A pragmatic analysis of the expression of appreciation – thanks in Nigerian English

Abolaji Samuel Mustapha

Professor
Department of English,
Lagos State University, Ojo
Lagos, Nigeria
Email: abolajimustapha@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Many studies on the linguistic realizations and social functions of responses to thanks in different varieties of English have reported interesting findings on the speech act. However, it appears that thanking, the first pair part of the thanking formula, is under-researched. To fill this gap, this study investigated the linguistic realizations of thanks in Nigerian English in order to determine and compare their features and functions with previous findings in British English. 300 expressions of thanks that were recorded from speakers of Nigerian English from verbal exchange, WhatsApp and radio airings were analyzed. The analysis revealed massive similarities in linguistic patterns but divergent pragmatic features owing to cultural differences. These findings support the variational pragmatic theory which opines that intra-variation does not guarantee same pragmatic features.

Keywords: Comparison, English, pragmatics, thanks, variation

Introduction

Studies on the thanking formulae (thanking and responding to thanks) in British English (BrE) (Jacobson, 2002), British English, American English (AmE) and Irish English (IrE) (Schneider, 2005), Canadian English (CanE) (Farenkia 2012), Cameroon English (CamE) (Ouafeu, 2009), English in Namibia (Schroder and Schneider 2018), Japanese (Ohashi, 2008), Akan (Agyekun, 2010) among others have reported interesting findings about the thanking formula. Their findings are germane to cross-variation and cross-cultural studies and second/foreign language teaching and learning. Insightful linguistic, socio-cultural and pragmatic information that suggest cultural and linguistic specificity abound in these works. However, it appears that most of the studies have concentrated on responses to thanks leaving the expression of thanks itself under-researched. Consequently, similar linguistic and cultural information that are provided for responses are yet to be reported about the first pair part, thanking, barring very few studies such as Eisenstein and Bodman (1993), Jacobson (2002), Ohashi (2008) and Agyekum (2010) that studied expressing appreciation - thanks. These studies provide insightful information relating to the contexts of usage and the semantics of thanking with skeletal pragmatic and cross-variation information within variational pragmatics.

Recognizing the gap in variational pragmatics studies and the place of such studies in cross-cultural/variational and second language learning studies between native and second language varieties of English, this paper examined thanking in Nigerian English (henceforth NigE) in order to determine whether its lexical, syntactic and pragmatic characteristics align with what has been reported about thanking in British English (henceforth BrE). The importance of comparative studies within cross-cultural orientation and their contribution towards the validity of variational pragmatics framework and cross-variation literature on "Old Englishes" and "New Englishes" cannot be overemphasized. They provide crucial insights into the ethno-

linguistic information of the speech communities, participants' speech functions as well as useful linguistic information for language teaching and learning.

Theoretical framework

This study is rooted in Barron and Schneider's (2009) schema, where intercultural pragmatics treats studies in second language varieties of English as postcolonial pragmatics. However, because we compare findings in NigE with what has been reported in BrE, the study is arguably considered as a study in variational pragmatics which treats all national varieties of English as forms of one Global English. According to Barron and Schneider (2009) "variational pragmatics investigates intra-lingual differences i.e., pragmatic variation between and across L1 varieties of the same language" (p.246). In addition, the framework takes variation studies beyond phonological, lexical and syntactic differences and postulates that varieties of the same language also vary along pragmatic parameters, especially in the speech acts of complimenting, apologizing, congratulating, thanking and responding. The theoretical underpinnings of variational pragmatics are captured in Schröder and Schneider (2018, p. 337) thus: "variational pragmatics, as the study of pragmatic differences between regional and social varieties of a language, is defined as the intersection of pragmatics and variational linguistics" (see Schneider and Barron (2008) for a detailed discussion of variational pragmatics). It is noted that speakers of NigE are considered as L1 speakers of NigE within sociolinguistic orientation just as speakers of BrE and AmE are considered as L1 speakers of their Englishes. In the next section, there is a review some existing studies on thanking with particular attention on definitions, structure, context and functions.

Background

Definitions

Thanking has been defined and/or described in many ways, thereby providing complementary views that provide a multi-faceted meaning of the speech act. For example, the Oxford Dictionary defines thanking as an expression of appreciation of someone else's investment in our well-being, an act of courtesy, or simply reciprocation. Rousan (2018) observed that thanking is a verbal appreciation for receiving a favour and help. Within the field of pragmatics, some authors have defined and/or described thanking as a pragmatic act that performs social actions. These actions include meeting the positive face need of the other person, ensuring good feelings in others and fostering or oiling the wheel of social relationships among interactants. One other definition of thanking that tends to stress its formulaic structure is that of Perkins (1999) cited in Wray and Perkins (2000, p. 1) which defines it "as manifested strings of linguistic items where the relation of each item to the rest is relatively fixed, and where the substitutability of one item by another of the same category is relatively constrained". These definitions suggest the functions, characteristics and structure of thanking. Two perceptions of thanking have been proposed in the literature - indebtedness and moral obligation. One postulation stipulates that thanking implies accepting indebtedness to the thankee. Studies by Agyekum (2010) and Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) appear to have stressed indebtedness, rooting their works within the politeness framework. Similarly, Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek and Kolts (2006), Ohashi (2008), and Farenkia (2012) fall into the same orientation. For example, in our data, some dyads express their gratitude by acknowledging their indebtedness (e.g., *I owe you a world of gratitude, thanks*/*I can never pay you enough for this*). Here, thankers acknowledge and exaggerate their indebtedness. These kinds of expression are rife in our data especially where the magnitude of the help, gift or favour is estimated to be of great value to the thanker. This is illustrated in Example 1.

