

Anne Barron

Thanking and responding to thanks in American English



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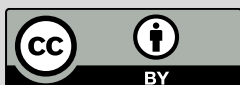
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Thanking and responding to thanks in American English: Language patterning and contextual appropriateness

Anne Barron (Leuphana Universität Lüneburg)

Level(s): Advanced

Aims:

- Develop students' awareness of patterns of formulaic expressions of gratitude with reference to their relative frequencies of use
- Familiarize students with the variety of responses to expressions of gratitude
- Enhance students' understanding of the contextual appropriateness of various thanking forms

Class time: 40 minutes

Preparation time: None

Resources: Computers, Internet, handout

Introduction

Research on English for general purposes (EGP) textbooks has highlighted a lack of variety in the formulaic routines and the range of speech act realizations presented to learners. Such studies also reveal that these EGP textbooks communicate contextual constraints only implicitly. Two potential consequences of these limitations are overgeneralization and pragmatic failure (e.g. Barron 2016, Limberg 2016). In the particular case of responses to *thanks*, Schneider (2006, p. 43) comments that the responses found in TESOL textbooks frequently do not mirror the forms employed in language use (see also De Pablos-Ortega, 2011 for Spanish as a foreign language).

The present lesson is designed to address these textbook deficits by employing naturally-occurring data in contrast to the intuitive data so often used in textbooks. We analyze realizations of *thanks* and responses to *thanks* in American English. The corpus we use is the freely available Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), a corpus of academic English currently encompassing 152 transcripts (totaling 1,848,364 words) (Simpson et al. 2002).

Steps

1. Invite students to visit the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/c/corpus/corpus?c=micase;page=simple>.
2. In the search panel on the left entitled "Find", ask students to enter the form *thanks* (see Figure 1).

Home	Search	Browse	Help
----------------------	------------------------	------------------------	----------------------

Search

Enter the exact word or phrase you wish to find in the box. The wildcard character * may be used at the end (but not the beginning) of a search word or phrase to represent zero or more characters (e.g. typing in walk* will give you walk, walks, walked, and walking). If you wish to search the entire corpus, use the default settings on the speaker and transcript attributes. If you wish to do a more specific search, choose the speaker and transcript level criteria using the menus on the right. When you click the button, utterances by speakers that fit the speaker-level criteria within transcripts that fit the transcript-level criteria will be found.

Find:

Speaker Attributes

Gender:

All

Female

Male

Age:

All

Unknown

17-23

Academic Position/Role:

All

Junior Faculty

Junior Graduate Student

Native speaker status:

Native speaker, American English

Native speaker, Other English

Unknown

First language:

All

Arabic

Armenian

Transcript Attributes

Speech Event Type:

All

Advising Session

Colloquium

Academic Division:

All

Biological and Health Sciences

Humanities and Arts

Academic Discipline:

All

Afroamerican and African Studies

American Culture

Participant Level:

All

Junior Faculty

Junior Graduate Students

Interactivity Rating:

All

Highly interactive

Highly monologic

Figure 1: Search panel in MICASE

- Under “Native speaker status”, ask students to choose “Native speaker, American English” (see Figure 1). The remaining options should be left as they are.
- Have students click on the “Submit Search” button on the left (see Figure 1). The new page will display concordance lines where *thanks* appears in red in the middle of the screen (see the column “Match” in Figure 2).

