

A Linguistic Analysis of Conference Titles in Applied Linguistics

Afful Joseph Benjamin Archibald*, Associate Professor, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, South Africa

jafful@ucc.edu.gh

Abstract

Over the past twenty-five years, researchers have expressed considerable interest in titles of academic publications. Unfortunately, conference paper titles (CPTs) have only recently begun to receive attention. The aim of this study, therefore, is to investigate the text length, syntactic structure, and lexicon of CPTs in Applied Linguistics. A data set of 698 titles was selected from the 2008 International Conference on Applied Linguistics held in Germany. The results from the analysis indicated that, first; the average text length of CPTs in Applied Linguistics is 10.4 words. Second, CPTs tended to be nominal, consistent with the finding in several titleology studies. Last, the lexical items of CPTs comprised a rich array of four main categories of lexicon (domain-specific words, research-related words, verbal expressions, and country/local references). These findings have implications for the scholarship on CPTs, academic writing pedagogy, and future research on academic titles.

Keywords: Applied linguistics, conference paper titles, lexicon, syntactic structure, text length

Introduction

Over the last twenty-five years, there has been an increasing interest in academic discourse among researchers in Applied Linguistics, in particular, and Linguistics, in general. This keenness has contributed towards the emergence of several recent studies on academic genres such as research articles (Swales, 1990, 2004), dissertation/thesis (Dudley-Evans, 1984; Bunton, 2005), and textbooks (Holmes, 1993). However, spoken academic genres, including conference papers (CPs), remain relatively under-researched in spite of their significant role in enhancing an interactive rapport between experts and learners (Cianflone, 2012). Conference papers have also been overlooked in terms of its availability on data bases as reference materials. Admittedly, a CP constitutes one of the earliest research genres in the process towards knowledge construction and dissemination among both expert and novice members in the academic discourse community.

Common to all written and spoken academic genres, including CPs, is one key ‘front’ rhetorical device, the title, which has recently been receiving attention from researchers. The interest in the titles of academic publication types has led to the emergence of a field of study termed “titleology” (Baicchi, 2003). Generally, titles are constrained by space and the need to be informative in order to explicitly articulate the content of publication types becomes imperative. According to Haggan (2004), a title is the first point of contact between the writer and potential reader. It also determines whether or not a text has to be read; that is, it can either attract or disinterest a reader (Afful, 2005; Hartley, 2005, 2007). Rhetorically effective titles of academic publication types (e.g. research articles, textbooks, edited collections, monographs, dissertations) catch the eye of researchers before the content of the text is actually read and creates identity for any academic piece of work.

Soler (2011:1) aptly sums up the meaning of titles: “Titles are succinct descriptive labels of texts and are meant to fulfil different purposes, such as to individualize a publication, summarize its content and appeal to its audience, among others.” To fulfill its functions, a title should indicate the scope of the research, introduce the topic of the research, and be self-

explanatory (Swales & Feak, 1994). It is these three aspects that contribute to the informativeness of a title.

Research Focus

Many titleology researchers namely, Kaur *et al.* (1997), Anthony (2001), Goodman, *et al.* (2001), Haggan (2004), Hartley (2005, 2007), Afful (2005), Gesuato (2008), Soler, (2007, 2011), Cianflone (2010, 2012), and Jalilifar (2010) have undertaken studies on titles of academic genres such as research articles, review papers, textbooks, dissertation, magazines, conference presentation abstracts, and poster sessions. As Nagano (2015) indicates, titles of these genres have been described and analyzed by numerous authors, from a variety of perspectives: generic, pedagogical, linguistic, diachronic, scientometric, mono-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary. Surprisingly, among all these studies, conference paper titles (CPTs, used thereafter) remain under researched. The present research, therefore, seeks to investigate the text length, syntactic structure, and the lexicon (also viewed as informativity) of CPTs provided by presenters at an international conference in the field of Applied Linguistics. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

Q1. What is the text length of CPTs in Applied Linguistics?

Q2. How are CPTs in Applied Linguistics syntactically structured?

Q3. What range of lexical choices constitutes CP titles in Applied Linguistics?

At the outset, it should be noted that in this study ‘title length’ refers to the length in words per title while ‘syntactic structure’ refers to elements such as phrases and clauses. ‘Lexical choices’ refers to the information content in the title. The answers provided to the above questions highlight the encoded linguistic resources available to both learners and experts in formulating CPTs.