Example 1: Two friends: one had received help from the other

A: Good morning. We cannot thank you enough. I am

around when can we meet?

B: Oh thank God.

Supporting the indebtedness of thankers, Agykenum (2010) quoted an Akan proverb which says that if someone took care of you when you were teething you should as well take care of him when s/he is losing his/her teeth.

Although thanking has been interpreted to suggest indebtedness, it might be necessary to clarify that this is actually the effect of thanking on the thanker. Thus it has been argued that the effects of thanking on dyads, especially on the thankee, are closely related to its functions. Many works such as Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek and Kolts (2006), Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) have examined the effects of thanking on dyads and noted that by accepting indebtedness to the thankee, thanking also renders the thanker a dependant, if not subordinate to the thankee. In other words, by accepting your indebtedness as a thanker you accept your dependence or subordinate status to the thankee. Thus sometimes parents, under the guise of training their wards, ask their children after the latter might have been given gifts*: Can't you show appreciation*? Or they may ask: *What should you do?* Thus thanking has a humbling effect on the thanker just as it also signals an acceptance of indebtedness which the thanker pays for in part.

According to Ksenofontov and Becker's (2019), study which is rooted in the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), expressing thanks signals acceptance of a gift or a favor which limits the beneficiary's freedom of action because it implies that they have taken on a debt and will have to pay. Therefore, giving thanks can cause indebtedness. Watkins, Scheer, Ovnicek and Kolts (2006) noted that this can, in turn,

be dissolved through the beneficiary paying off their debt with another benefit.

Thanking as a verbal gift has also been conceived as a moral obligation. Thus, thanking, especially between non-equals (parents and children, superiors and subordinates) is often demanded., Consequently, thanking has been conceived as a moral obligation in daily interactions so that failure to express (verbal) gratitude after one might have received a favour or gift is interpreted as being rude or an ingrate. Based on this social convention, thanking is said to accomplish a moral obligation. According to Ksenofontov and Beckect (2019), failure to express thanks is socially undesirable. While displays of thankfulness when receiving benefits are encouraged, displays of dissatisfaction and ingratitude, no matter how unattractive the benefit is, signify rudeness and moral defect as observed by Carr (2015) and Eibach et al. (2015). It is interesting however, that this moral obligation perception might explain why people are more likely to express thanks before an audience (Baumeister and Ilko, 1995). Based on the above argument, thanking, as a gift, might be conceived as verbal payback for the gift or favour received and a moral obligation to benefactors.

Structure

Thanking has been reported in the literature to be formulaic in structure and as phatic communication that is patterned as adjacency pairs. This structural characteristic has warranted its inclusion among the speech functions that are described as linguistic routines in some studies (e.g., Aijmer, 2010). Linguistic routines have been aptly described by Bonvillain (1993) "… as expressions that combine verbal material and social messages in patterns expressive of cultural values and sensitive to interactional context" (p.103). Agyekum (2010) amplified Bonvillain's (1993) description thus:

> Linguistic routines are determined by the formality of the setting, the nature of the relationship between the

participants, social variables, and their communicative goals. Linguistic routines are therefore context bound and socio-culturally oriented. The linguistic routines are communally owned and predictable, and interlocutors are expected to follow certain accepted societal and cultural formulas and conventions. However, the way they are employed and structured may differ from language to language, but their functions may be identical since they all aim at social cohesion and peaceful co-existence. (p.78)

Wray and Perkins's (2000) working definition in their study reiterates the structure as a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other meaning element, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar.

Describing the formulaic characteristic of phatic communication, Sinclair (1991, cited in Wray and Perkins 2000, p. 2) noted that formulaicity encompasses the enormous set of simple lexical collocations, whose patterns are both remarkable and puzzling from a formal grammatical point of view. The formulaic nature of thanking and responding that has been so widely supported in many studies is akin to other formulaic expressions with the strong claim that "all evidence points to an underlying rigidity of phraseology, despite a rich superficial variation (Sinclair 1991, p. 121 cited in Wray and Perkins 2000, p. 2)). This is corroborated by the observation in Perkins (1999) that formulaicity contrasts with productivity, the ability to use the structural system of language (syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology) in a combinatory way to create novel utterances and in an analytical way to understanding them.

