

## A CORPUS-ASSISTED STUDY OF ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE IN THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT SECTION OF PHD THESES

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### Abstract

*Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is founded on interpersonal, experiential, and textual meta-functions. Halliday and Matthiesen (2014) emphasise that language users make lexicogrammatical choices based on these meta-functions to convey intended meanings, such as expressing emotions or sharing information. The Appraisal theory by Martin and White (2005) builds on Halliday's interpersonal meanings and focuses on evaluating attitudinal expressions in discourse. This study has applied this theory to analyse the evaluative language in the acknowledgement sections of PhD theses, where researchers express gratitude to key contributors. This study utilised corpus-based quantitative methodology to analyse the acknowledgements of 50 PhD theses in linguistics and literature, downloaded from the HEC Pakistan repository. Using AntConc (version 3.5.8), concordance lines were extracted to examine three types of attitude markers: affect (personal feelings), judgment (evaluation of people), and appreciation (assessment of things or events). The results reveal that the acknowledgement language reflects the authors' emotional responses and gratitude toward those who aided their research. These acknowledgements provide lexicogrammatical evidence of positive interpersonal relationships. While Appraisal theory includes three sub-categories [attitude, graduation, and engagement], this study focuses on attitude, highlighting the affective and evaluative dimensions of the researchers' language choices.*

**Keywords:** appraisal theory, attitude, affect, judgment, appreciation, acknowledgement

### INTRODUCTION

Acknowledgement is a part of theses, books, articles, and novels that is usually unnoticed because it does not provide any information about the genre that is written. The scholars and authors submit their humbleness, gratitude, and gratefulness. Such comments are shown with the help of the attitude and dignity the writers show for the sources they approach. In dissertations, the acknowledgement section shows gratitude to the supervisor, friends, and others. According to Hyland and Tse (2004), the acknowledgement part of the thesis for the students is a unique part used to convey genuine submission and gratitude for the help and academic sources to promote their identity prominently. Since scholars and writers use language to express feelings of gratitude and gracefulness, it is essential to consider the acknowledgement section of theses. The present study focuses on the **acknowledgement section** of the **PhD Theses** of public universities of Pakistan to see the evaluative use of language. The study also aimed to see how the writers, with language's help, show attitude and admit others' assistance. The researchers have focused on the detailed analysis of the evaluative language used in the acknowledgements. By examining the acknowledgement section of PhD theses, this study provides insights into the evaluative use of language, including "affect, judgment, and appreciation". Moreover, this study offers a model for using corpus-assisted analysis to analyse written texts, which can be helpful for future research in various linguistic areas. Additionally, the findings of this study can be useful for writers and researchers who are

writing acknowledgements in their theses or other academic works, as they can learn from the patterns of language use and types of attitudes expressed in the acknowledgements. Overall, this study adds to the existing knowledge and understanding of the role of language in expressing attitudes and evaluating experiences in written texts.

*This study will answer the following question.*

- Which attitudinal resources are most common in PhD thesis acknowledgement section from Pakistani universities?
- What lexicogrammatical structures express gratitude and evaluation in the acknowledgements?
- What evaluative language patterns emerge in the corpus analysis of the acknowledgements?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Acknowledgements in academic discourse are “a distinct genre with a clear purpose and physical location” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 260). The previous research focuses on academic acknowledgements of research articles (Gionnoni, 1998) and graduate dissertations (Hyland & Tse, 2004; Yang, 2012). Gionnoni (1998) views sociolinguistic structure and pattern of acknowledgement sections in the context of genre analysis while drawing on other fields of knowledge, such as politeness theory. Hyland and Tse (2004), in their article “I’d like to express my gratitude to my boss. Academic dissertation acknowledgements”, describe the significance of acknowledgements sections in graduate dissertations. While expressing thanks to one’s supervisor is customary, the article makes the case that acknowledgements should include all people and organisations that provided financial or other assistance for the research endeavour. It is important to give specific examples of support and reflect on any difficulties encountered while doing the research. The acknowledgements part of a research paper serves as a crucial record of contributions; therefore, students should ensure it is accurate and complete. The study is based on 240 dissertation acknowledgements from students at five universities in Hong Kong and interviews with student authors. The acknowledgement sections of 20 MA and 20 PhD dissertations from the six academic disciplines comprise the 35,000-word text corpus. The article offers suggestions for changes to present pedagogical practices based on critically examining acknowledgements and student author responses.

