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Discourse Analysis of Speech Acts of Thanking by Bahraini and Vietnamese ESL Learners

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Language teaching has changed from the traditional focus on grammatical competence to communicative competence. The prevailing point of view in the field of pragmatics is that "two participants with two different value systems underlying each of their first language (L1) cultural group (Click, 1886 as cited in Cheng, 2011) transferred their L1 pragmatic rules into a second or foreign language (L2) domains" (Mascuñana & Patron, 2013). It is also widely accepted that different cultures structure discourse differently (Demir & Takkaç, 2016). Based on these assumptions, this paper employed a textual discourse analysis to examine the thanking strategies and the semantic formulas used by Vietnamese and Bahraini ESL students in their letters. This study focused on identifying the students' semantic expressions in thanking based on the 19 forms of thanking identified by Cheng and Seto (2015) and analyzing the students' thanking strategies based on Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Aijmer (1996) as cited by Demir and Takkaç (2016). Results showed that the students had limited semantic formulaic expressions in expressing gratitude. Meanwhile, there are significant variations of verbal strategies among students from the two cultural groups. The findings imply that thanking, as a speech act, along with other language functions, needs to be emphasized in the ESL curriculum in the hope of developing communicative competence inside and outside the classroom.

Keywords: speech act, thanking, gratitude, verbal strategies, communicative competence, pragmatic transfer

INTRODUCTION

The words that we utter in a speech situation are not only words and mere syntactic structures; they are thoughts, ideas, and emotions. In everyday communication, the words, phrases and sentences uttered or written perform certain language functions such as greeting, complimenting, ordering, thanking, apologizing, complimenting, among others, called speech acts.

According to Green (2014), speech acts are staples of life and have become a topic for investigation since the middle of the twentieth century. She pointed out that the "recognition of the significance of speech act illuminated the ability of language to do other things aside from describing reality." In How to Do Things with Words, J.L. Austin writes,

> *…to say something is to do something; or in which by saying or in saying something we are doing something.*

Speech Act of Thanking

This paper focused on the speech act of thanking. The speech act of gratitude is one of the commonly used speech acts in everyday interaction yet draws less attention (Adini & Iragiliati, n.d). The speech act of thanking is categorized by Austin (1962 in Searle, 1979) as behabitives include "the notion of reaction to other people's behaviour and fortunes and of attitudes and expressions of attitudes to someone else's past conduct or imminent conduct." Searle (1979), in his work *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts,* criticized Austin's work saying that one of the weaknesses of Austin's taxonomy is "the lack of clear principle of classification, there is a persistent confusion between illocutionary acts and illocutionary verbs, and an overlap from one category to another." This criticism led to Searle's alternative taxonomy. He classified "thanking" in his category of **expressives** together with "apologizing," "congratulating," "welcoming," among others. Searle also discussed the syntax of expressive in English, and that is, "expressive verb in a **performative** utterance will not take *that* clauses but require a gerundive nominalization or other nominals." An example presented by Searle in the speech act of thanking

is "I thank you for paying me the money" rather than saying, "I thank you that you paid the money." Meanwhile, the term "performative" was coined by Austin (1962) from the verb "perform" as associated with the noun "action" which indicates that the "issuing of utterance is the performing of an action; it is not normally thought of as just saying something."

Coulmas (1981 as cited in Díaz Pérez, 2005) presented the taxonomy of classification of expressions of gratitude. Díaz Pérez elaborated that " the object of thanking may be described in relation to different properties. Thus, it can be real or potential, material or immaterial, requested or not requested and indebting or not indebting. Likewise, the object of thanking may vary with regard to a scale of importance. The different objects of gratitude demand different strategies of thanking." Based on Coulmas' work, the expressions of gratitude were classified in four dimensions:

I   - thanks ex ante (for a promise, offer, invitation)
     - thanks ex post (for a favour, invitation (afterwards))
II - thanks for material goods (gifts, services)
     - thanks for immaterial goods (desires, compliments, congratulations, information)
III - thanks for some action initiated by the benefactor
     - thanks for some action resulting from a request, wish or order by the beneficiary
IV - thanks that imply indebtedness
     - thanks that do not imply indebtedness

There are many ways or strategies to perform the speech act of gratitude. A simple utterance of "Thanks" may be the most common expression, but there are other semantic formulas to perform "thanking." In a study conducted by Cheng and Seto (2015), they identified nineteen forms of thanking: Thanks, Thank you, Thanks very much, Thank you very much, I can't thank you enough, I don't know how to thank you, Thank you for…, Thank you so much, Thanks so much, Thank you so much for…, Thank you very much indeed, Thank you very much for..., Thanks a bunch, Thanks a lot, Thanks a lot for…, Thanks for…, Thanks for everything, Thanks awfully, Thanks very much indeed. These formulaic expressions were identified by Cheng and Seto through various literature review.

