

# Soap Opera Thankfulness — A Comparison of Expressions of Gratitude in *Fair City* and *EastEnders*

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## Introduction

In recent decades there has been increased focus on differences in international varieties of English. While past studies have primarily dealt with variation in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, less attention was paid to pragmatic differences. Even among inner-circle Englishes, however, differences have been observed in a variety of pragmatic features and speech acts, including backchannels (Tottie, 1999), response tokens (McCarthy, 2002; O'Keefe and Adolfs, 2008), stance markers (Precht, 2003), offers (Barron, 2005), expressions of gratitude (Jautz, 2008; Elwood, 2010), responses to expressions of gratitude (Schneider, 2008), requests (Barron, 2008), small talk (Schneider, 2008), and the use of *please* (Sato, 2008). Studies such as these reveal pragmatic variation in frequency, form, and positioning in discourse, and make plain the need for more investigation of such pragmatic differences in inner-circle Englishes.

## Soap operas

Soap operas are a useful source of linguistic data for a variety of reasons. Soap operas are cultural artifacts, often avidly watched not only by members of the culture of production, but increasingly by viewers throughout the

world. They range in type from those with highly improbable plots, with characters far removed from the target audience in terms of social class, to those that aim to portray the ups and downs of typical daily life. Regardless of whether the story lines correspond closely to events in the viewers' own lives, soap opera followers often assert that the characters deal with the various trials and tribulations confronting them in a realistic manner. That is, the language is perceived to be natural under the circumstances, setting aside considerations regarding the credibility of these circumstances. Unlike in many movies and other TV drama genres, in soap operas, various stories are intertwined, with no need to tie everything neatly into a particular denouement. (McQueen, 1998). Rather, they feature themes of everyday life that simulate the pace of real life instead of presenting key scene highlights (Crisell, 2006) and are highly dependent on context (Fahey, 2008). Charlotte Brundson notes:

“It is not character, in the sense of heroes and heroines, or the promise of action, and enigmas resolved, that is central, but the establishing of the “where” — the place that we know, where life is going on. And it is surely the predictable familiarity of the life represented which pulls us in.” (Brundson, 1997, p. 25).

Hobson similarly asserts, “...the soap opera provides a set of representations which can be seen as vibrant reflections of reality.” (Hobson, 2003, p. 201).

From the viewpoint of language research, soap operas provide a wealth of scenes involving many speech acts. Within a given speech act, a large assortment of examples may be found. Among apologies, infractions may be trivial or major. The imposition in requests may be commonplace or represent a substantial burden. Gratitude may be expressed for minor beneficial actions or for life-saving deeds. Moreover, the extensive cast of characters in soap operas means that the interlocutors in such speech acts may exemplify diverse types of relationships and social distance in various specific settings. Much of this language used in the execution of, and response to, these speech

acts might be difficult to collect as naturally occurring data. (McCarthy and Carter, 1994). Grant and Starks (2001) found that all four types of pre-closings noted by Schegloff and Sacks (1973) occur in the New Zealand soap opera *Shortland Street*, while the textbooks they examined included only one. Additionally, learners report finding soap operas useful in gaining knowledge of language and culture (Fallahkhair, Masthoff, and Pemberton, 2004).

### ***Fair City***

*Fair City* has been broadcast on RTE, the public service broadcaster of Ireland, since 1989, twice a week until 2001 and four times a week since then, at 8:00 p.m. on RTE1. There are repeat broadcasts at noon the following day. It is Ireland's longest-running soap opera and has a viewership of between 500,000 to 600,000, making it additionally the country's most-watched TV drama. *Fair City* was the winner of Ireland's TVNow Award as "Favourite Soap" in 2008 and 2009.

The action of the drama takes place in Carrigstown, a fictional suburb on the north side of Dublin. The program was created consciously with a view toward representing the realities of modern-day Ireland (Sheehan, 2007). It aims at presenting an all-encompassing view of daily life in Dublin, "a Dublin of hotmail and health clubs, of sex in the city, of clubbing and cocaine, of refugees and racism, of crime and compassion, of poverty and property, of books and websites and universities" (Sheehan, 2004, p. 156). The program has dealt with homosexuality, rape, abortion, domestic abuse, prostitution, and suicide, among other social issues.

### ***EastEnders***

*EastEnders* has been broadcast on BBC, the UK's public service broadcaster, since 1985. It takes place in a fictional borough in the East End of London, an area that has been traditionally been associated with poverty. Like *Fair City*, it was originally on air twice a week. From 1994 it was shown three times and since 2001 appears four times a week, at 8:00 p.m. on Mon-

days and Fridays and 7:30 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays on BBC1, with repeat broadcasts the same evening at 10:00 p.m. on BBC3, and an omnibus edition on Sunday afternoons. It is one of the most-watched programs in the UK, with an estimated 7 to 12 million viewers, and is the winner of numerous awards.

