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A sociolinguistic analysis of gratitude expressions in Tshivenda

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Abstract: This article presents a sociolinguistic analysis of gratitude expressions in Tshivenda, focusing on two gift-giving scenarios: a birthday gift exchange between friends; and a gift given to a sibling on the completion of their studies. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, this research investigates how Tshivenda speakers manage positive and negative face in these culturally significant interactions. Through a qualitative approach, data were collected from 20 Tshivenda speakers via semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The findings reveal that gratitude expressions in Tshivenda are heavily influenced by cultural norms, social expectations and the nature of the giver-receiver relationship. Themes such as politeness strategies, the negotiation of face and the interplay of gender and age emerge as key factors shaping these expressions. The article contributes to cross-cultural communication research by enhancing the understanding of how gratitude is conveyed within the Tshivenda-speaking community and by exploring the broader implications for politeness theory in verbal behaviour related to gift-giving.

Introduction

Expressing gratitude is a critical language function that holds significant social value across all languages, including Tshivenda. It serves not only as a reflection of appreciation, but also as a mechanism for fostering and maintaining social relationships. The expression of gratitude is influenced by the relationship dynamics between the giver and the receiver, and it is frequently utilised across various interpersonal interactions, such as between intimates, friends, strangers, superiors and subordinates (Eisenstein and Bodman 1986). When properly employed, the expression of gratitude can generate feelings of warmth, solidarity and reciprocity (Floyd et al. 2021). Conversely, inappropriate expressions can lead to negative social consequences, including damaged relationships between the speaker and listener (Wood et al. 2019).

The Vhavenda people are a part of the larger Bantu-speaking communities of southern Africa and are primarily located in Limpopo province, South Africa. They speak Tshivenda, a Bantu language with strong cultural and historical significance. Historical records indicate that the Vhavenda migrated from Central and East Africa, likely settling in the Limpopo region around the 9th century. Their society was shaped by contact with neighbouring city-state civilisations, such as Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, which influenced their culture, trade and social structures (Rafudeen and Phaahla 2021).

The Vhavenda traditionally organised into clans and chiefdoms, each led by a 'Khosi' or chief, creating a society that emphasised communal leadership and respect for elders. Their economy was largely based on cattle farming and cultivating crops like maize and sorghum, with skills in metalwork and pottery being common. Many Vhavenda communities settled in the fertile, mountainous regions near the Soutpansberg Mountains, where dense forests and rivers have helped maintain their cultural practices and language over generations (Ramovha 2022).

This article sought to explore whether Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory can be applied to another type of verbal behaviour: expressing gratitude. Specifically, this research focuses on expressions of gratitude following an action, where the receiver of a benefit expresses gratitude to the giver. Gratitude expressions are diverse, and are influenced not only by the relationship between the individuals, but also by the nature of the giver's action. It is anticipated that the greater the imposition on the giver, the more polite the expression of gratitude will be (Liao and Wang 2022).

This article analysed situations in which gratitude is expressed in response to receiving something. Tshivenda gratitude expressions were analysed through a sociolinguistic lens by having participants between 17 and 40 years old attend semi-structured interviews and answer a questionnaire addressing various gratitude scenarios. This analysis contributes to a better understanding of the predictability and cultural specificity of gratitude expressions in Tshivenda, enhancing cross-cultural communication research (Cheng 2020).

Speech acts, which refer to utterances that perform an action, are integral to this article's focus on gratitude (Austin 1962). The article looked at how people in Tshivenda say 'thank you', with a focus on how they try to make others feel good and appreciated during these conversations. The article was guided by the following research questions:

- How do Tshivenda speakers use politeness strategies in expressing gratitude during gift-giving, particularly between friends and family?;
- What role do cultural norms and social expectations play in shaping gratitude expressions among Tshivenda speakers in gift-giving?; and
- How do factors like gender, age and the giver-receiver relationships affect politeness and face negotiation in Tshivenda gratitude expressions?

Expressions of gratitude in situations where a gift is given

When someone gives a gift, expressing gratitude is crucial for reinforcing the relationship between the giver and the receiver. Saying 'thank you' and showing appreciation are not just polite gestures, they serve to acknowledge the giver's thoughtfulness and effort, reflecting the closeness of the relationship. How gratitude is expressed can vary significantly depending on cultural norms and expectations (Holmes 2020).

