

The Study of Compliment Speech Act Responses: A Study Based on Status and Gender in Persian

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Received: December 11 2013

Accepted: February 4 2014

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at extracting and categorizing the range of strategies used in responding to compliments in Persian regarding the relative status of compliments and complimentary. Another purpose of the study was to provide a contrastive view of compliment responses between Persian and English languages. 60 Iranian Persian and 12

Canadian English speaking university students attended in this study. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was used to extract the strategies employed when responding to compliments by Persian and English speakers. The corpus used in this analysis consists of 809

Persian and English compliment responses collected from the participants of the study. 655 compliment responses from the Iranian participants and 154 compliment responses from the Canadian participants were collected. Findings suggest that, in responding to a compliment, the general tendency of Persian speakers is an “agreement”, both in equal and unequal status. Further, comparing the results of Persian and English data, significant differences were observed.

KEYWORDS: compliment, compliment response strategy, pragmatic transfer, status

INTRODUCTION

People as social beings need to communicate with each other and this communication consists of different speech acts. Schmidt and Richards (as cited in Pishghadam and Sharafadini, 2011) defined Speech acts as including all the acts we do while speaking. Examples of speech acts include invitations, refusals, suggestions, apologies, compliments, compliment responses and so on. Communicating people in a language other than the speaker's first language may result in an inappropriate use of the language pragmatically and consequently cause misunderstanding the language and situation, which causes pragmatic negative transfer.

The importance of studying speech acts can be more tangible regarding teaching languages. In teaching a new language in addition to teaching structure of the language, it is a matter of importance that teachers spend time and energy on teaching how and when the language should be used, that is, the pragmatics of the language is as much important as the syntax, and phonology of the language. These questions may arise: how does the teacher gain the proper information herself? Who provides the material and the method of teaching? This kind of pragmatic and sociolinguistic information is not commonly accessible in the common grammar or conversation courses. To build this type of data we need to analyze languages themselves. A good way of reaching this data, to be analyzed, is to receive them from the native people using that language as the most reliable source of information as Celce-Murcia (1991), and McCarthy and Carter (1995) have argued for a discourse approach to teaching grammar. Therefore, as mentioned previously, discourse analysis would be useful to provide both course designers and teachers of a language with reliable material to make learners familiar with functions of language.

An important speech act specially in making stronger relationships is compliment. Compliment is defined as a structured speech act that reflects social values in the culture (Manes, 1983). The matter is recognizing the appropriate situation for performing each speech act and recognizing the proper act itself in a way not to violate the rules of a language community. In other words, considering compliment speech act, speakers need to know when and how it is appropriate to give one a compliment or respond to the received compliment, in a way not to be considered ill-cultured while communicating in a foreign language. As Nkwain (2011, p 61) has put it, “complimenting is a noticeable characteristic of naturally occurring speech acts and it usually stems from the speaker's courtesy or kindness and the desire to express admiration or

praise, asking for advice, opinions or approval, orally or through action". Although Complimenting is mostly considered a positive strategy with the intent to create solidarity between interlocutors, it may be interpreted carrying other intentions. Some functions attributed to a compliment include "Expression of solidarity, Expression of positive admiration, Expression of envy or desire, Verbal harassment, and Flattery" (Nkwain, 2011, p. 74). This interpretation depends on different factors such as the interlocutors' characteristics, relationship, and degree of familiarity, the words expressed and the circumscribing situation. In the present research the most basic function of a compliment, which is the "Expression of positive admiration" is the subject of investigation.

Lack of knowledge in and attention to how compliments and their responses function, as other speech acts, can cause serious problems and result in miscommunication. Further complication arises while communicating in a second or foreign language for the language users, because of cultural as well as linguistic differences across languages. Leech (1990) claimed that transferring a community's norms and habits into another community might

result in pragmatic failure. Wolfson (1983) (as cited in Keshavarz, 2011) has stated that compliments differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are structured but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and the function they serve. The same complications would apply to compliment responses.

Compliments are often followed by responses various in form and function based on different factors such as culture, social status, and type of the relationship between the interlocutors. Pomerantz (1978) and Herbert (1986) suggested classification patterns for compliment responses including different levels each. Then after, many works have been carried out in the field of compliment and compliment speech act. Han, 1996; Fong, 1998; Chen, 2003; Tran, 2007 and many others around the world have studied compliments and compliment responses; however, few works have dealt with the issue in Persian. Beeman, 1986; EslamiRasekh, 2000; Sharifiyan, 2005; Yousefvand, 2010; Pishghadam and Sharafadini, 2011 for instance, have carried out works but still there is the need to investigate the topic in a more detailed way.

