

‘Thank you so much! Mystery Solved’: Online Expressions of Gratitude by IMDb* Members

Çok Teşekkürler! Gizem Çözüldü: IMDb Kullanıcılarının Çevrimiçi Şükran İfadeleri

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Abstract

The majority of research on expressions of gratitude has generally examined data gathered from discourse completion tasks, corpus, and questionnaires, while a few studies have analyzed data from naturally occurring talk or text (Yuan, 2001). Expanding the research on expressions of gratitude to a computer-mediated communication (CMC) context, this study investigated the discourse-pragmatic characteristics of 100 messages from one of the Internet movie database (IMDb) discussion boards, ‘I Need to Know’. Drawing on the speech act theory (Searle, 1976), and relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005), this study aimed to explore users’ expressions of gratitude when closing conversation as an indicator of polite (if not, politic) behavior of relational work within a potentially “impolite” asynchronous online context as compared to corpora data from Global Web-based English (GloWbE) for other CMC genres and to Contemporary

Öz

Şükran ifadeleri üzerine yapılan araştırmaların çoğu söylem tamamlama görevleri, derlem, ve anketler dengelen verileri incelemişken, az sayıda çalışma da doğal olarak gerçekleşen konuşma ya da metinleri bu açıdan incelemişlerdir (Yuan, 2001). İlgili araştırma alanını bilgisayar ortamı iletişime uygulayan bu çalışma İnternet Film Veritabanı’ndaki (IMDb) tartışma odalarından çekilmiş 100 mesajın söylemsel ve pragmatik özelliklerini incelemiştir. Bu çalışmanın teorik temeli Searle’in Söz Edimleri Kuramı (1976) ve Locher ve Watts’ın ilişkisel çalışma (2005) kuramlarına dayanmaktadır. Bu kuramlardan yola çıkarak, bu çalışma kullanıcıların bir sohbeti kapatırken kullandıkları çevrimiçi şükran ifadelerini bir kaç (GlowBE - Küresel Web Tabanlı Derlem Güncel, COCA - Amerikan İngilizcesi Derlemi ve BNC - Britanya Ulusal Derlemi) derlemden alınan veriyle kıyaslayarak potansiyel olarak kaba olarak adlandırılacak bir ortam olan eşzamansız çevrimiçi bağlamda

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Corpus of American English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC) for spoken examples. Accordingly, thanking formulae were found to be in line with GloWbE, COCA, and BNC, though there were differences in terms of the frequencies of use. As for strategies and functional sequences, the findings support the literature on face to face (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; 1993) and CMC politeness (Darics, 2010). Lastly, the current study underscored that regardless of the lack of close social ties between the interactants and highly anonymous nature of the context, relational work is still significant for IMDb members.

Keywords: Online Expressions of Gratitude, CMC Discourse, Online Thanking Formulae, Online Speech Acts.

örneklenen ilişkisel çalışma örneği olarak incelemiştir. Bulgular teşekkür etme kalıplarının kullanım sıklığı dışında derlem verileriyle pek çok benzerliğe sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Çalışma, ayrıca, anılan çevrimiçi verilerin söz dizilerinin stratejik ve işlevsel özellikleri açısından da gerçek zamanlı yüz yüze iletişim ve diğer bilgisayar tabanlı iletişim biçimleri ile pek çok ortak noktaya sahip olduğunu belirtmektedir. Son olarak, bu çalışma, yakın sosyal bağların eksikliğine ve anılan bağlamın anonim doğasına bakmaksızın ilişkisel çalışmanın IMDb kullanıcıları açısından önemi vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Çevrimiçi Şükran İfadeleri, Bilgisayara Tabanlı Söylem, Çevrimiçi Teşekkür Kalıpları, Çevrimiçi Söz Edimleri.

Introduction

“Expressions of gratitude, or thanking, is one of the ‘most formulaic’ of expressive illocutionary acts” (Norrick, 1978, p. 284). According to Eisenstein and Bodman (1986), it is also of a significant social value in English and a primary example of polite behavior (Jautz, 2013), functioning as “the acknowledgement of one’s having benefited from the actions of another person” (Norrick, 1978, p. 285). Considering the purpose of thanking from a pragmatics perspective, Leech (1983) suggests that it can be defined as “appreciation, creating a friendly and polite atmosphere” (Pishghadam & Zarei, 2011, p. 141.) It is also indicated by Eisenstein and Bodman (1986; 1993) that the giver and the receiver of a gift, favor, help, reward, or service mutually express their gratitude in a variety of forms ranging from basic phatic utterances to lengthy communicative events.

Thanking is also one of the most commonly used speech acts in everyday face-to-face conversations (Pishghadam & Zarei, 2011). Computer mediated communication (CMC) is no exception in terms of the frequency of users’ producing gratitude speech acts with the new affordances of Web 2.0, which allows users to communicate and interact more. We express our gratitude by means of words of thanks, appreciation, and praise (Pishghadam & Zarei, 2011) regardless of the environment being online or offline. As for its social functional importance, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986; 1993) explained, in reference to Goffman (1967, as cited in Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993), that individuals’ expressing of gratitude has a strong relation with the individuals’ emotional responses, which are concerned with their “face” and images of the self, presented in terms of “approved social attributes”(p. 64).

Considering the contextual focus of this study, expressions of gratitude have only been studied within a larger focus on linguistic (im)politeness (Carlo & Yoo, 2007; Darics, 2010; Gonzales, 2013; Graham, 2007; Hardeker, 2010; Haugh, 2010; Locher, 2010; Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2011; Planchenault, 2010; Schallert et. al, 2009; Shum & Lee, 2013; Vinagre, 2008). Drawing on various theories and frameworks, these studies have concluded that strategies for online (im)politeness have both similarities and differences as compared to face-to-face (F2F) communication. Underlining shared norms, values, and linguistic features within the online community and pointing out the nature of human interaction, identity-construction, socialization, communities of practice, and power relations (Darics, 2010; Graham, 2007; Haugh, 2010; Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2011; Planchenault, 2010; Shum & Lee, 2013; Vinagre, 2008), CMC (im)politeness strategies have been found to align with

F2F examples. In contrast, due to medium-related differences, such as spatial distance and technological affordances (Carlo & Yoo, 2007; Das, 2011; Darics, 2010; Haugh, 2010), forms and structures of CMC politeness have been found to differ from F2F contexts.

