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Thanking strategies in Ghanaian English and Ugandan English: A corpus-based study

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A B S T R A C T

This paper investigates thanking strategies in Ghanaian and Ugandan Englishes, using a corpus-based approach to analyse patterns of gratitude expressions. Drawing on data from the Ghanaian and Ugandan components of the International Corpus of English, the study adopts a variational pragmatic framework to examine the frequency, formal properties, and distribution of various expressions of gratitude across different text types. The results show that both varieties favour *thank explicitly* and *stress gratitude* as thanking strategies, with *thank explicitly* occurring most frequently, often accompanied by expressions of appreciation for the addressee or the act itself. Optional complements, which are additional elements that expand a thanking expression but are not grammatically required, such as intensifiers, reasons for gratitude, and mentions of benefactors, are commonly used to reinforce sincerity in both varieties. The findings also show unique features: while *thank a supernatural being* appears in both varieties, *prayer* is used exclusively in Ugandan English, highlighting cultural influences in gratitude expression. This study contributes to the empirical description of pragmatic variation in postcolonial Englishes and offers valuable insights into cross-cultural communication in multilingual contexts.
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1. Introduction

Thanking is a communicative act in which a speaker shows gratitude or appreciation to another person or entity, usually in response to a favour, service, or benefit received. It is a fundamental aspect of human communication, reflecting social norms and cultural values. Although there is an increasing body of research on the speech act of thanking within world Englishes, these studies have concentrated on Inner Circle varieties, such as British English (BrE) and American English (AmE) (Cheng, 2010; Schauer and Adolphs, 2006; Eisenstein and Bodman, 1993) and learner English (Hesabi and Azima, 2015; Hinkel, 1994). The few studies on thanking expressions within postcolonial contexts have focused on Hong Kong English (Wong, 2010), South Asian Englishes (Funke, 2022), Filipino English (Calingasan et al., 2023), and Nigerian English (NigE) (Gut and Unuabonah, 2024; Utin, 2024). Some of these studies have compared thanking strategies between different Inner Circle Englishes, including BrE and New Zealand English (NZE) (Jautz, 2013). These studies indicate that the selection of thanking strategies and their functions differ among English varieties. However, research on thanking strategies in other postcolonial Englishes, such as Ghanaian English (GhE) and Ugandan English (UgE), especially using a corpus-based approach, remains scarce.

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This study addresses the existing gap by exploring the expression of gratitude in GhE and UgE, aiming to uncover the unique linguistic features and cultural influences that shape its expression in the two varieties. This research is significant because thanking strategies often differ across cultures, as each culture embeds unique values, customs, and social norms into various expressions (Watts, 2003). Understanding these variations in thanking practices can offer valuable insights into pragmatic variations within these communities, making it a crucial area of investigation within postcolonial pragmatics, which is an area that describes how pragmatic strategies operate in multilingual postcolonial settings. Thus, this paper aims to answer the following research questions:

i. What thanking strategies do GhE and UgE speakers employ in their utterances?
ii. What expressions of gratitude are used?
iii. How do these strategies differ in various text types?

In this section, we have provided the background to the study. Section 2 provides a brief overview of GhE and UgE; Section 3 focuses on the speech act of thanking; Section 4 discusses the theoretical framework; Section 5 presents the data and methods; Section 6 reports the results; and Section 7 discusses the findings. The study is concluded in Section 8.

2. English in Ghana and Uganda

English was introduced in Ghana in the 16th century, initially through trade and the transatlantic slave trade, and later consolidated by colonial administration. In contrast, its introduction to Uganda in the 19th century resulted solely from British colonial activities (Gut, 2017; Ssempuuma, 2012). In Ghana, English co-exists with approximately 73 indigenous languages, such as Akan, Ewe, and Ga, while in Uganda, it exists alongside about 41 indigenous languages, including Ateso, Luganda, and Rutooro (Eberhard et al., 2025). The interaction between English and these local languages, combined with various socio-historical factors, including colonial input, endonormative processes and attitudes (Wolf, 2021), has shaped the development of GhE and UgE. Today, English serves as the official language in Ghana and a co-official language (with Swahili) in Uganda and is used in domains such as law, media, education, commerce, and government administration (Gut, 2017; Meierkord, 2016a). Although English is mainly a second language (L2) for most speakers, it has become the first language (L1) for a growing number of young people, particularly in urban areas (Isingoma and Meierkord, 2016; Huber, 2008). According to Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model for the development of postcolonial Englishes, GhE is currently in the nativisation phase, while UgE is undergoing processes of nativisation (Nassenstein, 2016; Ssempuuma, 2012), where local linguistic and cultural influences have become more embedded in these varieties.

Numerous studies have examined the phonological (e.g., Meierkord, 2016b; Mintah, 2015), lexico-semantic (e.g., Isingoma, 2016; Ngula, 2014), and syntactic (e.g., Isingoma, 2021a; Brato, 2020) features of these two varieties. Recent focus on the pragmatic features of these two varieties has mainly addressed politeness strategies (e.g., Isingoma, 2021b; Anderson, 2009), speech acts (e.g., Meierkord, 2023; Anchimbe, 2018), pragmatic markers (e.g., Unuabonah and Daniel, 2025; Meierkord and Isingoma, 2021), and politeness markers (e.g., Unuabonah et al., 2026; Unuabonah et al., 2025). While a few have considered interjections in GhE (e.g., Anderson et al., 2024; Unuabonah and Anderson, 2023), others have carried out a comparative analysis of pragmatic features between the two varieties (e.g., Unuabonah, 2026; Unuabonah et al., 2025). Although some studies, such as Anderson (2009) and Isingoma (2021b), have explored politeness strategies and responses to thanking in these varieties, respectively, research specifically addressing thanking strategies in GhE and UgE remains noticeably limited.

3. The speech act of thanking

Thanking is an illocutionary act by which a speaker conveys gratitude or appreciation to a hearer for a perceived benefit, action, or favour that positively affects the speaker, often with the intention of maintaining politeness, social harmony, or interpersonal relationships (Holmes, 1984). Searle (1969) classifies thanking as an expressive speech act in which speakers express their emotions or attitudes toward a specific person or situation. Numerous scholars argue that thanking is a universal illocutionary act, present across various languages and cultures (Aijmer, 1996; Schneider, 2005; Coulmas, 1981). According to Jung (1994), expressions of gratitude play a crucial role in building rapport between speakers. He also notes that such expressions can fulfill different functions depending on the context, such as initiating or ending a conversation, bidding farewell, or providing positive feedback. Aijmer (1996: 78) describes thanking as a stereotypical speech act, since phrases like *thank you* or *thanks* are almost always used when speakers wish to express gratitude. Similarly, Jautz (2008: 142) adds that expressions of gratitude are employed "when a speaker wants the addressee to know that s/he is grateful for what the addressee has said or done."

3.1. Thanking strategies

Thanking can be communicated through a variety of linguistic strategies, which encompass the different methods people use to express gratitude in their interactions, making them crucial for understanding pragmatic and sociolinguistic dimensions of language use. This study adopts a classification scheme for thanking strategies based primarily on Aijmer (1996), adapted to suit

the GhE and UgE data. The framework comprises eight main strategies, as shown in Fig. 1. These strategies were used as the basis for coding and analysing all thanking expressions in the Ghanaian and Ugandan corpora. The framework allows for a systematic identification of both explicit and implicit realisations of gratitude across different text types. Aijmer (1996: 37) categorises these strategies into explicit and implicit forms, which can be further divided into emotional and non-emotional strategies (see Fig. 1). Explicit strategies include thanking somebody directly, expressing gratitude, and acknowledging a debt of gratitude. These may appear either in an emotional form, such as *thank you* or *I am grateful*, or in a non-emotional form like *I owe a debt of gratitude to*…. Implicit strategies, on the other hand, convey gratitude without overtly using a thanking formula. Emotional implicit strategies include expressions that highlight appreciation of the addressee or the act (e.g. *that's kind of you*, *that's lovely*), or that emphasise heightened feelings (e.g. *oh, thank you*). Non-emotional implicit strategies may also occur, such as instances where speakers downplay their own role through self-denigration (e.g. *I'm so careless*).

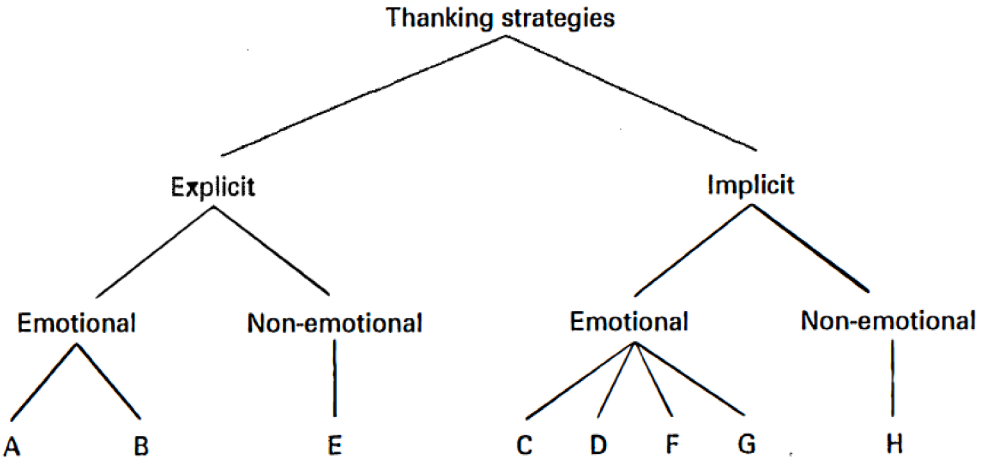


Fig. 1. Classification of thanking strategies (Aijmer, 1996: 37).

Aijmer (1996: 46) further differentiates between simple and intensified expressions of gratitude. In her study, intensified expressions of gratitude appear in nearly half of the examples (53.5 % for intensified *thanks* and 40.7 % for intensified *thank you*). These expressions are often strengthened by using intensifying adverbs such as "*thank you very much (indeed)*, *thank you so much*, *thanks awfully*, and *thanks a lot*. Aijmer (1996: 48) also identifies what she terms "compound thanks," which involves combining different thanking strategies. For example, a speaker might express appreciation for the addressee (e.g., *thank you, that's nice of you*) or for the act itself (e.g., *thank you, that's lovely*). These strategies can be mixed with one another and with the basic expression of gratitude to create a wide range of thanking forms. In Aijmer's corpus data, 12.8 % of the thanking expressions involve such combinations, with the most common combination being a basic expression of *thanks*/*thank you*, followed by an appreciation of the act.

Jautz (2013) compares the use of thanking formulae in NZE and BrE by analysing approximately one million words from the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English and the spoken section of the British National Corpus (BNC). The findings reveal notable differences in how expressions of gratitude are used across these two English varieties. Specifically, BrE speakers tend to use significantly more thanking formulae and demonstrate a broader range of expressions of gratitude than their NZE counterparts. This suggests that BrE speakers employ a more diverse set of linguistic strategies when expressing thanks, potentially reflecting cultural or pragmatic variations between the two groups. Jautz (2013) identifies several types of optional complements or modifications in expressions of gratitude. These are elements that, while not

obligatory, accompany and enrich the expression of gratitude. First, speakers can identify the benefactor, as in (1). Second, they might explain the reason for their gratitude, as in (2). Lastly, gratitude expressions can be intensified, as demonstrated in (3) and (4), by using adverbs like *very* and *ever so*, which enhance or amplify the expression of gratitude (Ito and Tagliamonte, 2003: 258).

(1) Thank you uh *Mister Appiah* (ICE-GH_S1B_026)
(2) Thanks *for your time* (ICE-UG_W1B-012)
(3) I am *exceptionally* grateful to all of you (ICE-GH_S2B-024)
(4) I want to appreciate you *so very much* for sharing your afternoon with me (ICE-UG_S2A-055)

English speakers employ various thanking expressions and linguistic strategies to convey gratitude, adapting them to different discourse functions and contexts. These variations are often influenced by speakers' cultural backgrounds or exposure to different cultural environments.

3.2. Thanking strategies in world Englishes

Previous research on thanking has demonstrated significant variation across different varieties of the same language, signifying that language communities are not homogenous (e.g., Funke, 2022; Jautz, 2013; Cheng, 2010; Wong, 2010). For example, Cheng (2010) examines the speech act of thanking in BrE and AmE using data from two corpora: the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English and the spoken component of the BNC. The study categorises thanking expressions into six distinct types: (a) thanking, which involves direct expressions of gratitude; (b) appreciation; (c) non-gratitude, which encompasses expressions that do not convey gratitude but serve other functions; (d) combinations, which include multiple strategies occurring within a single utterance; (e) thanking a third person, directed toward someone other than the interlocutor; and (f) formal speech. Findings from the study reveal that the thanking category was the most commonly used strategy, while the non-gratitude category, which includes thanking expressions that do not convey genuine gratitude but serve other pragmatic functions such as expressing relief, politely refusing offers, greeting, taking leave, or ending conversations, is the second most frequent. These results suggest that thanking expressions in BrE and AmE are versatile and multifunctional, often extending beyond their primary purpose of expressing gratitude to serve various communicative functions across different contexts.

Few studies have explored thanking strategies in postcolonial varieties of English. Wong (2010) explores the expressions of gratitude, *thanks a lot* and *thank you very much* in the Hong Kong component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-HK). The study reveals that expressions of gratitude in Hong Kong English are typically concise, with *thanks* and *thank you* being the most frequently used forms. These expressions often function as closing signals in conversations and frequently constitute a complete conversational turn, indicating their role in ending interactions or concluding exchanges. The research posits that repetitive gratitude formulae and expressions of appreciation towards interlocutors, whether within a single turn or across multiple turns, are notably rare. This observation suggests a cultural tendency towards reservation in expressing gratitude openly and explicitly, reflecting a more restrained approach to verbal expressions of thanks in Hong Kong English. Furthermore, Wong's study observes that responses to acts of thanking are infrequent in ICE-HK, with only a limited number of strategies for responding to gratitude represented. The paper also examines the pedagogical implications of these findings, emphasising how an understanding of these gratitude patterns can inform the teaching of *thank you* expressions in second or foreign language contexts.

Likewise, Funke (2022) investigates the pragmatic nativisation of thanking strategies in South Asian Englishes by analysing data from the spoken sections of the British, Indian, and Sri Lankan components of the International Corpus of English. Pragmatic nativisation refers to the process through which speakers adapt English pragmatic norms, such as the use of speech acts like thanking, to align with local cultural values, communicative conventions, and interactional preferences. The study utilises a combination of conditional inference tree analysis and random forest models to determine the key predictors influencing the choice of thanking strategies. The results indicate that factors such as age, the benefactor's identity, the use of intensifiers, and the specific variety of English significantly influence the choice of thanking strategies. The interaction between these factors also highlights the complexity of pragmatic variation in postcolonial Englishes. The study finds that thanking strategies in South Asian Englishes possess unique characteristics shaped by socio-cultural norms, underscoring the process of pragmatic nativisation and contributing to the broader discourse on variational pragmatics.

Calingasan et al. (2023) examine 279 instances of gratitude expressions from Filipino speakers of English, drawing data from the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PHI). The study utilises Wong's (2010) framework for categorising thanking strategies and identifies ten distinct types of thanking strategies employed by Filipino speakers. The findings reveal that "thanking + alerter" is the most frequently used, indicating its prominent role in expressing gratitude among Filipino English speakers. Additionally, the study finds that speakers frequently combine strategies, such as "thanking + alerters + stating a reason" and "thanking + stating beneficiary's feelings." These combinations allow speakers to add layers of meaning and context to their expressions of thanks, demonstrating the versatility and adaptability of thanking strategies in this postcolonial variety of English.

Utin (2024) investigates the conversational routines of thanking in spoken NigE by examining three different types of speech interactions: face-to-face conversations, telephone conversations, and votes of thanks. The study shows that thanking serves a range of functions beyond merely expressing gratitude, functioning as expressive, commissive, and requestive speech acts. This expanded classification underscores the diverse roles that thanking can play in conversations. In

their study of NigE, Gut and Unuabonah (2024) explore the nativisation process through analyses of thanking strategies, linguistic expressions, and structural patterns, comparing their findings with those of other English varieties. They analyse expressions of gratitude from over 1300 thanking speech acts elicited from Nigerian speakers of English through discourse completion tasks and 628 thanking speech acts identified across various text categories within the International Corpus of English-Nigeria (ICE-NIG). The findings reveal several unique strategies and forms of expressing gratitude in NigE. These distinct forms and strategies are not just variations from other English varieties but also reflect deeper nativisation processes influenced by local cultural norms and communicative practices.

While expressions of gratitude across various English varieties are often linked to cultural norms within different speaker communities, there remains a gap in studies focused on expressions of gratitude in GhE and UgE. Given that these varieties may exhibit unique patterns due to the influence of local cultural and communicative norms in these postcolonial contexts (Anchimbe, 2018; Schneider, 2007), exploring how these patterns manifest is crucial. This study seeks to deepen our understanding of variation in gratitude expressions between these two English varieties by employing the theoretical frameworks of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron, 2008) and postcolonial pragmatics (Anchimbe, 2018).

4. Theoretical framework

This study adopts two complementary theories: variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron, 2008) and postcolonial pragmatics (Anchimbe, 2018). Variational pragmatics explores how language use varies across different English varieties, based on a range of social and contextual factors. This field captures the intersection between pragmatics and dialectology, focusing on how pragmatic norms and practices differ based on macro-social variables such as region, age, gender, social class, and ethnicity (Schneider, 2021). In addition to these social factors, variational pragmatics examines how context-specific elements such as discourse types, genres, registers, and levels of formality influence pragmatic variation (Barron et al., 2015). Variational pragmatics operates on the principles of empiricity, contrastivity, and comparability. Empiricity ensures that analyses are grounded in data from real-world language use, while contrastivity involves comparing different language varieties to highlight variations. Comparability allows researchers to assess and compare pragmatic features, using comparable datasets (Barron et al., 2015).

Anchimbe (2018) introduced the concept of postcolonial pragmatics to describe how pragmatic strategies operate in multilingual postcolonial settings. Anchimbe (2018) subsequently expanded this framework to account for the influence of colonial histories and sociolinguistic ecologies on communicative behaviour in postcolonial Englishes. Postcolonial pragmatics examines how the interaction between indigenous and colonial languages shapes pragmatic norms and strategies, including speech acts, politeness conventions, and discourse practices. It focuses on how language users in formerly colonised regions negotiate identities and social relationships through their linguistic choices. These choices often integrate local linguistic traditions with the introduced colonial language, reflecting both adaptation to and departures from colonial legacies (see also Schneider, 2007).

Anchimbe (2018) argues that this framework investigates the various forms, functions, and effects of hybrid discourse in postcolonial speech contexts. He observes that the lives of postcolonial language users—whose identities, relationships, living conditions, communicative needs, and social perceptions have been historically shaped by the complex social environments into which they were born—are central to postcolonial pragmatics. This field seeks to explain hybrid postcolonial pragmatic practices in ways that are understandable within the societies in which they occur. It focuses specifically on these variant features and explores their social and cultural significance.

Postcolonial pragmatics examines all manifestations of discourse in postcolonial contexts, where interlocutors' behavior is influenced by, or can be explained with reference to, the transfer of pragmatic assumptions, expectations, or strategies from one ethnic, cultural, or linguistic frame of reference to another. Such influences include postcolonial "refunctionalizations" of Western speech acts, discourse markers, contextualization cues, and conversational routines. For example, the ways in which gratitude is expressed in postcolonial varieties of English can reveal much about the cultural and historical influences on language use. Speakers may combine traditional forms of expression with adaptations of colonial language practices to navigate social interactions and assert their cultural identity (see Schneider and Barron, 2008).

This blending of linguistic forms and pragmatic practices highlights the dynamic nature of language in postcolonial contexts, where communicative strategies continuously evolve in response to local sociocultural norms and historical experiences. The framework of postcolonial pragmatics provides a valuable perspective for examining the impact of multilingualism and the interaction of various language varieties in postcolonial settings. It sheds light on how speakers navigate language choices and usage in environments shaped by multiple linguistic and cultural influences, thereby deepening our understanding of communicative practices in these complex contexts (Schröder and Schneider, 2018).

5. Data and method

The research data were sourced from the Ghanaian and Ugandan components of the International Corpus of English (ICE), specifically ICE-GH and ICE-UG (Huber and Dako, 2013; Meierkord and Isingoma, 2022). Both corpora were similarly structured, comprising approximately one million words each, with around 600,000 words from spoken texts and 400,000 words from written texts. The data included a variety of text types, such as conversations, academic writings, press reportage, and novels. The total word counts for the two corpora were 949,334 for ICE-GH and 970,983 for ICE-UG. For this

study, cross-examinations were excluded from ICE-GH to match the content of ICE-UG, which also did not include cross-examinations.

To address the research objectives regarding thanking speech acts in GhE and UgE, corpus searches and concordance analyses were performed to explore thanking strategies, their frequency, forms, and occurrence in different text types. The searches specifically targeted expressions identified by Aijmer (1996: 37) as forms of thanking, including *thanks*, *thank you*, *grateful*, *appreciate*, and other contextually relevant expressions of gratitude. The corpus analysis tool AntConc (Anthony, 2015) was utilised for this purpose, with the data subsequently undergoing manual review to remove instances where expressions of thanks were not genuine indications of gratitude, as in (5), (6), and (7). The final dataset comprised 371 thanking speech acts in ICE-GH and 699 in ICE-UG, distributed across different text types. The data underwent both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis involved a detailed examination of the texts, enabling the coding of data based on their pragmatic strategies, linguistic expressions, optional complements, and occurrences in different text types (e.g., conversations and business letters). The quantitative analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics to calculate absolute and relative frequencies expressed in percentages and per million words. This research adopted a variational pragmatics approach, systematically analysing intralingual variation based on region and text type (Barron, 2014).

(5) It's easy to find people who claim to be very well acquainted who have never met one on one, *thanks to the mobile phone*. (ICE-GH_W1A-008)
(6) *Thanks to modern technology*, there are devices such as tear gas which can be sprayed (ICE-GH_W2B-028)
(7) She painfully hauled her body to the gate, *thanks to the helping hands of my* gate man who saw her from. (ICE-UG_W1B-014)

6. Results

6.1. Thanking strategies in GhE and UgE

Fig. 2 presents the various thanking strategies used by GhE and UgE speakers, along with their relative frequencies. UgE speakers use six out of the eight strategies identified by Aijmer (1996: 37), while GhE speakers use five. Neither variety exhibit instances of *appreciate addressee* and *self-denigration*, as these strategies did not occur in the data. The most frequently used strategies are *thank explicitly,* as in (8) and (9), and *stress gratitude*, as in (10) and (11).

(8) *Thank you* Doctor Yonas (ICE-UG_S1B-027)
(9) *Thank you* for a job done well done (ICE-GH_W2C-020)

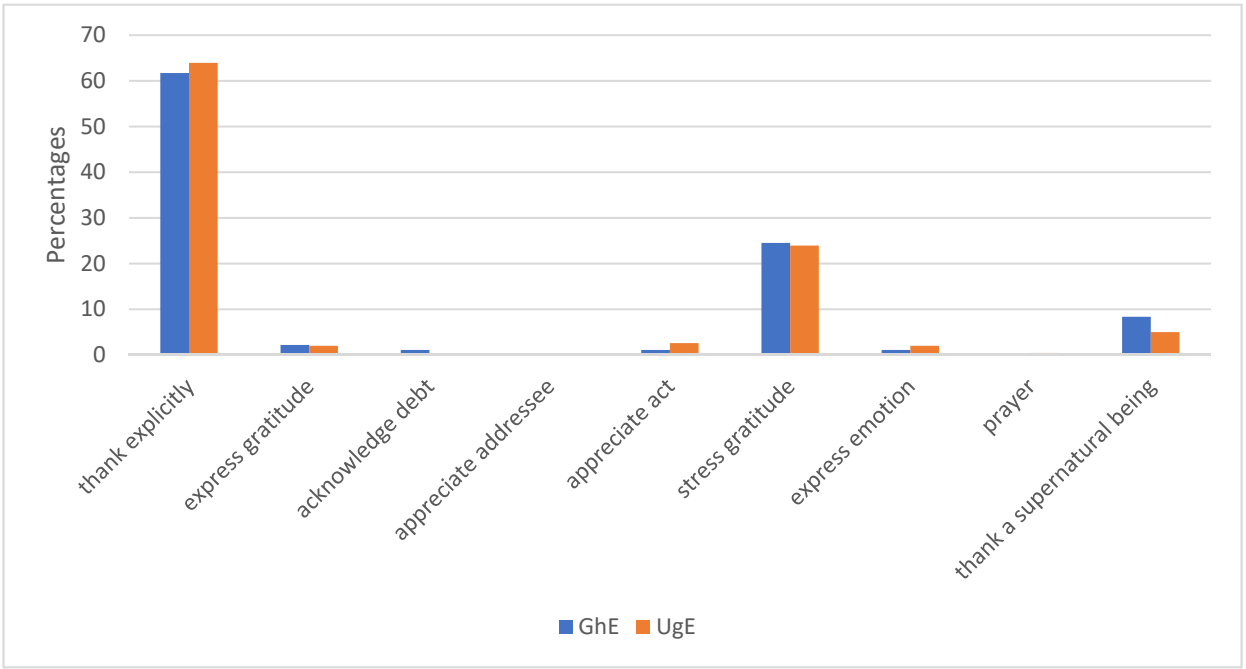


Fig. 2. Relative frequency of thanking strategies in ICE-GH and ICE-UG.

(10) I extend my *sincere thanks* to your office for offering me a study leave (ICE-UG_W1B- 029)
(11) *Thanks very much* for your last letter (ICE-GH_W1B-012)

Fig. 2 highlights similarities in thanking strategies between GhE and UgE speakers, as represented in the ICE-GH and ICE-UG corpora. Both varieties show a strong preference for the strategy of *thank explicitly*, with the strategy showing a higher frequency in UgE (N = 439) than in GhE (N = 229). The second most common strategy for both varieties is *stress gratitude* (ICE-GH = 91; ICE-UG = 175), though it occurs less frequently than *thank explicitly*. This substantial difference between the two strategies suggests a strong overall preference for explicit expressions of thanks in both GhE and UgE. There is also a notable similarity in the use of *express gratitude*, as seen in (12), with both varieties showing moderate usage of this strategy (ICE-GH = 9; ICE-UG = 14). In contrast, there is minimal use of *acknowledge debt*, as in (13), *appreciate act*, as in (14), and *express emotion, as in* (15), with only slight differences between the two corpora. Notably, the strategies *thank a supernatural being*, as in (16), and *prayer*, as in (17), introduced by Gut and Unuabonah (2024), show distinct usage patterns in UgE and GhE. The strategy *thank a supernatural being* appears in both corpora; however, *prayer* is absent in ICE-GH.

(12) I am grateful to you for the money and items brought for me to school (ICE-GH_W1B-013)
(13) I definitely owe a great debt of gratitude to our unwavering and always committed legal team (ICE-UG_S2B-042)
(14) We appreciate your continuous support towards maintaining high academic standards (ICE-GH_W1B-023)
(15) *Oh thanks* Bernard (laughter) (ICE-GH_S1B-032)
(16) thanks be to God. (ICE-UG_W1B-002)
(17) So fruitful work Missionaries of Africa thank you *may God continue to bless you* for this occasion (ICE-UG_S2B-036)

Fig. 3 shows the relative frequency of individual expressions of gratitude used by GhE and UgE speakers. Both varieties display a strong preference for the expression *thank*, with a slightly lower preference for *thanks*. UgE speakers use *thanks* slightly more frequently than GhE speakers. In contrast, the expressions *grateful*, *appreciate*, and *gratitude* are used less

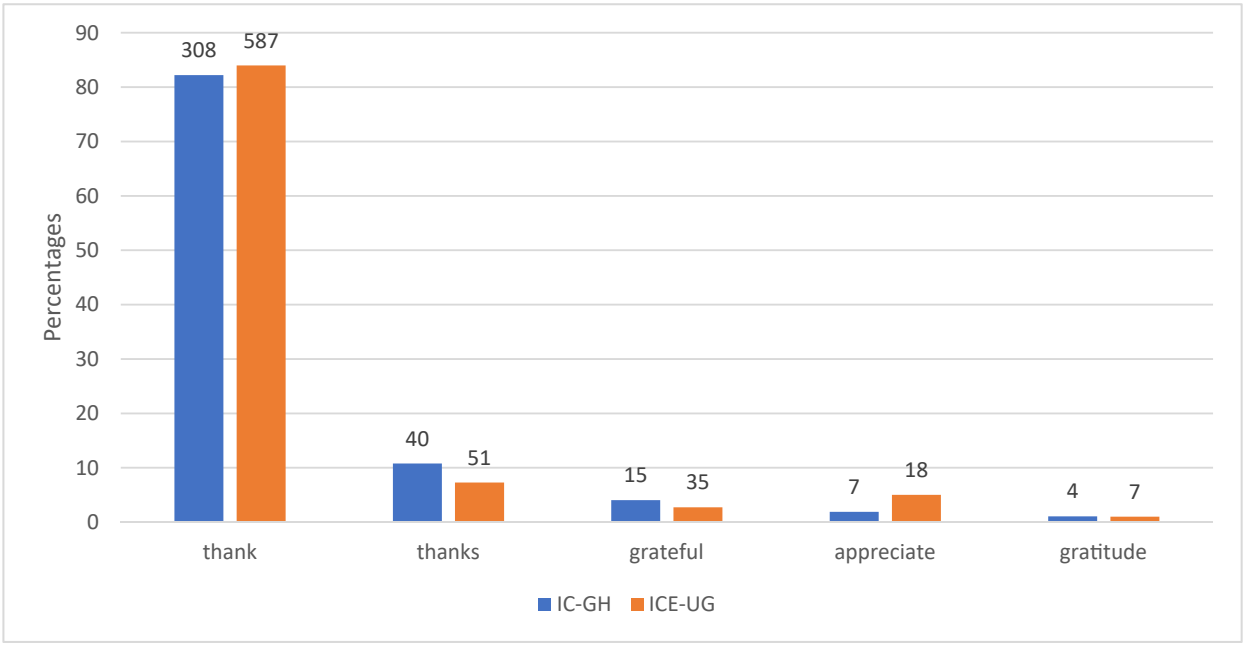


Fig. 3. Percentage of thanking expressions used in ICE-GH and ICE-UG.

frequently in both varieties, with *gratitude* being the least used.

Table 1
Percentage of optional complements in ICE-GH and ICE-UG (raw frequencies in brackets).[11]

	benefactor	Intensifier	reason	None
ICE-GH	26.7 (116)	21.6 (94)	21.6 (94)	30.3 (132)
ICE-UG	29 (240)	21.1 (179)	32.6 (285)	17.4 (160)

Table 1 presents the optional complementation used by GhE and UgE speakers in expressions of gratitude.

Both varieties show a clear preference for *naming the benefactor*, as in (18) and (19), with this choice being slightly more frequent in GhE. Interestingly, GhE speakers more often use a singular expression of gratitude without additional complements compared to UgE speakers, who display a stronger preference for *naming the reason*, as in (20), as an optional complement. Both varieties show similar frequencies for *intensification*. Therefore, while no complement is more common

in GhE, *naming the reason*, as in (21), appears more frequently in UgE, and *intensification*, as in (22) and (23), are used at comparable rates in both varieties. Also, both varieties frequently combine multiple optional complements in expressions of gratitude. For instance, speakers may combine *naming the benefactor* and *naming the reason*, as in (24), or use a combination of *intensification* and *naming the reason*, as in (25).

(18) Many thanks *Raymond Mujuni* for that report (ICE-UG_S2A-030)
(19) *Professor Hellen Lauer* thank you for bringing so many eminent visiting philosophers (ICE-GH_S2B-045)
(20) My Dear thank you *for your parcel of two beautiful handkerchiefs* (ICE-GH_W1B-009)
(21) I am very grateful *for the temporary appointment as a Teaching Assistant in the Department* (ICE-UG_W1B-029)
(22) I have received your letter with *many* thanks (ICE-GH_W1B-008)
(23) thanks very *much indeed* you are listening to Amanea on radio Univers 105.7fm (ICE-GH_S2B-016)
(24) *Mama* thanks *for taking care of them* (ICE-UG_S1A-097)
(25) Thanks *so much for your letter and that very nice picture*. (ICE-GH_W1B-014)

Fig. 4 presents the overall frequency of thanking speech acts across various text types in ICE-GH and ICE-UG. Thanking speech acts occur nearly twice as frequent in ICE-UG (N = 699) as in ICE-GH (N = 371), with notable differences in their distribution across text types. In both varieties, thanking speech acts occur most frequently in parliamentary debates, business letters, and social letters. However, UgE shows a higher frequency of thanking in parliamentary debates and social letters, whereas GhE has a higher frequency in business letters. In business transactions, thanking speech acts appear with high frequency in UgE but do not occur at all in GhE. Additionally, UgE demonstrates a higher frequency of thanking speech acts in non-broadcast talks, unscripted speech, broadcast news, and broadcast interviews compared to GhE. However, broadcast talks are the only text type where GhE slightly surpasses UgE in thanking frequency. Both varieties display similarly low frequencies of thanking speech acts in academic writing, non-academic writing, skills, editorials, student essays, exams, and reportage.

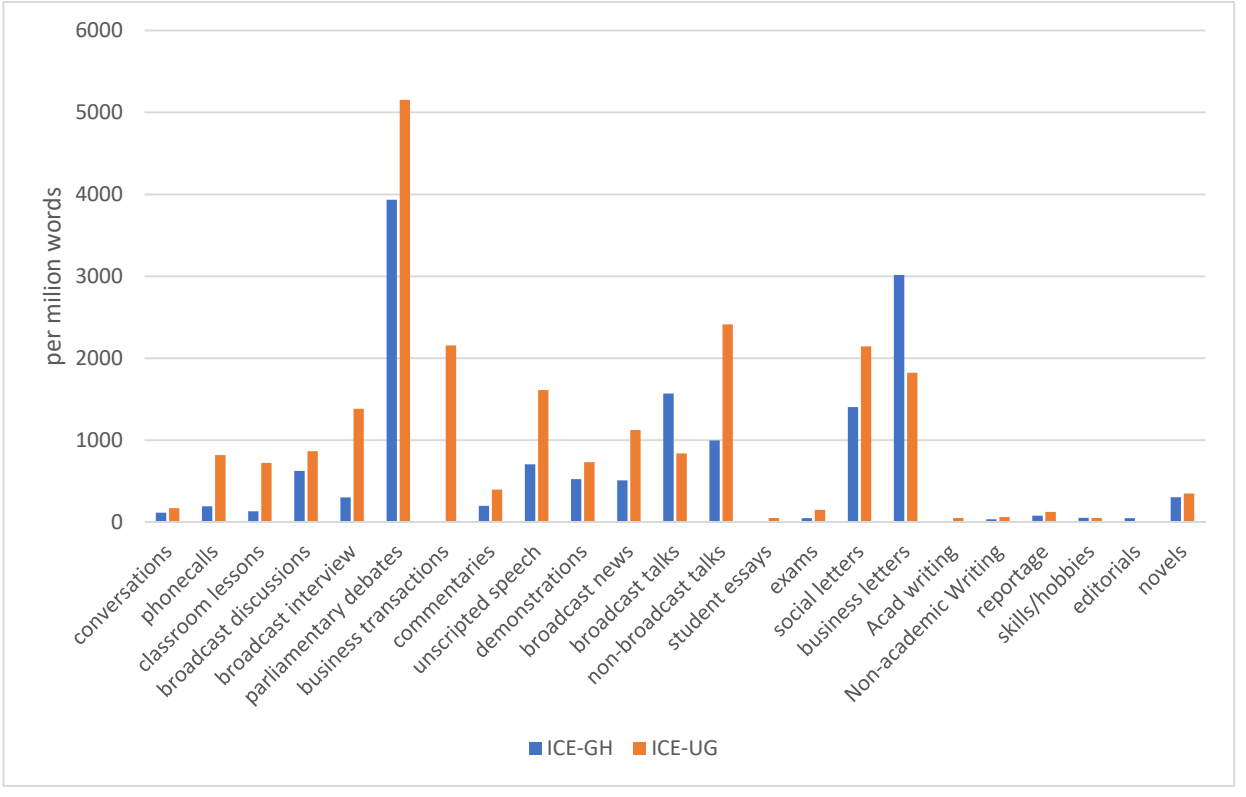


Fig. 4. Frequency of thanking speech acts across all text types in ICE-GH and ICE-UG (per million words)[21] times.

[1] Percentages were calculated as (raw frequency of each optional complement ÷ total number of optional complements in the respective variety) × 100. The total number of optional complements exceeded the total number of thanking speech acts because some single thanking speech acts included more than one optional complement.

7. Discussion

The first aim of this study was to investigate thanking strategies and their linguistic forms in GhE and UgE. The results show that UgE speakers use six of the eight thanking strategies identified by Aijmer (1996: 37), while GhE speakers use five, with *appreciate addressee* and *self-denigration* absent in both varieties. Notably, the data also reveal the presence of two additional thanking strategies not listed by Aijmer—*prayer* and *thank a supernatural being*—as identified by Gut and Unuabonah (2024). While *prayer* appears in the UgE corpus, it is absent in GhE, suggesting different cultural expressions of spirituality in gratitude. This distinction suggests that while both cultures incorporate references to the supernatural in expressions of gratitude, UgE speakers include explicit forms of prayer as part of their gratitude expressions. This difference may reflect a distinct way that religious language is integrated into everyday communication in UgE compared to GhE. These findings align closely with what has been observed in NigE (Gut and Unuabonah, 2024; Utin, 2024), where expressions like *Thank God* or *We give glory to God* are frequently used in both formal and informal contexts. Interestingly, although prayer is absent in GhE, GhE speakers use thank a supernatural being more frequently than UgE speakers. This distinction suggests subtle cultural differences in how spirituality is expressed within gratitude in each variety, with GhE showing a preference for general supernatural acknowledgments and UgE incorporating explicit religious elements in expressions of thanks. This similarity between UgE and NigE in the employment of both *prayer* and *thank a supernatural being* as thanking strategies, reinforces the idea that spirituality plays a central role in pragmatic routines across many African Englishes. The recurring presence of religious gratitude in GhE, NigE, and UgE, also underscores the need to expand existing pragmatic taxonomies (e.g., Aijmer's) to accommodate culturally embedded strategies like these. Considering that GhE is an African English variety, which should typically reflect religious behaviour as seen in the use of *prayer* as a thanking strategy, there is the need to further investigate other data sources. This would confirm whether this lack of *prayer* as a thanking strategy is generalised or particular to specific genres or groups of people. It is noted, for instance, that young GhE speakers will not use prayers to thank others while older people would do so (private communication with a native Ghanaian speaker).

The findings further reveal that *thank explicitly* is the most frequent thanking strategy across both GhE and UgE, followed by *stress gratitude.* The use of the linguistic form *thank*, which directly acknowledges the recipient, occurs with high frequency in both varieties, reflecting a shared cultural inclination to overtly express appreciation, likely influenced by norms of respect and politeness in both societies. This tendency towards explicitness aligns with patterns observed in other speech acts across African Englishes. For instance, Anderson (2009) reports that speakers of GhE prefer the *Want* strategy when making requests, Meierkord (2016c) finds that speakers of UgE favour mood derivables, and Kasanga (2006) shows that speakers of Black South African English tend to use explicit performatives, all of which fall under direct requesting strategies. The present findings therefore indicate that this preference for explicitness, previously observed in requests and other speech acts, also characterises the expression of gratitude in African Englishes, where directness often functions as a positive and affiliative strategy rather than as a face-threatening act. In both GhE and UgE, *thank* is the most commonly used expression for expressing gratitude, with *thanks* and *grateful* occurring significantly less often, and *gratitude* being the least used. This pattern aligns with findings in other African English varieties, such as NigE, where *thank* and *thanks* are similarly preferred over other expressions of gratitude (Gut and Unuabonah, 2024).

Despite these similarities, there are key differences in the use and form of thanking speech acts between GhE and UgE. In UgE, expressions of gratitude tend to be grammatically complex, with *naming the reason* as the most frequently used optional complement. In contrast, expressions of gratitude in GhE are less complex, with a third of thanking expressions occurring without any optional complements. This suggests that while UgE speakers often contextualise gratitude with additional information, GhE speakers tend to use more syntactically simple expressions. UgE speakers use expressions of gratitude nearly twice as frequently as GhE speakers, a difference that is both striking and culturally significant. Ugandan communicative culture, shaped by strong oral traditions and the pervasive influence of Christianity, tends to value expressivity and social affirmation. As Meierkord (2023) observes, UgE speakers frequently employ expressive speech acts such as praise, reflecting a broader preference for verbal acknowledgment and relational warmth. This orientation is reinforced by institutional practices in religious and community communication, where open verbal appreciation functions as both a moral and social norm. Consequently, UgE speakers often produce more emotionally charged and explicitly appreciative expressions of gratitude, mirroring these broader social expectations.

In contrast, in Ghana, expressions of politeness and gratitude are typically guided by norms of formality, restraint, and deference. Respect is often conveyed through measured and contextually appropriate language rather than overt emotional display. Norms of formality and respect can be seen in, for instance, the use of *please* in the speech acts of greeting and thanking (e.g. *Good evening, please* or *thank you, please*) to mark respect in GhE conversations (Anderson 2009: 75), due to the influence of local Ghanaian languages. Anderson (2009) further notes that *mi pa wʊ kyèw* (the Akan equivalent of *please*) is frequently employed by younger individuals and those of lower social status as a marker of respect or politeness toward older or higher-status interlocutors. Consequently, the differences between UgE and GhE illustrate distinct sociocultural orientations that shape communicative behaviour. The elevated frequency of gratitude in UgE aligns with a cultural emphasis on verbal affirmation and community-oriented politeness, whereas the comparatively lower frequency in GhE

[2] We are dealing with the frequencies of thanking speech acts in each text type in Fig. 4; hence, the formula we used here is the raw count of the thanking speech acts in each text type multiplied by 1 million, and then divided by the total word count in each text type.

reflects a preference for implicit acknowledgment and situational appropriateness. Their divergence illustrates how postcolonial Englishes are continually shaped by local sociocultural and institutional ecologies that influence not only what is said but how sincerity, respect, and social alignment are linguistically encoded.

With regard to optional complements to thanking, the frequent use of *naming the reason* and *intensification* in UgE shows an emphasis on providing context and depth in expressions of gratitude (e.g., Isingoma, 2021b). This tendency to specify the reason for gratitude may reflect Ugandan social norms where politeness is emphasised in public discourse. In both varieties, intensification is used similarly, suggesting a shared emphasis on sincerity, which is consistent with research showing that English varieties tend to use intensification to convey sincerity across different contexts. These preferences may be culturally motivated: in many African societies, including Ghana and Uganda, emotional expressiveness and verbal affirmation play important roles in maintaining interpersonal harmony and demonstrating respect (Meierkord, 2023). In GhE, while intensification also occurs, cultural preferences for indirectness and context-dependent acknowledgment influence when and how intensifiers are deployed. These culturally shaped preferences reinforce the idea that, although GhE and UgE share a colonial linguistic heritage, their pragmatic norms have evolved in ways that reflect distinct cultural ideologies, communicative values, and socially sanctioned conventions, particularly within educational and religious discourse, where politeness and deference are emphasised. Thus, intensification in gratitude functions not merely as linguistic emphasis but as a socially meaningful act of sincerity and relational bonding. This pattern is also evident in NigE, where intensifiers such as *so*, *much*, *really*, and *very* are commonly employed to heighten the emotional force of gratitude expressions (Gut and Unuabonah, 2024). The parallel use of intensification in UgE, GhE, and NigE suggests a broader pragmatic trend across African Englishes, where speakers strategically use intensifiers to signal genuine appreciation and reinforce social cohesion. This convergence reinforces the need to recognise intensification as a core element of African English pragmatics, shaped by local communicative norms, institutional expectations, and cultural ideologies. These findings support the Dynamic Model's core proposition that postcolonial Englishes evolve in response to local cultural, institutional, and communicative pressures.

In terms of text types, thanking strategies are most frequently employed in parliamentary debates, business letters, and social letters in both varieties. This tendency suggests that formal and semi-formal contexts in Ghana and Uganda require expressions of gratitude as part of polite discourse. UgE, however, shows a higher frequency of thanking in parliamentary debates and social letters, while GhE shows a higher frequency in business letters. These differences show that UgE speakers appear to prioritise gratitude across a broader range of social and political settings, while GhE speakers emphasise gratitude within business contexts. Interestingly, business transactions show high instances of thanking expressions in UgE, while such expressions are absent in GhE business transactions. This may reflect regional business communication norms, with UgE placing greater emphasis on gratitude in transactional interactions. Evidence from NigE also points to a strong presence of thanking expressions in business contexts, particularly in business transactions and letters (Gut and Unuabonah, 2024: 15). This convergence suggests a broader trend in African Englishes where gratitude is strategically employed in professional domains to reinforce politeness and maintain interpersonal harmony.

8. Conclusion

This study has explored thanking speech acts in GhE and UgE, identifying both shared and unique patterns shaped by cultural influences. The analysis reveals that, while both varieties rely on explicit expressions of gratitude, UgE demonstrates a higher frequency of these expressions and a tendency toward more elaborative structures. The findings underscore how local cultural and social norms influence language use, particularly in expressions of gratitude. By investigating these pragmatic variations, this study not only enhances our understanding of GhE and UgE within the broader landscape of postcolonial Englishes but also offers practical insights into effective cross-cultural communication in diverse and multilingual environments. This work contributes to the empirical understanding of linguistic diversity and supports continued exploration of how cultural context shapes communication styles across English varieties. Building on these findings, future studies could expand the scope of analysis by including other African Englishes such as Kenyan, South African, or Cameroonian English to develop a more comprehensive view of thanking strategies across the continent. Comparative investigations that incorporate NigE, which displays rich socio-pragmatic variation, would further illuminate regional trends and culturally specific norms. In addition, exploring the influence of social variables such as age, gender, profession, and educational background could offer deeper insights into intra-varietal differences. Future research might also consider non-verbal or multimodal expressions of gratitude, which play a significant role in many African communicative contexts. Finally, combining corpus-based approaches with ethnographic and interactional sociolinguistic methods could provide a deeper understanding of how gratitude is negotiated in real-life discourse.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Deborah A. Fifelola: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data Curation, Formal analysis, Resources. **Foluke O. Unuabonah:** Conceptualisation, Methodology, Validation, Supervision, Resources.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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