Based on a contrastive analysis view, it is important to compare and contrast the source and target languages in order to recognize possible difficulties in the process of language teaching and learning. Therefore, it is important to recognize the social, cultural and pragmatic differences and similarities within a language as a first step, in order to obtain the ability of comparison across languages. Reading the work of Eslami-Rasekh, Eslami-Rasekh and Fatahi (2004), one may infer that to avoid pragmatic failure in communications in a foreign language situation, language users need to be aware of the existing cultural and social differences and the difference in the use of language, i.e. having knowledge of appropriate language use. Yuan (2001) remarked that compliment responses are worth studying because, like all speech acts, they can show us the rules of language use in a speech community.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate compliment response strategies used by Persian speakers in Iran where the compliments are offered in two different social situations, namely equal and higher statuses. The study attempts to provide an inter-lingual understanding of compliment response strategies used by Iranian Persian and Canadian English speakers. The study will be conducted and accomplished through a DCT questionnaire in two Persian and English versions. In the next part of this paper a brief review of some studies on compliment responses, is provided. The other parts are devoted to methodology and results of the study. Consequently the questions being addressed in this paper are as the following:

1. Is there any difference in the use of strategies among Iranian Persian speakers while responding to complimenters of equal or higher status?
2. To what extent are Persian and Canadian English compliments similar or different?

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Compliment Response Strategies

Compliment responses have been greatly considered and focused in researches on complimenting studies. As the first researcher in compliment responses, Pomerantz (1978) categorized three main strategies in responding compliments: 1) Acceptance, 2) Rejection and 3) Avoid, on the belief that responding a compliment creates a dilemma for the respondents, which is avoid self-praise or agreement with complimenter. Her American data revealed a majority of disagreements and rejections. She concluded that recipients of compliments function to remove the dilemma and she came up with her three categories mentioned above.

Herbert (1986) was one of the pioneers who studied compliment responses. He devised a new

classification of compliment responses including three categories and twelve types.

Table 1: Herbert's (1986) Taxonomy of Compliment Responses (Herbert, 1986, p. 79)

Response Type	Example
A. Agreement	
I. Acceptances	
1. Appreciation Token	Thanks; thank you; [smile]
2. Comment Acceptance	Thanks, it's my favorite too.
3. Praise Upgrade	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it? II.
Comment History	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
III. Transfers	
1. Reassignment	My brother gave it to me.
2. Return	So's yours. B.
Non-agreement	
I. Scale Down	It's really quite old.
II. Question	Do you really think so?
III. Non-acceptances	
1. Disagreement	I hate it.
2. Qualification	It's all right, but Len's is nicer. IV. No Acknowledgement
	[silence]
C. Other Interpretations	
I. Request	You wanna borrow this one too?

When studying compliment responses and the first linguistic and cultural influence on L2 acquisition and performance in compliment responses, Tran (2007) proposed the compliment response Continuum Hypothesis because he believed that the existing compliment response categorizations could not suit the data in his study. He collected compliment response data in English and Vietnamese. He came up with two continua to categorize his data including "acceptance to denial continuum", and "avoidance continuum".

Acceptance to Denial Continuum:

Compliment Upgrade □ Agreement (including Agreement Token) □ Appreciation Token □ Return □ Explanation □ Reassignment □ (Non-idiomatic Response) □ Compliment Downgrade □ Disagreement (including Disagreement Token)

Avoidance Continuum:

Expressing Gladness □ Follow-up Question □ (Doubting) Question □ Opting out

Regarding compliment responses, Kim (n.d) recognized six categories in compliment responses studying complimenting behavior to find out the transfer of Korean and Japanese EFL learners' native cultures when they interact in English. These categories in order of their frequencies are *appreciation*, *return compliment*, *denial*, *no response*, *question*, *praise upgrade*. Comparing the results with the participants' native culture, Kim concluded that there was a transfer from their native culture.

In a study conducted to examine the similarities and differences of compliment response strategies used by Syrians and Americans, it was revealed that Arabic English is more likely to prefer acceptance of compliments and less likely to reject them than American English. Of the American compliment responses, 50 percent were coded as acceptances, 45 percent as mitigations, and 3 percent as rejections and 2 percent of English compliments were not responded that is they were put under no response category. Of the Syrian compliment responses, 67 percent were coded as acceptances, 33 percent as mitigations, and 0 percent as rejections (Nelson, Al-Batal, & Echols, 1996). A study conducted on compliment response in Korean showed that Koran females most often accept compliments in English interactions while they reject or deflect compliments in Korean interactions. Strategies used to respond compliments in Korean interactions in order of frequency were reject 45%, deflect or evade

35% and accept 20%. Strategies in English interactions in order of frequency comprised accept 75%, reject 20% and only one instance of deflection or evasion was observed in the data. Han asserted that no evidence of pragmatics transfer was observed. It was explained due to the participants' previous residence in the United States and their

familiarity with the norms the speech community and their ongoing interactions with native speakers of English and the use of English text books in Korea (Han, 1996).

Creese (1991) has conducted a cross-cultural study to compare compliment responses given by American and British teachers. The American teachers in her study responded the compliments mainly by acceptance (54%), then reflection (19%) and rejection (16.3%), compared to the British teachers responding the compliments with acceptance (45.9%), reflection (40.6%) and rejection (16.3%). Comparing her results with previous works, she claimed that the results of her American data had broken the expected patterns. Comparing Israeli and American compliment responses based on the data gathered from Discourse Completion Task, Olshtain and Weinbach (1993) came up with five strategies in responding to compliments. The strategies in order of frequency included: (1) reinforcing the compliments, (2) thanking the complimenter, (3) agreeing with the compliment, (4) justifying the compliment, and (5) expressing surprise. Further, they asserted that Israelis accepted the compliments far less than the Americans did.

