



Making a Case for New Directions in English Language Research at University of Cape Coast (UCC): A Meta-Analysis

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Abstract

Drawing insights from existing studies on research synthesize (e.g. Farsani & Babaii, 2018/2020; Plonsky & Oswald, 2015), this study engages in a meta-analysis of MPhil theses from the Department of English, University of Cape Coast (UCC), in order to make a case for new directions for language research in the department. A critical content analytical approach was adopted to analyse eighteen (18) theses purposively sampled from the University of Cape Coast Institutional Theses Repository. The analysis focused on the research topics/domains, theoretical frameworks adopted, and research methods used. The study revealed following: (a) most of the studies were conducted in the domain of the media; (b) while most of the studies employed the qualitative research paradigm, very few adopted the mixed method approach and no study employed the quantitative approach; and (c) most of the studies were underpinned by the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory while few employed the Theory of Nativization and Genre Theory. The study contends that there should be a shift in the focus of MPhil thesis to make it possible for the adoption of the mixed method and quantitative approaches as well as theories such as pragmatics, language variation, generative linguistics and corpus stylistics.

Keywords

research synthesis, research topics/domains, research paradigms, theoretical framework, MPhil theses

Introduction

Although research synthesis gained serious attention in the 1970s (Cooper & Hedges, 1994) because of its ability to 'replace those earlier papers that have been lost from sight behind the research front' (Price, 1965: 513) and direct future research (Cooper, 2016) by serving as 'the microscope through which past L2 research is interpreted as well as the telescope through which future L2 research efforts will be directed' (Plonsky & Oswald, 2015:121), available literature shows that from early 2000 to day, the field has received enormous scholarly attention. Characteristically, it takes a diachronic approach and systematically analyses or reviews primary literature or data relating to the focus of the synthesis, following specific coding schemes, in order to make general statements concerning the primary literature. The two main types of research synthesis identified in the literature are *qualitative research synthesis* and *meta-analysis* (Chong & Plonsky, 2021; Cooper & Hedges, 1994; Cooper, 2016; Plonsky, 2017). Further, two orientations dominate research synthesis: those that focus on only the research methods (e.g. Ganji, 2021; Li & Prior, 2022; Plonsky, 2017) or research foci (topics) (e.g. Afful & Twumasi, 2022) and those that are concerned with both the research methods and the research topics or foci (e.g. Anwaruddin, 2013; Farsani & Babii, 2018; Meihami, 2020). However, irrespective of the orientation, research syntheses aim at the integration of past literature on a common theme or topic. This helps to make general statements about the methods, theories and research foci of past studies, identify the gaps in existing studies and suggest alternative directions for future research.

The last two decades have witnessed an exponential rise in research synthesis. Li and Prior's (2022) study which was motivated by the need to make generalisations regarding every aspect of a study revealed that research syntheses focusing on methodology are relevant for two reasons: one, they are able to identify pitfalls in statistical data analysis, data size and means of reporting data or findings; and two, they account for what is called the 'methodological turn' in the literature. The study corroborates Farsani and Babaii's (2020) observation that research synthesis in Applied Linguistics focuses hugely on methodological issues. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of research methodologies, both Anwaruddin (2013) and Ganji (2021) come out with interesting findings. Adopting Cumming et al.'s (1994) typology of research orientations, Anwaruddin noted that studies in Teaching English to Speakers of Other languages (TESOL) generally adopt descriptive, interpretive and ideological orientations, each of which consists of a specific focus. Further, he contends 'that the polarization of research into quantitative and qualitative is not beneficial to TESOL research' (p. 208) and, thus, appears to advocate the adoption of the mixed method. On his part, Ganji (2021) revealed that the quantitative approach is the commonly used approach, followed by the mixed method. Further, the study highlighted that questionnaires, achievement tests, and documents such as textbooks are the common tools employed to gather data.