Transcript ID: (click to view)	Left context	Match	Right context	View context
SVC999MX148	no you're all set alright	thanks . do need_ do you need to use		view
STP545JU091		Robert? thanks a lot, you're we		view
SVC999MX148	these? this one's missing a test... S2 SCANS CARD	thanks ... mhm		view
SEM475MX041		oh thanks John m		view
SVC999MX148	thank you	thanks . i found one of these unde		view
SVC999MX148	yeah. SCANS CARD	thanks . hey		view
SVC999MX104	PAUSE duration okay, thank you.	thanks . sure.		view
ADV700JU047	ts out here? yep that's cool.	thanks . and so by taking it at a di		view
LEL220SU073	so, supposedly their hands are supposed to_ the thirty-year-old's hand isn't all wrinkled yet	thanks to the hand cream. but, even though it's for hands, you know they're sort of, they're putting their		view
DEF420SF022	now, that's coming up soon.	thanks for coming (xx)		view
SVC999MX148	there you go.	thanks ... hey can i see this? yeah.		view
SVC999MX148	there you go.	thanks . i think you might have th		view
LES335JG065	i all-	thanks . so that's all it took me, i		view
STP560JG118	ucably mentally impaired okay	thanks . sorry		view
SVC999MX148		thanks PAUSE duration :04SCANS TWO CARDS		view
QFC355SU094	theory and uh, conceptualizations.	thanks . PAUSE WHILE READING didn't come in here, that's a good one.		view
SVC999MX104	okay,	thanks . you're welcome		view
QFC578SG037	okay, um... yeah. okay,	thanks a lot i appreciate it. okay,		view
SGR200JU125		see? thanks Kelly you're welcome.		view

Figure 2: Concordance lines for *thanks* uttered by native speakers of American English in MICASE

5. Ask students to note the search term *thanks* in the table provided in the online support materials (under “Expression of gratitude search term”) and also its number of occurrences (under “Frequency”). The total number of occurrences of *thanks* is found on the top left in Figure 2 (i.e. 283).
6. Direct students to the “Sort results by” panel (see Figure 2); and ask them to choose “1R” for the first drop-down menu provided, “2R” for the second, and “3R” for the third (see Figure 3). They should then click on “Sort”. This command sorts the original results in alphabetical order according to the first, second and third words to the right of the search term (see Figure 3). Using this command, we can find frequent formulaic sequences involving *thanks*.

MICASE Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English				
Home	Search	Browse	Help	
283 matches in 78 transcripts				
View results statistics Download results as XML Download results in tab-delimited format				
Sort results by: 1R 2R 3R Sort				
Transcript ID: (click to view)	Left context	Match	Right context	View context
SVC999MX104	J E F, there you go.	thanks	a lot. and this is due, at n	view
LESS65MX152	oh yeah yeah yes cuz it's the intercept. it's_ yes y- otherwise the_ we got two of 'em	thanks	a lot David. now let's just go through that again okay? you can stare it on your paper you can stare	view
LEL500JU034	niversal, but other emotional expressions, vary widely by culture. we'll pick up there, on Thursday.	thanks	a lot. [END OF TRANSCRIPT]	view
MTG425JG004	PAUSE duration okay... okay well	thanks	a lot for, working on this, this weekend too. PAUSE duration :05 i heard there's like two fe	view
MTG999ST015	actical training alright okay	thanks	a lot for coming Arthur. yea	view
QFC578SG037	okay, um... yeah. okay.	thanks	a lot i appreciate it. okay,	view
QFC300JU149	good	thanks	a lot. i appreciate your time.	view
SVC999MX104	sorry about that no problem.	thanks	a lot man. (yep)	view
DEF270SF061	'll certainly be around... so	thanks	a lot thank you	view
LEL115SU005	ants to see me (xx) alright	thanks	a lot. UNINTELLIGIBLE SPEECH	view
SVC999MX104	fy-seven alright	thanks	a lot	view
SVC999MX104	LAUGH	thanks	a lot. yeah	view
SGR385SU057	hey.	LAUGH thanks	a lot yeah i like you too. wh	view
STP545JU091	Robert?	thanks	a lot. you're we	view
SVC999MX104	alright	thanks	a lot. yup. okay.	view
TOU999MX062	okay.	thanks	again. [END OF TRANSCRIPT] z z z z z z z z z z	view
COL575MX055	nd made about ten thousand copies.	LAUGH thanks	again for the letter, a person can only get an A-plus grade, in an A-plus class. and Carrie,	view
QFC195SU116	over time is, Q over A	thanks	Ali on- sure. we'll see you in the lecture. um is this Q? what is this Q? oh okay	view
QFC195SU116		okay? thanks	Ali. sure	view

