A Corpus-Based Approach to
the Study of Speech Act of Thanking

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The present study takes a corpus-based approach to investigate the speech act of thanking. Two well-known spoken corpora MICASE and BNC (the spoken part) were used for quantitative and qualitative analysis. Six major categories were identified: (a) thanking, (b) appreciation, (c) non-gratitude, (d) combinations, (e) thanking a 3rd person, and (f) formal speech. The results of the study indicate that the thanking strategy constituted the majority of the coded expressions; nevertheless, the second most frequent strategy is the non-gratitude strategy, which performs the illocutionary functions of relief, rejection of an offer, politeness, greetings, and conversation endings. Results also revealed that *thank you* is much more frequently used than *thanks*. In addition, data from MICASE show more varieties of strategies than BNC, particularly the more formal strategies such as appreciation, thanking a 3rd person, and formal speech whereas BNC contains much more instances of the non-gratitude strategy than MICASE, reflecting register differences of the two corpora. In sum, the wide variety of thanking strategies, the numerous formulaic linguistic realizations, and the expected appropriate responses when being thanked, as shown from the corpora, suggest potential problems the speech act of thanking poses for second language learners.

Keywords: corpus, expressions of gratitude, speech act, thank you, thanking

1. Introduction

Studies in second and foreign language learning have been paying more and more attention to pragmatics in the past two decades. Due to the growing recognition of the role of pragmatic competence in second language learning, researchers have been attempting to describe and investigate this important aspect of communicative competence. Briefly stated, pragmatics is the study of how people use language that is appropriate for the context of interaction, and that helps them accomplish their communication goals.

However, the new sources of information and research in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics seem to have little in common. For example, many ESL textbooks may not be informed by empirical research. Biber et al. (2002) commented on the lack of availability of empirical linguistic descriptions; they also pointed out language professionals' over-reliance on intuitions and anecdotal evidence of how language is used. Furthermore, these researchers stated that 'intuitions about language use often turn out to be wrong' (Biber et al. 2002:10). The discrepancies between researchers' analyses of naturally occurring conversations and the language of ESL textbooks have been reported in several studies (Carter and McCarthy 1995, Koester 2002). Incorporation of research results based on natural language use data into

pedagogy is thus urgently needed.

Pragmatics research has used various ways to capture or elicit authentic data, such as observation of authentic discourse, elicited conversation, role play, discourse completion task (DCT), multiple choice, rating scale, interview, diary, and think-aloud protocols (Kasper 2000). Among them, DCT and questionnaires have been widely used in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics research. However, they have been criticized for providing limited context (Zuskin 1993), and for eliciting a minimal amount of linguistic features (Sasaki 1998, Yuan 2001), a narrow range of semantic formulas (Rose 1994), and biased and aberrant responses (Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones 1989). In addition, DCT methodology perpetuates the focus on a closed set of speech act types identified either by default (e.g., the DCT was designed to elicit requests; therefore, participants' responses must be requests), or by specific linguistic features predetermined to signal a specific speech act (e.g., the use of *I'm sorry* must mean that the elicited speech act is an apology). Because of these methodological shortcomings, L2 researchers have called for further examination of naturally occurring language data to inform the redesign of pragmatic competence measures (Wolfson, Marmor, and Jones 1989). Studying naturally occurring conversations can provide valuable insights into how language is used within longer discourse.

With the aforementioned reasons, the present study aims to provide a better understanding of a particular aspect of pragmatics: the speech act of expressing gratitude by native speakers of English based on naturally occurring conversational data from a corpus. Using corpus as the source of speech act data for analysis—one that bases analysis on large amount of non-elicited real-world use data—helps to reveal how gratitude is expressed in various discourse contexts. There has been little corpus-based research in pragmatics up to now (Aijmer 1996, Koester 2002). It is partly because pragmatics relies on context. In the past, corpora contain only small samples of texts, and they tend to be removed from their social and textual contexts. However, with the increasing availability of new spoken corpora, such as the spoken part of the British National Corpus (BNC), or the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) as well as natural language processing (NLP) tools, a speech act can be explored both quantitatively and qualitatively so that its linguistic realizations and discourse functions in relation to specific discourse contexts can be identified.

