

# ***Thank you and thanks in Early Modern English***

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## ***1 Introduction***

What was politeness to the people in the 16th, 17th, and early 18th centuries? In this paper I will look at the gratitude expressions *thank you* and *thanks* and their function in ‘spoken’ language of the past. These expressions are seen as speech-acts and politeness markers and are analysed as such in the present study. Furthermore, gratitude expressions have discourse-organising functions and, of course, great significance for pragmatics, which will be analysed in terms of social situation and text type (cf Aijmer 1996: 33).

Previous research dealing with politeness and conversational routines from a historical perspective is not extensive. In recent years too, relatively few articles have been devoted to these issues. Some notable exceptions are Kopytko (1993, 1995), who focuses on politeness in Shakespeare’s English, and Brown and Gilman (1989). These studies are primarily concerned with the principles of conversation or politeness and not with particular expressions or speech-act forms. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) have looked at the pragmatics of address formulae in early English correspondence.

For the modern period, more work has been done. Aijmer (1996) deals with thanking as well as apologies, requests and offers, all of which are similar in that they are made up of limited numbers of expressions and speech-act forms. The present study makes use of her study as a basis for comparison. I must stress, however, that her study deals with authentic spoken present-day English, whereas this study is concerned with transcribed or fictional dialogue in Early Modern English. Consequently, the results presented in the following should be seen as preliminary.

A stratified corpus is a convenient way to collect the material needed for a study of this type. The material used in the following is drawn from a pilot version of the CED (Corpus of English Dialogues).<sup>1</sup> The CED embraces the period 1560–1760 and consists of both recorded and constructed speech in the text types comedy, fiction, didactic works, language teaching texts, witness deposi-

tions and trials (for a working plan for the corpus see Culpeper and Kytö 1997). My pilot version consists of 761,262 words with all the above text types represented.

In the following, I will first give the theoretical background to issues concerning the functions of thanking. I will then briefly look at thanking and the expressions associated with it in Modern English (using Aijmer's 1996 study for comparison), and investigate the same in my Early Modern English material. The issues I will discuss are the gratitude expressions themselves together with intensifiers and 'thanking responders'. Finally I will deal with the function of the expressions, which involves such issues as politeness, thanking strategies, discourse-marking and pragmatics in relation to the object of gratitude and to overall context.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Background

In order to approach the functions of thanking in Early Modern English it is useful to look at some theories concerning gratitude expressions. Understandably enough, these theories are based on findings in Modern English (and other modern languages).

It is clear that gratitude expressions can function in a number of ways in Modern English. Searle (1969: 67) considered *thank (for)* as an illocutionary force indicating device (hence IFID) which is specified by a set of rules (1969: 63):

Propositional content rule: past act A done by H (hearer).

Preparatory rule: A benefits S (speaker) and S believes A benefits S.

Sincerity rule: S feels grateful or appreciative for A.

Essential rule: Counts as an expression of gratitude or appreciation.

This is, however, not the only way to describe thanking. Searle's rules are sometimes broken, such as when *thank you* is used ironically (cf Eisenstein and Bodman 1986: 168; Aijmer 1996: 51) or has the function of closing a conversation, or accepting/rejecting an offer. A sociological approach suggests that thanking is a small supportive ritual associated with politeness (ibid), and its social effect is an acknowledgement of the benefit one has received. Thus, it is clear that the functions of thanking in Modern English cannot be explained as an IFID alone, as shown by the breaking of Searle's (1969) rules and the ritualised thanking associated with politeness.

*Politeness* is a key-word in this study. Therefore a look at some frequently quoted studies concerning politeness in Modern English may be useful.

Holmes (1984: 346) distinguishes between negatively affective speech which can be mitigated, and positively affective speech which can be boosted. A boosted thanking, *thank you very much*, is possible, whereas a mitigated thanking, *\*thank you a little*, seems odd. The expression *thank you* is therefore a positively affective speech act.

In Leech (1983), thanking falls under his ‘convivial’ category of speech-acts, that is, a speech-act which is intrinsically polite or courteous. Here, maximising politeness, ie positive politeness (1983: 84) is achieved by boosting, using intensifying adverbs, or by using prosodic devices. The expression ‘positive politeness’ is used differently by Brown and Levinson (1987), who consider it as one of the superstrategies for performing a face-threatening-act (FTA). Here, positive politeness is associated with a lesser degree of FTA and more intimacy between speakers than is negative politeness.

It is clear that the act of thanking was a politeness phenomenon, usually a positively affective speech act, also in Early Modern English. But the question is whether thanking in earlier centuries was required under conditions different from those of today in order for the speaker to achieve politeness. In this study I will look at the frequency of adverbial intensifying (or boosting) in Early Modern English and the (rule-breaking) ironical use of *thank you/thanks*, and also, whether these phenomena were realised in the same way as they are today, and how they were responded to.

In Modern English, there are several contexts where thanking is required in order to meet the demands of politeness. There are also requirements for how strong the gratitude-expression should be relative to the context. One constraint is caused by the object of gratitude, whether it is a major or a minor favour, and whether it relates to material or immaterial things. Aijmer (1996: 68) has grouped her data from the London-Lund Corpus into *material* and *immaterial things*, and I have used the same classification for CED data in Table 4 below. In Modern English, the most frequent context for thanking with regard to the type of ‘benefaction’ seems to be ‘a proposal to do something’. It is evident that, since this context may include such things as a proposal to end a conversation (ie a closing signal), the function of thanking extends beyond expressing gratitude.

When investigating the pragmatics of thanking, Aijmer (1996: 75) suggests the use of pragmatic frames for pragmatic phenomena.<sup>3</sup> The frames are, simply put, different variables for the context of an utterance. In order to be successful in communicative situations a speaker must know these frames, but the number

of variables in different contexts might be very large and not always easy to discern. Nevertheless, Aijmer (1996) suggests some situational parameters for thanking. She first distinguishes between simple and intensified *thank you/thanks*. She then suggests the formal features, *function* (phatic, closing signal, acceptance for simple *thank you/thanks*; expressing sincere gratitude for intensified), *intonation* (rising tone for simple; falling tone for intensified), *continuation patterns* (*that's okay* etc for both simple and intensified thanking) and *discourse specific features* (telephone conversations etc for simple; none for intensified). Furthermore, Aijmer suggests situational features, such as *setting* (at work, at a person's house for simple *thank you/thanks*; at work, at a person's house and on social occasions for intensified *thank you/thanks*), *participants* (social roles as operator-caller but also personal relations for simple; friends, family-members, strangers for intensified) and types of thanking ('minor favours' for simple *thank you/thanks*; 'major favours' or 'potential favours' for intensified).

### 3 Expressions of gratitude in the CED

As mentioned above, the material in the CED consists of dialogues, both recorded and constructed, from the period 1560–1760. The material is distributed unevenly over text-types and subperiods<sup>4</sup>, which has been taken into consideration in the following. In Table 1, the distribution of *thank you* and *thanks* in the subperiods of the CED can be seen together with the word count of each period in my pilot version of the corpus. By normalising the figures to frequency per 10,000 words it is possible to show that the use of thanking expressions decreases over time.

*Table 1:* Distribution of *thank you/thanks* in CED subperiods (the number within brackets is the wordcount for the subperiod. Figures have been normalised to 10,000 words. The count of the gratitude expressions is also given within brackets)

Period 1, 1560-1599 (126,197)	Period 2, 1600-1639 (133,316)	Period 3, 1640-1679 (211,665)	Period 4, 1680-1719 (217,132)	Period 5, 1720-1760 (59,343)
<i>Thank you</i>				
3.49 (44)	2.10 (28)	1.42 (30)	1.15 (25)	0.17 (1)
<i>Thanks</i>				
1.27 (16)	1.20 (16)	0.61 (13)	0.05 (1)	–

### 3.1 Gratitude expressions: Intensifiers and responders

The particular expressions of gratitude in Early Modern English seem to have been the same as today; in my material *thank you* and *thanks* are the most common ones, with 126 and 46 occurrences, respectively. Interestingly, the shift from a clearly performative speech act with a subject, eg *I thank you* or *I give thanks to you* to the shortened forms *thank you* and *thanks*, had not gone far in Early Modern English. The shortened forms appeared in the 15th century and there are only five examples in my material.

Apparently, Aijmer (1996) found no expression other than *thank you* and *thanks* in the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English that was frequent enough to provide any useful data. She mentions the informal *ta ta* (1996: 39), which she considers a morphological variant of *thank you* (or *thanks*) with the meaning ‘goodbye’, and the formal *I am grateful*. Nevertheless, there are expressions in the CED not mentioned by Aijmer, such as *obliged to* in (1):

- (1) Madam, I am very much *obliged to* you for your civilities (*The True Advancement of ... French*, 1653)<sup>5</sup>

and *beholden to* as in (2):

- (2) I vow and I swear I am mightily *beholden to* you, that you think me so fine a person, (*The Lancaster Witches*, 1682)

Unfortunately, these expressions are not frequent enough to provide useful material for quantification.

Whereas the gratitude expressions themselves seem to have been the same some centuries ago as they are today, the intensifiers show a few interesting differences. The intensifiers Aijmer (1996: 46) found in the London-Lund Corpus<sup>6</sup>, such as *thank you/thanks very much (indeed)*, *thank you so much*, *thanks awfully* and *thanks a lot*, do not occur at all in the CED, except for *many thanks*:

- (3) I give you *many thanks* with all my heart (*A New and Easy French Grammar*, 1667)

*Thank you/thanks + a thousand times* was found by Aijmer in the Birmingham Corpus and is also found in the CED. The intensifiers found in the CED can be seen in Table 2:

Table 2: Intensified *thank you* and *thanks* in the CED

<i>Thank you</i> + intensifier	<i>Thanks</i> + intensifier
<i>I thank you kindly</i> (1)	<i>many thanks</i> (3)
<i>I thank you forsooth</i> (2)	<i>thanks with all my heart</i> (3)
<i>I thank you a hundred (thousand) times</i> (2)	<i>thankes with bowed hearte</i> (1)
<i>I thank you with all my heart</i> (1)	<i>a thousand (twenty, hundred) thankes</i> (5)
<i>I thank you hartily</i> (3)	<i>great thankes</i> (1)
<i>I thanke you moch</i> (1)	<i>most hartye thankes</i> (2)
<i>I humbly thank you</i> (3)	

Thanking can also be intensified with what Aijmer calls compound thanks, and defines as ‘combinations of different strategies’ (1996: 48). In analysing Modern English thanking, she (1996: 35–38) uses Haverkate’s (1984) model, where thanking strategies are classified according to what the expression shows gratitude for. The gratitude expression is thus combined with another expression, which defines what the speaker wants to achieve. For instance, *thanks* is used for explicit thanking, *thank you, that’s nice of you* shows appreciation of the addressee, *thank you, that’s lovely* expresses appreciation of the act, and, *oh, thanks* expresses emotion. Each of these strategies can be combined with each other and the gratitude expression itself to create an almost infinite number of thanking forms. In Aijmer’s material, 12.8 per cent of the thanking expressions consisted of combinations of thanking strategies, the most frequent combination being appreciation of the act and explicit thanking.

Compound thanking is also found in the CED but is very rare and is far from Aijmer’s 12.8 per cent of thanking expressions. Examples (4)–(6) below are the only instances of compound thanking in the CED. (4), where a friend of the speaker has stated that he is ‘ready to obey’,

(4) *I thank you of your good will* (*The French Schoole-Maister*, 1573)

may be interpreted as expressing appreciation of the addressee, like (5):

(5) *I thank you hartely, I am much obliged to you* (*Nouvelle Methode pour apprendre l’anglois*, 1685)

An expression of emotion compounded with thanking is illustrated in (6), where a servant is freed by his master:

(6) *Q sweetly spoken, thanks my good maister* (*Menaecmi*, 1595)

The expressions *that's lovely* and *that's nice of you*, which, according to Aijmer, are common in Modern English, do not occur in the CED.

Another issue concerning the act of thanking is its continuation. A gratitude expression can be followed by a 'responder'. The responders may be seen as speaker-strategies, motivated by what the speaker wants to achieve. Modern English thanking responders are for instance *that's okay* (minimising the favour), *great pleasure* (expressing pleasure) and *you're welcome* (expressing appreciation of the addressee) (Aijmer 1996: 40). Thanking responders also differ somewhat between the Early Modern period and the present day. Aijmer (ibid) also mentions that thanking responders are uncommon in Modern English, and it seems they were even more so in Early Modern English. Five examples, (7)–(11), were found in the CED:

- (7) [C.\$] Come, Landlord, this is to your health, and to *thank you* for your good company.  
 [L.\$] Sir, I am *your most humble servant*. (*A New and Easy French Grammar*, 1667)

L's answer to C's thanks is best interpreted as expressing appreciation of the addressee, but it also contains an expression of deference (*humble servant*), as do (8) and (9):

- (8) [Ind.\$] First give me leave to *thank you* for my Tickets.  
 [Bev. Jun.\$] O! *your servant*, Madam. (*The Conscious Lovers*, 1723)
- (9) [G.\$] Madam, I give you a *thousand thanks* for your favors, and shall be all my life your *most affectionate servant*.  
 [M.\$] Sir, I am your *most humble Servant*. (*A New and Easy French Grammar*, 1667)

In (9) the gratitude expression is boosted with an expression of deference. This type of responder is not mentioned by Aijmer in Modern English. The remaining two examples of thanking responders are different. In (10), a knight thanks an innkeeper and in (11) two neighbours say farewell:

- (10) [Eum.\$] ... *I thanke you* for my good entertainment.  
 [Host.\$] You are *heartily welcome* sir (*The Old VVives Tale*, 1595)
- (11) [The Neigh.\$] *I thanke you* for your good chere.  
 [The Maist.\$] *It is not worth thankes*, good euen neighbour, *you are well come*. (*Familiar Dialogues*, 1586)

The expression *you are welcome* is found both in (10) and (11). It is boosted, or intensified, in (10) (where an innkeeper answers the thanks of a noble knight), which, according to Aijmer, expresses appreciation of the addressee. The expression *It is not worth thanks* in (11), is, on the other hand, used to minimize the favour.

It is tempting to suggest that the expression of deference in Early Modern English thanking responders, as realised in examples (7), (8) and (9), is connected with a stricter social hierarchy of the period than that of the present, but more data is needed to confirm this.

### 3.2 Thanking in different text types

The gratitude expressions *thank you* and *thanks* were found in CED text types as shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Number of *thank you* and *thanks* in CED text types/10,000 words (the figures within brackets are the word count of each text type in the corpus. Raw figures are given in square-brackets)

Trial	Witness depositions	Didactic works	Language teaching texts	Comedy	Fiction
(186,495)	(149,583)	(38,842)	(64,354)	(245,097)	(76,881)
<i>Thank you</i>					
0,21 [4]	0.26 [4]	1.54 [6]	7.15 [46]	2.37 [58]	1.04 [8]
<i>Thanks</i>					
Trial	Witness depositions	Didactic works	Language teaching texts	Comedy	Fiction
0 [0]	0 [0]	0.26 [1]	1.86 [12]	1.26 [31]	0.26 [2]

Judging by the raw figures, thanking is most frequent in the comedy text type, with 58 instances of *thank you* and 31 of *thanks*. However, comedy is the largest of the text types in terms of the number of words. Language teaching texts is a relatively small text type but contains a high number of instances of *thank you* and *thanks* (46 and 12 respectively), which suggests that thanking was considered very important for learners of a language. Trials and witness depositions are large text types, but the frequency of thanking in those texts is low. As shown in Table 3, with the figures normalised to frequency per 10,000 words,



the comedy text type scores high with 2.37 occurrences of *thank (you)*. In language teaching texts, however, that figure is very high (7.15). In trials the figure for *thank (you)* is low (0.21). It is clear that the context of courts of law did not require frequent expressions of gratitude. On the other hand, everyday encounters, which are the main focus of the language teaching texts, needed a correct use of gratitude expressions.

The frequencies of the gratitude expressions in the different text types is potentially problematic: comedy and language teaching texts, where most examples of *thank you/thanks* are found, are both fictional. Both may raise concerns as sources, for different reasons. In comedies, the play with conventions of thanking may be part of the humour. In language teaching texts, the artificiality of the dialogues is inherent to the genre.

### **3.3 Functions of Early Modern English thanking**

Below I discuss thanking in the context of politeness, discourse-marking and pragmatics; that is, how the gratitude expressions were used to achieve politeness (or impoliteness), if the gratitude expressions functioned according to their sequential position in a discourse structure, and the situational parameters linked to the use of gratitude expressions.

#### *3.3.1 Early Modern English politeness and thanking*

In Aijmer's Modern English data, *thank you* was intensified in 40.7 per cent of her examples, and *thanks* in 53.5 per cent of the examples (1996: 46). The corresponding figures are much lower in my data: *thank you* and *thanks* were intensified in 10.9 per cent and 23.9 per cent of the cases, respectively. The tendency for *thanks* to be intensified more often than *thank you* is the only clear similarity between my data and Aijmer's data. One reason for this might be found in differences in the politeness culture. In Brown and Levinson's model, positive politeness is associated with intimacy between speakers, and a low degree of FTA. One might assume that, in order to achieve positive politeness with thanking according to this model, neutral intensifiers, not expressing appreciation of addressee, act, etc, would be used. For instance, *thank you very much*, *thank you so much*, if any at all, would be expected (likewise, one would expect the omission of thanking responders, especially those expressing deference). Negative politeness, less intimacy and a higher FTA might involve intensifiers such as *I humbly thank you* or *most hartye thankes* (cf Table 2) and responders such as *I am your most humble servant*.

It has been suggested by Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 591) that, during the period 1420–1680, there was a tendency towards a more nega-

tive politeness culture in English, shown in the address formulae of correspondence. Kopytko (1995: 531 and 1993: 107), on the other hand, suggests that the trend in Shakespeare's time was towards a more positive politeness culture.

With regard to the low frequencies of intensifiers of thanking, my data supports Kopytko (1993, 1995), whereas my findings concerning the types of recurring intensifiers and responders support Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995). However, it is possible to apply the findings from both studies: the responders expressing deference (which signals negative politeness) are from 1640–1679, (examples (7), (8), (9)) and later, whereas examples (10) and (11) are from 1560–1599, which supports Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg without contradicting Kopytko.

In this context, one might ask whether *thank you* and *thanks* could be used ironically, ie as an impoliteness superstrategy as described by Culpeper (1996: 356). We know that this is possible in Modern English, and so it was evidently in the Early Modern period. The examples are mainly found in comedies and do not seem to differ from Modern English equivalents. In (12), a husband, who thinks his wife is having an affair with another man, talks to her in private:

- (12) ... and if you can contrive any way of being a Whore without making me a Cuckold, do it and welcome.  
 [\$ Mrs. Sull.\$] Sir, I *thank you* kindly, you would allow me the Sin but rob me of the Pleasure. (*The Beaux Stratagem*, 1707)

### 3.3.2 Thank you and thanks as discourse markers in the CED

In Modern English, the gratitude expressions *thank you* and *thanks* are becoming formal markers of certain segments of interaction between speakers (Aijmer 1996: 52). The actual attached 'gratitude' is, in some cases, only residual such as in service encounters (a ticket sold on a train etc). Aijmer (1996: 52–66) looked at thanking as a closing-signal and in proposal-acceptance sequences in both adjacency pairs and larger units. The results yielded by Aijmer's material showed great complexity where the function of the gratitude expressions was due to their sequential position in the discourse structure. In this section I will only look at thanking as a closing-signal in the Early Modern English material.

In my CED data the expressions *thank you* and *thanks* are found 14 times in closing-sequences of a conversation. Of these, seven occur in short dialogues, or rather glosses, from language teaching texts, which due to their lack of context (most language teaching texts consist of glosses) cannot be analysed with regard to the function of the gratitude expressions in different turn-positions. This leaves only four, examples (13)–(16):

- (13) [\$Theo.\$] Here's Doubty, I must get rid of this fool. Cousin, I hear your Father coming; if he sees you in this condition hee'l be very Angry.  
 [\$Yo. Har.\$] Thank you kindly, no more to be said. I'll go and sleep a little. (*The Lancaster Witches*, 1682)

(13) is unambiguous: the drunk Young Hartford (Yo. Har.) simply thanks Theo for the information, whereafter the speakers part. Similarly, the gentleman on the road in example (14) gives thanks for information but in this case the inn-keeper (The in.) needs an extra turn:

- (14) [\$The gent.\$] How farre is it to Rye?  
 [\$The in.\$] There is about twenty myles.  
 [\$The gent.\$] Is it a fayre way?  
 [\$The in.\$] Yea Syr, very fayre.  
 [\$The gent.\$] I *thanke you* myne host: I commit you to God.  
 [\$The in.\$] God be your speede Syrs: Fare you well, at your co~maundement. (*Familiar Dialogues*, 1586)

In (15), Sir Aminadab expresses gratitude for a gift, says farewell and exits. However, Sir Aminadab boosts his gratitude with the Latin *Ago tibi gratias* (the use of Latin is a peculiarity of the character).

- (15) [\$Ful.\$] With all my hart, I am no Rat-catcher, But if you need a poyson, here is that Will pepper both your Dogs & Rats and Cats: Nay spare your purse, I giue this in good will, And as it proues I pray you send to me, And let me know, wold you ought else with me?  
 [\$Ami.\$] (\Minime quidem,\) heer's that you say wil take them? *A thousand thankes* sweet sir, I say to you As Tully in his Aesops Fables said, (\Ago tibi gratias,\) so farewell, (\vale.\) (*How a Man May Chuse a Good Wife ...*, 1602)

The function of *thank you* also seems clear in (16):

- (16) [\$Abra.\$] Long may your Worships Gelding breathe, and your Worshipfull selfe also. I am in hast Sir Robert.  
 [\$Sir Rob.\$] Take your own good time Abram.  
 [\$Abra.\$] *Thank* your good Worship Sir Robert. [\$Exit\$] (*The Covntrie Girle*, 1647)

Here, Abram is grateful to Sir Rob. for the latter's letting him 'take his own good time'; ie he is grateful for a favour. It should be noted, however, that Abram is in a hurry, as is Theo in (13), who wants to get rid of Hartford quickly. Sir Aminadab in (15) has received a gift that he wants to keep secret, and haste

is important also to him. We do not know if the gentleman asking for the way to Rye in (14) is in a hurry, but assuming he is not, the contexts of (13), (15) and (16) speak against the use of complex structures in the closing sequences.

Nevertheless, the complexity observed in Modern English regarding *thank you* and *thanks* in closing sequences, compliment-thanking, well-wish-thanking and proposal-acceptance is not found in the CED. The Early Modern English *thank you* and *thanks* in my data seem to retain their main function of expressing gratitude, thus not yet having developed the function of marking the segments of interactions.<sup>7</sup> The reason for the elaborate patterns in Modern English can probably be explained by discourse type and sociolinguistic factors, such as the relationship between speakers (Aijmer 1996: 55), but their absence in the CED is difficult to account for. The only explanation at hand is the possible difference in politeness culture, discussed above (section 2.3.1). In Modern English, social distance between speakers creates more elaborate patterns (Aijmer 1996), or, in other words, creates negative politeness. This fits with the idea that the trend during the Early Modern period was from a positive politeness culture from the late 16th and early 17th centuries towards a more negative culture in later centuries. More data is likely to shed light on this matter.

### 3.3.3 *The pragmatics of thanking*

It seems reasonable to assume that the requirements for thanking were similar in Early Modern English to those in Modern English. That is, there were certain contexts where thanking was needed to achieve politeness, and there were rules governing the strength of gratitude expressions relative to contexts. Like Aijmer (1996), I have chosen to look at the object of gratitude in my CED material; the results are given in Table 4:

*Table 4:* Types of ‘benefaction’ in the CED

Type	Number
Material things	
gift	17
hospitality	17
services	22
visiting	3
Subtotal	59
Immaterial things	
compliments, congratulations, well-wishes	13

interest in one's health	1
carrying out a request	1
offer, promise, suggestion, invitation	73
information	8
a proposal to do something (eg close the conversation)	2
Subtotal	98
Total	157

The total does not add up to the total of 174 instances of *thank you* and *thanks* due to the omission of a few unclear examples, such as glosses from language teaching texts.

The figures in Table 4 are similar to those in Aijmer's study; the biggest difference is undoubtedly in 'thanking for a proposal to do something', where Aijmer includes gratitude expressions as closing signals. This difference is dramatic. Aijmer has 131 examples of 'thanking for a proposal to do something' out of 199 in her 'Immaterial' category (65.8 per cent), whereas, in the CED, the figures are two out of 98 (2.0 per cent). This clearly supports what has been mentioned earlier, that Early Modern English *thank you* and *thanks* had not yet developed into markers of segments of interaction.

The pragmatic frames, or the situational parameters for thanking, discussed above can be used to further examine the contextual significance of gratitude expressions. For this study I have looked at the 15 intensified *thank you* and *thanks* found in the comedy text type of the CED and included them in the same frames as did Aijmer (1996: 77), ie *Formal features*, (Function and Continuation), *Discourse-specific features*, and *Situational features* (Setting, Participants and Types of thanking ('benefits')).

The function of thanking in the 15 examples could rarely be described as expressing sincere thanks like Aijmer's intensified thanking (1996: 77). On the other hand, the sincerity is sometimes ambiguous. Irony, however, is evident in (12) above.

Continuation patterns are not found; however, one example, (17), shows some complexity:

- (17) [\$Mr. Page.\$] I am glad to see your Worships well; *I thanke* you for my Venison Master Shallow.  
 [\$Shal.\$] Master Page, I am glad to see you: much good doe it your good heart: I wish'd your Venison better, it was ill killd: how doth good Mis-

trousse Page? and *I thank you alwaies* with my heart, la: with my heart.

[\$M. Page.\$] Sir, *I thanke you*.

[\$Shal.\$] Sir, *I thanke you*: by yea, and no I doe. (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1623)

First, Page thanks Shallow for the venison. Shallow answers by expressing appreciation of Page and with an intensified *thank you*, which is answered by a possibly sincere *thank you*, the function of which is not quite clear. Finally, Shallow says *thank you* again, and the conversation continues.

No discourse-specific features were found in either the CED or Aijmer's study of Modern English.

The situational features for Modern English intensified thanking are wide-ranging: the setting can be either a person's house or social occasions, and the participants can be friends, family-members or (socially unequal) strangers. Social roles, like caller-operator host-guest, do not occur with intensified thanking; instead, a simple *thank you* or *thanks* is used. However, if the social distance between the speakers is great, an intensified gratitude expression may be predicted (Aijmer 1996: 76–7). The same is true for the CED material: when intensified gratitude expressions are used, the participants are mostly friends or family-members, but in some cases they are social unequals such as masters and servants. Consider example (18):

(18) [\$Kin.\$] Well Sirs, we grant your Petition.

[\$Cob.\$] We *humblie thank your* royall Maiesty. (*The Knack to Know a Knave*, 1594)

In (18), a 'gentleman' thanks a king for granting a petition. The petition is about letting the men of Gotham brew strong ale three times a week and forcing strangers in the town to spend money on the ale or else fast during their stay there. This is probably a major favour. The intensifier *humblie*, possibly marks the social distance between the king and the gentleman.

The types of thanking, or the benefits thanked for with intensified thanking are mostly major favours and services, invitations and social hospitality in Modern English. In CED comedies, the latter two types make up a third of examples of intensified thanking, and it seems almost obligatory to use intensified thanking in these cases, even if an invitation is rejected. See examples (19)–(20):

(19) [\$ (^Yon. Ar.^) \$] Sweet M. (^Anselme^) I desire yours too: Wil you come dine with me at home to morow, You shall be welcome I assure you sir.

[\$ (^Ans.^) \$] I feare sir I shall proue too bold a guest.

[\$ (^Yon. Ar.^) \$] You shal be welcome if you bring your friend.

[\$ (^Ful.^) \$] O Lord sir, we shall be too troublesome.

[\$ (^Yong Ar.^) \$] Nay now I will inforce a promise from you, Shall I expect you?

[\$ (^Ful.^) \$] Yes with all my heart.

[\$ (^Ans.^) \$] *A thousand thanks*. Yonders the schoolemaister. So till to morrow twentie times farewell.

(*How a Man May Chuse a Good Wife ...*, 1602)

(20) [\$An.\$] Will't please your worship to come in, Sir?

[\$Sl.\$] No, *I thank you forsooth, hartely*; I am very well.

[\$An.\$] The dinner attends you, Sir.

[\$Sl.\$] I am not a-hungry, *I thanke you, forsooth*: (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1623)

In (19) the invitation is accepted after some persuasion with *a thousand thanks*, whereas it is refused in (20) with *I thank you forsooth, hartely*; when the invitation is repeated, the refusal is also repeated with *I thanke you forsooth*, and intensified.

Although the material used to study the pragmatic frames is scanty, it would seem as if the situational parameters of the use of *thank you* and *thanks* have not changed since the Early Modern period.

#### 4 Conclusions

This study has been based on a pilot version of the CED corpus, and the results are thus only preliminary. Regarding the material in the corpus, there are of course particular problems, mostly regarding the extent to which it represents authentic speech, which have not been addressed here but of which one must be aware. For instance, it is impossible to know to what degree the language in depositions and trials was influenced by the recorders and how the author of a comedy wanted his lines to run. Nevertheless, a few characteristics of thanking in Early Modern English can be discerned.

The gratitude expressions themselves were probably the same in the Early Modern period as they are today, but the intensifiers used and especially the thanking-responders have changed. The latter often marked deference in the CED.

The text types with the highest frequencies of thanking in the CED are comedies and language teaching texts. The examples in language teaching texts are unfortunately very often isolated glosses that cannot be analysed in terms of context, but their occurrence at least shows that a polite use of gratitude expres-

sions was considered important. Thanking in comedies is a more rewarding subject for study since the context is always reasonably clear.

The function of the expressions *thank you* and *thanks* was mainly to express gratitude in Early Modern English. The gratitude expressions had not developed the discourse-marking features of today's British English; nor is it possible to see the complex patterns of thanking in different turn-positions in the CED material. The objects of gratitude were largely the same some centuries ago as they are today, but if 'a proposal to do something' is counted as an object of gratitude in Modern English, it seems it was not so in Early Modern times.

There is no reason to doubt that thanking was required in certain situations to achieve politeness in Early Modern English. However, Early Modern English thanking had some features which suggest that the politeness culture of the period was different from that of today, and possibly also that it changed during the period. It has been suggested that the early part of the period, the time of Shakespeare, was marked by positive politeness (Kopytko, 1993, 1995) but that the trend later was towards a more negative politeness culture (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995), created by greater social distance in society. Both the issues concerning the intensifiers/responders and the pragmatics of *thank you* and *thanks* appear to support this.

The results given in this paper suggest that thanking has changed from Early Modern times; however, further investigations into conversational routines and politeness of the Early Modern English period are in order. Moreover, the material needs to be expanded to enable a more detailed comparison within the Early Modern period and to provide sociolinguistic data on these issues.

### Notes

1. For a discussion on the reliance on spoken language in matters such as this, see Jacobs and Jucker (1995: 3).
2. Indirect ways of conveying thanks are not dealt with in this study.
3. This speech act event description originates in Olshtain and Cohen (1983) – 'speech act set', and Hoppe-Graff et al (1985: 90).
4. I have not attempted to compare data attained for the different sub-periods in any greater detail other than giving the frequencies of thanking within them; the material is too limited for such comparisons.
5. The texts in the CED are identified by text title and date.
6. Altenberg (1998: 106–7), who has used the same corpus as Aijmer, notes that thanking constitutes a restricted paradigm for the variants used in Mod-



ern English. Other functions may be expressed with a larger number of variant expressions.

7. In American English *thank you* is still mainly used for the expression of gratitude (Aijmer 1996: 52).

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