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'De rien ma puce ! C'est entre nous !'
RESPONDING TO THANKS IN CAMEROON FRENCH

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Abstract
This study examines strategies employed by Cameroonian French speakers when responding to gratitude expressions. Based on data collected by means of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), the study explores communicative choices in the realization of responses to thanks and the pragmatic motivations behind such choices in three different situations. The findings show that Cameroon French speakers have at their disposal a variety of face-saving and face-enhancing strategies that are used to downplay the cost of the benefit they are being thanked for, express positive feelings towards the addressee, express pleasure for providing the benefit, etc. Overall, responses to thanks occur in the data either as single head acts or as combinations of head acts and supportive acts.

Keywords: *responses to thanks, face, politeness, Cameroon French, strategy*

Rezumat
În articol, abordăm modalitățile camerunezilor francofoni de a răspunde mesajelor de gratitudine. Bazându-ne pe datele înregistrate după Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), ne propunem să cercetăm atât actele de răspuns la mulțumiri, cât și motivarea pragmatică a acestora în trei situații de comunicare distincte. Rezultatele obținute ne arată că camerunezii francofoni pun în aplicare strategii variate de face-saving și face-enhancing, care au drept scop minimalizarea politicoasă a aportului lor la realizarea unui lucru sau acțiune, dar, în același timp, servesc la exprimarea atitudinii pozitive față de interlocutor, a plăcerii de a-i fi util etc. În general, răspunsurile la mulțumiri sunt repertoriate, în acest caz, atât ca acte unice, cât și ca unele combinate cu alte tipuri de acte.

Cuvinte-cheie: *răspuns la mulțumiri, face, politețe, franceza cameruneză, strategie*

1. Introduction

This study examines the realization of responses to thanks in Cameroon French. The speech act of *responding to thanks* has been studied extensively in many languages and cultures and from different perspectives. In her research on responses to thanks in American English, Grando (Grando, 2016, pp. 11-33) provides an overview of studies on thanking, both in English and other languages and a review of literature on responses to thanks in English and other languages[1]. As far as French is concerned, the studies currently available are usually not entirely dedicated to this speech act. Reponses to thanks are rather examined alongside with other speech acts[2]. There is, to

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[1]Also see Gesuato (2016).

[2]See for instance Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005, pp. 122-143 who examines apologies, thanks and responses to both acts in the same chapter.

the best of my knowledge, no study entirely dedicated to responses to thanks in French in general and in Cameroon French in particular. The present paper is an attempt to fill this research gap. The main aim is to investigate communicative strategies adopted by Cameroonian French speakers when responding to gratitude expressions from a friend, a stranger, and a professor. To achieve this aim, I use data elicited by means of Discourse Completion tasks and an analytical framework based on the conception of French as pluricentric language. From this viewpoint, the study is based on the assumption that "in any language, each illocution can be performed in different ways. The different structural patterns and lexico-semantic devices conventionally available for performing a given illocution [...] represent different strategic options for the speaker. [...] The strategies and forms conventionally employed to realize a given speech act differ across varieties of the same language" (Schneider, 2005, pp. 101-102).

Other frameworks that are beneficial for exploring patterns of responses to thanks in Cameroon French include the politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), cross-cultural pragmatics (Wierzbicka, 2003), and postcolonial pragmatics (Anchimbe & Janney, 2011). This article is structured as follows: section 2 presents the theoretical background of the study. Section 3 presents the methodology. Findings and discussions are presented in section 4. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. Theoretical Background

According to Schneider, "responses to thanks follow acts of thanking. Thanks and responses to thanks form dialogical units known as adjacency pairs or, [...] simple interactional exchanges [...]. Thanking exchanges involve two interactants who appear in the local roles of thanker and thankee, with the thanker uttering a thanks and the thankee uttering a response to thanks. [...] A response to thanks is a reactive interactional move which follows a reactive move, as the act of thanking also refers back to an offer or after compliance with a request. [...] Responses to thanks fulfill an important social function. In all cases, a response to an act of thanking terminates the sequence it occurs in, irrespective of the length and complexity of this sequence. Thanks and responses to thanks, thus, form a sequence-final dependent simple exchange" (Schneider, 2005, p. 103).