Tang and Zhang (2009, p 325) believed “any universal CR model will fail, because different cultures have different sets of protocols”. They compared the complimenting behavior of Chinese with Australians. Tang and Zhang investigated compliment responses using DCTs including four situations of appearance, ability, character and possession. The findings demonstrated that Chinese participants used fewer Accept strategies, and more Evade and Reject strategies, than the Australian participants did, also the Chinese used far fewer combination strategies than the Australians, this meant to the researchers that the Australians made more effort to respond to a compliment.

Mustapha (2011) asserted that studies of compliment responses reveal not only their preferred response patterns but also some vital information about their social values and norms. He investigated compliment responses among native speakers of Nigerian English in Nigeria. His findings showed that Nigerian compliments were highly accepted (94%). This acceptance strategy of responses encompassed compliments with different topics including evaluation actions, supportive actions and credit attributed to self.

Huth (2006) investigated the effects of teaching German cultural points of complimenting behavior to American learners. Based on the data, he demonstrated that second language learners display their structural awareness of the sequential organization of a compliment-response in the second language and use it in talk-in-interaction. They also use different discourse markers to demonstrate the specific use of second language sequential patterns to their interlocutors. Further, they show their cultural orientation while interacting through the second language to display their own cultural identity.

Cheng (2011) studied compliment responses among native English speakers (NESs), Chinese ESL and Chinese EFL speakers through a naturalistic role-play task. Acceptance was the most preferred response by all three groups and was used more frequently by the EFL group. Findings also indicated that Chinese L2 participants demonstrated patterns similar to their Native English counterparts. Cheng further concluded that between the two Chinese L2 groups, the EFL participants had more difficulties in mastering a variety of strategies in responding to compliments compared with ESL participants, who benefited from more exposure to the authentic language input.

On the belief that speech act behaviors change through time, Chen and Yang (2010) replicated Chen's (1993) study. They adopted the same instrument, in the same research site, with a similar subject population, to find out whether compliment response strategies among Chinese people have undergone any changes during these almost two decades or not.

Comparing the results with the findings of Chen (1993) the study revealed drastic changes in the way Chinese respond to compliments. They found that not only the compliments were not rejected as they were in Chen (1993), but also the majority of compliments were accepted. This drastic change in Chinese complimenting behavior was attributed to the effects of Western cultural influences. These findings emphasize the importance of constant research in the field of pragmatics in order to have realistic and up-to-date data as they play a vital role in teaching and learning languages.

Mojica (2002) collected 270 Filipino compliments in six universities in Manila. The results revealed that the majority of responses by both Females and males' were Non-acceptance and Non-agreement. Mojica attributed the result to cultural points and believed that it was the adherence to the Filipinos' conservative culture, and the participants' desire to establish and maintain solidarity with each other, that caused such responses. There was a discrepancy between male and female responses. Males attempted more to maintain solidarity, whereas females tended to show their power of communication.

Complimenting and Status

In an early study, Manes and Wolfson (1981) analyzed daily conversations in American English. They

revealed that the majority of compliments were exchanged among people possessing the same status. Although when the status was unequal, most compliments were paid by a complimenter higher in status than the complementee. On the contrary to the previous study, Davaei (2011) investigating the common patterns of complimenting behavior among adult Persian speakers in Iran showed that 89% of the compliments were exchanged among people of unequal status, either upwards or downwards, and most compliments were given to lower-status addressees (47.61%)

In his study, Chen (2003) investigated compliment response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan in two situations, one in which the complimenter was of equal status, and the other of higher status relative to the responder. Results of the study were as the following: 1) In the equal status, the three most frequently used strategies were Accepting, Mitigating, and Returning, while in the higher status, the three most frequently used strategies are Accepting, Mitigating, and Accepting and Mitigating. Each of the strategies, however, did not carry equal weight across the two situations. 2) Compliment

response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers varied as a function of social status relationship and strategy type. 3) There were cross-cultural similarities and differences comparing the results with previous studies.

Golato (2002) focused on the preference organization of compliment sequences in German through a conversation analytic methodology. She compared German and American English compliment responses among friends and family members. She believed that in agreement sequences, cross-cultural communication between German and American English could become problematic because while the two languages share common points in their rejections and turns containing certain agreement and disagreement features, the difference mainly rests in agreement sequences. Her data revealed that Germans used a greater variety of acceptance/agreement responses than Americans did. They also did not use appreciation tokens to acknowledge compliments, but instead sometimes gave an assessment of a compliment, something that was not reported for Americans. She is on the belief that these differences may cause communication difficulties in cross-cultural encounters.

Gao and Ren (2008, p. 38) asserted that "Education influences people's social life to a large extent". To evaluate and analyze the effect of education on complimenting behavior, they compared the compliment responses of Chinese participants with different education background and explored the influence of education background on compliment response. Appreciation Token, Disagreement and Scale Down were the most common strategies.

They demonstrated that among Chinese participants the highly educated ones most often agreed with the compliments offered to them (54.87%), while participants with low level of education agreed with the compliments much less (48.64%).

