

SAYING THANKS IN BUTON CULTURE: GENDERED GRATITUDE STRATEGIES AMONG BUTONESE YOUTH ACROSS SOCIAL RELATIONS

Nur Melansari¹, Abdul Hakim Yassi², Harlinah Sahib³, Gusnawaty Gusnawaty⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Hasanuddin,

¹Universitas Dayanu Ikhsanuddin

nurmelansari@unidayan.ac.id¹; abdul.hakim@unhas.ac.id²; harlina.sahib@unhas.ac.id³; gusnawaty@unhas.ac.id⁴

ABSTRACT

This paper reports a sociopragmatic study of how Butonese young adults realize gratitude in Baubau City, with a focus on gendered patterns across social relations characterized by power, distance, and kinship. Although thanking is often treated as a routine politeness act, its realizations can vary systematically depending on relational configuration and cultural expectations. The study aims (1) to describe how strategy distributions pattern across deference, solidarity, and hierarchical relations (including speaking-up and speaking-down orientations) within kinship and non-kinship contexts, and (2) to identify differences in gratitude strategy realizations produced by male and female Butonese young adults across varied social relations. Data were collected in January-February 2026 using an open-ended written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with a split-set design, in which participants wrote the utterances they would produce in each scenario. Forty Butonese young adults residing in Baubau participated (20 male; 20 female), with two DCT versions (A and B) administered (20 participants per version; 10 male and 10 female). The scenarios collectively operationalized eight fixed social-relation conditions derived from power, distance, and kinship configurations, with hierarchical relations split into speaking-up and speaking-down contexts to support scenario distribution. All responses were coded using Cheng's (2005) eight-category taxonomy of thanking strategies, and descriptive counts and percentages were used to summarize distributions by social-relation condition and speaker gender; a supporting metric (average number of strategies per response) was calculated to indicate response elaboration. Results show that explicit thanking was near-universal across the dataset (479/480 responses; 99.8%) and that address/attention-getting devices occurred at high rates overall (85.4%), while other strategies appeared more selectively (positive feeling 28.5%, other 16.9%, apology 9.0%, repayment 5.2%, recognition of imposition 4.4%, appreciation 2.1%). Strategy use also varied across social-relation conditions, with the widest fluctuation observed for address/attention-getting devices (63.3%-100%), and average strategies per response ranging from 2.15 to 2.77. Gender differences were generally modest, but females showed higher use of "other" moves (20.8% vs. 12.9%), whereas males showed higher recognition of imposition (7.5% vs. 1.3%). Overall, the findings indicate that Butonese young adults' gratitude realizations are anchored by stable core routines yet remain sensitive to relational configuration, with supportive moves contributing to multi-strategy gratitude events across contexts.

Keywords: Butonese youth; gender; gratitude strategies; sociopragmatics; discourse completion task (DCT)

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini melaporkan studi sosiopragmatik tentang bagaimana penutur dewasa muda Buton merealisasikan ungkapan terima kasih di Kota Baubau, dengan fokus pada pola-pola berbasis gender dalam relasi sosial yang ditandai oleh kekuasaan, jarak sosial, dan kekerabatan. Meskipun tindak tutur berterima kasih sering dipahami sebagai praktik kesantunan yang rutin, realisasinya dapat bervariasi secara sistematis bergantung pada konfigurasi relasional dan harapan budaya. Studi ini bertujuan (1) mendeskripsikan bagaimana sebaran strategi membentuk pola pada relasi deference, solidarity, dan hierarchal (termasuk orientasi speaking-up dan speaking-down) dalam konteks kekerabatan maupun non-kekerabatan, dan (2) mengidentifikasi perbedaan realisasi strategi terima kasih yang diproduksi oleh penutur dewasa muda Buton laki-laki dan perempuan pada berbagai relasi sosial. Data dikumpulkan pada Januari-Februari 2026 menggunakan Discourse Completion Task (DCT) tertulis bersifat open-ended dengan desain split-set, di mana partisipan menuliskan tuturan yang akan mereka ucapkan pada setiap skenario. Sebanyak 40 penutur dewasa muda Buton yang berdomisili di Baubau berpartisipasi (20 laki-laki; 20 perempuan), dengan dua versi DCT (A dan B) yang masing-masing diisi oleh 20 partisipan (10 laki-laki dan 10 perempuan). Skenario-skenario tersebut secara kolektif mengoperasionalkan delapan kondisi relasi sosial yang diturunkan dari konfigurasi kekuasaan, jarak sosial, dan kekerabatan, dengan relasi hierarkis dipisahkan ke dalam konteks speaking-up dan speaking-down untuk mendukung distribusi skenario. Seluruh respons dikodekan menggunakan taksonomi delapan kategori strategi berterima kasih Cheng (2005), dan perhitungan deskriptif berupa jumlah serta persentase digunakan untuk merangkum sebaran strategi berdasarkan kondisi relasi sosial dan gender penutur; metrik pendukung berupa rata-rata jumlah strategi per respons dihitung untuk menggambarkan elaborasi respons. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa ungkapan terima kasih eksplisit hampir universal dalam data (479/480 respons; 99,8%) dan perangkat sapaan/penarik perhatian muncul dengan frekuensi tinggi secara keseluruhan (85,4%), sementara strategi lainnya lebih selektif (positive feeling 28,5%, other 16,9%, apology 9,0%, repayment 5,2%, recognition of imposition 4,4%, appreciation 2,1%). Penggunaan strategi juga bervariasi antar

