

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

8.0 Introduction

This final chapter presents the conclusion to the present study. It provides an overview of the findings obtained in the study and the implications of these findings to thesis writing. Suggestions for future study are also included as a closure to this chapter.

8.1 Research Questions Re-Visited

At the beginning of this study it was proposed that persuasion is employed in thesis writing. This section aims to briefly summarise the findings that support this view. The research questions given in Chapter One are listed below as a guide to sum up the findings of the present study.

Question 1: What kind of persuasion is employed in thesis writing and is considered to be appropriate by the academic discourse community?

To answer this question, we need to look back at the Social Constructionist Approach. Based on this approach, the framework presented in Chapter Four suggested that the academic discourse community prefers persuasion to be implicit. The genres it produces, the Master's thesis included, have prototypical features that reflect this preference. Members of the academic community use objective language to avoid any kind of attitudinal language associated with interpersonal meaning that may indicate that persuasion is employed. In fact, persuasion is so implicit that members of the community are convinced that no rhetoric is at work (Swales:1990). This is the way the members of the academic community prefer persuasion to present itself.

In presenting their findings, they employ rhetorical devices to present their arguments. They use logical reasoning and deduction as these are means of persuasion that are permitted by the community. As support to their findings, they provide empirical evidence and cite established members of the community to convince the examiners to accept them.

This basic understanding is applied to thesis writing. In thesis writing, the network of persuasion is presented as one that permeates the objectives, organisation, structure, and language used by thesis

writers to present research findings as new knowledge claims. Since their admission into the academic community depends on the evaluation made by examiners, it was found that thesis writers used similar means of persuasion to convince the examiners.

Thesis writers persuaded their examiners through logical reasoning and ethical reports of their findings. These were supported by evidence from previous findings by established members of the community. They situated their findings as new knowledge claims in a manner advocated by the academic discourse community: by making their presentation of findings appear as mere reportage in order to persuade the examiners to accept them.

Question 2: How is power linked to persuasion in thesis writing and how does it influence the way thesis writers use persuasive strategies?

It was suggested that three main parties involved in this "exclusive" persuasive act are the thesis writer, the supervisor and the examiners. The supervisor acts as the gatekeeper as well as the one who helps to initiate the thesis writer into the academic community. Thesis writers are made aware of the socio-rhetorical context they are in through the process of thesis writing.

Since the relationship between the examiners and the thesis writer is one of unequal balance in terms of power. Thesis writers need to present their findings in a manner that would not overstep their position as non-members of the community. The compliance and acceptance by thesis writers of this very fact influence the manner they present their findings as new knowledge claims to the examiners. This can be discussed in terms of Grice's maxims to describe the persuasive communication between thesis writers and their examiners.

Firstly, the findings showed that thesis writers observed the **maxims of quantity** by making their presentation of findings as informative as possible. They included details of their procedure and the materials they used in their study. It was found that the use of bald-on-statements in the chapters on the methods they used helped to ensure that their contributions did not exceed more than was required.

Secondly, it was demonstrated by the examples found in the data that thesis writers complied with the requirements set by **maxims of quality**. Thirdly, thesis writers provided concrete evidence to ensure that their contributions were supported and would be accepted by the examiners. Thesis writers also fulfilled the **maxims of relation** by discussing only the relevant issues pertaining to their study. Each

whole thesis made up one whole unit. The literature review, for instance, covered only topics that were relevant to their study. Finally, they observed the **maxims of manner**. They used terminologies and language that were clear to indicate precisely what they meant. This was done so that their contributions were clearly expressed.

The data showed that these four maxims were observed by thesis writers in response to their position in relation to the examiners. Since the examiners were empowered by the community to "sieve" through the applications for new membership, thesis writers were found to comply with the demands made by the community. Thesis writers used politeness strategies to justify their study, negotiate their claims, and present their findings as new knowledge claims. The persuasion they employed was implicit and couched in throughout their theses.

As such, instead of making a claim, they negotiated a claim. They did not make any demands on the examiners. Instead, they chose to justify why their study may be significant and beneficial to the community. They hedged the suggestions they made regarding the probable cause of problems they encountered as an indication of accepting the fact that the examiners might not accept their arguments.

The same reason explained why thesis writers did not refute the findings of established members without making any redress. The use of persuasive strategies to present their study and the findings seem to strongly suggest that thesis writers, and probably the supervisors, acknowledged the fact that examiners did have more power. Due to this, thesis writers were humble and were careful to use persuasive strategies to convince the examiners to accept their findings.

Question 3: What sort of persuasive strategies are found in the Master's theses of the Arts and Science fields?

Based on the data collected, it was found that the strategies used by thesis writers can be categorised into five main types. These are :

- (a) Justification strategies
- (b) Negotiation strategies
- (c) Politeness Strategies
- (d) Defensive strategies
- (e) Support strategies

Each of the above set of strategies carried out specific functions. The data shows that **justification strategies** were used by thesis writers to

justify the decisions made during the set up of their study. These include justifying the need to conduct a study in the chosen area, the methods and materials used, and the significance of their study.

It was found that the basic use of **negotiation strategies** was to negotiate with the examiners to accept their findings, and any other concerns relating to the outcome of their study. Among them were to negotiate the probable cause of observed phenomena and problems encountered in their study as well as the conclusions they reached based on their findings.

Defensive strategies, as seen in the analysis, enabled the theses to speak on their behalf. Since thesis writers were not in communication with the examiners, thesis writers used this set of strategies to defend the decisions they made and the findings they considered to be significant. A more important use was to protect their study from being rendered as weak or insignificant due to the problems they encountered in their study.

It was also found that thesis writers used citations, examples and explanations to support their observations and findings. Another form of **support strategies** was the use of non-linear texts that helped thesis writers present their findings in a compact and neat manner,

and, probably, the main reason for their use was to give visual impact to the presentation of the research findings. As the name suggests, these strategies helped thesis writers support their findings.

The analysis shows that **politeness strategies** formed a set of strategies that was not confined to any particular chapter. It was found that they were used by thesis writers in all of the persuasive strategies mentioned earlier. Hedgings seemed to be the most commonly used form in the present study's set of corpus.

Examples taken from the corpus were given to demonstrate the use of these strategies in the discussion of each type.

Question 4: Do thesis writers from different fields use persuasive strategies in a similar manner?

There appeared to be a difference in the manner thesis writers in the Arts used persuasive strategies compared to those in the Sciences. The analysis on the distribution of the three types of strategies seems to indicate that thesis writers in the Arts generally employed more of the persuasive strategies identified in this study.

This is supported in terms of the frequency count as well as the purpose of using persuasive strategies. For instance, it was found in the analysis that thesis writers in the Arts justify the limitations of their study more than those in the Sciences. This seems to suggest that the field of study may influence the way thesis writers justify and negotiate their study.

Another feature that may be touched upon here is related to the type of persuasive strategy used. The analysis shows that choice of persuasive strategy and purpose of using a particular strategy may also depend on the argumentative style of the writer. Analysis on the distribution of strategies seems to suggest that not all of the thesis writers used a similar method to persuade examiners or persuade examiners for a similar purpose.

In general, thesis writers in the Arts used more persuasive studies than those in the Sciences. This was found in the type, purpose and quantity of persuasive strategies used. This may have a bearing on the fact that the Sciences are depend on empirical evidence for support. The Arts, however, depends more on qualifying and making logical reasoning to support their observations and findings.

In terms of frequency, thesis writers in the Arts generally used more persuasive strategies than those in the Sciences. However, in terms of variety, there were very few instances in which thesis writers in the Arts and the Sciences varied in terms of the choice of persuasive strategies. However, in negotiating the discrepancies in findings it was only found in the Sciences. Although very low in frequency, it showed there was indeed a difference in terms of purpose in choosing to negotiate the discrepancies.

It was also found that in terms of distribution, each group of thesis writers from these two fields employed the strategies differently in terms of distribution. For instance, thesis writers from the Sciences used negotiation strategies mainly in the chapters on Results and Discussion, and the Conclusion while those in the Arts used this set of strategy in almost every chapter of the thesis.

In sum, it can be concluded that in terms of purpose, thesis writers from both fields used the strategies for similar purposes. However, in terms of frequency, thesis writers from the Arts used more persuasive strategies compared to those in the Sciences.

8.2 Overview of the Findings of the Present Study

The present study looked into several aspects of thesis writing, namely, the type of persuasion, kinds of persuasive strategies and the question of power.

The presence of the different methods used by thesis writers to carry out the different persuasive strategies is evidence to show the creativity of thesis writers in making a rhetoric. They hedged, cited previous findings, used support strategies and quantified their findings. They used emotive words and metaphors to invite the examiners to share their delight that they were able to contribute their findings to the community.

On the whole, the findings of the present study seem to suggest that thesis writers do realise that writing is a social act. This is reflected in the use of persuasive strategies they used to present findings to the examiners who are more powerful and established members of the community. The findings of the present study seem to demonstrate that thesis writers are aware of the need to situate themselves into the culture of academic writing and the academic discourse community that prefers persuasion that is implicit.

8.3 Further Investigations

The present study was confined to a study of persuasive strategies found in Master's theses. Future investigations may consider comparing the strategies found in this set of corpus to that of Ph.D theses. It would be interesting to see if there are any differences in types of strategies apart from the frequencies. Another comparison could be between the different disciplines.

This study does not intend to claim that the strategies identified in this study form a complete list of persuasive strategies found in thesis writing. Nor does it aim to suggest that overlapping did not occur at all in the grouping of strategies. It is quite possible that certain sentences used as examples for observation may also be used as examples for conclusions. Justification and negotiation strategies may seem to overlap as well since in justifying one is also trying to negotiate. In this study, categorising the examples were based on the following assumption.

There is a difference in the general purpose of doing the act. Justification is more concerned with the set up of the study while the negotiation is more concerned with the presentation of the findings. It

is very likely that other researchers may have other ways of categorising the examples found in this study.

It would be interesting to see, however, future studies conducted on theses submitted to other higher learning institutions. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the findings of the present study can be an impetus for future investigations so that a more comprehensive collection of strategies used in academic writing may be documented for the reference of thesis writers and instructors of academic writing.

8.4 Summary

The study began by referring to thesis writing as an unexplained genre in the academic world. Thesis writers look for answers as to the real purpose of presenting their findings. There seems to be a missing element in the overall picture that links research to the presentation of its findings in the form of a Master's thesis. The present study proposes that the link to the missing element is to view thesis writing as a persuasive act. By adopting the view proposed by the framework presented in this study, it may help enlighten thesis writers into seeing the real purpose of writing a thesis, that is, to implicitly persuade the examiners to accept their findings.

The findings of the present study support the notion that persuasion in academic discourse is implicitly intertwined in the presentation of facts obtained from research findings. The use of the persuasive strategies found in the corpus of the present study demonstrates the effective use of the Master's thesis as an established genre in the academic discourse by this group of thesis writers. To conclude, the findings based on the data collected seem to be supportive of the main thrust of the present study: There is persuasion in thesis writing.