

Expressing gratitude in Nigerian English

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This study explores nativisation processes in the area of pragmatics. Focussing on expressions of gratitude, more than 1,300 thanking speech acts elicited from Nigerian speakers of English via Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) and 628 thanking speech acts identified in various text categories of the *International Corpus of English-Nigeria* (ICE-Nig) were analysed (i) regarding the use of thanking strategy, linguistic expression and structural form and (ii) compared with other varieties of English. The results show distinct strategies and forms of expressing gratitude in Nigerian English (NigE) that suggest nativisation processes as they reflect local cultural and communicative practices. Furthermore, systematic differences between thanking speech acts in the corpus data and those elicited in the DCTs were observed.

Keywords: Nigerian English, thanking, pragmatics, nativisation, DCT, corpus linguistics

1. Introduction

This study investigates possible nativisation processes in the pragmatics of Nigerian English (NigE). Nigerians were first exposed to English through the activities of English-speaking (slave) traders in the 16th century, and later on through British colonisation and missionary activities between the late 19th century and independence in 1960. The latter involved formal education organised by British and American missionaries (Jowitt 2019). After independence, efforts were made to increase formal education and access to English throughout Nigeria, including rural areas (Schneider 2007:204), so that, today, English is spoken by at least 50 per cent of the population (Jowitt 2019:10), alongside over 500 Nigerian languages including Nigerian Pidgin, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Eberhard, Simons and Fennig 2023). These factors have led to a postcolonial variety of English called Nigerian English (NigE), which functions as the language of education, law, governance, financial transactions and the media (Taiwo 2009). It is also a lingua



franca for educated Nigerians who do not share a Nigerian language. NigE is a second language for many Nigerians; however, there is a growing number of children and young adults in urban centres, as well as offspring of interethnic marriages, who use English as a first language (Igboanusi and Wolf 2009).

There are different sub-varieties of NigE, which are based on factors such as speakers' ethnic/linguistic background (Jibril 1986) and educational status (e.g. Banjo 1993; Udofot 2003). For example, Udofot (2003) identifies three NigE sub-varieties, including the Non-Standard variety with distinct segmental and non-segmental features, which is spoken mainly by primary and secondary school leavers. The other two are the Standard variety with a distinct phoneme inventory and characteristic prosodic features, spoken by university graduates, lecturers and other professionals, while the Sophisticated variety is spoken by university lecturers in English and Linguistics, by speakers with training in English phonology and those who spent some time in English native-speaking areas. This paper investigates educated NigE usage, which covers Udofot's Standard and Sophisticated varieties.

Schneider (2003, 2007) proposes that postcolonial varieties of English tend to undergo five stages in their development towards a local norm. While in the first two stages, the English settlers have an exonormative orientation towards their home country, Britain, and teach some of the locals English, in stage three both the settlers' and the local population's English take on distinct local structures and a discussion about norms ensues. In stage four, a local norm of English, a new variety, emerges, which both the settlers' descendants and the locals identify with, and which might differentiate into various dialects in stage five. Based on Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of the Development of postcolonial Englishes, NigE can be located at stage three (i.e. nativisation), with signs of entering stage four (endonormative stabilisation). While the nativisation of NigE has been well documented for phonology and prosody (e.g. Gut 2004, 2005; Akinola and Oladipupo 2021), lexico-semantics (e.g. Wolf and Igboanusi 2003; Callies 2017) and morphosyntax (e.g. Gut and Fuchs 2013; Akinlotan and Akande 2020), research on the pragmatics of NigE is only just beginning. For instance, Gut (2005) reports that NigE speakers tend to put stress on nearly all content words in an utterance, including words that involve given information, while Callies (2017) identifies new idiomatic expressions from the word *pepper* such as in *to see pepper*, which means 'to experience a lot of trouble or challenges'. Gut and Fuchs (2013) point to the extended use of the progressive with non-agentive stative verbs as seen in an example from the *International Corpus of English-Nigeria* (ICE-Nig, sl_13): "I hope you are hearing from Mummy and Daddy in Nigeria." As Schneider (2007: 47) points out, the process of nativisation does not only become apparent in lexical, phonological and morphosyntactic features that are relatively easy

to observe but will also have consequences on the level of the pragmatics of language use. He suggests

a tendency for cultural and communicative conventions to be modified, possibly transferred from indigenous cultures, in such contact situations.

(Schneider 2007: 47)

This process has been documented for situations of language shift (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982: 6).

Two recent frameworks are concerned with studying pragmatics across varieties and in postcolonial varieties of English: variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008; Barron and Schneider 2009; Barron 2017; Schneider 2021) and postcolonial pragmatics (Anchimbe 2018). Variational pragmatics proposes the systematic investigation of pragmatic variation across varieties of English based on macro-social factors such as region, gender, social class, age, religion and ethnicity, as well as other factors such as discourse types and genre, register, community of practice, speech, writing and levels of formality (Schneider 2021). It is a discipline at the intersection between pragmatics and dialectology and is based on the principles of empiricity, contrastivity and comparability (Barron, Pandarova, and Muderack 2015). Variational pragmatic analyses are carried out at different levels including formal (linguistic forms), actional (speech act realisation), interactional (sequential patterns), topic (content), organisational (turn-taking), stylistic, prosodic and non-verbal levels (Schneider 2021). Research within the variational pragmatics framework comprises analyses of both native and postcolonial varieties of English (e.g. Schröder and Schneider 2018, 2021). In addition, Anchimbe (2018) proposes the framework of postcolonial pragmatics for the study of pragmatic strategies in multilingual postcolonial societies, which “deals with the colonial-intermixture of languages and communicative practices in postcolonial contexts” (41), and takes into account factors such as ethnicity, colonial history, language choice and speaker identities.

Research on pragmatic features of NigE has so far been almost exclusively restricted to the formal level of variational pragmatics. For instance, it has been shown that speakers of NigE borrow discourse-pragmatic features such as *jare* and *biko* from indigenous Nigerian languages (e.g. Unuabonah and Oladipupo 2021) and Nigerian Pidgin (e.g. Unuabonah, Oyebola, and Gut 2021). Moreover, indigenous Nigerian languages, such as Yoruba, seem to influence the use of certain English focus particles such as *even* and *still* (Fuchs, Gut, and Soneye 2013) or the pragmatic marker *now* (Oladipupo and Unuabonah 2021). It is only recently that NigE speakers’ language use on the actional and interactional level has been investigated. For example, Mustapha (2011), using field work methods, examined the speech act of compliments and their responses in NigE. He found a large

extent of code-switching in the compliment responses, with mixing between English and both Nigerian Pidgin and Nigerian local languages. Moreover, studying requests in various spoken and written text categories in both ICE-Nig and ICE-Great Britain (ICE-GB), Gut and Unuabonah (2022) showed that different factors influence the choice of requesting strategies in NigE and British English (BrE). Thus, first evidence for nativisation processes of pragmatic strategies in NigE has been documented.

