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# Thanking in Cameroon French

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## Abstract

This chapter discusses aspects of Cameroon French pragmatics, with focus on gratitude expressions. The chapter presents the taxonomy of patterns employed by Cameroon French speakers to express their gratitude to friends, strangers, and superiors/professors. Cameroon French speakers are found to express their gratitude directly or indirectly using a wide range of linguistic and pragmatic strategies, and the expressions employed mostly occur in speech act sets, which generally involve combinations of direct and indirect gratitude expressions and supportive acts. The results also reveal the use of nominal address terms to modify the illocutionary force of gratitude expressions. Overall, the linguistic and pragmatic choices made by Cameroon French speakers vary according to degree of familiarity and power distance between the interlocutors. The study adds to a growing body of research on Cameroon French pragmatics.

**Keywords:** Cameroon French, postcolonial pragmatics, expression of gratitude, politeness, variation

## 1. Introduction

Cameroon French has been the focus of many studies, and the research carried out so far has mainly explored phonetical, phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and semantic features. In recent years, the scope of research on Cameroon French has been expanded considerably, with scholars also giving more attention to pragmatic and discursive aspects of this postcolonial variety of French. The topics examined so far include address terms [1], speech acts (e.g., compliments and compliment responses [2], greetings [3], invitations and expressions of sympathy [4]), politeness strategies [5], discourse markers [6], etc.

The present study focuses on the analysis of pragmatic and linguistic choices made by Cameroon French speakers when expressing gratitude in three different situations. The speech act of giving thanks has been studied in many different languages and mostly within the framework of speech act and politeness theories. While there is an abundant literature on thanks in languages such as English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic, etc., there is a need to look at the impact of region on the realization of thanks in different regional varieties of the same language. With respect to French, the studies currently available mainly focus on the variety spoken in France. This paper is an attempt to extend the scope of research on thanks in French by examining the ways in which Cameroon French speakers express their gratitude in different situations. The study is based on data collected by means of a discourse completion task questionnaire that was administered to two

groups of university students<sup>1</sup>. This paper is structured as follows. After this introduction, the next section presents the theoretical framework of the study. Section 3 reports on the methodology employed. The findings of the study are presented and discussed in Section 4. Section 5 summarizes the main outcomes of the study and evokes some avenues for future research.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 The communicative act of thanking

Thanking is generally described as an expressive speech act, i.e., its illocutionary force is the expression of a psychological state about the speaker or the world. This speech act is produced in face-to-face situations or in written form when the speaker feels indebted to the addressee for a favor or help done in the past. The communicative act of thanking can also be performed as a reaction to compliments, offers, invitations, greetings, good wishes, etc. Thanks can also function as a closing signal in conversations or transactions in service encounters.

In research on the speech act of thanking in and across languages and cultures, it has been shown that giving thanks may occur in a single speech act (e.g., *thanks*, *thank you*, *that is kind of you* in English; *merci*, *je vous remercie*, *c'est très gentil*, in French; *danke*, *vielen Dank*, *ich danke Ihnen* in German; etc.). Gratitude expressions may also appear in combinations of several acts or speech act sets. In such cases, speakers may combine/repeat two or more expressions of gratitude or combine expressions of gratitude with other speech acts. For instance, in the data used for the present study, the communicative act of thanking is realized in some cases by combining greetings with thanks (*Bonjour monsieur, je vous remercie pour votre aide* "Good morning sir. I thank you for your help") or thanks with familiarization acts (*Oh! Merci beaucoup de ton aide! Moi c'est Sonia et toi?* "Oh, thanks very much for your help. I am Sonia and you?"). Given the complexity of many examples provided by the participants, it would be more appropriate to consider thanking as a speech act set or a communicative act made up of several acts (cf. [7]). It is also interesting to note that the choice of single or complex realization patterns depends on a number of factors, including social distance (degree of familiarity between the interlocutors), power distance (social or institutional status of the interlocutors), the magnitude of the benevolent act carried out, and politeness considerations in the social context where the interaction is taking place. As Siebold ([8], p. 158) put it: "the greater the imposition there is on the giver, the more polite gratitude forms will be used".<sup>2</sup>

### 2.2 Thanking, face, and politeness

The present study is based on Brown and Levinson's [9] theory of politeness, which uses the central concept of face of Goffman. Within this framework, there are two opposing views on thanks. The first view describes thanks as a face-flattering act, whereby giving thanks is considered as a communicative act that recognizes the effort of the interlocutor and enhances his/her negative face. A gratitude expression is viewed as a means employed to establish and maintain a harmonious social atmosphere between the speaker and the hearer. In other words, the speech

<sup>1</sup> See Section 4.1. for more explanation regarding the benefits of using this data collection instrument.

<sup>2</sup> The understanding here is that polite forms will consist of combinations of many different strategies, thus rendering the thanks more complex.

act of thanking has a “convivial function” ([10], p. 83). Overall, a gratitude expression can be defined as a

*“recognition of something which has already happened in [the speaker’s] favor. In this situation, the thanks acts as a kind of reward for the action carried out by the hearer [...]. The speaker doing the thanking appreciates the efforts of the hearer, who has previously to some extent forfeited his own freedom of action through this act. In this way, the expression of thanks serves to recognize the personal restriction experienced by the hearer for the benefit of the speaker, thus safeguarding and protecting his negative face” ([8], p. 157).*

On the other hand, giving thanks is viewed as a face-threatening act. Brown and Levinson [9], for instance, describe thanks as a threat to the speaker’s negative face, as the latter “accepts a debt [and] humbles his own face.” The self-humiliation is due to the fact that s/he who expresses his or her gratitude is “to some degree subordinated to the hearer as a result of accepting the benevolent act in [his/her] favor and is at times in conflict with [his/her] positive face.” Eisenstein and Bodman [11] also classify thanking as a face-threatening act: they are of the opinion that the speaker threatens his/her own negative face by acknowledging a debt to the hearer (p. 65).

Overall, it is safe to view thanks as a multidirectional communicative activity, with respect to face concerns. Thanks can flatter the positive image of the hearer, since the gratitude expression presents the hearer (the thankee) as someone who has done something beneficial to the speaker (the thanker). In this case, the thanks is an attempt to satisfy the hearer’s need to be approved of. Thanks can also be considered as an enhancing strategy directed toward the negative face of the hearer as it is employed to recognize the efforts of the hearer [8]. Thanks can also enhance the positive face of the speaker by presenting him/her as someone who recognizes the efforts of others and acknowledges benevolent actions. By expressing his/her gratitude, the speaker emerges as someone who knows how to satisfy the desire of the hearer. At the same time, thanks can threaten the positive face of the speaker because s/he subordinates himself/herself to the hearer. Finally, thanks can threaten the negative face of the speaker, since s/he admits having an obligation to the hearer.

