

“Thanks in Advance”. The Negative Effect
of a Polite Phrase on Compliance with a
Request

Lisa Bruttel
Juri Nithammer
Florian Stolley



Center for Economic Policy Analysis

<https://www.uni-potsdam.de/cepa>

University of Potsdam

August-Bebel-Straße 89, 14482 Potsdam

Tel.: +49 331 977-3225

Fax: +49 331 977-3210

E-Mail: dp-cepa@uni-potsdam.de

ISSN (online) 2628-653X

CEPA Discussion Papers can be downloaded from RePEc

<https://ideas.repec.org/s/pot/cepadp.html>

Opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect views of the Center of Economic Policy Analysis (CEPA). CEPA Discussion Papers may represent preliminary work and are circulated to encourage discussion.

All rights reserved by the authors.

Published online at the Institutional Repository of the University of Potsdam

<https://doi.org/10.25932/publishup-42770>

“Thanks in Advance”. The Negative Effect of a Polite Phrase on Compliance with a Request

Lisa Bruttel

University of Potsdam

Juri Nithammer

University of Potsdam

Florian Stolley

University of Potsdam

ABSTRACT

This paper studies the effect of the commonly used phrase “thanks in advance” on compliance with a small request. In a controlled laboratory experiment we ask participants to give a detailed answer to an open question. The treatment variable is whether or not they see the phrase “thanks in advance.” Our participants react to the treatment by exerting less effort in answering the request even though they perceive the phrase as polite.

Keywords: compliance behavior, gratitude, reciprocity, experiment

JEL Codes: C91, D64, D91

Corresponding author:

Juri Nithammer

University of Potsdam

Department of Economics and Social Sciences

August-Bebel-Str. 89

14482 Potsdam

Germany

E-Mail: juri.nithammer@uni-potsdam.de

1 Introduction

In many social and market interactions there is asymmetry between the parties involved. Such asymmetry, be it in endowments or information, can hinder an exchange of goods that would increase total welfare as the party that would benefit the most from the interaction cannot offer anything equivalent in return. In this paper, we are specifically interested in interactions in form of a request that the individual being asked is free to refuse. Examples for such interactions can be found in policy making and social marketing,¹ the collection of donations for charitable causes,² in making altruistic requests,³ and in marketing applications.⁴

Asymmetry in endowments (e.g. in money, knowledge or time) has been frequently studied using public good games, where it typically causes a reduction of total contributions in comparison to homogeneous endowments.⁵ Information asymmetries arise if only the person being asked has information on the costs and effort that would accompany compliance with the request. Principal-agent theory, especially on the problem of hidden information (Arrow, 1984; Thomas and Worrall, 1990; Holmstrom and Milgrom, 1991), suggests that incentivizing compliance in such situations is difficult, as either the costs of the desired behavior are unknown to the principal or the desired behavior itself is unknown to the principal.

We study a small but widely used attempt to resolve such problems. In an experiment, we as the researchers ask participants to explain their behavior to us, by which we face both types of asymmetry described above: we are interested in information only they possess, and we ask them to spend time and effort on providing this knowledge to us. Answering our question is associated with opportunity costs of time, but we do not know the exact level of these costs for any given individual. The solution approach we study is the phrase “thanks in advance” that can typically be found, e.g., at the end of e-mails containing any form of request.⁶ The frequent occurrence of the phrase “thanks in advance” suggests that the person making the

¹See Brennan and Binney (2010), Supphellen and Nelson (2001) or the study by Katzev and Johnson (1984) on campaigning for the advancement of energy savings.

²See Bell et al. (1994), Das et al. (2008), Andreoni et al. (2017), Sanders and Smith (2016), and Supphellen and Nelson (2001).

³See Andreoni and Rao (2011), Mohlin and Johannesson (2008), Bruttel and Stolley (2018), and Althoff et al. (2014).

⁴E.g., newspapers that want to increase their subscription numbers (Scott, 1976).

⁵See, e.g., Heap et al. (2016) and the therein cited literature.

⁶As anecdotal evidence: of the student requests the first author of this paper received by e-mail in a randomly selected month (January 2019), 50 percent (9 out of 18) contained “thanks in advance” or a similar text as a closing.

request expects the phrase to improve the chance that the person being asked will respond positively.

Thanking someone in advance relates to the behavioral principle of reciprocity, which is a well-known way of improving cooperation (Gouldner, 1960; Berg et al., 1995; Bolton and Ockenfels, 2000; Falk and Fischbacher, 2006): if the person being asked perceives the phrase as an initial act of kindness (as it implies gratitude as a form of compensation for fulfilling the request) a positive response may become more likely (Rabin, 1993; Goei et al., 2003). However, this attempt may also backfire if usage of the phrase is not seen as an act of kindness but rather as an impolite affront, an attempt to reduce the agent’s autonomy (Fehr and List, 2004; Falk and Kosfeld, 2006; Bowles, 2008). Hence, the direction of the effect of “thanks in advance” on compliance with the request is an empirical question.