Figure 3: Concordance lines for *thanks* uttered by native speakers of American English sorted to the right

7. Invite students to look through the alphabetically sorted words to the right of the search term and identify formulaic sequences. The first one in Figure 3 is *thanks a lot*, an intensified form of *thanks*. Another is *thanks for + verb*.
8. Ask students what other patterns realizing *thanks* they can find. They should enter these in the table provided in the online support materials, which also contain sample answers. They can also be asked to discuss how these compare to the textbook forms they have met to date.
9. Using the same concordance lines sorted to the right, now ask students to find responses to expressions of gratitude (e.g. *you're welcome*) following *thanks* and to note these in the table provided in the online support materials. If students are unsure whether a particular form is a response or not, they can click on the hyperlink provided under “Transcript ID” (see the left-hand side in Figure 3) for the relevant concordance line. This will allow them to access a complete transcript with speaker changes for any concordance line. When the

transcript appears, students should use the search function in their Internet browser to search for *thanks* until they find the relevant line.

10. Based on the data, ask students to answer the following questions:
 - a. Is *you're welcome* used as a response to gratitude? (*You're welcome* is used, but, despite frequently being viewed as the prototypical response pattern, we see that responses to *thanks* also take other forms.)
 - b. What other forms respond to an expression of gratitude? (The possible response tokens include *okay, sure, hey, yeah* and *yep*. *Thanks* may also be followed by a further *thanks* (cf. online support materials).)
 - c. Are there any verbalizations which are non-lexical in form (e.g. *mhm*, laughter)? (Some responses to *thanks* take a non-lexical form – such as *mhm* – or a non-verbal form – such as laughter or applause.)
 - d. Does a response to thanks always follow *thanks*? (*Thanks* is not always followed by a response. In the online support materials, for instance, we see that pauses frequently follow *thanks* or indeed actions such as scanning materials.)
11. Ask students to click on “View results statistics” at the top of the page in Figure 3. The results will show the exact speech event titles in which *thanks* is employed within the corpus (see Figure 4). The raw frequencies (cf. “Matches” in Figure 4) as well as the frequencies per 10,000 words per speech event are displayed (the former are less useful as the different speech events may be represented in the corpus with different frequencies).

