

## **Investigating the Use of Compliments in Persian and English: A Case Study of Iranian EFL Students**

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### **Abstract**

The current study aims to investigate how Iranian EFL students make use of compliments in Persian and English. To that end, 50 students majoring in English as a foreign language from Isfahan and Tehran, and Sheikhabaee universities were asked to respond to a Discourse Completion Test consisting of six situations in both English and Persian. They were asked to put themselves in those situations and respond to the compliments made on them. The results of the study showed that in addition to pre-existing categories of compliment responses, Iranians made use of other strategies not included in the pre-existing categories of compliments. Furthermore, in both English and Persian languages, students made use of compliments in the same order: accept, evade and reject strategies. The results of this study could add to cross-cultural findings, differences or similarities regarding compliments as a beneficial way of studying speech acts.

**Keywords:** Compliments, DCT (discourse completion test), Persian, English, strategies

### **Introduction**

Communication has been the core of many English classes in recent years. Much time and energy have been applied to make many volunteers communicate successfully in the second language. To make an efficient communication, as asserted by Hymes (1972), knowing rules of speaking is necessary. These rules contain rules of different speech acts and pragmatics. Not knowing these sets of rules would result in losing the game of communication. Therefore, learning the rules and applying them are of much importance in second/foreign language teaching and learning. As Hobbs (2003) notes “A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly bestows credit upon the addressee for some possession, skill, characteristic, or the like, that is positively evaluated by

the speaker and addressee.”(p. 249). “To be heard as a compliment, an utterance must refer to something which is positively valued by the participants and attributed to the addressees” (Holmes, 1988, p. 454). And according to Mackey and Gass (2005), one way to study pragmatics is through Discourse Completion Test.

Furthermore, it is known that cultural norms of the two languages (the native and target) would interact so that one makes use of one specific type of speech act. In the realm of speech acts, compliment responses are a part of efficient communication without which one may face a blind-alley which stops or eradicates the whole event of interaction and communication. Considering the fact that compliments oil the social wheels (Holmes, 1988), the current study aims to investigate how Iranian EFL learners make use of compliments in their native and the target language (English here). Based on the above-mentioned issues, the following research questions have been raised:

- 1) How do Iranian EFL learners use different types of compliments in Persian and English?
- 2) To what extent does the pattern of using compliments in Persian and English differ due to the particular language in use (L1 or L2)?

### **Literature Review**

As Bachman and Palmer (2000) assert language knowledge includes two broad categories: organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge.

#### *Pragmatic Knowledge*

According to Bachman (1995), pragmatics is concerned with the relationships between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers intend to perform through these utterances. As stated by Bachman and Palmer (2000), pragmatic knowledge enables us to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting. Based on their views, there are two areas of pragmatic knowledge, functional and sociolinguistic. Functional knowledge or illocutionary competence makes us enable to interpret relationships between utterances or sentences and texts and the intentions of language users. Functional knowledge includes knowledge of four

categories of language functions, ideational, manipulative, instrumental, and imaginative.

Furthermore, as Brown (2007) mentions, discourse analysis is the examination of the relationship between forms and functions of language. According to Hymes' theory (1972), the aim of language instruction comprises teaching learners not only to use language accurately but also to use language appropriately. For Hymes (1974), the ability to speak competently not only entails knowing the grammatical rules of a language, but also knowing what to say to whom in what circumstances, and how to say it.

In the process of second language learning, and according to Wolfson (1989), it is often the grammatical features that are understood rather than pragmatic ones, yet knowing "how to speak accurately" does not assure knowing "how to speak properly" (Asher & Simpson, 1994). Regarding Americans' use of compliments, Wolfson (1989) states:

In order to express thanks, native speakers of American English use formulas which involve from two to five different functions of speech. They often express surprise at the offering and then follow their statements with actual thanking formulas (e.g., "thanks", "thank you, thank you so much"). After the actual formulaic expression, it is typical to find another statement, this time expressing pleasure (e.g., "that's great"). An additional speech act, that of complimenting the giver (e.g., "you're wonderful"), is also frequently employed as part of the sequence of thanking, and finally, it is common for the recipient to employ a further strategy, that of expressing a desire to continue the relationship or to repay the favor. (p. 102)

