# UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

## TENSE IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: A STUDY OF TWO DISCIPLINES

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BY

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# DECLARATION

**Candidate's Declaration**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own original research

and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or

elsewhere.

Candidate's Name: Saeed Abdul-Majeed Abdullah

Candidate's signature ……………………….    Date ……………………….

**Supervisors' Declaration**

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the dissertation

were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of

dissertation laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Name: Prof. J. B. A. Afful

Signature………………………    Date…………………………………….

Co-Supervisor's Name: Dr. R. S. Ngula

Signature………………………    Date…………………………………….

## ABSTRACT

The study examined the types of tense used in the results and discussion sections of academic writings in M.Phil. theses in English and Health Science in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. The mixed method approach was used for the study. The sample was drawn, using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The total sample for the study was 20 M.Phil. theses. The quantitative approach of data analysis was used to analyse research question one and results presented in frequencies and percentages. Research questions two and three were analysed qualitatively. The descriptive, content, case and inductive analyses were generally adopted in organising the data for analysis. The study revealed that the simple present and simple past tense occurred most frequently in the results and discussion section of the M.Phil. theses in English Language and Health Sciences. The analysis revealed that the use of tense in the results and discussion section of the English and Health Science theses writing has some functions which include: advance labelling, recapitulation, commentary and evaluation, signalling, and references to previous research. The study revealed that there are number of factors that play a crucial role in tense choice and variation; the temporal references factors, the basic meanings of tenses, and uses of tense affect tense choice in academic writing. Variation in the choice of tense in thesis writing is also influenced by the author's point of view, disciplinary culture, and purpose of writing. It was recommended that in a follow-up activity, the candidates could take partial or complete authentic texts from their own disciplines and identify the categories of the future, occurrences in each rhetorical section, and communicative purposes.

**KEY WORDS**

Academic Discourse

Academic Writing

Disciplines

English Language

Health Science

Tense Usage

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved family and relatives for their support.

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**Introduction**

Graduate students in different disciplines are generally not sure of the appropriate tense to use when writing theses in their various disciplines in universities. Thesis guides available for candidates seem to provide little information regarding tense usage in academic texts. Gate-keepers like supervisors and thesis committees are also sometimes unsure of which tense expect students use in their final write-ups, since discourse is quite normative by nature and by the structure of the discourse, we would expect certain lexical items or grammatical structures to appear at particular places. The present study is concerned with tense usage in the results and discussion section of selected M.Phil. theses from a public university in Ghana. In this chapter the background to the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, justification for the study, and organisation of the study are presented.

**Background to the Study**

Language use has been known to be central to the concept of discourse and this has attracted the attention of applied linguists and teachers in the areas of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP). This interest has been triggered by the desire to investigate how subject matter and contextual factors affect the choice of linguistic forms in academic disciplines. Discourses are the actual usage of language by humans. Therefore, manifestations of language in human activities constitute discourses as they show

the language in use. This is made up of utterances or written texts which constitute meaningful communicative events (Stubbs, 1983; Fine, 1988; Gee, 1999).

In fact, the use of language as units of discourses shows how members of an academic community or community of practice choose to organise and communicate knowledge meaningfully. According to Foucault (1972), cited in Baker (2006), discourse can be seen as practices which systematically form the objects of which we speak. Indeed, this conceptualization of discourse, which the current study subscribes to, can be linked to genre, style or even text type. This implies that the various parts of the discourse structure work together to bring out a particular form or variety of events and for any event or object there may be different ways of representing it to the world. This conception of discourse by Foucault suggests that discourse could be a countable noun and hence 'discourses'. The innate diversity in humans allows us to perceive the world in different ways. Thus, for any given event or object we are likely to construct and present it in multiple ways (Stubbs, 1983; Gee, 2005).

Academic discourse could be seen as academic construction of reality in that the ability to only use the language code is not enough but must include knowledge of the world, the principles and knowledge of the norms of language use (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 2005). This is particularly because the meanings derived from academic discourse are often socially determined and shared. This is so when the term 'discourse' is sometimes applied to different types of language use or topics, such as 'political discourse', 'colonial discourse', 'media discourse',

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and 'environmental discourse' (Gee, 2005) and, therefore, a certain structure is expected as well as certain lexical items and rhetorical structure.

In the past three and half decades, the study of academic discourse has received much attention from a number of scholars across the academic globe. Such an interest to some extent has been influenced by the discontentment with the traditional grammar (Bloomfield, 1933; Lyons, 1977) or general English writing texts, some of which do not sometimes fall in line with actual practices in academic discourse. Of the grammatical features examined, the verb tense is key. Traditional tense grammar, which typically focuses on temporal factors and sentence-level usage, has also been found to be inadequate to explain tense usage in academic writing (Lackstrom, Selinker, & Trimble, 1970, 1973).

Dickey (2001) has intimated that the first function of tense is to locate the situation described with respect to some evaluation time. In this case, natural languages and for that matter English, express time location in sentences. In line with this, Lackstrom et al. (1970, 1973) have suggested that non-temporal considerations such as subject matter and rhetorical functions influence tense choice in scientific and technical discourse. Other studies have reported correlations between tense choice and the degree of generality intended, the attitude of the writer towards the work cited, the structure of citations, information structure, and cohesion (Oster, 1981; Swales, 1990; Shaw, 1992). Several quantitative analyses have also revealed some correlation between tense and the major rhetorical divisions such as abstract, introduction, literature review,

methodology, discussion, and conclusion sections of scientific reports (Wingard, 1981; Hanania & Akhtar, 1985; Biber, Conrad & Peppen, 1998).

According to Chen (2008),  reporting verbs and tense choice in literature reviews (LRs) in academic writing represent a significant rhetorical choice, not only because of their high frequency, but also because of the perspective realized by each reporting verb and tense choice, as the choice of reporting verbs and tense reflects the degree of writer commitment. In academic writing, selecting an appropriate reporting verb, and its tense and voice in a particular context is one of the most acceptable ways for the writer to present his/her work and to communicate effectively with others in the academic community.

Hyland (2013) is of the view that specialist forms of academic literacy are the heart of everything done at the university. For that matter, graduate students must gain fluency in the conventions of academic writing in English to understand their disciplines, to establish their careers or to successfully develop their learning. One such convention is the writer's ability to employ the socially appropriate types of tense in the specific rhetorical divisions of thesis in their disciplines. Scholars in the humanities and science disciplinary cultures have normative expectations regarding tense usage in thesis produced under their supervision. Hyland (2013) adds that students can only marshal support, express collegiality, and negotiate agreement by making use of linguistic features which connect their texts with their disciplines.

There is nothing intrinsically prescriptive about an approach that acknowledges options and possibilities as well as variation across and within

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disciplines. Some may argue that there is a certain constraining power in the use of some approaches but it is important to note that these approaches do not dictate. As Swales (2004) points out, a sufficient similarity in characteristics across texts within a given genre is what is important in the classification. Variety in the use of move and sub-moves options has been clearly illustrated in a range of analytical reports such as, thesis abstracts (Hyland, 2000) and thesis introductions (Samraj, 2008). Cheng (2007) has demonstrated how generic discourse features and skills can be effectively transferred and recontextualised in another disciplinary context. However, instructors have sometimes questioned the extent to which an analysis of patterns and norms in a particular discipline area can be transferred to another discipline.

**Statement of the Problem**

In order to provide a realistic and relevant account of tense usage in academic discourse, a number of studies such as Burrough-Boenisch (2003) and Hinkel (2004) have tracked the use of tense in academic texts. In addition, researchers have analysed a set of textual components and features of academic writing such as the use of tense and aspect (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003; Hinkel, 2004), modality (Ngula, 2009; Vassileva, 2001), functions of adjectives (Soler, 2002), nouns (Flowerdew, 2003), and reporting verbs (Thompson & Ye, 1991). A wide range of academic written genres and text material such as textbooks (Hyland, 2000; Moore, 2002) and conference papers (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002) and Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) in recent times have also been studied.

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Research articles, as the main channel for sharing research findings are the most reviewed and analysed type of academic written discourse, and a large number of studies have explored research articles such as historical evolution (Salager-Meyer, 1999), social construction (Myers, 1990), the structural and organizational features of research article including acknowledgement and introductions (Swales & Najjar, 1987; Swales, 1990), the schematic structure of Literature Reviews (Kwan, 2006), moves and sub-moves in the results sections (Brett, 1994; Williams, 1999), discussion and conclusion sections (Holmes, 1997; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Ruiying & Allison, 2003), abstracts (Salager-Meyer, 1992; Santos, 1996, Hyland, 2000; Lores, 2004, Samraj, 2005; Li, 2011), and the grammatical and stylistic aspects of research articles including various lexico-grammatical features, ranging from tense choice to citation practices. Other studies have investigated the dynamics of writing post-graduate thesis in the Humanities (Grix, 2001; Afful, 2010) and citation practices and analysis (White, 2004; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2012).

Despite the numerous studies carried out on research articles, investigations into the use of tenses in academic discourse particularly, the M.Phil. thesis in Ghana, are rare. The thesis has been analysed by scholars with varied interests. It cannot be said that there is a lack of account of tense use in the thesis, but it varies from discipline to discipline and from one rhetorical section to another (Hyland, 2000). In other words, different disciplines have different use of tense; thus, tense use is more likely to vary from one discipline to another.

Most tense usage research in academic discourse have been done on experimental research writing within the domain of the natural sciences (Hyland, 2013). However, there have been few studies in the variation of academic writings in research articles in different disciplines in Ghana despite the fact that there has been growing interest in disciplinary differences in academic writings. Most of the studies on academic writing have focused on professional writing and a lot more have also focussed on novice writings, as is the case of M.Phil. theses. While some of the previous studies have focused on tense choice and citation, few studies, if any, have examined how tense is used in different disciplines in the results and discussion sections. Since academic writing covers students' writings (Hyland, 2013), it is imperative to examine how novice writers negotiate their way through the academic environment. This research, therefore, seeks to examine how tense is used in the results and discussion sections of academic discourse of two disciplines (English and Health Science) in the University of Cape Coast.

**Purpose of the Study**

Primarily, the study was to examine the various tense forms used in the results and discussion sections of academic writings in M.Phil. theses in English and Health Science in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. In other words, the study sought to analyse how M.Phil. candidates in the University of Cape Coast use tense to advance their thoughts and arguments in the results and discussion sections of their theses.

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**Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relative frequency of tense types in the results and discussion section of M.Phil. theses in the disciplines of English (applied linguistics) and Health Science?

2. What are the functions of the tense types used in the results and discussion section of M.Phil. theses in the selected disciplines?

3. What factors influence tense choice and variations in the results and discussion section of M.Phil. theses in the selected disciplines?

**Significance of the Study**

The study will be significant in a number ways including the following:

The findings of this study will be an addition to the existing knowledge on the use of tense in academic discourse among disciplines. The results may serve as a baseline for further research studies to be conducted in the area of tenses and academic discourse. The categories of tense emerging in the present analysis can be used by supervisors and their candidates to inform both supervisors and candidates of the options characteristic of their disciplinary culture and/or disciplines. In other words, they will be able to understand the choices one can draw from to most effectively express their intended meanings.

Further, the findings from the present research will contribute to the body of knowledge available to English and Health Science students and researchers about how tense is used in these disciplines. The findings may contribute to the

development of an account of tense use that may be applicable to a wide range of academic disciplines and, at the same time, create awareness of discipline-specific usage of tense.

The results of this study may contribute to the development of teaching and reference materials to help novice writers gain proficiency in tense use in academic discourse. For the purpose of further research, the schema of analysis developed in this current study can be extended to the investigation of other grammatical features in other genres and subject areas.

**Scope of the Study**

The study consists of two major components. The first is a quantitative analysis to determine patterns and variations in usage of tense in the two chosen disciplines as well as within each discipline. The second is a contextual analysis to identify factors that affect tense choice and explore reasons for the variations. In addition, insights and findings from recent literature on academic writing are incorporated to identify features that are unique to academic text.

As the social sciences are quite similar to the natural sciences in overall text structure and communicative categories (Holmes, 1997), as well as in order to understand tense use in as wide range of situations as possible, the Humanities and the Health Sciences, were chosen as the focus of the present analysis. This is to establish whether differences and similarities exist in the two disciplinary cultures.

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Most of the studies on academic writing have focused on expert writing; a great deal of others have also focussed on novice writings, as is the case of the M.Phil. thesis. Since student or novice academic writings have been at the heart of investigations of academic writings, especially, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Hyland, 2013), it is imperative to extend our interest further to include theses in the study of tense. The focus is on theses because it is during thesis writing that the candidates are able to express themselves using tense. The thesis offers candidates the rare opportunity to do in-depth research work to come out with findings.

More so, some of the previous studies, for example Dickey (2001) and Taylor (2001), have focused on tense choice and citation, and how tense is used in different disciplines in the introduction and literature sections to the neglect of the results and discussion sections. Meanwhile, it is in this section that candidates have the opportunity to present their findings and make new knowledge claims. Given this research gap, the present study examined tense usage in the results and discussion sections of M.Phil. theses in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

**Justification of the Study**

According to Chen (2009) and Reeves (2009), selecting an appropriate reporting verb and its tense and voice in a particular context is one of the best ways for the writer to present her or his work appropriately and to communicate effectively with others in the academic community because tenses manage time by placing moments or periods within particular relationships or 'time

frameworks.' It is expected that in thesis writing, some frame-works are more commonly used than others. Their frequency is likely to be varied from one rhetorical section of a thesis to another and they may possibly vary between one discipline and another. However, a look at the thesis writing manuals and guidelines for University of Cape Coast reveals little or no information on how tenses can be employed in the rhetorical sections of theses drawn from the sciences and humanities' disciplines. Therefore, the question that emerges is: On which benchmarks should thesis writers base their tense usage when writing in their disciplines? In other words, on which guidelines should research supervisors base their judgments on the appropriateness of tenses in their students' thesis? As a response to this question, this study analyses the types of tense that writers use in their respective disciplines and the patterns emerging in humanities and science disciplinary cultures.

**Organisation of the Study**

This thesis is organized in five chapters. Chapter One deals with the introduction which covers the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose/objective of the study, research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study as well as organisation of the study. Chapter Two deals with the review of related literature on the topic and provides the theoretical, conceptual framework and empirical evidence for the study. The literature review in Chapter Two examined numerous studies on tense in academic discourse. The

chapter investigates influential research studies, and summarizes the findings of the work of many researchers and scholars.

Again, the chapter reviews some theories of tense within which the study is grounded. Chapter Three describes the procedures and methods that are employed in the study. The results and discussion of the study are detailed in Chapter Four. Chapter Five contains conclusions and implications of this research as well as recommendations and suggestions for further research.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has explained that the study of tense in students' writings has been inadequate. This has motivated the present study and what the study is set to achieve is both quantitative and qualitative analysis of tense usage in MPhil thesis in the university of Cape Coast. The chapter has also discussed the background of the study, the statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance and scope of the study. The chapter has also argued that there are inadequate guidelines for theses supervisors in some universities and departments to guide candidates on tense choices as they write the thesis. The chapter also provides the justification of the study and organisation of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Introduction

This chapter reviews related literature on tense usage in academic discourse. The chapter is divided into two sections. The conceptual and the theoretical frameworks of the study are discussed in the first section, emphasising their usefulness to the analysis and interpretation of the data. Also, empirical studies on the use of tense usage in specific academic genres were reviewed in order to demonstrate how the present study ties in with and differs from previous researches.

### Concept of Tense

Tense has been defined as the grammatical category that establishes a relationship between two temporal locations: the time of utterance and the time of the situation referred to (Lyons, 1968; Comrie, 1985). According to Comrie (1985), it, therefore, shows that the simple present tense, the simple past and the present perfect tense are the three most commonly used tenses in academic writings. The basic meaning of the simple present tense is that it refers to a situation that includes or coincides with the moment of utterance. It may refer to situations that occupy a period of time much longer than the present moment. Nonetheless, the situations include the present moment within them (Comrie, 1985).

