

SCHEMATIC STRUCTURE OF GUEST SPEAKERS' SPEECHES AT A GHANAIAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The present study explored the schematic structure in Guest Speakers' Speeches (GSS) in a Ghanaian university. A total of 20 speeches was purposively collected between 2014 and 2020. We utilized the frameworks proposed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) in identifying the schematic structure of the speeches. The findings revealed a macro-structure of four (4) Moves (*Welcome, Appreciation and Thanks, Teaching the last lesson and Closing moves*). Among the moves, *Teaching the Last Lesson* occupied the greatest textual space (i.e. 78%) of the data. As regards the sequence of moves, the study revealed (1) that the 10-move sequence was the most frequent pattern; and (2) that the moves are chronologically structured, with Move 1 followed by Move 2, Move 3, and finally Move 4. The study validates guest speakers' speeches as a conventionalized yet contextually adaptable genre that scaffolds graduates' identity transition. The findings advance genre research and inform professional practice in similar contexts.

Keywords: *ESP; genre; graduation ceremonies; guest speakers' speeches; schematic structure.*

1. Introduction

Universities host a range of ceremonial speeches, among which guest speakers' speeches (GSS) at graduation ceremonies hold particular rhetorical significance. According to Tashi and Suksawas (2018), GSS are interpersonal acts in speeches as presented to an audience with the intention of changing attitudes, behavior, and sentiments as well as further inspiring and impressing the audience with words and meanings during a graduation ceremony. As a result, GSS are regarded as a data source that scholars use to learn more about the phenomenon of graduation ceremonies. Delivered by guest speakers such as accomplished alumni, national figures, or distinguished professionals, these speeches are designed not only to honor the graduates but also to offer wisdom, instill hope, and provide a broader societal perspective. They are characterized by a particular use of language through which speakers express their ideas, intentions, and experiences. (Gault, 2008; Zhu,

2018). This is particularly significant, given the covert identities and corporate marketisation drive that the concerned institutions (universities) associate with graduation ceremonies.

While previous studies on Guest Speakers' Speeches (GSS) have examined linguistic features such as modal auxiliaries (Duku et al., 2024), thematic content (Basilio et al., 2020; Partch & Kinnier, 2011), and rhetorical strategies (Heracleous & Klaering, 2017; Ortega Ribeiro, 2013), these studies have largely focused on Western and Asian contexts, often employing theoretical frameworks such as Speech Act Theory and Aristotelian rhetoric. Other scholars have investigated cross-cultural metadiscourse (Zhu, 2018) and professional differences in the use of figurative language (Chang & Tanangkingsing, 2022). Despite these contributions, limited scholarly attention has been devoted to the organizational patterns of GSS, particularly within African contexts. As a result, little is known about how such speeches are rhetorically structured in Ghanaian universities. Given their rhetorical, interpersonal, and institutional significance, GSS provide a productive site for genre analysis. In addition to reflecting the personal experiences and ideologies of the speakers, these speeches serve ceremonial, ideological, and promotional functions for the host universities. Against this background, the present study investigates the schematic structure of GSS delivered at graduation ceremonies in a Ghanaian public university. The study is guided by the following research question: What is the schematic structure of Guest Speakers' Speeches delivered at graduation ceremonies in a Ghanaian university?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework – The Genre Theory

Genre theory has developed through three major traditions: Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), New Rhetoric (NR) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP). SFL views genres as culturally shaped, staged processes for achieving social purposes, reflected in schematic structures (Halliday & Martin, 1993). NR emphasizes genres as dynamic responses to recurring social situations and focuses on context, community practices and social action (Bazerman, 1994; Miller, 1984). ESP, associated with Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), combines textual and ethnographic analysis to examine how discourse communities construct genres. This study adopts the ESP approach because of its emphasis on analyzing rhetorical structures and communicative purposes within specific discourse communities. The framework is particularly relevant for examining the schematic structure and rhetorical functions of Guest Speakers' Speeches in a Ghanaian university context.

2.2 Previous Studies

Building on these theoretical traditions, prior studies have examined GSS across diverse contexts. Some studies (e.g. Duku et al., 2024; Basilio et al.; 2020; Heracleous and Klaering, 2017) have demonstrated their rhetorical and sociocultural relevance across different contexts. Heracleous and Klaering (2017) argued that Steve Jobs's Stanford commencement address derives its persuasive effectiveness from the rhetoric of identification, whereby personal stories and shared values are employed to create a sense of connection between the speaker and the audience. In a related study, Basilio et al. (2020) found that GSS within the Philippine educational context functioned as discursive instruments for projecting national educational policies and societal values relating to youth development. Similarly, Duku et al. (2024), in a comparative analysis of American and Ghanaian GSS, identified both quantitative and qualitative differences in the use of modal

auxiliaries, noting that American speeches predominantly emphasized interpersonal relationships, whereas Ghanaian speeches foregrounded individual empowerment and resilience.

Zhu (2018) compared English and Chinese GSS and yielded important insights into cultural variations in metadiscourse patterns, particularly in how speakers construct their authorial presence and engage audiences. Furthermore, Partch and Kinnier's (2011) large-scale content analysis of American GSS not only identified predominant value messages but also revealed significant gender-based differences in thematic emphasis, suggesting how ceremonial speeches reflect and reinforce societal norms. Ortega Ribeiro's (2013) examination of Barack Obama's commencement rhetoric illustrated the complex interplay between ceremonial conventions and political communication, showing how epideictic occasions can serve multiple discursive purposes. Finally, Chang and Tanangkingsing's (2022) focus on professional differences in figurative language use further enriched our understanding of how speaker identity shapes ceremonial discourse.