In some cultures, verbal expressions of thanks might be accompanied by non-verbal cues such as smiles, handshakes, or hugs. These actions can communicate warmth and sincerity, enhancing the emotional impact of the gratitude expressed. In Western cultures, people usually show gratitude by saying phrases like 'thank you', which highlights individual recognition and personal freedom (Haugh 2021). In Japanese culture, however, there is a focus on social hierarchy and indirect ways of communicating. Gratitude is expressed through respectful language and non-verbal cues, like bowing, to show respect and maintain harmony in social interactions (Kawamura 2020).

In Kenya, expressions of gratitude are closely linked to communal values and rituals. This reflects a deep respect for elders and the significance of social contexts (Ogot 2019). In Nigeria, gratitude is often expressed through proverbs, which help to affirm cultural identity and strengthen community bonds (Ogunbiyi 2021).

In the Eastern Cape province in South Africa, Xhosa culture emphasises community, with gratitude expressed during traditional ceremonies and through idiomatic sayings (Mkhize 2020). In KwaZulu-Natal province in South Africa, cultural practices and rich metaphors are used to convey gratitude, highlighting respect for elders and the community (Mthembu 2021). In Limpopo province in South Africa, Tshivenda culture explores gratitude through communal interactions, rituals and specific Tshivenda terms that capture appreciation (Mulaudzi 2022). By examining gratitude expressions in these different cultures, we gain a better understanding of how sociolinguistic frameworks shape communication practices in the Tshivenda-speaking community.

These approaches align with politeness strategies that aim to balance social dynamics and prevent the giver from feeling that their generosity has imposed undue pressure. By minimising the perceived value of the gift, the receiver helps maintain the giver's positive face, showing appreciation without creating discomfort or a sense of obligation (Mills 2021).

This balancing act of expressing gratitude while managing social expectations helps ensure that the interaction remains positive for both parties. It reinforces mutual respect and strengthens the relationship, making both individuals feel good about the exchange. The act of thanking not only acknowledges the giver's kindness, but also contributes to maintaining harmonious social interactions and reinforcing the bond between the individuals involved (Tannen 2019).

Expressions of gratitude in gift-giving situations are a fundamental part of social interactions. They are essential for showing respect, preserving relationships and ensuring that both the giver and receiver feel valued and appreciated.

Lakoff (1975) explained that being polite can sometimes clash with the usual rules of conversation, which focus on clarity. She believes that politeness developed in societies to help reduce friction in personal interactions. According to Lakoff, people often prioritise politeness over being direct, using strategies like softening their words or tone to avoid causing discomfort, even if it means being less clear. This shows that politeness can be more important than saying something directly when the goal is to keep things smooth between people.

Leech (1983) added to this idea by introducing the politeness principle, which goes beyond the rules of effective communication to include the social side of conversations. He came up with six rules – tact, generosity, approbation (praise), modesty, agreement and sympathy – that guide people in balancing the need to be polite with the need to be clear. These rules explain why people sometimes do not follow the usual communication rules. Instead, they focus on being polite, keeping things tactful, or showing sympathy to maintain good relationships.

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced the idea of 'face', which refers to a person's self-image during interactions. They explain that there are two types of face: positive face, which is the desire to be liked and appreciated; and negative face, which is the wish to act freely without being imposed on. Brown and Levinson say that people are always trying to protect both their own face and the face of others. This leads to a balancing act during communication, especially when certain actions or words might threaten someone's face – these are called face-threatening acts (FTAs). To handle these situations, people might avoid the threatening act altogether, be indirect to lessen the threat, or directly address the issue while using strategies to reduce the impact.

Politeness theory is about protecting both self-image and the other person's self-image during communication. It involves using various strategies to avoid threats to face and ensure that communication remains respectful and effective. Politeness is not just about being nice, but about maintaining social bonds and preventing conflict. It requires careful attention to how words, actions and gestures can affect interactions, helping to keep communication positive and harmonious.

Theoretical framework

To better understand how Tshivenda speakers express gratitude, this article uses Brown and Levinson's politeness theory which helps explain the ways people use language to manage social interactions, especially during gift-giving, where saying 'thank you' is important. By looking at how people balance their need to be polite and respected, this theory gives us a clearer view of the cultural and social rules that guide communication in Tshivenda.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, as explained by Trosborg (1995), examines how people use words, gestures and tone of voice to communicate smoothly and avoid social tension. It highlights that communication is not just about sharing information, but also about managing relationships and making sure interactions go well. Politeness helps reduce conflict, keeps relationships strong, and maintains harmony between people. Central to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is the concept of face, which refers to an individual's sense of reputation or self-worth. Politeness strategies are used to maintain or enhance face, particularly through positive and negative face strategies. Positive face reflects a desire for approval and belonging, which is crucial in expressing gratitude in ways that strengthen social bonds (Kádár and Haugh 2019). Politeness theory is about protecting both self-image and the other person's self-image during communication (Brown and Levinson 1987).

Politeness theory helps explain how people manage their self-image, or 'face', during communication, particularly in gratitude expressions after gift-giving in Tshivenda culture. In these situations, both positive and negative face concerns come into play. The person giving the gift wants to feel appreciated (positive face), while the person receiving the gift does not want to feel like they are imposing or taking too much (negative face) (Mills 2020).

When expressing gratitude, the receiver might use positive politeness strategies, like compliments or indirect language, to show appreciation and strengthen the social relationship without diminishing their own self-respect. At the same time, negative politeness strategies can be

used to ensure the giver does not feel like their personal space or freedom is being encroached upon (Tsakona and Sifianou 2019). For example, the recipient might downplay the importance of the gift, or emphasise how unworthy they feel of it, which helps maintain a respectful balance between both parties.

Politeness theory helps researchers understand how cultural norms and the closeness of the relationship influence the way people express thanks in Tshivenda, particularly in gift-giving scenarios. This approach highlights how individuals carefully navigate social risks while reinforcing positive relationships through their words and actions.

Methodology

This article employed a qualitative method to analyse gratitude expressions in Tshivenda, focusing on two specific gift-giving scenarios: a birthday gift between friends; and a gift on the completion of studies between siblings. The primary aim of this article was to investigate how gratitude is expressed in these contexts, applying Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as the framework for understanding the interplay of positive and negative face concerns in these interactions.

The research design used in this article was qualitative in nature, involving data collected through semi-structured interviews and a written questionnaire. The study is descriptive, seeking to explore the nature of gratitude expressions in real-life situations. The focus is on the language choices, politeness strategies and sociocultural nuances that inform how gratitude is expressed in Tshivenda.

In Tshivenda culture, saying thank you is an important part of social norms and values. Gratitude is expressed in different ways, such as verbally saying *Ndo livhuwa* ('I thank you'), or through non-verbal actions like giving gifts or helping others. These acts of gratitude are not just individual, but involve the whole community and extended family. Showing gratitude often includes polite strategies that focus on making others feel appreciated and respected. During special events, like weddings or traditional ceremonies (*mutshato*), it is common to express thanks to elders and ancestors. This practice reflects the Vhavenda belief in respecting age and ancestry. These expressions of gratitude help strengthen social ties and support cultural values (Mavhungu 2021).

In the Vhembe District Municipality of Limpopo province, Tshivenda speakers constitute the majority of the population, accounting for approximately 67.3%. The district has a total population of about 1.27 million, with black Africans making up 98.3% of residents. Smaller racial groups include white, Indian/Asian and coloured populations, each with a minor presence. Vhembe remains culturally significant for the Venda community, with municipalities like Thulamela and Makhado sustaining key Tshivenda-speaking communities and cultural practices (Vhembe District Municipality 2021; StatsSA 2022).

Two specific gift-giving scenarios were presented to the participants to elicit natural expressions of gratitude:

- **A gift on the birthday of your friend**

Khonani yaṅu Tshilidzi o ni ramba kha u takalela ḁuvha ḁawe ḁa mabebo. Inwi no mu ḁela na tshifhiwa tshe na mu rengela.

Kulivhutshela: Nga murahu ha mus i khonani yaṅu Tshilidzi o ṽanganedza tshifhiwa, o ni livhuwa nga u ri:

'Your friend Tshilidzi invited you to her birthday party, which she was celebrating. You bought a gift for her to mark the occasion.

After your friend Tshilidzi received this gift, she thanks you by saying:.....'

• A gift on completion of studies

Murathu waṅu o phasa murele sekondari/yunivesithi. Hezwi ndi zwiḥulwane vhukuma khae nga uri ndi gundo khae. Inwi no mu ḍisela tshifhiwa nga uri o shuma zwavhuḍi.

Kulivhutshela: Nga murahu ha musi murathu waṅu o tḡangedza tshifhiwa itsho, o ni livhuwa a ri:.....

‘Your sibling graduated from university, and it is a big achievement for him, and you bought him a gift. After receiving the gift, he thanked you by saying.....’

The study involves 20 Tshivenda-speaking participants of between 21 and 40 years old, and who were selected through purposive sampling. The article concentrated on participants from the Vhembe District in Limpopo province, particularly within the Thulamela Local Municipality, which has a significant Tshivenda-speaking population. This area was selected for its cultural importance and the traditional practices that shape gratitude expressions among its members.

Participants were chosen using purposive sampling to ensure diverse perspectives were represented. This method targeted individuals fluent in Tshivenda and familiar with the cultural aspects of gratitude. The sampling considered factors such as age, gender and socio-economic status to capture a wide range of experiences.

Selecting participants from Thulamela was beneficial because of the community’s strong connection to Tshivenda cultural practices, providing valuable insights into local gratitude expressions. The dynamic social environment in this area made it an ideal setting for examining the relationships between language, culture and social interactions. The article aimed to enhance understanding of gratitude expressions within a sociolinguistic framework, emphasising the role of the cultural context in communication practices.

To clarify the selection strategy for identifying participants in an article on gratitude expressions in Tshivenda, a systematic approach was followed:

- Participant identification: The process began by contacting community members and local leaders familiar with cultural practices, particularly those involving gift-giving. This engagement helped identify common scenarios where gratitude is expressed, such as during birthdays or educational celebrations;
- Community engagement: I attended local events and gatherings, like birthday parties or graduation ceremonies, to observe these cultural practices in action. This allowed for first-hand observation of gratitude expressions and helped in identifying potential participants;
- Criteria for selection: Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in gift-giving situations. For instance, the study focused on friends exchanging birthday gifts, or siblings celebrating academic achievements, ensuring that participants had relevant experiences related to the study;
- Consent and willingness: Gaining participants’ consent was crucial. I ensured that the participants were comfortable sharing their experiences by fostering trust and openness in discussing personal and cultural expressions of gratitude; and
- Diverse representation: To capture a comprehensive picture of gratitude expressions, it was important to include a diverse group of participants. This diversity encompassed various age groups, genders and social backgrounds within the Vhavenda community to provide a more nuanced understanding of the subject.

Data were collected using a combination of written questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was designed to elicit direct responses to the gift-giving scenarios, asking participants to describe how they would thank the giver of the gift in each situation. The questionnaire also included follow-up questions to probe the reasons behind their chosen expressions of gratitude and to explore their perceptions of politeness and face in these interactions. These interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of the cultural and contextual factors influencing their gratitude expressions. The interviews were conducted in Tshivenda and were recorded with the participants’ consent.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that allows for the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns (themes) within data (Braun and Clarke 2021). The process involved several stages:

- Familiarisation with data: I transcribed and reviewed all the interview recordings and questionnaire responses to become familiar with the content. Initial thoughts and reflections were noted during this process;
- Coding: I systematically coded the data by identifying key expressions, words and phrases related to gratitude, politeness strategies and face concerns. Both positive and negative politeness strategies were coded separately;
- Generating themes: After coding, I grouped the codes into broader themes that captured the essence of the data. The primary themes that emerged were: (1) politeness strategies in gratitude expressions; (2) cultural norms and expectations; (3) managing positive and negative face; and (4) gender and age influences on gratitude;
- Reviewing and refining themes: I reviewed the identified themes to ensure that they accurately represented the data, and refined them to ensure coherence and relevance to the research questions. This process included the creation of sub-themes where necessary; and
- Interpretation: The final stage involved interpreting the themes in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework. The analysis focused on how Tshivenda speakers manage face during gift-giving scenarios, and how cultural norms and politeness strategies inform their gratitude expressions.

By applying this analytical approach, the study aimed to contribute to the broader understanding of how gratitude is expressed in Tshivenda and how it reflects the interplay of cultural norms, politeness strategies and interpersonal relationships.

Gift-giving scenarios

Situation 1: A gift on the birthday of a friend (see Table 1)

In this situation, a gratitude function with the highest frequency is the expression of appreciation in receiving a gift on the birthday of a friend (13/40 = 30.9%). The reason for this high frequency has to do with awareness and enjoyment of the unexpected gift received from a friend. Appreciation may be expressed as follows in Tshivenda: *Ndi zwi hulwane* ('this is great'), *a thi nga do zwi hangwa* ('I will never forget this'), *zwi sumba u thogomela* ('this shows you really care'), *no nthakha* ('you help me a lot'), *nga ri farene nga urali* ('let us keep it like this'), or *ni di rali misi yothe* ('do like this all the time').

The gratitude function with the second highest frequency is the expression of thanking (8/42 = 19%). This function relates to the gratefulness of a friend after receiving a birthday gift from a friend. Such thanks in this sub-situation are expressed in Tshivenda by expressions such as the following: *Ndi a livhuwa* ('thank you'), *ndi khou ni livhuwa* ('I thank you'), and *ndo livhuwa nga maanga* ('thank you very much').

The gratitude function with the third highest frequency in this situation is the expression of pleasure (6/42 = 14.2%). The reason for this frequency has to do with the personal feeling of happiness of friend after receiving a gift. In Tshivenda, such pleasure may be expressed as follows: *Hetshi ndi tshifhiwa tshihulwane* ('this is a great gift'), *ndo takala vhukuma* ('I am very happy'), *ndi zwavhugi* ('this is nice'), and *zwi ita uri ndi pfe ndo takala* ('this makes me very happy').

The gratitude function with the fourth highest frequency is the expression of surprise (4/42 = 9.5%). The reason for this frequency is that the friend never expected to receive such a wonderful gift on their birthday. The surprise is expressed in Tshivenda by expressions such as the following: *No mmangadza vhukuma* ('It is really a surprise'), *ndo vha ndi songo zwi lavhelela* ('I did not expect this'), *Ee, zwo naka hani* ('Oh, it is good indeed'), and *ndo vha ndi songo zwi humbula* ('I did not think of this').

The gratitude function with the fifth highest frequency in this sub-situation is the expression of indebtedness (3/42 = 7.1%). After receiving a gift from a friend, one feels indebted to them. They owe gratitude to a friend after receiving a gift. Such indebtedness may be expressed as follows in Tshivenda: *Ndo fhelelwa nga maipfi* ('I am lost for words'), *a thi divhi uri ndi ri mini* ('I do not know what to say'), and *zwi amba zwi hulwane vhukuma* ('It means a lot').

TABLE 1

Table 1 Questionnaire	Thanks	Appreciation	Liking	Surprise	Generosity	Pleasure	Indebtedness	Relief	Desire	Caring	Enthusiasm	Reciprocation	Reason	Reassurance	Compliment			Total
															Person	Object	Action	
No.1		1													1			2
No.2		1				1												2
No.3						1												1
No.4				1			1											2
No.5	1			1												1		3
No.6		1				1												2
No.7	1			1														2
No.8															2			2
No.9	1					1												2
No.10	1											1						2
No.11		2														1		3
No.12		1																1
No.13	1	2																3
No.14			1			1	1											3
No.15		1				1										1		3
No.16		1																1
No.17	1	1																2
No.18	1	1		1														3
No.19	1						1											2
No.20		1																1
Total	8	13	1	4	-	6	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	3	3	-	42

Situation 2: A gift on completion of studies (see Table 2)

In this situation, of all the gratitude functions, there are two gratitude functions with the highest frequency. They are the expressions of appreciation and pleasure (10/38 = 26.3%). The reason in the expression of pleasure has to do with the personal feeling of happiness of the student in receiving a gift from a sibling after passing a grade in secondary school/university with flying colours.

In Tshivenda, pleasure may be expressed as follows: *Zwi a ntutuwedza* ('this encourages me'), *zwi mpha mafulufulu* ('this give me more courage'), *ndo takadzwa nga tshifhiwa* ('I am glad for the gift'), *zwo naka hani* ('this is very nice'), *ndi thuthuwedzo* ('this is a motivation'), *zwi khou ntakadza* ('it makes me happy'), *ndi zwavhudi* ('that is beautiful'), and *ndi gundo* ('this is a victory').

