

STUDY OF COMPLIMENT SPEECH ACT REALIZATION PATTERNS ACROSS GENDER IN PERSIAN

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Compliments are positive speech acts that express friendship and increase rapport among people. However, there are times when compliments are produced in conjunction with face-threatening acts to mitigate the face-threat (Golato, 2005). Owing to different cultural backgrounds and different social values, there are some differences existing in the compliment realization in different cultures. This study is aimed at extracting and categorizing the range of strategies used in responding to compliments in Persian. The study also intended to examine compliment responses across gender among Persian speakers. A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is used to study the strategies employed when responding to compliments by Persian speakers. The corpus used in this analysis consists of 540 compliment/response sequences collected with the assistance of university students. Findings suggest that, in responding to a compliment, the general tendency of Persian speakers to respond to a compliment with an agreement, in addition, they also tended to express their modesty, which is deeply rooted in their culture. The results also indicate a significant effect of gender on compliment responses. Specifically, males were most likely to reject a compliment by using a set of formulaic expressions and scaling down the received compliment; in contrast, females tended to respond with acceptance or surprise to a compliment. Some cultural and pedagogical implications are discussed at the end of the paper.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking to others is a social activity. By virtue of their membership in a particular community, individuals learn the skills necessary for everyday social interaction. There are many almost automatic patterns in the structure of conversation, and these automatic sequences are called routines. They always

consist of a first part and a second part, produced by different speakers. The first part that contains a request is typically made in the expectation that the second part will be an acceptance. Although it might be a culturally specific issues but an acceptance is structurally more likely than a refusal. This structural likelihood is called preference (Wang & Tsai, 2003). Preference structure divides second parts into preferred and dispreferred social acts. The preferred is the structurally expected next act and the dispreferred is the structurally unexpected next act. Specifically, to date some conversation analysts (e.g. Davidson, 1984; Levinson, 1983; Pomerantz, 1984) have observed that there is a systematic interactional preference toward affiliative actions and have demonstrated that the acceptance or rejection of such actions as an invitation, offer, assessment, and compliment, etc. are not generally of equal status.

Many people who communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries have experienced communication breakdowns with people from different first language (L1) backgrounds. Sociolinguists recognize that such intercultural miscommunication is partly due to different value systems underlying each speaker's L1 cultural group (Chick, 1996). Different value systems are reflected in speech acts; thus, different interpretations of a certain speech act sometimes cause misunderstandings of the speaker's intention.

Compliment responses have received attention from conversation analytic perspective, to investigate their underlying structures. Pomerantz (1978) in her empirical studies have been demonstrated that speakers of different languages and language varieties follow different patterns when responding to compliments. Since then, many linguists have focused their attention and drawn insights into the phenomenon of compliment response (Herbert, 1989, 1990; Holmes, 1988; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Nelson, G. L., Al-Batal, M. & Echols, E., 1996; Pomerantz, 1978; Wierzbickz, 1991; Wolfson, 1983). As a whole, studies on compliments demonstrate that a compliment is a structured speech act that reflects social values in the culture (Manes, 1983). Among the large body of research regarding this topic, are a few studies and little empirical research on Persian compliments and compliment responses, (e.g. Beeman, 1986; Eslami Rasekh, 2000; Sharifiyan, 2005). Although the above-mentioned studies on Persian compliments and compliment responses have provided a solid foundation for further work, the lack of further cross-cultural empirical studies in this area is obvious. A problem with the cited studies on Persian compliment responses is that, the complexity of the phenomenon of compliment responding has not been fully considered. Very often, they have been studied in a very general way and have been concluded that the compliment response patterns used by Persian speakers are different from those used by English speakers (Beeman, 1986). The lack of empirical study to make distinction between the different categories of compliment responses that composes them and to show the frequency distribution of different patterns of compliment response among Persian speakers is obvious. For these reasons, the present study attempted to investigate frequency distribution of different patterns of compliment response

among a group of Persian speakers. In addition, by adopting Herbert's (1990) classification of compliment responses, the researcher would try to compare the compliment response patterns used by a Persian participant in the present study, with those used by English speakers as cited in Herbert study. In addition to differences between cultures, it is important to take the difference between sexes into account, as a result, the study also intended to examine gender variation in responding to compliment among Persian speaker. This will be accomplished by the following steps; in the first part of this paper, a brief review of some studies on the speech event of complimenting, especially in the areas of compliment responses, is given. The second part presents methodological issues and the results of the present study regarding compliment responses in Persian.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Compliments

Compliments are positive expression or evaluation, which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone for something valued positively by the speaker and the hearer, and even the whole speech community (Holmes, 1986; Ye, 1995). Kodama (1996) supports Wierzbicka (as cited in Kodama, 1996), who maintains that compliments are complex combination of positive evaluation which, exhibit good feelings and implicit friendliness. Based on these interpretations, it seems feasible to regard compliments as interpersonal and interactive speech acts. As Holmes points out (1988b), compliments should function as positively affective speech acts and can be considered as phatic communion, a type of speech with ties of union which are created by a mere exchange of words. In our daily lives, we generally exchange compliments as an effort to keep relationships solid. In other words, compliments are supposed to be for rapport instead of report and for cooperation instead of competition in Tannen's terms (e.g., 1986, 1993 & 1996). In analyzing the American data, Manes and Wolfson (1981, p. 124) pointed out that the primary function of compliments is "the reinforcement and / or creation of solidarity" between the speaker and addressee. Meanwhile, Holmes (1986) held the similar view that compliments function as "social lubricates which increase or consolidate the solidarity between interlocutors" (p. 486). Brown and Levinson (1987) claimed that speech act of complimenting is largely a positive and polite strategy; since it lets the addressee know that he or she is being liked. As positively affective speech acts, the most obvious function of compliments is to polish the social relationship, pay attention to positive face wants, and thus increase or integrate solidarity between people.