METHODOLOGY

Setting and Participants

This descriptive study used a questionnaire to elicit participants' strategies, responding to compliments in Persian in a qualitative procedure and compared the results with their counterparts in English. Participants of the present study comprised two groups of BA undergraduate students ranging from 20 to 25 in age. One group was composed of 60 Iranian Persian speakers, 30 female and 30 male, from two universities; state University of Isfahan and Shahid Chamran state University of Ahvaz, Iran. All the participants were native speakers of Persian. Therefore, they showed homogeneity in terms of age, education, profession and most importantly native language. The other group included 12 Canadian English speakers, 6 male and 6 female.

The participants were asked to fill in a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire, designed by the researcher to elicit their compliment response strategies. The questionnaire was validated by university scholars. All the students who participated in this study were informed of the general aim of this study, which was conducting a research project and procedures of the study and no one participated in this research project against his or her will. Although they all knew the general purpose, they were not told what the exact purpose (compliment response strategies) is, in order to avoid affecting their common behavior in responding the compliments. The participants were given enough time, by the way they handed in the questionnaire almost after about fifteen minutes.

Instrumentation

"Responses from data elicitation procedures such as DCTs reflect the sum of prior experience with language" (Nkwain, 2011). Varghese and Billmyer (1996) remarked that advantages of using DCTs in

pragmatics studies are well known and DCT surpasses all others in ease of use. Beebe and Cummings (1985) suggested that DCTs provide the opportunity to gather a large corpus of data, on a wide range of difficult-to-observe speech behaviors, in a short time.

Furthermore, data elicited in this method is consistent with naturally occurring data, at least in the main patterns and formulas (cited in Varghese and Billmyer, 1996). They also accounted for some other advantages of using DCTs in pragmatic studies. They stated that DCT creates model responses, which are likely to occur in spontaneous speeches. DCT also provides stereotypical responses for a socially appropriate response (Beebe and Cummings, 1996 cited in Nurani, 2009). Of course, the researcher was aware of the weakness of using the DCT, in cases, data might be unnatural, but regarding the kind of study, its limitations and the type of data needed, DCT was deemed the most suitable data gathering means for this study.

The means of eliciting compliment response strategies was a DCT (Discourse Completion Test) questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of eight separate paragraphs describing various real life situations. The participants were asked to express their response(s) to each described situation, in the provided blank space after each of the paragraphs.

The situations were about events that typically take place in Iranian adults' everyday life in academic situations. The reasons to choose academic situations among the other ones lies in the importance of saving one's face in these situations, because the majority of contacts with other languages and foreigners, the most probable one being English, seems to happen for people, at least the Iranians, during their education at university. As the immigration to other countries for higher education and the recently acceptance of students from other countries at Iran universities has greatly increased. Although the length of time spend on academic life in one's life might be much less, than other situations such as occasions among family or friends, its importance should not be neglected. The more intimacy reduces, the fewer mistakes seem to be acceptable, but they may be seen so seriously and committed on purpose in case, which may result in serious problems.

Design of the Study

The design of the present study was descriptive. The attempt was to describe the strategies used to respond to compliments regarding status that is believed to affect complimenting behavior greatly in the Persian samples. In order to understand more about intra-lingual similarities and differences in compliment response, this study intended to investigate compliment response strategies used by Iranian Persian speakers in two different social statuses. The study intended to find out whether the strategies in responding to a compliment by complimentees differ in two situations when the complimenter has a higher or an equal social status in relation to the complimentee. For the unequal statuses boss and employee, or professor and student, and for the status in the equal situation friends and classmates were decided to comprise the interlocutors' relationship in the eight designed situations.

Further, to provide the readers with an inter-lingual comparison with English, 12

Canadian native English speakers completed the same questionnaire in English. The results of the two versions of the questionnaire will be compared in the discussion chapter.

Procedure

The steps and procedures included for the accomplishment of this research study were as follows: 1) Data Collection 2) Data Analysis 3) Comparison with the results of English Compliment response.

Data Collection

The data in this research was collected via a discourse completion task (DCT) designed by the researcher to evoke the discourse context. The DCTs were distributed among the participants and they were given enough time, as long as they wished to complete the questionnaire more carefully. The test constituted four generally accepted compliment-giving situations – possession, ability, appearance and character. These four topics of compliment were chosen based on the results of previous studies. The most complimented topics in some studies were reported to be appearance, ability, character and possession (Creese, 1991; Manes and Wolfson, 1981; Davaee, 2011; Rees Miller, 2011).

Data Analysis

The study was carried out based on the principles of compliment response presented by Herbert (1986). After the participants had filled in the questionnaires, compliment strategies were coded and the responses were

categorized based on Herbert's taxonomy of compliment responses. The responses were categorized based on the two given statuses. There are twelve categories of compliment responses in Herbert's (1986) classification. In this research because of the observation of an additional strategy in the Persian data, a formulaic expression category described by Yousefvand (2010) was also adopted to create results that are more detailed. Strategy selection was categorized based on the content of the compliment response. At the end, as the study is a qualitative descriptive one, the data was analyzed statistically, using percentage values. It should be mentioned that because the study is not based on random sampling, the results of the analysis could not be generalized to the whole Persian and English speaking communities.

RESULTS

Strategy Definitions

In order to categorize compliment responses, the researcher adopted Herbert's (1986) classification of compliment responses and one more category, namely, formulaic expressions, adopted from Yousefvand (2010) for the Persian compliment responses, and categorized the Persian and English data into thirteen categories.