Expressing gratitude is a speech act that is taught at an early age, and is commonly performed by native speakers of most languages. It is, thus, often assumed that learners can successfully say *thank you* in the target language. However, research shows that even advanced language learners have difficulty adequately expressing gratitude (Eisenstein and Bodman 1986, 1993, Hinkel 1994). Children are always

taught by parents or care-givers that thanking is a matter of politeness. It is rude if a child or adult fails to sincerely thank someone at the appropriate time. However, like many politeness conventions, there appears to be a large degree of cross-cultural variation in the use and realization of thanking. Therefore, saying *thank you* may pose problems for a second language learner, who needs to know when and how to thank in the target culture (Bodman and Eisenstein 1988, Eisenstein and Bodman 1986, 1993). The problem is typically considered in terms of when and how thanking is an appropriate response to the social situation. As Coulmas (1981:75) put it:

> The social relation of the participants and the inherent properties of the object of gratitude work together to determine the degree of gratefulness that should be expressed in a given situation. Differences in this respect are obviously subject to cultural variation.

Therefore, according to the rules of politeness in a second language community, simply knowing how to say *thank you* in a second language does not mean one is capable of recognizing the situations when thanking is appropriate or the extent to which thanks should be given.

The examples below provide inappropriate usage of thanking in American English (Hinkel 1994:74). In interaction (1), many native English speakers (role A) would probably conclude that the non-native English speaker (role B) did not know how to respond appropriately or that B perceived A's behavior to be particularly generous. Similarly, in interaction (2), native English speakers (role A) might think that the non-native English speaker in role B did not extend sufficient thanks because B did not understand the extent of the assistance A was offering. While B's use of thanks in (1) can be viewed as exaggerated and somewhat ingratiating, the lack of thanks in (2) may be damaging because failing to express thanks when it is expected is unlikely to prompt additional assistance from A in the future. Therefore, when gratitude is successfully expressed, it enhances the feelings of warmth and solidarity; however, if gratitude is not expressed adequately, it causes negative social consequences and may endanger the relationships among interlocutors.

(1) A: *I'm sorry, I can't talk to you right now. I am on my way to a meeting, but we can talk tomorrow.*
   B: *Thank you very much. I'll see you in class. Thank you very much.*
(2) A: *If you cannot find an apartment, you could stay at my house for a week or two.*

B: *Great. It'll give me time to keep looking.* (Hinkel 1994:74)

Showing appreciation has important social value in American English and is used frequently and openly in a wide range of interpersonal relationships: among intimate friends, acquaintances, strangers, and with superiors and subordinates. When people express gratitude successfully, they will have warm feelings about and solidarity with others; however, when people fail to express gratitude or to express it adequately, the relationship between the speaker and the listener may be in danger. According to Apte's (1974) study, expressions of gratitude are much more extensive in American culture than in South Asian communities. Americans verbalize their appreciation for all kinds of big and small favors, gifts, and compliments, and they use those expressions in various situations, such as the exchange of goods, at parties, and with friends. Most of the expressions of gratitude involve the word *thank*, as in *many thanks*, *thank you*, *thank you very much*, *thanks*, *thanks a lot*. Apte also indicated that because of the high frequency of use of these expressions of gratitude in the American speech community, it has come to be used 'more often perhaps in a mechanical rather than in a sincere way' (p. 85). In addition, Hymes (1972) pointed out that there is no one-to-one relationship between a grammatical form and a speech act it realizes. That is, depending on the situation, grammatically identical sentences can function as different speech acts, and conversely, the same speech act can be realized in many different ways.

In Eisenstein and Bodman's (1986) study of the expressions of gratitude used by native speakers of American English, they found that language patterns used in interactions between status unequals and equals are similar. However, they also found that thanks are restrained, or unelaborated in situations where the interlocutors are of unequal status whereas expressions of gratitude among friends contain formulaic thanks and also considerable elaboration. As Eisenstein and Bodman stated in their conclusion, 'Shorter thanking episodes sometimes reflected greater social distance between interlocutors' (p.176). In addition, Hinkel (1994) investigated cultural differences in the attitudes towards the speech act of giving thanks. Results indicate that differences exist between nonnative English language groups (i.e., Chinese, Indonesian, Korean, Japanese, Spanish, and Arabic) and native English speakers in their perception of the appropriateness of certain expressions of thanks. Therefore, contextual and linguistic variables play an important role in speech act interactions.

Previous studies on expressions of gratitude have shown that even though this speech act is taught at an early age and is commonly performed by native speakers of most languages, it is still difficult for advanced learners to adequately express gratitude in English (Eisenstein and Bodman 1986, 1993, Hinkel 1994).

