CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

People living around the world do not think or behave the same. The way they talk reflects the way they think and this is probably a result of their differences in custom, tradition and culture. But why do people react differently when they interact with each other? Why do people from different cultures display different strategies when given a compliment? This study is a comparative investigation of differences in strategy when responding to compliments between Iranian students and Malay students in Malaysia.

Hobbs (2003:249) defines compliment as 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 the addressee". This definition alongside other similar definitions places a study on compliment under the field of sociolinguistics and pragmatics. Pragmatics is concerned with language in use and it refers to how different people use language differently in different contexts based on the society they are a part of and the sociolinguistic rules and behaviours of the members of that society. In much the same way, people from different communities have different views, different cultures and different behaviours. As such, the sociolinguistic behaviour of an English native speaker and non-native speaker vis-à-vis giving and receiving compliment is most likely to be different; so awareness of these differences and familiarity with these norms are very important issues to consider, since lack of sociolinguistic awareness can cause misunderstandings among speakers.

Misunderstandings due to sociolinguistic, cultural and pragmatic incompetence are more common among ESL learners and these misunderstandings can be avoided if they are included in the teaching materials of English courses. Before sociolinguistics, pragmatics and cultural awareness can be included in the teaching materials of English courses, there is a need to establish how sociolinguistics or in particular how politeness is used by the different communities.

1.2 Politeness and Compliment

One of the areas in which politeness is observed is during the giving and receiving compliments. According to linguists, there are different definitions for politeness. Politeness norms would differ according to the terms used in different languages or different communities. Fraser (1990:31) defines politeness as a property of the utterance, which doesn't make the expectations of the hearer disappointed and fulfils the obligations of the speaker towards the recipient. He (1990) stresses that whatever the intention of the speaker; it is the hearer who assigns politeness to the utterance. Therefore, while giving compliment or responding to compliment, one should consider the standard norms of accepting this utterance as a polite behaviour according to the norms of the addressee.

Politeness is practical use of good manners. It may be defined as a cultural phenomenon and therefore, what is considered polite in one culture may sometimes be considered rude in another culture (Brown and Levinson,1987).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two kinds of politeness; negative politeness and positive politeness. The former observes the need to respect other people's 'space' i.e. to avoid intrusion or imposition on others while the latter is about

the need to include others whether for solidarity or for social approval. Negative politeness is often employed in order to mitigate the threat others feel when requests are made. In looking at language, the negative politeness may incur expressions like "if you don't mind... or if it is not difficult for you….". In this regard, it can be seen that a speaker who engages these strategies is also applying indirect speech acts which are illustrated by the examples below:

Example: A is looking for a mirror and B is within the same room. A uses an indirect expression:

A: "I am searching for a mirror".

In this situation, by making use of indirect strategy, the speaker hopes that the hearer goes and find a mirror for her. In this case the speaker does not want to impose her wants on the hearer; therefore, it is assumed that there should be some social distance between the speaker and the hearer.

In positive politeness, the interlocutors try to establish good and positive rapport and this is accomplished through direct speech acts which are usually articulated for the purpose of maintaining solidarity.. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this kind of politeness is usually observed among friends or among the people who know each other well. By using positive politeness which is expressed through direct speech acts, the speaker tries to minimize the distance between him/her. The example below exemplifies. .

Example: A is talking to B who had walked a long way and has finally reached B's house.

 "You have walked such a long distance, you must be tired and hungry, how about some

food?"

In above example the speaker wants to observe the hearer's need and therefore, uses direct questions suggesting food.

1.2.1 The Concept of Politeness among Malays

According to Asmah Haji Omar (1992), Malay children have been brought up in a way "to be seen by people but not to be heard by them". They have been taught not to speak too much but to listen more and try not to look at the elder's eyes directly while speaking. These criterion according to Asmah Haji Omar (1992), are considered as good breeding in which teaches the children to be humble. At the same time their verbal utterances should not be in the form of directness. In fact Malays have been brought up in a way to use indirect strategies in their conversations and should not show their feelings directly specially in negative responses. They have been trained to speak with polite intonation and feel shame. According to Asmah Haji (1992), Among Malays, feeling no shame is the greatest criticism. Due to this matter (feeling shame), direct acceptance of a compliment may be considered as arrogance among Malays. The person who accepts compliment directly may be considered as a person who is proud of his/her appearance/possession. Therefore, among Malays, showing modesty and being humble is very important and this is indicated by them through indirectness.

1.2.2 Compliments:

A compliment is a positive speech act which brings solidarity and reduces distance between the compliment giver and receiver. By paying it, the compliment giver is indicating respect to the compliment receiver's needs and wants. It can also be used for

praising someone's appearance, character, ability or possession. In these cases, the compliment giver tries to use polite, nice and beautiful words about the compliment receiver. Most people expect to hear nice and polite responses when they praise someone with nice and polite words, but not all nations of the world consider paying compliment as a polite behaviour and therefore they may not respond it nicely. In some cultures, like that of Japan, it is not customary to give compliment and it is not polite to accept a compliment, but in some other cultures like America, it is used frequently. Americans consider compliment as a speech act which brings solidarity and reduces distance between the interlocutors. They consider receiving a compliment as a polite behaviour and therefore, mostly believe it is polite to reply nicely when someone says nice things about them. Japanese, on the other hand, believe that accepting a compliment may be considered as an arrogant behaviour. They believe it is polite not to accept compliment and try to show humility.

From the examples presented above, it seems clear that politeness can be associated with the giving and receiving of compliments. However, this claim is dependent on the culture of the people who give and receive it and their interpretation of the compliment, whether they consider it as polite or impolite.

In Iranians culture, it is very customary to give and receive compliment. Compliments are frequently used among friends and between two people who are not acquainted with each other. The giving of a compliment by a woman on the bus to another woman who has a cute baby with her, is quite common in Iran. Among the Iranians, strangers may give compliments to people's possessions like scarf, ring or give compliments to outlook. This is usually used as a strategy to develop conversations. Among the

Iranians, it is more polite that the compliments be accepted by the receiver by saying a word of appreciation or "*taarof.*"

1.2.2.1 The Concept of *"Taarof"*

According to Aryan pour online Persian dictionary *"taarof"* means "compliment" and comity. *"Taarof"* is a special strategy which is used by Iranians and it may be a very rare practice in other cultures. Iranians believe that *"taarof"* is a part of their culture and it is a concept which is also linked to "politeness". *Taarof* strategy is used most of the time as a CRS (compliment response strategy) for possession compliments. As an example, when someone compliments one's shirt and says "what a beautiful shirt you have!" the polite response to this compliment from the addressee would be: "Thank you, you can take it". However, the person being addressed by saying "please takes it" as '*tarrof*', in polite answers, it is customary the compliment receiver refuses to accept the offer and he/she says "No thanks, it suits you more and is more beautiful on you".

Amouzade (2001:9) defines "*taarof*" as the basis of polite interactions. He claims that *"taarof"* is an interrelated concept to politeness while Beeman (1986:56) believes that the concept of *"taarof"* is extremely difficult to define as it may encompass a complex behaviour of different people from different social status.

As a whole the person who uses "*taarof* "strategy does not actually practice what is exchanged linguistically. Even if a compliment addressee has offered a compliment giver her possession/property, the addresses does not really take the property. The exchange is just a display of "politeness" which is currently practiced by Iranian culture. Through the "*taarof*" strategy of decline, the addressee is also showing his/her

generosity and politeness. Nonetheless, it is more polite if the addressee does not accept the possession.

Among Iranians, "*taarof*" has different usages apart from compliment. Sometimes it is used for inviting someone to one's house like in the case of someone who says "I have heard you are a real cook" then the receiver of the compliment may use "*taarof*" strategy and would say, "why don't you come to our house and try it?" The receiver of the compliment may use this strategy for inviting and at the same time showing her/his hospitality.

Iranians use "*taarof*" when they receive their guests. Some Iranians especially older ones believe that they should "*taarof*" their guests when they bring drink or food for their guests to receive and they relate it to politeness and hospitality of the host /hostess. In this case the host /hostess may use some sentences like "why don't you eat? Please eat more" or" please help yourself and make yourself comfortable ". The example below, may clarify this better.

In this example, Hesam has been invited to his aunt's house for dinner. His aunt has made his favourite dish. He helps himself, but in the end he feels he is still hungry. His aunt offers him another dish, but he politely refuses by saying, "No, thanks. I am full aunty". In this way he "*taarofs*" because he likes to eat more, but he is too polite to accept the offer. Yet, there is a solution for this as his aunt may insist on her offer more and then he can help himself with another dish.

A very typical example of "*taarof*" usage which is very common in Persian culture occurs when someone wants to buy something from a shop. As soon as the customer

asks the shopkeeper how much he/she should pay, the shopkeeper may say, (*ghabeli nadareh*) which means " it is worth nothing". In this way the shopkeeper is trying to be polite and he doesn't mean that he really wants to refuse the payment for the goods. In this case, he may give the price if the customer asks for the second time.

Another aspect of using "*taarof*" among Iranians is when they want to enter a door. In such situations, Iranians *taarof* each other for entering first. They believe that it is more polite to let the elders and women enter first. Hence, *taarof* has multiple functions.

Currently, "*taarof*" strategy is used more by the older generations, but new generations because of "globalization", are gradually forgetting this custom, though many young people due to family training are still practicing it.

As it was explained, *taarof* is used in different contexts in which responding to a compliment in a polite manner is one of them. As an example "offering a possession" by the receiver of the compliment is a kind of *taarof* which is commonly used among Iranians while responding to compliments on possession. For instance, if someone gives compliment on someone else's scarf and says, "nice scarf you have", the expected response from the receiver would be either "thank you" or offer as "*taarof*" like "you can take it or it can be yours"; but it should be mentioned that it is not polite to accept the offer immediately unless the compliment receiver insists on her offer.

1.2.2.2 Responding to Compliments

Giving compliment is a part of life in many cultures which is inter-related with politeness. Depending on who the speakers are and how compliments are perceived, the

sue of compliments may or may not demonstrate politeness. While giving and receiving compliments may vary from culture to culture, it appears that among Iranians, compliments can be expressed as an expression of concern which may be addressed in a friendly or formal term in the form of direct or indirect utterances for special purposes. It may also be used as a device for keeping or strengthening the solidarity between the addressees thus as a device for beginning a conversation or breaking the ice.

1.2.2.3 Compliments as Conversational Openers

As the topic signifies compliments may be employed by speakers as ways of opening conversations. An episode taken from Carla (2011) is provided for illustration.

A & C = daughters and **B** = mother

A: That's a nice sweater, mom.

B: Thanks.

C: It really is very nice. Where did you get it?

B: I got it at Second Time Around in exchange for the red bag.

A: Oh, you got rid of the red bag?

B: Yeah, well, what else was I going to do with it?

A: But it was a gift from Jenn.

B: I know, but that's okay, she wouldn't mind. We've used it enough.

C: Speaking of Jenn, how's she doing, I wonder. We haven't heard from her
    much these days, have we?

B: No, not much, which doesn't surprise me, since she's gone on a whale-
    watching tour off the coast. She must be travelling in Canada by now.

C: Oh, really? I never knew that! How did I miss such news?

A: You never knew that? Oh, that's right! You were out of town on business the

last time she stopped by. Now was it when you were in New York or Chicago?

<p style="text-align:center">(Carla 2011)</p>

Sometimes compliments can also be used as a strategy to encourage someone to do something as the example below illustrates: .

Example:

A teacher gives compliment about his student's work.

Teacher : This is excellent Jeannie. You've really done a nice job.

<p style="text-align:center">(Holmes 1995:119)</p>

Compliments are examples of speech acts which notice the hearer's objects, wants, interests, and needs,"(Brown and Levinson, 1987:102).

In some cultures people pay compliment directly and in some other cultures they pay it indirectly. An example is provided for illustration.

Example:

Mick is visiting his friend Brent and comments on his car.

Mick: New car? It's yours?

Brent : Yeah.

Mick: Looks as if it will move.

Brent : Yeah it goes well I must say.

<p style="text-align:center">(Holmes 1995: 124)</p>

In the above sentence Mick is paying compliment indirectly and why it is a compliment is because she is attributing credit upon the possession (car) of the addressee (Brent).

Some compliments, depending on speakers may also be addressed or responded to indirectly as the example below illustrates.

Example:

Rhonda and Carol meet each other together with their family. Carol comments on Rhonda's daughter.

> Carlo: What a polite girl!
>
> Rhonda: Thank you. We try hard.

<div align="right">(Holmes 1995: 117)</div>

In above mentioned example, Rhonda is actually giving the reason why her daughter is polite and therefore is accepting the compliment indirectly.

We employ compliments for indicating politeness but not all people like to be paid compliments. Sometimes they can be considered as face-threatening or insult. Then they may be considered as negative politeness. Yu (2003:1687) believes that compliments can sometimes be used in the form of criticism and may therefore make the hearer/receiver feel uncomfortable. It depends on the situation of which we pay compliment or to whom we pay it. When the compliment has too much distance from the reality or the situation is very formal or there is too much unequal status between the interlocutors, it can be considered as sarcastic or face-threatening and the receiver of the compliment may then be annoyed and feel uneasy (Holmes, 1995:119).

Example:

Two workmate meet at coffee machine at work :

Jack : You're looking great today.

George : (Looking very embarrassed) I'm going to see Helen and her mother for dinner.

<div align="right">(Holmes 1995: 133)</div>

In some cultures paying compliment to the possession of people may be considered as a desire for having that possession or implying that the compliment giver would envy the addressee's possession. Brown and Levinson (1987:66) remarks "compliments can be regarded as face threatening since they may imply the compliment giver envies the addressee in some way."

Example:

Betty: What an unusual bracelet. It's nice.
Sue : Please take it. (offer)

(Holmes 1995:120)

1.2.2.4 Language Structures/Forms of Compliment

According to Holmes (1988), compliments can be expressed in 3 ways but the findings are often coded according to language structure which is further illustrated below.

1- Noun Phrase+ is/look + (really) + Adjective

Example: Your blouse is really beautiful.

Your hair looks great.

2- **I + (really) + like/love + noun phrase**

Example: I really like your dress.

I love your new apartment.

3- **Pronoun + is + (really) + Adjective + noun phrase**

Example: That's really a nice rug.

That's a great looking car.

It should be noticed that interlocutors have been known to respond to compliments in different ways. The way they respond can be related to the situation, status, gender and their culture. As a whole some of the compliment response strategies (CRS) are culture specific.

1.2.2.5 Compliment Response Strategies (CRS)

Different people living in the same society should be familiar with the different strategies used by others to reduce misunderstanding as there may be situations where a person may be irritated by a compliment; for example, while an English woman may enjoy to hear "You look beautiful today", a Chinese woman may feel uneasy and even irritated (Tang & Zhang, 2009). As a whole a compliment may be interpreted positively or negatively and therefore, maybe accepted, evaded or rejected depending on the context and the culture of the people who use it. As an example David (2007: 70), expresses that in some cultures giving compliment to a possession by asking its price may be very rude and even may not be considered as a compliment like the example below:

Your earrings are pure gold, aren't they?

