



## A Pragmatic Study of Acknowledgments in Selected Theses by Iraqi EFL Learners

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### Abstract

Acknowledgments in academic writing serve as a platform for expressing gratitude, recognition, and social bonds. In line with this, the present study investigates the pragmatic aspects of acknowledgments in selected theses by Iraqi EFL learners to identify how politeness strategies influence the structuring of gratitude and the types of acknowledgment acts are most frequently employed. Five acknowledgments are selected from different Iraqi universities to be analysed according to Yule's (1996) strategies of politeness (solidarity and deference) along with Bach and Harnish's (1979) taxonomy of acknowledgments acts and by means of qualitative method of research analysis. The study reveals- in regard to strategies of politeness- that the deference strategy is frequently employed when addressing academic figures such as supervisors and professors, while the strategy of solidarity is identified when writers acknowledge family, friends, and colleagues. Regarding the acts of acknowledgments, the study shows that thanking is the most frequently used act, followed by the act of accepting, whereas acts like apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting are not existed in the provided acknowledgments. Notably, the study uncover that in some acknowledgments, the act of thanking can function or imply an act of accepting when it acknowledges received support or guidance.

The study finds out that Iraqi EFL learners strategically balance hierarchical respect and personal closeness in their acknowledgments, reflecting both academic conventions and cultural values.

### Paper Info

#### Keywords:

*Pragmatics, politeness strategies, acknowledgment acts, Iraqi EFL learners, academic writing.*

## 1. Introduction

According to Lacan, a culture's abstracted relations of its rules are embodied in its language. Since language only exists through individual speech, so in each speech act the self and the culture speak at the same time (Cameron, 1998: 57).

Acknowledgments are a special and very unique place for academic writers to show their appreciation and recognition. They also offer important insights into how writers use language to negotiate social connections.

Researchers such as Jaroenkitboworn (2014) has analysed the generic structure and linguistic patterns of gratitude expressions in dissertation acknowledgments written by Thai Ph.D. students by following the line of the move analysis in acknowledgements of Hyland (2004). Similarly, Razali and Jan (2020), investigate the strategies for expressing gratitude in thesis acknowledgements within the context of Malaysian ESL postgraduate students by adopting Haverkate's (1984) framework of thanking strategies. Furthermore, Yuvayapan and Bilginer (2024) examine how gratitude is expressed in the acknowledgment sections of Philosophy PhD theses across three languages: English, German, and Turkish

Accordingly, few studies have focused on how Iraqi EFL learners structure their acknowledgments pragmatically. The current study, therefore, aims to investigate the pragmatic aspects of acknowledgments in five theses written by Iraqi EFL students, with an emphasis on the ways in which speech acts and politeness strategies support the development of appreciation and acknowledgment in academic discourse.

Based on George Yule's politeness strategies (1996), this study explores the interplay between solidarity (the strategy that emphasises closeness and familiarity) and deference (the strategy that expresses respect and hierarchy) in acknowledgments. By analysing the linguistic choices made by the writers, the study highlights how these strategies reflect cultural and academic conventions in Iraqi academic settings.

Additionally, this study employs Bach and Harnish's (1979) taxonomy of acknowledgment acts, which divides acknowledging expressions into different speech acts, including thanking, apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, accepting, and rejecting. This framework makes it possible to examine in great detail how acknowledgments serve practical purposes more than merely expressing gratitude.

By combining both politeness strategies and acknowledgment acts, this study highlights the underlying pragmatic features in Iraqi EFL learners' acknowledgments.

In accordance with what has been mentioned above, the study tries to answer the following questions:

- 1- How do Iraqi EFL learners employ politeness strategies in writing acknowledgments?
- 2- Which acknowledgments acts do Iraqi EFL learners' in writing acknowledgments most frequently use?
- 3- How do politeness strategies influence the selection and structuring of acknowledgment

acts in Iraqi EFL learners' acknowledgments?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Academic Discourse and Academic Writing

The ways of thinking and speaking that are prevalent in academic settings are referred to as academic discourse. Its importance stems from the fact that language is necessary for carrying out intricate social tasks including teaching pupils, displaying learning, sharing concepts, and creating knowledge (Hyland, 2011).

Developments in preparing non-native speakers for study English language have been intimately linked to the study of academic discourse in English (Flowerdew, 2013). Consequently, academic discourse includes both written and spoken communication; therefore, a closer examination of academic writing is required to comprehend its structured conventions. Academic writing is a crucial part of academic discourse and is the main medium for scholarly communication.

Academic writing is that set of conventions people in general and readers in particular notice in a thesis or a published paper in various disciplines (Murray, 2009). It is intended for all students who must do essays and other assignments while attending English-medium institutions and universities. In addition to the intricacy of academic English terminology, international students find the written requirements of their courses to be very difficult and they also need to acquire a number of style, reference, and organisation rules (Bailey, 2003). Besides that, a major part of the process of becoming a successful writer

in academia is to develop an awareness that there are differences between language used academic discourse and that use in less 'formal' settings (Hewings, 2001).