While online (im)politeness is well-documented in the literature, online expressions of gratitude have only been discussed in terms of users' interaction through several CMC genres, such as social networking sites (SNSs), where frequency of interaction among participants are rather similar to F2F contexts, especially in terms of reciprocity (Das, 2011; Gonzales, 2013). Highlighting the similarities between F2F and CMC contexts in terms of thanking strategies used, Das (2011) and Gonzales (2013) have concluded that politeness behavior of the participants are closely linked to the levels of *intimacy* (Wolfson, 1988, as cited in Das, 2011), frequency of interaction, and closeness with their interactants (Gee, 2004, as cited in Gonzales, 2013). In other words, the closer and more intimate the relations between the parties are, the more they interact and express their gratitude, which is also supported by the literature on F2F communication. However, this emphasis on interpersonal relationships (Locher & Watts, 2005) and rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000; 2005) should also be explored within a CMC context, such as discussion boards, where frequency, intimacy, and reciprocal nature of relationships among the interactants are not prominent. It is also remarkable that relevant studies are generally designed to investigate the impolite behavior of the participants within such contexts (Hardeker, 2010; Haugh, 2010; Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010), depending on the less frequent, less reciprocal, and less intimate nature of human interaction. Unlike SNPs, it is also suggested that this lack of reciprocity in such contexts prevents the users to set shared social norms and values and function as a community of practice, which potentially leads to impolite behavior more (Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to investigate expressions of gratitude when closing conversation as an indicator of polite behavior within a *potentiallyimpolite context*, IMDb discussion boards, where reciprocity is less likely as compared to other CMC genres like SNSs. The results of the study bring insights into areas regarding pragmatics and CMC, and gratitude speech act, also providing information on the strategies and formulaic expressions utilized.

Research Questions

To explore the nature of interaction, strategies and formulaic language uses of the participants in terms of expressions of gratitude when closing conversation, the following research questions are addressed in the study:

1. What are the IMDb users' formulaic expressions to express gratitude when closing conversation in the discussion room "I Need to Know"?
 - a) How is this particular speech act found in online written texts related to the expressions of gratitude in other CMC genres as compared to spoken data?
2. What responses are given to expressions of gratitude when closing conversation in the discussion room "I Need to Know"?
3. What is the frequency of interaction and nature of reciprocity among the givers and receivers of gratitude?
4. What are the strategies and functional sequences of gratitude by IMDb users in the discussion room at issue?

1. Linguistic Politeness

Thanking formulae (Jautz, 2013) have mostly been investigated pertaining to the politeness models proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), Watts (2003; 2005), and Locher and Watts (2005). Brown & Levinson (1987) theorize politeness as a pragmatic phenomenon with a focus on the use of language. Arguing that human beings have a face, individuals, through their linguistic, behavioral, and gestural performances, endeavor to competently communicate (Brown & Levinson, 1987) in order to be regarded as appropriately responding and supporting the others' performances either by saving or losing face (Das, 2011). Brown and Levinson (1987) also argue that there are two kinds of politeness as being positive and negative determined by means of three universal mechanisms, one of which is the "social norm" that brings about certain behaviors, relational states, and thinking mechanisms in certain contexts in differentiated ways. Drawing also on the idea of communities of practice (CofP) by Wenger (1998), "politeness is a local negotiation of norms, which are assumed by individuals to exist at the social or cultural level" (Clark, 2011, p. 75). This existence is tightly connected to the notion of "effective management of relationships" within the given context, as defined by the use of language (Spencer-Oatey, 2002). The focus of the current study provides such a context where relational work matters among the members of the community regardless of the unlikely chances for the users to interact with each other again. Thus, the politeness strategies adopted by IMDb users on the discussion boards can be determined as examples of face

management in terms of their relational attempts with other users (Watts, 2003, 2005; Locher & Watts, 2005) rather than face-threatening illocutionary acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In other words, Brown and Levinson's framework, which evaluates linguistic politeness depending on the factors of social distance between the interlocutors, relative power between speakers and listeners, and other dominating cultural factors (Wang et al, 2008) may not solely account for online contexts such as IMDb discussion boards due to the highly anonymous and less reciprocal nature of interaction among people with no social ties. Therefore, the forms and structures of thanking within the norms of interaction in the context of the study can be better explained not only as indicators of polite behavior, but also as such driven by civility or politic behavior instead of impolite behavior as is always assumed to be the case.

Accordingly, Locher and Watts (2005) evaluate politeness as part of a continuum of relational work covering "polite, politic, and socially appropriate unmarked languages" (Das, 2011, p. 32) as they criticize Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory due to its focus on face-threat mitigation encompassing only appropriate and polite behavior. Thus, they introduced the notion of "politic behavior" to further explain the aspect of appropriate linguistic behavior (Locher & Watts, 2005), which is defined as "socio-culturally determined behavior directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group [...] during the ongoing process of interaction (Watts, 2005, p. 51). In the case of IMDb discussion boards as a community of practice, the notion of politic behavior may account for the nature of expressions of gratitude, where the anonymity of interaction among users with no social ties is typical due to the nature of CMC through asynchronous and text-based discussion boards (Locher, 2010).

In terms of expressions of gratitude as a speech act of politeness, Leech (1983; 2007) argues that people expresses their gratitude to achieve their illocutionary and discursive goals which can be "modified by their desire to maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place" (Leech, 1983, p. 82). Similar to Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983; 2007) also underlines the significance of relational work among the members of the society (or in this case the CofP), in which the politeness maxims are pragmatically defined and constrained by the societal norms. Keeping in mind that the abovementioned theories (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983) focus on politeness in naturally occurring

communicative events within F2F contexts, online discussion boards as examples of text-based asynchronous CMC, where less reciprocity and anonymous interaction dominate the actual course of communication, (Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010; Locher, 2010), politeness in CMC should be further discussed. Drawing theoretically on the model of relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005), the nature of interaction and strategies used for expressions of gratitude by the givers and receivers among IMDb members are analyzed in the sense that although the CMC context at issue may not require repeated interaction, it is still an act for face management for the users to express their gratitude in relational terms (Locher, 2010).