However, some compliments are indirect, implicit, or even unexpressed (Boyle, 2000) and the speech act of complimenting can be very complicated and confusing, not only cross-culturally, but even within the same cultural group. Hence, how to pay appropriate compliments, identify them and give appropriate responses is an important aspect of communicative

competence everyone in a given society needs to develop in order to avoid pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure (Holmes & Brown, 1987). Failures of communication in the process of interaction might be caused by differences in cultures, value systems, and speech norms that the interlocutors harbor.

Compliment Responses

One major focus of research on complimenting events has been on compliment responses. Pomerantz (1978) was the first researcher who discussed compliment responses from conversation analytic perspective. She claimed that in American English, the recipient of a compliment faces two conflicting conditions that pose a dilemma when responding to it: (A) Agree with the speaker and (B) Avoid self-praise (pp. 81-82). In any conversational exchange, she suggested, the preferred second part will present an agreement with the previous utterance. There is, thus, pressure on the recipient to agree with the complimenter and accept the compliment. On the other hand, there is strong pressure on speakers to avoid or minimize self-praise. Her American data reveal that a large number of compliment responses did not satisfied the constraint of accepting compliments, and actually show a prevalence of disagreements and rejections. She concluded that recipients of compliments use various solutions to mediate this conflict, categorized by Pomerantz as (1) Acceptance, (2) Rejection and (3) Self-praise Avoidance.

Likewise, in a series of studies on compliments, Holmes (1986, 1988) developed three main categories of compliment responses: Accept, Reject, and Deflect or Evade. Her data indicated that in New Zealand, by far the most frequent response to a compliment was Accept (1986, 1988). She further examined gender role in the process of responding to compliment and found that males will ignore or legitimately evade a compliment more often than females will (Holmes 1986). In a study on Polish compliments, Jaworski (1995) stated that whilst females tend to exchange compliments to achieve relational solidarity, males often use compliments in order to negotiate in-group power relation.

Herbert (1989,1990) conducted a large-scale analysis of compliment responses by speakers of American English. The corpus of the study was 1,062 compliment responses collected over a three-year period at the State University of New York. He revised the Pomerantz's taxonomy and ended up with a three-category, twelve-type taxonomy (Table 1). In Herbert's (1989) data, 66% of the American compliment responses were Agreements, out of which 29% were Acceptance Tokens and 7% were comment Acceptances; while in his South African data, 88% of the responses were categorised as Agreements, out of which 43% were Comment Acceptances. He also concluded that English and South African speakers are more likely to accept a compliment than their American counterparts are. Herbert explained this discrepancy stating, "[firstly,] that the patterned use of language is culturally variable and [secondly, that] these patterns may be linked to such larger aspects of sociocultural organization as religion, politics and ecology" (p. 82).

Herbert (1990) has also noted differences in the use of compliments and compliment responses between females and males, such as fewer instances of disagreeing with compliment by the former and a higher tendency to question or fail to acknowledge the compliment by the latter.

Table 1: Herbert's (1986) Taxonomy of Compliment Responses

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. Nonagreement	
I. Scale Down	It's really quite old.
II. Question	Do you really think so?
III. Nonacceptances	
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?

(From Herbert, 1986, p. 79)

Since then, contrastive studies have been conducted comparing compliment responses in different languages and language varieties with (mostly American) English. These studies illustrated a clear contrast among different languages regarding their compliment response patterns. Using Herbert's (1989, 1990) taxonomy of compliment responses, Lorenzo-Dus (2001) examined a compliment responses of British and Spanish male and female undergraduates. The results showed the existence of cross-cultural and cross-gender similarities as well as differences between the four groups of participants. For example, Spanish males tended to upgrade compliments ironically (a type of compliment response absent in the British data) more frequently than their female counterparts do.

On the one hand, Arabic and South African English are more likely to prefer acceptance of compliments and less likely to reject them than American English (Al-Batal, & Echols, 1996; Herbert, 1989; Herbert & Straight, 1989). Speakers of East Asian languages (Chinese, Japanese, Malay, and Thai), on

the other hand, tend to avoid accepting compliments but rather reject them compared to English (Chen, 1993; Daikuhara, 1986; Gajaseni, 1994; Holmes, 1988; Shih, 1986; Ye, 1995). For instance, Chen (1993) examined the compliment response strategies used by American English speakers and Chinese speakers, and stated that the American English speakers' strategies are characterized by acceptance governed by Leech's Agreement Maxim, whereas the Chinese speakers' strategies are characterized by rejection motivated by Leech's Modesty Maxim (Leech, 1983). According to Chen (1993) this can be explained by social values in the two cultures, the norm in American society seemed to be to receive the compliment gracefully, i.e., to accept it, while the social norm in Chinese was to appear humble. In another study, Ye (1995), based on her data collected through the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), explored compliments and compliment responses between interlocutors of equal status and those in close relationships. She found that males used acceptance with amendment as their first compliment response preference to both males and females, while females used the same strategy toward females but acceptance toward males. Based on the results, she concluded that Chinese rejection of compliments is not a real denial; the speaker denies the proposition but accepts the complimenting force. She maintained that this preference is a cultural choice of modesty.