Similar to *Fair City*, the program was specifically created with the notion that it would explore social issues (Hobson, 2003). It tackles many of the same social issues as the Irish soap opera, such as rape, prostitution, domestic violence, unemployment, homosexuality, mental illness, illiteracy, and abortion. *EastEnders* is also broadcast in several other countries, including Ireland, Canada, and New Zealand.

## The study

Six episodes of each program which aired in November 2008, and five episodes of each broadcast in January 2009 were examined for scenes in which expressions of gratitude occurred. Fifty-six short scenes related to gratitude from *Fair City* and 49 from *EastEnders* were found. In some cases, more than one expression of gratitude was employed in one scene, either by multiple speakers or, more commonly, by the same speaker in a gratitude sequence. Therefore, the total number of expressions of gratitude analyzed in this study is 70 in *Fair City* and 55 in *EastEnders*. The frequency and forms of the expressions of gratitude in the programs were analyzed, as well as the type of beneficial action that elicited the expressions of gratitude. A discourse analysis of the positioning of the expressions of gratitude was further undertaken. Ironic uses of gratitude in *Fair City* and *EastEnders* were also examined, as well as scenes related to the notion of thanking and indebtedness but which did not include expressions of gratitude.

### Forms and frequencies of gratitude expressions

Table 1 shows a breakdown of the types of gratitude expressions used.

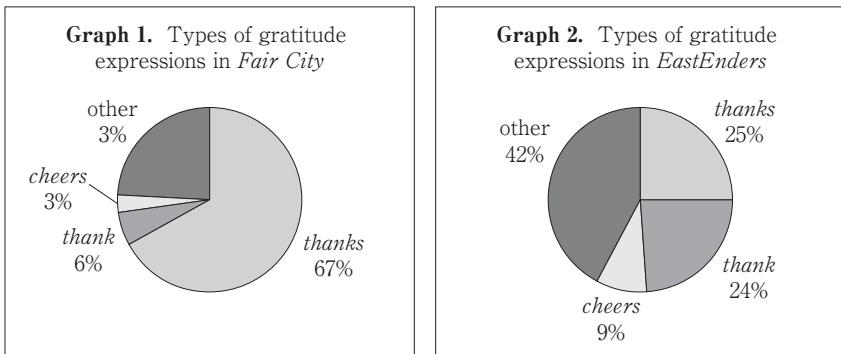
**Table 1.** Breakdown of types of gratitude expressions

Expression of gratitude	<i>Fair City</i>		<i>EastEnders</i>	
	No.	%	No.	%
<i>Thanks</i>	35	50%	12	22%
<i>Thanks a million</i>	2	3%	—	—
<i>Thanks a lot</i>	1	1%	—	—
<i>Thanks very much</i>	1	1%	—	—
<i>Thanks for...</i>	7	10%	2	3%
<i>Thanks very much for...</i>	1	1%	—	—
<i>Thank you</i>	3	4%	11	20%
<i>Thank you for...</i>	1	1%	2	4%
<i>Cheers</i>	2	3%	5	9%
<i>appreciate</i>	4	6%	2	4%
<i>grateful</i>	1	1%	2	4%
praise, positive adjective	7	10%	10	18%
statement, rhetorical question	—	—	8	14%
announcing action to express gratitude	2	3%	—	—
non-verbal	1	1%	1	2%
other	2	3%	—	—
Total	70	100%	55	100%

*Thanks* with no expansion was used most often in both *Fair City* and *EastEnders*. Fifty percent of the expressions of gratitude in the Irish soap opera were of this type. On the other hand, *Thanks* amounted to only 21% of the *EastEnders* data. When expanded *thanks* formulations are added, including *Thanks a million*, *Thanks a lot*, *Thanks very much*, *Thanks for...* and *Thanks very much for...*, the frequency rises to 67% in the *Fair City* data. However, *Thanks a million*, *Thanks a lot*, *Thanks very much*, and *Thanks very much for...* did not appear in the *EastEnders* data at all, and *Thanks for...* occurred only twice, so that the frequency of all expressions in the British soap opera using *thanks* was only 25%.

*Thank you* was almost as frequent as *Thanks* in the *EastEnders* data,

amounting to 20% of the expressions of gratitude used, or 24%, when the expanded form *Thank you for...* is added. In contrast, *Thank you* and *Thank you for...* comprised only 6% of the data for the Irish program. *Cheers* was also frequent in *EastEnders*, amounting to 9% of the data, while it totaled just 3% of the *Fair City* data. Graph 1 shows the frequency of expressions using *thanks*, *thank*, and *cheers* in the *Fair City* data, and graph 2 shows the frequencies for the *EastEnders* data.



There were a variety of other forms of expressions to indicate gratitude. *Appreciate* was used slightly more often in the Irish drama than in the British program, with a frequency of 6% compared to 4%. *Grateful* was used equally often in *EastEnders*, but comprised only 2% of the *Fair City* data.

Praise was a common way to express gratitude in *EastEnders*. Fourteen percent of the data was of this type. However, only 4% of the *Fair City* gratitude data took the form of praise. In two occurrences of praise as gratitude in *Fair City*, the praise was used after someone had acquiesced in a request to work. In example (1) *Thanks* is accompanied by praise when a woman agrees to cover a shift for another woman, and in (2), a young man has agreed to work overtime:

(1) Ah, thanks, Tracey. You're a star. (*Fair City*, November 19, 2008)

- (2) Good man. (*Fair City*, November 26, 2008)

Similarly, in example (3), from *EastEnders*, an older woman garners praise after agreeing to babysit:

- (3) Dot, you're worth your weight in gold, right through. You know that.  
(*EastEnders*, November 25, 2008)

In the remaining example (4), the praise follows other expressions of gratitude on the part of the speaker and another man, and also functions as a closing:

- (4) Girl: I'm going. I'll see ya.  
Man 1: Yeah, no problem. Thanks for the DVD.  
Man 2: Yeah, cheers. Good on ya. See ya.  
(*Fair City*, November 25, 2008)

The other praise examples from *EastEnders* were in response to gifts and offerings. In (5), a boy gives a jacket to a girl, in (6) a girl gives a card to her mother, and in (7) a man gives a doughnut to his grandmother. In (8) a woman expresses her happiness at a fun day planned for her by a friend who has urged her to call in sick from work, and in (9) a man is thanked when he tells a woman's father that he is on the way to visit her in the hospital with flowers:

- (5) It's brilliant. I haven't had a big present like this since, well, years.  
(*EastEnders*, January 19, 2009)
- (6) Wow, what's this? Oh, that's lovely. (*EastEnders*, January 20, 2009)

- (7) That's very thoughtful of you. (*EastEnders*, January 21, 2009)
- (8) This is the best sickie ever, Shirl. (*EastEnders*, November 27, 2008)
- (9) That's very decent of you. (*EastEnders*, November 18, 2008)

One example, (10), is different from the other praise data because the speaker rejects a grudging offer of a couch to sleep on for the night by sarcastically praising the other's consideration while asserting his right to claim a bed in the house:

- (10) That's very kind of you, Jack, but I'll have my own bed back is what I want to tell you. (*EastEnders*, November 24, 2008)

Among all of the gratitude data in the two programs, the longest sustained expression of gratitude occurs in *EastEnders* when a man has offered to serve as the father to a child born out of wedlock. The mother of the baby initially accepts the offer, but later turns him down, in a lengthy thank-you speech which includes the praise "You are one in a million":

- (11) Christian, what you did, what you were prepared to do, I will never forget that. Never. You are one in a million. You are going to be an honorary uncle, no question.... Christian, you were exactly what I needed at the time. (*EastEnders*, November 21, 2008)

Closely related to praise is the use of positive adjectives to express gratitude. These comprise 4% of the *EastEnders* data and 6% of the *Fair City* data. In *Fair City*, the adjectives were used in response to offers and gifts. Example (12) is a service encounter in which the clerk informs the customer he will put the purchased items on the man's tab. Examples (13) and (14) are scenes in which a man has received tickets to a musical performance (13),



and another man, a DVD (14):

(12) Great, great. (*Fair City*, November 18, 2008)

(13) Well, brilliant, yeah. (*Fair City*, November 18, 2008)

(14) Ah, dandy. Thanks, Keith. (*Fair City*, November 25, 2008)

On the other hand, in (15) a woman responds to the offer of use of a desk for 20 minutes with a flat-sounding “Terrific”, indicating she is not happy with the short time allotted:

(15) Terrific. (*Fair City*, November 18, 2008)

The two occurrences of positive adjectives in *EastEnders* take place after receiving a present of baby clothes (16) and in a service encounter after the clerk has given the customer a book she has purchased (17):

(16) Oh, so sweet. Thank you. (*EastEnders*, November 18, 2008)

(17) Oh, brilliant. Can I have it in a bag, please? It’s a present for my mum.  
(*EastEnders*, January 19, 2009)

There is little repetition among all of the praise and positive statements, with only “brilliant” used more than once.

The *EastEnders* data further contained six statements that, while not direct expressions of gratitude or praise, demonstrate satisfaction. Example (5) above, first praises the present of a coat, and then adds “I haven’t had a big present like this since, well, years.” Additionally, there is a series of statements before and after praise in the above-mentioned example (11), “Christian, what you did, what you were prepared to do, I will never forget that. Never.

You are one in a million. You are going to be an honorary uncle, no question.... Christian, you were exactly what I needed at the time.”

In a subsequent scene of the same episode, when the same woman has allowed the real father of the baby to have a relationship with her and the baby, he says “Thank you”. When the woman responds, “Don’t be stupid”, he continues:

(18) No, I mean it. This is everything to me. And everything.  
(*EastEnders*, November 21, 2008)

In another scene, a woman adds statements both before and after her expression of gratitude when receiving a dog as a present from a man:

(19) Woman: I always wanted a dog, since I was Ben’s age, but Mum said she had enough to do.  
Man: That’s for when you’re in the park together.  
Woman: Thanks, Phil. You needed a bit of prodding, but you came up trumps in the end.  
Man: Of course.  
(*EastEnders*, November 25, 2008)

Moreover, in (20), a temporarily homeless woman expresses appreciation for kindness:

(20) It’s ages since anyone has been this nice to me.  
(*EastEnders*, January 16, 2009)

While praise focuses on the bestower of the goods or service, most of these statements highlight the feelings of the recipient. Example (11) additionally promises future repayment in the form of status as an honorary uncle, and (19) somewhat wryly reflects on the recipient’s need to push the

bestower into action but acknowledges that the man who gave the dog has succeeded against expectation, indirectly expressing the woman's satisfaction.

On the other hand, in example (21), a statement is used by a man sardonically to "thank" his mother for being an uncaring mother:

- (21) Well, I suppose that's one thing I can thank you for. I'm going to be a great dad because of all the things I didn't learn from you.  
(*EastEnders*, November 21, 2008)

In *EastEnders* there were also two expressions of gratitude that took the form of rhetorical questions, both in response to receiving food. When a boy prepares a picnic for a girl, she says, "What did I do to deserve you?" (*EastEnders*, November 18, 2008). Similarly, when a girl offers her mother a cup of tea, the mother responds, "I am lucky, aren't I?" (January 19, 2009). Both of these rhetorical questions focus on showing appreciation by remarking on good fortune.

Additionally, two scenes in the *Fair City* data express gratitude by announcing an action to express gratitude. In one scene, a woman gives advice to a man about his gay son, and the man says, "Maybe I could give you a drink later on just to say thanks" (*Fair City*, November 23, 2008). In another, a girl tries to get a woman to sign up for a man's class at a community center. When the man expresses surprise, and perhaps gratitude, the girl suggests that she is helping him in return for a previous beneficial action:

- (22) Man: Look at you, giving the hard sell, what?  
Woman: Let's just say I owed you one.  
Man: What for?  
Woman: Well, for the football last night.  
(*Fair City*, November 26, 2008)

Additionally, there was one non-verbal expression of gratitude in *Fair City*, a smile in response to an offer of help, and in *EastEnders* a thumbs-up gesture in response to a request being agreed to. In the *EastEnders* example, the man who has agreed is speaking on the phone to someone else, which may be the reason for the silent communication of gratitude.

### Types of benefaction

The types of benefaction resulting in expressions of gratitude were similar in the two soap operas. In both *Fair City* and *EastEnders*, gratitude expressions occurred most often in situations in which help was supplied or participation was provided. Thirty-two percent of the scenes in which gratitude was expressed in *Fair City* were of this type, and 31% of those in *EastEnders* were used on similar occasions. Gratitude regarding a present or the loan of an object was equally frequent in the *EastEnders* data, while the frequency fell slightly in the Irish data, to 23%. Gratitude for encouragement, support, or advice was also expressed at roughly the same frequencies, in 13% of the scenes in the *Fair City* data, and just slightly less often in *EastEnders*, at 10%.

Routine uses of gratitude, such as in service exchanges or as closings to telephone calls, comprised 7% of the Irish data and 10% of the British data. There are four scenes in *Fair City* in which gratitude was expressed following a compliment or praise, but there were no such scenes in *EastEnders*.

