Cultural Differences in Writing English Native and Non-Native Acknowledgment texts: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract

This study investigates the similarities and differences in different cultures between English natives and non-natives speakers in writing acknowledgments. Six major sections of acknowledgments in both English natives and non-natives were examined. Forty- three dissertations and books from different fields, 11 by English natives and 32 by non-natives including Iranians (Fourteen written by Iranians, seven in English and seven in Persian) were analyzed in percentages, and the quantitative results of the analysis were examined statistically. The results showed that the cultural origins and the teamwork had the most differences. There was the least gap due to supervisor and advisor, and the most gaps were seen between writing acknowledgments of natives and non-natives, which were due to family and God. The average of word counts of natives and non-natives writings came to a great similarity.

Key words: Genre analysis, corpus linguistics, acknowledgment, cultural difference

Introduction

Writing acknowledgment text is a separate page that academic writers of dissertations and books devote it toward those whom they would like to give their thanks for any kind of help received from others during the process of writing. Acknowledgment page is not interconnected with the research methods or the case study that the author would like to investigate. Writing acknowledgment page is just a socio-cultural job and due to politeness. It is observed that writing acknowledgments in different cultures might vary. The variation in cultures was influenced by Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that proposes a close connection between language and our view of the world (Hudson, 1996). Culture is being defined as a body of learned behaviors that acts like a template that shapes behavior and points of view. This concept of a shaping template consists of the categories of systems of meaning, ways of organizing, and distinctive individual and group characteristics (Bodley, 1994). "Expressing gratitude is a language function that has important social value in American English" (Eisenstein and Bodman 1986, p. 167). According to Hyland (2003, p. 243). Acknowledgements are "neither strictly academic nor entirely personal;" they seem to fall through the cracks of the third category and represent a "Cinderella" genre.

Six component steps containing the debts embedded in the texts and allotting the intellectual credit realize this main thanking and moral influences to deserving contributors. These component steps inform the readers about the people and the institutions to be thanked, and, when and why to be acknowledged. As research in the field of genre analysis progressed, academic acknowledgements, part of the academic landscape in monographs, theses and dissertations and,

even, journal articles, since 1990s, began to interest genre researchers. Giannoni (2002), for example, analyzed acknowledgements in English and Italian research articles for their sociopragmatic construction and textualization in terms of move structural pattern to unveil ways by which research article writers organize and express their gratitude for assistance. Hyland (2003) explored the textualization of gratitude within the generic structure of 240 MA and PhD dissertations from six academic fields written by non-native English speaking students at five Hong Kong universities. His analysis demonstrated how acknowledgements offer writers a unique rhetorical space not only to convey their debt for the intellectual and personal assistance they received but also to promote a capable academic and social identity. Hyland (2004) analyzed the same data for their move structure and the results revealed a "three tier structure" consisting of a main thanking move framed by optional reflecting and announcing moves. Hyland has also found that the structure of his samples "differs considerably from Giannoni's (2002) description of research article acknowledgements". In a subsequent study, Hyland and Tse (2004) explored the lexico-grammatical patterns used to realize the component moves of the same acknowledgment texts.

The importance of acknowledgements stems from their high frequency of occurrence in scholarly texts in general and in MA and PhD dissertations in particular. They reflect a combination of interpersonal, academic, institutional, technical, financial, and moral support to the person(s) or institutions for their various contributions. As PhD students are potential members of the academic society, they are expected to demonstrate awareness of not only reciprocal gift giving rules that they should apply in areas of civilized life but also of central values and rules as well as the community that should be relevant in this regulated activity of academic practice.

Thanking Allah (God), this step occupies the first position in the analyzed texts. It embodies a form of gratitude to Allah (God) who is believed by Muslims as the source of inspirations, strength, and confidence, which make the completion of this task possible. Though not very common, this step reflects and symbolizes Muslims' attitudes towards their religious beliefs, as shown by the following excerpts:

1. *I am happy to acknowledge the inspirations of Allah (God), who gave me the confidence to pursue this work to its conclusion.*
2. *By God's will, aid, and support, the completion of this work has become a reality.*

Presenting participants is the other step that usually occurred initially or followed the 'Thanking God' step when it did occur. For the writers who employed it, this step has a textual function (Hyland, 2004) since it provided a means of introducing the people to be thanked who are then specified in the following steps.

3. I would like to thank the following for their assistance, support, and friendship during the course of my doctoral studies.