In our Iranian culture, complimenting is also used for establishing friendship that creates ties of solidarity. It is also an important social strategy in that it functions as an opener for a conversation and allows meaningful social interaction to follow. Neglecting to give compliments may even be understood as a sign of disapproval, and the inappropriate use of compliments may cause embarrassment and even offense (Ishihara, 2003). According to Manes and Wolfson (1981), 85 percent of American compliments contained one of three simple sentential patterns. The great majority of compliments included the most common five adjectives (nice, good, beautiful, pretty, and great) and two verbs (like

and love) (pp.117-120). Despite the relative linguistic simplicity of compliment form, the act of complimenting is not simple.

### *Compliment Formulas*

Manes and Wolfson (1981, pp. 120-121) have noted top three compliment formulas and examples as below:

1. Noun Phrase + is/look + (really) + Adjective  
Your blouse is really beautiful. Your hair looks great!
2. I + (really) + like/love + Noun Phrase  
I really like your dress. I love your new apartment.
3. Pronoun + is + (really) + Adjective + Noun Phrase  
That's a really nice rug. That's a great looking car.  
Additional six formula examples:
4. You have such beautiful hair.
5. What a lovely baby you have!
6. Isn't your ring beautiful
7. You (really) did a good job!
8. You (really) handled that situation well!
9. Nice game!

Besides, Holmes (1993) has proposed the following taxonomy of compliment responses (CR).

Table 1

*Holmes' (1988, 1993) taxonomy of CR strategies*

Macro level CRs	Micro level CRs	Example
accept	Appreciation token	Thank you ; Cheers ; Yes ; It's nothing ; I enjoyed doing it
	Agreeing utterance	Yes, I really like it ; I know; I enjoyed doing it
	Downgrading Utterance	It's nothing
	Return compliment	You've got beautiful too
reject	Disagreeing utterance	No, it was not good.
	Question accuracy	Really?
	Challenge sincerity	Don't lie ; come on
evade	Shift credit	You're polite ;
	Informative comment	That's what friends are for
	Request reassurance	It was not hard Really?

Furthermore, Herbert proposed the following Taxonomy of Compliment responses (Herbert 1986, p. 79).

#### 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 alright, but Len's is nicer.

##### IV. No Acknowledgment (silence)

### C. Other Interpretations

#### I. Request you wanna borrow this one too?

Furthermore, Herbert (1986 p. 79) categorizes Compliment responses in the following way:

- Compliment Upgrade: the complimentee agrees with and increases the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion.

A: *Nice car!*

B: *Thanks. Brand new.*

- Agreement, the complimentee agrees with the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion probably by providing a response which is “semantically fitted to the compliment” (Herbert, 1989, p. 12).

A: *Hey you’re looking really well today.*

B: *Yeah I’m happy to say that that’s correct. Heh heh heh.*

An agreement can be scaled down to mitigate or minimize the force of the compliment.

A: *I like your car. It’s very good.*

B: *Oh. Yeah. Thanks. It’s not bad.*

- Agreement Token: the complimentee may agree with the compliment assertion with a simple “Yes” or “Yeah”. An agreement token is classified as an agreement whether it occurs in a full agreement (e.g., “Yes, I think so, too”) or in isolation (e.g., “Yes” occurring by itself in a CR).

A: *It’s really stylish.*

B: *Yeah.*

- Appreciation Token: the complimentee recognizes the status of the other speaker’s previous utterance as a compliment and shows appreciation for it. The agreement token itself is not “semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment” (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 83).

A: *What a lovely dress!*

B: *Oh. Thank you. Thank you.*

- Return, The complimentee reciprocates the act of complimenting by paying back the compliment to the complimenter.

A: *You’re looking good today.*

B: *Thank you very much. Not too bad yourself.*

- Explanation/Comment History, The complimentee impersonalizes the complimentary force/ compliment assertion by giving further information, which may frequently be irrelevant, about the object of the compliment.  
*A: I like your tie. It suits you well.*  
*B: Thanks. Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again.*
- Reassignment, The complimentee redirects the praise offered by the complimenter to some third person or to something else (referent/credit shift)  
*A: By the way, I read your article that was published last week.*  
*B: Alright?*  
*A: Very very good.*  
*B: (Laughter)*  
*A: It is.*  
*B: Oh, no. Actually my supervisor helped me a lot. So I couldn't do it by myself. (Laughter)*
- Non-idiomatic Response: the complimentee implies or would like to express that he/she does not agree with the compliment assertion. But this is done through the use of non-target-like responses.  
*A: I like your car. Cute looking car.*  
*B: Uh. That's OK. (Intended meaning, which was specified in retrospective interviews, it's just OK. Nothing special)*
- Compliment Downgrade: the complimentee qualifies the praise force/compliment assertion, or downplays the object of the compliment.  
*A: It's a nice car. I really like it.*  
*B: Oh well. It's just a normal and not very reliable car.*
- Disagreement: the complimentee directly disagrees with the praise force/ compliment assertion. He/she asserts that the praise within the compliment is overdone or undue.  
*A: You're looking radiant.*  
*B: Oh. No, I don't think so.*
- Disagreement Token: the complimentee may disagree with the compliment assertion with a simple "No". A disagreement token is classified as a disagreement whether it occurs in a full disagreement

(e.g., “No, I don’t think so”) or in isolation (e.g., “No” occurring by itself in a CR).

A: *Oh you’re looking well.*

B: *Uhm. No.*

The avoidance continuum

Expressing Gladness ⇔ Follow-up Question ⇔ (Doubting) Question ⇔  
Opting out.

- Expressing Gladness: the complimentee does not address the compliment assertion itself, which makes the response a type of avoidance, but expresses his/her gladness that the complimenter likes the object of the compliment.

A: *By the way, I read your article that you published last week. It was very good.*

B: *Oh, that’s good. Thank you.*

- Follow-up Question, The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which elaborates the compliment assertion. It is equivocal whether this question is meant to fish for more compliments, or to gain specific information about the worthiness of the object being complimented. In the data for this research project, the latter seems to be the case.

A: *You know I just I just read your article that you published last week. I thought it was excellent.*

B: *Thanks a lot. What do you find interesting about it?*

- (Doubting) Question: the complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which corresponds to the request for repetition and/or expansion of the compliment assertion. The question is ambiguous in terms of whether the complimentee intends it to provide repetition/expansion of the original assertion or to question the sincerity/motives of the complimenter.

A: *(Referring to B’s article published last week) Fantastic actually.*

B: *Really?*

- Opting out,  
Opting out with laughter: the complimentee responds to the compliment with mere laughter.

A: *Oh, that’s nice. How lovely! It’s my favorite color. I wanna buy a blue car one day.*

B: *Heh heh.*



- Opting out with filler(s): the complimentee just utters (some) filler(s) in response to the compliment.

*A: I was just reading your paper, that paper you submitted to the journal the other day. It was really good.*

*B: Uhm.*

- Opting out without anything/No Acknowledgement: the complimentee does not respond to the compliment at all verbally or nonverbally probably because he/she does not hear the other speaker's previous utterance or is occupied with something else.

*A: I read your article the other day, too. It was really good.*

*B: (Silence)*

- Opting out with topic change, the complimentee provides a response which cannot be understood as being linked to the compliment. He/she does not respond to the compliment itself but changes the topic to something else.

*A: I like your lovely dress.*

*B: I heard that you (were) not well last time. So do you feel well now?*

Furthermore, Thomas (1983) asserts that pragmatic failure could lead to more negative outcomes than grammatical errors do; because pragmatic failure could be caused by personality weakness instead of language insufficiency.

