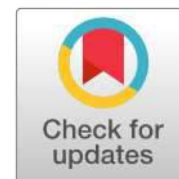


# EXPLORING THE LINGUISTIC PATTERNS OF GRATITUDE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ACKNOWLEDGMENTS IN PHILOSOPHY PHD THESES

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## Abstract

Acknowledgments as expressions of gratitude are not only mere formalities in academia but also represent heartfelt attempts by researchers to acknowledge the support that shaped their academic journeys. They are a specific academic genre in which personal texts are produced as a part of academic genres such as theses or books. Hence, a systematic understanding of the linguistic features of this specific genre may contribute to the literature on academic writing. Comparing expressions of gratitude across English, German, and Turkish L1 academic contexts, this study presents a detailed picture of linguistic patterns in Ph.D. thesis acknowledgments in the field of Philosophy. We found that thanking for academic purposes was the main reason for gratitude in the three cultures. Our analysis also revealed the influence of cultural and linguistic nuances on the syntactic patterns of gratitude in the three contexts. We concluded that while acknowledgments remain deeply personal and emotionally charged, they adhere to genre-specific encoding patterns and share common lexical preferences, which require explicit instruction in academic writing courses.

**Keywords:** academic genres, acknowledgments, linguistic conventions, gratitude, PhD theses

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### **Acknowledgments as an Academic Genre**

A “Cinderella” genre: Like the heroine in the children's fairy tale, acknowledgments are a taken-for-granted part of the background, a practice of unrecognized and disregarded value deserving of greater attention (Hyland, 2003, p. 243).

There is a general agreement that academic discourse is constructed on disciplinary, cultural, and genre-based conventions of academic communities. The style of writing in the academic discourse points to different ways of building writer-reader relationships and authorial stances and marshalling arguments across disciplines and cultures. The specific conventions of genres also influence the pragmatic and linguistic choices of academic writers. Studies on academic texts such as postgraduate genres, research articles, scientific books, and abstracts show that there exist disciplinary, cultural, and genre-based conventions in academic discourse.

The research up to now has tended to focus on linguistic properties of a wide range of academic genres yet acknowledgments have received scant attention. Swales (1990) categorizes academic genres into three categories regarding the audience type. Primary genres (research-process genres) like research articles and postgraduate genres construct peer communication while secondary genres – e.g. textbooks – serve instructive purposes. The occluded genres such as cover letters are concerned with confidential and semi-confidential exploitation of texts in academic discourse. Concerning acknowledgments, they are like “a Cinderella genre” (Hyland, 2003, p. 243).

Dating back to the 16th century, expressing gratitude in the form of acknowledgments is an ordinary process in academic texts. “Acknowledging the assistance and contributions of others is now a well-established feature of the scholarly communication process” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, p. 259). With its clear aim and place in texts, this genre has distinct rhetorical features. It provides writers a rhetorical space to both state their genuine gratitude for assistance and to mitigate a capable academic identity. It, therefore, reflects the strategic choices of writers rather than a mere listing of gratitude.

More widely, it would be wrong to consider acknowledgments as a summary of gratitude. Hyland (2004, p. 305) states that “They look inwards to the text and its author and outwards to the factors which help construct them both, and it is this which distinguishes acknowledgments as a genre.” Seemingly, they have both personal and disciplinary norms, which make them of considerable interest to linguists. Through interviews with postgraduate students and the analysis of Ph.D. and MA theses acknowledgments, Hyland (2003) claimed that acknowledgments are grounded on disciplinary variations and identity choices of writers. Hyland (2004) compared the moves of acknowledgments in Ph.D. and MA theses in six disciplines written by non-native speakers of English. In addition to disciplinary variations, he found genre-based differences in Ph.D. and MA theses acknowledgments. In the same year, Hyland and Tse conducted another study to examine the moves and lexico-grammatical features in Ph.D. and MA theses acknowledgments. Ph.D. students in the “soft” sciences employed a greater variety of lexico-grammatical patterns.

Following Hyland and Tse (2004), some researchers conducted studies about the moves of this genre in Persian and Arabian contexts. Concentrating on generic structures of acknowledgments in Arabic, Al-Ali (2010) observed that Arab writers utilized certain sociocultural-specific components reflecting the religious beliefs and the academic and social conventions of the Arab writers. Mohammadi and Tabari (2013) draw our attention to politeness in Persian doctoral acknowledgments in seven disciplines. The study revealed that the majority of communicative moves and linguistic steps used by the Persian and English writers were related to face management. Kuhi and Rezaei (2014) examined the moves of acknowledgments in MA and Ph.D. theses, research articles, and textbooks in Iranian and English and observed cultural variations in these four genres. In a diachronic study, Alemi and Rezanejad (2016) investigated the moves in Persian doctoral dissertation acknowledgments in hard and soft sciences and found statistically significant differences in the moves of this genre between hard and soft disciplines. In another study, Alotaibi (2018) displayed the absence of hedges and engagement markers in acknowledgments written by Saudi students at U.S. universities.