### 2.3 Literature review

The speech act of thanking has been extensively examined in many languages and from many different perspectives. Many studies have dealt with gratitude expressions and responses to thanks in languages such as Akan [12], German [13], English [11, 14], and Cameroon English ([15], p. 548).<sup>3</sup> Studies from a cross-cultural or contrastive pragmatics perspective compare French and Italian [17], German and Spanish [18], German and Iraqi Arabic [19], French and Romanian [20], etc., gratitude expressions with Jordan and England [21]. Comparative studies focusing on regional varieties of English include Jautz’s [22] analysis of gratitude expressions in British and New Zealand English radio programs and Elwood’s [23] examination of gratitude expressions in Irish English and New Zealand English.

As far as French is concerned, the studies currently available mostly analyze the speech act of thanking alongside other speech acts. For instance, Kerbrat-Orecchioni [24] examines apologies, thanks, and responses to both acts in the same chapter of her book on speech acts in discourse. She classifies thanks expressions in many subcategories. She distinguishes between direct thanks, i.e., those using either the performative utterance “je te/vous remercie” or the elliptical “merci”

<sup>3</sup> Also see Gesuato [16].

([25], p. 129) and indirect thanks, i.e., those occurring in the form of different speech acts. She identifies the following types of indirect thanks:

- a. expressions that focus on the thanker (the beneficiary of the benevolent act): expressions of a specific feeling (gratitude, pleasure, joy) such as “*Je vous suis reconnaissant*” and “*je suis ravi/touché*.”
- b. expressions that focus on the thankee (the author of the benevolent act): appreciations of the addressee such as “*c’est très gentil à vous*” and “*vous êtes bien amiable*.”
- c. expressions indicating that there is/was no need to grant the favor: “*Il ne fallait*” and “*tu n’aurais pas dû*.”
- d. expressions that focus on the benevolent act: appreciations of the act such as “*C’est superbe*” and “*c’est trop beau*.” ([24], p. 129–130).

A number of studies have been carried out in the past on gratitude expressions and responses to thanks in Cameroonian contexts. Investigations on the speech act of thanking include Dnzoutchep Nguewo’s [25] comparative study of gratitude expressions in German and some languages spoken in the western region of Cameroon. The author illustrates the complex structure of the speech act of thanking, which he describes as a communicative act made up of several other speech acts, and supported by compliments, good wishes, address terms, etc. The complexity of gratitude expressions in the Cameroonian languages examined is viewed by the author as a reflection of sociocultural norms of many ethnic groups in the western region of Cameroon. Another investigation of the author yielded similar results (cf. [26]). Another analysis of thanking in Cameroonian context is Anchimbe’s [27] study of thanking in written political discourse called “motions of support.” These are letters read on the radio or TV or published in newspapers, addressed to the president thanking him for a political favor or action deemed beneficial to the group writing the motion. The study shows that thanking in “motions of support” appears as a communicative act made up of several other speech acts (cf. [27], p. 240). Also interesting is the conclusion that “the sociocultural interactional norms of indigenous Cameroonian cultures could be said to have influenced the structure and content of [Motions of Support] through their decorum and the extensive use of linguistic oratory in traditional hereditary systems” ([27], p. 240–241).

The goal of the present study is to contribute to a better understanding of Cameroon French speakers’ patterns in giving thanks. The approach used here operates on the premises of postcolonial pragmatics (cf. [27]), which takes into account the complex, multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural postcolonial nature of the Cameroonian society, and thus considers giving thanks in Cameroon French (an ex-colonial language in a postcolonial space) as a postcolonial pragmatic behavior. Using this framework, the analysis reveals traces of indigenous cultural and communication patterns in the communicative act of giving thanks in Cameroon French. This impact could be noted in the use of nominal address terms by Cameroon French speakers as markers of group culture and in-group identity, on the one hand, and as expressions of deference and respect in formal situations, on the other hand. Also interesting here is the complexity of thanks utterances, which seems to be a reflection of indigenous sociocultural norms (see Section 5).



### 3. Method

#### 3.1 Procedure and informants

The data for the study were collected in Yaoundé and Douala, Cameroon, by means of a discourse completion task questionnaire (see [28]) consisting of several situations in which the participants had to realize a number of different speech acts in short dialogs. Each scenario comprised a brief description of the setting, i.e., “the general circumstances [...] and the relevant situational parameters concerning social dominance, social distance, and degree of imposition” ([22], p. 43).

Recordings of spontaneous or naturally occurring conversations could have been the ideal data for a study like this. Getting such data is, however, difficult: apart from the time-consuming nature of such recordings, a large quantity of the data obtained may contain a very small number of gratitude expressions. It may also be difficult to examine the impact of factors such as social status, social distance, types of gratitude expressions, etc., because these variables are difficult and even impossible to control in spontaneous conversations (cf. [29, 30], p. 35–37). The discourse completion task (DCT) questionnaire is one of the most widely used data collection instruments in pragmatic research. Established in the CCSARP [28], this instrument has the greatest advantage of producing a large number of data in a short time and it helps to account for variation in speech act realization influenced by social and contextual variables. While such data may not always be natural, they at least help to “inform about speakers’ pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategies and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented and about their sociopragmatic knowledge of the context factors under which strategic and linguistic choices are appropriate” ([31], p. 329). The three scenarios used to elicit thanks, the focus of the present study, were described as follows:

1. Situation 1 (friend): *Vous déjeunez avec votre ami(e) dans un restaurant du coin. Au moment de payer l’addition, vous constatez que vous n’avez pas votre porte-monnaie sur vous. Vous l’avez certainement oublié à la maison. Votre ami(e) paie pour vous. Qu’est-ce que vous lui dites?* “You are having lunch with a friend in a restaurant. When you are about to settle the bill you realize that you left your wallet at home. Your friend pays for your lunch. What do you say to him/her?”
2. Situation 2 (stranger): *En allant en classe, vous laissez tomber accidentellement vos documents et notes de cours, lesquels s’éparpillent dans le couloir encombré. Un(e) étudiant(e) inconnu(e) vous aide à ramasser vos documents. Qu’est-ce que vous lui dites?* “On your way to class, you accidentally drop your notes and a student you do not know helps you pick them. What do you say to him/her?”
3. Situation 3 (professor): *Votre professeur(e) vous accorde quelques jours supplémentaires pour la remise de votre travail de recherche. Lorsque vous lui remettez le travail en question que lui dites-vous?* “Your professor grants you an extension to submit a term paper. When you turn in the paper, what do you say to him/her?”

