

How to Say "Thanks" in English

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Abstract: *Thanks* is a very common expression in English. However, many English learners do not often use it. Very often, English teachers only teach their students how to pronounce the expression with some samples of situation. They do not explain why and when the native speakers of English say *thanks*. This article presents the usage and use of the expression, which is much related to the English culture. The discussion includes implications to TEFL.

Key words: thanking, English

In English speaking countries, such as England, the U.S., Australia, and New Zealand, the expressions *thanks*, *thank you*, *thanks a lot*, *thank you very much* or other equivalent expressions, such as *ta* (in Australia), or the slang *thanx* (in informal writing) and *tq* (as often used in a short message service), are very often and commonly used in daily communication. The following are some examples of the use of *thanks* or its equivalent by the native speakers of English in their daily communication, as observed by the writer.

- In answering a greeting a native speaker of English always adds an expression of thanks, such as in the following:
 - A. Hi, how are you?
 - B. Fine, *thanks*.
- When a passenger receives a ticket from the bus conductor, when he/she gets off the bus, or even when the bus stops for him/her, the passenger says *Thank you* to the driver or conductor.
- When someone helps to open the door for or gives way to a native

speaker of English, he/she usually says: *Thank you*.

- Even when refusing an offer, such as in the following case, a thanking expression is also added.
 - A. Do you want some more drink?
 - B. No, *thank you*.

In Indonesia, the expression *terimakasih*, which is the equivalent to *thank you*, is not often heard. For the examples of situations mentioned above, when they occur in Indonesia, Indonesians rarely say *terimakasih*. The following are some cases in daily interactions as experienced or observed by the writer where most Indonesians did not say thanks.

- When the writer was entering the door of a bank, he saw someone wanting to come out of the bank, so the writer held the door for him, but he did not say anything.
- In a lift of a hotel, the writer asked a lady who entered after him the level she wanted, and the writer pushed the button for her, but she just kept silent.
- In an office visited by the writer, an officer dropped a pencil from his table accidentally, and the writer helped pick up the pencil, but he did not thank the writer.
- The writer observed passengers getting off the bus at the bus terminal, but none of them thanked the driver or the conductor.

These are some examples in which the native speakers of English would say *thanks*, but Indonesians seldom did. However, it does not mean that Indonesians never say *terimakasih* (thanks). In some cases, such as when a stranger asked a *becak* driver about a certain address around the area, he thanked the *becak* driver after he got the information or direction. Or, when someone gets a present from someone else, the receiver will thank the giver. However, thanking in Indonesia is not as frequent as that in English speaking countries. This is due to culture differences.

In addition to his experience, the writer's observations in English classes at some elementary, junior high, and senior high schools, none of the teachers taught their students in what situations the students should say *thanks*. Many English textbooks which are used for the elementary up to the senior high school students give examples of conversations or dialogues which include the use of thanking; however, there is no further ex-

planation of when and how to use it. Therefore, it is no wonder that the elementary up to the senior high school students who have been learning English, or even the English department students, are not aware of this and so do not frequently use *thanks* or *thank you* in their communication with others. This is something lacking in the teaching of English in Indonesia. Thanking in English is very important to show our gratitude or politeness toward others. In a situation where we should say *thanks* but do not, we are considered impolite.

USE OF THANKS

The expression of thanks or its equivalents is not merely a matter of how to pronounce the expression correctly. It is part of the English culture. The following are situations, as observed by the writer, collected from samples of conversation, or predicted by the writer as events that would be encountered by the native speakers of English where they would say *thanks*, *thank you*, or any of their equivalents.

First, when someone gets (physical) help from someone else, for instance, when a person helps us pick up something we dropped, carries our things, lends us a pencil, makes a cup of tea/coffee for us, shows us how to operate a program in a computer, helps find books in a library, etc. we should thank him/her. For example:

A. Excuse me. This is your pen. You dropped it.

B. Oh, thank you very much.

In such a situation, Indonesians may not thank the helper.

Second, after someone receives a service from someone else. For example, when we pay for electricity bill, telephone bill, water bill, the bill at the restaurant, the bill for the purchase at a supermarket, etc., or when we check out books from a library, get a letter from the postman, get an answer to our question, etc., when the service is done we should say thanks. In these situations, Indonesians usually did not do it.

Third, when someone receives a gift from someone else in his/her birthday, when he receives a souvenir from a friend, or when he gets an applause from audience after a performance or presentation, he/she will say thanks. For example:

A. I got something for you (giving a souvenir).

B. Oh, thank you. It's beautiful.

Moderator : Let's give an applause for his presentation.

Audience : (clapping hands)

Presenter : Thank you

In this case, most Indonesians usually express some kind of thanks.

Fourth, when someone receives something from someone else. For instance, a student who hands in a paper to his/her teacher, or a guest receives food/meal he/she ordered in a café/restaurant, the teacher or the guest (respectively) usually says thanks. However, the teachers in class or the guests in a café/restaurant in Indonesia do not usually say thanks.

Fifth, when someone receives a compliment or congratulations from someone else, he/she will say thanks, for example:

A. Your English is much better now.

B. Oh, thanks.

In this situation, Indonesians usually do not say thanks. Instead, they may respond to the compliment in a modest or humble way by saying: *Ah, nggak* (Oh, no) or *O, ya?* (Is it true?). This kind of response might be typical of Asian people. The following is an illustration as quoted from Levine, Baxter, and McNulty (1987:17), where an English teacher (Jonathan) in the United States speaks to one of his foreign students (Anh) after the class.

Jonathan : Anh, your English is improving. I am pleased with your work.

Anh : (looking down) Oh, no. My English is not very good.

Jonathan : Why do say that Anh? You're doing very well in class.