In most of the studies currently available, it is claimed that strategies used to respond to gratitude expressions are mostly attempts to restore the social balance between the interactants. This is generally achieved by choosing strategies that focus on the thanker, the thankee, the debt generated by the benefit, the act of thanking itself, etc. For instance, the thankee can downplay the cost of the benefit they are being thanked for, express positive feelings towards the thanker, express pleasure for providing the benefit, etc. In order to achieve this, speakers have at their disposal a range of strategies that could be interpreted as politeness, face-saving or face-enhancing strategies.

The general point of agreement in cross-cultural pragmatics has been that the realization of speech acts and other pragmatic phenomena vary across languages and cultures. With respect to pluricentrinc languages,[3] however, recent studies have shown that "speakers who share the same native language do not necessarily share the same culture" (Barron & Schneider, 2009, p. 425), and that "pragmatic differences may occur across varieties of the same language" (*ibidem*). In both cases, there is need to examine how language-specific and sociocultural norms influence the ways speakers of a specific language realize speech acts. Research on speech acts in Cameroon French generally takes into account the complex, multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural postcolonial context. In order to adequately explain choices of Cameroonian French speakers when responding to thanks, it is necessary to operate on the premises of postcolonial pragmatics. According to Anchimbe and Janney, postcolonial pragmatics focuses on "experiences, interactions, challenges, and communicative strategies of members of postcolonial communities using ex-colonial languages, non-colonial languages, pidgin and creoles in their activities" (Anchimbe & Janney, 2011, pp. 421-422)[4]. In other words, the present study considers responses to thanks in Cameroon French (an ex-colonial language in a postcolonial space) as an example of postcolonial pragmatic behavior.

3. Method

The data for this study were collected by means of a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire, which was designed for a larger project on speech acts (e.g. apologies, requests, complaints, invitations, refusals, thanks, responses to thanks, etc.) in Cameroon French. Each situation comprised a brief description of the setting, i.e. "the general circumstances […] and the relevant situational parameters concerning social dominance, social distance and degree of imposition" (Barron, 2008, p. 43). The present study focuses on responses to thanks elicited from the DCT. The participants were asked to provide responses to gratitude expressions from a close friend, a stranger and a professor. The three scenarios were described in the questionnaire as shown below:

Situation 1 : *Un(e) ami(e) proche vous demande de l'aider à saisir un document à l'ordinateur. Lorsque le travail est fait, il/elle vous dit « merci ». Vous lui répondez :…* / 'A close friend asks you to help type a paper. When the work is done, s/he says "thank you". You respond : '

Situation 2 : *Un(e) visiteur/visiteuse s'est égaré(e) sur votre campus. Il/elle vous demande de le/la conduire à la bibliothèque universitaire. Quand vous y arrivez, il/elle*

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[3] See Clyne, 1992.

[4]For more details on the scope, aims, and goals of postcolonial pragmatics, see Janney (2009) too.

vous dit : "Merci beaucoup pour votre aide". Vous lui répondez : …/'A stranger got lost on campus. S/he asks you to take him/her to the university bookstore. When you get there s/he says "Thank you very much for your help". You respond : '

Situation 3 : *Votre professeur(e) vous demande de l'aider dans l'organisation d'une conférence. Après cet événement, il/elle vous appelle à son bureau et vous dit : « Merci beaucoup pour votre aide la semaine dernière ». Vous lui répondez : …/*'Your Professor asks you to help him/her organize a conference. After the event s/he calls you in his/her office and says "Thank you very much for your help last week". You respond: '

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

The 148 participants provided a total of 413 answers (142 examples in Situation 1; 133 examples in Situation 2 and 138 examples in Situation 3). The data collected were analyzed at many different levels. The first step consisted in identifying head acts, i.e. the communicative units or components that can realize the responses to thanks independently of the other units of a conversational turn. Head acts represent the main content of the conversational turn, the speech act proper (in this case, the response to thanks). In the 413 examples provided by the informants, responses to thanks appear as single head acts, as in (1), (2) and (3) or as combinations of head acts, as in (4):

1) (Friend[5]): *De rien.*/'Not at all'.
2) (Professor): *C'est moi qui vous remercie.*/'I am the one to thank you'.