Although many studies (e.g., Jespersen, 1968), Aijmer, 1996), Jacobson, 2002) have attested to the conversational routine nature of thanking, one of the strongest observations is that of Ouafeu (2009) which says that " phrases or expressions

of the type '*thank you*', '*thank you very much indeed*' or '*many thanks*' all belong to the class of fixed phrases whose main characteristic feature is their unalterable or fossilized nature" (p. 544).

Although the linguistic characteristics of our data attest to the routine nature of thanking, it is possible that speakers do bring innovations thereby suggesting that expressions of gratitude are not as unalterable as one might be tempted to believe going by the volume of works that supports their formulaicity. In fact, Leech *et al* (2001) acknowledged that there are a wide range of expressions available for dyads. Though thanking may have predictable forms in many cases, there are linguistic variations available to users that may not fit into the fixed formulaic forms. However, it must be noted that most thanking data in the previous studies and in our study display formulaic structures. Variants are therefore not as copious as formulaic forms of thanking.

Kinds of thanking

Thanking types are often identified based on whether they are between individuals (interpersonal) or among groups (corporate) although some expressions might be difficult to classify. For example, consider how a father's appreciation of colleagues' gesture at the workplace using the WhatsApp platform in Example 2 might be difficult to classify as individual or group thanking:

Example 2:

> A: (Father of the newborn): I want to use this forum to appreciate all members of staff for their love toward me and my family. May the good Lord continue to bless you. Amen.

> B1: (colleague). You are welcome
> B2: (colleague). You are welcome Bro. May the child be a great blessing to your family and to humanity in general. May you have peace.

Ironic thanking has also been identified in the literature although it is in doubt whether it should be included as expression of gratitude because of thankers' insincerity and their communicative function. We also found contexts where thankers thank those who wronged them as in Example 3. In such situations, the thanker may want the thankee to know that the former took notice of the wrong done. This kind of thanking is often determined by the reasons and contexts of thanking.

Example 3. A friend (B) had leaked the secret that plunged A into trouble.

> A: Thank you o. I saw your hand.
> B: What did I do?
> A: Thank you

Objects and contexts

Agyekum (2010, p. 77) gives a list of speech events where thanking occurs in the Akan culture of Ghana. The list includes thanking in joyful occasions such as childbirth and wedding ceremonies. In the literature, it has been shown that objects (reasons) of expressions of gratitude could be material gifts, hospitality such as showing interest in one's health, making a request, an offer, a promise, a suggestion, an invitation, a proposal, or giving useful information, among others. In fact, if you had coughed for whatever reason, a caring person around you is likely to tell you to '*take care*' and in response the person is thanked for showing concern.

Thus thanking is not so restricted to favours or gifts received as it includes appreciation for welcome performance, doing one's work which is neither a help nor a favour. For example, an employer may thank his/her employee for a work well done as a way of encouraging good work and fostering cordial relationship or showing politeness. Expression of gratitude might be given after enquiring after the welfare of the other person. Thanking may be offered after congratulating others, complimenting others, being shown favour, offered good

counsel, commiserated with someone, given a direction, even when you have done your expected service and/or extended an invitation; offered a free ride and many other reasons. Examples of all these objects of thanking among our participants are rife in our data. In fact, among speakers of NigE it is common for thankers to turn down an unwelcome offer with *thanks* as in Example 4,

Example 4. Context: A friend met his friend having a meal, the former asks:

> A: Do you need a hand to help you finish your meal?
> B: Thank you (to decline the offer).

Here the thanker uses *thank you* to turn down the offer. Sometimes, thanking might be a form of gambit or pre-act as the person giving the offer may not mean what is said. Rather s/he might like to use thanking to open a discussion with the other person. Example 5 illustrates this.

Example 5: After a church service

> Pastor: Thank you for attending the service today. How did you find it?
> Visitor: I enjoyed it. Pastor: Will you like to repeat visit or ….?

In terms of context, we found some expressions of gratitude in formal situation -institutional/corporate thanking. For example, after giving a lecture to an audience, the audience might thank the speaker by giving the vote of thanks through the moderator or another person. We found where hosts thanked their guests who had attended their parties, (birthday, naming, burial, housewarming). Sometimes, wealthy families use the print/electronic media to express gratitude to guests who supported them (financially) and/or attended their parties. In Example 6, a section of a programme book used at a burial ceremony reads:

Example 6. Appreciation:

> The entire family of Late Pa. Thomas A …profoundly express our gratitude to God and everyone that has demonstrated immeasurable love support towards the success of celebrating the glorious exit of our Father, Grandfather and Great Grandfather. Our prayers are with you. Our good God will grant us all safe trips back to our destinations.