It is important to note that within the benefaction types there was a wide range of types of specific beneficial activities. For example, in the presents and lending category, actions ranged from trivial offerings such as a pint of ale or a doughnut, to more significant presents of a large sum of money or a winter jacket. The relationship of the interlocutors also has an impact on the significance of the beneficial action. For example, in the case of the jacket, it was given to a young prostitute who was cold by a young teenage boy for whom the present represented a major expenditure. The category of help or participation had an even greater range, from helping to get drinks at a bar

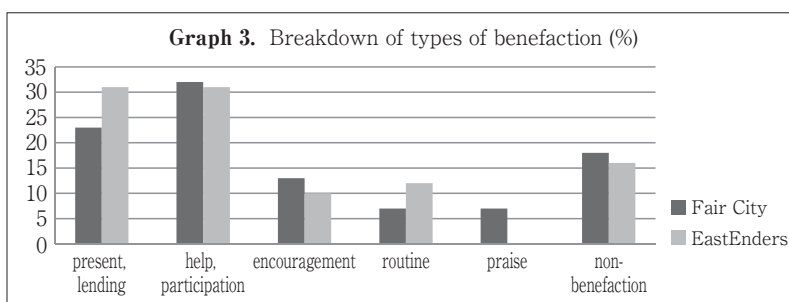
or taking over a work shift, to helping raise another man’s baby. Accordingly, the degree of benefaction is perceived differently by the recipient in each case, affecting the way in which gratitude is expressed.

A special category among the types of benefaction is “non-benefaction”. The non-benefaction classification was used for non-felicitous expressions of gratitude, that is, the use of an expression of thankfulness to communicate dissatisfaction rather than appreciation. Such uses of expressions of gratitude were frequent in both of the soap operas. In *Fair City* 18% were classified in this way, and in *EastEnders* 16% were.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of benefaction types, and Graph 3 shows the data as a graph.

**Table 3.** Breakdown of benefaction types

	Fair City		EastEnders	
	No.	%	No.	%
Present, lending	14	23%	15	31%
Help, participation	19	32%	15	31%
Encouragement, support, advice	8	13%	5	10%
Routine exchange, ex. service, closings	4	7%	6	12%
Compliment, praise	4	7%	—	—
Non-benefaction	11	18%	8	16%
Total	60	100%	49	100%



Non-felicitous expressions of gratitude

There were a number of types of triggers for the non-felicitous expressions of gratitude:

· Damage

Ironic expressions of gratitude in the Irish data were frequently activated by physical or emotional damage wrought. In example (23) a woman expresses her displeasure after her boyfriend punches another man at a bar, although the man had been provoked:

(23) Man's girlfriend: Thanks a million, Keith!

Man: He hit me!

(*Fair City*, November 20, 2008)

Similarly, in example (24) after a man has pretended to have a heart attack, a woman berates him for causing her anxiety:

(24) And as for you, thanks for nearly giving *me* a heart attack.

(*Fair City*, November 25, 2008)

In example (25) a man confesses to inadvertently disclosing information, regarding which another man expresses annoyance:

(25) Man 1: I was telling Jeannie, you know, about the ad thing and I think Bertie overheard me.

Man 2: He did. Thanks for that.

(*Fair City*, November 23, 2008)

· Insufficient offers

Somewhat less damaging, but grievous nonetheless, were instances of assistance that were too limited or unforthcoming, as in example (15) from

*Fair City* addressed above, in which a woman is only allowed use of a desk for 15 minutes, which resulted in an ironic response. Similarly, in *EastEnders*, a woman is not satisfied by the response she receives when she makes a telephone call to an insurance company about leaks in a wall:

(26) Woman: Right. This isn't the end of this. I'm going to speak to Consumer... or whatever you call them... Yeah, thanks a lot.

(*Fair City*, November 20, 2008)

While ironic expressions of gratitude following specific damage were not present in the British soap opera data, this type of gratitude expression executed in a disgusted tone was present in these kinds of situations of practical unhelpfulness.

· Lack of empathy

In *EastEnders*, the most common type of action that generated an expression of non-felicitous gratitude was a lack of empathy. For example, in (26) a man is insensitive in the way he treats a woman whose help he solicits in planning a party:

(26) Man: I got an emergency. She's got it in her head that there's going to be a party.

Woman: I appreciate the offer but I'm already spoken for.

(*EastEnders*, November 25, 2008)

In this example, the woman deliberately construes the man request for help as an "offer" to help in order to emphasize that the man should be focusing more on what the woman herself might enjoy rather than simply what she might be able to do for him. Her following remarks about being "spoken for", which connote romantic commitment, support the irony of the reconstructed request.

In a more serious example of a lack of empathy, (27), a woman is turned away when visiting her sister:

(27) Woman 1: When I'm ready to see you I'll invite you, all right? Until then, you stay away.

Woman 2: Right, well you always did have a very forgiving nature, didn't you? Thank you for that flood of compassion. I'm completely underwhelmed.

(*EastEnders*, January 14, 2009)

By feigning gratitude for her sister's forgiving nature and compassion, the woman is able to heighten the expression of her bitter feeling at the rejection. This is further accentuated by her final statement, "I'm completely underwhelmed" which refutes her earlier pretense of gratitude.