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[5]Examples from the data are coded as follows: (Friend) means 'response to thanks from a close friend; (Stranger) means 'response to thanks from a stranger' and (Professor) means 'response to thanks from a professor'.

3) (Stranger): *Il n'y a pas de quoi.*/'Don't mention it'.
4) (Professor): *De rien, monsieur. Tout le plaisir est pour moi.*/'Not at all sir. The pleasure is all mine'.

The second task was to classify the head acts found in the data according to their pragmatic functions. Using Aijmer's classification of responses to thanks in English, it was found that the Cameroonian French speakers employ the following five strategies to respond to thanks and to minimize the indebtedness of the thanker (see section 4.1.1) (Aijmer, 1996):

a) Strategy A: 'Minimizing the favor'. The thankee downplays the favor offered to the thanker or indicates that the action taken to do a favor to the other did not cause any trouble: e.g. *Il n'y a pas de quoi*/'Don't mention it'. It is a negative politeness strategy.

b) Strategy B: 'Expressing pleasure'. The thankee says that he/she had pleasure in doing the other a favor: e.g., *C'est un plaisir*/'My pleasure'. This is a positive politeness strategy that enhances the positive face of the speaker and the addressee.

c) Strategy C: 'Expressing appreciation'. The thankee expresses appreciation of the addressee: e.g., *Je vous en prie*/'You are very welcome'. It is positive politeness strategy.

d) Strategy D: 'Returning thanks'. The thankee thanks the addressee in return: e.g., *Merci aussi*/'Thank you too'. This is positive politeness strategy.

e) Strategy E: 'Acknowledging the thanks'. The thankee indicates that he or she acknowledges the thanks: e.g., *Ok*/'Yeah'. It is a positive politeness strategy.

In the third step of the analysis I examined the linguistic realization forms of the five major strategies used to respond to thanks. Using Schneider's (Schneider, 2005) inventory, the forms used by the respondents were classified into many sub-categories (see section 4.1.2). The fourth step of the analysis focused on types and functions of supportive moves (see section 4.2). Supportive moves are additional speech acts that either mitigate or aggravate the effect of the head act (response to thanks), as in (5):

5) (Friend): *Il n'y a pas de quoi. Les amis sont là pour ça.*/'Don't mention. Friends are meant for that'.

In the next section, findings are presented and discussed.

4. Findings
4.1. Head acts
4.1.1. Strategies and Pragmatic Functions

Following Aijmer, the head acts were examined and classified according to speakers' pragmatic intent regarding the initial gratitude expressions (Aijmer, 1996). Table 1 summarizes the distribution of the pragmatic strategies found in the corpus:

Strategy	Frequency
Strategy A: Minimizing the favor	348 (63%)
Strategy B: Expressing pleasure	120 (21.7%)
Strategy C: Expressing appreciation	44 (8%)
Strategy D: Returning thanks	35 (6.4%)
Strategy E: Acknowledging the thanks	5 (0.9%)
Total	**552 (100%)**

Table 1: *Distribution of head strategies in the data*

Overall, all the strategies documented in Aijmer's (1996) taxonomy are also represented in the Cameroon French data. As displayed in Table 1, the most frequently employed strategy is strategy A (Minimizing the favor), which accounts for 63% of all examples. Strategy B (Expressing pleasure) accounts for 21.7% and is the second most common strategy in the data. The three other strategies occur with much lower percentages: strategy C (Expressing appreciation) appears in 44 (8%) instances, while strategy D (Returning thanks) accounts 6.4%. Strategy E (Acknowledging the thanks) accounts for less than 1% of the data. In terms of politeness orientation, this result shows that the respondents mostly prefer negative politeness strategies while responding to gratitude expressions. In other words, they most frequently attempt to save the face of their counterparts by insisting on the fact that the acts they are being thanked for are not really thankworthy. The analysis also reveals situational variation in the use of the head act strategies, as can be seen in Table 2:

	Friend	Stranger	Professor
Strategy A: Minimizing the favor	128 (73.5%)	110 (65.5%)	110 (52.4%)
Strategy B: Expressing pleasure	29 (16.7%)	33 (19.6%)	58 (27.6%)
Strategy C: Expressing appreciation	7 (4%)	14 (8.4%)	23 (11%)
Strategy D: Returning thanks	9 (5.2%)	7 (4.2%)	19 (9%)
Strategy E: Acknowledging the thanks	1 (0.6%)	4 (2.3%)	0
Total	**174 (100%)**	**168 (100%)**	**210 (100%)**

Table 2: *Distribution of head-act strategies across the three situations*

Table 2 indicates that the most preferred strategy, namely strategy A (minimizing the favor) is not equally distributed across the three situations. As a matter of fact, strategy A is most frequently employed when the respondents react to thanks from close friends. This strategy accounts for 73.5% of all tokens in the Friend situation. The second most common strategy in the corpus, strategy B (expressing pleasure), is most frequent in the Professor situation (27.6%). This is also the case with the third and fourth preferred strategies, strategy C (expressing appreciation) and strategy D (returning thanks), which occurs with a percentage of 11% and 9%

respectively in the Professor situation. The least employed strategy in the data, namely strategy E (acknowledging the thanks), mostly occurs in situation 2 (stranger) and is not employed at all in situation 3 (professor).

4.1.2. Linguistic Realizations of Head Act Strategies

After examining the linguistic realization of the head act strategies discussed in the previous section, it was found that the respondents employ many different patterns to react to thanks. The patterns identified were classified following a modified version of Schneider's (Schneider, 2005, p. 116) typology. In his inventory of linguistic realization forms of thanks in English, Schneider identified the following eight groups of realization form and indicated how they relate to the head act strategies: *No problem; Welcome; Pleasure; Anytime; Thanks; Don't worry about it; Yeah; Don't mention it.* Based on this typology, I identified the following groups of realization patterns in the Cameroonian French corpus (represented by their distinctive element or dominant form): *De rien; Pas de quoi; Normal; Plaisir/Honneur; T'en/vous en prie; À votre service, Merci; D'accord.* Table 3 shows a breakdown of the realization forms in the data and how they relate to the five head act strategies of responses to thanks:

Head act strategy and linguistic realization forms		Frequency
Strategy A	PAS DE QUOI	155 (28.1%)
	DE RIEN	152 (27.5%)
	NORMAL	41 (7.5%)
Strategy B	PLAISIR	96 (17.4%)
	HONNEUR/JOIE/SATISFACTION	24 (4.3%)
Strategy C	JE T'EN/VOUS EN PRIE	36 (6.5%)
	À VOTRE SERVICE	8 (1.4%)
Strategy D	MERCI	35 (6.4%)
Strategy E	D'ACCORD	5 (0.9%)
Total		**552 (100%)**

Table 3: *Distribution of linguistic realization pattern of head act strategies*

As can be seen in Table 3, the three most favoured patterns in the data are, in decreasing order, PAS DE QUOI 'Don't mention it', which accounts for 28.1% of the data, DE RIEN "No Problem/Not at all", which accounts for 27.5% of all examples, and PLAISIR "Pleasure", which accounts for 17.4% of all occurrences. Overall, the three most frequent types represent more than 70% of all tokens in the data. The other patterns are employed with much lower frequencies: JE T'EN/VOUS EN PRIE 'Welcome' (6.5%), MERCI 'Thanks' (6.4%), À VOTRE SERVICE 'Anytime' (1.4%), D'ACCORD 'Okay' (0.9%). Table 3 also shows that while strategy A is realized in three different ways, Strategies B and C have two main realization patterns each. The two remaining strategies, D and E, are each realized using one pattern each. Let's

now turn to the linguistic realization forms of the various realization type presented in Table 3. We will begin with Strategy A.

