

**THANK YOU:
AN ANALYSIS OF THE THANKING STRATEGIES TAUGHT IN THE ENGLISH
CLASSROOMS IN ROMANIA**

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Situation: the conductor hands over a ticket:

Conductor: *Thank you.*

Passenger: *Thank you.*

Conductor: *Thank you.*

(From Coulmas 1981: 91)

This paper looks at how the linguistic forms related to thanking are linked to pragmatic and social rules, and at how and to what extent these are presented in the English textbooks approved or recommended by the Romanian Ministry of Education, and at the various functions of the thanking expressions used in the English classroom.

Parents in various cultures spend time and energy teaching their offsprings to say *thank you* in their mother tongue and then, in the foreign language classroom, teachers introduce *thank you* among the first phrases. However, the rules for how, where and when *thank you* and other expressions of gratitude or appreciation can be used vary across cultures, and the absence or the presence of these expressions where they do or do not belong in a foreign language may signal that someone's linguistic behaviour is foreign. When one compares English with other languages, and Romanian is no exception, there are differences concerning whom one says *thank you* to, when, and the settings in which an expression of gratitude is expected or not.

We sometimes hear British or American people say that foreigners sound impolite as they do not express their gratitude or appreciation when they should. This places the importance of the thanking strategies in a cross-cultural perspective, as thanking speech acts differ both with regard to strategies and the social and cultural rules for their use in the Romanian and the Anglo-American cultures.

We hypothesize that the problems caused by the absence, misuse or unnatural thanking strategies of the Romanian speakers of English are caused not as much by the idiomatic nature of the phrases and the socio-pragmatic constraints on their use, but by the way in which these are taught in school, by the model strategies presented in the textbooks, their frequency, the social and cultural roles that can be deduced from the use of the models, and the kind of strategies that the English teacher offers.

The functional perspective: expressive, factive and phatic functions

According to Searle (1976: 12), *thank you* and *thanks* can be analyzed from a functional perspective as either politeness markers or/and discourse markers with

organizing function. They are expressive and factive. The expressive function is obvious when they express the speaker's attitude of gratitude or appreciation towards a state of affairs or a person. They are factive when they presuppose the truth of the state of affairs by the speaker

According to Leech, thanking coincides with a convivial, courteous or polite function (1983: 104). In such cases, politeness is often maximized by using intensifying adverbs such as *very much*, *very much indeed*, by prosodic devices, and by using combinations and repetitions. Goffman (1971) considers the expressions of gratitude to be small supportive rituals associated with politeness and good behaviour.

In the case of offers, the thanking expressions can have either the illocutionary function of accepting an offer or they can be purely phatic when the offer is rejected. Small offers of food or of small services often take the form of adjacency pairs. However, in natural transactions, not all offer - acceptance sequences are two-exchange, straightforward adjacency pairs; sometimes we encounter five-move sequences, where a strong acceptance is preceded by a weak one: proposal, weak acceptance, request for confirmation, confirmation, strong acceptance/sequence closing. In such cases, *Thank you* signals acceptance of the proposal and/or it brings the sequence to a close. Such elaborate patterns, in which *thank you*s appear twice or even three times are explained by the importance of the favour that the speaker perceives s/he is granted, or by the relationship between the participants that requires more politeness. If the interlocutors are non-equal on the power scale, speakers are more likely to repeat thanks.

However, the functions of the expressions of gratitude are not restricted to their illocutionary force. Both *thank you* and *thanks* can also be used ironically or with the illocutionary function of accepting or rejecting an offer and signalling the conclusion of a conversational exchange. There are also derived uses of *thank you* signalling irony, sarcasm, brusqueness, marked by a characteristic prosody.

Norrick (1978: 248f) and Coulmas (1981b: 74) also mention the perlocutionary functions of these expressions and are of the opinion that often they are conventionally associated with the utterance when the speaker assures somebody in advance of one's gratitude.

Thank you and *thanks* are purely phatic in the answer to the enquiry about the speaker's welfare or when it marks the end of a shared activity. In adjacency pairs, *fine thanks* in the answer to the question *How are you?* represents a phatic use of the thanking expressions.

Very often, as Tsui (1994: 247) remarks, *thank you* is not a follow-up move meant to acknowledge the outcome but a signal that the exchange has come to an end. Hymes (1971: 69) says that while American English still preserves the gratitude function of *thank you* and *thanks*, British English tends to use it more often for marking the segments of certain interactions. In British English, *thank you* functions as a marker signalling that the exchange comes to an end; unlike *OK* or *well*, which can also have sequential or syntagmatic position, *thank you* and *thanks* do not lose their function of thanking altogether. Very often, *thank you* and *thanks* as a closing signal can be followed by other elements such as *right*, *right*, *oh*, *OK*, which also have a closing

function. In classroom discourse, as well as in telephone calls and debates, *thank you* can be accompanied by an extra appreciation move.

Both in telephone conversations and in the classroom, *thank you* can have a terminating or discourse-organizing feature. *Thank you* is also used to acknowledge small favours or to signal that the speaker can do the rest of the action him/herself. *Thank you* is also used to dismiss a person whose services are not needed ('dismissive thanks').

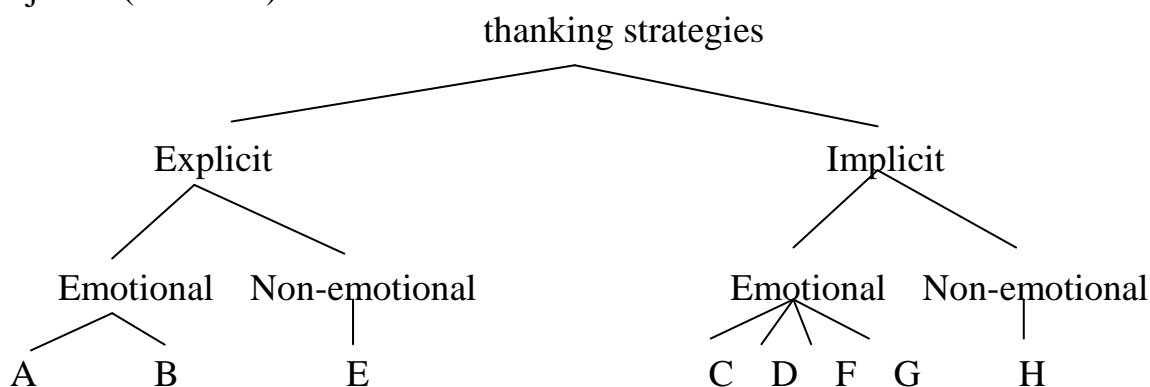
According to Eisenstein and Bodman (1986: 168), the most frequent use of thanking is almost automatic and it is typically used in service encounters, in response to a small service, and it really expresses real gratitude. *Thank you* and *thanks* are also used in polite greetings, to accept or reject an offer in a polite way and when a person is handed food or drink. Other uses are institutionalized, such as thanking in response to a telephone operator, at the end of a telephone call as a pre-closing or closing signal and in debates when the chairman thanks a participant for his contribution. Thanking may appear in paired routines consisting of thanking followed by a response (e.g. *thank you / that's OK*).

To sum up, *thank you* and *thanks* can be used with the following functions:

- acknowledging a favour, major or small
- accepting or refusing an offer
- returning greetings
- responding to congratulations
- responding to expressions of well-wishing
- dismissing a person or one's services
- marking the end of an exchange or conversation
- making the hearer feel good
- irony, sarcasm, brusqueness
- assuring a person of one's future gratitude
- negative request ("thank you for not smoking")

A few thanking strategies

Here are various **thanking strategies** together with their representations, as found in Ajmeer (1996: 37)



Code to strategies:

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| A | Thanking somebody explicitly | e.g. <i>thank you, thanks</i> |
| B | Expressing gratitude | e.g. <i>I am grateful</i> |
| C | Expressing appreciation of the addressee | e.g. <i>that's kind of you, that's nice (of you)</i> |
| D | Expressing appreciation of the act | e.g. <i>that's lovely, that's appreciated</i> |
| E | Acknowledging a debt of gratitude | e.g. <i>I owe a debt of gratitude to..., a particular debt of gratitude goes to..., very special acknowledgements to...</i> |
| F | Stressing one's gratitude | e.g. <i>I must thank you</i> |
| G | Expressing emotion | e.g. <i>oh (thank you)</i> |
| H | Commenting on one's own role by suppressing one's own importance (self-denigration) | e.g. <i>I am an ingrate, I'm so careless</i> |

(apud Aijmer, 1996: 37)

Strategies A and B (e.g. *thank you, thanks, I am grateful...*) are the most direct ones, and the most frequently used ones, as shown by the London-Lund Corpus (apud Aijmer). Strategies C (e.g. *that's kind of you, that's nice...*) and D (e.g. *that's lovely, that's appreciated*), which do not express gratitude directly, are reserved for the indirect expression of gratitude for either the benefactor (C) or of the act itself (D). Strategy E (e.g. *I owe a debt of gratitude to..., a particular debt of gratitude goes to..., very special acknowledgements to...*) is restricted to writing and to certain situations such as thanking one's teacher or family in the preface of academic works. Strategy F is also formal and involves the performative verb *to thank* (*I /hereby/ thank you for...*) and can be reinforced by stressing the speaker's wish or obligation to express gratitude (*I must thank you, I would like to thank you*). In similar but less formal contexts, strategy A is preferred. Strategy G (e.g. *oh (thank you)*) is an expression of surprise, and is associated with a high degree of emotionality. Strategy H (e.g. *I am an ingrate, I'm so careless*) is also typical of written discourse and tends to combine with other strategies.

Almost always, thanking is easy to recognize as the speaker uses an explicit strategy (e.g. A). The expressions of gratitude more often than not consist of *thank you* and *thanks*, with or without intensifiers: *thank you, thank you very much, thank you very much indeed, thank you so much; thanks, thanks very much, thanks very much indeed, thanks awfully, thanks a lot, many thanks, million thanks*; the informal *ta ta* and the formal *I am grateful*, etc. However, an explicit strategy may be combined with more indirect ones (D + A: *that's lovely, thank you*; G + A: *oh thanks*; A + C: *that's nice of you*; G + A + C + A: *oh thank you very much that's very nice of you thank you very much indeed*; C + A: *that's nice of you thank you*; G + A + D: *oh thanks lovely*; G + D + A: *oh thank you very much oh, etc.*).

Intensification of gratitude expressions

For greater politeness, thanks can be intensified. Intensification is used to express greater gratitude for major services and unexpected or generous offers. Power or social distance can also impose the use of intensification (Holmes 1990: 185f).

The intensification of the expressions of gratitude can be done by several grammatical operations: expansion, ellipsis, embedding and combination with other units. *I* or *we* can be added to *thank you* and *for* + NP/V-ing can follow it. While *I* or *we* are the people who benefit from a favour, *you* designates the benefactor(s). *Thanks* can be also followed by *for* NP/V-ing. The role of expansion is to make explicit the reason for gratitude: *thank you for...*

Intensification is the most frequent device to create more polite gratitude expressions. Both *thank you* and *thanks* can be intensified by *very much*, *very much indeed*, *so much*, *awfully*. Other intensifiers that collocate with *thank you* are *ever so much* and *a thousand times*. On the other hand, *thanks* can collocate with *a lot*, *many*, *ever so*, and *a million*.

Constraints on the choice of thanking expressions

Coulmas (1981b: 74) considers the type of favour as the most important factor in the choice of an expression of gratitude as it determines the degree of gratitude which is required. Other factors are the relationship between the participants (equal or unequal social status, closeness, the size of the favour and the place – place of work or a person's home).

- **Favour: material thing**

Material things can be gifts or services, major or minor. *Thank you* is used routinely when a person is handed an object, something to eat or to drink. These are considered small services, which may be carried out by a person as part of one's professional role.

Thanking is also required on social occasions. Guests thank the hosts for a meal when leaving the house. English-speaking people express thanks both for small services and for big favours, which may have caused trouble or inconvenience for the benefactor.

Thanking an interlocutor for coming along, for ringing, for being patient, etc, may have the additional purpose to signal that the conversation is coming to an end.

- **Favour: immaterial thing**

Favours which can be classified as immaterial objects, such as compliments, congratulations, well-wishes. Invitations are typically followed by expressions of thanks, too. Gratitude is also expressed for all types of information, including names, telephone numbers, instructions, etc., but also for potential favours such as offers, arrangements, suggestions. Depending on the occasion or the size of the favour, gratitude can be expressed more or less profusely. When the situation is formal, thanking can be expressed indirectly (e.g. *that would be nice, please*).

Thanking is also needed to soften the rejection of an offer for food, drink or a small service.

Responses to thanking

Sometimes, thanking expressions are followed by responses to thanking. These can also be grouped according to speaker strategies:

- minimizing the favour (e.g. *that's okay, not at all, no problem, don't mention it, that's all right*),
- expressing pleasure (e.g. *great pleasure*),
- expressing appreciation of the addressee (e.g. *you're welcome*).

However, responses to an act of thanking seem to be more infrequent in English compared with many other languages (Aijmer, p. 40)

Distribution of thanking expressions over different types of discourse

Thanking expressions are constrained by text type or medium (speech or writing). It is relatively frequent in informal conversation, while in written English, thanking is restricted to situations such as thanking one's colleagues, old teachers or family for their help and support in the preface of an academic work. One may also begin a *thank you* letter by thanking the recipient of the letter for something, using expressions which are not found in speech (e.g. *very many thanks, many thanks, I should like to thank you*).

Expressions of gratitude in the textbooks in use

In order to see how the expressions of gratitude are presented in the English textbooks in use, we analyzed a set of textbooks approved by the Romanian Ministry of Education:

1. Gray Elizabeth and Evans V., *Set Sail 1*, Express Publishing, 2001 (Teacher's Book)
2. Gray Elizabeth and Evans V., *Set Sail 2*, Express Publishing, 2001 (Teacher's Book)
3. Ellis Printha and Brown M., *Way Ahead*, A Foundation Course in English, Pupil's Book 1, Manual de limba engleză pentru clasa a III-a limba modernă 1, Macmillan Romania 2005, first published 1997
4. Gray, Elizabeth and Evans V., *Welcome*, Limba engleză (limba modernă 1), clasa a IV-a, Express Publishing, 2006
5. Ichim Alaviana, Capotă L., Comişel E., Dinu F., Mastacan A., Popovici R., Teodorescu E., Limba engleză, manual pentru clasa a V-a, *Pathway to English. English Agenda*, Student's book, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică R.A., Bucureşti, 1997
6. Ana Acevedo and Gower M., , *High Flyer* (Upper Intermediate), Student's book, Longman 1996
7. Balan Rada, Carianopol M., Colibaba Ş., Coşer C., Focşeneanu V., Stan V., Vulcănescu R., *Pathway to English: English My Love*, Student's book, 9th grade, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică R.A., Bucureşti 2004
8. Obee Bob and Evans V., *Upstream Upper Intermediate*, limba engleză L1, clasa a X-a, student's book, Express Publishing, 2003

9. Balan Rada, Carianopol M., Colibaba Ș., Coșer C., Focșeneanu V., Stan V., Vulcănescu R., *Pathway to English: English News and Views, student's book*, Oxford University Press, 1998

Here are the results of the investigation:

In **Set Sail 1**, *thank you* is used 10 times, eight times in the context of an adult (Daddy or Nanny) offering food or drink to a child at home. Only once a child offers food to another child. In Lesson 5, two children playing shop enact a shopping scene, where a child thanks a shop assistant for a purchase of toys. In the same textbook, *thank you* is used once by Mummy after an invitation to sit down from Larry (p. 85).

In **Set Sail 2**, *thank you* without continuation is used four times: twice for offering food, once for offering information, and once for receiving the gift of a toy. The context is always the family home where the child thanks an adult.

In **Way Ahead**, *thank you* is used only once by a child in the context of a waiter bringing chocolate ice-cream for a child.

In **Welcome**, both the contexts for the use of *thank you* and the forms are more diverse. In Unit 4, Lesson 2, the form *thanks* is introduced in the adjacency pair “*How are you? I'm fine, thanks*” used with a phatic function. However, both in units 5 and 13, in the context of buying food, *thank you* is missing after *Here you are!* although further on in the same Unit 13, *thank you* appears after *Here you are* and the handing of a pineapple. *No, thanks* is used for the first time in Unit 13, associated with the function of refusing food. An interesting use of *thank you* is that presented at page 105, where it expresses Eddy's relief for Lin's not burning the cake!

In **Pathway to English. English Agenda**, the form preferred by the authors seems to be *thanks*, rather than *thank you*. *No, thanks* is used in Units 2 and 12 with the function of refusing an offer in a food shop (p. 26), and as a typical refusal to a polite offer of tea (p. 39) and ice-cream (p. 128). In Unit 6 *thanks* is intensified as *thanks a lot* and offered as a response to an expression of good wish. It is recycled in the adjacency pair *How are you? I'm fine, thanks*, and after a wish for a nice weekend. Here, *thanks* is for the first time followed by *and the same to you* (p. 64). However, quite unexpectedly, without specifying the context, at page 128 in a fill in exercise, the authors ask for a continuation after *thank you*.

In **High Flyer** (textbook for the 8th form), no expression of gratitude can be found.

In the textbook for the 9th grade, *Pathway to English. English My Love*, we find two expressions of gratitude in Unit 4, Lesson 2: one is *No, thank you* used in a refusal to an offer of chocolate, and the other is the elaborate expression *I can't tell you how grateful I am for your help*.

By far the richest textbook in expressions of gratitude is *Upstream Upper Intermediate*, used in the 8th year of study. Here *thanks* is used in answer to a wish at page 13. The intensified *Thanks a million* is suggested as formula to be used informally, with the formal equivalents: *Thank you very much* and *I really appreciate all the trouble you went through in order to...* At page 40, *thank you* is given as a possible follow up to

an expression of good-will (*Say hello to your parents for me*). At page 67, *OK, thanks* has a dual function: appreciation of someone's promise to help and marker of the end of the exchange. In the same textbook, at page 105, *thanks for* appears for the first time (*Thanks for saying so*), together with suggestions of how one could extend thanking by complimenting: *Thanks, I'm glad you like it, You're so kind*. At page 154, *thank you* is accompanied by *Oh* and intensified: *Oh, thank you very much* in the context of congratulating someone on his/her promotion. In the same textbook, which is accompanied by an audiocassette, during various recorded interviews, *thank you* is used three times to mark the end of an exchange and the beginning of another, and also the end of the interview. With the same value, *thank you* is used nineteen times in Units 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 (pp. 241 – 260).

In ***Pathway to English: English News and Views***, *thanks* is used only once in the context of reminding: *Thanks for jogging my memory*.

In brief, a Romanian child who would hear English only in the classroom and from a teacher who does little else than following slavishly the textbooks in use, is exposed to only the following expressions of gratitude (given in the order in which they appear in the textbooks) in nine or ten years of English:

Strategy	Realization	No. of tokens	Function	Context	
				Setting	Participants
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	28 1 1 1	closing exchange	interview; no context; telephone conversation; shop	adults
A	<i>Here's.../ Here you are. Thank you.</i>	2 6 1	accepting an offer	home: food, gift shop: purchase; restaurant	child to adult
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	1	accepting an offer	home: food	children
	<i>Here you are. / Ø</i>	1	accepting an offer	shop: purchase	child to adult
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	2	accepting an invitation	home	adult to child
	<i>Thank you.</i>	1	accepting an invitation	office	adults
	<i>Thank you.</i>	1	accepting a gift	office	adults
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	1	acknowledging a small favour	home	child to adult
	<i>Thank you.</i>	1 2	acknowledging a small favour	office; home	adults children
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	1	responding to an	office	adults

			expression of well-wish		
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	1	irony	home	children
A	<i>Thank you.</i>	1		no context	
A	<i>No, thank you.</i>	1 1	expressing refusal	home; no context	adults
G + A	<i>Oh, thank you.</i>	1	acknowledging a small favour	home	child to adult
G + A intensions.	<i>Oh, thank you very much.</i>	1	responding to congratulations	office	adults
	<i>Thank you very much for...</i>	1	acknowledging a favour	office	adults
A	<i>Thanks.</i>	1	responding to well-wishing	no context	adult to child (?) adults (?)
A	<i>Thanks.</i>	1	closing exchange	office	adults
	<i>Thanks.</i>	1	acknowledging compliment	home	child to adult? adults?
A	<i>How are you? I'm fine, thanks.</i>	1	phatic	no context	children (?)
A	<i>No, thanks.</i>	2 2	refusing an offer (food, service)	home; no context	adults (?)
A	<i>Thanks for... (+ V-ing)</i>	1 1	acknowledging compliment	home; no context	adults
A + C	<i>Thanks for... (+ V-ing). You're so kind.</i>	1	acknowledging compliment	no context	adults (?)
A intensions.	<i>Thanks a million.</i>	1	accepting a gift	office	adults
A	<i>Thanks, and the same to you</i>	1	responding to well-wishing	no context	adults
G	<i>Ok, thanks.</i>	1	marking the end of an exchange	office	adults
A	<i>Thanks, I'm glad you like it.</i>	1	making the hearer feel good	office	adults
A + C	<i>Thanks, you're so kind.</i>	1	acknowledging a big favour	office	adults
A	<i>Thanks a lot.</i>	1	responding to well-	no context	adults (?)