The reason for another gratitude function with a high frequency (appreciation) relates to the awareness and enjoyment in receiving a gift from a sibling after completing one's studies. The expression of appreciation in Tshivenda can be expressed as follows: *Ndi zwa maimo* ('this is great'), *ndi zwa nthu* ('this is excellent'), *ndi zwavhudi* ('it is good'), *ndi zwiwulwane* ('this is great'), *zwi mpha mafulufulu* ('this motivates me'), and *zwi a ntutuwedza* ('it encourages me').

The gratitude function with a high frequency is the expression of thanking (8/38 = 21%). This function relates to the gratefulness of the student in receiving the gift from their sibling. Such thanks are expressed in Tshivenda by expressions such as: *Ndi khou livhuwa* ('thank you'), *ndi khou livhuwa nga maang'a* ('thanks a lot'), and *ndi khou livhuwa nga mbilu yanga yothu* ('thank you from the depths of my heart').

The gratitude functions with a much lower frequency are reassurance (4/38 = 10.5%) and surprise (1/38 = 2.6%). In reassurance, the sibling promises to keep on working hard. Reassurance in Tshivenda may be expressed as follows: *Ndi do vhalesa* ('I will study very hard'), *ndi do shuma ngaurali misi yothe* ('I will keep on working like this all the time'), *ndi do fhirisa izwi tshifhinga tshidaho* ('I will work harder than this next time'), and *a thi nga do vha shonisa* ('I will never disappoint you'). On the other hand, surprise has to do with personal feelings after receiving an unexpected gift from a sibling. Surprise in Tshivenda may be expressed as: *Ndo vha ndi songo zwi lavhelela* ('I did not expect it like this'), and *ndo vha ndi songo zwi humbula* ('It was unexpected').

In examining the expressions of gratitude in two different gift-giving scenarios, this article highlights how Tshivenda speakers convey appreciation based on the context of the gift. When a friend receives a birthday gift, her gratitude is expressed in a way that emphasises personal appreciation and celebration of the occasion. Similarly, when a sibling completes their studies and receives a gift, the expression of thanks reflects a sense of achievement and encouragement. These scenarios illustrate how gratitude is tailored to fit the nature of the relationship and the significance of the gift, revealing the nuanced ways Tshivenda speakers manage social interactions through their expressions of thanks.

TABLE 2

Table 2 Questionnaire	Thanks	Appreciation	Liking	Surprise	Generosity	Pleasure	Indebtedness	Relief	Desire	Caring	Enthusiasm	Reciprocation	Reason	Reassurance	Compliment			Total
															Person	Object	Action	
No.1		1				1												2
No.2	1	1																2
No.3	1													1				2
No.4														1				2
No.5		1				1								1				3
No.6		1				1												2
No.7	1	1													1			3
No.8		1																1
No.9		1				1												2
No.10	1					1												2
No.11	1																	1
No.12	1	1																2
No.13																	1	1
No.14	1	1				1												3
No.15	1					1												2
No.16				1														1
No.17														1				1
No.18						2				1								3
No.19		1																1
No.20															1		1	2
Total	11	10	-	1	-	10	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	4	2	-	2	38

Conclusion

This article investigates the ways Tshivenda speakers express gratitude in culturally significant gift-giving scenarios, i.e. receiving a birthday gift from a friend, and a gift from a sibling after completing one's studies. Using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, the analysis revealed that these expressions of gratitude are deeply rooted in Tshivenda cultural norms, where individuals balance positive face (the desire to be appreciated) and negative face (the need to avoid imposition) to maintain harmonious social relationships. Tshivenda speakers employ a variety of politeness strategies, including verbal appreciation, expressions of pleasure and demonstrations of thankfulness, to navigate the social expectations in these interactions. The article underscored the role of cultural context in shaping linguistic behaviour, as gratitude in Tshivenda is not a simple acknowledgment, but a complex act that reinforces social bonds and respect. The article also highlights the influence of the closeness of the relationship on the expression of gratitude, with more emotional expressions observed between siblings. The article opens avenues for further exploration into how other sociolinguistic factors, such as age, gender and social status, may affect gratitude expressions in Tshivenda-speaking communities. Age was a significant factor in the study on gratitude expressions in Tshivenda-speaking communities. The findings suggest that future research could explore how factors like gender and social status also shape gratitude behaviours.

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