Anh : No, I am not a good student.

In this illustration, Anh denies the compliment because that is the way to respond to a compliment in her culture. In the English culture, the expected interaction may run (Levine, Baxter, and McNulty, 1987:18) as follows.

Jonathan : Anh, your English is improving. I am pleased with your work.

Anh : (making eye contact) Thank you. I have learned a lot in this course.

Jonathan : You're doing very well and I can see your progress in class.

Anh : I enjoy studying English. I do homework every night.

Jonathan : I can see that. Keep up the good work.

Anh : I'll try. You are a good teacher. You have helped me a lot.

Sixth, when someone pays personal attention to someone else, such as in greeting or others. For instance:

A. How's your family now?

B. They are fine, thanks.

In Indonesian, the response to a greeting is not usually added with thanks, for instance:

A. *Hai, apa kabar?* (Hi, how are you?)

B. *Baik* (Fine).

Seventh, when someone wants to stop something being done, or something has been enough, he/she may use thanks. For example, when a teacher wants to stop the reading aloud done in turns by students (as asked by the teacher), he/she will say: *Thank you. Next, please.* In Indonesia an English teacher usually says: *Stop/enough/yes. Next, please*, which is a translation from Indonesian expressions.

Eighth, in accepting or refusing an offer, someone will say *thanks* preceded by a *yes* or *no*, for instance:

Host : Would you like some drink?

Guest : Yes, thanks/please (or, No, thank you).

For this example in the Indonesian context, the guest will usually just say *thanks* without an addition of *yes* or *no*. The host usually knows whether it means acceptance or refusal from the gestures or facial expression of the guest. Even, sometimes the guest will say: *Jangan repot-repot* (= Don't bother), which can be interpreted as refusal in English, but still a kind of acceptance in Indonesian culture.

The examples listed above are by no means exhaustive. We can include many more in the list. However, it is hoped that readers will get some perception on the situations where native speakers of English will say thanks. From the above description, we can also conclude that in many situations Indonesians do not say thanks, compared with the native speakers of English.

In addition to responding with *thanks*, in communicating with others we are also encouraged to practice or use situations in which others will

thank us. This is also important because otherwise we may be considered as inattentive, impolite, or ill-mannered (as in the cases of numbers first, fifth, sixth, and eighth, namely, we are willing to help others, give compliments when necessary, pay personal attention to friends, and give an offer if necessary, respectively).

USAGE

After discussing the use of thanks, we also need to know how to say *thanks* accurately. The word *thank* is usually used as a verb, and *thanks* is a plural noun. Swan (1983) explains that as a verb it is used with a direct object, for example, *Thank you* or *Thank God*. The expression *thanks* cannot be used with a direct object; therefore, the expression **Thanks God*, for instance, is an incorrect usage. In written form, the spelling *thank's* (with an apostrophe) is very often used by beginners in English. It is surely incorrect. *Thanks* can be followed by expressions such as *a lot*, *very much*, or *so much*, and is usually used in informal situations, e.g. *Thanks a lot*, *Thanks* (or also *Thank you*) *very much*, *Thanks so much for coming*. Both *Thank you* and *Thanks* can be followed by *for V-ing*, e.g. *Thank you for helping me*, or *Thanks for lending me the book*, etc.

The expressions *Thank you* or *Thanks* are usually answered by *Not at all* (formal), *It's a pleasure* or *It's my pleasure* (formal), *That's all right* (informal), *No problem* or *No worries* (Australian, informal), *You're welcome* (American), or *Don't mention it*.

A. Thank you for helping me with my computer.

B. No problem.

For small things, English people usually do not answer the thanks. Compare the two examples below.

A. Thanks so much for looking after the children.

B. That's all right.

X. Here's your coat.

Y. Thanks.

X. (no answer)

In Indonesian culture, people may respond to thanks by saying *ya* (yes) or *sama-sama* (the same). Indeed, the expressions *yes* or *the same* (as the translation from Indonesian expressions) cannot be used in English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Different nations surely have different cultures. Indonesian culture does not seem to use thanks as frequently as the native speakers of English do. However, since we learn English as a means for communication, we need to know and adopt the use of saying thanks. Not only when we speak English that we practice thanking, but also when we encounter the situations such as discussed above, we need to say thanks or *terimakasih* even when we speak Indonesian. In the writer's opinion, English people have better habits of the use of thanks. There is nothing bad adopting good habits from other cultures, such as English culture.

At school, an English teacher is recommended to teach his/her students not only the pronunciation or the usage of thanking but also the use of it. This can be done by first assuming the teacher as a model for the practice of thanking. A teacher is suggested that he/she always use thanking expression whenever there is an appropriate situation. Some classroom situations where a teacher can practice or where he or she becomes a model for expressing thanks are as follows: (a) after a student erases the board for the teacher, (b) when students submit their work, assignment, or test paper, (c) in response to a greeting, (d) after students finish doing a presentation, (e) when students help with the use of media (fixing OHP, putting on a chart, rearranging seats, etc.), (f) when a student finishes writing his or her answer on the board, (g) after a student finishes reading aloud which is asked by the teacher, (h) after a student helps open or close the door/window for the teacher. Outside the classroom, the teacher is also expected to practice thanking when he or she encounters situations as mentioned in the use of thanks discussed above.

Then, the teacher is suggested to train his or her students to also use the expression with guidance by the teacher. Whenever a student misses saying *thanks*, the teacher should remind him/her. In addition, a teacher should explain to his or her students the use of thanking expressions such as discussed above, since it is part of the English culture which needs to be learned by students. And lastly, it is suggested that the textbook writers add in their books notes about the English culture, such as the use of thanks or others, whenever necessary. In this way, we not only learn English accurately but also appropriately.

REFERENCES

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