Regarding the effect of gender on responding to compliment several studies have been carried out to tackle this issue (Bolton, 1994; Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988b; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Maruyama, 1996; Wolfson, 1984). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), regarding the gender difference in making and receiving compliments, stated that, women primarily use complimenting to communicate positive effect and to strengthen solidarity with others. Men, in contrast, perceive complimenting as a speech act, which primarily is supposed to assert one's authority to evaluate the others.

Among the large body of research regarding this topic, are a few studies on Persian compliments and compliment responses, (e.g. Koutlaki, 2002; Beeman, 1986; Eslami Rasekh, 2000; Sharifiyan, 2005). In a study by sharifiyan (2005), an attempt was made to explicate the Persian cultural schema of modesty 'shekasteh-nafsi'. According to him, the schema, which appears to be rooted in certain cultural-spiritual traditions of Iranian society, motivates the speakers to negate or scale down compliments, downplay their talents, skills, achievements, etc., and return the compliment to the complimenter. The schema also encourages the speakers to reassign the compliment to a family member, a friend, God, or another associate. The paper explored how the schema may be represented in Persian speakers' replies to compliments. A Discourse Completion Test were used to collect Persian and English data from two groups of Iranian and Australian participants. The results revealed that speakers of Persian largely influenced by the cultural schema of shekasteh-nafsi in their responses to compliments. The data from the Australians did not reflect a similar schema but showed a certain degree of overlap with the Persian responses in downplaying the trait that was the target of the compliment. As a result, Persian speakers by rejecting the compliment

show their modesty, which plays an important role in responding to compliment and is an important component of Persian politeness. (Beeman, 1986; Sharifiyan, 2005).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As it was stated, the previous studies on Persian compliments and compliment responses has not considered the complexity of the phenomenon of compliment responding. The lack of empirical study to make distinction between the different categories of compliment responses that composes them and to show the frequency distribution of different patterns of compliment response among Persian speakers is obvious. For these reasons, the purpose of this study is to examine Persian compliments response strategies and also examine cross-gender variation in responding to compliment among Persian speaker. In addition, the study would try to compare the compliment response patterns used by a special group of participant, with those used by English speakers as cited in Herbert study (1990) and to reveal differences between the American and Persian cultures, in terms of responding to compliments. As a result, two related research questions emerged from the literature:

Question 1: How differently do Persian speakers and English speakers respond to compliments?

Question 2: Does gender difference affect the compliment response patterns of Persian speakers?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the present study comprised a group of 30 undergraduate students, both male and female, majoring in English-Persian translation from two universities, namely, Islamic Azad University, Khorasgan Branch, Iran and State University of Isfahan, Iran. The participants were randomly chosen from a pool of students, who were at their third semester of their academic education. The age range of the participants was from 20 to 28 with an average age of 24. They were English as foreign language learners who were native speakers of Persian. The researcher asked the participants to fill in a questionnaire, which was designed to elicit compliment response strategies of the participants.

All the students who participated in this study were informed of the general aim, which is conducting a research project and procedures of the study and no one participated in this research project against his or her will.

Material

The questionnaire, which was designed to elicit compliment response patterns of the participants, was a Discourse Completion Test (DCT), which had been conducted to elicit compliment responses (CRs). In a DCT, a number of situations are described in writing with spaces for research participants to

fill in what they would say in such situations. The DCT consisted of thirty incomplete paragraphs and participants were asked to complete them. To describe these different situations of DCT in more detail it worth to mention that, among them, eighteen paragraphs were designed to meet the purpose of this study and to elicit corpus on compliment responses from participants and twelve of them were included as fillers. Regarding the compliment' topic of DCT, it should be mentioned that, in spite of the broad range of topics found in previous researches, the majority of compliments are restricted to only a few general topics. Manes and Wolfson (1981), Wolfson (1983) and Holmes (1986) observed that compliments seem to fall into three main categories—those which have to do with ability and/or accomplishments, those which focus on appearance and those which are about someone's possessions. Compliments assigned to the first category include those referring to the addressee's skill or performance, e.g. a well-done job or a skillfully played game. With respect to the second category, in addition to compliments on apparel, hairstyle, favorable comments on the attractiveness of one's children, pets, and even husbands or wives seem to fall within the same category. Compliments regarding to one's possessions such as jewelry, cars and houses fall into the third category. Consequently, compliment' topics included in the DCT were as follow: eight items related to aspects of the complimentees' ability and performance (e.g., you did a great job.). Five items related to their appearance, (e.g., you look beautiful today.), and five items related to their possessions (e.g., your shirt is really nice.). The DCT that the students wrote contained thirty paragraphs, which included eighteen different compliment topics, with an average of six items per compliment category. It is worthwhile to mention that, for the sake of efficiency only those sections, which were designed to meet the purpose of this study and elicit data on compliment responses from participants are appended. The remaining twelve sections were designed to tackle other speech act such as refusal, request and complaining. Consequently, complimenting is not the topic of all thirty sections and twelve sections were inserted in the questionnaire to act as fillers.