Despite studies on linguistic and rhetorical features of GSS, little is known about their schematic structure in African contexts, particularly Ghana. Despite extensive research in Western and Asian contexts, Ghanaian GSS remain underexplored, limiting our understanding of how ceremonial discourse functions in African higher education. This study addresses these gaps by applying ESP genre analysis to examine the schematic structure of GSS in a Ghanaian university.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a genre-analytic approach rooted in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) tradition (Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 2004) to investigate the schematic structure of guest speakers' speeches in a Ghanaian university. The methodology involves move analysis to systematically identify and interpret the rhetorical organization of these ceremonial academic texts. ESP genre analysis is appropriate because it captures both linguistic form and social function in ceremonial discourse.

3.2 Data Set and Sample

The present study purposively utilized 20 guest speakers' speeches delivered during graduation ceremonies. The data were obtained from the official website of the University of Ghana (<http://www.ug.edu.gh>). The addresses included in the dataset were released throughout the period spanning from June 2014 to October 2020. Table 1 shows the word count of each speech, ranging from 715 to 2,382 words.

Table 1.

Text Length and Number of Words of Guest Speakers' Speeches

GSS	No. of Words
GSS1	2382
GSS2	2132
GSS3	1818
GSS4	1597
GSS5	1686

GSS6	1652
GSS7	1637
GSS8	1825
GSS9	1796
GSS10	1714
GSS11	2019
GSS12	1492
GSS13	1138
GSS14	2051
GSS15	1106
GSS16	1439
GSS17	1882
GSS18	1021
GSS19	2102
GSS20	715
TOTAL= 20	33,204

The dataset comprises 33,204 words across 20 speeches, sufficient for genre analysis. The dataset size is comparable to previous studies (e.g., Gault, 2008; Han, 2014; Zhu, 2018).

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

In this study, we manually identified, coded, and recorded the schematic structures of the speeches using a macro-level rhetorical structure (Teo & Ren, 2019). Manual move analysis was employed, as communicative functions require cognitive interpretation beyond automated methods (Biber et al., 2007, as cited in Moreno & Swales, 2018, p. 33). Furthermore, it has been observed that manual analysis is characterized by a significant investment of time, which is perceived by some scholars as a limitation in the field of move analysis (Moreno & Swales, 2018). The present study incorporates the top-down approach proposed by Moreno and Swales (2018), which regards moves as coherent communicative units with specific discursal or rhetorical functions within texts. These moves may exhibit considerable variation in terms of their length and other linguistic characteristics (Kyei & Afful, 2021a; Kyei & Afful, 2021b; Afful & Kyei, 2020; Swales, 2004, pp. 228–229, as cited in Moreno & Swales, 2018, p. 40). In contrast, steps refer to the various textual components that, when combined or used in conjunction, fulfil the function of a specific move, serving the purpose of the move to which they pertain (Biber et al., 2007: 24 as cited in Moreno and Swales, 2018: 40). In this study, moves such as Welcome and Closing were identified, with steps like giving advice fulfilling specific rhetorical functions. To ensure reliability, coding was cross-checked by multiple researchers.

4. Results and Discussion

This section analyses and discusses the schematic structure of guest speaker speeches (GSS) delivered during graduation ceremonies at a Ghanaian university. It focuses on the identification of moves and steps within the speeches, their frequency across the dataset, the proportion of textual space allocated to each move, and the typical sequencing of moves and steps.

4.1 Moves and Steps Identified in the Guest Speakers' Speeches (GSS)

The analysis revealed a series of recurring rhetorical patterns in the guest speakers' speeches, which were categorized into distinct moves and steps based on their communicative purposes in line with existing research (e.g., Afful, 2005; Askehave, 2007; Han, 2014; Kyei, 2020; Osman, 2008; Teo & Ren, 2019; Xiong, 2012). In all, there were 4 moves identified in the data, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Moves and Steps in Guest Speakers Speeches

Moves	Name	Steps
1	WELCOME	1. Greetings 2. Vocative 3. Occasion 4. Gratitude 5. Credentials
2	APPRECIATION AND THANKS	1. For Students/Graduands 2. For Faculty/Families and Friends
3	TEACHING THE LAST LESSON	1. Presenting the world 2. Providing advice 3. Instilling hope
4	CLOSURE	1. Congratulating the graduands 2. Offering best wishes 3. Resounding the usual toast 4. Expressing thanks

Table 2 presents the four moves and their corresponding steps identified in the Guest Speaker Speeches (GSS). Move 1, Welcome, comprises five steps, including greetings, vocative expressions, reference to the occasion, expressions of gratitude, and the speaker's credentials. Move 2, Appreciation and Thanks, consists of two steps, directed respectively toward students/graduands and faculty, families, and friends. Move 3, Teaching the Last Lesson, includes three steps: presenting the world, providing advice, and instilling hope. Finally, move 4, Closure, encompasses four steps—congratulating the graduands, offering best wishes, reiterating the traditional toast, and expressing thanks. In what follows, I illustrate and explicate the moves and the associated steps, as evinced in the data set.

Move 1: Welcome

The first move identified is welcome. This move served as the introductory stage of the address, where the speaker began by formally welcoming the audience. The primary purpose of this move is to establish a connection with the audience and set a positive tone for the rest of the speech. The speaker fulfils this obligation through a number of steps, beginning with greetings:

Step 1: Greeting

In some of the speeches, the speakers directly and humbly greeted all the people gathered before addressing them (vocative) as in the example below:

Example 1

Good morning, I would like to greet the members of this august body. - GS#1

Good afternoon! - - GS#5

In the examples above, the speakers directly greet and acknowledge the audience, thereby fulfilling the communicative purpose of Move 1. Linguistic expressions such as "morning," the modal "would," and the phrase "this august body" convey politeness, formality, and respect towards the audience. These choices establish a cordial atmosphere, create a favorable first impression, and enhance audience receptiveness to the speech. This finding corroborates Teo and Ren's (2019) assertion that the welcoming move functions to attract audience attention and establish rapport through greetings and the acknowledgement of dignitaries.

Step 2: Vocative

All the speeches began by addressing the audience directly through the use of vocatives. In addressing the audience, the status of the individuals being addressed were revealed. This step is crucial because it acknowledged the presence of the dignitaries and attracted their attention. This step was utilized in all the speeches. See the examples 2 and 3 below:

Example 2

The Chairman and Members of Council of the University of Ghana,

The Vice-Chancellor,

Pro-Vice-Chancellors,

Provosts of Colleges,

[...]