1. Appreciation token: A verbal acceptance of a compliment, acceptance not being semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment.

e.g. *نونمم /Mamnoon/* thanks. Thanks

2. Comment acceptance: The addressee accepts the complimentary force by means of a response semantically fitted to the compliment.

e.g. *هراد دروم نیا رد ییوختا علاطا و دلیم مٹشود یلیخ عوضوم نیا زا نم /man az in mozu kheili*

khosham miad va etela'at e khubi dar in mored daram/ I like this topic very much and I have good information in this topic.

It goes with my eyes

3. Praise upgrade: The addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient.

e.g. *هیتاذ دادعتسا کین نیا مینلا /albate in ye este'dad e zatie/* of course it is an inherent talent. I worked hard

4. Comment history: The addressee, although agreeing with the complimentary force, does not accept the praise personally; rather, he or she impersonalizes the complimentary force by giving (maybe irrelevant) impersonal details.

e.g. *مٹفر ی می سیو نشود سلاک مدوبهک مچد /bache ke budam kelas e khosh nevisi miraftam/* when I

was a kid I went to calligraphy class.

I got it from Selfridges earlier this month as a rather pricey treat to myself

5. Reassignment: The addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person or to the object complimented itself.

e.g. *هسپوخت یلیخ، هسپوخت یلیخ هچد شیدوخ /khodesh bache kheili khubie, kheili arume/* he himself is a nice kid, he is so quiet.

You know what, your brother/sister is such an angel to look after!

6. Return: The praise is shifted to the addresser/complimenter.

e.g. *مزیز عی شد هام یلیخ مده وت /to ham kheili mah shodi azizam/* you have become so nice, too my dear.

You yourself look amazing tonight, too

7. Scale down: The force of the compliment is minimized or scaled down by the addressee.

e.g. *نا بابا نیا اهر دق نیا ابابا نم /na baba in ghadr ham tarifi nist/* no, it is not that much laudable.

Well, I don't think it's that great.

8. Question: The addressee might want an expansion or repetition of the original compliment or question the sincerity of the compliment.

e.g. *ی گیمه ی دج /jedi migi?/* are you serious? Are you kidding?

9. Disagreement: The addressee directly disagrees with addresser's assertion.

e.g. *نا بابا نم، اچک نم ی پیت شیدوخ و اچک نم /na baba, man koja va khosh tipi koja/* no, I'm so far from handsomeness.

No, my handwriting is so inconsistent

10. Qualification: The addressee may choose not to accept the full complimentary force offered by qualifying that praise, usually by employing *but*, *yet*, etc.

E.g. مدرک ار مشالته دامت نه بدخیلو، نه یک اهداتسا لشم /*mesl e ostada ke na, vali khob man tamam e talasham ra kardam*/ not like the professors, but I tried my best.

But I feel I could have developed my arguments more poignantly

11. No acknowledgement: The addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment; that is, he or she employs the conversational turn to do something other than responding to the compliment offered, e.g., shifts the topic.

e.g. سوتوکسد /*[Sokot]*/ silence

[Silence]

12. Request interpretation: The addressee interprets the compliment as a request rather than a simple compliment.

e.g. مینکت سرت دهور و تدیلاسی هاوخیم /*Mixae slide to ro ham dorost konam?*/ do you want me to make your slides, too?

Do you want to take it?

13. Formulaic expression: Addressee shows his or her modesty by using a set of prefabricated utterances.

e.g. چشمتوون گشنگش نهوتامشچ /*Cheshmatoon gashang mibine*/ your eyes see beautiful.

Persian Results

Table 2: Frequency of Compliment Response Types among Persian Speaking Participants

Response	Total	Percentage
	Number	
61.22	401	A. Agreement
48.39	317	I. Acceptances
28.09	184	1. Appreciation Token
14.50	95	2. Comment Acceptance
5.80	38	3. Praise Upgrade
4.58	30	II. Comment History
8.24	54	III. Transfers
4.27	28	1. Reassignment
3.96	26	2. Return
18.01	118	B. Non-agreement
4.42	29	I. Scale Down
6.56	43	II. Question
3.51	23	III. Non-acceptances
1.22	8	1. Disagreement
2.29	15	2. Qualification
3.51	23	IV. No Acknowledgement
4.12	27	C. Other Interpretations
4.12	27	I. Request
16.64	109	D. Formulaic Expression

As shown in Table 2, in our data, the four categories in order of their frequency are “agreement”, “non-agreement”, “formulaic expressions” and “other interpretations”. Among the four main categories, “agreement” responses occurred most frequently accounting for 61.22% of the whole responses in the compliment exchanges. In this category, there are three subcategories; among them, “acceptance”, “comment history” and “transfer” response types respectively made up 48.39% and 4.58% and 8.24% of all of the responses. The second category with the highest number of responses was “non-agreement” composing 18.01% of responses. The subcategories in this category, included “scale down” (4.42%), “question” (6.56%), “non-acceptance” (3.51%) and “no acknowledgement” (3.51%). The third category in order of frequency was “formulaic expression” with no subcategories that accounted for 16.64% of the responses.