Acknowledgments not only constitute a distinctive academic genre, but they also show variations across academic disciplines and cultures. Giannoni (2002) studied acknowledgments in English and Italian research articles in seven disciplines and

observed some common rhetorical norms maintained by sentential boundaries in both languages. In a diachronic study, Scrivener (2009) examined doctoral dissertations' acknowledgments in the field of history and reported that history doctoral students expressed gratitude first for academic assistance and then for moral support. Šinkūnienė and Dudzinskaitė (2018) compared acknowledgments in scientific books and doctoral dissertations in English and Lithuanian and observed that British researchers put more emphasis on this genre by marking them as long separate sections. The distributions of the moves of acknowledgments were not identical in the two academic communities. In a recent study, Tang (2021) examined the gender differences in MA theses acknowledgments and found striking gender differences in the selection of lexical items to express gratitude.

The literature on acknowledgments indicates the prominence of understanding the disciplinary and genre-based variations that exist among cultures. Tang (2021) emphasizes that this genre is conditioned by the conventional linguistic patterns of academic communities. However, very little is known about the features of acknowledgments in L1 academic contexts. This paper attempts to identify the differences in terms of the reasons for thanking, lexico-grammatical patterns, and choices of authorial subjects in acknowledgments in Ph.D. theses in the discipline of Philosophy written in English, German, and Turkish. The main reason for the selection of Ph.D. theses is that this genre is the key to gaining membership in an academic community and an outcome of a challenging process, in which writers sacrifice many things during thesis writing.

1. What are the reasons for thanking in English, German, and Turkish Ph.D. acknowledgments?
2. What are the lexico-grammatical patterns used in Ph.D. acknowledgments in English, German, and Turkish?
3. What are the preferred choices of authorial subjects by English, German, and Turkish postgraduate students in Ph.D. acknowledgments?

### **The Act of Thanking**

Koller (2001) states that when we think about the act of thanking, our minds often go to everyday situations where we verbally or even non-verbally thank someone in face-

to-face interactions. These situations include, for example, thanking someone for holding the door, a compliment, a gift, or help we have received. In these contexts, the act of expressing thanks tends to follow established patterns and is more or less ritualic, in which people often use a set of familiar phrases like 'thank you' or 'thanks' without necessarily expressing deep or spontaneous gratitude. These phrases of thanking follow certain social norms that apply when people interact in similar situations and they involve non-verbal cues like eye contact, gestures, and body language, as well as the words spoken. According to Koller (2001), these norms form a part of a collective social structure, a concept similarly articulated by Goffman (1973), who states that this structure governs a wide range of social contexts, encompassing public, semi-public, and private situations, regardless of whether they are formal events or casual everyday interactions.

In academic contexts, the act of thanking presented in acknowledgments becomes more complex due to academic power dynamics, individual emotional elements, and psychosocial factors combined with specific textual features. Yang (2012) asserts that the act of thanking is perceived differently by writers in different academic communities, which influences the thanking strategies adapted and rhetorical choices made. For Giannoni (2002), acknowledgments display the intellectual debts of the people who contributed to academic texts. They are the attempts of writers for prestige (when acknowledged people are prominent academics or organizations) and credibility concerning collaborative scholarship.

Acknowledgments are an academic genre grounded on social expectations rather than the personal feelings of writers, and these expectations are triggered by the choices of textual patterns that are determined by the structure of expressing gratitude and the specific communicative task of conveying thanks in academic texts. According to Koller, an acknowledgment consists of a series of thank acts, which can be represented as "Act of Thank 1, Act of Thank 2, Act of Thank 3, and so on, up to Act of Thank n" (Koller, 2001, p. 290). This fundamental and straightforward textual pattern, which underlies every acknowledgment, serves as the basis for the formulation process (Sandig, 1997). In other words, it guides the creation of individual textual instances.

According to Koller (2001, p. 290), acknowledgments in scholarly texts consist of at least one, typically two or more acts of gratitude. In these acts of gratitude, the central component is the verbal action of thanking, referred to as the action of thanking. The action of thanking is carried out by an acknowledger, directed towards a recipient of thanks, speaks the addressee, and is motivated by a reason of thanking. Often, qualifying elements are added to these components. In line with Koller's illustration in German (Koller, 2001, p. 290), we have constructed an English example to clarify the classification of thanking classification, as detailed in Figure 1.

### Figure 1

*Koller's (2001) classification of thanking*

"In addition, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my primary advisor for his unwavering guidance throughout my research."	
In addition:	positioning of the addressee within other addressees
I:	acknowledger
would like to express my gratitude to:	the action of thanking
deep:	qualification of the thanking action
my advisor:	addressee
primary:	qualification of the addressee
for his guidance throughout my research:	reason of thanking
unwavering:	qualification of the reason of thanking

For Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 264), the act of thanking is rested on three main reasons:

- thanking for academic assistance: thanks for intellectual support, ideas, analyses feedback, etc.
- thanking for resources: thanks for data access and clerical, technical, or financial support.
- thanking for moral support: thanks for the encouragement, friendship, sympathy, patience, etc.