The present study examines how native speakers of English perform the speech act of thanking, taking a corpus-based approach to examining the linguistic features (e.g., *thank you*) in the realization of expressions of gratitude.

2. Methodology

This study investigates native English speakers' performance of the speech act of thanking. The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) and the spoken part of the British National Corpus (BNC) were used in the study. MICASE is a specialized corpus of contemporary university speech recorded at the University of Michigan between 1997 and 2001 (Simpson, Briggs, Ovens, and Swales 2002). It contains approximately 1.7 million words (nearly 200 hours) in 152 speech events. The speech events are categorized according to various contextual variables, including the type of event, the subject area of the event, the extent to which an event is monologic or interactive, and the academic role or level of the majority of participants (e.g., whether the class is a graduate or an undergraduate class, or whether a meeting is primarily of senior faculty members). Similarly, all speakers in the corpus are classified according to several different demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, and academic roles). On the other hand, BNC is a corpus containing 100 million words of samples of written and spoken language from a wide range of sources, designed to represent a wide cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century. We use only the spoken part of the BNC Baby, which is a four million word sampling of the complete BNC. The spoken part consists of orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations and spoken language collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins. Originally we intended to use only MICASE; nevertheless, we found there are few occurrences of gratitude expressions with limited discourse contexts, that is, mostly classroom or laboratory settings in MICASE. In addition, we thought the different composition of the two corpora could probably further reveal interesting comparison and contrast.

Eighteen files from MICASE and ten files from BNC were searched, totaling 666,041 running words. Computer software AntConc 3.01 was used for both concordancing and frequency counting. To tag the various linguistic realizations of the thanking speech act, a coding scheme was first developed, differentiating the discourse functions of different forms of thanking, such as *thank you* as //Ty//, *thanks* as //Ts//, *many thanks*, *thank you very much*, and *thanks a lot* as //Tl//, *it's much appreciated* //AI//.

As indicated earlier, since native speakers of English express their appreciation for all kinds of big and small favors, gifts, and compliments, and they use these expressions for different communicative purposes, it is thus significant to relate linguistic realizations of gratitude to their possible discourse functions and contexts so that the pragmatic appropriateness of each can be revealed. Considering that most of the gratitude expressions involve the words *thank* and *appreciate*, we decided to focus the analysis on these two key words and their variants when searching the corpora.

The next step was context analysis of all occurrences of gratitude expressions containing *thank*, *appreciate* or their variants. Two professors (including the researcher) and one assistant (a graduate student majoring in TESOL) were involved in the analysis. The discourse function (and the code to be tagged on it) of each occurrence was discussed and confirmed by all three research members in the weekly meeting.

Tagging on the electronic files was simultaneously undertaken for the occurrences of gratitude expressions that have been discussed and coded.

3. Analysis of expressions of gratitude

The major topic under investigation is the use of expressions of gratitude by native speakers of English from the corpora of MICASE and BNC. We have categorized the thanking expressions into six major categories: (a) thanking, (b) appreciation, (c) non-gratitude, (d) combinations, (e) thanking a 3rd person, and (f) formal speech. Coding and examples of each category is presented in the following section.

A. Thanking

The thanking strategy consists of two major subcategories: (a) simple thanking, by using the word *thank you* or *thank*, and (b) elaborated thanking, including four sub-subcategories (i) by thanking and adding one intensifier, (ii) by thanking and adding two intensifiers (iii) thanking *for* (reason), by thanking and mentioning the reason, and (iv) thanking + intensifier + *for* (reason), by thanking and adding intensifier(s) and the reason. Coding and examples are provided for each subcategory as follows:

   (a) simple thanking, by using the word *thank you* or *thanks*
- //Ty//   *Thank you.*
- //Ts//   *Thanks.*

   (b) elaborated thanking
     (i)   by thanking and adding one intensifier

- //TI//   *Thank you very much.*
- //TI//   *Thanks a lot.*

(ii) by thanking and adding two intensifiers

- //TII//   *Thank you very much indeed.*

(iii) by thanking and stating the reason (thanking + *for* + reason). The reason is further categorized into three parts: favor (coded as //Rf//), imposition (coded as //Ri//), and positive feelings (coded as //Rp//)

- //TRf//   *Thank you for your consideration and your attention to all of the things that we brought forward.*

(iv) by thanking and adding both intensifier(s) and the reason (thanking + intensifier + *for* + reason).