kondisi relasi sosial, dengan fluktuasi terbesar pada perangkat sapaan/penarik perhatian (63,3%–100%), serta rata-rata strategi per respons berkisar antara 2,15 hingga 2,77. Perbedaan gender secara umum relatif kecil, namun perempuan menunjukkan penggunaan kategori “other” yang lebih tinggi (20,8% vs. 12,9%), sedangkan laki-laki menunjukkan tingkat recognition of imposition yang lebih tinggi (7,5% vs. 1,3%). Secara keseluruhan, temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa realisasi terima kasih penutur dewasa muda Buton berlandaskan pada rutinitas inti yang stabil, namun tetap peka terhadap konfigurasi relasional, dengan strategi pendukung berkontribusi pada peristiwa terima kasih multi-strategi lintas konteks.

Kata kunci: pemuda Buton; gender; strategi terima kasih; sosiopragmatik; discourse completion task (DCT)

INTRODUCTION

Gratitude is a core interpersonal practice through which speakers acknowledge benefits received and negotiate social relationships. As an expressive speech act, thanking does not merely convey appreciation; it performs relational work by indexing stance, alignment, and social positioning in context. Because such meanings are socially situated, gratitude realizations are expected to vary across social relations shaped by factors such as power, distance, and kinship.

Previous research on young speakers’ politeness and pragmatic behavior challenges the common stereotype that youth language is uniformly “less polite.” For example, Kariithi’s (2016) study of Kenyan youth, drawing on politeness theory, shows that young speakers deploy varied politeness strategies and adjust them according to audience and contextual factors. Similar patterns have also been reported among student speakers in Southeast Asia, where speakers strategically select politeness strategies in relation to power and distance in institutional and peer contexts (Nurrahmah et al., 2020; Susanto & Yahmun, 2023). These findings support a broader sociopragmatic view that strategic language choices among young speakers are patterned and responsive to social relations rather than random.

A useful framework for specifying social relations in Indonesian heritage-language settings is Yassi’s (2017) politeness theoretical framework, which emphasizes three social variables—Power (P), Distance (D), and Kinship (K)—as key determinants of politeness choices. Building on these variables, Yassi (2017) proposes six social-relation configurations: deference in non-kinship (-P,+D,-K), deference in kinship (-P,+D,+K), intimacy/solidarity in non-kinship (-P,-D,-K), intimacy/solidarity in kinship (-P,-D,+K), hierarchy in non-kinship (+P,+D,-K), and hierarchy in kinship (+P,-D,+K). This framework is particularly relevant because it explicitly distinguishes kinship-based interaction from non-kinship interaction, highlighting that relational patterns and politeness expectations may differ even when “closeness” is involved (e.g., siblings vs friends) (Yassi, 2017).

In addition, the present study’s scenario design includes interlocutors distributed across social-age categories (young adult, adult, senior/retired) to reflect socially meaningful life stages. This aligns with the sociolinguistic understanding that age is a social category tied to life-course positioning and interactional expectations, not merely a biological measure (Eckert, 1998). Importantly, however, the focus of the present paper remains on how Butonese youth realize gratitude strategies across social-relation configurations.