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, - GS#1

Example 3

Mr. Chairman

Vice-Chancellor

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen- GS#2

Both examples use Move 1 (the Welcome move) through formal vocatives to create a respectful tone. Example 2 lists several titles, acknowledging many university officials and emphasizing hierarchy and inclusiveness, while Example 3 uses a shorter greeting that still maintains formality by mentioning key figures. The comparison suggests that the Council Chairman presides over the occasion. The finding corroborated Antonova and Travina's (2014) assertion that addressing an interlocutor is the culture of speaking behavior in the first place and that correctly and appropriately addressing a person is the guarantee of a productive and fruitful conversation.

Step 3: Occasion

The speakers usually referred to the occasion. See the examples below:

Example 4

Graduation Day is a special day in the life of any student; it is the crowning moment of all the hard work, frustrations and anxieties endured and for staying the course of academic life. [...] I daresay it is the best feeling for any student who has successfully gone through the full rigors of academia. - GS#2

Example 5

I know how it feels since I have gone through this process three times: first, as an LLB Honors graduate in 1976, then as a professional on attainment of the Qualifying Certificate in Law and subsequent enrollment at the Bar in 1978 and finally upon graduation with an EMBA (Finance Option) from the University of Ghana Business School in 2004. [...] My mandate is to “encourage you, our post-graduate graduands from the College of Humanities as you prepare to make crucial decisions on the next steps in your careers” and where necessary, share some personal experiences with you. - GS#4

In Example 4, the speaker realizes Move 1 (*Welcome*) by emphasizing the significance of Graduation Day rather than employing a conventional greeting. By describing the occasion as a “crowning moment” and recounting a personal graduation experience, the speaker establishes rapport with the audience and foregrounds the emotional importance of the ceremony (Gault, 2008). Similarly, Example 5 introduces the occasion through personal reflection on graduation experiences and post-graduation expectations, thereby creating identification with the graduands and clarifying the motivational purpose of the address. In both examples, personal reflection is used to reinforce audience connection and underscore the symbolic value of the ceremony (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014; Zhu, 2018). This step highlights the academic significance of graduation ceremonies and positions the genre as a professional academic practice. The finding aligns with Han’s (2014) Move 1: *Congratulations*, in which speakers explicitly foreground the celebratory purpose of graduation ceremonies.

Step 4: Gratitude

In some of the speeches, the speakers demonstrated their delight and gratitude for being part of the occasion. This move is closely related to what Gault (2008) termed as “Acknowledging the Graduates and Their Achievements” and Han (2014) considers this move as part of his Stage 1 (Addressing the Past) or Congratulatory move 1, as can be seen in the examples below:

Example 6

I am delighted to be with you today at the University of Ghana at Legon at this ceremony for graduating students who have successfully completed their courses of study over the past few years. I would like to thank the University for the honor done to me in asking me to serve on this occasion as the Guest Speaker. (GS#1)

Example 7

And so, Mr. Chairman, I am indeed greatly honored by the invitation to be the Guest Speaker of this year's congregation for two very special Colleges of this great University. I am grateful to the University Management for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with graduands on this auspicious occasion and in the midst of renowned scholars and personalities from within and outside the University – (GS#2)

In Examples 6 and 7, the speakers realize Move 1 (*Welcome*) through expressions of gratitude, thereby establishing a respectful and appreciative tone at the beginning of their addresses. In Example 6, the speaker expresses appreciation for the opportunity to serve as Guest Speaker at the University of Ghana graduation ceremony, while Example 7 similarly acknowledges the University Management and emphasizes the significance of the occasion and the presence of distinguished personalities. In both instances, gratitude functions as a central welcoming strategy that fosters humility, respect, and audience connection. These findings support Bono et al.'s (2015) view that gratitude strengthens social relationships and promotes human flourishing. The results further align with perspectives that regard gratitude as both socially and evolutionarily significant in maintaining reciprocity and interpersonal bonds (Gouldner, 1960; Simmel, 1950; Trivers, 1971).

Step 5: Credentials

This step established the credentials of the university. Find the example below:

Example 8

The 2015 release by *The Times Higher Education World Rankings* names the University of Ghana as the best ranked university in Ghana and the 9th in Africa. This is a highly commendable achievement for which I would like to congratulate the University. The University of Ghana is striding towards the ideals for which it was established, and is making efforts to become a world-class, research-intensive university. [...] GS#1

Through this step, the speaker establishes the university's credentials as an important contextual foundation for the speech. In Example 8, the speaker highlights the achievements of the University of Ghana, particularly its ranking as the leading university in Ghana and among the top universities in Africa. The speaker also references institutional reforms and the establishment of new colleges, thereby emphasizing the university's commitment to excellence, innovation, and academic development. This credentialing strategy promotes institutional pride while motivating graduands to pursue excellence beyond university life. The finding supports Askehave's (2007) view that the presentation of institutional achievements reflects promotional and audience-oriented discourse. It also aligns with Teo and Ren's (2019) assertion that highlighting institutional excellence functions as a persuasive strategy aimed at enhancing institutional appeal among stakeholders, prospective students, and alumni.

Move 2: Appreciation and Thanks

Move 2 shows the speakers' appreciation and thanks for the graduands and all other stakeholders who have contributed to helping the students achieve their successes. It has two different realizations/steps which have been outlined below;

Step 1: For Students/Graduands

In the examples that follow, the speakers thanked the graduands for their unrelenting efforts which had brought them that far.