A lack of empathy also generates an ironic expression of gratitude in *Fair City*. In example (28) a man does not feel well and does not want to go to a concert he has promised to attend. When his friend insists that he go, the man acts as if his friend had responded with concern for his health rather than concern for the friend's own situation, underscoring the lack of sympathy in his friend's response to his news:

(28) Man 1: I feel a bit off.

Man 2: I am not going on my own.

Man 1: Oh, thanks very much, Steve, I'm fine. I'll just go home and throw my guts up.

Man 2: I'm serious. I'm not going on my own.

(*Fair City*, November 18, 2008)

As in (27), after the sham profession of gratitude and reassurance, the



man reverses course and asserts strongly his ill health, saying “I’ll just go home and throw my guts up.” By playacting a response to an imagined expression of empathy, the true message of disappointment and annoyance is made plain.

· Inappropriate remark

Another common activator of ironic expressions of gratitude was inappropriate remarks. In example (29) a woman unintentionally implies that another woman is old:

(29) Woman 1: Oh come, I don’t want to be the only old one there.

Woman 2: Oh, thanks a million.

(*Fair City*, November 23, 2008)

Likewise, in *EastEnders*, in a discussion of personal ads, a woman unwittingly paints a grim picture of the situation facing the other woman:

(30) Woman 1: You should have seen some of the blokes I went out with before I met Tony. I just thought I was in this dirty greed plug, all going round and round and round. I’d have just gotten sucked into it if he hadn’t come along to trap me.

Woman 2: (wryly) Thanks for that.

Woman 1: I was just trying to help.

(*EastEnders*, November 24, 2008)

In another example from *Fair City*, a man has been talking to his gay son about appropriate behavior for gay men. While the man intends his words to be approving, his son finds them belittling, which he demonstrates by means of a sarcastic thank you:

(31) Thanks, Leo. Thanks for letting me know what the limits are.

(*Fair City*, November 18, 2008)

In yet another example, a mother intends to praise her daughter when speaking to her son, but ends up making a left-handed compliment, causing the daughter to use an ironic expression of thanks:

(32) Mother: Listen to your sister She's talking sense for once.

Daughter: Oh, thanks.

(*EastEnders*, November 18, 2008)

· Well-meaning remarks

Non-felicitous expressions of gratitude were also sparked by genuinely well-meaning, and not necessarily inappropriate, remarks but which the ironic respondent nevertheless wishes to show are not appreciated by conversely feigning thanks. In example (32) a girl draws her stepmother's attention to a leak in a wall, which the woman has already noticed and feels irritation about:

(33) Girl: Have you seen what happened?

Stepmother: (sarcastically) No, Kylie, I didn't. Thanks very much for telling me.

(*Fair City*, November 20, 2008)

In a similar way, in example (34), a woman appears to try to be genuinely helpful, although her advice about what a man should give his girlfriend as a birthday present seems tricky, causing the man to make an insincere expression of thanks:

(34) Woman: What you've got to do, you've got to find something that's going to please a 40-year-old woman and a 12-year-old boy.

Man: Cheers.

(*EastEnders*, November 24, 2008)

· Forms of ironic expressions of gratitude

The ironic expressions of gratitude utilized a variety of forms:

One adjective (*Terrific*)

*Thanks*

*Cheers*

*appreciate*

*Thanks* + intensifier (*very much*) + expansion

*Thanks* + *Thanks for...*

*Thanks* + intensifier (*a lot*)

*Thanks* + intensifier + reason specification (*very much for...*)

*Thanks* + intensifier (*a million*)

*Thanks* + general reason specification (*for that*)

*Thanks* + reason specification (*for...*)

*Thank you* + general reason specification (*for that...*) + expansion

It is interesting to note that most of the ironic comments included intensifiers and/or expansion that ensured that the listener would not fail to miss the speaker's true intention of voicing disapproval through an insincere show of gratitude. In fact, all but one of the intensifiers that were used in *Fair City* in expressions of gratitude were used in ironic expressions. Moreover, 46% of the expressions that included reason specification were employed in producing ironic utterances. The piling on of ostensible gratitude was a means to both heighten the sense of irony and make certain that the speaker's true meaning would not be overlooked.

Positioning in discourse

The expressions of gratitude sometimes opened a scene in the soap opera, as a character made reference to an earlier beneficial act. More often, the scene involved a beneficial action taking place within the scene itself, and the gratitude followed its execution. In some cases, more than one expression

of gratitude was offered in a scene, and occasionally an expression of gratitude appeared to be prompted by the words of another character. Table 4 shows a breakdown of types of discourse positioning.