“Other interpretations” composed 4.12% compliment responses with only one subcategory and consequently the same frequency that is “request” 4.12%. As the results show, each type does not carry equal weight. The category that carries the most weight is the agreement type. Therefore, it can be concluded that the general tendency of Persian speakers in responding to compliments is “agreement”.

English Results

Table 3: Frequency of Compliment Response Types among English Speaking Participants

Response Type	Total Number	Percentage
88.31	136	A. Agreement
60.38	93	I. Acceptances
35.06	54	1. Appreciation Token
22.07	34	2. Comment Acceptance
3.24	5	3. Praise Upgrade
14.28	22	II. Comment History
13.63	21	III. Transfers
6.49	10	1. Reassignment
7.14	11	2. Return
11.68	18	B. Non-agreement
3.24	5	I. Scale Dow
3.89	6	II. Question
3.89	6	III. Non-acceptances
1.29	2	1. Disagreement
2.59	4	2. Qualification
0.64	1	IV. No Acknowledgement
0	0	C. Other Interpretations
0	0	I. Request
0	0	D. Formulaic Expressions

Based on the results in table 4.2 the English respondents chose only two main categories: “agreement” and non-agreement, the other two categories of “other interpretations” and “formulaic expressions” did not account for any responses. As in the Persian results, the majority of English compliment responses fell under the “agreement” category with 88.31% of total responses. The subcategories of “acceptance”, “comment history” and “transfer” accounted each respectively 60.38%, 14.28% and 13.63%. “Non-agreement” gained 11.68% of total responses and among its subcategories “scale down” received 3.24% and “question” and “non-acceptance” each received 3.89% of the responses among all the exchanges. **Complimenting and status in Persian**

In this part, the data will be discussed and compared according to the relative status of the complementee and complimenter. There are two statuses in this research; equal and unequal. In the unequal status, the complimenter is considered to have a higher status regarding the complementee while in the equal status the interlocutors have an equal social status.

Comparing Equal and Unequal Status

The equal status in this study was designed as the relationship between friends or classmates where for the unequal status the interlocutors were considered as a boss and employee or a professor and the student. The first category of compliment responses “Agreement” was used more than the other categories with 58.14% in the equal and the 64.88% in the unequal status. The second category “Non-agreement” gained 20.22% of the responses in the equal and

15.38%. “Formulaic expressions” was the next category in both groups with 15.73% in the equal and 17.72% in the unequal status. The last category was “Other interpretation” with 5.89% of the responses in the equal and 2% of the responses in the unequal status.

Unequal	Equal	Category
64.88	58.14	A. Agreement
15.38	20.22	B. Non-agreement
2	5.89	C. Other Interpretations
17.72	15.73	D. Formulaic Expression

a. Agreement

The first category in the classification of compliment responses is “agreement” that includes three

subcategories and six strategies discussed in the following for the number of times they have been used by the Persian participants in this research.

Hereafter the percentages of different subcategories and strategies will be presented in parentheses in the sequence of equal, unequal specified with E and UE letters.

I. Acceptances

This subcategory gained the most responses among all others (E 42.96%, UE 54.83%) in the unequal status including three strategies among which “*appreciation token*” received (E 21.62%, UE 35.78%) “*Comment acceptance*” (E 14.32%, UE 14.71) and “*praise upgrade*”

gained (E 7.02%, UE 4.34%) of the responses in either of the situations respectively.

II. Comment history

“*Comment history*”, the second subcategory of “*agreement*”, is in fact the fourth strategy of compliment responses in Herbert’s 1986 classification. “*Comment history*” was used (E 4.49%, UE 4.68%) by the Persian participants in this study responding to the compliments.

III. Transfers

“*Transfers*” gained (E 10.66%, 5.36%) of the responses, including two strategies of “*reassignment*”, and return each accounting for 5.33% in the equal data and respectively, 3.02% and 2.34% of the responses in the unequal data.

b. Non-agreement

This category includes four subcategories among which three of them are strategies, too and only one of them, “*non-acceptances*” covers two strategies.

I. Scale Down

(E 6.74%, UE 1.67%) was the percent of the “*scale down*” strategy used by the Persian complimentees in the present study where “*scale down*” is both a strategy and a subcategory of “*non-agreement*” category.

II. Question

In the present study, the Persian participants responded the compliments through a question (E 8.42%, UE 4.34%) of times. This subcategory is also a strategy.

III. Non-acceptances

Including two strategies, this subcategory accounted for (E 3.84%, UE 4.01) of the responses, of which “*disagreement*” composed (E 0.84%, UE 1.67%) and “*qualification*” composed (E 2.24%, UE 2.24%) of the responses..

IV. No Acknowledgement

The subcategory and strategy of no acknowledgement is the last one in the “*non-agreement*” category and was used by the Persian participants for (E 1.96%, 5.35%) of times responding to the compliments.

c. Other Interpretations

“*Other interpretations*” is the last category in Herbert’s (1986) classification of compliment responses and includes one subcategory.

I. Request

“*Request*” as mentioned in the previous part, above is the only subcategory and strategy in the “*other interpretations*” category. This strategy composed (E 5.89%, UE 2%) of the responses given to the compliments by Persian compliments..

d. Formulaic Expression

“*Formulaic expressions*” is the proposed category by Yousefvand (2011). This category strategy accounted for (E 15.73%, UE 17.72%) of the responses.