The intermediary tense, the present perfect tense, deals with the relevance of a previous situation to the present moment. The perfect expresses a relation between two temporal points: the time of the state resulting from a prior situation and the time of that prior situation. With the present perfect tense, the time of the resulting state includes or coincides with the moment of utterance (Comrie, 1976). Thus, tense locates an event or utterance within a specific time. Put simply, tense is the time sense of the verb.

The tense feature can be defined as the forms of the verb that may be used to indicate the time of the action or state expressed by the verb (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985). Accordingly, a point of reference is a point from which the relative time location of the situation is placed. In spoken discourse, this point of reference is usually the present moment 'now', and the moment of speaking is usually the same as the moment of hearing. In written discourse, the time of writing and reading are not the same, and situations can be considered in relation to either the time of writing or the time of reading (Comrie, 1985; Jackson, 1990).

Other terms used interchangeably to refer to the point of reference are 'point of orientation' and 'reference point'. Tense is also seen as a grammatical category, especially, in traditional grammar, where conjugations are compared with aspect and modality (Gledhill, 2009). Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) see tense essentially in terms of experiential metafunction (verb forms contribute to time reference in the clause) and the interpersonal metafunction (verb forms signal authorial stance).

Verb tenses present a relationship between the present moment (now) and another moment or period in time and this moment may be farther or closer in time. Traditional grammar sees these moments or periods as being in the present, past and future. We can therefore identify three types of simple tenses: present, past and future. The simple present tense locates a situation at the same time as the present moment (instantaneous present) or the period extends over time which includes the present moment (unrestrictive present) (Leech, 1987). On the other hand, the simple past tense locates a situation prior to the present moment while the simple future tense locates a situation ensuing to the present moment. The relationship that exists between these various time locations relative to the moment of utterance 'now' is illustrated in the following time continuum:

Past                     Present                    Future

Point of Orientation
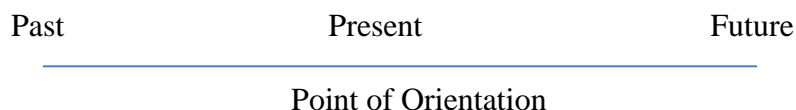
**Figure 1: Past, Present and Future Tenses**

Source: Jackson (1990; p.77). *Grammar and meaning: A semantic approach to English grammar*

According to Halliday (1994), the primary tense or absolute tense refers to the tense choice of past, present, or future relative to the time of speech. The time border of the primary tense can be taken as the reference point for another selection of present, past or future, which results in secondary tenses relative to the primary tense. Thus, the present perfect locates a situation started before the present moment and continues into the present moment. Reeves (2009) describes

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actions that occurred in the past which either have been completed or form part of an uncompleted whole in this sense. It contains an understood reference to the present, often made explicit by the addition of more information to this effect, or reflects the effects of past events on the present, and even the future, and it cannot be used together with references to specific periods in the past. This is illustrated in the following diagram:

Past                         Present                         Future

Point of Orientation
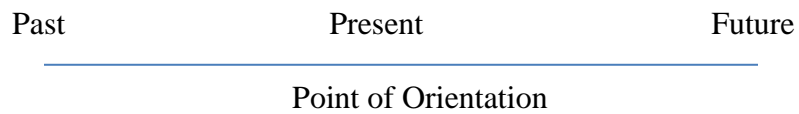
**Figure 2: Past, Present and Future Tenses**

Source: Jackson (1990). *Grammar and meaning: A semantic approach to English grammar*

The present progressive tense, according to Leech (1987), places a situation in a time span which includes the present moment and stretches for a limited period into the past and future, as shown in the figure below:

Past                    Present progressive              Future

Present

Point of orientation
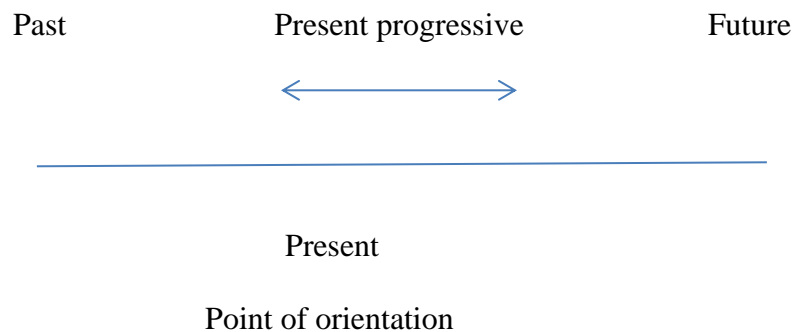
**Figure 3: Present Progressive Tense**

In this example, the past from the first time choice serves as a reference point for further choices, the secondary tenses include the past perfect (past-in-

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past), past progressive (present-in-past), and past future (future-in-past) (Glasbey, 2001). The past perfect tense locates a situation prior to a point in the past. It is 'a time further in the past, seen from the viewpoint of a definite point of time already in the past' (Leech, 1987, p. 47). The past progressive tense on the other hand locates a situation over a short time span including the past point of reference. Lastly, the past future locates a situation subsequent to a point in the past. Its common form is *would,* followed by the base form of the main verb. See the following illustration:

Past perfect        Past progressive        Past future

Past

Point of reference
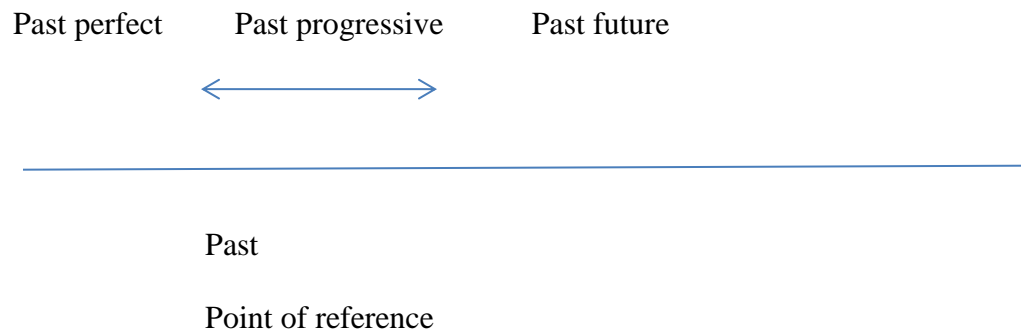
**Figure 4: Past Future Tense**

The point of orientation is typical of narrative texts conventionally written in the past tense and is usually useful in the analysis of the research report texts. Time frame may also be expressed through modals. Additionally, modals can express a temporal aspect. Accordingly, the modal verbs *will* and *shall* could be used to form the simple future tense, and *could*, *would, might*, and *should* could be used to express the past time of the related present-tense forms *can, will, may*, and *shall*. Further, modals can express modality, adding to a proposition 'an attitudinal component, giving the hearer (or reader) an assessment of the possibility, likelihood, probability, etc.' of a situation (Ngula, 2009, p.42). When

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used to express modality, the modals could be seen to be tenseless and the time frame is the unrestrictive present.

All in all, Traditional Grammar pegs the number of tenses at twelve. These are the simple present, simple past, simple future, present perfect, past perfect, future perfect, present progressive, past progressive, future progressive, present perfect progressive, past perfect progressive, and future perfect progressive (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

**Concept of Time**

The very first page of Jaszczolt's (2009) *Representing Time* discusses the concept of time according to the views of some Mathematicians and Scientists. Although it is not overtly stated in the extant literature, the concept of time is implicitly subsumed in most, if not all, of the treatises of the notions of tense and aspect. That is, being the more abstract domain, the time domain gets clarification in terms of some of the attributes of the spatial domain. Jespersen's (1924) allusion to the time line in his explanation of tense points to the centrality of time in any meaningful discussion of tense. Subsequent scholars like Reichenbach (1947), Comrie (1985), Dahl (1985), Binnick (1990), Kortmann (1991) also allude to this concept. Thus, if time is the sequence of moments of existence, then it is natural and should be regarded as a process of change that places existence into a sequence of linearity. But the flow of time is real and if there is a difference in the concept of time there will definitely have to be difference in its physical equivalent (McLaughlin & Bennett, 2005).

In the Newtonian view, according to Jaszczolt (2009), real time is backgrounded and, thus, invisible but causes change. In this sense, time is equated to a parallel to the earth's revolving around the sun. Newton explains this idea of time as a psycho-kinetic time. For him (Newton), time was absolute and simple and could be measured with certainty. That view was countered by the Einsteinian legacy that time is relative and not absolute. Explaining the concept of relative time, Jazsczolt (2009) puts it thus:

> According to the special theory, the speed of light appears the same independently of the speed with which the measuring agent/instrument moves, but the distances covered and the time the travel takes may vary from observer to observer. In short, moving clocks tick slower than a stationary clock of the observer and two events that simultaneous to a stationary observer will not be simultaneous to a moving observer (p. 6).

Therefore, relative time is used to measure absolute time and at the same time they are both linear and parallel. This argument indicates that everything goes through a natural process of change and that this material world is very dynamic. This temporal view of the world suggests that situations occur in sequence but some other ones occur simultaneously. Presentation of research findings relative to this frame-work will, therefore, be a presentation of a sequence of ideas, findings, and knowledge as in the case of the M. Phil thesis. This is surely based on the logic of serialisation which is at the core of the Newtonian view of time.

A further argument by Einstein suggests that even if the earth were to halt in its orbit around the sun there will be changes at the fore of the non-changing background. This concept is a psycho-static time. The foregoing discussion points to the fact that time, according to the temporal view, constitutes a change which has a parallel sequence in the real world but, relative time views time as not involving change in the real world but that changes occur in the situations in the world.

Undoubtedly, temporality is mainly marked in Indo-European languages by tense.  Tense and time must be distinguished from each other just as modality should be distinguished from mood, so must temporality will be distinguished from tense. As a grammatical category, Tense is a 'grammaticalised expression of location in time' (Comrie 1985: 9). Time on the other hand, according to Jaszczolt (2009), is ontological and psychological, which is tangential to the stand we took earlier on the notions of external (real, metaphysical) time and internal (conceptual, psychological) time. But, clearly, tense is one of the linguistic devices used to express temporal distinctions as evidence from tenseless languages like Yoruba and Chinese (Chen, 2009) shows and even tenseless expressions in tensed languages add up to this notion. Temporal adverbials such as 'again', 'tomorrow', 'last night', 'evidently', and clearly also provide information on time. But Jaszczolt (2009) further explained that tense is not only a grammatical category but also a semantic category since tense is a pairing of morpho-syntactic forms with meaning. Thus, the past has a form of the Base form of the verb+ed/en.

This supports the argument that though tense is usually credited for carrying information about time, it is not alone in this purpose. In short, grammatical means of expressing temporal distinctions are insufficient to place, in time, a situation to which an utterance pertains. There appear to be some correspondences between grammar and even pragmatics in order to locate an utterance or utterances in time. This view lends credence to Dowty's (1986) argument that temporal ordering of events in discourse requires not only the processing of sentence meaning by the addressee but also the result of pragmatic interference that may occur with the output of syntactic processing.

Asher and Lascarides (2003) argue that there are discourse relations or rhetorical structure rules which cater for the relations between the pieces of information that constitute a coherent discourse. Relations such as elaboration, narration, contrast, explanation, and background usually wax the information relative to events or states. So when two utterances have a relation of explanation, then one utterance comes before the second and the second utterance provides more information about the first one.

These relations are undoubtedly found in the MPhil theses when students report their findings in the results and discussion as they apply this "glue logic" to capture information. Presentation of information, knowledge or ideas must make use of situational defaults and pragmatic inference performed during utterance interpretation and analysis, using tense as the focus by the reader, and regarded as necessary by the writer or writers.

**Time in Language**

Time has been represented linguistically in two strands: the A-Series which correlates with the flow of river, time is linked to motion i.e. changes in the world. The other strand conceives of time as a line made up of stationary points. This distinction is also made by Jaszczolt (2009) by subscribing to the flow of river metaphor but uses the dry line arrangement of laundry to indicate the B-Series. De Swart and Verkuyl (1999) state that:

> In order to model these two pictures, MacTaggart (1908) as cited in Jszczolt (2009) distinguishes between the A-series and B-series conceptions of time. The A-series conception is based on the notion of past, present, and future. The B-series is based on a simultaneity and earlier-later calculus defined over objectively existing instants. The B-series embodies the 'objective' view on time. (p. 41).

This indicates that when events are ordered, the arrangements do not change with the passage of time. One event will permanently precede or succeed another event. The logic of temporality is usually with the A-series. Language combines both and tenses are typically concerned with the A-series, but many time adverbials have to do with the B-series as well. Hence, we usually order events in tensed discourse and we make interpretations of these events in the discourse.

The Reichenbachan idea that time is the preserve of physics gives rise to the idea that time may not feature prominently in human language. But the indispensability of time in language appears to be very high since language also

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makes reference to time in the temporal ordering of events. This relatively new idea is gaining grounds in theoretical linguistics. The traditional view of time (temporal), in this case the A-Series, brings forth the past, present and future and the B-Series which is a varying temporal imagery of linguistic items (events, states and processes) and indeed, the idea of locating processes or events and even states in time. Prominently, representing time linguistically will require some conception of time which includes the logical temporal relationships that exist between events on the timeline such as precedence, simultaneity, overlap or even subsequence.

It is independent of a point of view, and just gives a temporal ordering of events by the precedence relation. If an event is ordered as preceding another, it is then not related to the point of speech, and it is consequently non-deictic. This referred to as the objective view of time. The A-series expresses the 'subjective' (or intersubjective) view on time. If events are ordered as past, present and future, then there is a deictic Centre, point of speech. In any case, the verb is credited with encoding the concept of time. The duration of objects on the timeline is designated as *Aspect* whereas the latter manifestation of events, which involves the temporal logical relationship among events on the timeline, is referred to as *Tense.* However, this arrangement does not fit in for all languages. In some languages, temporal adverbials or particles carry the temporal information (Ranamane, 2009). Depending on the speech time, the truth value or condition of a proposition may change as time goes by. This then indicates the flow of time, since the present will be backgrounded into the past; that is, the present flows into

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the past. Both the static and the dynamic view of time are part of this conception of time. Lakoff and Johnson (1987) draw attention to metaphors built on the distinction between static, that is time is static and we sail through it and dynamic views of time, time as flowing like the river metaphor.

**Discourse Functional Theory of Tense**

A careful look at the treatises on the theories of tense will reveal that the study of tense in natural languages has a long history. There were various attempts to theorise an adequate tense theory that would capture the phenomenon clearly. Ranamane (2009) grouped these theories, quite correctly, into Basic structuralist approach to tense and aspect with the leading proponents being Jespersen's (1924) *The philosophy of grammar* and Reichenbach's (1947) *Elements of symbolic logic.* This is due to the fact that these scholars analysed tense in terms of form and meaning which is at the core of Structuralism. Also, both scholars analysed tense in terms of the timeline. The proponents of the Abstract Structuralist explain tense and aspect in terms of semantic features. Comrie's (1976) *Aspect*, Dahl's (1985) *Tense and aspect system*, Comrie's (1985) *Tense*, Binnick's (1990) *Time and the verb*, Davidsen-Nielsen's (1990) *Tense and mood in English*, Kortmann's (1991) *The triad, tense, aspect and aktionsart: problems and possible solutions,* and Sasse's (1991) *Aspect and aktionsart: a reconciliation* fall under this group. It is imperative to note that these scholars were influenced by their predecessors, Jerspersen (1924) and Reichenbach (1947).

Another group that have made significant contribution to our understanding of tense and aspect is those for the formalist approach. The publications that are classified under this approach, according to Ranamane (2009), are Hornstein's (1990) *As time goes by: tense and universal grammar,* and Georgi and Pianesi's (1997) *Tense and aspect: from semantics to morphosyntax.* These publications prefer the government and binding theory propounded by Chomsky to the analysis of tense and aspect. Furthermore, Georgi and Pianesi (1997) acknowledge the influence of Hornstein.

