Persuasive strategies in grant recommendation letters written by senior faculty in a Ghanaian university

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Abstract

The genre system of grant application has gained attention from researchers in Applied Linguistics, Discourse Studies, and Higher Education. However, the grant recommendation letter (GRL), also known as the "letter of support", has been understudied in this system. To address this gap, this study examined the persuasive strategies used in GRLs. Using Aristotle's Theory of Persuasion and a qualitative inductive discourse analysis, we analysed 90 GRLS. The findings revealed that GRLs employ different frequencies of ethos, logos, and pathos to influence the grant committee. The writers primarily emphasised rational justifications for the applicant's qualifications, while also demonstrating ethos through appropriate personal traits. Personal pronouns were used to perform discursive functions as well. Based on the findings, we offer implications for pedagogy and further research on GRLs.

Key words: application for grants; graduate education; logos; persuasion; personal pronouns.

1. Introduction

In academia, particularly postgraduate education, securing financial support through grants is crucial for students' advancement in their research work, especially the thesis or dissertation. Afful, Hesse, Agbaglo, and Bonsu (2022) contended that the significance of promoting proposed research through grant applications lies in the conviction that funding could be obtained to conduct the proposed study. The grant application involves a constellation of genres, such as a grant proposal, a grant recommendation letter (written

by the supervisor or head of department), academic transcripts, a cover letter, and a proposed budget. Among these constellations, we focus on grant recommendation letters (GRLs), which are exceedingly critical in helping postgraduate students secure funds for their research.

In Ghana, GRLs are written by supervisors or heads of departments, advocating financial support for their students' research endeavours. A GRL specifically focuses on the applicant's research abilities and potential and the need for financial support to carry out the proposed research project. It normally highlights the significance and potential impact of the research as well as the applicant's qualifications, dedication, and past achievements. It is established in literature that writing effective GRLs poses numerous challenges to faculty members (Connor, 2000; Myers, 1991; Pascual & Unger, 2010). Together with several other genres, GRLs form part of a class of hidden or occluded academic genres (Swales, 1990). The fact that these genres are hidden makes it difficult for them to be obtained for research (Connor & Mauranen, 1999; Johns, 1993; Myers, 1990, 1991). This notwithstanding, several researchers have been successful in obtaining and examining some of these genres, including request letters (Ting, 2018), fundraising letters (Goering et al., 2011), job application letters (Abbad et al., 2019), and recommendation letters for jobs or further education (McCarthy & Goffin, 2001; Precht, 1998). These studies have proved instructive in giving aspiring writers of the genres a foundation of evidence for guidance as well as enhancing our general understanding of these genres.

Despite this growing body of research on occluded genres, little is known about the GRL, the genre of focus in the present study. This means that supervisors and other faculty members might not know what to write in a GRL or how to format it correctly. This is because GRLs have their own rules that are different from other types of recommendation letters and occluded genres in general (Connor, 2000; Myers, 1991; Pascual & Unger, 2010). To occupy this niche, our research is pedagogically motivated to extend awareness about GRLs. Through this study's report, reforms and additional resources could be provided for supervisors and faculty members. This includes studying sample letters or accessing writing guides and resources provided by their institution or relevant academic organisations. Through these, supervisors and faculty members can write compelling and effective GRLs for their students' research funding applications.

The study reports on conventionalised knowledge in writing GRLs in a Ghanaian public university through the lens of Aristotle's persuasive strategies. Against this backdrop, the study aims to achieve two main objectives: (a) to account for the frequency and indicators of persuasive strategies in GRLs and (b) to examine how personal pronouns reveal focus in GRLs. Be-

fore explicating the theory underpinning this study, we briefly discuss GRLs as a form of persuasive writing.

Writing is an act of persuasion (Pascual & Unger, 2010), which, through lexico-grammatical resources, influences communication for a desired outcome. GRLs form part of the constellation of genres associated with grant applications. Together, such a constellation is targeted at persuading and securing funds from the funding agency. One genre that is closely associated with the GRL is the grant proposal, which enables researchers to "'sell' their ideas and their expertise to sponsors, make them see the innovation and value in their 'product' and persuade them to 'buy' it" (Koutsantoni, 2009: 39). Myers (1990) explains: "In classical rhetorical terms, the forms of appeals in the proposal are ethical and pathetic as well as logical; one shows that one can do a work and that the work is potentially interesting to one's audience or other researchers, as well as showing that one is right" (42). This persuasive intent of the grant proposal is affirmed by the GRL, which is written by a mentor or supervisor who can attest to the applicant's abilities.