Example 9

Today we must celebrate the hard work of students as well as that of Management, lecturers and administrators, who have groomed these graduands into becoming what they are today. I know the pride your teachers have in you. [...] I feel the same pride and I know that this is thanks to the great ground work that your teachers have laid as well as my own humble efforts. - GS#1

Example 10

To our proud graduands, I say congratulations and well done for staying the course and finishing the “race”; you have earned the right to celebrate this important achievement and by all means do so in moderation. There is no doubt that having come this far, you have burnt thousands of the mid night candles; you have had to obediently follow instructions from your lecturers to complete your programs, which span from four to six years, successfully. [...] - GS#18

In Examples 9 and 10, the speakers realize Move 2 (*Appreciation and Thanks*) by acknowledging the collective contributions underlying the graduands’ success. In Example 9, the speaker commends the students’ hard work while recognizing the significant role of teachers in shaping their achievements. Through references to personal experience, the speaker reinforces the importance of mentorship and institutional support. Similarly, Example 10 congratulates the graduands on their perseverance, employing the metaphor of “finishing the race” to emphasize determination and achievement. The speaker further acknowledges the sacrifices made by students and the support provided by families, thereby highlighting the communal nature of academic success. Both examples demonstrate that appreciation extends beyond the graduands to include teachers, institutions, and families. This finding supports Partch and Kinnier’s (2011) observation that commencement speakers commonly express gratitude towards mentors, institutions, and significant others. It also aligns with Chang and Tanangkingsing’s (2022) view that figurative expressions enhance the persuasive impact of ceremonial speeches.

Step 2: For Faculty, Family and Friends

Speakers extend their thanks and appreciations to the faculty members, family and friends for also performing various roles in the success stories of the students/graduands during the graduation. See the examples below:

Example 11

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank the families, friends, faculty as well as all whose sacrifices, resolve and determination have contributed in no small measure to making this day possible for our graduands. It is usually a refreshing moment for all who successfully see their wards clear this hurdle in life. – (GS#2)

Example 12

This day is also a moment to give thanks for the tremendous support of family, friends and benefactors who altogether, have made it possible for the students to make this remarkable journey through their schooling. – (GS#1)

In Examples 11 and 12, the speakers realize Move 2 (*Appreciation and Thanks*) by acknowledging the contributions of families, friends, faculty, and benefactors to the graduands' success. The speakers recognize the sacrifices, commitment, and support provided throughout the students' academic journey, while emphasizing the pride and fulfilment associated with their achievement. Both examples portray graduation as a collective accomplishment rather than an individual success, thereby reinforcing the communal and celebratory nature of the ceremony.

Move 3: Teaching the Last Lesson

The move addressed the graduating class. It presented the world to them and inspired them to press on till they reached the mark. Speakers also challenged the graduands to begin thinking of how to become useful citizens of the country. Three realizations/steps of this move were found in the data.

Step 1: Presenting The World

The speakers presented the world of work to the graduands. Here are examples:

Example 13

[...] Dear graduands, I would like to speak to you about entrepreneurship and the need for us to explore the vast unexplored potentials that we have in Ghana to build organizations. [...] Today, in Ghana we have many privately run medical facilities and several schools of medicine, dentistry and public health that seek to render service to the nation. Help the private sector to help improve the health delivery system in the country. Do not miss this opportunity through a fear of job insecurity in the private sector. – (GS #14)

Example 14

[...] To my proud graduands from the College of Education, I wish to reiterate the fact that teacher education lays the foundation for the development of the human capital of every nation without which social development and economic prosperity would be impossible. [...] You have indeed been introduced to best practice in teaching and learning that will enable you tackle broader issues of education in Ghana. Giving your best to the professional practice would enhance the image of the teaching profession and accord it the valued status it deserves in the Ghanaian society. – GS #12.

In Examples 13 and 14, the speakers realize Move 3 (*Teaching the Last Lesson*) by guiding graduands on their future responsibilities and societal roles. Example 13 emphasizes entrepreneurship, innovation, continuous learning, and the application of knowledge to local industries, particularly within Ghana's medical diagnostics sector. The speaker also encourages graduands to contribute to their alma mater and national development. Similarly, Example 14 provides practical advice on overcoming entrepreneurial challenges such as financial constraints and fear of failure, while promoting perseverance, innovation, and social responsibility in addressing health and educational needs. Both examples frame graduation not only as a personal achievement but also as a call to professional growth and societal contribution. This finding supports Gault's (2008) view that this step prepares graduands for their future roles and responsibilities.

Step 2: Providing Advice

This step provides advice to graduands as to the best way they are expected to live their lives. See the example below:

Example 15

Ladies and gentlemen, I am sure we have all been asked the question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Well now you are grown up – at least by the fact of your graduation today. By virtue of what you have all chosen or forced to study you may have probably answered this question in part [...] - GS#2

Example 16

I do hope the lessons from my experiences, these past years would help give you some guidance as you consider what life will throw at you as step out into the world. [...] Do not be boxed in the degree you are graduating in, learn more, continuously develop yourself, learn a trade, read a book, by all means do something with your life, never waste a day. Have a mentor to guide you, build networks of good people who can influence your life, people who can call you and say to you, stop that and you stop [...] - GS#3

In Example 15, the speaker draws on Steve Jobs’ principle and advises graduates to pursue careers aligned with their passions. Example 16 similarly encourages personal responsibility, goal-setting, ethical conduct, innovation, resilience, and continuous self-improvement, alongside values such as respect for parents and faith. Both examples foreground proactive career development and holistic success, combining passion, responsibility, and personal growth. Example 15 highlights transition into professional life and continuous learning, while Example 16 stresses ownership of outcomes and ethical practice. Collectively, they reflect Han’s (2014) *Move 4 (Farewell Message)*, which provides advice, encouragement, and goodwill to graduands, accompanied by a shift from an authoritative tone to one of equality as speakers address graduates as emerging professionals and alumni.