In light of the literature, we shaped the methodology of this study, as will be explained in the following section.

## Methodology

### Data Collection

This cross-cultural study was based on a self-complied corpus of 150 Ph.D. theses acknowledgments in English, German, and Turkish, totalling 39.295 words. The writers had to receive their Ph.D. education from universities in the USA, Germany, and Türkiye. The gender of the writers was not the focus of this study. Each sub-corpus consisted of 50 Ph.D. theses acknowledgments written between 2018 and 2022 in the field of Philosophy. The size of each sub-corpus is shown in Table 1. The acknowledgments were copied and pasted in separate Microsoft Word files. Each text was labelled using the year + the initial letter of the language + the number of the text. For example, 2019-E-12 indicates the acknowledgments were the 12th text written in 2019 in English.

**Table 1**

*Corpus Size (50 dissertations in each context)*

Sub-corpus	Acknowledgments	Words
English	50	15.785
German	50	13.320
Turkish	50	10.190

The acknowledgments in the English corpora were chosen from the database of ProQuest Theses and Dissertations (PQDT)<sup>1</sup>. The acknowledgments in the German corpora were derived from the database of the Deutsche National Bibliothek<sup>2</sup>. The acknowledgments in Turkish were selected from Ph.D. theses published online at YOKTEZ, the Thesis Center of the Council of Higher Education<sup>3</sup>.

For the genre of acknowledgments, it is characteristic that they exist in written form and function as non-independent texts. Acknowledgments are not separately published but rather constitute an academic document, such as a dissertation, along with other elements like the title page, table of contents, preface, list of abbreviations, main text, bibliography, table of figures, etc. Sometimes acknowledgments are also considered as a section of the preface. In our data, both separate acknowledgments and those integrated into the preface were included. Regarding the positioning of acknowledgments in our data, most of the

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<sup>1</sup> ProQuest Theses and Dissertations - <https://www.proquest.com/index>

<sup>2</sup> Deutsche National Bibliothek - [https://www.dnb.de/DE/Home/home\\_node.html](https://www.dnb.de/DE/Home/home_node.html)

<sup>3</sup> YOKTEZ - <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/giris.jsp>

acknowledgments were placed at the beginning of the theses in the three contexts. In examining the titles of acknowledgments in our data, we observed a diverse range of titles used in English, German, and Turkish theses. In the English data, there were 7 titled as Acknowledgment, 42 as Acknowledgements, and one without a title. In the German dataset, 38 acknowledgments were titled as Danksagung (Acknowledgment), 9 as Vorwort (Preface), 2 as Dank (Thank), and 1 with no title. In the Turkish data, the titles varied, with Teşekkür (Thank) being used 43 times, along with 6 titled as Önsöz (Preface), and 1 with no title.

### Data Analysis

The first aim of this study was to find the reasons for thanking in the acknowledgments in the three contexts. To do this, we utilized the three categories of thanking - academic, moral, and resources- proposed by Hyland and Tse (2004). Each corpus was checked manually by each researcher to identify the reasons for thanking and the identified reasons were tagged as A (academic), M (moral), and TR (thanking for resources). Frequency counts and percentages of each category of reasons were calculated.

The second concern of the study was to find out the patterns of gratitude in acknowledgments in the three linguistic contexts. As indicated in Table 2, we categorized the patterns into five categories, proposed by Hyland and Tse (2004). We first read each corpora and labelled all the patterns in each category. We then converted each corpus from Word files to UTF-8 txt files. Using AntConc (2023) - a free corpus analysis tool- we calculated the occurrences of the identified patterns. The percentages of the items in each category in each corpus were calculated.

**Table 2**

*Patterns of expressing gratitude*

Nominalization	"My sincere thanks to..."
Performative verb	"I thank..." "The author appreciates..."
Adjective	"I'm grateful to..." "The author is thankful for..."
Passive	"Y is thanked for..." "Appreciation is given to..."
Bare mention	"I cannot go without mentioning..." "X was helpful in..."

Hyland & Tse, 2004, p.266



The third step of the analysis was to examine the deployment of authorial pronouns in each corpus. To do this, we employed the four categories established by Hyland and Tse (2004) – I/my, none, no author, the author. We checked each instance of authorial pronoun usage manually and calculated the frequency counts and percentages by running descriptive statistics. We also discussed the reasons for the similarities and differences in the employment of authorial pronouns.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Thanking is the pillar of the acknowledgments genre in which the Ph.D. students display their gratitude for academic assistance and support, and feedback they received from members of the academic community such as advisors, committee members, and colleagues. They also appreciate the moral support they get from their families, friends, and colleagues. The third reason for thanking is the technical or financial support taken from colleagues or institutions. The first attempt of the present study was to conduct a cross-cultural analysis of the reasons for thanking. Inconsistent with Šinkūnienė and Dudzinskaitė (2018), who found the same percentages of academic and moral reasons for thanking in Lithuanian Ph.D. theses, we found an emphasis on thanking for academic reasons in the three data sets as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Distribution of thanking reasons*