1.1. Politeness in CMC

Drawing on the idea that “online communication is as real as offline interaction” (Locher, 2010, p. 1), studies on linguistic politeness in online contexts have yielded similar results with those pertaining to F2F communication. However, there has been an ongoing debate that especially text-based online contexts have given rise to less polite interaction as being less immediate, face-threatening and reciprocal in nature, which filters out voice and gestural cues, and enables users to hide their identities easily (Das, 2011). The “myth” that CMC may not provide a space for effective immediate communication like F2F interactions has been refuted by Woods and Smith (2005) as they point out that CMC still provides a space -regardless of being virtual- for human interaction, which underlines the importance of society, self, reality and related issues of identity and human interaction including relational work principles.

As Locher (2010) points out with reference to Wood and Smith (2005), the effects of online interaction are also considered by online users as effective as those to be encountered in F2F scenarios regardless of the availability of either using proper names or invented identities (p. 2). This argument highlights the importance of space, sense of community, and membership, rather than physical immediacy, rapport, social ties, or identification of the self. The idea that space shapes our communicative actions (Wood & Smith, 2005) has mitigated the importance of whether or not one can be identified or remain anonymous through his/her online activities. In contrast, the notion of membership is put forward as determining one’s communicative actions also within computer-mediated spaces (Wood & Smith, 2005). On these grounds, the current study argues that IMDb users as members of an online community interact with each other and express their gratitude within proper communicative events regardless of their identities being revealed. Thus, the argument

that online interaction within text-based asynchronous CMC should give rise to less polite communication among IMDb members may be proven false.

The idea that the lack of F2F features of communication, such as voice and gesture cues, leads to less polite interaction among online users has also been proven false by research on CMC language through text-based CMC genres like emails, blogs, and SNSs (Das, 2011; Herring, 1994; Morand & Ocker, 2003; Locher, 2010). Darics (2010) also argues that the dichotomy between politeness and economy is remarkable. Though the members of the virtual team were expected to economize on their use of keystrokes, they rather preferred following the norms of F2F interactions “even at the cost of typing twice as much”, (Darics, 2010, p. 12). It was also concluded that the participants –as members of a community– followed the norms of F2F interactions to develop their group identity, which enhanced the development of CofP communication. Similarly, the current study aims to shed light on the nature of participants’ interaction through their expressions of gratitude as an attempt to facilitate the norms of CofP communication with an emphasis on relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005) instead of the “impoverished nature” of CMC (Das, 2011).

Overall, mostly employing Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory (face-threatening acts), current research on politeness in CMC can be summarized within three major strands (Locher, 2010). The first strand focuses on the impact of technology in terms of politeness strategies adopted (Androutsopoulos, 2006). For instance, Schallert et. al (2009) investigated the naturally occurring discourse in online classroom discussions in terms of politeness strategies used. Both asynchronous and synchronous modes were found to be similar in terms of politeness expressions. Online classrooms are contexts for CofP, which can be accounted for the theory of relational work. In the case of asynchronous text-based IMDb discussion boards, thanking strategies are expected to be similar to F2F contexts due to this notion of CofP.

Secondly, how the technological, social, and contextual factors interplay in the shaping of computer-mediated language practices (Androutsopoulos, 2006, p. 421) is shed light on. For example, Carlo and Yoo (2007) reported on a comparative study pertaining to F2F versus CMC reference transactions in an academic library in terms of the politeness strategies used. The results indicated that different politeness strategies are employed according to the media used and there is a dynamic interplay existing among sense making, language use, and forms of life (Carlo & Yoo, 2007). Similarly, Darics (2010; 2013) underlines the use of computer-mediated discourse such as unconventional orthography,

capitalization of emphasized words, and the use of emoticons, which fulfill the lack of voice and gesture cues depending on the nature of CMC. The use of CMC-typical features of communication as pointed out by Darics (2010; 2013) is also apparent in the context of the current study. Facilitation of unconventional orthography, capitalization, and especially the use of emoticons, interjections, and CMC-specific abbreviations are universal across text-based CMC genres including IMDb discussion boards.

In the last strand, how the use of language is varied in the light of social interaction and identities are investigated (Locher, 2010). From a medium related focus to user-related patterns of language use, research on politeness in online contexts has evolved (Androustopoulos, 2006) as bringing the “variety of group practices to the center of attention” (Locher, 2010, p. 2). For example, Darics (2010) explored the interactions of a virtual team through chat and concluded that the participants’ following the norms of F2F politeness within the virtual platform contributed to the development of group identity and CofP communication norms. The current context of the study also focuses on the user-related patterns of language within a CMC context, where interestingly the reciprocal nature of interactions through expressions of gratitude contributes to the relational work among the members unlike what the literature suggests on text-based CMC genres (Locher, 2010).

1.2. Research on Expressions of Gratitude

The literature on expressing gratitude is varied. The first group of studies focuses on the functions of it as a speech act including formulaic expressions and sequences (Bardovi-Harlig et. al, 2008; Eisenstein, 1995; Farenkia, 2012; Pishghadam & Zarei, 2011). There are also a number of studies exploring the differences between corpus data and discourse completion tasks (DCT) (Schauer & Adolphs, 2006; Wong, 2009). The majority of the studies investigate the cross cultural differences in terms of expressing gratitude from a sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective (Intachakra, 2004; Kashdan et. al, 2009; Koutlaki, 2002). Finally, the differences in expressions of gratitude between native and non-native speakers are explored in relation to expressing gratitude (Cui, 2012; Fonia & Suleiman, 2009; Ghobadi & Fahim, 2009). However, none of the studies above conducted within an online CMC context. In terms of online expressions of gratitude, Das (2011) and Gonzales’ (2013) studies explore online politeness strategies with a general reference to gratitude and welcoming which may shed light on the scope of the current study.