The step of thanking supervisor and other academics is meant to show that the writers are grateful for any kind of intellectual help they received from members in the academic community such as those who have acted as principle or occasional dissertation advisors, doctoral committee members, senior academics, instructors, teachers. Thus, it is reserved for individuals who have been important in motivating or encouragement the reported research, and for those who have shaped the reported work through their ideas, insights, feedback, or critical analysis.

4. In particular, special thanks go to my project supervisor, Dr. Anson Liu for providing many papers to enrich my understanding of this topic.

Other step arranges acknowledgements for support received from colleagues and offers gratitude to friends for their encouragement and friendship. They are as teamwork in areas of using institutional facilities, including equipment, and libraries and embrace access to supporting including typing, and proofreading.

5. I would like to thank the bank managers and those who coordinated the distribution of the questionnaire. Thanks are also for helping in proofreading and editing the English language of the thesis.

6. I would like to thank my friends in Edinburgh for their encouragement and their cooperative spirit and for the nice times we spent together.

The step of moral support or giving thanks toward family members (father, mother, brothers, sisters, wife, and children) for their patience, understanding, sympathy, and care. This step and the previous step, therefore carries interpersonal considerations and social interactions with different audience other than academic and demonstrates how the acknowledgers present themselves as active participants not only in the same discourse community but also in the wider social community. The following portions from the acknowledgement texts illustrate the constituents of this step.

7. My special thanks are due to my father, mother, brothers, and sisters for their continuous love, encouragement, and patience. Most of all, I would like to thank my lovely wife for her patience and sacrifice throughout my study. Without her, this dissertation would never have been completed.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions
1. Are the origins of different cultures in writing acknowledgments observable, if it is so, why?
2. What categories or component steps in writing acknowledgments are of importance in the cultures of English natives and non-natives?

Method
Corpus
The corpus used in this contrastive analysis is composed of 43 MA and Doctoral dissertations and academic books listed in Appendix A. The criterion for selecting them is as follows:

Different fields were chosen since different fields of books or dissertations are not related to writing acknowledgments. There is no need to have special knowledge of the related field.
Procedures and data collection
The investigation of cultural differences in writing style of native and non-native English acknowledgment texts of theses and books is the objective of this paper. 43 books and dissertations are studied quantitatively. For this purpose, 11 native English writers and 32 non-native writers are studied. Among them, Iranian (7 written in Persian and 7 in English) writes 14. The study is also discussed qualitatively in discussion section.

Results
Table 1 indicates the results of this study, and it is described in detail in appendix A. The table points up the total average of native and non-native (T. Ave. of N. & N.N), the average of native (Ave. of N), the average of non-native (Ave. of N.N.) in English writing of acknowledgments, the total average of Iranian in English and Persian (T. Ave. of Ir. in E. & p.) writing of acknowledgments. The following table shows the frequency of all parameters in percentages except for the Word Count.

Table 1. The percentage of different parameters in writing acknowledgments in different cultures.

Parameters of → Average of ↓	Word Count	God	Family	Colleagues	Advisor and Supervisors	Friends
Total	330	16%	63%	47%	77%	58%
N.	351	0%	36%	64%	55%	45%
N.N.	322	22%	72%	41%	84%	63%
T. Ave. of Ir. in E. & P.	249	29%	64%	21%	71%	36%

Figure 1 to 6 show the results based on parameters of word count, God, supervisor and advisor, Family, Friends and Colleagues. The results are accounted in percentages excepting word count which is based on counting words. Diagrams are divided into four categories including total average, native average, and non-native average of writing acknowledgments; and Iranian (or non-native) average of writing acknowledgments.
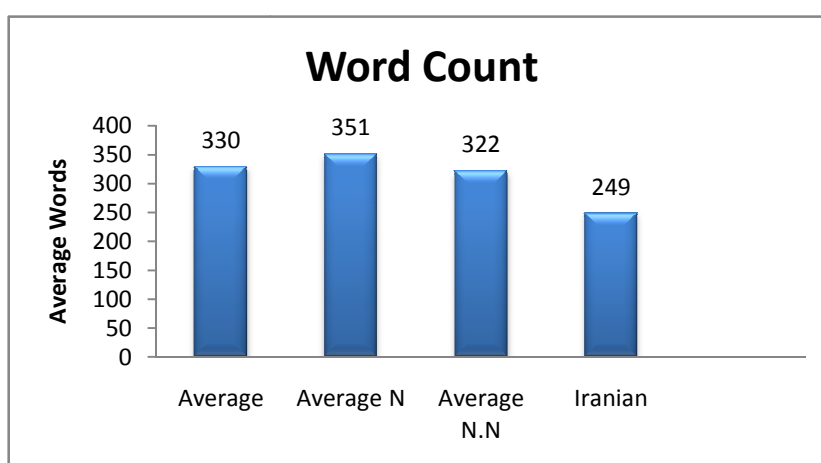

Figure 1. The average of word counted in writing acknowledgments in different cultures.