On the other hand, the GRL can be considered a promotional genre in which the writer seeks to advertise the abilities of the applicant in order to persuade the funding institution. This essentially involves *product differentiating*, that is, providing a "good product description which is good, positive, and favourable" (Bhatia, 2005: 216). In the context of GRLs, the applicant and his or her research constitute the product. This means that, like grant proposals, GRLs are expected to employ various persuasive techniques to effectively communicate the applicant's qualifications, the significance of their research, and the potential impact of the proposed study. In a GRL, the writer, typically a supervisor or mentor, emphasises the applicant's expertise, personal attitudes, and capabilities to demonstrate their suitability for the grant. We affirm that a GRL should highlight the applicant's academic achievements, research experience, and relevant skills, emphasising their competence and dedication to the proposed project.

2. Literature review

In this section, we review the literature pertinent to the purpose of the study in order to provide contextual information that will guide the interpretation of the findings. We first begin with a review of Aristotle's persuasive strategies, which serve as the theoretical lens of the present study. We end by critically reviewing studies conducted on recommendation letters in general.

2.1. *Aristotle's persuasive strategies*

Before explicating the nuances of persuasion and its strategies, we present a brief overview of the grey line between Aristotle's rhetoric and persuasion. Beard (2000) explains that rhetoric is the capacity to realise the available resources or persuasion in a given instance. The art of rhetoric affords individuals with explicit knowledge to convey implied meanings with (c)overt intents. The structured and deliberate approach of rhetoric differentiates it from persuasion (Al Abbad et al., 2019). According to O'Donnell and Kabel (1982), persuasion is an intricate and interactive process between a sender and receiver. In the context of GRLs, the persuader seeks to influence the persuadee to adopt a new attitude or behaviour by expanding or altering their perceptions. That is, persuasion represents the writer's intention and whether a favourable outcome can be reached (Charteris-Black, 2018).

Aristotle (384-322 BC) proposed three strategies of persuasion through which the art of rhetoric is achieved. These are ethos, logos, and pathos which appeal to ethics, rationality, and emotions, respectively (Connors, 1979; Kjaer Christensen & Hasle, 2007). These strategies are derived from observations of speeches, which have currently transcended to form a theoretical foundation for studies on persuasive discourse in different contexts (Connor, 1979; Emanuel et al., 2015). The manner in which these strategies are activated in a particular discourse (i.e., what technique is highlighted as a persuasive strategy) and the form of their linguistic and non-linguistic expression (e.g., word choice patterns, explicit/implicit choices, etc.) are all influenced by the larger sociocultural and situational setting in which the genre is grounded (Žmavc, 2018).

Charteris-Black (2018) associates ethos with a value system based on the person's individuality. According to Connors (1979), ethos is usually indicated by references to the intelligence, character, and morality of the person. Quite recently, Higgins and Walker (2012) added the individual's inclination to succeed and consistency as other indicators. Mori (2016) ascertains that moral character (ethos) is the most effective means of proof. Aristotle argues that an audience is more likely to be persuaded by someone who is perceived as trustworthy, credible, and knowledgeable (Walton, 2006). This can be achieved through a variety of means, such as demonstrating expertise in the relevant subject matter, establishing a personal connection with the audience, and displaying moral character. Concerning the GRLs, ethos refers to the credibility or trustworthiness of the student, which the supervisor may establish through linguistic means.

The second strategy is logos. Demirdöğen (2010) notes that logos is usually achieved by providing proof. The appeal to logos can be recognised through the use of argumentation, logical reasoning, justifications, claims, data, and evidence. These elements form the foundation of logical, rational,

critical, and analytical communication (Burke, 2014; Demirdöğen, 2010). This suggests that writers of GRLs must ground their recommendations in logic and support them with evidence. Interestingly, using reasoning and evidence enhances the credibility of the student for whom the letter is written. Thus, the arguments in the GRL must be communicated in an appropriate form to the grant committee. This strengthens the persuasive force of the GRLs.

Finally, pathos, as the last strategy, generates emotions and feelings of association in the intended audience (Halmari, 2005). In the Aristotelian view, pathos is an emotional quality that aims to influence the audience's state of mind. It is associated with both the desired outcome of an action and its underlying motivation (Al Abbad et al., 2019). Conspicuously, every writer who aims to persuade an intended audience must know the right emotions to evoke. Through this, pathos influences audiences to accept and act upon a piece of information without thoroughly examining it through rational means. Al-Momani (2014) illustrated that making pleas, thanking, and promising are some techniques that appeal to the emotions of an audience.