	English		Turkish		German	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Academic	534	78	235	64	276	59
Moral	140	21	117	32	104	22
Resources	9	1	14	4	87	19

Thanking for academic assistance accounted for 78% of the English data, followed by moral support, comprising 25% of the data. With a percentage of 1, thanking for resources was rarely observed. Similarly, in the Turkish data, we observed similar tendencies. 64% of reasons for thanking marked in the data were about academic assistance. Moral support had a percentage of 32. Only 4% of the data contained thanking for resources. Regarding the acknowledgments in German, expressions of gratitude for academic assistance constituted a predominant proportion, standing at 59%. Acknowledgments involving moral support had a notable share, accounting for 22%. While the German data placed thanking for resources at 19%,

which was consistent with its position in Turkish and English, it has to be noted, that this percentage was significantly higher in German.

Across all three languages, thanking for academic assistance appeared to be the most prevalent reason for acknowledgments. Acknowledgments were a means of showing gratefulness for any kind of intellectual support received from members of the academic community. While writing the acknowledgments, the Ph.D. students thanked those who helped them in their theses including their supervisors, thesis committees, professors, and colleagues, as seen in the extracts below. There were also cases when the writers thanked their colleagues for academic encouragement and fruitful discussions (extract 3).

1. I would like to thank the members of my committee for the guidance, confidence, and help they gave me during this process. (2018-E-2)

2. Bu araştırmanın sonunda, tez danışmanım Doç. Dr. Ç.T.'a en içten teşekkürlerimi sunarım.

(I would like to thank my supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ç. T.). (2018-T-6)<sup>4</sup>

3. Thanks to D. for careful and insightful comments on my written prospectus and my prospectus defense and a good deal of encouragement when I needed it. (2019-E-12).

4. Mein Dank gebührt an erster Stelle meinen beiden **Doktorvätern** Dr. J.-I.L. und Prof. Dr. P.K.

(First and foremost, I would like to thank my two **doctor fathers**, Dr. J.-I. L. and Prof. Dr. P.K.) (2021-D-39)

Acknowledging participants in this genre was mostly homogenous in terms of reference. Both in English and Turkish acknowledgments, writers tended to address academic members by Title + his/her full name because supervisors, members of the thesis committee, and other teachers were authorities who demanded respect from them. However, the colleagues acknowledged were thanked using their full names or first names as a sign of equality as seen in extracts 3 and 4. In German, supervisors were commonly referred to as "Doktormutter" (doctor mother) or "Doktorvater" (doctor father) (See extract 4). This reflected a unique form of addressing academic authority within the relationship between the student and the supervisor, which was often

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<sup>4</sup> All translations in this article from German and Turkish into English are ours.

characterized by a deep and mentor-like connection, combined with a sense of care, support, and responsibility like that of a parent. In addition, Ph.D. students often viewed themselves as being part of their supervisor's academic family tree therefore the expressions “Doktormutter” and “Doktorvater” strengthened that academic lineage.

The high frequency of thanking for academic reasons in the three data sets shows that it is essential and obligatory to thank members of the community for their contribution to the Ph.D. thesis. Another explanation may be that academic work does not belong to a particular writer; it is the product of various types of assistance from several people and the importance of academic collaboration and mentorship in the academic community, regardless of the language.

Acknowledgments are a unique genre in which mentioning personal issues is accepted in an academic work. In the acknowledgments, the Ph.D. students also thanked their families and friends for their spiritual support, unpaid labor of production, and patience during writing the thesis. For these students, writing their Ph.D. thesis is a big commitment concerning time and energy, which requires not spending time with their loved ones (Šinkūnienė & Dudzinskaitė, 2018). Hence, the frequency of thanking them for moral reasons shows that it is also important for them to thank those who support them morally and believe in them.

In our data, the family members most frequently mentioned were parents, partners, and children. There was more significance placed on gratitude to family and friends in the Turkish acknowledgments than in English and German ones. Turkish writers explicitly showed curtsy and love to their loved ones and thanked them explicitly for their support during the burdensome process of writing their theses. This finding may be explained by Turkish cultural norms that emphasize the importance and contribution of family in one's life. For Scriver (2009), mentioning family portrays writers as more human and sympathetic. It is also an intrinsic commitment of the writers to their families (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

In the German context, there was generally no substantial disparity in addressing family members. They were occasionally referenced without specifying their names, at times identified only by their first names or mentioned with both their first and last

names (extract 5). Turkish authors commonly used full names when referring to family members and friends, whereas English authors typically addressed them by their first names (extract 6). This difference suggests that Turkish authors tended to adhere to more formal acknowledgment norms.

5. Mein ganz besonderer Dank gilt meiner Familie: F., dessen Begeisterung für meine Forschung mich immer getragen hat und meinen Eltern, ohne deren geduldige und großzügige Unterstützung diese Arbeit nicht möglich gewesen wäre.

