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A Colloquy Analysis of Answers to Thanks in English, German, Spanish, and French around 1600 (A Seminar Project)*

Abstract

What are reactions to thanks in English, German, Spanish and French around the year 1600? This is analyzed by using Noel de Berlemont's cross-linguistic *Colloquia et Dictionariolum* (1598 version). As a result, Berlemont's dialogues show no regular reply to gratitude. It is rather typical that there is no reply. Even where a reply occurs, it rather refers to a new idea than being a direct reaction to the thanking. However, since the speech acts "thanking" and "reacting to thanking" are quite rare in Berlemont; the findings need to be supplemented by analyzing further sources even if they are not multilingual and thus not directly contrastive.

Sommaire

Quelles sont les réactions à un merci en anglais, allemand, espagnol et français vers 1600? Cela est analysé dans le livre *Colloquia et Dictionariolum* par Noel de Berlemont (version de 1598). Les dialogues de Berlemont ne révèlent aucune réaction régulière à un merci. Il est plutôt typique de réagir pas du tout à un merci. Même s'il y a une réaction, c'est une nouvelle idée qui est ajoutée plutôt qu'une réaction directe au merci. Pourtant, les actes "remercier" et "réagir à un remerciement" sont assez rares chez Berlemont; les résultats doivent être supplémentés par l'analyse d'autres sources, même si ceux-ci ne sont pas multilingues et ainsi pas directement contrastifs.

Zusammenfassung

Was sind Reaktionen auf ein Dankeschön im Englischen, Deutschen, Spanischen und Französischen um das Jahr 1600? Dies wird analysiert anhand Noel de Berlemonts mehrsprachigem Buch *Colloquia et Dictionariolum* (1598 version). Berlemonts Dialoge zeigen keine regelmäßigen Reaktionen auf ein Dankeschön. Es ist eher typisch, dass gar keine Reaktion erfolgt. Selbst wenn eine Reaktion erfolgt, dann wird eher eine neue Idee eingebracht als direkt auf das Danke zu reagieren. Allerdings sind die Sprechakte "Danken" und "Reagieren auf Danke" bei Berlemont ziemlich rar; die Ergebnisse müssen durch die Analyse weiterer Quellen ergänzt werden, auch wenn diese nicht mehrsprachig und somit nicht direkt kontrastiv wären.

1. Question, Background and Methodology

Some current English, French, Spanish and German phrases that are reactions to thanks are rather young: E. *you're welcome* (20th century), E. *don't mention it* (since the 18th century), E. *my pleasure* (20th century), Fr. *je vous en prie* (20th century), Fr. *de rien* (19th century), Sp. *de nada* (20th century), G. *bitte* (18th century) (OED s.v. *welcome*, OED s.v. *pleasure*, TLFi s.v. *prier*, TLFi s.v. *rien*, FEW s.v. *rēs*, Lanza 1909, DWDS s.v. *bitten*); some may be older, but we do not know how typical or frequent they were. For this study, we would like to know: What are reactions to thanks in these languages around the year 1600? This expressive speech act does not seem to have been analyzed in a historical way so far. We aim to analyse this by using Noel de Berlemont's cross-

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linguistic *Colloquia et Dictionariolum* (1598 version; even if a language version is copied from a previous edition it will not be older than about half a century; on the history of versions cf., e.g., Rossebastiano 2000). Berlemont's dialogues are meant to serve as a guide for relevant conversations for European travelers. However, they have not yet been analyzed very much for contrastive historical pragmatics. Exceptions are Radtke (1998) and Grzega (2013). The 1598 version displays eight different languages: Latin, French, Dutch/Flemish, High German, Spanish, Italian, English and Portuguese. We select French (as a western language), English (as a northern language), Italian (as a southern language) and German (as a central and eastern language, spoken in the Holy Roman Empire as well as in parts of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth). If Berlemont's translations of phrases from the Latin source differ, they can safely be considered as idiomatic; but even non-literal translations are likely to reflect real-life language as the number of formal deviations from the Latin original are frequent so that we can assume in general that the translations are not simply literal, but functional translations (Grzega 2013: 109). This, of course, does not deny that some translations may occasionally be literal.

2. Analysis

Surprisingly, the seven dialogs on about 100 pages of Berlemont's book contain only thirteen instances of explicit thanking (although they are many services done to other persons for which some sort of thanking is imaginable—maybe the reader is to imagine a nod or a smile). In nine of the explicit thanking phrases what follows are either turns to another topic—page 20 (asking further about the host's son, after host's thanks for a compliment), page 21 (host's wife asking about well-being, after guest thanking for welcome), page 36 (leaving after declining thanks for an offer), after page 65 (saleswoman offering to get a good deal also next time, after thanking for the money), page 87 (innkeeper asking if the two do not know each other, after thanks for toast), page 86 (after the guest thanking the innkeeper for his service offer), page 88 (innkeeper asking where somebody is from, after thanks for offer of friendship) and page 121 (servant offering the same quality service in the future, after thanks for tipping)—or the end of the scene—page 44 (after Mary thanking Roger for cutting her a piece of meat) and page 93 (guest thanking for a good-night wish). (The page number are the double page numbers according to the photographic PDF file of Berlemont's dialogues in the 1598 version [Berlemont 1598]).