Social actions/functions of thanking

In his study of thanking among the Akans of Ghana, Agyekum (2010, p. 83) noted that each of the expressions of thanking has deeper pragmatic and socio-philosophical meanings. The prototypical expression *meda wo ase* in Akan (I thank you) is made up of; *Me da wo ase* (I lie you under/below). Literally, it means "I, the recipient, lie below you, the benefactor". The Akans think that when somebody gives you something or does something (good) for you, that person is elevated higher in social status and the beneficiary is lowered and humbled. Agyekum's (2010) observation suggests a kind of power play that might be at work in thanking. This notion is truly reflected in situations where interactants are non-equals. Commenting on power play in thanking, Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) observed that "… benefactor can thus control or manipulate the beneficiary and the latter may not complain because the latter is below the former status-wise either perpetually or momentarily" (p. 1). Thus, the speech act of thanking presupposes conventional reciprocal contract (expression of gratitude for the good received and acknowledging the appreciation). In addition, Agykenum (2008) asserts, the notion of thanking presupposes power play of hierarchies and power relations between the *donor* and the *recipient.*

In terms of function, thanking has been described within politeness principles as positive politeness or negative politeness strategies. As a speech act, most of the studies thus far agree

that thanking serves as lubricant for social relationships and is used as tools for demonstrating politeness or at least, it serves as a positive politeness strategy in daily interactions. It is along this vein that Leech (1983) sees the act of thanking as a face-enhancing, a convivial or a positively affective speech act (p. 104). Similarly, Jautz (2008, p.142) asserts that expressions of gratitude are used when a speaker wants the addressee to know that s/he is grateful for what the addressee has said or done. By expressing appreciations, the speaker enhances the positive face need of the addressee (who desires that his/her action be approved by others).

In addition to serving as a social lubricant for relationships, psychological research has largely documented the intra/inter-personal benefits of giving thanks as it makes us feel better and brings us closer together (Watkins, 2014 cited in Ksenofontov and Becker 2019)**.** Expressions of thanks can yield beneficial psychological outcomes both in the giver and recipient of thanks (see Watkins, 2014 for a review). Giving thanks can increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms as reported in Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005). It strengthens social bonds as reported by Algoe, Fredrickson and Gable (2013) and motivates recipients of thanks to show prosocial behavior (Grant and Gino, 2010).

However, thanking does not only serve face enhancing functions but can also function as a face threatening act and more precisely, an act of accepting a debt or an act of humbling the speaker's own face which suggests two different and opposing pragmatic acts. In other words, it satisfies the positive face need of the addressee who is thanked but puts the speaker in debt, a kind of a face threatening act. Thus while the thanker satisfies the positive face need of the addressee, the thanker becomes indebted to the thankee – (self is put down), the response of the verbal gift may either enhance the debt, or reduce the debt in one form or the other that is acceptable to the culture of the speech community.

Effects

Apart from these positive and negative functions of thanking, studies have also shown other negative effects on both the giver and the recipient. For example, thanking between non-equals has been shown to perpetrate social distance that keeps low-group members from expressing discontent with oppressive domination by those in the high-group. For example, Ksenofontov and Becker (2019) studied the psychological effects of expressing 'thank you' and reported that giving thanks has multiple psychological benefits. For example, they noted that within intergroup contexts, thankful responses from low-power to high-power group members could solidify the power hierarchy. The other-oriented nature of grateful expressions could mask power differences and discourage low-power group members from advocating for their in-group interests. Their study demonstrates the other side of expressing gratitude which to them provides evidence for a problematic side of gratitude within intergroup relations. By recruiting some persons in the community to express unwarranted gratitude, the people are kept back from expressing their dissatisfaction or displeasure.

Speech/illocutionary/perlocutionary acts

Perhaps the functions of thanking and its effects on thankees and thankers might have informed the classification of thanking not only as perlocutionary act and performance act but also as expressive speech acts. Agyekum (2010, p. 78) classified thanking as "… an expressive speech act that states what the speaker feels". Expressives have been defined in many ways. One definition says that expressives are representatives and interpretations of the psychological inner state of the speaker either to himself or to the addressee. They denote the speaker's experience by the use of statements of pleasure, pain, likes and dislikes, joy, sorrow, love or hatred (see Yule 1996, p. 53, Mey 1993, p. 165 cited in Agyekum 2010, p. 76).

Although expressives have been described as representative of the inner feeling of the thanker, considering the social and cultural pressures and expectations on speakers, it is doubtful whether all expressions of gratitude can be said to be expressives. There are givers of thanks that are compelled or mandated to express gratitude because of the institutional/social/moral demands. At other times, the urge to express gratitude might be stronger especially where the receiver of the gift/favour is aware that failure to express gratitude might occasion being reprimanded for being rude and/or future gift/favour might be withdrawn. This position is corroborated by Ackah (1988, p. 55) who noted that failure to render thanks would mean, in the estimation of the giver, that the one who received the gift is an ungrateful wretch, and may result in the giver deciding never to make another present to that person. Thus, sometimes, expressions of gratitude might not reflect the inner state/feelings of its speakers. In fact, the name-callings for failing to express gratitude in some communities are so demeaning that receivers of gifts and favour are compelled to express 'thank you' to avoid such names. For example, according to Agykunem (2010) the word for ungratefulness in Akan is _bonniaye_; which is made up of _aboa a nni ayE_ (lit.) means 'the animal that has no gratefulness' (p. 81). Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, an ingrate is classified as a robber (e.g., _Alaimore eniyan dabi olosa to koni leru lo_ (An ingrate is like a robber that robbed one of his/her goods)).