Strategy A: "Minimizing the Favour"

Table 2 above shows that this strategy is realized in the data by means of three different sub-strategies, namely PAS DE QUOI, DE RIEN, and NORMAL. The first sub-strategy, PAS DE QUOI/"Don't mention", is realized in many ways. In addition to the elliptical variants, *pas de quoi* and *y'a pas de quoi*, more elaborated variants are employed, namely : *Il n'y a (vraiment) pas de quoi ; Il n'y a pas de quoi me dire merci.* This pattern is also realized as *Ne vous inquiétez pas ; Ne vous en faites pas ; Ça ne vaut pas la peine de me remercier ; Vous n'avez pas à me remercier,* etc. The second sub-strategy, DE RIEN "No problem", is realized in the data as *De rien ; C'est rien ; Sans souci ; Il n'y a pas de soucis.* These forms may also be accompanied by adding address terms and or conjunctions (e.g. *Mais de rien, monsieur).* The third sub-strategy, NORMAL 'It's normal', is realized as *C'est normal; C'est naturel.* In some cases, adverbs and clauses are added, as in *C'est (tout) naturel ; C'est normal que je t'aide.* Other variants attested in the data are : *C'est la moindre des choses ; Cela va de soi ; Entre amis, c'est tout à fait normal,* etc.

Strategy B: "Expressing Pleasure"

This strategy appears in the data in the forms of two sub-categories, namely PLAISIR and HONNEUR/JOIE/SATISFACTION. PLAISIR "Pleasure" is the third most frequent pattern in the data. It appears in short utterances such as *C'est un plaisir, Ce fût un plaisir*; *Le plaisir est partagé*/"my pleasure"; *Tout le plaisir a été pour moi*/'The pleasure was all mine'. Some respondents employ adverbs or adjectives to reinforce short expressions of pleasure, as in *Cela était un réel plaisir*. This pattern also appears in long utterances ("it was/is my pleasure to…"): *Ce fut un réel plaisir pour moi de vous aider*/'It was a real pleasure to help you'. The second sub-strategy, HONNEUR, JOIE, SATISFACTION, is realized 24 times (4.3%) in the corpus. The expression of honor and pride is framed as follows : *C'est un honneur de t'aider*/'It's an honor to help you'; *J'en suis fier*/'I am proud about it'. JOY is expressed as follows: *Je suis ravi de vous rendre ce service*/'I am happy to render this service'; *Je suis heureuse de t'avoir été utile*/'I am happy to have been useful to you'. SATISFACTION is expressed as follows: *Je suis satisfait de t'avoir aidé*/'I am satisfied to have helped you'.

Strategy C: "Expressing Appreciation"

This strategy can be divided into two sub-strategies, namely *JE T'EN/VOUS EN PRIE and À VOTRE SERVICE. JE T'EN/VOUS EN PRIE* "Welcome" is employed 36 times (6.5%). It is used to express appreciation for the interlocutor. It is realized as: *je vous en prie*/You are welcome'. À VOTRE SERVICE is realized as *Je suis à votre (entière) disposition ; C'est quand vous voulez*/'At your service'.

Strategy D: "Returning the Thanks"

MERCI "Thanks" appears 35 times (6.4%) in the data and is employed to reciprocate the thanks. It is realized as *Merci*, the elliptical form which can be accompanied by adverbs *Merci aussi*/'Thank you too'. Other variants of MERCI in the data are *C'est plutôt moi qui vous remercie*/'It's me who should thank you'; *C'est moi qui vous remercie*/'I want to thank you'.

Strategy E: "Acknowledging the Thanks"

D'ACCORD is employed 5 times in the data (0.9%). It is used to acknowledge the thanks. It is realized as *D'accord; Tant mieux; Ok; Okay; Oui.*

4.1.3. Situational Distribution of Strategies and Realization Forms

This section presents the distribution of the pragmatic strategies and their linguistic realization patterns across the three situations (see Table 4):

Strategy and sub-strategy		Friend	Stranger	Professor	Total
Strategy A	DE RIEN	63 (41.5%)	44 (28.9%)	45 (29.6%)	152 (100%)
	PAS DE QUOI	52 (33.5%)	50 (32.3%)	53 (34.2%)	155 (100%)
	NORMAL	13 (31.7%)	16 (39%)	12 (29.3%)	41 (100%)
Strategy B	PLAISIR	19 (19.8%)	26 (27.1%)	51 (53.1%)	96 (100%)
	HONNEUR/JOIE / SATISFACTION	10 (41.6%)	7 (29.2%)	7 (29.2%)	24 (100%)
Strategy C	JE T'EN/VOUS EN PRIE	4 (12.1%)	11 (33.3%)	18 (54.5%)	33 (100%)
	A VOTRE SERVICE	3 (27.3%)	3 (27.3%)	5 (45.4%)	11 (100%)
Strategy D	MERCI	9 (25.7%)	7 (20%)	19 (54.3%)	35 (100%)
Strategy E	D'ACCORD	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	-	5 (100%)