- //TIRf//   *Thank you very much for showing us your home.*

B. Appreciation

Three subcategories were identified in the appreciation strategy: (a) by showing appreciation and adding intensifier(s), (b) by showing appreciation and stating the reason, and (c) by showing appreciation and adding intensifier(s) and the reason. Coding and examples are provided for each subcategory as follows:

(a) by showing appreciation and adding intensifier(s)

- //AI//   *It's much appreciated.*

(b) by showing appreciation and stating the reason.

- //ARf//   *If you don't want to be public about it and will tell me later, I'd appreciate that.*

(c) by showing appreciation and adding both intensifier(s) and the reason.

- //AIRf//   *We would really appreciate it if you could come.*

C. Non-gratitude

The non-gratitude strategy consists of three subcategories: (a) by showing relief, (b) by rejecting an offer, and (c) by showing politeness, greeting, and conversation ending. Coding and examples are provided for each subcategory as follows:

(a) by showing relief

- //NGr//   *Thank goodness.*
- //NGr//   *Thank God for that.*

(b) by rejecting an offer

- //NGo//   *No, thanks.*
- //NGo//   *I can manage on my own. Thank you.*

(c) by showing politeness, greeting, and conversation ending
- /NGp//   Sure? *I'm positive, thank you.*
- /NGp//   Are you alright? *Yes, thank you.*
- /NGp//   Have a nice day. *Thank you, you too.*

D. Combinations

This category is a combination of different strategies. Two subcategories were identified: (a) by thanking and stating the reason, and (b) by thanking and adding intensifier(s) and the reason. Coding and examples are provided for each subcategory as follows:

(a) by thanking and stating the reason
- //Ty//+/Rp// *Thank you dear. Very kind of you.*
- //Ty//+//Ri// *Thank you. Disturb you again.*

(b) by thanking and adding intensifier(s) and the reason
- //TI//+//Rf// *Thank you thank you. I got to use your hat.*
- //TI//+//Ri// *Thank you very much. I'm sorry to bother you.*

E. Thanking a 3rd person

The "thanking a 3rd person" strategy consists of two subcategories: (a) by thanking a 3rd person and stating the reason, and (b) by thanking a 3rd person and adding intensifier(s) and the reason. Coding and examples are provided for each subcategory as follows:

(a) by thanking a 3rd person and stating the reason
- //ToRf//   *It falls uh to me on your behalf uh to thank uh, Gary Glick for a talk.*

(b) by thanking a 3rd person and adding intensifier(s) and the reason
- //TIoRf//   *Many thanks to Eunice and Matt for lots of hard work and for really making a big leap forward and for going from where we were in Chicago in terms of text to where we are today.*

F. Formal speech

The formal speech strategy uses overt subjects, such as 'I' or 'we', in thanking expressions. Three subcategories were identified in this strategy: (a) by formally thanking and stating the reason, (b) by formally thanking a 3rd person, and (c) by

formally thanking a 3rd person, and stating the reason. Coding and examples are provided for each subcategory as follows:

(a) by formally thanking and stating the reason (favor or positive feeling)
- //FTRp// *I thank you, Pam, because I think the committee's done a great job.*
- //FTRf// *I want to thank you for soliciting our ideas and concerns, as you deliberate and develop the item and test specifications for the Voluntary National Eighth Grade Math Test.*

(b) by formally thanking a 3rd person
- //FTo// *The committee would like to publicly thank Garland Hershey and Dick McCormick and their offices.*

(c) by formally thanking a 3rd person, and stating the reason
- //FToRf// *We'd like to thank Garland Hershey and Dick McCormick and especially the staffs in their offices for all the help they've given us this past year in gathering the data for the glass ceiling study that we are currently engaged in, and hopefully next year we will have in our report the conclusions from that study.*

We did not count the instances when *thank you* or *appreciate* does not have an illocutionary force or when it is used in indirect speech. Following are some of the examples that were not coded for analysis:
- *Stuart said thank you.*
- *Why are you saying thank you.*
- *I don't wish to learn thank you.*
- *He said he didn't wanna know thank you.*
- *We don't have it very often. I suppose you appreciate it more when you….*

4. Results and discussion

Thanking is easy to recognize because the speaker almost always uses an explicit expression, such as *thank you* or *thanks*. Based on the previous categorization, a total of 342 instances of expressions of gratitude involving *thank* or *appreciate* were identified from both corpora, with 144 (42.11%) from MICASE, and 198 (57.89%)

from BNC, averaging 5.14 strategies per 10,000 words. Table 1 shows the frequency of the major categories of strategies involving *thank* or *appreciate* and their variants.