The acceptance to denial continuum as Herbert (1989) asserts follows this pattern:

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

Herbert (1989) asserts Compliment Responses (hereafter CRs) are an interesting object for study because there is quite strong agreement within the speech community as to what form constitutes a "correct response" (p. 5). Therefore, studying CRs can "enhance our understanding of a people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and meaning of language use in a community" (Yuan, 2001, p. 273). In English, a simple CR- "thank you" is preferred as mentioned in Johnson's etiquette book (1979). The preference for a simple 'thank you' in replying to compliments was demonstrated in American English (Saito & Beecken, 1997), British English (Herbert, 1986), New Zealand English (Holmes, 1986) and Australian English

(Soenarso, 1988). Specifically, the percentages of acceptances out of the total number of CRs studied were 66% versus 88% for Americans and South Africans (Herbert, 1989), 61% for New Zealanders (Holmes, 1986) and 58% for Americans (Chen, 1993). Therefore, although there might be exceptions, Herbert's (1989) generalization about English CRs apparently comes to be true in these situations.

Saito and Beecken (1997) studied CRs by American learners of Japanese. They analyzed CRs in two ways: Initial Sentence Analysis (quantitative analysis) and Semantic Formula Analysis (qualitative analysis). In the Initial Sentence Analysis, they categorized a CR based on the first sentence rather than all sentences in the CR. The first sentence in the CR was classified as positive, negative or avoidance. In the Semantic Formula Analysis, they classified CRs based on semantic formula e.g., gratitude, affirmative explanation, agreement, acceptance, joke, avoidance/topic change, mitigation, return and denial.

Farghal and Al-Khatib (2001) also used two types of distinctions (i.e., binary distinctions) to categorize CRs by Jordanian college students. Their categories of CRs include simple responses versus complex responses, macro-functions versus micro-illocutions, and intrinsically-complex responses versus extrinsically-complex responses.

Compliments are recognized as an important speech act in a socio-cultural context. Holmes (1988, p. 462) states that compliments are “positively affective speech acts, the most obvious function they serve is to oil the social wheels, paying attention to positive face wants and thus increasing or consolidating solidarity between people”. However, compliments may also be regarded as a threat to negative face, even while paying attention to positive face (see section 2.1 for details). CR is a response to a compliment. The speech acts of compliment and CR are conversational devices of interpersonal relationships in daily life. The use of CR as a phatic expression (more of a ‘ritual’ type) may also play a particular role in maintaining the solidarity of interpersonal relationships and the harmony of social interaction. For example, during this study an Australian informant mentioned that his answer to a compliment on appearance (“Hey, you look great! You’re really handsome today”) would be “Cheers! So do you”, even if the addressee was not good looking. CRs are “worth studying because, like all speech acts, they can show us the rules of language use in a speech community” (Yuan, 2001, p.273). The study of CRs in cross-cultural, socio-linguistic contexts can make an important contribution “because they are ubiquitous, yet frequently problematic speech acts” (Yu, 2003, p. 1687). According to

Wolfson (1986), two thirds of English compliments use the adjectives “nice, good, beautiful, pretty, great”, and 90% make use of just two verbs “like and love” (p.116). The lack of creativity in the form and content of English compliments is related to their function in discourse. Herbert (1986) demonstrates that compliments are used to “negotiate solidarity with the addressee” (p. 76). Based on the above-mentioned statements, and due to the importance of cross-cultural studies, this study aimed to investigate how Iranian EFL learners tend to make use of compliments in English and Persian, the following methodology is used to clarify the pattern of using compliments, furthermore, a comparison between the two languages would be made based on the results. A point of interest also was to see what combinations of strategies were used so that a model for cultural response would be attained.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants/Materials**

The sample for this research study was composed of 50 Iranian EFL learners from Isfahan, Tehran, and Sheikhbahae Universities. Their age-range was 18-30 and they were undergraduate students, 30 females and 20 males. They were asked to respond to a Discourse Completion Test consisting of six situations in which students were required to put themselves in and respond. In each situation, a compliment addressed the participants, and the students were asked to say how they would react to that compliment. The questions were open-ended so that they could answer without any limitations.

### **Procedure**

50 EFL learners from universities of Isfahan, Tehran, and Sheikhbahae (located in Isfahan) were selected for this study. Method of sampling was based on non-randomized design, and available samples from the three universities took a Discourse compliment test. The DCT consisting of six situations was administered to them and it took the students about 45 minutes to assert how they would respond to the compliments made on them both in English and Persian. The DCT and the instructions were designed in Persian and the students were required to answer the same questions in both English and Persian. On one side of the paper, they had to write in Persian and on the other side in English. The tests were administered simultaneously.