And yet, another approach is the Syntactic-Conceptual Approach to tense and aspect. Scholars have exerted much energy on Aspect rather than on Tense. The leading scholarly works in this category are Verkuyl's (1972) *A theory of aspectuality*, Brinton's (1988) *The development of the aspectual systems: aspectualizers and post-verbal particles*, Smith's (1991) *The parameter of aspect*, Tobin's (1993) *Aspect in the English verb: process and result in language* and Michaelis's (1998) *Aspectual grammar and past time reference*. These scholars were influenced by the syntactic-Conceptual parameters.

From the foregoing groupings, it appears the theorisation of Tense started from Otto Jespersen's (1924) work on tense. A careful glance at most of the dispensation on tense will reveal that the pioneering insights of Jespersen are in formulation. Reichenbach (1947) used the insights from Jespersen (1924). What Jerspesen had not done was to use his analysis of grammar to interpret all the tenses. Reichenbach used Jerspesen's three-point structure to account for all the tenses. But these pioneer scholars were oblivious of Tense's twin, Aspect. They

used tense to cover tense and aspect category. They used tenses to locate events on a timeline.

These were not the starting point of the expositions on tense since the concept that is today celebrated as tense is a very old idea. It extends as far back to the era of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers. Binnick's (1991) *Time and The Verb: A Guide to Tense and Aspect* provides a historical account of the evolution of the understanding of tense. He asserted that for Plato, the verb denotes action while Aristotle saw it as a composite sound with meaning, indicative of time. So in this case Aristotle uses tense as the distinguishing feature in dealing with the verb. Evidently, this Aristotelian idea of the verb has thrived on. In many natural languages, the three times of present, past and future are seen as segments of a long line passing through the present. The Aristotlean view cited in Binnick (1991) as stated in the *Physics,* the present is but a boundary between the past and the future. Aristotle assumes that there are indeed only two times, the past and the future. If the present is without duration, a paradox is created. Aristotle is quoted in Binnick (1991: 4) as:

> Some of [time] is past and no longer exists, and the rest is future and does not yet exist; and all time… is entirely made up of the no-longer and not-yet; and how can we conceive of that which is composed of non-existents sharing in existence in any way?

This indicates that, for Aristotle, there are only two times, the past and the future and rejects the idea of the present consisting of an interval. The Stoics are not left out in the contribution of our understanding of tense today.

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Taking a giant stride, we arrive at a more recent exposition on tense above the sentence level which is the Discourse Functional Approach. This theory is significant since the current study has some bearing with tense at the discoursal level. The domain is mainly academic discourse. The works put under this group include but not limited according to Ranamane (2009) Engel's (1990) *Tense and text: a study of French past tenses*, Fanning's (1990) *Verbal aspect in the New Testament Greek*, Fleischman's (1990) *Tense and narrativity: from medieval performance to modern fiction*, Thelin's (1990) *Verbal aspect in discourse* and lastly Gvozdanovič and Janssen's (1991) *The function of tense in texts*. These publications are classified under this approach because they all adopt a discourse-functional approach to the analysis of tense and or aspect. They try to show the functions that tense and or aspect perform at the discourse level.

These studies drew on both oral and written texts for their analysis. Engel (1990) drew her examples from journalistic discourse, using a corpus of 2,226 articles in 23 newspapers and magazines published in the year of 1984. Fanning (1990) adopts a corpus-based approach, using biblical citations (approximately 2,000). Further, Fleischman (1990) derived her examples from oral texts in French. In Thelin (1990), the various authors derived discourse examples from European languages such as Russian, Bulgarian, French, Finnish and Lithuanian. Finally, in Gvozdanovič and Janssen (1991) the samples came from various texts including scientific texts.

Fleischman (1990) argued that the referential functions are the basic meaning a tense or aspect assumes and take precedence over non-referential

functions. For instance, the referential meaning of the present tense is that the event time coincides with the present moment or moment of speech and of the past tense the event time is located prior to the moment of speech. In English, the past tense is regarded as the prototypical tense of a narrative text par excellence (Waugh, 1990; Fleischman, 1990) and in French it is the simple past (Desclés & Guentichéva, 1990). The reason for this conclusion, according to Ranamane (2009), is that both the past in English and simple past in French assist to recount the narrative events in a text.

Discourse functions such as expressive, textual and meta-linguistic functions were identified by the scholars who subscribe to the discourse functional approach to the study of tense. For example, Fleischman (1990) opined that the expressive function pertains to the attitude of the writer or character to the events in the narration. The textual function looks at the organization of discourse such as boundary marking, information blocking and grounding of information in the text. At the meta-linguistic level, it involves comments about the language itself. In other words, meta-linguistic is how language says something about language. Waugh (1990) argues quite significantly that a set of rules for the distribution of tense in a text could be arrived at. Fanning (1990) and Descles and Guentcheva (1990) therefore proposed how tense is to be distributed in texts by explaining that the simple past is used to achieve formal style and objectivity and also for narration. They added that in sports articles, the simple past is usually used in the beginning and closing (Fanning, 1990; Descles & Guentcheva, 1990). They also contend that tense can be used to interrupt the narrative flow in a text.

Tense performs this function by contrasting background or foreground or even segmenting the narratives into various parts. The present tense and the historical present are used under the expressive function to evaluate, provide point of view and accommodate focalization. Simple compound, on the other hand is used for the discourse (Waugh, 1990) or expressing the writer's commentary.

The discourse functions of tense or aspect are associated with the point of view of the writer. The present tense dominates in a text once the events are narrated from the writer's vantage point (Gvozdanovič, 1991) or the reflection of direct perception by the writer (Fleischman, 1990). In this case, students comment or pass judgments on a result or finding in the discussion. The various meanings of the French historic present tense are realized in evaluation, highlighting the propinquity and brilliance of the story as well as for tracking other scholars in a text (Monville-Burston & Waugh, 1991). The future tense, the scholars argue, is used to either introduce or divide the discourse into parts, to maintain the tension of the story, and to signal the use of idiomatic expressions and general truth statements (Tobin, 1991). In the context of the current study, therefore, futurity places the discussion ahead of the moment of writing and achieves these purposes as making general truth statements about the phenomenon under discussion.

The expositions on discourse function of tense were not limited to only narration but extended to cover scientific texts too. One such influential work was by Andersson (1990). He examined the role of tense in scientific writings and established four levels of tense-forms viz the book production level, the object level, textual organization level and the history of science level.  For instance,

there is the book production level and the information in it is presented in the future tense; the historical of science level deals with the beginning and the general purpose of the scientific text. The information is presented in the past tense since it looks further back to distance the text.  The textual organization level puts the information in an orderly manner, as presented in the scientific text. Perhaps, the most important of all the levels in the scientific text is the object level which carries the content and facts about the matter under discussion. For example, in connection with insects, the object level carries information regarding the anatomy or structure of insects, their kinds and their distribution across a geographical area and even their life processes. This led Andersson (1991) to conclude that the tense used is usually in the present tense. This shows it is relevant to the body of knowledge on insects.

Like many theories of our times, discourse functional approach to the study of tense has come under criticisms. Many of the scholars focused their studies at the sentence-level by examining the semantic functions of tense or aspect or even both. Ranamane (2009), for instance, asserts that Fanning (1990) was the first to do this. He set out to look at the discourse function of aspect in New Testament Greek; instead, he rather looked at the semantic feature which differed from the aim of the paper. Other scholars like Thelin (1990) and Fielder (1990) have made a similar slip. According to Ranamane (2009), Thelin (1990) researched the notion of time mainly by looking at its historical evolution and he ended up interpreting it relative to its semantic features totality and partiality. Other scholars like Fielder were interested in aspect rather than tense.

Engel (1990) is criticised by Waugh et al., (1992) for her inability to thoroughly examine the passé simple (simple past) in French. For them French has four past tenses which include compound past, imperfect past, simple past and the historical past but she limits herself to only two of the past tenses. She is also criticised for ignoring other findings by some scholars in her analysis. She concludes the past tense and compound past are in complementary distribution.

Similar criticisms came from Miller (1994) on Janssen (1991) and other scholars for neglecting the contributions of earlier scholars. He argues that a careful reading of Dahl (1985) will reveal that aspect of Classical Greek is grammatical and not derivational, as in the case of Slavic. Miller (1994) further argues that developing a model of deixis without indicating its advantages over earlier contributions constitutes an exercise in futility. According to Janssen (1991) and Tobin (1991), tense could be interpreted in terms of focal and disfocal concerns. These concepts clearly focus on the remote tenses. Undisputedly, this point is well made but as Miller (1994) observes, Jespersen (1924) analyses this issue pretty well in his publication. Miller's criticism centred on the semantics to the neglect of the discourse functions of tense and it could be said that these papers did not examine the discourse functions of tense due to the novice nature of discourse analysis which is still receiving attention from scholars.

The exception of this approach is that it provides a point of departure by providing for the referential functions of tense for the analysis of the discourse functions. Using these discourse functions of grounding, boundary marking and information blocking further research could be endeavoured. The aim of the

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current preoccupation is therefore to research the discourse functions of tense with aspect implicitly found in tense, either by corroborating or rejecting the existing ones or coming up with new ones in the Health Sciences and English theses in the University of Cape Coast.

## Discourse and Discourse Analysis

'Discourse' has long been used and so it has variously been defined. Jorgensen et al. (1999) claim that the term is difficult to define since various discourse analysts have defined it within the context of their research. They define discourse as a "particular way of talking about the world" (p. 1). This is suggestive that discourse is used for some communicative purpose. They add that a common idea that underlines all definitions of discourse: that is, Discourse is structured according to different patterns that people's utterance follows when they take part in different social life. The implication therein is that discourse is a social activity, has unity, and unity refers to the use of language above the sentence level. This assertion seems to buttress Aitchison (1992:92), cited in Brenes; that "…when we use language, we do not necessarily do so in a random manner and unstructured way. Both conversation and written texts have devices for welding together miscellaneous utterances into a cohesive whole". However, we have stated in Chapter one that for the purposes of this study, we agree with the view of Foucault (1972), cited in Baker (2006), that discourse can be seen as practices which systematically form the objects of which we speak. Indeed, this conceptualization of discourse, which the current study subscribes to, can be

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linked to genre, style text type. This implies that the various parts of the discourse structure work together to bring out a particular form or variety of events and for any event or object there may be different ways of representing it to the world. If discourse is conceived of generally as the use of language, then the M. Phil. thesis fits this definition; hence, it falls directly under academic discourse.

Generally, theses are written in academic settings, whether virtual or not. They focus on specific themes and form part of the discursive practices aimed at earning a degree in any academic field of endeavour. Discourse analysts have classified discourse into various types such as political discourse, sermonic discourse, scientific discourse, business discourse, and academic discourse. However, whether it is academic, sermonic, scientific, business discourse, it may be argumentative, descriptive, narrative or even expository in nature based on its formal characteristics and communicative purpose. Discourse, often broadly defined as language in use, is certainly more than language. According to Gee (1996), discourse is ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles.

The form and function of a piece of discourse is usually used to categorise discourse as narrative, expository, descriptive or argumentative. Bain (1987) and Genung (1990) exploited these principles to identify four main types of discourse namely, argumentation, description, narration, and exposition. Smith (2003) however, classified discourse into five main types: description, narration, information, report and argumentaion. She added that each type has a specific

type of situation, event, state or process, and is characterised by the principles of progressivity and temporality.

While acknowledging the appropriateness of the typology of discourse, I should add that a discourse type may be ambiguous in nature or may be a 'hybrid' of two types. This occurs when the discourse type serves multiple functions; therefore, it may characteristically be both descriptive and expository at the same time. Again, it can be a hybrid when it combines three or more of the types in a piece of discourse. In classifying discourse of this nature, the dominant characteristic ought to be prioritised.

The foregoing shows that the M.Phil. thesis could fit into one or two or even a combination of the characteristics. At one point the thesis is reporting and at another it is arguing. Even the various rhetorical sections may vary in terms of characteristics. Hybridization in the characteristics of the thesis will thus occur across and within the thesis itself. This implies that the nature and purpose of M.Phil. thesis will determine the classification into which that particular thesis will belong. The event and situation that necessitates the writing of the thesis will be the best determinant factor in the classification.

**Academic Discourse**

Every academic institution has a peculiar use of language in discourse patterns. The junior members, the students, are trained in these discourse patterns (Edu-Buandoh, 2010). Academic discourse is different from casual conversation, because the former utilises academic register, which makes up the language of

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academic discourse (Coxhead & Bryd, 2007). Gray (2011) is of the view that there is a general consensus among people, even outside the academic community, that academic writing has distinct characteristics that set it apart from other types of writing. According to Gee (2003), the term 'Discourse' with capital D (as cited in Osborn, 2009, p.22) is "how language is used 'on site' to enact activities and identities" (p.7) and indicates that "we craft what we have to say to fit the situation or context in which we are communicating" (p.11). Academic discourse, in this sense, is the discourse naturalized in the academy (Osborn, 2009) or "the preferred values, discourse conventions, and knowledge content of the academy" (Canagarajah, 1999, p.147 as cited in Osborn, 2009, p.29).

Instructors in academic settings may have different names for academic writing assignments (essay, paper, research paper, term paper, argumentative paper or essay, analysis paper, informative essay, position paper, thesis, long essay, dissertation, project work), but all of these academic writings have the same goal and principles (Hyland, 2013). For Hyland (2008), academic discourse 'is a privileged form of argument in the modern world, offering a model of rationality and detached reasoning' (p. 2). He further indicates that it is a demonstration of "flawless logic or empirical evidence, or absolute truth" (p. 2).

Academic discourse has been looked at as a model of detached reasoning and rationality. It is seen to demonstrate absolute truth about human experiences, empirical evidence and flawless logic. Hyland (2008) asserts that academic discourse is devoid of the doubt and anxiety associated with the partisan rhetoric

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of politics and commerce since its investigations are objective and mirror exactly, the true, natural and human world.

The academic discourse doyen, Hyland (2013), argues that specialist forms of academic literacy are at the heart of everything done at the university. As such, postgraduate students and their lecturers must gain fluency in the conventions of academic writing in English to understand their disciplines, to establish their careers or to successfully develop their learning. One such convention is the writer's ability to employ the socially appropriate and acceptable types of tense in the specific rhetorical divisions of students' M. Phil thesis in their disciplines. And these rhetorical divisions must stream into the expectations of the academic community. Scholars in the humanities and science disciplinary cultures have normative expectations since discourse itself is normative in nature (Coker, 2010) with expectation regarding tense usage in M. Phil Thesis produced under their supervision. Hyland (2013) adds that students can only organize support, express collegiality, and negotiate agreement by making use of linguistic features that are discipline specific. The variations, though subtle (Afful, 2012) from discipline to discipline, determine the tense feature, which can be defined as the forms of the verb that may be used to indicate the time of the action or state expressed by the verb (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985).

In discussing the procedures in academic writing, Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) assert that a thesis should "look scholarly" (p. 6) and "sound scholarly" (p. 7). In other words, it should meet the standards of academic writing expected of

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the discipline and the academic community. This means, among other things, avoiding unsupported assertions, and ensuring careful documentation and citation of previous research to support statements and arguments are mandatory as well as adopting a formal and objective writing style. Appropriate use of tense enables researchers to achieve these three requirements of the thesis and make the thesis scholarly. However, it is important to note that tense may not be the only deciding feature for the scholarly nature of the thesis. Other linguistic resources such as lexical bundles, reporting verbs, personal pronouns, evaluative adjectives, hedging devices and metadiscoursal elements (Swales & Feak, 1994) also play a vital role in giving the thesis some scholarly touch.

This study, however, focuses on the M.Phil. thesis of students of English and Health Science in the University of Cape Coast.  It is important to state that in the current work, academic writing is occasionally used in place of academic discourse but the meaning we have outlined above still holds for this study and thesis in place of M.Phil. thesis which are used in reference to the same thing, the M.Phil.  thesis.

## Empirical Review

Tense has received a considerable amount of attention from scholars; each scholar ends the analysis with some form of axiomatic conclusion on tense due to the very peculiar nature of it. This research considered similar works that have been done on tense. The works of these scholars were reviewed for the purpose of this study. Issues that were considered in their studies included the objectives of

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the works, methodologies used in carrying out the works, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the works under review.

**Tense Usage in Selected Humanities and Science Dissertations/Theses**

There are several works on tense usage in humanities and science dissertation and theses across the globe. For instance, Maroko and Kiai (2014) carried out a comparative study to describe the frequency and usage of the various types of tenses in academic discourse from Kenya public universities. They based their argument on the views of Chen (2009) and Reeves (2009) that appropriateness of tense use presupposes logical presentation of work and effective communication of ideas as well as fitting the work to the demand of the academic community.

Again, selecting an appropriate reporting verb (tense) allows for time management by placing the periods or moments within particular "time frameworks". The frequency and use of tense in the various rhetorical sections of academic discourse may vary from one discipline to another. They further argue that dissertation writing manuals and guidelines provide very little information on how tense could be deployed in the rhetorical sections of dissertations drawn from the sciences and humanities domains.

Maroko and Kiai (2014) used six dissertations, three each from both the humanities disciplines and science disciplines. The scholars claimed that sciences demonstrate absolute truths, and flawless logic. The humanities on the other hand showed logical presentation and discussion of knowledge. Dissertations written in

the 2007/2008 academic year were chosen for the study so as to avoid generational or diachronic changes in the genre. The sampling procedure used was the convenient sample based on the authors' knowledge and expertise of the chosen disciplines.

The scholars also used "tense" as an overriding term to refer to the tense-aspect combinations which is similar to the current study. The count was done manually and yielded 10,221 verbs in the data. The scholars found out that primary tenses featured more in dissertations but also subtle disciplinary variations relative to the use of tense also featured. This implies that one rhetorical section demanded different tense from another rhetorical section. They also concluded that some social constraints from the community of practice as regards normative expectations were evidenced from the data. Thirdly, they asserted that the use of the various types of tenses in the various sections of the dissertation was on purpose. This conclusion lends support to the fact that tense usage entailed an understanding of the communicative purposes associated with the relevant propositions where it occurs. Inappropriate use of tense in any section suggests the writers make personal choices which deviate from the normative expectation in their disciplines.

Maroko and Kiai (2014) recommended genre-based approach to the teaching of dissertation writing. Maroko and Kiai (2014) further recommended an expansion of the corpus in order to yield quantitative results so as to provide a vivid typology of the tenses used in the various disciplines. Also, in order to

understand the tense usage in the writing of dissertations, the various levels must be considered and be included in the process of writing.

Some points need discussion in the study by Maroko and Kiai (2014). First, the study appeared to have attempted to cover so much. I think that any attempt to analyse the tenses used in the various rhetorical sections in one study will result in a not-so-deep analysis and the results may only be conclusive enough as in the case of the study by Maroko and Kiai (2014). The present study went further by looking at 20 MPhil theses, focusing on only the results and discussion section to allow for a deeper analysis. Moreover, Maroko and Kiai have conceded that the data were not enough for the study and thus future studies should expand the data.

Maroko and Kiai's (2014) study, however, faces a methodological deficiency. This is seen in the way the authors used only six dissertations from one academic year. This opens the study to criticism as one characterised by small data size. This is because the data was not representative enough to warrant conclusions.

A major significance of Maroko and Kiai's work is that it affirmed two scholarly positions on the subject of tense. The first one is that disciplinary variations exist among works from various disciplines, as posited by Hyland (2005). Second, tense alternations in the various rhetorical sections are meant to achieve some communicative purposes (Swales, 1990).

Another related work is Taylor's (2001) 'Tense usage in Academic writing: A cross disciplinary study'. The study used 18 journal articles (JAs) from

English, history, and philosophy, Taylor compared patterns of tense usage across these disciplines. Taylor's study was at two levels. The first level was a quantitative analysis to establish patterns of tense usage in the various rhetorical sections. The second level was a conceptual analysis which explored the possible factors influencing the choice of one tense over another. It is important to note that the second part of Taylor's work was exploratory since the study could not cover all factors affecting tense choice such as the writer's own creativity and even the writer's lack of expertise needed to alternate verb forms in order to achieve the normative expectations in their disciplines.

Although Taylor's (2001) work was not based on the science disciplines, insights from English for Science and Technology (EST) introduced by Lackstronm et al. (1970, 1973) were used. According to Taylor, Lackstrom et al. (1970) made a distinction between rhetoric as judgment affecting the way in which information has been organized and the clarity of expression that comes along with the organization.  This contrasts with rhetoric as the art of influencing the thought and conduct of an audience or people. Thus, the thesis for example, has rhetorical section, each of these sections has distinct grammatical features that correlate with certain rhetorical features as well as which cast influence on the other.

To achieve the objectives of the study, Taylor (2001) adopted Bley-Vroman and Selinker's (1984) five-step optimal research strategy for rhetorical-grammatical study on academic genres. These include observation of practical learning/teaching problems and dissatisfaction with current tools, perform a

"quick and dirty" analysis to determine appropriate texts and units to be studied, state explicit initial assumptions to guide the analysis, select high valued texts as samples, and lastly, consult subject-specialist informants. Following this, Taylor (2001) agreed, quite correctly, with Swales (1990) that the first three steps may not pose problems but the last two could.

However, Bley-vroman and selinker's (1984) model appeared to be in general agreement with the Swalesian CARS (Create a Research Space) model. Taylor (2001), like Maroko and Kiai (2014), selected the finite verbs in selected texts but Taylor went further to examine the rhetorical and contextual factors influencing the choice of the tense. A total of 10,188 finite verbs were found from 18 journal articles which were in the threshold of the 6 dissertations analysed by Maroko and Kiai (2014).

Taylor finally concluded that from the results and discussion, generalization regarding the humanities domain is not feasible. This was due to the discipline-sensitive variations that exist among disciplines in the humanities. However, some generalization within disciplines may be possible. Maroko and Kiai (2014) confirmed this in their study that disciplinary variations exist and thus generalizations may be out of place. Again, not all the twelve tenses were used in one discipline. Taylor found out also that the nature of the content each discipline dealt with also determined the type of tense used. Thus academic discourse had unique rhetorical categories which included tense and should not be utopian.

The reason for the choice was not given, leaving the work open to criticisms of the use of a small corpus for the study. Again, limiting the corpus to

the humanities discipline alone but using insights from EST raises some questions. Are writings in the humanities similar to that of the sciences? This, Hyland (2005) disagrees and asserts that the humanities consisted of an expression of knowledge presented in a logical manner. Thus, they are soft science and quite subjective.

**Tense in Second Language Context**

Min (2013) in a study of 120 academic essays written by Non-Native Speakers (NNS) from three levels of language proficiency during English placement testing writing examination at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), sought to address the importance of teaching grammar. This study signified a paradigm shift from "whether or not to teach grammar to how and when to teach which grammar". Ghanaian schools use English as a second language and usually instruction are carried out in English language in Ghanaian public universities. Therefore, as non-Native speakers of the language we are likely to exhibit similar features with others in other parts of the world (Ngula, 2009).

Min (2013) asserted that English verb tense and aspect system posed more challenge to the NNS and thus formed part of NNS most frequent errors and from which much misunderstanding was generated. Of all tense errors, verbal errors were most noticeable by NS professors in various fields of study. By focusing on the two-tenses and their twin, aspect system, the relationship between ESL students' grammar knowledge and their language proficiency in academic writing

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may be brought out vividly. Basing understanding on the claims by various scholars such as Shaughnessy (1976; 1997); Bartholomae (1985 as cited in Zamel, 1987); Biber et al. (1999); Gee (2003); Coxhead and Bryd (2007); Osborn (2009); and Gray (2011) that, the influence of academic discourse on the writings of the NNS was enormous. This was because the scholars claimed that academic discourse played a significant role in disciplinary styles and conventions of students language uses.

Min (2013) went further to argue that when second language (L2) learners committed grammatical errors or used unpolished expressions in their academic papers the onus was placed squarely at the doorstep of the student for not meeting the high standard of academic discourse. They were seen to show insufficient linguistic knowledge, lacking practice or even seen as exhibiting signs of laziness in their academic work. We could argue here that errors by language learners are signs that learning is taking place. In other words, errors in the language of NNS provide feedback to language teachers that students were making progress and thus remedial measures are taken to mediate the learning process. Again, writing placement tests such as the one in UIUC may come with anxiety usually characteristics of examinations.

Similarly, Min (2013) acquiesced that L2 production errors provided invaluable resources for analysing learners' interlanguage. Thus errors provide data for understanding which language features the learners are having difficulties with. We must add that second language learners' progress along the interlanguage continuum to near-native speaker. If this was so, then masters'

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students may be argued to be on the interlanguage continuum since they have not reached NS status yet. Therefore, the appropriateness of the MPhil thesis which is also naturally-occurring data cannot be overemphasized.

The study by Min unravelled that contrary to the famous hypothesis that more proficient students would demonstrate better knowledge of verb tense and aspect and use more variety of verb structure, the results of the study strongly established that grammatical knowledge of the NNS' usage patterns of verb tense and aspect system was not the only factor but also academic discourse played significant role as a variable to the frequency of each verb structure.

Again, the error analysis in the study suggested that the frequency rates of correct or incorrect uses or even avoided uses did not reflect adequately their l2 writing proficiency. The author established a close relationship with the learner's knowledge of more varieties of functions of each verb tense and aspect and their ability to make functional uses of each for the appropriate content. The author further suggests the grammatical content does not stand alone and isolated but had significance in meaning function and purposes as they integrate to make the learner's essay whole and entire. Teachers of L2 learners must bear in mind that grammar should not be seen as opposed to the components of content, so in teaching L2 academic writing, grammar does not oppose coherence or structure when assessing students' writing proficiency must provide focus for the teaching process.

Smith (2003) also conducted a study which aimed at finding the patterns of covert linguistic categories in discourse and also show that aspectual situation

categories such as event and state pattern together to establish discourse units of the passage. She emphasized that very serious studies have focused on discourse of particular genres ranging from personal narratives, to highly structured written materials. This, according to Smith, has proven fruitful over the years since people make sense of a discourse as an activity with its own communicative purpose, structure and even conventions rather than on some specific linguistic features. She believed that genre may be the wrong level for close linguistic study of discourse, due to its strong pragmatic basis which was the global structure of discourse but was not usually presented in texts.

Using the passage as the main focus, Smith (2003) identified that in the passage there were stretches of what may be regarded as different types for example, narration, argument, description and even commentary. These, she posited, constitute discourse modes of narrative, report, description, information, and argument. Her corpus consisted of 30 texts of varying genres, length, and venues. Specially, she used newspaper articles, essays in journals, short stories and novels. She showed that from a newspaper editorial may in a single paragraph shift from one discourse mode to another, for example moving from argument in one sentence to narrative in the second sentence. She acknowledged two linguistic features that characterize the discourse modes which both involve temporality by extension and one is the type of situation introduced by the passage into the universe of discourse. These may be seen as events, states, and others go for a mode. In the temporal mode of narrative, description and report text passage progression were based on the principle of temporal or spatial change. In a

temporal mode of information and argument the principle of text progression will be with metaphorical changes of location through the information space of the text.

Smith (2003) found out that the narrative advanced through narrative time but description was static temporally. The only advancement was by changes in the spatial location within the scene described. As for reports, situations are related to the time of report which usually coincided with the Speech Time and it progresses by a change of time. Thus, the research report may exhibit such modes relative to tense. She further argued that tense interpretation principles were three-continuity, Deixis and Anaphora. Thus in narrative, tense shows continuity, but in report it shows deixis since situations are related to the speech time, for description, tense is anaphoric because situations were related to an already established time.

Smith (2003) concluded quite correctly that tense interpretation patterns were mainly three (3): continuity, deictic, and anaphora but, the deictic is usually the default pattern.  Smith's work brings to the fore two important ideas. First, it was an extension of the Reichenbachian framework which posited that tense continuity corresponded with a time reference of that advanced with bounded events or temporal adverbials, with the deictic tense, reference time changes with different relations to speech time. Tense anaphora comes with reference time as simultaneous with a previously established time. Secondly, to get temporal location in a discourse passage, we must have accessed, directly or indirectly, the

discourse mode of the passage. This conclusion, as Smith argued, added to the refinement of the discourse representation theory (DRT).

**Tense and Aspect of Narrative Writing**

Similar to Min (2013), Tsai and Tseng (2011) also analysed tense and aspect in narrative writing but this time with both native and English learners at the intermediate and advanced level. They aimed to apply the Aspect Hypothesis which attempted to interpret morphological markings for verbs, to examine tense-aspect markings in written narratives from a real audience. This, the scholars did by allowing both the participants and the researchers to see a silent film entitled *Modern Times*. After the film, the participants were asked to describe the second half of the film since the researcher left at the mid-point of the film.

Indeed, the choice of a film undoubtedly brings variety into classroom discourse by arousing the interest of the students (participants) which is in contrast to the examination situation of anxiety. The scholars found out that the participants appeared to have adequate knowledge of the suffixes of the verbs to mark tense. For example, the progressive form was found to be attached to the dynamic verbs and not statives. In other words, they used more –ing forms with activity verbs embodying the durative feature. Again, it was ascertained, similar to findings in Min (2013), that proficiency levels had a strong correlation with tense-aspect markings. Tsai and Tseng (2011) conclude that native speakers preferred the present tense while the advanced learners favoured the past tense.

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The intermediate learners leaned towards a hybrid of the two tenses. This also could be a signification of interlanguage of learners.

The study by Potowski (2005) was more specific of the language spoken by the learners. She used Spanish-speaking and English-speaking children who were integrated in mainstream school and this sought to promote bilingual development. The children received the same content instruction in the same classroom. She carried out the study to unearth the grammatical competence of the children not in English but Spanish.

Elson and Mckeown (2003), in a seminal work, examined tense and aspect in computer mediated interaction of a reader or readers to a narrative. In other words, symbolically encoded narratives were assigned tense and aspect in system that realizes surface text. Proposition that were attached to a timeline were encoded such that the narrative would be realized from several viewpoints. The interface then selected tense and aspect for single events intervals and sub-intervals for quoted and unquoted speeches. This way, the generation system communicated knowledge of time by selecting tense and aspect carefully in their surface realizations. Thus, the events, if arranged and selected correctly, will give the correct impression of events that were serialized as previous state and current reality.

The study made two important contributions to the extant literature. First, correspondences were established between tense, aspect and interval logic and a generation situation. Therefore, mappings of temporal relationship to specific or

aspect selection were emphasized. This would enable novice users to create semantic encodings of short stories like Aesop's fables.

Operating in the field of computational linguistics, Elson and Mckeown (2003) demonstrated the usability of the encoding interface. Narratives could be turned into a formal representation with some exposure to semantic encodings being through the reference text generator. However, Elson and Mckeown (2003) cannot escape criticism of obscurity and complexity. Using such an interface requires serious focused training to use the software. But it has also established tense and aspect studies could be made easier by the use of the interface.

**Verb Tense and Verb Aspect in the Foregrounding of Information**

Carreiras, Carriedo, Alonso, Fernandez (1997) carried out three experiments to examine the role of verb tense and verb aspect in the construction of mental models during reading. A sample of 32 participants was selected to voluntarily participate in the experiment.

Using 80 paragraphs of 8 each paragraph contained four segments made up of one sentence each. This was rather a complex procedure, but the researcher showed the materials on screen for the subjects. The subjects were to look for test words and to answer 'yes' or 'no' when they thought that the test word had appeared in the previous paragraph or not.

They posited based on the experiment that tense and aspect affect foregrounding of tokens in a mental representation of a text. Thus, a simple change in tense or aspect makes information inaccessible at early stages of

processing. Readers understand narrative by constructing a mental model of what the text describes.

Again, tense and aspect indicate whether an event occurred prior to, at or after the narrative now. They also show event time distance relative to the timeline. They argued that progressive verbs do not advance the story time line because they occur at the last mentioned event. The past perfect show situations of events irrelevant to the present and therefore have occurred prior to the present moment (Hopper, 1979), cited in Carreiras et al. (1997).

Carreiras et al. (1997) concluded that the temporal framework of a text and the temporal relations between pieces of a text provide a multidimensional representation of text. Again, tenses/aspect which form part of the linguistic devices help to foreground information by giving it prominence which is similar to that of the MPhil thesis where candidates communicate knowledge by selecting which information need foregrounding or backgrounding. It would be interesting to explore how tense/aspect foregrounds or backgrounds information in the theses of MPhil students of University of Cape Coast.

**Tense Usage in Academic Writing**

Scholars have expressed different views about academic writing. For example, Melander et al. (1997) examined English and Swedish RAs in biology, medicine and linguistics. The results showed that discipline as well as culture affected the way RA was written. This influence varied across the three disciplines. That is, culture affected the structure of RA in linguistics, but this was

not found in biology texts which were consistent across the two languages. With regard to medicine, neither discipline nor culture influenced RA writing.

Little research has been conducted in relation to the verb tense of the moves in thesis at the intermediate and advanced levels (Tseng, 2011). This might be due to the complexity of the tense usage in thesis (Swales & Feak, 2004). Salager-Meyer (1992) found that medical researchers used different verb tenses to present move structures of their 84 RAs. That is, they used the past tense in three moves: purpose, method and results. However, they used the present tense to introduce the conclusion move. Similarly, Pezzine (2000) investigated the preferred verb tense used in 18 RAs in linguistics and translation. He found that the present simple was the most frequently tense used in RAs, followed by the past simple and present perfect, which was used in very few RAs.

From a cross-disciplinary perspective, Li (2011) found that the present tense was more common than the past tense in the introduction and literature sections in linguistics RAs. Chemistry RAs used the present tense but in the passive voice. In reporting academic writing, tense-alternation is often studied together with voice (Oster, 1981; Malcolm, 1987; Shaw, 1992). Past tense and active voice tend to be associated with reporting detail, while passive-perfect verbs often initiate new subtopics. The writer exploits temporal reference to strategically manipulate generality. The simple present tense, present perfect tense, simple past tense scale covers over 90 per cent of finite reporting verbs. This represents increasing distance of various kinds from the reported finding (Swales, 1990). Tense-alternation is the speaker's strategic device that encodes

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informational and attitudinal contrasts of reporting in discourse, that is the speaker's attitude for example, empathy to participants and to speech event, and the contextual information, human relations, participants' psychological states (Sakita, 2002). Sakita's (2002) research can shed some light on the study of tense in academic writing.

Tense-alternation phenomena of reporting verbs reflect how a speaker perceives the past scenes that existed in his memory and are now being recollected. For example, Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) analyse the pattern of an Introduction in the thesis. According to Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988), an introduction is a cyclical pattern with the components outlined as follows.

i. Statement outlining variable 1.

ii. Description of the previous research relating to variable 1.

iii. An evaluation of this research (optional).

iv. Statement outlining variable 2.

v. Description of the previous research related to variable 2.

vi. An evaluation of this research (optional).

In the step of 'Statement outlining variable 1', the present tense is often used, and in the step of 'Description of the previous research relating to variable 1', past tense is mostly employed. Although in Hopkins and Dudley-Evan's (1988) pattern, the step of 'An evaluation of this research' is optional, and it is in this part of LRs that variation of tense use of reporting verbs occurs more often than in other steps. Below is an example analysed by using Hopkins and Dudley-Evans' (1988) pattern (only the main structures of the sentences are shown).

(1) Prior research <u>has addressed </u>different aspects of marketing coordination separately. (Statement outlining variable 1)

For example, researches <u>have considered</u> the specific case of coordinating prices across multiple products in a related bundle (Nalebuff, 2000); <u>have looked</u> at the macro-level organizational issues associated with marketing multiple products (Homburg, Workman & Jensen, 2000); and <u>have looked </u>at coordinating marketing decisions with other functional areas (Griffin & Hauser, 1996).

(Description of the previous research relating to variable 1)

However, there is no research that <u>examines</u> the economic value of coordination on its own, <u>relates</u> that value to the organizational issues of marketing decision-making.

In Step i of Example (1), present perfect tense is used, while in Step ii, present perfect tense is used most of the time. Tense variation in Step iii indicates that an evaluation of the previous research is presented. It should be pointed out that sometimes an Introduction does not follow the sequence of the pattern strictly, and there are cases when an evaluation is presented after more than one description of the previous research are portrayed. This example shows that tense alternation is a common phenomenon in LRs.

As far as the study is concerned, the simple present tense, the simple past tense and the present perfect tense of reporting verbs are the three commonly used tenses in thesis. Although in the current study, tense realization in each thesis is, in a sense, individualistic and particular to each situation, theses follow certain patterns shared by the peers and the audiences of the writer. The basic temporal

meaning of a tense remains constant, regardless of its use in particular contexts (Comrie, 1985). That means the interpretations a tense may receive in a specific context are best accounted for linguistically, not solely in terms of its contextual uses, but rather in terms of the interaction between context-independent meaning and context-dependent use. Sometimes, tense usage may be related to rhetoric purposes. The writer can choose the time location that best suits his purposes, as will be shown in the following section.

**Tense Usage in Pedagogic Texts**

Whereas some scientists, for example, Day (1995) and Matthews et al. (1996) prescribe the use of tense in academic discourse, other scholars such as Weissberg and Buker (1990) and Swales and Feak (1994) give advice based on the use of tense analyses of papers published in a range of scientific disciplines. They show that in real life, authors do not follow strictly the conventions. They attribute rhetorical power to tense deployment. For example,

(1) The differences among … tenses are subtle. In general a move from past to present perfect and then to present indicates that the research reported is increasingly *close* to the writer in some way: close to the writer's own opinion, close to the writer's own research, or close to the current state of knowledge (Swales & Feak, 1994: 184).

What Swales and Feak mean can be illustrated in the following example:

(2) Mitchell and Krumboltz (1990) reviewed empirical studies related to social learning theory, that have supported what the author call "testable

hypotheses" suggested by "the social learning theory of career decision making ". This theory also <u>accounts for </u>...

In Example (2), tense shift of reporting verbs from simple past (*reviewed*) to present perfect (*have supported*) and then to simple present (*accounts for*) shows that the research done by Mitchell and Krumboltz is increasingly close to the writer's own research.

Conversely, Comrie (1985) asserts that the basic temporal meaning of a tense remains constant regardless of its use in particular contexts. That means the interpretations a tense may receive in a specific context are best accounted for linguistically, not solely in terms of its contextual uses, but rather in terms of the interaction between context-independent meaning and context-dependent use.

Another important study of the use of tenses in academic writing is that of Lackstrom et al. (1973). In their study, they claimed that previous research is presented in the Past tense when such research does not bear directly, in terms of importance, on the current writer's work. The Present Perfect tense is used when the past research is directly related to the current writer's research. Another study, Oster (1981), makes the following hypotheses about the use of tenses in reporting past literature in two technical articles: 1. The Present Perfect tense is used primarily to indicate the continued discussion of information in the sentence. 2. The Past tense is used to claim non-generality about past literature and also to refer to quantitative results of past literature that are non-supportive. 3. The Present tense is used a) to refer to quantitative results of past literature that are supportive and b) to refer to past literature, rather than to discuss it.

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However, Oster herself concedes that her generalizations must be speculative, given that her analysis was based on only two RAs. Other research of relevance to this investigation is that of Salager-Meyer (1992), which discusses verb tense and modality in medical abstracts; Gunawardena (1989), on the Present Perfect in journal articles; and Malcolm (1987), on rules of tense usage in scientific articles. Generally, there is consensus among these researchers that tense choices are determined by a variety of factors rather than simply by time.

**Guide for Writing and Presenting Theses**

Every academic institution has guidelines for writing and presenting thesis. The University of Cape Coast has one which students have to follow. The title of the guide is 'University of Cape Coast School of Graduate Studies Guidelines for Preparing and Presenting Project Work, Dissertation and Thesis'. The thesis guide for the University of Cape Coast is divided into various sections. Subsequently, students are supposed to use the guide and refer to it most often for relevant information about what goes into each section. Students are demanded to meet every requirement in the guide for writing thesis. The requirement for writing in each section of the thesis is high for all students, especially, M. Phil and Ph. D candidates.

The guide for writing thesis in the University of Cape Coast consists of three main categories of material, namely: preliminaries, the main body including references, and the back. In each of these sections, detailed requirement of what is expected of the candidate is explicitly written. Unfortunately, the type of tense to

be used in each section is conspicuously missing in the guide. It is only in the general formatting that some small portion captures issues on language and expression.

In this guide, provision is made on how to organise and introduce a thesis. It stated that a candidate should provide introductory statement at the beginning of chapters two to five to indicate how each chapter is organised. Here, the candidate is advised to commit to a structure and the development of ideas in a sequence and ideas must be presented in an orderly manner. To achieve continuity, candidates are advised to use punctuation marks appropriately and use transition words to help maintain the flow of thought.

More importantly, the candidate must avoid shifting topic or tense or person (pronoun) abruptly. This is where something has been said on the use of tense without making reference to a particular section in the process of writing the thesis. The guide stated that students must be consistent in the use of verb tenses. Use the past tense to present or describe the results of the study (e.g. student performance increased from…). Use the present tense to discuss the results (e.g. the results indicate that…). Use past tense (e.g. Smith asserted that…) or present perfect tense (Smith has argued…) for the literature review.

Bitchener (2009) touched on the various rhetorical sections but provide little information on tense usage the rhetorical sections. This supports the earlier assertion that theses Writers are left in the dark on which tense to use the various sections of the theses report.

It is clear from the presentation on the guide for writing thesis from the University of Cape Coast that much attention has not been given to tense usage in the various sections of the thesis. This makes it difficult to say with certainty the particular tense that M. Phil candidates are likely to employ in writing their theses.

Given that tense use in academic writing is not followed strictly by the writer/author, it is difficult to be sure about what underlies the way a competent writer/author handles tense in academic writing. However, it can be seen from the above discussions that although temporal meaning is basic, the interaction between context-independent meaning and context-dependent use of tense is of crucial importance, which allows more than one temporal meaning. Presenting tense use in academic writing as inviolable rules (Day, 1995) oversimplifies actual practice and ignores the reader's abilities to infer meaning from context (Burrough-Boenisch, 2003).

In the analysis of tense usage in thesis, one does not have to adhere rigidly to the conventions to match grammatical choices with the time of events in the physical world. An important feature that needs to be presented here is that the temporal location of many references to the previous studies is one that exists only in the mind of the thesis writer. To some extent, the choice of tense is a rhetorical one, and the writer can choose the time location that best suits his/her purposes.

**Chapter Summary**

Generally, the review comprised theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed in the study as well as previous studies on the research topic. Some key concepts such as academic discourse, time, tense, and discourse functional approach to tense as its theoretical framework. Specifically, the review has demonstrated that tense usage will vary as its use is based on subject matter and some contextual factors like the communicative purpose as well as the writer's own competence in handling the issue of tense in his or her write-up. The choice of tense is a rhetorical one and the author can choose the time location that best suits his or her purpose.

Writing manuals and guides sometimes do not talk about tense usage in the results and discussion sections of the thesis. Again, the writer's competence level shows how well she or he can use tense appropriately.

## CHAPTER THREE

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This chapter presents the procedures and techniques that were employed to conduct the study. It comprises a discussion of the research design, the sample size and sampling procedure, data collection procedure, and methods employed in data analysis.

### Research Design

Mixed method approach was adopted for the study. Mixed method research is a form of research methodology used for conducting research that involves collecting, analysing, and integrating qualitative and quantitative data in one research. The main purpose for using mixed method in research is that both qualitative and quantitative research designs when used in combination provides a better understanding of the research problem than either of the methods in isolation. Philosophically, mixed research method takes an eclectic, pragmatic, and common sense approach, suggesting that the researcher mix quantitative and qualitative methods in a way that works best for the given research questions being studied or investigated in a particular context without any interference. Mixed research obtains both quantitative and qualitative data, attempts to corroborate and complement findings, and takes a balanced approach to research.

According to Harvey (1990), and Walliman (2004), a mixed method research strategy is sometimes appropriate in collecting data in descriptive

studies. On the strength of this recommendation, both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in carrying out the study. The mixed method was used for the following reasons. First, because the study addresses several relatively unexplored questions, it is uncertain which method is most appropriate to generate the best answers. Second, it is believed that bridging qualitative and quantitative methods will generate more inclusive results than either method in isolation. Quantitative methods are valuable to test the relative importance of qualitatively informed ideas.

More so, in the social sciences, quantitative statements are subject to different interpretations and may sometimes be used for political spin. Qualitative method allows a researcher to study selected themes and events into detail and effectively. Information gathered is not limited to a single case or predetermined by results; it provides detailed results which quantitative strategies could not have provided (Patton, 2002).

Quantitative method was used to assist me find answers to the research question one, the distribution of tense types in the disciplines of English and Health Science. I employed qualitative method to help find answers to research questions two and three. The qualitative method helped me to find out the functions of the tenses used in the discussion section of the English and Health Science disciplines and factors that affect tense choice and variations in English and Health Science especially, in the results and discussion sections.

I adopted descriptive research design to help me obtain information concerning the status of the phenomenon of tense and describe "what exists" with

respect to variables or conditions being investigated (Grix, 2001; Babbie, 2005). This helped me to describe attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of the students on one hand and the characteristics of the group of theses being investigated. Further, I used the design because I investigated the issues involved in this study at a point in time (Harvey, 1990; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Through this, I gained more information and added this to the theoretical discussions on tense in academic discourse.

The choice of my research design was that, I took into consideration the view of Robson (1993), that the choice of any research design for any study and strategy used must be appropriate for answering the research questions formulated. Furthermore, the reason for the choice of this methodology rested on Mason's (1996) and Harvey's (1990) suggestion that as a researcher, the method you are using should be the one that would help you in identifying your data sources and methods of generating the data; the feasibility of the information, and whether the chosen method could assist in answering the research questions posed in a logical manner.

**Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Two major sampling methods were used for the study: purposive sampling, which is non-probability sampling, and simple random sampling, a probability sampling method. According to Walliman (2005), purposive sampling is a useful sampling method which allows a researcher to get information from a sample of the population that one thinks knows most about the subject matter. In

purposive sampling, specific elements which satisfy some predetermined criteria are selected.

Although the criteria to be used in this kind of sampling are usually a matter of the researcher's judgment, I exercised this judgment in relation to what I think constitutes a representative sample with respect to the research purpose. Since not all the theses in the University of Cape Coast can be used for a single study of this nature, judgmental sampling was used to select only M. Phil theses from all the other academic writings of students in the University of Cape Coast. Judgmental samples do not involve any random selection process because it is often impossible to study the entire population in a single research.

Also, the purposive sampling method helped me to select M. Phil theses in English and Health Science and not any other discipline based on the purpose and objectives of this current study. Purposive sampling is relatively cheaper and easier, and ensures that only those elements that are relevant to the research are included.

The convenience sampling technique was applied to sample only the M. Phil theses produced at the English Department and the Health Science Department during the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic year. Convenience sampling is used when data gathered from a specific group is desired. It is often used to sample what you can get at the time of the study. I used this sampling method in order to help me get access to the M. Phil theses that were available at the time of the research. Getting access to data of this nature is sometimes difficult.

A convenience sampling procedure, which includes picking the required theses from the total population of available theses, was used to select the texts for this study. Obviously, the success of such procedures depends on the knowledge, expertise, and sound judgement of the researcher (Ary, Jacob & Rzavieh, 1996). According to Becher (1989) and Belcher (1994), such an approach simplifies what are, in fact, innumerable disciplinary differences. According to Hyland (2005), a large corpus does not necessarily represent a study better than a small one, particularly if it is used to study high frequency items.

There were fifty-one (51) theses: twenty from English Department and thirty-one from Health Science Department. The simple random sampling method, which is a probability sampling technique, was then applied at this stage to get the sample size for the study.

Simple random sampling is a method of selecting samples such that all members of the various groups stand equal opportunity of being chosen. The lottery method of the simple random sampling was used to select the data. Based on a sample frame of 1-2, every K-th unit (every 2nd number) theses were chosen from 20 MPhil English specifically applied linguistics theses. In the Health Science, based on a sample frame of 1-3, every K-th unit (every 3rd number) theses were chosen from 31 MPhil Health Science theses. In all, a sample size of 20 theses was chosen for the study. I selected 10 theses from each discipline. The thing that informed the choice of this sample size was due to the bulky nature of data in the results and discussion sections which were the rhetorical sections that the study focused on.

Becher's (1989) taxonomy that categorises disciplines into soft and hard respectively was used in the stratification and selection of theses for the study. The consideration for using humanities (English in applied linguistics) and the Health Sciences is based on the argument by Hyland (2013) that academic discourse in the sciences depends on the demonstration of absolute truth, empirical evidence or flawless logic. So, the type of tense used in writing theses in such a discipline is likely to be different from the other disciplines. The humanities, on the other hand, are known to be based on logical presentation and discussion of knowledge and for that matter will employ different tense in writing and presenting theses. To illustrate how these contrasting aspects of knowledge construction are expressed by tense, twenty (20) theses were selected for analysis, as summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1**

**Sample of theses (Results and Discussion section)**

| Humanities (English) | Science (Health Science) | Total |
|---|---|---|
| Number of copies | Number of copies | |
| 10 | 10 | 20 |
| Total    10 | 10 | 20 |

Source: Field survey, Majeed (2016)

The sampling procedure used for the selection of the twenty (20) theses was based on the population of all the M. Phil theses produced at the Department of English in applied linguistics, and the Department Health Science during the

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2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic year. There were fifty-one (51) theses making up the total population. Only 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic years were considered in order to avoid the possible influence(s) of generational and diachronic changes in the nature of this work.

**Table 2**

**Text length of the Results and Discussion section of the two corpora**

| Humanities (English) | | Science (Health Science) | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Average number of words | 13126 | Average number of words | 8564 | 21690 |

Source: Field survey, Majeed (2016)

**Data Collection Procedure**

I obtained a letter of introduction from the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, to enable me to secure trust from the authorities of the Department of English and Department of Health Science. I first gave the introduction letter to the heads of departments of the two selected departments for the study. The heads welcomed me and gave me permission to request for the theses from the librarians. As suggested by Jary and Jary (1991), that instructions and directives about how to get the data should be followed to the latter. Also cooperating with the keeper is important if the required data are to be gathered. Therefore, the consent of the librarians was sought first for them to let me know their less busy time when they are prepared to go through the theses to get the required number I was looking for. I made an initial contact explaining the

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objective of the research in a systematic manner and soliciting the librarians' cooperation since the theses are the property of the university.

I had to follow the instructions of the librarians with patience and went through different procedures in getting the theses for the study. The theses were finally given to me to do photocopies of the results and discussion sections, because, it was not allowed to take the theses from the library. This was done gradually until the required sample was obtained for the study. The collection of the theses took two weeks to complete.

**Data Management and Analyses**

The quantitative approach of data analysis was used to analyse research question one, the distribution of tense types in the disciplines of English and Health Science. The descriptive statistics was used to present the data for this research question. According to Glass and Hopkins (1996), descriptive statistics involve tabulating, depicting, and describing collections of data. They stated that descriptive statistics provide very simple summaries about the sample of study and the measures. In this regard, I used simple frequencies and percentages to analyse the data for the research question, the distribution of tense types in the disciplines of English and Health Science. The analysis of the data provided answers to the research question and research objective.

The qualitative method of analysis was employed to help find answers to research questions two and three, the functions of the tenses used in the discussion section of the English and Health Science disciplines, and factors that affect tense

choice and variations in English and Health Science especially, in the results and discussion section respectively.

The qualitative data analysis involved gaining comprehensive understanding and analytical descriptions of statements made in the process of data collection. The qualitative data that were gathered were put into various themes for easy analysis. The content, case and inductive analyses were adopted in organising the qualitative data for analysis.

*Content Analysis*

The content analysis was used to code, identify patterns, themes, categorize patterns, and classify the data. Care was taken to notice convergence and divergence in coding and classifying. First, I categorised the two data sets into their respective disciplines and labelled them as 'EN' and 'HS' for English and Health Science respectively. These codes or labels were merely shortened forms of the two disciplines. Second, each instance of tense use was labelled with numerals. Thus, I could generate data such as extracts 'EN 3' and 'HS 3', which indicate the data numbers three from both English and Health Science respectively. I further categorised the texts in both data sets into their respective forms and functions. For easy reference and understanding, the disciplines were code as 'EN' and 'HS' in Table 3.

**Table 3**

**Coding for English and Health Science**

| Discipline | Code |
|---|---|
| English | EN |
| Health Science | HS |

Source: Field survey, Majeed (2016)

The content analysis is crucial in this study because it is an important methodological means of analysing written texts. As a qualitative research method, content analysis enables the researcher to arrive at various meaning patterns of texts. It also helps the analyst to understand the types, characteristics and organisational aspects of the documents as social products in their own right as well as what they claim.  According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), a person's or group's conscious or unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas often are revealed in their communications through a rigorous content analysis.

An advantage of content analysis is its unobtrusive nature, because a researcher can, for instance, observe a phenomenon without being observed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000), and so avoids the dilemma of the observer's paradox. This is particularly true in the sense that the contents being analysed are not influenced by the researcher's presence. Moreover, information that might be difficult or even impossible to obtain through direct observation can be gained, using content analysis without any or so much hindrance.

*Case Analysis*

Case analysis was used to organise the data into English and Health Science. This involved organising the data by specific cases, individuals, groups, sites, and communities for in-depth study and comparison. The case analysis enabled me to understand each case as a unique, holistic entity. Each case represented and was understood as a distinctive manifestation of the evaluation of phenomenon of interest, tense.

*Inductive Analysis*

Inductive analysis is a process which leads to the discovering of patterns, themes, and categories in the process of data analysis. Results are gotten from the data through careful analysis by the researcher. Once patterns, themes, and/or categories have been established through inductive analysis, confirmatory statements are now drawn.

To elicit the data for analysis in a study of this nature, all the finite verbs were first identified and classified strictly by form with no regard to function and meaning following the forms of the English tense-aspect system, or the twelve 'tenses' as commonly referred to in general grammar adapted from Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999).

Traditional grammar approach to the verb tense describes how tense is used in language. In doing this it classifies the verb tense into twelve which lays the foundation for later theories of grammar. The traditional grammar describes the patterns for word inflection, and the rules of syntax by which words are

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combined into sentences. The justification for the use of the traditional grammar approach is that, it is broad and comprehensive enough to capture all instances of tense occurrence in academic discourse. In other words, any instance of the verb that will occur in the data will fall under one of the English tense system. These forms are shown in Table 4. The tenses in this table are shown as combinations of tense and aspect.

**Table 4: The English Tense-Aspect System**

| Aspect | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Simple | Perfect | Progressive | Perfect Progressive |
| Present | write/writes | has/have written | am/is/are writing | has/have been writing |
| Past | wrote | had written | was/were writing | had been writing |
| Future | will write | will have written | will be writing | will have been writing |

Source: Field survey, Majeed (2016)

This study used 'tense' as an overriding term to refer to tense-aspect combinations. Although the 'future tense' is usually not considered to be a tense in English in a form-orientated account of tense, since there is no future inflection of the finite verb stems in English (Celcie-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), it forms the scope of the present study. For practical purpose, the future time was expressed as the simple future. This future expression was taken as the periphrastic form *will* or *shall* and this was followed by the base form of the main verb. The categories for the count included the simple present, simple past, present perfect, past perfect, simple future, past progressive, present progressive.

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Such categories as the present perfect progressive, past perfect progressive, future perfect, future progressive, and future perfect progressive were not included in the present study because they are generally insignificant in academic texts (Malcolm, 1987; Swales, 1990; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999; Reeves, 2009). Based on this classification, all the tense forms were manually counted and marked in the contexts in which they occurred in the selected theses and discussed in line with the criteria selected.

**Limitations of the Study**

In conducting a study of this nature, the researcher encountered some challenges that might affect the validity and reliability of the results of the study.

One major challenge I encountered was how to collect data from the two departments, namely English and Health Science. The heads of department were somewhat reluctant to allow me to access the data because they seemed not to be sure as to what exactly the documents were going to be used for. Secondly, the heads of departments were of the view that they did not know of what benefit the study would be to the departments, although, with the introductory letter, I had thoroughly explained the purpose and significance of the study to them.

The consent of the librarians was sought first for them to let me know their less busy time when they are prepared to go through the theses to get the required number I was looking for. I made an initial contact explaining the objective of the research in a systematic manner (Payne & Payne, 2004) and soliciting the librarians' cooperation since the theses are the property of the university.

More so, I encountered a problem in collecting the data because the librarians of the various departments were not willing to release the theses for me to go through for the data. I had to follow the instructions of the librarians with patience and went through different procedures in getting the theses for the study. When the theses were finally given to me, I had to do photocopies of the results and discussion sections, because, it was not allowed to take the theses from the library. This was not easy but was done gradually until the required sample was obtained for the study.

In analysing the data, I encountered a challenge which involves the manual counting of each of the various tenses in each of the discipline. Due to the bulky nature of the data it was not easy doing the manual count.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the methodology that guided the study. It discussed the research method employed in the study and gave justification for using it. The sampling technique and how the data was gathered and used for analysis were detailed in the chapter. Data management and analyses and limitations of the study were discussed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Introduction**

This chapter is concerned with the presentation and discussion of the results of the data that were collected in order to provide answers to the research questions. Particular attention is given to the various discourse features of tenses and how they are exploited by thesis writers in academic writing to perform specific discourse function. First, the chapter discusses the distributions of tense types in the disciplines of English and Health Science in the results and discussion section of theses followed by the discussion of the functions of the tense types used in the discussion section of the selected disciplines. Finally, factors that affect tense choice and variations in the results and discussion sections in English and Health Science theses are discussed.

**The Relative Frequency of Tense Types in the Results and Discussion Section of M. Phil. Theses in the Disciplines of English (Applied Linguistics) and Health Science**

The quantitative approach was used to analyse research one to identify the distribution of tense types in the disciplines of English and Health Science in the results and discussion section of theses. A manual count of finite verbs yielded a total of 21124 verbs in the data gathered for the study. The distribution of tense types in English in the results and discussion section of the various theses

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revealed varied patterns of tense usage in academic writing. These were classified into seven categories are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

**Distribution of tense types in English theses**

| Tense | Simple | | Perfect | | Progressive | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Present | 10378 | 49.1 | 621 | 3.0 | 343 | 1.6 |
| Past | 9232 | 43.7 | 204 | 1.0 | 26 | 0.1 |
| Future | 320 | 1.5 | - | - | - | - |

**Source: Field survey, Majeed (2016) N=21124**

The results from Table 5 revealed that the simple present tense occurred most frequently in the results and discussion section of the English theses making a total of 10378 (49.1%). This was followed by the simple past with a total of 9232 (43.7%). The combined percentage total for the simple present and past tenses from the result is 92.8 per cent. It was observed from the results that there is a rare use of the simple future, present perfect, past perfect, and present progressive forms with their combined total being only 7.1 per cent. On the other hand, the past progressive was found to be extremely rare, with only 26 occurrences out of the total 21,124 verbs gathered. This is supported by qualitative evidence in the following:

1. The result *reveals* that… (EN). (Simple present)

2. Table 2 *presents* the distribution of… (EN). (Simple present)

The use of the simple present tense most frequently in the results and discussion section implies that the time of writing the thesis by the candidate

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coincides with the time of reading. Although the writer and the reader are not co-present at the moment of writing or reading, the data indicate that they use a similar platform of grammatical category in their construction of knowledge or creation. Therefore, the data supports the claims that members in a similar community of practice share similar discourse features such as the tense category that reflect the way they perceive the world.

The high incidence of the usage of the simple present tense in the results and discussion section therefore suggests that the work presented in a thesis has some significance to the contemporary situation. This lends credence to Maroko and Kiai's (2014) and Talor's (2001) finding that researchers at the time of writing probably believe that the content in their thesis continues to express general truths as supported by research results and findings. This is also similar to the findings of Tsai and Tseng (2011) that Native speakers preferred the present tense over the past tense since they think that their narrations were relevant to the present moment. Further, Pezzine (2000) confirmed this notion that the preferred verb tense in RAs is the present simple. This lends credence to the idea that authors believe their findings are true at the time of writing.  Therefore, inferring from the data, the authors consider their works as immediate, instantaneous and relevant to the present moment.

Similarly, the results of this study make it clear that the data is a true reflection of what actually exist in contemporary terms at the time of writing. The result is consistent with the finding of Comrie (1985) and Leech (1987) that the simple present tense locates a situation at the same time as the present moment

(instantaneous present) or the period extends over time which includes the present moment (unrestrictive present). Fanning (1990), Descles and Guentcheva (1990) and Sakita (2002) findings also support this by explaining that the simple past is used to achieve formal style and objectivity and also for narration.

In addition, the use of simple past tense in the results and discussion section indicates that the research process culminating in the thesis has actually been completed and the researcher is reporting what has been done. Therefore, making reference to it requires such a tense indicating that the work has been done. More so, the simple past tense locates a situation prior to the present moment. This is illustrated in the following examples;

3.  The analysis of the data *revealed* that the simple present is used most frequently (EN). (Simple past)

4.  The data *indicated* that modal auxiliary verbs present the most frequent means of hedging lexically in English (EN). (Simple past)

The writer's choice of the simple past tense forms in writing served the function of referring back to the research activity that has been done earlier. The simple past describes the situation as complete at some point in the past. It conveys a sense of remoteness; that is, the situation is 'done and over with' (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 114). Referring to the simple past as the preterite, Reeves (2009, p. 99) echoes these words when he avers, 'the preterite describes actions completed in the past with no implicit reference to the present (time of writing), and may also be accompanied in a sentence by explicit references to specific periods in the past.'

The finding of this current study is in line with that of Swales and Feak (1994, p. 184) who concluded that "the difference among…tenses are subtle. In general, a move from past to present perfect and to present indicates that the research reported is increasingly close to the writer in some way: close to the writer's own opinion, close to the writer's own research, or close to the current state of knowledge." Arising from Swales and Feak's view, Gledhill (2009) argues that tense usage is a result of mental computation, complete and invariable in its reference, irrespective of context. This view by Gledhill (2009) was also iterated by Comrie (1985) when, argued that the interpretation of a tense remains the same in spite of the context. In other words, tense interpretation is not context-dependent.

The use of the present perfect tense in the results and discussion section of the theses also indicates that the events described in the theses only took place prior to the present moment and are, therefore, of contemporary significance.

5. The analysis *has revealed* that the transitivity choices made by the author in terms of participants… (EN). (Present perfect)

6.  Maroko and Kiai (2014) have indicated that… (EN). (Present perfect)

This supports the findings of Reeves (2009) that the present perfect locates a situation that started before the present moment and continues into the present moment. Reeves (2009) went further to describe actions that occurred in the past which either have been completed or form part of an uncompleted whole in this sense. The writer's choice of the present perfect in presenting and discussing the results describes what is known or has been done in the field on a similar or

related topic up to the present moment. This tense indicates that previous work of others is considered as part of a growing body of knowledge in contemporary time, subject to debate and further development in future.

The present perfect tense is used to indicate the continued discussion of some of the information in the sentence in which the present perfect occurs. It contains an implicit reference or link to the present, often made explicit by the addition of more information to this effect, or reflects the effects of past events on the present, and even the future (Reeves, 2009). It can also be added that the present perfect communicates 'recency' or 'currency' in academic discourse.

The simple future tense locates a situation ensuing to the present moment. The simple future tense is used to show that further research is possible which implies that research in a particular line of knowledge is progressing step by step from one point to the other, in a linear time sequence which confirms the Reichenbachan concept of the timeline in his discussion on tense. The simple future tense locates a situation ensuing to the present moment. While the present progressive tense indicates that the work being reported in the thesis has a link to the past and progresses into the future.