Table 4: *Distribution of the realization types*
of head-act strategies across the three situations

As displayed in Table 4, the sub-strategy DE RIEN is mostly used by the respondents in the Friend situation, while it is almost equally distributed in the Stranger and Professor situations. By contrast, PAS DE QUOI, the most frequent realization type or sub-strategy in the data, appears to be equally distributed in the three situations. PLAISIR, the third most preferred realization type of head act strategies in the corpus, appears mostly in the Professor situation. The respondents mostly employ forms belonging to NORMAL sub-strategy in the Stranger situation. Table 4 also indicates that MERCI and JE T'EN/VOUS EN PRIE, the fifth and sixth most employed realization types, are most common in the Professor situation. The least employed realization pattern D'ACCORD mostly appears in the Stranger situation and is not employed in the Professor situation.

4.2. Supportive Acts and Their Pragmatic Functions

Several speech acts are used as supportive acts in the data. Of the 144 tokens of supportive acts attested 63 (43.8%) occur in the Friend situation, 54 (37.5%) tokens appear in the Stranger situation, while 27 (18.7%) instances are used in the Professor situation. With respect to their pragmatic functions, the 144 supportive acts identified were classified in different groups.

The first group consists of supportive acts that occur exclusively in the friend situation. They are chosen by the speakers in order to remind the addressees that the existing friendship is the reason for providing the benefit. By attributing the benefit to their close relationship, the speakers want to minimize the favour and flatter the face of the addressees. Friendship can be expressed in an explicit manner, as in (6) or indirectly, as in (7). In some examples, these supportive acts serve as suggestions that speaker and addressee have to help each other or cooperate beyond the present situation. In this case, the speaker explicitly says that friends are there to help, as in (8). Overall, the expression of social responsibility (to friends and superiors) and the strengthening of cordial relationships are the motivations behind such supportive acts:

1) (Friend): *De rien. "C'est entre nous camardes"*[6]*./'*Not at all. It's between friends'.
2) (Friend): *Pas de quoi. "Ton travail est aussi le mien"*./'Don't mention it. Your work is also mine'. *Il n'y a pas de quoi. "Les amis sont faits pour ça"*./'Don't mention it. Friends are meant for that/What are friends for?'

The second group consists of supportive acts that are used to indicate that the speaker also benefited from favor. Acts belonging to this group appear in the formal situation (professor), as in (9) and in the informal situation (friend), as in (10):

(Professor): *Je vous en prie. Ce fût un plaisir. "J'en ai beaucoup appris"*./'You are welcome. It was a pleasure. I learned a lot from it (the conference)'.
(Friend): *De rien. "Cela m'a permis aussi d'améliorer mes performances"*./'Don't mention it. It also helped me develop my skills'.

The supportive acts of the third group are employed to express the conviction that the addressee would have acted in the same way. The acts belonging to this category are employed to enhance the positive face of the other: s/he is implicitly presented as a helpful person. The positive image is also presented as the leverage to provide the benefit for which the speaker is being thanked. In most cases, the face-enhancing supportive act could be interpreted as a justification of the head act, as in (11):

(Friend): *C'est rien. "Je pense quand même que tu aurais fait pareil pour moi"*./'It's nothing. I think you would have done the same thing to me'.

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[6]The supportive acts are in comas.

Another category consists of supportive acts that are used to stress the speaker's willingness or duty to help, as in (12) and to describe "the benefit as ordinary rather than special or costly" (Grando, 2016, p. 62), as in (13). In both cases, the supportive acts intensify the minimizing function of the head acts:

3) (Friend): *De rien ma puce ! C'est l'amitié. "Je suis là pour toi ma belle et tu pourras toujours compter sur moi".*/'Not at all darling. It's friendship. I am there for you beautiful and you can always rely on me'.

4) (Stranger): *Ce n'était pas grandiose. "Ce n'était qu'une aide".*/'It was not a big deal. It was just a help'.