## Results

As the below table shows, Iranian EFL learners have made use of Persian and English compliments almost similarly. The pattern of using compliments in Persian and English is the same; it begins with accept, then evade and the last strategy used is reject. The results show that they accept 72% of compliments in English and 75.6 in Persian. However, a very large gap exists between downgrading in English and Persian; English majoring students used Persian downgrading strategy about 12 times more than English. It means Persian native speakers are less confident in Persian than English. Agreeing utterances in Persian and English are 8% and 10 %, respectively. The table also shows that return-rate in English and Persian is low.

Assuming “reject” responses, it is clear that, all in all, they made use of reject strategy at most about 2 percent. This shows that reject responses are not a leading response in Iranian culture.

Table 2

*Percentage of the compliment-response strategies used in Persian and English*

Macro level CRs	Micro level CRs	Students' English response	Students' Persian response	English VS Persian
Accept	Appreciation token	%60	%55	Eng: %72 Pers: %75.6
	Agreeing utterance	%10	%8	
	downgrading	%1	%12	
	Return compliment	%1	%.6	
Reject	Disagreeing utterance	%1	-	Eng: %2.2 Pers: %1
	Question accuracy	%.6	%1	
	Challenging sincerity	%.6	-	
Evade	Shift credit	%11	%13	Eng: %19 Pers: %16.4
	Informative comment	%5	%.4	
	Request reassurance	%3	%3	
Surprising		%1	%2	Eng: 7 % Pers: 7 %
Confirmation/smile		%1	%1	
Suggestion		-	%1	
Wish/hope		-	%1	
Pleasing		%5	%2	

Regarding “evade” as a way to reply compliments, both English and Persian evade rates are close to each other and it seems that students do not differ on English and Persian regarding “evade” strategy. According to the above table, “shift credit” strategy is the most used strategy from evade category. The other two parts of evade including informative comment and request reassurance also show similar amount.

Assuming Holmes’ category of compliment responses, Iranian EFL learners used few more strategies in addition to what mentioned by Holmes. These strategies include surprising, confirmation, suggestion, Wish/hope, and pleasing. Many times, the students assert that they are simply surprised as their interlocutors make a compliment on them. In other situations, they try to please their interlocutors by a gracious and generous offer, e.g., “you can take the rest of pies”. Sometimes, in response to a compliment, the complimentee makes a hope or wish, for example she may say: “I hope you enjoyed the taste” or “I wish you the same”. From these results, it can be concluded that seeking for compliment responses is not a simple matter, because we are dealing with human beings and coming to a comprehensive picture of speech acts including compliments is a very complex work to do. Besides, in order to see how individuals respond to their interlocutors, it is of much importance to examine different cultures or communities’ speech acts.

Table 3

*Correlation among different parts of compliments*

	ACCEPT	REJECT	EVADE	ACCEPT 2	REJECT 2	EVADE 2
ACCEPT Pearson Correlation	1	-.220	-.091	.381	-.231	.002
Sig. (2- tailed)	.	.269	.650	.055	.328	.994
N	27	27	27	26	20	25
REJECT Pearson Correlation	-.220	1	-.091	-.282	.810**	.123
Sig. (2- tailed)	.269	.	.653	.163	.000	.557
N	27	27	27	26	20	25
EVADE Pearson Correlation	-.091	-.091	1	.322	.252	-.078
Sig. (2- tailed)	.650	.653	.	.109	.284	.709
N	27	27	27	26	20	25
ACCEPT 2 Pearson Correlation	.381	-.282	.322	1	-.265	.028
Sig. (2- tailed)	.055	.163	.109	.	.259	.894
N	26	26	26	26	20	25
REJECT 2 Pearson Correlation	-.231	.810**	.252	-.265	1	.160
Sig. (2- tailed)	.328	.000	.284	.259	.	.500
N	20	20	20	20	20	20
EVADE 2 Pearson Correlation	.002	.123	-.078	.028	.160	1
Sig. (2- tailed)	.994	.557	.709	.894	.500	.
N	25	25	25	25	20	25

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The above table shows the correlation among different parts of compliments. Regarding the table, the correlation between English and Persian reject strategy is significant at .81 and its eta square is equal to %65, which means if someone rejects a compliment in Persian, with the probability of 65 percent, s/he will do the same when s/he makes an English compliment.