Procedures

The first step to conduct the main study was to obtain the permission from universities for selecting the participants and running the research there. In order to answer the questions underlying this study the main experiment was conducted in the following steps. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) had been conducted to elicit Compliment Responses (CRs). The participants had not been informed of the exact purpose of the study. This procedure was chosen for the following reasons. First, data elicitation procedures that raise participants' metacognitive awareness are problematic (Cohen, 1996). For example, a kind of discourse completion task, which try to elicit only compliment response strategies of participants, is probable to elicit the participants' CRs that have already been filtered through their conscious knowledge about how they are supposed to respond to compliments (Boxer, 1996; Tran, 2004). By inserting fillers in DCT, the researcher acted to reduce

and control this limitation. On the other hand, observation of naturally occurring CRs has some limitations, too. Although one can collect CRs in natural settings through observation and field recording of actual language use, as it is stated by Urano (2000), it is difficult to control for other factors that may affect CRs (i.e., target of compliment, social distance between the complimenter and the recipient, etc.). Thus, in natural setting, the CRs are collected under incomparable conditions and consequently, comparison among different groups becomes impossible.

Analyses

The corpus of compliment responses upon which the analysis of present study rests consists of 540 examples. All the CRs were coded using Herbert's (1986) taxonomy (Table.1). Nevertheless, this study required one more category, which henceforth will be referred to as *formulaic expression*. It should be noted that, Americans also use their own specific formulaic expressions in responding to compliments, and it seems that many English expressions are formulaic expressions too, (e.g., thank you). Nonetheless, the formulaic expressions used by Persian speakers are different in a sense that, these responses to compliments seem to come from Persian speakers' culture and allow the addressees to avoid acceptance of compliments, which can be regarded as self-praise. More details in this regard would be present in the discussion section.

There is also a methodological consideration, which is relevant to mention here, namely the inter-rater reliability (Chaudron, Crookes, & Long, 1988). In the process of coding different compliment responses, at least two raters, including the author, code the CRs to increase the reliability of coding. In the cases of disagreement where a few discrepancies arose, two linguistic colleagues were consulted and consensus reached on the coding.

In order to determine whether gender difference would affect the individual's use of different strategies of response, the data analyzed statistically, using percentage values. The present result is also compared with the study, which was conducted by Herbert (1990), to determine whether there are response pattern differences between the Persian and American English speakers.

To answer the questions of present study and to code CRs, the researcher adopted Herbert's (1989, 1990) classification of compliment responses plus one more category, namely, formulaic expressions, and divided her data into 13 types.

1. APPRECIATION TOKEN. A verbal acceptance of a compliment, acceptance not being semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment, e.g., .. Mamnoon.
"Thanks"
2. COMMENT ACCEPTANCE. The addressee accepts the complimentary force by means of a response semantically fitted to the compliment. e.g.,.. Manam range abi ra kheili doost damam.

- "Blue is my favorite color, too"
3. PRAISE UPGRADE. The addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient.
e.g., .. Man hamishe khoshgelam.
"I am always beautiful"
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., .. Areh, as Kish xaridam.
"Yes, I bought it from Kish"
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., .. Saligeye xaharame.
"(This is) my sister taste"
6. RETURN. The praise is shifted to the addresser/complimenter.
e.g., .. Esme shoma ham gashange.
"Your name is nice, too" (so is yours)
7. SCALE DOWN. The force of the compliment is minimized or scaled down by the addressee.
e.g., .. Intoram nist, xeili gadimiye.
"It isn't that way, it's really quite old"
8. QUESTION. The addressee might want an expansion or repetition of the original compliment or question the sincerity of the compliment.
e.g., .. Jeddi?
"Really?"
9. DISAGREEMENT. The addressee directly disagrees with addresser's assertion.
e.g., .. Na, aslant.
"No, not at all"
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., .. A're vali man sorati ra bishtar dost daram.
"Yes, but I like pink more"
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., .. [Sokot]
[Silence]
12. REQUEST INTERPRETATION. The addressee interprets the compliment as a request rather than a simple compliment.
e.g., .. Mixaae bedamesh be to?
Do you want me to give it to you?

13. FORMULAIC EXPRESSION. Addressee shows his or her modesty by using a set of prefabricated utterances.

e.g., .. Cheshmatoon gashang mibine
 "Your eyes are beautiful and they see everything beautiful"

The data on the actual frequencies of the various response types' occurrences are given in Table 2.