Despite the expanding literature on politeness and pragmatic variation among young speakers (Kariithi, 2016), sociopragmatic research on Butonese youth gratitude strategies remains limited in the international literature. Addressing this gap, this paper examines gendered realizations of gratitude strategies among Butonese youth across social relations characterized by power, distance, and kinship. The study uses written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) scenarios representing deference, solidarity, and hierarchical relations, operationalized through eight fixed social-relation conditions (SR1-SR8) that distribute hierarchical relations into speaking-down and speaking-up contexts for instrument design.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative sociopragmatic design, supported by descriptive frequency counts, to examine and compare gratitude strategy realizations produced by Butonese youth across social relations configured by P, D, and K.

Research Site and Period

The study was conducted in Baubau City, and data collection took place in January-February 2026.

Participants and Operationalization of Youth

Participants were Butonese speakers residing in Baubau City. “Youth” in this study refers to individuals who have completed senior secondary education (SMA/SMK/MA or equivalent), may be university students or in a gap year, and are not yet active members of professional communities. This definition is consistent with the notion of social age as a life-stage category grounded in participation and social positioning (Eckert, 1998).

A total of 40 participants completed the DCT: 20 young men and 20 young women. Two DCT versions were administered (A and B), with 20 participants per version (10 male; 10 female).

Social-Relation Configurations (P, D, K)

To structure relational contexts, the study draws on Yassi’s (2017) politeness framework, which foregrounds Power (P), Distance (D), and Kinship (K) as social variables shaping interactional choices. In Yassi’s (2017) model, these variables yield six social-relation configurations (deference, intimacy/solidarity, hierarchy) across kinship vs. non-kinship relations. For instrument distribution and clearer scenario assignment, the present study operationalizes these six configurations into eight fixed social relations by splitting hierarchical relations into speaking-down and speaking-up orientations in both kinship and non-kinship contexts (SR5 vs. SR6; SR7 vs. SR8). These SR conditions and their contextual specifications are summarized in Table 1.

Instrument: Written DCT (Split-Set)

Data were elicited using an open-ended written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with a split-set design, in which participants wrote the utterances they would produce in each scenario rather than selecting from predetermined options (Ogiermann, 2018). In this split-set design, the full set of scenarios was distributed across two DCT versions so that each participant completed only one version, reducing respondent burden while preserving coverage of the targeted social-relation conditions across the dataset. Two DCT versions were administered:

1. Version A: favor/kindness scenario “Someone returns your lost wallet,” with SR1, SR3, SR5, SR7.
2. Version B: favor/kindness scenario “Someone gives you the information or advice you need,” with SR2, SR4, SR6, SR8.

Two favor prompts (returned wallet vs. information/advice) were selected to maintain ecological plausibility across the targeted social-relation (SR) configurations. The split-set arrangement was designed to balance scenario realism and respondent workload while ensuring full coverage of SR1-SR8 in the dataset.

Table 1. Summary of open-ended DCT scenarios, social-relation configurations (P,D,K), and interlocutor types

No.	DCT Version	Favor or kindness	Social-relation (SR) Configurations	Interlocutor Type	Interlocutor Gender + Social Age (G+SA)
1	Version A	Someone returns your lost wallet	SR1 - Deference in non-kinship (-P,+D,-K)	Strangers	Male Adult (MA)
					Female Adult (FA)
					Male Senior/Retired (MS)
			SR3 - Solidarity in non-kinship (-P,-D,-K)	Close friends	Female Young Adult (FYA)
					Male Adult (MA)
					Female Senior/Retired (FS)
			SR5 - Hierarchy in non-kinship (+P,+D,-K) ↓	Junior/subordinate/person with lower status in a work/organizational context	Male Young Adult (MYA)
					Female Young Adult (FYA)
					Male Adult (MA)
			SR7 - Hierarchy in kinship (+P,-D,+K) ↓	Younger close relatives (e.g. nephews or nieces)	Male Young Adult (MYA)
					Female Young Adult (FYA)
					Female Adult (FA)