In situation 1 (friend), the speaker, i.e., the person thanking for the favor (the thanker), and the addressee, the person being thanked for the favor (the thankee), are close friends and equal in social status. In situation 2 (stranger), the speaker and the addressee do not know each other. The relationship here is one of total social distance. Situation 3 (professor) illustrates an asymmetrical interaction: the

addressee has a higher power position (professor) than the speaker (student) and they know each other as acquaintances. The respondents were asked to write down what they would say in order to express their gratitude in the three situations.

A group of 148 French-speaking Cameroonian students participated in the study: 104 students at the University of Douala and 44 students at the University of Yaoundé I. Of the 148 respondents, 100 (67.6%) were females and 48 (32.4%) were males. They ranged in age from 18 to 30; however, 105 (70.9%) of the respondents were between 20 and 25 years old. The respondents were speakers of French in a multilingual context where two official languages (French and English) are permanently in contact with more than 250 native languages. All the participants indicated that they acquired French through school education and that they have been speaking French for more than 15 years. With regard to the questions of the main language used at home, 118 (79.7%) use indigenous languages and 41 (27.7%) use French. Concerning the main language used with friends: 144 (97.3%) use French, 11 (7.4%) use Camfranglais, 8 (5.4%) use English, 3 (2%), and 3 (2%) use German. The complex sociolinguistic and cultural background and language choices of the participants certainly also play an important role in the choice of strategies when expressing gratitude in French<sup>4</sup>.

### 3.2 Data analysis

The participants provided 411 answers for the three questionnaire tasks, namely 139 examples in situation 1, 137 examples in situation 2, and 135 examples in situation 3<sup>5</sup>. The analysis of the examples collected involved both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Some of the utterances provided consist of only one move/act as in *merci, c'est gentil, je suis reconnaissant*. Each of such utterances is a communicative unit that realizes thanks independently of any other unit of a conversational turn: they are “head acts.”

Other examples in the corpus consist of two moves as in (1) or more than two moves as in (2) and (3). In (1), the speaker combines a direct gratitude expression, namely *merci beaucoup*, with an indirect gratitude expression, namely an appreciation of the addressee (*c'est gentil de ta part*). Each of these strategies could be used alone to express gratitude. The example (2) consists of three moves: two direct thanks, namely *merci* and *je ne sais comment vous remercier*, and an invitation act (“*Ça vous dirait de prendre un verre ensemble?*”), which serves here as a supportive move. In (3), the speaker employs a more complex structure and does three things: (a) he uses a familiarization act to introduce himself (the speaker says who he is and why he has come to see the professor), (b) he produces an utterance presenting the paper to the professor, and (c) he expresses his gratitude for the favor. Of these three acts, only the last one could be employed alone to realize the speech act of thanking.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning that English and French, the two official languages, are the sole medium of education, while the indigenous languages, Pidgin English and camfranglais are used in nonofficial domains. All the participants in this study acquired French in education settings (starting in elementary school) and they were university students. The analysis did not pay attention to the impact of French proficiency level on the use of gratitude expressions.

<sup>5</sup> This number (instead of 444 examples) is due to the fact all the respondents did not do all the questionnaire tasks.

1. *Merci beaucoup! C'est gentil de ta part!* (friend<sup>6</sup>)  
“Thanks very much. That’s kind of you.”
2. *Merci, je ne sais comment vous remercier. Ça vous dirait de prendre un verre ensemble?* (stranger)  
“Thanks, I don’t know how to thank you. Do you mind having a drink with me?”
3. *Monsieur je suis l’étudiant à qui vous avez accordé un autre délai pour la remise du travail, voici le rapport et je vous remercie pour votre compréhension* (professor)  
“Sir, I am the student whom you granted an extension to submit the paper. Here is the paper and I thank you for your understanding.”

Due to the complexity of some thanks utterances in the data, the first step of the analysis was to segment each of the examples collected in individual acts and to classify each of them as a head act (i.e., a gratitude expression proper) or as a supportive act. The next step was to examine types of gratitude expressions attested in the data, namely direct gratitude expressions and indirect gratitude expressions, with emphasis on their pragmatic functions and distributions. The last step focused on the analysis of types, pragmatic functions, and situational distributions of supportive acts in the corpus. The next section presents the results of the analysis.

## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1 Overall use of strategies

**Table 1** shows the distribution of the three main strategies used to construct thanks utterances in the data. Overall, the participants produce 754 occurrences in the corpus. Direct expressions of gratitude are by far the most frequently employed in the examples, and they represent 407 occurrences and account for 54% of the data. There are 267 instances of indirect expressions of gratitude, which represent 35.4% of all examples and 80 tokens of supportive acts (10.6%). **Table 1** also indicates that while direct gratitude expressions are most preferred in the professor situation, indirect gratitude expressions mostly appear in the friend situation. We also see that the respondents mostly prefer supportive acts in the friend situation.

	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
Direct expressions of gratitude	123 (43%)	138 (59%)	146 (62%)	407 (54%)
Indirect expressions of gratitude	128 (45%)	73 (31.2%)	66 (28%)	267 (35.4%)
Supportive acts	34 (12%)	23 (9.8%)	23 (10%)	80 (10.6%)
Total	285 (100%)	234 (100%)	235 (100%)	754 (100%)

**Table 1.**  
*Overall distribution of strategies.*

<sup>6</sup> The examples from the data are coded as follows: friend for “thanks in the friend situation,” stranger for “thanks in the stranger situation,” and professor for “thanks in the professor situation.”



4.2 Complexity/length of expressions of gratitude

The analysis of the complexity of the thanks utterances in the corpus reveals that the participants employ simple thanks as well as complex thanks. Simple expressions of gratitude consist of one act/move as in *merci beaucoup* “thank you very much” or *c’est très gentil (de ta part)* “that’s very kind of you.” As can be seen in **Table 2**, the respondents most frequently use complex gratitude expressions, i.e., those made up of several acts/moves as in (1), (2), and (3). In (1), the second gratitude expression (*C’est gentil de ta part*) is intended to intensify the illocutionary force of the first one (*Merci beaucoup*). Example (2) consists of three moves. The first two acts “*Merci*” and “*je ne sais comment vous remercier*” are used to express the speaker’s gratitude, while the third move “*Ça vous dirait de prendre un verre ensemble?*” serves to intensify the two preceding gratitude expressions. In (3), the speaker expresses his gratitude using a combination of three moves: a familiarization act (*Monsieur je suis l’étudiant à qui vous avez accordé un autre délai pour la remise du travail*), a presentation of the work (*voici le rapport*), and an expression of gratitude (*je vous remercie pour votre compréhension*). ([24], p. 131) argues that combinations of several moves in the expression of gratitude appear to be more polite than simple thanks.