Review of Literature

In this section, I discuss the related literature under such themes as text length, syntactic structure, and information content in order to provide the conceptual terrain and to establish a niche for the present study.

Title length

The issue of text length of academic publication titles has been investigated by a number of researchers. As a result of the controversy surrounding what the acceptable length of titles should be, Anthony (2001) conducted a study on 600 titles of RAs in various computer science sub-disciplines. His results showed that text length varied considerably within sub-disciplines. Haggan’s (2004) study found that the average word per titles were 9.4, 8.8, and 13.8 for Literature, Linguistics, and Science RA titles respectively. This indicates that Science titles are longer than that of Literature. The findings of Anthony (2001), however, contrasted with that of Haggan (2004) in that the former found that the average title length was 9 words as against 13.8 words for the latter’s titles in Science.

Furthermore, the findings of Busch-Lauer (2000) suggested that, out of the 150 German and English titles in Linguistics and Medicine papers from RAs and CPs, titles in Linguistics were shorter than those of Medicine, representing 8.4 and 9.9 average words per titles respectively. This finding somewhat confirmed Haggan’s (2004) claim that Science (13.8) titles are longer than Linguistics (8.8) titles. Fortanet *et al.*’s (1997) study of 200 titles of RAs in Computer Science, Applied Linguistics, Business, Economics, and Chemistry also revealed that Chemistry and Linguistics titles contained the highest and the lowest number of words

respectively. Their results indicated that the length of titles varied across fields, consistent with that of Busch-Lauer (2000), as stated earlier. Findings from Gesuato's (2008) corpus reveal that the average number of words for titles of book, dissertations, RAs and CPs are 9.2, 12.9, 10.8, and 9.9 words respectively. That is, dissertation titles recorded the highest number of words while book titles had the least number. Gesuato's study on the text length of titles, unlike several other works, provides literature on across-genres studies.

The closest studies to the present one are Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) and Cianflone (2012). In Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010), the length of 78 CPTs of four scholars in Education and Applied Linguistics were investigated. The study indicated that two scholars in Applied Linguistics, JAB and YSB, recorded 12.1 and 7.5 words per title, while the two scholars in Education, FKA and YKE, had the averages of 6.4 and 10.1 words per title. Thus, although these scholars wrote the same genre, there were differences in their title lengths, thereby confirming the possibility of individual preferences accounting for differences in the title length of CPTs. In the case of Cianflone (2012), 241 titles in Food Science posters were studied. Findings indicated the mean count of 12.02 words per titles and the exclusive use of the nominal and the compound formats.

Syntactic structure

Key among studies on the syntactic structure of titles of academic publications are Fortanet *et al.* (1998), Haggan (2004), Soler (2007), Wang & Bai (2007), Afful & Mwinlaaru (2010), and Moattarian & Alibabae (2015).

In an earlier study, Fortanet *et al.* (1998) examined the syntactic structure of 200 titles each in Computer Science, Applied Linguistics, Business and Economics, and Chemistry. After scrutiny, it was revealed that the most frequently used syntactic structure was the noun phrase with a premodifier, head and post modifier. Haggan (2004) analysed 751 RA titles in Linguistics, Literature, and Science, classifying the titles into three categories: full-sentence titles, compound titles, and the remaining title structures. The category of 'the remaining title structures' encompassed three subcategories: noun phrases, prepositional phrases, and participial phrases. The results demonstrate that in Literature RAs, compound titles dominated (60%), while in Science and Linguistics approximately two-thirds of the titles used nominal constructions. Soler (2007), on the other hand, examined titles in two genres – research papers and review papers in two contrasting fields – Biological Sciences (including Biology, Medicine, and Biochemistry) and Social Sciences (including Linguistics, Anthropology, and Psychology) and identified four structures: nominal, question, compound, and full-sentence constructions. Full-sentence construction was found to be peculiar to research article titles in Biology, Medicine, and Biochemistry, but this construction did not occur in review paper titles.

In her study on the syntactic structure of 250 titles for each of the four genres, Gesuato (2008) observed that the noun phrase stood as the most frequently used structure, recording about 87.5%, 86.9%, 83.5% and 82.0% for book, dissertations, RAs and CPs respectively. A very current study, Moattarian and Alibabae (2015) investigated the syntactic structures used in RA titles in Applied Linguistics, Dentistry, and Civil Engineering. To this end, they randomly selected 420 RAs from four reputable journals in each field and analysed their titles, based on Dietz's (1995) taxonomy for the syntactic structure of RA titles. The findings of the study indicated that, although there were some similarities in title structures, there were some discipline-specific differences.

