	0	0	1	0.87	1.026	0.311
<i>Dedicating the thesis</i>	0	0	0	0	0.000	1.000
Signing off Move	0	0	1	0.87	1.026	0.311
Total	102		115		0.779	0.378

## 9. Discussion

This study shows that acknowledgements reflect the intersection of academic convention, cultural identity, and personal voice. Differences between L1 and L2 English acknowledgements are not just about the number of moves but indicate two

distinct rhetorical approaches. L1 English writers emphasize personal gratitude, emotional reflection, and individual identity, following an interpersonal-relational model. In contrast, L2 Arab writers adopt a theocentric-social model, prioritizing religious obligation over interpersonal gratitude, framing acknowledgements as a public act of faith. This expands Hyland's (2004) framework, which was based on a culturally uniform corpus and did not account for the religiously grounded structural variation observed here.

The results identified two new steps in the Thanking Move: thanking the reader and concluding the thank-you. The 'thanking the reader' step, absent in Hyland (2004) and Al-Ali (2010), involves expressing gratitude for reading and reflecting on the thesis. The 'conclusion of thanking' repeats thanks to those previously acknowledged, similar to Jaroenkitboworn's (2014: 117) findings, acting as a restatement of the 'presenting the participant' step and emphasizing the overall Thanking Move. The appearance of these steps in both L1 and L2 corpora suggests that Hyland's (2004) three-tier model is a minimum framework, with writers often exceeding it, as Yang (2012) found in various disciplinary and cultural contexts, highlighting the need for a more flexible, context-aware model.

Findings show differences in the structure of English acknowledgment sections by native and non-native authors. EFL writers often transfer Arabic acknowledgment conventions to English. For instance, in the L2 corpus, the number of moves resembled Arabic patterns, aligning with the contrastive rhetoric hypothesis, which suggests that rhetorical conventions are culturally shaped and L1 patterns influence L2 writing. However, Kaplan's (1966) framework has been critiqued for oversimplifying cultural differences. The findings add nuance: while L1 transfer is evident in the religious moves of the L2 corpus, both groups share a core structure — the Thanking Move — indicating transfer is selective, influencing genre periphery but keeping the functional center intact.

Findings indicate that Arabic's linguistic and rhetorical conventions interfere with Arab learners' English writing. This confirms Zare-ee and Hejazi's (2019) results: writers with different linguistic backgrounds develop unique styles, while those sharing a native language show variances across languages. Amara's (2008) study also showed Algerian EFL writers deviating from Hyland's model due to Arabic norms. Overall, L1 interference in acknowledgment writing follows predictable, culturally-based patterns, impacting how we understand the link between L1 socialization and L2 academic genre learning.

Some differences exist between the common moves of the two groups. The Reflecting Move was twice as frequent in native writers' acknowledgements, and their Thanking Move contained more moves, with a unique thanking the reader step. The Announcing Move was also more frequent among natives. Native acknowledgements were over twice as long as non-natives, indicating that variation extends beyond move presence to rhetorical elaboration. While the L2 corpus includes culturally bound religious moves, the L1 acknowledgements are more discursively expansive, especially in Thanking and Reflecting, with native writers elaborating gratitude more extensively and personally. This aligns with Giannoni's (2002) finding that Italian writers produce more elaborate acknowledgements than

English ones, suggesting cultural influences over elaboration. In this study, the elaboration advantage favors L1 writers, reflecting the Western academic culture's emphasis on extended personal acknowledgements as a form of identity.

Non-native English writers did not include a dedication in their Announcing Move. The L1 corpus shows a higher frequency of financial support references, likely reflecting institutional differences rather than style. Native English authors often mention formal funding sources like fellowships and grants, which are standard in academic writing. The limited references in the L2 corpus may indicate less access to such funding or a different framing of support, such as administrative aid instead of financial sponsorship. This suggests that acknowledgement practices are influenced by both institutional context and rhetorical conventions.

A notable difference is the absence of a dedication in L2 acknowledgements. This doesn't imply less gratitude but reflects genre differences; some traditions treat dedication as a separate unit rather than part of acknowledgements. Native writers often include it within acknowledgements, while nonnative writers place it elsewhere. Cultural and religious influences also significantly shape L2 acknowledgements.