(My very special thanks go to my family: F., whose enthusiasm for my research has always carried me, and my parents, without whose patient and generous support this work would not have been possible.) (2021-G-38)

6. Thank you to all my friends back home, especially G., who showed me love and remained in close contact during my five-year absence in America. (2018-E-7)

Acknowledgments also reflected thanking the reasons of the Ph.D. students for the institutional support and finances for conducting the research. The support mentioned here ranges from access to data, proofreading of the thesis, and financial assistance. In our data, Turkish writers were mostly grateful to TÜBİTAK (a Turkish state institution providing scholarships to scholars) for funding and scholarships (e.g. extract 7). This gratitude included an explicit speech act of thanking because the acknowledgment of funding was phrased according to the officially stated requirements. For Hyland (2004), the detailed explanation of prestigious scholarships is a way of recognizing the writer's academic talents. In the English and German data, the writers also appreciated libraries and institutions for providing access to sources in addition to funding and scholarship. These appreciations were less explicit in the English and Turkish data. However, there is a notable disparity within the German data, exhibiting a distinct emphasis on resource-related gratitude. Our data supports the assertion that research projects in philosophy in Germany often benefited from more significant material or financial resources than those in Turkish and English contexts (extract 8).

7. 2015-2016 yılları arasında 2214-A Yurt Dışı Doktora Sırası Araştırma Burs Programı ile Purdue Üniversitesi'ne yapmış olduğum on aylık ziyaretimi finanse eden TÜBİTAK'a teşekkür ederim.

(I would like to thank TÜBİTAK for financing my ten-month visit to Purdue University between 2015-2016 with the 2214-A Research Fellowship Program abroad.) (2022-T-45).

8. Für die finanzielle Unterstützung bedanke ich mich bei der Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, der Technischen Universität Dresden und der Geschwister Boehringer Ingelheim Stiftung

für Geisteswissenschaften. Des Weiteren danke ich D.R. für die mühsame Durchsicht des Manuskriptes.

(I would like to thank the Dresden State and University Library, the Technical University of Dresden and the Geschwister Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation for Human Sciences for their financial support. I would also like to thank D.R. for the painstaking review of the manuscript.)  
(2021-G-40)

As the second aim of the present study, we investigated the linguistic patterns of usage of thanking in this genre in English, German, and Turkish. Our data analysis on the lexical and grammatical patterns of thanking in academic acknowledgments across English, German, and Turkish revealed some interesting findings as seen in Table 4. In English acknowledgments, nominalizations were significant at 41% and performative verbs were prominent, constituting 25% of the thanking patterns. In contrast, adjectives (16%) and bare mentions (13%) played comparatively smaller roles in English acknowledgments. In Turkish acknowledgments, performative verbs were prevalent at 59%. Nominalizations, while still significant at 29%, hold a lesser role compared to performative verbs. Compared to English, in Turkish acknowledgments, adjectives, and bare mentions were used less frequently, both at a rate of 5%. Similar to Turkish, in German acknowledgments, performative verbs took a dominant position at 46%, emphasizing direct gratitude expression. Nominalizations were prominent at 30%, but still less prominent than in English. Adjectives (20%) were used less frequently in German acknowledgments. Interestingly, bare mentions were applied at a rate of 18%, which was more frequent than those in Turkish and English. Passive voice usage for expressing gratitude in academic acknowledgments was not employed frequently across all three languages, with English (5%), Turkish (2%) and German (1%) exhibiting relatively low percentages.

**Table 4**

*The linguistic patterns of thanking*

Linguistic Patterns of Thanking	English		Turkish		German	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Nominalization	100	41	56	29	122	30
Performative verb	166	25	112	59	191	46
Adjective	66	16	9	5	20	5
Passive	19	5	4	2	6	1
Bare mention	55	13	9	5	72	18

Following procedures by Hyland and Tse (2004), we calculated the frequency of verbs and nouns in English Ph.D. acknowledgments as overt expressions of gratitude. Ph.D. students relied heavily on performative verbs marked by the use of “thank”, “owe” and “acknowledge”. The verb “thank” was observed at a frequency count of 148. As for Gesuato (2008, p. 1), “thank” displays “a favorable feeling towards the benefactors”, as shown in (9) and (10) while “acknowledge” - in (11) - indicates “benefactors’ merits”.

9. **Thank you** for your insight and critical comments. (2020-E-29).
10. **I would like to thank** the US-Germany Fulbright Commission and Dr. N. for supporting my research in Kaiserslautern (2018-E-5).
11. **I would like to acknowledge** the teachers I had before arriving at my doctoral program as well (2019-E-13).
12. **I owe** a debt of gratitude to P.F. for his helpful written and verbal comments on my work. (2020-E-28).

In the data, half of the performative examples observed were the examples of weakening the illocutionary force of thanking through the use of an introductory phrase before the main verb, which diminished the force of thanking (See extracts 10 and 11). The introductory phrases included mostly a modal and a mental state verb. The acknowledgments in English mostly contained a formulaic preface mitigating the writers’ inclinations usually with the pattern of “I would like to”. Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 269) explain this formulaic use of hedging (would in our case) by “the relative power imbalance between acknowledger and addressee in these cases and to the desire of students to avoid imposing a debt on those they thank”. The employment of a hedging modal lessens the threat of the addressee by emphasizing the writer’s inclination to thank rather than perform an obligatory act of thanking.

“Thanks” and “gratitude” were the two nouns observed in the English data as a means of thanking. In (14), the writer conveyed his pleased acceptance of the scholarship offered.

13. **Thanks** especially to my wife, Kaylyn, for her enthusiastic love and her relentless reminders on the importance of using philosophy to help those outside of the ivory tower. (2020-E-25)
14. **My gratitude** also extends to the Irish Famine Memorial Fund as a scholarship recipient (2022-E-47)

As illustrated in (15), the most common adjectives used in the English acknowledgments were “grateful” and “indebted to”. The use of passives did not seem to be frequent. This syntactic structure is a way of expressing gratitude implicitly. Since acknowledgments are an explicit way of expressing gratitude, passives may not be preferred frequently in this genre. Extract 17 is an example of bare mention, which is another strategy of removing the writer. For Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 267), passives and bare mentions are “the low-key ways of expressing gratitude”.

15. The list of folks I am intellectually **indebted** to is vast ... (2022-E-41).

16. None of this **would have been possible**, or worthwhile, without her. (2019-E-18).

17. Lastly, **without the awesome people** who helped me in the philosophy department, I probably would not have survived these last few years. (2018-E-8).

Unlike the English data, the vast majority of the patterns of gratitude in Turkish acknowledgments contained verbs (18 and 19) and nouns (20 and 21), as seen in the examples.

18. Kıymetli üstadım ve değerli dostum F.Ç.A.’a kendi tezi gibi titizlikle emek sarfettiği için **teşekkür ederim**.

(I would like to thank my esteemed master and dear friend F.Ç.A. for working as meticulously as he did for his thesis.) (2022-T-47)

19. ... ve Prof. Dr. M.S. S.’a **teşekkürü bir borç bilirim**

( ... and Prof. Dr. M.S. I owe a debt of gratitude to S.) (2022-T-49)

20. Bu çalışmayı yöneten ve doktora dönemi süresince yardımını, **desteğini ve hoşgörüsünü** esirgemeyen değerli danışman hocam (2018-T-1)

21. Her anımda yanımda olan yol arkadaşım R. Y.’a **şükranlarımı sunarım**.

(My dear advisor, who directed this study and provided his help, support and tolerance throughout the doctoral period) (2022-T-44)

Adjectives (22), passives (23), and bare mentions (24) were not seen at high occurrences in the Turkish data. “Minnettar” and “müteşekkir” -meaning thankful - were the common adjectives observed. In (23), the use of passive disguised the presence of the writer while in (24), through the employment of bare mention, the act of thanking was somehow moved.

22. ... koşulsuz sevgileriyle beni motive eden sevgili çocuklara **minnettar** olduğumu belirtmek isterim.

(I would like to express my gratitude to the beloved children who motivate me with their unconditional love.) (2018-T-9)

23. Bu çalışma, birgün bana zamanı enine yaşamaktan söz eden ustam -benim Sokrates'im - M. N.'e **ithaf** edildi.

(This work is dedicated to my master - my Socrates - M. N., who one day told me about living time to the fullest.) (2020-T-27)

24. .... Ne söylesem eksik kalacağımı biliyorum.

(I know whatever I say will be incomplete.) (2020-T-24)

Similar to Turkish practices, German acknowledgments differ from English by displaying a higher prevalence of performative verbs. The most frequently encountered verb is "danken" (to thank), while "sich bedanken" is also employed with frequency, whereas "verdanken" (to owe) was employed more sparingly. Performative verbs in German acknowledgments were often accompanied by qualifying expressions and adverbs such as "Herzlich" (cordially), "besonders" (especially), "zutiefst" (deeply), and "sehr" (very much). Moreover, these verbs were commonly employed in modalized forms, including "möchte danken" (want to thank) and "habe zu danken" (have to thank), or in volitive moods expressing structures like "es sei gedankt" (it is to be thanked), which notably represented the only instance of passive usage of the verb "danken" within our German data. In parallel with performative verbs, nominalizations such as "Dank" and "Dankeschön" were frequently coupled with qualifying expressions and adjectives, such as "besonderer" (special), "erster" (first), "allererster" (very first), "großer" (great), "größter" (greatest), "innigster" (most heartfelt), "verbindlicher" (obliging) and "herzlicher" (cordial). Although the array of adjectives and adverbs in the German thank pattern was not exceptionally extensive, it was employed with precision. These qualifications collectively attempted to characterize the act of expressing gratitude as a personal and heartfelt gesture, reflecting a genuine sense of appreciation rather than a mere ritual or formality.

Furthermore, nominalizations in German acknowledgments were often combined with verbs. Frequently encountered combinations in our data were: "Dank gelten" (thanks are given), "Dank gebühren" (thanks are due), "Dank schulden" (owe thanks), "zu Dank verpflichtet sein" (be obligated to thanks), "Dank aussprechen" (express thanks),



and "Dank widmen" (dedicate thanks). Less frequently encountered combinations involved phrases such as "mit Dank verbunden sein" (be connected with thanks), "Dank / Dankbarkeit geht an" (thanks / gratitude goes to), "Dank/Dankbarkeit ausdrücken" (express thanks / gratitude), "Dank sagen" (say thanks), "Gefühl der Dankbarkeit empfinden" (feel a sense of gratitude), and "in Dankbarkeit verbleiben" (remain in gratitude). Koller (2001, 291) argues that in the case of nominalizations such as "Dank schulden" (owe thanks) and "zu Dank verpflichtet sein" (be obligated to thanks), connotations of indebtedness and obligation underscore fundamental psychosocial attributes of expressions of gratitude, particularly within the context of German culture.

Passive adjectives were not observed frequently in the German acknowledgments. However, bare mentions, which entail expressing gratitude without explicitly using phrases of "thanks" seemed to be more common in our German data compared to English and Turkish as exemplified in (26).

25. Zuletzt möchte ich meine Großeltern J.-B. und M. M.-M. hervorheben, die mir zum größten Teil meinen bisherigen Lebensweg überhaupt ermöglichten.

(Finally, I would like to mention my grandparents J.-B. and M. M.-M. who for the most part made my life path possible to date.) (2019-G-14)

A reason for the frequent use of bare mentions could be giving the acknowledgment a more personal touch. Such an approach can create a sense of gratitude that extends beyond mere ritual or formality, contributing to a more intimate and heartfelt expression of thanks.

The last aim of the study was to give a clear picture of the authorial subject pronouns in the three contexts. Interestingly, we observed an extensive utilization of authorial pronouns in subject position in the English, German, and Turkish data, which contrasts with the impersonal nature of Ph.D. theses. Table 5 shows the distribution of authorial subject pronouns in the three contexts.

**Table 5**

*Subject types in acknowledgments*

	I / my		none		no author		the author	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
English	291	59	102	21	100	20	0	0
Turkish	126	90	4	3	10	7	0	0
German	310	67	56	12	98	21	0	0

The use of authorial subject pronouns in Turkish had a high percentage while the other categories had small percentages, which proved that Turkish Ph.D. thesis writers employed limited means of authorial subjects and had a strong stance with the use of I subject pronouns. In the English data, we observed an opposite trend. Ph.D. thesis writers made use of different authorial subject pronouns in the acknowledgments. As the strongest means of mitigating stance, the usage of I/my comprised 59 %. None author and no author category nearly shared the same percentages. The author category was found in none of the data sets.

The Ph.D. students usually tended to be more objective and impersonal to diminish the risk of being rejected by their supervisors and the thesis committee. However, they opted for a more personal style in the acknowledgments of their Ph.D. theses in the three contexts, which is consistent with Hyland (2011). Our findings were also in line with Hyland and Tse (2004) who observed the significant use of authorial pronouns in MA and Ph.D. theses. The Ph.D. writers did not want to distance themselves from their gratitude. Ph.D. theses are the keys to gaining membership in an academic community. Thus, in all three languages, Ph.D. students might prefer to set up a bond with their acknowledgees through genuine thanking including first-person subject and object pronouns I and me, and the possessive adjective my, as seen in the below examples in the three contexts.

26. I want to express **my** gratitude to my committee members (2018-E-7)

27. Doktora eğitimimin ders aşamasından itibaren **bana** karşı göstermiş olduğu olumlu ve yapıcı tavrından, aynı zamanda bu tezin oluşturulmasında sunduğu katkılarından dolayı sevgili tez danışmanım Prof. Dr. H.B.'ya öncelikle içtenlikle teşekkür **ederim**.

(I would like to sincerely thank, my dear thesis advisor, Prof. Dr. H.B., due to the positive and constructive attitude he has shown towards me since the course stage of my doctoral studies, as well as his contributions to the creation of this thesis)

28. Sehr dankbar bin **ich** auch Herrn PD Dr. J.H., der das Zweitgutachten verfasst hat. (I am also very grateful to Adjunct Professor Dr. J.H., who wrote the second report.) (2019-G-14)

According to Koller (2001), the authors of acknowledgments are faced with the challenge, where they must delicately handle "I" to avoid excessive self-focus. Hence, they often tend to emphasize the acknowledgee or the reason for thanking. This style was rarely found in the Turkish data due to the linguistic patterns of the Turkish language, which is an agglutinative language. In Turkish, the subject can be understood clearly from

the verb and many acts of thanking include the first-person subject pronoun added to the verb as an affix. Not all the acts of thanking included explicit authorial involvement in English acknowledgments. Through the use of non-author confronted linguistic patterns—mainly the passives and ellipsis—the English writers disguised their presence from the acknowledging process and created a more formal style, as seen in the below extract (30). Our analysis revealed that the German writers exhibited a trend similar to the English writers. The writers of German acknowledgments applied various techniques to create an emphasis on modesty, as illustrated in (30) and (31). These strategies included the use of the volitional subjunctive (“gedankt sei” -thanks is to be given) and nominal expressions (“der Dank gilt”-thanks goes to). The withdrawal of the acknowledger is also achieved by placing adverbials or adverbial phrases, such as ‘last but not least’ at the beginning of the sentence as seen in (31). In this extract the usage of the English phrase ‘Last but not least’ in a German sentence demonstrates a translanguaging practice; although it is not within the scope of our research it underscores the prevalence of English phrases in the German language.

29. A special thanks goes to E. K. (2018-E-3)

30. Ein großes Dankeschön geht auch an alle meine Freundinnen und Freunde.  
(A big thank you also goes to all my friends.) (2020-G-24)

31. Last but not least ein herzliches „Danke schön“ an J.L. für das Korrekturlesen.  
(Last but not least, a big “thank you” to J.L. for proofreading.) (2018-G-2)".

In the case of no author preference, writers mention, “the assistance of the addressee without expressing thanks” (Hyland & Tse, 2004, 272). The Turkish writers who mostly tended to adopt a more impersonal style did not prefer this style of thanking. They did not distance themselves from the act of thanking and attributed the thanks to an impersonal agent. They took responsibility for any imposition on the addressee or potential face violation. However, this preference was marked in the English data with a percentage of 20. In (32) and (33), we see the writer’s attempts to give explicit credit for the help and support received in the English and German acknowledgments.

32. It would be very hard to overestimate her influence on my work (E-2018-4).

33. Herr Prof. Dr. P.O. hat sich freundlicherweise bereiterklärt als Fachfremder den Vorsitz des Prüfungsausschusses zu übernehmen.

(Prof. Dr. P.O. has kindly agreed to chair the examination board, despite being from a different academic field.) (2020-G-25)

For Hyland and Tse (2004), acknowledgments are communicative parts of academic texts. Here, the writers represent themselves more freely without following the linguistic conventions of their academic communities. The frequent use of the subject pronoun I is an indication of this freestyle rather than the explicit and strong authorial stance usually taken in marshalling arguments in academic genres. The explicit authorial involvement reflects the writers' attempts to set up a genuine writer-reader relationship. However, it becomes apparent that the writers of Ph.D. acknowledgments in English and German theses make efforts to balance self-expression and demonstrate modesty in the genre of acknowledgments.

### **Conclusion**

Acknowledgments are a unique academic genre that conveys deeply personal expressions of gratitude of the writers to the people who help and support them. They hold a significant role in scholarly communication, enabling researchers not only to express gratitude but also to contemplate their academic journey and identity. Although they seem to be impersonal, they follow cultural and discipline-oriented conventions reflected through the employment of certain linguistic patterns. As noted by Sandig (1997), acknowledgments constitute the “building blocks” of individualized compositions and play a significant role in shaping individual pieces of writing relying on basic textual structures as their foundation.

The aim of the present study was to uncover the reasons for thanking and the linguistic patterns of thanking in acknowledgments. Compiling a corpus of Ph.D. theses acknowledgments written between 2018 and 2022 in the field of Philosophy in English, German, and Turkish, we intended to figure out the specific features of acknowledgments. We found that the act of thanking was mostly based on academic purposes, following moral ones in the three contexts. Thanking for resources was the least frequently employed reason for thanking. In the English and Turkish acknowledgments, usage frequencies of performative verbs were identical, followed by nominalizations. On the contrary, in the German data set, nominalizations were the distinctive linguistic patterns. As indicators of implicit gratitude, passives, and bare mentions were not common in the

English and Turkish acknowledgments but there is a tendency to utilize bare mentions as a pattern of gratitude in the German academic culture, showing that taking a humble stance for gratitude might be a linguistic norm in this culture. In all three cultures, the employment of “I” subject pronouns for thanking was identical. Overall, our analysis revealed nuanced linguistic variations between English, German, and Turkish acknowledgments, rooted in cultural and linguistic differences.

Our findings have shown that acknowledgments are not only checklists of useful people or institutions; they serve a more profound purpose. Acknowledgments provide writers with a platform to reflect on the procedures and practices that contributed to the completion of their dissertations, thereby allowing them to project a competent and professional identity (Hyland, 2004). To enhance the effectiveness of acknowledgments, we propose that scholars teaching academic writing should recognize this genre as a distinct academic genre. By doing so, instructors can raise postgraduate students' awareness of the cultural and disciplinary conventions of this genre, especially when their own lingua-cultural background requires different conventions in acknowledgment writing compared to the conventions of their academic studies. This approach would encourage students not to perceive acknowledgments merely as a formality but as a powerful means to convey their competence and appreciation for the academic community.

The study is limited by a lack of information on the generic features of all academic genres, such as books and research articles that include acknowledgments. Further research focusing on the comparison of different genres and cultures may give us a more detailed picture of these features. The study may also be repeated in different lingua-cultural academic contexts to provide more comparisons between different contexts to identify other cross-cultural linguistic norms in the genre of acknowledgments.

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