The literature in behavioral economics has shown that communication in general can increase cooperation (Mohlin and Johannesson, 2008; Andreoni and Rao, 2011) and that expressions of gratitude in particular can increase compliance with a request: occurrence of the word “thanks” in a request increases giving by female dictators in a binary dictator game (Bruttel et al., 2018) and gratitude that is expressed in advance increases the probability of a request being successful (Althoff et al., 2014). Economidou-Kogetsidis (2015) finds that e-mails written by students are perceived as more polite by (British-English native speaking) faculty members when containing the phrase “thanking you in advance” than other e-mails without the phrase but also other differences. However, politeness may not necessarily predict a higher success rate, as in the study by (Althoff et al., 2014), where politeness has no significant effect on success. Furthermore, the effect of “thanks in advance” may have a cultural component, as thanking someone in advance is common in the United States (Lee et al., 2012) but viewed as extremely impolite in, e.g, Japan (Mizutani and Mizutani, 1989; Ohashi, 2006). We add to this literature by conducting a laboratory experiment with German students.

Two treatments are conducted in a between-subjects design. We ask participants to explain their behavior in a previous part of the experiment. In the `THANKSINADVANCE` treatment, the phrase “thanks in advance” is displayed as a closing of the request while no phrase is used in the `CONTROL` treatment. Participants’ compliance with the request is measured by the time they spend answering the request as well as the length of the answer. Participants are allowed to leave the experiment as soon as they are finished. Hence, answering in more detail is associated with opportunity costs in terms of time.

The data reveal that our participants spend significantly less time on answering the request and tend to write shorter answers when seeing the phrase “thanks in advance.” Thus, their reaction is consistent with the interpretation that they perceive the phrase as an unkind attempt to restrict their autonomy.

2 Experimental Design and Procedures

The experiment is very short and consists of two parts. In the first part, participants perform a 5x5-version of the bomb risk elicitation task (Crosetto and Filippin, 2013). In the second part, participants answer a short questionnaire, which mainly consists of an open question in which they are asked to explain their behavior in the bomb risk elicitation task.

In the bomb risk elicitation task in the first part, participants collect packages. Each collected package is worth 0.50 euros. There are 25 packages which are numbered consecutively from 1 to 25. In one of the packages, a bomb is hidden. If a participant collects this package, all packages collected will be destroyed and the participant will earn 0 euros for this task. On their screen, participants see a rectangle with 25 buttons labeled “package 1” to “package 25.” They can decide which packages to collect. Participants are allowed to collect between 1 and 24 packages. A screenshot of the bomb risk elicitation task can be found in the Appendix. Only after finishing the questionnaire, each participant picks a note with a number between 1 and 25 on it. The picked number determines the package in which the bomb is hidden for this particular participant. We use this task because it is short and it leaves participants with sufficient substance to write more than a few words about their decision making process. For example, they can explain whether they chose packages according to a special pattern or lucky numbers, or they may elaborate on their risk preferences.

In the questionnaire (after finishing the collection of packages and before picking the number of the “bomb” package), participants are asked to explain their strategy in the bomb risk elicitation task in as much detail as possible. Translated into English, the request is as follows: “Please explain in as much detail as possible how you decided in the previous part which packages to collect.”⁷

⁷The exact wording in the original, German language is: “Erläutern Sie bitte möglichst ausführlich, wie Sie im vorherigen Teil entschieden haben, welche Päckchen Sie einsammeln.”

The experiment consists of two treatments in a between-subjects design. In the THANKSINADVANCE treatment, the phrase “thanks in advance” is displayed directly below the request.⁸ In the CONTROL treatment, no such additional text is displayed. Screenshots of the two questionnaire screens, one for the THANKSINADVANCE and one for the CONTROL treatment can be found in the Appendix. Participants are told explicitly that they can leave the experiment as soon as they have completed the questionnaire and that they will individually receive their payment immediately afterwards. Hence, complying with the request to answer in as much detail as possible is associated with noticeable opportunity costs. Participants spend on average around 3 minutes (which corresponds to 20 percent of their total time in the laboratory) on answering this request. They are allowed to provide no answer. To make sure that participants do not skip the request by accident, they are asked whether they are done answering when leaving the request screen.

After answering the main question (with or without the “thanks in advance” text), participants were asked to rate the politeness of the closing “thanks in advance” and two other closings, which were displayed in random order, on a 7-point Likert scale. These other closings, translated into English, are: “I would be delighted to receive a response.” and “I expect your answer.” We use the other two closings to construct a reliability variable to identify participants who do not read the on-screen instructions properly: participants who rated the phrase “I expect your answer” as more polite than “I would be delighted to receive a response” are assumed to act inattentively and are therefore classified as unreliable both in their rating of “thanks in advance” and their response to the treatment.