The dominance of the nominal construction is often reflected in a number of studies (e.g. Siso, 2009; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010; Cianflone, 2010). For instance, Afful and Mwinlaaru

(2010) in their paper investigated the syntactic structure of CPTs and observed that there was a relatively uniform preference for NP among all four scholars, recording a total of 88.7% while that of ing-clauses was 11.2% and were mostly expanded through complementation of the noun phrase heads.

Informativity

Several scholars have explored information content or the lexicon in academic publication titles. These scholars include Kaur *et al.* (1997), Goodman *et al.* (2001), Afful (2004), Gesuato (2008), Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010).

Kaur *et al.* (1997), in their study on textbook and RA titles, found two categories of words: keywords and non-keywords. Drawing on a preliminary count of non-keywords and keywords, they found that whereas the total number of keywords in 100 Library and Information Science (LIS) textbook titles totalled 500, that of 100 RAs titles summed up to 770. The average scores for LIS textbook titles and the RA titles were 5.00 and 7.70 respectively, suggesting that RA titles are longer than textbook titles. One issue, however, is the fact that due to the inadequate sample size used, there is difficulty in accepting the final claims of the study even though other studies are consistent with similar findings.

Goodman *et al.* (2001) focused on a typological framework which examined the content and elements present in the articles. They characterised each RA under the following categories: topic only, method or design, data set and results. They found that out of the 420 RA titles, 40% of the titles provided information only on the topic discussed, 33% focused on the topics and methods, 18% on the topic and results while 2% focused on their topics and conclusion. However, Goodman *et al.*'s study did not provide a convincing justification and elaboration for the typology they used. Using a sample size of 355 dissertation titles in the Department of English at the National University of Singapore, Afful (2004) found that nominal expressions, verbal expressions, and time-related words constituted the key linguistic realizations of dissertations titles.

As already indicated, Gesuato (2008) also analysed the information content of titles of four genres. Her findings indicated that the total number of function words for book, dissertation, RA and CP titles were 733, 1,025, 849 and 765 respectively while that of the content words were 1,574, 2,207, 1,852 and 1,731. This implies that content words outnumbered that of the function words in the corpus. Hence, writers of academic publications make considerable use of lexical items in formulating their titles, implying that academic genre titles have a high lexical density. In their study on CPTs of four individual scholars, Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010) found that the lexical densities of the scholars were very high, recording 67.4% and 74.8% for Education titles and 66.3% and 62.7% for Linguistics titles. These findings differ though minimally from the findings of Gesuato (2008) who found the lexical density of CPs to be 69.4%.

Thus, all the studies reviewed here simultaneously vary and maintain similarities across some several dimensions including length, syntactic structure, and informativity. Applied Linguistics has featured prominently in, especially, cross-disciplinary studies (e.g. Busch-Lauer, 2000; Haggan, 2004; Soler, 2007, 2011; Gesuato, 2008; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010; Moattarian & Alibabaeen, 2015). The frequency and prominence of Applied Linguistics in such studies may stem from the fact that the scholars who have been keen in titleology have come from Applied Linguistics and are interested about knowing and explicating their own research writing practices for various purposes.

The problem, however, with cross-disciplinary studies is that many of them reach conclusions based on a small sample, or merge several disciplines together as, for example,

“Science” (as in Haggan, 2004). It is expected, therefore, that much attention on titles will be paid to mono-disciplinary studies. Unfortunately, Applied Linguistics has featured in few of such mono-disciplinary studies (e.g. Pulaczewska, 2008; Gesuato, 2008; Jalilifar, 2010; Cheng *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, whether in cross-disciplinary or mono-disciplinary studies on academic publication titles, CPTs have been least investigated; hence, the need for the present study.

Method

The corpus

The data for this study is the compilation of titles of individual and symposia abstracts from the 15th World Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA) Congress (2008) dubbed: ‘Multilingualism: Challenges and Opportunities’. The Association of Applied Linguistics is a body of scholars who employ linguistic theories and methods in teaching and research on learning a second language. In recent times though what constitutes Applied Linguistics has been problematised (Brumfit, 1997; Davies, 2007; Liddicoat, 2010). Nonetheless, congresses are annually organised by the association to discuss applied linguistics research papers of scholars all over the world. The choice for the above data was due to its availability and recency. A total of 1397 titles were collected. Out of this, 509 titles were from the symposium abstracts while that of the individual paper abstracts were 888. However, considering the total number of titles collected, the random sampling method was used. That is, every other second title was selected in order to arrive at a sample size of 698. Considering the above range of data of other previous studies (e.g. Kaur, *et al.*, 1997; Gesuato, 2008), the data collected for this present study were deemed adequate and appropriate.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the analysis and discussion on CPTs in Applied Linguistics. To accomplish this task, findings related to titles length, syntactic structure, and informativity, are discussed. I provide the qualitative and quantitative data under each variable in order to answer each research question.