Das (2011) investigated compliments, expressions of gratitude, and greetings as speech acts of politeness among members of a Bengali community in a SNS, Orkut. It is concluded that degrees of politeness as exemplified in these three speech acts among the members are varied according to levels of intimacy among them. As for expressions of gratitude, it was reported that the more intimate and close the parties are the more they interact and express their gratitude reciprocally. In contrast, the emotional and social distance between the interactants leads to less intensified but more unmarked politeness. The increase in the frequency of interaction and levels of closeness between the parties was found to meaningfully affect the intensity of expressions of gratitude. It should also be kept in mind that the CMC context in the Das study (2011) is a SNS, where anonymity is less likely. Also such platforms are more suitable for F2F-like social interactions and reciprocity. In contrast, the context of the current study, IMDB discussion boards facilitates anonymity and discretion like many other text-based CMC genres, which has been regarded as a feature leading to less polite interactions (Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the current literature pertains to impoliteness in terms of the given context of a text-based CMC genre. However, the current study aims to propose a counter argument that the reciprocal nature of expressions of gratitude is still prominent within relational terms among interactants regardless of the context-dependent nature of interaction on discussion boards, which supposedly give rise to less intimate and frequent interaction among the participants and more anonymity.

Finally, Gonzales (2013) investigated the expressions of gratitude with a minor focus within her case study on politeness strategies in a participatory online environment, *Livemocha*, a context similar to SNS. Though the emphasis is on the dynamics of social interaction and the language learning process of a user, Gonzales (2013) explored the functions of thanking when closing conversation as an indicator of polite behavior. Drawing on the notion of CoP by Wenger (1998), the notion of spaces by Gee (2004, as cited in Gonzales, 2013), and the framework for rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2005) it was argued that the more the participant interacts with the native speaker through the SNS, in other words the space, the more he uses politeness strategies—including expressions of gratitude- when closing the conversation as the conversation closing lengthens due to the increased level of interaction and rapport between the interactants. The results of Gonzales' study (2013) align with Das (2011) in the sense that increased interaction results in intensified politeness. However, the current study argues that regardless of the frequency of interaction, or the nature of CMC genre at issue, relational work still matters among the participants. In terms of exploring

thanking at conversation closings, the current study aligns with Gonzales (2013) as they are especially sensitive to interlocutors' orientations to their interactions, and "while closings are used to organize terminization, perhaps more importantly they can provide insight into the relational states speakers have achieved in talk, since they are used to determine how speakers will 'leave' one another for continuation or closure" (p. 110). All in all, the current study is designed to fill a gap in terms of exploring expressions of gratitude when closing conversation in a "potentially impolite" asynchronous text-based CMC context in an attempt to determine the reciprocal nature of interaction through the two-part exchange of thanking by the interactants who have no distinct social ties unlike the relevant examples in the literature (Daric, 2010; Das, 2011; Gonzales, 2013).

1.3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frameworks employed for the current study is twofold. First, to determine the strategies, formulaic expressions, and functional sequences of gratitude at conversation closings, I draw on the speech act theory by Searle (1976), whose typology defines act of gratitude as "the performance of an action by a speaker on a past act done by a hearer for whom it is beneficial" (Pishghadam & Zarei, 2011, p. 141). Thus, one focus of this study is gratitude as an expressive illocutionary act provided occurring after the inquiry by the user is solved. As being a "face-threatening act in which the speaker feels obliged to acknowledge a debt to the hearer" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62), both the givers' and the receivers' expressions are analyzed. However, taking a more interactional approach, the two-part exchange of thanking among the participants are also analyzed pertaining to Locher and Watt's (2005) discursive approach to politeness on the grounds that the scope of relational work underlines the interactional nature of politeness rather than efforts of mitigating face-threatening acts (Darics, 2010). Because the nature of the object of gratitude is not the only factor determining the choice of gratitude expression (Pishghadam & Zarei, 2011), it is also crucial to analyze the nature of the interpersonal relation between the givers and receivers of gratitude.

2. Methodology

2.1. Context

The context of this study is the Internet movie database (IMDb). This online database was launched in 1990 ("Internet movie database", 2013). The information and reviews

provided on IMDb includes all film, television, and electronic gaming industry related topics and products. It is reported that there are more than 45 million registered users on the database (“Internet movie database”, 2013). Another significant feature of IMDb is thus the message boards, where 45 million registered users potentially interact by starting new threads, posting messages and participating discussions. It should also be noted that it is not possible to post on IMDb message boards unless the user registers through an authentication process via email or cell phone (“Internet movie database”, 2013). However, only aimed to prevent scamming and spamming on the website, this authentication process does not necessitate revealing one’s identity to other users. There are various message boards available at IMDb, some of which are “Film Talk”, “Awards Season”, and “Genre Zone”. Each discussion board consists of several discussion rooms, where users start new threads about various IMDb related topic. The data analyzed were gathered from one of this database’s message boards, called “Trivia! Trivia!”. where users post about trivial information with regards to the film industry, actors, electronic games, and related topics.

2.2. Participants

The participants of the study are registered IMDb *fellow*² users from all over the world who post on discussion boards. Having millions of users with a common interest to a specific domain, IMDb can be considered as an online community of practice (Wenger, 1998), and thus the registered users are the members of this community. Apart from this common interest in the filming and entertainment industry, IMDb members frequently use domain-specific language, such as film-related terms and abbreviations, a typicality of most CMC genres, such as SNSs. Also, sharing information on the related topics through the discussion boards, these users engage with other members and learn new things from each other. They present authentic ways of “thinking and speaking, discourses, tools, and memories” (Gonzales, 2013), which indicate that the IMDb discussion boards can be considered as a CofP.

Unlike SNSs, although there is a user profile page feature, most of the users do not provide any information on their profile pages. Thus, it is generally not possible to identify the users by their gender, age, or nationality. However, on the discussion boards, some of them reveal

² Term used in IMDb texts to describe registered users.

information as to their location, nationality, age, gender, occupation, educational level etc. through their posts. There is a ranking system at the database regarding how long a person is a registered user, how many reviews they have made, whether they are beta testers, how much they have contributed to the database, and finally whether they are employed by IMDb or not. Called *badges*³, there are various ranks among the members. Some of these badges include IMDb champ, rater for Oscars, top contributor, top reviewer etc. (“IMDb”, 2013). Considering IMDb as a CoFP, the ranking system highlights the issues of power and prestige among the database users (Wenger, 1998).

2.3. Data Collection Methods

The data set for analysis consists of 100 online posts from IMDb users. The data to be analyzed in this study were compiled from asynchronous posts available at one of IMDb message boards; “Trivia! Trivia!”. There are several discussion rooms available on this board, one of which is “I Need to Know”. IMDb users post about films, TV shows, or actors that they cannot remember the name of or details about and ask for help to “*solvethe mysteries*”⁴. All the postings included in the data set were gathered from the abovementioned discussion board beginning from July 25 to September 20, 2013. Inside the discussion board ‘I Need to Know’, posts can be divided into two categories as *solved* or *unsolved* (as indicated in the thread title) regarding the current situation of the inquiry. All the selected posts were gathered from the *solved* threads in order to compile sufficient data with regards to some illocutionary acts (Searle, 1979), such as expressives (gratitude and apologies) and directives (request and advice). If the thread is unsolved, it becomes more difficult to find examples of expressives which indicate strategies of showing or responding to gratitude as the user has not yet taken her turn to express gratitude to the mystery solver. Once the mystery is solved, the users almost always express their gratitude, which is also frequently reciprocated by the solvers. Thus, the unsolved threads were excluded from the data collection. In addition, posts with less than 100 words were also excluded when compiling the data set, where the mode of inquiry and/or reply is not by words but rather by providing a hyperlink. While collecting data, rank of users was not a criterion for selection. Thus, the data were gathered regardless of the rank of the users.

3 Term used in IMDb texts.

Overall, an average solved thread includes 240 words. The corpus of the study is comprised of 28637 words. All the selected posts were gathered from the *solved* threads in order to compile sufficient data with regards to gratitude as an expressive illocutionary act (Searle, 1979). Considering the speech act at issue, 94 of the threads from the dataset include a form of thanking formulae. Additionally, an average of 6 posts were observed before a mystery is solved. In terms of the interaction between the asker and solver, it was found that 74% of all the expressions of gratitude were reciprocated by the mystery solvers.

2.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Addressing each research question, the data set was coded and analyzed through a basic concordancing program, AntConc version 3.2.4w, as well as several rounds of manual coding for specific features (Vasquez, 2011). Frequencies of lexical items (e.g. thanks) and formulaic sequences (e.g. thank you, you're welcome) were calculated (See Table 1). The quantitative findings as to thanking formulae were also compared with the corpus of global web-based English (GloWbE) in terms of frequencies of occurrence. Following the identification process, the data set was "manually screened to ensure that related phenomena had not been overlooked" (Vasquez, 2011, p. 1710). Following Vasquez (2011), new research questions were directed within several rounds of coding the data manually in order to ensure intra-rater reliability.

As for analysis, after numerous readings, sample data were coded thematically for gratitude strategies employed following Searle (1975), Einstein (1995), Das (2011), and Jautz (2012). The taxonomy of the coding scheme below (Table 1) has eight strategies for expressions of gratitude (Das, 2011, Pp. 66-67). In addition, because "a speech act set is a combination of speech acts that, taken together, make up a complete speech act" (Murphy & Neu, 1996, as cited in Vasquez, 2011, Pp. 1708-9), all the gratitude expressions were also coded and categorized for strategies and a functional sequence (followed or preceded by gratitude), such as "thanking + compliments", "thanking + appreciation", "thanking + compliments", "thanking + friendly teasing ± emoticons) etc. In terms of the research question on the nature of interaction, the two way-exchange between the givers and receivers of gratitude were quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed within a more discursive approach on interaction (Locher & Watts, 2005).

4 Term by IMDb users to describe resolving a film-related inquiry.

Table 1. Coding Scheme Taxonomy

Types	Examples
Unmarked	Thank you, cheers etc.
Formulaic gratitude	
Abbreviation	OMG, thank you
Intensified politeness (followed or preceded by gratitude)	
Semantic intensifier	You are absolutely fabulous
Syntactic Elaboration	You are really awesome
Character/Word Repetition	Thank you soooooo much
Formulaic gratitude + emoticon(s)	Thanks 😊
Formulaic gratitude + multiple expressive punctuations	Thank you so much!!!
Other	
Friendly teasing (with or without emoticon(s))	Thank you so much Jedi :P

3. Data Analysis, Results, and Discussion

The results of the analysis are presented in order of research questions addressed. The first group of results includes the general quantitative analysis with regards to the frequency of lexical items for gratitude and basic formulaic expressions of thanking. The qualitative results are presented in relation to third and fourth research questions.

3.1 Research Question 1 and 1a: Frequency of basic formulaic expressions of gratitude as compared to GloWbE

Addressing the first research question, the analysis revealed that the frequencies of the thanking words used in the IMDb corpus align with those in GloWbE for the first four mostly occurred expressions (See Table 2, Chart 1).

Table 2. Frequency of basic formulaic expressions of gratitude compared to GloWbE

Expressions of gratitude	Rank of Freq.	IMDb Corpus	Rank of Freq.	GloWbE
<i>Thanks</i>	1	64 (38.5%)	1	235709 (47%)
<i>Thank you</i>	2	55 (33.1%)	2	217614 (43.4%)
<i>Thank you so much</i>	3	17 (10.2%)	3	17044 (3.4%)
<i>Thank you very much</i>	4	11 (6.8%)	4	13764 (2.7%)
<i>Thanks a lot</i>	5	8 (4.9%)	6	3867 (0.77%)
<i>Cheers</i>	6	6 (3.7%)	7	2023 (0.04%)
<i>Thanx</i>	7	2 (1.2%)	8	1983 (0.04%)
<i>Many Thanks</i>	8	1 (0.54%)	5	9032 (0.18%)
<i>Thanks muchly</i>	8	1 (0.54%)	9	23 (0.005%)
TOTAL		165 (100%)		501059 (100%)

In both corpora, *thanks* was found to be the mostly occurred expression of gratitude. Following that, *thank you*, *thank you so much*, and *thank you very much* were determined to be the second, third, and fourth mostly occurred thanking formulae in both corpora. However, a difference in the rank of frequency of formulaic gratitude expressions were found to occur between the IMDb corpus and GloWbE since a variety of CMC genres (blogs, websites, online bulletin boards etc.) and 20 different dialects of English with a word count of 1.9 billion words are included within the latter corpus. In other words, the size and genre difference between the two corpora may have resulted in this ranking difference. Chart 1 visually presents the percentages of distribution of thanking expressions in both corpora.

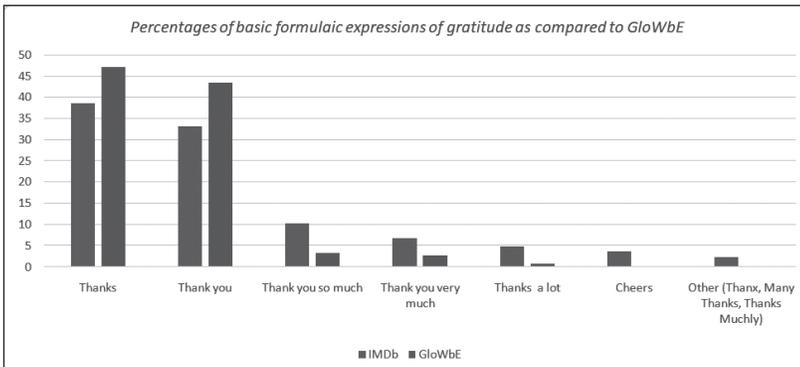


Chart 1 - Percentages of basic formulaic expressions of gratitude compared to GloWbE

Frequency of basic formulaic expressions of gratitude as compared to COCA and BNC

As for a comparison between the frequency of expressions of gratitude determined in the IMDb corpus and spoken data, the results of the analysis were compared to two spoken corpora; Corpus of American Contemporary English (COCA) and British National Corpus (BNC). Table 3 illustrates the results of the analysis.

Table 3. Frequency basic formulaic expressions of gratitude as compared to COCA and BNC

Expressions of gratitude	Rank of Freq.	IMDb Corpus	Rank of Freq.	COCA	Rank of Freq.	BNC
<i>Thanks</i>	1	64	2	31421	2	1585
<i>Thank you</i>	2	55	1	71549	1	5811
<i>Thank you so much</i>	3	17	4	4891	6	12
<i>Thank you very much</i>	4	11	3	11864	3	1028
<i>Thanks a lot</i>	5	8	5	1857	5	83
<i>Cheers</i>	6	6	6	699	4	162
<i>Many Thanks</i>	7	1	7	85	7	25
TOTAL		165		122366		8706

As illustrated above, the frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sentences were found to highly differ as compared to spoken data from COCA and BNU. While the most frequently occurred expression of gratitude was found to be *Thanks* in the IMDb corpus, this expression was determined to be *Thank you* in spoken data. One reason for this difference can be the efforts of users to economize on typing (Darics, 2010). Typical to CMC genres, IMDb users may seem to have preferred using shorter expressions of gratitude than lengthier formulas. However, formulaic thanking with the use of quantifiers such as *so*, *much*, and *a lot* were also found to occur 36 times within the corpus, which indicates that IMDb users still prefer lengthier thanking formulae at the expense of typing more (Darics, 2010). Yet, considering the 96% of typing a form of explicit thanking expression found in the current corpus, it is still remarkable that politeness strategies are still a part of IMDb users' interactions. Further discussion including the rate of gratitude

expressions in terms of reciprocity are also provided in the related subsection of results. Though not presented in the chart due to the unavailability of searching for non-verbal cues in GloWbE, the use of emoticon [Cheers] were found to occur 26 times within the corpus, which can be explained in relation to the nature of CMC. Due to the need for expressing emotions in a context where F2F features of communication, such as voice and gesture cues are lacking, typing or copying and pasting emoticons are preferred by the users as compensators (Darics, 2010). Chart 2 visually presents the results at issue.

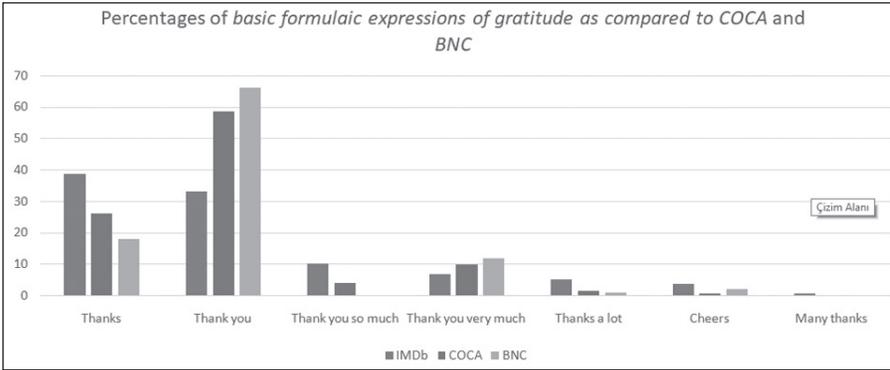


Chart 2 - Percentages of basic formulaic expressions of gratitude as compared to COCA and BNC

3.2. Research Question 2: The responses given to expressions of gratitude when closing conversation

Addressing the second research question, the responses provided by the mystery solvers at the end of conversation are determined by using the same basic concordancing program and manual coding procedures. The results as to the lexical items and basic formulaic sequences of responses to expressions of gratitude are illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of lexical items and basic formulaic sequences of responses to expressions of gratitude

Responses to Expressions of Gratitude		
	Rank of Freq.	IMDb Corpus
<i>You are/'re welcome!</i>	1	34 (38%)
[Cheers]	2	24 (28%)
<i>Glad to help!</i>	3	15 (17%)
<i>Glad (that) I could help.</i>	4	9 (10.2%)
<i>Glad you found your film</i>	5	2 (2.3%)
[Smiley]	6	2 (2.3%)
<i>Glad for you!</i>	7	1 (1.14%)
<i>Cheers!</i>	7	1 (1.14%)
TOTAL	88	88 (100%)

As shown in the above table, the most frequently observed response to expressions of gratitude is the formulaic “*you are/'re welcome*” with an occurring rate of 34 times. This is followed by the use of the adjective *glad* and its variations with the infinitive *help*, or noun clauses like “*(that) I could help*” and “*(that) you found your film*”. These expressions of welcoming and gladness are also reported in the literature as typical responses to gratitude (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; 1993). Yet, the findings also revealed that the use of emoticons [Cheers] and [Smiley] are also preferred when responding to gratitude, typical to CMC genres. Daric (2010; 2013) also suggests that non-verbal cues such as emoticons are mostly reciprocal and highlights the economizing principle related to CMC genres. Instead of typing words, shortly code-typing for emoticons or selecting from a list of them is a widespread communication strategy among users of IMDb, too (Darics, 2010; 2013). In the current corpus, the use of emoticons and smileys were observed 37 times out of 100 interactions. Among them, [Cheers] is the mostly used non-verbal cue for either thanking or reciprocating to thanks. The use of these non-verbal cues may also account for the users’ need for adding interactants’ emotions into the online conversation and compensating/mitigating the effects of the lack of voice and gesture cues, which are indispensable at F2F communication (Darics, 2013). Expressing emotions is therefore important for IMDb users even in the form of non-verbal cues.

3.3 Research Question 3: The nature of reciprocity among the givers and receivers of gratitude

Addressing this research question, the results of the quantitative analysis revealed that 75% of all 100 interactions collected are reciprocated by the receivers of the gratitude. The shortest response to a thanking expression, was found to include a single emoticon, [Cheers], in 3 of all 4 such cases. The lengthiest reciprocation was found to include 100 words.

<23>

Original poster (OP): Thank you for your assistance.

Solver (S): [cheers] (Emoticon)

<87>

OP: That's it!!! Thanks so much - Love your tag ***

S: You're welcome! Many people reviewing this mention that it reminds them of "Rosemary's Baby". I especially like Andy Serkis as the fanatical priest (or, maybe he's a former priest). The party scene at the ending is the best moment =} I've loved that saying since I saw it in a TK Graphics catalog. Who knows how many romantic opportunities were missed and how often it would have helped knowing that danger was near? I love and collect film scores, so it seemed just right for me.

Remember to add "SOLVED" to your original subject line. (100 words)

However, although there is no set rule or emerging strategy why some forms of reciprocation are as lengthy as the above given case, all 75 examples of them include at least one polite form of response to the thanker (See Table 4). In addition, mostly referring back to the inquiry by the original poster, the solvers further commented on how they gave the correct answer; in other words, solved the mystery, or narrated their stories as to the object of inquiry as underlined in example <87>. Also, in 18% of all reciprocation, the solvers reminded the original poster to add "solved" to their original thread title either with an impolite form of imperative or an over polite indirect/rhetorical question, which helps other fellow users not bother looking for an answer to the mystery posted.

<5>

OP: Thanks thinker! That's it.

S: You are very welcome. Your servant sir.

Would you be so kind as to add ' SOLVED ' to your post?

This finding also leads us to the idea that the members of IMDb as a CofP use language as a tool to follow or help other members follow the social norm of the community (Locher & Watts, 2005).

Overall, the reciprocity of interaction (75%); in other words, the two-part exchange by the givers and receivers of gratitude underlines the significance of the relational work among the members of the community at issue (Locher, 2004; Locher & Watts, 2005). Therefore, it can be argued that the two-way relationship, which is a typical F2F politeness behavior (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; 1993) is moved to CMC discourse unlike the “impoverished” and less-polite nature of an asynchronous text-based CMC genre (Das, 2011; Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010).

3.4 Research Question 4: Strategies and functional sequences of gratitude

Gratitude expressions when closing conversation were discursively analyzed drawing on the notion of “speech act sets”, which “refers to the fact that any speech act may be realized by either using a single discourse strategy – or by combining two or more discourse strategies, some of which may represent other types of speech acts” (Vasquez, 2011). The results of the analysis indicated that 97% of all gratitude speech acts was combined with at least another discourse strategy. Only six examples were found to include a single formulaic expression of gratitude, yet three of them including a CMC-specific non-verbal strategy. Interestingly, these three examples were all reciprocated by a single formulaic response to gratitude.

<53>

OP:THANK YOU SOOO MUCH!

S: You're very welcome!

<55>

OP:Thanks :)

S: You're welcome!

<57>

OP: Thank you !!!!!

S: You're welcome.

Even more interestingly, all three examples included CMC-typical thanking formulae, such as capitalization, emoticon use, and repetition of the exclamation mark (Darics, 2010). It can be argued that even in the shortest form of thanking, a CMC-specific thanking strategy is used due to the nature of CMC itself. However, these strategies, which are capitalization, non-verbal cues, and multiple use of exclamation marks, are nothing but CMC alternatives for F2F interaction features, such intonation and gesture (Darics, 2010).

As for the 97% of gratitude speech act, five discursive strategies were found: (1) confirmation +thanking ± compliments/explanation/appreciation/friendly teasing (58%), (2) formulaic thanks +compliment/appreciation/explanation/friendly teasing (25%), (3) compliment +thanking +explanation +thanking (7%), (4) formulaic thanking only ±CMC strategies (6%), (5) lengthy narration + thanking (4%). Each strategy are further discussed in order of occurrence rate.

Strategy #1: confirmation +thanking ± compliments/explanation/appreciation/friendly teasing

This strategy is the most frequently observed one with a frequency rate of 57%. The results is not interesting if determined in terms of the object of gratitude being an answer to the inquiry by the original poster. In such cases, it is also typical in F2F contexts that some sort of confirmation precedes or follows the actual thanking (Searle, 1976; Eisenstein, 1995). The fact that the speech act of gratitude within the examples of this strategy itself is generally preceded by a compliment <56>, explanation <56>, appreciation <96>, or friendly teasing <13> are all apparent in F2F contexts as suggested by relevant literature (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; 1993). What is typical to the genre of the current data set is that the speech act of gratitude combined with confirmation also include interjections <96>, emoticons <45>, CMC specific abbreviations <13>, or multiple expressive punctuation marks <56>, which again used as online alternatives for voice and gesture cues available only at F2F contexts. Therefore, it can be argued that F2F communication strategies of thanking are also moved to the CMC genre at issue with the inclusion of CMC specific strategies.

<45> That's it. Thank you :D!

<56> Yes -that's definitely it!!! [Wow - I didn't think anyone would be able to help me - especially so quickly] - I'm impressed!!!

<96> Ah that's it. [I typed in "Kill or Kill" before but nothing came up. I thought it was close to that.] Thanks a lot, appreciate it.

<13> Hahaha! Ah hA! You got it! Thanks! If IMDB had a rating system with 100 gold stars I'd gladly reward you. LMAO (laughing my a** of), bonus points for naming the foreign version!

Strategy #2: (Compliment)/Formulaic thanks + naming the benefactor(compliment) / appreciation/explanation/friendly teasing ±emoticons

The second most frequent strategy determined is the use of formulaic thanking with a name of the benefactor addressed. This strategy is combined with functional sequences of again compliments <65>, appreciation <62>, explanation <30>, friendly teasing <97> which are all similar to F2F examples of thanking (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; 1993). Capitalization of words, emoticons, and non-grammatical forms are again inclusions due to the nature of the context (Darics, 2013). Therefore, it can be suggested that this strategy also helps the thanking formulae in the context at issue be regarded similar to F2F contexts.

<49> Thanks a lot, man! :D

<65> FREAKING GENIUS!!! Thank you (the username of the solver)... do you take internet cookies?! ;) xx

<30> Thanks (the username of the solver). Haven't seen Remo for years. Saw it a few times and enjoyed it, but I didn't connect that scene with it.

<97> Thank you (the username of the solver)! You rock. [cheers]

<62> "Thank you very much (to both of you)! Hugely appreciated :D

Strategy #3: (Compliment) +thanking +explanation +thanking ±emoticons

The third most frequent strategy used is interesting in terms of the duplication of thanks, in between which explanation to the inquiry by the original poster is addressed. It is also remarkable that this intensified expression of gratitude is mostly linked to how desperate

the original poster about the “mystery”. In addition to being lengthy, these examples confirm that the more intense our emotions about the object of gratitude are the more intensified our expressions of gratitude will be (Das, 2011; Eisenstein, 1995). In example <33>, the use of the adjective “doomed”, and the use of the sentence “I think I can finally sleep” in example <86> actually highlight how the original posters’ emotions about the object of gratitude are.

<33> Thank you so much! [May of taken three days but I’m glad someone was able to help me out. I thought **I was doomed.**] Anyway, thanks again! :-)

<86> YES, thank you very much, [I’ve been looking for this movie for a long while. I spent several weekends looking through IMDB, lists, etc. but couldn’t find it till now...I even asked some friends that have seen thousands of movies but they wouldn’t remember the name neither.] So thank you very much, now I think I can finally sleep.

Strategy #5: Lengthy narration + thanking

As an extension to the third strategy, the results also revealed that lengthy narration as in the form of a letter is used as a strategy of expressing gratitude. However, none of these four examples are reciprocated by the solvers of the mystery although the benefactors are always explicitly addressed in these “thank you letters”. This indicates that the interaction between the original poster and the solver is not new. However, it can be argued that none of them were reciprocated due to the strategy’s being “improper” and “over polite” in terms of the nature of the CMC genre at issue. Though relational work is important for IMDB members, social ties are not as tight as those in F2F communication or those in a more interactive CMC, such as SNSs. Therefore, it can be argued that level of politeness, when being “exaggerated” are probably not regarded as “sincere” by the members, and thus not reciprocated.

<21> OP: Hey, Hey, it’s (name of the benefactor)! It’s good to know you’re still around and still as wise as ever. You know, I had it in my mind that Morgan Freeman played The President lots of times, but I was wrong. He play God more often than that. Still he’s a great actor. I want to thank you for ringing my doorbell and giving me the sum of your wisdom.

Thank you (name of the benefactor)

Your friend always, (name of the thanker)

Conclusion

Drawing on Searle (1976) and Locher and Watts (2005), this paper aimed to investigate expressions of gratitude when closing conversation as an indicator of polite (if not, politic) behavior of relational work within a potentially “impolite” asynchronous text-based CMC context, IMDb discussion room called “*I Need to Know*”. As for data analysis, expressions of gratitude from a data set of 100 thread postings on IMDb were analyzed quantitatively as compared to corpora of Global Web-based English (GloWbE) for other CMC genres and to COCA and BNC for spoken examples. Considering qualitative analysis, expressions of gratitude and those used by the receivers for reciprocation were analyzed for frequencies of formulaic expressions, strategies, and functional sequences as in the form of speech act sets. The two-part exchange between the giver and receiver of gratitude were also discursively analyzed within relational terms (Locher & Watts, 2005).

According to the results, thanking formulae were found to be in line with GloWbE, COCA, and BNC, though there were differences in terms of the frequencies of use. As for strategies and functional sequences, the findings support the literature on F2F (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; 1993) and CMC politeness (Darics, 2010). Contrary to the findings in the literature which suggests that the higher the level of intimacy between the interactants, the more intensely gratitude is expressed (Das, 2011; Gonzales, 2013), the results of the current study indicated that regardless of the lack of close social ties between the interactants and highly anonymous nature of the context, relational work is still significant for IMDb members. Interestingly, intensified forms of thanking were not reciprocated within the corpus of the study. The high rate of thanking (95%) and reciprocity (75%) in the current corpus strengthens the argument that relational work is important among the members of IMDb. While it has been argued that especially asynchronous text-based CMC genres lead to less polite interaction (Das, 2011; Locher, 2010; Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010), this result can be evaluated as a counter argument with the abovementioned high percentages within the corpus of the study. Therefore, IMDb members interacting at the discussion board at issue can be argued to follow one of the social norms of F2F communication regardless of the high anonymity of interaction and the nature of text-based asynchronous CMC apparent at IMDb. Furthermore, if questioned in terms of the looseness of the social ties and anonymity of interaction among the participants of the study, it can be suggested that their thanking behavior is at least “politic” (Locher & Watts, 2005) if not polite as compared to the notions of F2F communication. This thanking behavior within an interactional and

relational framework can also be explained with the idea that IMDb is a CofP (Lave & Wenger, 1998), and thus its members communicate as to maintain their online personal relations with other members regardless of the small chances of interaction with the same member again.

Considering limitations, it is significant to indicate that this study explored a corpus of 100 online posts in terms of gratitude expressions only at the end of conversation. The speech act at issue and the selection of a single genre may have narrowed down the results and limited the generalizability of them. Therefore, it is suggested that the pragmatic phenomenon investigated in this study should be extended to other genres with larger corpora. The results from a synchronous multimodal CMC genre are anticipated to reveal different outcomes.

All in all, it is concluded that reciprocity within relational terms is still remarkable even in a CMC genre which is “notorious” as being potentially impolite. Though counter-argued the relevant literature in terms of the nature of the CMC genre and its effects on impoliteness (Lorenzo-Dus et. al, 2010), the results also supported many findings in the literature as to F2F and CMC contexts in terms of thanking formulae, strategies, functional sequences, and the importance of relations among the interactants.

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