In the following table, the percentage values of each strategy can be viewed based on the status of the participants in Persian.

Table 4: Compliment responses based on the status in Persian

Unequal	Equal	Strategy
35.7 8	21.6 2	Appreciation Token
14.7 1	14.3 2	Comment Acceptance
4. 34	7. 02	Praise Upgrade
4. 68	4. 49	Comment History
3. 02	5. 33	Reassignment
2. 34	5. 33	Return
1. 67	6. 74	Scale Down
4. 34	8. 42	Question
1. 67	0. 84	Disagreement
5. 35	2. 24	Qualification
2	1. 96	No Acknowledgement
17.7 2	5. 89	Request Interpretation
18.9 1	15.7 3	Formulaic Expression

Complimenting and status, inter-lingual

The study aimed to compare and contrast Persian and English compliment responses. In this section, the results will be contrasted based on the status of the participants in Persian and English. The most obvious difference in the comparison of the English and Persian data, observed in this study was frequency of responses. In the Persian data, all categories were used, but in the English data, two categories of “*other interpretations*” and “*formulaic expressions*” were not used at all.

Table 5: Comparative Persian and English data based on gender and status

	English			Persian				
Formulaic expressions	Other interpretations	Non-agreement	agreement	Formulaic expressions	Other interpretations	Non-agreement	Agreement	
0	0	7.5	92.5	15.37	5.89	20.22	Equal	58.14
Un-equal	64.88	15.38	2	17.72	83.78	16.21	0	0

Equal status

In the equal status, Persian participants responded with “*agreement*” strategies 58.14% of their responses while this category was used by English participants for 92.5% of the responses, almost 1.5 times more as the Persian responses in this category. This category included the most frequency of responses in both groups of Persian and English.

The second category both in order of Herbert’s classification and in order of frequency in this study was “*non-agreement*”. “*Non-agreement*” composed 20.22% of Persian responses and 7.5% off the English compliment responses in the equal status. Persian “*non-agreement*” responses, is almost 3 times larger than English responses in this category.

The third category is the “*other interpretations*” not used in English but composing 5.89% of the Persian responses in the equal status. The same result in comparison of Persian and English data was observed in the “*formulaic expressions*”, but the frequency of responses in the last category was more than 2.5 times larger than the third category of “*other interpretations*” accounting for 15.37% of the responses.

Unequal status

Distribution of responses in the unequal status is more similar between English and Persian groups regardless the third and fourth categories, which were not used by the English participants. As it can be seen in table 4.5, English “*agreement*” responses in the unequal status were more than Persian gaining 83.78% and 64.88%. In the second category of “*non-agreement*”, likewise, the English responses gained slightly higher frequency than the Persian did (16.21% > 15.38%). “*Other interpretations*” received 2% and “*formulaic expressions*” gained 17.72% of the responses in the Persian.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Restatement of the problem

Studying compliments is important due to the vital role and function they play in people’s social life and relations as Herbert (1998, p497) believed that “compliment events (compliment + response) provide interesting information on sociocultural values and organization”. Among all the various speech acts, compliment responses were chosen in this research on the belief that they can reinforce or even build a relationship, if they are expressed suitably; and weaken or end a relationship on the case the complementee uses an inappropriate strategy to respond a compliment. In order to gain the knowledge of recognizing and defining the correctness of every speech act, we need firstly to study that act exclusively.

This study aimed firstly, to find out how Persian speakers respond to compliments in academic situations when they expose the compliments in two different statuses; and secondly, to compare the Persian response strategies with the English responses in the same situation and status. The contrastive purpose of the study was to discover how close or far Persian speakers are in responding to compliment responses received from native English speakers. The importance of researches of this type lies in preparing university students for the probable coming situations in their academic or vocational life where they need communicating in English.

Obviously, this study is not going to prepare the Iranians for the ESL or EFL situations, but this study was carried out as an attempt to prepare the base for more practical studies in this field. In this part, the research questions will be answered based on the data and results discussed in the previous section.

Question 1:

Is there any difference in the use of strategies among Iranian Persian speakers while responding to compliments of equal or higher status?

Unequal	Equal	Category
64.88	58.14	A. Agreement
15.38	20.22	B. Non-agreement
2	5.89	C. Other Interpretations
17.72	15.73	D. Formulaic Expression

In both equal and unequal status, the order of categories regarding their frequency is the same (*agreement, non-agreement, other interpretations, formulaic expressions*). The answer to the first question in this research is positive. Comparing the results, we observed that the participants agreed with the compliments in the unequal status, when they received a compliment from a person in a higher situation, compared to the equal status (64.88% >

58.14%). On the other hand, they disagreed with compliments more frequently in the equal status than the unequal status (20.22% > 15.38%). This result can be attributed to the characteristic of Iranians in showing their respect to their superiors through agreement with their ideas. Interpreting a compliment as a request happened more in the equal status where more intimacy is felt between the interlocutors than in the unequal status (5.89% > 2%). The participants used the “*formulaic expressions*” more in the unequal status than equal (15.73%

>17.72%), this can be again attached to the greatest amount of intimacy in the unequal status among the interlocutors.