Title length

The length of CPTs was measured in terms of the number of words. Words are defined as strings of letters preceded and/or followed by spaces or punctuation marks (Gesuato, 2008). This includes non-hyphenated compounds, capitalised abbreviations, and numerical sequence of words which are regarded as single words. Table 1 shows some basic quantitative analysis of the data collected.

Table 1. *Quantitative analysis of some variables of the data set*

Variables	Frequency
Number of titles	698
Number of words	7235
Average title length	10.4
Number of words for shortest title	2
Number of words for longest title	24

As can be found in Table 1, the average text length of CPTs in the data set was 10.4 words. Afful and Mwinlaaru’s (2010) study of the two Applied Linguistics scholars showed

different text lengths (12.1 words and 7.5 words), thereby suggesting that although these scholars operated within the same genre, there were distinctive features that characterized each individual scholar. Gesuato (2008) reports on Fortanet *et al.*'s (1997) findings on the text length of 200 titles of RA in Computer Science, Applied Linguistics, Business and Economics and Chemistry. It was found that, similar to the finding of Haggan (2004), Chemistry and Linguistics titles recorded the highest and lowest average words respectively. Also, after using a content-function approach, Kaur *et al.* (1997) found that RA titles were longer than textbook titles, recording 7.7 and 5.0 average title lengths respectively. These findings appear to be at odds with Gesuato (2008) who found RA titles longer than that of book titles, recording an average title length of 10.8 and 9.2 respectively. Below are the longest and shortest CPTs found in the data:

1. *Students practices and strategies in negotiating the effects of monolingual language policies in the school context: Conformity, resistance and crossing in the Ghanaian school (24 words)*

2. *Bilingual couples (2 words)*

While Text 1 may lack conciseness and conceptual clarity, it is without doubt informative. On the other hand, Text 2 is not only too concise to a fault but also lacking in adequate information. Title (2), one of the shortest article titles, is an under-informative one, in that, like most short titles, it is not self-explanatory and offers only the topic, hence, it flouts the maxim of quantity (Grice, 1975).

The above studies on title length reveal some differences and similarities in findings. One reason that accounts for this variation is the differences in genre and discipline. In other words, while Haggan (2004) and Fortanet *et al.*'s (1998) studies used the RA, the present study focused on the CP genre. With respect to variations in discipline, for the above studies Science titles recorded the highest number of words as against titles in Linguistics.

Syntactic structures

The term 'syntactic structures' refers to elements such as nouns phrases, prepositional phrases, verb phrases, and all types of clauses. In order to examine the syntactic structures of the data set, structural organisation and syntactic encoding, were considered, following Gesuato (2008).

Structural organisation

Two structural categories of titles – single-unit titles, consisting of one information unit and multi-unit titles, comprising two or more units – were noticed in the data set. The structural units within the titles were determined by the occurrence of specific punctuation marks (i.e. colons, semi-colons, full stops, question marks or dashes), following Gesuato (2008). All punctuation marks other than the above were not considered as boundary markers. To arrive at the frequencies indicated, the following procedures were undertaken. First, the total number of words was divided by the total number of units to arrive at an average of 7.3 words per unit, which is quite consistent with Gesuato's (2008) findings. With respect to the frequency for the 1-unit title, the number of 1-unit titles was divided by the sample size, 698 and multiplied by 100, to arrive at 59.9%. Similarly, for the 2-unit title frequency the total number of 2-unit titles was divided by the sample size and multiplied by 100 to arrive at a percentage of 40.1.

Below are some examples of 1-unit and 2-unit titles identified in the data.