The fourth group consists of supportive acts that are employed to close the exchange by treating the other as a potential partner in the future, as in (14):

5) (Stranger) : *Vous n'avez pas à me remercier, "passez tout simplement un bon séjour et à nous revoir prochainement s'il plait à Dieu".*/'You don't have to thank me. I just want to wish you a nice stay and see you next time by the grace of God'.

The fifth group consists of promises of future help to the other if assistance is needed, as in (15):

6) (Friend): *Il n'y a pas de quoi. "Je serai toujours disponible quand besoin sera".*/'Don't mention it. I will always be available when needed'.

The sixth group is that of supportive acts that are employed to assert reciprocity with the other. These include welcoming as in (16), expressions of empathy, as in (17), well-wishes, as in (18):

7) (Stranger): *Je vous en prie. "Vous êtes la bienvenue dans notre campus".*/'You are welcome. Welcome to our campus'.

8) (Stranger): *Il n'y a pas de quoi me remercier, "car tout le monde peut s'égarer et avoir besoin d'aide".*/'You don't have to thank me because anybody can get lost and need help.' *Il n'y a pas de quoi! "Faites un bon choix du livre que vous voulez acheter et passez une bonne journée".*/'Don't mention it. I wish you a good choice of the book you want to buy and have a nice day'.

The last group consists of a variety of supportive acts. They include advice, offering help, requests, etc. Advice is often intended to encourage the addressee to do something in connection with the favour granted. In (16), the speaker explicitly tells the addressee that if they do what they are advised to do, they should be able to help themselves in the future and also help other people. It is important to note in this example that the expression *quand tu as le temps* 'when you have time' and two justifications serve as mitigations for the advice. Another type of advice is illustrated in (17): the addressee is encouraged to be more careful in order not to miss their way. The advice is mitigated by a justification:

9) (Friend): *De rien, "mais il faut aussi apprendre à saisir quand tu as le temps car cela peut aussi aider quelqu'un comme toi demain et t'aider aussi dans d'autres situations".*/'Not at all, but you also have to learn how to type when you have time because it could also help somebody like you in the future and help you out in other situations'.

10) (Stranger): *De rien Monsieur, ne vous en faites pas, "prochainement il faut prêter attention. Ce campus est vraiment quelque chose à s'égarer, mais il n'est même pas grand".*/'Not at all sir, don't worry about it, you have to be more careful next time. You can easily go astray on this campus, but it's not that big'.

After responding to the gratitude expression, the speaker may use the act of offering help to indicate their readiness to help (again) in the near future. This consolidates the student-professor relationships, as in (18) and solidifies social bonds, as in (19):

11) (Professor): *C'était un plaisir ! "N'hésitez-pas de me faire signe si vous avez encore besoin de moi monsieur".*/'It was my pleasure. Don't hesitate to contact me if you need me sir'.

12) (Friend): De rien, le plaisir est partagé. "Tu peux revenir quand tu le souhaites"./'No problem, the pleasure is also mine. You can come back when you want to'.

The speaker can make a request for reciprocation in the future, as in (20) or for a different kind of reward (money, drink, etc.), as in (21):

13) (Friend): *Merci aussi, "mais j'espère que tu m'aideras de même lorsque j'aurai besoin de faire saisir mon devoir si je n'ai pas le temps".*/'Thank you too, but I hope you will help me when I need to type my homework and I don't have time'.

14) (Professor): *De rien. "Mais monsieur il n'y a pas un pot pour moi"?*/'No problem. But, is there a drink for me sir?'

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to describe strategies adopted by Cameroon French speakers to respond to gratitude expressions in three different situations. The findings show that Cameroon French speakers have at their disposal a variety of face-saving and face-enhancing strategies to downplay the cost of the benefit they are being thanked for, express positive feelings towards the addressee, express pleasure for providing the benefit, etc. Overall, responses to thanks occur in the data either as single head acts or as combinations of head acts and supportive acts. With respect to head act strategies, it was found that 'minimizing the favour' is the most common strategy among the respondents. The results also show that the head acts are mostly realized using structures that belong to pattern such as *DE RIEN; PAS DE QUOI; PLAISIR*. The various supportive acts attested are employed, as the analysis above has shown, not only to mitigate and intensify the

preceding or following head acts, but also to express many other pragmatic and social intents.

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