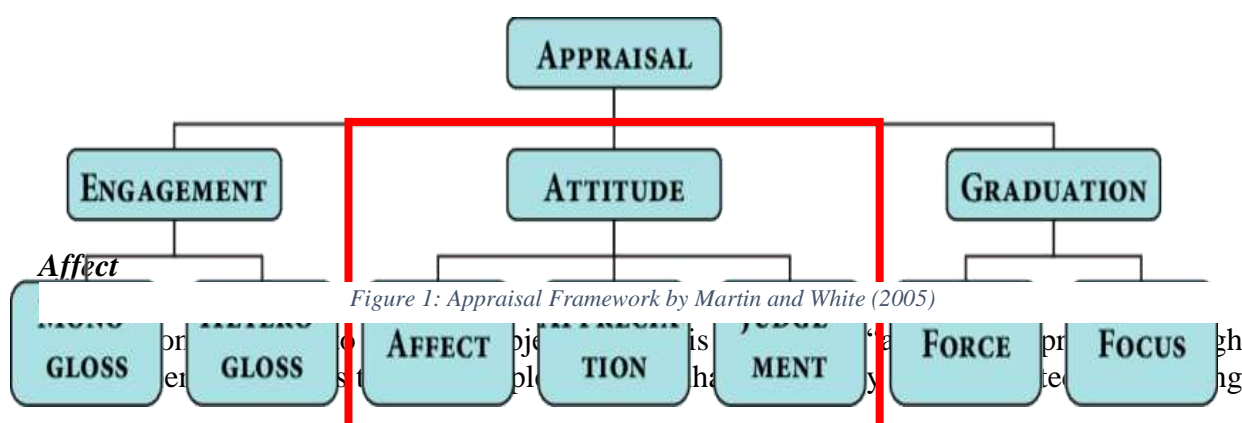
Al-Ali (2010) studied the generic language patterns in expressions of thankfulness in the Arabic Ph.D. dissertation acknowledgements. In the corpus of 100 Arabic acknowledgements included with PhD dissertations in soft sciences written by doctoral Arabic native speakers, they studied the various rhetorical component options that writers use to express gratitude and the part played by socio-cultural factors in shaping this genre. According to this discursive genre analysis, Arab authors frequently employ certain socio-cultural elements that can be viewed as contextualisation cues for their religious convictions and academic and social conventions. Also, they frequently use specific preferred address formats, social honorifics, and other expressions of thankfulness. However, the higher rates of acknowledgement in the hard sciences reflect scientists’ greater reliance on institutional and financial support as well as their involvement in the cross-disciplinary exchange of materials and pre-prints, according to studies that have also found that acknowledgements reflect disciplinary practices (Wang & Shapira, 2011). Acknowledgement sections usually do not attract much focus in teaching academic writing and are often considered the least important in academic discourse. However, Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 261) argue that these sections help authors establish their professional and personal identity. Diaz-Faes and Bordons (2017) contend that acknowledgement sections are often overlooked but offer insightful information about the social and intellectual networks that influence academic activity. Through a qualitative study, the authors detect many recurring themes in the acknowledgements sections of a sample of books and papers, including

expressions of gratitude, acknowledgement of intellectual debts, and acknowledgement of the influence of institutions and colleagues on research. According to the authors, the analysis of acknowledgements sections can help make visible the frequently unseen social and intellectual networks that support academic labor and offer a more nuanced understanding of how knowledge is produced in the humanities.

For the reasons mentioned above, acknowledgement sections not only express the author's gratitude to the individuals and other institutions for financial and emotional support but also provide insight into the socio-cultural specifics of academic discourse. In our study, we focused on PhD dissertation acknowledgements written by non-native English writers and researchers. We assume that these sections interest discourse analysts, English teachers, and students for academic purposes. While previous research by Hyland and Tse (2004) established academic acknowledgements as a genre and described how student authors structured this section, recent research illustrates the social aspects of the acknowledgement section. However, existing research does not analyse the authors' lexicogrammatical choices of gratitude by identifying the significant individuals who assisted them in their research. The rest of this paper addresses this research gap by analysing the system of attitude showing affect (personal attitude), judgment (others' value), and appreciation (assessment of objects or experiences). We are focusing on using the attitude system outlined by Martin and White (2005, p. 42) to look into acknowledgements of the thesis. We focus on the acknowledgement section in the theses, where acknowledgement is essential and required to show gratitude, appreciation, and gratefulness to his or her supervisor, dean, faculty, and other resources that helped him or her carry out the research. In this regard, this study tries to fill this gap by looking at the evaluative use of language.

### APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK

An explanation of how people assess and react to the experiences and events in their lives is provided by the psychological theory known as appraisal theory, which was created by Martin and White (2005). According to the theory, people base their assessments of a situation or experience influenced by various cognitive processes on their perceptions. Appraisal theory examines the organisation of language that employs meaning by appraising attitudes, judgment, and graduation and emerges from the interpersonal social meta-function (Hadidi, 2015). A crucial element of the appraisal theory is attitude because it significantly influences how someone evaluates things. A person's ideas and feelings about a specific thing or circumstance are known as their attitudes, which can be positive, negative, or neutral. Martin and White (2005) suggest that attitudes are created through appraisal, which entails assessing the circumstance or item from multiple angles. Martin and White (2005) define a framework for mapping attitudes as a system of meanings that refers to how attitudes are understood in English texts. Three semantic areas, generally referred to as emotion, ethics, and aesthetics, make up this system (p. 42). These measurements consist of affect, judgment, and appreciation.



or event is called affect assessment. The evaluation may be favourable, unfavourable, or neutral. According to Martin and White (2005, p. 42), “Affect is concerned with registering positive and negative feelings: do we feel happy or sad, confident or anxious, interested or bored?” For instance, someone may positively evaluate a stunning sunset because it makes them joyful. Thus, affect can be positive or negative, as well as explicit or implicit.

### **Judgement**

By applying their ideas, values, and expectations to an object or event, people evaluate it via the judgement appraisal process. This evaluation focuses on the level of goodness or badness a person assigns to the thing or occurrence. According to Martin and White (2005, p. 42), “Judgement deals with attitudes towards behaviour, which we admire or criticise, praise or condemn”. For instance, a person’s assessment of a political speech may depend on their political ideas and ideals. In addition, there are ways to judge and evaluate others, such as personal judgement (Social Esteem), where you assess the character of someone by praising or criticising, and moral (Social Sanction) judgment, which is used to evaluate one’s character by giving criticism and admiration.

### **Appreciation**

Appreciation assessment involves evaluating it based on its inherent qualities or features. This evaluation is about a person's value or significance to the thing or event. Martin and White (2005, p. 43) explained, “Appreciation involves evaluations of semiotic and natural phenomena, according to how they are valued or not in a given field”. For instance, a person may judge a work of art to be valuable or significant based on its artistic value. The literature review discussed using appraisal theory to analyse different genres, including fictional, written, and spoken discourse. Nuraisiah et al. (2018) examined the attitudes of the writer and translator toward sexism changes in translation and concluded that translation can mitigate the originality of context and language attitudes. Liu (2018) investigated the use of lexical metaphors in news editorials, and Siregar (2018) explored the functional use of language in thesis convocation. Engelbrecht (2020) investigated the use of appraisal in newspapers, and Adriyadt et al. (2020) examined the use of attitude in Obama’s speech.