2	Version B	Someone gives you the information or advice you need	SR2 - Deference in kinship (-P,+D,+K)	Distant relatives/someone from extended family lines that are rarely seen	Female Adult (FA)
					Male Senior/Retired (MS)
					Female Senior/Retired (FS)
			SR4 - Solidarity in kinship (-P,-D,+K)	Close immediate family (e.g. siblings/close cousins)	Male Young Adult (MYA)
					Male Adult (MA)
					Female Senior/Retired (FS)
			SR6 - Hierarchy in non-kinship (+P,+D,-K) ↑	Superiors/leaders/lecturers/elderly non-relative figures	Male Adult (MA)
					Female Adult (FA)
					Male Senior/Retired (MS)
			SR8 - Hierarchy in kinship (+P,-D,+K) ↑	Close relatives who are older and/or respected (e.g. parents, uncles/aunts)	Female Adult (FA)
					Male Senior/Retired (MS)
					Female Senior/Retired (FS)

As shown in Table 1, Versions A and B jointly cover all eight SR conditions, representing different configurations of P, D, and K status. The scenarios specify interlocutor types (e.g., stranger, close friend, distant relative, superior/leader, older kin) and include interlocutor gender and social-age labels (young adult, adult, senior/retired) as part of the fixed contextual setup. In Table 1, G+SA denotes the interlocutor's gender and social-age category; codes used are MYA/FYA (male/female young adult), MA/FA (male/female adult), and MS/FS (male/female senior/retired).

Data Collection Procedure

Each participant completed one DCT version (A or B) in writing via Google Forms. Responses were compiled and organized by speaker gender and social-relation condition (SR).

Data Analysis

All gratitude expressions were coded using Cheng's (2005) taxonomy of gratitude expressions, which classifies thanking realizations into eight strategy categories: thanking (THX), appreciation (APP), positive feeling (PF), apology (APY), recognition of imposition (ROI), repayment (RPY), other (OTH), and alerters (ALT). Coding results were used to (1) identify strategy types used in each SR condition and (2) compare patterns by speaker gender across the eight social relations. Descriptive frequency counts were used to summarize distributions of strategies across gender and SR conditions.

To complement the descriptive frequency results, selected responses were also presented as illustrative examples of how the coded strategies were linguistically realized across the eight social-relation conditions. These examples were not treated as a separate qualitative analysis, but as representative excerpts supporting the quantitative patterns.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the empirical findings of the study. Results are reported descriptively based on the distribution of gratitude strategy realizations across social-relation (SR) configurations and speaker gender, supported by summary tables and the average number of strategies per response.

Response distribution

A total of 480 non-empty DCT responses were analyzed, produced by Butonese young adult speakers (240 male; 240 female). Each social-relation condition (SR1-SR8) contained 60 responses (30 male; 30 female), ensuring balanced coverage across SR and gender. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of responses across SR conditions by speaker gender.

Table 2. Response distribution across SR by gender

<i>Social-relation (SR)</i>	<i>Male (M)</i>	<i>Female (F)</i>	<i>Total</i>
SR1	30	30	60
SR2	30	30	60
SR3	30	30	60
SR4	30	30	60
SR5	30	30	60
SR6	30	30	60
SR7	30	30	60
SR8	30	30	60
Total	240	240	480

As shown in Table 2, the dataset is evenly balanced across SR conditions and across gender, allowing comparisons of strategy distributions without unequal cell sizes.

Overall strategy frequencies

Across all SR conditions, Thanking (THX) was near-universal, occurring in 479 out of 480 responses (99.8%). Alerters (ALT) were also highly frequent, appearing in 410 responses (85.4%). Other strategies occurred less often: Positive feeling (PF) appeared in 137 responses (28.5%), followed by Other (OTH) in 81 responses (16.9%), Apology (APY) in 43 responses (9.0%), Repayment (RPY) in 25 responses (5.2%), Recognition of imposition (ROI) in 21 responses (4.4%), and Appreciation (APP) in 10 responses (2.1%). Overall, this distribution indicates that Butonese young adults relied primarily on explicit thanking and attention-getting/addressing devices, while affective and supportive moves (e.g., positive feeling, apology, repayment) were used more selectively.

Variation across social-relation configurations (SR)

Although thanking remained consistently high across SR conditions (98.3-100%), other strategies varied more noticeably by social-relation configuration. Alerters showed the widest fluctuation, ranging from 63.3% (SR7: hierarchy in kinship, speaking-down) to 100% (SR6 and SR8: hierarchy speaking-up contexts). In solidarity contexts, alerters were comparatively moderate (75.0% in SR3; 78.3% in SR4), while deference contexts showed very high rates (96.7% in SR1; 98.3% in SR2).