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

Response Type	number	percentage
A. Agreement		
I. Acceptances		
1. Appreciation Token	130	24.07
2. Comment Acceptance	28	5.19
3. Praise Upgrade	26	4.80
Subtotal	184	34.06
II. Nonacceptance		
1. Comment History	26	4.80
2. Reassignment	10	1.85
3. Return	15	2.78
Subtotal	51	9.43
Subtotal	235	44.6
B. Nonagreement		
1. Scale Down	44	8.14
2. Question	55	10.19
3. Disagreement	10	1.85
4. Qualification	3	.55
5. No Acknowledgement	22	4.08
Subtotal	134	24.82
C. Other Interpretations		
1. Request	5	.92
2. Formulaic Expression	<u>166</u>	<u>30.74</u>
Subtotal	171	31.70
Total	540	100.01

Table 3: Frequency of Compliment Response Types in English (Herbert, 1990, p. 211)

	American		South African	
	No.	%	No.	%
A. Agreement				
I. Acceptances				
1. Appreciation Token	312	29.4	162	32.9

	2. Comment Acceptance	70	6.6	213	43.2
	3. Praise Upgrade	4	.4	1	.2
	II. Nonacceptance				
	1. Comment History	205	19.3	24	4.9
	2. Reassignment	32	3.0	23	4.7
	3. Return	77	7.3	12	2.4
	B. Nonagreement				
	1. Scale Down	48	4.5	31	6.3
	2. Question	70	6.6	12	2.4
	3. Disagreement	53	5.0	9	1.8
	4. Qualification	100	10.0	0	0
	5. No Acknowledgement	54	5.1	1	.2
	C. Other Interpretations				
	1. Request	31	2.9	4	.8
	Total	1,062	100.1	492	99.8

As shown in Table 2, in our data, among three main categories, *agreement* responses occurred most frequently (43.49%) in the compliment exchanges. Among them, *acceptance* and *nonacceptance* response types made up 34.06% and 9.43% of all of the responses, respectively. The remaining responses were comprised of *non-agreement* responses, in which the compliment receiver disagree the semantic content of the compliment (24.82%), and *other interpretation* (31.70%) including *Request* and *Formulaic Expression*. Obviously, each type does not carry equal weight. The category that carries the most weight is the agreement type. Therefore, the general tendency of the Persian speakers' responses to compliments is agreement. As a result, in this respect, the findings presented here indicate similarity to Herbert's (1990) findings for American English speakers' compliment responses. Herbert (1990) in his study on American college students, indicated that the proportion of agreement responses, (66%, comprising 29.4% appreciation token, 6.6% comment acceptance, 0.4% praise upgrade, 19.3% comment history, 3% reassignment and 7.3% return), was much higher and made up two-thirds of the total responses, as displayed in Table 3.

On the other hand, we can clearly see the most significant difference in the distribution between Persian speakers and American English speakers is in the sub-category formulaic expression, which is absent in American English responses to compliments. If we compare sub-categories we can see that formulaic expression responses occurred in approximately around one-third (30.78%) of the compliment exchanges. Persian speakers' participants in their responses to compliments, use a set of formulaic expression to avoid self-praise. In many cases, firstly, as an acceptance, they *thank* the compliment giver, and then following it with a comment like "It's very kind of you to say so" or "Your eyes are beautiful, and they see everything beautiful" to show their modesty.

Table 4: Compliment Response by Gender

Response Type	Female		Male	
	No.	%	No.	%
A. Agreement				
I. Acceptances				
1. Appreciation Token	87	32.22	43	15.92
2. Comment Acceptance	17	6.30	11	4.07
3. Praise Upgrade	8	2.96	18	6.66
Subtotal	112	41.50	72	26.65
II. Nonacceptance				
1. Comment History	16	5.92	10	3.70
2. Reassignment	5	1.85	5	1.85
3. Return	9	3.33	6	2.29
Subtotal	30	11.1	21	7.84
Subtotal	142	52.70	93	34.49
B. Nonagreement				
1. Scale Down	4	1.54	28	10.37
2. Question	46	16.60	9	3.24
3. Disagreement	0	0	2	8.6
4. Qualification	2	.37	1	.37
5. No Acknowledgement	8	3.33	13	4.81
Subtotal	60	21.90	74	27.39
C. Other Interpretations				
1. Request	2	.74	3	1.11
2. Formulaic Expression	66	24.44	100	37.03
Subtotal	68	25.24	103	38.14
Total	270	99.80	270	100.02

To be more specific, the males were most likely to show their modesty by using these formulaic expressions (i.e., 103 out of 270 or 38.14%). In contrast, the females showed a preference for an acceptance of the compliment, they tended to accept the compliments given to them by simply providing a general verbal acceptance of a compliment (i.e., 87 out of 270 or 32.22%).

DISCUSSION

Based on the research questions mentioned earlier, the results are divided into two sections: 1) the response patterns, and 2) the gender difference effect, as respectively demonstrated below.

Research Question (1) How differently do Persian speakers and American English speakers respond to compliments?