Perhaps one of the ways to determine whether the expression of appreciation is a reflection of the inner feeling of the speaker or not might be at the point of data collection where the data collector might need to probe the speaker further whether the appreciation expressed is from a pleased mind or is motivated by the social, institutional and cultural demands/pressures. Also, the failure of a receiver of gift or favour to express gratitude to the giver might be interpreted as impoliteness and/or being deficient in the communicative competence in

the language. According to Agyekum (2010) within the Akan culture if people are supposed to be polite and failed to do so they bring about disgrace not only to themselves but also to their parents who might be indicted for failing to bring up their wards in the expected ways of the given culture. Consequently, some other factors aside from a pleased inner feeling are responsible for the giving of thanks among thankers.

In sum, (Mey 1993) claims that:

> an expressive speech act must presuppose an embedded true proposition to indicate that the speaker is expressing an inner feeling towards something which s/he deems to be true in the world and which s/he is sincerely giving his/her state of mind (p.160 cited in Agyekun 2010, p.76).

This claim is controversial. The impact of the expressive should move from the individual to the societal level (Rosaldo 1982, p. 204 cited in Agyekum 2010, p. 78) and might extend to other expressives. Consequently, caution is needed in classifying all thanking expressions as expressives. In fact, Viser (2009) observed that people do not have to experience gratitude when saying 'thank you'. This becomes apparent when observing the difficulty young children have in expressing thanks, despite persistent prompting from their parents as observed by Grief and Gleason (1980) cited in Ksenofotov and Becker (2019).

Perhaps, the act of thanking might rather fall into what has been described as perlocutionary acts rather than expressive speech acts. This might be the case if due consideration is accorded the definitions of speech acts and perlocutionary acts. Speech act is used to refer to a theory that analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of the Speaker (S) and the Addressee (A) in interpersonal communication while perlocutionary acts according to Duranti (1997, p. 220) consists of actions that might be beyond the conventional interpretation of an utterance and/or outside the control of the

speaker. In other words, the act of thanking might be beyond the conventional interpretation as a reflection of true state of the inner feeling of the speaker. This is not to assert that all expressions of appreciation are not representative of the pleased inner feeling of their speakers. However, the fact that there are other sociocultural and institutional pressures on speakers to give thanks must be considered in the act of thanking so that if thanking must be classified as expressives, perhaps Mey's (1993, p. 166) description that "expressives are subject to limitations and changes according to different conceptualisations of social guilt behaviour." might be more appropriate.

From the foregoing, it is safe to acknowledge and align with the position of some studies which opine that thanking be considered as a speech act and grouped among other speech functions that serve as politeness strategies such as compliment, praises, and congratulations, among others. To summarise this section, thanking seems to be indisputably positive, universal, and multifunctional and as a pragmatic and sociocultural act (that) it requires the communicative competence of the language users whether as a native speaker or near-native user of the language. However, though many studies have examined thanking in various languages including BrE, it appears there is neither an in-depth study of thanking in NigE nor a comparative study of intra-varieties of the same language, e.g., BrE and NigE. The preoccupation of this undertaking is to fill these gaps.

Methodology

Data

The data used were drawn from a corpus of thanking and responding exchanges that we collected from speakers of NigE in Nigeria between 2018 and 2020. The researcher with a team of research assistants (undergraduate and postgraduate students from five universities in Nigeria) collected thanking and responding exchanges between dyads. Data from cell phones (sms), WhatsApp, and participants on air (radio), daily

conversations in shops, homes, schools, religious meetings, on the bus and other domains of language use in many parts of the country were collected. Fieldnotes were used to record spoken data (205) and written data (95). Data collected included those between intimates (74), casuals (192), strangers (34); equals (99) and non-equals (201). 300 exchanges from the corpus of 500 were used for this study. The other 200 exchanges were ignored because they were repetitive and/or contain expressions in local languages. Attempts to translate expressions in local languages to Nigerian English might be faulted because they are not the actual renderings from research participants. In addition, natural occurring data are commonplace in variational studies. Other expressions were excluded because they failed the test of thanks as an expression of satisfaction/pleasure for a gift/favour received. For example, in Example 6, the speaker ironically thanks a gossip for maligning him.

Example 6:

> Context: The thanker has been told of what the thankee
> said to badmouth him.
> Thanker: I saw your hand. Thank you o
> Thankee: What did I do o?

It is noted that the corpus consists of the entire thanking formula – thanking and responses. For this study, we have isolated the first pair part – thanking – while the responses to the thanks, the second pair part are being examined for another study on responses to thanks in Nigerian English. For example, Data 8 in the appendix has the complete thanking formulae although only the first pair part is used for this study.

Example 7 *Context: The principal of a school attended one of the teacher's party in Ibadan.*

> A: *Thank* you, Sir, for attending our party.
> B: Oh! It's my pleasure.