Finally, we consider Afful and Twumasi (2022) and Nartey and Mwinlaaru (2019) significant to the present study because of their focus. Both studies depart significantly from the existing studies (e.g. Farsani & Babii, 2018; 2020; Ganji, 2021) because while the former explored the language of evaluation in academic writing, the latter discussed

research topics in relation to broad domains of research, made a chronological corpus-methodological synthesis and drew attention, both conceptually and chronologically, to the synergy between critical discourse analysis (CDA) and corpus-linguistics. Further, while the first study posited that the language of academic writing is not only dialogic and evaluative but also coloured by the subjective judgements of the writer, the second observed, as noted by Baker et al. (2008), though corpus linguistics emerged in the mid-1990s, it became popular in the late 2000s with wordlists, keywords, concordances and collocations being the frequently used corpus linguistic tools in critical discourse analysis. Again, it was observed that there is the likelihood of a surge in the application of corpus linguistic tools in regions such as Africa and South America, where not much attention has been given to corpus linguistics.

Although methodological synthesis has received great attention because of the 'methodological turn' (Byrnes, 2013: 825), presently, research synthesis appears to have shifted focus to other aspects of research works such as the synergy between theoretical and methodological frameworks (e.g. Mwinlaaru & Xuan, 2016; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019) and language of academic writing (e.g. Afful & Twumasi, 2022). While this shift is rewarding, the area has received little attention. The present study fills this lacuna through a meta-analysis of MPhil theses in the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, focusing on three key areas: their research methods, research topics in relation to the larger domains of engagement of the theses and theoretical frameworks. Hence, we address two questions:

1. What are the frequently explored research topics and domains in MPhil theses in the Department of English, UCC?
2. What theories and research methods are employed in the writing of MPhil theses in the Department of English, UCC?

This study is significant in two principal ways. First, the dynamism of academic institutions is appreciated in their diverse research orientations which change to reflect current trends in the academy. This means that academic institutions reserve the power to direct their members (both faculty and students) to conduct their research in specific areas of learning or field (Lei & Liu, 2018). Through a detailed synthetic analysis of available studies that simultaneously draws attention to the research foci and the theoretical and methodological orientations of such studies, it provides enough justification for academic institutions' call for new directions in research. Second, by exploring an area that has not received much attention, this study has drawn attention to pragmatic, generative grammatical, stylistic and variationist theories often not employed in MPhil thesis in the Department of English, UCC. The study is beneficial to future researchers because it will guide them in selecting research topics that will enable them to adopt the aforementioned theories. Hence, the study is a welcoming addition to the scarce literature on research synthesis on post-graduate theses.

Method

Research Design

The study employed the qualitative analytical framework which makes it possible for the analysis of contents of a written, spoken, and computer-mediated piece in which the analyst brings his or her subjective opinions to bear on the analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018; Drisko & Maschi, 2016). The analysis involves the establishment of categories of analysis which are coded. In some cases, frequencies of the codes are established using simple descriptive statistics. It often draws attention to divergences and convergences between the topics or themes of analysis through a systematic synthesis. It is this added advantage that critical content analysis offers over the traditional content analysis that makes it the ideal analytical method for this study.

Data and Data Gathering Procedure

The data consisted of eighteen (18) MPhil theses submitted to the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, between 2010 and 2020. They were purposively sampled from the university's institutional online repository. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria (See Chong & Plonsky, 2021; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019) were adopted because of the impossibility of including every thesis in the study. Thus, the selected theses were expected to:

1. be published in the Institutional Theses Repository, University of Cape Coast (UCC).
2. be written or submitted to the Department of English, UCC, between 2010 and 2020.
3. have a clearly stated theoretical and/or conceptual framework and have adopted one of these research approaches, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods.
4. explore a topic in English Language study or an interface between Language and Literature.

The theses were grouped, using three parameters: domain of engagement, theoretical/conceptual framework employed and research approach adopted. Their frequencies were then established and discussed.

Results

This section of the study provides a quantitative analysis of the domains of engagement of the theses, the theoretical frameworks employed in the theses and the research approaches adopted.