**Table 4.** Breakdown of types of discourse positioning

Positioning	<i>Fair City</i>		<i>EastEnders</i>	
Following benefaction directly	47	67%	43	78%
Follow-up expression of gratitude	6	9%	5	9%
Subsequent gratitude	5	7%	3	5%
Following confirmation/reassurance	3	4%	—	—
Following benefaction- related comment/question	1	1%	1	2%
Following another's gratitude expression	2	3%	1	2%
Refusal	2	3%	—	—
Closing	1		1	2%
Other	3	6%	1	2%
Total	70	100%	55	100%

In both of the soap operas, expressions of gratitude typically came directly after the beneficial action. Sixty-seven percent of the expressions of gratitude in *Fair City* were positioned in this way, as were 78% of those in the British data. An action was performed, and gratitude for it immediately ensued.

Follow-up expressions of gratitude, additional expressions of gratitude for the same beneficial action by the same speaker in the same scene, were used in 9% of the Irish data and 9% of the British data. These types of two or more connected expressions of gratitude took a variety of forms: *Thanks + I really appreciate that*; *Thanks + Thanks for...*; *Thanks + praise*; positive adjective + *Thanks*; *Cheers + praise*; *Thanks + Cheers*; praise + *thank you*. In most cases, when an illocutionary force identifying device such as *Thanks* or *Cheers* was used, it occupied the initial position, although there were some exceptions.

These follow-up expressions typically came directly after a preliminary

expression of gratitude. However, occasionally, the follow-up expression came later in the same scene. In one example, a man thanks a woman who works at a newspaper for putting a birthday message in the newspaper after the usual deadline:

- (35) Man: Thanks for getting the birthday remembrance in for me Ma.  
Woman: Just give a little more notice next time.  
Man: Yeah, I don't know what happened. It went completely out of me mind.  
Woman: Not to worry. It's done now.  
Man: Thanks again.  
Woman: No problem. See ya.  
(*Fair City*, January 22, 2009)

In another scene, a man thanks a woman who has agreed to pretend that he is the owner of a bar she works at, in order to impress another woman.

- (36) Man: Thanks to you, Shirl, I might be in for some major love later.  
Woman: She's coming!  
Man: I really... I mean this, I really, really, really appreciate it.  
Woman: You'd the same for me.  
(*EastEnders*, November 20, 2008)

In (35) it is possible that the man felt another expression of gratitude was necessary as a follow-up to his apology. In (36) the man may have intended to say more and been interrupted by the woman's announcement, or the further expression of gratitude may serve as a closing to their conversation as he must now end the talk about his surreptitious plan and begin to play the part of the bar owner.

Both (35) and (36) are also examples of scenes in which gratitude expressed subsequently for a beneficial action that took place earlier. This

type of expression of gratitude referring back to an earlier event comprised 7% of the *Fair City* expressions of gratitude and 5% of the *EastEnders* data. In 4% of the expressions of gratitude in the Irish soap opera, gratitude was not expressed until the speaker had made sure that an offer was solid before saying thank you, using questions like, “Are you certain?” “You really want to give all this?” In one scene a woman is unsure of what a man is implying by a comment. Only after she understands his intention to compliment her does she express gratitude:

(37) Man: Steady on, steady on. You’ll make me drop the rashers.

Woman: I’ve done a lot worse in my time.

Man: Yes, I’d say you have.

Woman: What are you saying?

Man: I meant it as a compliment.

Woman: Well, thank you.

(*Fair City*, November 26, 2008)

Gratitude, especially follow-up expressions of gratitude, might also be elicited by the bestower making another comment about the beneficial action, or, in the case of more than one person being the recipient, expressions of gratitude might be prompted by the other recipient’s expression of gratitude. These two types of discourse patterns amounted to 4% of the data of both soap operas.

#### Other gratitude-related scenes

There were a few other gratitude-related scenes that did not feature expressions of gratitude, but which demonstrated the expectation of a character that such gratitude ought to be forthcoming. In one example, (38), a woman who runs a garage puts in a new transmission for a male employee. While she believes she has been helpful, the man is not pleased with her action:

(38) Man: Where's the transmission?

Woman: Where do you think?

Man: You fitted it?

Woman: No need to thank me.

Man: Are you out of your mind?

(*Fair City*, November 20, 2008)

In example (39), a woman who has given another woman a job, is annoyed by the other's lack of appreciation for her beneficence, and uses a typical gratitude response to emphasize the missing sense of gratitude:

(39) Woman 1: Why do you hate me?

Woman 2: I don't hate you. I swung you a job, didn't I?

Woman 1: Yeah, treating me like your skivvy. You haven't stopped whingeing at me since I started.

Woman 2: Yeah, well, you're welcome.

(*Fair City*, January 19, 2009)

Such examples of pointed non-gratitude reveal interesting communication strategies for drawing attention to perceived gratitude deficiency.