114. "وما توفيقي إلا بالله عليه توكلت وإليه أنيب" (هود:88)

“And my guidance cannot come except from Allah, in Him I trust and unto him I repent”. (The Holy Qur’an, 11:88, translated by Khan and Al-Hilali) (F).

115. ....; and peace and blessings be upon his mightiest messenger Mohammed (M).

Muslims thank Allah (God) before thanking anyone else. This was evident in the Praising and Thanking Allah Move. This move represents a form of Arabic language interference. More specifically, L2 English writers carried over the convention of their first language (i.e. Arabic) in writing in the foreign language.

116. First and foremost, all praise be to Allah, the Almighty, who empowered me to accomplish this research (M).

Another religious marker used in the acknowledgements of the nonnative writers was (Invoking and Blessing). This move supplements the Thanking Move. As proposed by AL-Ali (2010), the writers request from Allah to reward the academics who helped the researcher.

117. May the Almighty God bless her, keep her and reward her with long life so that many people will continue to benefit from her vast knowledge and experience (F).

The gender findings warrant deeper theoretical consideration. Gender is an influential factor in pragmatic research (e.g., Alshakhanbeh and Alghazo 2022). In this study, female writers in the L1 English corpus exclusively used thesis dedication, aligning with research showing women often emphasize affective and relational aspects of their work (Hyland 2002). Their greater use of the Reflecting Move, which involves public reflection on personal and emotional challenges, is consistent with this pattern, as these are more associated with female writers in

Western contexts. In the L2 corpus, males used religious moves like praising and thanking Allah more often, possibly due to cultural expectations in Arab Islamic society, where men feel more obliged to demonstrate religious identity in academic writing.

These findings impact ESP/EAP teaching, doctoral writing support, and genre-based instruction. While acknowledgements are an established academic genre, they are rarely explicitly taught, despite involving complex, culturally influenced rhetorical moves. Non-native writers' transfer of L1 norms into English acknowledgements should be seen as the use of rhetorical resources rather than errors. Recognizing this shifts pedagogy from correction to negotiation, allowing instructors to validate existing practices while highlighting target conventions. Doctoral writing programs should explicitly address genre variation across cultures. Theoretically, the results show acknowledgement writing varies not only structurally but also in sociocultural norms, gender patterns, and identity. This highlights the need for more context-aware, culturally sensitive frameworks in academic discourse analysis.

## **10. Conclusion**

This study examined the rhetorical structure of PhD acknowledgement sections and the influence of gender. Unlike prior research, it compared two corpora: English acknowledgements by native and non-native speakers (Arab learners). Native English acknowledgements typically consist of four moves: a main Thanking Move and three optional ones—Reflecting, Announcing, and Signing off. Non-native acknowledgements include a main Thanking Move and six optional moves: Opening, Praising and Thanking Allah, Reflecting, Invoking and Blessing, Announcing, and Signing off. The study found cultural and gender-based differences, with native speakers using fewer moves due to a preference for straightforwardness. Arab EFL learners often incorporate religious expressions in various moves. Females tended to include more moves, while males used more gratitude expressions.

While offering insights into cultural and gender differences in academic gratitude, the study has limitations. Its method, dividing data by language and sex, overlooks other factors like the author's interdisciplinary background, research type, or personal gratitude style. The research mainly used qualitative analysis of acknowledgements; incorporating interviews could provide deeper understanding of participants' motives. Reliance on frameworks tailored for English may bias Arabic text analysis, necessitating culturally sensitive approaches. Additionally, the sample of only 120 dissertations limits generalizability; a larger, more diverse sample would improve it.

Future research could explore different languages and cultures to better understand how rhetorical structures and expressions of gratitude vary across academic communities. A neglected area is the impact of disciplinary differences, which could be examined through comparative studies between fields. Such studies could use qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups to uncover why certain organizational patterns and expressions are chosen and the personal

motivations behind them. This would clarify the interaction between individual agency and cultural norms in academic writing. Additionally, further research could investigate how gratitude markers are perceived by audiences in academic contexts.

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