Aristotle argued that a successful persuasive argument should incorporate all three elements of ethos, pathos, and logos to establish credibility, capture the audience's attention, and provide a compelling and logically sound argument. Hence, as a written persuasive genre (Connor & Lauer, 1985), GRLs are expected to integrate these three persuasive strategies to effect cooperation and identification with an intended audience. We adopt this theoretical lens to explore GRLs written by supervisors and heads of departments in a Ghanaian university. Aside from the demands of the research objectives, the wide application of the theory in academic (Al-Momami, 2014; Beck & Wegner, 1992), industrial (Nair & Ndubisi, 2015; Torto, 2020), and other professional contexts (Emmanuel et al., 2015; Fife, 2010; Ho, 2018; Mori, 2016) contributed to our decision to adopt it in the present study.

2.2. *Previous studies on recommendation letters*

Broadly speaking, recommendation letters (RLs) are written on behalf of an individual who might be seeking admission, employment, a research fellowship, or, in this study, research grants. From this point, recommendation letters are generally categorised into three: for a job, for admission, and for grants. A comprehensive survey of the literature on these categories reveals that recommendation letters for grants (as we term, "grant recommendation letters") have received minimal attention. The review of previous studies

centres on RLs for admissions and jobs. Through this, we create a space that necessitates the present study.

The justification for the emphasis on RLs is grounded in their significance and widespread utilisation as a selection tool. RLs offer valuable insights into applicants' previous qualifications and performances (McCarthy & Goffin, 2001). Additionally, they serve to validate or supplement the information provided by applicants themselves (Brems et al., 1995), as well as shed light on applicants' motivation (Tommasi et al., 1998). Cascio and Aguinis (2004) assert that decisions are frequently based on letters of recommendation. Additionally, they carry incremental information that predicts the degree attainment of college or graduate students (Kuncelet et al., 2014). RLs have been particularly identified as crucial criteria in the evaluation and screening of applicants for internships (Lopez et al., 1996), graduate studies (Landrum et al., 1994), medical schools (Johnson et al., 1998), military training programs (McCarthy & Goffin, 2001), and faculty positions (Sheehan et al., 1998). However, none of the aforementioned reasons specifically highlights the use of RLs in determining grants for deserving students in higher education, thus underscoring the need to investigate the GRL.

Trix and Psenka (2003) conducted a discourse analysis of over 300 RLs for doctors applying for medical faculty positions and found that letters for male applicants were longer and included more standout adjectives (such as *superb*, *successful*, *compassionate*, *enthusiastic*, *bright*, *excellent*, *finest*, and *very active*) and research-related descriptors (such as *clinical*, *research*, and *training*) compared to letters for female applicants. The words highlight the positive character of the applicant, which can serve as a persuasive strategy relating to ethos. Similarly, Schmader et al. (2007) replicated this study for science faculty positions and observed that letters for male applicants contained more standout adjectives, with more ability words and fewer grindstone words. By using *ability words* (such as *inherent*, *creative*, *insight*, *adept*, *capable*, and *genius*), which refer to terms that showcase the applicant's skills, expertise, and aptitude, the recommendation letter aims to persuade the reader of the applicant's competence and potential. Interestingly, the fewer grindstone words such as *assiduous*, *trust*, *work*, *busy*, *persist*, and *disciplined* maintained a persuasive tone relying on works of ethics. Quite recently, scholars focused on RLs from medical residency applicants have introduced contrasting results where female RLs were relatively longer (French et al., 2019; Lin et al., 2019), where there were several doubt raisers (Madera et al., 2019), and communal and agentic descriptive terms (Grimm et al., 2020; Hoffman et al., 2019) in the letters for women. However, no statistical differences were found in terms of letter length, positive language (such as *most* gifted, *best* qualified, *hardworking*, *dedicated*, and rising *star*) and negative language associated with apparent commendation (such as *determined* and

unflinching), the use of research- and teaching-related words (such as *research*, *publish*, *train*, *mentor*, *educate*, *course*, and *teach*) for male and female applicants. Positive language influences the reader's perception and increases the persuasiveness of the recommendation letter. Negative language serves as a persuasive device by demonstrating the applicant's ability to overcome obstacles, exhibit resilience, or show growth, thereby maintaining an overall positive tone to ensure the persuasiveness of the recommendation.