The study was also interested in finding out the relative distribution of tense types in Health Science in theses. The counting of the data gathered of the finite verb forms in the Health Science in the results and discussion sections yielded 16240 finite verbs found in the Health Science theses. The results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

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**Distribution of tense types in Health Science theses**

| Tense | Simple | | Perfect | | Progressive | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Present | 8553 | 52.7 | 115 | 0.7 | 1024 | 6.3 |
| Past | 6120 | 37.7 | 105 | 0.6 | 98 | 0.6 |
| Future | 225 | 1.4 | - | - | - | - |

**Source: Field survey, Majeed (2016) N=16240**

From the figures in Table 6, several trends can be observed in the distribution of tense in the results and discussion section in theses in the Health science. It was realised that the simple present and simple past appeared most. For instance, the simple present had 8553 (52.7%) counts and the simple past had 6120 (37.7%). The simple present and simple past gave a total of 90.4% of the 16240 finite verbs. The view of Gvozdanovič (1991) and Fleischman (1990) that the present tense dominates in a text once the events are narrated from the writer's vantage point or the reflection of direct perception by the writer agreed with this finding. In this case, the candidates comment or pass judgments on a result or finding in the discussion of the results of their research. The following illustrations explain the results.

7. This section *presents* the results of the experiments (HS). (Simple present)

8. Table 4.5 *shows* the distributions of answers to the questions on the knowledge of HB (HS). (Simple present)

9. From Tables 4.5 it can clearly be *seen* that the vast majority of respondents knew that HBV can be contracted from a NSI… (HS). (Simple past)

10. The second research objective in this study *was* to identify the attitudes of HCWs towards vaccination against HBV (HS). (Simple past)

It can also be observed further from Table 6 that the present progressive tense was the third most commonly used in the results and discussion section in theses in the Health science taking a total of 1024 (6.3%). The present progressive tense was employed in the study in the results and discussion section as shown in excerpts 11-12.

11. When *discussing* knowledge regarding vaccination against HBV (HS). (Present progressive)

12. When *examining* patients and taking specimens… (HS). (Present progressive)

This supports the findings of Leech (1987) that the present progressive tense places a situation in a time span which includes the present moment and stretches for a limited period into the past and future. Again, the result from Table 6 also indicates that the use of the simple future, present perfect, past perfect, and past progressive was low in the results and discussion section in theses in the Health science making a total of 3.3% of the total 16240 finite verbs.

**Comparison of tense usage in the results and discussion sections of English Language and Health Science**

In order to bring the difference in tense usage in English Language and Health, the study did some comparison by doing some quantitative analysis to reveal the significant differences.

From the on-going discussion, it is observed that the results and discussion section of theses in English (Applied Linguistics) and Health Science appeared to have very high frequencies of the simple present and simple past making reference to Tables 5 and 6. In the results and discussion section of theses in English (Applied Linguistics), the simple present had 49.1% and the simple past had 43.7% (see Table 5). Similarly, the simple present and the simple past had the highest frequency and percentage in the results and discussion section of theses in Health Science 52.7% and 37.7% respectively (see Table 6). However, they differed in present progressive. In the results and discussion section of theses in English, the present progressive had the fourth highest frequency, while in the results and discussion section of theses in Health Science present progressive had the third highest frequency.

This variation could be attributed to the differences in discipline or discourse, either scientific discourse or political discourse. This could be accounted for by the fact that Health Science was more concerned with reporting an experiment and focusing less on application of knowledge to the contemporary situation while English was based on a literary text which favours the simple present tense.

The analysis of the distributions of tense in the results and discussion sections of each of the selected disciplines from Tables 5 and 6 indicates that each

discipline has two predominant tenses, the simple present and simple past, in the results and discussion section. The present progressive was relatively high in Health Science as compared to English. It also indicates that the use of present and past perfect, simple future, and the past progressive was low in both disciplines.

Although in the current study, it is observed that tense realization in each thesis is, in a sense, individualistic and particular to each situation, theses follow certain patterns shared by the peers and the audiences of the writer. That means the interpretations a particular tense may receive in a specific context are best accounted for linguistically, not solely in terms of its contextual uses, but rather in terms of the interaction between context-independent meaning and context-dependent use. Sometimes, tense usage may be related to rhetoric purposes. That is why it will be somehow wrong to try to prescribe tense usage as attempted by Day (1995) and Mathews et al. (1996).  The writer can choose the time location that best suits his purposes. As may be noted from the foregoing analysis, the verb tense chosen for the results and discussion section is based on the purpose of the section of the thesis. The current study therefore agrees with Weissberg and Buker (1990) and Swales and Feak (1994) who advise that the use of tense in any rhetorical section should depend on the communicative purpose of the section. In real life writers do not follow the conventions such as those proposed by Mathews et al. (1996). Therefore, the writer can choose the time location that best suits his or her purpose.

**Functions of Tenses Types Used in the Results and Discussion Section of the Two Disciplines**

Contextual analysis was done to identify the functions of the tenses types used in the results and discussion section of the two disciplines and noted the tense choices associated with these functions. It was done to discover the tenses functions and associations in terms of time and meanings and explored probable explanations and interpretations for the choices of such tenses in the results and discussion sections of theses. The analysis revealed that the use of tense in a rhetoric section of an academic writing has some functions. These include; advance labelling, recapitulation, commentary and evaluation, signalling, and references to previous research (Tadros, 1993).

The writer in order to present his/her results and discuss it communicates with the reader, telling the reader what is coming up, what has been done in the text before the reader, or how data gathered are interpreted. The writer tells the reader in advance what to expect in the text this is what Tadros (1993) calls advance labelling and recapitulation. Advance labelling indicates to the reader what is happening or what is coming up in the text; that is stating the purpose. The finite verb forms associated with this function include the simple present, the simple future, and the present progressive, as can be seen in the illustration samples below:

13. This section *deals* with the discussion of the results (EN). (Simple present)

14. This chapter *will present* the results of the study (EN). (Simple future)

15. In *presenting* the data, the researcher… (EN). (Present progressive)

16. The chapter *introduces* the outcomes of this study (HS). (Simple present)

17. The results of the experiment *will form* part of discussion (HS). (Simple future)

18. In *discussing* the relatively low fecundity of fish species in the pond… (HS). (Present progressive)

Malcolm (1987) is of the view that tense has two major functions in academic writing; deictic function and referential function. Drawing our analysis on Malcolm's (1987) classification scheme, the study grouped the functions of tense into two main categories, 'deictic' and 'referential'. The deictic function serves as directives or pointers through which the writer guides the reader through the text, revealing the structure of discourse. Under the deictic functions we have stating purpose, announcing argument, recapitulation, and commentary and evaluation. Referential functions make references to primary or secondary sources of scholarly works. A primary source is first-hand information that serves to support an argument. A secondary source is previous research on the same field or a related topic in the discipline.

When making reference to other sources, the common tense is past. In Malcolm's referential category, references to the writer's own specific experiments is included, but for the present study it was necessary to modify this to reflect the non-experimental disciplines such as the humanities (English). In non-experiment reports, the major source of supporting evidence comes not from

writer-constructed scientific experiments, but from primary sources already in existence. For example, in English, the writer refers to the literary works, letters, and diaries of the authors under study to support an interpretation.

**Deictic Functions**

Under this section the writer communicates to the reader what to expect in the text or what has been done or how data are interpreted.  Deictic function of a tense type is used to introduce a rhetorical section in an academic writing telling the reader what to expect in the text Smith (2003). From the gathered data, the tense types that were used to introduce the results and discussion sections of the data is the simple present, simple past, simple future and simple progressive as shown in examples 19, 20, 21 and 22.

19. In this study, the hedging devices *are* modals, adverbs ……. (EN). (Simple present)

20.  The number of oviposition punctures on fruits from Edumfa *was* high and abundant… (HS). (Simple past)

21. Fruit weight *will emerge* as the parameter for judging the presence of bactrocera invadens (HS). (Simple future)

22. The high Ferric compounds and their abundance *occurring* in the wet season …… (HS). (Present progressive)

As shown in examples 19, 20, 21, and 22, above, the writer prepares the reader by giving some indication that a claim or finding is about to be made. This way, tenses serve as sign post for the reader to navigate through the work.

**Stating Purpose**

The statement of purpose announces to the reader what the research is about and the finite verbs associated with this section is simple present, simple past and the present progressive as shown in examples 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27.

23. This section *discusses* the results of the experiment… (HS). (Simple present)

24. The first research objective in this study *was* to identify the level of knowledge of HCWs about vaccination against HBV (HS). (Simple past)

25. The section *shall argue* that Ceratis Capitata is most present and is responsible for… (HS). (Simple future)

26. The chapter *discussed* the distribution of hedging devices in the selected disciplines (EN). (Simple past)

27. In *presenting* the results of the study… (EN). (Present progressive)

The choice for the simple present stems from the fact that the work is treated as a complete whole as it is in the reader's hand at the time of writing and reading. The notion created is that the work has been done and is being presented as a complete work to the reader. In terms of time location, the choice of the tense represents the unrestrictive use of the present tense to show that the situation described extends over unlimited time span including the present moment. It creates a condition that the moment of writing the thesis coincides with the time of reading it by the reader. The thesis being written can also be considered as

knowledge in construction and the situation being described is occurring simultaneously with the moment of writing hence the choice of the present progressive. Though the present progressive occurs sparingly in the work, it shows that the thesis is work or an activity in progress and progresses from one stage to the other at the time of writing and reading. For the choice of the simple future tense, the thesis signifies a work in progress moving from step to step to show that what the reader is reading occurs before what will follow after.

**Announcing Argumentation**

Another function of tense type in an academic writing is for the writer to announce argument. Here the tense choice depends on how the author views the work he/she is presenting to the readers as to whether the work is a complete whole or a work in progress. Mostly the types of tenses used are the simple present and the simple future. When the work presented by the writer is considered as a complete whole or entity, the unrestricted simple present is used to describe the work but when the work is seen as a work in progress then the future tense is used often. Example can be seen in 28, 29, 30 and 31

28. Table two *shows* ranking of the species according to genera, species and numbers (HS). (Simple present)

29. Table 4.4 *will present* results on how… (HS). (Simple future)

30. In example 1, the data *indicates* that… (EN). (Simple present)

31. The results *will indicate* the position of scholars on the pragmatic of greeting (EN). (Simple future).

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 Examples 28, 29, 30, and 31 show how the writer announces the argument of the section or a point being made. The tense used is dependent on the point of view of the writer on whether is complete whole or still going on. This is similar to the argument by Genung (1990) that sometimes tenses describe and make arguments logic.

**Recapitulation**

Recapitulation presents to the reader what has been discussed so far and the commonly used tenses are the present and the simple past. Both tenses serve the function of referring back to what has been discussed in the study earlier. However, the simple past describes the situation as complete at some time in the past and conveys a sense of remoteness. The present perfect also relates a situation retrospectively from the present to an earlier time describing the situation as haven occurred over a period of time in the past and is completed at the moment of writing. It carries a sense of current relevance or perhaps a sense of transition from the past to the present moment. Examples are seen in 32, 33, 34 and 35

32. The experiment *determined* the different species of fruit flies, their pupal number, pupal period… (HS). (Simple past).

33. I have observed from the experiment that… (HS). (Present perfect)

34. The study *looked* at modals (EN). (Simple past)

35. I *have intimated* that the difficulty level of a text is… (EN). (Present perfect).

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Examples 32, 33, 34, and 35 show that the writer sums up what has been discussed or communicate a finding in the study that needs highlighting. This recapitulation is based on observations or an argument made so far in the study.

**Writer's Commentary and Evaluation**

The type of tense used to make commentary and evaluation in writing is simple present tense and modal auxiliaries. The use of simple present here conveys a high level of conviction in the expression of the writer's opinion about the study. The tense choice makes clear the writer's point of view so that the reader is directed to the information put across as intended by the writer or for the reader to focus attention on some information in the text. Modality can be used to express varying degree of certainty and possibility. One common device used to express the writer's reasoning and inferences is the modal verb. Example 36 and 37 indicate the phenomenon.

36. The B. invadens best *fits* in the orange fruit than in the mango fruit (HS). (Simple Present)

37. *Perhaps* the most frequently occurring concept in Echewa's <u>The Land's Lord</u>….. (EN). (modal)

In examples 36 and 37, the writer shows her or his agreement or otherwise to a proposition in the work. It reveals the writer's attitude towards a claim being made. Tsai and Tseng (2011) suggest that tense encodes informational and

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attitudinal contrast in research report in academic discourse. The examples above confirm this stance by Tsai and Tseng (2011).

**Referential Functions**

The choice of tense used in this section served reference function. This makes references to various sources or research works or reports whether it is making an argument, making a point, confirming or refuting an idea or claim. This referential function of tense is classified into two viz; Signal element to previous research and Signal element to primary Sources. In the signal element of references to past research or works, the simple present, present perfect and simple past are used. Examples are in 38, 39 and 40.

38. This is what Hyland (2008) *calls* 'disciplinary culture' (EN). (Simple present)

39. Swales and Feak (2004) *have indicated* that… (EN). (Present perfect)

40. Welcomme (1975) *recommended* a two way analysis for the… (HS). (Simple past)

With references to signal element primary source, the simple present and simple past tenses are used as indicated in examples 41, 42, 43 and 44.

41. Coker (2010) *writes* that love text messaging falls within the purview of a specialised electronic discourse (EN). ( Simple present)

42. Overall, the modal auxiliaries are *used* frequently to express epistemic modality in the writing (EN). (Simple past)

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43. The result *shows* that participants are 1.133 times more likely to vaccinate as their attitude score *increases* by 1 (one) (HS). (Simple present)

44. The scholars *argued* that fruit flies were present in Edumfa and UCC farms (HS). (Simple past).

More so, the discourse functions of tense or aspect are associated with the point of view of the writer. Also, the purpose of the writing could determine the functions of tenses types to be used in the writing. For instance, to achieve a communicative purpose, the tense used is different (Gledhill, 2009; Weisberg & Buker, 1990). The section announces the purpose of the study. Examples drawn from this study revealed that the *simple past* and *simple present* tenses are preferred in realising this communicative function.

According to Weissberg and Buker (1990, p. 138), and Nwogu (1997, p. 129) the results and discussion section usually consists of three main information steps:

Step 1: a statement that locates the figure(s) where the results can be found

Step 2: statements that present the most important findings

Step 3: statements that comment on the results.

In Step 1, Weissberg and Buker (1990, p. 148) and Swales (1990, p. 160) recommend the use of the *simple present* tense to locate data in a figure. This was confirmed in this study as examples 45 and 46 can attest.

45. This result *is* presented in Table 5. (EN). (Simple present)

46. Figure 4. *shows* the body weight of babies. (HS) (Simple present)

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Swales (1990, p. 161), Nwogu (1997, p. 130), and Weissberg and Buker (1990, p. 149) recommend the *past tense* when reporting findings (Step 2). Because the experiments or investigations described in the text were completed before the thesis was written, one would expect this rhetorical section to be written in the *past tense*. However, data in this study indicated that apart from the *simple past* tense, the *simple present* may also be employed to report findings as examples 47, 48, 49 and 50 indicate:

47. Syntactically, they *are* not… as an element of the clause (EN). (Simple present)

48. There *was* no significant difference between the tense and the major rhetorical divisions of research articles (EN). (Simple past)

49. Of the 60 blood samples, 28 *are* Hepatitis B positive while the remaining 32 *are* negative (HS). (Simple present)

50. The student's t-test *was* used to compare the mean scores for knowledge and attitude (HS). (Simple past)

When commenting on the findings of the study (Step 3), it is conventional to use the *present tense* (Weissberg & Buker 1990, p. 149; Nwogu 1997, p. 130). It is at this stage that the author points out if the results were expected or not, whether the results compare or contrast with theirs, and what important conclusions may be drawn from such comparisons. In other words, this is where the authors are expected to interpret their findings and make meaning out of it. The data in the present study indicated that in addition to the prescribed *simple*

*present* tense, which is used most often, the *simple past* is used as evidenced in examples 51-52.

51. It *was concluded* from the analysis of the data that the use of simple present and simple past tense *was* the most frequent tense (EN). (Simple past)

52. Results *concur* with reports on the composition and abundance of microinvertebrates communities of muni lagoon… (HS). (Simple present)

Weisberg and Buker (1990) in their study advise that when the comment gives a possible explanation for the results, a *modal auxiliary* should be used. Though modals do not form the scope of the present study, the following examples confirm Weissberg and Buker's advice:

53. This variation *could* be due to differences in discipline (EN). (Modal)

54. Wetland *might* therefore suggest that this habitat is polluted (HS). (Modal)

55. Also the slight differences between the species evenness of the communities *may* be attributed to the fact……… (HS). (HS). (Modal)

**Tense-alternation**

The data also indicated alternation among tenses like simple present to past tense and present perfect in the results and discussion section of thesis under consideration. In some cases, only one tense is used. This usage of tense suggests that the research works referred to have direct or indirect link in terms of

importance on the current work. Tense alternations reflect how an author or speaker perceives past researches that they have met before and are being alluded to. Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) analysed the patterns of introduction in thesis and found out that the present tense is often used to outline variables, but in describing past researches related to variables the past tense is often used. The examples show tense alternations in the results and discussion section:

56. White and Elson-Harris (1992) *argued* that D. bivittatus mainly *attacked* cucurbit plants pawpaw, tomato and Liberica coffee. However one of its hosts *is found* in the study area considering the fact the orchard *is surrounded* by farmlands and large patches of uncultivated farmlands. (HS) (past, past, present perfect present perfect).

57. Unpublished data by Billah (Fruit Taxonomist) between 2002 and 2005 *has records* of a few species from forest areas of the Kwaebibirem District in the Eastern Region. Some *are known* to be attracted to Methyl eugesol while others *have no confirmed* lure records (HS) (present perfect, present perfect, present perfect).

In 56, the past tense is used to refer to scholarly works and finding of the study. In reflecting on the finding and stating the author's position or comment, the present perfect is used and same is used for the possible explanation for the phenomenon. In 57, the present perfect is used throughout. The data showed that sometimes tense realisation is in a sense individualistic and particular to each situation. Results and discussion sections follow certain patterns of tense shared

by peers and audiences. Again, usage of tense in particular context does not alter the basic temporal (Comrie, 1985). This means that an explanation a tense may receive in any context is best accounted for linguistically. Tense usage may be related to rhetoric purposes. The writer can choose a time location that best suits his or her purpose. For Oster (1981), Malcolm (1987), and Shaw (1992), tense alternation is the writer's strategic device that allows her him to encode information and also attitudinal distinction in academic writing thereby removing the writer from the claim being made.

It can be noted from the discussion that, in most cases, there is not a one-to-one relationship between tense and function. For a given function, various tenses may be used. The communicative purpose or the writer's point of view could determine the choice of tense to use in a particular rhetoric section of writing. Tense establishes the relationship between two time locations: the time of the situation described and the time of a reference point. The nature of the situations, i.e. whether they are instantaneous, time-bound or timeless, determines the time location of the situations relative to the reference point. The time for the point of reference is usually the here and now, i.e. the moment of utterance; however, it may change with a shift in perspective.

**Factors that Affect tense Choice and Variation in the Results and Discussion Section of English and Health Science**

From the study, a number of factors are found to play crucial role in tense choice and variations. The temporal references factors, the basic meanings of

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tenses, and uses of tense affect tense choice in academic writing. Variation in the choice of tense in thesis writing is also influenced by the authors' point of view, disciplinary culture, and purpose of writing.

Chen (2009) concedes that establishing an account not only for the context in which tense is used but also for the manoeuvres that allow the competent writer to handle the temporal meanings and uses for their own rhetorical purposes is by no means an easy one. More so, it is difficult to be sure what really underlies the way a competent writer handles tense in the rhetorical sections. But in the current study, I argue that in the results and discussion section, tense can be associated with rhetorical uses and I attempt to account for correlations by the same temporal meanings and uses attributed to tense categories.

Although most of the references on academic discourse guide students to use the simple past when referring to a study done by other people, not many of them provide detailed explanations and/or examples considering the specific context but usually resort to generalisations. For example, compare how references on academic writing discourse usually make generalisations about using the simple present/past tense. For example, Wallwork (2011) indicates that use the simple past for the findings you use. Simple past tense is used to establish previous findings and claims in situating the research study within the canon of knowledge to some extent (Gray, 2009). In general, the simple past is the 'normal' one for referring to the past events; we use it if we do not have a special reason for using one of the other tenses (Swan, 2005). Let us examine the sample sentence below:

Sample Sentence: Smith and Jones (1990) developed a new system of comparison. In their system two languages are / were compared from the point of view of … They found that ….

Explanations: The first verb introduces the author and is typically used in the past simple. Note that the first verb could also be in the present simple. However, generally when the present simple is used the construction is slightly different: first the reference and then the author. In the second verb, both past simple and present simple are possible. However, it is common to use the present simple when describing a system, method, procedure etc. functions. Present simple underlines that Smith and Jones are still using their system and that it is still valid. The use of the past simple (were compared) would probably imply that Smith and Jones' system is not in use anymore and it was just a step in this road of research that has subsequently been superseded. The third verb (found) indicates what the author managed to do, and typically such verbs are used in the past simple.

Again, however, some authors use the present simple in such cases. From this sample, it is possible to infer that academic discourse disciplines may not be providing information on verb tense and aspect usage in writing that is detailed and contextualized enough for NNS students to apply properly. In other words, the complexity of verb tense and aspect usage revealed in the sample above reiterates the significance of discourse-level analysis and the need for understanding each verb form's meaning and functions, which not so many references on academic writing discourse offer to provide.

**Organisational Factors**

Lackstrom et al. (1970, 1973) consider the organisation of the paragraph to be a crucial factor in tense choice and variations in any academic writing. Each paragraph consists of a core, which is a generalisation in relation to the specificity of the supporting facts contained within the paragraph. The facts supporting a core idea have been found to alternate between the simple past, simple present, or the present perfect. The authors suggest that the choice of one tense over another is determined by the "degree of generality" the writer wishes to claim for the information, for example: The present tense is used for the highest degree of generality, i.e. universal truth about the world. The past tense is used to claim no generality. The present perfect conveys generalisation without committing to the future.

However, each rhetorical section, or organisational considerations of the work may place a constraint on the degree of generality expressed at various points in the paragraph and thus restrict the choice of tense. It is observed that in technical texts, the preferred progression in a paragraph is from more to less general statements, and the use of tense has been found to reflect this progression, e.g., a sentence in the present perfect followed by a series of statement in the past.

Shaw (1992) supported this when she examines reporting verbs in six introductory chapters of PhD. theses in agricultural biology and biochemistry and finds correlations between tense, voice, and sentence types and emphasizes the role of organisational factors in determining the choice of tense. Sentences with the names of researchers included as part of the sentence structure are usually past

active; sentences without the names of researchers are usually present perfect passive.

## Evaluative Use

The writer's point of view, assessment or attitude towards the nature of the claim being made about the work cited has an influence on the tense choice and variations.  A writer's choice between past and present perfect tenses in the reporting of past literature review brings about variations. The past is used when the past research is not related directly in terms of importance to the present work; the present perfect is used when the past research is related directly in terms of importance to the present work. This is supported by Lackstrom et al. (1973) findings.

Oster's (1981) view supports this that the past is used to claim non-generality or to refer to non-supportive quantitative results of past literature, the present perfect is used to indicate that there will be continued discussion of the same information later in the study and to claim generality, and the present to refer to quantitative results that are supportive of the present work. The general conclusion here is that the writer's attitude towards the work cited, i.e. the degree of generality the writer wishes to claim, or the relevance/proximity of the cited work to the present work, play a role in tense choice.

The discussion section typically focuses on the author's own argument and the emphasis is on what is being argued at the present moment. The variability discussed here serves as a reminder for the need to be cautious when making

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generalisations regarding tense-structure correlations. In the study, it seems that communicative functions associated with the major divisions of the text, rather than reference structure, determine the choice of tense.

From the analysis some of the influencing factors in tense choice are identified. These factors include organisational factors, degree of generality, the writer's attitude and valuations toward the work cited the relevance of the data to the present work, and the structure of references. However, it should be noted that tense should not be taken as the only linguistic feature employed to realize these functions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Introduction**

This chapter presents summary of the study, which includes the key findings that emerged from the research. The chapter contains the conclusions and recommendations that are made based on the findings of the study. It also contains suggestions for further studies. All these aim at providing closure to the study in an unambiguous note.

**Summary**

The study set out to examine the types of tense used in the results and discussion section of the M. Phil theses written by students in English and Health Science disciplines at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the relative frequency of tense types in the results and discussion section of M.Phil. theses in the disciplines of English (applied linguistics) and Health Science?

2. What are the functions of the tense types used in the results and discussion section of M.Phil. theses in the selected disciplines?

3. What factors influence tense choice and variations in the results and discussion section of M.Phil. theses in the selected disciplines?

The mixed method approach was used for the study. The sample was drawn, using purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The purposive

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sampling method was used to select M. Phil theses from all the other academic writings of students in the University of Cape Coast for this particular study. Also, the purposive sampling method helped me to select M. Phil theses in English and Health Science, and not any other discipline. The simple random sampling technique was applied to sample 20 theses in all. Ten (10) theses were selected from the humanities (English) field while the other ten (10) theses were selected from the Health science discipline. The descriptive, content, case and inductive analyses were generally adopted in organising the data for analysis.

**Key Findings**

Based on the analysis of data and discussion of the results, the following are the key findings. These findings are presented in relation to the three research questions.

The study revealed that the simple present tense occurred most frequently in the results and discussion section of the English theses, making a total of 10378 (49.1%). This was followed by the simple past with a total of 9232 (43.7%). The combined percentage total for the simple present and past tenses from the result is 92.8 per cent. Similarly, it was realised that the simple present and simple past appeared most in the results and discussion section of the Health Science theses. For instance, the simple present had 8553 (52.7%) counts and the simple past had 6120 (37.7%). The simple present and simple past gave a total of 90.4% of the 16240 finite verbs count.

It is observed that the results and discussion section of theses in English and Health Science have very high frequencies of the simple present and simple past. In the results and discussion section of theses in English, the simple present had 49.1% and the simple past had 43.7%. Similarly, the simple present and the simple past had the highest frequency and percentage in the results and discussion section of theses in Health Science, 52.7% and 37.7% respectively. However, they differed in the use of present progressive. In the results and discussion section of theses in English, the present progressive had the fourth higher frequency, while in the results and discussion section of theses in Health Science present progressive had the third higher frequency.

It can be deduced from the analysis presented in this study that the primary tenses (simple present, simple past, and future) and the secondary tense (present perfect) are critical in academic discourse. It can be noted also that the simple present applies when information presented is generally accepted as scientific fact. The choice and use of the simple past tense forms in the results and discussion sections of thesis served the function of referring back to the research activity that was done earlier. The simple past describes the situation as complete at some point in the past. It conveys a sense of remoteness; that is, the situation is 'done and over with.' The simple future tense is used in writing where further research possibilities are implied; indicating that research in a particular line of knowledge is progressing step by step, in a linear time sequence. The future tense is used if directions for additional research or scholarship are brought up.

The study revealed that the present perfect describes what is known or has been done in the field on a similar or related topic up to the present moment. The tense used in this section for the writing of the thesis indicates that previous research is considered as part of a growing body of knowledge, subject to debate and further development. The present perfect tense is used to indicate the continued discussion of some of the information in the sentence in which the present perfect occurs. It contains an implicit reference or link to the present, often made explicit by the addition of more information to this effect, or reflects the effects of past events on the present, and even the future.  It can also be added that the present perfect communicates 'recency' or 'currency' in academic discourse.

The analysis revealed that the use of tense in the results and discussion section of the English and Health Science theses writing has some functions which include: advance labelling, recapitulation, commentary and evaluation, signalling, and references to previous research. It also emerged from the results of the study that the distribution of tense presents a complex picture. It shows that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between tense and communicative function and/or results and discussion section of the English and Health Science theses although some commonalities can be detected along communities of practice. For a given rhetorical section of a thesis, researchers must be prepared to alternate mainly the primary tenses of English. It is, therefore, significant that transition from one verb tense to another in different rhetorical sections in a thesis

is couched in terms of proximity to the author's message or communicative purpose.

The study revealed that there are a number of factors that play a crucial role in tense choice and variations. The temporal reference factors, the basic meanings of tenses, and uses of tense affect tense choice in academic writing. Variation in the choice of tense in thesis writing is also influenced by the authors' point of view, disciplinary culture, and purpose of writing.

**Conclusions**

This study has indicated that primary tenses are high frequency items in M.Phil. theses writing. It has also emerged that despite the fact that the primary tenses are high in type and frequency to some extent, there are some variations according to the discipline and rhetorical section of the thesis. In other cases, tense usage is not a straight-jacket but a feature characterised by alternations in order to achieve various rhetorical purposes.

Secondly, given the correspondence between a given discipline and a particular verb tense, as evidenced in this study, it can be concluded that tense usage is a socially constrained feature. The influence of a community of practice in which the writing takes place is evident. Patterns of use do not exist in isolation but are part of the communicative routines of academic disciplines. This means that tense usage is apparently intimately connected to the different epistemological frameworks of the disciplines and the way they understand the world.

Again, the various types of tense discussed in the study are purposeful in the thesis genre. Thus, cultivating the best tense usage will entail an understanding of the communicative purposes associated with each type and the relevant propositions where it occurs. Also, given the similarities and disparities of tense usage in various disciplines, tense options are not only influenced by the conventions of a disciplinary culture in which the thesis is being written, but also are creations of the writer. Writers make personal choices deviating from any available disciplinary norms to probably meet their own rhetorical purposes. This could also be a pointer to students' lack of expertise needed to alternate verb forms in order to fulfil the normative expectation in their disciplines.

Moreover, tense usage is highly versatile. Several differences can be established that give the tense feature its character. For instance, in a particular discipline, there are a number of common practices regarding tense usage. Narrowing the focus, a thesis produced in a particular discipline reveals peculiar tense usage characteristics. This means that to understand the verb usage in a thesis, the various levels must be included in the picture.

**Implications of the Study**

One important implication of this work for post-graduate thesis writing is that, based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are deemed necessary. Writing an empirically based thesis for the first time requires a clear understanding of verb tenses which are appropriate not only for each rhetorical section but the rhetorical purposes of the text.

Empirical evidence from this study shows that tense usage relates to the discipline, the rhetorical section and the communicative purposes. In order to raise the consciousness of those working on their theses, this study proposes a genre-based approach.

In a follow-up activity, the candidates could take partial or complete authentic texts from their own disciplines and identify the categories of future, occurrences in each rhetorical section, and communicative purposes. Through this exercise, the candidates will be able to determine the variation, in usage, of tense. For practice, learners may rewrite propositions in an article, term paper, or section of theses from another discipline so that it reflects the style in their field of expertise. This exercise will raise the consciousness of the students to the tense types appropriate to their communities of practice.

## Suggestions for Further Studies

Further research would be valuable to verify the findings of this current study, particularly in terms of corpus size. What was examined in this study represents an infinitesimal portion of the whole. For instance, theses from the social sciences were not included in this study. At the same time, the twenty theses examined in this study seem not enough to bring out typical patterns of verb tense in the disciplines studied. However, the scheme of analysis proposed in the present study can be extended to the investigation of a larger corpus and to test the quantitative results of the present study, perhaps using computer corpus-based methods where resources permit and a more complex statistical analysis.

Also, the present analysis focused mainly on the primary tenses (simple present, simple past, and simple future) and a few secondary tenses (notably present perfect and present continuous). Further research could focus on other features associated with the verb such as aspect, modality and voice and how these apply to academic writing.

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