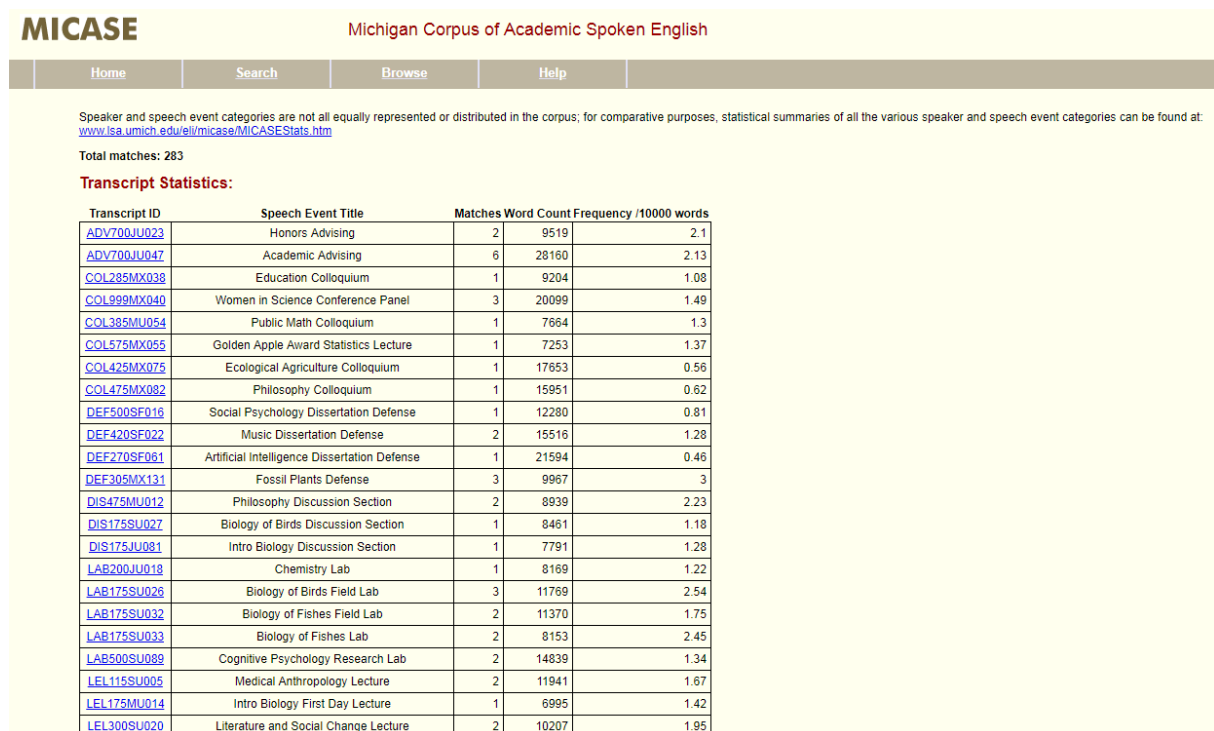


Figure 4: Statistics for *thanks* uttered by native speakers of American English

12. Ask students to examine the “Frequencies /10,000 words” column and note down the top three speech events with their frequencies in the table provided in the online support materials.

Points for consideration and alternative steps

- Steps 2-12 can be repeated for other thanking forms, such as *thank you*, *appreciate*, *cheers*, *ta* and *grateful*. For some of these searches, it will be especially important to read through the concordance lines and ensure that the concordance lines returned actually realize an expression of gratitude (e.g. *I really did not appreciate how unequal the world was* is not an expression of gratitude).
- Alternatively, the lesson can be implemented in small groups with each one in charge of a different form (e.g. Group 1: *thanks*; Group 2: *thank you*; Group 3: *cheers*). Findings can then be compared in a plenum and the following questions discussed:
 - Are some words/phrases used more frequently than others?
 - Are different words/phrases employed more often in different speech events?
 - Are there differences in patterns of usage?
 - Are there any differences in response patterns?
- The findings of the present task might be compared to how expressions of *thanks* and responses to *thanks* are represented in textbooks. This activity is particularly interesting for future teachers of English.

References and suggested reading

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Online support materials

Template for analyzing patterns of expressions of gratitude and responses to these

Expression of gratitude search term	Frequency (152 transcripts, 1,848,364 words)	Thanking patterns to the right of the search term	Responses to expression of gratitude	Speech events with the highest frequencies per 10,000 words

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Online support materials

Sample answers for *thanks* and responses to this form uttered by native speakers of American English in MICASE

Expression of gratitude search term	Frequency (152 transcripts; 1,848,364 words)	Thanking patterns to the right of the search term	Responses to expression of gratitude	Speech events with the highest frequencies per 10,000 words
Thanks	283 in 78 transcripts	Thanks a lot Thanks very much Thanks again Thanks for + verb phrase (VP) Thanks for + noun phrase (NP) Thanks + names (Ali, Dennis, ...) Thanks to	Thanks – Sure Thanks – Thank you Thanks – You’re welcome Thanks – applause Thanks – Okay Thanks – Yeah Thanks – Yep Thanks – Hey Thanks – Mhm Thanks – PAUSE (different durations) Thanks – LAUGH	Service encounters (Science Learning Center): 107.97 Service encounters (Media Union): 13.1 Office hours (Art History): 5.41

			Thanks – SCANS (no verbal/ non-verbal response recorded)	
			Thanks – LEAVES (no verbal/ non-verbal response recorded)	