To present these cross-SR patterns more transparently, Table 3 reports strategy frequencies as percentages within each SR (with *N_responses (%)* indicating the SR baseline). Because strategies are coded as presence/absence (0/1) and a single response may contain multiple strategies, percentages across strategy columns are not expected to sum to 100%.

Table 3. Strategy frequencies by SR (percentage within SR)

<i>SR</i>	<i>N-Responses (%)</i>	<i>Thanking (%)</i>	<i>Appreciation (%)</i>	<i>Positive feeling (%)</i>	<i>Apology (%)</i>	<i>Recognition of imposition (%)</i>	<i>Repayment (%)</i>	<i>Other (%)</i>	<i>Alerters (%)</i>
SR1	100%	100%	3.3%	20%	26.7%	0%	13.3%	16.7%	96.7%
SR2	100%	100%	3.3%	36.7%	5%	5%	0%	25%	98.3%
SR3	100%	98.3%	0%	25%	18.3%	6.7%	10%	23.3%	75%
SR4	100%	100%	0%	36.7%	3.3%	8.3%	3.3%	11.7%	78.3%
SR5	100%	100%	6.7%	11.7%	6.7%	5%	8.3%	5%	71.7%
SR6	100%	100%	1.7%	35%	5%	1.7%	0%	33.3%	100%
SR7	100%	100%	0%	31.7%	6.7%	5%	6.7%	6.7%	63.3%
SR8	100%	100%	1.7%	31.7%	0%	3.3%	0%	13.3%	100%

Notes: Percentages are calculated based on the number of non-empty responses within each SR (*N_responses* = 100%). Strategy categories may co-occur in a single response (i.e., they are not mutually exclusive).

Beyond alerters, several strategy categories also displayed SR-specific tendencies. Positive feeling was more prominent in several kinship-oriented and deference/solidarity contexts (e.g., 36.7% in SR2 and SR4), while it was lower in SR5 (11.7%). Apology was highest in SR1 (26.7%) and SR3 (18.3%), and absent in SR8 (0%). Other (OTH) strategies (including wish/blessing expressions, affective exclamations, and response/acceptance markers, as coded in this study) were notably high in SR6 (33.3%), followed by SR2 (25.0%) and SR3 (23.3%).

To provide qualitative support for the descriptive frequency patterns, Table 4 presents selected response excerpts from each social-relation condition. The examples illustrate how dominant or salient strategy combinations were realized linguistically in the participants' responses. The original excerpts are presented with English translations and the corresponding strategy codes.

Table 4. Representative examples of gratitude realizations across SR conditions

SR	Social-relation configuration	Illustrative excerpt and English translation	Main strategy codes	Pattern illustrated
SR1	Deference, non-kinship	<i>Terima kasih banyak Pak, sudah mengembalikan dompet saya. Maaf sekali sudah merepotkan kita Pak.</i> "Thank you very much, Sir, for returning my wallet. I am very sorry for troubling you, Sir."	THX + ALT + APY	Respectful thanks with apology/mitigation.
SR2	Deference, kinship	<i>Terima kasih banyak, Bu. Senang sekali bisa menerima perhatian dari Ibu.</i> "Thank you very much, Ma'am. I am very happy to receive your care and attention."	THX + ALT + PF	Respectful thanks with positive feeling.
SR3	Solidarity, non-kinship	<i>Makasih kau benar-benar teman yang baik.</i> "Thanks, you are really a good friend."	THX + PF	Informal thanks with positive evaluation.
SR4	Solidarity, kinship	<i>Makasih ya, penjelasannya membantu banget. Saya jadi lebih ngerti sekarang.</i> "Thanks, your explanation was very helpful. I understand much better now."	THX + PF	Informal family-based affective gratitude.
SR5	Hierarchy, non-kinship, speaking-down	<i>Makasih banyak ya, btw kalau misalnya butuh atau ada yang mau ditanyakan soal kampus jangan sungkan hubungi saya.</i> "Thanks a lot, by the way, if you need anything or have something to ask about campus, please do not hesitate to contact me."	THX + RPY	Reciprocal thanking through an offer of future assistance.
SR6	Hierarchy, non-kinship, speaking-up	<i>Terima kasih, Pak, atas informasi dan arahannya. Itu sangat membantu saya mengambil keputusan.</i> "Thank you, Sir, for the information and guidance. It really helped me make a decision."	THX + ALT + PF	Deferential thanks to a higher-status non-kin.
SR7	Hierarchy, kinship, speaking-down	<i>Terima kasih ya, sudah menemukan dompetku, untung ada kamu.</i> "Thank you for finding my wallet; luckily, you were there."	THX + PF	Less formal thanks with affective relief.
SR8	Hierarchy, kinship, speaking-up	<i>Terima kasih banyak Om, atas nasihat dan penjelasannya. Saya jadi lebih berfikir luas berkat pengalaman dan pandangan yang kita berikan.</i> "Thank you very much, Uncle, for the advice and explanation. I can think more broadly because of the experience and perspective you shared."	THX + ALT + PF	Respectful kinship-based deferential thanks.