On the other hand, Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Ajmer (1996 as cited in Demir & Takkaç, 2016) identified thanking strategies. This paradigm accounts for a thanking utterance's specific purpose and offers syntactic formulas for some verbal thanking strategies. These thanking strategies are summarized by Demir and Takkaç (2016) in a tabular form.

A. An explicit expression of gratitude
  Sub-formula A1. **Use of performative**
  Sub-formula A2. **Offer of gratitude**
  Sub-formula A3. **Expressing indebtedness**
B. An account or acknowledgment of favour
C. An expression of admiration
  Sub-formula C1. **Admiration of the act**
  Sub-formula C2. **Admiration of the addressee**
D. An indication of unnecessity of favor
E. A promise of repayment

The researcher used Demir and Takkaç's discussion to explain each thanking strategy and presented some examples from the coded thank you letters.

A. An explicit expression of gratitude
  Sub-formula A1. **Use of performative.** It can be recalled that Austin coined the term performative to mean an utterance performing something rather than plainly saying something. In Demir and Takkak's work, this category offers explicit thanks in formal speech events and requires a first-person subject and a speech act verb.
  Example:
  I would like to thank you for all that you have done for the class.
  I really thank you for teaching us.

> I + speech act verb

  Sub-formula A2. **Offer of gratitude.** This is characterized by elliptical expressions of gratitude, thus, the subject which is the pronoun I, is implied.
  Example:

Thank you for giving me extra lessons
Thanks for everything.

Sub-formula A3. ***Expressing indebtedness.*** This is done through chunks or fixed expressions such as I am much obliged, I am grateful, I am thankful, among others. Based on Demir and Takkak's corpora, this formulaic expression is used to express gratitude of a favor already done.

I + copula + adjective

Examples:
I am grateful for your efforts.
I am so thankful.

B. An account or acknowledgment of favor.

Unlike the previous category, this group expresses illocutionary intent which may not be directly seen using grammatical indicators. It does not explicitly convey gratefulness but only suggests the positive effect that the favor has on the speaker.

Examples:
You made me star. But now it's time to move.
Nothing you have done has been forgotten.

C. An expression of admiration

Sub-formula C1. ***Admiration of the act.*** This is an expression of appreciation towards the hearer's kind act or benevolent deed. Demir and Takkaç construed that this strategy can strengthen the correlation between the speaker and the hearer.

Examples:
Million of thanks. I really appreciate your work.
Thank you. I really appreciate everything you did.
I greatly appreciate your generosity.

Sub-formula C2. ***Admiration of the addressee.*** In this strategy, the speaker focuses and expresses his/her admiration towards the hearer by giving well wishes and other utterances of appreciation and affirmation after thanking.

Example:
Thank you. You are my best English teacher.

D. An indication of unnecessity of favour.
In this strategy, the speaker expresses gratitude by using negative statements. Some common examples presented by Demir and Takkaç from their corpus are *you shouldn't have; I didn't expect you to do that; and you didn't have to do it.* Meanwhile, there was no single example of this thanking strategy found among the letters being coded.

E. A promise of repayment.
According to Demir and Takkaç, this strategy implies a "high feel" of indebtedness and gratitude. This thanking act commits a future repayment of the favor done by the hearer. From the letters coded, the researcher found a single example of this strategy being used.
Example:
Thank you, teacher. I owe you a lot.

Pragmatic Transfer

Since this paper also focused on the assumption on pragmatic transfer, it is important to discuss theories that explain this notion.

A pragmatic transfer is an offshoot of pragmatic competence, which is a sub-category of communicative competence. "Dell Hymes coined the term communicative competence in 1966 in response to Noam Chomsky's linguistic competence in 1965. Communicative competence is defined as the intuitive functional knowledge and control of the principles of language usage" (Armostis, 2013). Meanwhile, Blythe (2010) discussed that "Canale and Swain published an influential article in 1980, which they argued that the ability to communicate required four different sub-competencies: *grammatical* (ability to create grammatically correct utterances), *sociolinguistic* (ability to produce sociolinguistically appropriate utterances), *discourse* (ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances), and *strategic* (ability to solve communication problems as they arise)." While *linguistic* competence refers to the grammatical knowledge of a person, which includes phonological knowledge, syntactic knowledge,

and semantic knowledge (Finch, 2000), Kecskes (2013) defines *pragmatic competence* in L2 research as the ability to produce and comprehend utterances (discourse) that is adequate to the L2 socio-cultural context in which interaction takes place.