The table below shows how Iranian English learners make use of a combination of strategies in response to a compliment. An in-depth look over the DCT shows that there are many times that speakers do respond to a compliment with two or more kinds of compliments.

Table 4

*The distribution of compound strategies*

The Combination of Strategies	English	Persian
an acceptance (appreciation token) followed by An evade (shift credit)	13.1 %	36.5 %
an Acceptance followed by An explanation	20 %	6.3 %
a surprise followed by an acceptance then a promise i.e., a pleasing expression	13.1%	-
a surprise followed by An acceptance (appreciation token)	11.1 %	-
an explanation (appreciation token) followed by an acceptance (appreciation token)	2.2 %	3.1%
a reject (challenge sincerity) followed by An explanation	4.4 %	1.5%
an evade (request assurance) followed by an acceptance (appreciation)	4.4 %	11.1%
an evade (shift credit) followed by An acceptance (downgrading)	4.4 %	1.5%
an acceptance (appreciation token) followed by an acceptance (return compliment)	-	1.5%
an acceptance (appreciation token) followed by an acceptance (an agreeing utterance)	4.4 %	3.1%
an acceptance (appreciation token) followed by an acceptance (appreciation token)	6.6 %	12.6 %
an evade (request assurance) followed by an acceptance (appreciation token)	-	11.1 %
an evade (request assurance) followed by a pleasing suggestion	6.6 %	1.5 %
an acceptance followed by an interrogative suggestion	8.8 %	-
an acceptance followed by a reject (question accuracy)	-	1.5%
an acceptance followed by an acceptance (return compliment)	-	1.5 %
an acceptance followed by a hope	-	1.5 %
a reject (challenge accuracy) followed by an explanation	-	1.5 %
an evade (shift credit) followed by an acceptance (downgrading)	-	1.5%
an evade (shift credit) followed by a pleasing expression	-	1.5 %

As Table 4 shows, from all compound statements elicited from the DCT, the most used compound strategy in Persian is accept (appreciation token) followed by an evade (shift credit) but the most used strategy in English is accept (appreciation token) followed by an explanation. In Holme's category; however, no room is devoted to the explanation; here we find most of accept in English followed by an explanation.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

As stated by Hymes (1974), the ability to speak a language not only includes knowing grammar but also how to use them. In this regard, an English instructor may make use of the results of this study. That is, when there is no difference between the two languages in the speech act of compliment, no difficulty would emerge for Persian speakers learning English in using compliments in English because, as Herbert (1989), and Chen (1993) assert, the type of compliment most used by English speakers is accept. Therefore, since the Iranians and English follow the same patterns of using compliments, English instructors would face no difficulty in this regard. Moreover, Persian speakers make the same pattern of compliments when using English. These patterns are started with accept, followed by evade and ended by reject strategies. Regarding the same results of the studies done by Herbert (1989) and Chen (1993), it cannot be concluded that L2 learners (here Persian students) had transferred their L1 norms of speech acts to the L2. However, if similar studies are done on the languages with differing patterns of compliments, it would reveal if any transfer takes place.

Also in line with the findings of Wolfson (1989), when Iranian students use an accept strategy in Persian they follow an accept using an evade strategy, specially a shift credit in about 36 percent of cases. But as they accept a compliment in English, in 13 percent of cases they use an evade strategy after an accept. This shows although the overall pattern of complimenting is accept, evade and reject in English and Persian, the combinations of strategies used by the speakers are different regarding the two languages. One cannot conclude that the same combinations of strategies are used in other contexts unless similar studies are done in different places with different learners and differing levels of English proficiency.