Domains of Engagement

This section of the study provides an analysis of the domains of engagement of the theses. A careful reading of the theses reveals four domains of engagement, namely the

media, Ghanaian English, academic discourse, stylistics and others. They are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Classification of theses based on domains of engagement

Domains of theses	Authors of theses	Freq. of domains	Per. of domains
Media	1. Coker (2011) 2. Amoakohene (2016) 3. Boamah (2016) 4. Akese (2018) 5. Akakpo-Ashiadey (2019) 6. Ohemeng (2020)	6	33.33
Ghanaian English	1. Nkansah (2016) 2. Nyanta (2017) 3. Appiah (2020)	3	16.67
Academic discourse	1. Afful (2016) 2. Abdul-Majeed (2016) 3. Gyamera (2016) 4. Agbagblo (2020)	4	22.22
Stylistics	1. Mwinlaaru (2012) 2. Abedu (2019) 3. Insaiddoo (2020)	3	16.67
Others	1. Ahialey (2011) 2. Tiekue (2020)	2	11.11
		Total: 18	Total: 100

As can be seen from Table 1, the dominant domain of engagement of the theses within the ten-year period, from 2010 to 2020, is the *media* which has the highest frequency of 6 (33.33%). This is followed by the domain of *Academic Discourse* with a frequency of 4 (22.22%). The domains of *Ghanaian English* and *Stylistics* both have a frequency of 3 (16.67%). The domain with the least frequency of 2 (11.11%) is *Others*.

Table 2 shows the theoretical frameworks that underpinned the studies:

Table 2. Theoretical frameworks of theses

No.	Authors	Theoretical/conceptual framework	Freq. of theory/concept	Per. of theory/concept
		Systemic Functional Linguistics	7	38.89
1.	Agbaglo (2020)			
2.	Insaiddoo (2020)			
3.	Tiekue (2020)			
4.	Abedu (2019)			
5.	Akese (2019)			
6.	Gyamera (2016)			
7.	Mwinlaaru (2012)			

No.	Authors	Theoretical/conceptual framework	Freq. of theory/concept	Per. of theory/concept
8.	Appiah (2020)	Nativization	3	16.67
9.	Nyanta (2017)			
10.	Nkansah (2016)			
11.	Akpakpo-Ahiadey (2019)	Genre Theory	3	16.67
12.	Amoakohene (2016)			
13.	Boamah (2016)			
14.	Afful (2016)	Appraisal Theory	1	5.56
15.	Abdul-Majeed (2016)	Discourse Function of Tense	1	5.56
16.	Ohemeng (2016)	Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis	1	5.56
17.	Ahiale (2011)	Cooperative Principle	1	5.56
18.	Coker (2011)	Use and Gratification Theory	1	5.56
			Total: 18	Total: 100

This table demonstrates the diversity of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were adopted in writing the theses. A cursory look at the above table reveals that most of the studies were conducted from the theoretical perspective of *Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)* and very few of them adopted *Genre* and *Nativization Theories*. The *Discourse Function of Tense*, *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis*, *Cooperative Principle* and *Use and Gratification Theory* were hardly employed in the theses.

Methodological Approaches Employed in the Theses

This section of the first part of the analysis concentrates on the three research approaches, namely *qualitative*, *quantitative* and *mixed methods*. From Table 3, the majority of the theses employed the qualitative research design and few of them employed the mixed method design. However, none of the eighteen (18) theses employed the quantitative research paradigm. The frequency distribution of the research designs is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Distribution of research approaches across the theses

Type of Research Approach	Frequency	Percentage
Qualitative	12	66.67
Quantitative	-	-
Mixed	6	33.33
Total: 18		Total: 100

Discussion

The discussion is organized around three themes: the domains of engagement in relation to the research topics of the theses, theoretical or conceptual frameworks that underpinned the theses and research approaches adopted.

Research Topics and Domains

A number of theses were conducted in the discourse site of the media (Akakpo-Ashiadey, 2019; Akese, 2018; Boamah, 2016; Coker, 2011; Ohemeng, 2016), but focused on specific topics within the media discourse: *SMS Messages* (Coker, 2011), *Sports* (Amoakohene, 2016), *News Bulletin* (Boamah, 2016), *Political Cartoons* (Ohemeng, 2016), *Editorial* (Akese, 2018) and *Managerial Job Advertisements* (Akakpo-Ashiadey, 2019). Coker (2011)'s study revealed that characteristic of SMS messages are phonetic approximation (e.g. 'de' (the), 'kol' (call), 'kam' (come) etc. 'u' (you)) and abbreviations (e.g. *DCE* - District Chief Executive - and *PRO* - Public Relation Officer). Also, Amoakohene (2016) identified that the introductory section of television sports presentation has six moves, namely *Opening* (Move 1), *Outline of presentation* (Move 2), *Advertising* (Move 3), *Invitation to views* (Move 4), *Assuring* (Move 5) and *Quote of the day* (Move 6). There are two obligatory moves, namely *Opening* and *Outline of presentation*; two core moves - *Advertising* and *Assurance*; and one optional move - *Quote*. In terms of textual space, *Outline of presentation* had the greatest textual space and the least space was occupied by *Involvement of the viewers*. Also, the keyness analysis shows that *sports, highlights, Ghana, boxing, football, league, cup, world, CAF, Kotoko, premier, break, Hello, good evening, welcome to the show* etc. are lexico-grammatical resources associated with television sports presentation.

Closely aligned to Amoakohene (2016) is Boamah (2016), whose examination of the rhetorical structure of radio news bulletins showed that they have twelve moves: *Source of Information* (SI), *Introducing the Edition* (IE), *Identity of Anchor* (IA), *Heading* (H), *Lead* (L), *Body* (B), and *Sign Off* (SO) as obligatory; *Greeting* (G), *Welcoming* (W) and *Conclusion* (C) as core moves; and *Summary of News* and *Appreciation of Listeners* (AL) as optional moves. Further, it highlighted that *Believed, asked, tell, commends* etc. are positive reporting verbs; *warned, accused, denied* etc. are negative reporting verbs; and *described* is a neutral reporting verb used in the bulletins.

However, Ohemeng (2016), Akese (2018) and Akakpo-Ashiadey (2019) studied written media discourse. Specifically, Ohemeng (2016)'s multimodal critical discourse analysis of political cartoons called *Akosua Cartoons* featured in the *Daily Graphic* revealed that six themes dominated the Ghanaian media landscape prior to the 2016 general elections: *electoral process, media, opposing political personalities, religious personalities, corruption* and *utilities*. Further, the analysis highlighted that while the NPP received positive representation, the NDC was negatively portrayed. For Akese (2018), the focus was on the forms and functions of passive constructions in Ghanaian newspaper editorials. The study revealed that passive constructions may be used to thematise action, sufferer of the action, or actor of the action in the editorials.

With a focus on media discourse, Akakpo-Ashiadey (2019) examined the generic structure of managerial positions job advertisements (MPJAs) of tertiary institutions published in a Ghanaian newspaper and the rhetorical functions of modal verbs in the advertisements. The study found out that MPJAs have five moves, namely *Institution identification (M1)*, *Vacancy declaration (M2)*, *Job details (M3)*, *Application details (M4)* and *Authority signing (M5)*. While Moves 1-4 are obligatory, Move 5 is optional. The move sequence is generally 1>2>3>4>5. The lexico-grammatical analysis reveals the dominant use of the modal *must*. This is significant not only because it endows the MPJAs with some authority status but it is also necessary, considering that MPJAs give directions to the applicants. Another modal identified is 'strong' *shall* which features in the *Job details* section where information regarding the tenure of office is provided.

The findings of these studies, as shown above, are instructive as they characterise the rhetorical structure and the lexico-grammatical features of these individual genres. However, within media discourse, many genres may be identified following the Swalesian (1990) definition of a genre. For example, newspapers, radio and television funeral announcement, headlines etc., all of which could be described as specific genres within media discourse. For a comprehensive and an in-depth characterisation of the thematic structure and the lexico-grammatical resources which define all of these as distinct genres, there is need for future research to examine these seemingly neglected genres.

Another interesting discourse site explored by the theses is *Ghanaian English*, focusing on the following aspects of Ghanaian English: the progressive aspect (Appiah, 2020), dative alternation (Nyanta, 2017) and the acceptability of its lexicon and certain grammatical structures (Nkansah, 2016). Appiah (2020) comparatively examined the use of the progressive aspect in both Ghana and British English, using data from the ICE Ghana corpus. The study found out that in British English, the progressive aspect is common in popular, academic and students' writings but in Ghanaian English, it is common in letters, email and institutional writing. However, it performs similar functions in both Ghanaian and British English. Further, Nyanta (2017) examined the concept of *dative alternation* to determine the disparities in its use in the Ghanaian and the British English. The analysis revealed that the following forms of the verb 'give' – *gave*, *gives* and *given* – are used in dative alternations. However, she is quick to point out that they have unequal distributions. The verbs 'give' and 'given' have the greatest (55%) and the least (8%) frequencies respectively in the two corpora.

Finally, within the same domain of Ghanaian English is Nkansah (2016). The study examined the phenomenon of acceptability with regard to certain lexical and grammatical constructions identified as indices of Ghanaian English on a five-level-scale of acceptability: 1, *Unacceptable*, 2, *Unacceptable sometimes*, 3, *Neutral*, 4, *Acceptable sometimes* and 5, *Acceptable*. (Italics in original). Among others, the study found out that while lexical items such as 'bush meat', 'boys' quarters', 'gate fee', 'senior brother' and 'chop box' enjoyed a high level of acceptability, 'coal pot', 'booker', 'chop money', 'small chops', 'fitter', 'chop bar', and 'tight friend' had low acceptability. Interestingly, Nkansah (2016) observed that the choice of these lexical items in any communicative event is tied to their frequency of use and the speaker's knowledge of the native speaker's lexical forms.

Studies on academic discourse appear to favour a cross-disciplinary approach. Generally, these studies explore the language of academic discourse with emphasis on tense (Abdul-Majeed, 201), language of evaluation (Afful, 2016), and process nominalization (Agbaglo, 2020). Focusing on MPhil theses from the Departments of English and Health Sciences, Abdul-Majeed (2016) study examined the functions that the simple past, simple present and future tenses perform in the analysis and discussion section of the theses. The study revealed that the primary tenses, namely simple present, simple past and future, had a higher frequency. Most importantly, the study identified the pragma-semantic functions of tenses in labelling, evaluating and referencing previous studies. Equally important is the finding that writers' tense use is influenced by the point of view of the writer. Similarly, Afful (2016) explored engagement markers in the literature review section of the these. He posited that the dominance of contractive and expansive resources in the sciences shows the writers' commitment to the propositional contents of their expressions and their accommodation of alternative views. Also, the study demonstrated that writers' rhetorical resources are constrained by their disciplinary conventions. For Agbaglo (2020), the focus was on process nominalization in abstracts of research articles and the discourse functions of these nominalizing structures. The study revealed the dominance of nominalization of materials, mental and verbal processes against the nominalization of relational, existential and behavioral processes. Nominalization functions ideationally to create taxonomies, interpersonally to evaluate propositions and textually for cohesion. These studies demonstrate the different linguistic resources that have evaluative functions in academic writing.

Finally, within the domain of stylistics, we find studies such as Abedu (2019), Insaيدoo (2020) and Mwinlaaru (2012). Both Insaيدoo (2020) and Mwinlaaru (2012) explored how point of view interacts with transitivity in African novels *Woman at Point Zero* and *Anthills of the Savannah* respectively to foreground ideologies and themes. The stylistic study takes a different turn with Abedu's (2019) study which examined the confluence between transitivity patterns and characterisation and thematic development in Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Insaيدoo (2020) corroborates Mwinlaaru's (2012) assertion that the *meronymic agency* is a significant narrative technique in African novels. In fact, all the three studies (Abedu, 2019; Insaيدoo, 2020; Mwinlaaru, 2012) identified that pragmatic factors influence a writer's linguistic choices. Further, they highlighted that the transitivity patterns attributed to characters foreground the thematic concerns of literary texts. While Insaيدoo (2020) and Mwinlaaru (2012) affirm that a characters' transitivity profile foregrounds the theme of oppression and patriarchy respectively, Abedu (2019) points out that the transitivity choices of the characters foreground the theme of class identity.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks Employed in the Theses

This section of the study synthesizes the theoretical and/or the conceptual frameworks that were employed in the theses. As Table 2 demonstrates, the theory that was applied the most in the theses is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It was employed to study grammatical metaphor in academic writing (Agbaglo, 2020), ideological and psychological points of view in African novels (Insaيدoo, 2020), forms and functions of passive structures in Ghanaian newspaper editorials (Akeso, 2019), characterisation and

themes in plays (Abedu, 2019) and point of view, characterisation and themes in African novels (Mwinlaaru, 2012). However, SFL, as an evolving theory and a methodological framework has also been applied in the analysis of political discourse (Logogye & Ewusi-Mensah, 2021), mood and modality (Bankole & Ayoola, 2014), language description and typology (Mwinlaaru, 2017), register of newspaper editorials (Lagu, 2021) etc. The systemic theoretical application should be extended to these areas. Such an enterprise will deepen our understanding of the assumptions of the theory and contribute to the modification of certain conceptual and theoretical positions held by systemicists.

Studies such as Abedu (2019), Insaadoo (2020) and Mwinlaaru (2012) adopted a functional stylistic analytical framework. This is appropriate, considering the fact that the studies are situated within systemicist theory. In as much as this is rewarding in itself, revealing how language functions in context in the fictional worlds of the literary texts to create character and foreground themes, such over-emphasis eventuates in the neglect of scholarly attention to other strands of stylistics such as corpus stylistics, pragmatic stylistics and pedagogical stylistics (See discussions in Sotirova, 2016). This study, therefore, contends that to make a strong case for stylistics, as a discipline that straddles between linguistics and literary criticism, post-graduate students writing thesis should venture into different strands of stylistics.

Again, from Table 2, nativization and genre theories are the second most adopted theory in the theses. The studies drew hugely on Kachru's (1982; 1992) seminal model of *Three Concentric Cycles* and other new approaches that have emerged from it. For instance, Nkansah (2016) complemented Kachru's approach with Schneider's (2007) *Dynamic Model of Post-Colonial Englishes* which is an elaboration of Kachru's. Nyanta (2017) and Appiah (2020) appear to broaden the discussion by adopting three different approaches to nativization. While the former adopted Kachru's *Concentric Cycles*, Schneider's *Dynamic Model* and Moag's (1982; 1992) *Life Cycle of Non-Native Englishes*, the latter adopted Yano's *Cylindrical Model of World Englishes* in addition to Kachru's and Schneider's. This is significant as it enabled them to cater for the weaknesses of each model, expand theoretical discussions on nativization and demonstrate the applicability of different models of nativization in the characterisation of the Ghanaian variety of English.

Further from the table, the Genre Theory was employed in three theses: Amoakohene (2016), Boamah (2016) and Akakpo-Ashiadey (2019). Specifically, they adopted the Swalesian and the Bhatian frameworks which were originally applied to research article abstracts and job application letters respectively to analyse different media genres and by this the studies demonstrate the adaptability of the approaches.

As can be seen from Table 2, four theories, namely the *Cooperative Principle*, *Appraisal Theory*, *Discourse Function of Tense* and *Use and Gratification Theory* have received little application in MPhil theses at the Department of English. The above-named theories have been used in studies such as Ahialey (2011), Afful (2016), Abdul-Majeed (2016) and Coker (2011) respectively. Very surprising is the minimal use of the Gricean Co-operative Principle and its maxims. Not only do they present themselves as practical pragmatic concepts in language research but also they are very familiar to students. The Maxims have been employed in many studies, including conversational analysis (Ghilzai & Baloch,

2016; Girgin et al., 2022) and since pragmatics is a major area in linguistics, future research should delve into this area.

Methodological Orientations of the Theses

This section is devoted to research paradigms that drive the theses. The majority of the theses (12, representing 66.67% of the theses) adopted the qualitative research paradigm. Examples of these studies are shown on Table 1 above. The specific type of qualitative analytical method employed is content analysis, as evidenced by the studies (e.g. Amoakohene, 2016; Boamah, 2016; Coker, 2011 etc.). Characteristically, the studies supported the analysis with quantitative tools, specifically simple descriptive statistics. Amoakohene's (2016) use of AntConc is significant for it marks a shift from the monologic concentration on simple descriptive statistics that characterizes the studies. Again, characteristically, the only study which specified the type of qualitative design employed is Gyamera (2016) who employed the case study. The conclusion is that while the majority of the theses are placed in the broader qualitative research approach, the specific type of qualitative research whether case study, ethnography etc. are hardly mentioned.

The second type of research paradigm employed is the mixed method approach. Six of the theses (representing 33.33%), as can be seen in Table 3, adopted this method. Though the studies adopted the mixed method approach, they used different statistical instruments in the analysis. Abdul-Majeed (2016) used simple descriptive statistics and Nkansah (2016) employed both descriptive and inferential statistical tools. Three studies, namely Afful (2017), Nyanta (2017) and Appiah (2020), could be classified as corpus-assisted though not explicitly stated. An important observation made is that all of them used Chi-Square, an inferential statistical tool, but Afful (2016) and Nyanta (2017) again used the AntConc.

In fact, post-graduate students of the Department of English, like any other researchers, are confronted with a methodology challenge and to arrest the problem, they usually adopt the qualitative research approach, as Table 3 above demonstrates. The choice of this research approach is influenced by three factors. The first is their disciplinary conventions; the second is the interpretive nature of qualitative research; and the third is the focus of the studies. Clearly, none of the studies was conducted from the Chomskyan or the generative perspective. It has been contended in the literature that the choice of either the quantitative or the qualitative approach in linguistic analysis is influenced by the Chomsky-Vygotsky debate (Meihami, 2020). While Chomsky favours a quantitative analysis, Vygotsky prefers a qualitative analysis. In a department where students shy away from generative linguistics, it is understandable that the studies employed the qualitative research paradigm.

Also, the discussion above shows that some studies adopted the mixed method (e.g. Afful, 2016). Qualitative research has been criticized for being overtly subjective and lacking empirical evidence (Cohen et al., 2018). It appears that by employing the mixed method, the researchers wanted to overcome this criticism and by so doing, they implicitly cater for the quantitative and the qualitative perspectives of Chomsky and Vygotsky in language research.

Finally, none of the studies employed the quantitative research paradigm. It is the contention of this study that a shift in research focus or topic will lead to a shift in emphasis on the qualitative research paradigm. Contemporary studies in language make strong cases for the adoption of either the mixed method or the quantitative approach. He's (2018) synthesis provides justification and scholarly evidence for the use of quantitative research methods in systemic functional linguistics. Similarly, Nartey and Mwinlaaru (2019) draw attention to the synergy between corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis and, thus, create an awareness of the shift of emphasis from a purely qualitative analysis of linguistic data to a mixed method approach which prioritizes both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Also, in variationist studies (e.g. Donoso & Sanchez, 2017; Tagliamonte, 2016), whether in the field of phonetics and phonology or grammar or syntax, quantitative inferential analytical tools such as regression analysis and Qui-square are mobilized to support the analysis. In fact, the popularity of corpus linguistics may be attributed to the need to overcome the criticism of 'cherry-picking' that characterizes strict qualitative analysis (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). Hence, many current studies now adopt corpus linguistics as the only analytical framework (e.g. Sarfo-Kantankah, 2021) or as a supporting analytical tool (e.g. Sarfo-Kantankah & Agbaglo, 2022) in linguistic analysis. Thus, for post-graduate students in the Department of English, UCC, to adopt different research paradigms other than the qualitative approach, there should be new foci of post-graduate research, some of which we have suggested above.

Conclusion

Briefly, the present study is a meta-analysis of eighteen MPhil theses submitted to the Department of English, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana, between 2010 and 2020. Employing critical content analysis as the analytical framework, the research topics in relation to domains of engagement, theoretical frameworks employed, and research methods used were systematically synthesized. The analysis revealed the following: first, the theses focused on four domains of engagement, namely the media, Ghanaian English, academic discourse and stylistics; second, the majority of the theses employed systemic functional theory; and third, the theses favoured the qualitative research paradigm.

The study recommends a shift in research focus in the department to encourage the adoption of either the mixed method approach or the quantitative approach and new linguistic theories such as conceptual metaphor, Gricean Maxims and identity theory. Also, to strengthen the arguments made, the study suggests that further studies should employ larger data.

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