Delimiting the focus to Ghana, there is an emerging scholarship targeted at RLs (Afful, 2018; Afful & Kyei, 2020; Kyei & Afful, 2020, 2021). The scholarship adopted a genre-based approach to explore RLs, reporting on varied move structures and attitudinal meanings (Afful & Kyei, 2020; Kyei & Afful, 2020, 2021). On the attitudinal meaning, Kyei and Afful (2020) found 59.28% of all instantiations falling under the category of judgment (with words such as *diligent*, *serious-minded*, *reliable*, *dependable*, and *effective*); affect came in second with 27.26% (with words such as *recommend*, *am confident*, and *will not disappoint*); and appreciation came in third with 13.46% (with words such as *outstanding*, *reputable*, *brilliant*, *commendable*, *impressive*, and *thoughtful*). The predominant focus on judgment reflects the evaluative nature of recommendation letters, where recommenders provide assessments and opinions about the recommended person's qualifications and suitability. This alludes to the logos appeal based on reason. However, Afful's (2018) attempt to reveal the rhetorical structure and persuasive features of GRLs was limited by the small corpus of data he used. That aside, he characterised the GRLS as having dominant use of personal pronouns, evaluative lexis, and discipline-specific lexis, which all contributed to the rhetorical features of the letters. Generally, while these studies have focused on students seeking employment or further education, the present study explores GRLs written in support of students who are seeking funding to complete their research or graduate programme.

Other studies have explored (fundraising) letters, which bear verisimilitude to GRLs because they both adopt persuasive strategies to convince donors or grantors to contribute to a worthy cause. For instance, Connor and Gladkov (2004) operationalised persuasive appeals in fundraising letters, drawing insights from Connor and Lauer's (1985) previous work: rational (logos), credibility (ethos), and affective (pathos). Connor and Gladkov revealed that rational appeals predominate the corpus of fundraising letters (48%), with affective and credibility appeals having 28% and 25%, respectively. They, however, reviewed their report and concluded that credibility appeals should have been influential because of the importance of donor trust. Earlier, Handy (2000) provided persuasive cues used by the writers of the letters to build trust. He found that the charitable status of the organisa-

tion, their longevity, and celebrity endorsement were cues used for credibility appeal. Goering et al.'s (2009) interdisciplinary study on fundraising letters, through an experimental approach, supported the earlier review by Connor and Gladkov (2004). That is, Goering et al.'s (2009) results suggested that letters that utilised more credibility appeals received more funds compared to other persuasive appeals.

While the reviewed studies provide a valuable context to situate our study, they also indicate a gap that needs to be addressed. For instance, the pragmatic limitations, such as not providing the institutional context of the texts and providing textual evidence, associated with most of the studies (Afful, 2018; Afful & Kyei, 2020; Grimm et al., 2020), are crucial. Departing from the assumptions of these works, we attempt to reveal the persuasive strategies writers use in the GRLs in the Ghanaian context. Studies focusing primarily on persuasive strategies in GRLs are under-represented. While we attempt to address this gap, we discover how writers construe focus through personal pronouns in the letters.

3. Methodology

3.1. *Institutional context*

The University of Cape Coast (UCC) is where this study was carried out. In response to the growing demand for more teachers to be trained for Ghana's second-cycle educational institutions, UCC was founded in 1962. Since then, UCC has broadened the scope of its academic offerings over the years, most recently adding business, law, and science-related subjects like medicine, allied sciences, and forensic sciences. The University switched to a collegiate administrative structure in 2014, grouping its academic programs into five colleges (College of Agriculture and Natural Sciences, College of Education Studies, College of Health and Allied Sciences, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, and College of Distance Education), as well as more than 80 departments (Afful & Tetteh, 2022).

The School of Graduate Studies oversees the administration of the university's master's and doctoral programs (Afful & Tetteh, 2022; Ankrah & Atuase, 2018). Students, faculty, and administrative personnel at the university place a high value on research, which is occasionally backed by funds. In the case of students, this scholarship is designed to aid them in carrying out the research associated with post-graduate work (such as the thesis or dissertation). Being a Ghanaian, enrolling in a UCC program, exhibiting financial need, and being exceptionally gifted are the eligibility requirements. The GRL, on which this study focuses, is one of mandatory documents that must be submitted with a grant application.

3.2. *Sampling and data collection*

The University of Cape Coast's School of Graduate Studies provided the GRLs for the study. These GRLs were authored by lecturers who also served as supervisors, ranging in rank from Senior Lecturer to Professor. These samples were included in the grant applications for the 2019–2020 academic year, together with additional supporting materials. Despite the general difficulties of acquiring private papers or occluded genres (McMahon, 2013; Starfield, 2016), we were able to access the GRLs. Due to two of the authors' intimate relationship with the School of Graduate Studies, we had little difficulty securing "local approval" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018: 145) from the school's gatekeepers. We obtained the data in hard copies, photocopied them, and then returned the original copies to uphold our commitment to the offices of the School of Graduate Studies.

We collected a total of 97 letters. Out of this number, we sampled and analysed 90 of the letters. Two reasons account for this. First, we skimmed through the letters and found that five of the letters were repeated. To ensure accuracy in the count, we excluded these five letters from the 97. Second, reading through the letters, we identified that two of them had incomplete content. This would have affected the credibility and validity of the research. As such, we removed the incomplete letters from the 92, leaving us with a total of 90 letters that were used for the analysis.