According to Robledillo (2015), pragmatic transfer is commonly defined as the influence of the speaker's L1 on his/her performance of the L2. Ellis (1997) discussed about negative and positive transfer. L1 transfer refers to the influence of learner's L1 that exerts over the acquisition of an L2. When the learner's L1 is one of the sources of error in learner language, it is referred to as negative transfer. On the other hand, positive transfer occurs when the learner's L1 can facilitate L2 acquisition. In the discussion of pragmatic transference, Zegarac and Pennington (2000 as cited by Hoang, 2013) who said:

> In the case of L2 learners, negative transfer occurs when L2 learners have mistakenly generalised from pragmatic knowledge of L1 to an L2 setting, that is, they have carried over the L1 knowledge which is appropriate and acceptable in L1 culture but inappropriate and unusual in L2 culture. Positive transfer, on the other hand, happens when the learners apply an L1 pragmatic norm in an L2 interaction with success because the norm is shared.

Speech Act of Thanking as Influenced by Culture

According to Gass (1995), "speech acts are realized from culture to culture in different ways and that these differences may result in communication difficulties that range from the humorous to the serious." Speech acts vary from culture to culture, and people from different cultures have different norms in expressing gratitude, apology compliments, refusal, etc. (Yusefia, Gowharya, Azizifara & Esmaeilia, 2015). Meanwhile, Eisenstein and Bodman's (1986) study revealed that non-native speakers have difficulty expressing gratitude in English. The participants of the study were unable to approximate idiomatic expressions due to socio-cultural incongruities, which created serious misunderstandings.

It is assumed that speech acts vary from culture to another and that L1 speech patterns may be carried over or may be transferred to the target language subconsciously. Since some text samples analyzed and coded in

this study are written by Bahraini students, studies focusing on speech act of gratitude in the Arabic-speaking context are considered relevant.

First, a study conducted by Morsi (2010) which focused on the thanking strategies of Egyptians revealed that their strategy of thanking differs significantly from English thanking strategy and that of other cultures. Morsi elaborated that the Egyptian verbal strategies of thanking are comprised of lengthy utterances. These verbal strategies include repetitions, blessings, religious and non-religious semantic formulas, and other formulaic expressions. Another cross-cultural study on thanking strategy was conducted by Farnia and Abdul Sattar (2015) among Iranian and Malay students in Malaysia. Results showed that both groups used similar thanking strategies but differed on the frequency of strategies used. Just like Morsi's findings, Farnia and Abdul Sattar construed that "Iranians use lengthy thanking strategies when expressing gratitude to people of higher social status (e.g. professors)."

Another group of students in this study is composed of Vietnamese ESL students. Thus, it is also relevant to explore studies of the speech act of thanking in the Vietnamese context. One study was conducted by Pham (2013) to explore the effects of social distance in the speech act of thanking among Vietnamese. Results showed that social distance is found to affect thanking behaviors in Vietnamese significantly; that is, the greater the social distance between the speaker and the hearer, the more frequently thanking expressions (direct and/or indirect) are employed. Pham's data showed a higher frequency of thanking strategies characterized with explicit head act used in talking to strangers. In comparison, there is less frequency incurred of thanking strategies using head act among intimate (e.g., spouse, partners, nuclear family members, etc.) interlocutors. Meanwhile, another study which explores about the change of social relationship between interlocutors through the use of personal pronouns was conducted by Ho-Dac (1997 as cited in Hoang, 2013). Ho-Dac argued that "because the use of address terms in the Vietnamese language is so important in speech, 'a change in address terms signals a change in relation between the participants'". To explain the Vietnamese communication style, Clark (1988 as cited by Hoang, 2013) elaborated that

> Vietnamese language "does make distinctions in terms of address
> that reflect a very deep concern in Vietnamese society for respect

and good feeling in personal relation". This means that the nature of communication among Vietnamese is determined by hierarchical factors such as age, social status, kinship, and relationship, all of which again determine the word choice patterns formally and informally.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the thanking strategies used by Vietnamese and Bahraini students in writing their "thank you" letters to their teachers. Although many studies are available on the speech act of gratitude, most of these studies used DCT and corpora to gather data. Aside from this, most investigations on cross-cultural pragmatic on speech acts of thanking were done using contrastive analysis between English and other native languages. In this study, the researcher employed textual discourse analysis of authentic thanking letters written in English by ESL students from two different cultural backgrounds. This paper is based on the assumption that ESL learners tend to carry the socio-pragmatic rules of their L1 when they write a letter in English, the target language. At the end of the study, the research hopes to find certain implications relevant to the development of communicative competence among ESL learners. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the thanking expressions used by the students?
2. What are the thanking strategies used by each group of students?

METHODOLOGY

This paper implored discourse analysis, which is a qualitative research approach. According to Jones (2012), "discourse analysis is the study of language. As a sub-field of linguistics, it is the study of the ways sentences and utterances are put together to make texts and interactions and how those texts and interactions fit into our social world."

Discourse analysis is defined as the study of naturally occurring language in any social context that uses various qualitative methods to increase people's understanding of the human experience (Shanthi, Lee & Lajium, 2015).

In this research, there are two sets of data. The first set was composed of letters written by Grade 6 students of an international school from the Kingdom of Bahrain. The thanking letters were products of freewriting activity in an English class conducted through emergency remote teaching (ERT); thus, the letters were submitted and collected through Google form. Before the writing activity, the researcher provided instructions and a letter template to the students. Below are the exact instructions and the content of the letter template provided before the writing activity. Although it was freewriting, some students chose to create thanking letters for their teachers. Thus, the researcher purposively selected these thanking letters for teachers to match the criteria of the other set of data.

General Instructions
Writing a Thank You letter
This is a free writing activity in which you just have to put your thoughts into writing regardless of errors in spelling, grammar or punctuation. For this activity, you are encouraged to pour your thoughts and feelings in writing.

Specific Instructions
Think of someone who has inspired or helped you. Express your gratitude by writing a Thank You letter to him/her.

Dear _____,

Thank you for the _____. I really
_____

From _____

Another set of data was taken from the thank you letters and notes written and pasted by the students in a scrapbook as a year-end activity. They were Grade 6 students from a private institution in Vietnam. Since it was a scrapbooking activity, the letters were products of the students' free will and expression.

Initially, 56 thank you letters were collected from the Bahrain group; however, some letters were expressions of gratitude to their parents and siblings. Meanwhile, there were 34 thanking letters from the Vietnam group. Yet, some samples were written by Grade 9 students. Thus, for even distribution when it comes to age and academic level, a purposive sampling was done. Coincidentally, both groups had 15 samples, which were coded and analyzed. To sum it up, the data sources were thank you letters for teachers in English written by Grade 6 students from private schools in Bahrain and Vietnam.

For ethical considerations, the researcher sent emails to the administrators of the two schools to request permission to use the letters for discourse analysis. The two schools graciously granted permission for the utilization of the letters for the sole purpose of this research.

This paper identified and categorized the students' thanking expressions in their thanking letters for their teachers. This was done by identifying the students' semantic expressions in thanking based on the 19 forms of thanking identified by Cheng and Seto (2015) and analyzing the students' thanking strategies based on Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Aijmer (1996 as cited by Demir & Takkaç, 2016).

RESULTS

The tables below present the data gathered, which were coded and analyzed. Below each table are discussions of the most important and salient aspects of the data.

To determine the thanking expressions, the researcher only counted the utterances with direct, explicit thanking expressions like "thank you," "I am grateful," and "I really appreciate." Other implicit expressions and utterances to express gratitude are coded and considered in the thanking strategies based on Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Aijmer (1996 as cited by Demir & Takkaç, 2016).

Table 1

Thanking Expressions Used by Bahraini Students

Thanking Expressions	Frequency	Percent
Thank you for…	21	91.30
Thank you	1	4.35
Thanks for everything	1	4.35
Thanks	0	0.00
I can't thank you enough	0	0.00
I don't know how to thank you	0	0.00
Thank you very much	0	0.00
Thank you so much	0	0.00
Thank you so much for...	0	0.00
Thank you so much indeed	0	0.00
Thank you very much for...	0	0.00
Thanks a bunch	0	0.00
Thanks a lot	0	0.00
Thanks a lot for...	0	0.00
Thanks for...	0	0.00
Thanks awfully	0	0.00
Thanks very much indeed	0	0.00
Thanks very much	0	0.00
All expressions combined	23	100.00

The data in Table 1 show that among the 19 expressions identified by Cheng and Seto (2015) in their study, the students used three semantic expressions. This current study shows a similar result with Cheng and Seto's work in which ***thank you*** and ***thank you for*** falls on the top five most frequent forms of thanking in the four corpora of their study. The expression ***thank you for*** accounts for the highest number in the thanking letters of students from Bahrain. This expression is used to specify the thing which a speaker is thankful for. In Arabic, šukran is a formal way of saying thank you (Arabic Manners: Learn how to say "thank you", n. d.). It is used in all Arab countries and understood among all Arabic dialects (How to say thank you in Arabic in 13 ways, 2020). In Lebanese Arabic, ***thank you for*** is done by adding the preposition "3alā / عَلى" (usually contracted to 3a / عَ) + noun to the word or expression of thankfulness. If what the person being thankful for is described in a phrase, the preposition is omitted (Lebanese Arabic Institute, n. d.).

Table 2

Thanking Expressions Used by Vietnamese Students

Thanking Expressions	Frequency	Percent
Thank you	6	42.86
Thank you for…	5	35.71
Thanks for everything	1	7.14
Thank you very much	1	7.14
Thanks for...	1	7.14
I don't know how to thank you	0	0.00
I can't thank you enough	0	0.00
Thank you so much	0	0.00
Thank you so much for...	0	0.00
Thank you so much indeed	0	0.00
Thank you very much for...	0	0.00
Thanks a bunch	0	0.00
Thanks a lot	0	0.00
Thanks a lot for...	0	0.00
Thanks	0	0.00
Thanks awfully	0	0.00
Thanks very much indeed	0	0.00
Thanks very much	0	0.00
All expressions combined	14	100.00

Table 2 shows that the ESL students from Vietnam used five expressions from the 19 expressions identified by Cheng and Seto (2015). Among the five expressions, the expression *thank you* is the most frequently used. This result coincides with the corpus-based study of the speech act of thanking by Stephanie Cheng (2010). She asserted that the "systematic finding based on the two corpora she utilized in her study indicates that *thank you* is much more conventional and well-accepted than *thanks*, and thus is used in wider different contexts (e.g., whether it is formal or informal) or with wider range of social relationships." In a study conducted by Pham (2013) that explored the Vietnamese thanking strategies, most Vietnamese respondents prefer to use direct head act strategies, especially when talking to strangers. She explained that a direct thanking head act is composed of the semantic unit *cảm ơn* "thank" which can be used to express gratitude, with or without other elements. Pham's data suggested a tendency that "the closer the relationship between the speaker (the receiver of favour or a good deed) and the hearer

(the giver) was, the less frequently verbal expressions related to gratitude were used." The data imply that Vietnamese students may have used a similar semantic pattern in their L1 in expressing their gratitude in English (L2), primarily that the speech act of thanking is addressed to a teacher.

Table 3

Other Thanking Expressions Used by Bahraini Students in their Thank You Letters

Thanking Expressions	Frequency	Percent
I really appreciate	3	25.00
I would like to thank you for	2	16.67
I'm writing to thank you for	1	8.33
I am grateful for	1	8.33
I really thank you	1	8.33
I wrote this letter to thank you for	1	8.33
I thank you for	1	8.33
Thank you once again for everything	1	8.33
Million of thanks for	1	8.33
All expressions combined	12	100.00

Table 3 shows other thanking expressions by ESL students from Bahrain other than the 19 expressions identified by Cheng and Seto (2015). It can be deduced that out of nine expressions tallied, seven of these expressions use of formal performative structure *I + verb*. According to Cheng (2010), as cited by Adini and Iragiliati (n. d.), this structure is sub-categorized as elaborated thanking, which is used when the speaker hopes to sound more formal. In the study of Adini and Iragiliati, the majority of the subjects used an elaborated thanking strategy. Some of the occurrences include strategies that contain the following semantic formulas: thanking + intensifier (thank you very much), thanking + reason *(thank you for your help), thanking + intensifier + reason (thank you very much for your help).* Meanwhile, in a study of thanking appropriateness in a dynamic context, Liao (2013) described that Indonesian students do not use the utterance "I appreciate your help" in a daily conversation. Liao asserted that this kind of expression is only used by the students in a formal context. These semantic formulas used by some ESL students in Bahrain may be due to formal language practice in the students' Arabic classes. This is also

another implication of the influence of the students' pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2.

Table 4

Other Thanking Expressions Used by Vietnamese Students in Their Thank You Letters

Thanking Expressions	Frequency	Percent
Thank you, teacher	3	37.5
Thank you, teacher, for	2	25.00
I am truly grateful	1	12.50
I'm very grateful for	1	12.50
Thank you for everything	1	12.50
All expressions combined	8	100.00

Table 4 shows Vietnamese students' thanking expressions other than the expressions identified by Cheng and Seto (2015). It is notable that the first and second expressions directly address the person whom the expression of gratitude is intended for. When the data are combined, 62.5% have a direct address, ***"teacher."*** This finding implies a change of semantic formula to show politeness and respect, especially when there is a social distance like a teacher-student relationship. A study conducted by Farnia and Abdul Sattar (2015) in a cross-cultural study on the expression of gratitude among Iranians and Malays, both groups of respondents in a DCT "softened" their responses by adding "Professor" in their thanking utterances. Farnia and Abdul Sattar explained that "this is a cultural specific strategy where the respondents attempt to emphasize, and even exaggerate their recognition of the higher social rank of their interlocutors as a way of showing respect. Therefore, the use of forms like 'professor,' 'Dr.' or 'sir' was evident in the data." On the other hand, it is also worth mentioning that the use of the intensifier "truly" and "very" in the two utterances in the table above also signifies politeness. According to Otani and Ogawa's (2014) study of how Japanese EFL learners express their thanks and disagreement, students added intensifiers such as "so much" or "very much" when they thanked their teachers. Otani and Ogawa concluded that "the greater the social status between interlocutors is, the more polite a beneficiary, a person who feels indebted, expresses their gratitude." The same claim was made by Robledillo (2015) in her study on the thanking formula in English and Spanish. Robledillo asserted that

"social relative power may also be a determining factor in the use of internal modifiers." Her study showed that 80% of the participants used intensifiers to express gratitude to a professor or a boss.

Table 5

Thanking Strategies Used by Bahraini Students in Their Thank You Letters

Thanking Strategies	Frequency	Percent
A. An explicit expression of gratitude		
Sub-formula A1. Use of performative	7	14.00
Sub-formula A2. Offer of gratitude	26	52.00
Sub-formula A3. Expressing indebtedness	1	2.00
B. An account of acknowledgment of favor	2	4.00
C. An expression of admiration		
Sub-formula C1. Admiration of the act	9	18.00
Sub-formula C2. Admiration of the addressee	5	10.00
D. An indication of unnecessity of favour	0	0.00
E. A promise of repayment	0	0.00
All strategies combined	50	100.00

Based on the thanking taxonomy of Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Ajmer (1996 as cited in Demir and Takkac, 2016), the data show that majority of the subjects from Bahrain used the sub-formula in ***offering an explicit gratitude.*** Demir and Takkac explained that sub-formula A2 – offer of gratitude is characterized by the use of the most common elliptical expressions such as *thank you, thanks, thanks for doing something.* This result is similar to the finding of Cheng (2010) in which *thank you* is the most frequently used expression in the two corpora being coded and analyzed. In the study of Díaz Pérez (2005), it was found out that the IFID (illocutionary force indicating device) *thank you* and *gracias* in English and Spanish, respectively, are the most common among the three groups of informants.

The other formulas such as expression of admiration of the act, admiration of the addressee, and the use of performative also tallied a significant number. According to Demir and Takkac, the sub-formula expressing admiration of an act contains a specific reference to the act worthy of appreciation. Usually, it is represented by a direct head of thanking expression followed by the appreciation of the benevolent act. Here are some samples from the letters coded:

>*Thank you for everything you taught me. I really appreciate
>   everything you did.*
>*Thank you. I greatly appreciate your generosity.*
>*Thank you for always inspiring and loving us. I really enjoy being
>   your student.*

Meanwhile, the sub-formula of the admiration of the addressee is characterized by focusing the semantic expression on the hearer. This is done by adding well-wishes and other positive statements after thanking. Here are some samples from the actual letters coded.

>*Thank you for being such a great teacher. I really appreciate that I
>   got to be your student.*
>*Thank you for teaching us. You are my best English teacher.*
>*Thank you for taking care of us during this school year. I wish you
>   happiness and good fortune.*
>*Thank you for being my teachers and making me the best. May you
>   inspire others to achieve the greatness you have.*

Finally, the sub-formula of explicit expression of gratitude through the use of performative is characterized by **the first-person subject I and a speech act verb.** According to Demir and Takkac, this formula is used to offer thanks in formal speech. Here are some actual samples:

>*I would like to thank you for all that you have done for the class year
>   6A throughout the year.*
>*I thank you for teaching me English, writing and for preparing me
>   and my friends for the next grade.*
>*I would like to thank you for the support you provided to me during
>   the virtual learning in term three.*
>*Today, I would like to say thank you for your hard work.*

On the other hand, the table above shows a total of 50 strategies coded and identified from 15 sample letters written by ESL students from Bahrain. Though the writing template provided before the writing activity presented the simple thanking expression *(Thank you for…)*, the students created longer thanking expressions by using other strategies such as using the formula of expressing gratitude through performative, expressing admiration,

indebtedness, and acknowledgment of favor. This may be attributed to the fact that the letters were produced because it was expected from the students to write a thanking letter as a requirement of an English class. Other factors that may have affected the length and the variation of thanking strategies were social and cultural. According to some Arabic teachers, students are taught the formal Arabic structure of utterances in their Arabic classes. It is assumed that this practice would influence students' writing outputs in English. In a study conducted by Morsi (2010), which focused on the analysis of different functions of expressing gratitude and the responses to it in Egyptian Arabic, he claimed that "the forms of thanking in Egyptian Arabic differ significantly from those of English and probably those of some other cultures in particular ways. In Egyptian Arabic, to be polite and express sincere gratitude to the hearer, the thanker uses one or more of the following strategies: 1) repetition and 2) formulaic expressions, whether explicit mention of thanks, e.g. ('thanks a million,' 'don't mention it') or 2) blessings, e.g. ('bless your hand,' 'bless your heart,' 'may God reward you') or other non-religious formulas including good wishes, e.g. ('may we hear good things about you') all of which result in a lengthy form and expressions of gratitude. It is important to note that different factors affect the thanker's choice of any or all of these strategies, such as the thanker's age, gender, and social distance with the hearer."

Table 6

Thanking Strategies used by Vietnamese Students in Their Thank You Letters

Thanking Strategies	Frequency	Percent
A. An explicit expression of gratitude		
Sub-formula A1. Use of performative	0	0.00
Sub-formula A2. Offer of gratitude	14	51.85
Sub-formula A3. Expressing indebtedness	2	7.41
B. An account of acknowledgment of favor	5	18.52
C. An expression of admiration		
Sub-formula C1. Admiration of the act	1	3.70
Sub-formula C2. Admiration of the addressee	4	14.81
D. An indication of unnecessity of favour	0	0.00
E. A promise of repayment	1	3.70
All strategies combined	27	100.00

The table shows a summary of Vietnamese students' thanking strategies in their thanking letters and notes. There are 27 thanking strategies coded and identified. There are 27 thanking strategies coded and identified. Most of the students expressed their thanks by using the sub-formula of ***offering gratitude***, that is, using elliptical expressions by omitting the pronoun I. This result may be attributed to the semantic formula in expressing gratitude in the students' L1. In a study by Pham (2013), which investigated the effects of social distance on the act of expressing gratitude in Vietnamese, data revealed that most of the responses are done by using a single direct head act ***cảm ơn*** (thank). Pham explained by citing Huu (2009) that "expressing gratitude is a frequently used speech act in Vietnamese and an important part of speech etiquette in Vietnamese culture." There are two ways in which Vietnamese expresses their gratitude: direct and indirect (Luong 2010, Nguyen, 2010 as cited by Pham, 2013). She also explained that "a direct expression of gratitude contains either cảm ơn (thank) or another more formal thanking verb such as *cảm tạ, đa tạ, đội ơn*, or *bái tạ* (in Nguyen, 2010). Here are some samples of the direct strategy of thanking by using a sub-formula of offering gratitude.

Thank you teacher for teaching me for one school year.
Thank you teacher for sticking with the whole class for a complete school year.
Thank you teacher for teaching us.
Thank you very much.

As shown in Table 4, Vietnamese students used direct address by writing the word ***"teacher"*** in between the thanking utterance and the reason. This data indicates politeness and respect of the students towards the teacher.

Meanwhile, Pham (2013) explained that "Vietnamese' indirect expressions are those which have the illocutionary force of thanking but are realized in the form of other speech acts such as complimenting, evaluating, expressing luckiness, etc." Since Vietnamese also use other indirect strategies of expressing gratitude in their L1, this characteristic may be transferred or may influence the students' thanking strategies in English. This is evident in the students' use of the semantic formula in acknowledging favor (18.52%) and expressing admiration of the addressee (14.81%). Demir and Takkaç (2016) contended that an account or acknowledgment of favor "divorced

from the other strategy types in that it covers illocutionary intent rather than grammatical indicators. An 'account' or an 'acknowledgment of favor' does not push on to convey gratefulness, but only suggests the positive effect that the favour has on the speaker instead." Here are some samples from the letters and notes coded and analyzed.

> *You are the only one who can make me interested in studying English.*
> *You taught me a lot of things and I'm very grateful. I hope I can meet you*
> *again.*
> *You have been helping and caring for us in every period possible.*

The data show that Vietnamese students do not use the thanking strategy using the performative formula *I + **speech act verb**.* This may be explained by the fact that the activity was a year-end scrapbooking activity where students drew and wrote anything they wanted to express. In most situations, scrapbooking is an informal writing and art activity. This may have affected the students' semantic formulas in their letters and notes. At the beginning of the activity, the instructions focused on creating a scrapbook as memorabilia of the whole class. Though they were given prompts as a guide, all the writing outputs and their contents were products of the students' free-will. There may be many other factors that influence the students' thanking strategies, but the results of the analysis also give rise to some teaching-learning implications.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the thanking strategies of Grade 6 Bahraini and Vietnamese students in their thank you letters. It employed discourse analysis to determine the thanking expressions in reference to Cheng and Seto's (2015) nineteen (19) linguistic realizations of thanking and to classify the thanking strategies using the taxonomy of Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) and Aijmer (1996 as cited by Demir & Takkaç, 2016).

Results showed that both groups used a limited number of expressions in thanking. While Cheng and Seto identified 19 expressions from their literature review and corpora, Bahraini students only used three of these thanking expressions (Table 1) while Vietnamese students only used five thanking expressions (Table 2).

Each group of students has a unique syntactic pattern expressing gratitude other than those 19 expressions identified by Cheng and Seto. Some Bahraini students use the ***performative I + speech act verb*** of thanking like *I thank you for*, or *I would like to thank you*. Others express gratitude using the expression of admiration like *I really appreciate* (Table 3). Meanwhile, Vietnamese students' expression of gratitude in written English is characterized by an "alerter" or "direct address" of the person whom the thanking is intended for. Based on the researcher's personal experience as an ESL teacher, the Vietnamese students also carry the same behavioral pattern in spoken English inside the classroom. As evident in Table 4, some utterances include *"Thank you, teacher"* and *"Thank you, teacher, for."* These syntactic structures and semantic formulas in expressing gratitude are believed to be influenced by the students' L1 and culture resulting in pragmatic transfer in L2.

In Table 5 and Table 6, data showed that both groups of students used the ***sub-formula of offering gratitude*** characterized by direct and simple expressions such as "thank you" and "thank you for" in expressing thanks to their teachers. Both groups did not use the sub-formula in *indicating unnecessity of favor* as a thanking strategy. According to Demir and Takkaç, this strategy is not widely used in American daily conversation. These two researchers had a hard time finding samples of this kind.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Due to the students' limited use of thanking expressions, it implies that other thanking expressions be taught in the classroom in various ways. Although students knew how to express gratitude using simple and direct expression like *"thank you,"* they have to understand that there are other formulaic expressions to express thanks in various contexts. According to Jones (2012), "the meaning of an utterance can change dramatically depending on who is saying, when and where it is said, and to whom it is said." To communicate effectively, one has to gain not only linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. This is why pragmatics has become an important aspect of learning a language. This paper supports Mascuñana and Patron's study on *Sociolinguistic Competence through Speech Acts* (2013), which asserted that a language teacher's primary

goal is to teach communicative competence and can do this by integrating pragmatics in the classroom . Mascuñana and Patron suggested some strategies in teaching speech acts such as model dialogs, role-plays, discourse completion tasks (DCTs), discourse rating tasks, and awareness-raising.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

This is a small-scale study with a sample of 15 letters from each group, a total of 30 letters. In the coding and analysis of data, the researcher is fully aware that the coding process should have involved a team of professionals to increase the coding's reliability. Likewise, since the samples are written discourse, a triangulation of data is recommended in future researches.

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