Step 3: Instilling Hope

The step instills a sense of hope in the graduates that they have all the tools they need to be successful in such a challenging world. See the examples below:

Example 17

I would like to address the graduating class. This is a time to celebrate your accomplishments, and to find inspiration for the life ahead. Commencement Day, as it is called in some parts of the world, truly marks for the graduating student, a moment where one door closes and another opens, as you enter into the world of work. [...] Let me congratulate you all on your achievements as you conclude this important phase of your lives and start a new journey. - GS#1

Example 18

Surely all is not lost neither have your training been in vain. Without doubt the economy needs and has more room for doctors, nurses, teachers, educationists, pharmacists etc. What has changed really is who and how to employ these professionals beside Government. Nothing stops these professionals from becoming their own employers. Indeed, I believe that given the medium to long term prospects

of the [...] This is throwing up opportunities for opening up education and training centers as lucrative businesses. Similarly, the health care industry is witnessing growth fueled by increasing education and health-consciousness among the populace. [...] - GS#2

In Examples 17 and 18, the speakers realize the "instilling hope" step by highlighting the positive prospects associated with the transition from education to professional life and the opportunities for personal and economic advancement (Gault, 2008). Example 17 presents graduation as the beginning of new opportunities for leadership and growth, encouraging confidence in future challenges. Example 18 similarly emphasizes available economic opportunities, particularly in entrepreneurship and innovation within sectors such as education and healthcare, thereby encouraging self-employment and adaptive thinking in response to changing labor markets. Both speeches maintain an optimistic tone that reinforces graduates' capacity to succeed beyond university. This aligns with Gault's (2008) position that graduation addresses should alleviate anxiety and foster confidence rather than uncertainty. It also supports DeCapua and Dunham's (1993) view that advice is most persuasive when delivered by credible and trusted speakers.

Move 4: Closure (Farewell)

Move 4 (Closure/Farewell) marks the final part of the speech, where the speaker brings the address to a close. In this move, speakers perform four steps: *congratulating the graduands, wishing them all the best, resounding the usual toast, and expressing thanks* before exiting the speech.

Step 1: Congratulating the Graduands

The speaker takes a moment to recognize the significant effort, perseverance, and dedication that the graduates have demonstrated throughout their academic journey, as in the examples below:

Example 19

I would like to end by congratulating each and every one of you who has gone through the University of Ghana. We know for a fact that your presence here is a testimony to your great efforts and a major milestone in each of your individual lives. It is all our sincere hope that you will prove to be worthy ambassadors of the University and that you will uphold the highest standards, the integrity and the values that the University has inculcated in you. - GS#2

Example 20

Congratulations. – (GS#4)

In Example 19, the speaker acknowledges the graduands' hard work and the values gained from the university, reinforcing their achievement and future responsibility. Example 20 offers a brief but powerful "Congratulations," directly celebrating their success. Both examples recognise the graduates' accomplishment—Example 19 through detailed praise and reflection, and Example 20 with concise but meaningful acknowledgment.

Step 2: Offering Best Wishes

In this step, the speakers show strong and positive beliefs and hopes in the graduands. The speakers, thus, wish the graduands success as they step into the world of work. Find examples as follows:

Example 21

I wish you all the best as you journey into the world and pray that you will conquer the world. - GS#1

Example 22

Let me conclude by encouraging our graduands to never give up in the face of adversity. Please, live your life but you must live for something and your life must count for something. -GS#17

In Examples 21 and 22, both speakers extend good wishes to the graduates but with different emphases. Example 21 offers general encouragement, wishing them strength to overcome challenges and succeed, while Example 22 adds a motivational layer, urging graduates to persevere and lead meaningful lives. This aligns with Kyei's (2020) Move 6, Step 2, and Gault's (2008) Move 3, Step 3, which emphasize instilling hope and confidence in graduates as they face the future. The messages reflect the goal of commencement speeches to inspire, uplift, and empower graduates, as noted by Partch and Kinnier (2011).

Step 3: Resounding the (Usual) Toast

Step 3: Resounding the Usual Toast involves reiterating a traditional or expected message of well-wishing, typically symbolizing the conclusion of the ceremony and the official transition of the graduands into the next phase of their lives. This step often includes expressions of hope for their success, happiness, and future achievements, serving as a final, uplifting send-off. Here, the speakers may for example, make reference to a renowned quote or quote a famous speech.

Example 23

Long live the College of Health Sciences and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences!

Long live the University of Ghana, Long live Ghana. – (GSPCH#1)

Example 24

I will like to bring my talk to an end by charging you all with a quote I saw...“Cowardice asks the question - is it safe? Expediency asks the question - is it politic? Vanity asks the question - is it popular? But conscience asks the question - is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular; but one must take it BECAUSE it is right” Martin Luther King. – (GSPC#3)

In Examples 23 and 24, the speakers realize Move 4, Step 3 (*Resounding the Usual Toast*) through contrasting rhetorical strategies. Example 23 adopts a formal and conventional approach by invoking institutional and national identity, highlighting the legacy of the University of Ghana, its constituent colleges, and the nation, thereby reinforcing unity

and national pride. Example 24, in contrast, employs a reflective and motivational closure, drawing on Martin Luther King Jr.'s quotation to encourage moral courage, principled action, and resilience in the face of challenges. Both approaches effectively achieve a memorable conclusion by instilling pride, hope, and inspiration, though through different emphases—patriotic affirmation in Example 23 and ethical motivation in Example 24.

Step 4: Expressing Thanks

Following are excerpts showing how the speakers expressed thanks for the opportunity given them:

Example 25

Thank you for your attention. – (GS#1).

Example 26

Thank you very much for allowing me to be part of this special occasion (GS#2).

In Examples 25 and 26, the speakers realize Move 4, Step 4 (*Expressing Thanks*) by concluding their speeches with expressions of gratitude. Example 25 employs a brief and formal statement, directly acknowledging the audience's attention, thereby maintaining a professional tone. In contrast, Example 26 provides a more personalized expression of appreciation, emphasizing gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the occasion and contribute to the event. Both forms of closing reinforce politeness and rapport while signaling the end of the speech. This finding aligns with Kyei's (2020) concept of a "polite exit" and supports Han's (2014) view that expressions of gratitude constitute an essential feature of formal speech endings, reflecting appreciation for the audience and other stakeholders.