Figure 1 shows the total average of words counted in acknowledgments written by English native and non-native authors equal 330, the average of word count of English native writers is 351, and the average of 322 goes with non-natives. Iranian has the average of 249 for word count in writing English or Persian acknowledgments considered for dissertations and books. The general result of this word count study supports that the total average is 330. While the major frequency of word count (351) goes with English natives for writing acknowledgments than non-natives, and the less average of writing with 249 belongs to Iranian writers, however.

Figure 2 presents the average words in percentages used for recalling and God assisting the authors in writing dissertations and books. The total average of native and non-native writers reported 16%, native writers just about zero, non-natives are 22%, and the total average of Iranian in writing English and Persian dissertations and books is 29%. In this study, diagram 2 shows that the average natives who acknowledge God is about zero, Iranians with the average of 29% are the most who praise God in their writings.
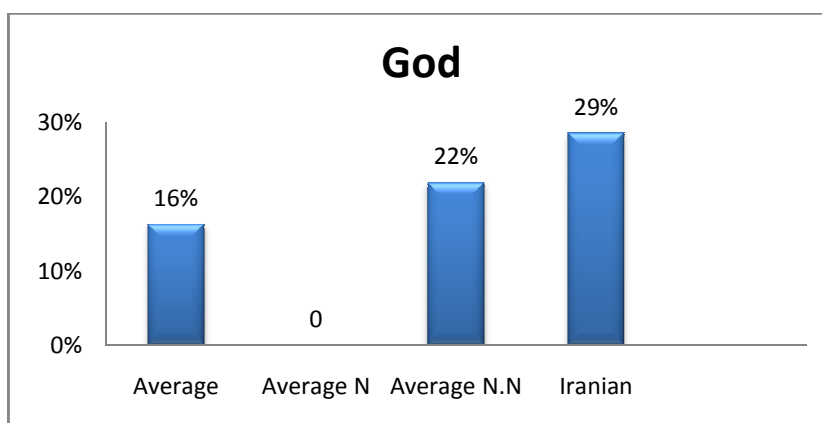

Figure 2. The average of writers who acknowledge God in different cultures.

The average words in percentages used for expressing thanks to families who have helped the native and non-native authors in writing dissertations and books depicted in figure 3. The total average of writers including English natives and non-natives who acknowledge their families are 63%. 72% is the most average thanks of non-native writers toward their families, also the least, that is, 36% for natives, and 34% of Iranians express their thanks toward their families.
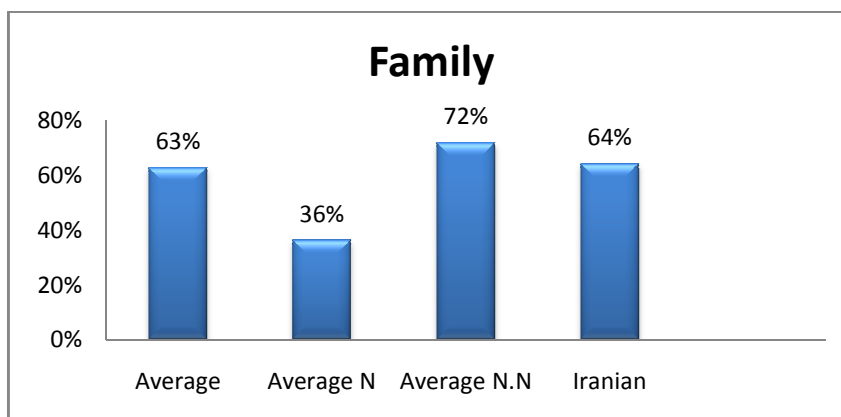

Figure 3. The average of writers who acknowledge their families in different cultures.

In percentages, Figure 4 represents the word average in using acknowledgments toward writers' colleagues who have assisted him in the dissertation or book. It illustrates that 64% of colleagues in English native writings have helped with the writer and this average is the highest, and the least, that is, 21% is for the Iranians. the total average of N. and N. N. is 47%. Non-natives take up 41%.
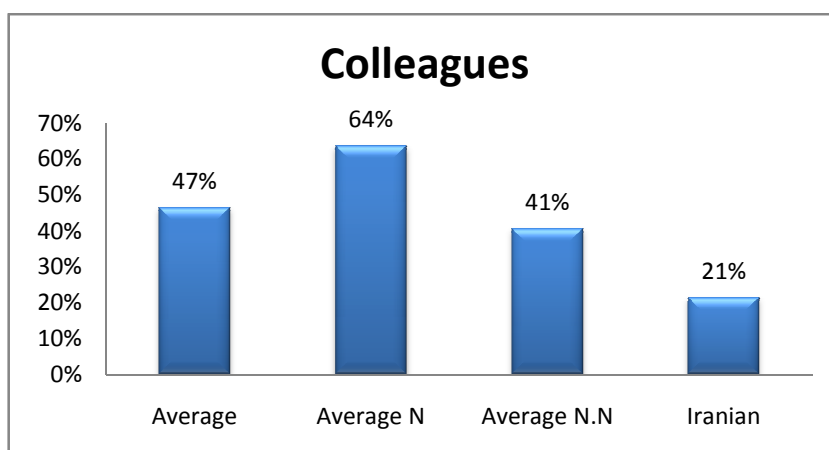

Figure 4. The average of writers who acknowledge their colleagues in different cultures

Figure 5 indicates the average of natives and non-natives in acknowledging supervisors and advisors. The top average belongs to non-natives with 84%, and the slightest is the average of native authors with 55%. The total average is 77%, and 71% of Iranians express their thanks toward their supervisors and advisors.
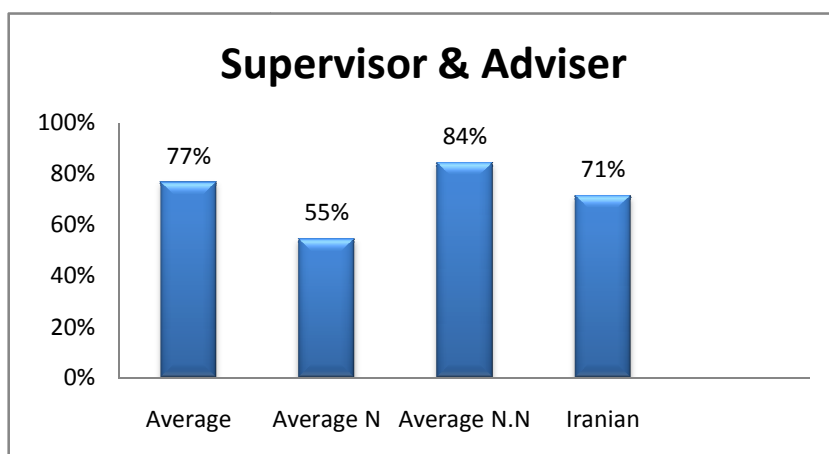

Figure 5. The percentages of supervisors and advisors who are expressed thanks.

Figure 6 shows the total average of English native and non-native authors in writing acknowledgments intended for friends is 58%. The top average concerning 63% for non-natives and the least average focuses on Iranians. Then the native average is about 45%.
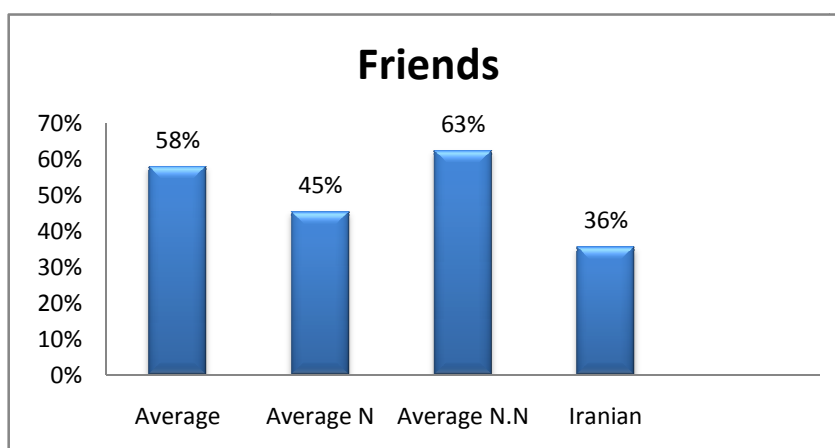
Figure 6. The percentages of friends who are acknowledged by Ns .and N.N.s in different cultures.

Disscusion

In this study,as it is obseved indisscussion section, the total average of word count is 330. It means that the English natives and non-natives use averagly 330 words in writing acknowledgments of dissertations or books. The center of attention of nearly all non-natives is on supervisor and advisor followed by family, then on friends, colleaguges, and God, respectively. However , the most focuses of native writers are on colleagues and friends than those of Iranians. In comparing English native writers with Iranian writers, there is no mention of God by 11 natives, in this study . While Iranians have the most mention of God. Then expressing thanks goes toward superviser and advisor , and family, respectively. This is indicated This shows the most cultural gap and the most religious or spritual gap and also cultural differences between English natives and Iranians. It means that first God and then family are the main focus of Iranian in doing their jobs.Unlike Iranians, inthe case of Western countries, or here English native writers of dessertations or books, colleagues and friends play the main roles; because it is understood from reading their acknowledgments that

Their research job is usually done with the collaboration of a team work and solidarity. Hence, first the collaboration of colleagues, then friends are important. But Iranians usually done their research works individually, so in comparison with Western world, it is less seen that they express their thanks toward colleagues and friends.

Conclusion

Dissertation and book acknowledgements are sometimes considered an unconventionalised genre, which allows writers to express themselves unreservedly and sincerely. Acknowledgments provide a valuable space for writers to present and promote themselves as thankers, indebters, and academics having a professional, social, responsible, and social identity. Thus, it is often wise to raise dissertation writers' attention to the appropriate wording and staging of these 'special textual constructs' whose 'formation is governed by conventions that are different from those of the main text' (Ben Ari, 1987, p. 79).

The present study analyzed results of this research quantitatively. The indicators of word count , God, family, supervisor and advisor, colleagues, and friends are studied.

In this study, although, it is observed that the writing style of acknowledgments doesn't have any special pattern. In acknowledgments, the average of word count used by Iranian is less than

other non- natives, and it is also less than English natives. That is , natives write more words than non-natives. Refering toward family in non-natives specially Iranians is more than natives. This is because of cultural and religious origins. Compared with the Western world, it is less seen that Iranians turn to colleagues and friends. The main focuse of natives is around team works in a research job , they are on top average than Iranians and non-natives Non-natives ;and Iranian giving their thanks toward God for helping them to write the dessertations or books; Iranians also are on top average. On the contrary, in this research, it is not seen recalling of God in Western or native acknowledgment writings. In the case of advisors and supervisors, natives rely on them less than non-natives and iranians.

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Appendix

No	Name	Language	Type	Nationality	W.C.	God	Family	Colleagues	Advisor and Supervisors	Friends	Others
1	Andrews	English	Thesis	Non-English	294	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	Kim	English	Thesis	English	180	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
3	Pauchalo	English	Thesis	English	60	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Kentner	English	Thesis	English	504	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Jouhnson	English	Thesis	English	1295	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Lai	English	Thesis	Non-English	540	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
7	Fliciano	English	Thesis	Non-English	288	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
8	Khaolarm	English	Thesis	Non-English	840	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9	Marchenco	English	Thesis	Non-English	182	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
10	Moore	English	Thesis	English	534	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
11	Martin	English	Thesis	English	349	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
12	hashemian	English	Thesis	Iranian	300	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
13	Marzban	English	Thesis	Iranian	240	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
14	Mortazavi	English	Thesis	Iranian	228	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
15	Toluei	English	Thesis	Iranian	280	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
16	Mojtabapour	English	Thesis	Iranian	100	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
17	Zafari	English	Thesis	Iranian	208	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
18	Khordi	English	Thesis	Iranian	112	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
19	Payne	English	Thesis	Non-English	38	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
20	Bashiradin	English	Thesis	Non-English	480	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
21	Yoshida	English	Thesis	Non-English	420	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
22	Igra	English	Thesis	Non-English	642	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
23	Dehaam	English	Thesis	Non-English	462	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
24	Zhang	English	Thesis	Non-English	206	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
25	Hu	English	Thesis	Non-English	700	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
26	Rosule	English	Thesis	Non-English	309	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
27	Al-shargh	English	Thesis	Non-English	403	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
28	Jung	English	Thesis	Non-English	322	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
29	Huthiialy	English	Thesis	Non-English	277	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
30	Seta	English	Thesis	Non-English	239	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
31	Brown& Yule	English	Book	English	242	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
32	Schmidt&Richards	English	Book	English	188	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
33	Aitchison	English	Book	English	52	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
34	Brown	English	Book	English	224	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
35	Wardhaugh	English	Book	English	192	No	No	Yes	No	No	NO
36	Brown	English	Book	English	224	No	No	Yes	No	No	NO
37	Azimain	Farsi	Book	Iranian	150	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
38	Rajaei	Farsi	Book	Iranian	105	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
39	Jahangiri	Farsi	Book	Iranian	204	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
40	Hasanli	Farsi	Book	Iranian	268	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
41	Sharifi	Farsi	Book	Iranian	900	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
42	Mohammadi	Farsi	Thesis	Iranian	160	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
43	Motamedi	Farsi	Thesis	Iranian	234		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes