

Compliment Responses among Male and Female Jordanian University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine compliment responses among Jordanian university students. It aims to explore the use of compliment responses among Jordanian, and investigate if there are any differences with regard to gender. The corpus consists of 611 compliment responses collected from 36 participants through an ethnographic (note-taking) method during the second semester of 2013/2014 academic session. This research adopted Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of compliment response strategies to analyze the compliment responses. Results show that recipients used the agreement strategies more frequently than the other strategies. The findings also show although both males and females favored to use agreement strategies more than non agreement and other interpretation strategies, female students used agreement strategies more frequently than the male students. This may support the claim that males tend to interpret compliment as FTA. Females also preferred to use agreement strategies to respond to compliment offered by female than compliment offered by male. Compliment responses strategies are discussed in terms of gender. It can be concluded that the linguistic manipulations of compliment responses shown in this study indicate that no one strategy of compliment responses would work because different genders have different sets of strategies, thereby preventing any valid generalization. The current study offered important differences in using compliment responses between genders.

Keywords: compliment responses; response strategies; ethnographic method; gender; FTA

INTRODUCTION

The essential element of any communication is politeness. People behave and talk politely in order to show respect and to be respected at the same time. Politeness is a fundamental part of social reality and is more than just a question of formality and routine. Compliment is an aspect of daily relation in a person's life which has become embedded in our daily life; it plays an important communicative function to establish solidarity in the interpersonal relationships. According to (Holmes, 1988) complimenting helps people to be closer to one another. She defines compliment as:

“A speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speakers, usually the person addressed, for some “good” (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (Holmes, 1988, p. 446).

A compliment response is considered as a type of speech acts which is important to be studied because responses to compliments can provide different functions of compliment (Herbert, 1990). On the one hand, the harmony between compliments and complement responses helps determine the success of a particular interaction. On the other hand, inappropriate compliment responses lead to failure in the interaction which conflicted with the functions of the compliment as the main function of compliments is to establish solidarity in the interpersonal relationships. For example: in the Jordanian culture, giving compliment on appearance from man to women may be considered as an offense. Therefore, whether a compliment is to be recognized as positive or negative speech act relies on a number of factors such as context, cultural protocols and individual interpretation (Tang & Zhang, 2009).

COMPLIMENT RESPONSES

Heidari et al. (2009) states that compliment responses play an important role in establishing and preserving the solidarity of interpersonal relationships. Pomerantz (1978) conducted the first research on compliment responses in American English and revealed that there are two rules that govern the principle of compliment responses:

1. Agree with the speaker
2. Avoid self-praise

(Pomerantz, 1978, pp. 81-82)

The first rule is that the addressees have to agree with the compliments offered by the complimenter, and the other rule is that the addressees have to avoid self praise. These rules are rather similar with Leech's (1983) explanatory analysis of politeness. Leech (1983) is considered as one of the first theorists of politeness who studied the phenomena of politeness from a Gricean and speech-act theoretic perspective. He developed a theory of politeness to illustrate "why people are often so indirect in conveying what they mean" (1983, p. 80). He proposed the following principles:

Minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs;

Maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs

(Leech, 1983, p. 81)

Leech also introduces a number of politeness maxims:

"(I) Tact Maxim

(a) Minimize cost to other (b) Maximize benefit to other

(II) Generosity Maxim

(a) Minimize benefit to self (b) Maximize cost to self

(III) Approbation Maxim

(a) Minimize dispraise of other (b) Maximize praise of other

(IV) Modesty Maxim

(a) Minimize praise of self (b) Maximize dispraise of self

(V) Agreement Maxim

(a) Minimize disagreement between self and other (b) Maximize agreement between self and other

(VI) Sympathy Maxim

(a) Minimize antipathy between self and other (b) Maximize sympathy between self and other"

(Leech, 1983, p. 132)

Where compliment responses are concerned, the Agreement and Modesty maxims are the two maxims that are applicable to compliment responses as these maxims are the fundamental notions of understanding compliment responses. The Modesty Maxim makes the addressees feel uncomfortable to accept the compliment. There is a conflict between Modesty and Agreement Maxims in the response to the compliments since the addressee may like to minimize self-praise by refusing or rejecting compliment. However, this will lead to a disagreement with the producer of compliment (for more explanation, see the example 1). Or the addressee may like to minimize disagreement with the complimenter by accepting the compliment, while this will lead to self-praise (see example 2), which disagrees with the Modesty Maxim. Generally, the interlocutors use Agreement Maxim to stay away from conflicts between themselves. When compliments are considered as verbal gift, the addressees would naturally accept this gift. However, in complimenting, Modesty Maxim would disagree with the Agreement Maxim because compliment is initially positive judgment and evaluation about the addressee. Therefore, by accepting compliment, the addressee might seem to praise oneself. These two maxims obviously contradict with each other, as shown in the following example.

Example 1:

At the dinner table

C: You are such an excellent cook.

R: No no not at all. Just ordinary, nothing special.

Example 2:

At university.

C: You look very nice today, Ali!

R: Yeah, thank you.

Herbert (1989) offered a detailed analysis of compliment responses. Based on the data he collected from American English and South African English, Herbert developed a new taxonomy of compliment responses comparable to the taxonomy of Pomerantz (1978). He also added some categories and discussed relative frequencies of various compliment responses types. The basic categories are agreement, non agreement, and request of interpretation, with the first two containing other sub-categories. The agreement category consists of acceptance and non acceptance. Acceptance is further subcategorized into appreciation token, comment acceptances, and praise upgrade, whereas non acceptance is comprised of comment history, reassignment and return. The non agreement category consists of the sub-types of scale down, disagreement, qualification, question and no acknowledgement. A comparative study was conducted to investigate the frequency of compliment responses in American English and South African English; the findings show that Americans used more non acceptance strategies than (58% of the time) their counterpart; the South African (34% of the time). Herbert (1989) related this dissimilarity between the participants' responses in compliments to the ideological background and function of compliment in each culture.

PREVIOUS STUDIES ON COMPLIMENT RESPONSES

Many studies on compliments and compliment responses have been conducted from cross-cultural perspectives; however, only some attempts have been done to carry out contrastive studies between genders. Morales (2012) revealed that the male and female participants opt to follow the trend from the previous studies: accept, reject, and evade pattern. Both groups

preferred Accept the most, and Reject the least. Based on Hungarian undergraduate students' responses data collected by Furko and Dudas (2012), they revealed that Hungarian females use more acceptance strategy to respond to compliment offered by females, while Hungarian males show no differences in using the acceptance strategies between male and female compliments.

Urano (1998) carried out a research concerning compliment responses. He revealed that Arabic and South African English speakers accept compliments, while speakers of Asian languages favored to reject them. Chen (2003) conducted a study to investigate the use of speech act of compliment among Chinese learners of English and American native speakers. The results revealed that most of the Chinese learners reject compliments whereas American speakers accept and appreciate compliments. In a more recent study on compliment responses, Cedar (2006) compared compliment responses between Thai speakers of English and American native speakers. The study showed that the responses of compliment among Americans speakers were more positive (accept the compliments), whereas Thai speakers of English were more negative by rejecting and evading the compliments. Zhang Jin-pei (2013) studied compliment responses in Philippine English, and found that the most frequent strategy used by Philippine English speakers to respond to compliments is "acceptance" which comprises 60% of the collected compliment responses.

Heidari et. al. (2009) found that teenage Iranian females are likely to reject and evade compliments rather than teenage Iranian males. They also revealed that while teenage Iranian females used implicit compliment responses, teenage Iranian males preferred to use explicit compliment responses. Heidari et. al. (2009) stated that teenager Iranian female-female pairs were more prone to giving implicit compliment responses than their counterparts (male-male). They further explicated that attitude differs across gender. According to Herbert (1990 cited in Mojica, 2002, p. 116), the speech act of complimenting is used "more frequently by women and that women are more complimented by men." Mojica (2002) stated that Holmes' (1994 cited in Mojica, 2002, p. 120) asserted that "more compliments are heard from, and are directed to women." The findings of these studies supported Mojica's (2002) study. The study revealed that males complimented females and males on an almost equal frequency. One interesting study that focused on the compliment responses uttered by high school students in Taiwan was conducted by Wu (2006 cited in Chung & Chen, n.d.). The study revealed that Taiwanese high schools students tend to use acceptance strategy when the topic is on appearance, ability, possession; however, they tend to reject the compliment when the topic is on personality.

Anh Ngoc (2011) studied the differences of compliment response strategies in American English between males and female. The study revealed that both males and females used more non acceptance strategy than acceptance to compliments. Heidari et. al. (2009) stated that both gender like to use accept strategy; however, females showed the use of evade strategy when receiving compliment on possession. He added that males and female Persian speakers respond to compliments in a culturally acceptable manner.

Farghal and Al- khatib (2001) examined compliment responses among Jordanians, and revealed that men and women showed acceptance strategy and preference to use simple compliment responses rather than complex responses. They also found that the gender of the interlocutors affected on the responses of compliment. For instance, male used more simple responses when complimented by male, and more non-verbal responses when complimented by females.

Therefore, based on the review of previous studies, the main aim of this study is to examine the compliment response strategies among young male and female Jordanian students. The following questions guided the research:

1. How do Jordanian speakers respond to compliments based on Herbert's taxonomy?
2. What are the compliment response strategies used by Jordanian according to their gender?

METHODOLOGY

Data that are obtained naturally have the advantage of reflecting the authentic use of language. Thus, many researchers (e.g., Labov, 1972; Hymes, 1974; Wolfson, 1983) suggested the participant observation technique in speech act studies as the best way to collect natural data because the authentic data come from observing the language used by people when they are unaware of being watched (Labov, 1972). In addition, Wolfson (1983, p. 95) believes that "ethnographic research is the only reliable method about the way speech act function in interaction".

The subjects of this study were 36 students (18 male, 18 female) all of them were university students in Jordan (Yarmouk University). Their age ranged from 18 to 24 years old. They were randomly invited to participate in this study. The observation data were gained through note-taking technique using a notebook. The researcher used his notebook and wrote down what he identified as compliments from the Jordanian students during their gathering in different places at Yarmouk University. Notebook technique is a natural way to collect the data because the participants express themselves naturally in different situations. Data was collected at the beginning of semester 2013/2014. This was the time when students had just returned from their hometown after a month's vacation. Since it was assumed that students would have a lot of things to tell each other and to compliment each other after a long break, the beginning of the semester was seen as the best time to collect data on compliment responses. Before administering the observation, the participants' permissions were sought. The participants were informed that the research concerns conversations among Jordanian students and no indication was given that the research aims to investigate "compliment responses". This is important so as to ensure that the data is natural and not skewed to a particular objective. All expressions deemed as compliment responses uttered by the participants were taken down and kept in the notebook.

As soon as the observation was finished, the note-book was scanned and saved on the researcher's laptop. The researcher asked the subjects to write their names on a piece of paper and take pictures with these papers in front of them in order to help the researcher to remember their faces and names. The entire subjects accepted that and none of them refused after the research told them that their pictures and names would be confidential. This process helped the researcher to remember the participants quickly and to remember the situations. The researcher then used Microsoft word to transcribe all the possible complimenting behaviours that the researcher detected in the note-taking. The researcher then transcribed them in English orthography. The corpus of this study consists of 611 naturally occurring compliment exchanges collected from the 36 participants, who are Arabic native speakers.

DATA ANALYSIS

The current research adopted Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of compliment response strategies in order to analyze the compliment responses collected from the Jordanian students. The collected compliment responses between male and female participants were also compared to address the issue of gender differences with regard to compliment responses. Herbert discussed relative frequencies of various compliment responses types. The basic categories in his taxonomy are agreement, non agreement, and other interpretation (see table 1 below), with the first two containing other sub-categories. The agreement category consists of

acceptance and non acceptance. Acceptance is subcategorized into appreciation token, comment acceptances, praise upgrade, while Non acceptance is comprised of comment history, reassignment and return. The non agreement category consists of the sub-types such as scale down, disagreement, qualification, question and no acknowledgement. While the last category is other interpretation subcategorizes, which is only limited to request.

TABLE 1. Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of compliment response strategies

I. Agreement		Example
A. Acceptance		
1.	Appreciation token: a verbal or non verbal acceptance of the compliment.	Thank you! [nod]
2.	Comment acceptance: addressee accepts the compliment and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.	Yeah, this is my favorite, too!
3.	Praise Upgrade: addressee accepts the compliment and contributes to the force of the compliment.	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, Doesn't it?
B. Non acceptance		
1.	Comment History: addressee offers a comment on the object of the compliment, usually some information about how s/he has acquired it.	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
2.	Reassignment: addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person.	My mother gave it to me.
3.	Return: the praise is shifted or returned to the addresser.	So is yours.
II. Non agreement		
1.	Scale down: addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated.	It is really quite old.
2.	Question: addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment.	Do you really think so?
3.	Disagreement: addressee asserts that the object of the compliment is not praiseworthy.	I hate it.
4.	Qualification: Addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with <i>though, but, well</i> etc.	Well, it is all right but Kim's is nicer.
5.	No Acknowledgement: addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment. The addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment or gives no response.	topic shift/no response
III. Other interpretation		
1.	Request: Addressee interprets the utterance as a request rather than a simple compliment.	You wanna borrow it?

The compliment responses between male and female participants will be compared to address the issue of gender differences with regard to compliment responses.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Herbert (1986) studied the compliment responses strategies between the Americans and the South African English and asserted that when the addressees respond to compliment, a certain type of pattern can be acknowledged. The first objective of the current study aims to examine the pattern of compliment responses among Jordanian students.

Some differences were found in the frequent occurrence of responses strategies used by the Jordanian students. The participants' most common response to compliments was to agree with compliments, accounting for 86% of the total responses. The second most frequent responses strategy was non agreement, accounting for 12% of the total responses. The least frequent response was other interpretation, accounting for only 2% of total responses. The frequency of occurrences for each response strategies is summarized in Table 2. These findings are comparable to Herbert's (1990) result for American English speakers' compliment responses, whereby the findings of his study showed that 66% of the compliment responses listed under the agreement category consisted of 29.4% appreciation token, 6.6% comment acceptance, 0.4% praise upgrade, 19.3% comment history, 3% reassignment, and 7.3% return.

TABLE 2. Frequency of compliment responses strategies of addressees

Response strategy	Number	Percentage (%)
1. Agreement		
A. Acceptance		
1. Appreciation token	287	47
2. Comment acceptance	85	14
3. Praise upgrade	50	8
Subtotal	422	69
A. Non acceptance		
1. Comment history	43	7
2. Reassignment	25	4
3. Return	36	6
Subtotal	104	17
Subtotal	526	86
B. Non agreement		
1. Scale down	18	3
2. Question	19	3.1
3. Disagreement	12	2
4. Qualification	12	2
5. No acknowledgement	12	2
Subtotal	73	12
C. Other interpretation		
1. Request	12	2
Total	611	100

The socio-cultural norms in Jordan also play an important role in the high frequency of acceptance. Specifically, rejecting a compliment, which is the opposite to accepting, is considered "ayeb" (shameful act) because the addressee does not accept the solidarity reflected in the compliment. As a result, examples of rejecting compliment were almost not found in the data. Finally, the frequency count (422), for acceptances and agreements are paralleled with findings about compliment responses of Jordanian college students (Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001).

AGREEMENT COMPLIMENTS IN JORDANIAN ARABIC

Within the agreement strategy, two main strategies were found; accepting and non accepting, and each strategy contains sub-strategies. In table 3, the percentage indicates the frequency of sub-categories as a proportion of the entire data set comprising 611 compliment responses.

TABLE 3. Agreement type of strategy in Jordanian responses of compliment

Responses strategy	Compliments	Responses	N	%
Agreement				
• Acceptance				
• Appreciation Token	اليوم حل وشكلك You look beautiful today	كثير شكر Thank you so much	287	47
• Comment acceptance	منيح دارس انت You study hard	عشان كثير بندرس حالنا نحسن I study hard to improve myself	85	14
• Praise upgrade	عيناها البنات هاي عليك this girl is interested in you	في بكون اروح ما وين علي عيونهم بنات Wherever I go I find girls interested in me	50	8
Subtotal			422	69
• Non acceptance				
• Comment history	كثير حل وطاقيتك Your hat is nice	رحلة عشان اشتريتها الاجاي الاسبوع الجامعة I bought it for the university trip next week	43	7
• Reassignment	وعلى فخمه ساعتك الموضه Your hand watch is fashion	اخوي اياه اعطاني لكبيري My eldest brother gave it to me	25	4
• Return	مرتب شعرك Your hair looks nice	كمان وانت So is yours	36	6
Subtotal			104	17
Total			526	86

As seen in table 3, the Jordanian speakers accepted their compliments 69% of the time, while the percentage is 17% for non-acceptance to compliments, In total 86% of the collected compliments response is listed under the agreement strategy. Among acceptance types, the most frequent strategy was appreciation. Among the subcategories of acceptance strategy, the most frequent type was appreciation token. The excerpt displayed an example of the appreciation token.

A and B are 21 years old Jordanian female and are classmate. The conversation took place at the university.

A: كثير حل وشعرك
Your hair looks beautiful
B: شكرا
Thank you.

This strategy is the most frequent among the other strategies accounted for, which is at 47%. The result for appreciation strategy is much higher than the other studies on compliment responses, for example, 15.3% of all Holmes's data on compliment responses in New Zealand (1988, p. 495), and 29.4% in Herbert's study in American English (1990). This result suggested that the strategies used by Jordanian Arabic students were highly motivated by Leech's (1983) Agreement Maxim, which is maximize agreement between self and others and minimize disagreement between self and others. In the sample of this study, 69% of the Jordanian compliment responses were categorized as Acceptances.

A comparative study has been carried out by Nelson et. al. (1996) to examine the responses to compliment between Syrian Arabic speakers and American speakers. The findings revealed that both speakers tended to accept compliment. In the same notion, Ensaif (2005) conducted a study on compliment responses among Saudi female students and she reported that Saudi female tended to accept compliment rather than reject it. Among the subcategories of non-acceptance strategy, the result shows that there are no major differences in using them. The most frequent strategy was comment, which accounted for 7% of the compliment responses. The excerpt displayed an example of the comment strategy.

A and B are 20 years old Jordanian male and they are classmates. The conversation took place at the university campus.

A: بتجتن نظارتك
Your sunglasses is wonderful

B: اشتريتها عشان اطلعنا
I bought it for our trip

In this type of response of compliment, the complimentee gives some information about the object of compliment, which is the sunglasses. He informed A why he bought it.

NON-AGREEMENT COMPLIMENTS IN JORDANIAN ARABIC

Within the non-agreement strategy, five sub-categories were found in the corpus. The data found that this strategy was the second most frequent among Jordanian students. The data revealed that this strategy accounts for 12% of the non-agreement strategy.

TABLE 4. Non-agreement type of strategies in Jordanian responses to compliments

Strategy types	Compliments	Responses	N	%
• Scale down	كندررتك عجب بيتني I like your shoes	كثير قديمه It is quite old	18	3
• question	اليوم نشيط عليك مابين You do look fresh today	مابين هيك جد Really, do I?	19	3.1
• disagreement	حلوين عيونك Your eyes are beautiful	حلوين مش ل No, they are not.	12	2
• qualification	حلولونك بنط Your trouser is nice	شوي ضيق بس اه Yeah, but it's a bit tight	12	2
• no acknowledgment	بجتن شورك Your hair is nice	giggles	12	2
Total			73	12

As seen in table 4, Jordanian students paid little attention to non-agreement responses to compliment responses. However, they have also shown variety in using non-agreement types. The diverse non acceptance strategy which was found in the present study was not in line with the findings reported in Holmes' study (1995). This demonstrates that non-agreement compliment strategies are not the normative response to compliments within this community.

Among the sub-categories of non-agreement, the most frequent types were both scale-down and question at 3% each.

SCALE DOWN

A and B are 21 years old Jordanian male, who are also classmate. The conversation took place at the university's library.

A: حلوة لجديدة ش عرك قصت
Your new hair style is nice

B: شوي قصير
It's a bit short

This type of response shows that the addressee “disagree with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated

QUESTION

A and B are 21 years old Jordanian male, who are also classmate. The conversation took place in the classroom.

A: اليوم مبسوط عليكي مبين
You do look happy today

B: علي مبين جد
Really, do I?

In this type of response, the addressee “questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment”.

OTHER INTERPRETATION OF COMPLIMENTS STRATEGY IN JORDANIAN ARABIC

Within the other interpretation strategy, only one sub-category was found in the corpus. The data indicates that other interpretation strategy is the least frequent strategy used among Jordanian students. In this situation, the participants mis-interpret the compliment utterances. Only 2% of the whole data on this strategy was identified.

TABLE 5. Other interpretation types of strategies in Jordanian responses to compliment

Strategy type	Compliment	Responses	N	%
Other interpretation				
• Request	كثير حل وساعتك Your hand watch is very nice	تستعيرها بدك You wanna borrow it	12	2

When the speaker uses this strategy, which is neither agreeing nor disagreeing with compliments, the speakers do not show their obvious orientation to the agreement maxim or the modesty maxim. They actually refuse to follow either.

A and B are 21 years old Jordanian male, who are also classmate. The conversation took place at the university campus.

A: رائع خاتمك
Your ring is stunning

B: بدك ما متى تستعيره بتقدر عليكي بي جي اذا
If it fits your finger you can borrow it anytime you want.

In this type of strategy, the complimentee considers the compliment as a request , instead of understanding it as a compliment.

While the first objective aims to examine the pattern of compliment responses among Jordanian students, the second objective aims to explore the usage pattern of compliment responses among male and female Jordanian students.

Table 3 shows that female responded to compliment more often than males. It is obvious that female tended to use appreciation token strategy as the most frequent response to compliment. In fact, appreciation token strategy is the most frequent strategy for both genders (49.4% (female); 44% (male)). Under the agreement strategy and the sub-category acceptance, female respondents seem more likely to accept the compliment more than male as shown in the usage (71.1% (female); 66.3% (male)). However, in the second subcategory of non acceptance, female are more likely to employ the comment history and reassignment strategies compared to male respondents, while male are more used to return strategy than females. Interestingly, the result shows that female used agreement strategies 87.6% more than male (83.7%). In the next category of non-agreement, female subjects used scale down and disagreement more than male. Despite this, it appears that male respondents seem to use this strategy more than female (12.7% (male), 10.6% (female)). For the least employed category, which is other interpretation, it obvious that male used more request than female do (2.8% (male), 1.1% (female)). Finally, The findings showed that female subjects practice the act of politeness more than male.

TABLE 6. Frequency compliment responses by sex of participants

Response strategy	Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%
1. Agreement				
A. Acceptance				
1. Appreciation token	122	44	165	49.4
2. Comment acceptance	35	12.6	50	14.9
3. Praise upgrade	27	9.7	23	6.8
Subtotal	184	66.3	238	71.1
B. Non acceptance				
1. Comment history	18	6.4	26	7.7
2. Reassignment	11	3.9	14	4.1
3. Return	20	7.1	16	4.7
Subtotal	49	17.4	56	16.5
Subtotal	233	83.7	294	87.6
2. Non agreement				
1. Scale down	6	2.1	12	3.5
2. Question	11	3.9	8	2.3
3. Disagreement	5	1.8	7	2
4. Qualification	6	2.1	6	1.7
5. O acknowledgement	8	2.8	4	1.1
Subtotal	36	12.7	37	10.6
3. Other interpretation				
1. Request	8	2.8	4	1.1
Total		277		334

The most significant result in the current study is that the recipients responded to compliment by using agreement strategies more frequently than the others strategies. As seen in table 6, 86% of the data collected is listed under the agreement strategies. The particular frequencies of compliment responses in Jordanian Arabic is in contrast with data found in American English, in which compliment responses other than acceptances account for almost two thirds of the data (Herbert, 1990). According to Pomerantz (1978), Americans prefer compliment responses other than acceptances due to two conflicting principle: 1: agree with the conversational participant, and 2: avoid self-praise. This is attributed to the fact that acceptance

does not involve avoiding self-praise. Acceptance strategy occurs less frequently than compliment responses that deflect the praise. This is parallel to Herbert's (1989) "Solidarity Principle which states that the complimenter offers solidarity with the addressee who, in turn, confirms solidarity by agreeing with the speaker's assertion and negating self-directed praise". However, in a study on South African English, acceptance occurred for approximately two thirds (76%) of the compliment responses used because compliments serve to praise the object of compliment rather than establish solidarity with the complimenter (Herbert, 1989, 1990); "That is, harmony is already established between the interlocutors, so the self-praise indicated by acceptances is not likely to affect their social balance". Similar to the South African English, one reason for the high occurrence of acceptances in Jordanian Arabic could be that compliments serve to praise the object of compliment. Compliments are often expected to be an expression to praise the addressee, so the addressee tends to accept them as appreciation token, an acceptance comment, or both.

As seen in table 3, both male and female favored agreement strategies more than non-agreement and other interpretation strategies. However, female students used agreement strategies more frequently than the male students. In this study, it was noted that female preferred to use agreement strategies more to respond to compliments offered by female than compliment offered by male students. The current research contradicts with Wolfson's (1983) findings, who stated that female are prone to accept compliment offered by male more than the compliment offered by female. She indicated in her study that compliments offered by female were likely not accepted or ignored, while compliment offered by male was most likely to be agreed or/and accepted by the female recipients. The findings of this study contradict also with Herbert's (1998) findings, in which male are more likely to accept compliment from male, more than from female friends. This study found that both male and female Jordanian students used agreement strategies most frequently, in respond to compliment (71.1% (female), 66.3% (male)).

In agreement strategies, namely, acceptance, female students used appreciation token (a verbal or non-verbal acceptance of the compliment, example: Thank you! [nod]) and comment acceptance (addressee accepts the compliment and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic) to accept compliment more than male students, whereas male students used praise upgrade more frequently than the female students. Female students tend to use the agreement strategies that can help show the positive face to the complimenter by accepting compliment. Precisely, to prevent self-praise, female students used comment acceptance strategy while male student simply favored accepting the compliment.

In the second subcategory of non-acceptance strategy, female employ comment history (addressee offers a comment on the object of the compliment, usually some information about how s/he has acquired it) and reassignment strategies (addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person) more than male students. It is also noted that male student used return strategy more than female, particularly when the compliment is offered by female. With regard to the small number of the return strategy in this study, this result needs to be investigated in future studies with more extensive data. However, if this finding is verified that male are more likely to use return strategy to respond to female compliment, then it might be interpreted in line with Davis' (2008) hypothesis, who proposes that "men are more likely to (mis)interpret female compliments as "flirtatious" and "seductive" than women".

Another significant finding is that both male and female students used reassignment strategies. Most of the responses to compliment were "what they possess came from God". The current study shows that female used this strategy less when the compliment was offered by male, and the male student used it more when the compliment was given by female student. It is assumed that this issue might be explained with reference to religion. This issue

also needs to be studied to show why female tend to use this strategy more than male students. The following excerpt is an example.

(1) Male Complimenter:

صوتك كتير حلو

“You have a very nice voice”

Female respondent:

شكرا لك, هاد هديّة رب العالمين

“Thanks, my voices is a gift from Allah”

The example shows that the respondent to compliment reassigns the compliment to God (Allah). This strategy of compliment responses is most frequent when the compliment comes from male respondent.

In the second category, which is non agreement strategies, the findings show that question strategy is most frequent strategy. This study contradicts with Holmes’s (1986) study, who stated that “women tend to use this strategy because women are more concerned about face than men when they reject a compliment”. The findings showed that male students tended to use this strategy more than female students, especially when the compliment is offered by female. This might be related to male’s role in the Jordanian society, thus they have the power to confirm the compliment again or ask for further clarification on the compliment received. The following excerpt is an example.

(1) Female complimenter:

سيارتك حلو كتير

“You have a nice car”

Male respondent:

وين شفتيها

“Where did you see it?”

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This paper sets out to investigate the differences between male and female Jordanian students in using compliment responses. The findings of the current study show that the most frequent strategy was agreement which is similar with some studies (e.g., Herbert, 1990), Farghal and Al-khatib (2001), Zhang (2013). However, the findings of the current study contradicts with many studies on speakers of East Asian Languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Malay and Thai (e.g., Chen, 1993), Daikuhara (1986), Gajaseni (1995), Shih (1986), and Ye, 1995, as cited in Yousefvand, 2010). These studies stated that the speakers tend to reject compliment rather than accepting them.

In investigating the compliment responses from the perspective of gender, the current study found that female students tend to use appreciation token strategy more than male students, which contradicts with Herbert’s (1998) study, who claims that female disagree with compliment. It also showed that female students preferred to employ comment acceptance and reassignment to respond to compliment. Male students tend to agree with compliments but not directly and this confirms Holmes’ (1988) claim that male identify compliment as face-threatening act (FTA). Regardless, male students also favoured the use of questioning strategy to respond to compliments. This outcome is compatible with Herbert’s (1986) who stated that male tended to use question strategy more than female when responding to compliments. However, this result is in contrast with Holmes (1986) who

stated that female tended to use the questioning strategy more than male because female are more concerned about face when they reject a compliment.

Based on the findings of this study, two pedagogical implications can be drawn for language learners and language teachers. Both language learners and language teacher should be aware of stereotypes based on a few observations of target language and socio-linguistic behaviour. Some might say that interaction between the sexes is totally prohibited in Arab Islamic countries; a more objective statement would be that cross-sex interaction between the Arabs depends on the situation. Frequent interaction is likely to occur in professional situations, but social interaction is carefully restricted. The degree of restriction differs among social groups depending on their level of conservatism. However, cross-gender interaction never reaches the high level of freedom in western countries.

There is also socio-linguistic difference between Arabic speakers and English speakers. For example, the Arabic-Islamic culture plays an important role in the phrasing of compliment and compliment responses, with reference to Jordanian Arabic context. If this socio-linguistic phenomenon is highlighted to learners of Arabic as a second language, the possibility of pragmatic failure will be minimized. Compliments and compliment responses in Jordanian Arabic are also longer and more repetitive than those in the American English. In Jordanian Arabic, people use elaborate compliments to convince the addressees about the sincerity of their praises. This finding may have significant implication for acquisition of Arabic complimenting behaviour by native speakers of English, especially so when compliment and compliment responses in most English varieties are expected to be formulaic.

With regard to the limitations of this study, the limited age group of participants is the main limitation. The participants of this study are university students. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all Jordanian speakers. Furthermore, future studies need to be conducted to investigate the age differences in using compliment responses. In spite of this limitation, the current study has offered useful evidences to clarify how people of different genders deal with compliment responses.

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