(David 2007: 69)

There are special strategies for accepting a compliment. Some strategies are used for accepting a compliment directly, like "appreciation token or return strategies". Some strategies are used for accepting a compliment indirectly such as "downgrading,

questioning for reassurance, shifting credit, smile and giving comment". Below are some hypothetical examples provided by the researcher on each of the strategies:

Accepting directly (saying thank you)

Example: A: What a nice carpet!

            B: Thank you.

Downgrading

Example: A: That's a nice shirt you are wearing.

            B: Well, I just got it pretty cheap.

Questioning for reassurance

Example: A: Do you really think so?

            B: Oh, yeah, it was fabulous.

Shifting credit

Example: A: love your clock. It looks great in your living room

            B: Thanks. A friend of mine brought it for me from England.

Returning

Example: A: You are looking well.

            B: Thanks. You too.

Non-verbal smiles

Example: A: You are really beautiful.

            B: (smile)

Giving comments – (Informative, Encouragement, Recommendation)

Example:

A: Wow, Your mobile phone is fantastic.

B: They come with better facilities every day. There is one with

a TV. receiver.

Using *Taarof*

Example 1 :   A: Thanks for your help.

B: Don't mention it. Any time.

Example 2:   A: Your car is nice.

B: Thanks, it's yours. You can take it.(offer)

Good wishes

Example: A: You have bought a very nice apartment.

B: I hope you buy one like this soon, thanks.

This study has materialised as a result of a previous small scale study that was conducted by the researcher a few years ago for a course project assignment. The procedure for this study is explained below for clarification purposes.

1.3   Preliminary Study

The present study was influenced by a previous project carried out a few years ago as a part of the coursework requirement for the course on Applied Linguistics offered in the institution where the researcher was studying. Termed as preliminary study because it was conducted with no agenda in mind, the findings generated in this study ignited the

interests in conducting this study. Interest was further sparked by observations of foreign students in Malaysia who made and received compliments differently from Malaysians.

In that project the CRS (Compliment Response Strategy) among Iranians and Malaysians i.e. Malays, Chinese and Indians were compared. The data were collected through the use of written discourse completion tasks (DCT) composing, nine complimentary sentences (three on appearance, three on possession and three on skill). This is further elaborated on in chapter 3.

The findings demonstrated that in general, the Iranian participants accepted compliments more than the Malay participants do. At the same time, Chinese and Malays were observed to reject compliments more than the Iranians and Indians. Although such a finding was attributed to the Malays' indirect mannerisms (see Asmah Haji Omar 1997,Thilagavathi, 2003) it cannot be denied that Malaysian Malays are generally gentle people who also practise a lot of humility as they tend to avoid confrontations and putting themselves in the limelight. From the findings of the preliminary study, it was found that compliment acceptance strategies differ across all groups. Malaysian Chinese participants appeared to use more evading strategies than did the Malays and the Indians. Further, the most interesting finding out of the preliminary study was the analysed expression, "Thank you" which was used most frequently as an acceptance strategy across all the four groups. In contrast, it was found that the Iranians tended to use *taarof* strategy for accepting compliments directed to personal possessions. The preliminary study was a small scale study which was conducted for a small project required by a course but the findings did spur some interest.

1.4 The Research Problem

Language is a tool of communication which is used to display the culture or behavioural traits of the people who use it. It is used in various situations by various groups of people to convey specific meanings determined by the speakers, it has an important role as it is a kind of mirror which reflects the speakers' beliefs and thoughts. Therefore, it is important for speakers to know what to say, and how to say something in different situations in order to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. This is most crucial in international or multicultural settings as a slight misunderstanding can set off unnecessary conflicts which consume lives. This ability is what Hymes (1974) and others term as sociolinguistic competence. Currently many Iranians are going abroad to countries such as Singapore and Malaysia to further their education. As a hub of education excellence, Malaysia is not only the melting pot for various nationalities it is also a centre where other Asians come in order to acquire better proficiency in English. Malaysian universities also use English as a medium of instruction particularly at the postgraduate level thus this makes it important for all foreign students especially Iranian students landing on the shores of Malaysian universities to be better equipped in the English language. However, Iranians are not well verse din using English nor are they well versed with the cultures of Malaysians; therefore, it is vital that they be equipped in terms of the cross cultural differences existing between Iranians and Malaysians which can be composed of a diverse cultural background. If Iranians are not well versed in the social cultural nuances of Malaysia, they may be at the losing end when it comes to interacting with the locals.

To Iranians, English is a foreign language which is learnt in school. Their grammar skills in English may be good but their proficiency is low because they hardly get opportunities to use English in their homeland. Since Iran has just started sending

Iranians abroad, many Iranians are also ignorant of local cultural rules. Due to their inadequacies mentioned above, it is thus, necessary for them to be able to use English in a correct and comprehensible way both in the academic as well as social situations. Further, this has to be adhered to the standard of the country where they are based in order to avoid any misunderstandings. A lack of social competence and in this regard, lack of pragmatic awareness, which according to Baba (1999:76) is "pragmatic component of the foreign language learners' imperfect knowledge of the second language", would cause misunderstanding and misconception. Therefore having a familiarity with complimentary speech act strategy responses particularly those used by Malaysians would enable Iranian students who are living in this country to further their education and then can enhance better relationships and develop friendship thereby reducing misunderstandings when interacting with one another.

1.4.1 Misunderstandings

As a foreign student staying in Malaysia for about three years, it was observed that the Malay culture differs from the Iranian culture. For instance the Malay responses towards any compliment given by Iranians, were mostly rejections which comprise saying "no, no", "oh really?", and sometimes "smiling and keeping silent." Rarely was it observed that they accept a compliment. In the beginning it was thought that the local Malays might not like to communicate with foreigners and therefore, would not accept compliments. However, further observations suggest that this matter could be clarified but for the sake of evidence, it ought to be conducted as a study. Previously some misunderstandings had occurred between Iranian students and local Malay students over the use of compliments. These misunderstandings happen when we are not familiar with each other's culture. In the Iranian culture, one is expected to say something when

people give you a compliment and if you keep silent or just smile, then they may think you are neglecting them.

According to David (2007:70) misunderstanding happens when the interpretation of a concept differs in different cultures. As an example, if someone gives compliment to young Malaysians by saying, "you are like the moon", may make them feel offended as the interpretation of it is gaining weight. But this may make Iranians feel happy as the interpretation of this compliment in Iranian culture is "being very beautiful".

Different compliment responses in different cultures can arise misunderstanding. For instance, when Kurosawa, one of the famous movie directors of Japan, refused to accept the compliment for his Academy Award by saying "I do not deserve the prize", "I don't even know how to shoot a film", the American employee of the video club was completely confused. Actually Kurosawa's compliment response was a kind of typical Japanese response. Kurosawa wanted to show humility but the American employee had considered it as an unsuitable or self-effacing to this situation (Baba, 1999: 65).

According to Baba (1999 : 68), when someone says to a Japanese woman that her husband is nice, the woman may respond by saying that he is a "couch potato" and is always lazy around the home even though in reality he is not and she may be proud of him. It is very common in Japan that a man refers to his wife as *gusai* "stupid wife" and a woman refers to her husband *sodaigomi* "big junk" in public to show the expression of humility. Baba (1999:71) went on to say that Americans use a compliment to indicate solidarity between two interlocutors; therefore it should be accepted and appreciated but the compliment for Japanese is meant to create distance between interlocutors by downgrading, showing humility and respect.

In some cultures denying or rejecting a compliment is a norm and in this way the receivers of compliment want to show their humility; on the contrary in other cultures especially American and some European cultures, acceptance of a compliment is a norm. American native speakers mostly accept compliment by responding "Thanks" or "Thank you" followed by either expressing pleasure "I'm glad you like it" or questioning "Do you like it?" (Eisentein & Bodman, 1986:171)

This study further suggests that conceptualizing complimentary speech act expressions may help second language learners (Iranians and other international students) who are studying in Malaysia acquire the proper ways of carrying out this speech act according to the culture of this community, i.e. Malaysia.

Having discussed the preliminary study, and the observations of this researcher, it is apt to provide a section explaining the aim of this study more specifically.

1.5   Aim of the Study

This study aims to explore the compliment responses generated by two groups of respondents: Malaysian Malays and Iranians. Specifically it seeks to identify the different strategies used by the respondents by describing how each complimentary speech act expression differs conceptually between these two groups. This study also aims to identify the kind of compliments which are generally accepted or rejected by each group. Further, it seeks to uncover the reasons behind the use of specific compliment response strategies for each nationality. As a whole, the purpose of this study is to find out how Malays and Iranians make use of their own native cultures while responding to compliments in English.

1.6 The Research Questions

In order to meet the aim of this study the following research questions were formulated:

1. Which types of CRS are used by the Malays and Iranians?
2. What is the frequency of acceptance, rejection and evasion of each type of compliment between the two groups?
3. What are the probable cultural reasons behind the use of specific CRS for each nationality?

1.7 Limitations of the Study

As is typical for all studies, this study also bears some limitations. Although it would be more opportune to involve both genders in this study, the participants of this study were confined to females only since the attitudes of males are different from females especially in their employment of compliment response strategies, according to Holmes (1988).

In addition, the participants of this study were limited to only Iranians and Malays to avoid the complications of comparing the perceptions and cultural backgrounds of three or four ethnic groups such as Indians and Chinese. Another reason for choosing Malays was because they make up the larger portion of the Malaysian population.

Although this study uses Holmes' (1988) framework on complimentary speech acts as its theoretical framework, this study would also refer to politeness theories offered by Brown and Levinson (1987) as a way of determining politeness. The data generated from this study are not naturally occurring data but instead used DCT (discourse

completion task) and interview as the main tools for data collection. The justifications will be discussed in chapter 3.

1.8 Summary

This chapter has attempted to outline the current study by providing a wide explanation about what compliments are and how they are linked to politeness. This chapter also attempted to define in what ways compliment responses in different cultures are different and at the same time it also discussed the concept of the responses which are likely to differ from culture to culture. As an example rejecting or evading a compliment might be considered as a polite behaviour among Japanese while accepting a compliment might be considered as a polite behaviour among Americans. This chapter has also highlighted the aim of the study which was to track the similarities and differences between the two cultures, Iranian and Malays, in using compliment response strategies with the sole aim of reducing misunderstandings among these people while interacting with one another. In this contrastive study, compliment response strategies used by fifteen Iranian students and fifteen Malay students were compared. The data used for this study, were generated through DCT responses and also interview.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Many studies have been done on compliments as a speech act in the field of pragmatics but little attention has been paid to the investigation of this speech act among Malays and Iranians. The official language in Iran is Farsi or Persian. Farsi and Persian are equivalent from the meaning point of view, referring to the same language i.e., Iranian's official language. This literature chapter will cover some of the studies which have been previously done among different nationalities in order to track the differences or similarities in compliment response strategies or in using compliment with different objectives.

2.2 Previous Studies on Compliments and Compliment Responses

There are many studies on compliments, but most of these studies have compared compliment response strategy (CRS) used by English or American native speakers with non-native speakers and hardly any studies have been done comparing two non-native speakers, i.e. Iranians and Malays. Therefore, the literature which is reviewed below includes the compliment studies among these two nationalities, Iranians and Malays and at the same time, among other nationalities specifically, in comparison with English or American native speakers.

2.2.1 Malaysian Respondents

In the Malaysian context, David (1999), in a study showed pragmatic differences in using compliment and compliment response strategies between native speakers and none native speakers and introduced these strategies to the teachers as bases for bringing cultural awareness to ESL learners to improve their communicative competence. In this study, she reviewed some previous studies on compliment among different nationalities like Malaysians, Japanese, Koreans, Israelis and Americans and gave different examples of their responses to compliment. In the end she emphasized that it is the responsibility of a good teacher to make second language learners aware of these cultural differences through some special materials of teaching.

David (2007, p.68-71) in another study gave different examples of compliment responses among Malaysians. Most of the examples were extracted from K.S. Maniam's book, "*Between Lives*" or from "Levine".

Example 1:

-"Wah, so brave, lah, you!" Christina says.   (Maniam, 2003: 209)

-"Nothing to do with being brave".

Example 2:

-"You're so, sincere"!   (Maniam, 2003: 118)

- "I try to be"

- "Try to be? That's good" he says laughing.

After giving different examples, she concluded that in Malaysian context, it is more polite to negate a compliment by giving contradictory response to the person who gives the compliment. In her idea, while this way of responding may be considered impolite for other cultures, it is considered as a polite response in Malaysian culture. As a whole, she believed rejecting or negating a compliment is used by Malaysians to emphasize on their humility.

She also in an example extracted from Levine illustrated that compliments might be interpreted differently in different cultures. She said something which is considered pretty or good in one culture may not necessarily be considered good in another culture too. She reported if someone says to a Malaysian girl that "You are like the moon and have beautiful eyes", may not be considered as a compliment, as the interpretation of being "like the moon" among Malaysians, is gaining some weight; therefore the girl may be offended as it is not interpreted well.

David's (2007) research was based on experiments extracted from a book. Although, she did not collect any formal data and did not make use of any special participants, her examples can clarify the compliment strategies used by Malaysians and therefore can provide one with good information about Malaysian culture.

In another study, Gaudart (2008) from the University Malaya investigated different kinds of speech acts such as Greetings, farewells, forms of compliments and compared the use of these speech acts in different cultures with an aim to investigate cultural norms of the various speakers of English. According to Gaudart (2008), knowledge of such differences is important in English language teaching. The participants of this case study were 42 Malaysian undergraduate student teachers, 15 practicing Malaysian English Language teachers who were also graduate students, and 11 non-Malaysian

native and second language speakers of English who had been in Malaysia for at least 6 months and possessed tertiary level qualifications. Undergraduate students were selected according to the proficiency in English and were those who had scored "A" in their English 1119 paper, or had at least a MUET Band 5. The non-Malaysian participants were 3 from Ghana, 1 from Sierra Leone, 2 from the Philippines, 2 from England, 2 from the United States, and 1 from Australia. The researcher collected the data through interviews, observations and recording conversations at special ceremonies like birthday or dinner parties. According to data analysis, Gaudart (2008), similar to David (1999&2007), reported that Malaysian students were apparently reluctant to receive compliment, on the contrary non-Malaysian students readily accepted it. Below is an example for compliment on possession which Gaudart (2008) has given for more clarification.

· *Example 1*

A: Wah! Your dress very nice, lah!

B: No lah! Bought from PasarMalam. Cheap cheap only.

A: PasarMalam also still nice!

B: No response.

Gaudart (2008) reported that in an interview, with the participant "B"(above) asked the reason why she responded to compliment like this. The participant "B" answered that she appreciated the compliment but that she felt she had to downplay. According to the researcher there were other similar examples of rejecting compliment or using downgrading strategies like, "the clothes are cheap or old".

Gaudart (2008) reported that Malaysians tend to accept compliments on work/skill more than other types. Below is an example for clarification.

· *Example 2*

A: Now that is really good work. Well done!

B: Thank you, Prof. I worked hard. Didn't sleep!

Gaudart (2008), in this study, compared 42 Malaysian with 11 native and second language speakers of English which seems un-equal in view of the quantity. However, the findings of this study have many similarities to the present study which would be reviewed in chapter 4.