3.3. *Data analysis procedure*

The data analysis process included a set of phases. All names and other details that could be used to identify the authors and the applicants have been withheld in accordance with ethical concerns of confidentiality and anonymity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In keeping with accepted procedure, we first tagged the exemplars to distinguish them from the rest (Afful & Kyei, 2020; Kyei & Afful, 2021). This phase involved creating the label GRL, which stands for Grant Recommendation Letter. So, each exemplar received this label. In the end, the copies of the GRLs that made up the sample size ranged from GRL1, GRL2, GRL3, up to GRL90.

In this study, we relied on inductive discourse analysis to examine the GRLs. This approach to text analysis is essentially "qualitative and inductive, with basic quantitative verification" (Barton, 2004: 63). It entails locating relevant features through in-depth qualitative analysis, confirming their presence across the dataset through primary quantitative analysis, and interpreting the findings through illustrations to connect structural features to relevant practical and context-sensitive dimensions. These rich textual features have linguistic integrity, being salient or frequent enough to constitute

a convention, as well as contextual value, performing meaningful work in the context of the text (Barton, 2004; Hyon, 2011).

Along these lines, the present analysis first involved reading all of the letters and then taking notes on patterns that might illuminate evaluative values. From these notes, coding categories were developed that related to writers' persuasive intent. These features are grouped under the three persuasive strategies, frequency counts are provided, and a detailed discussion is given to explain how they express the writers' persuasive purposes. The unit of analysis for the persuasive strategies was a sentence. This is because Myers (1990) contended that every sentence in a GRL is meant to persuade. In cases where a paragraph alluded to a single persuasion, it was considered one unit because of its coherent common meaning. We argue that by revealing the persuasive strategies in the letters, we can provide a fine-grained overview of language use in the context of GRLs influencing authorities to accept and offer grants to postgraduate students.

The analysis came with some challenges. One of the challenges we encountered was considering the provision of contact details as a form of ethos whereby the authors show deference or respect to the grant authorities. However, a close reading of the literature (such as Al-Momani, 2014; Chakorn, 2006; Connors, 1979) on Aristotle's persuasion provided some insights. In this regard, we considered such information to be a form of respect for acknowledging the channels of formal communication between authorities. Second, we had difficulty distinguishing between the need and purpose of the grant. In this situation, we re-read such paragraphs several times and confirmed that in cases where the authors only state the need for the grant for the postgraduate student without stating its end or consequence, it was considered as *pathos*, and vice versa.

4. Results and discussion

We present the analysis and discussion of findings in this section. We first present the frequency distributions of persuasive strategies used, followed by a qualitative examination of them. Attention is also given to the role of personal pronouns in these strategies.

4.1. *Frequency distribution of persuasive strategies in GRLS*

We analysed and calculated the occurrence and distribution of the strategies in the sampled data. Table 1 presents the results of the analysis of the persuasive strategies in the analysed letters. The percentages were approximated to one-decimal place.

Table 1: Frequency count of persuasive strategies in GRLs

Persuasive strategies	Frequency	Percentage
Ethos: credibility, character	73	26.5%
Logos: reason, rationality	146	52.9%
Pathos: emotions, identification	57	20.6%
Total	276	100%

Table 1 presents a summary of the frequency and percentage distribution of persuasive strategies found in the letters. Ethos was used 73 times, accounting for 26.5% of the total persuasive strategies; logos had 146 instances, representing 52.9% of the total appeals; and pathos was used 57 times, accounting for 20.6% of the total persuasive strategies. These results highlight the importance of presenting logical and rational arguments, supported by the writer's credibility, and making an emotional connection with the reader to create a compelling case for the applicant's eligibility for funding. More importantly, the findings suggest that a majority of the writers focused on logical and rational arguments to make a case for the applicant's eligibility for the grant. Also, the findings imply the grant committee's expectations for applicants who have a strong track record of success and who can demonstrate that their proposed project is feasible. This finding disagrees with Al-Momani's (2014) research on letters of complaint, where pathos was found to be pervasive. The difference in findings could be attributed to differences in the communicative purposes of GRLs and complaint letters. For example, as Al-Momani (2014) rightly explains, they are almost always written by students in trouble, sometimes with significant problems, including being expelled from the university with its associated dreadful repercussions.

4.2. *Indicators of persuasive appeals in GRLs*

We present the results for the linguistic indicators that implied persuasive strategies in the letters. These indicators help identify and analyse the use of ethos, logos, and pathos. We envision that it is through these indicators that writers enhance their persuasive impact and increase their chances of securing grants. Table 2 presents indicators of the persuasive appeals identified in the letters with examples.