12 sessions were conducted at the Potsdam Laboratory for Economic Experiments (PLEx) in May 2018, divided into 6 sessions for each treatment. The number of participants per session varied between 9 and 20. In total, 179 students participated in the experiment, 92 in the THANKSINADVANCE treatment and 87 in the CONTROL treatment. In the THANKSINADVANCE treatment, 57 participants were female (62%) while in the CONTROL treatment, 59 participants were female (68%). The different group sizes are the result of the pure randomization process we used to assign participants to the treatments.

In each session, participants were randomly assigned a seat. At the beginning, they read the instructions for the bomb risk elicitation task on-screen and, subsequently, carried out the task. Then, participants answered the questionnaire. After finishing the questionnaire,

⁸The exact wording in the original, German language is: “Vielen Dank im Voraus.”

participants were instructed on screen to go to the experimenter. They drew a number which determined the number of the package containing the “bomb” (and thus their individual payoff) and received their payment in cash. Sessions lasted for approximately 15 minutes and participants earned on average 7.60 euros,⁹ including a show-up fee of 5 euros. The experiment was computerized with z-Tree (Fischbacher, 2007) and the recruitment process was conducted using ORSEE (Greiner, 2015).

3 Results

We use two proxies for effort: The time spent on answering the request¹⁰ (in seconds) and the length of the answer (in characters).¹¹ We consider the time spent on answering as our primary measure, because a decrease in length of the answer could also be explained by an increase in precision. With time there is no such confound.¹² Nevertheless, the two measures correlate highly ($r = 0.75$).

Figure 1 shows the average time participants spend on answering in both treatments and the average length of their answers. Both measures indicate that participants spend less effort when reading the phrase “thanks in advance” while writing their text. This negative reaction notwithstanding, thanking someone in advance is generally viewed as very polite by our participants. The median politeness rating on a Likert scale from 1 to 7 is 6, the mean is 5.73.¹³

⁹7.60 euros \approx 8.85 dollars at the time of the experiment.

¹⁰We measure the time from when the screen with the strategy request is initially displayed to exiting this screen.

¹¹In their answers, participants often discussed their level of risk aversion or the probability of hitting the bomb. Many wrote that they chose numbers which had special meaning to them or, on the contrary, numbers that were completely random. Some wanted to achieve or avoid a certain pattern, and a few had a certain payoff goal. Examples are “I was thinking about collecting 50% of the packages to keep the risk of hitting the bomb about the same as the chance of not hitting the bomb. I chose the packages at random.” or “I decided to collect 10 packages, because that would lead to 5 euros and the probability of success is still more than 50 percent. When selecting the packages, I started with my favorite numbers and then selected random numbers.” Thus, it seems that participants took the request seriously. Three participants chose not to provide an answer at all, two of whom were in the THANKSINADVANCE treatment.

¹²We believe that these proxies measure effort with sufficient accuracy. Our implementation of opportunity costs in terms of time ensures a trade-off between answering in more detail and leaving the experiment earlier for lunch or other enjoyable activities. Any differences in, e.g., language precision, preferences for lunch at the university, or the true explanation for participants’ behavior in the prior task and hence, the necessary level of detail, should be distributed randomly over the treatments.

¹³Participants’ ratings of “thanks in advance” do not differ significantly by treatment (two-sided t-test:

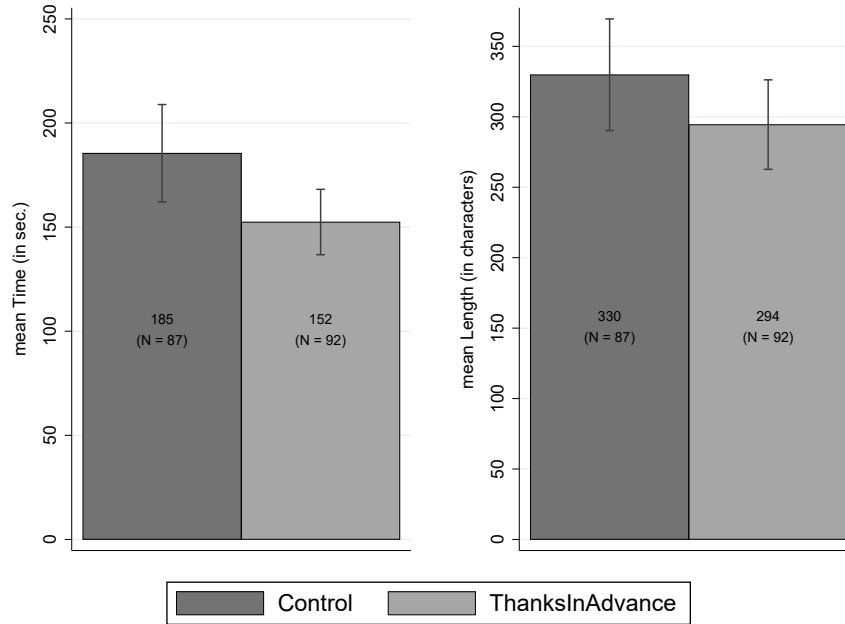


Figure 1: Average time participants spend on answering and average length of participants’ answers, separated by treatment.