Table 1. Frequency of major categories of expressions of gratitude

Strategy	MICASE	BNC	Total
Thanking	110 (76.39%)	147 (74.24%)	257 (75.15%)
Appreciation	7 (4.86%)	0 (0.00%)	7 (2.05%)
Non-gratitude	15 (10.42%)	47 (23.74%)	62 (18.13%)
Combinations	3 (2.08%)	4 (2.02%)	7 (2.05%)
Thanking a 3rd person	5 (3.47%)	0 (0.00%)	5 (1.46%)
Formal speech	4 (2.78%)	0 (0.00%)	4 (1.17%)
Total	144 (100.00%)	198 (100.00%)	342 (100.00%)

The overall use of strategies in both corpora shows that the most frequent strategy is the thanking strategy, which constitutes 75.15% of the coded expressions. The second most frequent strategy is non-gratitude strategy (18.13%). The other four strategies constitute only 6.73% of the total occurrences, with 1-2% for each strategy.

Of all the expressions of thanking, instances that show a combination of thanking strategies constitute 2.05% with a total of seven instances, three from MICASE and four from BNC. These combinations all include simple thanking and stating the reason or thanking with an intensifier or reason.

Further analysis of the subcategories of all thanking strategies reveals, as shown in Table 2, that simple thanking *thank you* is most frequently used in both MICASE (60%) and BNC (71.43%), whereas simple thanking *thanks* has a fairly low percentage in each corpus, with 9.09% in MICASE and 4.08% in BNC. This systematic finding in both corpora indicates that *thank you* is much more conventional and well-accepted than *thanks*, and thus is used in wider different contexts (e.g., whether it is formal or informal) or with wider range of social relationships.

Table 2. Frequency of subcategories of the thanking strategy

Thanking strategy	MICASE	BNC	Total
Simple thanking			
thank you	66 (60.00%)	105 (71.43%)	171 (66.54%)
thanks	10 (9.09%)	6 (4.08%)	16 (6.23%)
Elaborated thanking			
thanking + intensifier	25 (22.73%)	31 (21.09%)	56 (21.79%)
thanking + intensifier + intensifier	0 (0.00%)	4 (2.72%)	4 (1.56%)
thanking + *for* (reason)	4 (3.64%)	1 (0.68%)	5 (1.95%)
thanking + intensifier + *for* (reason)	5 (4.55%)	0 (0.00%)	5 (1.95%)
Total	110 (100.00%)	147 (100.00%)	257 (100.00%)

With respect to elaborated thanking, the most frequently used method is intensification. The strategy of thanking + one intensifier is the second frequent strategy in both corpora: MICASE (22.73%) and BNC (21.09%). The most frequently used intensifier, as can be expected, is *very much*. Thus, *thank you very much* may be considered as a formulaic thanking expression. (*Thanks very much* has much fewer occurrences, however.) Other intensifiers include *a lot* and *so*. However, we can note that *thanks a lot* is used but *thank you a lot* is not. Two interesting instances in this thanking + one intensifier subcategory are *thank you thank you* and *very much thank you*. (In the former, the second *thank you* was coded as an intensifier.) Another subcategory includes thanking with two intensifiers. Only four cases were found in this subcategory and all of them were from BNC. The intensifiers used are as follows: *very much + indeed/much obliged*. Five cases were found in the strategy of thanking + intensifier + *for* + reason, all from MICASE. For example, "Well, thank you very much for your statement" or "Thank you very much Professor Veltman for a marvelous introduction to the mysterious world of particle physics." It seems this strategy is mainly used in more formal contexts and occasions such as in invited lectures or when comments are given, as shown in the above examples. We may also note that in the second example the name of the person to whom gratitude is shown is articulated. Only one instance of thanking + *for* (reason) / thanking + intensifier + *for* (reason) was found in BNC.