Academic writing is clearly intended to elicit affinity and involvement in the formal settings, despite the fact that it frequently lacks explicit appraisal and attitude (Hyland, 2004; Swales, 2004, as cited in Hyland, 2009). In order to engage in what is essentially a virtual conversation with readers, authors must also take interactional and evaluative stances when presenting their work, anticipating their expectations and reactions (ibid.).

academic writing definitely involves the use of academic vocabulary; the term 'academic vocabulary' frequently refers to a collection of lexical items that are not core terms but are rather common in academic publications. Unlike technical terms, they are widely used in academic texts across many disciplines (Paquot, 2010).

Academic writing suggests formality and in certain ways formality is attached to politeness. Various scholars have developed and categorised politeness and impoliteness strategies to resist face-threatening activities based on the positive or negative needs of the speaker and the hearer. Here the variables of power and social rank mainly predetermine the choice of linguistic means to fulfil proper aims. Additionally, Because the subordination in this domain is more rigorously and consistently observed between students and professors, junior and senior researchers, scholars and principal investigators, etc., the role of power and social distance gains more weight in the

context of academic discourse (Gasparyan et al.).

## 2.2 Use of Language by foreigners

Languages are primarily tools for establishing social ties and relationships; speakers employ them in their social interactions, putting in consideration when using a language in social situations, speakers adhere to certain norms, guidelines, and restrictions (Senft, 2014).

Studies on writing in second languages have shown that mastering academic prose in a second language necessitates a high level of linguistic proficiency; without it, students lack the variety of lexical and grammatical abilities needed for academic writing (Jordan, 1997; Nation and Waring, 1997; Hinkel, 2002; 2004; Reynolds, 2005, as cited in Paquot, 2010). In addition, understanding many skills and facets of the second language that are especially important for effective face-to-face communication is necessary to become a proficient user of the language. Since accurately comprehending and successfully communicating intents are crucial parts of a set of competences that any language professional is required to exhibit, they view gaining pragmatic competence in a second language as an absolute necessity. Therefore, learners must become proficient in second language pragmatics as a tool to use in their future job, regardless of their personal beliefs (Savic, 2014).

It is crucial to mention that not all language users act appropriately in every circumstance. They might purposefully employ an unexpected linguistic form or expression; as a result, when a speaker makes utterances that differ from expectations, he/she provides a unique

impression upon the hearer (Baker and Hengeveld, 2012). Accordingly, a variety of circumstances influence people's decision to speak, limiting both what they say and how they say it (Crystal, 1985). At this part it is valuable to discuss the notion of pragmatic appropriateness which plays an important role in foreign language learning as Baker and Hengeveld (2012) clearly state. They claim that how an individual addresses a waiter in French? They further set forth that even for someone that has flawless accent and impressive vocabulary in French, a good command of its grammar and a perfect accent, questions such as these may yield unexpected problems (ibid.).

Following that, there is a great deal of overlap with first language knowledge, particularly in terms of the fundamental principles or norms that all languages share as well as the ability of language to convey meaning. The most crucial factor is that the degree of overlap with the first language is determined by the genetic or typological relationships of the two languages as well as whether or not they have borrowed from or otherwise influenced one another (Troike, 2006).

Notably, non-native speakers often adapt English in unique ways, leading to differences in formality, vocabulary use, and sentence structure.

## 2.3 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines meaning in the context, namely, how a hearer understands another person's intended meaning based on what he/she has said and the context in which he/she has said it, and how speakers craft their utterances with that in mind (Briner, 2021). It encompasses linguistic functions,

patterns of language use, inference types, communication principles, knowledge frames, attitudes, and beliefs, as well as organisational principles of text and discourse (Bublitz and Norrick, 2011).

In many respects, pragmatics is the study of invisible meaning, or how people understand what is meant even when it is not expressed verbally or in writing, as Yule (2010) states. For him, in order for that to happen, speakers or writers must be able to depend on a lot of shared assumptions and expectations when they attempt to communicate.

In pragmatics, context is everything. Consider the following example which is provided by Cummings (2010):

Mary: *He is a banker.*

In the absence of a context the understanding of such an utterance will be incomplete, thus, to whom the pronoun 'he' is referring. To be understood, such an utterance should be provided by preceding discourse (this discourse will make it understood) as it is shown below:

Peter: *What does John do for living?*

Mary: *He is a banker.*

It is worth mentioning that there are several types of context, one kind is referred to as the linguistic context or also known as the co-text as the example above illustrates. The co-text of particular word is the group of other words that are used in the same phrase or sentence (Yule, 2010). Thus, the word 'bank' which is mentioned earlier could also mean the side of the river and this is of course interpreted according to the given situation. The other type of context is the physical context which entails that

if people see the word 'bank' on the wall of a building in a certain place, of course the physical location will influence their interpretation (ibid.).

In a nutshell, pragmatics is the study of the speaker/writer's meaning in the context and without the context interpretation of what is meant will be unclear.

## 2.4 Speech Acts

People use words and grammatical structures to create utterances, but they also use these utterances to execute actions in an effort to communicate themselves. Thereupon, speech acts are typically defined as actions carried out by utterances (Yule, 1996). These verbal actions that occur in the world and alter the current situation are known as speech acts (May, 2001). The idea of speech acts is that when people speak they are doing things and that they can understand verbal interaction better if they focus on the kinds of acts which speech can perform (Clark, 2022).

In addition to that, the action which is performed when an utterance is produced can be analysed on three levels (Austin, 1962). Cutting (2002) explains these levels in a simplified way, he introduces the first level by describing it as the words themselves, that is, the act of saying something, in other words it asserts 'what is said' and this is known as the locutionary act. The illocutionary force, or "what is done in uttering the words," is the second level, which is what the speaker is accomplishing with his or her words. The last level is the result of the words or what is accomplished by uttering them, in other words it is the effect the words leave upon the hearer.

To sum up, speech acts are actions that are done through words. These words are said not only about the world (locution) but also to perform an act by the speaker (illocution) and as a sequence these words intend to have an effect upon the hearer (perlocution).

## 2.5 Politeness in the Lens of Linguistics

Politeness is a theory of meaning that puts language in its social context (Chapman, 2011). In interaction, it can be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person's face and in this sense politeness can be accomplished in situations of social distance (Yule, 1996). In this way, when there is a significant social distance, there is more indirectness; when there is less social distance, there is less negative politeness and indirectness (Cutting and Fordyce, 2021). It is important to note that indirectness is closely related to the concept of politeness.

There are two different types of politeness since there are two types of feelings that need to be addressed. One type appears whenever anything that is going to be spoken might be unwanted, causing people to show respect, restraint, or avoidance. Another is that enduring relationships with people can be crucial in considering their emotions, leading to displays of acceptance, care, and social closeness (Brown, 2015).

Furthermore, the word 'face' has been mentioned in the first paragraph, well, the notion of 'face' is the foundation of the theory of politeness, which is dated back from the 1950s by the sociologist Goffman who links face with notions of being embarrassed or humiliated, or 'losing face'. Therefore, face is an emotionally invested entity, and that can

be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to while interaction (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

According to Brown and Levinson (ibid.) there are two types of face as shown below:

(a) Negative face signifies the fundamental claim to personal property, territories, and the freedoms of activity and imposition, or non-distraction;

(b) Positive face represents a consistent, positive self-image or "personality", it is important since it conveys the desire for this self-image to be valued and accepted.

## 2.6 Acknowledgments

Certain sentiments towards the hearer are expressed through acknowledgements. These emotions are suited for certain types of events based on how they are expressed. For instance, greeting conveys joy at meeting or seeing someone, thanking conveys appreciation for something received, apologizing conveys regret for hurting or upsetting the hearer, condoling conveys sympathy for the hearer who has experienced some misfortune, and congratulating conveys happiness that the hearer has accomplished or received something noteworthy. Commonly, such an occasion, when it arises, is mutually recognized by the speaker and the hearer, and then it is not only appropriate but expected by the hearer that the speaker will provide the relevant acknowledgment (Bach and Harnish, 1979).

Mentioning that, most academic articles contain acknowledgments to various sources of help received during their preparation. Cokonin et al. (2003) cited

in Hartley (2008) shows that there are different parts that acknowledgments could involve, these parts go as follows:

- Financial (recognition of funding);
- Instrumental/ technical (providing access to tools, technologies, facilities, as well as furnishing technical expertise such as statistical analysis);
- Conceptual (source of inspiration, idea generation, critical insight, intellectual guidance, assistance of referees);
- Editorial (providing advice on manuscript preparation, submission, bibliographic assistance); and
- Moral (recognising the support of family and friends).

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Data Description**

The section of acknowledgments will be analysed in five selected MA theses written by Iraqi EFL learners specialised in English language/ Linguistics and literature from different universities in Iraq to ensure diversity in institutional backgrounds and writing styles.

The data were not modified but were anonymized to protect identities.

#### **3.2 Method of Analysis**

The present study adopts a qualitative method of analysis as it enables a deep exploration of pragmatic features in acknowledgments as well as, the study involves interpreting meaning and function rather than counting numerical data as qualitative research involves presenting, interpreting, and validating the data at the same time identifying the

potential outcomes of the study (Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

### **3.3 The Model**

The adopted model for the present study will be a combination of politeness theory and speech act theory. Therefore it will go like this; politeness strategies by Yule (1996) and Bach and Harnish's (1979) acts of acknowledgments. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the adopted model are illustrated below.

#### **3.3.1 Theoretical and conceptual frameworks**

In his book 'Pragmatics' (1996) Yule provides a clear and simplified framework for understanding how people manage face and politeness in communication. He sets forth that there are two strategies that an individual should be aware of. These strategies are closely related to positive and negative politeness provided by Brown & Levinson (1987). According to Yule (1996), the solidarity strategy might be the guiding strategy of a whole group or it can be a choice made by a single speaker on a given occasion. Linguistically, this strategy will involve sharing slang or dialect, using nick names or even abusive phrases (especially among men), and revealing personal information. The inclusive pronouns "let's" and "we" are often used to express it. Conversely, there is the deference strategy, which is a component of "formal politeness" It can contain terms that do not refer to either the speaker or the hearer, and it is impersonal, as though nothing is communicated (ibid.). It is significant to note that the language used in this method emphasises the independence of both the speaker and the hearer, as

evidenced by the lack of personal claims (ibid).

Now it is essential to explore the acknowledgment acts that manifest the strategies politeness strategies in academic writing. Bach and Harnish (1979) put that acknowledgments include list of feelings that are directed toward the hearer, or the reader, (they will be explained in a very simple way) as demonstrated below:

- Apologize: to express regret.
- Condole: to express sympathy.
- Congratulate: to express happiness.
- Greet: to recognise someone's presence.
- Thank: to express gratitude.
- Bid: to express bid or wish.
- Accept: to express agreement to an invitation, offer...etc.
- Reject: to decline something.

The conceptual framework of the adopted model is shown in figure (1).

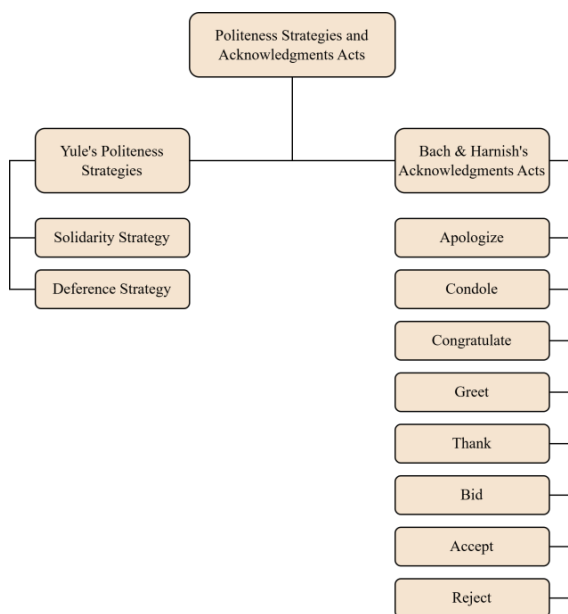


Figure (1) the model of politeness strategies and acknowledgments acts.

## 4. Data Analysis

### 4.1 Acknowledgments 1

*Above all, all the praise and thanks are due to the Almighty Allah, Who has granted me the power to do this work.*

*My profound gratitude, appreciation, and special thanks go to my supervisor and tutor, Asst. Prof.....(PhD), for all of his help, support, and encouragement while I was writing my thesis.*

*I am pleased to thank Prof. ....(Ph.D.), the Head of the Department of English - College of Education for Human Sciences, for being patient and for showing willingness to cooperate and support his students.*

*I am honored to thank the seminar committee members who have given me their time to enrich my research. Many thanks extend to Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.); and Prof. ....(Ph.D.). I would also like to thank my teachers and professors at the Department of English for their guidance throughout B.A. and M.A. Degrees, Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Asst. Prof. ....(MA); Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Asst. Prof.....; and Lecturer .... (Ph.D.).*

#### 4.1.1 Analysis of Acknowledgments Based on Solidarity and Deference Strategies

Throughout this acknowledgments the deference strategy is highly employed as the following statements show:

- *"Above all, all the praise and thanks are due to the Almighty Allah, Who has granted me the power to do this work."*
- *"I am honored to thank the seminar committee members who have given me their time to enrich my research."*

The phrase "Above all" emphasises humility and placing divine gratitude in the first position. The phrase "granted me the power" implies a lack of self-sufficiency, difficult time and the need for support. Clearly this is reinforcing deference.

- *"My profound gratitude, appreciation, and special thanks go to my supervisor and tutor, Asst. Prof. ....(PhD), for all of his help, support, and encouragement while I was writing my thesis."*

The writer uses formal phrases such as "profound gratitude" and "special thanks" besides mentioning the title and the full name along with credentials and that present the formal relationship as well as the social distance. The phrase "for all of his help" places the focus on the supervisor's contribution, rather than the writer's own effort.

- *"I am pleased to thank Prof. ....(Ph.D.), the Head of the Department of English - College of Education for Human Sciences, for being patient and for showing willingness to cooperate and support his students."*

The writer uses the title besides the full name with credentials to show respect. The phrase "for being patient" suggests an imbalance of power, where the professor is seen as a mentor guiding students.

"I am honoured" acknowledges the high status of the committee members. The phrase "who have given me their time" implies that their time is more valuable than the writer's, reinforcing respect and social distance.

- *"I would also like to thank my teachers and professors at the Department of English for their guidance throughout B.A. and M.A. Degrees, Prof. ....(Ph.D.); Prof. ...."*

This statement clarifies the formal and highly relationship, listing titles first, maintaining hierarchical respect.

The analysis reveals that there is no solidarity strategy because there is no personal connection mentioned with family, friends, or colleagues.

#### **4.1.2 Analysis of Acknowledgments Acts**

The statement *"Above all, all the praise and thanks are due to the Almighty Allah, Who has granted me the power to do this work."* shows the act of thanking so to expressing gratitude to Allah, together with the act of accepting which conveys implicitly acknowledging divine support in completing the thesis.

The statement *"My profound gratitude, appreciation, and special thanks go to my supervisor and tutor, Asst. Prof.....(PhD), for all of his help, support, and encouragement while I was writing my thesis."* again shows the acts

of thanking accompanied by the act of accepting in which the writer manifests gratitude towards the supervisor as well as recognising the supervisor's contributions.

The following statement proves the act of thanking where the writer is expressing his/ her gratitude to the head of the department head and acknowledging his patience and support:

- *"I am pleased to thank Prof..... (Ph.D.), the Head of the Department of English - College of Education for Human Sciences, for being patient and for showing willingness to cooperate and support his students."*

*"I am honored to thank the seminar committee members who have given me their time to enrich my research."*

By means of the act of thanking, the writer shows his/her appreciation for the seminar committee members and by the act of accepting he/she acknowledges their role in enriching the research.

- *"I would also like to thank my teachers and professors at the Department of English for their guidance throughout B.A. and M.A. Degrees..."*

The writer displays the act of thanking by expressing appreciation to all teachers and professors and recognizing their guidance as an essential thing throughout his study via the act of accepting.

There are no instances of apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting.

## 4.2 Acknowledgments 2

*My heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude are due to Allah, the most Gracious and most Merciful, for the many blessings He bestowed upon me.*

*I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and indebtedness to my supervisor Prof. ....for her unfailing patience and endurance and for her kind treatment and decisive remarks to make this thesis come into existence. Many thanks are due to Dr. ....for her support and encouragement and her invaluable remarks. Special thanks must go to the staff of the M.A. program in English Literature at .....University.*

*I gratefully acknowledge the love and support of my family, particularly my grandfather, parents, sister, brother, and wife. Without their help, this thesis would not have been written.*

### 4.2.1 Analysis of Acknowledgments Based on Solidarity and Deference Strategies

The deference strategy is frequently used as the following statements clarify:

- *"My heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude are due to Allah, the most Gracious and most Merciful, for the many blessings He bestowed upon me."*

The deference strategy emerges by way of the adjectives "Gracious" and "Merciful" that depict Allah's high status, and this emphasises respect and humility.

- *"I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and indebtedness to my supervisor Prof. ....for her unfailing patience and endurance and for her kind treatment and decisive remarks to make this thesis come into existence."*

The phrase "sincerest gratitude and indebtedness" suggests debt or obligation to the professor, a key marker of deference. Moreover, the phrase "unfailing patience and endurance" highlights the professor's effort rather than the student's.

- *"Many thanks are due to Dr. ....for her support and encouragement and her invaluable remarks."*

The writer uses formal phrasing that highlights the professor's role in guiding him/her.

- *"Special thanks must go to the staff of the M.A program in English Literature at ....University."*

Here, the writer maintains a formal distance by not mentioning individual names, which would create more deference.

- *"I gratefully acknowledge the love and support of my family, particularly, my grandfather, parents, sister, brother, and wife. Without their help, this thesis would not have been written."*

In this statement the solidarity strategy emerges and this is clear across the use of "love and support" together with the

phrase "Without their help" suggests emotional dependence, therefore such expressions reflect closeness.

It can be said that the deference strategy dominates this acknowledgments. The solidarity strategy comes next.

#### **4.2.2 Analysis of Acknowledgments Acts**

The introductory statement *"My heartfelt thanks and deep gratitude are due to Allah, the most Gracious and most Merciful, for the many blessings He bestowed upon me."* shows the act of thanking by presenting gratitude towards Allah.

- *"I would like to express my sincerest gratitude and indebtedness to my supervisor Prof. ....for her unfailing patience and endurance and for her kind treatments and decisive remarks to make this thesis come into existence."*

The above statement demonstrates the act of thanking by declaring appreciation for the supervisor's patience and feedback in line with recognising the supervisor's role in shaping the thesis through the act of accepting, though, one can say it is an implicit act of accepting, yet it shows the accept professor's help in the phrases "kind treatment" and "decisive remarks".

- *"Many thanks are due to Dr. ....for her support and encouragement and her invaluable remarks."*

This statement illustrates the act of thanking by indicating gratitude towards

another professor for support and acknowledging her remarks as valuable by employing the act of accepting.

- *"Special thanks must go to the staff of the M.A program in English Literature at .....University."*

Here the act of thanking appears in a clear way by expressing appreciation towards the program's staff.

- *"I gratefully acknowledge the love and support of my family, particularly, my grandfather, parents, sister, brother, and wife. Without their help, this thesis would not have been written."*

The last statement clarifies the act of thanking through determining gratitude towards family, at the same time it clarifies the act of accepting by acknowledging the role the family has presented in supporting the researcher.

There are no instances of acts of apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting.

### 4.3 Acknowledgments 3

*Firstly, I thank Almighty Allah, to whom I owe all of my success and good fortune. I also take this opportunity to express my most sincere and deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Asst. Prof....., without whom this thesis would not have been complete. It is through her academic support, encouragement, and constant belief in me that I was able to conquer impossible challenges. I would also like to express my gratitude to my family for providing me with comfortable*

*conditions and aiding me through this journey.*

*I owe my inspiration and dedicate my infinite gratitude to my professors: Prof. Dr....., Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., Asst. Prof. Dr....., and Dr..*

*Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for their unconditional love and support.*

#### **4.3.1 Analysis of Acknowledgments Based on Solidarity and Deference Strategies**

The use of deference strategy is established through the following statements:

- *"Firstly, I thank Almighty Allah, to whom I owe all of my success and good fortune."*

The writer emphasises humility by attributing all success to Allah.

- *"I also take this opportunity to express my most sincere and deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Asst. Prof....., without whom this thesis would not have been complete."*

Here the writer uses formal, respectful language that presents the status of the professor.

The following statements illustrate the use of solidarity strategy:

- *"It is through her academic support, encouragement, and*

*constant belief in me that I was able to conquer impossible challenges."*

This statement could be said to be as an example of solidarity strategy; the phrase "belief in me" suggests a more personal connection rather than just professional guidance.

- *"I would also like to express my gratitude to my family for providing me with the comfortable conditions and aiding me through this journey."*

The phrase "providing comfortable conditions" suggests emotional and material support, and this would deliberate closeness.

- *"Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for their unconditional love and support."*

The phrase "unconditional love" emphasises personal closeness and friendship as well as the words "love" and "support" plainly present strong relationship.

This acknowledgments is more personal, balancing formal gratitude (deference) with warm personal appreciation (solidarity)

#### **4.3.2 Analysis of Acknowledgments Acts**

The introductory statement *"Firstly, I thank Almighty Allah, to whom I owe all of my success and good fortune."* proves the act of thanking by showing appreciation towards Allah.

- *"I also take this opportunity to express my most sincere and deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Asst. Prof.....without whom this thesis would not have been complete. It is through her academic support, encouragement, and constant belief in me that I was able to conquer impossible challenges."*

By expressing appreciation to the supervisor, the act of thanking emerges, and by acknowledging her essential role in conducting the study, the act of accepting is noticeable.

- *"I would also like to express my gratitude to my family for providing me with comfortable conditions and aiding me through this journey."*

The writer expresses his/her obliged towards his/her family and this doubtless presents the act of thanking

- *"I owe my inspiration and dedicate my infinite gratitude to my professors..."*

Appreciation for multiple professors clearly reveals the act of thanking.

- *"Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and colleagues for their unconditional love and support."*

Expressing gratitude to friends and colleagues is a definite example of the act of thanking.

There are no acts of apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting.

#### **4.4 Acknowledgments 4**

*First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah, the Almighty, who is the source of knowledge, for giving me the power and patience to continue and get this work done.*

*I would also like to express my sincere appreciation, gratitude, and special thanks to my professor and supervisor, Asst. Prof....., for his invaluable guidance, continuous encouragement, and support during the writing of this project.*

*Special thanks are due to Prof....., Head of the English Department.*

*From the bottom of my heart, I would like to express my gratitude to all my professors who have supported me from the beginning, helping me along the way with their knowledge: Prof. ....(Ph.D.), Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.), Asst. Prof....., Prof. ....(Ph.D.), Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.), Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.), Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.), Asst. Prof....., Asst. Prof....., Lecturer....., and Lecturer.....*

*Special thanks are due to Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.) for her encouragement throughout the M.A. study.*

*Finally, I am thankful to everyone who has supported me in moments of weakness throughout the M.A. courses and writing of the thesis, including my colleagues.*

#### **4.4.1 Analysis of Acknowledgments Based on Solidarity and Deference Strategies**

This acknowledgments also highly employs the deference strategy

- *"First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah, the Almighty, who*

*is the source of knowledge for giving me the power and patience to continue and get this work done."*

The writer expresses humility by attributing knowledge and success to Allah rather than personal effort.

- *"I would also like to express my sincere appreciation, gratitude, and special thanks to my professor and supervisor, Asst. Prof....., for his invaluable guidance, continuous encouragement, and support during the writing of this project."*

The writer uses highly formal expressions such as "sincere appreciation", "special thanks", and "invaluable guidance" besides the phrase "continuous encouragement" which shows the imbalance of power, emphasising the professor's role as a mentor.

- *"Special thanks are due to Prof. ....Head of English Department."*

The phrase "special thanks are due" reflects formality, and mentioning the full title reinforces hierarchical respect.

- *"From the bottom of my heart, I would like to express my gratitude to all my professors who have supported me from the beginning, helping me along the way with their knowledge."*

The phrase "from the bottom of my heart" slightly personalizes the appreciation, but "helping me along the

way” still emphasises their higher authority.

- “Special thanks are due to Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.) for her encouragement throughout the M.A. study.”

The writer repetitively expresses his/her gratitude to his/her professors and that illustrates their authority.

- “Finally, I am thankful to everyone who has supported me in moments of weakness throughout the M.A. courses and writing of the thesis, including my colleagues.”

The solidarity strategy is explained through the phrase “moments of weakness” which creates an emotional connection, showing vulnerability and mutual support. Furthermore, acknowledging colleagues as a group signals peer solidarity.

This acknowledgment is heavily deferential to professors but incorporates some solidarity by mentioning colleagues and expressing emotion.

#### **4.4.2 Analysis of Acknowledgments Acts**

The introductory statement “*First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah, the Almighty, who is the source of knowledge for giving me the power and patience to continue and get this work done.*” identifies the act of thanking by expressing gratitude towards Allah.

- “I would also like to express my sincere appreciations, gratitude, and special thanks to my professor and supervisor Asst.

*Prof. ....for his invaluable guidance, continuous encouragement, and support.”*

Showing appreciation towards the supervisor could tell that here the act of thanking lies. In addition to that, recognizing his role clarifies the act of accepting.

- “From the bottom of my heart, I would like to express my gratitude to all my professors who have supported me from the beginning...”

Here the act of thanking is shown through expressing appreciation toward the professors.

- “Special thanks are due to Asst. Prof. ....(Ph.D.) for her encouragement throughout the M.A study.”

This statement also manifests the act of thanking through expressing appreciation for encouragement.

There are no acts of apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting.

#### **4.5 Acknowledgments 5**

*First and foremost, I praise Allah for the strength, patience, and persistence that He has supported me with throughout my master’s degree—its challenges, concerns, and moments of despair. Without this support, I would not be here today.*

*I am deeply appreciative of my esteemed supervisor, Prof. ....(Ph.D.), whose incomparable*

*guidance, support, and insightful feedback have been the cornerstone of this writing process. Through countless discussions and rational exchanges, you have encouraged and motivated me to push the boundaries of my vision beyond what I believed I could reach.*

*I am equally indebted to all professors at the Department of English / College of Education for Humanities / .....University, whose scholarly expertise and instrumental insights have significantly supplemented my study and research journey.*

*I am also grateful to my friend....., who assisted me greatly despite the long-standing distance between us.*

#### **4.5.1 Analysis of Acknowledgments Based on Solidarity and Deference Strategies**

The deference strategy takes the first place in this acknowledgment as the following statements clarify:

- *“First and foremost, I praise Allah for the strength, patience, and persistence that He has supported me with throughout my master’s degree—its challenges, concerns, and moments of despair.”*

The writer emphasises dependence on Allah for strength and patience.

- *“I am deeply appreciative of my esteemed supervisor, Prof. ....(Ph.D.), whose incomparable guidance, support, and insightful feedback have been the cornerstone of this writing process.”*

The writer uses formal and elevated language (e.g., “esteemed supervisor,” “incomparable guidance”), along with the phrase “cornerstone of this writing process” which places ultimate credit with the professor rather than the writer.

- *“Through countless discussions and rational exchanges, you have encouraged and motivated me to push the boundaries of my vision much more beyond what I believed I could reach.”*

The solidarity strategy is employed throughout this statement; unlike previous acknowledgments, this humanises the professor-student relationship by mentioning “countless discussions and exchanges.”

The phrase “encouraged and motivated me” suggests collaboration rather than strict hierarchy.

- *“I am equally indebted to all professors at the Department of English / College of Education for Humanities / .....University whose scholarly expertise and instrumental insights have significantly supplemented my study and research journey.”*

The writer maintains hierarchical distance by using formal phrasing and this clearly tells the existence of deference strategy.

- *“I am also grateful to my friend....., who assisted me greatly despite the long-standing distance between us.”*

The solidarity strategy appears again by using the phrase “despite the long-

standing distance” that introduces a personal and emotional element to emphasise.

This acknowledgments is a mix of deference and solidarity but tends toward formality.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis of Acknowledgments Acts**

- “*First and foremost, I praise Allah for the strength, patience, and persistence that He has supported me with throughout my master’s degree—its challenges, concerns, and moments of despair.*”

This statement functions as thanking in the form of religious praise.

- “*I am deeply appreciative of my esteemed supervisor, Prof. ....(Ph.D.), whose incomparable guidance, support, and insightful feedback have been the cornerstone of this writing process. Through countless discussions and rational exchanges, you have encouraged and motivated me to push the boundaries of my vision beyond what I believed I could reach.*”

Here is a direct thanking act toward the supervisor along with the accepting act as the writer determines and accepts that the supervisor’s guidance helped him/her expand his/her vision and abilities. .

- “*I am equally indebted to all professors at the Department of English / College of Education for Humanities / .....University,*

*whose scholarly expertise and instrumental insights have significantly supplemented my study and research journey.*”

The phrase "equally indebted" reinforces gratitude and this clarifies the act of thanking.

- “*I am also grateful to my friend....., who assisted me greatly despite the long-standing distance between us.*”

The act of thanking is clearly illustrated here by expressing gratitude to a friend for support.

There are no acts of apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting.

## **5. Results and Discussion**

By analysing the acknowledgments section of Iraqi EFL learners’ theses through the lens of Yule’s (1996) politeness strategies (solidarity and deference) and Bach and Harnish’s (1979) taxonomy of acknowledgment acts, the study has revealed that regarding politeness strategies the deference strategy is the most frequently employed in the provided acknowledgments. Thus, writers use formal expressions of gratitude toward almighty Allah, supervisors, professors, and academic figures. Accordingly, the use of titles (Prof., Ph.D., and Asst. Prof.) and honorifics shows hierarchical respect rather than familiarity as shown below:

- “*I would also like to express my sincere appreciation...to my professor and supervisor, Asst.*

- Prof....., for his invaluable guidance...”*
- *“Special thanks are due to the Head of the English Department...”*
  - *“I am deeply appreciative of my esteemed supervisor, Prof. ....(Ph.D.)...”*

These expressions emphasise hierarchical respect and social distance, aligning with Iraqi academic culture, where supervisors and faculty members are given high status and acknowledgment is structured to show formality and respect.

While deference strategy is dominant, the solidarity strategy is also evident when the writers use personal, warm, and emotionally expressive language to highlight close relationships with their family, friends, and colleagues as well as with their professors or supervisors. Phrases such as:

- *“I gratefully acknowledge the love and support of my family...”*
- *"Through countless discussions and rational exchanges, you have encouraged and motivated me to push the boundaries of my vision much more beyond what I believed I could reach."*
- *"I am also grateful to my friend....., who assisted me greatly despite the long-standing distance between us."*

These expressions demonstrate a personal and intimate tone, reinforcing a sense of closeness between the writer and their social circle. The use of emotionally loaded words (e.g., “love and support”, “through countless discussions”) and first-person pronouns

(e.g., “I gratefully”, “I am also grateful”) definitely indicate solidarity.

Concerning acknowledgments acts, the study has found that the most frequently occurring acknowledgments act is ‘thanking’, which aligns with the primary function of acknowledgments—to express gratitude as in:

- *"First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah, the Almighty...”*
- *“My profound gratitude, appreciation, and special thanks go to my supervisor...”*
- *“I would also like to express my gratitude to my family for providing me with comfortable conditions”*

This dominance of thanking act reflects cultural norms, where expressions of gratitude are highly valued in both academic and social contexts.

Another frequently observed acknowledgments act is ‘accepting’ which is expected as it gives focus on appreciation rather than refusal.

- *“without whom this thesis would not have been complete.”*
- *"I would also like to thank my teachers and professors at the Department of English for their guidance throughout B.A. and M.A. Degrees..."*

These statements acknowledge and accept the contributions of others indirectly, affirming the value of their support.

It is important to note that when the writers express gratitude in response to guidance, supervision, or assistance, it

implies that they have accepted the help or the support they have received. However, thanking is not always equivalent to accepting. In most cases it is purely an expression of appreciation rather than an acknowledgment of accepting something.

Acts such as apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, or rejecting are not commonly found in acknowledgments. Their absence aligns with the formal and structured nature of academic acknowledgments, which focus primarily on gratitude rather than personal hardships or celebrations.

## 6. Conclusion

The current study examines the pragmatic features of acknowledgments in selected theses by Iraqi EFL learners. By adopting George Yule's (1996) politeness strategies (solidarity and deference) and Bach and Harnish's (1979) taxonomy of acknowledgments acts to analyse five acknowledgments and by way of qualitative method of research analysis, the study concludes that Iraqi EFL learners strategically employ both politeness strategies and acknowledgment acts to express gratitude while navigating academic hierarchies and social relationships.

With regard to politeness strategies, this study shows that the deference strategy is highly followed when acknowledging academic figures, demonstrating formality, hierarchy, and respect. In contrast, the solidarity strategy is used when thanking family, friends, and colleagues, emphasising personal bonds and emotional closeness. This balance between solidarity and deference reflects

both cultural and academic influences in the structuring of acknowledgments. In connection with acknowledgments acts, the study illustrates that the act of thanking takes the first place and the act of accepting comes next. Moreover, in the provided acknowledgments, thanking can function as an act of accepting when it acknowledges received support, assistance, or guidance. However, not all thanking expressions carry this meaning; it depends on whether the writer is responding to something they have received or accepted. Lastly, acts of apologizing, condoling, congratulating, greeting, bidding, and rejecting are not used in the given acknowledgments.

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### Abstract in Arabic

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تُعدّ كلمات الشكر في الكتابة الأكاديمية وسيلة للتعبير عن الامتنان، والتقدير، وتوطيد الروابط الاجتماعية. وانطلاقاً من ذلك، تسعى الدراسة الحالية إلى استقصاء الجوانب التداولية للإقرارات الواردة في عدد من الأطروحات المختارة لطلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق، بهدف التعرف على كيفية تأثير استراتيجيات التأدب في تنظيم خطاب الامتنان، إلى جانب تحديد أكثر أفعال الإقرار استعمالاً.

تم اختيار خمس إقرارات من أطروحات مختلفة تعود لجامعات عراقية متعددة، لتحليلها وفقاً لاستراتيجيات التأدب التي طرحها يول عام (١٩٩٦) والمتمثلة في استراتيجيات التضامن والاحترام، بالإضافة إلى تصنيف باخ وهارنيس لعام (١٩٧٩) لأفعال الإقرار، وذلك باعتماد المنهج النوعي في التحليل.

بعد إجراء التحليل اللغوي للإقرارات المختارة كشفت الدراسة - فيما يتعلق باستراتيجيات التأدب - أن استراتيجية الاحترام هي الأكثر استخداماً عند توجيه الخطاب إلى الشخصيات الأكاديمية مثل المشرفين والأساتذة، في حين تلاحظ استراتيجية التضامن عند توجيه الشكر إلى الأسرة، والأصدقاء، والزملاء. أما فيما يخص أفعال الإقرار، فقد أظهرت الدراسة أن فعل الشكر هو الأكثر تكراراً، يليه فعل القبول، بينما لم تُذكر أفعال مثل الاعتذار، أو التعزية، أو التهنية، أو التحية، أو التوديع، أو الرفض في العينة المدروسة. ومن الجدير بالذكر أن الدراسة توصلت إلى أن فعل الشكر قد يؤدي - في بعض المواضع - وظيفة فعل القبول، أو يتضمنه، لا سيما عند الإشارة إلى الدعم أو التوجيه الذي تلقاه الكاتب.

خلصت الدراسة إلى أن طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق يحققون توازناً استراتيجياً بين التوقير الرسمي تجاه الشخصيات الأكاديمية و التعبير عن الروابط الاجتماعية، بما يعكس الامتثال للأعراف الأكاديمية جنباً إلى جنب مع تمثيل القيم الثقافية الخاصة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التداولية، استراتيجيات التأدب، أفعال الإقرار، طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية في العراق، الكتابة الأكاديمية.

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