Another study was performed by UmmulKhair and Ming (2010), from the University Technology Malaysia. They conducted a study on compliment and compliment responses among Malaysians with two aims; first, to investigate how compliment is used or is responded among English speaking Malaysians and then, to investigate pragmatic function of this speech act within this community.

The participants of this study were 32 people, aged 20 to 40 from different occupations such as student, housewives, and veterinarian. All the conversations were in English. The data were collected through recording natural occurring conversation.

After analysing the data, UmmulKhair and Ming (2010) found that most of compliments occur in the beginning of the conversation in order to establish good rapport. UmmulKhair and Ming (2010), similar to Gaudart (2008) also found that most of compliments were given for possessions and ability of someone which were accepted

in most of the cases but with mixed response strategies to avoid arrogance and self-praise.

Hani Shaari, A. & Kim, L.S (2010) performed a study to investigate compliment and compliment responses among the Malays with an aim to investigate the differences of paying and accepting compliment among teenagers and adults. They pick up 143 compliments and 156 compliment responses through using 280 Malay participants. As a whole 136 Malay teenagers and 144 adults participated in this study. They used two instruments for collecting data, recording natural conversations, oral simulation of classroom. After analysing the data they found that Malays young generation's patterns of compliment responses are not indicating traditional and cultural values and norms of Malays which are showing modesty or being indirect while accepting a compliment. They reported that all the participants used the word of "thank you" instead of the word "*terimah kasih*" which shows that English has penetrated a lot in the culture of Malays specially youngsters.

 Othman (2011), from the International Islamic University Malaysia, investigated pragmatic and cultural considerations of compliment responses among Malay speakers with the aim of pursuing the enculturation effects of English language in Malay society especially on compliment responses among Malays. Othman (2011), was also interested to know if the language of the compliments has any influence on the compliment responses.

In this study, Othman (2011) found that not only was the Malay language but also the Malay culture was affected by the use of the English Language. According to the researcher, as Malaysia, once had been British colony, English penetrated a lot in this

society. Therefore, English would be considered as a second language in Malaysia. It appears that when people talk in Malay, they tend to shift to English or vice versa. Looking at over 1000 compliment responses collected with the help of students, Othman, (2011) looked at how student assistants were responsible in giving compliments and they then had to record the responses. Like Tang and Zhang (2009), DCT was used as a data collection tool. All the subjects in his study were Malays whose English proficiencies were at the same level as they were majoring in English. The compliments were given in Malay, English or code mixed.

The collected data were analysed and then categorized. Othman (2011) found that compliment responses were influenced by the distance between the person who receives compliment and the things which are given compliment. In other words, their relationship level was a determining factor. He was able to put these compliments into , 4 groups which are: :

Compliments on achievements which are really close to a person: (You were so intelligent to pass the entrance exam)

Compliments on the personal possessions close to a person: (I like your shirt)

Compliments on the personal possessions far from a person: (Your house is really nice)

Compliments on non-personal things of a person: (Thanks a lot for your beautiful painting)

After analysing, all the collected compliment responses were categorized to acceptance or rejection. According to the standard norm of Malay culture, Othman (2011) expected most of the Malay subjects to reject the compliments or at least not to accept it directly. The responses of Othman's respondents were grouped into two groups according to the

languages which were used by them, Malay and English. The data were analysed and results are as follows:

	"Malay" language (rejection)	"non-Malay language (English acceptance)
Type1 : Compliments on achievements (close to a person)	94	6
Type 2:Compliments on the personal possessions (close to a person)	60	40
Type 3: Compliments on the personal possessions (far from a person)	56	44
Type 4 : Compliments on non-personal things of a person (eg., A newly received gift)	25	75

Othman's findings indicated that most of the responses for compliment type 1 were rejections. For Type 2 and Type 3, it was also deduced that the subjects tended to reject them more than accepting them. However, the frequencies of the acceptance were more than type 1. For type 4, as it is shown, acceptance was high with the frequency of 75%.

Othman (2011), unlike Ummulkhair and Ming (2010) and Gaduart (2008), concluded that Malays tend to reject compliments on achievement more than other types, as this achievement is within them and therefore is the closest thing to them. According to Othman (2011), compliment type 2 and 3 are also close to the person but not as close as compliment on achievement; therefore, they tend to be rejected. In the case of compliment type 4, as it is much farther away from the person, hence the frequencies of its acceptance are more than its rejection. Othman thus concluded that the closer the things to the person, the more they are rejected by that person.

Othman (2011) then reported that when the compliments are in Malay, they are more rejected and when the compliments are in English, they are accepted more. Othman believed that if Malays tend to accept more while responding to compliment in English, it can be a signal that they are changing their attitudes towards compliment responses. Othman (2011) believed this is because of globalization and the effects of borrowing from other language, English. Othman (2011), in the end, concluded that not only the language itself but other aspects of it such as cultural, pragmatic and linguistic aspects would change too.

Some of the findings of Othman's (2011) study is in conflict with the findings of two previous studies such as Ummulkhair and Ming (2010) and Gaduart (2008), as according to Othman's (2011), compliments on achievements are rejected more; but, according to Ummulkhair & Ming (2010) and Gaudart (2008), this type of compliment is accepted more.

In the meantime, Chen's study (1993) was also reviewed as a study related to Othman's and her findings on compliment responses between Americans and Chinese were compared. According to Chen's (1993), Americans tend to accept compliments more than the Chinese. However, this issue is not related to Malays attitudes regarding compliment, this claim may be due to the limited case studies performed among Malaysians.

2.2.2 Iranian Respondents

Afghari and Karimnia (2007), investigated compliment response strategy differences in everyday conversation between English and Persian. Afghari and Karimnia's (2007) study was based on the writers' observations and experiences. They gave some

examples of compliment response norms among Iranians. In one of the examples a woman compliments her neighbour on her neighbour's dress and says "what a beautiful dress" and the neighbour responds, "oh it looks good but the quality is not good". In another example, someone introduces his chemist friend to his foreign friend by saying," this is my friend Mr. Zahmatkesh, an intellectual chemist"; then his friend replies this compliment and says, " I am blushed, I should tell you he doesn't really mean that". By these two above examples, the authors wanted to indicate some norms of using CRS among Iranians. In the first example, the neighbour tries to evade the compliment by downgrading the quality of the dress and in the second example the intellectual wants to show humility by denying the compliment.

In this journal, they also gave a situational example of *"taarof"* to show how communicative norms and strategies for using CRS and offer may be different in Persian and English. In this example "Alice" comes Iran to visit her friend "Zohreh". She takes her to visit the memorial and historical buildings. As usual Zohreh wants to pay for her ticket and she accepts the offer by complimenting "you are so kind". Although in Iran, it is not uncommon the host/hostess pays for the guest, but in Iranian culture it is expected that the guest does not accept the offer immediately or easily. In this example the foreign guest might be assumed inconsiderate by the Iranian friend if she doesn't have any familiarity with American culture, i.e. accepting an offer easily.

In conclusion Afghari and Karimnia (2007) mentioned that learning a language is not merely learning vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and expression or idiom of that language and it is in fact learning the culture of that language too.

Although Afghari and Karimnia's (2007) journal has been written on the basis of the authors' previous observations and experiences and it is not a formal research as there weren't any specific data collection tools, participants or special methods, but as a whole the examples given by them, could clarify some of the CRS and specially *"taarof"* strategies which are used as a norm in Iranian culture.

Besides Afghari and Karimnia (2007), Sharifian (2008) too conducted a survey among Iranian Persian speaking learners of English on compliment responses with an aim to explore the degree to which these responses reflected the Persian cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi* (modesty). The concept of being modest means showing humility by downgrading things in response to a compliment. "*Shekasteh-nafsi*" on the other hand, is a Persian word which also means showing humility. As an example when someone is paid compliment for her ability for driving well, the response to this compliment for showing modesty would be, "oh I think you are much better than me, or there are lots of people even better than me and I am an ordinary one." These downgrading strategies are used by the compliment receiver in order to reduce the distance and keep the solidarity between him/her and the compliment receiver. In Farsi (Persian Language), when someone downscales himself, his possessions or his abilities, is doing "*shekastehnafsi*" in order to show politeness and be away from being considered selfish and proud.

Sharifian (2008) also aimed to find out whether the schema is activated differently according to the context in which the compliments are received. The participants of this study were 30 male and female Persian (Farsi) speakers between the ages of 16 to 36 and most of them were studying at an intermediate level in an English Language centre at the time of data collection. The instrument used for data collection was DCT in two versions, English and Persian with 10 situational settings. Sharifian after analysing the

collected data, in terms of the degree to which they reflected the schema of *shekasteh-nafsi*, compared the Persian and English responses. Then he reported that responses to compliment in Persian speakers' L1 and L2 (English) were largely informed by various aspects of the *shekasteh- nafsi*s chema with the tendency to downgrade or scale down, negate, a skill / talent or possession, shifting credits to another person /group, such as God /parents/ teachers, or return the compliment to the compliment giver.

The findings of Sharifian (2008) demonstrated that the link between linguistic performance and cultural schemas are not fixed and the speakers appear to be drawing on cultural schemas dynamically, depending on context. A speaker may draw on the cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi* (downgrading) in his/her L2, but not L1; as an example in some cases the same participant used return strategy in L2 but accepted the compliment in L1. The researcher pointed out another significant finding which shows that single response can serve more than one function; for instance the formulaic expression of *ghaabeli nadareh*, which literally means 'it does not have any worth" was used as a very frequent response for minimizing the compliment or downplaying the worth of what is being offered on a possession compliment or on the compliment for the taste of the food that has been served.

Though Sharifian (2008), made use of the participants with the age of 16 to 36 which seems to be very different in view of the attitudes they may have about compliment or compliment responses, his findings is similar to the findings of Afghari and Karimnia (2007) as both studies confirm the usage of evade strategies such as down grading and shifting credit for showing modesty among Farsi (Persian) speakers.

The DCT used by Sharifian (2008) seemed complete having different kinds of compliments; therefore, was adopted for doing the current study. As a whole his findings have many similarities to the findings of current study which would be reviewed in chapter 4.

Heidari, Rezazadeh and EslamiRasekh (2009) carried out a contrastive study of compliment responses. The participants of this study were 60 male and female Iranian teenaged EFL learners in Iran. Like Tang and Zhang (2009), they collected their data through the use of written discourse completion tasks (DCT), with four situational settings (appearance, character, ability and possession).

According to their findings males tended to use more acceptance strategies and less rejection and evasion ones compared to the female participants who tended to use fewer Acceptance strategies and more evasion and rejection ones. In addition the female participants tended to downgrade themselves more and express less appreciation when responding to compliments. In responding to a compliment, females used more implicit strategies than males who tended to use more explicit ones. According to them, as a whole, both men and females accepted compliment the most and rejected it the least. In the meantime both male and female used appreciation token and return strategies more than other strategies.

 According to Heidari's et al (2009) findings, no culture specific response or universal pattern was found among the responses to compliments. But this is maybe because of the participants' age. All of them were teenagers and since teenagers are less tied to culture, then they might have used fewer strategies related to the culture. It is believed

that elder people, especially in Iran, are much more tied to culture than the youngsters. Youngsters, due to globalization, gradually, are staying away from the cultural norms.

Yousefvand (2010) conducted a study on compliments with an aim to find and categorize the compliment response strategies among Iranians. The participants of this study were thirty undergraduate students majoring in English translation between the ages of 20 to 28 from two different universities of Iran. She made use of DCT as an instrument for collecting data and she collected a corpus of 540 examples of compliments /responses with the help of some university students. The DCT was composed of twelve incomplete situations of compliments on appearance, ability and possession, which the participants were asked to fill in. She analysed the data according to Herbert's (1990) classification of compliment response strategies which was composed of 13 types.

According to Yousefvand's (2010) findings, the most repeated strategy which was used among Persian speakers' responses to compliment was "agreement tokens "which indicated acceptance of compliments. She reported that their acceptance of compliment was mostly together with saying "thank you" followed by giving some comments like "It's kind of you" or "You see it beautiful" in order to show modesty. She reported that Iranians rarely reject a compliment by saying "no", but instead, they use some Persian specific- culture formulas to downgrade things or themselves to show modesty like " I am not that much perfect", " I don't deserve your compliment", "I am ashamed" and "It's my duty". She reported that the most repeated strategies after appreciation and formulaic expressions were "questioning" or "Request reassurance".

She considered the study of American compliment responses by Herbert (1990) and compared her findings with Herbert's (1990). According to Herbert (1990), American acceptance of compliment was together with some comments like "I also think it's nice" or "you can say that" to show their agreement with the compliment giver. By comparing these comments, Yousefvand (2010), unlike Haidari et al (2009), concluded that that responses to compliment are based on a culture-specific formula. Americans norm of accepting a compliment is showing agreement with the person who pays the compliment, but Iranians norm of accepting a compliment is appreciation followed by some downgrading strategies showing humility.

Though Yousefvand (2010), investigated compliments on appearance, possession and ability, and therefore, missed another type of compliment, "character; her findings has some similarities with the present study which would be reviewed in chapter 4.

2.2.3 Arab Respondents

In looking at Arabic participants, Abdul Sattar & Che Lah (2007) from the university of Science Malaysia conducted a research on compliment responses among EFL Arabic native speakers of Iraq with an aim to investigate how they responded to compliments and whether there could be found any evidence of pragmatic transfer while speaking English. The subjects of this study were 25 Iraqi males between the ages of 25 to 39. All of them had studied English for 12 years in governmental schools in Iraq before joining the university. The participants were majoring in a subject not related to languages or linguistics. The researcher collected the data by using (DCT), with 4 situational setting on ability, appearance, character and possession. After analysing the collected data, Abdul Sattar and Che Lah (2007) reported that, Iraqi postgraduates reflected their L1

behaviour while responding to compliments in English to some extent. He also reported the use of "offer" for responding to possession compliment to the compliment giver. According to him this offer comes in a formulaic expression and is not likely to be accepted. It is an expected polite response to certain compliments. The compliment giver typically says: *shukran! Alasaahibtuahiaa* (Thank you! It looks much nicer on its owner) or *Tithannifiiha. Insha aLLaah tihriiha bi-l-hanaa* (May you enjoy it. May you, God willing, wear it out in happiness.

Abdul Sattar et al (2007) concluded that pragmatic transfer does exist in compliment responses in English by Iraqi postgraduates which can cause intercultural misunderstanding and lead to serious consequences.

Al Falasi (2007), conducted a study of compliment responses among Emeriti female Arabic learners of English with an aim to investigate if pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 occurs while speaking English. The subjects of the study were ten American native speakers of English, twenty Emeriti none native speakers. The instruments used for data collection were both DCT with different situations and interview. After analysing the data, the researcher found that in most of the cases, female Emeriti learners of English did not produce target-like compliment responses. They unconsciously used some L1 strategies and expressions which according to the researcher might result in communicative misunderstanding or breakdown. As an example, they literally translated Arabic expressions while responding to a compliment in English which was not suitable in most cases.

Al Flasi (2007) made use of two instruments, DCT and interview; while rare researchers have made use of both instruments together. Al Falasi (2007) made use of 30 subjects.

The number of respondents was adopted from Al Falasi for doing the current study as both studies made use of interview and DCT together.

The findings of Abdul Sattar et al (2007) and Al Falasi (2007), are similar to each other, as both studies confirm the pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 while responding to compliments. The findings of these two studies have also some similarities with the findings of present study which would be reviewed in chapter 4.

2.2.4 Korean and Japanese Respondents

Han (1992) in a research compared CRS of Korean female ESL learners with their L1 and L2 female interlocutors. The participants of her research were 10 Korean females between the ages of 21 to 29. The data were collected through interview and field note. The participants were to respond to compliment once in Korean and once in an interaction with 10 Americans in English.

After analysing the data, it was found that Korean female responses were different when speaking in Korean from when speaking in English. In Korean, most of the time they rejected or evaded the compliment. On the contrary, they accepted 75% with only 20% rejection when they responded in English. She found that Korean female learners accepted compliments even more than American native speakers although they rejected compliments more frequently when they were within their own language (L1) group. She went through interview with her participants to find the reason. During the interview she found three reasons for Korean ESL learners' different responses:
(1) They had perceived the US norms of culture and their acquisition of these norms through acculturation process;

(2) they thought they should respond to compliment with "thank you" as, according to their learned knowledge, this was the correct way of responding to a compliment; and (3) they believed that Americans accepted compliment directly and frankly.

Han (1992) made use of two instruments, interview and field note, for doing this research. Although this provides the researcher with more reliable data, but since the number of participants is limited to just 10 people, it may not be reliable enough. In the meantime, Han (1992) did not explain the data collection procedure clearly, as it is not clear in which language the compliments were responded first; LL1 orL2. At the same time, it is not clear whether there was any interval between these two rounds of data collection or not, as to have reliable data there should be some interval between these two rounds.

Kim (2003), in another study examined how Korean and Japanese English learners used their cultures while responding or giving compliment in English. The subjects of this study were twenty people, ten Korean and ten Japanese university students. They were asked to assign their proficiency level in a questionnaire and all of them reported their proficiency level as intermediate. The data were collected through English text chatting. After analyzing the data three categories were distinguished according to types of structure, topics, and response of compliments. The researcher found that Koreans and Japanese use almost the same rate of giving compliment (28-30 tokens). The compliments were mostly given for appearance, performance, personal traits and their country by each group. The researcher reported that six categories were distinguished in view of compliment response strategies; appreciation, return, denial, no response, question and praise upgrade.

According to data analysis, Kim (2003) similar to Han (1992), found that pragmatic and cultural transfer does exist from Korean and Japanese languages into English as there were many evidences that the same type of compliment, the same structure or the same compliment response were used while interacting in English. In the end as a conclusion, the researcher added that Japanese and Koreans tended to use denial or no response as a culture specific response while responding to compliments in English. According to Kim (2003), this implies that there are possibilities of occurring misunderstanding among non-native speakers and native speakers while communicating in English in compliment speech act.

Although Han (1992) and Kim (2003) made use of few participants from the view point of quantity, as a whole the aims of this study, and the conclusions made out of its findings could help the researcher with giving some inspirations for doing the current study.

2.2.5 English Speaking Respondents

Creese (1991) performed a survey and Looked at how cultural differences were reflected in five speech acts: complimenting, requesting, apologizing, thanking, and greeting. The researcher interviewed with Eight Americans and four Britons in order to understand their perceptions regarding the differences of speech acts between the two cultures. Creese (1991) collected 73 natural occurred compliments from teachers of Penn and 138 from a London school. Creese (1991) then analysed the data looking for compliment responses, lexical predictability, syntactic categories, and compliment topic. Similarity was in the first two areas, but British tended to evade the compliments more. The difference was on appearance and ability: British 39% vs. 54% American

66% vs. 33%. Therefore, the Americans had a tendency to compliment more on appearance and the British tended to compliment more on ability.

Creese (1991) made use of only 13 subjects for doing this study which seems very small in view of population. However the situations of natural occurred compliments were enough. Many studies have been done in comparison between non native speakers and native speakers regarding compliment and CRS, but rare studies have compared two native speakers' view about compliment and CRS. Therefore, the findings of this study seem interesting and helpful.

Holmes (1988) collected 484 compliment exchanges from students in New Zealand using Pomerantz's (1978) framework as a starting point, developed three broad categories of compliment responses to describe the New Zealand corpus: Accept, Reject and Deflect or Evade. She went on to report that women give compliment to each other on appearance more than on any other topic and this is a topic which is generally regarded as the most appropriate between equals, friends and intimates. She also concluded that women of higher status were more likely to receive compliments than higher status men suggesting that compliment givers might be aware of the risk of complimenting men as compliments would make the men feel embarrassed or uneasy. She also found that men were more anxious to avoid recognizing and responding to a compliment than women. At the same time, she found no sex differences in the proportion of reject responses.

She also reported that women used a syntactic form which strengthens the positive force of the compliment significantly more often than men did. Holmes in her study analysed

five adjectives such as *good, nice, great, beautiful, and pretty* as syntactic patterns which occurred with the most frequency in New Zealand compliments and were fairly equally used by women and men. She reported that women tended to use rhetorical pattern, *What Adj (Np) (e.g. What lovely children)* but men used the minimal pattern, *Adj (Np) (e.g. nice shoes)*. Holmes commented on this difference and believed that women paid compliments linguistically stronger than men.

According to her findings, women most of the time pay compliment on their appearance and men most of the time tend to compliment other men's possessions. She reports that men don't like complimenting on appearance for two reasons; first it may cause them to feel uneasy and embarrassed, second they have the fear of the possible imputation of homosexuality. According to Holmes' (1988) findings men and women in New Zealand respond to compliments in a very similar way and mostly accept it.

Holmes (1988), in this study categorized compliment response strategies into three categories; accept, evade and reject. All these categories were divided into some sub categories which were used as the basis for analysing the data of the current study. As a whole, Holmes'(1988) classification seems complete in view of strategies and sub strategies and therefore, was adopted as the theoretical frame work for doing the current research.

2.2.6 Chinese Respondents

Ye (1995) conducted a study on Chinese compliments and collected the related data through DCT from 96 native speakers of Chinese in China (42 male, 54 female) ranging

from age 18 to 38 years old. The DCT was consisting of 16 situations, eight for responding to compliments and eight for giving compliments. The result of data analysis showed that Chinese tended to make use of adjectives and adverbs as positive semantic carriers more than verbs. In the meantime, the compliments function in Chinese seemed to be different from Western cultures; since while compliment might be used for creating and increasing solidarity in Western cultures, it might increase social distances in Chinese culture. The analysed data asserts this claim in which the occurrence of compliments is relatively low when the statuses of Chinese interlocutors are equal. The researcher found that it was preferred in Chinese culture to give compliments about performance rather than appearance (in contrast to English). The researcher reported according to Chinese culture there are some constraints upon giving compliments across genders; in Chinese it can be seen as a violation of social order while it is seen as a courtesy in Western countries.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has looked at various studies of compliment responses conducted in various countries or among various nationalities such as Malaysian, Iranian, Arab, Korean, Chinese and English speaking respondents.

According to the results found through the studies performed by David (2007 & 1999), Gaduart (2008), UmmulKhair, Ming (2010) and Othman (2011), it is concluded that Malays tend to reject and evade compliments more than accepting it; and According to the results found through the studies performed by Afghari & Karimnia (2007), Sharifian (2008), Heidari et al (2009) and Yousefvand (2010), it is concluded that Iranians tend to accept compliments but at the same time, try to be modest and

therefore, may use some specific responses in their acceptances such as *"shekastehnafsi"* (downgrading strategies) like "it's kind of you" or "you / your eyes see it beautiful", *Ghabeli nadare* (it does not worth at all), , which can be regarded as culture –specific responses.

According to the results found through the studies performed among Arabs by Abdul Sattar & Che Lah (2007) and Al Falasi (2007), it is deduced that there are some evidences of pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 while responding to compliments.

From the literature reviewed above, it can also be concluded that Americans and English, tend to accept compliments more than the people from the Far East such as Japanese, Chinese, Malaysians and Koreans. For Americans and Europeans it is polite to accept a compliment while for the Far East people it is polite to evade or reject it.

Some of the studies which were reviewed above helped the researcher with the design and theoretical framework of the current study. For instance, Holmes (1988) was used as the theoretical framework for the current study. In the meantime, the DCTs used by Heidari et al (2009) and Sharifian (2008) were adopted as the instrument for collecting data. At the same time, the number of respondents was adopted from Al Falasi (2007) and Abdul Sattar et al (2007).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study was performed with the aim to track the similarities and differences between Iranians and Malays in using compliment response strategy (CRS) and to trace any possible misunderstanding between these two nationalities while interacting with one another. The subjects of this study were fifteen Iranian and fifteen Malay female postgraduate students, aged between 25 to 30 pursuing different aspects of English language studies in two public universities in Malaysia. Two data collection instruments, the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and the interview protocol were administered on the participants, with at least two weeks interval from each other, for obtaining more valid and reliable data.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study was derived due to the findings of a preliminary study performed as a project work for a postgraduate course which showed that Malaysians differ in terms of the way they respond to Iranian compliments. Observations of people in general, also indicated that there were some differences in CRS between Malays and Iranians. The existence of differences in CRS was led to materialize the current study. For the benefit of readers, the details of the preliminary study are discussed in the following section.

3.2 Preliminary Study

The preliminary study was carried out about two years ago (2009/2010) as a part of the coursework requirement for one of the courses offered in the master program. It should be mentioned this was not a pilot project for testing the suitability of the DCT of the current study. In addition, the type of respondents and scope of study conducted were different from the present study. In the preliminary study, only the DCT was used as the instrument. Interest in the project arose from observations as a foreign student in Malaysia in looking at how people from different backgrounds pay compliments to each other and how they respond to these compliments. In the preliminary study the CRS (Complimentary Response Strategy) among Iranians and Malaysians i.e. Malays, Chinese and Indians were compared. The data were collected through the use of written discourse completion tasks (DCT) composed of nine complimentary sentences, three on appearance, three on possession and three on skill (see appendix B). A total of twenty female university students participated in the preliminary study.

The findings of the preliminary study demonstrated that in general all the Malaysian and Iranian participants accepted compliments but Iranians had more acceptance than the Malaysians. At the same time, Chinese and Malays tended to reject more than the Iranians and the Indians. Their strategies for acceptance were also found to differ. Malaysian Chinese used more evading strategies than did the Malays and the Indians. The most interesting finding of this preliminary study was that "Thank you" was used as the most frequently used strategy for acceptance across all four groups (Iranians, Malays, Chinese and Indians). In the same study it seemed that Iranians tended to use "*taarof*" strategy for accepting compliments on possession.

One of the benefits gained from the preliminary study is its methodology which has aided the researcher in determining the research design of the current study. For instance, In the preliminary study it was discovered that the DCT instrument was close ended, so the participants had some limitations for choosing the responses (see appendix B). To overcome this limitation, the current study amended the DCT used in the preliminary study by offering open ended questions which were adopted from Heidari, et al. (2009) and Sharifian (2008), (see appendix A). The reason for doing this was because they seemed more suitable in view of the types of compliment. At the same time, the compliments used by Heidari, et al. (2009) and Sharifian (2008), seemed more common in view point of usage among females and also among two nationalities, i.e., Iranians and Malays. In the preliminary study, the only instrument used was DCT, however, to ensure that data were more reliable, the current study also introduced interviews which were employed together with DCT as a procedure for data collection. The research design for the current study is discussed below in detail.

3.3 Research Design and Theoretical Framework

From the analysis of methodologies used by researchers which have been discussed in the literature review it appears that most of studies would employ the DCT as an instrument to collect data and their respondents were generally homogenous in nature. In addition, some of those studies also employed statistics to present their findings but in the case of the current study, some adjustments were made for the sake of contributing new knowledge to the linguistic world. In that regard, this study would differ slightly as it applied two instruments for data collection which was DCT and interview.

The research design of this study adopted Holmes' (1988) three-way classification as shown below, in Table 1, Holmes categorizes the CRS into three main acts: Accept, Reject and Deflect/Evade as shown below. The reason for using Holme's framework and classification was because she has given situational examples of different types of compliments and different compliment response strategies. In the meantime her classifications seemed complete and understandable.

Table 1: Examples of Compliment Response Strategies

Acceptance strategies	Thank you nice of you ", ''You /yours too''
Evade/Deflect strategies	"It's an old one .I bought it very cheap" or I have some wrinkles"
Non-acceptance strategies	"Not at all, I don't think so"

(Holmes 1995:141)

According to Holmes (1988), these three main classifications are divided into three main categories which are followed by sub-strategies. These are as follows:

A. Accept:

1. Appreciation/agreement token

   E.g. thanks, yes

2. Agreeing utterance

   E.g. I think it's lovely too

3. Downgrading utterance

   E.g. it's not too bad, is it?

4. Return compliment

   E.g. you're looking good too

B. Deflect/Evade:

1. Shift credit

   E.g. my mother knitted it

2. Informative comment

   E.g. I bought it at the vibrant knits place

3. Ignore

   E.g. It's time we were leaving isn't it?

4. Request reassurance

   E.g. do you really think so?

C. Reject:

1. Disagreeing utterance

   E.g. I'm afraid I don't like it much

2. Question accuracy

   E.g. is cute the right word?

3. Challenge sincerity

   E.g. you don't really mean that

                                   (Holmes 1995: 141)

In addition to the classification and framework provided by Holmes (1988), this study also employed the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1987) for the purpose of analysing the responses in terms of polite or impolite accompanied by whether these strategies were direct or indirect speech acts.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is sharing respect and consideration to others. As Brown and Levinson believe politeness is a strategy to avoid conflicts and aggression among interlocutors (Brown & Levinson 1987:1). Brown & Levinson (1987) used the expression of "face" which is comprehended as an emotional or feelings of individuals. According to them each person has two kinds of face, positive face and negative face. Positive face means the person's desire that his/ her wishes or wants to be appreciated by others in social interactions. Negative face, on the other hand, means the desire of a person for having freedom of action and being away from imposition.

The theory suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) states that the speech acts such as compliment or requests may be a kind of threaten either for the speaker's face or for the hearer's and therefore, politeness can involve redressing these face threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two kinds of politeness, positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is hired to support the addressee's face but negative politeness is often employed in order to mitigate the threat others feel when requests are made. In looking at language, the negative politeness may incur expressions like " if you don't mind... or if it is not difficult for you….". In this regard, it can be seen that a speaker who engages these strategies is also applying indirect speech acts which are illustrated by the example below:

Example: This conversation is between a student and a teacher in a class:

Student : "Isn't it very hot today?"

Teacher : " Do you want to open the window?"

In above situation, by making use of indirect strategy, the student hopes that the teacher suggests opening the window. In this case the student does not want to impose her wants on the teacher, therefore, tries to ask her wants indirectly.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is usually observed among friends through direct speech acts to minimize the distance between them. The example below exemplifies.

Example:

A and B are friends. A is talking to B who has not been given her wage for two months.

A: "You have not been given yet, do you need some money?"

B: " Oh thanks a lot dear, you are my best friend"

The framework for working on the responses of the interviews was also similarly classified. Interviews were extracted from thirty respondents and these were orthographically transcribed.

Almost all the data analysed were presented descriptively but a small amount of the data were also calculated and presented quantitatively. In the current study, the data gathered for research questions no.1 and no.3 were analysed qualitatively and the data gathered for research question no.2 involved simple quantitative analysis such as frequency counts of the acceptance and rejection of CRS (compliment response strategy). .

3.4 Participants

The participants of this study were thirty females. All of them postgraduate students pursuing different aspects of English language studies in two public universities in Malaysia; fifteen Malays, and fifteen Iranians aged between 25 to 30 years old. The language proficiency of the Iranian participants was almost at the same level as they were post graduate students majoring in English who had obtained at least a Band 5 in the IELTS as an English language university entry requirement. At the same time, the Language proficiency of the Malay participants would be Band 5 in the MUET or Malaysian University English Test. The preliminary study had used 20 participants but the current study involved 30 participants of two nationalities: Malaysian Malays and Iranians.

The reason for increasing the number of participants is because, twenty people seemed to be enough for performing this research as a course work final project, but it seemed insufficient for performing this, as a thesis for master program. Therefore, considering the number of participants and methods applied by the previous studies which were reviewed in the section of literature, the number of the participants in the current study was increased to thirty, fifteen for Iranians and fifteen for Malays. The number of respondents seemed sufficient as the researcher came to the conclusion that this was just a small study which was to satisfy a partial fulfilment for the programme.

In the meantme, past researches such as Sharifian (2008), Heidari et al (2009), Yousefvand (2010), Abdul Sattar et al (2007) and Al Falasi (2007) appear to also employ the DCT as an instrument with at least 30 to 60 people. In that regard, the current study can be said to be involving the minimum number of participants.

Although the present study includes 30 subjects who were not only of two cultural backgrounds but were also females and this allowed the researcher to have control over the gender although their age factor could not be taken into consideration. Using the DCT and interview was also intended for the purpose for eliciting better quality data in terms of reliability (as mentioned earlier) and this intention can be substantiated by Denzin (1970) who say that using different methods for collecting data reduces the risk of reflecting the limitation of a specific method which leads a researcher to achieve more valid data.

3.5 Instrument

The current study employed two instruments, DCT and interview. The intention of using two instruments to collect data is also further supported by the studies conducted by other researchers such as Han (1992); Al Falasi, (2007), Gaudart (2008); However, their participants ranged between minimum 10 to maximum 42 people.

The DCT situations were adopted from Heidari et al (2009) and Sharifian (2008) according to the suitability of compliments for the gender used in this study and according to the commonness and usability among two nationalities, Iranians and Malays.

3.5.1 The DCT

It is hereby highlighted that the DCT used in the current study is different from the DCT of preliminary study. The DCT used in the preliminary study was created by the researcher based on her observations of the interactions between Malaysians and Iranians, but the DCT of the current study was adopted from Heidari et al (2009) and

Sharifian (2008); because, their DCT seemed to be complete having four different types of compliments and at the same time seemed suitable in view of the gender of the participants which were all female.

3.5.1.1 DCT of Preliminary Study

The DCT used in the preliminary study contained nine close ended situations (three on appearance, three on possession and three on skill) with six optional responses for choosing. The options encompassed all the strategies such as accept, evade and reject according to Holmes classification (1998) which might be chosen by the participants while responding to compliments in DCT. The DCT of preliminary study was composed of three types of compliments, appearance, possession and skill which missed another type of compliment, character.

3.5.1.2 DCT of Current Study

The DCT of current study was adopted from Heidari et al (2009) and Sharifian (2008) according to the suitability of compliments for the gender used in the current study and according to their commonness among Iranians and Malays. The reason for adopting the DCT from these two previous studies was because they seemed to be more common and complete, having all four types of compliments.

In the DCT of current study, the respondents were given eight situational settings of different complimentary sentences, (two on appearance, two on character, two on ability, two on possession) and they were asked to provide their responses to these situations (see appendix A). These eight settings do not involve the whole range of variables such as the time, the formality and informality of relationships and the moods

of the interlocutors; hence, all the possible pragmatic aspects influencing compliment response strategies would not be explored thoroughly in this study. In the meantime, the DCT of preliminary study encompassed three kinds of compliments i.e., a) appearance, b) possession and c) ability which missed another type of compliment, character. Hence, for a more complete task, a new dimension was added to the DCT of current study and this included the compliment on character, but instead, the DCT situations of current study were reduced to prevent the participants of being tired of replying too many situations in a long questionnaire.

In the current study the questions were open ended and the participants could write their own responses according to the situations without any limitation. This was so, because it is believed that the instrument would reflect responses which are more reliable.

For the current study, the DCT was administered first. It was provided in English for both the Iranians and the Malay respondents. The DCT was administered in mid-June to mid-July. At least 2 weeks after filling out the DCT by the participants, interviews were conducted with the same participants to obtain verifications or justifications for their responses. Interviews were administered from mid-July to end of August. All the DCT and interview were administered in the university campus.

3.5.1.3 Justification for using DCT as the main Data Collection tool

Although naturally occurring talk-interaction is the best way to collect data as Holmes (1988) had used, it cannot be dismissed that naturally occurring data requires a long period of time to collect and transcribe. The DCT, on the other hand enables the

researcher to obtain sufficient data in a relatively short period of time which is adequate for small study of this nature as it seeks to understand how two different nationalities respond to compliments. As Lorenzo-Dus (2001) argues, DCT can provide a sound template of stereotypically perceived requirements for socially appropriate CRS in the groups studied. Secondly DCT may be adequate when the aim is to make broad generalizations, As Golato (2003, p.111) believes, ''DCT is better suited to the study of 'what people think they would say'.

3.6 The Interview

The interview protocol was administered after the DCT and it comprised nine questions related to compliment. All the nine questions were created by the researcher based on the DCT compliments. The questions were related to different types of compliment and compliment response strategies. Through interview, the DCT responses and interview data were compared for each participant in order to ensure the validity of the data. In some cases, a participant might have accepted a compliment in the DCT, but could have rejected it in the interview. Through the interview, the researcher could ask for more clarification so as to verify or confirm the data acquired in the DCT.

These interviews were audio recorded and the recorded data were transcribed word by word and then summarized according to themes as those provided by Holmes (1988). The data from the DCT and interviews were then analysed for each participant. Finally, by reviewing the analysed data of the DCT and interview of each participant, a comparison could be determined and this then allowed for a conclusion to be drawn.

Through the interview, the researcher could also ascertain the truthfulness of the responses of the DCT. At the same time the researcher could obtain more information about the reasons or justifications for the use of compliment response strategies by the participants in the DCT.

There were also some questions regarding cultural and pragmatic matters. Pragmatics refers to different usages of language in different situations. Pragmatically, the responses to compliment may differ according to the situations, genders, positions, social status, relationships and etc... . As an example, one of the interview questions was about whether smiling is a kind of strategy among Malays for acceptance or rejection of a compliment (see appendix C). It is clear that language is used for communication, but not all Communications are verbal. It can be non-verbal too. In verbal communication we use spoken words, while in nonverbal one we use facial expressions or body language including silence. Although smiling is a non-verbal response, it is generally perceived more positively and therefore could be inferred as being polite. Kuang et al (2011) in a study investigated disagreements among Malays in different contexts. In their study they found that Malays prefer to keep silent or to use non-verbal expressions when they want to show their disagreements to their boss or their employer. In that study they showed that the closer the relationships are, the more vocal words are used and vice versa. Accordingly, smiling is nonverbal but polite as a response strategy to compliment among Malays.

Therefore, smiling, despite being non-verbal, can be an important strategy, as the nonverbal strategy carries emotional and meaningful message. Therefore, it is relevant to uncover it as a subtle cultural behaviour which is practised by certain ethnic groups.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection for both the DCT and interview was administered between mid-June to the end of August, 2011. And this was for about 10 weeks. To ensure reliability of data, two weeks interval was allowed between the time of filling out the DCT and the interview. In the coding of participants, each participant was given a code number so that they could be easily identified for the next round of the data collection, which was the interview. Six participants gave their telephone numbers or Yahoo IDs for availability to attend the interview. For some others, they were contacted through the courses they were attending at the universities. The participants who filled out the DCT but did not attend the interview were left out of the study and then were substituted with other new participants. But as a whole thirty subjects who filed out the DCT, were interviewed. After all DCT and interview data had been completely obtained, the interviews were transcribed and then the data were analysed.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure was composed of first, analysing the data gathered from the DCT and then analysing the data obtained through the interview.

3.8.1 DCT Data

Holme's (1988) framework was employed as a model for classifying data. The data

analysis involved first sorting the strategies obtained from the participants' responses in the DCT according to Holme's three pre-determined categories: rejection, acceptance and evasion and also its sub-categories (see section 3.3).

In situations where the participants had used two or three sub strategies in their responding to a compliment, the data were then classified accordingly as the following example illustrates:

Example:

A: You are a good cook.

B: Oh, really? I learned it from my mother.

    Evade   request reassurance & Shifting credit

    Strategy   Sub-strategies

Once all the strategies were sorted, they were counted in terms of frequency. This includes the Malay group followed by the Iranian group. The data with similar strategies were then counted in terms of the frequency counts and based on the analysis, conclusions as to which type of compliment responses (rejection, acceptance or evasion) was preferred by each group were made. After sorting the main strategies seen in each compliment made by each of the 30 participants, the sub strategies detected in each compliment responses were further analysed and this too was according to Holmes (1988). Below is a sample of DCT analysis of an Iranian participant and a Malay participant.

.

3.8.1.1 DCT Analysis for Iranian Student with code no. : M3

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation 1 (appearance):
   a. Thank you very much, you too.

    Strategy : Accept

    Sub-strategy: Appreciation + Return

b. Oh, thank you. But I decided to cut it because of the hot weather.

Strategy: Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation + comment

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation 2 (character):

a. You are welcome. You are my friend and I do everything I can for you.

Strategy : Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation + *Taarof*

b. Thank you sir, I just do my duties and I am responsible for my job here.

Strategy : Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation + Downgrading

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation 3 (ability):

a. Thank you, I am sure you can do it as well as me.

Strategy : Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation + comment

b. Wow thank you very much, I learned cooking from my mom. She is a good

cook.

Strategy : Evade

Sub-strategy : Appreciation + Shift credit

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation 4 (possession):

a. Thank you, I can give you its brochure if you want to buy one.

Strategy : Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation + Recommendation comment

b. Oh, thank you. You really make me happy.

Strategy : Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation

3.8.1.2 DCT Analysis for Malay Student with code no. : R1

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation1 (appearance):

a. Really?

strategy : Evade

Sub-strategy : Request Reassurance

b. Really ?

Strategy : Evade

Sub-strategy: Request Reassurance

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation2 (character):

a. Ok.

Strategy: Evade

Sub-strategy : Ignore

b. Thank you

Strategy: Accept

Sub-strategy : Appreciation

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation3 (ability):

a.   Are you sure?

Strategy : Evade

Sub-strategy : Request Reassurance

b. Not really.

Strategy : Rejection

Sub-strategy : Disagreeing utterance

Strategies Used in Responding to Situation4 (possession):

   a. Are you sure?

     Strategy : Evade

     Sub-strategy : Request Reassurance

   b. No lah

     Strategy : Rejection

     Sub-strategy : Disagreeing utterance

3.8.1.3 Overcoming Difficulties Encountered in This Study

As is common in all researches, this study also faced some difficulties. One of the difficulties encountered was in coding the data for the sub strategies (see Holmes, 1988). It appears that the sub strategies employed by the 30 participants in this study were of different types. As an example a participant might have responded to compliments of the DCT with using more than one sub strategy (mixed sub strategies) as illustrated below:

"agreeing utterance + return" , "agreeing utterance + appreciation" , "appreciation + return" appreciation + request reassurance" . "appreciation + *taarof*" , "shifting credit + return" "appreciation + shifting credit" or "appreciation + comment and etc…. .

Because of the different sub-strategies detected, it was found that there were more than 25 types of sub -strategies altogether. Their frequency counts were then produced and in

total, there were 120 instances for each group. The SPSS software was then used to measure these frequencies for more precise and systematic data analysis.

3.8.2 Interview Data

As mentioned above, the data of interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed qualitatively for each participant. The data obtained through the interview assisted the researcher to distinguish different reasons and aspects of their acceptance or rejection of a compliment. This was analysed in terms of themes. The last part of the interview was then analysed in relation to one of the aims of this study which was to identify pragmatic reasons behind the use of specific CRS.

Pragmatics is one of the fields of linguistics in which studies language in use and its contextual meaning. It includes the theory of speech act, conversational and talk interaction analysis and other aspects of language behaviour in linguistics and sociology. In pragmatic studies it is shown that conveying meaning does not only depend on the linguistic knowledge i.e., vocabulary, grammar, etc., but also it may depend on the context / situation of the utterance, the status, the intention or mood of the interlocutors and etc… .

Below is a sample of interview for an Iranian and a Malay student. The interview data were also transcribed and analysed carefully. Reviewing and analysing interview data through the interview transcription of each participant was a difficult and time consuming task. Hence, for ease, the summary of the responses to each of the nine questions of the interview produced by each participant was written down. By reviewing the summary of the interview of each person, analysis was made based on

themes and then conclusions were drawn. . Below is a sample of the interview summary for one of the Iranian and Malay participant.

3.8.2.1 Interview analysis for Iranian Student with code no. M3

This student has accepted all the compliments but her strategies for acceptance are different for different compliments. Accordingly, in her interview, she believes that she would respond to compliments almost the same in English and Persian but she may add some more *taarof* while responding in Persian. She believes compliments are appreciated and it's a custom in Persian culture. According to her modesty is expected in Iranian culture and the people who don't follow this are selfish. She believes she should not accept compliments directly but should be modest in accepting. In her idea she would not reject any compliment and she would prefer to accept compliments on ability more than others. In her idea Malays smiling is a kind of acceptance of a compliment. She believes *taarof* is real offer just for family members and it's not that much real when she is using it for strangers and others and is just used to show politeness. She believes that the way we respond to compliment is due to both pragmatics and cultural conditioning since pragmatics and culture are interrelated matters.

3.8.2.2 Interview analysis for Malay Student with code no. R1

This student has mostly evaded and rejected the compliments with different strategies. Accordingly, in her interview, she believes that she would respond to compliments the same in English and in Malay as her thinking is the same. She believes compliments are mostly dreaded and at the same time modesty is expected in Malay culture. As she says

when Malays answer to a compliment with "not really" or "are you sure?", they are showing modesty. She, personally, rejects most of compliments but prefers to accept compliments on ability more than other types since it is a skill which is learned. She prefers to reject compliments on appearance more than other types as she is not that much confidant about it. According to her, Malays smiling is for rejecting a compliment and since they want to show politeness they just smile but it does not mean they are satisfied with the compliment. As she reports there isn't any *taarof* in her culture. In responding to the question that if an Iranian offers her possession to her, she would take it or not; she answered "no", as she just gives compliment and this does not mean she wants it. She thinks the way they respond to compliments is first due to pragmatics and then cultural conditioning.