The analysis also reveals that the distribution of simple and complex gratitude expressions varies across the three situations. Of the 111 simple expressions identified in the data, there are 47 tokens in the professor situation, 47 in the stranger situation, and only 17 in the friend situation. Complex gratitude expressions are more commonly employed in the friend situation. However, it is worth mentioning that complex utterances are generally much longer in the professor situation than in the other two situations: they are employed in order to emphasize the speaker’s sincerity in expressing gratitude to a superior.

The next section focuses on the realization patterns and distribution of the direct thanks, indirect thanks, and supportive acts found in the data.

4.3 Direct expressions of gratitude

Direct expressions of gratitude occur in the data in many different ways. In most cases, the respondents use the word *merci* “Thanks,” which in some cases is accompanied by modifiers such as adverbs (*merci beaucoup* “thanks a lot”), address terms (*merci mon frère* “thanks my brother”), adjectives (*grand merci* “big thank you,” interjections (*oh merci* “oh thanks”), or combinations of many intensifiers (*merci beaucoup professeur* “thank you very much professor”).

Another direct strategy consists in expressing gratitude and stating the beneficial action at the same time. This type appears in the form of *merci de/pour + NP* (*Merci beaucoup pour/de votre aide* “thanks very much for your help,” *Une fois de plus merci pour votre indulgence* “once again thank you for your indulgence”), and *merci de VP* (*Merci mon ami d’avoir payé la note* “thanks my friend for having paid my bill”).

	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
Simple expressions of gratitude	17 (12.2%)	47 (34.3%)	47 (34.8%)	111 (27%)
Complex expressions of gratitude	122 (87.8%)	90 (65.7%)	88 (65.2%)	300 (73%)
Total	139 (100%)	137 (100%)	135 (100%)	411 (100%)

Table 2.  
Distribution of simple and complex expressions of gratitude.

A third direct strategy found in the data is the performative utterance *je te/ vous remercie* “I thank you,” which may be modified in many different ways. Some respondents use adverbs and address terms to upgrade the illocutionary force of the performative utterance, as in *professeur je vous remercie sincèrement* “Professor I sincerely thank you”; *je te remercie beaucoup mon ami* “I thank you very much my friend.” In other examples, the performative utterance is followed by a statement of the favor/beneficial action as in *je vous remercie infiniment pour la faveur que vous m’avez accordée* “I thank you very much for the favor you have given me” and *je te remercie beaucoup d’avoir payé* “I thank you very much for having settled the bill”.

Also attested are examples in which the participants indicate their inability to express their gratitude as in *monsieur je ne sais pas comment vous remercier pour votre générosité* “Sir, I do not know how to thank you for your generosity.” Some participants indicate lack of words to articulate their gratitude as in *Les mots me manquent pour exprimer ma gratitude pour cette faveur* “I lack word to express my gratitude for this favor” and *Je ne saurais vous remercier autant* “I can’t thank you enough.” Also attested are expressions of long term/permanent gratitude/indebtedness as in *je ne cesserai de vous dire merci* “I won’t stop thanking you.”

The data also consist of examples in which the participants state their desire to express their gratitude as in *Professeur, je tiens/tenais à vous remercier de m’avoir accordé un autre délai* “Professor, I want(ed) to thank you for giving me another deadline”; *Monsieur, je voudrais bien vous remercier pour ce vous m’avez fait*. The following examples were also found in the data: *Je n’ai qu’une chose à vous dire merci et mille fois merci* “I have only one thing to tell you thanks and thousand thanks”; *je te dis merci* “I say thanks.”

Overall, the performative utterances and their variants are intended to maximize the expression of sincerity in the gratitude expressed and to maximize its acceptance by the interlocutor, and these direct strategies mostly appear in the professor situation (see **Table 2**). It is worth mentioning that direct thanks appear in the data either alone or in combination with indirect thanks and/or supportive acts, as in (4–6).

4. *Merci mon ami d’avoir payé. Prochainement c’est moi qui paye* (friend)  
“Thanks my friend for paying. Next time I will foot the bill.”

5. *Je vous remercie beaucoup pour votre aide. Je ne sais pas ce que j’aurais fait sans vous. Encore merci!* (stranger)  
“I thank you so much for your help. I do not know what I could have done without you. Thanks again.”

6. *Professeur, je tiens à vous remercier de m’avoir accordé un autre délai. Grâce à cela, j’ai pu réaliser mon rapport de recherche. Une fois de plus merci monsieur* (professor)  
“Professor, I would like to thank you for giving me an extension. Thanks to this, I was able to complete my research report. Once again thank you sir.”

The frequencies and situation distribution of direct thanks strategies are summarized in **Table 3**.

**Table 3** shows that the participants most frequently use the word *merci* accompanied by various types of modification devices (adverbs, address terms, interjections, etc.) to realize direct thanks. This strategy appears in 223 (54.8%) instances of the 407 tokens of direct thanks, and it is mostly employed by the respondents

	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
<i>Merci</i>	33	28	2	63 (15.5%)
<i>Merci + adverbs/address terms/adjectives, interjections, etc.</i>	72	75	76	223 (54.8%)
<i>Merci de/pour + NP/VP</i>	10	20	19	49 (12%)
<i>Je te/vous remercie and variants</i>	8	15	49	72 (17.7%)
Total	123	138	146	407 (100%)

**Table 3.**  
*Distribution of direct expressions of gratitude.*

in both the professor and the stranger situations with fairly equal distribution (76 tokens, i.e., 34% in the professor situation and 75 examples, i.e., 33.6% in the stranger situation. The frequency of this strategy is a bit lower in the friend situation (72 tokens, i.e., 32.4%).

The second most common direct strategy is the use of performative utterances. This strategy represents 72 (17.7%) tokens of all direct thanks. With respect to situational distribution, **Table 3** indicates that this strategy mostly occurs in the professor situation (49 tokens of 72 attested occurrences, i.e., 68%). The high number of such expressions in this situation may be due to the level of formality and the weight of the favor granted by the superior.

The third strategy is the use of the word *merci* alone. It represents 63 (15.5%) instances of all direct thanks. It appears mostly in the friend (33 tokens) and the stranger (28 tokens) situations. The very low number of *merci* in the professor situation (only two examples) is probably due to the fact that this simple form would appear to be very impolite in an asymmetrical situation, where the student has received a huge (unmerited) favor from their professor. In other words, a simple thanks would not be sufficient to express the debt of gratitude of the speaker. As can be seen in **Table 3**, the low number of *merci* is compensated by a very high frequency of *merci* with intensifiers and a very high frequency of performative utterances.

The fourth strategy is the use of the word *merci* followed by statements of the favor. It appears in 49 (12%) instances of all direct thanks and is mostly employed in the stranger (20 tokens) and the professor (19 instances) situations. After discussing types of direct thanks, let us now turn to the strategies employed to express gratitude indirectly.

4.4 Indirect expressions of gratitude

The participants produced 267 tokens of indirect gratitude expressions. As can be seen in **Table 4**, six types of speech acts were used in the data to realize indirect thanks: (a) praising the addressee, (b) promising to compensate, (c) praising the act, (d) expressing indebtedness, (e) expressing wishes, and (f) expressing lack of obligation or necessity for the act. The three most frequent types in the data, namely “praising the addressee,” “promising to compensate,” and “praising the act,” represent more than 70% of all tokens of indirect gratitude expressions.

The results also show that the speech acts employed as indirect gratitude expressions are distributed differently across the three situations. As seen in **Table 4**, the participants used more praises of the addressee in the stranger situation (54 tokens: 63.5%) than in the other two situations (friend (23 tokens: 27%), professor (8 tokens: 9.5%)). The “promising to compensate” strategy only occurs in the

Types of indirect gratitude expressions	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
Praising the addressee	23	54	8	85 (31.8%)
Promising to compensate	64	0	0	64 (24%)
Praising the act	28	7	25	58 (22.4%)
Expressing indebtedness	11	4	25	40 (15%)
Expressing wishes	2	5	8	15 (5.6%)
Expressing lack of obligation or necessity	0	3	0	3 (1.2%)
Total	128	73	66	267 (100%)

**Table 4.**  
*Types of indirect expressions of gratitude.*

friend situation. The third most frequent indirect gratitude expression, “praising the act,” is mostly used in the friend (28 instances: 48.3%) and professor situations (24 tokens: 41.4%). In contrast, the fourth type, “expressing indebtedness,” is most frequent in the professor situation (25 tokens: 62.5%).

Let us now examine the individual speech acts employed as indirect thanks and describe their pragmatic functions and realization patterns.

4.4.1 Praising the addressee

This strategy serves to return the favor to the addressee by indicating that s/he has done something good. By employing this strategy, the speaker does two things simultaneously: s/he expresses his/her gratitude for the favor and highlights attributes such as kindness, generosity, indulgence, etc., as the driving force of the addressee’s action. In this sense, this type of indirect thanks is a positive politeness strategy and it is employed to notice and approve the addressee’s remarkable character (cf. [10], p. 103).

The examples attested show that the respondents mostly employ constructions like: *c’est (vraiment) gentil (de ta/votre part/à vous)* “that’s (very) kind of you,” *tu es vraiment gentile* “you are really nice,” *(C’est) très amiable de votre part* “that is very kind of you,” *c’est vraiment sympa* “that’s really nice,” *vous êtes vraiment serviable* “you are really helpful,” *quelle gentillesse* “how nice,” etc. Generally, praises of the addressee are associated with other indirect gratitude expressions as in (7) and/or with direct gratitude expressions as in (8) and (9). Some of the praises focus on the physical appearance of the addressee as in (10).

7. *Ce fut gentil de votre part et j’en suis vraiment reconnaissant* (professor)  
“That was kind of you and I’m really grateful.”
8. *Merci de votre geste. Ce fut très gentil de votre part* (stranger)  
“Thanks for your gesture. That was very kind of you.”
9. *Merci beaucoup, les gens comme toi on les compte du bout des doigts* (stranger)  
“Thanks very much, people like you are very rare.”
10. *Merci de m’avoir aidé à ramasser mes documents. Je ne savais pas qu’une jolie fille comme vous pouvait m’aider jusqu’à ramasser mes feuilles pour me remettre* (stranger)  
“Thanks for helping to pick up the documents. I did not know that a pretty lady like you could help me pick my papers.”



#### 4.4.2 Promising to compensate

The speaker promises to reimburse what the addressee has spent for them. This type occurs only in the friend situation. This result is due to the nature of the situation. The addressee had spent some money to pay for a friend's lunch. Despite the friendship, the addressee was not obliged/did not expect to spend his/her money in that manner and the friend did not have the right to oblige him/her to do so. Consequently, the speaker deems it appropriate to thank the friend for the kind gesture and to return the favor by reimbursing the money spent for him/her. This type of indirect thanks could be interpreted as a politeness strategy with two functions: it helps to save the face of the person who benefited from the favor granted and to restore balance/cohesion/harmony in the relationship.

This strategy appears in two realization patterns. The first pattern consists in promising to refund the money spent by the friend. In this case, the respondents mostly use constructions like: *je te rembourserai* "I will reimburse you," *je te rembourse très prochainement* "I will reimburse very soon," *je te rendrai la somme que tu as payée pour moi* "I will refund you the amount you spent for me," *Une fois à la maison je te restituerai l'argent* "Once we get home I will pay you back the money," etc. The second pattern consists in promising to settle the bill next time. In this case, the participants employ constructions like: *C'est moi qui vais payer prochainement* "I am the one to settle the bill next time," *la prochaine fois tu mangeras à mes frais* "the next time you will eat at my expense/next time I will settle the bill," etc. Another construction employed to promise repayment is *je te revaudrai ça un jour* "I will repay you someday." It is less used than the other structures. Also attested are the constructions *ça va gérer* and *on va gérer* that are also employed as promises to reimburse the money spent. In most of the examples attested, this strategy is associated with direct gratitude expressions as in (11) and/or comments as in (12).

11. *Merci mon ami d'avoir payé. Prochainement c'est moi qui paye* (friend)  
 "Thanks my friend for having paid the bill. Next time it's on me."

12. *Ah, c'est tellement gênant j'ai honte. Je te promets samedi on déjeune et je paie la note* OK? (friend)  
 "Oh, it's really embarrassing I am ashamed. I promise you that we will have lunch on Saturday and I will settle the bill, right."

#### 4.4.3 Praising the act

Contrary to praises of the addressee, the praises in question in this section are made to express gratitude while highlighting the value of the beneficial action. While praises of the addressee are explicit face-flattering strategies, positive comments on the beneficial action could be considered as implicit face-enhancing strategies. Praises of the favor appear in two different patterns. The first pattern consists in simply describing the act as good helpful, kind, great, immense, etc., as in (13) (*Vous m'avez rendu un grand service*). The second pattern consists in explicitly stressing the outcome of the act. More specifically, the speaker indicates that the addressee's intervention/action/favor really saved the speaker from an embarrassing or humiliating situation as in (14). In (15), the speaker says that the extra time granted by the professor saved them from a disaster. Also attested are examples in which the speaker indicates that s/he really appreciates the action of the addressee, using constructions like *ce geste m'a vraiment marqué me va droit au coeur/me touche* as in (16).

13. *Je vous remercie sincèrement de votre compréhension, vous m'aviez rendu un énorme service* (professor)  
"I sincerely thank you. You did me a great favor."
14. *Merci gars! Si tu n'avais pas été là cela aura été honteux et humiliant pour moi* (friend)  
"Thanks man. If you were not there it would have been embarrassing for me."
15. *Je vous remercie grandement monsieur, sans votre faveur je n'imagine pas le désastre de mon travail* (professor)  
"I sincerely thank you sir, without your favor I can't imagine the disaster I would have been in with my work."
16. *Merci beaucoup! C'est gentil de ta part. Ce geste me va droit au cœur. Que Dieu contribue à la réalisation de tes rêves* (stranger)  
"Thanks very much. That's very kind of you. I really appreciate this gesture. May God make your dreams come true."

#### 4.4.4 Expressing indebtedness

This type is employed to express the speaker's indebtedness toward the addressee. The respondents mostly use the construction *je vous suis reconnaissant* "I am grateful," with variations regarding the intensity/sincerity and time frame of the indebtedness. While adverbs such as *vraiment*, *très*, etc., are used by the participants to express sincerity as in *j'en suis vraiment reconnaissant/je vous suis très reconnaissant* "I am really grateful," adverbs such as *infiniment*, *toujours*, *éternellement*, etc., seem to emphasize long-term indebtedness as in *je vous/te serai toujours reconnaissant* "I will always be grateful." Apart from these utterances, the respondents also employ constructions like: *Je te redevrai ça* "I owe you," *je te dois une fière chandelle* "I owe you," *je te suis redevable* "I owe you," *c'est une dette que j'ai envers vous* "It's a debt I owe you." The analysis also reveals that this strategy is highly recurrent in the professor situation. This could be explained by the nature of the situation and the type of favor granted to the speaker. The professor granted the student's request for extra time to submit an assignment. By choosing the expression of indebtedness, the student intends not only to stress the level of sincerity in gratitude expression but also to reinforce the student-professor relationship. This strategy seems to be vital in such situation as the student does not exclude the possibility of future requests of this nature. Therefore, using such a strategy not only convinces the addressee to accept the thanks. It also builds a solid platform for a harmonious student-professor collaboration.

#### 4.4.5 Expressing wishes

This strategy consists mostly in invoking blessings upon the addressee. The speaker is saying indirectly: "since you have been so kind to me, I wish you well and I invoke God's blessings upon you." The most frequent construction used to pray to God to bless the addressee is *Que Dieu te/vous bénisse!* "May God bless you." This construction is, in some cases, modified by replacing the verb *bénir* "to bless" with *récompenser* "to recompense," *protéger/garder* "to protect," etc., as in *C'est Dieu qui vous récompensera* "God will reward you"; *Dieu vous bénira* "God will bless you"; *Que Dieu vous garde et vous bénisse.* "May God protect and bless you"; *Que Dieu vous protège* "May God protect you." Some informants use more complex structure to wish their interlocutors well as in *Que Dieu contribue à la réalisation de tes rêves* "May

	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
Comments	19	1	10	30
Familiarization acts	0	18	2	20
Apologies/regrets	10	1	2	13
Promise to change	5	0	7	12
Offers/invitations	0	2	2	4
Encouragements/advice	0	2	0	2
Total	34	24	23	81

**Table 5.**  
*Types of supportive acts and their distribution.*

contribute to the realization of your dreams.” This type of thanks is always associated with other types, as can be seen in (17).

17. Je vous remercie infiniment que Dieu vous garde et vous bénisse (stranger)

4.4.6 Stressing lack of need/necessity to help

This type of indirect thanks occurs with a very low frequency. It appears three times in the stranger situation where it serves to thank the addressee while reminding him/her that he/she did not have to bother himself/herself as in (18).

18. C’est très gentil de votre part, **mais il ne fallait pas vous gêner** (stranger)  
“That’s very kind of you, but you shouldn’t have bothered.”

As already indicated above, direct and indirect expressions of gratitude are modified by means of supportive acts. The next section presents the types, functions, and distributions of these supportive acts.

4.5 Supportive acts

Supportive acts are different kinds of speech acts, which may come before or after direct and indirect expressions of gratitude. They play various pragmatic roles and serve mostly as external modification devices (softeners). As can be seen in **Table 5**, the participants used many different types of speech acts as supportive acts. Their frequencies and distribution vary across the three situations. There are 81 tokens of supportive acts in the data, 34 occurrences in the friend situation, 24 tokens in the stranger, and 23 instances in the professor situation. The most preferred supportive acts are, in decreasing order, comments (30 tokens), familiarization acts (20), apologies/regrets (12 examples), and promises to change (12 instances).

Comments are used to reinforce direct and indirect thanks. The contents of the comments identified vary from one situation to another. In the friend situation, the speaker attempts to save his/her own face by expressing his/her surprise that s/ he could forget his/her wallet as in (19).<sup>7</sup> Some comments serve to reiterate the fact that what happened was accidental and not planned, as in (20).

<sup>7</sup> The comments are in bold.

19. *Merci mon ami, je vous rendrai ce geste salulaire, **je ne comprends pas comment j'ai pu oublier mon porte-monnaie*** (friend)  
“Thanks my friend, I will repay this kind gesture, I can't understand how I could forget my wallet.”

20. *Je te suis profondément reconnaissante. **Je ne sais pas où j'avais la tête pour oublier de la sorte mon porte-monnaie.** On pourrait se faire une sortie dans le restaurant de ton choix. Qu'en dis-tu? Et je pourrai payer en guise de remerciement* (friend)  
“I am deeply grateful to you. I don't where my head was to forget my wallet. We could go to a restaurant of your choice. What do you say? And I will pay as thank you.”

In the professor situation, the comments relate to the quality of the work submitted. In order to reinforce his/her gratitude, the student assures the professor that the extra time granted was wisely used and that s/he believes or hopes the professor will not be disappointed as in (21) and (22).

21. *Monsieur, je vous remercie infiniment et **je crois qu'après la lecture du travail vous ne serez pas déçu*** (professor)  
“Sir I thank you so much and I think that you will not be disappointed after reading the work.”
22. *Monsieur je vous remercie une fois de plus pour votre compréhension. **J'espère que mon travail sera à la hauteur de vos attentes*** (professor)  
“Sir I thank you once more for your understanding. I hope my work will meet your expectations.”

The only comment found in the stranger situation serves to emphasize the importance of the help rendered and to reinforce the gratitude expressed. As can be seen in (23), the speaker explicitly says that the document the addressee helped to pick is a very important one. In making this comment, the speaker is indirectly appreciating the addressee and the act.

23. *Merci énormément. **Ce document que vous veniez de me remettre est très important pour moi*** (stranger)  
“Thanks a lot. This document you just handed to me is very important to me.”

The second most common supportive act is familiarization. It appears in 20 instances in the data, and it mostly occurs in the stranger situation. Familiarization appears in the form of self-introductions as in (24).<sup>8</sup> These acts entail telling the name of the speaker and/or asking the name of the addressee. Familiarization acts also occur in the form of questions whether the interlocutors can meet subsequently as in (25) and farewells as in (26). Overall, familiarization acts are intended to help the interlocutors know each other better and to prepare the ground for future interactions.

24. *Je vous remercie grandement mademoiselle. **Puis-je connaître votre nom?*** (stranger)  
“Thank you very much, miss. Can I know your name?”

<sup>8</sup> The familiarization acts are in bold.



25. *Merci bien! Que vous êtes gentils! Puis je vous rencontrer après? Ok à toute à l'heure après le cours de 15 heures* (stranger)

"Thank you very much. How nice you are. Can I meet you later? Ok see you soon after the class at 3 pm."

26. *Merci, merci pour votre aide. Je m'appelle "X," et vous? Ravi de vous connaître et à la prochaine* (stranger)

"Thanks, thanks for your help. My name is "X" and you? Nice to meet you and see you next time."

The third supportive act found in the data, the apology/regret act, generally appears with direct and indirect gratitude expressions. This supportive move serves to indicate that the speaker is aware of the potential disruption of the favor to the addressee's plan and apologizes for any inconveniences as in (27) and (28)<sup>9</sup>.

27. *Monsieur, je vous remercie pour votre compréhension et je suis une fois de plus désolé pour le retard* (professor)

"Sir I thank you for your understanding and once again I am sorry for the delay."

28. *Merci de m'avoir sauvé de cette situation, je suis vraiment désolé, j'ai complètement oublié le porte-monnaie à la maison. Je te rembourserai* (friend)

"Thanks for having saved me from this situation. I am very sorry, I completely forgot my wallet at home. I will refund your money."

The fourth supportive act in the data is the promise to change. It appears in the friend and the professor situations. It serves to mitigate the potential negative impact of the help rendered on the speaker's face. More precisely, the promise to change is employed to protect the positive face of the speaker. In the friend situation, the favor was granted because the speaker forgot his/her wallet and was unable to pay for his/her food. In the professor situation, the student was not able to submit his/her assignment on time. In both situations, the speaker is grateful to the request granted but feels guilty of any potential negative impact the favor could have on the addressee's face wants. In order to protect his/her own face, the speaker promises that this will not happen again as can be seen in (29) and (30).

29. *Je vous remercie de m'avoir accordé quelques jours supplémentaires. Je m'efforcerai la prochaine fois pour qu'il n'y ait pas de situations embarrassantes pareilles* (professor)

"I thank you for having granted me a few more days. I will try next time to avoid such embarrassing situations."

30. *Merci bien, la prochaine fois je m'assurerai que mon porte-monnaie est bel et bien sur moi* (friend)

"Thank you very much, next time I will make sure that I have my wallet."

Another supportive act used with thanks is the act of offering or inviting. Of the four tokens found in the data, there are two examples in the stranger situation and two instances in the professor situation. In the professor situation, the speaker invites the professor to a drink as in (31). In the other example, the speaker offers a gift to the addressee as in (30).

<sup>9</sup> Apologies are in bold.

31. *Merci infiniment vous êtes vraiment gentil, vous êtes compréhensible. En fait ça (ne) va pas finir ainsi, on va quand même couper une gorge!* (professor)  
“Thank you very much you are really nice, you are understandable. Actually it is not going to end this way, let’s have a drink together.”
32. *Merci monsieur. Acceptez ce présent en signe de reconnaissance* (professor)  
“Thank you sir. Accept this gift a token of appreciation.”

In the stranger situation, the speaker invites the addressee for lunch as in (33) or for a drink as in (34).

33. *Merci de ton aide. Est-ce que je peux t’inviter à déjeuner ce soir afin de te remercier pour ton aimable service?* (stranger)  
“Thank you for your help. Can I invite you to lunch tonight to thank you for kind service.”
34. *Merci, je ne sais comment vous remercier. Ça vous dirait de prendre un verre ensemble?* (stranger)  
“Thank you, I don’t know how to thank you. How about having a drink together?”

The last supportive act is the act of encouragement or advising. The speaker exhorts the addressee to keep up being helpful to people. This act is preceded by a direct gratitude expression, as can be seen in (32).

35. *Merci beaucoup pour votre geste. Il faut toujours continuer comme ça car vous ne serez bloqué en aucun jour quelle que soit la situation et cela vous aider aussi dans la société* (stranger)  
“Thank you very much for your gesture. Always continue in the same manner and you will face any difficulty for whatever the situation may be and this will also help you in society.”

4.6 Intensification of gratitude expressions

The respondents use many different strategies to intensify their gratitude expressions. The analysis reveals that direct thanks are the most frequently intensified in the corpus. Our analysis focused on three types of intensification. The first type consists in the use of lexical intensifiers such as adverbs and nominal address terms in direct gratitude expressions. Table 6 summarizes the distribution of the lexical intensifiers across the three situations.

The second type of intensification consists in mentioning the object of gratitude. Table 7 presents the distribution of this type in the data.

The third type of intensification consists in the combination of different types of gratitude expressions. The most common patterns found in the data involve the combinations of direct gratitude expressions and indirect gratitude expressions. The most preferred combinations in the friend situation are, in decreasing order, *merci + promise to reimburse* (41 examples), *merci/je te remercie + praising the act* (27 tokens), and *merci + praising the addressee* (9 instances). The most frequent combinations in the stranger situation are *merci/je vous remercie + praising the addressee* (46 tokens) and *merci/je vous remercie + praising the act* (7 examples). The predominant combination in the professor situation is *merci/je vous remercie + appreciation of the act* (19 examples). The other combinations are very diverse.

	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
<i>Merci/je te/vous remercie beaucoup</i>	28	45	12	85
<i>Merci bien</i>	7	6	1	14
<i>Merci/je te/vous remercie infiniment</i>	7	2	8	17
<i>Grand merci</i>	3	4	3	10
<i>Mille fois merci</i>	2	2	1	5
<i>Merci encore</i>	2	0	1	3
<i>Vraiment merci/je vous remercie vraiment</i>	2	2	5	9
<i>Merci/je/te vous remercie franchement/énormément/ grandement/(très) sincèrement</i>	4	4	5	13
<i>Une fois de plus</i>	0	0	6	6
<i>Cordialement</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>Du fond du cœur</i>	0	0	1	1
<i>Merci/je te/vous remercie + address term/address term + merci</i>	18	8	43	69
Total	73	73	87	233

**Table 6.**  
*Distribution of lexical intensification devices (adverbs and address terms) across the three situations.*

	Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
<i>Merci de/pour + NP/VP</i>	10	20	19	49
<i>Je te/vous remercie de/pour + NP/VP</i>	1	4	37	42
Total	11	24	56	91

**Table 7.**  
*Mentioning the object of gratitude across the three situations.*

Nominal address terms	Friend (n = 20)	Stranger (n = 11)	Professor (n = 99)	Total
Mon ami/pote	7	0	0	7
Gars	6	3	0	9
(Cher) Camarade	1	3	0	4
Mon frère	1	2	0	3
L'ami	1	0	0	1
Cher ami/chère amie	1	1	0	2
(Cher) First name	3	0	0	3
Monsieur	0	0	99	99
Mademoiselle	0	1	0	1
Grand	0	1	0	1
Total	20	11	99	130

**Table 8.**  
*Distribution of nominal address terms.*

#### 4.7 The use of nominal address terms

The analysis also reveals that a number of nominal address terms were employed in the thanks utterances. The pragmatic functions of such terms are to signal and draw attention to existing as well as intended relationships between the speaker and the hearer and to upgrade the illocutionary value of the thanks utterances. As can be seen in **Table 8**, the participants employed 130 instances of nominal forms of address and the vast majority of these terms appear in the professor situation. The nominal forms of address attested in the friend and the stranger situations consist mainly of kinship and solidarity terms: their pragmatic role is to express closeness and solidarity to the interlocutors (friends and strangers). The terms used in the professor situation express respect and deference. In the three situations, the nominal address terms contribute, as already indicated, in enhancing the relational value of the gratitude expressions in which they occur.

### 5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine some pragmatic aspects of Cameroon French, focusing on expressions of gratitude. Using data provided by a group of University students, the analysis reveals the use of a wide range of strategies to express gratitude in situations involving close friends, strangers, and professors.

Overall, factors such as the weight of the favor granted/received, level of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer, and power distance between the interaction partners played an important role in the choices and combinations of thanks strategies. As far as the complexity of the utterances is concerned, the informants mostly used complex gratitude expressions. The complexity of the utterances is due to the fact that the proper gratitude expressions are either repeated or combined with a number of other speech acts with various pragmatic functions (familiarization, comments, apologies, encouragements, etc.). Such complexity helps the speakers to give thanks while performing other face-saving and/or face-enhancing activities. The results show, for instance, that the familiarization act is mostly employed with strangers. This choice is due to the fact that familiarization is “important in multilingual and multiethnic postcolonial communities because of multiple identities people construct around their languages, cultures, religions, and social groups. Through familiarization, interlocutors quickly know the identity to adopt that fits the context of interaction and the status of their addressees” ([32], p. 58).

With respect to level of directness, the study has shown that the participants employed direct gratitude expressions as well as indirect gratitude expressions. Far more direct gratitude expressions were registered than indirect gratitude expressions. As far as the realizations of direct thanks are concerned, the results show that the simple form *merci* “thanks” is rather rare in the professor situation. A possible reason for this choice is that this simple pattern is not suitable to reflect the weight/value of the favor granted and the power asymmetry (student-professor) in this formal situation. When *merci* is employed in the professor situation, it is mostly accompanied and reinforced by nominal address terms. Also interesting is the fact that explicit performative patterns such as *je vous remercie* are most frequently employed in the professor situation. It could be said that the formality of the situation plays an important role in the choice of types of direct gratitude expressions.

With respect to indirect gratitude expressions, the results show that Cameroon French speakers use the “*praising the addressee*” realization pattern much more toward strangers (54 tokens: 63.5%) than with friends (23 tokens: 27%) and professors



(8 tokens: 9.5%). The “promising to compensate” strategy only occurs in the friend situation. The “praising the act” pattern is mostly used in the friend situation (28 instances: 48.3%) and the professor situation (24 tokens: 41.4%). In contrast, the “expressing indebtedness” pattern is most frequent in the professor situation (25 tokens: 62.5%).

The analysis also reveals the use of a number of supportive acts and different types of nominal forms of address that seem to be indicative of some sociocultural norms of interaction in postcolonial contexts. For instance, the collectivist nature of the Cameroonian society that is reflected in the abundant use of nominal address terms in gratitude expressions. Looking at the findings summarized in **Table 8**, we see that most of the terms used in the friend and stranger situations hint at the group-based conceptualization of relationship. Such terms index closeness, affection, in-group belonging, and the pragmatic intent behind their use is to intensify the gratitude expressions. Also noteworthy is the abundant use of honorific terms to index the power imbalance between the speaker (student) and the interlocutor (professor). In a postcolonial context such as Cameroon, such honorifics “mark respect and deference along a continuum of age and social hierarchy” ([32], p. 100). It could be said that in giving thanks to a professor, Cameroon French speakers use honorifics “as a sign of respect for his/her social, professional status, and possibly age” ([32], p. 100). Overall, address terms, a major postcolonial pragmatic component, play a vital role in the intensification of gratitude expressions [33–36].

The study has some limitations. Since it was based on written questionnaire data, it is not sure that the examples provided by the participants would be the same as their choices in naturally occurring situations. Nevertheless, the results obtained here still reflect potential trends of Cameroon French speakers’ thanking behavior. Since the research considered only three situations, we cannot make any claim that the results obtained would be generalized to all situations. There is also a need to consider factors such as age, socioeconomic groups, gender, and ethnic group in the analysis of thanks strategies. It is likely that such factors may lead to the use of strategies that differ from those found in the present study. Future studies can expand the scope of the current study by overcoming these limitations.

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