Table 2: Indicators of Persuasive Appeals in GRLs

Appeals	Indicators	Examples
Ethos	Showing deference Demonstrating the student's inclination to succeed	1. *Miss XXX is motivated, intelligent, hardworking, sincere and very respectful.*

	Showing the academic and non-academic character of the student Respect for authority and related agencies Descriptors that highlight positive attitudes	2. *I have no doubt that XXX will successfully complete his thesis project in the stipulated time.*
Logos	Providing evidence of the student's research and its significance Claiming support for the student Illustrating knowledge of the student Justifying the need for the grant Referencing attached proofs Using factual language	1. *I am currently supervising Mr. XXX thesis on the topic XXX.* 2. *This grant, XXX, will help address his financial needs associated with data collection, printing, transportation, etc.*
Pathos	Thanking in anticipation Pleading for consideration Promising good outcome from grants Pity Identification based on values and friendship	1. *Kindly consider Mr XXX for this life-changing opportunity.* 2. *Thanks in anticipation.*

4.2.1. *Ethos*

Ethical appeal (Ethos) was the second highest persuasive appeal (26.5%). It is based on establishing the credibility and trustworthiness of the speaker or writer. It involves presenting oneself as knowledgeable, competent, and reliable. From the analysis, ethos is indicated as the demonstration of the student's inclination to succeed, showing appropriate academic and non-academic character, showing deference, etc. Extracts 1 to 5 support the explanation:

Extract 1

XXX is matured, understanding, motivated and hardworking. He is in-depth knowledge and training in his field of expertise (GRL3).

Extract 2

He exhibited high integrity in all situations he found himself in and tried to keep an upright image at all times. He is therefore academically and physically prepared to take any task (GRL82).

Extract 3

She is committed to academic work and is determined to reach the highest level in academia. She has the requisite academic background and capability to complete the thesis within the stipulated time (GRL34).

Extract 4

Having known XXX during this period of study, find him to be intelligent, hardworking, result-oriented, time conscious, self-motivated, energetic and able to undertake difficult tasks with little supervision. He is humble, honest, committed, confident, and respectful… (GRL1).

Extract 5

Please let me know if there is any additional information to support you in your decision-making process (GRL55).

In (1), the writer highlighted the applicant's level of maturity, understanding, knowledge, and training in his field of research. This is intended to persuade the grant committee that the applicant possesses the ability to conduct impactful research and, thus, deserves the funding. In (2), the writer highlights the positive image of the applicant as being a person with integrity and uprightness, projecting the applicant as ready for any task involving the research work. The writer in (3) presents the applicant as someone with the highest level of commitment and determination towards academic work, qualities that place the applicant in a position to finish the work within the given period. In (4), the applicant's intelligence, hard work, result-oriented disposition, time consciousness, etc. are foregrounded alongside his humility, honesty, and confidence, all of which are intended to convince the grant committee that the applicant is in a good standing and deserves the grant. In (5), the writer expresses willingness to provide any other information to confirm the applicant's credibility.

As the extracts show, with ethos, the writers highlight some desirable qualities of the applicants, and this agrees with Charteris-Black (2018), who associates ethos with the value system based on the person's individuality. Similarly, Connors (1979) mentions that ethos relies on the intelligence, character, and morality of the person to achieve persuasive aims. Mori (2016) ascertains that moral character (ethos) is the most effective means of proof, while Aristotle argues that an audience is more likely to be persuaded by someone who is perceived as trustworthy, credible, and knowledgeable (Walton, 2006).

4.2.2. *Logos*

As the dominant persuasive appeal in the data (52.9%), logos (logical appeal) relies on presenting a well-structured and reasoned argument support-

ed by evidence, facts, and logical reasoning. It involves using logical thinking to convince the audience of the validity and soundness of the research. It was indicated by providing evidence of the student's research and significance, using factual language, justifying the need for the grant, and among others (see Extracts 6 to 9).

Extract 6

Therefore, I fully support him, without any reservation, for consideration for the financial support he has applied for. It must, however, be noted that on his transcript, Academic Writing and Computer Application in Education have been captured as "incomplete" because the results are yet to be released by the Department (GRL4).

Extract 7

I write in support of XXX, a student pursuing the Master of Philosophy (Development Studies) programme at the School for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast. I have known XXX for two years and I am his supervision… (GRL12)

Extract 8

She has submitted an independent graduate research thesis topic that sits well with her main academic goal, bordering on health and safety issues in the oil and gas sector downstream (fuel retail outlets to be precise). She has successfully defended a proposal on the topic and have the go ahead from the department as well as myself to research on the topic (GRL17).