			wishing		
B	<i>I can't tell you how grateful I am for your help.</i>	1	acknowledging a big favour	office	adults
D	<i>I really appreciate all the trouble you went through in order to...</i>	2			adults

In the real world, gratitude phrases are associated with frames which are activated when a certain extralinguistic situation recurs, and thanking is probably one of the most stereotypic speech acts since speakers use some form of *thank you* or *thanks* to express gratitude for a service, big or small. However, looking at the number of tokens of thanking expressions presented in the English textbooks, one is surprised at how few they are. Also, one can easily notice that most strategies are presented in isolation and that only two combined strategies are used: thanking explicitly followed by appreciation of the addressee (A + C): *Thanks for... (+ V-ing)*. *You're so kind* and *Thanks, you're so kind* and expressing emotion followed by thanking explicitly (G + A): *Oh, thank you; Oh, thank you very much*. Another striking characteristic is the presence of surprisingly few intensified expressions: *Thank you very much* (one token) and *Thanks a million* (one token). Moreover, no expression of indirect thanking and no response/continuation pattern to thanking is introduced.

Expressions of gratitude in classroom talk

Looking at more than one hundred records of classroom sessions, we could easily notice that *thank you* is frequent as a pre-closing or closing signal in classroom talk..

T: so + this is the end of the lesson + for the next time you'll have to tell a story (...) + thank you very much + good bye pupils
(Cehan, 2002: 61)

P1: I went to school + yes + but I was very surprised because nobody went to school just me + when I arrived at school I saw that it was closed and ++ then I realized that it was half past three in the afternoon not eight o' clock in the morning and I went home laughing all the way and of course I told this to my friends
T: yes + it is a funny story + thank you
(Cehan, 2002: 79)

Sometimes *thank you* or *thanks* are used with a phatic function in the adjacency pair *How are you? I'm very well thank you/ I'm fine, thanks*, at the beginning of the lesson. However, as very few favours or offers are made to either the teacher or the pupils in the classroom, it was difficult to find *thank you* or *thanks* used as expressions

of gratitude in classroom talk. Here is one sequence in which the teacher thanks her pupils for their well-wishing. The example is exceptional in at least two respects: it is uncommon to hear pupils offering the favour of protection to their teacher and, secondly, the jocular disposition of the teacher who addresses her male pupils with ‘sir’, marking thus an imaginary social distance.

P5: we don’t want you to be hurt

T: of thank you I’m not hurt only...

P6: we are your bodyguards

T: Thank you sir very very nice + good gentlemen + my nose is clogged and I’m not very well + I have a cold + yes

(Cehan, 2002: 27)

We could conclude that the main function of the thanking expressions in classroom talk is that of being a preclosing or closing signal, and that the phatic and offer or favour acceptance or rejection functions are not very common. Based on the data collected, we suggest the following classroom frame for thanking:

Formal features

Function

Phatic, closing signal, acceptance, politeness, etc. in the classroom

Intonation

Rising tone

Stereotypic tone

Continuation patterns

That’s okey

You’re welcome

Discourse-specific features

occurs mainly in exchange closings

Situational features

Setting

in the classroom

Participants

social roles: teacher - students

personal relations: student - student

Types of thanking

(‘minor favours’)

acknowledging the receipt of a small favour or treat returning greetings, well-wish

, closing an interaction, responding to congratulations or accepting or refusing an offer

Conclusions

Of the eight thanking strategies mentioned in Ajmeer, only five are presented in the English textbooks visited: A, B, C, D, and G. The missing strategies, E, F and H are characteristic of written English and formal style, and as such, their absence is not surprising. The reduced number of examples of intensified gratitude expressions (only two) may also be explained by the nature of the contexts presented in the textbooks: the contexts are familiar to children, the characters are mainly members of the same family, classmates or friends. Intensification is imposed by power or social distance, as Holmes

(1983) says, while the world of the textbooks is the child's or the teenager's world, where the power relationships and the social distance are not yet felt.

However, the reduced number of tokens of gratitude expressions in the textbooks is a great surprise. The question still remains: if expressions of gratitude are, as Goffman (1971) says, supportive rituals associated with politeness and good behaviour, why are there so few such expressions in the English textbooks and in teacher talk?

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