Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyze the functions of thanking and responses to it in Egyptian Arabic. The data in this paper shows that Egyptian Arabic speakers use varied forms and strategies in expressing thanking and responses to it. In addition to formulas explicitly mentioning thanks, other formulaic expressions including blessings and non-religious formulas such as good wishes are used as well as repetition, and further commentary on the compliments. This can result in lengthy expressions of gratitude as compared to some other languages such as English.

Since cross-cultural differences in how this kind of speech is realized can result in misunderstandings and even in judgments about the sincerity of speakers from another culture, it is important to investigate such difference in an objective way using naturally occurring data. This paper also serves as a baseline on the norms of one culture, which other researchers interested in the cross-cultural realization of the speech act of thanking can use for comparison with other cultures. This is especially relevant for the teaching of English to speakers of Egyptian Arabic. It will also be applicable to the teaching of Egyptian Arabic to speakers of other languages.

Several studies have been carried out to examine the norms of various speech acts and response to them in Egyptian Arabic. However, none has been carried out on how expressions of gratitude are realized and performed in Egyptian Arabic.

Data was collected through observing naturally occurring thanking and responses to thanking in Egyptians everyday interactions. In collecting the data, I observed the actual and spontaneous use of everyday interaction in an Egyptian Arabic neighborhood in New York City which is highly populated with Egyptian Arabic immigrants. I argue that situation, social distance, age and gender play a role in the forms and strategies used, and resulting length of the thanking expressions.