

## EXPLORING COMMUNICATIVE INTENTIONS IN AMERICAN AND BULGARIAN DRAMA SERIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GRATITUDE SPEECH ACTS

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**Abstract:** *The article presents a comparative study of gratitude communicative acts observed in two medical drama series, in American-English and in Bulgarian. It delves into the typology of gratitude speech acts in both languages, distinguishing between explicit and implicit communicative interactions within the domain of gratitude performance. The paper further emphasizes the specific pragmatic similarities and differences of gratitude expressions, dwelling on the interpretation of communicative intention within each dataset. A focal aspect of the study is the examination of conversational implicatures conveyed through gratitude performance in terms of levels of imposition and indebtedness. By offering a modern approach to the pragmatics of gratitude, the paper expands on traditional interpretations of implicature, providing new insights into the issues of quantity and informativeness as well as greater expertise in understanding gratitude behavior cross-culturally.*

**Keywords:** *communicative intention; conversational implicature; gratitude utterances; pragmatic effectiveness; pragmatic failure.*

### Introduction

A fundamental challenge in contemporary cross-cultural pragmatics is the accurate interpretation of communicative messages across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes. While common-sense communication norms facilitate the recognition of communicative intentions, this does not necessarily imply that the same speech act will be interpreted consistently when conveyed across different cultural contexts. The study highlights the pragmatic variations and the enactment of conversational implicatures through gratitude utterances, offering a reframed perspective on implicit premises and implied meanings manifested by gratitude behaviour.

The analysis is based on a database extracted from two drama series - *Doc* (2025) in American-English and *Otkradnat Zhivot (Stolen Life)* (2024) in Bulgarian. What sets this study apart is its extension and application beyond the classical views of conversational implicatures as outlined by Grice (1989), incorporating elements of neo-Gricean theory. The paper offers comprehensive observations into the issues of quantity and informativeness, which are essential to a more profound understanding of gratitude performance in the broader context of speech act production and perception.

### **Theoretical background**

A central objective within speech acts studies is to compile, classify and analyze the diverse forms of rational social interactions and examine the underlying principles that contribute to their effective performance. In this context, a discursive exchange is considered successful when the addresser's intended meaning is accurately interpreted and acknowledged by the other speaker (Bublitz, Norrick 2011). Another important premise is that effective communication depends on mutual cooperation between interlocutors (Grice 1989; Levinson 2000). However, pragmatic inaccuracy is not merely an isolated discourse phenomenon, rather, it is an embedded risk in spoken discourse, as misapprehension can disrupt communicative interchange, thereby challenging Grice's cooperative principle. Such pragmatic deficiencies can lead to violations of the four maxims (quality, quantity, relevance, informativeness), ultimately hindering successful mutual understanding (Grice 1989; Clark, Schaefer 1989). To address these challenges, the neo-Gricean framework expands Grice's maxims, particularly with respect to quantity and informativeness, in a manner that ensures effective allocation of the speaker's implied message (Horn 2004; Allott 2018).

Given that this study dwells on gratitude speech acts in a dialogue-based framework, the maxim of quantity is especially relevant in maintaining an optimal balance between providing sufficient information and avoiding excessive elaboration. Overly detailed utterances of gratitude may impose a deliberate obligation on the addressee, while minimal recognition can create ambiguity regarding sincerity condition (Levinson 2000; Horn 2004).

Gratitude speech acts, in particular, fulfill an expressive illocutionary function (Eisenstein, Bodman, 1995; Al-Khawaldeh, Zegarac 2013), necessitating that the speaker conveys sincerity by appropriately integrating both locutionary and illocutionary content. The perlocutionary effect or the hearer's interpretation of the speaker's intention, determines how conversational implicatures are understood (Schegloff 2007). However, a gratitude utterance is not always a straightforward act; it may also evoke feelings of indebtedness or imply an obligation. When the addressee perceives gratitude as a means of restoring social balance or an anticipation of a future act of reciprocation, it may transform from a standard expression of gratitude into a covert form of social imposition (Nur 2015). Hence, understanding the fine line between expressing gratitude and managing the social implications of indebtedness is crucial for pragmatic competence. The following example highlights the main points of analysis discussed in the paper in terms of the cooperative principle, conversational implicatures, and the maxims of quantity and informativeness from a neo-Gricean standpoint:

**Context:** Dr. Heller, an attending physician and Dr. Maitra, a third-year resident of the hospital are finishing a medical procedure. Dr. Heller has just helped Dr. Maitra finish a task she was struggling with, and she wants to express her gratitude: (from *Doc*)

**Dr. Maitra:** *I really appreciate you stepping in to help with that, Dr. Heller!*

**Dr. Heller:** *No problem! Glad I could give you a hand.*

Main points:

➤ **gratitude speech act:** by saying *I really appreciate ...*, Dr. Maitra performs a gratitude speech act by explicitly providing an expression of appreciation followed by an expression indicating the favour;

➤ **cooperative principle:** Dr. Heller reciprocates with an act of acknowledgement (*No problem ...*), which confirms that the illocutionary force of gratitude has been recognized and he expresses willingness to assist. Both interlocutors adhere to Grice's cooperative principle as they cooperate to achieve effective communication;

➤ **conversational implicature:** Dr. Maitra's statement *I really appreciate ...* suggests that Dr. Heller's assistance was meaningful, though its propositional content is not explicitly stated. The implicature lies in Dr. Maitra's acknowledgment of the assistance's value, while Dr. Heller's response conveys that he does not perceive the gratitude as an imposition;

➤ **quantity and informativeness:** Dr. Maitra's gratitude expression is well-measured, neither too brief nor too elaborate. She provides sufficient information (*I really appreciate you stepping in to help with that*) without overwhelming Dr. Heller with unnecessary details. Dr. Heller's response offers sufficient acknowledgement without excessive details or underplaying the significance of the act.

➤ **neo-Gricean interpretation:** Dr. Maitra's expression of gratitude suggests that Dr. Heller's assistance was not anticipated but rather a generous act. However, Dr. Heller's response aligns with the principle of informativeness, providing just sufficient level of politeness to conclude the exchange, ensuring a balanced interaction.

Overall, the example demonstrates how both traditional and modern perspectives on quantity and informativeness will be applied in the study, highlighting the main factors in maintaining social balance by managing imposition and preventing ambiguity.

## Research questions

The paper examines two corpora of dialogue-format datasets in American English (*Doc*) and in Bulgarian (*Otkradnat Zhivot*), containing explicit and implicit expressions of gratitude. These datasets were compiled by transcribing and extracting dialogues from movie sound recordings and scripts. The programs depict contemporary scenarios in a medical

environment, where characters manage problems of identity, resilience and professional hardships. The dialogues involve speakers with a common social framework of interests and status and prioritizes formal, consultative and casual speech registers (Wolfram, Schilling 2015). It raises several research questions regarding:

- 1) frequency occurrence of the three types of conversational implicature (scalar, generalized, particularized) (Levinson 1983, Grice 1989);
- 2) frequency occurrence of explicit/implicit gratitude acts across both datasets in terms of speaker's communicative intention;
- 3) evaluation of pragmatic deviations in gratitude behaviour regarding its impact on effective communication.

## Methods

The research exploits various methodological approaches in order to gather, categorize and evaluate the selected empirical data. A mixed-method approach was adopted, integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques to decode and analyse corpus-based data without altering contextual parameters or utterance structural patterns. Since each approach addresses its own constraints and complements the others, the descriptive nature of the methodology is essential. While the qualitative approach is particularly suited for examining discourse data and exploring the social and cultural aspects of language use and acquisition, the quantitative method focuses on systematically collecting discourse data (Byrne 2002; Maxwell 2013). With regard to pragmatic tendencies in expressing gratitude within a specific socio-cultural framework across two distinct linguistic settings, the latter in particular aids in pattern recognition and offers more objective and precise viewpoints. (Creswell 2014, Weisser 2018).

Since the study follows a comparative approach, the analysis requires a substantial database of gratitude utterances as part of the qualitative review.