In the analysis, we describe the linguistic forms of the expressions of gratitude collected from speakers of Nigerian English. In addition, we identified the number of headings, supportive structures, lexical and syntactic forms before comparing the linguistic characteristics with the patterns that have been reported in BrE. The importance of these forms is that they could form the basis for describing communicative strategies in a given speech community especially among second language users of English who have domesticated English (merging local language features with the second language).

Analysis

Headings

Expression of gratitude could have one heading (e.g., *I thank you*) or two or more headings (e.g., *I thank you very much. I am really grateful* [two headings] or *Thank you for being my companion. I appreciate you*). We found some expressions of gratitude that have one heading, whereas others had two or more headings. In Example 8, the thanker uses multiple headings to express gratitude that might be termed exaggerated gratitude. Example 9 contains one heading though the expression is long.

> Example 8: No words can express, no act of gratitude can relay; no gift can represent what your engagement and support have meant to me.

> Exchange 9: Please accept this note as an indicator of my heartfelt appreciation for everything you are to me.

Lexical characteristics

At the lexical level, there is the preponderant use of *thank*, *thanks*, *appreciate* (e.g., *I thank you or thank you/Thanks a lot/ many thanks/thanks a bunch*. Where the word *thanks* is used as a noun, it is often quantified with *a lot, a million, very much, a bunch*. But where it serves as a verb (e.g., *I thank you*), we have *very, greatly*…modifying the verb *thank. Appreciate* as a verb

co-occurs with ... *a lot/much (e.g. I appreciate this a lot)*. As a noun, *appreciation* appears in some expressions of thanks (e.g. *I hereby express my appreciation for*....). Thus, the nouns *thanks*, *appreciation*, *gratitude* might be expected in the expressions of gratitude while the verb *thank* and *appreciate* are also used.

The other verbs and adjectives that appear to characterize the lexical forms of thanking are *indebted*, (e.g., *I am indebted to you* ...); *owe* (e.g., *I owe you ...*). The adjectives *grateful,* as in *I am very grateful* is often used. The other adjectives that are sparingly used are *kind* and *nice* (e.g., *You are too good/ That was kind/nice of you/That was thoughtful of you*) that are compliments but function as expressions of gratitude. Table 1 provides the frequency.

Table 1: Frequency of lexical words

Lexical characteristics		
Verbs	**Frequencies**	**%**
Thank	178	59.3
Appreciate	20	6.6
Nouns		
Thanks	65	21.6
Appreciation	05	1.6
Gratitude	06	2.0
Adjectives		
Grateful	12	4.0
Kind and nice	14	4.6
Total	300	99.7

Table 1 shows that the use of verbs ranks highest (65.9%) followed by nouns (25.2%) and then adjectives (8.6%). These results suggest that verbs are most preferred in the participants' thanking expressions. For verbs, *thank* as a verb (59.3%) is preferred to the use of the verb *appreciate* 6.6%). Similarly, in

the use of nouns, *thanks* seems to be most preferred (21.6%) since only less than 4% is for both *appreciation* (1.6%) and *gratitude* (2.0%).

A further analysis revealed the use of quantifiers (intensifiers) in the expressions. For example, we found expressions such as *I thank you very much/I cannot thank you enough/Thanks a lot/very much/a bunch/I owe you a lot of thanks/appreciation*. Amongst them were quantifiers – *much* (*e.g., I thank you* very much; *thanks so much*/*Thanks a lot*/*Thanks a bunch*/*Thanks a million*)*.* Thus, there is a preponderant use of intensifiers that accompany *thanks.* We did find some interesting expressions of thanks such as *I cannot thank you enough/I thank you ever so much*. Two exchanges in our data used expressions such as *Thanks anyway/ I thank you anyway*.

Adverbs such as *truly, really* (e.g., *I truly appreciate/I really appreciate*) were reported in our data. There was also the use of *many* (e.g., *Many thanks*). We also found the use of *truly, really* which might have been used to signify sincerity or mark emotion.

It is very interesting to find that many of the thanking expressions of our participants were characterized by the use of vocatives such as Sir, Madam, Dad, mum, daughter, Son, *Oga* (Boss), Prof, Dr. to mark social distance in relationships (e.g., *Many thanks, my brother/Thanks so much* Dr/*I thank you very much Ma for the gift*).

Syntactic structure

The following syntactic structures appear to characterize thanking among our participants.   Sentence types include simple sentences (e.g., *Thank you very much. I appreciate*); complex sentences as in *I thank you for the help you rendered or Thanks very much for the helping, Madam*; and other simple sentences as in *I thank you*. The use of two simple sentences in an expression to convey appreciation is common. In what follows, we describe the structural patterns in their expressions.