The theoretical framework used in the current study is **Appraisal** within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), which deals with language, context, and the social relationship between language and social context. We have investigated the **attitude system (as highlighted in Figure 1)** in the acknowledgement section of PhD theses in Pakistan to map feelings of gratitude. In the analysis section below, we have explored the acknowledgement sections, whereby the authorial voice is positioned concerning these attitudinal assessments.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Procedures of Corpus Building and Analysis**

A corpus of 16,566 words was compiled to conduct the study, and **50 acknowledgements** from **PhD theses** were selected based on the scope of the research. The data for the acknowledgements section was collected from the **HEC Pakistan online repository**, which is in bulk and freely available to access. The data was downloaded from the repository. After downloading the samples, the acknowledgements were read and cleaned for uploading in **AntConc software version 3.5.8**. After cleaning the files, the data was uploaded, and the keywords search method was used to extract the words of selected themes. According to the theory, the attitudinal expressions were identified and analysed per the attitudinal markers, such as “affect, judgment, and appreciation.” The dissertation acknowledgements were examined for attitude indicators using Martin and White’s (2005) attitude framework. The attitude markers were found using the AntConc programme, and each instance was manually examined and categorised into several sub-categories following the semantic significance given by the attitude-controlling system. After adjusting to a relative frequency per 10,000 words, attitude

feature frequencies were calculated. We used the KWIC (Keyword in Context) method and selected four words from the left and right windows. However, it was noted that sometimes, five or seven words were required to clarify the attitude chosen marker. The AntConc software version 3.5.8 was applied for two primary functions: keywords and concord. It makes sense to try to build grammatical frameworks for differentiating types of attitudes concerning this form of realisation, as adjectival is the standard grammatical realisation for attitude.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### Corpus-Assisted Attitude Analysis [The System of Attitude]

For analysis, we have selected the highest-frequency attitude lexis. We selected the two most frequently inscribed affect items for affect: *I am thankful* and *I would like to thank*. We selected these two items because, according to Martin and White (2005, p. 91), expressions like these are so packed with feelings. Table 1 below provides information about the frequency and percentage of different types of attitude items used in the acknowledgement section of PhD theses. According to **Table 1**, the most frequent attitudinal type is **affect**, which accounts for **79%** of the total attitudinal appraisal items. This suggests that PhD graduates express their feelings and emotions toward the people who have supported them in their research journey. The second most frequent attitudinal type is **judgement**, which accounts for **14%** of the total attitudinal appraisal items. This attitudinal type reflects the evaluative stance of the writer towards the person being acknowledged. Finally, **appreciation** is the least frequent attitudinal type, accounting for only **7%** of the total attitudinal appraisal items. Overall, the table highlights the prioritisation of **Affect** and **Judgement** from the system of attitude in the acknowledgement section of PhD theses, which could provide insights for future research on academic writing and social communication.

*Table 1: Attitudinal Appraisal Items Overall Frequency*

Attitudinal Type	Frequency	Percentage
Affect (I)	446	79%
Judgement (He, She, They)	50+12+18=80	14%
Appreciation (It)	37	7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>563</b>	

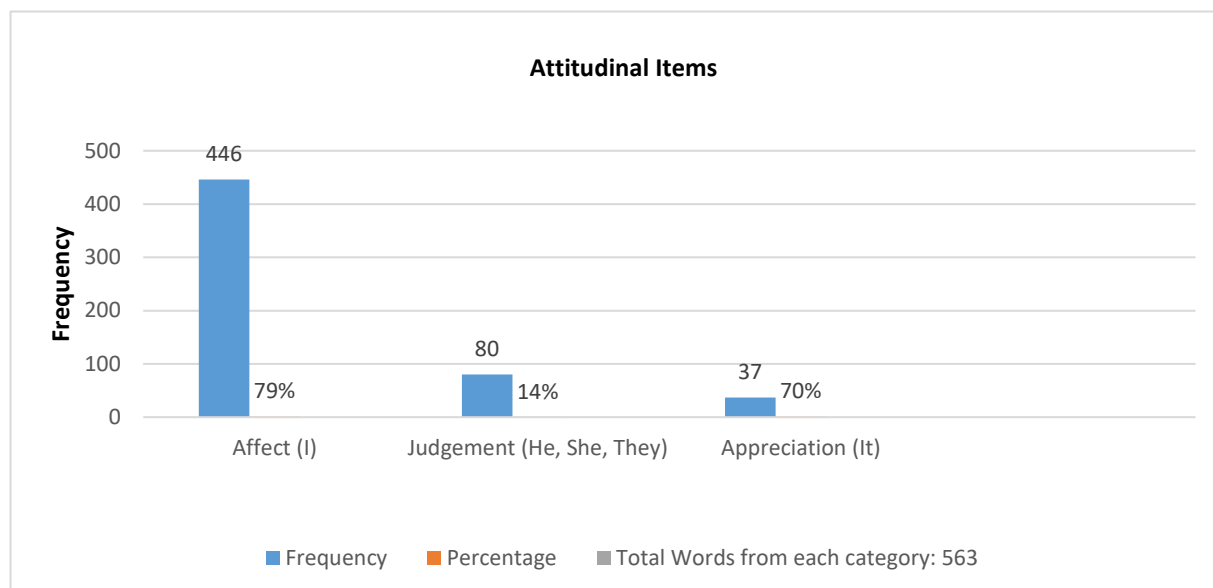


Figure 2: Attitudinal Appraisal Items in Acknowledgements

The following lexical items, **i.e., (1) Affect, (2) Judgement, and (3) Appreciation**, are taken for the analysis of the current study. Affect refers to the emotional tone conveyed in language, such as whether the author expresses a positive or negative attitude towards something. Judgement refers to the author's evaluation or opinion about something, while appreciation refers to a positive attitude of admiration or gratitude towards someone or something. By analysing the acknowledgement section using these three specific words, the authors of the study can gain insights into the attitudes expressed by the authors towards individuals or groups who contributed to the research or other aspects of the study. This type of analysis can provide a more nuanced understanding of the author's perspective and the social context in which the research was conducted.