Note: The figure shows means as well as 95% confidence intervals.

We use OLS regressions to estimate the treatment effects. Tables 1 and 2 provide the full estimation results. In addition to the main treatment variable, the regressions include control variables for participants’ gender, a dummy that equals one if a participant rated “thanks in advance” as more or equally polite than the median rating,¹⁴ and interaction terms of these two variables and the treatment variable.¹⁵ We include a variable controlling for gender because previous studies found substantial gender differences in the domain of asking someone a favor (Bruttel and Stolley, 2018; Bruttel et al., 2018).

The data reveal that being exposed to the phrase “thanks in advance” has a statistically significant negative effect on the time participants spend on describing their strategy (about 40-50 seconds less) and tends to decrease the length of these messages. Interestingly, neither the

$p = 0.9228$). Thus, there is no indication that seeing the phrase earlier influenced the politeness rating of “thanks in advance.” Given $\alpha = 0.05$, a medium effect size of $d = 0.5$ and our sample size $N = 179$, we would be able to detect an effect with sufficient power of $(1 - \beta) = 0.95$.

¹⁴We use a median split because the politeness ratings of “thanks in advance” are strongly skewed towards the upper end of the scale.

¹⁵The regressions use a sample that excludes five observations that we classified as unreliable given participants’ politeness ratings of the two other closings. Tables 3 and 4 in the Appendix provide the regression results including these observations. The effects are almost the same.

Table 1: Estimations of treatment effects

	Time in seconds			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
THANKSINADVANCE	-34.25** (14.37)	-41.46** (17.76)	-51.18** (25.23)	-57.31* (29.26)
Male		26.19 (21.88)		19.29 (23.12)
THANKSINADVANCE#Male		13.30 (29.90)		20.10 (30.87)
Polite			-28.26 (22.33)	-22.13 (23.36)
THANKSINADVANCE#Polite			24.13 (30.73)	19.57 (31.40)
Constant	185.22*** (10.28)	176.90*** (12.33)	204.84*** (18.60)	194.45*** (22.28)
Observations	174	174	174	174
R-squared	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.07

Note: OLS-estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

dummy variable indicating that “thanks in advance” was rated as more or equally polite than the median rating nor the interaction of this dummy with the treatment variable contribute significantly to explaining the time spend on answering.

Our data do not reveal statistically significant gender effects on the time spend on answering. Interestingly though, the (weak) treatment effect on the length of the answer seems to be driven by female participants as the interaction `THANKSINADVANCE#Male` seems to nullify the effect in size.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Problems of cooperation in principal-agent relationships characterized by endowment and information asymmetries can be difficult to resolve, as direct reciprocal behavior or monetary incentives cannot be implemented. A charitable organization cannot offer monetary compensation for donations, students asking their professors for letters of recommendation are not allowed to compensate them in any way, and researchers cannot easily incentivize de-

Table 2: Estimations of treatment effects

	Length in characters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
THANKSINADVANCE	-37.77 (26.01)	-61.76* (32.39)	-42.80 (45.64)	-75.93 (53.22)
Male		-2.61 (39.90)		-16.64 (42.06)
THANKSINADVANCE#Male		61.49 (54.53)		74.28 (56.16)
Polite			-39.72 (40.40)	-45.02 (42.50)
THANKSINADVANCE#Polite			5.12 (55.59)	12.72 (57.11)
Constant	328.96*** (18.60)	329.79*** (22.49)	356.54*** (33.66)	365.50*** (40.52)
Observations	174	174	174	174
R-squared	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.04

Note: OLS-estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

tailed answers in questionnaires. In this study, we analyzed the effect of a simple and small alternative: The use of the phrase “thanks in advance.” This widely used phrase usually accompanies requests such as the examples above, suggesting that its users hope it will increase the probability of the request being successful.

In a controlled laboratory experiment with German students, we as researchers asked participants to provide information to us. The participants were free to refuse this request and answering the question was associated with opportunity costs in terms of time. They were asked to explain to us in detail the strategy they used in a previous part of the experiment. Thus, the request is comparable in extent to, e.g., answering a small questionnaire or looking up a small information. Participants took the request seriously as can be seen from their answers (see footnote 11 for examples). The text “thanks in advance” was added to the request in the THANKSINADVANCE treatment, whereas this text was not displayed in the CONTROL treatment. As proxies for the effort participants exerted in order to comply with our request, we measured the time participants spent on answering the request and the length of their answers.