4.2 Frequency of Occurrences of the Moves and Steps Identified

Next, we examine the frequency of moves in guest speakers' speeches. Hüttner's (2010) model, which categorizes moves based on their frequency, was used to assess their status. Table 4 summarizes the frequency and percentage of different moves and steps, along with their status according to Hüttner's framework.

Table 3.

Frequency of Moves and Steps in Guest Speakers' Speeches

Moves	Name	Steps	No. of Occurrences	% of Occurrences	Move Status
1	Welcome		20	100	Obligatory
		1. Greetings	0	0%	
		2. Vocative	0	0%	
		3. Occasion	0	0%	
		4. Gratitude	0	0%	
		5. Credentials	0	0%	
		1&2	1	5%	
		2&3	3	15%	
		2&4	4	20%	
		2&3&4	7	35%	
		2&4&5	1	5%	
		1&2&3&4&5	1	5%	

2	Appreciation and Thanks		14	70%	Core
		1. For Students/ Graduands.	4	20%	
		2. For Faculty/ Families and Friends.	2	10%	
		1 & 2	9	45%	
3	Teaching the last lesson		20	100%	Obligatory
		1. Presenting the world.	0	0%	
		2. Providing advice.	2	10%	
		3. Instilling hope.	0	0%	
		1&2	1	5%	
		1&2&3	14	70%	
4	Closure/Fare well		16	80%	Core
		1. Congratulating the graduands	1	5%	
		2. Offering best wishes	0	0%	
		3. Resounding the usual toast	0	0%	
		4. Expressing thanks	1	5%	
		1&2	2	10%	
		2&3	2	10%	
		2&4	1	5%	
		1&2&4	7	35%	
		2&3&4	5	25%	
		1&2&3&4	1	5%	

Table 4 shows that the *Welcome* move occurred in all speeches (100%), making it obligatory within Hüttner's framework. It functions primarily to establish tone and engage the audience at the beginning of the address. However, individual steps such as greetings, vocatives, occasion reference, gratitude, and credentials were rarely used in isolation. The most frequent patterns combined gratitude with reference to the occasion (20%) and gratitude with occasion and credentials (35%).

The *Appreciation and Thanks* move is identified as a core component of the speeches, serving to acknowledge key stakeholder groups. Appreciation directed at students/graduands occurred in 20% of cases, while recognition of faculty, families, and friends appeared in 10%. The most dominant pattern involved a combined acknowledgment of both graduands and their support networks (45%), indicating a more inclusive and holistic expression of gratitude (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014; Partch & Kinnier, 2011).

The *Teaching the Last Lesson* move occurred in all speeches (100%), making it obligatory. It plays a central role in providing guidance, perspective, and inspiration as

graduates transition into post-university life (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014). However, individual steps were seldom used independently: *Presenting the World* did not appear as a standalone step, while *Providing Advice* occurred in 10% of the speeches. *Instilling Hope* also did not appear separately but was typically integrated with other steps. The most frequent pattern was the combination of *Providing Advice* and *Instilling Hope* (70%), indicating a dominant focus on both practical guidance and motivational support for graduates.

The consistent use of *Teaching the Last Lesson* (100%) aligns with Han's (2014, p.88) observation that graduation speeches often include moral instruction aimed at shaping values and guiding graduates towards responsible citizenship. This move typically involves presenting societal realities and encouraging perseverance towards meaningful goals. Similarly, Gault (2008) notes that it frames the challenges graduates are likely to encounter, thereby preparing them for post-university life.

The *Closure/Farewell* move occurs in 80% of the speeches, making it a core component used to conclude addresses with goodwill and final remarks. Individually, *Congratulating the Graduands* appears in 5% of cases, while *Expressing Thanks* also occurs in 5%; both are usually combined with other steps. *Offering Best Wishes* and *Resounding the Usual Toast* do not occur independently. The most frequent pattern is the combination of *Congratulating the Graduands* and *Expressing Thanks* (35%), reflecting a common concluding strategy that blends congratulations with gratitude (Gault, 2008; Han, 2014).

The analysis of graduation speeches from a Ghanaian public university shows a consistent rhetorical structure. The *Welcome* and *Teaching the Last Lesson* moves occurred in all speeches (100%), making them obligatory and highlighting their central role in establishing engagement and providing final guidance. These findings support Gault (2008) and Han (2014), who characterize commencement speeches as ritualized communicative events. This view is further reinforced by Turner's (1969) concept of ceremonies as symbolic rites and Goffman's (1967) interpretation of them as structured social performances. In addition, Ohashi (2008, as cited in Han, 2014) conceptualizes the welcoming phase as a ritualized interaction used to build social bonds through greetings and acknowledgements. Applying Hüttner's (2010) framework, the data further reveal two core moves (*Appreciation and Thanks* and *Closure/Farewell*) and two obligatory moves (*Welcome* and *Teaching the Last Lesson*), resulting in four main rhetorical moves in total. This finding aligns with Gault's (2008) identification of four dominant themes in commencement discourse, although it differs from Han (2014), who proposed a five-move structure including *Awarding the Degree*. Overall, the study confirms that guest speakers' speeches at the University of Ghana closely reflect established patterns in commencement rhetoric, particularly in acknowledging graduates, building identification, presenting societal realities, and instilling hope. The discussion now proceeds to the sequence of moves.

4.3 Sequence of Moves

Table 4 shows the order or arrangement of the moves as they occur in the Guest Speakers' Speeches at the University of Ghana, Legon, graduation speeches.