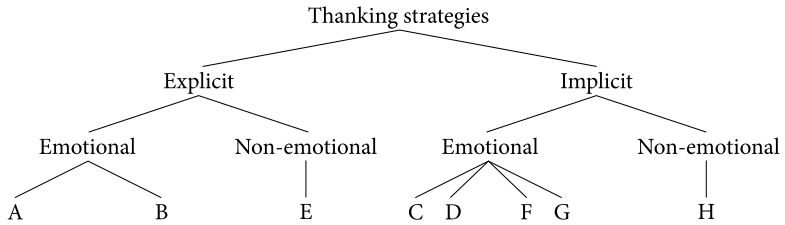
The present study analyses NigE pragmatics at the actional level and focuses on the speech act of expressing gratitude/thanking with a view of contributing to our knowledge of the form that nativisation processes can take on in this area of pragmatics. The speech act of thanking and the choice of thanking strategies seem to be especially suited for this task, as they have been described to be “subject to cultural variation” (Coulmas 1981: 75). Likewise, Eisenstein and Bodmann (1993: 74) claim that thanking “encodes cultural values and customs”, which makes it particularly interesting for a study of pragmatic variation in a postcolonial context. With the proposed difference in cultural and communicative practices in postcolonial countries like Nigeria (Anchimbe 2018), which houses a multilingual, multi-ethnic, high context culture society (Hall and Hall 1990) that is highly religious (Chiluwa 2008, 2010; Jowitt 2019), we expect specific pragmatic differences in language use and especially in the speech act of expressing gratitude to have developed in NigE.

2. The speech act of thanking across varieties of English

Thanking is an expressive speech act, in which speakers express their emotion or attitude towards a state of affairs or a person (Searle 1976: 12). In general, with the speech act of thanking, a speaker acknowledges “having benefited from the actions of another person” (Norrick 1978: 285). Thanking can be expressed by using different linguistic strategies. Aijmer (1996: 37) classifies these strategies into explicit and implicit ones, which in turn can both be divided into emotional and non-emotional strategies (see Figure 1).

Speakers can also combine two or more of these strategies when expressing their gratitude, which Aijmer (1996: 48) refers to as “compound thanking”. One example would be *Thank you, that’s kind of you*, the combination of strategies (A) and (C) in Figure 1. Aijmer reports that compound thanking has a frequency of 12.8 per cent in the London-Lund corpus of English conversations.

In general, speakers can use different linguistic forms for expressing gratitude: they can choose from a variety of thanking expressions such as *thank*, *appreciate*, *grateful* and use various syntactic realisations. Jautz (2013) describes three cate-



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)²</i>
(D) expressing appreciation of the act	e.g. <i>that's lovely, it's appreciated</i>
(E) acknowledging a debt of gratitude	e.g. <i>I owe a debt of gratitude 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>

Figure 1. Thanking strategies according to Aijmer (1996:37)

gories of optional complements and modifications: speakers can name the benefactor, as in (1) or state the reason for their gratitude, as in (2). Finally, expressions of gratitude can be intensified (3) by using adverbs such as *very* and *ever so*, which “maximize or boost meaning” (Ito and Tagliamonte 2003: 258).

- (1) Thank you **Mr Uzoma** (ICE-Nig, ph_16, our emphasis)
- (2) Thank you **for your faxed message** (ICE-GB, bl, our emphasis)
- (3) I **really** appreciate it (ICE-Nig, sl_47, our emphasis)

Moreover, Jautz (2013:70) proposes that thanking formulae such as *thank you very much* can fulfil different functions in discourse depending on the specific context in which they are used. She distinguishes between five possible functions that include

- organising discourse: e.g. *thank you for the question*
- phatic communication: e.g. *thank God*
- responding to material goods and services: e.g. *thanks ever so much for the present*
- responding to immaterial goods and interpersonal support: e.g. *thank you for waiting*
- joking or ironical use: e.g. *thank you for the compliment*

Thus, speakers of English can choose between several thanking expressions and linguistic strategies to express gratitude and can use thanking formulae for different discursual functions in different contexts. All of these aspects theoretically lend themselves to variation due to speakers' contact with or having grown up in different cultural contexts. First evidence has been collected to show that pragmatic variation indeed exists across the varieties of English on all of these levels.

Although research on expressing gratitude in English is not extensive, previous studies have shown that choices of thanking strategies and thanking functions differ across different varieties of English (e.g. Cheng 2010; Wong 2010; Jautz 2013; Funke 2022). Jautz (2013), for example, compared the use of thanking formulae in New Zealand English (NZE) and BrE, using about one million words from the *Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English* (WSC) and the spoken part of the *British National Corpus* (BNC) each. The lexical items she searched for in the two corpora included a wide range of expressions such as *thank*, *thanks*, *thankful*, *appreciate*, *grateful*, *obliged*, *cheers* and *ta* (Jautz 2013: 64). She found systematic differences in the use of these expressions of gratitude across the two varieties of English: in general, BrE speakers use significantly more thanking formulae and have a larger repertoire of different expressions of gratitude. Different lexical preferences were also found: NZE speakers use *thanks* significantly more frequently, while BrE speakers use *thank* more frequently. Moreover, *ta* is only used by NZE speakers and *grateful* only occurs in the BNC. BrE speakers furthermore name the benefactor and use intensifiers more frequently than NZE speakers do in their expressions of gratitude.

Likewise, Cheng (2010) found various differences in expressing gratitude between BrE and American English (AmE) as represented in the *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (MICASE) and a four-million-word sample of the spoken part of the BNC (BNC baby). Based on a sample of about 660,000 words across the two corpora, thanking formulae containing *thank/s* and *appreciate* were classified according to their function with a system that partly overlaps with that proposed by Jautz (2013) and includes the optional complements and modifications *naming the benefactor*, *naming the reason* and intensifiers. The major differences found between BrE and AmE were that *appreciate* and *naming the benefactor* are not used at all in BrE and that the phatic function of thanking (labelled "non-gratitude, relief" in Cheng (2010)) is far more frequent in BrE than in AmE.

Only few studies so far have investigated thanking expressions in postcolonial varieties of English. Funke (2022) focussed on the factors that influence speakers' choice between *thank* and *thanks* in their expressions of gratitude in the spoken parts of the Sri Lankan, Indian and British components of the ICE corpora. She found variety to be a significant factor to determine this choice in interaction with

social variables such as speaker age and gender, as well as structural factors of the thanking formula such as the naming of a benefactor or intensification. For example, *thank* is more frequently used by young speakers and by females in Sri Lankan English than in BrE, and female speakers of Sri Lankan English show a tendency to use *thank* more frequently than Indian speakers of English.

Wong (2010) analysed 233 thanking expressions involving *thank/s* in the Hong Kong component of the ICE corpora and found that *thank/s* is most frequently used with a discourse organising function by Hong Kong English speakers. They further produced simple *thank/s* in 26 per cent of all cases. *Naming the benefactor* and *naming the reason* were used as optional complements in only 18.5 per cent and 16.7 per cent of all thanking expressions, while intensification was very rarely produced by Hong Kong English speakers altogether.

These specific characteristics of expressing gratitude in different varieties of English and the variation in preferential patterns for thanking strategies and specific thanking formulae across them are commonly explained by different cultural norms that operate in these speaker communities. For instance, Jautz (2013) explains the differences that she found between thanking in NZE and BrE with cultural differences: NZE speakers' preference for *thanks* rather than *thank* for example is assumed to reflect the generally less formal and more laid-back culture in New Zealand. Wong (2010) also describes the rare use of compound thanking formulae in Hong Kong English as a reflection of the Chinese speakers' reservation to express gratitude openly and explicitly.

No systematic studies have yet been carried out to investigate expressions of gratitude in NigE, where it can be expected that some nativisation patterns in pragmatic language use may have emerged due to the influence of the specific cultural and communicative norms in this postcolonial country (Schneider 2007; Anchimbe 2018). It is thus the first aim of the present study to contribute, within the paradigms of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron 2008) and postcolonial pragmatics (Anchimbe 2018), to our growing knowledge of variation in expressions of gratitude across varieties of English. We will do so by investigating the use of thanking expressions in NigE and comparing them to thanking expressions in BrE. Based on the different cultural norms operating in these two societies, their different histories and highly diverse linguistic situations, we expect to find variation between NigE and BrE in all areas of expressing gratitude. These areas include the choice of thanking strategies, which have been found to differ between BrE and AmE; the choice of thanking expressions, which have been documented to vary across NZE and BrE (Jautz 2013) and across Sri Lankan, Indian and BrE (Funke 2022), as well as the factors influencing this choice; and the syntactic structure of expressions of gratitude that differs between AmE and BrE (Cheng 2010) and in Hong Kong English (Wong 2010).

The second aim of the present study is a methodological one. Previous research has suggested that the linguistic strategies and the linguistic form of thanking speech acts differ systematically with the data collection method that is employed. Schauer and Adolphs (2006), for example, compared expressions of gratitude by BrE speakers in the *Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English* corpus (CANCODE), which contains authentic spontaneous conversations, with thanking speech acts produced by BrE speakers in a discourse completion task (DCT; cf. Ogiermann 2018). It was found that the speech acts of thanking that were provided in the eight scenarios in the DCT yielded a wider variety of expressions of gratitude than those found in the corpus. For example, *cheers sweetie* was only produced in the DCT but does not occur in the corpus data. Likewise, several types of compound thanking, such as *thanking+stating intent to reciprocate* (*Thanks very much, I'll get it next time*) or *thanking+confirming interlocutor's commitment* (*Are you sure you don't mind? Great, thanks*), were only found in the DCT data. Moreover, Schauer and Adolphs (2006) found different relative frequencies of specific thanking formulae across DCT and corpus data: *naming the reason*, for instance, is much more frequent in the latter than the former. Finally, while the corpus data yielded longer expressions of gratitude, many of which were spread out over several conversational turns, the DCT data yielded more formulaic sequences such as *ok, thanks* and *that's wicked*.

These differences in the type and form of expressing gratitude found for corpus data and DCTs might well reflect that different linguistic competences of speakers are targeted and triggered by the two methods. While corpus data represents actual language use in different conversational contexts, speech acts elicited in DCTs, as also Schneider (2012) suggests, tend to reveal the underlying behavioural norms that speakers of a particular sociocultural community have internalised. However, more data is needed to uphold this hypothesis. As called for by Schauer and Adolphs (2006: 131), this study thus aims to explore differences in thanking expressions across corpus data and DCTs.

The four research questions to be answered in this study are thus:

1. What thanking strategies are employed by Nigerian speakers of English?
2. What expressions of gratitude are used?
3. (How) do Nigerian speakers of English differ from speakers of other varieties of English when expressing gratitude? Can these differences be explained by cultural differences?
4. Are there any differences in expressing gratitude between corpus-based and DCT data for NigE?

3. Methodology

In order to answer the research questions in this paper, the study utilises two kinds of data: DCT data and corpus data, which are explained in the following sub-sections.

3.1 DCT data

The DCT data were collected in printed questionnaires containing DCTs with the prompt “What will you say...?” that invited the respondents to provide a written response on the blank lines provided (see Figure 2).

15. You need some money urgently to offset a bill in the hospital. On getting to the bank, you find that the bankers are already closing for the day. Your plea fell on deaf ears, and you cannot figure out what to do. Just then, the manager who had been watching the scene instructs one of the bankers to allow you in and you are able to get the money. What will you say to the manager?

*Thanks 1.5 million for the hand of help
you stretched towards me. Am very
grateful.*

Figure 2. Scenario and prompt for eliciting expressions of gratitude

As this study forms part of a larger study on various speech acts in NigE, 18 scenarios prompting expressions of gratitude were distributed over five different questionnaires and were presented together with scenarios eliciting other kinds of speech acts. In total, each questionnaire contained between 14 and 17 scenarios, of which either three or four prompted expressions of gratitude. The 18 scenarios prompting expressions of gratitude differed in the two social variables: the interlocutors’ social status (addressed person is of higher, lower or the same social status) and social distance (high or low) of the conversation partners, as well as the stimulus for the expression of gratitude (gift, favour, reward or service; see Table 1). The scenarios are based on Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) but were adapted to fit the Nigerian context better. A full list of the scenarios can be found in Appendix I.

Table 1. Distribution of variables stimulus, interlocutors' social status and social distance across the 18 scenarios eliciting expressions of gratitude

Scenario	Stimulus	Interlocutors' social status	Social distance
1	Gift	Same	Low
2	Gift	High	Low
3	Gift	Low	Low
4	Favour	Same	Low
5	Favour	Same	High
6	Favour	High	Low
7	Favour	High	High
8	Favour	Low	High
9	Favour	Low	Low
10	Reward	Same	Low
11	Reward	High	Low
12	Reward	High	High
13	Reward	Low	Low
14	Service	Same	Low
15	Service	Same	High
16	Service	High	High
17	Service	Low	High
18	Service	High	Low

3.2 Respondents

The five questionnaires were filled in at the beginning of 2022 by between 66 and 114 Nigerians each (total: 452 respondents) from different regions of Nigeria (North-Central: Jos, Nasarawa, Minna; South-West: Ota, Ondo, Osogbo, Ede; South East: Nsukka; and South-South: Benin, Port Harcourt), allowing a representation of Nigerian English users from not only the major ethnic groups but also minority groups. Of the 452 respondents, 218 gave their gender as female, 203 as male, one as other, and 30 did not provide any information on their gender. Their ages range from 18 to 60+ and they have a wide range of professions including clergyman, accountant, student and nurse.

3.3 Analysis

Overall, the 18 DCTs were designed to elicit 1,603 expressions of gratitude. However, 206 instances could not be analysed either because the respondents did not provide any response at all or because what they provided did not constitute an expression of gratitude. This was the case, for example, for answers that only described the respondent's intention, as in (4), and those that constituted other speech acts, as in (5):

- (4) I will say thank you and get him a gift. (questionnaire E64)
- (5) Please, sir, I have a problem. I have not been able to pay my tuition fee (questionnaire C77)

Thus, a total of 1,397 expressions of gratitude provided by the Nigerian English speakers in the DCTs were analysed for various aspects. In detail, we

- classified the employed **thanking strategy** according to Aijmer (1996:37)
- analysed the **thanking expression** used and
- analysed the use of the optional structural elements *naming the benefactor*, *naming the reason* and intensification.

When a respondent provided a compound thanking speech act, as in (6), each thanking strategy was analysed and classified separately.

- (6) OMG! Thank you for saving me. I would definitely repay your kindness. (A93)

3.4 Corpus data

In addition, in both ICE-GB and ICE-Nigeria, expressions of gratitude were identified in the text categories private conversation, phone calls, parliamentary speeches, business transactions, broadcast talks, interviews and discussions in the spoken part, as well as in the text categories social and business letters. A corpus-driven process (e.g. Westphal 2021) for identifying expressions of gratitude was used, during which the orthographic transcriptions of the corpus data were read, and all expressions of gratitude were identified and collected. This yielded a total of 628 expressions of gratitude in ICE-Nigeria and 281 in ICE-GB. These expressions of gratitude were analysed in the same way as the DCT data, analysing thanking strategy, thanking expression and the use of optional complements and intensification.

4. Results

4.1 Thanking strategies in the DCTs

Figure 3 shows the different thanking strategies produced by the NigE speakers in the DCTs as well as their relative frequency. The NigE speakers produce seven out of the eight thanking strategies listed by Aijmer (1996: 37), the exception being the strategy of self-denigration, which did not occur in the data. The strategies *thanking explicitly* and *stressing gratitude* are used most frequently, while the strategy *acknowledging a debt* is used rather rarely by the Nigerian respondents. In Figure 3 we also include a strategy which we labelled *thank a supernatural being*¹ as in (7). Moreover, we found that 16.3 per cent ($N=228$) of all expressions of gratitude that were produced by the NigE speakers contained prayers such as in (8) and (9), which we also identified as a separate thanking strategy:

- (7) Hmm **thank God** you came, am so glad, thanks alot and be bless. (C21)
- (8) Thank you for prize. More funds in the club account. (B91)²
- (9) May God bless you sir. (D64)

Table 2 shows how often the speech acts of thanking consisted of a single thanking strategy and how often the Nigerian users of English produced compound thanking strategies that combine more than one strategy (i.e. compound thanking according to Aijmer (1996)). Expressions of gratitude consist of a single thanking strategy in about half of the cases, with 47.7 per cent of all expressions of gratitude consisting of a sequence of two or more thanking strategies. These types of compound thanking in the DCT responses given by the Nigerian users of English usually (37.2 per cent) comprise two thanking strategies, while some of them even combine three or four.

1. Jautz (2013) refers to this strategy as phatic communication; however, within the Nigerian sociocultural context, thanking a supernatural being is much more than social etiquette. As noted in several studies (e.g. Jowitt 2019), Nigerians are highly religious and thanking God for people's actions is intentional.

2. Prayers such as a prayer of blessing in this case stem from the Nigerian sociocultural context, where prayers may or may not include the name of God although it is usually implied. Such prayers are based on the belief that spoken words are powerful and are able to produce supernatural effects (see Olajubu 2001).

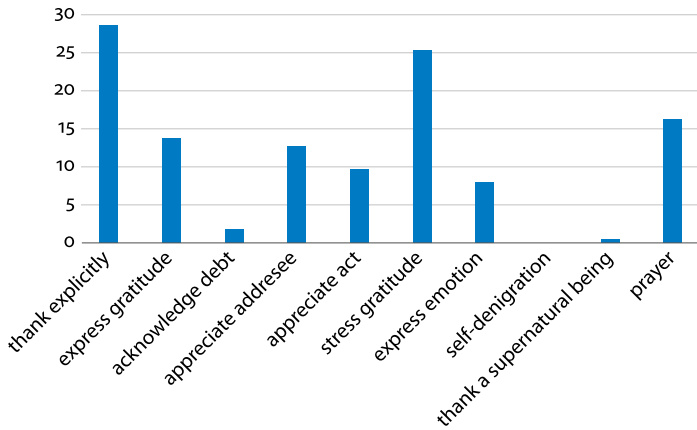


Figure 3. Thanking strategies according to Aijmer (1996:37) produced by the NigE speakers in the DCTs. The categories *thank a supernatural being* and *prayer* were added

Table 2. Percentage of expressions of gratitude that employ one or more thanking strategies in the DCT data (absolute numbers in brackets)

	one	two	three	four or five
%	52.3	37.2	9	1.5
	(731)	(520)	(126)	(20)

4.2 Thanking expressions

Table 3 shows the frequency of the different thanking expressions/formulae produced by the NigE speakers in the DCTs. Forms of *thank* are the most frequently used ones, with *appreciate* and *grateful* each occurring in about 15 per cent of all cases. Four thanking expressions borrowed from Nigerian languages, including one from Nigerian Pidgin, were also found.

Table 3. Total number and percentage of thanking expression/formula used by the NigE speakers in the DCTs*

<i>thank</i>	<i>thanks</i>	<i>thankful</i>	<i>grateful</i>	<i>gratitude</i>	<i>appreciate</i>	<i>that's</i>	Nigerian language
1007	227	3	285	27	289	4	4
54.6%	12.3%	0.2%	15.4%	1.4%	15.7%	0.2%	0.2%

* Total number is higher than 1,397 because many expressions of gratitude contain multiple thanking expressions

When analysing the use of *appreciate* in the various expressions of gratitude, it becomes apparent that *appreciate* is used with extended grammatical options in NigE: It can occur without any object, as in (10), with an animate object, as in (11), with a *for*-construction, as in (12), as well as in formulaic expressions, such as in (13):

- (10) I really appreciate (B103)
- (11) I appreciate you all (C9)
- (12) I want to appreciate Vice-Chancellor for the great opportunity given to me (D2)
- (13) I cannot appreciate you enough (C57)

4.3 Optional complements in thanking expressions

Nigerian users of English rarely produce speech acts of thanking that consist of just a thanking expression without any further grammatical elements. Table 4 shows that simple expressions of gratitude occurred in the DCT data in only 146 (10.4 per cent) of all cases. The majority of all responses produced by the NigE users have more complex structures: they either contain an intensifier (71 per cent) or the benefactor is named (46.5 per cent). Moreover, Nigerian respondents named the reason in nearly 40 per cent of all cases in their expressions of gratitude. In addition, in many responses, two or more of these optional elements co-occur, as in (14).

- (14) Awnn mom thank you so much for always coming through for me I really appreciate, God bless you. (B63)

Table 4. Frequency of optional complements *naming the benefactor*, *naming the reason* and intensification in the DCT data

	benefactor	reason	intensification	none
%	46.5	39.2	71	10.4
n	(650)	(548)	(993)	(146)

4.4 Thanking speech acts in NigE and other varieties of English

Figure 4 presents the overall frequencies of thanking speech acts across the analysed text types in ICE-Nigeria and ICE-GB, while Figure 5 compares the relative frequency of the different thanking strategies according to Aijmer (1996) in ICE-Nigeria and ICE-GB.

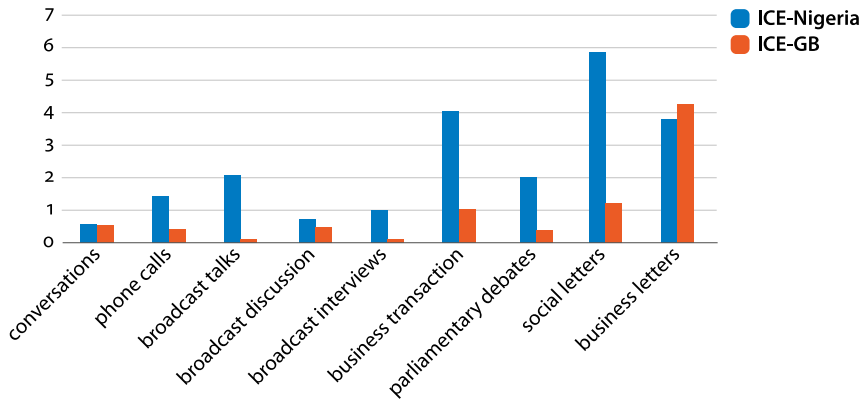


Figure 4. Frequency of thanking speech acts across all analysed text types in ICE-Nigeria and ICE-GB (measured per thousand words)

Overall, there are nearly three times more thanking speech acts in ICE-Nigeria ($N=628$) than in ICE-GB ($N=281$), and their relative distribution across the different text types differs. In ICE-Nigeria, the frequency (ptw) of thanking speech acts is especially high in social letters, business transactions, business letters, broadcast talks, parliamentary debates and phone calls. In ICE-GB, only the text categories business letters, social letters and business transactions have a frequency of thanking speech acts that is higher than 1 ptw. For both varieties, thus, thanking is more frequent in written letters/emails than in spoken text categories.

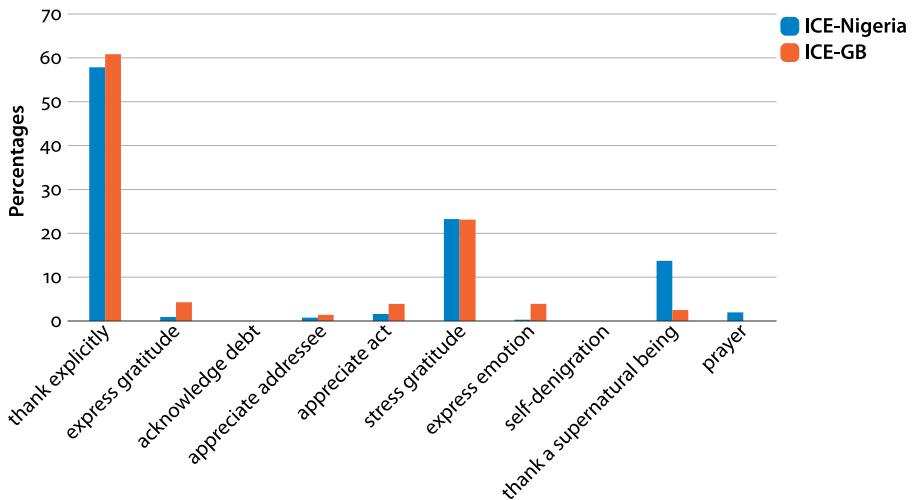


Figure 5. Relative frequency of thanking strategies in ICE-Nigeria and ICE-GB (in per cent)

Figure 5 shows that there is much similarity between NigE and BrE users in terms of the relative use of the different thanking strategies proposed by Aijmer (1996). For instance, there is a strong preference for the strategy *thanking explicitly* and, somewhat less, for the strategy *stressing gratitude* in both varieties of English, while the strategies *acknowledge debt* and *self-denigration* were not found at all in either of the two corpora. With regard to differences between NigE and BrE, Figure 5 shows that there are more expressions of gratitude using the *thank a supernatural being* strategy in ICE-Nigeria than in ICE-GB, while the *express emotion*, *express gratitude* and *appreciate act* strategies occur with a slightly higher frequency in ICE-GB. Prayers also occur in ICE-Nig but not in ICE-GB.

Table 5 shows the relative frequency (in per cent) of the individual expressions of thanking that were produced by the NigE speakers compared to BrE, as represented in ICE-GB, and NZE, as represented in WSC (from Jautz 2013). While speakers of all three varieties show a clear preference for *thank* and *thanks*, the use of the other lexical items in expressions of gratitude shows marked differences. NigE speakers use the other lexical items less frequently than BrE and NZE speakers, but use *appreciate* more frequently than BrE speakers. Likewise, the formula *that's...* (e.g. *nice*), *ta* and *cheers* are used exclusively in BrE and NZE.

Table 5. Percentage of thanking expression/formula used in ICE-Nig, ICE-GB and WSC (Jautz 2013)

	<i>thank</i>	<i>thanks</i>	<i>thankful/ thanking</i>	<i>grateful</i>	<i>gratitude</i>	<i>appreciate appreciated/ ive</i>	<i>that's...</i>	<i>other: kind, decent, bless</i>	<i>ta, cheers</i>
NigE	78.9	16.4	0.3	1.5	0.2	2.8	–	–	–
BrE	66.5	22.1	1.1	3.9	0.4	2.1	1.1	2.5	0.4
NZE	52.5	36.2	0.4	–	–	4.1	4.4	–	2.4

Table 6 compares the optional complements and intensification in thanking expressions in NigE (ICE-Nigeria) with the values found for BrE (ICE-GB) and by Cheng (2010) for AmE (MICASE corpus). It is striking that simple speech acts consisting of a single expression of gratitude are far more frequent in the AmE corpus data than in NigE and BrE and that the optional complement *naming the reason* as well as intensification occur far less frequently in AmE than in the NigE and BrE data. While *benefactor* occurs more frequently in NigE, *naming the reason* occurs less frequently in NigE than in BrE.

Table 6. Percentage of optional complements *naming the benefactor, naming the reason* and intensification in ICE-Nigeria, ICE-GB and MICASE (taken from Cheng 2010; n.g. = not given)

	benefactor	reason	intensification	none
NigE	33.1	23.4	23.4	31.4
BrE	15.3	41.6	24.9	28.8
AmE	n.g.	6.3	17.4	76.4

4.5 Thanking strategies in DCT-elicited data and in ICE-Nigeria compared

Figures 6 and 7 show the relative frequencies of thanking strategies and the presence of optional complements and intensification in the thanking expressions, respectively, comparing the data elicited with the DCTs and the data in ICE-Nigeria.

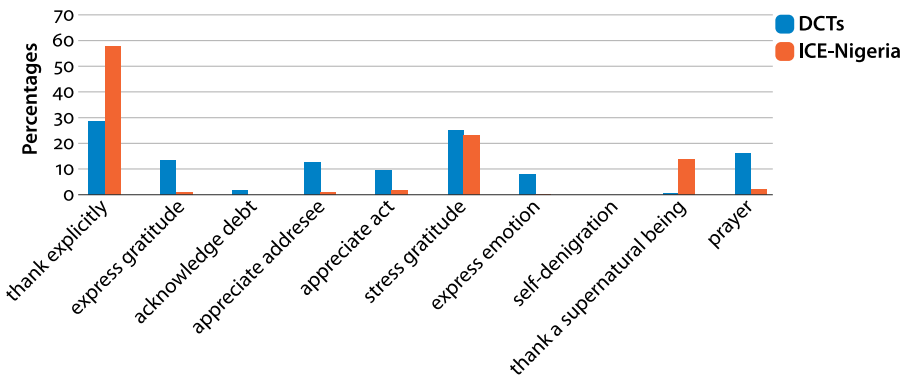


Figure 6. Thanking strategies according to Aijmer (1996) in the Nigerian DCT data and in ICE-Nigeria

Systematic differences between the two types of data are apparent in several respects: The NigE speakers represented in ICE-Nigeria use fewer thanking strategies (only five out of the eight strategies proposed by Aijmer (1996)) and show a stronger preference for *thanking explicitly*, a strategy that is used in nearly 60 per cent of their expressions of gratitude. Moreover, the strategy of *thanking a supernatural being* has a higher relative frequency in the corpus data than in the DCTs. Prayers, on the other hand, are more frequently produced in the DCTs (16.3 per cent of all thanking speech acts) than in the corpus data (1.9 per cent).

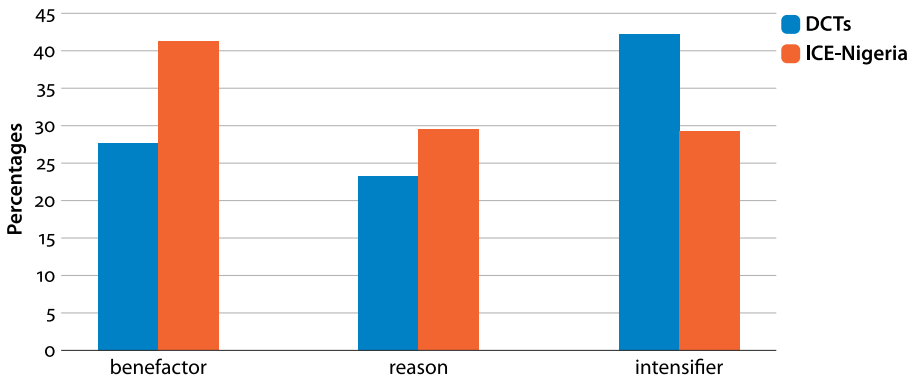


Figure 7. Optional complements and intensification of thanking expressions in the DCT data and in ICE-Nigeria

5. Discussion

This study's first aims were to investigate thanking strategies and their linguistic forms in NigE. The results show that seven out of the eight thanking strategies listed in Aijmer (1996:37) are used by NigE speakers, the exception being the strategy of self-denigration. Two thanking strategies which were not described in Aijmer but found in both the corpus and the DCT data are prayers and expressions that we labelled *thanking a supernatural being*. In about half of the cases, a NigE expression of gratitude consists of two or more thanking strategies in a row, as in (15).

(15) Thanks for the kind gesture, I'm very grateful (D2)

NigE speakers mostly use the lexical items *thank* and *thanks* in their thanking speech acts, with *appreciate* and *grateful* occurring considerably less often. Typically, i.e. in about 90 per cent of all cases, expressions of gratitude in NigE are grammatically complex, containing optional complements such as *naming the benefactor*, *naming the reason* and intensification.

A comparison of expressing gratitude in NigE with other varieties of English shows some similarities but also differences: BrE and NigE speakers use a similar range of thanking strategies and show the same preferences regarding thanking strategy and choice of thanking expression. Furthermore, both speaker groups use all strategies listed by Aijmer (1996) with the exception of self-denigration. By the same token, a strong preference for the *thanking explicitly* strategy as well as for the thanking expressions *thank/thanks* can be observed in both varieties of English.

However, there are also a number of differences in the use and form of speech acts of thanking between NigE and other varieties of English. Compared to BrE speakers, Nigerians use expressions of gratitude much more often in general (nearly three times as many in the corpus data). Furthermore, they produce more elaborate expressions of gratitude, with nearly 50 per cent of all thanking speech acts consisting of two or more utterances using different thanking strategies in a row. By contrast, the frequency of this compound thanking in BrE is merely 17.2 per cent (Aijmer 1996). NigE speech acts of thanking are also structurally more elaborate than in other varieties of English. A simple *thank you*, which is used in about two thirds of all thanking expressions in both BrE and AmE (Cheng 2010), is extremely uncommon in NigE, where nearly all speech acts of thanking contain optional complements such as *naming the benefactor*, *naming the reason* and/or intensification. Finally, NigE speakers differ from speakers of either BrE or NZE in their more frequent use of the thanking expressions *appreciate* and *grateful*.

While these pragmatic differences across varieties of English can be described as differences in the degree of use of certain linguistic strategies, our results also show a small number of expressions of gratitude that make NigE distinct from varieties such as BrE, AmE and NZE. These include the use of prayers as thanking strategies (which most probably also occur in other African varieties of English whose thanking speech acts have not been studied yet) and the thanking expression *gratitude* that only occurs in NigE. Conversely, NigE speakers do not use *ta* and *cheers*, unlike speakers of BrE and NZE (Jautz 2013).

Which of these differences might be a result of nativisation processes in NigE that include language contact with the indigenous languages and the local cultural and communicative practices? One obvious candidate is the use of thanking expressions from indigenous languages, as in (16), which however occurred very rarely in the DCT data and not at all in the corpus data.

- (16) O se gan. Thank you jare. smiles. (C39)
 ‘Thank you indeed. Thank you indeed. Smiles.’

Similarly, the use of prayers in thanking expressions reflects the highly religious Nigerian culture (Jowitt 2019) that is also evidenced in their linguistic expressions in other contexts, including emails and car stickers (Chiluwa 2008, 2010). It is typical for Nigerians to pray for benefactors as a way of appreciating them, and examples of similar prayers can also be seen in emails (Chiluwa 2010). The higher use of the *thank a supernatural being* strategy in NigE furthermore reflects local practices and is based on the belief that it is a supernatural being, i.e. God, who gives the benefactor the ability to be of assistance to the recipient.

The extended grammatical functions of *appreciate* in NigE that are evidenced in our data can also be categorised as an example of nativisation, although this

falls into the linguistic category of morpho-syntax rather than pragmatics. The fact that NigE speakers, unlike BrE speakers (Cheng 2010), use *appreciate* might be an indication of AmE influence, and thus, be a product of earlier contact with this variety during the stationing of the American Peace Corps in Nigeria in the 1960s as well as through the contemporary contact with AmE through popular films, music and now, social media (Awonusi 1994; Jowitt 2019).

Nativisation in the sense of the adoption of pragmatic rules of indigenous languages into English is furthermore reflected in the overall higher use of thanking speech acts in NigE as well as in their elaborate form. Thanking is associated with politeness and is regarded as polite and appropriate behaviour in different Nigerian ethnic groups. For example, Odebunmi (2015) posits that the expression of appreciation or thanking is associated with the Yoruba concept of *Omoluabi*, which captures the idea of a good Yoruba person. This study thus shows that nativisation processes can take on a variety of forms including direct borrowing of lexical items from indigenous languages as well as more subtle linguistic influences that surface in different communicative strategies and linguistic forms. Moreover, indigenous cultural practices such as using prayers in or as expressions of gratitude can be transferred into English and result in new and variety-specific pragmatic practices.

The cross-varietal differences in expressing gratitude observed here, however, require close methodological scrutiny. In many cases, data from DCTs are compared with corpus data despite first observations that these can yield diverging results (Schauer and Adolphs 2006). It was thus the methodological aim of this study to provide further insight into possible differences between thanking expressions elicited with the help of DCTs and thanking expressions found in a corpus of natural speech. Our data from NigE confirms the findings from BrE described by Schauer and Adolphs (2006): speakers produce a wider variety of expressions of gratitude in the DCTs than in the corpus. In ICE-Nigeria, three thanking strategies that were employed in the speech acts elicited in the DCTs were not used at all. Equally, like in the BrE data comparison (Schauer and Adolphs 2006), the optional complement *naming the reason* was found to be more frequent in the NigE corpus data than in the DCTs. The inclusion of more references to benefactors and reasons in the corpus data may be linked to the presence or knowledge of the benefactor. Since the speakers represented in the corpus have actual knowledge of the benefactors, this might have some influence on the linguistic form to be used in thanking them unlike in the DCTs where the respondents only have a fictional knowledge of the benefactors, which may have less influence on the actual linguistic form and structure. In addition, the low frequency of prayers in the corpus data may be tied to other aspects of context, which

may not have been captured in the DCT scenarios, e.g. the preferences of the benefactor.

It thus appears that thanking expressions elicited in DCTs include more formal, elaborate and polite expressions than those found in the corpus, which mainly follow the *thanking explicitly* strategy. Although the DCT scenarios involve spoken events, the written (and formal) nature of the DCTs may have some influence on the thanking strategies elicited by this method. This is corroborated by the fact that thanking occurred more frequently in the two written ICE categories (business letters and social letters) than in almost all the spoken ICE categories except business transactions. Notwithstanding, DCTs appear to reveal the underlying behavioural norms of the respective sociocultural community of speakers (Schneider 2012), and as such, reveal the behavioural norms of Nigerians towards appreciating benefactors who should be treated with reverence for their benevolent actions.

Methodological restrictions might also apply on a more general level. We aimed at giving a first complete description of expressing gratitude in NigE, as well as of possible types of nativisation processes apparent in this speech act. However, neither corpus data nor data elicited in DCTs can give a full representation of communicative practices. In spoken contexts, non-verbal thanking forms such as bowing or curtsying might be used by NigE speakers, which show reverence and appreciation, and which may accompany the *thanking explicitly* linguistic strategy. Furthermore, the classification models of speech acts might have to be extended to incorporate a wider range of linguistic strategies: it appears that, for example, the *express emotion* thanking strategy occurs very rarely in ICE-Nigeria, but this is only based on Aijmer's (1996) classification of thanking emotions being expressed through interjections such as *oh*. For NigE users, emotions may also be expressed by the repetition of thanking acts or combination of different thanking strategies. Such repetitions or combinations have been found for other linguistic items, such as pragmatic markers (Oladipupo and Unuabonah 2021).