We find that the phrase “thanks in advance” significantly reduces the effort participants exert. They take considerably and significantly less time to write their answers (about 40-50 seconds or about 25% less) and tend to write shorter answers. Therefore, we believe that using this phrase is not an expedient way of fostering cooperation or compliance in principal-agent relationships. More generally, our results show that even small lapses in language can have noticeable negative consequences for cooperation or compliance. Participants’ perception of the politeness of “thanks in advance” does not seem to impact their reaction, and neither does their gender.

These findings seem to contradict those of Althoff et al. (2014) and Bruttel et al. (2018) who found a positive affect of (advance) gratitude on generosity. A likely explanation for this difference is that the “gratitude” category in the computer based text analysis by Althoff et al. (2014) also contains expressions of need, such as “craving,” “help,” or “anyone.” It might be that these expressions rather than the ones promising gratitude are the main drivers of the positive effect of this category of text messages in their study. Similarly, Bruttel et al. (2018) did not focus on the specific phrase “thanks in advance” but just reported a positive effect of the word “thanks,” irrespective of the precise context.

Our findings suggest that people – or at least German students – perceive “thanks in advance” as polite but nevertheless react negatively to the phrase. We thereby add to literature on the effects of the language of a request on perceived politeness (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2015) as well as on compliance with a request (Althoff et al., 2014; Mitra and Gilbert, 2014; Das et al., 2008; Bruttel et al., 2018) and to literature on cultural differences in the use and effects of “thanks in advance” (Lee et al., 2012; Mizutani and Mizutani, 1989; Ohashi, 2006). The negative reaction to the phrase could be explained by a perceived reduction of participants’ autonomy, which has been shown to decrease compliance also in other contexts (Fehr and List, 2004; Falk and Kosfeld, 2006; Bowles, 2008; Bruttel and Stolley, 2018).

References

- Althoff, Tim, Cristian Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, and Dan Jurafsky (2014) “How to Ask for a Favor: A Case Study on the Success of Altruistic Requests,” Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, URL: <http://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM14/paper/download/8106/8101>.
- Andreoni, James and Justin M. Rao (2011) “The Power of Asking: How Communication Affects

- Selfishness, Empathy, and Altruism,” *Journal of Public Economics*, 95 (7–8), pp. 513–520, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2010.12.008>.
- Andreoni, James, Justin M. Rao, and Hannah Trachtman (2017) “Avoiding the Ask: A Field Experiment on Altruism, Empathy, and Charitable Giving,” *Journal of Political Economy*, 125 (3), pp. 625–653, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/691703>.
- Arrow, Kenneth J. (1984) “The Economics of Agency,” *A Report of the Center for Research on Organizational Efficiency, Stanford University*.
- Bell, Robert Alan, Matthew Cholerton, Kevin E. Fraczek, Guy S. Rohlf, and Brian A. Smith (1994) “Encouraging Donations to Charity: A Field Study of Competing and Complementary Factors in Tactic Sequencing,” *Western Journal of Communication*, 58 (2), pp. 98–115, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10570319409374490>.
- Berg, Joyce, John Dickhaut, and Kevin McCabe (1995) “Trust, Reciprocity, and Social History,” *Games and economic behavior*, 10 (1), pp. 122–142, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1006/game.1995.1027>.
- Bolton, Gary E and Axel Ockenfels (2000) “ERC: A Theory of Equity, Reciprocity, and Competition,” *American economic review*, 90 (1), pp. 166–193, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.90.1.166>.
- Bowles, Samuel (2008) “Policies Designed for Self-Interested Citizens May Undermine ‘The Moral Sentiments’: Evidence from Economic Experiments,” *science*, 320 (5883), pp. 1605–1609, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.1152110>.
- Brennan, Linda and Wayne Binney (2010) “Fear, Guilt, and Shame Appeals in Social Marketing,” *Journal of Business Research*, 63 (2), pp. 140–146, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.02.006>.
- Bruttel, Lisa and Florian Stolley (2018) “Gender Differences in the Response to Decision Power and Responsibility – Framing Effects in a Dictator Game,” *Games 2018*, 9 (2), DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/g9020028>.
- Bruttel, Lisa, Florian Stolley, and Verena Utikal (2018) “Getting a Yes. An Experiment on the Power of Asking,” Working Paper, URL: <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/87687>.
- Crosetto, Paolo and Antonio Filippin (2013) “The ‘Bomb’ Risk Elicitation Task,” *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty*, 47 (1), pp. 31–65, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11166-013-9170-z>.
- Das, Enny, Peter Kerkhof, and Joyce Kuiper (2008) “Improving the Effectiveness of Fundraising Messages: The Impact of Charity Goal Attainment, Message Framing, and Evidence on Persuasion,” *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 36 (2), pp. 161–175, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00909880801922854>.
- Economidou-Kogetsidis, Maria (2015) “Teaching Email Politeness in the EFL/ESL Classroom,” *ELT Journal*, 69 (4), pp. 415–424, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccv031>.