Note. THX = Thanking; PF = Positive Feeling; APY = Apology; RPY = Repayment; ALT = Alerters.

Strategy codes are listed according to their approximate order of occurrence in the excerpts, while repeated occurrences of the same strategy are counted only once. English translations are provided to clarify the pragmatic meaning of the original responses.

As shown in Table 4, the selected excerpts illustrate how the quantitative patterns are realized at the level of actual utterances. Across all SR conditions, explicit thanking appears as the core component of the responses, while additional moves vary according to relational configuration. In deference and hierarchy speaking-up contexts (e.g., SR1, SR2, SR6, and SR8), thanking is commonly combined with respectful address terms such as *Pak*, *Bu*, or *Om*, supporting the high frequency of alerters in these contexts. In contrast, solidarity and kinship speaking-down contexts (e.g., SR3, SR4, and SR7) show more informal and affective realizations, often through expressions of relief or positive feeling, while SR5 illustrates reciprocity through an offer of future assistance. These examples support the descriptive

findings that gratitude among Butonese young adults is anchored in explicit thanking but becomes more elaborate or relationally marked depending on power, distance, and kinship.

Supporting metric: average strategies per response

To describe response elaboration, the analysis also examined the average number of strategies per response within each SR. Across SR1-SR8, the averages ranged from 2.15 to 2.77 strategies per response. The highest averages were observed in SR1 and SR6 (2.77 each) and SR2 (2.73), whereas the lowest averages occurred in SR5 (2.15) and SR7 (2.20). This pattern indicates that some social-relation conditions elicited more multi-strategy realizations than others, even though explicit thanking was consistently present.

Strategy frequencies by gender (overall)

Gender differences were generally modest in overall distributions. Both male and female speakers showed similarly high use of Alerters (85.4% each) and near-universal Thanking (99.6% for males; 100% for females). The most visible difference appeared in Other (OTH) strategies, with females showing higher use (20.8%) than males (12.9%). Males showed higher use of Recognition of imposition (ROI) (7.5%) than females (1.3%), while other categories (PF, APY, RPY, APP) showed relatively small differences. Table 5 presents the overall distribution of strategies by speaker gender.

Table 5. Overall distribution of thanking strategies by speaker gender

<i>Strategy</i>	<i>Male (n)</i>	<i>Female (n)</i>	<i>Total (n)</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Thanking (THX)	239	240	479	99.6%	100.0%	99.8%
Appreciation (APP)	2	8	10	0.8%	3.3%	2.1%
Positive feeling (PF)	73	64	137	30.4%	26.7%	28.5%
Apology (APY)	23	20	43	9.6%	8.3%	9.0%
Recognition of imposition (ROI)	18	3	21	7.5%	1.3%	4.4%
Repayment (RPY)	15	10	25	6.3%	4.2%	5.2%
Other (OTH)	31	50	81	12.9%	20.8%	16.9%
Alerters (ALT)	205	205	410	85.4%	85.4%	85.4%
N Responses (non-empty)	240	240	480	100%	100%	100%

As shown in Table 5, the gender-related contrasts are concentrated primarily in OTH and ROI, while the core realization components (THX and ALT) remain comparably high for both male and female young adult speakers.

This study examined how Butonese young adults realize gratitude strategies across social-relation configurations characterized by power (P), distance (D), and kinship (K), operationalized into eight SR conditions by distinguishing hierarchy speaking-up vs. speaking-down. The results show a robust reliance on two core components—explicit thanking (THX) and alerters (ALT)—across all SR conditions, with additional strategies (PF, APY, ROI, RPY, OTH, APP) varying more markedly by relational configuration.