Table 4.
Sequencing of Moves in the UG Guest Speakers' Graduation Addresses

Move Patterns	Count T-units	Percentage (%)
14 move sequence (Total =1)	1	5%
1→1→1→1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4→4	1	5%

10 move sequence (Total =7)	7	35%
1→1→1→2→2→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4	2	10%
1→1→1→2→2→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→2→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
9 move sequence (Total =6)	6	30%
1→1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4	1	5%
1→1→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	2	10%
1→2→2→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→2→3→3→3→4→4	1	5%
1→1→1→3→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
8 move sequence (Total = 1)	1	5%
1→1→1→2→3→4→4→4	1	5%
7 move sequence (Total = 2)	2	10%
1→1→1→3→3→3→4	1	5%
1→1→3→3→4→4→4	1	5%
6 move sequence (Total =2)	2	10%
1→2→3→3→3→4	1	5%
1→1→3→3→3→4	1	5%
5 move sequence (Total = 1)	1	5%
1→1→3→4→4	1	5%

The move patterns in the Guest Speakers' Speeches demonstrate a clear sequential organization of rhetorical elements. Table 5 indicates that the 14-move sequence occurred only once (5%), making it the least frequent pattern, although it represents the most comprehensive and elaborate structuring of the speeches. In contrast, the 10-move sequence was the most common, occurring in 7 instances (35%). This pattern typically follows a coherent progression from *Welcome* (Move 1), through *Appreciation and Thanks* (Move 2) and *Teaching the Last Lesson* (Move 3), to *Closure/Farewell* (Move 4). Overall, this distribution suggests a preference for moderately detailed but well-structured speeches that balance completeness with conciseness.

The 9-move sequence was the second most frequent pattern, occurring 6 times (30%). It is slightly less elaborate than the 10-move sequence, omitting some details while still retaining the core rhetorical moves. The 8-move sequence appeared once (5%) and reflects a more condensed structure focused on essential elements with minimal elaboration.

The 7-move sequence occurred twice (10%), indicating a more streamlined pattern that prioritizes addressing the audience, offering guidance, and concluding efficiently. Similarly, the 6-move sequence, also observed twice (10%), is more compact and places greater emphasis on advice before moving quickly to closure. The 5-move sequence was the least frequent (5%) and represents the most reduced form, focusing primarily on welcoming, advising, and concluding.

Overall, the findings show variation in structural length, but with a consistent reliance on core rhetorical elements. Table 5 shows that Guest Speakers' Speeches are largely organized in a chronological sequence (1→2→3→4), consistent with Swales' (2004, as cited in Daniels, 2017) adaptation of the CARS model, where rhetorical moves follow a linear progression from introduction to conclusion. However, deviations were observed, particularly the omission of Move 2 in five instances across different sequences, suggesting that appreciation is sometimes subsumed under the closing remarks in Move 4, which appears to function recursively across all speeches. The dominance of the 1→2→3→4 pattern (35%) indicates a preferred structure beginning with *Welcome*, followed by *Appreciation*, *Teaching the Last Lesson*, and *Closure/Farewell*. This sequence reflects a conventional rhetorical progression consistent with Han (2014) and Gault (2008). Nonetheless, the data also reveal variability in sequencing, confirming that no strict uniform format governs the speeches, as similarly noted by Afful (2005), Daniels (2017), and Kyei (2020). Despite this variation, move 1 typically initiates the speech and Move 4 consistently concludes it, reinforcing their fixed positional roles within the genre. The sample data was coded GS#1. The results are presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.
A Sample Move Analysis of an Unedited Speech

GS#1	MOVE/STEP
Good morning, I would like to greet the members of this august body	MOVE 1 STEP 1: GREETINGS
The Chairman and Members of Council of the University of Ghana, The Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, [..] Distinguished Invited Guests, <i>Nananom, Neemei, Naamei</i> , Parents and Guardians,	MOVE 1 STEP 2: VOCATIVE
I am delighted to be with you today at the University of Ghana at Legon at this ceremony for graduating students who have successfully completed their courses of study over the past few years. I would like thank the University for the honor done to me in asking me to serve on this occasion as the Guest Speaker.	MOVE 1 STEP 3: GRATITUDE
The 2015 release by <i>The Times Higher Education World Rankings</i> names the University of Ghana as the best ranked university in Ghana and the 9th in Africa. This is a highly commendable achievement for which I would like to congratulate the University. The University of Ghana is striding towards the ideals for which it was established, and is making efforts to become a world-class, research-intensive university. [...]	MOVE 1 STEP 5: CREDENTIALS
I understand that this ceremony is a joint one being held for students of the two science-based colleges in the university, namely the College of Health Sciences and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences.	MOVE 1 STEP 4: OCCASION

<p>Today we must celebrate the hard work of students as well as that of Management, lecturers and administrators, who have groomed these graduands into becoming what they are today. I know the pride your teachers have in you. At Medlab I get compliments on the quality, knowledge and competence of my staff from the external auditors who conduct our accreditation visits. I feel the same pride and I know that this is thanks to the great ground work that your teachers have laid as well as my own humble efforts.</p>	<p>MOVE 2 STEP 1 FOR STUDENTS</p>
<p>This day is also a moment to give thanks for the tremendous support of family, friends and benefactors who altogether, have made it possible for the students to make this remarkable journey through their schooling.</p>	<p>MOVE 2 STEP 2 FOR FACULTY/FRIENDS/ FAMILIES</p>
<p>I would like to address the graduating class. This is a time to celebrate your accomplishments, and to find inspiration for the life ahead. Commencement Day, as it is called in some parts of the world, truly marks for the graduating student, a moment where one door closes and another opens, as you enter into the world of work. For those of you with further degrees from the School of Graduate Studies, you have been through this transition before, and today marks yet another milestone in your academic career which will allow you to reposition yourselves as more mature persons and future leaders of whom much would be expected. [...]</p>	<p>MOVE 3 STEP 2 PROVIDING ADVICE</p>
<p>Let me share a few words and thoughts with you. The focus of university training is not only the acquisition of knowledge, it is the development of analytical and problem-solving skills which will allow you to deal with the problems that you will encounter tomorrow. The end result of this training should be to acquire a resilience that should enable you to withstand the challenges that lie ahead. Certainly, living a meaningful life is being able to have the versatility and creativity of mind to take appropriate control of your destiny and your environment. [...] It is therefore important to give your utmost, back to family, society, country and the world, and certainly, in the best way you can. [...]</p>	<p>MOVE 3 STEP 1: PRESENTING THE WORLD</p>
<p>Never be afraid to originate ideas. For a modern nation to succeed, it must be a knowledge-based economy. We need to develop the ability to manufacture innovative technology in Ghana. In the area of medical diagnostics, this could include production of reagents and X-ray equipment. I procured an X-ray system from a European provider and found out that my classmate in a large London Hospital had procured the same product at 30% below my cost. I approached the vendor and asked why poor Africans were to be charged more. I was informed that since we did not produce such systems, there was no competition to drive down prices! [...]</p>	<p>MOVE 3 STEP 3 INSTILLING HOPE</p>