Extract 9

I write in support of XXX proposal to the school of graduate studies for a grant to fund a thesis project entitled, experiences of registered nurses in caring for the aged: a study at the three main hospitals in Cape Coast metropolis". XXX commenced a master of nursing in the year 2019. As part of obtaining a master of nursing degree, she is required to successfully complete a thesis project. Accordingly, she has taken steps toward the completion of the thesis project for which I am her principal supervisor (GRL22).

In (6), the writer provides support for the candidate. He resorts to justification to logically explain why the results are not part of the application. In (7), the writer mentions his long-standing relations with the applicant, and this serves as argumentation and justification for his support for the applicant. In (8), reference is made to the candidates' research topic which accords with her academic aims. In addition, the writer alludes to the fact that the applicant has been successful in defending the proposal and has the approval of the supervisor and the department to conduct the study. A similar strategy is used in (9), all of which serve as a justification or argument intended to persuade the grant committee to give a favourable consideration to the application.

4.2.3. *Pathos*

Pathetic appeal (pathos), which had the least frequency (20.6%), focuses on appealing to the emotions and values of the audience. It aims to evoke feelings, empathy, or emotional responses that create a connection between the proposer and the audience. While there are several indicators for this, it was dominantly demonstrated through thanking in anticipation and pleading for consideration. Extracts 10 to 13 illustrate pathos in the GRLs.

Extract 10

Thank you (GRL27).

Extract 11

Thank you in advance for your kind cooperation in this matter (GRL40).

Extract 12

I would be grateful if XXX will be supported through Samuel and Emelia Brew-Butler Graduate Research Grant (GRL41).

Extract 13

Kindly consider Mr XXX for this life-changing opportunity (GRL43).

Extracts (10)-(13) show how the writers relied on pathos to achieve persuasion. In (10-12), the writers expressed gratitude to the grant committee while in (13), the writer pleads for consideration. These are to elicit empathy or emotional responses from the committee and to persuade the members of the committee.

4.3. *Focus in GRLs through personal pronouns*

GRLs, like any form of persuasive writing, can benefit from incorporating personal pronouns that align with ethos, logos, and pathos. Contrary to the assertion by Myers (1990) and Connor and Mauranen (1999) that writers should use 'I', in our present study, we assume third-person pronouns to be key because the GRLs are written on behalf of postgraduate students. Table 3 illustrates the frequency of self-focus and other-focus in the GRL through the use of personal pronouns. The differences in the pronominal references are categorized according to the persuasive appeals in the letters. It must, however, be noted that no instances of plural pronoun references were identified in the letters.

As can be seen in Table 3, for ethos, 3rd-person singular pronouns were used frequently (21.5%), followed by 1st-person singular pronouns (6.2%), and 2nd-person singular pronouns (1%). Concerning logos, 3rd-person singular pronouns accounted for 36.5%, 1st-person singular pronouns had 21.1%, and 2nd-person singular pronouns achieved 1.7%. Finally, for pathos, there were 61 counts representing 5.6% for 3rd-person singular pronouns, 49

counts (4.5%) for 2nd-person singular pronouns, and 20 counts (1.9%) for 1st-person singular pronouns. In terms of ethos, the use of 3rd-person singular pronouns dominates. This indicates that supervisors focused on presenting their students' qualifications, achievements, and capabilities to enhance their credibility in the eyes of the grant committee board. Logos primarily employs 3rd-person singular pronouns, emphasising a logical and objective approach. This approach aims to maintain an objective tone and emphasise the logical merits of the students' research. Finally, while Table 3 indicates a relatively lower frequency of personal pronouns in the pathos category, 1st-person singular pronouns were used to create an emotional connection and appeal to the grant committee's emotions on behalf of the student, mainly through appreciation.

Table 3: Focus through personal pronouns in GRLs

Appeals	1st-person singular	2nd-person singular	3rd-person singular	Total
Ethos	67(6.2%)	11(1%)	232(21.5%)	310
Logos	228(21.1%)	18(1.7%)	394(36.5%)	640
Pathos	20(1.9%)	49(4.5%)	61(5.6%)	130

4.3.1. *Ethos*

When using personal pronouns to enhance ethos, it is essential to select pronouns that reflect the student's authority and knowledge. This creates a sense of trust and confidence to assess the applicant's qualifications and potential for success. Instances are presented in Extracts 14 and 15.

Extract 14

I have no doubt that XXX will successfully complete her thesis project in the stipulated time (GRL44).

Extract 15

He is assertive, hardworking, well-behaved, affable, full of initiative and ready to learn something new. I am confident in his intellectual ability to complete the programme and highly recommend him without any reservation (GRL60).