## Discussion

There were significant differences in the forms of expressions of gratitude in the two soap operas. While *Thanks* was the most frequent type of expression in both, it was used more than twice as often in *Fair City* than it was in *EastEnders*. Characters in *EastEnders*, on the other hand, used a greater range of forms to demonstrate appreciation. Use of *Thank you* was four times more frequent than among characters in *Fair City*, and *Cheers* was used three times more frequently. Similarly, praise and positive adjectives were used almost twice as frequently. Fourteen percent of the

*EastEnders* gratitude data also comprised statements or rhetorical questions as a means of thanking the hearer, but this strategy was not observed in the *Fair City* data.

On the other hand, the types of benefaction for which gratitude was expressed were similar in the two soap operas. In both soap operas, gratitude was most often expressed for help or participation, at roughly the same rates of frequency. In *EastEnders*, gratitude was just as likely to be expressed in response to a present or the loan of something. In *Fair City* the rate was slightly lower, but it was nonetheless the second most frequent category of benefaction types. The third most frequent benefaction type in *Fair City* was gratitude for encouragement, support, or advice, but in *EastEnders* the third most frequent category was thanking in routine exchanges. Thanking in routine exchanges and gratitude for compliments or praise were equally frequent in *Fair City*. There were no scenes of gratitude expressed for compliments or praise in *EastEnders*.

It is possible that the reason that although the types of benefaction were similar, the forms employed to express gratitude were different is simply a matter of the predilections of the scriptwriters. However, both programs make use of many scriptwriters and script editors, so it is likely that the scripts reflect the speech intuitions of a large group of speakers in each country. While intuitions about speech forms may not necessarily correspond with the speech that naturally occurs in real situations, soap operas maintain the engagement of their viewers by rendering the speech of characters in a way that seems realistic. The differences in the speech forms present in expressing gratitude in the two shows suggest potential pragmatic differences in the two cultures represented.

The frequency of ironic expressions of gratitude was also roughly the same in *Fair City* and *EastEnders*. In *Fair City*, insincere thanking for non-benefaction represented 18% of the data, and in *EastEnders* it comprised 16%. Irony was employed to express dissatisfaction regarding damage, insufficient offers, lack of empathy, inappropriate remarks, and well-meaning



remarks that nevertheless caused frustration. It is interesting to note that the frequency of both the use of intensifiers and reason specification was quite high in the ironic expressions compared to the data as a whole. It is likely that the use of these types of forms elevated the impact the sarcasm, making the remarks more incisive.

Soap operas are continuing stories that are often propelled by things not going smoothly, by thwarted desires, both trivial and profound, and by resultant resentment and antipathy. It can be imagined that frequency of scenes involving disgruntled or even outraged characters might contribute to the prevalence of ironic expressions of gratitude in both programs. At the same time, it is interesting to note that while many of the scenes involving damage, insufficient offers, and lack of empathy are the stuff and substance of this type of drama genre, tactless remarks or well-intentioned remarks that misfired often occurred in scenes of run-of-the-mill gauche behavior or simple irritation, producing wry responses.

In both *Fair City* and *EastEnders*, the majority of the expressions of gratitude were made directly in response to a beneficial action. In both dramas, follow-up expressions of gratitude by the same speaker regarding the same benefaction occurred at the same rate of frequency, comprising 9% of each set of data. Similarly, when multiple expressions of thank-you were voiced, the illocutionary force identifying device was usually in the initial position in both dramas. Thus, while there was variation in the forms of the expressions of gratitude between the two soap operas, there was less divergence regarding positioning in discourse.

## Conclusion

An analysis of the language used in soap operas such as *Fair City* and *EastEnders* offers valuable insight into the various strategies that speakers in a given speech community may employ in the execution of speech acts. While this language is not naturally occurring data but instead is scripted, based on the intuitions of the various scriptwriters working on the programs, it none-

theless reveals the notions these writers hold of what “counts” as a successful realization of the speech act. Moreover, soap opera audiences desire to identify with the characters. Although many viewers will not find themselves in the same dramatic situations as the characters, nevertheless they wish to feel an affinity with them, which they are unable to feel with characters who respond to these situations in an unrealistic way, including in their use of language. In the case of the speech act of thanking, soap operas provide a wealth of situations in which appreciation is expressed on the part of a wide variety of characters. Additionally, there are many scenes of frustration and discontent, allowing for ironic expressions of gratitude.

While the frequency of various types of benefactive acts, and their positioning in the discourse, was similar in *Fair City* and *EastEnders*, the frequency of different forms and strategies used to express gratitude diverged. A next step in the exploration of expressions of gratitude in inner-circle varieties of English will be a comparison of these findings with the frequency of different strategies and forms in naturally occurring data in Irish English and British English. Investigation of expressions of gratitude in films and novels would also be fruitful.

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