For example, we found (i) TL + verb + obj as in *Madam, thank you*; (ii) NP +verb (appreciate)+obj +) adverbial reason) as *in I appreciate your efforts* ... Table 2 captures the frequencies of the syntactic structures:

Table 2: Frequency of syntactic structures

Structure	Frequency	%
A. **Double sentence or two sentences** Thanks so much. I appreciate you. *Thank* you a lot. That was very thoughtful of you. (10)	28	9

B. **NP+Vb+Object (Adjunct)**
58
  (I) thank you so much (170
  Ah Baba, … thank you so much
  I can't thank you enough (4)
  I owe you big time
	174	

C. **Noun + quantifier** Thanks a million/so much/anyway/a lot	60	20

D. **Demon+Vb+Adj+Pp**
  That is kind/nice of you
  That was thoughtful of you
	10	3

E. **NP+Vb+(Comple)**
10
  I am grateful (12)
  I appreciate   (16)
	28	

Total	300	100

Table 2 shows that the most preferred syntactic structure is the B structure (58%) followed by C structure (20%) and then E (10%) and A (9%) structures. The least preferred is the D structure (3%) as in *That is kind/nice/thoughtful of you.*

Apart from these formulaic expressions, there are other forms such as metaphorical expressions and compliments (e.g., *You are a blessing/You are so great*) that are used to express gratitude. Others are long expressions in written form (e.g., *No words can express; no act of gratitude can relay; no gift can represent what your encouragement and support have meant to me/Please accept this note as an indicator of my heartfelt appreciation for everything you are/If I tried to tell you how much I appreciate you; I'd be talking for the rest of my life. I hope that, in some small way, you realize how much you've meant to me, and how truly I desire to give back to you*). Other special expressions (e.g., *This means a lot to me!*) were found. Apart from very few instances of double thanking, (e.g., *Thank you very much…I am very grateful*), thanking with compliments (e.g., *I thank you for this lovely gift*), gratitude that conveys emotions (e.g., *I truly appreciate/Kindly accept my heartfelt appreciation/I am deeply grateful/I honestly appreciate*) and those accompanied with blessing, it appears thanking among speakers of NigE is often bare.

Summary and discussion

In summary, our analysis of expressions of gratitude in NigE is characterized by formulaic expression apart from few special expressions (e.g., *I cannot thank you enough/What should I say*?). Most of the expressions largely contain one thanking strategy (heading) apart from very few expressions that contain other strategies such as blessing the thankee and the others that convey emotions. *Thanks* are generally accompanied by intensifiers *very much* and *a lot*. In other words, their expressions of gratitude are largely bare – simple rather than complex.

The contexts for thanking are many - social meetings, offices, and schools and the formal and informal settings. The social relationships between dyads also vary: there are exchanges between intimates, casuals, strangers and acquaintances.

Reasons for expressing gratitude include – asking after the well-being of others, given gifts, favour shown, help rendered, offered free ride, counseling given, honouring invitations, attending to students or customers, among the others.

The use of address forms such as *Sir, Madam, Dad, mum, son, daughter*, is rife in their expressions. These vocatives are used to mark hierarchy and relationship (social distance) between dyads. . For example, the use of *Dad, mum, pet names,* such as *Dear, Honey, Sweety* was reported. This is similar to what Jacobson (2002) reported about Early Modern BrE and Ajiimer (1996) in AmE. However, Jacobson (2002) reported that this feature has disappeared in contemporary English society. The use of hierarchical titles in contemporary NigE differs from what Jacobson (2002) reported about contemporary English society.

However, thanking in NigE and BrE has common cores in their use of same lexical words and syntactic structures. NigE might have inherited these features from the early BrE. However, the use of different speech acts to accompany thanking, such as the use of address forms and blessing the thankee in NigE, points to the divergence in the two varieties of English (BrE and NigE) as these forms are not reported in the early and contemporary BrE thanking formulae.

The similarities in the lexical and syntactic characteristics suggest that NigE has not departed much from the BrE, its ancestor, although NigE as a norm-evolving outer circle English has its distinctive features. However, the differences in the use of pragmatic features (e.g., marking social distance and the use bare expressions of thanks in NigE) mark departures from BrE. These differences in pragmatic features might be interpreted to show that although speakers of NigE learnt/inherited English from speakers of BrE at the inception, influences from Nigeria's local languages and the process of domesticating BrE has occasioned departure from what they have learnt in BrE. Thus these results lend support to the claim those second/foreign language learners, who learn communicative English in the classroom and from

textbooks often depart from what they have learnt to form their local pragmatic communicative expressions. This conclusion is further strengthened by the finding that thanking in NigE is often bare whereas BrE thanking is rarely bare. For example, bare thanking (e.g., _Thanks a lot_) is the most preferred formula in NigE whereas, thanking in BrE is often complex as it is often complemented with other strategies such as appreciating the addressee, the gift or favour received, complimenting (e.g., _Thanks, that's nice of you_). In other words, BrE has complex thanking expressions because they are often accompanied with another clause that comments on how much the favour/gift is valued (e.g., _Thanks a lot. The dress fits so well)_. This complex thanking has also been reported in AmE (Ajiimer, 1996) where its speakers show consistent use of expressions of gratitude which are often accompanied by other expressions such as complimenting, reassuring, expression of surprise and delight, expressing a lack of necessity or obligation. On the other hand, NigE speakers' thanking expressions are largely simple although few of their thanking expressions are accompanied with blessing (e.g. _Thank you so much. God bless you_).