6. Conclusion

This study has examined thanking strategies and their linguistic forms in NigE, using corpus-based data and data collected from DCTs. The study shows that thanking expressions occur more frequently in NigE than other varieties such as BrE and finds similarities and differences in the use of thanking strategies between NigE and other varieties of English. The results suggest that these differences may be tied to the Nigerian religious and sociocultural contexts. As claimed by Schneider (2007), the area of pragmatics constitutes another linguistic level in

which nativisation processes can become apparent. The present study has shown that these processes surface in NigE expressions of gratitude in various forms ranging from direct borrowing of lexical items to shaping frequency and preference patterns for individual linguistic strategies and structural forms, and thus contributes to the frameworks of variational pragmatics and postcolonial pragmatics. On a methodological level, this study observes similarities and differences in the use of thanking strategies found in corpus-based data and DCT data, indicating that different types of data elicitation methods trigger different speaker competencies and productions, which need to be taken into account in future (comparative) pragmatic research. One of the limitations of this study is that it compares the NigE data to BrE and other native English varieties, without comparing its findings to data from other varieties found in postcolonial contexts, which is an aspect that further studies may explore. Furthermore, the influence of factors such as the age and social power of the interlocutors, register and data type on specific thanking strategies could be explored with sophisticated statistical methods such as multifactorial statistical models in future studies.





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Appendix A

List of 18 scenarios used in the DCT study

1. You are a class representative and it's your birthday. Your colleagues planned a surprise for you. They got a cake; some drinks and a gift packed in a well decorated bag and invite you over to the dining hall. On your arrival, they sing and cheer you and present you the gift. How do you react to such a surprise?
You: _____
2. For your excellent performance, your mum gives you a camera which you have been wishing to have for some time now. What will you tell her?
You: _____
3. It's a valedictory service, your younger siblings agree to give you a surprise and buy you a new wristwatch. How will you appreciate them?
You: _____
4. You missed a class because you had to go to the school clinic. Your friend, who was in the class and copied the notes, made an extra copy and brings it to you at the clinic. How do you react to this favour?
You: _____
5. Some security operatives raided your hostel in search of suspected 'yahoo boys' and you were among the guys they arrested. You did all could to prove your innocence but it fell on deaf ears. The lead security officer said you'll only be released on the condition that your

hostel president (who is your colleague and with whom you recently had a fight) comes to vindicate you. The president was informed and consented to come over to vindicate you. Now you are out of the police custody. What will you say to the president?

You _____

6. Tomorrow is your project defense. As the first candidate to be examined, you had worked all day on the final draft, yet to be printed. At dinner, you left your laptop at the balcony hoping to get back to it after dinner, but some other events kept you away. You went to bed afterwards and there was a thunderstorm. Your mum who was awake when the rain was about to start went out to shut the windows and noticed your books and the laptop at the balcony. She moved it in for you and kept it. You woke up and learnt there was a thunderstorm over the night. Then you remember your laptop and the defense and you are dazed. You went outside to check the laptop but wasn't there. Then you let out a cry. Some minutes later, your mum walks in with the laptop in good shape. How will you express your gratitude?

You _____

7. You have issues paying your fees and registering for a new session because it's already late, you explained your ordeals to your level adviser who takes it upon herself to get that sorted. Now the fees have been paid and you can sit for the exam. What will you say to the level adviser the next time you see her?

You: _____

8. You have miraculously escaped from the den of kidnappers and have been wandering in the forest for some days now. You met a hunter (with some dead animals near him), who almost shot at you taking you for one of the games. Then you let out a cry and he realised you are not. You explained your ordeals to him and he helped you out of the forest, directed you on how to get home and gave you some money for your fare. How will you express your gratitude to him?

You: _____

9. It is your turn to prepare dinner. Your mum had instructed you on the dish to prepare and when to start preparing it. It has to be ready before your dad returns at 5pm. You had promised to hang out with one of your friends today. As soon as your mum left for the office, your friend came and you went out together. You got so carried away that you didn't notice the time. Then she called at 4pm to find out how far you have gone with the cooking. You tried to mumble some lies and dashed home. On getting home, your sister who overheard your mum's instruction has gone halfway into the cooking and that saved the day. How will you thank her?

You _____

10. It is prize-giving day in the school club you belong to. You are presented a new laptop for being an active member of the club. How will you appreciate the club members?

You: _____

11. It is thanksgiving service in your parish. Your parish priest who is also a family friend calls out your name together with some other members of the parish and you are given an award of recognition and active service. How will you thank the priest when you see him after the service?

You _____

12. For being the overall best graduating student in your campus, the vice-chancellor offers to retain you in the university, you are given some minutes to address the school after the vice-chancellor's speech. How will you express your gratitude?

You: _____

13. You are a graduating member of the students association in your department. Your junior colleagues organised a party for all graduating members of the association and specifically present you an award of excellence. How will you express your gratitude to them?
You: _____
14. You are a parent. Your child developed some health issues in the dead hour of the night. You had to take the child to the clinic that night. On your arrival at the hospital, you notice your friend who is a pediatric consultant on his way out of the hospital having just closed for the day. You called out to him, explained the issue and he returned to the ward. It took him hours to stabilise the child. Knowing the bottle necks you would have had to battle with at the hospital and the possibility of losing the child to those administrative issues, how will you express your gratitude to your friend for such a selfless service?
You _____
15. You are a Corp member. You have just been posted to a village clinic for your primary assignment. At the close of the day's work, you discovered there are no more vehicles going your way. Luckily, a fully loaded vehicle comes along and you waved it down only to discover that the driver is a former classmate in your primary school days. He makes some space for you and gets you to your destination. How will you appreciate him?
You _____
16. You need some money urgently to offset a bill in the hospital. On getting to the bank, you find that the bankers are already closing for the day. Your plea fell on deaf ears and you cannot figure out what to do. Just then, the manager who had been watching the scene instructs one of the bankers to allow you in and you are able to get the money. What will you say to the manager?
You _____
17. As a senior staff in an organisation, you drive to the city centre on a weekend and suddenly have issues with your car. The company mechanic who is on leave incidentally walks on the opposite direction and notices you struggling with the car. He comes over and spends the rest of the day fixing the car. At last, it works and you can drive the car home now. What will your response be to the service rendered?
You _____
18. As an ex-student of a university, you need a letter of introduction from your department. You wrote the head of department who is presently on Sabbatical but incidentally came to school on that weekend. He graciously granted your request and on the letter you discovered that the head of department is your uncle. Do you still need to thank him, if yes how?
You _____

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