In the other four situations, there is some semantic connection between the thanks and the following passage. They are first quoted in the following table.

E.	G.	Sp.	Fr.
D. Well then we thanke you / wee must deserve it. M. It is all deserved. P. I thank you also that yee are com. (50f.)	D. VVol dann, so danken wir euch, es stehet uns zu verdienen. M. Es ist lang verdienet. P. Ich dancke euch auch das ihr kommen seydt. (50f.)	D. Pues bien tenemos lo en merced. cumple que los merezcamos. M. Todo es merecido. P. Yo os agradezco tambien que sois venidos. (50f.)	D. Bien doncques nous vous remercions. c'est à nous à le desservir. M. Tout est desservy. P. Je vous remercie aussy que vous estes venuz. (50f.)
B. Much good / may it doo you Sirs? E. God a mercy mine hoste. B. I pray you / make good cheere with such as ther is and spare not the wine / for it is hot. (85)	B. Gott gesegne es euch ihr Herren. E. Gott dancke euch mein wirt. B. Ich bit euch seydt frolich mit dem das ihr habt, und spart den wein nit, den es ist heisz. (85)	B. Buen prouecho os haga, Señores. E. Yo os selo agradezco mi huesped. B. Supplico à vs. ms. que hagan buena ciera de lo que ay, y no ahorrays el vino, porque haze calor. (85)	B. Bon-prou vous face Messieurs. E. Grand mercy mon hoste. B. Je vous prie, faictes bonne chere de ce qu'il y a, & n'espargnez pas le vin, car il faict chaud. (85)
A. Wee be very well mine hoste/ wee thancke you. B. Sir/ I drinke to you. (86)	A. wir sein gar wol Herr wirdt, wir dancken euch. B. Mein Herr, ich brings euch. (86)	A. Muy bien somos señor huesped, tenemos lo en merced. B. Señor mio, supplico à v. m. de beuer. (86)	A. Nous sommes tresbien mon hoste, nous vous remercions. B. Monsieur, ie boy à vous. (86)
C. Yea Sir: I thanke you/ spare nothing that I have/ aswell without money as whit money. B. God a mercy sir. (118)	C. Ia herr, ich dancke euch, und sparet nichts das ich habe, so wol sonder geldt als mit geldt. B. Danck habet herr, (118)	C. Señor si: yo se lo agradezco, no ahor rays cosa que yo tenga tan libremente sin dinero, como con dinero. B. Beso os las manos señor. (118)	C. Ouy Monsieur: ie vous remercie, n'espargnez chose que i'aye, aussy bien sans argent, qu'auec argent. B. Grand mercy Sire. (118)

Table 1

The first scene (p. 50f.) is at the end of the dialog. David (and Roger) had wanted to pay for the drinks, Peter said that, of course, they do not have to pay. Now they thank Peter (and Mary) expressing doubt whether they deserve it. Mary first says that it is deserved and then Peter returns the thanking for the meal by thanking for their presence.

The second dialogue (p. 85) shows a conversation between a host and guests at a hostel. After the innkeeper has brought food and drink, one guest thanks him. The host again does not react to the thanking with a short phrase, but asks the guests at the table that they should be happy with the things they have in front of them and drink enough wine.

The third dialogue (p. 86) deals with another form of replying to expressions of thanks. The event of this conversation plays again in the lodging, where the host serves wine to the guests and asks them to enjoy themselves before the hostess comes for further service. Guest A reassures him that they feel well and thanks him. In the Spanish and French version (as in the Latin original *propino tibi*) the host answers with 'I drink to you'. In English and German the answer is 'I bring it to you', meaning 'I (will) bring a toast to you'.

The fourth conversation (p. 118) takes place during a purchase conversation. Here, the buyer does not want to buy the goods at first, but then gives the seller the money. Person C expresses thanks to the interlocutor and immediately returns a reassurance of using his service, which speaker B returns with another type of thank you. In the German and French version, this is done with the same stem

for thanks (Fr. *merci*, G. *dank*). In English, speaker B replies with *God a mercy*, which may be a slurred, shortened “God [h]a[ve] mercy [with you]” (cf. OED s.v. *God-a-mercy*). In Spanish, the reply means ‘I kiss you the hands’; this translates L. *ago gratias*, which on p. 85 is given by *yo os se lo agradezco*, but this is presumably avoided in this dialog because it is already used by the other interlocutor. A relevant thing seems to be variation; however there is never a variant “thánk you—thank yóu”. Also of note, a slot in the Latin reference form is always given by some form, never by zero.

3. Conclusion and Outlook

In sum, Berlemont’s dialogues shows no regular reply to gratitude. It is rather typical that there is no reply. Even where a reply occurs, it rather refers to a new idea than being a direct reaction to the thanking for a service completed, and the structure of pattern sequences is thus different from today. However, since the explicit speech acts “thanking” and “reacting to thanking” are rather rare in Berlemont, the findings need to be supplemented by analyzing further sources (with also more occurrences of diverse reasons for thanking) even if these sources may not be multilingual and this not directly contrastive.

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