## Data analysis

The dataset includes 162 gratitude communicative acts from the American-English corpus (Am-EnC), contrasted with a total of 178 gratitude utterances from the Bulgarian corpus (BC). The analysis is conducted using a two-dimensional examination approach based on the degree of indebtedness and level of imposition:

### 1. Type of implicature:

- a) **scalar** (in relation to the degree of intensity in implementing gratitude illocutionary force):  
ex. *I really appreciate your help.* (less intensive) (from *Doc*)

ex. *Bezkrayno sam Vi blagodaren.*

(in En.: *I am infinitely grateful to you*) (implying more intense feeling of gratitude) (from *Otkradnat zhivot*)

- b) **generalized** (greater emphasis on propositional content, less significance to contextual parameters):

ex. *It was kind of you. Highly appreciated.* (general, not specific circumstances) (from *Doc*)

- c) **particularized** (emphasis on contextual aspects, reduced focus on locutionary (propositional) component):

ex. *You really came through for me today, thank you!* (more specific, situational) (from *Doc*)

## 2. Type of gratitude act (Eisenstein, Bodman 1995)

- a) **explicit gratitude acts** (EGA) (illocutionary force is expressed through performative entries - *thank, thanks, thankful; grateful, gratitude; appreciate, appreciation*)

- b) **a combination of explicit and implicit gratitude acts** (EGA + IGA):

- EGA + indicating the benefactor;
- EGA + indicating the act of benevolence/favour/kindness;
- EGA + indicating imposition;
- EGA in negated sentences.

- c) **implicit strategies communicating positive feelings:**

- towards the recipient of the favour/act of kindness by offering a compliment;
- towards the outcomes or consequences of the favour/act of kindness.

- d) **implicit strategies indicating level and type of imposition:**

- acknowledging factual imposition;
- recognizing the imposition while highlighting the need for the favour/service;
- minimizing the perceived imposition by downplaying the necessity or obligation.

## Analysis of the American-English corpus

The analysis, which is presented in a comprehensive two-perspective manner, starts by examining implicature preferences obtained from the American-English corpus (Am-EnC) and then assesses the employment of gratitude speech act types.

In terms of *implicature preferences*, the Am-EnC identifies three types of conversational implicatures - scalar, generalized, and particularized - each displaying variations in pragmatic behaviour. These implicatures show illocutionary force deviations in their quantitative values when examined

within the context of gratitude speech acts. Below are examples of scalar, generalized, and particularized implicatures presented in a sequential exchange: (from *Doc*)

**Context:** A patient, now on the mend from a severe illness, visits Dr. Heller for a follow-up appointment. She hopes to convey her appreciation for the doctor's outstanding care throughout her treatment.

**Patient:** *Dr. Heller, thank you so much for everything. I honestly don't know if I would have made it without your help.* (scalar)

**Dr. Heller:** *I'm glad seeing you're doing better.*

**Patient:** *It goes beyond that. You genuinely went above and beyond to ensure the highest quality of care, even coordinating specialist appointments without me needing to ask.* (generalized)

**Dr. Heller:** *Just doing my job to make sure you got the care you needed.*

**Patient:** *I remember when you stayed late after hours to fit me in for that last-minute appointment. That really meant a lot.* (particularized)

The illustrated conversational exchange demonstrates all three types of conversational implicature. The patient's utterance *Dr. Heller, thank you so ...* conveys more than a simple expression of gratitude. Through scalar implicature, the addresser underscores the significance of the doctor's care, suggesting that any lesser degree of assistance might have resulted in a significantly more challenging or even unsuccessful recovery. The gratitude illocutionary perspective is rather expressive as both sets of utterances seem to amplify the depth of the speaker's indebtedness but also subtly acknowledges the potential imposition placed on the addressee. The communicative intentions behind this set of utterances extend beyond simple politeness. By framing the gratitude expressions in such strong terms, the addresser communicates both sincere appreciation and an awareness of the extra effort the doctor may have extended, reinforcing the social expectation of reciprocation and respect for the doctor's commitment, which further enhances the expressive illocutionary point.

Regarding cases of generalized implicature, which are theoretically assumed to be automatically inferred and context-neutral, the provided set of gratitude utterances *You genuinely went above and beyond to ...* situates the statement within a broader, more generalized state of affairs, namely, the anticipated standard of professionalism and compassion in medical practice. Here, the speaker not only acknowledges the doctor's exceptional effort but also implicitly contrasts it with a level of care that would be considered standard. This contrast will definitely reinforce the expressive illocutionary perspective in terms of the higher level of indebtedness and degree of imposition, that the doctor's actions were not merely part of routine responsibilities but rather a voluntary extension of effort. In both cases, these heightened levels of indebtedness and imposition make the gratitude utterance

more intense, so that the implied illocutionary message not only conveys appreciation but also ensures the proper realization of the perlocutionary effect, that is, the intended communicative response (the personal cost of the favour).