I would like to end by congratulating each and every one of you who has gone through the University of Ghana. We know for a fact that your presence here is a testimony to your great efforts and a major milestone in each of your individual lives.	MOVE 4 STEP 1 CONGRATULATING
It is all our sincere hope that you will prove to be worthy ambassadors of the University and that you will uphold the highest standards, the integrity and the values that the University has inculcated in you. I wish you all the best as you journey into the world and pray that you will conquer the world.	MOVE 4 STEP 2 WISHING ALL THE BEST
Long live the College of Health Sciences and the College of Basic and Applied Sciences! Long live the University of Ghana, Long live Ghana.	MOVE 4 STEP 3 RESOUNDING THE USUAL TOAST
Thank you for your attention.	MOVE 4 STEP 4 EXPRESSING THANKS

In the speech above (GS1, Fig. 5), the speaker systematically employs moves and steps to engage the audience and convey a persuasive message. Move 1 (Welcoming/Establishing the Scene) begins with Step 1A (Welcoming and Greeting the Audience), where key figures such as the Chairman and Members of the Council of the University of Ghana are acknowledged, establishing a formal tone. This is followed by Step 1B (Expressing Appreciation for the Invitation), in which the speaker expresses gratitude for the opportunity to serve as Guest Speaker. Step 1C (Referring to the Achievements of the Host Institution) highlights the university's ranking as the best in Ghana and ninth in Africa, aligning the speaker with the institution's prestige.

The speech then moves to Move 2 (Recognizing the Audience). In Step 2A (Congratulating the Graduates), the speaker celebrates the graduates' achievements. Step 2B (Recognizing the Role of Faculty and Administrators) acknowledges the contributions of university staff, while Step 2C (Acknowledging Family and Friends) extends appreciation to those who supported the graduates' journey.

Move 3 (Teaching the Graduates the Last Lesson) focuses on guidance for the future. Step 3A (Offering Advice) encourages graduates to apply their knowledge and develop critical thinking skills. Step 3B (Sharing Personal Experience) draws on the speaker's professional journey to inspire perseverance and professionalism. Step 3C (Encouraging National Responsibility) urges graduates to contribute to national development.

Finally, move 4 (Closing the Speech) includes Step 4A (Summarizing Key Messages)—emphasizing resilience, responsibility, and nation-building—and Step 4B (Offering Best Wishes), where the speaker expresses hopes for the graduates' future success. Overall, this structured use of moves and steps creates a coherent, engaging, and impactful address.

4.4 Textual Space of Moves

The next aspect of the schematic structure of the sample explained data is the textual space. Textual space illustrates the attention given to each Move in terms of words,

phrase, clauses and sentences. In this study, the number of words contained in the Moves was utilized to establish the textual space. The words constituted the basis for measuring the textual space in each text. Table 6 presents the distribution of textual space of the moves of Guest Speakers' Speeches presented at graduation ceremonies at University of Ghana.

Table 5.

Textual Space Allocated to the Moves in the Data

Moves	No. of words	Percentage
Move 1: Welcome	3320	10.00
Move 2: Appreciation and Thanks	2656	8.00
Move 3: Teaching the last Lesson	25899	78.00
Move 4: Closure	1328	4.00
Total of words	33204	100.00

Table 6 shows a clear imbalance in the distribution of textual space across the four moves. *Teaching the Last Lesson* dominates the speeches with 25,899 words (78%), making it the most prominent component. *Welcome* accounts for 3,320 words (10%), *Appreciation and Thanks* 2,656 words (8%), and *Closure* 1,328 words (4%), indicating comparatively limited space for framing and concluding elements.

The dominance of Move 3 highlights its central communicative role in delivering advice, reflection, and future-oriented guidance to graduands. This confirms its importance in graduation discourse, where speakers prioritize motivating students for post-university life. The allocation of textual space further supports Afful (2005) and Kyei (2020), who argue that greater textual prominence reflects higher functional importance. It also aligns with Daniels (2017), who notes that extensive elaboration signals deeper expertise and persuasive intent.

Overall, the distribution reflects the genre's communicative purpose of transitioning graduates from academic life to professional and societal roles, consistent with Han's (2014) past-present-future structure. It also indicates a Ghanaian adaptation of the genre, where conversational and advisory discourse is prioritized over purely ceremonial or authoritative styles, in contrast to the more formalized patterns observed in some other contexts.

5. Conclusion

This study investigated the schematic structure of guest speakers' commencement addresses at the University of Ghana, Legon, analysing 20 speeches delivered between 2014 and 2020 through the lens of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990). The move analysis revealed a consistent four-move macro-structure: (1) Welcome, (2) Appreciation and Thanks, (3) Teaching the Last Lesson, and (4) Closing. Notably, the Teaching the Last Lesson move emerged as both structurally dominant, occupying the majority of the speeches, and functionally central, primarily realised through advice-giving that facilitates graduates' transition into professional life.

This study extends genre analysis to African ceremonial discourse. It shows how institutional genres balance stability with adaptability. It highlights Ghanaian cultural values through appreciation moves.

Future research should expand the corpus, compare across universities, and examine disciplinary variations. This research advances understanding of genre as both a social practice and a pedagogical tool. The findings underscore how genre theory can illuminate both universal patterns and local variations in genres in professional settings (here, academic) across diverse cultural contexts.

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