

# Politeness and Expressing Gratitude in English among Igbo Native Speakers in Nigeria: A Cross-sectional Survey

Chinomso Dozie<sup>1\*</sup> Chioma Chinedu-Oko<sup>2</sup> Patricia Anyanwu<sup>3</sup> Lovina Madu<sup>1</sup>  
Favour Egwim<sup>1</sup> Emeka Otagburuagu<sup>4</sup>

1. Use of English Language and Communication Unit, Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Nigeria

2. Department of Humanities, Federal Polytechnic Nekede, Owerri.

3. Department of English and Communication Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Federal University Otuoke, Nigeria

4. Department of English and Communication skills, School of General Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Nsukka Campus, Nigeria

\*chinomso.dozie@futo.edu.ng

## Abstract

Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness as a framework for the analysis of data collected by means of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) from a total of 2748 respondents purposively drawn from the Igbo English speakers in Nigeria otherwise referred to as Igbo bilinguals, this study positioned itself to explore and analyse how Igbo English speakers express gratitude in the target language mirroring parameters of social distance, social status and power as the case may be as variables that impel the choice of one strategy or the other. Findings showed that the Igbo routinely express appreciation not only for acts of kindness, goodwill, favours received, but also for favours anticipated usually characterised by single word utterances such as: **dalu/deme/imeela/ndewo/kaanka/anwuna** – Thank you, which is simply a way of life for the Igbo. Also, results showed instances of elaborated and genuine show of gratitude which went beyond the usual 'thank you' phrase but extended to offer of prayer for acts of kindness largely made manifest by the receiver's acknowledgment of such acts as uncommon. Results demonstrated that beyond the bounds of distance, status, age, power etc, the Igbo accomplish this interactional goal very seamlessly although not without transfer of the distinctions of the mother tongue to the target language. The study concluded that the culture of the study sample as well as the prevailing contexts in the DCT further affirms that expressing gratitude is an anticipated and acceptable behaviour and neither a face-threatening act for the Igbo.

**Keywords:** Gratitude, Igbo Native speakers, Conversational English, Bilinguals, Nigeria.

**DOI:** 10.7176/JLLL/93-02

**Publication date:** November 30<sup>th</sup> 2022

## 1. Introduction

Every human utterance is believed to have a *raison d'être* as well as perform a function which interlocutors respond to as a way of fulfilling a communication need which thrives on reactions and feedbacks. Within the framework of human utterances otherwise called speech which traverses all nodes of locution, illocution, perlocution, politeness, hedging, turn-taking, adjacency principle, code mixing/switching etc, various researchers (Austin 1962; Searle 1969; Brown and Levinson 1987; Lakoff 1989; Nwoye 1989 and 1992; Garcia 1992 etc) have studied, theorised and classified these utterances into speech act. Speech act represents a body of evidence from Austin's seminal work remarking that speech act subsumes the utterance, the speaker's intention for making the utterance and the effect of the utterance on the hearer as well as the strategies for expressing these acts by observing acceptable cultural norms which may be at varying degrees of directness/indirectness or even veiled as tactfulness reinforced socially. Based on Yule's 1996 taxonomy, these speech acts have been assigned specific labels such as: request, apology, offer, reprimand, promise, invitation, refusal, complaint, thanking etc and investigated across cultures mirroring various parameters of distance, power and extent of infraction between interlocutors.

Expression of gratitude is an intentional show of appreciation or politeness arising in response to something said, done, given, promised, anticipated, offered and even thoughtfulness, which may differ in terms of - effusiveness, form, depth of emotion, frequency etc and largely dependent on context and cultural leanings. According to Yule (1996), thanking is an effective verbalized feeling of gratefulness directed towards another for acts of kindness, support, concern and which helps to manage and maintain healthy relationships. Yule equally noted that apart from expressing gratitude, thanking also expresses other emotions such as sarcasm, irony and blame while serving to open, change and close conversations.

Several studies have been carried out on the speech act of thanking, in the forms of comparative, contrastive, single language, interlanguage, cross-cultural analysis of the expression of gratitude aimed at establishing the realization of the act across languages and cultures of the world though it seems to be universally operational.