- Falk, Armin and Urs Fischbacher (2006) “A Theory of Reciprocity,” *Games and Economic Behavior*, 54 (2), pp. 293 – 315, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.geb.2005.03.001>.
- Falk, Armin and Michael Kosfeld (2006) “The Hidden Costs of Control,” *American Economic Review*, 96 (5), pp. 1611–1630, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/aer.96.5.1611>.
- Fehr, Ernst and John A List (2004) “The Hidden Costs and Returns of Incentives – Trust and Trustworthiness among CEOs,” *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 2 (5), pp. 743–771, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1162/1542476042782297>.
- Fischbacher, Urs (2007) “z-Tree: Zurich Toolbox for Ready-Made Economic Experiments,” *Experimental Economics*, 10 (2), pp. 171–178, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10683-006-9159-4>.
- Goei, Ryan, Lisa L. Massi Lindsey, Franklin J. Boster, Paul D. Skalski, and Jonathan M. Bowman (2003) “The Mediating Roles of Liking and Obligation on the Relationship between Favors and Compliance,” *Communication Research*, 30 (2), pp. 178–197, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0093650202250877>.
- Gouldner, Alvin W (1960) “The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement,” *American sociological review*, pp. 161–178, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2092623>.
- Greiner, Ben (2015) “Subject Pool Recruitment Procedures: Organizing Experiments with ORSEE,” *Journal of the Economic Science Association*, 1 (1), pp. 114–125, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s40881-015-0004-4>.
- Heap, Shaun P Hargreaves, Abhijit Ramalingam, and Brock V Stoddard (2016) “Endowment Inequality in Public Goods Games: A Re-Examination,” *Economics Letters*, 146, pp. 4–7, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2016.07.015>.
- Holmstrom, Bengt and Paul Milgrom (1991) “Multitask Principal-Agent Analyses: Incentive Contracts, Asset Ownership, and Job Design,” *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 7, pp. 24–52, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/764957>.
- Katzev, Richard D. and Theodore R. Johnson (1984) “Comparing the Effects of Monetary Incentives and Foot-in-the-Door Strategies in Promoting Residential Electricity Conservation,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 14 (1), pp. 12–27, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.1984.tb02217.x>.
- Lee, Hye Eun, Hee Sun Park, Tatsuya Imai, and Daniel Dolan (2012) “Cultural Differences Between Japan and the United States in Uses of ‘Apology’ and ‘Thank You’ in Favor Asking Messages,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 31 (3), pp. 263–289, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0261927X12446595>.
- Mitra, Tanushree and Eric Gilbert (2014) “The Language that Gets People to Give: Phrases that Predict Success on Kickstarter,” in *CSCW ’14* eds. by Susan Fussell, Wayne Lutters, Meredith Ringel Morris, and Madhu Reddy, pp. 49–61: ACM, New York, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2531602.2531656>.

- Mizutani, Osamu and Nobuko Mizutani (1989) *Nihongo Notes 9: Situational Japanese 4*: The Japan Times, Tokyo.
- Mohlin, Erik and Magnus Johannesson (2008) “Communication: Content or Relationship?” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 65 (3–4), pp. 409–419, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2005.12.003>.
- Ohashi, Jun (2006) “Japanese Culture Specific Face and Politeness Orientation: A Pragmatic Investigation of *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*,” *Multilingua*, 22 (3), pp. 257–274, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/mult.2003.013>.
- Rabin, Matthew (1993) “Incorporating Fairness into Game Theory and Economics,” *The American economic review*, pp. 1281–1302.
- Sanders, Michael and Sarah Smith (2016) “Can Simple Prompts Increase Bequest Giving? Field Evidence from a Legal Call Centre,” *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 125, pp. 179–191, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2016.01.002>.
- Scott, Carol A. (1976) “The Effects of Trial and Incentives on Repeat Purchase Behavior,” *Journal of Marketing Research*, 13 (3), pp. 263–269, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3150736>.
- Supphellen, Magne and Michelle R. Nelson (2001) “Developing, Exploring, and Validating a Typology of Private Philanthropic Decision Making,” *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 22 (5), pp. 573–603, DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0167-4870\(01\)00056-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0167-4870(01)00056-3).
- Thomas, Jonathan and Tim Worrall (1990) “Income Fluctuation and Asymmetric Information: An Example of a Repeated Principal-Agent Problem,” *Journal of Economic Theory*, 51 (2), pp. 367–390, DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-0531\(90\)90023-D](http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-0531(90)90023-D).