3.9 Summary

This chapter presented the methods employed in order to meet the research objectives. It also described the instruments used to obtain the information and data required to answer the research questions set in Chapter 1 as well as the justifications for choosing these instruments. The chapter following this, will present the results of the analysis before the discussion of the main findings and their implications in the final chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

The analysis of the data obtained for this research was done in two stages; the first stage was data analysis of the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and second one was data analysis of the interview talks. Data analysis of the DCT was done quantitatively with the objective of determining the strategies used by each nationality, Iranians and Malays. At the same time the frequency of each strategy used between these two groups were tabulated using the SPSS software. Information obtained from the interview was transcribed and then analysed qualitatively to determine the reasons and justifications for the strategies used by each participant. The following sections present the results of each of this analysis.

4.2 Analysis of Data from the DCT

Data analysis of the DCT was done quantitatively. Each compliment response strategy used by each participant was identified and then categorized into one of the categories "accept", "evade" and "reject". After analysing the data of each DCT, these strategies were counted in terms of the frequency they occur, to decide which strategy had been used most frequently by each group of participants. Fifteen Iranians and fifteen Malays participated in this survey. Each participant responded to eight situations of compliment (two situations on appearance, two situations on character, two situations on ability and two situations on possession). So the frequency responses for each type of compliment in each group, Malays and Iranians, would be thirty.

2 situations of compliment responses on appearance x   15 Malay   =   30

2 situations of compliment responses on appearance   x 15 Iranians =   30

2 situations of compliment responses on character   x 15 Malays =   30

2 situations of compliment responses on character   x 15 Iranians =   30

2 situations of compliment responses on ability   x 15 Malays =   30

2 situations of compliment responses on ability   x 15 Iranians =   30

2 situations of compliment responses on possessions   x 15 Malays = 30

2 situations of compliment responses on possession   x 15 Iranians = 30

Each participant responded to eight situations of compliments. This means that the
frequency of all compliment responses for each nationality would be 120.

8 cases of compliment x 15 Iranian participants = 120

8 cases of compliment x 15 Malay participants = 120

 For more clarification, below are the tables of data analysis of DCT for each group of
participants, Iranians and Malays :

Table 2: Data Analysis of DCT for Iranian Group

Iranian group (2 situations for each participant x 15participants)	Appearance (Total 30)	Character (Total 30)	Ability (Total 30)	Possession (Total 30)	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptance	24	22	24	24	94/120	78.3%
Evasion	5	1	5	5	16/120	13.3%
Rejection	1	7	1	1	10 /120	8.3%

Table 3 : Data Analysis of DCT for Malay Group

Malay group (2 situations for each participant x 15participants)	Appearance (Total 30)	Character (Total 30)	Ability (Total 30)	Possession (Total 30)	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptance	10	16	19	13	58/120	48.3%
Evasion	15	12	9	12	48/120	40%
Rejection	5	2	2	5	14/120	11.6%

4.2.1 Analysis of Compliments on Appearance (Situation1)

Iranians, out of 30 situations of compliments on appearance (situation 1) replied with 24 acceptances, 5 Evasions and 1 rejection. The most repeated strategy which was used by them was "appreciation token" mixed with other strategies like "agreeing utterance, downgrading utterance, return and *taarof*." As a whole, it seems that the Iranians accepted compliments on appearance.

Example:

Your friends have organized a party to celebrate the end of semester. You've dressed up for the party. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends (girl) says: ''hey, you look great! You're really beautiful today.''

Iranian participant's response: Thank you, your eyes see me beautiful.

Accept Strategy: (Appreciation+ Taarof)

Malays, out of 30 situations of compliment on appearance accepted 10 situations, evaded 15 situations , and rejected 5 other situations; so as a whole, it seems that they mostly tend not to accept compliment on appearance directly as their evasions and rejections are more than the Iranians.

Example:

You go to the hairdresser's and want to cut your hair. As soon as the hair dresser sees your hair says: "nice hair you have. How can I cut it? It's really beautiful."

Malay participant's response: <u>Really? It falls a lot</u>.

Evade Strategy: (Request reassurance+ downgrading)

4.2.2 Analysis of Compliments on Character (Situation 2)

Iranians, out of 30 situations of compliments on character (situation 2), replied with 22 acceptance, 1 evasion and 7 rejection strategies. The most repeated strategy which was used by them was again "appreciation token" mostly mixed with other strategies like "*taarof,* downgrading, agreeing utterance and giving comment". The most interesting thing was that Iranians used *taarof* strategy for 5 situations.

Example:

One of your friends together with her family has recently moved into a new apartment. She asks you to help her unpack her things. It takes you several hours to put all the things away. As you are about to say goodbye, your friend says: "Thank you! You are really kind and helpful".

Iranian participant's response: <u>Thank you, I am always at your service</u>.

Accept Strategy :(appreciation+ taarof)

At the same time Malays, out of 30 situations of compliments on character accepted 16, evaded 12, and rejected 2 situations; so as a whole it seems that they have accepted this type of compliment too but with using more downgrading and evading strategies.

Example:

Your superior (male) finds you very busy with your work and says to you," You're a real hard worker!"

Malay participant's response: <u>Oh I just do my duties</u>.

Evade Strategy: (Downgrading)

4.2.3 Data Analysis of Compliments on Ability (Situation 3)

Iranians, out of 30 situations of compliments on ability (situation 3), replied with 24 acceptance, 5 evasion and 1 rejection strategies. The most repeated strategy which was used by them was again "appreciation token, agreeing utterance, downgrading and request reassurance".

Example:

After you have completed a presentation, your male classmate says: ''Wow, that's brilliant, I hope I can do it the way you did. Well done!''

Iranian participant's response: <u>Thank you.</u>

Accept Strategy: (Appreciation token)

Malays out of 30 situations of compliments on ability (situation 3), replied with 19 acceptance, 9 evasion and 2 rejection strategies. The most repeated strategy which was used by them for their acceptance was "appreciation token" and the most frequent strategy used for their evasion was "shifting credit, request reassurance and giving comment".

Example:

A family friend (female) compliments your cooking after dinner by saying,

"Your food is so delicious. You're a fantastic cook!"

Malay participant's response: <u>Thank you. I learned it from my Mom.</u>

Evade Strategy: (Shifting credit)

As a whole it seems that both nationalities accepted this type of compliment but Iranians' acceptances were more.

4.2.4 Data Analysis of Compliments on Possession (Situation4)

Iranians, out of 30 situations of compliments on possession (situation 4), replied with 24 acceptance, 5 evasion and 1 rejection strategies. The most repeated strategy which was used by them for their acceptance was "appreciation token" with 11 situations. In the meantime they made use of "*taarof* "strategy in 4 situations of their responses.

Example:

You just bought a new mobile phone. When you received a call, your friend notices that your phone is different from the one you had before. Having looked at it and tried some functions, she says: ''Wow, how smart! My mobile does not have such functions. It is really great!''

Iranian participant's response: <u>Thank you, you can take it</u>.

Accept Strategy: (appreciation+ taarof)

Malays, at the same time, out of 30 situations of compliments on possession (situation 4), replied with 13 acceptance, 12 evasion and 5 rejection strategies. The most frequent strategy which was used by them for their acceptance was "appreciation token" with 11

situations. The most interesting thing was that they used appreciation token together with downgrading utterance for every situations of their acceptances. At the same time the most frequent strategy which was used by them for their evasion was comment strategy.

Example:

Your friend is visiting your newly-built house and she says, "What a beautiful house!"

Malay participant's response: <u>Really? it's small</u>.

Evade Strategy :(Request reassurance+ downgrading)

Therefore, as a whole it seems that the Iranians tend to accept compliments on possession more than the Malays as their acceptance strategy was 24 versus 13 situations. At the same time the Malays used evasion strategy in 12 situations while the Iranians used it in 5 situations. The Iranians rejection strategies were less than the Malays too; 1 versus 5 situations.

4.3 Summary of the Results of DCT Analysis

After counting the frequency of "acceptance strategies", it was found that the Iranians accepted compliments more than the Malays, as the Iranians' acceptance was 94 out of 120 situations, while the Malays acceptance was 58 out of 120 situations. The Iranians used "evasion strategy" less than the Malays with the frequency of 16 out of 120 situations, but the Malays used "evasion strategy" more with the frequency of 48 situations out of 120. At the same time the Iranians used less "rejection strategies" than the Malays, as the Iranians frequency of rejection was 10 situations out of 120, but the Malays frequency of rejection was 14 situations out of 120.

From the DCT analysis it is concluded that the Iranians tend to accept compliments more than the Malays and at the same time, Malays tend to evade or reject compliments more than the Iranians.
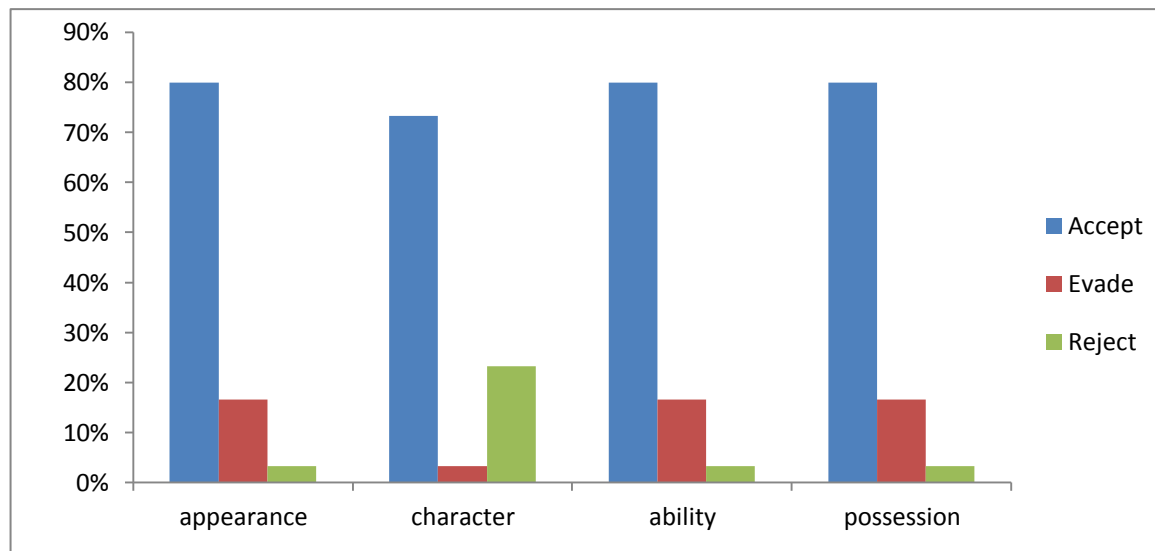

Figure 1 : Frequency Percentage of Compliment Response Strategies (CRS)
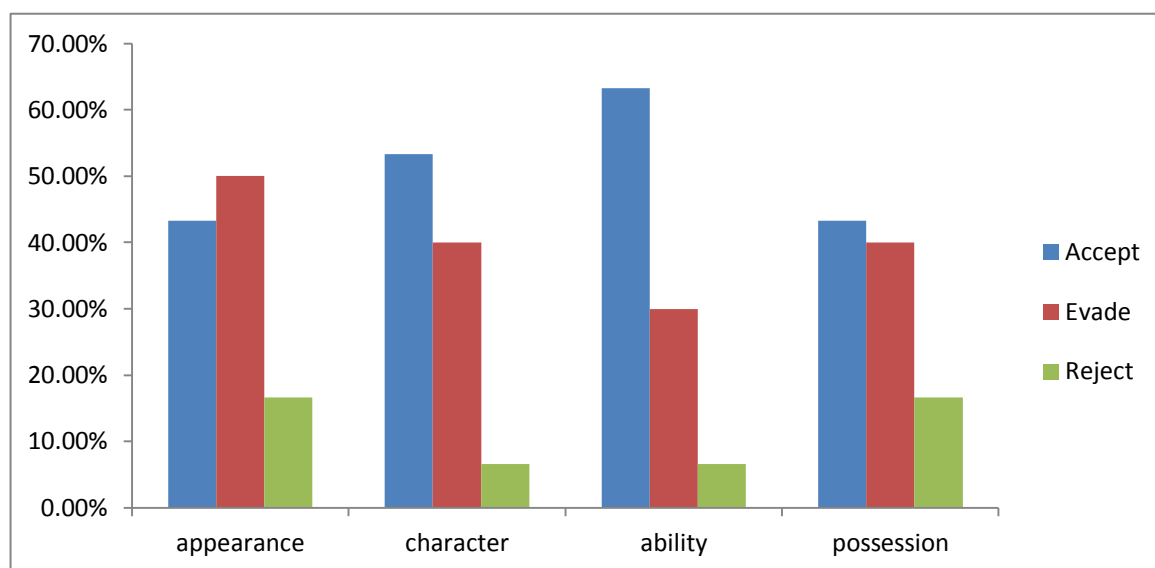
for Iranians

Figure 2 : Frequency percentage of Compliment Response Strategies (CRS)

for Malays

4.3.1 The Most Frequent Sub strategies Used by Iranians and Malays

Data analysis of sub strategies was a complicated task as the sub strategies used by each group were different especially there were many situations of mixed sub strategies. It was identified more than 25 sub strategies for each group. Counting them required the use of "SPSS". After making use of "SPSS" the frequency of each sub strategy was found, but because of the existence of too many types of sub strategies with low frequency, the researcher preferred to mention the most frequent ones and ignore other sub strategies with the frequency below 5. Data analysis by "SPSS" was done and the results were interesting. Below is a sample of data analysis of sub strategies for more clarification.

4.3.1.1 Sample of Data analysis of sub strategies used for Situation 1
(appearance) for Iranian participants:

24 situations of acceptance

Appreciation token: 11 situations

Appreciation +return : 3 situations

Appreciation+downgrading:3 situations

Agreeing utterance+ return: 4 situation

Downgrading +return:1 situation

Appreciation+ *taarof* : 2 situations

5 situations of evasion

comment : 2 situations

request reassurance : 2 situations

shifting credit: 1 situation

1 situation of rejection

Disagreeing utterance

As mentioned previously, like the results of preliminary study, the most frequent sub strategy used by both groups, the Iranians and the Malays, was "appreciation token" i.e. "Thank You". Out of 120 cases, the Iranians used 33 and the Malays used 16 situations of "appreciation token".

After "appreciation token", the most frequent sub strategy which was used by the Iranians was "agreeing utterance" with the frequency of 17 situations out of 120; on the contrary, the most frequent sub strategies which were used by the Malays were "comment" with the frequency of 15; "downgrading" with the frequency of 15; "return" with the frequency of 10; "disagreeing utterance" with the frequency of 10; and "request reassurance" with the frequency of 8 situations out of 120. As it is clear, the sub strategies used by the Malays are mostly from the cluster of evasion or rejection strategies. This clarifies that the Malays tend not to accept compliments directly. According to Asmah Haji Omar (1992), Malays from childhood have been brought up in a way to show politeness through using indirect words and being humble. In the current study they have also used indirect strategies (evasion) for accepting compliments which testifies Malays are modest.

Iranians used more mixed sub strategies than the Malays, as the most frequent sub strategies used by them after "appreciation token and agreeing utterance" were "appreciation + downgrading" with the frequency of 8; "appreciation + return" with the frequency of 7; and "appreciation + *taarof*" with the frequency of 6 out of 120 situations.