Compared with the BNC data, the MICASE data show more varieties of strategies, such as appreciation, thanking a 3rd person, and formal speech, which were not found in BNC. A possible reason is that, as mentioned earlier, the data in MICASE are mostly classroom lectures, some of which, in particular, are invited speeches, thus, the

more formal thanking strategies such as thanking a 3rd person or formal speech strategies may occur. In contrast, the spoken data in BNC are largely informal conversations that rely mostly on general thanking and non-gratitude strategies.

The function of thanking is not restricted to showing gratitude. Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) mentioned that the uses of *thank you* from Rubin's (1983) study showed that *thank you* can refer to gratitude and also other discourse functions, such as complimenting or signaling the closing of a conversation, or 'bald' thank you at service encounters. In addition, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) indicated that *thank you* can also be used ironically and can have the illocutionary function of accepting or rejecting an offer. Similarly, the results of the present study show that *thank you* has other discourse functions than expressing gratitude. In the non-gratitude strategy category, we identified three major subcategories: relief, rejection of an offer, and politeness, greetings, and conversation endings. As shown in Table 3, the category of politeness, greeting, and conversational ending constitutes more than half of the instances of this strategy. In addition, most instances in the three subcategories were found in BNC. Only one instance of relief and one instance of rejection of an offer were found in MICASE. The use of thanking as an expression of relief has seldom been mentioned in previous studies, but this usage was found in the present study.

Table 3. Frequency of subcategories of non-gratitude strategy

Strategy	MICASE	BNC	Total
Relief	1 (6.67%)	10 (21.28%)	11 (17.74%)
Rejection to an offer	1 (6.67%)	17 (36.17%)	18 (29.03%)
Politeness, greeting, conversational ending	13 (86.67%)	20 (42.55%)	33 (53.23%)
Total	15 (100.00%)	47 (100.00%)	62 (100.00%)

Since the thanking expressions of the non-gratitude strategy are not used to express gratitude, they may cause misunderstanding in social interactions, particularly for non-native speakers of English. Therefore, the social contexts in which the non-gratitude strategy may occur as well as the formulaic sequences involved should worth our special attention. Following are three examples showing each of the three subcategories of the non-gratitude strategy.

(1) Relief

> *I didn't know whether to put that out or er.*
>
> *No. No no.*
>
> *I done it right?*
>
> *Perfect. Absolutely perfect.*
>
> *Thank god for that.*

(2) Rejection to an offer

> *Or do you want something else this time?*
>
> *No.*
>
> *Sure?*
>
> *I'm positive thank you.*

(3) Politeness, greeting, conversational ending

> *Hello. How's your husband?*
>
> *He's doing fine thank you.*
>
> *Oh that's good.*

In the first example, the first speaker feels relieved after being confirmed that she has executed the task correctly. In this case, *Thank god for that* could be viewed as a conventionalized expression of relief. The second speaker in the next example uses *thank you* to politely reject an offer. The thanking expression here may be considered as a conversational politeness strategy to redress one's imposition as a result of his or her rejection of an offer. In the last example, thanking accompanying the response ("He's doing fine.") to greeting is common in daily conversations.

It is worth noting that *thank you* is used as a response to expressions of gratitude. This usage is rarely mentioned in previous studies on expressions of gratitude. It is not commonly mentioned in typical conversational textbooks, either (Schauer and Adolph, 2006). However, of all the coded expressions, 25 instances (6.85%) were identified as responses to thanking. The following examples show this usage.

(4)   *… And so you are an important part of this. I'm glad you're here. I'm glad we're having this meeting. I'm looking forward to it. Thank you.*
DOSSEY: Thank you, Gary.

(5)   *S1: … thank you very much Gary for a splendid lecture.*
<APPLAUSE>
S3: thank you.

As indicated earlier in the research methodology section, DCT and questionnaire provide only limited context with elicited responses while the corpus-based approach

can reveal how speech acts are performed in various real-life interactions. In this study, it was found that thanking is used in some special contexts. For example, *thank you* can be used after a request or command, suggesting the speaker's disapproval of the other interlocutor's behavior. In such case, the tone can be sarcastic or stern. In the following example, the mother is commanding her daughter not to touch her Walkman.

(6) *Daughter: Well, what are you la like that for?*
    Mother: Leave that please!
               Don't touch it thank you!
               This is my personal stereo Walkman.

Thankers may use the initial thanking as a pre-request and wait for a response which allows verification of the degree of their indebtedness involved (Aston 1995).