## Attitudinal Appraisal Lexical Items for Analysis

### Part 1: "Affect"

#### *Affect Type 1: "I am thankful"*

Table 2: Frequency of "I am thankful"

Affect	Frequency
I am thankful	15

Type 1 of Affect, "**I am thankful**," was searched and analysed using the AntConc. The software was used to search for the phrase "I am thankful" in the concordance lines provided in **Figure 3** below. The frequency of this attitudinal appraisal lexical item was found to be 15, as shown in **Table 2**. The concordance lines show that the phrase "I am thankful" was used in the acknowledgements section of PhD theses. In all 15 instances, the writers expressed gratitude towards people who have helped and supported them in different ways during their research. The individuals who were thanked included supervisors, colleagues, family members, and friends. The expressions of gratitude are also extended towards Allah Almighty in a few instances. The analysis of "**Affect Type 1**" demonstrated that gratitude and appreciation are common in the acknowledgements section of PhD theses. These expressions reflected the writer's gratitude towards those who helped and supported them during their research. The use of such attitudinal appraisal lexical items in academic writing shows the writer's acknowledgement of the contributions made by others towards their research.

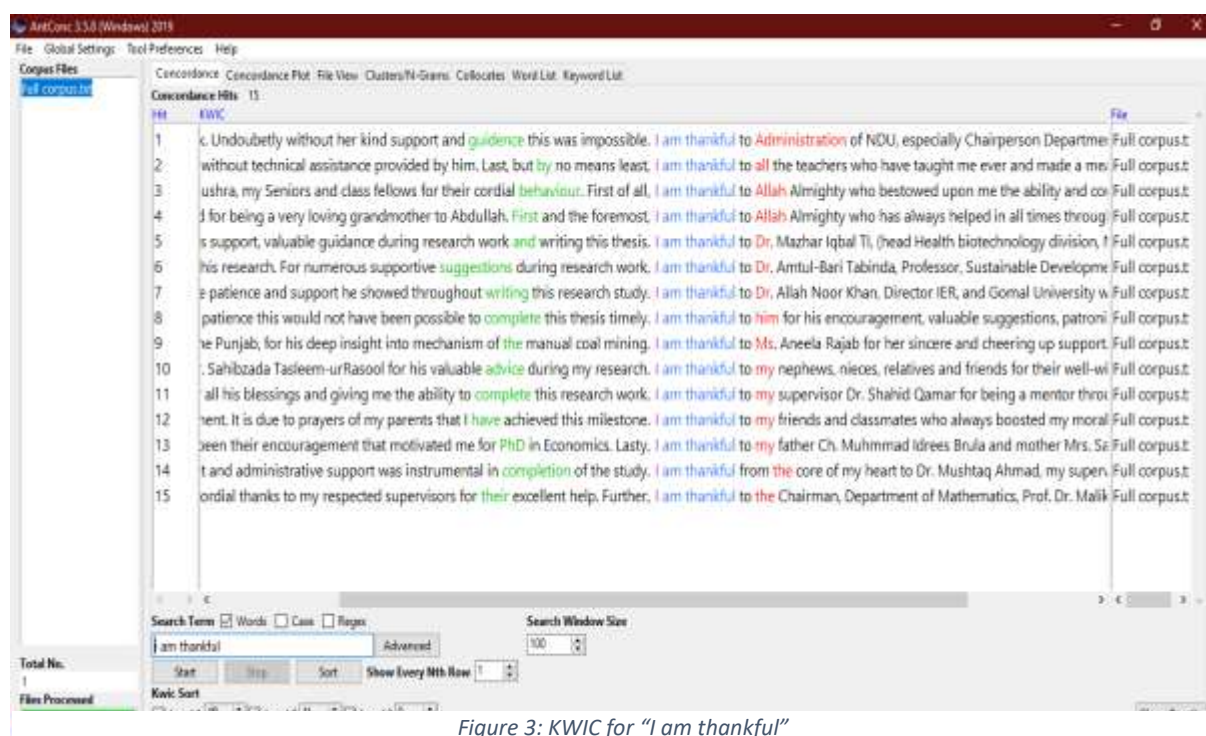


Figure 3: KWIC for "I am thankful"

## Affect Type 2: “I would like to thank”

Table 3: Frequency of “I would like to thank”

Affect	Frequency
I would like to thank	15

**Table 3** summarises the frequency of this affect type, which is 15 times as frequent as per selected theses. From the concordance lines in **Figure 4**, it appears that the search for Affect Type 2: “I would like to thank” was conducted using a keyword in context (KWIC) search, with the keyword being “I.”. The results show various instances of individuals expressing gratitude and appreciation towards others for their support, guidance, and help in different contexts. The KWIC summary listed 15 concordance lines in total. These concordance lines show that people expressed gratitude towards various individuals, including supervisors, colleagues, lab members, family members, scholarship providers, and professionals who helped them complete their studies. The individuals expressing gratitude also highlight specific support or assistance from these people, such as guidance during research work, financial help, and emotional support. Overall, the “Affect Type 2” analysis shows that gratitude expressions are common in acknowledgements in various contexts and towards individuals who have provided support and assistance.

The screenshot displays the AntConc 3.5.8 (Windows) 2019 interface. The 'Concordance Hits' window shows 15 results for the search term 'I would like to thank'. The results are listed in a table with columns for Hit, KWIC, and File. The KWIC column contains the search term highlighted in blue. The File column shows the source of each hit, all labeled as 'Full corpus.t'. The search term is 'I would like to thank'. The search window size is set to 200. The search term is 'I would like to thank'. The search window size is set to 200. The search term is 'I would like to thank'. The search window size is set to 200.

Figure 4: KWIC for “I would like to thank”

## Part 2: “Judgement”

### Judgement Type 1: “He is”

Table 4: Frequency of “He is”

Judgement	Frequency
He is	9

The Judgement Type 1, “**He is**”, was searched and analysed from the given concordance lines in **Figure 5** and the frequency was found to be 9, as shown in **Table 4**. The concordance lines indicate that this type of judgement is used to express opinions or evaluations about a person, often with positive connotations. In the examples, “He is” describes a person’s character, behaviour, or skills. For instance, line 4, “*He is a real source of knowledge, support, and motivation for all the scholars and students*”, shows a positive evaluation of the person’s expertise and helpfulness. Similarly, line 2, “*He is the best mentor and teacher I ever found in my life*”, reflects a positive evaluation of the person’s teaching abilities. In general, Judgement Type 1 assesses someone’s qualities, abilities, or behaviours. This analysis shows that “He is” is used to express various judgments such as humility, knowledge, mentorship, thankfulness, kindness, and hope of the appraised. The frequency of “He is” in the given corpus is 9, which suggests that this type of judgment is not as frequent as other affect types in the corpus. However, it still shows that judgments are important to language use and help convey attitudes and opinions about people and situations.

### Judgement Type 2: “She is”

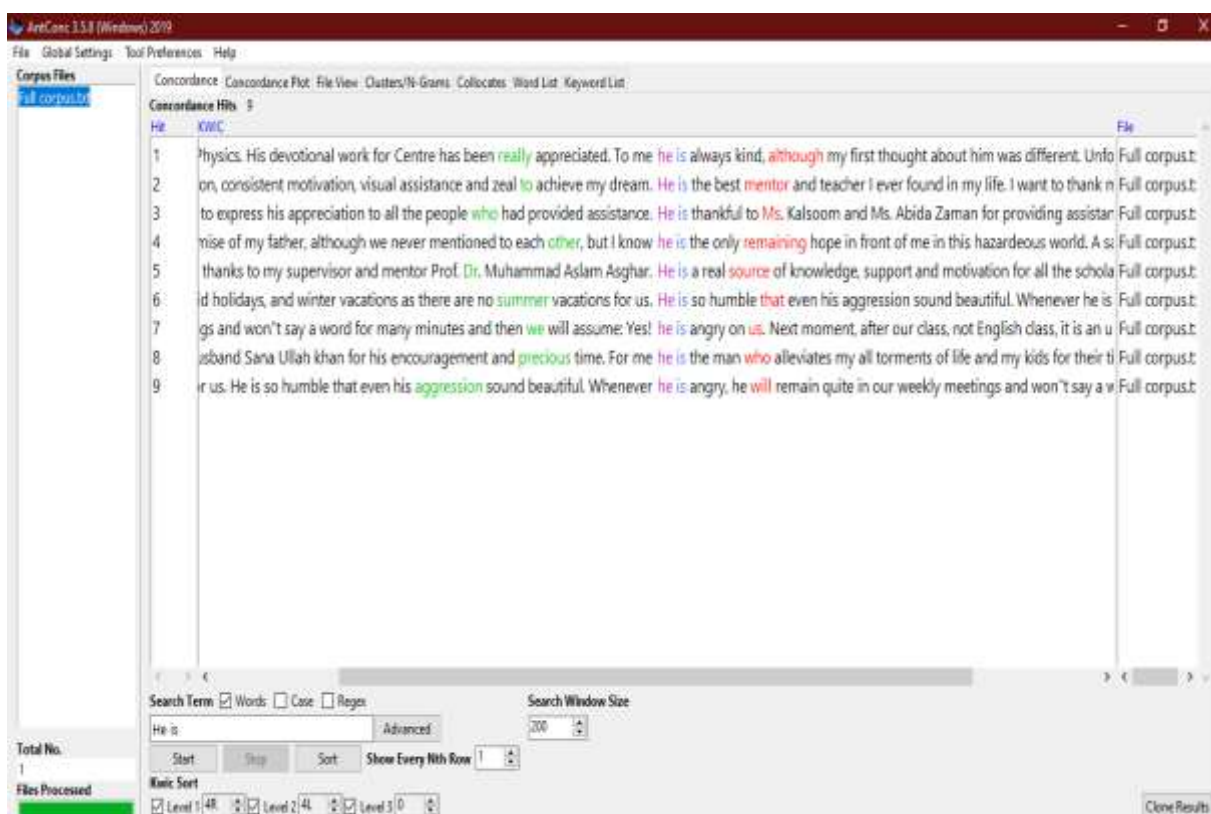


Figure 5: KWIC for “He is”

Table 5: Frequency of “She is”

Judgement	Frequency
She is	4

The analysis of judgement type 2 shows a lower frequency than judgement type 1, as indicated in **Table 5**. In this case, the phrase “She is” appears only four times in the concordance lines, as shown in **Figure 6**. The context of the lines indicates that the phrase is used to express gratitude and appreciation towards individuals who have provided support, guidance, and

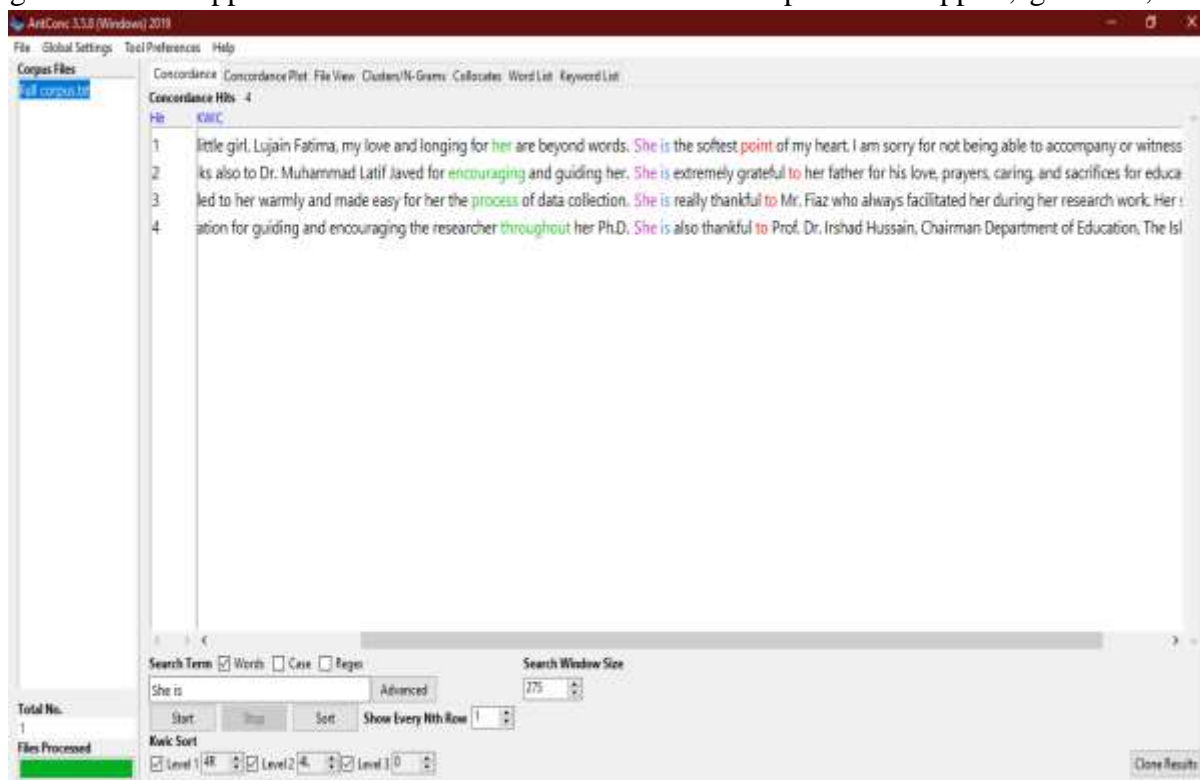


Figure 6: KWIC for “She is”

assistance in research work and education. From the given concordance lines, it analyses that “She is” occurs only 4 times in the corpus. The instances of “She is” express a positive evaluation of someone or something, as they are all used in a thankful context. For example, the first line, “*She is the softest point of my heart*”, expresses a positive judgement about a woman, describing her as deeply cherished and valued. It represents a deep emotional attachment to a person, expressing a positive evaluation of their character. The second line also expresses gratitude towards someone, specifically a father, for their love, care, and sacrifices. The third- and fourth lines express thanks towards individuals who have provided help and assistance in research work. Overall, the small number of instances of Judgement Type 2 indicated the specific focus of the corpus on evaluating female individuals. However, the instances suggest that they are typically positive evaluations of individuals who have been helpful or essential to the speaker.

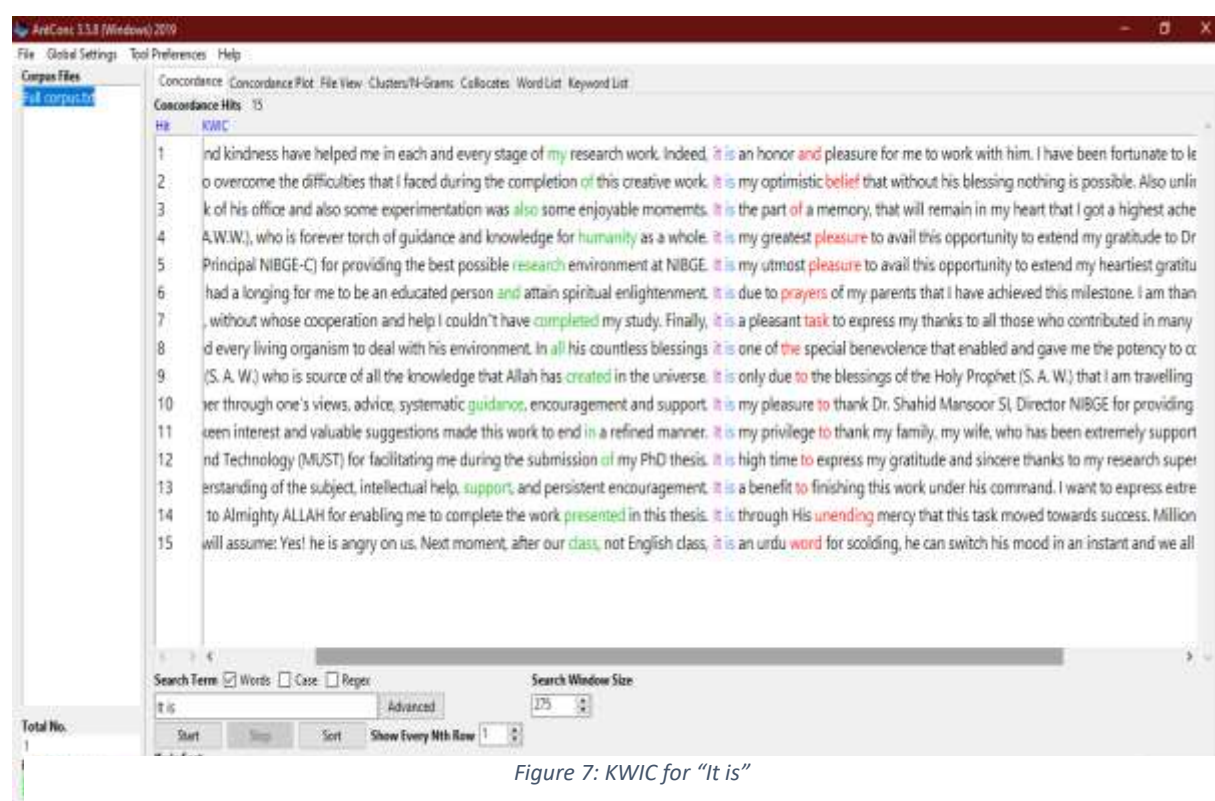
### Part 3: “Appreciation”

#### Appreciation Type 1: “It is”

Table 6: Frequency of “It is”

Appreciation	Frequency
It is	15

The analysis of appreciation type 1 in **Table 6** shows that the most frequent usage of the phrase “It is” is in expressing gratitude and acknowledging the contributions of others towards one’s success or achievement. The examples in **Figure 7** demonstrate a range of acknowledgements, including an appreciation for the mentorship of supervisors, gratitude for research facilities and support from family and friends, and recognition of the role of divine intervention in one’s achievements. For example, the statement, “*It is my utmost pleasure to avail this opportunity to extend my heartiest gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Moazur Rahman, who was always a source of learning and confidence for me.*” In this statement, the writer is expressing their deep appreciation for their supervisor, Dr. Moazur Rahman. The phrase “*the utmost pleasure*” suggests that the speaker is genuinely delighted to have the opportunity to thank their supervisor in this way. The writer describes his supervisor as a “*source of learning and confidence,*” suggesting that the supervisor has played a significant role in their personal and professional development. Overall, the high frequency of the phrase “It is” in the acknowledgement section highlights the importance of expressing appreciation and gratitude towards those who have contributed to the research work, both directly and indirectly.



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of attitudinal phrases in the acknowledgement sections of PhD theses demonstrates a pervasive and significant trend of expressing positive and appreciative attitudes. This tendency reflects the social and cultural importance of gratitude and recognition within academic and professional communities. Attitudinal phrases, which include expressions of Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation, serve as a linguistic mechanism through which authors convey their emotional responses, evaluations, and recognitions of contributions made by others to their scholarly journey. The prominence of positive and appreciative language, as highlighted by the frequent use of phrases such as “I am thankful” and “I would like to thank,” underscores the centrality of affect in the discourse of academic acknowledgements. Martin and White (2005) argue that affect refers to the emotional responses of the writer, and in the context of acknowledgements, this is often manifested through expressions of gratitude. The analysis reveals that these phrases are not merely superficial acknowledgements but are laden with genuine emotional significance. For instance, the frequent use of “I am thankful” reflects an emotional connection between the writer and those being acknowledged, signalling that the writer recognises and values the personal and professional support received during the research process. This aligns with Hyland and Tse’s (2004) findings, which suggest that acknowledgements are a strategic site for expressing personal feelings and maintaining social relationships within academic contexts.

Similarly, using Judgement phrases, such as “He is” and “She is,” further reinforces the importance of positively evaluating individuals’ contributions. Judgement, as defined by Martin and White (2005), involves the assessment of people’s behaviour and character. In the context of PhD acknowledgements, it often takes the form of praise for supervisors, mentors, and colleagues. The data indicate that these evaluations are predominantly positive, reflecting admiration for these individuals’ expertise, guidance, and support. For example, phrases like “He is a real source of knowledge, support, and motivation” convey a deep respect and appreciation for the intellectual and emotional labour invested by supervisors in the writer’s academic journey. This evaluative language serves to honour these individuals’ contributions and reinforce the social bonds between the writer and their academic community. This is consistent with the findings of Sahlane (2013), who noted that evaluative language in academic discourse often builds and maintains professional relationships. Moreover, the analysis of Appreciation phrases, such as “It is” used to express gratitude for resources, facilities, or other forms of support, illustrates the multifaceted nature of gratitude in academic writing. According to Martin and White (2005), appreciation refers to the evaluation of objects, processes, and phenomena, and in acknowledgements, it often pertains to institutional or material support. The use of phrases like “It is my utmost pleasure to extend my heartiest gratitude to my supervisor” expresses personal appreciation and highlights the significance of the institutional and structural support systems that facilitate academic success. This is consistent with the findings of Engelbrecht (2020), who noted that appreciation in academic texts often acknowledges the broader context in which research is conducted, including the contributions of both individuals and institutions.

The analysis of attitudinal phrases in PhD acknowledgements reveals a deeply ingrained culture of appreciation within academic discourse. By employing positive and appreciative language, writers not only fulfil a social expectation of gratitude but also actively construct and reinforce the professional and personal relationships vital to academic life. This aligns with the broader theoretical frameworks of systemic functional linguistics (SFL), which posit that language functions as a tool for enacting social relationships and expressing interpersonal meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013). Through their choice of attitudinal phrases, writers

demonstrate that gratitude and admiration are not peripheral elements of academic writing but central to constructing academic identity and community.