3. *The diversity and complexity of contemporary multilingualism (1-unit)*

1. *Language data analysis of students in Japanese immersion programs in the United States. (1-unit)*

2. *One and the same task? Comparing task on paper and task in the classroom.* (2-unit)

3. *Lexical hierarchy in French and English scientific articles: A step towards classifying meaning* (2-unit)

Table 2. *Frequency distribution of units*

Variables	Frequency
Total number of words	7235
1-unit title	418 (59.9%)
2-unit title	280 (40.1%)
Average words per unit	7.3
Total units	978

As shown above, the table (2) displays the frequency distribution of one and two unit titles in the data set. Of the 698 titles under investigation, one unit titles accounted for most of the data (59.9%) for the present study. Thus, Applied Linguistics shows a predisposition towards the formulation of single units in CPTs. This finding is interestingly at variance with the dominance of multiple units in Applied Linguistics RA titles which were found in Moattarian and Alibabae (2015) and Hartley's (2007) work involving Arts and Humanities.

Syntactic encoding

The term 'syntactic encoding' is used to refer to the word order realised in the title units, following Gesuato (2008). The title units in the present data set were noun phrases, 'ing' clauses, and prepositional phrases. In this study, the first two categories are emphasised because of their relative prominence. The table below presents the title unit distribution with reference to the two categories in the data set.

Table 3. *Frequency distribution of title unit categories*

Variables	Frequency
NP	705 (79%)
Ing Clause	135 (15%)
Others	53(6%)

According to Table 3, there is relative dominance of the NP structure, with a total of about 705 NPs in the titles. The unit realised as noun phrases mostly had nominal, adjectival, verbal or adverbial heads. Most of the NPs were coordinated by one or more phrases with several forms of modification. The dominance of NPs in CPTs, according to Afful and Mwinlaaru (2010), might be due to its distinctive features of embedding, labelling, and multiple functions. This finding concurs with previous findings on syntactic encoding (e.g. Gesuato, 2008). Below are some examples of NPs found in the data:

4. *Dialogical approach to foreign language and pedagogy.* (single NP with adjectival pre-modification and post modification)

5. *Language maintenance and language shift.* (NPs with coordinated head)

6. *Bilingual couples.* (single NP with adjectival head)

7. *Second language learning in a multilingual setting.* (verbal head NP with pre-modification and post modification)

8. *A contrastive, multilingual, multidimensional text-based analysis.* (single NP with multiple pre-modification)

Other title units are realised as V-ing clauses, which are expanded through pre-modification and post modification NP heads, as shown below:

9. *Promoting multilingualism beyond Europe.* (V-ing with post modified NP expansion)

10. *Constructing meaning using multimodal discourse.* (V-ing clause with a verbal head)

11. *Learning and ICT.* (V-ing coordinated with a noun)

12. *Reading and writing for technological areas.* (coordinated V-ing with post modification)

Another category labelled as ‘others’ in Table 3 consists of prepositional phrases, verb phrases, adjectival phrases, clauses and a few sentences. Below are some examples from the data set:

13. *Do students use paper comments with rejection, appreciation or sympathy?* (interrogative sentence structure)

14. *On the resyllabification in contracted structure.* (double PP)

15. *On course book reform.* (single PP)

16. *When and what do we differentiate request strategies?* (interrogative sentence structure)

The post modification expansion of the NPs was often realised as prepositional phrases headed by ‘on’, ‘in’, or ‘form’ and often embedded in one another.

Also, the two unit titles were characterised by combinations such as NP/NP, PP/NP or NP/NN. However, the combination, NP/NP was found in most of the data. Below are examples of NP/NP syntactic structure:

17. *The inseparability of lexis and grammar: Corpus linguistics perspectives.* (NP/NP)

18. *The social function of the recount genre: Experiential and interpersonal meaning in Spanish EFL writers.* (NP/NP)

19. *The expressions of writer stance in the British and Spanish press: A comparative corpus-based study.* (NP/NP).

The dominance of the NP/NP structure is not surprising as these findings are consistent with previous findings such as Gesuato (2008). They seem to offer an opportunity for researchers to be more accessible in their formulation of titles. For instance, in Text 20 the second part of the title suggests a specific approach, that is, corpus linguistics.

Lexical choices

Another means of capturing informativity in the data set is by alluding to lexical density and lexical choices.

Lexical density

The issue of lexical density of titles has been examined by several researchers (e.g. Fortanet *et al.*, 1997; Busch-Lauer, 2000; Gesuato, 2009; Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2010). Generally, these scholars agree with the assumption that the higher the lexical density of a text, the more informative or dense it is.

Using a content analysis approach, I set out to find the various lexical realisations that underpinned the formulation of CPTs in Applied Linguistics. It was assumed that the titles would be richer in content words than function words. Thus, the latter was counted first and subtracted from the total number of words in order to derive the total number of lexical items or content words. The lexical density was then calculated, using the formula below:

Lexical density = $\frac{\text{Total number of content words}}{\text{Total number of words}} \times 100$

Total number of words

Table 4 provides the measures of the lexical density of CPTs in the study and other useful quantitative data.

Table 4. *Lexical density and other quantitative data*

Variables	Frequency
Total number of words	2735
Total number of lexical words	5035
Total number of function words	2200
Lexical density (in percentage)	69.5
Average lexical words per title	7.1
Average function words per title	3.1

As can be found in the table, lexical words far outnumbered the function words in the data set, with an average of 7.2 lexical words per title as against 3.1 as the average number of function words per title. With respect to lexical density, out of 698 titles examined in this study, the lexical density calculated was 69.5% as against 68.2%, 68.6%, 69.4% for book, dissertation, journal article and proceeding titles respectively in Gesuato (2008). These results indicate that Linguistics titles are very informative due to its generally high lexical density. The following are some examples of lexical and function words found in the data set:

20. *Intercultural communication in legal context in Germany.* (lexical words)

21. *Tensions and conflicts in fostering collaborative teaching autonomy online.* (lexical words)

22. *Convergence and divergence in evaluation between the curriculum and the new textbook for L1 in the Greek elementary school.* (function words)

The lexical words found in the data set were mostly nouns and adjectival expressions on one hand (Texts 23 and 24) and prepositions and determiners for the function words on the other hand (Text 25).

Lexical choice

In this section, I used a combined qualitative and quantitative content analysis approach to discover the range of lexical choices that underpinned the formulation of CPs titles in Applied Linguistics. Table 5 summarises the distribution of each linguistic category in relation to the data set.

Table 5. *Distribution of lexical choices in CPTs*

Lexical Items	Frequency	Percentage
Domain-specific	585	43
Research-related	127	9.3
Verbal expressions	283	21
Country/local	365	27
Total	1360	100

Table 5 shows that domain-specific words were the most frequently used, recording 585 (43%) words while research-related words recorded the least of 127 (9.3%) words in the study. Table 6 further displays some examples of the four categories of lexical items observed to be most salient in the present data set.

Table 6. *Main categories of lexical items in the data set*

Categories	Examples
domain-specific words	Multilingualism, linguistic, morphological, EFL, ESL, resyllabification, pedagogy, lexicalisation, discourse analysis, code switching, phonology, metapragmatic
research- related words	Preparation, review, investigation, analysis, examination, approach, study, inquiry, evaluation
verbal expression	Annotating, navigating, writing, evaluating, assessing, teaching, negotiating, learning, hedging, switching, making, looking.
country/local references (proper nouns, adjectives)	Portuguese, Germany, Costa Rica, French, Chinese, bantu, Swiss, American, Philippines, English, Finnish, Australian.

Below are a few CPTs chosen from the data in order to provide reader an idea of the varying range of choices found in the data set:

23. *Task complexity and development of L2 lexicalisation patterns for describing motion events.*

24. *Code-switching patterns in writing text among Japanese Advance English learners*

25. *Deaf EFL learning outside the school system*

26. *A Compilation of corpus for spoken German academic discourse.*

27. *An investigation into template learning and the use of dynamic stereotypes*

28. *A contrastive study of the rhetorical organisation of English and Spanish PhD thesis introductions*

29. *Negotiating traditional modern self*

30. *Annotating learner language: Uniform tag sets for canonical and non-canonical sequences*

The following section discusses in turn the four linguistic categories observed in the present study. The frequent occurrence of domain-specific words in the data set which were often nominal expressions supports other studies on titles (e.g. Afful, 2004; Gesuato, 2008). Some of the domain-specific expressions are identified with courses in Applied Linguistics such as Pragmatics, Phonology, and Sociolinguistics and Discourse Analysis. Some of these expressions were found in the head position and non-head position, as shown below.

31. *The discourse dynamics of multilingual educational contexts.* (compound head-position)

32. *Semantic and pragmatic functions ‘also’ in oral semi-formal German.* (non-position)

33. *Portuguese L1 English L1 phonological transfer and Hip cort of memory system.* (non-position)

34. *Transpersonal linguistics in British Austrian press.* (head position)

The first three domain-specific titles are in the non-head position whereas the last one is in the head position.

Other domain-specific words identified in the titles include words which are used in the courses previously discussed. Some of these words include ‘lexicalisation’, ‘modals’, code-switching’, ‘nominals’, ‘hedges’, and ‘metadiscourse’. The recurrence of these words further confirms that the titles and the subject of the CP’s dwelt on the domain of linguistics as these words are popular terms used in the discipline. The third category of domain-specific expressions

identified in the data set was found in the form of capitalised acronyms. Below are some examples of acronyms identified in the study:

35. *Collostructions in SLA corpus and linguistics evidence*

36. *The effect of intercultural communication among EAP students on language learning and social participation.*

37. *Tax-based language learning in EFL classroom*

38. *An International Auxiliary Language (IAL)*

These capitalised acronyms were classified as domain-specified expressions as they are commonly used in Applied Linguistics, in particular, and Linguistics, in general. They are often realised as phrases but written as acronyms and this could be due to space constraints and convenience. In the data set, Texts 38-40 exemplified the use of unexplained acronyms, suggesting the audience's familiarity with the terminology used in the discipline. It was only Text 41 that had explained acronym. However, according to Busch-Lauer (2000), it is appropriate to provide the full forms of acronyms when they are being used.

In addition, other domain-specific words found in the data set were identified as words traditionally outside Applied Linguistics studies. They included words such as 'investment', (business) 'pedagogy', (education) 'mimicry', (literature) 'enthnotourism', (tourism) 'paediatric', (medicine) 'pedagogy', 'arbitration', (law) and 'plant biology' (science). These words were identified in the data set because in recent times Discourse Analysis, a branch of Applied Linguistics, has been redefined as language use in social institutions, practices and processes; thereby involving other human institutions such as law, media, and religion. Thus, credence has been given to the permeability and fluidity of disciplines. The recurrence of these words lately reflects the accommodating nature of the studies carried out by these researchers. These findings concur with studies such as Afful (2004) and Haggan (2004) that highlighted the dominance of domain-specific words.

The second set of words under lexical choices concerns research-related words. It is closely related to the mode of enquiry in research. In other words, it refers to the act of research itself or the result of the activity. This includes words such as 'analysis', 'study', 'inquiry', 'approach' and 'investigation', as known in the CPTs below:

39. *Image-text policies: A linguistic approach to commemorative culture.*

40. *The discourse of arbitration and mediation: a comparative analysis*

41. *An investigation into template learning and the use of dynamic stereotypes in professional communities among NNS engineering student.*

42. *Language maintenance and shift among the foreign brides and their children in Taiwan: A comparative study.*

The underlined words in the titles above can be said to represent distinct aspects of the research activity. A commonly occurring research-related word in the data was 'analysis' which is not surprising as research in any field deals with analysing data in order to arrive at validated findings. Other words like 'examination', 'acquisition', 'evaluation', 'review', were also found in the data.

The third group of lexical choices were verbal expressions, referring to the forms of the verb used. Two main verbal expressions were identified. However, this section discusses the main function as illustrated below in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Examples of Linguistic Categories

Label	Examples
Gerund	Developing, teaching, learning, evaluating
Be	Is

The above figure (2) illustrates the main categories of verbal expressions noted in the data set. The first category is realised as ‘ing’ words; the other category of words is realised as interrogative structure with the use of the operator verb, ‘is’. Below are some examples of the two forms of found in the data set:

43. *Developing teacher’s competence and thinking in content-based programs*

44. *Learning English pronunciation by early and later learners: a variability analysis.*

45. *Is globalisation real in Eastern Europe? First and second language teaching, intercultural education and learner motivation in Poland.*

46. *Is there a European way of doing TV news? TV news style across time and space – the cases of CBS Evening News and the Swiss Tagesschau.*

Texts 46 and 47 focus on the processes or the action taking place, thereby indicating and confirming the processes that need to be undertaken in research. In Text 48, the operator verb is used in the initial position, which puts the whole structure in a question form. This certainly indicates an interactive environment between the presenter and the audience. However, this form is relatively small less in the data set with just three titles out of the 698 title in the data set. Texts 48 and 49 remind us of the structure of title as they are presented not only in an interrogative form but are also followed by a nominal form in the case of text 48 and to nominal forms in the case of text 49. As noted by Kane and Peters (1966), Sacks *et al.* (1974), Hyland (2002), and confirmed in Haggan’s (2004), the question form serves as a rhetorical device to draw the reader in by identifying the topic.

Another observation in the data set was the seeming metaphorical use of the verb forms in the titles which creates a mental picture of an activity being performed. Below are some examples found in the data.