In addition to the explicit expressions of *thank you* or *thanks*, another explicit expression *appreciate* in the appreciation strategy, has only 7 instances (2.06%) and all of them were from MICASE. Most occurrences of *appreciate* are accompanied by a request or wish, which can either precede or follow the word, as shown in example (7) when the instructor is asking the students to come to a forum.

(7) *This forum is going to be this coming Tuesday, January 17th, at*
    5:00 in the 24. Student Union, Room 205 and 206. We would
    really appreciate it if you could come. Thank you.

Neither *appreciation* nor *appreciative(ly)* occurs in either corpus. It seems, thus, the appreciation strategy is not so commonly used in daily interactions.

5. Pedagogical implications

Language teaching materials should equip learners with a repertoire of conversation strategies that learners may use in a given context. Research findings thus provide a very useful source for language textbooks. My brief survey of ten ESL conversation or speaking textbooks shows that the introduction of conversation strategies and speech acts are included in most of the textbooks; however, the speech act of expressions of gratitude appears only in one textbook: Viney's (2004) *Survival English: International communication for professional people*. The lack of the introduction of expressions of gratitude in ESL textbooks may be due to the general belief that expressing gratitude is not a difficult task for learners.

One of Viney's (2004:24) textbook units introduces polite exchanges between the host and the guests before the guests leaving a social dinner or event. Some thanking expressions listed are as follows:

(host) Thank you for coming.
(guest) Thank you for inviting us. We've had a really wonderful evening.
(guest) Thank you for a nice evening. I really enjoyed it.
(guest) Thanks for dinner!
(guest) Thank you for having us! I haven't enjoyed myself so much for a long time! It was a wonderful evening!

Compared with the findings of the present study, only one thanking strategy (thanking and stating the reason) is introduced in this context. This finding indicates the insufficient connection between research and textbooks. In addition, Schauer and Adolphs (2006) investigated expressions of gratitude in four textbooks and found that all of them contain simple thanking strategy (*thanks/thank you*), but two beginner level textbooks do not contain the strategy of thanking and stating the reason. It is hoped that findings of the present study not only provide learners with a wider variety of formulaic expressions of gratitude than those presented in the current teaching materials, but also provide teachers and textbook developers with additional resources and materials to incorporate in their teaching.

6. Conclusion

The present study uses a corpus approach to examine the speech act of expressions of gratitude. Since a corpus captures language use by a wide range of speakers and in a wide variety of contexts and social relationships, corpus-based research is aimed to provide evidence of patterns in the language use. Thanking is probably one of the most stereotypical speech acts since speakers almost always use some form of *thank you/thanks* in various contexts. The findings of the present study confirm that *thank you* is the most frequently used strategy.

In addition to its use as an expression of gratitude, *thank you* is often used for other functions, such as showing relief, rejecting an offer, greeting, showing politeness or as conversation ending. Interestingly, this non-gratitude category, which constitutes the second most frequently used thanking strategy, has not received much attention in the previous research. Future research is needed to explore the non-gratitude function of thanking expressions, and to understand how these expressions are appropriately presented in various contexts. It is hoped that the

findings of the present study shed lights on the field of second language learning and teaching, and on the development of second language textbooks.

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以語料庫為依據之感激用語的分析研究

鄭維容

國立交通大學

　　本論文利用語料庫來檢視以英語為母語的人士如何在現實生活中表示感激。本論文使用兩個著名的口語語料庫，一是密西根學術口語語料庫（Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English, or MICASE），以及英國國家語料庫的口語部分 British National Corpus（BNC, the spoken part）。這兩個口語語料庫都包括了各種類型的情境和說話者，與各種不同形式的互動。本文以質性與量性的方式分析以英語為母語的人士在各種情境中表達感激的方式，並將感激用語分為六大類。分析結果顯示以英語為母語的人士最常使用 *thanks* 和 *thank you* 兩種感激用語。另外，研究成果亦歸納出 *thanks* 和 *thank you* 的各種不同的功用。例如，他們可以用於表示禮貌，回覆別人的感激，回絕他人的贈與或邀請，以及當作是對話的結束語，這類的用法多出現在 BNC 語料庫。MICASE 語料庫則有較多的 *appreciate* 用法，感謝第三者，以及在正式演講場合所使用的較為正式的感謝用語。對外語學習者而言，表達感激的方式就像其他語言行為一樣需要加強學習。尤其要學習在適當的時間與情境下，表達適宜的感激方式。

關鍵詞：語用學，語料庫，言談行為，第二語言習得，感激