However, *I remember when you stayed late after hours to fit me in for that last-minute appointment. That really meant a lot* utterances transfer to a more personalized inference towards the act of gratitude. The speaker's communicative intention transforms the act of gratitude from a general appreciation into a more personal and genuine expression. In the particular case, the speaker is highlighting a specific, context-dependent behaviour that demonstrates the addressee's personal sacrifice to guarantee a proper and uninterrupted treatment.

As for the aspects of quantity and informativeness, the proposed set of gratitude utterances is considered sufficiently informative. The speaker provides enough detail to clearly convey the gratitude illocutionary perspective without excessive elaboration while still emphasizing the depth of appreciation. This is in line with the neo-Gricean standpoint on quantity and informativeness, which emphasizes the value of individualized context and a more emotionally charged implicature.

The numerical data below represent the frequency distribution of the three types of conversational implicature displayed in the Am-EnC, totalling 168 cases.

type of implicature	N of utterances	percent
<i>scalar</i>	32	19.04%
<i>generalized</i>	69	41.08%
<i>particularized</i>	67	39.88%

It can be seen that the usage patterns of generalized and particularized conversational implicatures hold almost equal status in preference, both being significantly more preferred than scalar implicature. Indeed, the scalar aspect can be easily recognized within the frame of a gratitude utterance, as it becomes explicit mostly in performative gratitude acts that can also include intensifiers, as in: *I am (truly, wholeheartedly) grateful/thankful for; Thank you (kindly, greatly, sincerely) for; I (highly, greatly, sincerely, truly) appreciate ...*. The majority of the extracted performative acts possesses an emphatic element or a reinforcing element, which further strengthens the illocutionary force, ensuring that the gratitude is interpreted as genuine. Using a stronger lexical component (intensifier) will definitely signal a higher level of sincerity and greater sense of indebtedness. While minimal propositional content may adequately convey the illocutionary perspective and provide sufficient informativeness, it may fail to fully fulfill the perlocutionary goal, as it may not be deemed compelling enough.

The analysis further focuses on the type of gratitude acts and reveals the following frequency distributions concerning the manifestation of communicative intention:

type of gratitude act	N of utterance	percent
<i>explicit</i>	39	23.22%
<i>explicit + implicit</i>	45	26.78%
<i>implicit (positive feelings)</i>	26	15.48%
<i>implicit (imposition)</i>	58	34.52%

It becomes clear that the smallest percentage of the categories are *implicit utterances that convey positive emotions*, whereas *explicit-only* and *explicit and implicit utterances* (the latter slightly outnumbering the *explicit-only* category) indicate a significant presence of both patterns. The largest proportion is observed in *implicit utterances reflecting the degree of imposition*, highlighting that this type of gratitude speech act is the most predominant in the dataset.

When considering *explicit-only gratitude speech acts*, 31 out of 39 instances feature utterances including mainly the performative entries *thank*, *thankful* and *grateful*, while the performative verb *appreciate* and its derivational forms are less prevalent. Additionally, the majority of these expressions are intensified, and although they may communicate a more ritualistic and formulaic gratitude behaviour, they can still effectively convey the expressive communicative intention, provided the level of indebtedness is not particularly high. Conversely, *appreciate* typically carries a greater degree of imposition (as for a profound act of kindness or a meaningful gesture/support; greater favour/service; emotional engagement), which may account for its less frequent occurrence in *explicit-only* speech acts.

The combination of *explicit and implicit gratitude utterances* prompts a more interesting discussion, as this pattern ranks second in preference with well over one-fourth of all cases in the corpus (45 occurrences). The examples illustrate the four sub-categories of the pattern (indicating the benefactor, the act of benevolence, imposition, negation in sentences):

- ex. *I am truly grateful to you, Dr. Hamda.* (EGA + indicating the benefactor)
- ex. *I am incredibly thankful for the effort you put into ensuring my comfort during my recovery.* (EGA + indicating the act of benevolence)
- ex. *I really appreciate you helping me out, even though I know it was an extra load for you.* (EGA + indicating imposition)
- ex. *I honestly don't know how to thank you enough for taking such great care of me.* (EGA in negated sentence)

Based on the data, utterances that indicate the act of benevolence (favour, service, kindness) are the most prominent, followed by those that



highlight the benefactor, with 24 and 12 cases respectively. In contrast, gratitude acts indicating imposition are significantly less frequent, appearing only in 5 instances, and explicit gratitude acts in negated sentences occur in just 4 cases.

Obviously, the findings suggest a preference for expressing the illocutionary point by focusing on the benevolent act itself rather than highlighting the imposition or through negated sentences. Such patterns are likely to align with a specific communicative intention emphasizing the positive aspects of the interaction and the sincerity condition of the gratitude expressed, rather than diminishing its impact by imposing burden or obligation onto the benefactor (Wolfram, Schilling 2015).

*Implicit acts demonstrating positive feelings* occupy the bottom position in the scale of preference, with 26 instances. Within this category, there is a slight disparity in frequency between expressions directed towards the benefactor by communicating a compliment and those addressing the outcomes or consequences of the favour, with the latter being marginally more prevalent. For example:

ex. *You always know how to make things better.*

(communicating a compliment)

ex. *That really helped me get through a tough time.*

(addressing the outcomes of the favour)

When gratitude is expressed as a compliment directed towards the benefactor, it somehow validates their personal qualities rather than the act of benevolence itself (Al-Khateeb, 2009). This may reduce the perceived imposition by shifting the focus from the favour to the benefactor's personal skills and expertise, which may, in turn, mitigate any sense of obligation. On the other hand, a gratitude act emphasizing the outcome or benefit of the favour may infer a stronger illocutionary force, as it explicitly highlights the positive impact of the benefactor's action. This framing will undoubtedly provoke a higher level of indebtedness.

*Implicit expressions of gratitude that signal the degree of imposition* are the most prevalent in the Am-EnC. The majority involves implicit acts acknowledging the imposition while emphasizing the necessity of the favour or service (1). The next most communicated are acts that explicitly recognize the factual imposition (2). In contrast, only four cases attempt to downplay the necessity or obligation, thereby minimizing the perceived imposition (3). For example:

ex. *I hate to take up more of your time, but I was really worried about my symptoms.*

*Thank you for fitting me in. (1)*

ex. *I know this probably meant more work for you today, and I really appreciate it! (2)*

ex. *I'm sure this was nothing out of the ordinary for you, D-r Maitra, but it made a huge difference for me, thank you.* (3)

The *first sub-category* demonstrates pragmatic effectiveness by recognizing the imposition (requiring additional time from the medical staff) while simultaneously emphasizing the necessity of the favour (the speaker's concern regarding their condition). This expression conveys a moderate sense of indebtedness, as the speaker does not explicitly communicate an obligation but implicitly conveys it through emphasis on necessity. This, in turn, underscores the significance of the addressee's time and effort. Similarly, the *second sub-category*, which involves the explicit acknowledgment of factual imposition, effectively conveys appreciation by recognizing the addressee's additional effort. However, the degree of indebtedness is expressed more distinctly than in the first sub-category. Nonetheless, this approach may be less effective if the addressee perceives the praise as unnecessary or the task as routine. In contrast, the *third sub-category*, which minimizes necessity or obligation, fosters a more casual interaction by reducing the perceived burden. This approach conveys a weaker sense of indebtedness, focusing more on casual appreciation than obligation.

### Analysis of the Bulgarian corpus

There are 178 gratitude utterances extracted from the Bulgarian corpus (BgC), highlighting differences from the American database in terms of implicature preferences and the selection of gratitude strategies. The figures below show the frequency distribution of conversational implicature types in the BgC compared to the Am-EnC data.

type of implicature	N of utterances		percent
<i>scalar</i>	48	(32 - Am-En)	26.97% (19.04% - Am-En)
<i>generalized</i>	18	(61 - Am-En)	10.11% (41.08% - Am-En)
<i>particularized</i>	112	(67 - Am-En)	62.92% (39.88% - Am-En)

The findings clearly illustrate that Bulgarian speakers exhibit a marked preference for particularized implicatures. Conversely, generalized implicatures are significantly more frequent in the Am-EnC, while their occurrence in the BgC remains comparatively low. Although scalar implicatures are slightly more frequent in the BgC than in the Am-EnC, the discrepancy between the two corpora is less pronounced compared to the disparities conveyed in generalized and particularized implicatures.

Contextual factors evidently play a crucial role in shaping how Bulgarians perform gratitude speech acts, as demonstrated by the increased prevalence of particularized implicature type. In this regard, speaker's intentions are mainly interpreted based on the situational context rather than

inherently drawn from common-sense reasoning about easily recognizable propositional content (Trendafilov 2010). In most cases, particularized implicated intentions are conveyed through indirect expressions of gratitude or a combination of direct and indirect forms, which are generally less likely to impose on the interlocutor's social standing or sense of self-respect compared to those observed in the Am-EnC database. Below is a dialogue illustration of how the three types of implicature blend to express different layers of gratitude, from specific activities during a medical procedure to broader appreciation for one's professional competence and skills: (from *Otkradnat zhivot*)

**Context:** Dr. Krasteva and Dr. Violeta Zaharieva have just finished a complicated surgical procedure on a patient in a life-threatening condition. Dr. Krasteva was the lead surgeon, while Dr. Zaharieva assisted and managed an unexpected complication.

**Dr. Krasteva:** *Violeta, ne znam kak shtyahme da se spravim bez teb dnes. Beshe vpechatlyavashta, kato ti hrumna vednaga za aritmiyata. Mnogo dobre se справи.*

(in En.: *Violeta, I don't know how we would've managed without you today. It was impressive how you immediately thought of the arrhythmia. You handled it very well.*)

**Dr. Zaharieva:** *Beshe samo malka chast ot rabotata. Chestno kazano, edinstveno se radvam che vsichko se naredi.*

(in En.: *It was just a small part of the job. Honestly speaking, I'm just glad everything worked out.*)

**Dr. Krasteva:** *Hich ne beshe malko! Namesi se tochno kogato imahme nuzhda ot teb. Ako ne beshe reagirala tolkova barzo, veche shtyahme da sme v trapa. Naistina sam blagodarna za srachnostta ti.*

(in En.: *It was not small at all! You stepped in exactly when we needed you. If you hadn't reacted so quickly, we would have already gone downhill. I'm truly grateful for your skill.*)

**Dr. Zaharieva:** *Blagodarya, no si beshe kolektivno usilie.*

(in En.: *Thank you, but it was a team effort.*)

**Dr. Krasteva:** *... Ne si samo dobra v krizisni situatsii, na teb mozhe da se razchita i pri vsyaka operatsiya, bez znachenie kakva.*

(in En.: *You're not just good in a crisis, you're reliable in every surgery we do, no matter what.*)

In the utterance *If you hadn't acted so quickly, it could've gone downhill*, the scalar aspect of gratitude is evident, as the addresser compares the addressee's contribution to a critical moment, implying that the situation was on the brink of spiraling out of control. The expression *would have gone downhill* further conveys a sense of indebtedness, as the addresser acknowledges that without the addressee's timely intervention, the situation might have deteriorated. Additionally, in *You handled it very well* the addresser seems to evaluate the addressee's performance in terms of their proficiency or effectiveness. The word *very* as an intensifier, amplifies the degree of indebtedness and conveys a stronger, more emotive illocutionary force. It suggests that the addressee's actions surpassed a baseline level of

competence, further emphasizing the significance of their contribution. In fact, Bulgarian speakers appear to employ a greater use of intensifiers compared to the American-English speakers. While American-English utterances tend to be more routinized and pragmatic, often less elaborate, Bulgarian expressions are typically more hearer-oriented and personalized. This difference suggests that Bulgarians place a stronger emphasis on emotional depth and individual connection in their gratitude, whereas American-English expressions tend to prioritize efficiency and practicality.

The generalized implicature becomes explicit in the addresser's statement *You're reliable in every surgery we do, no matter what*, reflecting a broader illocutionary force. Here, the addresser emphasizes the addressee's consistent competence and reliability across a range of situations, rather than focusing solely on the specific case. This implicature also carries an element of imposition, as the addresser subtly implies that the addressee's continued dependability is crucial to their collaborative success. Finally, the particularized implicature is observed in the addresser's reference to the addressee's management of the patient's heart arrhythmia. This emphasis on a particular demonstration of skill further reinforces the sense and level of indebtedness.

The findings regarding *gratitude type preferences* present intriguing data. The frequency comparison of gratitude acts between BgC and Am-EnC datasets reveals distinct differences in their usage patterns, as illustrated below:

type of gratitude act	N of utterance BC / Am-En		percent BC / Am-En
<i>explicit</i>	38	(39)	23.22% (21.35%)
<i>explicit + implicit</i>	58	(45)	26.78% (32.58%)
<i>implicit (positive feelings)</i>	21	(26)	15.48% (11.80%)
<i>implicit (imposition)</i>	61	(58)	34.52% (34.27%)

Regarding percentage values, both groups of speakers use *explicit gratitude acts* relatively equally, with a slight preference for BgC speakers in this category, while Am-EnC speakers tend to combine *explicit and implicit gratitude utterances* more frequently than BgC speakers, suggesting a more context-sensitive approach to expressing gratitude. Interestingly, BgC speakers express *positive feelings through implicit gratitude strategies* slightly more often than their Am-EnC counterparts. Both groups use *implicit gratitude involving imposition* at almost identical rates, indicating a similar preference for this form of gratitude strategies in both languages.

Similar to the Am-EnC, Bulgarian speakers primarily use the explicit performative verb *thank (blagodarya)* while employing the verb *appreciate (otsenyavam)* less frequently. However, explicit gratitude acts in BgC are

somewhat restricted in locutionary performance, as the Bulgarian language has only one adjective that encompasses both *grateful* and *thankful*, limiting lexical variation in expressing gratitude. This can affect the emotional contour of the illocutionary force, from a deeper, long-term appreciation to a short-term situational recognition for a favour/service (Peneva 2019). Both Am-EnC *explicit-only gratitude acts* and their Bulgarian equivalents frequently incorporate intensifiers, though with notable differences in preference. American-English speakers tend to favour intensifiers that emphasize sincerity and personal appreciation (*truly, deeply, sincerely, really*) whereas Bulgarian speakers often use quantitative intensifiers (*many thanks, enormous thanks, endless thanks*). It seems that American-English speakers focus on the truth-value semantics of gratitude, while Bulgarian speakers tend to emphasize the scale or magnitude of their gratitude to reinforce social exchange.

The comparative analysis of *explicit and implicit gratitude utterances* presents a more complex discussion, as this pattern ranks second in preference across both corpora. The following examples demonstrate the four subcategories within this pattern: (referencing the benefactor, acknowledging the act of benevolence, expressing imposition, through negated sentences).

- ex. *Blagodarya ti, Maria, bez teb nyamashe da se spravya.*  
(in En.: *Thank you, Maria, I wouldn't have managed without you.*)  
(EGA + indicating the benefactor)
- ex. *Izklyuchitelno otsenyavam pomoshhta ti s doklada.*  
(in En.: *I extremely appreciate your help with the report.*)  
(EGA + indicating the act of benevolence)
- ex. *Blagodarya ti mnogo, znam, che naistina ti otne mnogo usiliya i vreme da razchetesh izsledvaniyata*  
(in En.: *Thank you so much, I know it really took a lot of effort and time for you to analyze the results*) (EGA + indicating imposition)
- ex. *Nyama dumi, s koito da izrazha kolko sam ti blagodaren.*  
(in En.: *There are no words to express how grateful I am to you.*)  
(EGA in negated sentence)

In BgC, there is a prevalence of *gratitude acts in negated sentences* (21 cases), followed by *acts highlighting imposition* (15). Utterances *indicating the act of benevolence* and *pointing to the benefactor* rank third in BgC (11), while in the Am-EnC acts of benevolence are prioritized. The prevalence of gratitude acts in negated sentences in BgC demonstrates a strategy to downplay the speaker's sense of indebtedness while still recognizing the benefactor's contribution. Similarly, the relatively high frequency of gratitude acts stressing on imposition implies a heightened awareness of social obligation as if Bulgarian speakers may seek to acknowledge a social debt more explicitly. In contrast, Am-EnC prioritizes expressions that focus on the act of benevolence and highlight the benefactor, suggesting a more individual-

centered approach. This emphasizes the generosity of the benefactor rather than the speaker's obligation to reciprocate. The lower frequency of such acts in BgC suggests that Bulgarian speakers may avoid explicitly communicating direct praise both of the favour and the benefactor to prevent face-threatening behavior, as it could create an imbalance in social standing or infer excessive indebtedness (Arundale 2010).

*Implicit gratitude acts expressing positive feelings* appear with the lowest frequency in BgC, a trend that is in line with Am-EnC data. However, while American-English speakers seem to convey gratitude by acknowledging the outcomes or benefits of the favour, their Bulgarian counterparts are more inclined to express appreciation through a compliment directed at the benefactor. For example:

- ex. *Beshe strahotna. Prosto unikalna.* (in En.: *You were great. Just unique.*)  
(communicating a compliment)
- ex. *Ne znam kak shtyah da se spravya bez teb.* (in En.: *I don't know how I would have managed without you!*)  
(addressing the outcomes of the favour)

This distinction suggests that in the Am-EnC, gratitude communicative behavior primarily emphasizes the practical impact of the favour, reinforcing a results-oriented perspective. In contrast, BgC shifts the focus to the benefactor, highlighting their personal qualities rather than the favour itself, which in turn creates a more approachable environment and strengthens social connection. However, this pragmatic performance seems to be limited within implicit gratitude acts.

*Implicit expressions of gratitude signalling the degree of imposition* are the most prevalent in the BgC, a trend that mirrors Am-EnC. In both corpora, the dominant sub-category consists of gratitude acts that acknowledge the imposition while emphasizing the necessity of the favour or service (1). Interestingly, while the second most common strategy in the Am-EnC explicitly recognizes the factual imposition (2), BgC contains only five such utterances and lacks any examples of the third sub-category, which downplay the necessity or obligation, thereby minimizing the perceived imposition. For example:

- ex. *Razbiram, che tova ti otneme vreme, no beshe neobhodimo. Mnogo blagodarya!*  
(in En.: *I understand this took up your time, but it was urgent. Thank you so much!*) (1)
- ex. *Znam, che te natovarivah s tova, naistina go otsenyavam.*  
(in En.: *I know I burdened you with this, I really appreciate it.*) (2)

The absence of downplaying strategies in BgC suggests that Bulgarian speakers tend to directly acknowledge the weight of the favour rather than minimizing it, which may reflect a cultural preference for recognizing social obligations more distinctly and a higher level of indebtedness.

In all, the comparative analysis shows that successful gratitude behaviour relies on a strategic combination of elements, including an appropriate balance of imposition and indebtedness. Speakers should navigate this balance by adjusting explicitness and implicitness, ensuring that gratitude remains contextually appropriate, aligning with the specific cultural norms and conversational inferences. However, the degree of indebtedness communicated can influence relational dynamics. A stronger illocutionary performance of indebtedness, from a Neo-Gricean perspective, may strengthen interpersonal relations by conforming to social norms of reciprocity and support, but it could also impose an implicit obligation to reciprocate.

### **Key findings and results**

The analysis in this paper highlights the following notable parameters:

#### ***Regarding implicature preferences:***

- both generalized and particularized implicatures are preferred over scalar implicatures in both corpora;

#### ***BgC:***

- Bulgarian speakers show preference to particularized implicatures, driven by context, with a focus on avoiding social intrusion;
- illocutionary perspective is often expressed implicitly or in a mixed direct-indirect form.

#### ***Am-EnC:***

- generalized implicatures are more common than in Bulgarian, rooted in common-sense reasoning;
- more neutral and standardized.

#### ***Regarding gratitude type preferences:***

- American-English speakers combine explicit and implicit gratitude acts more frequently, showing a context-sensitive approach;
- Bulgarian speakers use implicit gratitude acts expressing positive feelings slightly more often than American-English speakers;
- American-English speakers prefer intensifiers emphasizing sincerity and personal appreciation;

- Bulgarian speakers use quantitative intensifiers highlighting the scale or magnitude of gratitude;
- in BgC, prevalence of gratitude acts in negated sentences downplaying indebtedness while acknowledging the benefactor;
- in Am-EnC, prevalence of acts focusing on the benefactor's generosity (benevolence), highlighting the act rather than the speaker's obligation;
- American-English speakers often acknowledge the outcomes or benefits of the favour;
- Bulgarian speakers tend to express gratitude through compliments to the benefactor;
- in both corpora, the most common strategy is acknowledging the imposition while emphasizing the necessity of the favour/service.

## **Conclusion**

This research investigates the interaction between communicative intentions, conversational implicatures, and the pragmatic strategies employed in expressing gratitude behaviour, managing imposition and conveying indebtedness. It highlights crucial cross-cultural distinctions in the realization of these speech acts across American-English and Bulgarian linguistic contexts. While American-English speakers tend to prioritize explicit acknowledgment and adherence to conventional politeness norms, Bulgarian speakers demonstrate a greater reliance on contextual sensitivity and emotional expressiveness. These findings enhance the comprehension of cross-cultural pragmatics, providing valuable contributions for foreign language education and the advancement of intercultural communication skills.

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