As observed, in this study, “*agreement*” was used more than other categories in both statuses in the Persian data. A reason for this fact is the cultural values as Davaee (2011) put it, it is very important to note that Persian culture places great emphasis on considering respect (Ehteram) for superiors as well as status equals and this respect is supposed to be revealed in the agreement with the complimenter.

Question 2:

To what extent are Persian and Canadian English compliments similar or different? Category

English	Persian	
61.22%	88.31%	A. Agreement
18.01%	11.68%	B. Non-agreement
4.12%	0	C. Other Interpretations
16.64%	0	D. Formulaic Expression

In order to make this study more implacable in the field of foreign language teaching it seemed better to provide a comparative view of the two languages under study; Persian and English. The most obvious difference between the two languages is in categories of “*other interpretations*” and “*formulaic expressions*”. These two categories were not used in English while they received respectively 4.12% and 16.64% of the Persian responses. The two other categories of “*agreement*” and “*non-agreement*” were in the same order in both English and Persian regarding their frequency. Agreement gained 88.31% of English responses and

61.22% of the Persian responses. English participants responded to the compliments through “*non-agreement*” strategies 18.01% of times while English participants responded to compliments with “*non-agreement*” strategies 11.68% of the whole responses.

Comparing responses in the two languages in more details, we observe that the most common strategy in both languages is “*appreciation token*” with 35.06% in English and

28.09% in Persian. The second strategy regarding their frequency in Persian is “*request interpretation*” (16.64%) while in English is “*comment acceptance*” (22.07%). “*Comment acceptance*” is the third strategy in Persian (14.50%) but in English data “*comment history*” is the third strategy used by the English speaking participants (14.28%). Other strategies received more or less close frequencies under 10%. The results are shown in table 5.1 below.

Table 6: English and Persian results, comparative

Persian	English	Strategy
28.09	35.06	Appreciation Token
14.50	22.07	Comment Acceptance
5.80	3.24	Praise Upgrade
4.58	14.28	Comment History
4.27	6.49	Reassignment
3.96	7.14	Return
4.42	3.24	Scale Down
6.56	3.89	Question
1.22	1.29	Disagreement
2.29	2.59	Qualification
3.51	0.64	No Acknowledgement
4.12	0	Request Interpretation
16.64	0	Formulaic Expression

Implications and Further Research

This study in addition to being a descriptive study on Persian compliment responses was a contrastive one, comparing Persian compliment response strategies with the English. Such contrastive studies on speech acts can help learners get aware of the gaps existing between first language and second or foreign language; these gaps may result in miscommunication. In this case, if teachers become familiar with these differences, they can enhance it in their learners. As If the non-native language learner is consciously aware of the sociopragmatic similarities and differences between his/her native and target languages, then negative outcomes of transfer will most probably occur. In order to avoid this negative effect, the solution seems to be in the material providers’ hand. The sociopragmatic points of difference should be first discovered and then devised in the syllabus, and teaching material to pose the learners indirectly with the aimed points. As another solution Dornyei and Thurrell (1994) suggested teaching conversational skills according to a systematic approach based on the knowledge of how conversations are structured in order to have authentic teaching material for teaching languages, especially for discourse, it is more useful to gain and base the material on the real information and strategies that people use in their interactions. This will cause to growing learners who are capable of working out the new language in a natural, sensible way. The first step in order to provide the sociopragmatic differences is to analyze the single languages and

then contrast them. Second or foreign language syllabus designers should examine learners' needs considering the understanding and production of compliment responses in the target language. The range and variety of these needs can be detected studying the first and second or foreign language features, cultural points and strategies that the native speakers of each language use. Future research like this is needed to provide a better understanding of compliment responses in Persian. More ethnographical studies are needed on different aspects and factors affecting the complimenting behavior of the Persian people need to be taken into consideration in future studies. Compliment topics, interlocutors' age, educational background, social distance (friends, acquaintances, or strangers), and situations are among the factors. Another area that calls for further investigation is the cross-cultural study of Persian and other languages especially English.

Considering compliment responses more critically, we observe two sets of answers: simple and complex responses. Studying this aspect of compliment responses can result in valuable information regarding the topic and situations of compliments. This can help find out what situations and on what topics people give simple or complex responses to the compliments.

Conclusion

Speech acts have different functions, and may be used in different forms depending on the various circumscribing situations. In the case of compliments, the kind of relationship between the interlocutors based on their status can be defining. As Duck, Rutt, Hurst, and Strejc (1991) put it, considering relationships in everyday talk, "there will be important differences in the daily communication within different sorts of relationships and there will be communicative as well as psychological features on which such relationships can be differentiated" (p 231). While investigating speech acts, an important point should be kept in mind, which is, not only the effect of the function of speech act varies according to the conditions, but also the circumstances greatly affect the audience's interpretation and understanding of the utterance. According to Liu (2011), there is no one to one utterance-to- action relationship in the interpretation of speech acts. For example, depending on the situation, background and interlocutors' status and relationship, a compliment may be interpreted or even uttered to praise, humiliate or to joke the other party of the interlocution. In this study, the main function of compliment and its response is in mind.

Acknowledgment

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest in the research.

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