The results of data analysis of sub strategies used by the Iranians indicated that the Iranians accepted compliments more than the Malays, because all the sub strategies

used by them, were in the cluster of acceptance strategies; while the results of data analysis of sub strategies used by the Malays indicated that most of sub strategies used by them were in the cluster of evasion strategy like "comment and request reassurance" or from the cluster of rejection strategy, i.e.; "disagreeing utterance".

In order to know more about the social and cultural reasons behind these strategies used by each group of participants, an informal interview was done; tape recorded and then was transcribed for each participant.

4.4 Analysis of Data from the Interview

The interview was composed of 9 questions on compliment; some questions were related to the DCT or to the strategies used by them in the DCT and some other questions searched different aspects of cultural reasons behind using special strategies while responding to compliments. The data analysis of the interview was done qualitatively and the results were interesting as follows:

4.4.1 Iranians and Malays' Responses to Compliments in their First Language and in English. Is There any Evidence of Cultural Transfer from L1 to L2?

According to the analysis of the data collected through the interview, out of 15 Iranian participants, 13 of them believed that they would not respond to compliments the same while speaking in Persian and English; as they may add some more words, compliments, *taarofs* , jokes and slangs while speaking Persian to exert their feelings better. At the same time, 2 of them said that they would speak almost the same as they use the background of their culture and the way of their thinking and no matter in what language they speak whether Persian or English. In the meantime some of them

believed they may unintentionally, transfer and use their cultural norms or habits like *taarof,* while responding to compliments in English. Most of them believed that they make use of more sentences when they respond to compliments in their mother tongue and make use of shorter sentences while talking in English.

As a whole it seems that although Iranians mostly believe they would not respond to compliments the same, there were many cases in the collected data of the DCT that Iranian participants responded to the compliments with some special strategies which are tied to Iranian culture, like *"taarof"*. As an example there were some cases in the DCT in which some participants responded "your eyes see nice or beautiful" when given the compliment of "nice hair you have or you are beautiful today". The compliment response "Your eyes see it beautiful," is a kind of downgrading strategy which is an Iranian culture specific response to a compliment. In this way the compliment receiver wants to downgrade himself/ herself or his/her possessions by implying that it is not beautiful but the complimenter's eyes see it beautiful. But in this study, in spite of the fact the participants had claimed in the interview they had tried not to use the same response, still made use of their culture specific responses while speaking English inevitably. This matter clarifies cultural transfer among Iranians in this respect.

On the other hand, out of 15 Malay participants, just 1 of them believed that she would not speak the same, as she may add more words while responding to compliments in her mother tongue. 14 participants mentioned that they would respond to the compliments the same in Malay and in English. Their justifications for this matter were different; some of them believed, "it's just a matter of saying things in different languages, as they believed their first language is Malay and their second language is English"; some of

them said that their thinking would be the same for each language; other participants said that they would use their Malay culture while responding to compliments in English.

Regarding DCT and interview data analysis, it was found that Malays are much tied to their culture and tend to use or in other words, transfer their own culture while responding to the compliments in English. It seems that they believe they should exert their feelings or attitudes, no matter in what language they are speaking; while on the contrary, despite the fact the Iranians believed they would not respond to compliments the same while speaking Persian or English, still made use of some strategies which were tied to Iranian culture. Hence, Iranians are not aware of cultural transmission while responding to a compliment in English and they just do it unconsciously; but, Malays are doing it consciously. This matter proves that Malays have a lot tendency to show or to observe their cultural norms.

As it was reviewed in the literature, there were two studies whose findings were similar to the present study which would testify cultural transmission from L1 to L2; One study was Abdul Sattar et al (2009) and the other one was Al- falasi (2007). Similar to the present study, as cultural transfers from L1 were traced in L2, Abdul Sattar et al (2007), had concluded that cultural and pragmatic transfer does exist in compliment responses in English by Iraqi postgraduates which can cause intercultural misunderstanding and lead to serious consequences. The findings of the present study are also similar to the findings of Al Falasi (2007). He had found that in most of the situations, Emeriti learners unconsciously used some L1 strategies and expressions which might result in communicative misunderstanding or breakdown. Similar to Emeriti English learners who used Arabic expressions in English, Iranians, at the same time, used "*taarof*" in

their responses while speaking English. As an Example in response to the compliment " wow, how smart! My mobile does not have such functions", they used *"taarof"* strategy as to offer it to the complimenter by saying "you can take it, or please take it. Similarly, Sharifian (2008), and also Yousofvand (2010), had found that Iranians use some culture specific responses to the compliment like *ghabelinadare* which means"" it is not worthy at all"; "it's kind of you", or "I am ashamed" which may testify that compliment response strategies are really linked to the culture of the people they grow with. According to them, similar to the findings of this study, it is not important in what language people speak, whether English or Persian, they reflect their culture in their responses unintentionally. Hence, pragmatic and cultural transfer from L1 to L2 is an unconscious and inevitable matter.

In the interview talks, Malays claimed that they tend to follow their culture while responding to compliment and do not mind in what language or to which nation they talk. However, this may cause misunderstanding while communicating with other people from other nationalities. But the Iranians who are studying or living in this community should consider this matter and try to assimilate themselves according to the culture of the people of this society to reduce misunderstanding while communicating with them.

Cultural conditioning is part of the upbringing of a child in that it focuses on certain behaviours that are considered as socially acceptable or otherwise. Pragmatics, on the other hand, is the language in use. Pragmatics and cultural conditioning may affect compliment responses. The ways, the purposes, the persons and the situations that we pay or respond to compliments are all related to pragmatics.

According to the analysis of the data collected through the interview, Iranian participants mostly believed that the way they respond to compliments is due to both pragmatics and cultural conditioning. Out of 15 Iranian participants 10 of them said that it is due to both pragmatics and culture. In the meantime most of them believed that cultural transferring is inevitable; therefore, they may make use of their cultural norms unintentionally while responding to compliments.

On the other hand, all 15 Malay participants believed that the way they respond to compliment is due to both cultural conditioning and pragmatics. Most of the Malays gave priority to cultural effects than pragmatics; as they believed they are too much tied to their culture and would show their cultural habits such as rejection of compliments and being modest while responding to compliments. A participant said that the sociolinguistic aspects of language are very important in Malay society, so according to her, culture has strong effects in compliment responses. Another participant reported that it is due to pragmatics. She believed that when a very good friend of her compliments her by saying, "you are very beautiful today" she can just play around with her and responds, "oh yes I am always beautiful". She said, "but if other people say the same thing, she would respond, thank you, you too". According to most of Malay participants, compliment responses are affected by the culture too. They said that in their culture people say thank you and do not want to show off. Some participants reported, for instance if people say, "you have beautiful new car/house" they would reply, "oh thank you, you can also get one if you want but you do not want to". Some other participants believed that compliment response strategies are affected by pragmatics more than culture; because according to them, when they are responding to a high position person, the response would be different from when they are responding to their friends.

According to the interview talks, it is found that out of 30 Iranian and Malay participants, 25 people believed that, responses to compliments are affected by, both pragmatics and cultural conditioning. But there was a difference in this view; most of the Iranians gave priority to pragmatics while most of the Malays gave priority to cultural conditioning. Considering the Malay responses to compliments, it is obvious that culture is a very important issue for them and it seems that they are really tied to their culture. In most of their responses, they have tried to follow the norms of their culture more than the Iranians; as for example, they have rejected and evaded most of the cases of compliments since they believe they should reject or evade compliments, because immediate or direct acceptance is not considered as a standard or acceptable norm in Malay culture (Asmah Haji Omar 1992).

4.4.2 Respondents' Perceptions on whether Compliments are Appreciated or Dreaded in Iranian and Malay Culture

All 15 Iranian participants reported that compliments are really appreciated in Iranian culture. According to them rejecting a compliment is not polite. They said when someone says nice things about them it is not polite not to accept or not to appreciate; therefore, it seems that Iranians' acceptance of compliments have some relations to politeness and maybe that's why they have accepted most of the situations of compliments in this study, 94 out of 120 situations.

The findings of the present study compared with Yousvand's (2010) which was reviewed in the section of literature, showed many similarities regarding the use of strategies. In Both studies acceptance of compliment was more than the rejection of it which testifies that Iranians tend to accept compliment and appreciate it; at the same time, in both studies it was found that Iranians rarely reject compliments directly.

On the other hand, the findings of this study, showed some similarities and differences compared with the findings of Heidari, et al (2009) too. The findings are similar as in both studies, it was found that Iranians tend to accept compliments the most. In the meantime, the most frequent strategy used by the participants in both studies, was appreciation token. At the same time, there is a difference between the findings of Heidari et al (2009) and the findings of present study, as according to Heidari's et al (2009), there wasn't any universal pattern for using CRS among Farsi speakers, but in the present study and also Yousofvand's (2010), it was found that Farsi (Persian) speakers used some special common patterns in their strategies for accepting a compliment. As an example, it can be pointed to the patterns which were used as culture- specific response strategies like *"taarof"* strategies such as; "you can take it, it's yours" or "Your eyes see it beautiful".

On the other hand, out of 15 Malay participants, 6 of them believed that compliments are mostly appreciated and 9 of them said that compliments are mostly dreaded in Malay culture.

The results of data analysis of the DCT testifies the above mentioned matter as the Malays rejected and evaded more than half of the situations of compliments, 62 situations out of 120. In spite of the fact that Iranians think it is polite to accept compliments, Malays think the reverse. They believe rejecting a compliment is more polite as it shows they are more modest and away from self-esteem or boasting off. When they were asked why they tended to reject compliment, they replied that if they accept it, they may be considered arrogant or proud of themselves. They believed that in Malay culture people should be humble and not to accept (Othman 2011). Through the interview, they reported that even if they want to accept, their acceptance should be in a

way that shows their humility. As an example, they said that they should make use of return strategies like " you are also beautiful" or make use of downgrading strategies like " It's an ordinary hand phone, everyone can buy", "it's a normal picture only", " no la, nothing special with me, like the other days also" or "it's just a simple house".

Therefore, according to Malays participated in this study rejection of a compliment is a norm in this society as it shows their humility and equality. As they believe, if they accept compliments directly, they would be considered arrogant or proud of themselves.

The findings of the present study compared with Gaudart's findings (2008) and Othman (2011), indicated some similarities, as in all these studies it was found that Malaysian students were apparently reluctant to receive compliment.

From the interview talks and DCT analysis it is concluded that in Malay culture, there is a great tendency to reject compliments. But one should bear in mind that their rejections do not mean that they are not appreciated or do not want to establish good rapport with the compliment giver. As rejection of a compliment has been used as a standard and polite norm in this culture, therefore, they think they should reject or evade compliments in most of situations.

4.4.3 Respondents' Perceptions on Modesty in Iranian and Malay Culture

Out of 15 Iranian participants 14 of them believed that modesty is really expected in Iranian culture. They said that it is customary in Iran to downgrade things or themselves when receiving compliment. Actually many people use modesty when they want to respond to a compliment; as for example, when someone says, " your house is

beautiful" , the receiver of the compliment may respond, " Yours is much more beautiful than ours", " it's nice of you, you see it beautiful", " your eyes see it beautiful" or "It's not worthy at all, please take it". In this way they want to show modesty and therefore, try to downgrade the value of their things to show humility.

The findings of the present study compared with Yousvand (2010) which was reviewed in the section of literature, showed many similarities; as both studies confirm that Iranians try to be modest and show humility while responding to a compliment by using some specific-culture formulas like "Yours is much more beautiful than ours", or "your eyes see it beautiful".

 As discussed in the literature section, the findings of Sharifian (2008) compared with the present study, showed some similarities; as in his study he found many strategies for reflecting modesty (*Shekastenafsi*) like "downplaying things, shifting credits to others and return the compliment to the compliment giver; similarly, in the present study it was found that although Iranians used "appreciation token" and "agreeing utterance" with the most frequency among other strategies, but their acceptance of compliment was mostly mixed with "downgrading, return and *Taarof* strategies.

At the same time, all 15 Malay participants said that modesty is really expected in Malay culture. According to them Malays should be humble and not to accept compliments directly (Asmah Haji 1992, Othman 2011). As an example they said they should respond to compliments with evasion strategies like "not really, are you sure"? Or shifting credit to others. For instance many of the Malay participants used shifting credit strategy and responded "It's my mum's recipe or I learned it from my mother"

when given compliment on ability (situation 3-b), "your food is delicious, you are a fantastic cook".

They reported if for example, someone compliments their car or their house by saying, "vow such a nice car/house you have", they would respond "It's just an ordinary car or a house like yours". Even some of them believed that they should reject compliments; otherwise, would be considered arrogant. Accordingly, David (1999 & 2007) and Asmah Haji Omar (1992), had reported that negating or evading a compliment is a polite norm among Malays. According to Haji Omar (1992), Malays from child hood have been brought up to be indirect and they are not taught to accept a compliment directly as being indirect is considered as a polite response for showing modesty and being away from pride .

Therefore, as a whole it is concluded that Malays rejection or evasion of a compliment is a way for showing humility and modesty towards the person who gives the compliment to them; so rejection among Malays does not mean that they are not thankful or appreciated, but it is believed that accepting a compliment, immediately on the spot, is not sometimes polite, as it shows the selfishness or pride of the receiver of the compliment, specially for the compliments on possession and appearance; and maybe that is why they have rejected and evaded these two compliments more than other types.

The findings of David (1999 and 2007) testify above mentioned results of the present study as she had found that Malaysians tend to reject compliments more. Similarly, in this study, it was found that Malays rejected and evaded more than half of the situations of compliments, 62 out of 120 situations.

In the meantime, according to the interview analysis of the present study, similar to David's (1999 & 2007) and Asmah Haji Omar (1992), it was found that Malays tend to be modest. Therefore, it is concluded that Malays tend to show humility and politeness through not accepting a compliment directly or even through rejecting it.

4.4.4 Respondents' Perceptions on whether Smiling is a kind of Strategy among Malays for Acceptance or Rejection of a Compliment

According to data analysis of the interview, out of 15 Iranian participants, 9 of them said that Malays "smiling" could be used for accepting a compliment; 4 of them said it might be used for both accepting or rejecting a compliment and 2 other participants said that they are not sure about it. But as a whole most of the Iranian participants believed that "smiling" is a culture specific response among Malays for accepting a compliment.

Despite Iranians views about Malays smile, out of 15 Malay participants, just 6 of them believed the same as Iranians, i.e. considering their smile as an acceptance of a compliment; 4 of them, at the same time, believed that it could be used for both acceptance or rejection of a compliment; and 5 of the participants said that it could be used for rejecting a compliment.

Therefore, one should bear in mind that Malays smiling does not always mean acceptance of a compliment, but the reverse, it may mean rejecting it too. It was asked from the participants in the interview, how one can distinguish which type of smile it is. Most of them believed that the compliment giver should also pay attention to the gesture of the face of the compliment receiver and other things too. They mentioned if the compliment receiver does not reply verbally and keeps silence, or does not make use of any appreciation token or even if just replies with "ok", this means that she is not

satisfied with the compliment. In the meantime, some participants believed that they do not take the compliment serious or on the contrary, sometime consider it sarcastic. In the interview, the participants were asked why Malays smile if they are not satisfied with the compliment and why they do not show their dissatisfaction or even their anger while receiving compliment. Most of them replied that, as Malays try to be calm and polite, so they try to hide their dissatisfaction behind their smile.