In the occurrences of different types of compliment responses, although there are some similarities between English and Persian speakers compliment response patters, there are also some differences between the two. In the Persian speakers responses, 43.49% of all the compliment responses fall into the category agreement category, while 66% in the American English responses. Most Americans accept compliments happily with, if they do, a comment like "I also think it's beautiful" or "you can say that again", showing their agreement with the compliment giver (Herbert, 1990). In addition, the result pattern indicates that another category of compliment response, namely, formulaic expression were used by the Persian speakers participants in this study that did not exist in American responses and among the sub-categories, these formulaic expression responses are the most frequently used type. Although Americans also use their own specific formulaic expressions in responding to compliments, the formulaic expressions used by Persian speakers are different. To be more precise, these responses to compliments seem to come from Persian speakers' culture and allow the addressees to avoid acceptance of compliments, which can be regarded as self-praise. Moreover, the function of these expressions in Persian speakers' culture is to lessen embarrassment and tension between interlocutors (Sharifiyan, 2005). Persian speakers' participants might have regarded the compliments put forth to them as insincere, or they might have felt embarrassed. Therefore, instead of saying *no*, Persian speakers would simply use these formulas. Therefore, it can be claimed that this feature of using formulaic expression is culture-specific. Persian speakers rarely disagree with the compliment in a flat way (only 0.55%), but tend to make a comment to show their modesty. Therefore, the Persian speakers' strategies in responding to compliment are characterized by compliment rejection motivated by Leech's Modesty Maxim. (Leech, 1983). One outstanding characteristic of the rejecting strategy is that most of the responses are combinations of a few rejecting formulas and other strategies. It seems that Persian speakers seldom reject a compliment simply with a formula meaning a flat *no*. Some of these rejecting formulas are as follows; *xahesh mikonam* خواهش می کنم, *nazare lotfe shomast* نظر لطف شماست, *kari nakardam* کاری نکردم, *vazifeam bood* وظیفه ام بود, *Xejalatam nadin* خجالتم ندین, *Sharmande mikonid* شرمنده می کنید, etc. These terms generally mean *no. I'm not that good. I don't deserve your praise*. They need to be understood culture-specifically because the English translation can hardly convey what each of them means in specific situations. Take "Sharmandeam mikonid" (شرمنده ام می کنید) for example, the closest English equivalent of it is "I am embarrassed". However, *Sharmandeam mikonid* is never so strong in the sense of embarrassment from the speaker's part. It is simply something like an automatic reaction when complimented. The complimentee's reaction may be "I know I am complimented and I should not show that I am arrogant or self-conceited, so I just say *Sharmandeam mikonid* شرمنده ام می کنید".

One distinctive feature of these rejecting formulas is, what the complimentee denies is only the quality of the object or content of the compliment, but not the illocutionary force of complimenting. The formulaic

denial is not a real denial in the sense of rejecting the compliment. Rather, it has the function of letting the compliment pass. The speaker denies the proposition but accepts the complimenting force, thus emphasizing the value of modesty. As mentioned earlier, if the function of the compliment is to make the hearer feel good, the function of a response other than acceptance may be the same. The results imply that, recognizing that the compliment was intended to make him or her feel good, the addressee asserted that he or she and the complimenter were equal by employing the strategy of 'shekasteh-nafsi' (Sharifiyan, 2005) to avoid self-praise. When complimented by others, many Persian speakers accept it reluctantly with a comment to show their modesty. This is very comparable with the modesty maximum principle by Leech (1983), and Sharifiyan (2005) referred to it as Persian cultural schema of shekasteh-nafsi (modesty). This schema motivates the speakers to negate or scale down compliments, downplay their talents, skills, achievements, etc. (Sharifiyan, 2005). The results of this study supported the idea that speakers of Persian instantiated the cultural schema of shekasteh-nafsi, in varying degrees, according to the context of receiving the compliment in their responses to compliments. The findings also suggest that the schema may be instantiated differently across gender. The following examples of these formulaic expressions in Persian reflect this schema:

- (1) Cheshmatoon gashang mibine
'Your eyes see beautifully'
- (2) Shoma lotf darin
'It's very kind of you to say so'
- (3) Gabele shoma ra nadareh
'It is not worthy of you'
- (4) Motealeg be xodetone
'It belongs to you'
- (5) Har chi darim be xatere shomast.
'Whatever we have is because of you'
- (6) Vazife ast
'It's my duty' (That's what I should do.)
- (7) Nokaretam (Chakeram)
'I'm your servant'
- (8) Xejalatam midin
'I'm ashamed'
- (9) Shooxi mikoni?
'Are you kidding?'

The formulaic (1) and (2) may be used in response to a compliment about an individual's appearance or possessions. Expressions (3), (4), (5), (6), (7) and (8) are general formulaic utterances that may be used in response to compliment on one's possessions or one's abilities. In Persian, for example 'It's my duty' is just a polite and modest expression in accepting the compliment, but for the English native speakers, the subtext may be "Your compliment is too much for what I have done, it's just what I usually do and it's not worth complimenting at all". These expressions may not necessarily be instantiated

in fixed formulas and clichéd expressions. Although the utterances explicated here may have certain linguistic manifestations in Persian, it does not follow that they will always appear in the same wording.