Near-universal thanking and the role of alerters

First, THX was near-universal across the dataset, indicating that explicit thanking remains the default strategy among Butonese young adults in the elicited scenarios. This aligns with the view of gratitude as a routinized expressive act that is widely practiced but shaped by contextual constraints (Bakırcı & Özbay, 2020; Cheng, 2005; Min, 2019; Searle, 1969; Yusof et al., 2022). The high frequency of ALT suggests that addressing/attention-getting devices are central to Butonese young adults' gratitude realizations, especially when social relations involve deference or asymmetrical status. From a politeness perspective, alerters can function as an interactional resource to manage face needs and relational positioning, including showing respect or aligning appropriately before delivering the core thanking move (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

SR-based patterns and hierarchy directionality

The strongest SR-based variation appears in ALT, which fluctuates substantially across contexts. In hierarchy speaking-up contexts (both non-kinship and kinship), alerters reach ceiling levels. This pattern

is consistent with the expectation that when speakers address higher-status or socially superior interlocutors, they tend to employ more explicit address strategies to mark deference and manage social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Gkouma et al., 2023; Yassi, 2017). Conversely, in hierarchy speaking-down within kinship (SR7), alerters show the lowest rate, suggesting that when speakers are positioned “above” younger close relatives, the interaction permits less formal address marking and more relaxed openings, reflecting the kinship-driven relational frame emphasized in Yassi’s (2017) P, D, and K configuration approach.

Beyond alerters, the distribution of PF and APY across SR conditions suggests that affective and supportive moves become more salient in certain relational configurations. Higher levels of PF in selected kinship-oriented contexts indicate that speakers sometimes strengthen gratitude by adding positive affect (e.g., praise or affective stance) alongside the core thanking move. Notably, PF is also relatively high in SR6 (hierarchy in non-kinship, speaking-up), which can be interpreted as a face-supportive move when addressing an interlocutor with greater power: speakers may add positive affect to enhance deference and attend to the addressee’s positive face in high-status encounters (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Yassi, 2017).

Meanwhile, elevated APY in specific contexts suggests that apology-type moves can co-occur with gratitude to recognize inconvenience or interpersonal trouble, a pattern commonly discussed as part of multi-move thanking realizations (Cheng, 2005). The fact that APY is highest in SR1 may reflect the greater social distance and formality of a deference configuration in non-kinship relations, where “apologetic thanks” functions as a mitigating device. This interpretation is consistent with observations in Chinese(-influenced) pragmatic norms that gratitude expressions may orient to the trouble imposed on the benefactor, making apology-like formulations pragmatically appropriate in some benefaction contexts (Cheng, 2005). In contrast, APY is absent in SR8 (hierarchy in kinship, speaking-up), which resonates with prior findings that gratitude within intimate family relations may be less likely to be verbalized explicitly and may instead be treated as assumed or normatively obligatory within kinship-based solidarity, rather than requiring overt apology or explicit verbal appreciation (Wong, 2010).

Finally, although less frequent overall, RPY appears most in SR1 and SR3 (both non-kinship, symmetrical relations in Yassi’s classification), suggesting that reciprocity-oriented moves are more likely to surface where gratitude is negotiated among non-kin equals; this aligns with the broader view that expressions of gratitude can encode reciprocity and relational maintenance, not merely appreciation (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1993; Gouldner, 1960).

“Other” as culturally grounded discourse moves

The OTH category—treated here as an umbrella for discourse moves beyond Cheng’s core labels—was relatively prominent in some SR conditions. In this dataset, OTH included recurrent items such as wish/blessing expressions, affective exclamations, and response/acceptance markers as coded in the present study. These moves can be interpreted as additional resources for managing interpersonal tone and affiliative stance around the thanking event, complementing the core THX and ALT strategies. Importantly, the presence of such moves supports the view that thanking realizations often take the form of speech-act sets, where several micro-moves jointly construct the overall gratitude event (Cheng, 2005; Garcia, 2016; Schauer & Adolphs, 2006; Wong, 2010).

Average strategies per response as a supporting indicator

The average number of strategies per response provides a supporting indicator of response elaboration across SR conditions. SR contexts with higher averages suggest that certain configurations motivate more multi-strategy realizations—typically combining THX and ALT with one or more supportive moves (e.g., APY, PF, OTH). This complements the SR-based frequency patterns, showing that variation is not only about which strategies occur but also about how densely speakers combine them in a single gratitude event (Cheng, 2005).