The findings regarding the use of attitudinal appraisal in PhD thesis acknowledgements reveal significant insights into the expression of gratitude and evaluative stance in academic writing. Specifically, the predominance of the “Affect” type, which accounted for 79% of the total attitudinal appraisal items, underscores the emotional language that PhD graduates employ to express their gratitude. This finding aligns with the work of Hyland and Tse (2004), who identified that academic writing often serves as a space for personal expression, particularly regarding gratitude and emotional responses to those who supported the research process. The “Affect” category, divided into sub-types such as “I am thankful” and “I would like to thank,” further supports the notion that expressions of personal gratitude are central to this genre of writing. The frequent use of these phrases indicates the deep connection between the graduates and their supporters, including supervisors, colleagues, friends, family members, and funding agencies. This finding is consistent with Alhabib (2020), who noted that using appraisal devices to express gratitude is a common rhetorical strategy in formal speeches, such as Obama’s inaugural address, where emotional language is utilised to establish rapport and express appreciation. The data analysis also highlighted that a small percentage (14%) of the attitudinal appraisal items were categorised under “Judgement.” This type reflects the writer’s evaluative stance towards others’ contributions, often manifesting through the use of lexical items such as “He/She/They.” This aligns with the observations of Martin and White (2005), who noted that judgement often involves assessments of people’s behaviour, either positively or negatively. In this context, the positive evaluations of supervisors and mentors for their support, guidance, and expertise align with the broader understanding of how judgement functions within academic discourse to acknowledge intellectual contributions and professional relationships.

However, compared to affect, the relatively low percentage of Judgement items suggests that while evaluative language is present, the primary focus in these acknowledgements remains on expressing gratitude rather than critiquing or evaluating contributions. This contrasts with findings from other genres, such as political speeches, where judgement is often more prominent due to the necessity of establishing authority and critiquing opponents, as Ross and Caldwell (2020) noted in their appraisal analysis of Donald Trump’s rhetoric. Furthermore, the finding that “Appreciation” only accounted for 7% of the attitudinal appraisal items in PhD acknowledgements suggests that PhD graduates are less inclined to focus on evaluating objects or outcomes. This is in line with the findings of Siregar (2018), who noted that in academic contexts, especially during thesis defences, the focus tends to be more on the evaluative language related to people (Judgement) rather than objects or processes (Appreciation). Overall, the findings from this study contribute to the existing body of literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of how attitudinal appraisal functions within the specific context of PhD thesis acknowledgements. The prominence of Affect-type items highlights the importance of emotional language in academic acknowledgements. At the same time, the lesser use of judgment and appreciation indicates a focus on personal gratitude over evaluative or descriptive language. These findings are consistent with previous research on appraisal in academic and formal discourse (e.g., Hyland & Tse, 2004; Martin & White, 2005; Alhabib, 2020) and provide a foundation for further exploration of appraisal in different academic genres.

## CONCLUSION

The present study sought to investigate the use of attitudinal appraisal in the acknowledgement sections of PhD theses from Pakistani public universities. Employing Martin and White’s (2005) Systemic Functional Linguistics framework, specifically the Appraisal Theory, the

research aimed to uncover how PhD graduates utilise language to express attitudes through affect, judgement, and appreciation. This study is significant for its focus on the interpersonal meaning conveyed through these attitudinal choices, shedding light on how academic writers' articulate gratitude and recognition. The findings reveal that all three types of appraisals— affect, judgement, and appreciation—are present in the acknowledgement sections of the theses analysed. However, affect emerged as the most predominant type, accounting for 79% of the total attitudinal appraisal items. This suggests a strong inclination towards expressing personal feelings and emotional responses towards those who have contributed to the research journey. The frequent use of affective expressions, such as “I am thankful” and “I would like to thank,” highlights the central role of emotional language in acknowledging the support and assistance received. The study employed a corpus-based approach to attitudinal analysis, creating a dataset of acknowledgements from a sample of 50 PhD theses from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) online repository. Using AntConc for concordance line extraction and applying Martin and Rose's (2003) Appraisal Theory for analysis, the study was able to quantitatively and qualitatively assess the use of attitudinal appraisal in these texts. The methodology facilitated a comprehensive examination of how PhD graduates articulate their gratitude and evaluate the contributions of others through their acknowledgements.

This research contributes to linguistics by offering new insights into the evaluative dimensions of academic writing, particularly in the context of acknowledgements. The study underscores the significance of the affective dimension in academic discourse, demonstrating how personal gratitude and emotional responses are crucial elements of scholarly communication. Furthermore, it illustrates the broader role of language in shaping and expressing interpersonal relationships within academic settings, aligning with Halliday and Hasan's (1989) perspectives on the interpersonal metafunction of language. This study provides significant insights into the evaluative use of language in the acknowledgement sections of PhD theses, highlighting the importance of affective and appreciative language in academic writing. The findings contribute to the theoretical understanding of attitudinal appraisal and offer practical implications for scholars and academics in crafting their acknowledgements. The research underscores the value of recognising and appreciating the contributions of others, reflecting the broader social and professional norms within the academic community.

For future research, several avenues are suggested. Extending the analysis to other sections of academic writing, such as abstracts, introductions, and conclusions, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of attitudinal appraisal across different parts of scholarly texts. Investigating how attitudinal choices are made in these sections could reveal patterns or shifts in language use depending on each section's specific context or function. Additionally, cross-cultural and cross-linguistic comparisons of attitudinal appraisal in academic writing could yield valuable insights into how different cultures and languages approach expressions of gratitude and appreciation. Such comparative studies might uncover cultural variations in the use of attitudinal language, offering a broader perspective on the global practices of academic acknowledgement.

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