Other outstanding feature in Persian speakers' norms is the point that because of their strong ties with their religion, Persian speakers have their faith in (Allah) God deeply embedded within their speech acts. That is why some of the compliment responses are in the form of a small prayer that the speaker be blessed from Allah, and he or she gets whatever they want with the help of Allah;

(10) *Xoda ra shokr.*

'Thank God'

(11) *Lotfē xoda bode*

'By the grace of God'

Furthermore, the other most frequently used strategy is a question, which is after formulaic expression and appreciation token, the third most frequently used category by Persian speaking participants. From the point of view of social interaction, the question type, can be seen as a negotiating strategy, i.e., as a gambit where the complimentee has an opportunity to negotiate an offer of solidarity. Put differently, question displays a neutral stand on the part of the compliment receiver. The co-participant can often be seen to give another compliment, reassuring the compliment receiver. In the data, there are 32 instances of questions (out of 55) in combination with the other response types, which further shows that complimenting chiefly serves the function of negotiating solidarity. In one sense, these responses are ambiguous. It was difficult to discern the complimentees' intentions from the questions in the data. They might have wanted expansion or repetition of the original compliment or might have been questioning the sincerity of the complimenter. Although a question deviates from disagreement in its illocutionary force, e.g., a question is felt to be less aggressive than a disagreement, some question responses that are meant to question the sincerity of the complimenter also entail self-praise avoidance. We can observe question types responses in the data are the manifestation of Persian speakers' modesty.

Research question (2) Does gender difference affect the compliment response patterns of Persian speakers?

Although in Persian speakers' exchanges, the modesty maxim (Leech, 1983) is heavily weighted, we observe a difference between men and woman in how they respond to a compliment if we examine the common response types within the thirteen categories. For a better picture, four major differences are descriptively reported as follows. First, in the data, male Persian speaking respondents show a tendency to use formulaic expressions far more often than female Persian speakers (100:66) do, whereas female Persian speakers' respondents show a preference for using appreciation token far more often than male Persian speakers (87:43) use. This preference is obvious irrespective of the subject of compliment, whether it is the addressees' appearance, ability,

or their possessions. To be specific, by choosing to avoid self-praise, males tend to employ the formulaic expressions response type to weaken the complimentary force, but females simply favor accepting the compliment.

However, an interesting issue that rises from the findings is that male participants when complimented by an unknown female prefer to use appreciation token. On the other hand, female participants when receive a compliment on their appearance by an unknown man responded with no acknowledgment or by offending the man, rather than showing their general preference for accepting the compliment (e.g. "what's it got to do with you?; Be shoma che rabti dare?). It can be explain by the fact that in the Persian speakers' culture, compliments from men are generally not accepted unless the man is a member of the family. However, if they happen, the appropriate response from the female would be to simply ignore the man.

The other most frequently used strategy are questions, which are after appreciation token and formulaic expression, the third most frequently used category by female participants. The female preference for the category of questions is related to the fact that women are more concerned about face than are men when they reject a compliment (Holmes, 1986). Additionally, women probably view question-type responses to compliments as necessary for conversational maintenance. To put it another way, compliments are more often employed by women than by men to reinforce friendship, intimacy, and solidarity between themselves and the complimenter (Holmes, 1986; Wang & Tsai, 2003). In addition, question responses are the type most frequently combined with other response. In 32 out of the 46 cases (i.e., 58.18%), a question was combined with other response types (in 20 cases, it was combined with agreement token; in four cases, with comment history; in five cases, with scale down; and in three cases with formulaic expression), as illustrated in (12).

(12) Chegadr pirhane abit gashange.

"Your blue dress is very beautiful"

Vagea'n? manam hamintof fekr mikonam.

"Really? I think so, too."

In the examples above, the compliment receiver reacts to a compliment with a question in a neutral manner, which results in a confirmation uttered by the compliment giver. We find that compliment responses of this type exhibit some agreement and some disagreement, similar to the category identified as the *inbetween-ness* by Pomerantz (1978). The most frequently used question- Vagea'n/really- might be interpreted as a request for confirmation, which reveals that the speaker has received the information and is soliciting further information. The phrase Vagea'n/really in Persian speakers responses may not be the same as the question type for English, typically realized in "Do you really think so?". Although their semantic meanings look similar, their pragmatic meanings may not be similar. These participants probably saw in the use of this compliment response type an opportunity to attend to their interlocutor's positive face wants, i.e.,

fulfilling the desire of a person to be appreciated, liked, and approved of by others, rather than an invasion of his or her negative face needs. Such a circular exchange of compliments might contribute to enhancing a rapport between the complimenter and the complimentee. Whereas the English question expresses doubt or surprise about the complimentee's praiseworthiness, the Persian speakers' response can merely be a modest way to accept the compliment while still avoiding outright self-praise, thus a nice compromise between accepting the compliment and avoiding self-praise.

The results also show a difference in denial responses between females and males. None of the females' participants in this study used denial response to the compliments, while 8.6% of males' responses fall into the category of disagreement. The generalization seems to be that denial responses are not likely to be used by female complimentees, whereas male complimentees would use them more often. This can be explained by Brown and Levinson's *face* - public self-image - in their politeness theory (1987). Since the absence of compliment responses often leads to situations that threaten the positive face (the need to be approved) of complimenters, it is important for complimentees responding to the compliments to minimize the sense of threat. Therefore, the female participants seem to regard the denial response pattern as an inappropriate option.