## 2. Literature Review

Existing literature shows that quite a lot of research has been done on the speech act of thanking which has been variously described as behavioural expectation and an externalisation of the depth of gratitude from a beneficiary to the benefactor on account of favours received as well as favours anticipated. These studies cut through different angles and aspects of this communicative need as the researchers' preferences offered possible gaps in the paradigm to be further expounded. Granted that there has been extensive research on the performance of this speech act of thanking (Searle 1975; Nwoye 1992; Haverkate 1993; Jung 1994; Yusefi et al 2015; Cheng & Seto 2015; Perez 2005; Altalhi 2014; Garcia 2016; Hosseinpur & Mosavy 2019; Faq, Jbrae I& Muhammad 2019; Hassan 2019 etc) on diverse focus and interest, not much has been done on expressing gratitude in English among Igbo native speakers in Nigeria. The structural debate therefore is to appreciate the cultural sensitiveness underlying speech acts and to this end, this study adds to the existing body of research by exploring and analysing how Igbo English speakers, express gratitude in the target language with Brown and Levinson's 1987 politeness theory serving as a framework for the study.

### 2.1 The Igbo Culture and Thanking

The Igbo are the inhabitants of Abia, Anambra, Ebony, Enugu and Imo states of the south-east and part of Delta and Rivers states of south-south Nigeria with one common language – Igbo and varying but mutually intelligible dialects. As a people with unique history and culture; their values, beliefs and attitudes which differ a great deal from other cultures of the world are reflected in her statistically fewer linguistic forms used to adequately address all language matters in Igbo. According to the pioneering works of Nwoye (1989 and 1992) on "Linguistic politeness in Igbo" as well as "Linguistic politeness and socio-cultural variations of the notion of face" which has continued to drive other studies, the Igbo is a group-oriented nation whose culture is provenanced by brotherliness, hence, acts which are considered private and face-threatening in other cultures are routine among the Igbo. Therefore, thanking in and among the Igbo is a verbal manifestation of appreciation sufficiently accomplished by single word utterances such as: *dalu/deme/imeela/ndewo/kaanka/anwuna* – Thank you (Nwoye 1992). The idea of thanking in and among the Igbo is not limited to responses for favours received, acts of kindness, promises, well wishes etc on personal encounters but extend to matters of indirect concern and benefit. For example, the Igbo choose to say 'thank you' rather than 'congratulations' to a woman who has just been delivered of a baby in the spirit of oneness and deep belief that welcoming a baby is an addition to humanity actuated by God and made possible through the travails of labour. Also, it is natural that the Igbo say 'thank you' even in appreciation for the good deed done for someone else as a social obligation which is a testament to conformity rather than individualism characterising most cultures of the world. Again, the Igbo equally have elaborated forms of showing appreciation without necessarily mentioning the deed necessitating the act but alluding to it while showing gratitude and which is recognizable by the interlocutors. However, the Igbo are known to perform very elaborated or exaggerated forms of thanking which smacks of sarcasm and insincerity often brought about by negligence or irresponsibility with an air of 'having done so much' earlier or the 'not my business' hint on the part of the benefactor. This is possible because the culture of the people is so structured that certain acts are expected of and demanded from one another in the spirit of sodality and anything short of such expectations is against the deep social conscience of the Igbo.

### 2.2 Previous Studies

Eisenstein and Bodman (1993) investigated expression of gratitude in American English using four experiments by mean of naturally occurring data collected through fieldnotes and audiotapes. The authors reported that native speakers expressed gratitude by saying anything they choose which signals that, native speakers adopt lack of necessity as a strategy in expressing gratitude for gift.

By the same token, Aijmer's (1996) study investigated the functions and strategies of gratitude expressions based on London-Lund Corpus of spoken English. Aijmer, like other researchers referred to thanking as an expressive speech act which has illocutionary force and stated that the most used of all the thanking routines were *thanks/thank you*. The present study will consider various expressions of gratitude in English by Igbo native speakers.

In addition, Morsi (2010) studied the speech act of thanking in the Egyptian Arabic dialect using naturally occurring thanks as well as response to thanking in the subjects' everyday conversation collected in two neighbourhoods in New York City. The study demonstrated that Egyptian speakers show politeness by using formulaic expressions of thanks such as "thanks a million", "don't mention it", or blessings such as "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". In response to thanking, they were found to use strategies showing acceptance, denial of favour and even complimenting the thanker while older participants used lengthier forms in expressing gratitude than the younger ones. Morsi's study has shed great light to responding to thanking speech act which the present study does not address.

Moreover, Al-Khwaldeh and Zegarac (2013) examined gender and the communication of gratitude in Jordan typically exploring how gender impacts communication of thankfulness in daily interaction by means of oral interview of 20 Jordanian students. The study focused on ways participants expressed gratitude to the same as well as opposite gender in the eight situations projected and the possible reasons behind the choices. Findings showed that Jordanian men and women use suitable politeness strategies when addressing individuals of higher status, but women were found to show gratitude to women more than to men while men expressed gratitude to women more than to men. The present study will attempt to record the choice of expressions of males and females alike in order that differences if any existed may be graduated.

Also, Altalhi (2014) examined speech acts of thanking and thanking responses by Hijazi females using a corpus of naturally occurring data. The results showed that the samples used various strategies in expressing and responding to thanking for a low imposition favour. Also, Hijazi females used a limited number of thanking and response strategies in thanking for a meal and gifts adopting principally Bald thanking strategy. The study concluded that thanking behaviours of the study participants were mandated by culture.

Similarly, Yusefi et al. (2015) did a pragmatic analysis of thanking strategies among Kurdish speakers of Ilam based on gender and age using a discourse completion task (DCT) for data elicitation for 117 participants. Results of the study indicated that regardless of age and gender, participants expressed gratitude by means of positive feeling, thanking and appreciation strategies while noting that the females experienced and expressed gratitude more than their male counterparts. The study also indicated that while participants were driven to express gratitude for favours done, the females were found to be more expressive than the males.

Furthermore, Garcia (2016) investigated Peruvian Spanish speakers' cultural preferences in expressing gratitude using Spencer-Oatey's rapport-management model to analyse data collected in open role-play interactions from 20 adult subjects; 10 males and 10 females averagely aged 33 and who were practising professionals. Based on the model for analysis, results demonstrated that subjects aligned with interpersonal relationships and prescribed behaviour in the socio-cultural context to achieve their interactional goals. In other words, given the contexts, subjects expressed gratitude by way of elaborate, enthusiastic and effusive responses or by using formulaic expressions, apologising for any imposition caused, expressing indebtedness and promising to repair as culture and context prevailed.

Still on the matter, Hassan (2019) studied genderlect and thanking with focus on the strategies twenty Iraqi EFL learners adopt in the speech act of thanking using the role-play method for data collection. Findings of the study showed that the study participants used the direct strategies rather than indirect strategies to always express gives them off as more linguistically polite than males. This significant finding forms an interesting caveat to be further expounded in the present research.

In addition, Fage et al (2019) examined the most frequently used thanking strategies by Kurdish EFL learners by means of DCT generated data from fourteen randomly selected Kurdish EFL learners of English language at Soran University. The study noted that subjects used simple as well as elaborate thanking strategies which were indicative of the socio-cultural mandate of Kurdish to fulfil the communicative need as it arose.

Now a review of findings of different studies on thanking speech act will help us contextualize Igbo native speakers use and possible transfer of the distinctions of the indigenous language into the English lan

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1 Subjects*

Subjects were two thousand seven hundred and forty-eight (2748) undergraduate students from southeast and part of south-south, zones of Nigeria, one thousand one hundred and fifty-three (1153) males and one thousand five hundred and ninety-five (1595) females, aged between 17 and 25 years and all were Igbo native speakers. Subjects were purposively drawn from a larger pool of participants who gave verbal consent and were enlisted for the study. The institutions of study were –Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike (MOU) Abia State, Nnamdi Azikiwe University (NAU) Awka Anambra State, Ebonyi State University (EBSU) Ebonyi State, University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) Enugu State, Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO) Imo State, Delta State University (DELSU) and University of Port-Harcourt (UNIPORT) River State. Using a 10-item questionnaire, responses were elicited from these subjects who gave consent and agreed to be part of the study.

#### *3.2 Instrument*

The instrument for data collection was a 10-item pretested and validated Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire, written in English and designed to be responded to by the subjects in the English language. The DCT presents ten different situations intended to evoke politeness strategies in performing the thanking speech act which include: (1) You walked into a bank to have your biometric capture so that you can obtain your Bank Verification Number (BVN) and the staff assigned to do the job attended to you. What would you say to him/her? (2) You went to a bus park to make a journey to Abuja. You paid your fare and the ticketer issued you a ticket

for the trip. What would you say to him/her? (3) You walked into a bank to have your biometric capture so that you can obtain your Bank Verification Number (BVN) and the staff assigned to do the job attended to you. What would you say to him/her? (4) You were walking along the road on a sunny day and a good-spirited driver offers you a lift and you obviously didn't need that help and wouldn't accept the gesture. What would you say to the driver? (5) At a family reunion or get together with much to eat and drink, an aunt asked if you needed a second helping of ice cream and sincerely you needed it. What would you say to her? (6) You walked into the church slightly late and the seats in the church were all taken. A child was gracious enough to make a space for you to sit by asking other occupants to adjust their positions. What would you say to that child? (7) You are preparing for a promotion interview at your workplace, and you have been searching for some information contained in a document that had been missing for years. A senior colleague suddenly made that available to you when all hope was almost lost. What would you say to him/her? (8) As the head of a non-governmental organization, you are preparing for a landmark event that would put your establishment in the limelight. It has been time consuming, capital intensive and frustrating trying to put things in place for this event. Suddenly, a junior officer rendered an unsolicited service in that regard. What would you say to him or her? (9) A friend of yours came to you with a malicious gossip making the rounds about you. What would you say to her/him? (10) At a mall, someone offered to pay for your shopping. What would you say?

Just like earlier studies (Dozie, 2017, 2020, 2022) which worked on the same study samples using same methodological system, hence all questionnaire items were followed by three guided options tagged alphabetically from A – C with varying degrees of politeness measuring from the least to the most polite as the case may be. Also, sociolinguistic variations such as status of speakers as well as social distance between speakers are posited in the imagined role-play in each situation.

### 3.3 Data Collection

As a cross-sectional questionnaire-based study, data were collected by means of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) at seven (7) institutions selected for the study in the second/rain semester of 2016/2017 academic session. In addition, ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Ethics Committee of the institutions of study while informed verbal consent was obtained from all the study participants who were considered partners in the study having explained the objective of the research to them. Time allotment for the completion of the DCT was 15minutes.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was used to evaluate respondents' expressed opinions on politeness strategies employed in showing gratitude.

## 4. Results

Gender distribution and return of questionnaire by respondents according to institutions.

Table 1 shows that out of the 3000 copies of questionnaire distributed, 2748 representing 92% was returned consisting of 42% males and 58% females from various institutions of study.

Table1: Gender Distribution and Return of Questionnaire by Respondents

Institutions	No. of Questionnaire Distributed		No (%) of Questionnaire returned			
			Male		Female	
			Freq	(%)	Freq	(%)
MOUAU	500	440 (88.0)	200	45.5	240	54.5
NAU	500	461 (92.2)	198	43.0	263	57.0
EBSU	500	464 (92.8)	204	44.0	260	56.0
UNN	500	446 (92.2)	257	58.0	189	42.0
FUTO	500	478 (95.6)	148	31.0	330	69.0
DELSU	500	227 (90.8)	70	31.0	157	69.0
UNIPORT	500	232 (92.8)	76	32.8	156	67.2
TOTAL	3,000	2748 ( 92.00)	1153	42.0	1595	58.0

Key:

- MOUAU = Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike
- NAU = Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka
- EBSU = Ebonyi State University
- UNN = University of Nigeria Nsukka
- FUTO = Federal University of Technology Owerri
- DELSU = Delta State University
- UNIPORT = University of Port Harcourt.

Respondents' English Proficiency level

Table 2 indicates respondents' self-assessment of proficiency level in English Language. Results show that the highest percentage (48.0%) was of the good proficiency level while the least percentage (0.8%) was of the weak proficiency level.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents according to level of Proficiency in English

Level of Proficiency in English	Frequency	Percentage
Weak	23	0.8
Fair	700	25.0
Good	1320	48.0
Very good	604	22.1
Excellent	101	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2748</b>	<b>100</b>

Responses on appreciation discourse

Table 3 indicates the frequency of respondents' Responses on Appreciation Discourse considering the situations projected by different scenarios and working with the guided options provided.

Table 3: Summary of Respondents' Reponses on Appreciation Discourse

Situation	OPTION A POLITE								OPTION B MORE POLITE								OPTION C MOST POLITE							
	MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT		MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT		MOUAU	NAU	EBSU	UNN	FUTO	DELSU	UNIPORT	
21	26	27	27	26	28	13	14	11	12	12	11	12	6	6	403	422	425	409	438	208	213			
22	33	35	35	34	36	17	17	10	11	11	10	11	5	5	397	416	418	402	431	205	209			
26	156	164	165	159	170	81	83	111	117	117	113	121	57	59	172	180	182	174	187	89	91			
28	148	155	156	150	161	76	78	156	164	165	159	170	81	83	135	142	143	137	147	70	71			
23	59	62	62	60	64	30	31	285	299	301	289	310	147	150	96	100	101	97	104	49	50			
25	20	21	21	21	22	10	11	75	78	79	76	81	38	39	345	362	364	350	375	178	182			
30	30	32	32	31	33	16	16	65	68	69	66	71	34	34	344	361	363	349	374	178	182			
24	83	87	87	84	90	43	44	86	90	90	87	93	44	45	272	285	286	275	295	140	143			
27	109	114	115	110	118	56	57	170	178	180	173	185	88	90	161	169	170	163	175	83	85			
29	48	50	50	49	52	25	25	51	53	53	51	55	26	27	342	358	360	346	371	176	180			
<b>Total</b>	712	747	750	724	774	367	376	1020	1070	1077	1035	1109	526	538	2667	2795	2812	2702	2897	1376	1406			

**Key:** MOUAU = 440  
 NAU = 461  
 EBSU = 464  
 UNN = 446  
 FUTO = 478  
 DELSU = 227  
 UNIPORT = 232  
**TOTAL = 2748**

Assessment of Overall Respondents' Discourse on Appreciation

Table 4 demonstrates that 71.65% of males chose the polite option A on appreciation discourse as against 28.35% of the females who selected the same option. Again 47.48% of the males selected the more polite option B responses as against 52.52% of females who chose same option B. Although 36.09% of the most polite option C was recorded by the males, the females recorded 63.91%.

Table 4: Assessment of Respondents' Reponses on Appreciation Discourse (n=2748)

Situation	Social Status	Social Distance	OPTION A POLITE								OPTION B MORE POLITE								OPTION C MOST POLITE							
			Freq		%		Male		Female		Freq		%		Male		Female		Freq		%		Male		Female	
			Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%		
11	S > H	OSD	161	3.62	115	2.58	46	1.03	70	1.10	34	0.53	36	0.56	2518	15.12	861	5.17	1657	9.95						
12	S > H	OSD	207	4.65	148	3.33	59	1.33	63	0.99	38	0.60	25	0.39	2478	14.88	897	5.39	1581	9.49						
15	S > H	+SD	978	21.98	701	15.75	277	6.22	695	10.90	319	5.00	376	5.90	1075	6.45	356	2.14	719	4.32						
17	S > H	-SD	924	20.76	662	14.88	262	5.89	978	15.34	430	6.75	548	8.60	845	5.07	296	1.78	549	3.30						
13	S = H	OSD	368	8.27	264	5.93	104	2.34	1781	27.94	821	12.88	960	15.06	597	3.58	309	1.86	288	1.73						
14	S = H	+SD	126	2.83	90	2.02	36	0.81	466	7.31	250	3.92	216	3.39	2156	12.95	775	4.65	1381	8.29						
19	S = H	OSD	190	4.27	136	3.06	54	1.21	407	6.38	173	2.71	234	3.67	2151	12.92	853	5.12	1298	7.79						
16	S = H	+SD	518	11.64	371	8.34	147	3.30	535	8.39	261	4.09	274	4.30	1696	10.18	564	3.39	1132	6.80						
18	S = H	OSD	679	15.26	487	10.94	192	4.31	1064	16.69	459	7.20	605	9.49	1006	6.04	312	1.87	694	4.17						
20	S < H	-SD	299	6.72	214	4.81	85	1.91	316	4.96	242	3.80	74	1.16	2133	12.81	787	4.73	1346	8.08						
			4450	100.00	3188	71.64	1262	28.36	6375	100.00	3027	47.48	3348	52.52	16655	100.00	6010	36.09	10645	63.91						

S = Speaker; H = Hearer, SD = Social Distance  
 < = Lower; = equal; > higher; 0 = not established  
 + = close; - = distant; 0 = neutral

## 5. Discussion

Results from the study show that thankfulness which is expressed in different forms has permeated the very culture of the Igbo as it is evident in the analysis presented as a verbal display of the value system of the native speakers externalized by kind words of deep appreciation for all forms of thoughtfulness. Findings of this research are an obvious indicator that expressing gratitude is a typical linguistic feature of Igbo bilinguals particularly in their interactional English and daily exchange. Overall, results provided support that Igbo bilinguals realise the act of indebtedness and express same with recourse to several situational background by careful choice of different linguistic terms to fulfil this communication need. In earlier studies by Nwoye (1992), the Igbo have been found to sufficiently achieve this conversational demand (thanking) by single word utterances the most identifiable of which is the word 'thank you'.

Another component of Nwoye's observation pointed to observable cases of elaborated forms of thanking which are also verbally applied to indicate profound appreciation for acts of kindness manifested in some of the choice options in the questionnaire where an interlocutor, in trying to express gratitude, praises the hearer as well as offers a short prayer instead (situation 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8.) which corroborates earlier studies by Morsi (2010) which reported the use of formulaic responses and by extension a word of prayer/blessing in expressing gratitude. Nwoye further reiterates that the show of appreciation or solidarity agrees with the communal life and living characterizing the Igbo society and culture. One would agree with this view as a true representation of the Igbo bilingual following the trend of the respondents' responses which pervasively depicts that at the instance of any act of kindness shown, promised or even anticipated, what supervenes by way of verbal manifestation and expression of gratitude – 'Thank you', 'thank you very much', 'thanks a lot', 'God bless you', 'you are most kind' etc.

Furthermore, with strict observance to the social variables portrayed by different situations, results of the inquiry show that in communicating gratitude between interlocutors where the speaker is of higher social status than the hearer (situation 1, 2, 6, & 8) responses generated were inclined to the most polite (option C) which signals that expressing thanks by the Igbo is scarcely a status mark. Also, results from the research illustrate that in appreciation acts among speakers whose statuses are not established (situation 3, 5 and 10), responses tilted towards the most polite (option C). This attests to the fact that beyond the boundaries of acquaintanceship, Igbo bilinguals show appreciation by means of utterances for every act of kindness. Also, findings from the study show that in acts of appreciation among interactants where speaker is of a lower social status than hearer (situations 4 and 7), the responses generated were largely the most polite (option C). This is a testament to the commonness of thanking among Igbo native speakers of English as a second language. Additionally, expressing thanks among equals engaged in routine exchange (situation 9) shows that the study participants still worked with the most polite (option C). This is an indication that even among contemporaries, or friends, expressing gratitude is a way of life for the Igbo bilinguals. This important observation symbolizes that thankfulness is a trait of the Igbo bilingual and is consistent with as well as validates previous reports by Garcia (2016) that interpersonal relationships as well as socio-cultural context enabled speakers accomplish their interactional goals. While the totality of the responses on expressing gratitude across all margins projected in the DCT (vertical, horizontal, diagonal/seesaw) relationships principally demonstrates that thanking is reflective of the attitudes and values of the Igbo as stressed by Nwoye (1992), it is important to state that, although analysis of data established that the vast majority of the responses tilted towards (option C) the most polite, the female respondents were responsible for 63.91% of those responses while the males recorded 36.09% of the most polite (option C) responses (Table 4). From the report, we may deduce that, females in the study sample are more subtle in their choice of words and are thus inclined to adopt more linguistically polite terms than their male counterparts. This result is consistent with and validates earlier research by Yusefi et al. (2015) and Hassan (2019) that females are more linguistically polite than males.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study elaborately showed that Igbo native speakers in Nigeria profusely express gratitude by simply saying 'thank you' in various forms for favours received and for other acts of kindness accruing during human interaction and exchange. For the Igbo, saying 'thank you' is not age-related; rather, it cuts across bounds of distance, power, degree of acknowledgment etc because an elder, superior, child says same to a stranger, younger, subordinate or older person. It has also defied the face-threatening potentiality accompanying the act as claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987) because it is a natural response in appreciation and acknowledgement for a deed well done. Since the objective of the study was to explore and analyse how Igbo English speakers, express gratitude in the target language, it is obvious that findings have provided evidence to show that socio-cultural as well as contextual mandate accelerated the native speaker's choice patterns hence the ease with which they deployed the nuances of the mother tongue into the target language. This observation is not entirely out of place as second language learners have been found to struggle with proficiency level in the target language which obviously reflects in their linguistic realisations. Based on the findings of this study, it is important that

second language teachers leverage on this discovery to help learners attain competence and performance in the target language by encouraging learners to deliberately learn the target language in the real life and authentic context to circumvent interlanguage slides. Finally, it should be noted that this study only investigated and reported verbal forms of expressive gratitude and did not include responses to thanking as used by Igbo learners of English as a second language. Therefore, interested scholars can conduct corresponding and follow-up studies for a more inclusive and all-encompassing findings.

### Acknowledgements

We are indeed thankful to Professor S.M Onuigbo for his comments, proof reading and constructive input and Professor T.O Ebiringa for validation of instrument and formal statistical analysis of the study.

### References

- Aijimer, K. (1996). *Conversational Routines in English*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Al-Khawaldeh, N.N & Zegarac, V. (2013). Gender and the communication of Gratitude in Jordan. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 3(03) 268-287
- Altalhi, H. (2014). Speech acts of thanking and thanking responses by Hijazi females. Unpublished masters' thesis, Ball State University Muncie, Indiana.
- Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S., (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cheng, W. & Seto, A. (2019). Thanks a Bunch: Cross-Cultural Comparison of the Speech Act of Thanking. In S. Gesuato, F. Bianchi and W. Cheng (Eds.), *Teaching, Learning and Investigating Pragmatics: Principles, Methods and Practices* (pp.363-386) Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Dozie, C. P (2017). *Politeness Forms and Hedging Strategies in English among Igbo bilinguals*. Nigeria: University of Nigeria, Nsukka Doctoral dissertation.
- Dozie, C.P & Otagburuagu, E.J. (2020). Apology and Linguistic Politeness Strategies in English among Igbo native speakers in Nigeria: An Inter-language study. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 10(5) 1-9
- Dozie, C.P, Chinedu-Oko, C.N, Anyanwu, P.N, Egwim, F.O & Otagburuagu, E.J (2022). Requests and Linguistic Politeness Strategies: A case study of Igbo English speakers in Nigeria. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 13(1)23-31
- Eisenstein, M. & Bodman, J.W (1993). Expressing gratitude in American English. In G. Kasper and S. Blumkulka (Eds.), *Inter-language pragmatics* (pp.64-81). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Faqe, C.K, Jbrael, S.J & Muhammad, K.R (2019). The use of Thanking Speech Act strategies in English realised by Kurdish EFL Learners at Soran University. *Education Quarterly Reviews* 2(3) 640-650
- Garcia, C. (1992). Refusing an invitation: A case study of Peruvian style. *Hispanic Linguistics* 5: 207-243
- Garcia, C. (2016). Peruvian Spanish speakers' cultural preferences in expressing gratitude. *Pragmatics* 26(1) 21-49
- Hassan, W.A. (2019). Genderlect and Thanking. *British Journal of English Linguistics*, 7(3) 1-9
- Haverkate, H. (1993). "Acerca de los actos de habla expresivos y comisivos en español", *Aproximaciones pragmalingüísticas al español*. Eds. H. Haverkate, K. Hengeveld and G. Mulder. Amsterdam: Rodopi (pp.149-180).
- Hosseinpur, R.M. & Mosavy, Z. (2019). Gratitude Speech act in Instagram: The emergence of a particular genre of language. *Journal of Language Horizons*, Alzahra University 3(1) 21-41
- Jung, W.H. (1994). Speech acts of "Thank You" and responses to it in American English. Paper presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics. Baltimore, MD.
- Lakoff, R. (1989). The limits of politeness: Therapeutic and courtroom discourse. *Multilingual Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 8(2-3) 101-130.
- Morsi, R. (2010). The speech act of thanking in Egyptian Arabic. Unpublished masters' thesis, Ball State University, Indiana. Retrieved April 7, 2018 from <http://cardinalscholar.bsu.edu/handle/123456789/193733>
- Nwoye, O., (1989). Linguistic politeness in Igbo. *Multilingua*.8, 259-275.
- Nwoye, O., (1992). Linguistic politeness and socio-cultural variations of the notion of face. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 18, 309-328.
- Diaz Perez, F.J. (2005). The Speech act of thanking in English: Differences between Native and Non-native speakers' behaviour. *ES: Revista de Filología Inglesa* 26(2005): 91-101
- Searle, J. R (1969). *Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1975). A taxonomy of illocutionary acts. In Gunderson, K. (Ed.), *Language, mind and knowledge* (pp. 344-369). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

---

Yusefi, K., Gowhary, H., Azizifar, A.&Esmaeili, Z. (2015). A pragmatic analysis of thanking strategies among Kurdish speakers of Ilam based on gender and age. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 199, 211-217