A Appendix

A.1 Additional tables

Table 3: Estimations of treatment effects, including all observations

	Time in seconds			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
THANKSINADVANCE	-33.04** (14.03)	-38.03** (17.28)	-46.83* (23.96)	-49.60* (27.79)
Male		27.38 (21.36)		20.71 (22.57)
THANKSINADVANCE#Male		8.91 (29.25)		15.55 (30.18)
Polite			-27.68 (21.54)	-21.15 (22.57)
THANKSINADVANCE#Polite			19.78 (29.59)	13.36 (30.26)
Constant	185.48*** (10.06)	176.67*** (12.12)	204.25*** (17.74)	193.16*** (21.38)
Observations	179	179	179	179
R-squared	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.06

Note: OLS-estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table 4: Estimations of treatment effects, including all observations

	Length in characters			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
THANKSINADVANCE	-35.37 (25.43)	-54.39* (31.57)	-36.67 (43.35)	-62.58 (50.55)
Male		2.80 (39.01)		-11.08 (41.06)
THANKSINADVANCE#Male		49.55 (53.43)		63.30 (54.91)
Polite			-40.51 (38.98)	-44.00 (41.06)
THANKSINADVANCE#Polite			-1.00 (53.53)	2.65 (55.05)
Constant	329.85*** (18.23)	328.95*** (22.13)	357.32*** (32.10)	363.25*** (38.90)
Observations	179	179	179	179
R-squared	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.04

Note: OLS-estimates. Standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

A.2 Instructions for Participants of the Experiment

The following section provides the English translation of the originally German instructions which the participants received in the experiment on-screen:

Screen 1

Welcome to PLEx

Please abide by the following rules:

1. Communication is forbidden as long as you are in the laboratory.
2. If you have any questions, please ask the experimenters.
3. You may only use those functions of your computer that are intended for the experiment.

Thank you for supporting our research. You will find the instructions for the experiment on the next pages.

Screen 2

General Instructions

You will receive 5 euros for your arrival on time and your participation in the experiment.

Furthermore, you can earn additional money in the main part of the experiment. The amount of money you earn depends on your decision in the experiment.

At the end of today's experiment, you will be paid in cash.

The experiment consists of a main part, which we will explain to you in detail on the next page, and a subsequent questionnaire. Please read the instructions for the main part of the experiment carefully.

If there is anything you do not understand, please raise your hand. We will then come to your seat and answer your question personally.

Screen 3

Instructions for the main part of the experiment

In the main part of the experiment you will see a rectangle on the left side of the screen, which consists of 25 numbered packages.

Your task is to collect packages. This is done by a left-click on the desired package. You earn 0,50 euro for each collected package.

Once you have collected a package, it disappears from the rectangle. On the right side of the screen you will see current information about the number of packages you have collected so far and how your earnings may look like accordingly.

But beware: Your earnings are merely hypothetical at first, because behind one of the 25 packages there is a bomb! If you have collected the package behind which the bomb is hidden, all packages you have collected will be destroyed and you will receive 0 euro for this part of the experiment.

You do not know behind which one of the packages the bomb is. The bomb can be hidden anywhere in the rectangle with equal probability.

Only when leaving the laboratory, you are going to pick a number from a bag of 25 numbered notes. The number on your note determines behind which package the bomb is in your case. Therefore, you will learn only after the experiment whether or not you have collected the package behind which the bomb is located. If you have collected the package behind which the bomb is located, you will receive 0 euro. However, if you have not collected the package behind which the bomb is located, you will receive 0.50 euro for each package you have collected. In any case, you may keep the 5 euro for your punctual appearance.

If you have collected a package by accident, you can always return all packages by clicking "reset"

and start collecting the packages again.

There is no time limit for this task. Once you are done, you will start with the questionnaire.

A.3 Screenshots

The following section provides screenshots of the bomb risk elicitation task (Figure 2), of the open question in the THANKSINADVANCE treatment (Figure 3) as well as in the CONTROL treatment (Figure 4).