CONCLUSION

Compliments in Persian are usually intended to have a positive effect on interpersonal relations, yet for the outcome actually to be positive, both the compliments and compliment responses need to be handled appropriately. It has been argued that compliments reflect cultural values and norms of behavior (Manes, 1983). Our data on compliments and compliment responses uttered by Persian speaking university students indicate that among three main categories, agreement is the most frequently used category in responding to compliments. At the same time, results reveal significant features in responses to compliments by Persian speaking participants and support the argument that modesty plays a role in Persian speakers complimenting and compliment responding and is an important component of Persian politeness (Beeman, 1986; Sharifiyan, 2005). To be more precise, in our study, formulaic expression and appreciation token were the two major response types most often found; however, males used formulaic expression as their first compliment response preference, while females used appreciation token. In addition, the scale down response type and question type, which are the next most frequently used responses, are also cases of modesty application, that is, strategies for self-praise avoidance. We can conclude that modesty, which is meant to strengthen solidarity, is the driving force behind Persian speakers' responses to compliment.

As a whole, the present study confirms previous findings that language and culture are closely related. As analyzed above, Persian speakers' compliment responses, especially the ritual expressions need to be understood

in the Persian cultural context. One must bear in mind that the speech event of complimenting, and responses are "dependent on shared beliefs and values of the speech community coded into communicative patterns, and thus can not be interpreted apart from social and cultural context" (Saville-Troike, 1982, p. 44). These observations point to the dynamic nature of the relationship between language and cultural conceptualizations. Hence, the results show the strong effects of both culture and gender on responding to a compliment.

IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Then, what can teachers of second language do to teach pragmatic knowledge and try to inhibit negative transfer from learner first language? In the pedagogical field, the study suggests that language and culture should not be taught separately. The necessary condition for pragmatic learning to take place is conscious attention to the pragmatic information to be acquired. As a result, a direct approach to teaching the pragmatics of the second language is in order. As Kasper & Schmidt (1996, p. 160) put it: "pragmatic knowledge should be teachable". The idea seems to be that if the non-native student is consciously aware of the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic similarities and differences between his or her native and target languages, then negative outcomes of transfer will most probably be inhibited. The teachers should develop learner understanding of the frames of interaction and rules of politeness within the target culture. It is also important to provide learners with knowledge of the linguistic forms or stylistic strategies appropriate to convey the intended meaning in different contexts or situations. Teachers have the responsibility of providing the student with the necessary tools to make the appropriate pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic decisions in the target language. The information regarding compliment response patterns given above, together with examples taken from authentic materials, the internet and movies should provide a useful tool for a teacher of second language to raise students' awareness of cultural similarities and differences between L1 and L2. The conflicting patterns may require an explanation, as an inappropriate response to a compliment can cause communication breakdown or offence. Teachers can also help students become pragmatically aware and improve their pragmatic knowledge by providing them the sort of metapragmatic information such as the social value judgments of the target society, etc. Effective activities of teaching these aspects of language and culture include student research projects (e.g. movie studies), role-plays and internet search. On the other hand, syllabus designers should examine learners' needs considering the understanding and production of speech acts in the target language. Learners should be made aware of native speakers' usage of the variety of expressions to realize a certain function, depending on the situation where they are used. This could be accomplished by eliciting compliment responses from their own culture and presenting the target culture's way of responding to compliments to raise their awareness. To conclude, it is highly recommended that teachers include the teaching of pragmatics in their lesson

plans and at the same time students should be taught to feed themselves and should be on the alert to finding out more information about the cultural backgrounds of their interlocutors.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As the research design shows, the comparisons are made possible by controlling other variables. In so doing, this study limits its generalizability. Even if the results suggest that the Persian speakers' participants show great tendency to accept the compliment, we cannot conclude that all Persian speakers would show the same tendency. The study is highly restricted with regard to age and educational background of participants. Even, the same participants might perform differently if the target of the compliment was different, for example. This tradeoff between testability (comparability) and generalizability is always a source of concern to second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, and studies in language pragmatics are no exception. By taking more variables into consideration, one makes the design of the study more complicated, thus difficult to conduct.

Rather than solving, or even trying to solve this problem, I would like to limit the scope of the study as it is. I believe that an accumulation of future research like this will capture the whole picture of compliment response in Persian speakers' cultures. More ethnographical studies are needed in the Persian speakers' community on compliment topics, responses and functions between males and females, and between people with different age, social status (high vs. low) of the interlocutors, social distance (friends, acquaintances, or strangers), and situations. Another possible variable, which should be explored in future research, is educational background. Whether or not those with extensive formal education use different compliment strategies from those with less education is worth exploring and clearly, this is an area that calls for further investigation.

Finally, studies of compliments together with their framing dialogues in natural conversational flow may help understand the functions of compliments in Persian speakers' society. In addition, through interlanguage studies we can examine whether Persian speakers show negative transfer in compliment response in the process of English learning or produce target-like compliment responses. Examine whether they unconsciously brought about some L1 expressions in the process of English learning or not and whether they use the verbatim translation of a formulaic Persian expression. For instance, they would literally translate Persian formulaic expressions used in compliment responses which these might not always suitable for the compliment given in English and might result in communicative breakdown. Further research on interlanguage studies can reveal that whether in addition to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic transfer which were identified by Kasper we have another type of transfer—pragmarhetoric transfer, or not.

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