This divergence is one area of cultural difference between BrE and NigE. Speakers of NigE are not likely to pass explicit comment on how much they value the gift/favour/help apart from the use of intensifiers such as _I so much appreciate this gift._ In other words, this is one area that cross-cultural communication information is very important and speakers from both speech communities might need to understand why one group prefers bare thanking while the other favours complex thanking.

One other area that marks divergence is the use of deference. Although Jacobson (2002) has reported that Early Middle English was characterized by the use of deference which is said to be connected with a stricter social hierarchy of the period while the Modern English appears to have relaxed the use of deference, the use of deference is still rife in the NigE thanking formulae. Marking relationship and social distance and social

hierarchy appears to be important to NigE speech community. For example, subordinates would often add *Sir* or *Ma(dam*) to thank their superiors in age, social status, and education, among others. Thus although thanking has been described as positive politeness strategy helping to cement social relationships and enhance solidarity and good feelings between dyads, the use of deference to mark social hierarchy in thanking appears to be counterproductive in their social functions. It is difficult to interpret this divergence to mean that NigE still retains the Victorian English it learnt from the native speakers since the Nigerian society sociologically is a hierarchical community where age, economic, educational and political status divide the people into social strata and linguistic means are used to mark these features.

Conclusion

Thanking is ubiquitous in NigE speakers' daily interactions. This feature suggests how much they value cordial social relationships and meeting the face needs of their interactional partners. Though their thanking is formulaic in structure, they also use innovation to express gratitude accompanied by gestures and address forms. Lexical and syntactic features of thanking in NigE are similar to what has been reported about contemporary BrE, except in the use of other pragmatic strategies that accompany thanking in BrE which are rarely found in NigE because of cultural difference. NigE and BrE appear to be maintaining linguistic common-cores in English, which tie the varieties together as members of World Englishes. This finding suggests the significance of teaching/learning of common-cores language features of English amongst learners and users of English. The writing of learning materials for learners/users of English as a second language should not concentrate on what sets the varieties of English apart but rather, they should stress the common-cores which ensure/foster mutual intelligibility among learners/users of English worldwide. However, the pragmatic

features in their thanking formulas suggest divergences that index different cultural environments. This study therefore corroborates the postulations of the variational pragmatic theory and also supports the claim that second/foreign language learners and users do depart in some way from the communicative practice they learn in the target language and evolve their communicative practices in line with their local environment. Consequently, this position supports the room for innovations in the learning and use of English in the 'outer circle'. Finally, the study points to the fact that speakers of English worldwide must recognize their convergence and also be willing to welcome divergence in their speech functions for inter-cultural communication and language accommodation.

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Appendix

Appendix: Responses to thanks

1. A conversation between a Boss and his lover.
    Akin: Please, take good care of yourself for me.
    Inioluwa: Okay love, thanks. I will.

2. In a conversation between two friends.
    Richard: To truly appreciate life, we seek companionship.
    Fred: *Thank* you for being my companion. I *appreciate* you.

3. A doctor and his patient's relative.
    Doctor: We've tried all our best to revive your sister, but all to no avail. So, you have to take her out of this place.
    Patient Relative: Uh! Doctor. Okay**,** thanks any way.
    Doctor: Thanks too. It's our work.

4. Between two close friends who have lost contact.
    Friend A: That's all right.
    Friend B: It's my pleasure.

5. For an assistance rendered in an office.
    Oga: Don't mention it.
    Staff: Not at all!
    Oga: It's nothing, thanks.

6. A daughter had helped her dad.
    Daughter: *Thank* you for taking the pains to ……..
    Father: I don't know what to say!!!!!!!
    Daughter: Oh, you shouldn't have!

7. In a reply to a message.
   Gabriel Clark: Hi Cuks, thanks so much for the positive feedback. It's always good to know people are out there, enjoying our work and finding it useful.
   Chuks: You've done it again. Brilliant! Thanks ever so much.
   Gabriel Clark: No. Thank YOU!

8. *The principal of a school attended a party organized by one of the teacher's in Ibadan.*
   A. (F) : *Thank* you Sir for attending our party.
   B. Oh! It's my pleasure.

9. *A man has just helped to fix a punctured tyre.*
   A. (M): Thanks so much, I appreciate you.
   B. (M) : I'm happy to help
   Context: Informal – by the side of the road.

10. *Mrs. Josiah visited the Alabis.*
    A. (F): Thanks very much for the visit.
    B. Ah! It's nothing.
    Context: Informal.

11. *Helped to relay a piece of information.*
    A. (F): Thanks a bunch.
    B. (M): No worries.
    Context: Informal.

12. *Honored an invitation to a party.*
    A. (F) : *Thank* you for the other day.
    B. (M): You're welcome.
    Context: Informal.

13. *A son has just finished his meal.*
    A. (M): Daddy, *thank* you.
    B. You're welcome.
    Context: Informal – Father and Son.

14. *Helped to get a book from his library.*
    A. (M): Thank you very much.
    (F): Don't mention.