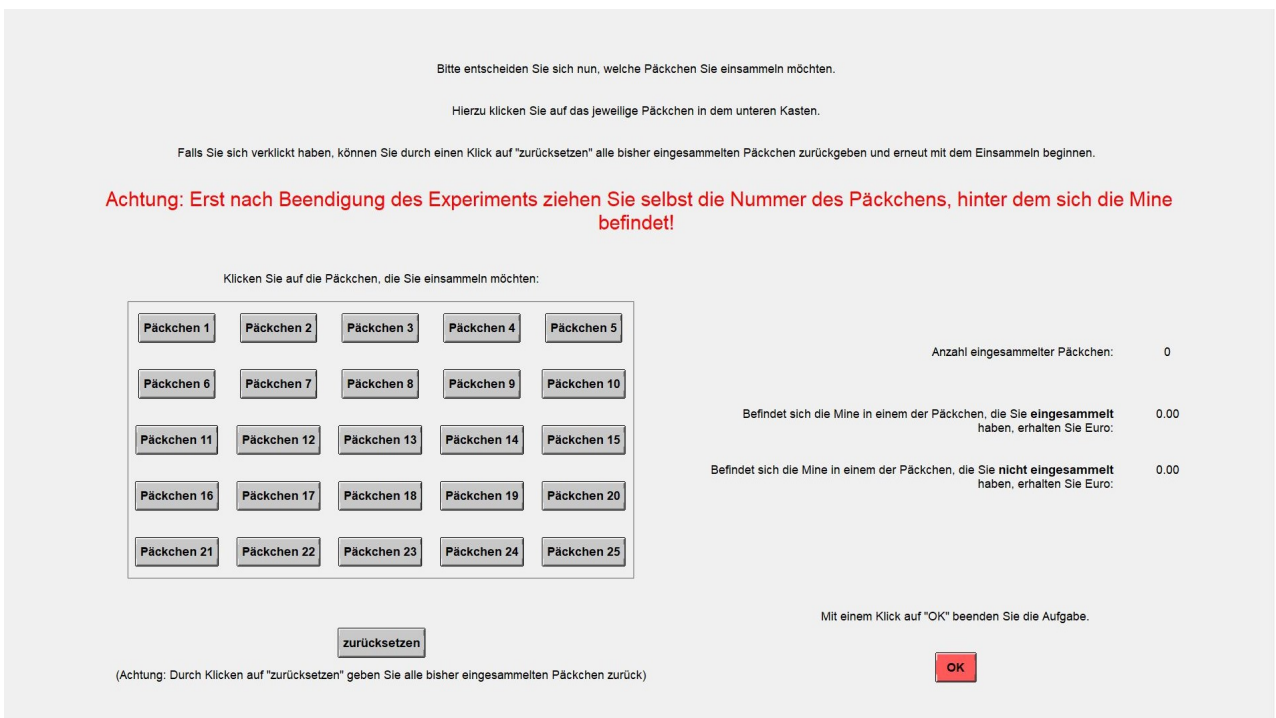


Figure 2: Screenshot of the 5x5-version of the bomb risk elicitation task.



Figure 3: Screenshot of the request in the **THANKSINADVANCE** treatment.

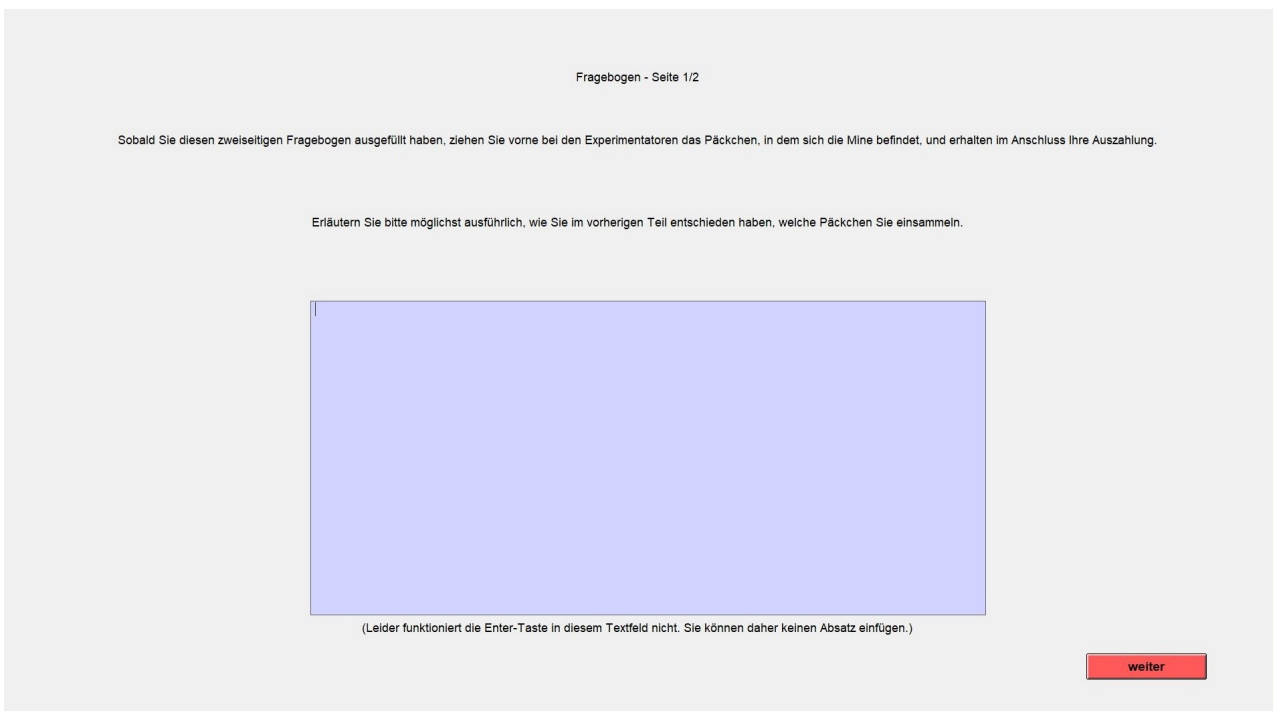


Figure 4: Screenshot of the request in the **CONTROL** treatment.