Gendered patterns among young adult speakers

Gender differences in overall distributions were modest, particularly for the two most dominant categories (THX and ALT), which were comparably high for male and female speakers. The most salient contrasts appeared in OTH and ROI: female speakers produced OTH more frequently, whereas male speakers showed higher ROI. Rather than implying categorical gendered styles, these differences point to small but observable preferences in how young adult speakers supplement core thanking with additional discourse moves (e.g., stance-taking, markers, or explicit recognition of inconvenience). Such patterns align with

the broader sociopragmatic insight that gender may shape pragmatic choices, but effects are often contextual and gradient rather than uniform across all situations (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Eckert, 1998).

Limitations and Future Work

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on an open-ended written DCT, which enables systematic comparison across controlled scenarios but cannot fully represent the interactional dynamics of naturally occurring talk (e.g., turn-taking, timing, and prosody) (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Labben, 2016; Ogiermann, 2018). Second, SR conditions were distributed across two DCT versions with different favor prompts; future work can rotate or control favor prompts within each SR configuration to test the robustness of the observed SR-based patterns. Third, the present coding uses presence/absence (0/1) strategy labels, which captures distributional tendencies but not repetition, sequencing, or finer degrees of elaboration; subsequent studies may incorporate frequency- and sequence-sensitive coding (Cheng, 2005). Finally, this paper focuses on young adult speakers only; future research can extend the design to additional life-stage speaker groups to examine age-related variation more directly (Eckert, 1998).

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Butonese young adults (male and female) realize gratitude strategies across social-relation configurations defined by power (P), distance (D), and kinship (K), operationalized into eight SR conditions by distinguishing hierarchy speaking-up and speaking-down contexts. The findings show that gratitude realizations are anchored by two highly stable components—explicit thanking (THX) (near-universal) and alerters (ALT) (highly frequent)—while other strategies (PF, APY, ROI, RPY, OTH, APP) display clearer variation across SR conditions. In particular, ALT fluctuates most strongly across relational configurations, reaching ceiling levels in hierarchy speaking-up contexts but dropping markedly in hierarchy speaking-down within kinship. PF appears salient in selected kinship-oriented contexts and is also relatively high in non-kinship hierarchy speaking-up (SR6), indicating that positive affect can serve as an additional supportive layer in gratitude realization. APY peaks in SR1 and is absent in SR8, suggesting sensitivity to relational distance and kinship-based expectations. The supporting metric of average strategies per response (2.15-2.77) further indicates that SR conditions differ not only in which strategies occur but also in how densely speakers combine them within a single gratitude event. Overall gender differences are modest; however, contrasts are most visible in OTH (higher among females) and ROI (higher among males), pointing to small but observable preferences in how young adults supplement core thanking with additional discourse moves across P, D, and K configurations.

Based on the present findings, several directions are recommended:

1. Strengthen empirical grounding through triangulation. Future research should complement open-ended DCT data with naturally occurring interactions and/or follow-up interviews to capture sequential organization, interactional dynamics, and participants' emic rationales for strategy choice.
2. Refine the analytic resolution of gratitude events. Subsequent studies can extend beyond presence/absence coding by incorporating sequence-sensitive analysis (e.g., ordering of moves) and more detailed treatment of multi-move realizations (including responses-to-thanks), allowing a fuller account of how gratitude events are constructed in context.

Improve generalizability through design expansion. Future work may rotate favor prompts within SR configurations and broaden speaker groups beyond young adults (e.g., other social-age groups). For journal-length publications, the OTH umbrella category can be systematically elaborated into subtypes to clarify culturally grounded discourse moves in Butonese gratitude realizations.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Complete Name	Institution	Education	Research Interests
Nur Melansari	Universitas Hasanuddin, Universitas Dayanu Ikhsanuddin	Possess Master Degree of English Language Studies (S2), and Currently as Student of Doctoral Program in Linguistics in Universitas Hasanuddin (S3)	Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, English Language Studies
Abdul Hakim Yassi	Universitas Hasanuddin	Possess Doctoral Degree (S3), and Professor in Linguistics and English Language Studies, Universitas Hasanuddin	Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Applied Linguistics, English Language Studies
Harlinah Sahib	Universitas Hasanuddin	Possess Doctoral Degree (S3), and Professor in Linguistics and English Language Studies, Universitas Hasanuddin	Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Anthropological Linguistics, English Language Studies