Based on the results, it seems that Persian and English speakers are more culturally similar to each other in that the preference of using compliment begins with accept, continues with evade, and less reject

strategies are used; however, this pattern seems to be different from other communities where reject is the most used strategy.

According to Ishihara (2003), compliments act like a tool for establishing friendship that creates ties of solidarity. However, based on the results of the current study in Iran, paying no attention to the fact that a stranger's compliment is culturally bound, Iranian students may not accept or reject a stranger's compliment or the only reply may be silence or to say "it is none of your business!"

According to Wolfson (1989), an error in grammar or pronunciation can be easily forgiven by the native speakers of a language; however a pragmatic one can cause offence. We face the same reality in Iran where not using compliments is assumed as being impolite even if no sign of offence is found in the speech.

Furthermore, Razi (2013) asserts, in Iranian culture, taking a compliment on appearance from a socially distant man, makes a woman uncomfortable or might be considered as an insult. In this study, women also said they keep silent or react with a frown as a strange man makes compliment on them regarding their appearance or the dress they wear. On the contrary, the results of this study show that when a strange woman makes a compliment on a man, he would not take such a distant position and replies with a smile or a simple "thank you" (a kind of accept strategy). As quoted by Tang and Zhang (2009), whether a compliment is to be considered as positive or negative speech act depends on a number of factors like context, cultural protocols and individual interpretation. The findings of this study show that cultural limitations or customs are bound with the personality of female students and they do not respond to a stranger when they are complimented in both Persian and English.

Furthermore, Pomerantz (1978) found out that speakers of different languages and language varieties followed different patterns when responding to compliments. In this regard, Iranian students act like Americans both in their native and foreign language (English). Like Americans, Iranian students made use of accept, evade and reject linearly and this pattern is the same as Americans' pattern of compliment responses. It is also of interest to see how communities with different patterns of complimenting respond to a compliment made in their foreign or second language. Iranians' pattern of using compliments is also similar to New Zealanders in that, as Holmes (1986, 1988) asserts, in New Zealand, the category of Accept is the most frequent one.



The last word is that a comprehensive pattern of compliments is achieved when similar studies would be done in different parts of the world in different cultures. This study like previous ones, took a step forward in this regard and others may add more. A comprehensive pattern would also help us find the psychological and social styles of thinking.

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## Appendix (1)

دانشجوی گرامی، از اینکه وقت خود را برای پاسخ به این پرسشنامه در اختیار من قرار دادید از شما صمیمانه سپاسگزارم؛ خواهشمندم پاسخهای واقعی خود را در زیر هر بخش و به زبان انگلیسی بنویسید.

شماره دانشجویی: .....  
سن: ..... سال  
جنسیت: .....

(۱) هم اکنون کنفرانس خود را در کلاس را به پایان رسانده اید؛ یکی از همکلاسانتان نزد شما می آید و میگوید: بسیار عالی بود، من خیلی لذت بردم.

شما چگونه پاسخ میدهید:

(۲) دوستان خود را به صرف چایی و کیک که خودتان پخته اید دعوت میکنید بعد از پذیرایی به شما میگویند: کیکت بسیار خوشمزه بود...

شما چگونه پاسخ میدهید:

(۳) در حال خرید یک دامن/پیراهن مرد غریبه ای به شما میگوید: این لباس خیلی برازنده شما است.

شما چگونه پاسخ میدهید:

(۴) در حال خرید یک دامن /پیراهن، زن غریبه ای به شما میگوید: این لباس خیلی برازنده شماست.

شما چگونه پاسخ میدهید:

(۵) دوستان خود را به خانه خود دعوت کرده اید یکی از دوستانتان چشمش به ساعتی که روی دیوار نصب کرده اید می افتد و می گوید: من عاشق این ساعت شدم، چقدر به این سالن می آید.

شما چگونه پاسخ میدهید:

(۶) روز اولی است که پیراهن (لباسی) را به تن کرده اید، یکی از همکارانتان به شما میگوید چقدر این لباس برازنده شماست؛ رنگ آبی خیلی به شما می آید. شما چگونه

پاسخ میدهید: