

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports



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ABSTRACT: The thesis examiner's report is an evaluation of a thesis, which includes dialogic and evaluative elements. The purpose of the study was to investigate the roles that examiners adopt for themselves and the language use in examiners' reports on MPhil theses submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University of Cape Coast. The study purposively selected 100 theses examiners reports from four disciplines. The study revealed that examiners adopted eight different roles in the reports. Another key finding of the study was that evaluator role was most frequent, and the least frequently occurring role was Institutional role. Again, examiners employed imperatives, personal pronouns, and adjectives in their adopted roles. The findings of the study serve to create an awareness for explicit guidelines for both fresh and experienced examiners in the task of postgraduate thesis examination.

KEYWORDS: feedback, thesis examiners' reports, examiner roles, examiner judgement, language use

BRIEF SYNOPSIS: The paper investigates the roles examiners enact for themselves and their attendant linguistic resources in the thesis examiners' reports.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Academic discourse is cast in or conditioned by genres (Mauranen, 1996). Genre is defined as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some common set of communicative purpose" (Swales, 1990, p. 58), a view shared by Bhatia (1997). In addition, genres share similar "structure, style, content and intended audience" (Swales, 1990, p. 58). It is a social activity of a specific discourse community realised in language (Mauranen, 1996). Genres are not fixed and uniformed but rather dynamic, flexible, and sometimes contested (Bhatia, 2008).

According to Swales (2009, p. 45), genres can be occluded, explaining that "academic occluded genres are, in part, those which support the research publication process but are not themselves part of the research record." He postulates further that these occluded genres in academia support and validate the manufacture of knowledge, directly as part of the publishing process itself or indirectly by the underpinning academic administrative processes of hiring, promotion and departmental review. He adds that written occluded genres are mostly formal documents which remain on files though they are rarely part of the public record. These occluded genres are typically hidden or kept "out of sight" from the public gaze by the veil of confidentiality.

The thesis examiner's report (TER) can be described as an occluded genre. The purpose of TER, according to Starfield, Paltridge, Bourke, and Fairbairn (2015, p. 132), is "to evaluate, either negatively or positively, the thesis ... so that the candidate can bridge the gap between the current state of their PhD". This is also true of MPhil programmes as a thesis at this level is a research report submitted in support of a person's candidature for an academic degree. According to Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat, and Dally (2004a), the TER exemplifies key features which include report organization, examiner and process, assessable areas covered, dialogic elements, and evaluative elements. In a sense, evaluation is an integral part of the examination process and it should be reflected in the final TER.

As a review genre in the academic community (AC), TER has been studied in many directions. Such studies have concentrated on language use in these reports (Adika, 2015; Kosonen, 2014; Kumar & Stracke, 2011; Starfield et al., 2015; 2017); rhetorical sections of the reports (Holbrook et al., 2007); codification of practices and examiners' expectations (Golding et al., 2014; Holbrook et al., 2004a; Kumar & Kumar, 2009; Kumar & Stracke, 2007; Sankaran et al., 2005; Stracke & Kumar, 2010; Wisker & Robinson, 2014); philosophies that underlie the production of the reports (Mullins & Kiley, 2002; Simpkins, 1987), and institutional expectations (Holbrook et al., 2004b; Nightingale, 1984). Several studies have investigated evaluative language, in general and TERs, in particular, but not many studies have investigated TERs in Ghana, in general, and University of Cape Coast, in particular, which also runs many postgraduate studies, and examine theses.

1.2 Aim of Study and Research Questions

The study investigates the kinds of role enacted by examiners in the thesis reports and the frequency of each of the roles to be identified as well as the attendant linguistic resources for each role. The questions that the study seeks answers to are:

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

1. What roles do examiners assume in their evaluation of MPhil theses?
2. How do these examiner roles manifest through lexico-grammatical resources?

The identification of the roles will help ascertain the kind of relationship that exists between the examiner and the candidate, vertical or horizontal, and how examiners maintain solidarity with readers of the reports. Again, the identification of the roles will assist in determining whether examiners adhere to institutional guidelines or are idiosyncratic in their attempt to write their reports on the assessed theses.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual framework, in the present study, centres on stance, feedback, and the taxonomy of examiner roles identified by Starfield et al. (2017).

2.1 Stance

Thompson and Hunston (2000) explain 'evaluation' as an umbrella term which covers aspects such as the speaker's or writer's expression of 'stance' or 'attitude' to mean entities discussed. Stance concerns the way in which writers present themselves and convey different kinds of opinion, attitudes, credibility, assessments, and commitments about propositional content (Hyland, 2008). Thompson and Alba-Juez (2014) offer a revised explanation of 'evaluation' and 'stance' to mean evaluation as the actual realization of the expression of the speaker's stance or attitude. In this way, 'stance' is thought of as an abstract and umbrella term.

Hunston (2011) explains that, in the literature, there are two distinct uses of the term 'stance': in one sense, 'stance' is used in a way that matches to some aspects of evaluation. Conrad and Biber (2000), for example, consider stance adverbials in three different corpora. Biber (2006) equates stance to attributive markers. "Epistemic" and "attitudinal" stance, projected by Biber (2006), refer to those "linguistic mechanisms used by speakers and writers to convey their personal feelings and assessments" (p. 97). Epistemic stance is associated with certainty, reliability, and limitations of propositions. Attitudinal stance concerns attitudes, feelings, or value judgments. Olivier and Carstens (2018) note that stance features are ways in which writers present themselves in their texts and convey opinions and commitments which include attitude markers that express writer's attitude to proposition.

Du Bois (2007) propounded the 'stance triangle' to signify the act of stance taking in speech, comprising all three aspects of stance: evaluation, alignment, and positioning. Thus, according to Du Bois (2007), stance includes (1) evaluating an object; (2) aligning with the subjects, and (3) positioning of a subject (mostly, the self). Biber and Zhang (2018) sum up that stance is an expression of explicit lexico-grammatical features, which is employed in corpus-based methods to generally describe different registers. They contrast this with 'evaluation' that is considered to be implicit and context-based, focusing on connotations or particular words and phrases or detailed descriptions rather than on generalized descriptions. By adopting different roles in the thesis reports, examiners express their attitudes towards the entities evaluated; that is, the thesis and the candidate. This is very much in line with Du Bois (2007) and Biber (2006).

2.2 Written Feedback

Another key concept which is related to the present study is written feedback. Stracke and Kumar (2010) recognize feedback as the provision of developmental experiences and encouragement of self-regulated learning. They observe that feedback provides opportunities for students to practise skills and to consolidate the journey from a zone of current development to a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978); that is, students move from being a novice to becoming experts in a specialised fields of study and achieve the tenacities of self-regulated learning. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), the main aim of feedback is to reduce discrepancies between current understandings, performance, and a goal. The focus in feedback is on specific aspects that need improvement—both supervisors and examiners may provide such feedback, with the examiners providing the last stage of supporting the candidate's learning experience.

Feedback involves gathering information in order to make a determination about a student's learning, and that is assessment. Assessment is categorized into summative and formative. Summative assessment (SA), sometimes, referred to as assessment of learning (Bruno & Santos, 2010), typically, documents how much learning has occurred at a point in time; its purpose is to measure the level of student, school, or programme success. Ketabi and Ketabi (2014) support Chappuis and Chappuis (2008) by expressing that SA summarizes what students learnt during a course and it is usually done at the end of the semester (Brown, 2004). This kind of assessment shows what objectives have been accomplished, but it lacks any suggestion to improve performance.

On the other hand, formative assessment (FA) can be defined as every intentional proceeding act on learning mechanisms that directly contributes to the progression and/or redirection of learning (Bruno & Santos, 2010). Bruno and Santos (2010) explain further that FA, or assessment for learning, is multi-dimensional, integrated in the curriculum, authentic, context-embedded, and flexible. FA does not interrupt, but rather goes along with the learning process, and is aimed to help learning and teaching by giving appropriate feedback (Lewy, 1990). Lewy (1990) explains that FA is based on a communication process in which feedback can be fundamental to the activation of the students' cognitive and meta-cognitive development.

We agree with Stracke and Kumar (2010) that TERs at the doctoral and Master's levels consist of two components: firstly, summative assessment (SA) where a judgement is made about whether the thesis has met the standards established by the discipline

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

for the award of the degree; and, secondly, the developmental and formative component, where examiners provide feedback to assist a candidate to revise the thesis for final submission.

2.3 Taxonomy of examiner roles

We consider the meaning of roles and elaborate on the types of examiner roles, which will also serve as the analytical framework for the present study. First, we adopted the explanation of roles by Starfield et al. (2017) that roles are the many social responsibilities we apportion to ourselves grounded on our language choices, like a mentor and advisor. We adopted Starfield et al.'s (2017) framework because of its currency and the breadth of the linguistic realizations of the roles which include examiner, expert, institution, editor (proofreader), peer, supervisor, evaluator, commentator, reporter, and viva examiner. How these roles are linguistically realized are clarified below.

Linguistically, first, the Examiner role (ER) has relational clauses (identifying), imperatives with process type verbs, and the candidate is presented as the 'candidate', 'the author', 'she' or 'he'. Second, Institutional role (IR) involves the examiner citing verbatim with answer the criterion by the institution. Besides, the Expert role (EXR) gives disciplinary facts, corrects factual errors, defines terms, and cites prominent theorists, establishing his/her authority as an examiner, and displaying expertise in content and structure of a thesis. The Editor (Proofreader role, PR) concentrates on spelling, amalgamation, capitalization, formatting, punctuation, and grammar. In addition, the Supervisor role (SR) gives formative comments, uses low modality, lexical items like supervisor, personal pronoun I, imperatives with Mental Process, use either/or, yes/no, and multiple choice questions and the candidate is referred to as 'you'. The Peer role uses low modality, with third conditionality and lexical item 'publishable' being used. Also, when the student is assigned the grammatical role of Token or Carrier, and with evaluative adjectives, both predicative and attributive, then, the examiner is Evaluator (EVR). Furthermore, the Reporter (RR) uses verbal processes, quotation marks, and headings, and restates what is in the thesis by giving a synoptic overview of the thesis, sections and chapters of the report. The next point which may be reserved for examiners of doctoral theses is Viva Examiner that employs wh-questions and makes reference to viva. The last of these roles, Commentator (CR), uses the personal pronoun 'I' as Senser (Mental Process), modal adjuncts, attitude markers, and third conditional.

Starfield et al.'s (2017) framework, with the corresponding identified roles, was adopted in the present analysis of data to ascertain the roles enacted by examiners in the reports presented to the SGS (UCC), on their assessment of MPhil theses. However, with the Editor (Proofreader) role, what Starfield et al. (2017) outline as Editor role is best categorized as Proofreader because editing is done at structural and content levels as associated with the expert role, but proofreading is associated with surface level issues (Afful, 2009; Kroll, 2003; Swales & Feak, 1994). Hence, the analysis will use 'Proofreader' instead of 'Editor'.

3. DATA

The qualitative research design, specifically, the content analysis (see Creswell, 2003), was adopted to enable us read closely and understand the many unique forms of examiner roles employed as well as the linguistic resources associated with these roles in the examiners' reports on MPhil theses submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University of Cape Coast. We purposively selected hundred (100) examiners' reports in 2006-2016 from the disciplines Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Population and Health, and History and English. For the analysis of the data, we, first, coded the data, with 1-25 for each selected discipline. For example, the first History data was coded HIS 1; second, HIS 2 up to the last item, HIS 25. ENG represented English, POH for Population and Health, and HOT for Hospitality and Tourism Management. Thus, the various distinctive forms of examiner roles and their attendant linguistic resources in the data were easily identified and analysed. The analysis was organised according to the emerged themes, which were further categorised into further emerging patterns, thereby enhancing interpretation. Again, given the large textual nature of the data, requiring that we constantly refer to the text in the data, the data were referred to or quoted unedited; thus, errors that may be found in the extracts are as found in the data.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of the data, which is grouped into two: the distribution of examiner roles and the presentation of each examiner role, and the attendant linguistic resources, with relevant illustrations.

5.1 Distribution of Examiner Roles with Attendant Linguistic Resources

The analysis of the data revealed that eight (8) roles were assumed by examiners in their submitted reports on assessed theses. These included Evaluator, Examiner, Commentator, Proofreader, Expert, Reporter, Supervisor, and Institution. The findings on the distribution of these different examiner roles in the data are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Distribution of Examiner Roles in Examiners' Reports

Examiner Roles	N	(%)
Evaluator	435	20.6
Examiner	397	18.8

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

Commentator	352	16.7
Proofreader	313	14.8
Expert	230	10.9
Reporter	201	9.5
Supervisor	136	6.5
Institutional	46	2.2
Total	2110	100

Source: Field data (2020)

According to Table 1, eight roles in varying proportion were identified in the data. Evaluator role was the highest, 435 (20.6%). Evaluator role was followed by Examiner role 397 (18.8%). The least occurring role was Institutional role, with 46 (2.2%). The frequent use of the evaluator role is not surprising as the core duty of the examiner is to evaluate what the candidate has produced, determining whether it is good(positive) or bad (negative) so as to allow entry or otherwise of that academic output, the thesis. The assumption of multiple roles in the data is in consonance with Lovat et al. (2002), Holbrook et al. (2004a), and Starfield et al. (2017), who found that examiners adopt a range of roles when composing the written report; that is, examiners take on specific roles, positioning themselves in many ways. However, in the present study, these identified roles exclude peer role and viva role, as found by Pitkethly and Prosser (1995), Holbrook et al. (2004a), and Starfield et al. (2017).

5.2 Linguistic realisation of examiner roles

In the ensuing paragraphs, starting with Evaluator, each role is discussed independently. However, this ordering for the discussion does not mean that some roles are more important than others since all these roles are collectively geared towards ensuring that the finest form and quality of the work is produced. Evidence from the data in support of these findings is provided.

EVALUATOR

First, in performing the evaluator role (EVR), the examiner uses evaluative adjectives, which are both predicative and attributive, for the thesis and the candidate. These comments are usually the examiners' appreciation or approbation. Some examples in the data are these:

Extract 1

A useful research on practical dimension of tourism and hospitality industry in Ghana... (HOT 17)

Extract 2

In terms of substance, the research is reasonably impressive and rich insight. (HIS 14)

The extracts (1 and 2) above show evidence of EVR in the data, and these relate to the thesis. In Extract 1, the evaluator appreciates the thesis (positive), using an attributive adjective, 'useful' to describe the research, confirming the findings of Johnston (1997) and Holbrook et al. (2004a) that examiners, in their quest for fulfilling their roles, judge the thesis in terms of quality.

Examples of evaluation of candidates, both positive and negative, in the data are as follows:

Extract 3

The candidate was lucid in his problem statement. (HIS 14)

Extract 4

The candidate was rather exhaustive to a fault almost bordering on repetitiveness. (HOT 15)

Extract 3 is an example of a positive comment expressed by the evaluator while Extract 4 is an instance of a negative comment in relation to the evaluator role, which are all in reference to the candidate. In Extract 3, the evaluator announces that the candidate articulates the problem statement in a 'lucid' manner for the present work to fill that gap. Thus, the evaluators find that the studies have been carried out well. The candidate's capability to express the statement of the problem as expected confirms Lunenburge and Irby's (2008) observation that the statement of the problem for the thesis must be succinct and clear.

Lastly, the evaluator alluded to many parts of the thesis, such as topic/title, literature, methodology, analysis and discussion, and reference. Some examples of these are found below:

Extract 5

The discussion on the 'background to the study' is too long (9 pages). (POH 1)

Extract 5 is on the background information provided for the work— which is negative. Given that the background to the study serves as contextualization to readers (Swales, 1990; Swales & Feak, 1994), it is supposed to be suitable and concise. Therefore, by including other issues which may be considered 'irrelevant' makes the background 'too long', in the view of the evaluator.

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

EXAMINER

Apart from the Evaluator Role (EVR), there is the Examiner Role (ER). The ER is identified with the field of degree and recommendations since the examiner is deemed an authoritative figure who exerts power (Starfield et al., 2017). As a result, it can be said that this role is about knowledge base and expectations underpinning the examination (Holbrook et al., 2004a).

First, the examiner, in this role, evaluates the thesis in relation to originality, coherency, methodology, presentation, and knowledge, which have also been established in other studies such as Holbrook et al. (2004b) and Pitkethly and Prosser (1995). Examiners assume this role, using both positive and negative comments. An example of Examiner role can be found in the extract below:

Extract 7

The work however sheds important light on the independence movement in Ghana. (HIS 15)

In Extract 7, the examiner says, in specific terms, what this knowledge is about, in that, more light is thrown unto the independence movement in Ghana. This extract has been positively evaluated. Again, a candidate's study is required to contribute to knowledge, which is mostly captured in the Significance of the Study section or Implications found in the Conclusion section (Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007). The absence of this contribution is 'disappointing' to the examiner (Extract 8), describing the situation as a lost opportunity for the candidate to advertise the work. In essence, the candidate falls short of the expected outcome of the finished product—the thesis.

Again, there was the use of imperatives which relate to 'fix-in' or prescriptive comments. Examples are found below:

Extract 8

Justify the use of systematic random sampling technique. (POH 1)

In Extracts 8, the examiners employ the base form of the verbs 'Justify' to request the candidate to amend what has been done already in the thesis. Hyland (2002) explains that directives undermine the harmony of such audience relationship since they require the reader to consider things in a way that the writer determines. For Petch-Tyson (1998), the use of imperatives enables examiners to evince visibility in the reports. Interpersonally, the examiner role establishes a vertical relationship with the candidate, with the examiner and the candidate on top and at the bottom, respectively, of the hierarchy. Such comments, according to Holbrook et al. (2004b) and Starfield et al. (2017) bring quick closure to the thesis, which contrasts more development.

The last of the features of the ER is his/her offering of recommendations. The examiner exercise the authority to indicate a failure or pass of the thesis based on evidence found in the thesis, and these are seen in the recommendations given either at the beginning of the report or mostly at the end of the report. In some cases, the examiners tend to be more specific by attaching the grade earned to the pass to present clearer issues to readers, and making declarations with or without conditions. Presented below are some examples:

Extract 9

I am willing to award a pass. (ENG 20)

As seen in Extract 9, the examiner declares that he/she is willing to award a pass. The use of 'willing' is a rank of inclination in the modality system (Halliday, 1994) which shows how much explicit responsibility the speaker takes for his attitudes (Ngula, 2017; Thompson, 2014).

The analysis of the present study also showed that examiners rarely recommended outright failure, which will require resubmission. This contrasts the finding of Becher (1993) that examiners' demand for resubmission was quite common. However, the finding of the present study is closer to Holbrook et al. (2004a), who found that only two examiners out of 301 examiners failed thesis, and there were rare cases of resubmission, confirming that examiners generally have a positive attitude towards the examination of a thesis (Johnston, 1997; Mullins & Kiley, 2002).

COMMENTATOR

The examiner as a commentator is neither prescriptive, summative nor formative, but the role "emerges as examiners voice opinion" (Starfield et al., 2017, p. 8), which appeals to the interpersonal metafunction of SFL. In the view of Hyland and Hyland (2001), Commentator role is reflective; it seeks to nurture ideas, but does not attempt to be dictatorial. Starfield et al. (2017) explain that though such comments can be evaluative, they can be disregarded without any effect on the result of the thesis. The present study recorded the use of first person singular pronoun, 'I' which is, generally, a Senser in Mental Process, using other hedging devices, 'personal musing statements', third conditional sentence, and combined personal reference (Senser) with third conditional clauses in the comments. Examples are given here:

Extract 10

The candidate is advised to re-check the accuracy of the name of the paramount chief of the Juabeng traditional area on page 47, line 14. I doubt whether what is written in the text is the correct name. (HOT 6)

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

Extract 11

By limiting herself to the Likert format of questioning, the candidate has lost a golden opportunity to collect very useful data that could have been more relevant than the status quo in which no explanation is given for the choice of answer. (POP 16)

Extract 10 indicates CR, using the first person singular pronoun which, using grammatical roles, is a participant in Mental process, and is about the examiner rather than the candidate. 'I' which is, generally, a Senser in Mental Process, and is said to be non-committed to the information (Martin & White, 2005). Fløttum (2012) notes that the first pronoun, 'I', is a key feature of voice, and the most overt expressions of stance (Gray & Biber, 2012). In Extract 10, given the fact that examiners are selected, based on their expertise in the discipline, the examiner could have indicated that the name of the paramount chief provided by the candidate is wrong, making the claim absolute; rather, the examiner intrudes in the message by indicating that he 'doubts' whether it is the correct name.

Again, an example of the third conditional sentence which expresses a very hypothetical condition that it is now too late for the condition to be fulfilled is found in Extract 11. With this, the examiner indicates that more relevance could have been achieved if useful data had been collected through other means other than the Likert scale, but the reality is that the Likert scale was not adopted, and this prevented the candidate from utilizing that useful data that could have enhanced the quality of the work. The examiner's desire that some issues could have been addressed differently at this stage of the work is viewed as a comment expressed—CR

PROOFREADER

Another role identified in the data is the Proofreader. The Proofreader, through this role, informs the student of the error and, generally, supplies the correction thereafter, and this was mainly accompanied by a page number and/or a line, as found by Holbrook et al. (2004a).

Examiners' comments on errors occupy a considerable space in the examiner's comment (Holbrook et al., 2004a), explaining that such comments may not be necessarily critical but rather prescriptive and negative in nature. While Golding et al. (2014) observe that such errors annoy examiners and distract them (examiners), Holbrook et al. (2004a) notice that these errors carry frustration, showing weaknesses in the style of communication throughout the thesis. Besides, in the present study, this role does not only occur in the last stage of the TERs in a list form, as found by Starfield et al. (2017), but in the main report itself as well.

Proofreader role (PR) points to issues such as spelling, spacing and other visuals, vocabulary usage, word specification, punctuation, tense, reference, heading and sub-headings, and formatting, which the candidate is obliged to correct to bring the work to the best form. As trivial as these errors seem, they speak about the lack of seriousness and meticulousness of the candidate and the poor quality of the thesis in totality. A few examples are provided below:

Extract 12

Margins should be 2 inches to the left and 1 inch to the right. The candidate should observe these rules of layout in the final presentation of the dissertation. (HIS 8)

Extract 13

Portable water p 61 line 3 from bottom. Spelling should be potable water. (POH 4)

In Extract 12, the examiner indicates that the margins should be 2 inches to the left and 1 inch to the right. If the final form of the thesis is to be submitted, enough space will be left for comb-binding the thesis and the writings will not be pushed into the margin. Left in its current form, the margin creates difficulty for readers since some texts have to be squeezed out from the corner of the work. All these are to ensure that candidates produce the finest form of the thesis. Similar to the findings of Holbrook et al. (2017), many examiners allocate long segments of their reports to editorial issues from 2-3 pages, especially with referencing.

EXPERT

The examiner as an Expert demonstrate considerable research experience (Starfield et al., 2017). As Adika (2015) avers, academic discourse communities thrive on the expertise of its members, and that individuals who join the community must bring their expertise to bear on activities in the community. In the thesis examiners' reports (TERs), the Expert role (EXR) is displayed when the examiner, according to the disciplinary expectations, gives facts; corrects the candidates' factual errors; defines concepts and cites prominent theorists; establishes his/her authority as an expert, and displays expertise in commenting on content, structure, language, rhetoric, and style of thesis. Examples are shown below:

Extract 14

On page 103, the candidate stated that Baafour Akoto was educated at the government boy's school but the fact is he was self – taught. A lot of information provided in the work need to be carefully crosschecked. This will be a historical record that will be consulted by future researchers. Accuracy is essential. (HIS 19)

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

Extract 15

The candidate demonstrated adequate knowledge of literature on the history of Ghana generally. The only shortcoming of the candidate was his failure to examine the works of Dr. Kwabena Adu Boahene and Dr Kwame Kwarteng which are specifically on Brong Ahafo. Besides, out of the so many published works on colonization of the Gold Coast by the British, the candidate relied only on the account of Lord Hailey without acknowledging or referencing the others. (HIS 1)

In Extract 14, the expert corrects erroneous fact. As intimated by Mullins and Kiley (2002), examiners are considered gatekeepers, keeping disciplinary standards. Thus, the EXR seeks to maintain standards in relation to the accuracy of knowledge, fronting their role as custodians and experts of the body of conventional and technical knowledge (Lovat et al., 2008). In Extract 14, the examiner emphasises: 'this will be a historical record that will be consulted by future researchers'; thus, 'accuracy is essential'. In other words, if these mistakes are not corrected, and they remain in the shelves of libraries, individuals who refer to them may take every information contained in them as the entire truth. Since that particular work has been examined and a degree awarded, it is presumed that correct information has been documented, per the time of the assessment. Thus, the examiner's reputation will be questionable. As explained by Ballard (1996), examiners are aware of their reputation that is mirrored in the report.

Again, Extract 15 shown above is an example of examiner as an expert, citing key researchers in the area. Given the knowledge of the examiner and his/her exposure to different perspectives of issues in the related discipline, s/he refers to key theorists and works which can be of immense benefit to the candidate. The examiner was surprised that a study on Brong Ahafo did not cite names like Dr. Kwabena Adu Boahene and Dr Kwame Kwarteng whose works are also in the area. By mentioning such names, the examiner draws the candidate's attention to such names in the study. The expectation that such names will be used is high; failure by the candidate to achieve this constitute a problem. Again, the candidate's attention is drawn to other texts that could have enhanced the quality of the thesis. Examiners' dual role is at play here: as gatekeepers to the academic profession and as educators. Tonks and Williams (2018) explain that as gatekeepers, examiners ensure that the thesis meets the requirement of the degree. As educators, examiners teach and help the candidate improve the thesis and suggest further research.

REPORTER

The examiner as a Reporter restates what is in the thesis by giving a synoptic view of the thesis, chapters, and sections of the report (Starfield et al., 2017), as observed by Holbrook et al., (2004a). Again, the reporter, through Verbal process, uses logico-semantic resources of projection like 'reports' and 'states'. The reporter also uses candidate's subheadings and headings as well as quotation marks, as illustrated below:

Extract 16

Candidate bases her discussion on the comparative analysis of the trickster and dilemma tales with special reference to an African-Rattary's for example- and Toni Morrison's re-working of the tale in her novel Tar Baby to see the convergence and divergence between the three forms of the Tar baby story.

(ENG 4)

Extract 17

Knowledge of relevant literature, theoretical framework

He proceeded on the premise that 'the establishment of political hegemony over groups of peoples whose social structures and cultures were radically different from that of the metropolitan power' created a situation that led to the growth of national consciousness and the need for indigenous leadership that could help end foreign dominance while retaining the essentials of indigenous culture'.

(HIS 4)

Extract 16 reports comparative analysis of the literary texts Here, the examiner does not provide summative comment as the theses being good or bad; nor is there any evidence of prescriptive comments given, as in 'do this' or 'do that' in the theses, which confirms the finding of Schulze and Lemmer (2019) that examiners gave general vague comments that only summarised the thesis. Formative comments aimed to improve the work are also not found in this context. What is found here rather is a report of what can be found in the thesis; so, in Extract 16, the examiner reports on the analysis of the study, and it can be seen that though the examiner could have indicated further whether such an analysis was valid or invalid, in line with disciplinary practices, this was not done. With 'no evaluation', ways for improving the work are unavailable. It is the examiners' expectations that serve as indices of the quality of the dissertation (Kyvik & Thune, 2015; Tinkler & Jackson, 2004). Consequently, examiners need proper guidelines and training to enable them to be of the expected quality (Lessing 2009). In Extract 16, the examiner provides a subsection of the thesis under consideration, literature review. The examiner proceeds with what the candidate rather did, and this is where we see the use of the quotation. The premise on which the whole work was based is quoted but the examiner's appreciation of this or otherwise is not indicated. Thus, readers are left wondering whether what the candidate has done is the norm or otherwise.

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

It cannot be said that such examiners are not conversant with how to examine a thesis. The point is that examiners are selected based on their expertise, experience, and skills (Holbrook et al., 2007; 2014; Starfield et al., 2017). Again, examiners may be described as members who have long been socialized into the practices and values of their communities, and are expected to be very familiar with these practices and values. In addition, per the title, 'examiner', the person assessing the thesis is to examine it by indicating what is good or acceptable as against what is bad or unacceptable, and not merely report on what the thesis contains. Thus, the examiner goes contrary to the evaluative criteria provided by the SGS (UCC).

SUPERVISOR

Supervisors guide their supervisees in their research and the writing of theses to conform to appropriate and approved standards (Lovat et al., 2008; Lynch, 2014; Paltridge & Starfield, 2007); thus, signifying that the major role of the supervisor is a custodian one. The examiner who adopts the role of a supervisor gives formative comments aimed to improve the thesis. The Supervisor role was adopted when the examiner posed thought-provoking questions that did not resemble confrontational interrogations, adopted metaphors of modality, encouraged students, led by example, and offered suggestions. Some examples of Supervisor role in the data are as follows:

Extract 18

Why do you think the British took over the sovereignty of the peoples of the area that became their colony? (HIS 12)

Extract 19

He may consider sectionalizing the study to make easy reference. Some corrections have been made in the body of the text.

(POH 25)

Shown in Extracts 18-19 are examples of examiner adopting Supervisor role. Here, the candidate is not confronted as to why or what was done but is offered an opportunity to reflect his/her actions. In Extract 18, instead of the examiner asking the question like, 'Why did the British take over the sovereignty of the people...?', which highlights power at play, the examiner rather posed the question, 'why do you think...'. With this latter question, space is created for the candidate to operate in. In this way, the candidate is not placed in a subservient position and the supervisor is not seen wielding too much power over the candidate.

Extract 19 shows the examiner, as supervisor, offering advice to the candidate. The extract is typically presented in two to three sentences that explain what is to be done. First, it is seen that the examiner uses low modality in offering this advice to the candidate, a finding of Starfield et al. (2017), to develop the Supervisor role as a steward, and to create a more cordial relationship between the candidate the supervisor than between the candidate and the examiner, whose distant relationship, contrastively, is noticed by employing the third person. This creation of relationship is situated in the interpersonal mode, which is a resource for the enactment of roles and relationship between, here, examiner and candidate (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Thompson, 2014). By employing 'may' the examiner does not require that the candidate does this, though the candidate, by heeding to the advice of the examiner, can improve the current state of the work, confirming the findings of Hansford and Maxwell (1993) and Lovat et al.'s (2008) that examiners severally advise students on how to develop or progress as a researcher, even when the thesis is of the uppermost quality. Also, the use of 'consider' in the advice highlights this Supervisor role of the examiner. Starfield et al. (2017) explain that 'consider' does dictate not to the candidate to revise the thesis, but it inspires the candidate to think critically and creatively. Its optional nature places it within the SR. In addition, 'consider' places the candidate in the Mental Process as Senser, capable of engaging and expressing thoughts. Jackson and Tinkler (2004) and Mullins and Kiley (2002) observed that examiners defined their role as gatekeepers, with a responsibility to maintain standards. However, Starfield et al. (2017) explain that the wish to set the bar high is mitigated by the desire to instruct and encourage (advisor and mentor).

INSTITUTIONAL

The last role to be discussed is the Institutional Role (IR). Examiners perform this role by quoting criteria questions and providing answers to them (Starfield, 2017). Analysis of the present data revealed that IR role was minimal (2.2%), compared with the other roles undertaken by the examiners. However, both the findings of the present study and Starfield et al. (2007) contrast that of Lovat et al. (2008) that recorded 61% of this role. Afful (2020) notes that assessors adhere to institutional guidelines. In performing their IR role, examiners commented on the sections of a thesis; thus, confirming the findings of Hansford and Maxwell (1993), Johnston (1997), and Holbrook et al. (2004a). Examples of examiner performing Institutional role (IR) in the data are as follows:

Extract 20

ABSTRACT

Is it an adequate statement of the substance of the thesis? Yes.

The abstract is an adequate statement of the substance of the thesis.

(ENG 19)

Extracts 20 indicates the use of similar structures by the examiners, where sections of the theses were indicated; preambles to questions were stated, and/or main questions were posed and with sub-ones that introduced the 'yes' or 'no' structures. So, in Extract

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

20 above, for instance, we see that the section titled, 'Abstract' is introduced in caps so as to attract the attention of readers as it is the focus of discussion at the moment. This is, then, followed by the question, 'Is it an adequate statement of the substance of the thesis?'. The examiner responds in an affirmation, indicating that the examiner finds value in what the candidate has presented for the abstract; thus, treating the thesis as an end to itself or as a product (Johnston, 1997; Pitkethly & Prosser, 1995). Also, in Extracts 20, one can see that the examiner was not only quoting what the institution specifies but also filled in answers to questions posed in the assessment form. Thus, examiners can be said to have followed the institution's guidelines, as found by Johnston (1997), but disconfirmed in Mullins and Kiley's (2002) where examiners create their own criteria, and do not use the provided guidelines. In the present case, examiners performed IR role by providing 'yes' or 'no' to the questions posed in the assessment form, rather than writing an entirely new report. Hence, examiners provide summative ECs which are the strongest statements about a thesis (Holbrook et al., 2007).

Furthermore, in other situations, examiners comment on the chosen answer by repeating verbatim the content of the question in addition to the specified answers. These, usually, were provided in some three to four spaces left after the plausible questions before the introduction of an item of assessment on the assessment sheet. The examiners add their comments to what has been specified on the form already; but these comments may be described as a summary of what the examiners have already indicated under the 'yes' or 'no' section and it relates to the findings of Starfield et al. (2017) that short statements directed to one or more facets or elements of the thesis are also given by examiners in this direction. Some examples include these:

Extract 21

HYPOTHESIS/EXPLANATORY ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE THESIS

- i. Do they derive from the literature? Yes
- ii. If no, how rational are the hypothesis?
- iii. Are they relevant to the subject matter of the thesis? Yes
- iv. Are they adequate? Yes

The hypothesis is derived from the literature reviewed, is rational and relevant and adequate.

(ENG 16)

In Extract 21, after the 'yes' answers, the examiner repeats the focus of the question in the extra comments that the hypothesis is rational, relevant and adequate. Essentially, these constitute the main substance of the questions which have already been answered by the 'yes'. Perhaps, the examiner feels that once space has been provided, it must be filled with some comments.

In addition, other realizations of this IR were adopted by the examiners. There was one form where the examiner stated the subsection of the thesis under consideration, introduced the colon, and then provided his/her evaluation of the item. This can be seen as a form of listing:

Extract 22

Background: Fairly good

(ENG 18)

We see in Extract 22 that the examiners provided the aspects of the thesis evaluated. For instance, in Extract 22, though the examiner indicated that the 'Background to the study' was 'fairly good', it would have been clearer if some sentences had been included to explain that fairness. As it stands now, readers do not obtain all the required information that called for that conclusion to be drawn by the examiner. This approach prevented the use of commentary on the work or the reporting of what is actually contained in the thesis or done by the candidate. Providing extra direction to the candidate which came in the form of formative comments is found missing. This style of providing summative feedback on student work defeats the assertion by Kumar and Kumar (2009) that feedback plays an interventionist role in the writing process. By providing only summative comments (SCs), examiners do not create the opportunity of raising students' awareness of the reader's expectations (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1994).

Conclusion and Implications

The study investigated types of role assumed and the linguistic resources employed by examiners in the thesis examiners' reports (TERs) on MPhil theses submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, University of Cape Coast. The study purposively selected 100 theses TERS from four disciplines in University of Cape Coast.

The study revealed that examiners adopted eight of the roles identified by Starfield et al. (2017), though to varying degrees. Such roles include Institutional, Examiner, Supervisor, and Evaluator. Whereas some roles positioned the candidate in a subservient position and the examiner as wielding more power (such as Examiner and Expert role), others placed the candidate on an equal level with the examiner, where the examiner saw the candidate as capable of engaging in critical thinking and reaching decisions for him/herself (such as Supervisor and Commentator roles).

The study has implications for professionalism. The analysis of the data indicates that examiners adopt multiple roles in writing their reports, some of which do not directly express examiner's evaluation of the candidate and the thesis, bringing their persona to bear on the reports they write. Thus, the study may serve to create an awareness for departments and graduate schools or the institution, about the need to provide more explicit guidelines for examiners and sensitize examiners, perhaps, to more clearly

Examiner Roles and Language Use in Examiners' Reports

differentiate the purposes of their comments in drafting their reports, considering the very tacit nature of examiner judgments. As observed by Starfield et al. (2017), the linguistic choices that examiners make (consciously and unconsciously) when construing their evaluations have consequences and potential meanings. Therefore, seminars and workshops could be organized for beginner and middle level examiners and supervisors on how best to examine and supervise theses so that standards can be maintained in such practices. In the view of Bitzer (2014), developmental seminar opportunities for supervisors from different disciplines, and institutions can help greatly; these workshops can target inexperienced supervisors who had completed their doctoral degrees and are co-supervising postgraduate candidates. Again, seminar activities could include how developmental activities and opportunities may be cascaded in universities. Also, there could be the introduction of a course, 'Teaching in Higher Education', for all faculty to enable them to discharge their core duties of tutoring, supervising, examining, and researching.

Though some examiners may feel comfortable doing what they do as evinced in the Reporter and Commenter Role, examiners can be trained to become better (Johnston, 1997; Sankaran et al., 2005). Holbrook et al. (2007) assert that the skills and understandings needed from a scholarly investigation are developed through undertaking research in a defined field(s), typically through a research programme/degree. Even so, these capabilities, especially the skill to assess research and write in an intelligible way about it, are not easily accessed or attained. They demand time and socialization in research activities to develop and form. Thus, it may be concluded that with more examination and more acquaintanceship with the practices in the community, such mere reporting will be reduced if not eradicated entirely.

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