

# A comparative study of gratitude expressions in Norwegian and English from an interlanguage pragmatic and second language acquisition research perspective

[Johansen, Stine Hulleberg](#)

## Master thesis

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## Abstract

The aims and goals of this study have been to find out how native speakers of Norwegian and learners of English as a foreign language express gratitude in certain situations. Based on the impression that Norwegians may appear impolite to people from other cultures, I hypothesised that this might be related to how Norwegians express gratitude in English, i.e. that they do not adjust to the sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic norms of English, but simply transfer their L1 strategies. To determine whether this was the case or not, I adopted the discourse completion test, originally constructed by Eisenstein and Bodman in connection with their 1986 article, translated it into Norwegian and handed it out to two groups of Norwegian students enrolled in an introductory grammar course at the University of Oslo. The students were given 13 situations, six of which were in Norwegian and seven in English. The questionnaire was also handed out via email to a group of some 20 native speakers of British English connected to the University of York. The responses were analysed and coded according to Karin Aijmer's (1996) strategies of gratitude and the categories in Eisenstein and Bodman's articles (1986, 1993). In some cases, I also had to use my own tentative terminology. The material was also compared to Eisenstein and Bodman's results as well as considered in relation to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness.

The results showed that although there are several differences between the US, the UK and Norway, the Norwegian participants relied heavily on their L1 pragmatic competence when expressing gratitude. The results also indicated several underlying differences with regards to the respective politeness systems. The native speakers of Norwegian and native speakers of English judged the relationship between themselves and the hearer and the size of the imposition differently in several situations. The native speakers of Norwegian also tended to apply to the hearer's negative face to restore 'the harmonious relationship' with their interlocutor, whereas the native speakers of English frequently used positive politeness strategies.

My results give clear indications of certain sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic differences which need to be considered in order for Norwegian learners to communicate successfully in English.



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