In (14), the writer uses the first-person pronoun "I" to express his or her level of confidence in the applicant. The writer specifically invests the highest level of confidence in the statement and this is further evident in the use of "no doubt." In (15), the second person pronoun "he" expresses the applicant's positive characteristics and "I" expresses the writer's confidence. In these instances, the pronouns project the writer as an opinion holder who expresses his views and passes positive evaluative comments on the appli-

cant in order to persuade the grant committee (Dontcheva-Navrátilová, 2018).

4.3.2. *Logos*

The logical appeal in GRLs relies on presenting a well-structured argument (Connors, 1979) that supports the student's qualifications and merits for receiving the grant. The analysis revealed a dominant use of 3rd-person singular pronouns relative to 1st-person (see Extracts 16 and 17).

Extract 16

I recommend her without any reservations to you for consideration for the research grant as it would offer the financial support to complete the thesis on time (GRL61).

Extract 17

He is conducting a research as part of his thesis, on the topic "Audit Quality and Corporate Failure Prediction of Commercial Banks in Ghana" (GRL62).

As seen in (16) and (17), the writers use the first and third person pronouns to present logical arguments in support of the applicants. Al-Momani (2014) reported the use of 'we', 'our', or 'us' in similar letters. This concurs with Myers's (1990) proposition of using 'I' in grant proposals. This is because the supervisors have to align with the students or foreground their own authority based on logic and facts.

4.3.3. *Pathos*

Personal pronouns play a role in establishing an emotional connection through pathos. Supervisors utilise pronouns such as 'you' and 'your' to address the reader directly and engage them emotionally while self-referencing a focus with 'I'. Through an expression of gratitude, the writers demonstrate how the grant will positively affect the recipient. Instances are provided in Extracts 18 and 19.

Extract 18

I would be grateful if XXX will be supported through Samuel and Emelia Brew-Butler Graduate Research Grant (GRL68).

Extract 19

I count on your usual cooperation (GRL70).

In (18) and (19) above, the personal pronouns help to establish some emotional connection between the writer and the addressee. This is intended to persuade the addressee. This confirms the view of that pathos strategies

involve personal pronouns and self-mentions (Dontcheva-Navratilova et al., 2020).

In all, these findings offer valuable guidance to postgraduate applicants, through their supervisors, on how to effectively influence grant committees. By strategically incorporating ethos, logos, and pathos, applicants can enhance the persuasiveness of their applications. Furthermore, the study emphasises the role of personal pronouns and the need to present a rational and sound argument to maximise the chances of success. Understanding and implementing these persuasive strategies can significantly improve the grant recommendation process, enabling deserving postgraduate students to secure the necessary funding for their research and education.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyse the methods of persuasion in GRLs submitted to the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Cape Coast using Aristotle's three-dimensional rhetorical theory. GRLs use varied amounts of ethos, logos, and pathos to influence the grant committee. In particular, the results indicate that most authors emphasize logical and sensible arguments to support the applicant's eligibility for the award. The investigation suggests that the student's ethos demonstrates their propensity for success, acceptable academic and non-academic character, displays reverence, etc. Pathos involved expressing expectation and asking for consideration, whereas logos involved offering evidence of the student's research and relevance, using factual language, and demonstrating the need for the grant to others. The study also emphasised how important personal pronouns are for persuasion.

The current study is important in a number of ways. First, the study produces findings that can be used as a foundation for explicit writing training for GRLs. Faculty could find it challenging to write in this genre because of how obscure it is. The results of this research should therefore expose teachers to the essential elements of this genre and the necessity of emphasising particular elements of it in order to convince the grant committee. In addition, the findings complement those of previous studies on other forms of recommendation letters (Afful & Kyei, 2020; Kyei & Afful, 2021; Liu, 2007; Precht, 1998) and occluded genres in general (Abbad et al., 2019; Goering et al., 2011; McCarthy & Goffin, 2001; Precht, 1998; Ting, 2018). Specifically, by highlighting the persuasive potential of GRLs, the study makes a significant addition to the existing literature, which focuses primarily on the schematic structure and linguistic properties of this class of genres.

Considering the GRL as a persuasive text opens doors for further research. First, it may be crucial to look at the persuasive strategies used in

other forms of recommendation letters since previous research on them has ignored this aspect. In this regard, it will be valuable to consider recommendation letters written for people applying for jobs and postgraduate fellowships since they have attracted little research attention. In addition, it will be interesting to conduct a similar study using other approaches, such as corpus linguistics, which relies on quantitative methods. Engagement resources and lexical bundles used in letters of recommendation will also be interesting to study.

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