47. *Developing the intercultural dimension: Interlinguistic considerations in international education*

48. *Constructing meaning in L2: The re-organisation of event representations in speech and gestures*

49. *Building and/or competence*

50. *Mapping linguistic diversity in Europe*

In Examples 50, 51, 52 and 53, the verb forms, ‘developing’, ‘constructing’, ‘building’ and ‘mapping’ appear to have been used metaphorically. This is to say, Applied Linguistics as a discipline does not deal with ‘constructing’ language. Other forms like ‘mapping’ and ‘exploring’ deal with the domain of geography, though they have been used in the context of Linguistics. As observed in this study, the use of verbal forms, although fewer than domain-specific words enhances comprehension of CP titles and makes it less complex in meaning. The issue of metaphoricality in Applied Linguistics titles is also alluded to in Haggan (2004).

The final group of lexical choices open to members in the Applied Linguistics discourse community concerns country or local references. This group of words refers to proper nouns and

proper adjectives indicating names of countries, cities, nationalities, and languages. Some names of countries often used in the data set included Germany, Cameroun, Singapore, England, South Africa, Spain, China and America; names of languages in the data set were English, Bantu, Kashmiri, Frisian, Tamil and Creole. Please find below some titles with such local or national allusions:

51. Public information campaigns in the mass media in Germany and Ireland: A contrastive analysis

52. Pidgin English and social interaction in Cameroon

53. Social identities in Russian advertising discourse at the stage of transition

54. Problems in migrant education: L1 and L2 linguistic education

55. The new Swedish language policy: A missed opportunity for second foreign language teaching

56. Code-alternation in online discussion forums in Taiwan: A functional approach.

57. Interference phenomena in the forming of Italian American lexicon

As can be seen, while Texts 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, and 60 are explicit in making references to local or national contexts such as Germany, Ireland, Cameroon, Russian, and Taiwan, a few titles are implicit in their reference to the specific setting by referring to ‘second foreign language (58) and ‘L1 and L2’ (57).

The fact that some of the titles in the data set make use of these references is not surprising because it confirms the fact that the conference from which this data was derived was an international one with presenters from all over the world. Its use, according to Afful (2005), also brings to the fore the possibility of case studies of particular languages, countries and localities.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore the title length, syntactic structure, and informativity of conference paper titles (CPTs) in Applied Linguistics. The study utilized a corpus of 689 CPTs, drawing on a qualitative content analysis approach, complemented by some descriptive statistics.

Three main findings were obtained in response to the research questions. First, the study revealed the average title length of CP's in Applied Linguistics as 10.4 words. This finding provides a general idea on the number of words acceptable in the formulation of CPTs. The study also identified the noun phrase as the dominant syntactic structure, consistent with the results on other publication types in such disciplines as Medical Science (Wang & Bai, 2007) and Food Science (Cianflone, 2012). In response to the third questions, first, the lexical density measured out of 698 CP titles was found to be 69.5%. The findings revealed that specific lexical items were frequently used in the data set, recording 585 (43%), 127 (9%), 283(21%), and 365 (27%) for domain-specific words, research-related words, verbal expressions and country/local references respectively. These lexical forms can be said to form part of the ‘house style’ of Applied Linguistics as a disciplinary community.

These findings contribute to the scholarship on Applied Linguistics research, in general, and what has recently become known as ‘titlelogy’, in particular. The findings discussed in the paper are, as far as I know, the first on titles in Conference Papers in Applied Linguistics. By providing information on the text length, syntactic structures and lexical choices, the study provides both experts and novice researchers in Applied Linguistics a means of understanding their practices with regard to the formulation of CPTs. The findings of this study have re-echoed the earlier stance of scholars notably, Busch-Lauer (2000), Anthony (2001), Afful (2005), Soler

(2007), and Moattarian and Alibabaeen (2015) on the possibility of discipline-specific and field-dependent culture that influences the choice of style and structure for various genres.

Pedagogically, the acquisition of knowledge on the choice of title length, syntactic structure and lexicon of CP titles serves as a means of informing both junior and senior members of the Applied Linguistics academic discourse community on the acceptable rhetorical practices and epistemological disposition of their discipline in formulating titles. In research methods, thesis writing, and supervisory sessions that involve both undergraduate and postgraduate students either the entire data or some provided in the brochure for the 2008 Applied Linguistics conference participants can be used as the basis to stress textual schemata and rhetorical patterns in shaping Applied Linguistics titles. Such discussions with students can be held with the view to enabling them to understand the peculiarities and communicative load of titles as well as improving their writing skills by focusing on various aspects of titles.

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