As whole it is concluded that Iranians' view about compliment is totally different from Malays'. Iranians like to give and receive compliment as they think it increases solidarity among the interlocutors and also consider it as a favour from the compliment giver; so, they think they should appreciate when someone does them a favour and therefore, it is not polite to reject it. But according to data analysis of the interview, Malays mostly do not have tendency to receive compliment as they think the compliment giver may not be sincere in giving it or may just give it for sarcasm. They also reported that they think the compliment giver may need some help or wants them to do something for her, like the case of giving compliment to the teacher for getting better marks. They said when they cannot help; they reject the compliment by smiling without using any verbal appreciation. Their justification for their smile was that they do not want to show their dissatisfaction to the compliment giver to make him/her upset and therefore, prefer to hide it behind their smile.

The smiling strategy is similar to Kuang et al (2011), in which they found that Malays use non-verbal expressions like "smiling" when they interact. According to the results found through the interview of this study, smiling or keeping silent is nonverbal but polite and so could be used as a rejection strategy for responding to compliments among

Malays. Therefore, smiling, despite being non-verbal, can be an important strategy, as the nonverbal strategy carries emotional and meaningful message.

4.4.5 Respondents' Perceptions about *"Taarof"* (offering possessions)

Out of 15 Iranian participants, 13 of them believed that *"taarof"* is just used for showing politeness and is a custom in Iranian culture which is rarely found in any other culture. Most of the participants said that when an Iranian offers her possession in replying to someone's compliment, most of the time she/ he does not really mean that; as they reported people do it because it has been used among them from ancient time as a custom or habit just for showing politeness. But some of the participants believed that when people offer (*taarof*) their possessions to their family members, or to their close friends, they may mean a real offer.

Most of the participants said that it is not polite to take the offered possession unless the person who offers, be very close to them or insists on her offer too much. Many of the participants believed that using offer strategy for small things, like food can be much closer to reality than using it for precious things like car or house.

On the other hand, out of 15 Malay participants, 14 of them believed that there isn't any *"taarof"* in Malay culture, and only one participant reported that *taarof* is sometimes used among Malays for things like food or small material things just for showing politeness.

14 Malay participants out of 15 reported that they would not accept an offer (*taarof*) of possessions. They gave different justifications for their rejections of the offer; 7 people

believed that it is not custom and is not polite in Malay culture to take the offered possession especially for expensive things, 8 people said, "that they do not accept the offer as they do not take it serious or they are not sure whether the owner of the possession is sincere and truthful in her/his offer". Many of them reported that they use offer among their friends as a play for kidding or teasing. As an example they reported that they offer their things by saying, "you want, you want? Take it take it".

Therefore, the concept of *"taarof"* or offering things among Iranians is totally used for showing politeness. Sometimes it is a real offer and sometimes it's just *taarof*. It is necessary to be mentioned that in Iranian culture it is polite to *taarof* (offer) the possessions to the compliment giver but, it is not polite to take the possessions unless the receiver of compliment insists on her/his offer too much. If the receiver of compliment insists on her/his offer, then it would be a real offer and the compliment giver may take it.

From the interview talks and DCT analysis, it is concluded that "*taarof"* is an Iranian culture specific strategy used in response to compliment. Iranians, specially elder ones, tend to offer (*taarof)* their things to show their generosity and at the same time, their politeness to the compliment giver.

As reviewed in the section of literature, Abdul Sattar et al (2007) had also reported the use of "offer" for responding to possession compliment to the compliment giver. Similar to the findings of the current study, according to Abdul Sattar et al (2007), this offer comes in a formulaic expression for showing politeness and is not likely to be accepted.

4.4.6 Types of the Most Accepted and Rejected Compliment between Each Group and Cultural Reasons behind using them

According to data analysis of the interview, out of 15 Iranian participants, 10 of them said that they would not reject any compliment as they thought it wouldn't be polite. They believed that when someone says nice things about them, it is not polite not to accept.

On the other hand, out of 15 Iranian participants, 4 of them said they would reject compliments on possession more, as they believed this kind of compliment was given for their money not for themselves. At the same time 8 participants said they would accept compliments on ability more than the other types. Some of them gave justifications for their acceptances and some of them did not; but among those who gave comment on this matter, mostly believed that these types of compliments were more important for them, gave them more self-confidence and were more objective. One of the participants believed that she would accept compliments on appearance more than other types as she believed most Iranians use it as a greeting which gives good energy, and therefore should be accepted. Another participant said that she would reject compliments on appearance more, especially if the compliment is given by an opposite sex; as she thought it might be used as a kind of instrument for deceiving people. A participant said that she would reject compliments on appearance more; as she thought most people might not be truthful in giving it. It was very interesting that one of the participants said that she would never reject any compliment; as it is impolite. She said, "even if people say, you look tired, I accept again; as I don't want to be opposite and therefore, I always accept compliments".

At the same time, Malays reported that they prefer to reject compliments more on appearance and accept compliments more on ability. The similarities which were found in the results of the interview analysis and the DCT analysis attest this claim; as in both interview and DCT, they rejected compliments on appearance and accepted compliments on ability more than other types. Out of 15 Malay participants, 11 of them said that they prefer to reject compliments more on appearance and the other 3 persons said that they would reject compliments on possession more than other types. In the meantime, out of 15 Malay participants, 10 people reported that they would accept compliments on ability more than other types.

As reviewed in the section of literature, Gaudart (2008) had found that Malaysian students tended to accept compliment on ability more than other types. The similarity of the present study to Gaudart's findings (2008), testifies that Malaysians tend to accept compliments on ability more than the other types. In this study more than 60% of the Malay participants accepted compliments on ability.

At the same time, as reviewed in the literature of this research, Othman (2011), in a study, had found that Malays tend to reject compliments on achievement more than other types. According to her, as achievement is the closest item to the person from the view point of distance, it would be rejected more than the other types of compliment. But according to the results of data analysis of the present study and also Gaudart's findings (2008), Malays tend to accept this type of compliment more than other types. According to the participants' justifications, most of them believed that this type of compliment seems to have more truthfulness than the other types. They also reported that they prefer to accept it, as it is a kind of encouragement and gives them more self-confidence. The similarities found in the results of the interview analysis and the DCT

analysis confirms this matter more. In the DCT, Malay participants accepted compliments on ability about 65% and at the same time, in the interview, out of 15 Malay participants, 10 of them believed they would accept compliments on ability more than the other types. Therefore, it seems that the idea of "distance" claimed by Othman (2011) cannot be generalized in every type of compliment.

According to data analysis of the DCT and the data collected through interview, it can be concluded that Malays as a whole are reluctant to receive compliments on appearance. Their justifications for this matter are interesting. Most of them believe that if they accept compliments on appearance, they may be considered proud or confident on their appearance in Malay society. At the same time many of them believed that the person who gives them compliment on appearance may not be always truthful or sincere in giving it. Some participants said, "When someone gives compliment on appearance and says, you are pretty, it may have two meanings; yes I am pretty or no I am not pretty at all". They reported that they sometimes use it for sarcasm and hence may mean it the other way round. Some of them believed that appearance can change and is not stable for always, so its compliment is not an important issue for them and therefore, may not be taken serious and therefore may be rejected.

4.4.7 Summary of the Results of interview Analysis

According to the analysis of the data collected through the interview, it was concluded that both groups, the Iranians and the Malays used or reflected their own cultures while responding to compliments in English.

Through the interview, the Iranians claimed that they appreciate compliments a lot and rarely do they reject them. But some Malays said that they sometimes dread compliments. However they believe this does not mean they are not appreciated, but this implies that they are humble and away from self esteem. The sub-strategies used in DCT by each group clarifies this matter more, as out of 120 situations of compliments, the Iranians used 33 and the Malays used 16 situations of "appreciation token". In the meantime, the Malays rejection and evasion of compliments were more than the Iranians 62 versus 26.

Both groups indicated modesty, as they downgraded themselves or their things while responding to compliments, but Malays indicated more humility than the Iranians as they used more evasion strategies and more downgrading and return sub strategies in their responses than the Iranians.

According to the analysis of the data collected through the interview, Among Iranians, Malays' smiling is a kind of non- verbal strategy which is considered as an acceptance for a compliment; while according to Malays themselves, it may mean, rejecting a compliment too. In this case, according to them, the interpretation of the compliment depends on the gesture of the face and body language of the compliment receiver.

According to the interview analysis, it is concluded that *"taarof"* is an Iranian culture specific strategy used for accepting a compliment. The concept of *"taarof"* or offering things among Iranians is totally used for showing politeness and generosity of the compliment receiver. Sometimes it is a real offer and sometimes it is just *"taarof"* for showing respect and politeness to the compliment giver.

According to data analysis of the interview, Iranians claimed that they tend to accept compliments more than rejecting them, as they believed rejection of compliment is not polite. Malays, on the other hand, claimed that they should not accept compliments directly, as they might be considered arrogant. The results found in DCT analysis confirms this matter more, as the Iranians accepted compliments in 94 situations out of 120 situations and at the same time ,the Malays accepted compliments in 58 situations out of 120 situations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The data obtained from the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and interview were analysed and compared with the similar previous studies and then according to the analysis, results and conclusions were made.

5.2 Cultural Conditioning in Compliment Response Strategies

People from different cultures may respond to compliments differently. Their responses to compliment may be affected by their culture. In other words, they may use the strategies according to the cultural norms which are acceptable among the people of that culture. These strategies are called culture specific strategies.

In this study, it was found that accepting compliment is not very common in Malay society. In Malay culture, people are conditioned and brought up in a way to evade or reject compliments, as they believe they should be humble and should not accept compliments directly. Accordingly Haji Omar (1992), reports that Malay children are taught to be humble, feel shame and not to look at elder's eyes directly, listen more than speak and to use indirect strategies in their conversations.

In the meantime, according to data analysis of the current study, it was clarified that Malays are modest and therefore, in this study most of the Malay participants evaded and rejected more than half of the cases. At the same time, they made use of

downgrading and return as the sub strategies for their acceptances which testify the reflection of their cultural attitudes towards compliment and CRS.

In this study, on the other hand, it was clarified that in Iranian culture, people are conditioned to accept compliment as it is a common aspect of social interaction. Iranians have been brought up in a way to accept compliments, as it is assumed that rejecting a compliment is not polite.

From the data analysis of the DCT, it was clarified that Iranians, at the same time, used some culture specific responses like you see it beautiful", "your eyes see it beautiful" or "It's not worthy (*ghabeli nadareh*), please take it" while responding to compliments in English which again testifies the reflection of their cultural attitudes towards compliment and CRS.

From the above mentioned results, it is concluded that compliment responses are affected by cultural conditioning a lot.

5.3 Cultural Awareness among ESL Learners

According to the results found through this study, it is clear that there are many differences in view of sociolinguistics behaviours between the Iranians and the Malays. For both groups, English is considered as a second language, so both nationalities shift to the second language, English, while communicating with each other. As it was found in this study, most Malays said that they use their own culture while responding to compliments in English. At the same time, Iranians responded to compliments with some culture specific responses in many cases. For instance, there were some special

strategies in their responses to the compliments which were just related to Iranian culture like "*taarof*". It is necessary to be mentioned once again that familiarity with the culture of each nationality that are living together in one society is very important and this may be possible through specifying some special courses for the Iranian ESL learners who come to Malaysia to continue their studies in the higher levels of education. This may help them to assimilate themselves to Malay culture and therefore, reduce misunderstanding while communicating with Malays. These special courses can supply Iranian ESL learners with some cultural basis used among Malays in different speech acts such as compliment, apology, request, and greetings.

According to the results found through this study, it seems there are other differences between Iranians and Malays regarding their attitudes vis-à-vis compliment or responding to compliment; as Iranians believe that rejecting compliment is not polite but Malays, on the contrary, think it is more polite to negate or reject it. At the same time, it was found that Iranians consider Malays 'smiling as a strategy for acceptance of a compliment while on the contrary; more than half of the Malay participants reported that this "smile" may be for rejecting a compliment too.

These differences of attitudes can also lead them to misunderstanding, while communicating with each other. Therefore, awareness of cultural differences about Iranians and Malays who are living together in one society, Malaysia, may help both nationalities to reduce misunderstandings and misconceptions.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies

This study was performed among females, but further studies are recommended among males or among both, males and females comparing their attitudes regarding CRS.

In addition, this study was performed among Iranians and Malays. It is recommended that further studies on the role of pragmatics and cultural conditioning be conducted among other ethnic groups of Malaysians, Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indians.

5.5 Summary

In this study, it was found that Iranians tended to accept compliment more than the Malays and on the contrary, the Malays tended to evade or reject it more than the Iranians. The Iranians believed that it is polite to accept a compliment, while the Malays believed that it is polite to evade or reject it. Malays believe in equality and unity; therefore, they think they should downgrade the value of their things while receiving compliment. Hence, they tend to reject compliments more on possessions. The Malays believed that rejection or evasion of compliments show they are more modest, polite and away from self-esteem. But the Iranians believed when someone says nice things about them, it is more polite to accept. As a whole, among Iranians, compliment is a speech act which brings solidarity and reduces distance between the compliment giver and the addressee. It gives positive energy and is a kind of encouragement which cause good rapport between the addressee and the compliment giver. Therefore, giving and appreciating compliment is common among Iranians as it is used as means of social interactions in this community.

According to data analysis of the DCT, it is concluded that the Iranians, among four types of compliments, rejected compliments on character more than the other types

since their rejection for this type of compliment was 22% while this figure for the other types of compliments was less than 0.5%. This means that the Iranians rarely rejected compliments on appearance, ability and possession.

In the meantime Iranians acceptances for each type of compliment such as, appearance, ability and possession were equal, 80% for each.

According to data analysis of the DCT and interview talks, it is concluded that Malays, among four types of compliments accepted compliments on ability more than other types at about 65 per cent. In the meantime Malays rejected compliments on appearance and possessions more than other types of compliment as their rejection was 18% for each.

According to the findings of the data analysis of interview talks, most of the Iranians and the Malays believed that the way they respond to a compliment is related to both pragmatics and cultural conditioning, but Malays gave priority to cultural conditioning as they believed they are very much tied to their culture.

.

After data analysis of the DCT, it was found that both the Iranians and the Malays indicated some evidences of cultural transfer from L1 to L2 while responding to compliments. Iranians used *"taarof"* strategy in their responses which is a culture specific response. At the same time, out of 15 Malay participants 14 of them, said that they would respond to the compliments almost the same, no matter in what language they speak, Malay or English. Most of them believed that they would use their own culture while responding to compliment and it is not important in what language they talk. Therefore, it was found that Iranians are not aware of cultural transfer while

responding to a compliment in English and they just do it unconsciously; but, Malays are doing it consciously.

As a whole the findings of this study confirms the findings of previous studies that culture and language are inter-related matters as the most responses of both nationalities, Iranians and Malays reflected their culture. One should bear in mind that the speech act of compliment and compliment responses are all dependant on the culture, shared values and beliefs of the people who live in a community together, so interpretation of compliment and compliment response strategies would not be possible without considering these values of their culture.