

**A STUDY OF COMPLIMENT RESPONSES OF
MALAYSIAN CHINESE UNDERGRADUATES**

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MALAYSIAN CHINESE UNDERGRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate compliment responses (CRs) produced by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates and identify the face-saving strategies applied in their compliment responses. The data of this study was collected from 30 Malaysian Chinese undergraduate students in University of Malaya. Role-play scenarios consisted of 8 situations that were recorded and transcribed to investigate the compliment response strategies using Dongmei Cheng's (2011) framework and Gu's (1992) politeness framework was used to investigate the face-saving strategies in the compliment responses. The findings show that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates tend to use *Acceptance* strategy at the macro level. At the micro level, the most preferable strategy appears to be that of *Acceptance*, especially *Appreciation* which shows gratitude to the complimenter. On the contrary, *Rejection* and *Offering* have been the most unfavorable CRs strategies. Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in arts majors showed a preference of applying *Combination* strategies compared to the undergraduates in science who preferred *Acceptance* strategies. The findings of micro CRs strategies revealed that there were no marked distinctions between participants in the two study fields. Social distance and social power affected the choices of CRs. Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in this study were primarily motivated by Gu Yueguo's Accordance Maxim then Refinement Maxim in their CRs. Findings also reveal that there are some similarities and differences between the Malaysian Chinese in arts and science majors in preference of CRs strategies.

Key Words: Compliment Responses Strategies; Malaysian Chinese Undergraduates; Politeness

ABSTRAK

Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat respon terhadap pujian yang dihasilkan oleh pelajar ijazah sarjana muda berbangsa Cina Malaysia dan mengenal pasti strategi menjaga air muka yang diaplikasi dalam respons terhadap kajian. Data kajian ini telah dikumpul daripada 30 orang pelajar ijazah sarjana muda berbangsa Cina di Universiti Malaya. Senario lakonan yang menrangkumi lapan situasi telah direkodkan dan transkrip dihasilkan untuk menyiasat strategi respon terhadap pujian dengan menggunakan rangka kerja Dongmei Cheng (2011) dan rangka kerja kesopanan Gu (1992) untuk menyiasat strategi menjaga air muka dalam respon terhadap pujian. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar ijazah sarjana muda berbangsa Cina di Malaysia cenderung untuk menggunakan strategi Penerimaan pada peringkat makro. Pada peringkat mikro, strategi yang paling kerap digunakan ialah Penerimaan, terutamanya Penghargaan bagi menunjukkan penghargaan terhadap pengucap. Sebaliknya, Penolakan dan Tawaran merupakan strategi respon terhadap pujian yang paling tidak disukai. Pelajar bidang sastera menunjukkan kecenderungan untuk menggunakan strategi Gabungan berbanding dengan pelajar bidang sains yang lebih suka untuk menggunakan strategi Penerimaan. Hasil kajian mikro strategi respon terhadap pujian mendedahkan bahawa tidak ada perbezaan ketara antara peserta dalam kedua-dua bidang pengajian. Jarak sosial dan kuasa sosial memberi kesan terhadap pilihan respon terhadap pujian. Pelajar ijazah sarjana muda berbangsa Cina di Malaysia yang terlibat dalam kajian ini didorong oleh Maxim Selaras Gu Yueguo berbanding dengan Maxim Penghalusan dalam respon mereka terhadap pujian. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa terdapat beberapa persamaan dan perbezaan antara pelajar Cina Malaysia dalam bidang seni dan bidang sains dalam pilihan strategi respon terhadap kajian.

Kata Kunci: Strategi Respon Terhadap Pujian; Pelajar Ijazah Sarjana Muda Berbangsa Cina Malaysia; Kesopanan

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRS: COMPLIMENT RESPONSES

DCT: DISCOURSE COMPLETION TASKS

UM: UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

ESL: ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

EFL: ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

MUET: MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY ENGLISH TEST

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Many empirical researches (Afsari, 2012; Cheng, 2011; David et al, 2005; Tang and Zhang, 2009) conducted on speech acts give evidence that speech acts are very likely to be realized quite differently across cultures. Researchers on speech acts showed that although speech acts are cultural universals, each speech act can vary from one society to another (Holmes, 1988).

Searle (1969), in *Speech Act Theory*, pointed out that speaking a language is engaging in a rule-governed form of behavior and that speech acts are basic or minimal units of linguistic communication. Searle (1975) further held the view that “talking is performing acts according to rules”. Searle’s idea has been supported by Yu (1999) who says that speech acts refer to utterances that have performative functions in language and communication.

Among all the speech acts, compliment is a widely applied behavior that is typically considered as an important speech act in social-cultural contexts (Tang and Zhang, 2009). Holmes (1986) defined compliment as “a speech act that explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speakers, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, personality, ability) which has a positive value both for the speaker and the hearer”. Compliments have been described as the “social lubricant to

grease the social wheels” (Cheng, 2009). Compliment is typically performed to make the addressee feel good by saying something nice to him/her, more than just satisfying the addressee’s expectation. The compliment also has the potential to show gratitude, start or end a conversation, or even soften a criticism or request (Billmeyer, 1990).

Studies on compliments provide abundant evidences that a compliment and its responses vary according to social variables such as social power and social distance (Wolfson, 1983; Nelson et al, 1996), gender (Herbert, 1989; Holmes, 1989) and cultural factors such as politeness (Pomerantz, 1978; Shanmuganathan, 2003; Yu, 2003) and topic (Baba, 1999; Fukushima, 1990).

Structurally, a compliment is an adjacency pair as it is generally followed by compliment responses (henceforth CRs). “CRs are intricate speech acts because they are ‘multifunctional and ubiquitous’” (Yu, 1999). Compliment responses not only show the rules of language use in a speech community, but also reflect the value system of individual speakers as well as the community (Yuan, 2002). In other words, compliment responses are so deeply related to society, culture and language that they serve as a mirror to reflect pragmatic awareness, social norms and cultural values of the speakers.

Wierzbicka (2006) stated that the English language is not culturally and ideologically neutral, on the contrary, it is steeped in the culture. Therefore it is unlikely that one culture is filtered out when the language is spoken in a country which was formerly colonized by the British and has inherited the language as a colonial legacy. In Malaysia,

a former colony of Britain, English serves as an intermediate language for business and mother tongue for some Chinese who do not speak Mandarin or other dialects. In addition to the effects of Malay and Chinese, the English spoken by Malaysian Chinese has formed its localization under the influence of other dialects like Cantonese, Hokkien, Hakka and Teochew (Huang, 2013). Malaysian universities also use English as a medium of instruction (Afsari, 2012) mentioned that. Thus it is important for Malaysian Chinese students to be well-equipped with English in speech. Hence, this study examined the compliment responses of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates with the purpose of gaining insights in terms of compliment responding strategies and politeness strategies for face saving.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In some situations, performing the compliment and response appropriately can help to make the communication successful. However, Yu (2004), in line with Brown & Levinson (1987: 66), stated that there is one phenomenon that compliment behaviors can be deemed as a face-threatening act. It may connote that something about the addressee is admirable or interesting to the speaker, therefore possibly leading the addressee to think that he or she has to take action to protect the desire of compliment giver, or even to make the addressee feel compelled to offer the object complimented to the compliment giver.

Pomerantz (1978:81), one of the leading researchers who have studied compliment responses from sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspectives, contented that the recipients

of compliments are facing two contradictory constraints which are “concurrently relevant but not concurrently satisfiable”. She asserted two conflicting conditions for speakers when responding to compliments:

(A) Agree with the speaker by acceptance

(B) Avoid self-praise

For instance, if the speaker agreed with his/her addressee by accepting the compliment (Condition A), then it violated condition B in that the response went against the speaker’s sociolinguistic expectations thus the respondent indirectly praises him/herself. On the other hand, for the purpose of following Condition B, the respondent did not accept the compliment, then the response itself might be regarded as face-threatening since it violated Condition A. These two conditions, simultaneously, constitute an interactional dilemma for the respondent of any compliments: how could one agree with the speaker and accept the force of a compliment without showing the praise in an appropriate way? In order to mediate this conflict, respondents of compliments apply a number of solutions to contribute to the social solidarity of the relationship (Thevendiraraj, 2006).

Researches in the field of compliment responses indicate that the conflict mentioned above hinges upon varying politeness principles which are at work within or across communities (Brown and Levinson, 1978), which shows that compliment responses are not universal but culture-related.

It has been shown that non-native English speakers face a difficult task in acquiring the appropriate ways to communicate language functions (Farnia & Suleiman, 2009). As discussed above, compliment responses are not only a multifunctional speech act but also may be face-threatening act, hence the difficulty for Malaysian Chinese undergraduates to acquire and give appropriate responses to compliments in English may cause offense to others or make others misunderstand the illocutionary force of their compliment responses (Allami & Montazeri, 2012; Walfson, 1989).

Therefore, in order to help Malaysian Chinese undergraduates to build up a good communicative competence of responding to compliments and reducing face-threat, the present study is highly needed to explore the compliment responses and politeness strategies performed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in English context.

1.2 The Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to investigate compliment responses strategies as well as politeness strategies in responding to compliments of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. The specific purposes of the study are as follows:

(1) To explore the compliment responses strategies generated by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, especially, to find out their preferred patterns of responses to compliments under different circumstances. Until now, there are no well-known studies conducted on compliment responses within the intra-ethnic community of Malaysian Chinese.

2) To find out whether the responses to compliments use face-saving strategies in different communicative situations.

1.3 Research Questions

The above research objectives are fulfilled by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the preferred patterns of responses to compliments employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates?
- 2) How is face maintained when responding to compliments under different circumstances?

Through these two research questions, this study attempts to investigate the strategies in responding to compliments. Based on findings of research question one, the researcher tries to seek the politeness strategies underlying the CRs strategies to reduce the face-threat in responding to compliments.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Within the paradigm of communicative competence, a primary rationale of studying speech acts is to obtain pragmatic knowledge of the rules of speech in the language. Accordingly, the study of speech act of compliment responses in Malaysian English social context is to help the Malaysian Chinese English speakers to be socially appropriate in responding to compliments in English.

By investigating the compliment responses strategies of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, the study will shed light on the following aspects:

First, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the field of pragmatics by providing a more integrated pragmatics and cultural awareness of compliment responses by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. Secondly, findings of the preferred strategies of CRs will help interlocutors to understand Malaysian Chinese properly and maintain a harmonious communicative relationship at all times.

Previous studies conducted on second language teaching and learning showed that there is a need to include resources of more naturalistic communication in the language classes (Golato, 2002). Hence, familiarity with English compliment responses will be beneficial to the teaching of complimentary behavior and thus enhance the communicative skills for the English language education in Malaysia.

1.5 Summary

In this chapter, a brief notion of the study is presented as an introduction. The following chapters will show more information and discussion regarding to the study. Chapter two is the literature review of previous studies mainly on compliment responses (CRs) and Chinese culture as well as politeness theories. Chapter three outlines the methodology applied in the study. Chapter four presents the analysis and discussion of the study. The conclusions, limitations and the recommendations for further studies are presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the review of previous studies on compliments and compliment responses (CRs) in the view of definitions, functions, topics and categorization. Both traditional Chinese culture and Malaysian Chinese culture are also reviewed. This is followed by a review of politeness theories related to compliment responses (CRs).

2.1 The Speech Act of Compliments: Definitions and Functions

Hobbs (2003: 249) defined compliments as “a speech act that explicitly or implicitly bestows credits upon the interlocutor for some possessions, ability, personality, or the like, which is positively evaluated by both speaker and the addressee”.

According to Yuan (2002), the ethnolinguistic term used to describe compliment behaviors in Chinese term is “赞美”(literally 'beautify'), which is equivalent to what is defined as a compliment in English-speaking cultures as the *New English-Chinese Dictionary* (1979) translates the English word 'compliment' into (literally 'beautify') and (literally 'praise') in Chinese. “赞美”, in Chinese, refers to utterances that contain positive semantic carriers to give at least one positive evaluation to something that is related to the addressee.

Based on the definition posed by Hobbs (2003) and Yuan (2002), it is generally believed that the typical function of compliments is to establish solidarity between speakers and addressees (Herbert, 1989; Holmes, 1988; Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1989; Yu, 2005). Manes (1983), for instance, maintains that praise in American English functions to both establish and reinforce social solidarity between interlocutors.

Previous studies like Wolfson's (1983:89) showed that by offering compliments, the speaker in effect expresses approval or admiration toward the hearer, thus the solidarity between interlocutors is established or improved. In other words, a compliment can be regarded as a social lubricant that is used to create or maintain rapport.

There are other functions served by compliments (Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1983). A common phenomenon seen in human interaction is that speakers usually offer praises to reinforce or encourage the desired behaviors in certain situations, such as teaching and learning. Another possible function of compliments is to strengthen or replace other speech acts like requesting, apologizing, greeting, reprimanding, or thanking, or to soften criticism, or even to serve as acts like sarcasm or a conversation opener (Wolfson, 1983:86-93). Allami and Montazeri (2012) also pointed out that compliments can be employed to request something, mainly possessions, belonging to the addressee. Holmes (1995) stated that compliments can be employed as conversation openers in natural communicative conditions to open conversation. Sometimes, words spoken by speakers may be face-threatening as it may embarrass or even insult the addressee. Allami and Montazeri (2012) believed that compliments can be used to soften criticism

in order to keep the harmonious communication between the speaker and addressee.

2.2 Studies on Compliments

2.2.1 Structures of Compliments

Herbert (1991: 385) expounded that “compliments are most often expressed via a restricted set of formula”. Hence, Holmes (1986) clarified three categories of compliments in terms of language structures which are further explained as follow:

1) Noun phrase + is/look + (really/so) + Adjective

Examples: Your English is really good.

Your dress looks so fashionable.

2) I + (really) + like/love + Noun phrase

Examples: I really like your car.

I love your book.

3) Pronoun + is + (really) + Adjective + Noun phrase

Examples: That is really a beautiful garden.

It is a great phone.

Holmes (1986)

In Yuan's (2002) study of 175 participants in Kun Ming, China by collecting data through Discourse Completion Task, she found two most common patterns of compliments with a number of sub-forms shown in Table 2.1. There are two macro categories of compliment semantic formulas, compliment unbound and compliment bound. The unbound semantic formulas refer to explicit compliments (including at least

one positive semantic carrier) or implicit compliments, both of which can be comprehended as compliments of one kind or another by their surface forms. Implicit compliments are often general or amphibolous statements with or without a positive semantic carrier.

Table 2.1: Yuan's Compliments Categorizations (2002)

Macro	Micro	Examples
Compliments Unbound	Explicit compliment	You are handsome.
	Implicit compliment	Only if one is good looking, the clothes doesn't matter.
Compliments Bound	Explanation	The color is nice.
	Information Question	Where did you buy it?
	Future Reference	You can find a good job in future.
	Contrast	Your house is so big, unlike mine, a small one.
	Advice	May you can change a shirt.
	Request	Can I borrow it?

According to Yuan's (2002) findings, explicit compliments most frequently combine with micro category of Explanation; Information Question is the second semantic formula that is most frequently combined with Explicit Compliments, furthermore, it can precede or follow an Explicit Compliment. The most typical example of Information Question is asking about where or when the items complimented are purchased. The bound semantic formulas of Future Reference and Contrast have roughly the same frequency, but worth noting that Contrast occurs only with Explicit Compliment. However, Advice and Request are less common compared with all the other semantic formulas. Implicit Compliment, on the contrary, tends to be performed by itself without any Compliment Bound categories most of the time. If any, an Implicit

Compliment frequently combines with an Explanation.

Yuan (2002) asserted that it rarely occurs when the first personal pronoun 'I' is used in Chinese syntactic structures like 'I + (think/feel) + subordinate clause', which is quite different from American and New Zealand data which shows that the first personal pronoun 'I' is predominantly used in the patterns like 'I + (like/love) + Noun Phrase' (Holmes, 1988; Wolfson, 1989).

The most common compliments structure of Chinese is clarified as 'Noun phrase + (Intensifier) + Adj/Verb + (Object)'. The compulsory element of this structure is the predicate, which served by either an adjective/stative verb or a verb, with or without an intensifier. The object may be optional if the predicate is a verb. An example taken from Yi Yuan (2002) is provided as illustration:

噢， 你 爱 学习 了 嘛。

(particle) you love study (Tense Marker) (Particle)

"Wow, you love study (Particle).

(Yuan, 2002)

Other researchers also supported Yuan's (2002) findings. Ye (1995) analyzed Chinese compliments and found that the most frequently produced positive semantic carriers in Chinese compliments were adjective/stative verbs and adverbs.

2.2.2 Compliment Topics

Fukushima (1990) and Baba (1999) both investigated compliment topics in Japanese community and agreed that compliments can be grouped as internal compliments or external compliments according to the content of the compliment. Baba (1999) clarified two categories of compliment topics in order to testify her studies, namely, compliments on external characteristics and compliments on internal characteristics. Internal compliment topics include content referring to skill, abilities, and personal attributes. External compliment topics include content referring to physically tangible things such as physical attributes or attire.

A significant difference between Baba's and Fukushima's categorization schemes is that "appearance" is categorized by Fukushima as "internal stable uncontrollable", however, Baba categorizes "physical attributes" as an external topic. Similarly, "work" is categorized by Fukushima as "external unstable controllable" but categorized by Baba as an internal topic.

Studies conducted on CRs in Western societies showed that more values are attached to compliments on items like newness, change in outlook in Western societies (Wolfson, 1989). More compliments are given on personal ability rather than possession and appearance in Japanese social context (Daikuhara, 1986). Overseas Chinese societies such as Singapore, the most common compliment topic given by women is paid on children's study, achievement and potential career success rather than appearance (Lee, 2009), moreover, Singapore university undergraduates would like to compliment more

on ability of the interlocutors (Lee, 2015).

In Kunming of mainland China, speakers are more likely to pay compliments on addressee's performance or ability, possession, child, and attire (Yuan, 2002). Ye (1995) found that 81% of her Chinese participants paid most compliments on performance and 44% on appearance.

To sum up, previous researches of compliments have proved that the most compliments given in daily communication fall into four categories: appearance, character, ability and possession (Cheng, 2009).

2.2.3 Distribution of Compliments

For a long time, it is widely believed that compliments are influenced by a variety of factors such as cultural orientation, social value and social norms, etc. as a consequence, a compliment has formed its fruitful characteristics in the aspects of content, structure and response strategies (Chen & Yang, 2010).

Holmes (1995) contended that relative social distance plays a significant role in determining certain aspects of politeness in linguistic fields, for instance, compliments and responses are greatly affected by social distance of speakers.

Wolfson (1989) showed that compliments are mostly given between speakers of same status who are usually friends rather than strangers. She further explained that it is

common for speech behavior to be more frequent and more elaborate between ordinary friends and acquaintances. Therefore, the status relationship between the complimenter and receiver is certainly a factor affecting the choices of CRs.

Sims (1989) illustrated that the compliment structures are influenced by the status and gender of the speakers. A number of studies showed that plenty of compliments are given to addressees of the same age and status (Wolfson, 1981; Herbert, 1990; Knapp et al, 1984). Holmes (1986) showed that compliments were also given by those in superior positions and those from a lower status. Sim (1989) also pointed out that social status was important to compliment sequence and speakers tended to compliment addressees whose statuses were same as the speakers.

According to Chen (2011), Chinese compliments have been changed in terms of distributions. Previous studies showed that Chinese compliments are co-existing with *官本位* (literally ‘officer status’) that refers to the traditional Chinese politeness to someone who is working as a government officer. In other words, Chinese speakers pay much attention to ‘authority’ in the communication so that Chinese are more likely to compliment someone whose social status is higher. To date, this traditional way of compliments still exists in Chinese society, nevertheless, we find more and more compliments with sheer appreciation are generated by nowadays Chinese. For the distribution of compliments, Chinese do not compliment their addressees face to face as frequently as Americans. Previous studies showed that Chinese would like to pay more compliments to someone holding same social status or power with the complimenter

such as close friends or colleagues in the workplace. However, nowadays in China, more and more compliments are given to family members especially more compliments are paid from lower social status with less social power to someone higher.

2.3 Studies on Compliment Responses (CRs)

2.3.1 Categorization of Compliment Responses

Compliments are naturally used and heard in everyday conversations which indicates that responding to compliments is a ubiquitous attribute of discursal interactions (Shahsavari et al, 2014). Compliment responses are worthy of study according to the above fact that they are significant speech acts.

Table 2.2: Compliment Response Categorisation (Holmes, 1988)

Category	Response Type	Examples
ACCEPT	Appreciation Token/ Agreement Token	Thanks, yes
	Agreeing utterance	I think it is lovely too
	Downgrading utterance	I think it is not bad too
	Return compliment	You are looking good too
REJECT	Disagreeing utterance	I'm afraid I don't like it much
	Question accuracy	Is beautiful the right word?
	Challenge sincerity	You don't really mean that
DEFLECT/ EVADE	Shift credit	My mother knitted it
	Informative comment	I bought it at SS2
	Ignore	Is it time to go?
	Legitimate evasion	Context needed to illustrate
	Request reassurance	Do you really think so?

In terms of classification of CRs of native English speakers, Holmes (1988) divided CRs into three main categories: *Accept*, *Reject* and *Deflect/Evade*, with micro types, which are shown in Table 2.2.

Within Malaysian context, Thevendiraraj (2006) categorized 3 macro strategies, namely, *Accept*, *Deflect* and *Reject*, with 13 micro compliment responses strategies as her responding patterns (see Table 2.3) for Malaysian Tamil based on the CRs frameworks of Holmes (1988), Herbert (1989) and David (2002).

Table 2.3: CRs categorization of Thevendiraraj (2006)

Macro	Micro	Examples
Accept	Appreciation token	Thank you
	Praise upgrade	Hhhh I thought I always looked young (smile)
	Bald acceptance with/without explanation	Thanks and I've been doing this for several years
	Return compliment	Yours is also nice
	Acceptance and concern	Thanks, shall I buy you a drink?
	Acceptance and scale down	Not bad right
Deflect	Shift credit	My brother's English is better
	Doubting/seeking reassurance	Really?
	Offering	You can have it if you like
	Sarcasm	Didn't you go to hospital?
Reject	Disagreement	No my car is bad
	Challenge complimenter's sincerity	You must be kidding
	Downgrading	It is no big deal

Contrastive studies have been conducted to compare compliment responses in different languages and language varieties with mostly English (Cheng, 2009). As previous studies indicate, Chinese is possibly the second most investigated languages in compliment responses which is next to different varieties of English (Chen, 1993; Chen and Yang, 2010; Loh, 1993; Rose and Ng, 1999; Spencer-Oatey and Ng, Tang and Zhang, 2009; 2001; Yuan 2002; Yu, 2003, 2004; etc.). There are a number of contrastive studies comparing compliment responses between Chinese speakers and native English speakers in English language, hence, a variety of different CRs categories were

formulated in order to seek compliment responses of Chinese in English context.

Table 2.4: Chen's CRs Categories (1993)

Accepting	Examples
1. Agreeing	Yeah.
2. Thanking	Thank you.
3. Expressing gladness	I am so happy you think so.
4. Returning	You look nice too.
5. Encouraging	Your work should be better.
6. A-Explaining	Yes. It's from my uncle.
Combination	Thanks, it's from my uncle.
Deflecting/Evading	
1. Offering	Do you need it?
2. Using humor	Oh kill me.
3. Seeking confirmation	Are you sure?
4. Doubting	I don't believe you.
5. Deflecting	It is nothing.
6. D/E-Explaining	It is ok, I like the colour.
Combination: thanking +denigrating	Thanks, but it is ok.
Rejecting	
1. Disagreeing	No.
2. Denigrating	It is bad.
3. Expressing embarrassment	A tentative smile.
4. R-Explaining	No, it's so old.
Combination: Disagreeing + Denigration	No, it is a small case.

As one of the first researchers exploring Chinese CRs, Chen (1993) conducted a contrastive research on CRs between American English speakers and Xi'an Chinese speakers. For the Xi'an Chinese participants, Chen grouped ten CRs strategies into three super-strategies, namely *Accepting*, *Deflecting/Evading* and *Rejecting*, which is shown in Table 2.4.

In order to find out the variations of CRs among data in different languages, Tang and Zhang (2009) compared compliment responses between Mandarin Chinese and

Australian English speakers by collecting data from a total of 60 university students through Discourse Completion Task (DCT). This contrastive study adapted Holmes's (1988) classification of CRs shown in above Table 2.2 and utilized Yu's (2003) 'combination strategies' (Table 2.6) as it is suitable for both Chinese and Australian speakers.

Table 2.5: CRs Categorisation of Tang and Zhang (2009)

Macro level	Micro level	Examples
ACCEPT	Appreciation Token	Thanks
	Agreeing utterance	I know
	Downgrading/qualifying utterance	I hope it is good
	Return compliment	You are looking good too
REJECT	Disagreeing utterance	I'm afraid I don't like it much
	Question accuracy	Is beautiful the right word?
	Challenge sincerity	You don't really mean that
EVADE	Shift credit	My mother knitted it
	Informative comment	I bought it at SS2
	Request reassurance	Really?

Yu (2004) explored CRs produced by two groups of Chinese learners of English, one living in America while the other in Taiwan. The study aimed to find out how these two groups of Chinese responded to compliments under different circumstances when it involved variations of addressees' social status and gender (see Table 2.6).

Table 2.6: Compliment Response Categorisation of Yu (2004)

CRs strategies	Examples
Acceptance	Thank you
Amendment	You are good too
Non-acceptance	No
Face relationship related response	I am embarrassed
Combination	Thank you, you are good too.
No acknowledgment	Addressee does not respond

Cheng (2011) investigated CRs produced by mainland Chinese ESL (English as Second Language) and EFL (English as Foreign Language) speakers as well as native English speakers living in United State. Prior to the analysis, the researcher had used Holmes' (1988), Yu's (2004) and Tang & Zhang's (2009) CRs categories as initial coding frame for data transcription, which were later adapted as framework of CRs strategies (see Table 2.7) for the study.

Table 2.7: CRs Categories of Cheng (2011)

Macro level	Micro level	Examples
Acceptance	Appreciation	Thanks. Thank you. Yeah
	Agreeing	Yeah, I really like it. I know. I'm glad you think so.
	Downgrading	It's nothing. It's ok. It's just so so.
	Qualifying	I enjoyed doing it. I worked hard on it.
	Returning	Yours is nice too. You're not too bad yourself. I'm sure you'll be great.
	Non-idiomatic	The utterance does not fit into the native speaker's norm but has a clear intention of showing acceptance to the compliment. E.g. Amy: Your Chinese is really good. John: I am very happy.
Evasion	Credit-shifting	No problem. My pleasure. You're welcome. I got it from my mom.
	Commenting	It isn't difficult. I bought it from the shop. Blue is my favorite color.
	Reassuring	Are you kidding? Really? Sure or not?
	Offering	You can use mine if you like it. I can let you read it.
	Ignoring/Giggling	No response
		Shifting to another topic Giggling/Smiling
Combination	Acceptance + Evasion E.g. Appreciation + Credit-shifting Thank you so much. It is gift from my brother. E.g. Evasion + Acceptance Really? Thank you.	

All the above tables provide various paradigmatic examples of the compliment responses types in different research backgrounds. Obviously, Cheng's (2011) CRs patterns combined previous studies and could be regarded as a general scheme for CRs

strategies that are illustrated as:

Appreciation: Utterance that expresses gratitude for the compliment.

Agreeing: The expression shows that complimentee agrees with the complimenter.

Downgrading: Or Scale Down, complimentee points out the flaw in the object or claims that the compliment is overstated.

Qualifying: Or qualification, complimentee merely qualifies the objects usually with 'but' or 'well'.

Returning: Returning of a compliment to the complimenter.

Non-idiomatic: The responses do not fit into the norm of native speakers but has a clear intention of showing acceptance to the compliment.

Credit-shifting: Or reassignment, complimentee agrees with the compliment but the complimentary force is transferred to another person.

Commenting: Complimentee provides a series of comments on the object complimented.

Reassuring: Or seeking confirmation or doubt, complimentee tends to be ambiguous of the compliment and usually asks for confirmation.

Offering: Complimentee offers the complimenter either the object complimented or help.

No response: Or no acknowledgment, addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment.

Shifting to another topic: Addressee changes the topic of the conversation.

Giggling/smiling: Addressee only giggles or smiles as responding.

Rejection: Complimentee disagrees with the complimenter and rejects the praise.

Based on the previous studies, complimentees sometimes prefer to combine two or more types at once when responding to compliments. It is also a popular and complex strategy as a compliment response, for example, *appreciation* and *offering* may co-occur like “*Thank you, if you like it I can lend that to you*”.

(Herbert, 1989, 1990; Tang and Zhang, 2009)

Looking back into the past categories of CRs, we find out that there are some typical strategies shared by all communities such as *acceptance*. Nevertheless, the occurrence of *rejection* is quite different. From the earliest works to the up-to-date studies, the strategy of *rejection* (*rejecting*) is inclined to vary dramatically under different communicative situations. There were three micro levels of *rejection* in Holmes’ (1988) study, four in Chen’s (1993), three in Thevendiraraj’s (2006), and three in Tang & Zhang’s (2009) research. However, Yu (2003) only clarified one *no-acceptance* as *rejection* in the study while Cheng (2011) did not clarify any rejection types for her data. Some responses may occur in one study but not in another, like ‘challenge sincerity of the speaker is not included as *rejection* in Yu’s and Cheng’s studies. Not only the numbers of sub-categories of *rejection* are different, but also the definition of *rejection/rejecting* is inconsistent. Unlike others, Yu (2003) regarded “No” as *non-acceptance* rather than obvious *objection*. And for ‘*downgrading*’, Thevendiraraj (2006) took it as *rejection* for her Malaysian Tamil participants, however, Cheng (2011) categorized it as evasion rather than rejection. Based on the previous studies on CRs categorization, this study has used the CRs framework of Cheng (2011). The reason for this is explained in Section 3.2.

2.3.2 Compliment Responses Studies on Mainland Chinese

Studies on CRs have been one of the most popular topics in linguistics in the last three decades. A surge of studies has been conducted since the early 1970s to explore compliment responses in different countries by various sub-fields of linguistics such as pragmatics, discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, etc. The studies on compliment responses within Mainland China have been generated until the late 1980s (Cai, 2012; Chen, 1993; Chen & Yang, 2010; Tian, 2014; Ye, 1995; Yuan, 2002, 2004; etc.).

Chen (1993) organized a comparative study of CRs between college undergraduates of Xi'an Chinese and American. A DCT questionnaire consisting of four situations (appearance, clothing, achievement, possession) was used as data collection instrument. Based on Chen's (1993) CRs strategies framework (see Table 2.4), Chinese participants applied *rejecting* strategy up to 95.7%, while they accepted compliments only 1.03% of total. On the other hand, the strategies of *deflecting* or *evading* took up 3.41% among all the data. The study showed that Chinese college students would like to perform more rejections when responding to compliments by denigrating the objects that were complimented.

As a recent investigation of CRs, Tang and Zhang's (2009) findings of Mandarin Chinese speakers also support the findings of Chen and Yang (2010) and Yuan (2002). Tang and Zhang's (2009) study employed DCT with four communicative subjects, namely appearance, character, ability and possession. A total of 60 university students

participated in the research by responding to the DCT in written form. Based on the strategy framework of CRs (see Table 2.5), we found the resemblances between Tang & Zhang (2009) and Chen & Yang's (2010) studies. The participants in Tang & Zhang's study also preferred to accept most compliments with 48.82% in total; the following strategy was *Deflecting/Evading* with amount of 36.66% in all; the last favored responding type was *Rejecting* with 14.55%. Chinese participants tended to accept compliments on appearance and ability while evade most on character and possession. Meanwhile, more combination patterns such as *Evade + Accept* and *Reject + Accept* were used by the Chinese participants in their CRs. The similarities identified between Tang & Zhang and Chen & Yang's studies showed that Western cultural influence may have not only affected the CRs of Xi'an Chinese but also Chinese in other regions.

Viewing the research findings of Chen's (1993), Yang (2010) replicated Chen's study to testify whether Chinese speakers have changed the way of responding to compliments as time changes. Yang (2010) adapted Chen's instrument with same participants in the identical social context, Xi'an, China. Dramatically, Yang's study showed a great change in CRs of Xi'an Chinese, to that time, they were more likely to accept compliments as much as speakers from Western societies such as English and German speaking countries. The *Accepting* strategy was counted with 62.6% of total (1.03% of Chen's (1995)); on the other hand, *Rejecting* strategy only took up 9.03% in Yang's study compared to 95.73% of Chen's. Chen's study was conducted in Xi'an that was a conservative region without ingratiated political and economic reform in 1993. All participants of Chen's study were likely born between 1968 and 1971 and just grew up

in the 1980s during which the inner land China still paid great value to traditional Chinese social norms like modesty. However, the replicated study attributed that change to the influences of a number of Western cultures which appeared in Xi'an since 1990s. That explanation for the change of CRs of Xin'an Chinese was supported by Yuan (2002) who claimed that the "social changes are the reasons for her subjects to differ from Chen's (1993) subjects".

Interlanguage pragmatics commonly refers to the studies of non-native speakers' application and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in second language and the use of second language communicative strategies (Allami & Montazeri, 2012). There are also a number of studies focusing on CRs of Chinese in second or foreign language which is mainly English (Chen & Rau, 2011; Cheng, D, 2011; Cheng, Y, 2009).

Cheng (2011) investigated CRs in English produced by Mainland Chinese ESL (English as Second Language) and EFL (English as Foreign Language) speakers as well as native English speakers living in United States. A total of 45 college students participated in the study, including 15 members per group. All Chinese participants were from Mainland China. The main instrument in the study was a naturalistic role-play task that may closely resemble naturalistic conversation. The compliments in the study fell into four subjects: ability, possession, appearance and personality trait. Following the role play, a retrospective interview would be carried out for each participant for tracing more information regarding CRs.

The role play showed that Chinese ESL almost applied *acceptance* strategies “*thank you*” in all settings which was similar to the previous CRs studies of Chinese in Chinese language, especially those studies done within the latest 10 years (Chen, 2003; Chen & Yang, 2010; Yuan, 2001). Nevertheless, Chinese ESL speakers did not perform much further comments as a responding strategy. Compared with Chinese ESL, Chinese EFL speakers faced more difficulties in generating adequate CRs strategies except the typically applied response of *appreciation*. The retrospective interview explained that Chinese ESL speakers were frequently immersed in authentic English conditions thus gained more opportunities to improve their English speaking competence and built up a good cultural awareness of English CRs. The study also demonstrated that not only the English proficiency but also the Chinese speakers’ culture influenced their responses to compliments.

With regard of social distance and social status, Cai (2012) conducted a study to investigate CRs behaviors of Chinese college students. Firstly, complimenter were clarified as unfamiliar and familiar ones. The study found that the CRs strategies of Chinese college students are influenced by the social distance between complimenter and complimentee. Chinese college students preferred explicit *acceptance* strategies (44.4%) most when responding to distant complimenter, however, more implicit *acceptance* strategies (40.1%) were used with close complimenters. With close interlocutors, Chinese college students showed a stronger tendency to apply strategies of *deflection*, *no verbal acknowledgment* and *rejection*. Then, the strategies of *combination* surpassed *no verbal acknowledgment* and *rejection* when participants

responded to unfamiliar compliment givers; on the contrary, strategies of *no verbal acknowledgment* surpassed *deflection* strategies in the interaction with familiar complimenters.

In terms of social status investigated by Cai (2012), she clarified different compliment givers into “equal” and “up-down” that means the complimenter’s social status is higher than the complementee. First of all, strategies of implicit *acceptance* were preferred most by participants when the complimenter’s social status was equal and higher than participants; secondly, strategies of *no verbal acknowledgment* ranked before *deflection* in “up-down” situation. Then, *rejection* surpassed *no verbal acknowledgment* strategies and ranked fourth in responding to complimenters in equal status.

To sum up, findings of Cai (2012) suggested the variables of social distance and status exert great effect on Chinese’ CRs strategies. Explicit *acceptance* strategies are favorable when the complimenters’ social status is relatively high or is an unfamiliar, nevertheless, strategies *deflection* and *rejection* are more preferred when complimenter’s social status is relatively equal or is a familiar interlocutor. From the study we see that the more distance between the compliment payer and receiver, the greater the power of the compliment payer over the receiver, the greater imposition of the speech act, and thus the speech act is more face-threatening. Therefore, the participants should apply more face-saving strategies.

2.3.3 Compliment Responses Studies outside Mainland China

Not only mainland China but also Taiwan has paid great attention to compliments researches (Lee, 2015). Chen, S. H (2003) used a DCT including eight communicative settings to investigate Taiwanese's CRs in Mandarin Chinese with regard to social status. Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan generally tend to accept rather than reject compliments. When the compliment giver is of equal status, complimentees used more diverse CRs strategies. In responding to complimenter of equal status, participants tend to use the *Returning super strategy* and *Combined super strategy* of *Mitigating & Rejecting*, likewise, participants are more likely to apply the *Combined super strategy* of *Accepting & Rejecting* with the complimenter of equal status. In contrast, when responding to someone of higher status, Taiwanese are more likely to employ the *Combined super strategy* of *Accepting and Mitigating*, with a preference for the strategy of *Thanking and Explaining*. Meanwhile, more *Rejecting & Explaining* are utilized with the complimenter in higher status. In order to get out of the dilemma of *Acceptance* or *Rejection*, participants also used formulas when responding to compliments.

Cheng (2003) concludes from his CRs findings of Hong Kong Chinese that both social norms and context specific factors can result in the distinctions observed in the speech acts of compliments and responses between Hong Kong Chinese speakers.

Lee (2009) explored the acts of compliments and compliment responses among Singapore Chinese during Chinese New Year. She asserted that most frequent responses were non-acceptance type with *downgrading*, which was in line with findings from

previous studies (Gu, 1990; Chen, 1993). The phenomenon of large amount of *non-acceptance* responses showed that complimentees understood this strategy as being largely conventional and formalistic rather than literal in natural. This study of compliments and CRs serves as a mirror of cultural values revealing that the Chinese speaking community of Singapore attaches great importance on conventional humility responding to praise.

Lee (2015) also examined compliments and compliment responses of Singapore Chinese university students. She found that unlike some studies on Chinese CRs, there was overall more *acceptance* of CRs among Singapore Chinese students especially with intimate friends. Even compared to Lee's (2009) findings of large amount of *non-acceptance*, this study revealed a great change of that speech act taking place in Singapore. It is believed that the change may be caused by predominant English speaking environment in Singapore which means that Singapore Chinese place more and more Western values in daily life than traditional Chinese values.

2.3.4 Compliment Responses Studies in Malaysia

Thevendiraraj (2006) investigated gender variations of compliment responses between males and females in Malaysian Tamil community. The data was collected from 20 Malaysian Tamil professionals through oral responses to DCT. The findings showed that there was no obvious distinction between Malaysian Tamil males and females in the overall choices of their strategies. This study found that males accepted and deflected more compliments, however, females would reject more compliment than males. Yet a

more detailed analysis relating gender to age illustrated that older women deflected and rejected compliments more than accepting them. Moreover, both two gender groups had strong preference for particular responses strategies depending on the topics of the compliments.

Farnia and Suleiman (2009) carried out a study to gain insights on how cultural evaluation affects Malaysian students in responding to compliments. For the sake of group homogeneity, this study only chose 26 Malay undergraduates as participants. According to the evaluation of CRs, Malay speakers regarded *agreement* and *acceptance* strategies as appropriate responses to compliments rather than conceited behaviors. Responding with agreement and acceptance was on purpose to show favorable impressions to the complimenter. While for Malay, disagreement responses were given the largest number of negative comments. The main criticism to disagreement was that complimentees were over humble to deny their good work or something else, and it was not appropriate at all even may be impolite for the compliment giver. In another word, Malay respondents thought excessive modesty was wrong and insincere for it might convey conceit rather than modesty. As the study indicated, Malaysian participants expressed relatively few concerns over the effect of rejection responses which showed that Agreement Maxim of Leech was not powerfully influencing Malay's choices of compliment responses.

2.4 Chinese Culture

2.4.1 Traditional Chinese Culture

It is widely believed that Confucianism has a profound impact on the formulation of a Chinese belief system (Yu, 2003). The core value of Confucianism is derived from the concept of *Ren* (仁) (goodness, humanity) which was originally notarized by Confucius (551B.C.-479 B.C.). *Ren* (仁) describes the “highest human achievement ever reached through moral self-cultivation” (Tu, 1979). Therefore, *Ren* (仁) is viewed as probably the most dominant part in attempting to describing the central values of Confucianism. Tu (1979) regards it as the virtue of the highest order in the value system of Confucianism.

In order to learn how to be a human being, namely *Ren* (仁), it is important to grasp simultaneously Confucius concept of ‘self’. In Confucius school, the ‘self’ is not an isolated or single entity. Its existential reality is dialectically related to others in the social spheres, such as family, neighborhood, community or whole society (Tu, 1985).

For Chinese culture, the second influential notion, *Li* (礼) which was put forward by Confucius (551B.C.-479 B.C.). The meaning of *Li* (礼) was designated in the book *Li Ji* 《礼记》 in Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-8 A. D). *Li* (礼) did not refer to politeness initially, whereas it referred to the social hierarchy and order of the slavery system of the Zhou Dynasty (dating back to 1100 B.C.) which has been considered as a prime model of society. Later, *Li* (礼) deals with the human being’s ability to communicate with others and is the hallmark of appropriate social interaction within the context of a

person's social relationships. According to *Li* (礼), speech is used appropriately in accordance with the speaker's social status then *Li* (礼) can be maintained (Gu, 1990, 1992; Tu, 1985).

Limao (礼貌), mentioned as Chinese politeness, was derived from *Li* (礼). There are two main notions in *Limao* (礼貌) since the concept of *Li* (礼) was connected with politeness: sincerity and balance. First of all, polite behaviors must be sincerely performed, and the addressees need to enact similarly sincere politeness that is termed as *Huanli* (还礼) (literally return politeness). The underlying concept of *Huanli* (还礼) is so called *Qianrenqing* (欠人情) (literal translation: to be indebted) because Chinese believe if A is polite to B, B is indebted to pay the politeness back to A.

The traditional Chinese culture emphasizes the social or collective restriction on individuals, so the standing out of individuals is not expected. In other words, Chinese people tend to live through cooperation, by working for the common benefit, by supporting each other, and by saving other's face as well as not elevating themselves above others (Cheng, Y, 2009; Mao, 1994). Therefore, Chinese prefer to downgrade the importance of themselves and ego (Mao, 1994).

It is universally agreed that showing modesty is a way to perform politeness. In English, modesty is a strategy of minimizing praise of self, however, in Chinese culture, modesty is the most outstanding aspect of politeness, and Chinese tend to make negative responses or self-denigration to show their modesty. Modesty is greatly valued in

Chinese culture, but it is also likely to be misunderstood by foreigners who merely denigrate or humble themselves. Tu (1985) once concluded that “the exaggerated modesty is not a sign of lack of self-confidence...the overestimate of one’s ability, the exaggeration of one’s capacity, designed to elevate one above one’s fellows, is frowned upon by Chinese society”.

Since modesty is a valuable virtue, accepting a compliment implies conceit and emphasizing the individual in the responses is not socially acceptable in China. As a result, most responses to compliments in Chinese tend to be rejections, characterized by disagreement and self-denigration (Zhang, 2005)

2.4.2 Chinese Culture in Malaysia

Malaysia has been ranked as the 26th most collectivistic society including many traditional values, for instance, showing deference to authority, respects for older citizens, preserving harmony and avoiding conflicts being maintained (Hofstede, 1984).

Malaysia is a high context culture where approval from members of a community is important for the well-being of an individual. This is because one’s local standing in society depends very much on acceptance by the community (Storz, 1999).

Chinese community is a mighty ethnic group in Malaysia in terms of population, economy or culture. In recent years that Malaysian Chinese have increased their Malaysian ingredients, meanwhile there is no reduction of their Chinese identity. As time goes by, the accumulation of Chinese culture in Malaysian Chinese community

will be more and more intense (Huang, 2013).

Unlike their ancestors, many up-to-date Malaysian Chinese have become more prosperous, gained education both locally and abroad therefore are greatly open-minded. As a consequence, the lifestyles and attitudes of Malaysian Chinese of current generation would be overtly distinct from that of old generations. These distinctions are manifested in the way they interact, behave and socialize. However, certain traditional values such as filial piety and deference for elders acquired from Confucian teachings are still broadly valued (Kuang et al, 2015).

In terms of Confucianism, it can be assumed that the Malaysian Chinese have monolithic Chinese culture with mainland Chinese. There are obvious distinctions among Malaysian Chinese in various aspects of their daily lives, for example, the dialects they speak. However, it is important to bear in mind that regardless of the cultural diversity in Malaysian Chinese community, Malaysian Chinese draw their conscious or unconscious values from the Confucianism (Storz, 1999).

The Malaysian Chinese's view of *self* is socially constructed by others. It is collective and socially contextualized based on commonality and connectedness. In this sense, the Malaysian Chinese are other oriented, which is delineated as a collective orientation (Parsons, 1951). In consequence, in such a value orientation, Malaysian Chinese hold reciprocity and mutuality as strong values.

Studies on speech acts show that Malaysians are generally indirect within a high social culture where approval from members of a community is important for the well-being of an individual (Kennedy, 2002). Hence, it is believed that Malaysian Chinese are often regarded as being direct, upfront and straightforward in communication (Kuang, 2009; Phaveena, 2010). Kuang et al (2011) found that Malaysian Chinese are prone to showing disagreements with familiar interlocutors such as parents, living partners, siblings or close friends, however, there are less disagreements with bosses. Malaysian Chinese prefer to use words to express themselves verbally or they may use fewer words or keep silent.

Generally, it is a Chinese value to show respect to others who are older by using kinship forms and that address forms may be either formal or informal. Formal address terms may focus on specific terms advocated by Chinese culture and informal terms will take on the neutral terms such as uncle. Even if there is no blood relationship, Malaysian Chinese speakers are expected to use terms of address in the communications (Kuang & Maya, 2009).

A number of researches have indicated that Malaysians are indirect people but it should be mentioned that such a description is more relevant to the Malays (David & Kuang, 1999, 2005; Shanmuganathan, 2003). Meanwhile, Malaysians are generally group-oriented people and are collectivistic in nature (Asmah, 1992; Hofstede, 1984) but they also have some distinctive differences in their behavior due to their different culture, religion, beliefs, values as well as upbringing.

2.5 Politeness Theory

Politeness appears to be a social-cultural phenomenon, which can be generally defined as showing consideration to others in human interactions (Yu, 2003). It can be regarded as one of the most dominating social guidelines for human interactions. Investigations have been carried out aiming to pursue a better understanding of politeness phenomenon in a variety of cultures. The purpose of the studies of politeness is to reflect or realize the social or interpersonal functions of various languages by reducing the potential conflict and miscommunication in human interaction.

2.5.1 Western Concepts of Face and Politeness

The basic notion of Western politeness theory is 'face' that is defined as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" by Goffman (1967). Thus, face is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" and "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (Brown and Levinson, 1987:61). Brown and Levinson (1987) further claimed that "face" has two aspects:

Positive face, which is the desire to be liked by others;

Negative face, which is the desire to act unimpeded by other people;

Nevertheless, the behaviors of satisfying others' personal desires or wants may lead to the acts that inevitably threaten both faces of the interactants. Thereby, Brown and Levinson (1987) defined these acts as 'face-threatening acts (FTAs)'.

Geoffrey N. Leech (1983:104) considered politeness as a form of behavior that aims to achieve the establishment and maintenance of comity, which is the ability of participants to engage in interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. He established six maxims to describe politeness which are termed as Politeness Principle which is shown in the following:

1) Tact Maxim:

Minimize cost and maximize benefit to others

2) Generosity Maxim:

Minimize benefit and maximize cost to self

3) Approbation Maxim:

Minimize dispraise and maximize praise of other

4) Modesty Maxim:

Minimize praise and maximize dispraise of self

5) Agreement Maxim:

Minimize disagreement and maximize agreement between self and others

6) Sympathy Maxim:

Minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy between self and others

2.5.2 Chinese Concepts of Face and Politeness

Undoubtedly, Western concepts of face and politeness have been widely accepted around the world, meanwhile, they have been criticized since they are tested in different cultures. Gu Yueguo (1990) criticized the unsuitability of Brown and Levinson's face framework for Chinese politeness. *Limao* (礼貌) (morphemically means 'polite

appearance’) is the equivalent Chinese expression to English word ‘politeness’. There are four essential notions in the Chinese *Limao*: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement (Gu, 1990).

Hu (1944) claimed that there are two aspects of face in Chinese culture. The first is *mianzi* (面子) that refers to “prestige or reputation” which can be either achieved by enrolling in community or being ascribed by other community fellows; another one is *lian* (脸) that refers to “the respect of the group for a member with a good moral standard” (Yu, 2003). The core difference between two aspects is that, generally speaking, *mianzi* (面子) is relevant with an individual’s dignity or prestige, conversely *lian* (脸) is related to the recognition by society for his/her socially moral behaviors or judgments (Yu, 2003).

Comparing the faces in Western and Chinese cultural backgrounds, it is noticeable that the face models of Brown & Levinson (1987) is defined as an individualistic and self-oriented image, in contrast, Chinese face emphasizes communality and interpersonality (Yu, 2003). Furthermore, face models of Brown & Levinson and Chinese are discrepant. First of all, the Chinese concept of negative face differentiates the one of Brown and Levinson. In Chinese community, speech acts such as offering, inviting and promising, ordinarily speaking, are not regarded as impeding hearer’s freedom, let alone threatening hearer’s negative face. Second, Chinese politeness is not only instrumental but also normative. Beyond the sole instrumental function of Brown and Levinson’s face model, politeness, in Chinese social setting, also performs its

normative functions (Gu, 1990).

Unlike Brown and Levinson, Leech highlighted the normative (or regulative) aspect of politeness which is shown by the formulation of politeness principles or the six maxims (see 2.4.1). Gu (1992) defined culture as a set of maxims which were used to explain behaviors, therefore in Chinese culture, it is more appropriate to study politeness in the view of maxims accounting for the moralization of Chinese value and culture. That is why Gu (1992) adapted Leech's Politeness Principle to construct politeness maxims which he claimed to be very characteristic to the Chinese culture.

1) The Self-denigration Maxim:

The maxim consists of two clauses or submaxims (a) denigrate self and (b) elevate other.

This maxim absorbs the notions of respectfulness and modesty.

The Self-denigration Maxim is based on the respectfulness and modesty of Chinese *Limao* (礼貌). This maxim is quite common in Chinese expressions, a typical example should be asking names between L and G who are both Chinese:

L: 您贵姓? (*nin gui xing*) (*What's) your precious name?*

G: 贱姓歌。 (*jian xing ge*) (*My) cheap/worthless surname (is) Ge.*

When L asks the surname of G, L elevates the name of the addressee by adding 'precious' to show great respect to G, in responding to the enquiry, G denigrates his/her surname by using 'worthless' to perform modesty. Besides surnames, Chinese interlocutors obey the maxim of denigration in most politeness-sensitive aspects such as professions, belongings, artistic works, etc.

Gu (1992) also pointed out a new phenomenon that since the foundation of People's Republic of China, new views and values have changed and have replaced some of the traditional ones. Nevertheless, a set of neutral terms appear and are widely used by people. For example, the neutral expression“我/你的意见”(my/your ideas) has taken place of self-referring term“拙见/愚见”((my) stupid idea), other-referring term“高见/尊意”respectfully, which shows that many Chinese regard their relationship with others as equal ones, and they don't have to show their respect to others by using honorific terms to address others.

2) The Address Maxim:

The maxim reads: address your interlocutor with an appropriate address term. This maxim is based on the notions of respectfulness and attitudinal warmth.

The Address Maxim fulfills the concepts of respectfulness and attitudinal warmth. There are two aspects involved in naming addressees:

(a) Speaker's recognition of hearer as a social being in his/her specific social status or role; (b) Speaker's definition of the social relation between speaker and hearer. In Chinese culture, the complex use of address reflects a kind of social relationship between people, a failure to name others appropriately may result in offense. It is noticed that the ways of addressing in Chinese are flexible and complex in different circumstances.

Gu (1990, 1992) divided the system of addressing into two categories: unitary and multiple addressing terms. The former one refers to the terms that can be singly used such as one's profession, and the latter one refers to the terms that are composed of two or more sub-addressing terms like "old /little+LN" and "LN+old". However, more pragmatics elements are needed to be taken into consideration in order to address appropriately, for instance, kin or non-kin, male or female, etc.

3) The Refinement Maxim:

The maxim refers to self's behavior to other which meets certain standards. With regard to language use, it means the use of refined language and a ban on foul language. The use of euphemisms and indirectness is also covered in this maxim.

The Refinement Maxim refers to the use of refined words and avoid obscene expressions, especially in Chinese communicative situations, and use more euphemisms and less straightforward expressions. For instance, A wants to taste something like a cake belonging to B, A's expression "The cake looks very delicious" would be regarded as a refined utterance rather than the direct request "I want to eat this cake".

4) The Accordance Maxim:

The maxim refers to the efforts made by both interlocutors to maximize agreement and harmony and minimize disagreement.

The Accordance Maxim is highly related to Chinese face (as mentioned: *lian*; *mianzi*). When Chinese take their own or others' "*lian*" or "*mianzi*" into account, they usually take politeness as the measurement in their speech. As shown in *ShangTong* section in *MoZi* (《墨子. 尚同》), the central idea of agreement in Chinese is to agree with addressees as much as possible in order to satisfy the addressees' psychological desires thus to build a harmonious relationship with them. In Chinese daily interactions, if someone is really holding a different opinion with the interlocutor, he/she is more likely to compliment firstly and then denigrate him/herself with expression of his/her common opinion, and lastly points out the addressees' insufficiencies and drawbacks. In this way, the faces of both speakers will be kept.

5) The Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim:

This maxim refers to minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to other at the motivational level ((being virtuous), and maximizing benefit received and minimizing cost to self at the conversational level (being a nobleman).

The speech and virtue are significant elements in Confucianism School, China (Huang, 2012). According to Confucianism School, being polite, speakers should consider the virtue, words and deeds as a unity, and always pay attention to the cost and benefit related to self and the others. An example of invitation is provided as illustration:

L: 明天 来 吃 晚饭 啊?

Tomorrow come eat dinner particle?

G: 不 来了, 太 麻烦。

Not come too trouble.

L: 不 麻烦, 菜 都是 现成的。

Not trouble, dishes all are ready-made.

.....

G: 好吧, 就 随便一点。

All right, just potluck.

(adapted from (Gu, 1990))

In the above daily communication, A invites B for dinner, which is very polite in essence as A tries to maximize benefits to B on the motivational level. For A's sincere invitation, B feels it would be a great trouble for A, so B doesn't intend to accept it, which shows B tries to minimize cost to A at the expressive level. Then A's answer has minimized the cost that he would only serve something simple therefore makes it easy for B to join the dinner. It seems that B would be impolite if he/she rejects A's invitation for several times because he/she would break A's face. Of course B is polite although he/she does not minimize the cost to the least to A, but in China, there is a social custom that if A invites B for once, in return, B will repay it by inviting A for the next time.

2.5.3 Politeness with CRs

Starting with Holmes (1988), theories of politeness have been employed to account for the studies of CRs in different social contexts. Holmes (1988) used politeness theory of Brown & Levinson for New Zealand data, Sharifian (2005) posited an approach of

cultural schema to account for his Persian data while Thevendiraraj (2006) used Leech's Politeness Maxims for her Malaysian Tamil data.

In Chen's (1993) study, a variety of popular politeness theories were used to testify CRs of her Xi'an Mainland Chinese data. She argued that Brown & Levinson's politeness theory is just suitable for the English data but not for Chinese data, whereas Gu's (1990) concept of modesty can just explain why Chinese rejected compliments dramatically. With overall consideration, Leech's (1983) politeness maxims especially the Agreement Maxim and Modesty Maxim can explain the CRs of English and Chinese data respectively. Countering to the findings of Mainland Chinese in Chen's (1993) study, Chen, S. H (2003) investigated compliment responses of Chinese speakers in Taiwan and found that the most frequently applied CRs strategy was acceptance which indicated that Taiwanese were mostly motivated by Leech's Agreement Maxim.

Denying other's praise is an appropriate behavior in China, therefore for Chinese, acceptance runs the risk of showing off or violating the modesty and the value of self-denigration has imposed on the Chinese community to avoid explicit acceptance with the compliment (Zhang, 2005). These cultural values account for the study of Cheng, Y (2009) which shows Chinese use *Implicit Acceptance* more frequently than *Explicit Acceptance* to respond to compliments. And another feature shared in the previous studies is that the focus of denial is on the complimentee him/herself, never on the compliments (Cheng, Y, 2009).

In Malaysia, Thevendiraraj (2006) concluded that the Malaysian Tamil males and younger females were greatly motivated by Leech's Agreement Maxim, which explained why both Tamil men and women performed more acceptance and deflecting strategies rather than rejections in CRs. While the older females' (in late 30's) responses were primarily motivated by the Modesty Maxim when responding to compliments that was why they performed more rejections in CRs than men.

2.6 Summary

This chapter presented a number of previous studies on compliments by investigating its topics, functions, formulation and distribution. There are also plenty of studies on CRs in different circumstances discussed in the present chapter. Meanwhile, the Chinese culture and politeness were also viewed in this chapter. Based on the previous studies, this study will cover the following research gaps. Firstly, most of the existing comparative studies on CRs focus on the intermediate language of English that is used by native English speakers and non-native English speakers. Hence, there are less researches that explore the interaction among speakers who belong to same social community, especially, in a context where English is used as a second language. There are fewer researches done on CRs in Malaysian community. Although there are some studies conducted in Malaysian community, they have only focused on the ethnic groups of Malay, Tamil or other international communities in Malaysia (Afsari, 2012; Farnia & Suleiman, 2009; Thevendiraraj, 2006).

Besides, the methodological flaw existing in previous studies is that the data was frequently collected by DCT (Discourse Completion Task) in a written form (Cai, 2012; Chen, 1993; Chen & Yang, 2010; Cheng, Y, 2009; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Ye, 1995; Yuan, 2002). Few studies collected data of oral responses to compliments (Chen & Yang, 2010; Cheng, D, 2011; Lee, 2009; Thevendiraraj, 2006). In addition to instruments, few famous studies focus on the influence of social distance and social status on compliment responses (Cai, 2012).

Lastly, in spite of a wide variety of politeness or cultural theories (shown in 2.5.3) applied to studies of CRs, there is nearly no study that applies a politeness theory which accounts for Chinese CRs with respect of Chinese thinking or culture. Therefore, there is a necessity for the present study on the CRs among Malaysian Chinese undergraduates.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHDOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter firstly presents the description of the research design and theoretical frameworks used in the study. Next section is the description of the participants. This is followed by four predominant sections of the methodology, the research instruments, the research procedures of data collection and data analysis. This chapter ends with a description on the pilot study and data transcription.

3.1 Research Design

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was employed. Comparably speaking, this study paid more attention to the qualitative part in which the study provided more detailed analysis and interpretations of the CRs generated by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. Creswell (1994) stated that a qualitative research begins with vaguely formulated research questions and develops insights from the pattern of data. According to Creswell's (1994) statement, this study begins with research questions shown at the beginning of the study and followed by analysis of data and discussion of the findings. Hence, to facilitate the description of the analysis, data and analysis will be quantified in a number of tables and figures.

3.2 Theoretical Frameworks

In order to answer both research questions of the study (see Section 1.3, Chapter 1), this study follows two perspectives to form the theoretical frameworks.

In answering research question one, the framework of Cheng's (2011) CRs categorization (see Table 3.1) was used to analyze the CRs strategies of the data in the study. In Cheng's (2011) study (see Section 2.3.1 for details), three macro strategies are categorized to classify the CRs of participants, namely, *Acceptance*, *Evasion* and *Combination*. With reference to the micro division, *Acceptance* and *Evasion* include 11 micro types of responses: *Appreciation*, *Agreeing*, *Downgrading*, *Qualifying*, *Returning*, *Non-idiomatic*, *Credit-shifting*, *Commenting*, *Reassuring*, *Offering*, *Ignoring/giggling*, which are shown and explained in Table 3.1.

Cheng (2011) used Holmes' (1988), Yu's (2004) and Tang & Zhang's (2009) CRs models as initial coding frames for data transcription and later adapted them as the framework (see Table 3.1) for her study. Comparing Cheng's (2011) CRs model with other three frameworks mentioned above, the most obvious difference is the non-existence of *Rejection/Reject* in Cheng's (2011) model. Moreover, Holmes' (1988), Yu's (2004) and Tang & Zhang's (2009) CRs models include the macro CRs of *Reject* or *Non-acceptance*. Cheng's (2011) and Yu's (2004) frameworks have *Combination* as macro level in which *Acceptance* and *Evasion/Deflect/Evade* may be used together. Cheng's (2011) framework has adopted parts of Holmes' (1988) and Tang & Zhang's (2009) frameworks in which *Appreciation*, *Agreeing*, *Downgrading*, *Returning* are

classified as *Accept* while *Shift credit*, *Informative comment*, *Request reassurance* are categorized as *Evade/Deflect*. In addition, two more *Evasion* strategies were developed in Cheng's (2011) model, *Smiling/Giggling* and *Offering*. In terms of *Acceptance*, Cheng (2011) took some *Non-idiomatic* expressions but showing intention of acceptance into consideration.

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Table 3.1: CRs Categories of Cheng (2011)

Macro level	Micro level	Examples
Acceptance	Appreciation	Thanks. Thank you. Yeah.
	Agreeing	Yeah, I really like it. I know. I'm glad you think so.
	Downgrading	It's nothing. It's ok. It's just so so.
	Qualifying	I enjoyed doing it. I worked hard on it.
	Returning	Yours is nice too. You're not too bad yourself. I'm sure you'll be great.
	Non-idiomatic	The utterance does not fit into the native speaker's norm but has a clear intention of showing acceptance to the compliment. E.g. Amy: Your Chinese is really good. John: I am very happy.
Evasion	Credit-shifting	No problem. My pleasure. You're welcome. I got it from my mom.
	Commenting	It isn't difficult. I bought it from the shop. Blue is my favorite color.
	Reassuring	Are you kidding? Really? Sure or not?
	Offering	You can use mine if you like it. I can let you read it.
	Ignoring/Giggling	No response
		Shifting to another topic
		Giggling/Smiling
Combination	Acceptance + Evasion E.g. Appreciation + Credit-shifting Thank you so much. It is gift from my brother. E.g. Evasion + Acceptance Really? Thank you.	

Cheng's (2011) study was more recent than the other studies discussed in Chapter 2 and the participants were American native English speakers and Chinese speakers who speak English as second language or foreign language. Therefore, the coding system of

Cheng (2011) is suitable for Malaysian Chinese who speak English as a second language or foreign language. In addition, the pilot study also proved the validity of Cheng's (2011) framework for classifying CRs strategies generated by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates.

In answering research question two, Gu's (1992) Politeness Principles framework (see Table 3.2 in which the examples of each maxim are underlined) was used to account for the face-saving strategies in CRs. The explanation and examples of Gu's (1992) theoretical framework can be referred to Section 2.5.2 for details. Gu (1992) defined culture as a set of maxims which were used to explain behaviors. In Chinese culture, it is more appropriate to study politeness in the view of maxims accounting for the moralization of Chinese value and culture. Based on the Politeness Principle of Leech (1983), Gu (1992) formed his Politeness Principles that are claimed to be very characteristic to the Chinese culture hence appropriate to be used to account for politeness in CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates.

Table 3.2: Politeness Principles of Gu (1992)

Politeness Maxims		Examples
The Self-denigration Maxim	(a) denigrate self	e.g. Liu is complimenting Li's new car. Liu: "Your car is so beautiful!" Li: " <u>No, this car is not very good.</u> "
	(b) elevate others	e.g. Liu is complimenting Li's new car.. Liu: "Your car is so beautiful!" Li: " <u>I think your car is better.</u> "
The Address Maxim		Address the interlocutor with an appropriate address term e.g. Dear <u>Mr. Li</u> , could you come in? Morning, <u>Professor Wang</u> !
The Refinement Maxim	(a) the use of refined words and avoid obscene expressions	e.g. If Li wants to leave, his/her implication that "Sorry, I have something else to do" is regarded as using non-abscene and less straightforward expression.
	(b) the use of more euphemisms and less straightforward expressions	e.g. If Li wants to leave, his/her implication that "I don't like talking to you" or "Go away" are obscene, non-refined and too straightforward.
The Accordance Maxim	(a) maximize agreement and harmony	e.g. Li likes the book and says: "This book is very interesting!" Liu: " <u>Yes, it is. I like reading it.</u> "
	(b) minimize disagreement	e.g. Li likes a book and says: "This book is very interesting!" Liu: " <u>Yes, it is. I like reading it.</u> " (Although Liu thinks that the book is boring but she/he tries to avoid disagreement)
The Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim	(a) minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to other at the motivational level	e.g. Zhang: " <u>Wu, you need beef. Let me help you buy the beef.</u> " (Maximizing benefit to other at the motivational level)
	(b) maximizing benefit received and minimizing cost to self at the conversational level	Wu: " <u>That would be great trouble for you. Aren't you going to the office?</u> " (Minimizing cost to other at the motivational level) Zhang: " <u>No trouble at all. The market is near my office.</u> " (Minimizing cost to self at the conversational level) Wu: "Thank you so much!"

Both frameworks in this study are chosen due to their suitability for Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. Cheng's (2011) framework was used to investigate the surface forms by which the participants respond to compliments in various conditions. Based on the strategies that are classified by Cheng's (2011) framework, Gu's (1992) theoretical framework was used to find out the underlying functions of speakers' speeches and behaviors with regard to politeness. In this study, Gu's (1992) politeness model was used to analyze how the CRs strategies from Cheng's (2011) model maintain face and in what way the participants show great preference. Therefore, with the combination of two frameworks, a more complete understanding of participants' CRs will be presented.

3.3 Profile of Participants

In order to fulfill the research that is related to Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, a method of random sampling was applied to get enough and qualified participants. The participants in the study are all Malaysian Chinese undergraduate students taking different majors from freshman year to senior year in a local university, University of Malaya (UM). The participants consisted of 30 Malaysian Chinese comprising 16 males (No. 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30) and 14 females (No. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 25, 28). All the participants were born and grew up in Malaysia and continued their higher education in University of Malaya. The profile of the participants in Table 3.3 shows that all participants are registered undergraduates ranging from age 19 to 24. Based on the website of *Studyinmalaysia.com*, participants from different academic majors could be generally divided into two groups, Arts & Social Science studies and Science & Technology Studies (see Table 3.3). 18

participants were from majors in arts & social science and 12 participants were from majors in science & technology in UM.

Table 3.3: Profile of Participants

No	Age	Gender	MUET	Major	
1	20	Female	5	Spanish	Arts & Social science
2	20	Female	3	Spanish	Arts & Social science
3	23	Female	3	Korean Studies	Arts & Social science
4	22	Female	4	Korean Studies	Arts & Social science
5	20	Female	4	Japanese	Arts & Social science
6	23	Female	3	Music	Arts & Social science
7	20	Male	4	French	Arts & Social science
8	21	Male	5	History	Arts & Social science
9	20	Female	6	Italian	Arts & Social science
10	21	Male	5	Economics	Arts & Social science
11	20	Male	4	Engineering	Science & Technology
12	20	Male	5	Engineering	Science & Technology
13	21	Female	5	Asian Studies	Arts & Social science
14	21	Male	4	Mechanical Science	Science & Technology
15	23	Female	5	Science	Science & Technology
16	19	Female	3	Science	Science & Technology
17	21	Male	5	Science	Science & Technology
18	24	Female	4	Chinese	Arts & Social science
19	22	Female	5	Science	Science & Technology
20	22	Male	4	Computer Science	Science & Technology
21	22	Male	5	Engineering	Science & Technology
22	23	Male	3	Chemistry	Science & Technology
23	22	Male	3	Chinese	Arts & Social science
24	21	Male	4	Estate Management	Arts & Social science
25	23	Female	3	Chinese	Arts & Social science
26	24	Male	4	Education	Arts & Social science
27	24	Male	5	Chemistry	Science & Technology
28	23	Female	4	Literature	Arts & Social science
29	21	Male	5	Science	Science & Technology
30	22	Male	6	Accounting	Arts & Social science

MUET: Malaysia University English Test

Based on the profile in Table 3.3, participants' range of MUET is Band 3-6 which shows that they are at least modest users of English and are qualified to join this study. For the purpose of confidentiality, all the names of the participants were retained while the participants were marked by their initials in accordance with the sequence number of joining the role play. The present research was carried out in English, all the participants were at least ranked as modest users of English which was shown by their scores (Band 3-6) of Malaysian University English Test (MUET)

3.4 Research Instruments

There were two instruments, role play scenarios and questionnaires, employed in this study.

3.4.1 Role Play Scenarios

The main tool used in the study was adapted role play scenarios (Appendix A) from Discourse Completion Task (DCT) of Tang and Zhang (2009) (see Appendix B). As Tran (2006) once claimed that role play can allow the research to incorporate the targeted pragmatic feature into communicative tasks which closely resemble real life situations and to conveniently take control of the data collection process (Cheng, 2011).

According to the previous studies, the most compliments are commonly paid on appearance, ability, personality and possession in the human life. Every set of role play scenarios consisted of four social situations that were mainly adapted from previous study of Tang and Zhang (2009). Tang and Zhang (2009) organized DCT comprising

four situational settings, appearance, character, ability and possession. In their original DCT, there was only one communicative condition for each compliment topic and just restricted the relationship between complimenter and complementee as friends. Based on the DCT model of Tang and Zhang (2009), role play scenarios in the present study have been designed and modified to ensure that the role play situations are suitable for Malaysian Chinese especially university undergraduates.

Holmes (1995) mentioned that relative social distance is a significant aspect in determining certain aspects of linguistic politeness in terms of compliment and its responses. Another social factor, social power, of the interlocutors is also a predominant factor in the compliment (Sims, 1989). Therefore, there are four situations with 2 sub-settings (a and b) respectively in the present role play (see Table 3.4). Both a and b are under the same social setting, however, each situation involves two social variables: social status (high >/ equal =) and social distance (familiar +/ unfamiliar -), which is illustrated as following:

Table 3.4: Situations of CRs Related to the Social Status and Social Distance

Situation	Subject	Social Power	Social Distance
1a	Appearance	>	+
1b	Appearance	=	-
2a	Character	>	-
2b	Character	=	+
3a	Ability	>	+
3b	Ability	=	-
4a	Possession	>	-
4b	Possession	=	+

The example of situation 1 is about the appearance in which the situation 1b was revised from the condition and syntactic structure of situation 1 of Tang & Zhang's (2009) DCT. In the present situation 1b, a new friend who is socially far but has equal status with the participants was set. And a lecturer who has a close social distance while higher social status was created in situation 1a. The original and adapted one are shown as follows:

Situation 1 (appearance) of Tang & Zhang (2009):

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 says: "Hey, you look great! You're really handsome/beautiful today."

Chinese version: (all in simplified Chinese)

你的朋友为庆祝学期的结束搞了一个聚会。你悉心打扮了一番。当你出现在聚会时，你的一位朋友说：“嘿！你真精神！今天看起来很帅/漂亮。”

Your answer:

Adapted version for Situation 1 Appearance:

Situation 1 Appearance (The outward or visible aspect of a person or thing)

a.

Your lecturer (whom you are familiar with) organized a party to celebrate the end of examination (task). You have dressed up for the party. You arrive at the party.

The lecturer says: "You look so nice today!"

Your response:

b.

You greet your good friend. He/She introduces a new friend (unfamiliar) to you.

The new friend says: "Hey, you look great! You are really beautiful (handsome) today!"

Your response:

The Situation 2-4 in this study which are also adapted from Tang & Zhang (2009) are shown as follows:

Situation 2 Character (The combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person or thing)

a.

You and your best friend meet an office staff (whom you are unfamiliar with) in the hallway carrying some files. You help her (him) to take files to her (his) office.

The officer says: "Thank you so much, you are really a helpful and caring person."

Your response:

b.

You and your friend get out of the office. She/He smiles at you.

She (he) says: "Wow! You like helping others. You are so kind and caring!"

Your response:

Situation 3 Ability (The qualities required to do something)

a.

You have completed a presentation. After that your lecturer (whom you are familiar with) gives you immediate feedback.

She (he) says: “Well done, your English is very good. And your presentation is well-organized. Thank you.”

Your response:

b.

You go back to your seat. After you have completed your presentation, one of your classmates (whom you are unfamiliar with) smiles at you.

The classmate says: “Wow, that’s brilliant! I hope I can do it the way you did. Well done!”

Your response:

Situation 4 Possession (Anything that is owned or possessed)

a.

You have bought a new mobile phone. When you visit your close friend’s family for the first time, your friend’s father (whom you are unfamiliar with) notices your mobile phone.

He says: “Your phone looks very nice. I believe it is a good phone!”

Your response:

b.

When you receive a call, your close friend notices that your phone is a new one. Your friend looks at it and tries some functions.

She (he) says: “Wow, how smart! It looks so nice. My phone doesn’t have such functions. It is really great!”

Your response:

Thus, it can be seen that the role play scenarios employed in the study were changed in terms of location or language expression in order to conform to the Malaysian Chinese social context.

Ever since the first systematic and extensive employment in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realizations Patterns (CCSARP) Projects in 1989, the written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) has been used to collect data in a variety of empirical pragmatics researches (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Since the researchers are able to control different variables related to the context, for instance, the social status or social power, it is possible to study the influences of the variables on speech (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989; Takahashi & Beebe, 1987).

Moreover, using written DCT has a number of limitations, because the respondents’ speech is intended to be elicited indirectly through the written form (Kasper & Dahl, 1991). Yuan (2001) said that the use of traditional written DCT may not represent accurately what the interlocutors orally respond in DCT because there were a number of distinctions between their findings. Therefore, it has been argued that oral DCT is a better instrument than written DCT to elicit speech act data if the focus of the research

is natural speech (Yuan, 2001).

In order to gather valid data in the study of pragmatics, role play is considered as simulating more authentic and natural situations, in which the respondents will be asked to play a particular role and required the performance of a speech act. And role play can be categorized in terms of the respondent's freedom to control the conversation (Sasaki, 1998). Tran (2006) further mentioned that role-play can provide spoken data which approaches real-life performance because the researchers investigate not only the content of the speech but also its discourse features. Role play yields longer and more elaborated communicative act data in the data collection.

To sum up, the role play adapted from DCT has gained the strengths of the DCT, meanwhile, it overcomes the limitations of DCT by resembling more naturalistic situations and conveniently takes a good control of the variables as well as data collection procedure.

3.4.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is capable of gathering a large and useful corpus of data in pragmatics studies (Tran, 2006). Hence, immediately after the completion of the role play, a questionnaire (Appendix C) would be handed out to each participant to trace more information or thinking regarding the participant's responses to the compliments given.

There are six questions for each participant which are shown below:

1. Do you think your responses are typical of what you would do in real life?

2. What is your instant response normally to a compliment?
3. Do you intentionally choose particular response strategies in particular situations?
4. What factors influenced your choices?
5. How do you feel when you receive compliments?
6. Is politeness shown when you respond to compliments? Is Chinese culture expected in your English speech?

The first five questions were replicated from Thevendiraraj (2006) due to the similar function of acquiring deep insights of participants after responding to compliments. Questions 1-4 are mainly used to facilitate research methodology and research question 1. Question 1 tests the validity of the role play scenarios. Question 2 seeks the typical and general responses to compliments of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. Question 3 and 4 are used to find out whether Malaysian Chinese respond differently in different situations and what may influence their behaviors.

Question 5 investigates the politeness underlying participants' CRs. Question 5 is asked to see whether Malaysian Chinese undergraduates regard compliments as face-threatening acts to themselves, then question 6 was designed by the researcher to seek information about politeness and culture involved in saving faces of complimenters.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Since the information of the participants needed in this study involves personal privacy, thus permission, anonymity and confidentiality are highly necessary.

Initially, E-mails or phone messages were sent to the participants to invite them to join the study. Prior to the role play, an overall introduction of the study was illustrated by the researcher. Later, the participants signed a consent form (see Appendix D) to show their permission that all their information given in the study could be used. The researcher informed the participants that all their information will be kept confidential. In order to preserve their identity, the names of the participants were replaced by serial numbers such as No.1, No.2 according to the orders of their participation. The personal information on the consent form was only seen by the researcher and the supervisor. Therefore, there is no violation of confidentiality in the study.

3.6 Procedure of Data Collection

This section describes the procedures of collecting data through the role play scenarios and the questionnaires. The procedure of data collection is summarized in Figure 3.1. Firstly, some familiar friends of the researcher helped to find out Malaysian Chinese who are undergraduates in UM then sincere invitations to join the study were given to them. Once the participants accepted the invitations, a convenient time was negotiated with them. The venue of the role play was a study room in the main library of UM to avoid any disturbance.

After the signature of the consent form, the role play was conducted with one participant at a time. The participants were given the role play situations which were typed on different cards. On each situation, the participants were firstly given half minute to read situation a, then the researcher would act as the complimenter involved in the sub-situation a. Then, the participants responded immediately to the compliment. When the situation a was finished, another card of sub-situation b was given to the participant, another complimeter who is a good friend of researcher would appear and give another compliment. Same as Situation a, the participant just orally responded spontaneously to the sub-situation b. The duration of each role play was 8 minutes. The whole process of the role play was audio recorded.

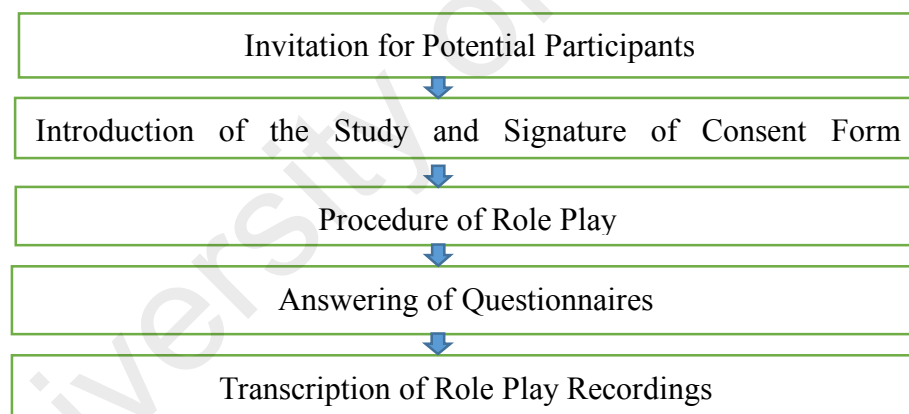


Figure 3.1: Procedure of Data Collection

The compliments given in the role play were representatives that may occur frequently in speakers' daily social lives. And all the compliments that appeared in the scenarios were explicit compliments to ensure the participants respond to the compliments.

After the role play, participants were given copies of the questionnaires and the participants needed to write down their answers to the questions on the questionnaire by recalling their performance in the role play and everyday life. The duration of answering questionnaires was 5 to 10 minutes. This post questionnaire was organized with the intention of getting the insights on CRs generated in the role play. All the information gathered from the questionnaire would be beneficial to enhance the interpretation of the data. Lastly, all compliment responses in the recording of role plays were transcribed.

3.7 Procedure of Data Analysis

In the data analysis, two methods were implemented: quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative method refers to the tabulations of frequency counts and responding percentages of CRs in the role plays. The frequency counts would show the recurrent CRs tokens given by the participants. The calculations of frequency count and percentage were accomplished by a calculator. Later, the results would be presented in figures and tables. The qualitative analysis relied on the interpretation of contextual clues that were derived from participants' responses in the role plays and questionnaires.

The first step of the data analysis was carried out with regards to research question one: What are the preferred patterns of responses to compliment employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates?

The analysis would make an overall description of the CRs among Malaysian Chinese participants. Then more specific analysis was carried out by looking at the CRs used in various situations with different topics, social status and social distance.

The second phase was centered on the research question two:

How is face maintained when responding to compliments under different circumstances?

According to the previous section about culture and politeness, Malaysian Chinese are still inheriting Chinese culture to a certain extent. As a consequence, this question would be analyzed based on the Politeness Principles with five maxims by Gu Yueguo (1992). The procedure of data analysis is summarized in Figure 3.2 as follows:

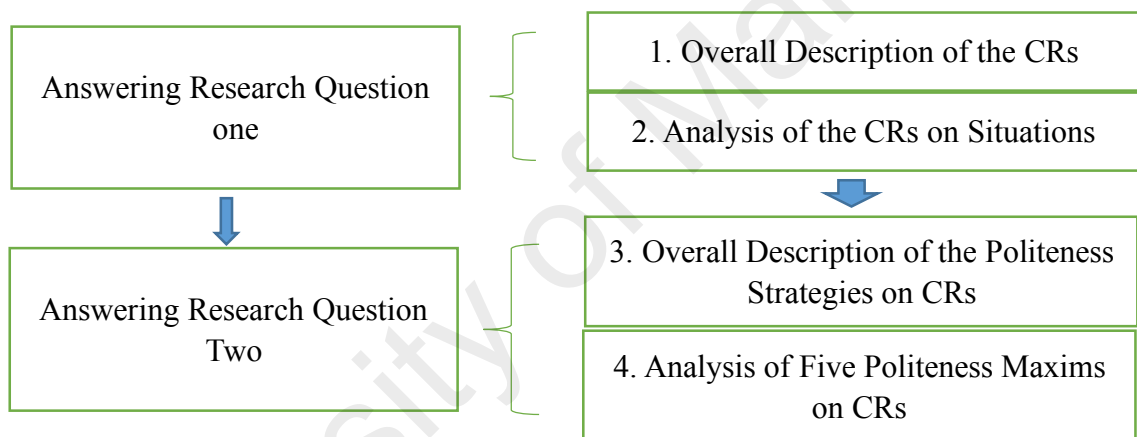


Figure 3.2: Procedure of Data Analysis

3.8 Pilot Study

This section illustrates the pilot study conducted prior to the complete administration of the role play. The purpose of organizing the pilot study was to testify the reliability of the instruments which were used to collect data. Then it aimed to check out the suitability of the situations in the role play scenarios. Lastly, the pilot study was used to testify the suitability of the theoretical frameworks employed in the study and to further gain insights of the possible limitations.

In the pilot study, there were four participants comprising two males and females respectively. All the chosen participants were Malaysian Chinese who are undergraduates in University of Malaya. The chosen participants were asked to join in the role play after the given instructions by the researcher. They orally responded to the situations and the whole process was audio-recorded. The whole process of the role play was around ten minutes for each participant.

4 participants joined the pilot study and each of them responded to eight compliments, therefore 32 pieces of responses were collected. All 32 pieces of responses could be clarified by Cheng's (2011) CRs framework, therefore, the framework of Cheng (2011) is valid for the present study.

During the process of answering the questionnaires, the answers with written forms were preferred by participants. The pilot study also suggested that the different situations should be typed out on cards so that the participants could read them and fully understand the situations.

3.9 Transcription of Data

All the data of compliment responses in the recordings of the role plays were transcribed in this study based on the framework of Cheng (2011) (See Table 3.1). Some CRs strategies belong to non-linguistic features such as *Giggling* and *Smiling* were coded according to respondents' sound in which a louder one was classified as *Giggling* while a softer or lower one was *Smiling*. The research has noted down the occurrence of

giggling or smiling as well as non-response during the role-play scenarios. A number of previous studies in the field of pragmatics applied the transcription model of Jefferson (1972) (Cheng, 2009). Thevendiraraj (2006) adapted Jefferson's (1972) transcription model to investigate CRs of Malaysian Tamil community. This study mainly focuses on the CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, so a narrow transcription adapted from Thevendiraraj's (2006) model is used and shown in the following:

1. Parentheses with dots enclosed (.) (..) (...) shows intervals within utterances. The number of dots approximately categorizes the intervals as short, medium or long.
2. A dash (-) indicates a cut off of speech and appears when speakers are doing self-repair during their responses.
3. **(Smile)** or **(Giggle)** indicates the smiling or giggling of the speakers during their responses.
4. An 'en' 'ya' 'ah' 'wow' or 'ah', etc., indicates the gutturalness or interjection of utterance.

3.10 Summary

This chapter illustrated the research methodology designed to explore the compliment responses generated by 30 Malaysian Chinese undergraduates from University of Malaya. The main instruments involved in the study were role play scenarios and questionnaires. A coding system from Cheng (2011) was applied to clarify the CRs of the participants. Then the Politeness Principles of Gu Yueguo (1992) were used to trace insights of politeness strategies underlying the CRs. Lastly, the data transcribed and questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively in order to answer the

research questions.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the study based on the following two research questions:

- 1) What are the preferred patterns of responses to compliments employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates?
- 2) How is face maintained when responding to compliments under different circumstances?

The findings are then discussed in relation to previous studies that have been reviewed in Chapter 2.

The analysis of the study was carried out in three phases in order to fully answer the two research questions. Research question one was solved through the first and second phases based on the framework of Cheng (2011). In the first phase, a generic analysis of the compliment responses preferred by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates is presented. The second phase is the in-depth analysis of the CRs strategies of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates based on the variables of topic and social distance as well as social status. In the final phase, research question two was answered where the CRs were analyzed in the light of Politeness Principles of Gu Yueguo (1992).

4.1 Analysis of Compliment Responses Strategies

A generic analysis of CRs strategies was carried out firstly. This was followed by an analysis of CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in different social circumstances to gain more in-depth insights.

4.1.1 Generic Analysis of Compliment Responses

In totality, 240 compliment responses were collected from the 30 participants multiplied by the four situations (Appendix E) in the role plays. The CRs were then classified according to the macro level of Cheng's (2011) framework.

Table 4.1: Macro Types of Compliment Responses

Macro Type of CRs	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptance	97	40.5%
Combination	91	38%
Evasion	51	21%
Rejection	1	0.5%

Table 4.1 shows that there was a total of 97 responses of pure *Acceptance* which took 40.5% of all responses and was the most preferred macro response type. The participants frequently responded to the compliments with an expression of *Appreciation* such as 'Thank you', which may be combined with other statements showing *Returning*, *Qualifying*, *Downgrading* or *Agreeing*, such as, 'Thank you. You too'. Most responses of *Acceptance* just show agreement with the compliments while do not provide many further elaborations or explanations. There were 51 responses (21%) belonging to pure *Evasion*. Compared to *Evasion*, 91 responses of *Combination* (38%)

of total was the second most popular macro pattern of CRs. Based on the framework of Cheng (2011) (Table 3.1), *Combination* in this study refers to the combined CRs patterns of *Acceptance*, *Evasion* and *Rejection*. Under the *Combination*, 70 % of total was the *Acceptance + Evasion*, and then 28 % of all belongs to *Evasion + Acceptance*. There was 2 % of *Combination* involving *Rejection*, namely, *Evasion + Rejection + Acceptance* and *Rejection + Evasion*. As the least preferred type, only 1 (0.5%) response shows explicit rejection: (...) *Ya it's not really nice*. The findings are graphically presented in Chart 4.1.

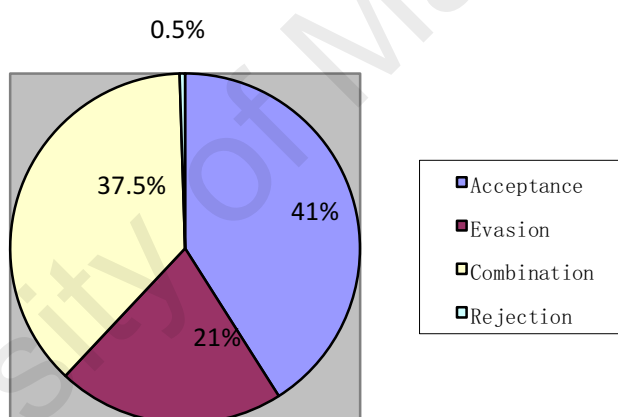


Chart 4.1: Macro Types of Compliment Responses

4.1.1.1 Categories of Acceptance

A total of five strategies were classified as compliment responses under *Acceptance*. Table 4.2 presents the *Acceptance* strategies employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in tandem and analytical tabulations. In this chapter, all examples are taken from Appendix E which contains full responses to compliments generated by the participants. All examples are given in italic such as the following Examples 1 and 2. In

the following examples, No.1 and No.3 refer to the CRs were made by participant 1 and participant 3. 1a and 3a refer to the situation 1a and situation 3a in the role play respectively. The CRs strategy discussed in each example is underlined in order to highlight it.

Table 4.2: CRs of Acceptance

CRs Type	Malaysian Chinese Undergraduates	
Acceptance	Frequency	Percentage
Appreciation	163	41%
Returning	25	6%
Qualifying	16	4%
Agreeing	16	4%
Downgrading	10	3%
Total	230	58%

1) Appreciation

The result in the study shows that there are altogether 163 responses of *Appreciation* which holds the largest portion (41%) in all conditions. The responses of *Appreciation* act as clear indicators of gratitude. The participants mostly responded to the compliments by using ‘*Thank you*’ (126 CRs strategies out of 163), with which the participants preferred to apply other strategies. As explained by the participants, they preferred to use ‘*Thank you*’ because it is more direct to show their appreciation to the complimenters. In addition, the participants have been taught to speak ‘*Thank you*’ as a standard response to the compliments since they were children in school therefore they were accustomed to using it to respond to compliments. As shown in Examples 1 and 2,

the participants begun the responses with ‘*Thank you*’ and ‘*Thank you very much*’ with other micro-level CRs.

Example 1:

No. 1: *Oh thank you.* (*Smile*). (1a)

Example 2:

No. 24: *Thank you very much.* *And you too.* (1b)

Other frequent CRs strategies of *Appreciation* in the present study include ‘*Thanks*’ and ‘*Yeah*’ as shown in Examples 3-6. ‘*Thanks*’ is also showing a clear meaning of appreciation like ‘*Thank you*’ however it was used less than ‘*Thank you*’ (11 out of 163 CRs). As shown in Examples 3 and 4, the participants responded to the compliments by speaking ‘*Thanks*’ to appreciate the complimenters. According to the CRs categorization of Cheng (2011), expressions of ‘*Yeah*’ can be classified as *Appreciation*. In the present study, ‘*Yeah*’ was used secondly (26 out of 163 CRs strategies) among all CRs strategies under *Appreciation*. In Example 5, the participant No.4 was very happy after receiving the compliment so she showed a giggling. Based on the inquiry with the participant during the data coding, the participant explained that the ‘*Yeah*’ in Example 5 was used like ‘*Thank you*’ to show her appreciation. Therefore, the expressions of ‘*Yeah*’ were classified as *Appreciation* if they were used like ‘*Thank you*’ to show the meaning of appreciation to the complimenters. In Example 6, ‘*Yeah*’ was used separately and the participant also showed a tone of happiness by it. The participant No. 14 in Example 6 explained that she used ‘*Yeah*’ to express similar meaning of ‘*Thank you*’ that she was very happy to receive the compliments and the it was used with a

positive intonation which means the compliment is good.

Example 3:

No. 1: Really? (.) Thanks. (3a)

Example 4:

No. 14: Ok (..) Thanks for the compliment and suggestions. (3a)

Example 5:

No. 4: (Giggle). Oh yeah. (4b)

Example 6:

No. 14: Yeah. It's a new phone. (4a)

2) Returning

The strategy of *Returning* has been used 25 times (6%) which is the second most favorable response of *Acceptance* where the complimentees illustrated the regard for the others and shifted the focus to the complimenter, by reciprocating with compliments.

The typical *Returning* strategies are shown in the following examples.

Example 7:

No.1: Wow you too. (Smile). (1b)

Example 8:

No. 9: Oh well, I think you have a very nice smile. (3b)

In the above examples, the complementees did not show direct agreements with the compliments by using expressions like 'Yes', however, there was no denial or disagreement with the compliments in the first place. Typically, 'You too', as Holmes

(1998) contended, indicates that the complimentees accept the positive evaluations paid by complimenters so that the credits are re-paid to complimenters. Therefore, in this study, 'You too' was the most preferred *Returning* strategy to return the positive evaluations to the complimenters. Besides, some participants also used other expressions such as the Example 8 in which they directly complimented some aspects of the complimenters.

3) Qualifying

This response strategy tends to be less preferred by participants with 16 CRs (4%) in the overall data. In fact, respondents tended to qualify the objects after an appreciation when responding to the compliments, as shown in the following examples.

Example 9:

No. 9: Thank you. I believed the English proficiency is very important. (3a)

Example 10:

No. 17: Thank you. I just be prepared well. (3a)

The examples above show that the participants employed the responses of *Qualifying* to elaborate the objects complimented and indirectly strengthened the great value of the objects.

4) Agreeing

It has been found that there were 16 (4%) CRs of *Agreeing* in the study which is similarly employed strategy as *Qualifying*. The following examples illustrate how

participants used this strategy to show agreements with the compliments. Example 11 is an explicit expression showing agreement with the compliments. In the present study, the typical *Agreeing* strategy was shown by the expression of 'Yes'. Other expressions such as Examples 12 and 13 are also showing a meaning of agreeing with the complimenters although there are no direct expressions of 'Yes'.

Example 11:

No. 15: Yes (..) *It is a very new phone. / And its function is good.* (4a)

Example 12:

No. 22: I'm sure it is. *Thank you.* (4a)

Example 13:

No. 21: Ya definitely. (4b)

5) Downgrading

Downgrading, which was used in 10 CRs (3%), is the least employed response strategy for Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. As seen from the questionnaires, in English speaking context, they did not like downgrading themselves to show modesty. Examples 14 – 16 are taken to show this strategy.

Example 14:

No. 4: (Smile). It's nothing. (2b)

Example 15:

No. 16: *Ok (..)* It's ok. It doesn't matter. (2a)

Example 16:

No. 1: *Really?* Oh ok but it is just a smart phone. (4b)

Examples 14-16 illustrate that when the respondents downgraded the compliments, there would not be clear expressions of appreciations or agreements. Although the respondents did not indicate the agreements of the credit attributed in the compliments in an obvious way, the underlying meaning of acceptance comes out through their responses. Mostly, as shown in Example 14 and 15, the respondents generally downgraded the compliments without mentioning the object being complimented. However, some participants such as No 1 in Example 16 would downgrade the compliment on smart phone by mentioning ‘*smart phone*’.

4.1.1.2 Categories of Evasion

It is found that the respondents in the study have applied six strategies of *Evasion*. The researcher has classified these strategies and organized tabulation that is seen in the following Table 4.3. In this section, the results of *Evasion* strategies utilized by the respondents are discussed to explore more details in the application of CRs.

Table 4.3: CRs of Evasion

CRs Type	Malaysian Chinese Undergraduates	
	Frequency	Percentage
Giggling/Smiling	63	16%
Commenting	40	10%
Credit-shifting	34	8.6%
Reassuring	14	3.5%
Topic-shifting	8	2%
Offering	5	1.2%
Total	164	41.3%

1) Giggling/Smiling

Among the six strategies, *Giggling/Smiling*, a unique phenomenon in responding to the compliments, has been used mostly by Malaysian Chinese in the study with occurrence of 63 times (16%). According to the further explanations of the participants, two reasons were given by the participants to account for the responses of *Giggling/Smiling*. First of all, 16 out of 30 participants regarded smiling/giggling as an appropriate way to show politeness in their daily communications no matter who the interlocutors are. Therefore, smiling/giggling plays as an indicator of politeness for Malaysian Chinese. Secondly, 18 out of 30 participants mentioned that they did not know what to say or how to make better responses in some situations. Among all the participants who admitted they had no idea to say anything, 14 out of 18 had got band 3 or 4 in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET), which shows that these participants are ranked as modest user or competent user of English. Hence, there are plenty of Malaysian Chinese participants who lack a good command of expressive, fluent, accurate and appropriate English language. Although the score of MUET may not definitely reflect their communicative ability, it shows that some Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in deed do not grasp a high proficiency of English so that they may apply a number of smiling/giggling in their speech acts to recover the ability of making complicated and diverse responses to compliments. The following examples are given as clear explanations.

Example 17:

No. 10: Oh thank you. (Smile). (1a)

Example 18:

No. 10: (Smile). Thank you. (3b)

Example 19:

No. 2: En (Giggle).. (2b)

Example 20:

No. 27: (Smile). (1a)

Examples 17 and 18 show a great popularity of *Combination* CRs of *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling*, where the *Giggling/Smiling* is used to show politeness after or before showing the gratitude to complimenter. There are also a large number of responses of pure *Giggling/Smiling* such as Examples 19 and 20 from participants No.2 and No. 27 who explained that they did not know what to say because she somehow could not catch up with the speech of the complimenter and she had a limited vocabulary in English communication so that she just used a giggling. Therefore some strategies of *Giggling/Smiling* were solely used as responses to compliments.

Based on the data transcription, there were more CRs of *Giggling* (37 out 63) than *Smiling* (26). The researcher has focused on the sound and facial expressions of the non-linguistic expressions of giggling or smiling. During the role plays, the participants preferred to giggle with a higher sound rather than showing a wee smile. The large number of giggling may show the positive attitude of the participants. Besides, it is also shown that the participants welcomed the compliments and they did not regard the compliments as face threatening acts which may make them feel embarrassed in

responding.

2) Commenting

The second most preferred *Evasion* strategy used by Malaysian Chinese participants is giving further comments, with 40 times (10%). Providing informative comments, as mentioned by some participants, is much easier in some situations compared to other strategies, because they are able to express their ideas. Following examples of *Commenting* are given to show how the participants commonly commented the objects.

Example 21:

No. 14: Yeah. It's a new phone. (4a)

Example 22:

No. 26: Ya, I just bought it like one week ago. (4a)

Example 23:

No. 9: Yes it is. I got it at a very valuable price. I think you should get one too. (4a)

Example 24:

No. 15: Yes (..) It is a very new phone. And its function is good. (4a)

As illustrated by the above examples, the comments were more likely to be attached on possession and especially the price, time of buying and function of the possession. As Examples 21 and 22 shown, respondents said that the phone is a new one which refers the short time of buying. Furthermore, Example 23 provides further description of the price of the phone. However, the participant No. 9 in Example 23 also suggested the complimenter to buy the phone, which means that the phone is very good in price and

function like Example 24.

3) Credit-shifting

This response strategy seems to be a bit less popular than *Commenting*. 34 (8.6%) responses of *Credit-shifting* were used by participants in the study. As Chen (1993) stated that *Credit-shifting* serves as a softener resolving the conflict between being cooperative while adhering to the Modesty Maxim.

Example 25:

No. 12: Yeah. You are welcome. (2a)

Example 26:

No. 16: Oh you are welcome. It's my pleasure. (2a)

Example 27:

No. 2: Oh welcome. (2a)

Example 28:

No. 17: Oh thank you. It's bought by my father. (4a)

Example 29:

No. 8: You are welcome (..) Because of your guidance my English can (.) get so well. (3a)

There are mainly two types of *Credit-shifting* in this study as shown in Examples 25-27 and 28-29. The Example 25 illustrates that the most credits were always attributed to the complimenter when the praise was given with appreciation such as 'Thank you'. When the participants received the praise because of their help to others, the central part of the

utterance from complimenter was the gratitude rather than the compliment. Therefore, the respondents would like to shift the credits back to the complimenter by using ‘*You are welcome; It’s my pleasure; Welcome*’. As explained by some participants that being welcome or 客气 (kèqì: being courteous in Chinese) is a good merit, therefore the participants tended to use ‘*You are welcome; It’s my pleasure; Welcome*’ to praise complimenters’ good manner of speaking ‘*Thank you*’ in compliments. Thus, the majority of the participants used expressions like ‘*You are welcome; It’s my pleasure; Welcome*’ to shift credits back to the complimenters. On the other hand, Example 28 indicates that the credits may also be shifted to someone within the family circle especially when the praise is paid on possessions. Some credits were also shifted to the lecturer in class to appreciate his/her help in participants’ study which is shown in Example 29.

4) Reassuring

The researcher found out that the participants employed this response strategy in 14 CRs (3.5%) in order to seek assurance because they did not completely believe in the compliment assertion. For instance, in Example 30, the respondent questioned the complimenter by asking ‘*Really?*’ to confirm the praise. ‘*Really*’ has been the most frequently used by participants to seek assurance, in addition, ‘*Is it*’ or ‘*Ya?*’ were also employed in a few cases. In Example 32, the modal particle ‘*Ya*’ was used with interrogative mood so it is classified as *Reassuring* strategy. All CRs strategies of *Reassuring* are followed by other strategies such as *Appreciation* (Example 30), *Smiling* (Example 31) or *Topic-shifting* (Example 32).

Example 30:

No. 5: Really? Thank you. (4b)

Example 31:

No.18: Oh is it? Thank you. (Smile). (2b)

Example 32:

No. 18: Oh ya? Thank you. Nice to meet you. (1b)

4) Topic-shifting

The data in the study shows that 8 responses (2%) given by the participants are strategies of *Topic-shifting* which were mainly used in the conditions with unfamiliar speakers. Examples are shown below.

Example 33:

No. 2: Oh thank you. Nice to meet you. (2b)

Example 34:

No. 8: En (..) thanks. You too. En (..) how is your day? (1b)

Example 35:

No. 9: Wow thank you. You look pretty nice too. Where did you get this shirt from?
(1a)

It can be seen that these responses were acted as openers of a new conversation. In Examples 33 and 34, regular greeting expressions of ‘Nice to meet you’ and ‘How is your day?’ were used by the participants to make new friends with the complimenter. In Example 35, the participant asked the purchase place of the shirt then a new

conversation about the shopping of the shirt may be begun. By using the strategies of *Topic-shifting*, the complimentees tried to begin a new conversation so that they were able to evade the direct responses to the compliments and continue the communication.

5) Offering

Offering was the least preferred strategy of *Evasion* by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. There were only 5 CRs including it (1.2%). Examples of *Offering* indicate that this strategy plays down the value of the praiseworthiness in the compliments and the participants tended to evade the praiseworthiness by offering something as CRs.

Example 36:

No. 8: Ah well, if you have any questions about your presentation, you can ask me

I can help you. (3b)

Example 37:

No. 10: Oh yes (...). Do you want to have a look. (4b)

Example 38:

No. 15: Yes (...) This is a new phone that I bought. And I would like to offer you to

look at it also. It has great functions. (4b)

Example 36 is the compliment response towards presentation of the participant and the respondent would like to offer the help as he wondered that the compliment giver has a problem for his presentation. Examples 37 and 38 are the compliment responses to possession of a smart phone, the reason why the respondents offered a chance of

checking out the phone is that they thought sharing something good with close friends was beneficial to their friendship.

4.1.1.3 Categories of Combination

In this section, the micro-level CRs strategies of *Combination* used by the participants will be discussed to explore more complex combined patterns in the use of CRs. At the macro level of *Combination* strategies which is shown in section 4.1.1, the participants preferred to employ *Combination* of *Acceptance + Evasion* and *Evasion + Acceptance*. Table 4.4-4.5 show the combined CRs patterns of *Acceptance + Evasion* and *Evasion + Acceptance* in which the CRs types were listed according to the frequency (1 to 20 in Table 4.4 / 1 to 10 in Table 4.5) in the data transcription. There are 20 combined CRs patterns of *Acceptance + Evasion*; moreover the number of combined CRs patterns of *Evasion + Acceptance* is 10. Therefore, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to use *Acceptance* strategies first in responding to compliments.

Among all the *Combination* strategies of *Acceptance + Evasion* used by the participants, *Appreciation + Giggling/Smiling* was the most used pattern (22 out of 64 of total responses of *Acceptance + Evasion* CRs). The more frequently used combined pattern was *Appreciation + Commenting* (11 out of 64 of total responses of *Acceptance + Evasion* CRs). All the other *Acceptance + Evasion* types are used less. In terms of the *Combination* strategies of *Evasion + Acceptance*, the most preferred combinational type was *Giggling/Smiling + Appreciation* (11 CRs out of 25 *Evasion + Acceptance* types). All the other types of *Evasion + Acceptance* are not frequently used (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.4: Combination of Acceptance and Evasion

CRs Strategies	Frequency
1: Appreciation+ Giggling/Smiling	22
2: Appreciation + Commenting	11
3: Appreciation + Credit-shifting	6
4: Appreciation + Commenting + Commenting	3
5: Appreciation + Appreciation + Giggling/Smiling	2
6: Appreciation + Qualifying + Giggling/Smiling	2
7: Returning + Giggling/Smiling	2
8: Appreciation + Returning	2
9: Appreciation + Returning + Topic-shifting	2
10: Agreeing + Commenting	1
11: Agreeing + Giggling/Smiling	1
12: Appreciation + Commenting	1
13: Appreciation + Commenting + Appreciation	1
14: Appreciation + Commenting + Appreciation	1
15: Appreciation + Giggling/Smiling + Qualifying	1
16: Appreciation + Offering	1
17: Appreciation + Qualifying + Giggling/Smiling	1
18: Appreciation + Topic-shifting	1
19: Commenting+ Giggling/Smiling	1
20: Downgrading + Commenting	1
Total frequency of CRs : 64	

Table 4.5: Combination of Evasion and Acceptance

CRs Strategies	Frequency
1: Giggling/Smiling+ Appreciation	11
2: Reassuring + Appreciation	3
3: Giggling/Smiling+ Downgrading	2
4: Reassuring + Appreciation	2
5: Reassuring + Appreciation + Giggling/Smiling	2
6: Giggling/Smiling + Returning	1
7: Reassuring + Appreciation + Topic-shifting	1
8: Reassuring + Downgrading	1
9: Reassuring + Qualifying	1
10: Reassuring + Returning	1
Total frequency of CRs : 25	

This finding shows that Malaysian Chinese had a stronger preference of combining *Appreciation* and *Giggling//Smiling* as compliment responses. Comparatively speaking, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were more likely to appreciate others first then giggled/smiled. The examples are given as bellows in which different micro-level strategies are separated by a slash (/):

Example 39:

No.7: *Oh thank you very much. / (Smile). (3b) (Appreciation + Smiling)*

Example 40:

No.16: *Thank you very much. / (Giggle). (1a) (Appreciation + Smiling)*

Example 41:

No 5: *Giggle. / Thank you. (1b) (Giggling + Appreciation)*

Example 42:

No. 10: *Smile. / Ok (..) Thank you. (1b) (Smiling + Appreciation)*

As shown in Examples 39-42, the participants preferred to use *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling* as combined types, which is consistent with the most preferred micro-level CRs shown in Table 4.2 and 4.4. However, the pattern of *Appreciation + Commenting* was also frequently used by the participants. It is found that all the *Appreciation* strategies of *Appreciation + Commenting* were ‘*Yeah*’ rather than ‘*Thank you; Thanks*’, however, ‘*Yeah*’ functions as ‘*Thank you*’ when it is classified as *Appreciation*. The examples are shown by Examples 43- 45.

Example 43:

No. 11: *Oh yeah (. .). / It's a really nice phone. (4a)*

(Appreciation + Commenting)

Example 44:

No. 19: Yeah (..) / This is a new phone. (4a)

(Appreciation + Commenting)

Example 45:

No. 16: Yeah (..) / It's also very cheap. / You can buy it and try it. (4b)

(Appreciation + Commenting + Commenting)

Among all the CRs of *Combination* type (91 in total), 74 responses were combined with two micro-level strategies (such as Examples 43-44), on the other hand, 17 responses consisted of 3 different CRs strategies (see Examples 45-47). As explained by the participants, they tended to follow the native English expressions when speaking English. They were taught in school that English is more direct and brief than Chinese. Therefore, the majority of the participants preferred to combine one *Acceptance* and one *Evasion* strategy as a *Combination* type thus to make their responses short and brief. In the Examples 46-47, the participants applied three different micro-level CRs strategies to respond to their complimenters. All the *Acceptance + Evasion* examples of three micro-level strategies begin with *Appreciation* then other strategies may be used to evade the praise.

Example 46:

No. 8: Ah thank you. / (Smile). / I actually prepared this like two hours. Yeah I have to actually pick so many cloth to pick the nice one because this is probably the last day we going to celebrate together. Because after this we are going back to

hometown and it won't be seeing each other anymore. (1a)

(Appreciation+ Smiling+ Qualifying)

Example 47:

No. 9: Wow thank you. / You look pretty nice too. / Where did you get this shirt from?

(3a) (Appreciation+ Returning +Topic-shifting)

However, in terms of the *Evasion + Acceptance* strategies, there were only three responses consisting of three micro-level CRs strategies, namely, *Reassuring + Appreciation + Topic-shifting* and *Reassuring + Appreciation + Smiling* (shown in Examples 48-49). Both *Combination* CRs begin with *Reassuring* to express their doubt about the compliments. It means that the participants preferred to give more strategies after the reassurance of the reality of the compliments.

Example 48:

o.18: Oh ya? / Thank you. / Nice to meet you. (1b)

(Reassuring + Appreciation + Topic-shifting)

Example 49:

No.18: Oh is it? / Thank you. / (Smile). (2b)

(Reassuring + Appreciation + Smiling)

There were only two CRs of *Combination* including *Rejection* (see Table 4.6), namely *Reassuring + Rejection + Appreciation* and *Rejection + Giggling/Smiling*. The examples indicate that the participants tended not to use *Rejection* solely; instead, it was used with other *Acceptance* or *Evasion* strategies. Participant 17 responded with ‘*Oh is*

it? I don't think so (...) But anyway thank you so much' in situation 4b with familiar friend. Another participant (No. 25) responded with '*En I not think so. (Giggle)*' to unfamiliar friend in situation 1b. Therefore, the participants in this study tended to reduce the meaning of rejection by using other strategies such as *Appreciation* and *Smiling*.

Table 4.6: Combination with Rejection

CRs Strategies	Frequency
1: Reassuring + Rejection + Appreciation	1
2: Rejection + Giggling/Smiling	1
Total frequency of CRs : 2	

Cheng's (2011) macro-level CRs of *Combination* were the combination of CRs strategies of *Acceptance* and *Evasion*. Nevertheless, the participants in this study also applied a large number of combined CRs strategies belonging to the same macro level, for instance *Acceptance* + *Acceptance* or *Evasion* + *Evasion*. Hence, the analysis of combined CRs pattern of *Acceptance* + *Acceptance* (+ *Acceptance*) and *Evasion* + *Evasion* (+ *Evasion*) is shown in Table 4.7-4.8.

Table 4.7: Combined Pattern of Acceptance and Acceptance

CRs Strategies	Frequency
1: Appreciation + Returning	12
2: Appreciation + Qualifying	10
3: Appreciation + Appreciation	2
4: Downgrading + Appreciation	2
5: Agreeing + Appreciation	1
6: Agreeing + Appreciation + Appreciation	1
7: Appreciation + Agreeing	1
8: Appreciation + Appreciation + Returning	1
9: Downgrading + Downgrading	1
Total frequency of CRs : 31	

Table 4.8 shows CRs patterns of *Acceptance + Acceptance* used by the participants. It is clearly shown that the preference of the participants is in the order of *Appreciation + Returning* and *Appreciation + Qualifying*. It illustrates that the Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to begin with *Appreciation* strategies in combined CRs of *Acceptance + Acceptance*. Two of the most preferred patterns of *Acceptance + Acceptance* are shown in Examples 50-54.

Example 50:

No. 15: *Oh thank you. / (...) You too. (1a) (Appreciation + Returning)*

Example 51:

No. 13: *Thank you. / You can do it. (3b) (Appreciation + Returning)*

Example 52:

No. 9: *Thank you. / I think you have a very nice hair-cut. (1b)*

(Appreciation + Returning)

Example 53:

No. 9: Thank you. / I believe the English proficiency is very important. (3a)

(Appreciation + Qualifying)

Example 54:

No. 17: Thank you. / I just be prepared well. (3a)

(Appreciation + Qualifying)

In terms of CRs of *Appreciation + Returning*, the participants used ‘*You too*’ as the most typical responses which just return the compliments to the complimenter like in Example 50. In the meantime, in the responses to the compliments on ability, the participants tended to return a good wish to complimenter by using expressions like ‘*You can do it*’. Besides, some participants also directly complimented the complimenter’s appearance as shown in Example 52. CRs of *Appreciation + Qualifying* were mostly used to respond to the compliments on their study in which the participants tended to qualify the reason why they did the presentation well (Examples 53 - 54). Moreover, this type of CRs was also used on other topics with lower frequency.

Table 4.8: Combination of Evasion and Evasion

CRs Strategies	Frequency
1: Credit-shifting + Topic-shifting	3
2: Commenting + Commenting	2
3: Commenting + Giggling/Smiling	2
4: Credit-shifting + Credit-shifting	2
5: Reassuring + Giggling/Smiling	2
6: Credit-shifting + Commenting	1
7: Giggling/Smiling + Returning	1
Total frequency of CRs : 13	

Table 4.8 shows that the combined patterns of *Evasion + Evasion* were applied not much (13 responses). There was no pattern commonly used and all the patterns were used 1 to 3 times. Generally speaking, more patterns beginning with *Credit-shifting* were found in *Evasion + Evasion* as shown by Examples 55-57.

Example 55:

No. 7: *You are welcome. / That's my pleasure. (2a)*

(Credit-shifting + Credit-shifting)

Example 56:

No. 23: *Ok (.) Welcome. / Nice to see you. (2a)*

(Credit-shifting + Topic-shifting)

Example 57:

No. 30: *En you are welcome. / This is just a part of our nature to be helpful. (2a)*

(Credit-shifting + Commenting)

4.1.1.4 Categories of Rejection

There are 3 responses (0.7%) showing semantic meaning of rejection according to the data analysis. All these three responses of rejection are provided for further discussion.

Example 58:

No. 13: (...) Ya it is not really nice. (4a)

Example 59:

No. 17: *Oh is it? I don't think so (...) But anyway thank you so much. (4b)*

Example 60:

No.25: En I not think so. (Giggle). (1b)

In these three cases, the respondents put forth their direct disagreement with the complimenter on the praiseworthiness of the objects being complimented. In Example 58, the respondent gave the negative comment on the phone to reject the praise. The respondents in Example 59 applied *Combination* by doubting the reality of the compliments at first then he rejected it and showed appreciation to the complimenter, meanwhile, No.17 also showed embarrassment by pausing for a while after the rejection. Although No. 25 used non-standard English to respond in Example 60, it showed clear intention of rejection.

4.1.1.5 Compliment Responses and Academic Background

In order to gain a better understanding of CRs strategies of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, the significant variations of CRs between participants in arts & social science and science & technology will be discussed in this section.

It is worth noting that participants in arts & social science majors applied more *Combination* (42%) than *Acceptance* (35%), *Evasion* (22%) and *Rejection* (1%), moreover, the participants majoring in science & technology preferred to use more *Acceptance* (51%) than *Combination* (29%) and *Evasion* (20%). It shows that participants in science & technology studies tended to accept the compliments than students in arts & social science studies that preferred to combine *Acceptance* with *Evasion* as CRs. In terms of *Combination*, both students in arts & social science and science & technology studies preferred *Acceptance* + *Evasion*. Moreover, participants in science & technology majors showed a stronger preference to *Acceptance* + *Evasion*

(71%) than participants in arts & social science studies (43%).

Table 4.9: Micro CRs between Participants in Arts & Social Science and Science & Technology

Micro CRs	Arts & Social Science		Science & Technology	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Acceptance	136	54%	87	60%
Evasion	113	45%	50	34%
Rejection	2	1%	1	1%

With regards to macro CRs strategies shown in Table 4.9, the participants in arts & social science and science & technology seem to have similar inclinations. Both participants majoring in in arts & social science and science & technology subjects chose *Acceptance* as their most favorable strategies among three macro responses types, which was followed by *Evasion*. Nevertheless, participants in science & technology were more likely to accept the compliments by using simple and brief expression like ‘*Thank you*’ than participants in arts, in another word, participants in arts also applied more expressions to deflect or evade the compliments than participants in science. With regard to study background, first of all, most of the micro CRs fell into the *Appreciation* categories indicating once again that it was the most preferred strategy among all the micro-level CRs strategies. Furthermore, the participants in science & technology (49%) applied more *Appreciation* than participants in arts & social science (39%), which illustrates that participants in science & technology studies were more inclined to expressing gratitude to compliments in the communications. With further analysis of *Giggling/Smiling*, it has been found that participants in the majors of arts & social science (18%) were more prone to giggling/smiling at complimenters than participants in science & technology (11%). The result is in line with the level of English

proficiency between two groups which means 67% participants of total in arts & social science achieved band 3-4 while 41% of all in science & technology got band 3-4. Therefore the finding shows that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in arts & social science studies face a greater issue of lacking English proficiency than their peers in science & technology so more giggling/smiling has been used by them in responding to compliments.

Generally speaking, the participants tended to use brief expressions as compliment responses. There are two reasons given by the participants to account for this phenomenon. First, the participants were taught English since primary schools and they believed that English language is brief and straightforward. Second, the CRs of the participants were greatly influenced by their English proficiency, for instance, a large amount of *Giggling/Smiling* was made by the participants when they did not know what to say in some situations (see section 4.1.1.2).

Based on the data transcription (see Appendix E), the participants 7. 8. 9. 14 and 30 have employed more elaborate compliment responses. The examples taken from the participants 7, 8, 9, 14 and 30 are shown below:

Example 61:

No.7: Oh ya (..) that's my en (..) that's my pleasure. (2b) (Credit-shifting)

Example 62:

No.8: Ah thank you. / (Smile). / I actually prepared this like two hours. Yeah I have to actually pick so many cloths to pick the nice one because this is probably the last

day we going to celebrate together because after this we are going back to hometown and it won't be seeing each other anymore. (1a)

(Appreciation + Smiling + Qualifying)

Example 63:

No. 9: Oh thank you very much. / I hope I manage to help you to carry out these books. (2a) (Appreciation + Qualifying)

Example 64:

No. 14: Ok (..) Thank you. / I hope you can do a great job as well. (3b)

(Appreciation + Returning)

Example 65:

No. 30: Yeah. / This is Iphone 6S leastest in the market now even though yet the price is 2000 plus but then you get multi-functions. It's a good phone. (4a)

(Appreciation + Commenting + Commenting)

The above examples are typical CRs used by the participants (No. 7. 8. 9. 14. 30) who tended to employ more lengthy and elaborate compliment responses. First, they have made longer CRs than other participants. Then, they used more combined CRs patterns as shown in Examples 61–65. According to Table 3.3, the participants 7, 8 and 9 were from arts & social science studies while the participants 14 and 30 were studying in science & technology majors. It is worth noting that all those five participants' MUET scores were beyond band 3, which means that all of them are competent users who can use satisfactory expressive, fluent and appropriate English language. On the whole, they have a higher English proficiency so that lengthy and elaborate English CRs were

generated. However, by comparing their MUET scores and CRs, the researcher found out that the CRs of participants 7 and 14 were shorter than participants 8, 9 and 30. Especially there were more pauses, gutturalness or interjection in the CRs of participants 7 and 14, which rarely exist in the CRs of participants 8, 9 and 30. Following examples show the shortness (Examples 66-67) and pause (underlined) (Examples 68-69) in the CRs of participants 7 and 14.

Example 66:

No. 7: Thank you. (1a) (Appreciation)

Example 67:

No. 14: (Smile). (2b) (Smiling)

Example 68:

No.7: Oh ya (..) that's my en (..) that's my pleasure. (2b) (Credit-shifting)

Example 69:

No. 14: Ok (..) / Thanks for the compliment and suggestions. (3a) (Appreciation)

The difference among CRs between the participants 7 and 14, and participants 8, 9 and 30 may be caused by their different level of English proficiency. The participants 7 and 14 reached band 4 in MUET, on the other hand, the participant 8 got band 5, participants 9 and 30 got band 6. It means that the participants 7 and 14 had a lower English proficiency than participant 8, especially 9 and 30. Thus the participants 7 and 14 may make pauses or minor inaccuracies in speaking, on the contrary, the participants 8, 9 and 30 with band 5 or 6 are identified as very good English users whose English is highly expressive, fluent, accurate and appropriate in speaking. Thus it can be seen that

the participants' English proficiency is greatly influencing their compliment responses in which higher proficient speakers are able to use more accurate, fluent and elaborate CRs, however, the respondents with lower proficient English may employ shorter, brief and disfluent responses to compliments.

4.1.1.6 Discussion and Summary of Generic Analysis of CRs

The analysis of the data shows that the majority of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates employed *Acceptance* strategy in responding to compliments. This finding is in line with studies of Chen (2003), Tang & Zhang (2009), Cheng (2011) and Lee (2015) who found the similarly strong preference of accepting the compliments among Taiwanese Mandarin-Chinese, Mainland Mandarin-Chinese, Chinese ESL speakers from People's Republic of China and Singapore Chinese university students.

The second most preferred macro pattern was *Combination* which was mainly of the type: *Acceptance + Evasion*. The participants had a stronger preference of combining *Appreciation* and *Giggling//Smiling* as compliment responses in *Acceptance + Evasion*. Similarly, *Giggling/Smiling + Appreciation* was the most preferred combinational type under *Evasion + Acceptance*. Comparatively speaking, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were more likely to appreciate others first then showed a giggling/smiling. Thirdly, a number of recipients also chose to apply macro pattern of *Evasion* to avoid direct acceptance of compliments. Nevertheless, participants did not favor *Rejection* much as only 0.7% of responses show disagreement with the compliments, which is far less than previous studies of Chen (1993), Thevendiraraj

(2006), Tang & Zhang (2009), etc. The finding of *Rejection* shows difference with Tamil communities (Thevendiraraj, 2006) in Malaysia, in which Malaysian Tamil performed rejections in CRs especially women rejected more. Another difference is between Malaysian Chinese and Cheng's (2011) mainland Chinese participants who did not show any rejections at all. However, the finding is in line with Tang and Zhang (2009) who discovered that Mandarin Chinese applied least *Rejection* as their CRs. In the view of study-specific variation, participants in arts preferred to use *Combination* (*Acceptance* + *Evasion*) most than sole *Acceptance* or *Evasion*, however, participants in science studies still preferred *Acceptance* most.

Other than the CRs framework of Cheng (2011), there were no CRs strategies of Non-idiomatic and ignoring in this study which means all participants responded to compliments and used idiomatic English. Among all the micro CRs strategies in this study, the most favorable response type was *Appreciation*, which consents with the Chinese ESL speakers in Cheng (2011) and Malay undergraduates in Farnia & Suleiman (2009) who considered acceptance expressions like '*thank you*' or '*thanks*' as the 'safest' respondents to compliments. As elaborated by Thevendiraraj (2006), the respondents agreed that they appreciate the praises while may not consider the credits attributed as truth. This result is in accordance with investigations of CRs studies by mainland Chinese, especially those done after 2000 (Yuan, 2001; Chen, 2003; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Chen & Yang, 2010).

The second most favorable type was *Giggling/Smiling*. This finding of *Giggling/Smiling* strategy is similar to Kuang et al (2011), in which they found Malays also used a few of non-verbal expressions like ‘smiling’ when they interact. *Giggling/Smiling* was frequently used due to its function of showing politeness as well as offsetting the limitation of English proficiency in Malaysian Chinese community. For the participants in arts & social science and sciences & technology, participants in science applied more *Appreciation* than participants in arts, nevertheless, recipients in arts & technology tended to make more *Giggling/Smiling* than undergraduates in science & technology.

There was no significant difference between the third frequent CRs *Commenting* and the following *Credit-shifting*, *Returning*. The data also reveals that less popularity was attached to the strategies of *Qualifying*, *Reassuring*, *Agreeing*, *Downgrading* and *Topic-shifting*. The least preferred strategies for Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were *Offering* and *Rejection*.

4.1.2 Analysis of Compliment Responses on Subjects

In order to gain more in-depth insights of CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in different social circumstances, the factors of social distance and social status were considered in the study which has been organized into four distinct subjects, namely, appearance, character, ability and possession. This section will report the CRs employed by participants regarding to different social distance and status.

4.1.2.1 Compliment Responses on Appearance

It has been shown that a number of compliments were paid on appearance during the daily communications (Fukushima, 1990). In this study, the participants need to respond to the compliments paid on their appearance from two interlocutors in situation 1a and 1b. In situation 1a, there is a familiar lecturer whose social distance is close but social status is higher than the participants', in contrast in situation 1b, an unfamiliar new friend who is socially distant and whose social status is equal to the participants' is involved. The Situation 1 is shown as follows:

Situation 1 Appearance (The outward or visible aspect of a person or thing)

a.

Your lecturer (whom you are familiar with) organized a party to celebrate the end of examination (task). You have dressed up for the party. You arrive at the party.

Your lecturer says: "You look so nice today!"

Your response:

b.

You greet your good friends. They introduce a new friend (unfamiliar) to you.

The new friend says: "Hey, you look great! You are really beautiful (handsome) today!"

Your response:

Table 4.10: Micro-Level CRs for Appearance

CRs Strategy	Situation 1a		Situation 1b		Situation 1	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
ACCEPTANCE						
Appreciation	31	60%	24	43.6%	55	51%
Agreeing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Downgrading	0	0	0	0	0	0
Qualifying	2	4%	0	0	2	2%
Returning	4	8%	12	21.8%	16	15%
EVASION						
Credit-shifting	0	0	0	0	0	0
Commenting	0	0	0	0	0	0
Reassuring	2	4%	4	7.3%	6	6%
Offering	0	0	0	0	0	0
Giggling/Smiling	11	22%	9	16.4%	20	19%
Topic-shifting	1	2%	5	9.1%	6	6%
REJECTION						
Rejection	0	0	1	1.8%	1	1%
Total	51	100%	55	100%	106	100%

A total of 60 responses were generated by the respondents, which were further clarified into 106 micro-level CRs strategies in the overall situation 1 (shown in Table 4.10), 51 in 1a and 55 in 1b respectively. The data reveals that the micro strategies of *Agreeing*, *Downgrading*, *Commenting*, *Credit-shifting*, *Commenting* and *Offering* have not been used by participants in the situation 1.

In all CRs strategies on appearance, 55 CRs out of 106 were *Appreciation* that takes the largest proportion (51%). *Giggling/Smiling* was another popular strategy (19%) used by participants when receiving the praise on appearance. However, respondents were more likely to show smiling or giggling after other strategies. The respondents also indirectly returned compliments to compliment givers by *Returning* (15%).

The frequency of *Reassuring* and *Topic-shifting* was the same, 6% of total. In the situation 1, the least strategies used by the participants are *Qualifying* (2%) and *Rejection* (1%). Therefore, as a whole, it seems that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates tended to accept compliments on appearance as their *Acceptance* strategies are up to 66% (*Appreciation*, *Returning*).

Figure 4.2 shows the difference between the CRs strategies in situation 1a and 1b. In all the figures (Figure 4.2-4.5) about micro-level CRs, the micro-level CRs strategies are coded by serial numbers: 1: *Appreciation*; 2: *Agreeing*; 3: *Downgrading*; 4: *Qualifying*; 5: *Returning*; 6: *Credit-shifting*; 7: *Commenting*; 8: *Reassuring*; 9: *Offering*; 10: *Giggling/Smiling*; 11: *Topic-shifting*; 12: *Rejection*. *Appreciation* is the most preferred type among all the strategies in two sub-situations. However, there are more *Appreciations* (60%) used in situation 1a than situation 1b (43.6%). The participants in the study typically responded to the interlocutors by expressing ‘*Thank you*’ to show gratitude no matter who the complimenter was, which are illustrated by examples of 70 and 71.

Example 70:

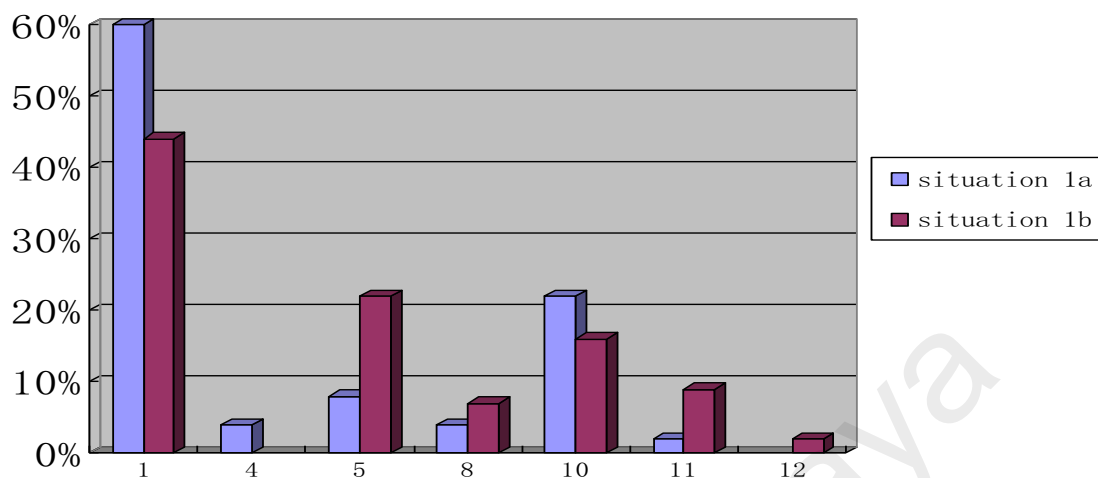
No. 2: *Oh thank you.* (1a)

Example 71:

No. 2: *Oh thank you.* *Nice to meet you.* (1b)

Appreciation strategies give great predominance to the agreements with the compliments and show less emphasis on the modesty issue in responding to the praise

on appearance.



1: Appreciation 4: Qualifying 5: Returning 8: Reassuring
10: Giggling/Smiling 11: Topic-shifting 12: Rejection

Figure 4.2: Micro-Level CRs for Appearance

In terms of *Returning*, there were fewer applications (8%) in situation 1a than 1b (21.8%) as shown in Examples 72 and 73.

Example 72:

No 1: Wow you too. (Smile). (1a)

Example 73:

No. 3: Oh you too. You are very handsome. (Giggle). (1b)

Obviously, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were more likely to return the compliments on appearance of the interlocutors who are unfamiliar, especially new friends.

There was no significant difference of *Reassuring* between situation 1a and 1b, as 4% and 7.3% in each sub-situation. As mentioned by the respondents, they would like to seek the affirmation when they were given praise on appearance from strangers as they did not confirm the intentions of the speakers.

Example 74:

No. 23: Oh really? Thank you. (1a)

Example 75:

No. 29: Oh really? (Giggle). (1b)

Although participants may reassure the compliments, they frequently applied brief expressions such as ‘*Really*’ with pleasant intonation which indicated that most of the participants did not perceive the compliments on appearance as face threatening, therefore, short responses were more likely to be used.

For recipients, no matter whether the compliment payer was a close person with higher status or unfamiliar friend, they would like to smile or lightly giggle at him/her after hearing the compliments on appearance. Nevertheless, 22% CRs in situation 1a belonged to *Giggling/Smiling*, which is higher than situation 1b (16.4%).

It is interesting to notice that *Qualifying*, a strategy that was not used by speakers in situation 1b was applied twice in situation 1a (4%). The Examples of 76 and 77 as following illustrate that participants tended to justify their good appearance with familiar speakers.

Example 76:

No. 8: *Ah thank you. (Smile). I actually prepared this like two hours. Yeah I have to actually pick so many cloth to pick the nice one because this is probably the last day we going to celebrate together. Because after this we are going back to hometown and it won't be seeing each other anymore.* (1a)

Example 77:

No 30: *Wow thanks Doctor. This party is a memorable one because it celebrates the end of examination, so I think I should dress well.* (1a)

There was only one occurrence of *Topic-shifting* in situation 1a as shown in Example 78, however, 5 occurrences of *Topic-shifting* (9.1%) in situation 1b were found such as 'Nice to meet you' in Example 79. Obviously, respondents tended to shift topics more with new friends than familiar communicators.

Example 78:

No. 9: *Wow thank you. You look pretty nice too. Where did you get this shirt from?*
(1a)

Example 79:

No. 14: *Yeah. Nice to meet you.* (1b)

Generally speaking, *Rejection* was not a popular strategy used by participants when facing compliments on appearance, moreover, in situation 1b, a female rejected the complimenter by disagreeing the whole compliment in Example 80 as she thought the words were not true.

Example 80:

No 25: En I not think so. (Giggle). (1b)

The respondent in the above example rejected the credit attributed in the praise because she believed the content was not a description of fact and it was only used for flattering herself. The respondent further commented that such a compliment may sound offensive so she felt a bit of embarrassed.

4.1.2.2 Compliment Responses on Character

In situation 2, participants are complimented on their helpfulness. The participants need to respond to compliments from an office staff whose social distance is far and social status is higher than the participants in situation 2a; in situation 2b, the complimenter is a close friend of the participant. The Situation 2 is shown as follows:

Situation 2 Character (The combination of traits and qualities distinguishing the individual nature of a person or thing)

a.

You and your best friend meet an office staff (whom you are unfamiliar with) in the hallway carrying some files. You help her (him) to take files to her (his) office.

The officer says: “Thank you so much, you are really a helpful and caring person.”

Your response:

b.

You and your friend get out of the office. She/He smiles at you.

She (he) says: “Wow! You like helping others. You are so kind and caring!”

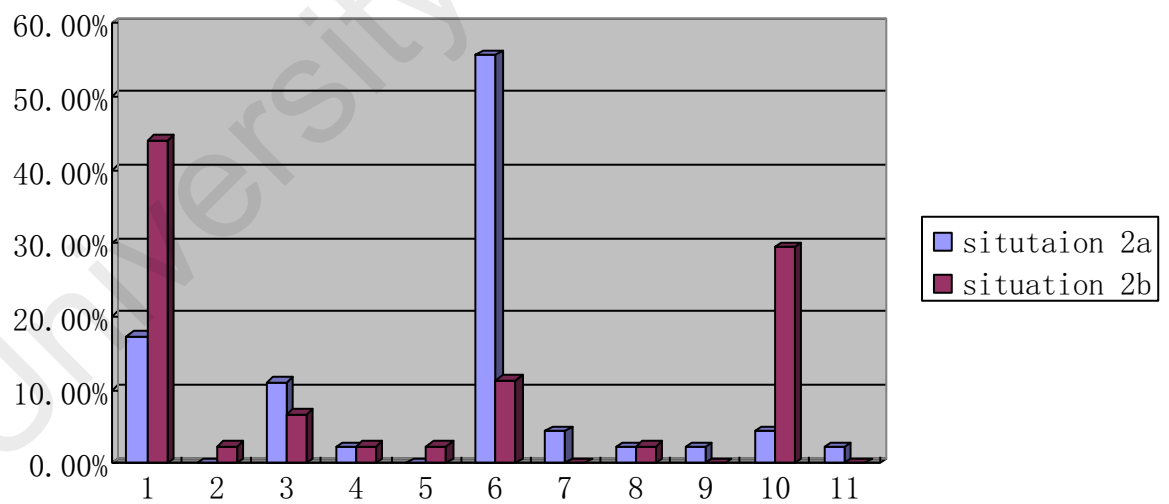
Your response:

As shown in Table 4.11, there were 60 responses consisting of 89 CRs strategies in situation 2. The result of the analysis firstly reveals that the most preferred strategy used by Malaysian Chinese is *Credit-shifting* with 30 CRs (33.7%), where the respondents would like to shift the credits back to the compliment giver by expressing ‘*You are welcome*’ or ‘*Welcome*’.

Table 4.11: Micro-Level CRs for Character

CRs Strategy	Situation 2a		Situation 2b		Situation 2	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
ACCEPTANCE						
Appreciation	7	15.7%	19	43.1%	26	29.3%
Agreeing	0	0	1	2.3%	1	1.1%
Downgrading	5	11.1%	3	6.8%	8	9.0%
Qualifying	1	2.2%	1	2.3%	2	2.2%
Returning	0	0	1	2.3%	1	1.1%
EVASION						
Credit-shifting	25	55.6%	5	11.4%	30	33.7%
Commenting	2	4.4%	0	0	2	2.2%
Reassuring	1	2.2%	1	2.3%	2	2.2%
Offering	1	2.2%	0	0	1	1.1%
Giggling/Smiling	2	4.4%	13	29.5%	15	17.0%
Topic-shifting	1	2.2%	0	0	1	1.1%
REJECTION						
Rejection	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	45	100%	44	100%	89	100%

It is obvious to conclude that when recipients responded to the interlocutors in situation 2, they would place more emphasis on the gratitude to the complimenters rather than the praise on their good manner, which is a common way to avoid self-praise. *Appreciation* was also frequently applied by respondents as its proportion is 29.3%. *Giggling/Smiling*, 17.0% of total micro-level CRs in situation 2, has been used less than the above two strategies. However, 9 % of all micro-level CRs are classified as *Downgrading* in the data. It is interesting to note that the employment of *Qualifying*, *Commenting*, and *Reassuring* are the same, 2.2% for each which is only higher than *Agreeing*, *Returning*, *Offering* and *Topic-shifting* (1.1% for each strategy). In addition, strategies of *Rejection* have not been used at all by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in neither situation 2a nor 2b.



1: Appreciation 2: Agreeing 3: Downgrading 4: Qualifying 5: Returning
 6: Credit-shifting 7: Commenting 8: Reassuring 9: Offering 10: Giggling/Smiling
 11: Topic-shifting

Figure 4.3: Micro-level CRs for Character

The variation of CRs is more significant in this situation as shown in Figure 4.3. The first difference was *Credit-shifting* to which participants showed strong preference (55.6%) by shifting the credit back to the complimenter in situation 2a, in contrary, this strategy was less generated in situation 2b (11.4%). Typical examples of this type of responses are shown in Examples 81 and 82.

Example 81:

No 1: You are welcome. (2a)

Example 82:

No. 9: Wow thank you. My parents always tell me to care about others. (2b)

Example 81 shows that, in the face of strangers, Malaysian Chinese were used to replying ‘*You are welcome/Welcome*’ if the compliments were paid on their personality when they offered help or friendly behaviors to others, in another word, they paid more emphasis to the gratitude from the interlocutors rather than the content of compliments. In the rest circumstances, they also transferred the credits to their parents like in Example 82.

In situation 2a, the respondents also used *Appreciation* (15.7%), while in the counter situation 2b, this pattern of CRs is largely used (43.1%) which was the most favorable strategy. It is illustrated by Examples 83-84.

Example 83:

No. 3: Oh thank you. Welcome. (2a)

Example 84:

No. 3: En thank you. (Giggle). (2b)

As shown in Example 83, the *Appreciation* of ‘Thank you’ was used by respondents before the strategy of *Credit-shifting*. However, in situation 2b, more brief *Appreciation* CRs are utilized. The distributions of *Giggling/Smiling* also indicate significant distinction between two sub-situations, respondents in situation 2a only used this strategy by 4.4%, however, 29.5% in situation 2b.

Within situation 2, only 1 response (2.3%) including *Returning* in situation 2b. As shown in Example 85, ‘You too’ means that the respondent believes the complimenter is also warmhearted and helpful, which is clearly returning the praise. The strategy of *Agreeing* was also used for once in situation 2b by ‘Yes’ which was shown by Example 86.

Example 85:

No. 19: Yeah. Thank you. You too. (2b)

Example 86:

No. 10: Oh, (Smile). Yes. (2b)

Likely, there were two strategies used by the participants only in situation 2a, namely, *Commenting* (4.4%) and *Topic-shifting* (2.2%). Examples are given as following 87-88.

Example 87:

No. 29: Oh it's ok. Just isn't busy. (2a)

Example 88:

No. 8: *En welcome. Nice to meet you.* (2a)

As shown in Example 87, the response of *Commenting* is about the explanation of the help. With regard to *Topic-shifting*, respondent of No.8 changed the topic by greeting the unfamiliar officer in Example 89 to begin further communication.

The participants employed almost equal proportion of *Qualifying* and *Reassuring* in situation 2a and 2b, 2% of *Qualifying* in situation 2a and 2.3% in 2b. In terms of *Reassuring*, 2.2% was used by respondents in 2a and 2.3% in 2b, which are presented by Examples 89 and 90.

Example 89:

No. 8: *Ah (.) because I was taught that way since I was young.* (2b)

Example 90:

No. 20: *Oh really? Ok. Thanks. (Giggle).* (2a)

In both sub-situations especially 2b with close friend, participants showed their comfort with the compliments on personality, giving rise to the interpretation that they valued being praised with regards to their personality traits. When received compliments from a stranger with higher social status, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates would like to shift credits back to the complimenter or sometimes to their parents, which was not shown frequently with close friend. Another popular responding pattern was *Giggling/Smiling* to their close friends after compliments on their good character, which

rarely occurred with unfamiliar complimenters.

4.1.2.3 Compliment Responses on Ability

Ability and skills are highly valued by most societies across the world. In situation 3 of this study, compliments are given to the respondents based on their success in presentation, which is regarded as a good ability of university students. Two different compliment givers existed in situation 3a and 3b. Compliments are given after the presentation in a class by a lecturer whose social status is higher while familiar with the compliment receiver in situation 3a, and then another compliment is given by an unfamiliar student who is socially equal to the respondent in situation 3b. The Situation 3 is shown below:

Situation 3 Ability (The qualities required to do something)

a.

You have completed a presentation. After that your lecturer (whom you are familiar with) gives you immediate feedback.

She (he) says: “Well done, your English is very good. And your presentation is well-organized. Thank you.”

Your response:

b.

You go back to your seat. After you have completed your presentation, one of your classmates (whom you are unfamiliar with) smiles at you.

The classmate says: “Wow, that’s brilliant! I hope I can do it the way you did. Well done!”

Your response:

Table 4.12: Micro-Level CRs for Ability

CRs Strategy	Situation 3a		Situation 3b		Situation 3	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
ACCEPTANCE						
Appreciation	30	68.2%	19	40.4%	49	53.8%
Agreeing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Downgrading	0	0	0	0	0	0
Qualifying	8	18.2%	0	0	8	8.8%
Returning	0	0	8	17.1%	8	8.8%
EVASION						
Credit-shifting	2	4.5%	0	0	2	2.2%
Commenting	0	0	1	2.1%	1	1.1%
Reassuring	1	2.3%	0	0	1	1.1%
Offering	0	0	1	2.1%	1	1.1%
Giggling/Smiling	3	6.8%	17	36.2%	20	22.0%
Topic-shifting	0	0	1	2.1%	1	1.1%
REJECTION						
Rejection	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	44	100%	47	100%	91	100%

Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, as shown in Table 4.12, replied with 91 CRs strategies. The most repeated strategy used by them was *Appreciation* (53.8%). The secondly used strategy was *Giggling/Smiling* (22%). Both strategies of *Qualifying* and *Returning* were applied equally in responding to compliments on ability (8.8%). The strategies of *Credit-shifting* were less popular in situation 3 (only 2.2%). According to the data, four CRs strategies, namely, *Commenting*, *Reassuring*, *Offering* and *Topic-shifting* were equally used in this situation with proportion (1.1%). Moreover, no one rejected the compliments on the ability.

It can be deduced from the analysis that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in this study gave emphasis to their personal efforts and achievements; hence, the clear *Appreciation*

of the praise for presentation was used mostly as depicted in Examples 91-92.

Example 91:

No. 3: Thank you, teacher. (3a)

Example 92:

No. 7: Oh thank you very much. (Smile). (3b)

As demonstrated in Example 91, the respondents were more likely to accept the compliments from the familiar lecturer by using more expressions like ‘*Thank you*’ (68.2%), in contrary, they chose this strategy less with the classmate whom they did not know much (40.4%).

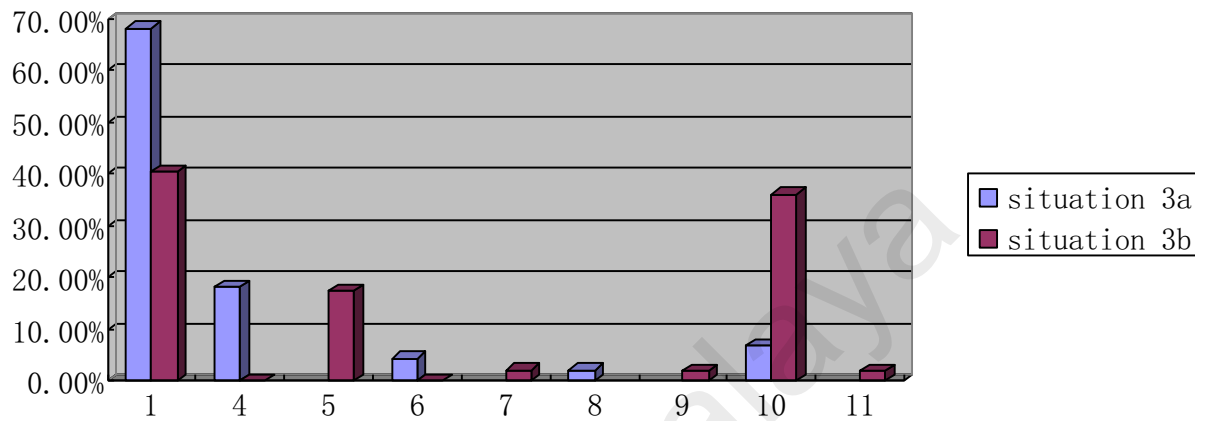
As mentioned earlier, *Giggling/Smiling* was the second most favorable strategy in this situation. However, the respondents in situation 3a (6.8%) giggled/smiled far less than in situation 3b (36.2%). In situation 3a, most respondents only appreciated it by using ‘*Thank you*’, nevertheless, as shown in Examples 93 and 94, they often combined *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling* as a response or only showed *Giggling/Smiling*. According to the explanations of the participants, they believed that they had to appreciate the compliments if their work or efforts were confirmed by others, and giggling/smiling should be the easiest way of showing appreciation to someone unfamiliar.

Example 93:

No. 10: (Smile). *Thank you*. (3b)

Example 94:

No. 12: (Smile). (3b)



1: Appreciation 4: Qualifying 5: Returning 6: Credit-shifting 7: Commenting
8: Reassuring 9: Offering 10: Giggling/ Smiling 11: Topic-shifting

Figure 4.4: Micro-level CRs for Ability

Yet, surprisingly with the distribution of the CRs in situation 3 shown in Figure 4.4, the CRs of *Qualifying*, *Credit-shifting* and *Reassuring* only appeared in situation 3a in which the compliments were given by a lecturer, therefore, the respondents never used these strategies to respond to unfamiliar classmate. The strategies of *Qualifying* took up 18.2% of total in situation 3a, in which the main expression was the wish to improve the presentation and make it better as illustrated in Example 95. Another strategy used only once in situation 3a was *Credit-shifting* that is mainly shifting appreciation to the lecturer (Example 96), which occupies 4.5% of all in situation 3a. *Reassuring* was employed only once (2.3%) by asking ‘*Really*’ in Example 97.

Example 95:

No. 7: *Thank you very much. I will improve myself.* (3a)

Example 96:

No. 8: *You are welcome. Because of your guidance, my English can (.) get so well.*

(3a)

Example 97:

No. 1: *Really? Thanks.* (3a)

Strategies of *Returning*, *Commenting*, *Offering* and *Topic-shifting* were only found in situation 3b. Among all these four types, *Returning* was used most (17.1%), which was the third popular strategy in situation 3b and typically illustrated by Example 98. With reference of *Commenting*, *Offering* and *Topic-shifting*, the use was only once for each as shown by Examples 99-101.

Example 98:

No. 13: *Thank you. You can do it.* (3b)

Example 99:

No. 30: *You put great efforts, you get good result.* (3b)

Example 100:

No. 8: *Ah well, if you have any questions about your presentation,
you can ask me I can help you.* (3b)

Example 101:

No. 29: *Ya, good luck.* (3b)

It is evident that the variation of CRs strategies between situation 3a and 3b is huge as participants obviously chose certain responses to respond to their interlocutors. The CRs

of *Qualifying*, *Credit-shifting* and *Reassuring* were used equally when the compliments were given by a speaker whose social status was higher and close, which would not be used with someone they did not know much. With the speakers owning same social status, the participants were more likely to use strategies of *Returning*, *Commenting*, *Offering* and *Topic-shifting*.

4.1.2.4 Compliment Responses on Possession

In situation 4, compliments are paid to a smart phone of the respondents. Two different complimenters are set in situation 4a and 4b. Firstly, an unfamiliar father of a close friend in 4a, then a close friend in 4b. The Situation 4 is shown as follows:

Situation 4 Possession (Anything that is owned or possessed)

a.

You have bought a new mobile phone. When you visit your close friend's family for the first time, your friend's father (whom you are unfamiliar with) notices your mobile phone.

He says: "Your phone looks very nice. I believe it is a good phone!"

Your response:

b.

When you receive a call, your close friend notices that your phone is a new one. Your friend looks at it and tries some functions.

She (he) says: "Wow, how smart! It looks so nice. My phone doesn't have such functions. It is really great!"

Your response:

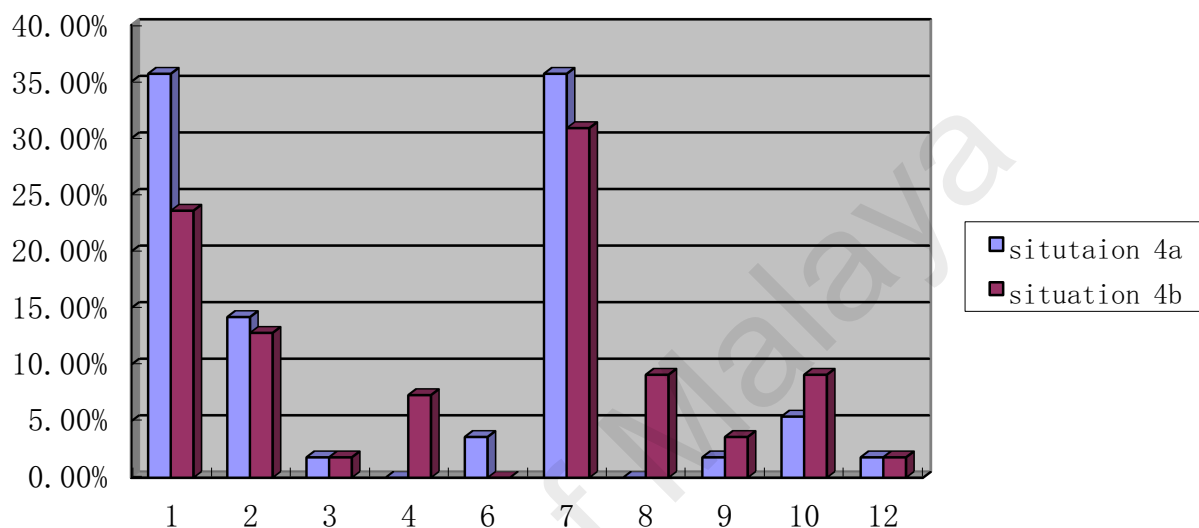
As shown in Table 4.13, the strategies of *Returning* and *Topic-shifting* have not occurred in respect to compliments on possession. There was no huge difference between *Appreciation* (29.7%) and *Commenting* (33.4%), which were the two most frequently used types of CRs to personal belongings. The following two strategies were *Agreeing* (13.5%) and *Giggling/Smiling* (7.2%). Moreover, *Reassuring* (4.5%) and *Qualifying* (3.6%) have been used a few times. Interestingly, the number of *Downgrading*, *Credit-shifting*, *Offering* and *Rejection* was same by taking 1.8% respectively.

Table 4.13: Micro-Level CRs for Possession

CRs Strategy	Situation 4a		Situation 4b		Situation 4	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
ACCEPTANCE						
Appreciation	20	35.7 %	13	23.6%	33	29.7 %
Agreeing	8	14.2%	7	12.8 %	15	13.5 %
Downgrading	1	1.8 %	1	1.8%	2	1.8 %
Qualifying	0	0	4	7.3%	4	3.6%
Returning	0	0	0	0	0	0
EVASION						
Credit-shifting	2	3.6 %	0	0	2	1.8%
Commenting	20	35.7 %	17	30.9 %	37	33.4%
Reassuring	0	0	5	9.1%	5	4.5%
Offering	1	1.8%	2	3.6 %	3	2.7%
Giggling/Smiling	3	5.4%	5	9.1%	8	7.2 %
Topic-shifting	0	0	0	0	0	0
REJECTION						
Rejection	1	1.8 %	1	1.8 %	2	1.8%
Total	56	100%	55	100%	111	100%

The distributions of the CRs on possession in Figure 4.5 indicate great distinctions between situation 4a and 4b. Firstly, participants in situation 4a (35.7%) appreciated the compliments more than in situation 4b (23.6%). With reference to the compliments on

possession of a smart phone, it is found that the most popular strategy employed by participants is *Appreciation* when facing someone unfamiliar while higher in social status.



1: Appreciation 2: Agreeing 3: Downgrading 4: Qualifying 6: Credit-shifting
7: Commenting 8: Reassuring 9: Offering 10: Giggling/Smiling 12: Rejection

Figure 4.5: Micro-level CRs for Possession

Nevertheless, the most popular strategy used with close friend in situation 4b was *Commenting* (30.9%). In terms of *Commenting*, it was the most favorable CRs type in situation 4a (35.7%). The second most popular strategy in situation 4b was *Appreciation* (23.6%) whose proportion was not far less than *Commenting*. Further analysis of *Commenting* is provided by Examples 102-103.

Example 102:

No. 8: *Ya, I just bought it two weeks ago. It is great and the price is not that high.*

(4a)

Example 103:

No. 8: So you should go and buy one. (4b)

Usually, the respondents would like to comment the phone by general description such as ‘*it is great*’ or the history of the purchase was also frequently commented as shown in Example 102. Additionally, the high or low cost of the phone was often mentioned by the participants. Specifically, with close friend in situation 4b, respondents generated more utterances like ‘*You should buy it*’ such as Example 103, which means that the phone is very nice and the price is not expensive so it is worthy purchase. Therefore, participants preferred to suggest their friends buy the possessions that they complimented.

In both situation 4a and 4b, the strategy of *Downgrading* was only used once (1.8%) to evade the praise. Similarly, 2 responses of *Rejection* were found in situation 4 with 1.8% in each sub-situation; hence, participants were more likely to reject compliments on personal possession than other topics as shown in Examples 104-105.

Example 104:

No. 13: (...) Ya it is not really nice. (4a)

Example 105:

No. 17: Oh is it? I don't think so (...) But anyway thank you so much. (4b)

There were some strategies that showed fewer variations in situation 4a and 4b. The *Agreeing* was used a little more in situation 4a (14.2%) than situation 4b (12.8%), which

demonstrates that the participants tended to agree similarly with both familiar and unfamiliar speaker of different status. Another strategy used by the participants without huge variation was *Offering* (1.8% in situation 4a while 3.6 in situation 4b). However, they tended to giggle/smile more at their close friend (9.1%) in 4b rather than unfamiliar father in higher status in 4a (5.4%).

The variation between two sub-situations also lays on the use of some strategies that only exist in one sub-situation. The *Credit-shifting* (3.6%) was only found in situation 4a, moreover, CRs of *Reassuring* (9.1%) and *Qualifying* (7.3%) were only used by the respondents in situation 4b.

4.1.2.5 Discussion and Summary of CRs on Subjects

According to the analysis of CRs on different subjects, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates showed obvious preference to certain strategies with regard to different conditions. It seems that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates tended to apply more patterns of CRs strategies on topic of possession.

With compliments on appearance, CRs strategies of *Appreciation* has been used most to show acceptance with the compliments, which accords with Tang & Zhang's (2009) and Cheng's (2011) findings of Chinese mandarin and ESL speakers. The respondents in this study also indirectly returned compliments to compliment givers by *Returning* (15%), which is in contract with Tang & Zhang's (2009) finding that a large number of *Returning* has been found on appearance. Nevertheless, *Qualifying* and *Rejection* have

not been favored by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. When the participants were facing two compliment givers, *Appreciation* is the most preferred strategy to both complimenters. The dramatic difference is that participants used more *Returning* with unfamiliar friend rather than familiar lecturer.

With regard to compliments on character, *Credit-shifting* was the most preferred type as CRs, in which Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were more likely to transfer the credits back to the unfamiliar complemter. This finding is in accordance with Chen (1993) who defined *Credit-shifting* as a 'self-praise avoidance' strategy. Additionally, the finding is in consistent with Tang & Zhang (2009) and Cheng (2011) in which *Appreciation* has been applied as second most preferred CRs that was preceded by *Credit-shifting* (e.g. *You're welcome*). The finding is totally opposite to Cai's (2012) study of Chinese college students that *Acceptance* strategies are favorably used to respond to complimenters whose social status is higher or is unfamiliar, nevertheless, *Evasion* and *Rejection* are more preferred when complimenters' social status is equal or is a familiar interlocutor.

With reference of compliments on ability, Malaysian Chinese participants were prone to using *Appreciation*, which is similar to Cheng's (2011) study of CRs on ability that Chinese ESL speakers used *Appreciation* (e.g. *Thank you/Thanks*) most but used other strategies infrequently. However, in Cheng's (2011) investigation of Chinese EFL speakers, *Offering* has been used more frequent than Malaysian Chinese participants. The biggest variation on that topic is found between speakers with different social

distance and social status.

Lastly with compliments on possession, in addition to *Appreciation*, participants tended to comment the object as well. The studies of Tang & Zhang (2009) and Cheng (2011) also reveal that the *Appreciation* is the most favorable CRs on possession in their studies, but there were more *Downgrading* strategies employed than *Commenting*. The participants preferred to give more *Appreciation* and *Commenting* to unfamiliar compliment payers in higher social status. This finding is in line with the study of Cai (2012) for mainland Chinese college students.

4.1.3 Participants' Views on Their Compliment Responses

In order to gain a better understanding of the CRs strategies of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, the answers to the questions 1 – 4 in the questionnaires are analyzed in this section. Questions 1 – 4 are mainly used to gain more insights into the research question one of the present study: What are the preferred patterns of responses to compliments employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates?

According to the answers to the question 1 in the questionnaires: Do you think your responses are typical of what you would do in real life? All the 30 participants answered 'Yes' which shows that the data collected from the role plays is valid for analysis. The role-play scenarios used in this study could be used to collect more naturalistic compliment responses of the participants.

In terms of the question 2 in the questionnaires: What is your instant response normally to a compliment? The majority of the participants (28 out of 30) (see Table 4.14)

mentioned that ‘*Thank you*’ would be their first choice in responding to compliments. Meanwhile there were 5 participants explained that they would like to smile at the complimenters. There was 1 participant who would say ‘*Thanks*’ which has a similar meaning as ‘*Thank you*’. The participants explained that they preferred to use ‘*Thank you*’ to show their appreciation to the complimenters because it was more direct. In addition, the participants had been taught to say ‘*Thank you*’ as a standard response to the compliments since they were children in school therefore they were accustomed to using it to respond to compliments.

Table 4.14: Instant Response to A Compliment

Instant Responses to Compliments	Mention by Participants
Thank you	28
Smiling	5
Thanks	1

Based on the question 3 in the questionnaires: Do you intentionally choose particular response strategies in particular situations? 17 participants out of 30 said that they intentionally chose particular response strategies in particular situations in the role-plays since they had to take different factors into consideration. On the other hand, 13 of the participants answered that they were not aware of their choice of compliment responses because they just naturally produced their responses. On the whole, the majority of Malaysian Chinese were influenced by certain variables in responding to compliments in different circumstances.

Based on the question 4 in the questionnaires: What factors influenced your choices? various factors influencing their CRs were given by the participants. As shown in Table 4.15, 24 out of 30 (80%) respondents stated that they took familiarity or social distance into consideration when they produced the responses to different compliments. Other factors such as social power, gender, topic, age of the complimenter or intonation of the utterance were mentioned less than three times each. That is to say social distance is the most influential factor on the compliment responses of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. As a consequence, social distance influences CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates more.

Table 4.15: Factors Influencing CRs

Influential Factors	Frequency
Familiarity / Social distance	24
Social power	2
Gender	1
Compliment topic	2
Topic	1
Age of the complimenter	1
Intonation of the compliment	1

It corresponds with the conclusion of Holmes (1995) that relative social distance plays a significant role in compliment responses. It also confirms that “in situations of social distance or closeness, Chinese show more awareness for other persons’ faces when that others seem socially distant is often described in terms of respect or deference” (Huang, 2008: 98).

Based on the further inquiry, Malaysian Chinese participants explicated that familiarity is more important than social status in their daily communication because they like to be polite to everyone around them. They explained that they need to build a harmonious relationship with everyone in society so that they can be welcomed and accepted by others. Thus, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates attach importance to the concept of *Ren* (仁) (goodness, humanity) by Confucius School that being kind to all members in the society is crucial. Moreover, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates do not focus on the traditional Confucius concept *Li* (礼) that if speech is used appropriately in accordance with the speaker's social status, good relationship will be maintained. Participants believe that everyone is equal in daily communication, so no one deserves special treatment. As explained by the participants, they feel close to familiar interlocutors even those of higher social status; however, they treat someone unfamiliar as an equal due to ignorance of his/her social background or identity. Therefore, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates overlook social status in compliment responses.

Wolfson's (1989) opinion that status relationship greatly affects the CRs is not true of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. Moreover, they do not attach much value to the traditional Chinese concept of 官本位 (literally 'Officer status') which lays more emphasis on the social status or power of the complimenter. This finding does not support the study of Chen (2003) on Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan, which showed the CRs strategies used by Mandarin Chinese in Taiwan vary as a function of social status relationship hence their CRs strategies were significantly influenced by social status of the complimenter. Generally speaking, Malaysian Chinese

undergraduates still uphold the idea of collectivism by saving each other's faces, preserving harmony and avoiding conflicts being maintained (Hofstede, 1984; Storz, 1999). They draw their conscious or unconscious values from the Confucianism of traditional Chinese culture (Storz, 1999).

4.2 Analysis of Politeness Strategies

In the earlier section, the review described the phenomenon in terms of politeness in Western world and Chinese culture then the analysis has justified the variation between the behaviors of politeness performed by Westerners and Chinese. Following the analysis of compliment responses strategies, in this section, the analysis of CRs by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates will be viewed in the light of Politeness Principles of Gu Yueguo (1992).

Gu (1992) defined five maxims of politeness according to the analysis of Chinese culture, which have been described in the section 2.5.2. In terms of CRs at the macro level, *Acceptance* belongs to the Accordance Maxim which states that the speakers try to maximize agreement and harmony with the interlocutor. According to the analysis of the data (see Table 4.1), there were 97 out of 240 pieces of responses showing explicit acceptance, thus it can be seen that 40.5% of total is abided by the Accordance Maxim. As described before, responses of *Acceptance* like '*Thank you! I like it, too*' can be considered showing agreement because there is no unambiguously attributable intention with which both interactants concur or accept the compliments. In other words, the respondents unambiguously expressed the intentions of agreeing with the

complimenters. Likewise, it can also be shown that the participants did not violate the Accordance Maxim frequently: the occurrence was 0.5 % of *Rejection* which turns down the compliments.

There were 51 (21%) pieces of CRs that were classified as *Evasion*, which refer to the indirect acceptance to the compliments reveal the contents of the Refinement Maxim. As explained by Gu (1992), speakers need to use refined words and avoid obscene words; or use more euphemisms and less straight-forward expressions in utterances. In the data collected through the role plays, all the responses were spoken in clear and simple English which can be understood at a glance. In the study, the respondents did not use refined words and rarely-understood expressions when responding to compliments. As a consequence, the expressions of *Evasion* show the feature of being less-straightforward. The participants also meant to agree with the compliments, however, they did not express it straightway. Compared to the responses of absolute *Acceptance* and *Evasion*, 91 pieces of responses (38%) were *Combination*, in which the 98% was the *Combination* of *Acceptance* and *Evasion*, while 2 % is the *Combination* involving *Rejection*, therefore, the majority of respondents were governed by the Accordance Maxim and the Refinement Maxim in responding to compliments.

In order to account for the politeness of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in CRs in details, the further analysis will be carried out on each maxim in sequence.

4.2.1 Analysis of the Self-denigration Maxim

According to Gu (1990, 1992), the most typical feature of Chinese politeness is to respect others by being self-effacing, in which the central idea is that one should denigrate self and elevate others. In Chinese culture, when people tend to make negative answer or self-denigration, modesty has been greatly shown (Zhang, 2005). As the researcher has analyzed the CRs framework of Cheng (2011), *Downgrading* and *Returning* manifest the Self-denigration Maxim which is shown by Examples 106 and 107 respectively.

Example 106:

No 4: (Smile). It's nothing. (2b)

Example 107:

No.1: Wow you too. (Smile). (1b)

Out of 397 strategies of compliment responses, there were 35 strategies (9%) in four situations (see Table 4.2) that keep the Self-denigration Maxim. It obviously indicates that participants did not obey this maxim much in their CRs. Respondents mainly used *Downgrading* strategies such as Example 107 to scale down the praise. In other words, there were 10 (29%) out of 35 tokens taken as denigration of self. In employing the strategies of *Returning* shown in Example 108, the respondents seemed to imply that they agreed with the complimenter and accepted the positive valuation then transferred the credits back to the complimenter. *Returning* was implied to elevate the positive aspects of the complimenter. In viewing of the Self-denigration Maxim, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were inclined to elevate others rather than denigrating

themselves due to the larger proportion of *Returning* (71%).

In situation 1 with topic of appearance, 16 CRs strategies (see Table 4.10) have been identified as the Self-denigration maxim. It can be seen that the participants preferred not to denigrate their appearance; in contrast, they may elevate the appearance of the interlocutors. Based on the deep comparison between two sub-situations, 4 CRs (25%) in situation 1a while 12 (75%) in situation 1b were found respectively, which obviously shows that the respondents would like to elevate more on someone unfamiliar with equal social status. With the compliments on character in situation 2 (see Table 4.11), there were 8 CRs of *Downgrading*, including 5 CRs in situation 2a and 3 CRs in situation 2b. With regard to *Returning*, there was only one strategy found in situation 2b. It suggests that the participants tended not to keep this maxim much in terms of CRs on character, if any, they liked denigrating the character of own rather than elevating others, as the participants demonstrated that they did not know whether the complimenter have a good personality or not. And there is no huge distinction between the maxim-followings in two sub-situations. When it comes to the compliments on ability (see Table 4.12), surprisingly, the participants have never denigrated themselves. Similarly, they did not return the compliments to familiar lecturer, whereas, 8 CRs show the elevation of unfamiliar classmate's ability. Unlike situation 4 (see Table 4.13) where the compliments are paid on possession, the *Returning* has not been found which indicates no elevation at all; only one response of *Downgrading* found in each sub-situation.

In consequence, the respondents almost abandoned the Self-denigration Maxim as showing modesty in responding to compliments, especially on personal possession.

4.2.2 Analysis of the Address Maxim

The core idea of this maxim is that there shall be propriety and righteousness between the superior and the inferior. In this study, not many address terms have been use in responding to compliments compared to the examples of address terms in traditional Chinese culture given by Gu (1992). There are 15 responses including address forms, the majority (12 out of 15) of which appeared in situation 3a (see Examples 108-110) where the participants are responding to a familiar lecturer in class.

Example 108:

No 19: Thank you teacher. (3a)

Example 109:

No.13: Thank you Sir. I will work hard for the next time presentations.. (3a)

Example 110:

No 19: Thank you lecturer. (3a)

As demonstrated by the respondents, they were accustomed to addressing someone with higher status in some formal occasions like in class or meeting; however, they might overlook the importance of naming others in casual conditions like a party in situation 1. In addition to situation 3a, another 3 addressing terms were found in situation 1a and 2a, in which the interlocutors are lecturers and an office staff. Therefore, this kind of phenomenon may imply that the participants are accustomed to addressing someone

familiar with higher social status, especially in academic circles. Compared to the unfamiliar interlocutors, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates regularly attached address terms in the utterances with familiar interlocutors, which is shown by the frequent use of address terms with familiar lecturer in Situation 3a (Example 108-110).

According to the semantic analysis of the addressing terms, all participants used ‘*teacher, lecturer, sir and doctor*’ which is defined as unitary addressing form to name the complimenters. Based on the analysis of the data transcription and questionnaires, to address others appropriately, participants in this study considered a few pragmatic elements such as professionally prestigious or non-prestigious, familiar and unfamiliar, on a formal or informal occasion.

4.2.3 Analysis of the Refinement Maxim

To be refined means to use refined words and avoid obscene expressions, and to use more euphemisms and less straight-forward words. First, there were no refined words used by respondents in their responses, instead, all the English expressions or words were simple and could be understood easily (see Examples 111-113). Although a few responses are non-standard expressions, for instance, ‘*I not think so*’, they showed clear meaning.

Example 111:

No 5: (Giggle). (3b)

Example 112:

No 1: You are welcome. (2a)

Example 113:

No 3: You can buy too. (Giggle). (4a)

On the opposite direction of a scale, rude or obscene words have not been found in their CRs. And all the English expressions were viewed as neutrally polite. It is found that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates did not pay much attention to this maxim by using refined words; however, they also tried to avoid using English words that may show vulgar meanings which may lead the utterance to be impolite. Regarding the analysis of the explanation from the participants, it seems that participants violated this maxim due to the language differences in vocabulary and expressions as well as the model of thinking between Chinese and English. First of all, some participants admitted that most Chinese expressions such as idioms or polite formulas have no responding expressions in English due to their limitation of English proficiency; therefore, they have to choose easy responses instead of refined ways. This explanation is justified by the large number of band 3-4 in the MUET of the participants. Another reason is that they speak English as a second language, when they use English as the medium of communication, they try to follow English thinking rather than transferring Chinese culture into it, hence, they try to imitate the straightforward way of speaking of native English speakers.

On the other hand, as shown in Table 4.3, there were 164 (41.3%) CRs strategies were classified under *Evasion* which refers to the indirect acceptance. All these indirect responses are in accordance with ‘to use more euphemisms and less straight-forward words’. Euphemisms refer to inoffensive words or phrases substituted for one regarded

offensive or hurtful, which is rarely existed in the CRs of respondents. Moreover, the strategies under *Evasion* are regarded as indirect expressions because they show their acceptance to the compliments in a non-straightforward way. In four situations shown by Table 4.10-4.13, the applications of *Evasion* have shown no significant distinction among topics on appearance (55%), character (57.2%) and possession (49.9%), nevertheless, in situation 3 with compliments on ability, there was a less popularity with *Evasion* (28.2%) which indicates that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to use more direct speeches as responses to compliments on ability.

According to the further analysis of CRs on different compliment topics, when respondents were facing unfamiliar speakers in higher status in situation 2a (shown in Table 4.11), they mostly employed strategies of *Evasion* (69.2%) which accounts that they preferred indirect responses to avoid face-threatening acts in terms of compliments on character. In responding to compliments on ability (see Table 4.12) with familiar speakers in higher status, they used the least *Evasion* (15.6%) that reveals the Refinement Maxim.

Out of 164 strategies of *Evasion* CRs (see Table 4.3), *Giggling/Smiling* has been used mostly by taking up 38%, which was followed by *Commenting* (25%). According to the explanations by 16 out of 30 participants, *Giggling/Smiling* is a non-verbal but polite expression so it can be used as the strategy for responding to compliments because it makes people neither feel over-humble nor conceited to reject or accept the compliments directly. Therefore, *Giggling/Smiling*, despite being non-verbal, can be an

important strategy for participants as it carries emotional and meaningful message whose function is same as refined verbal expressions.

4.2.4 Analysis of the Accordance Maxim

The kernel of this maxim is to be in agreement with others as much as possible so as to satisfy the other's psychological desires and to keep a harmonious relationship among each other. Based on that, strategies of *Appreciation*, *Agreeing* and *Qualifying* (see Examples 114-116 for each strategy) can be considered as following the rule of agreement; on the other hand, CRs of *Rejection* are viewed as violation of it.

Example 114:

No 2: Oh thank you. (1a)

Example 115:

No 2: Yeah, I think so. (4a)

Example 116:

No 9: Oh thank you very much. I hope I manage to help you to carry out these books. (2a)

In total, there were 195 strategies of *Appreciation*, *Agreeing* and *Qualifying* (see Table 4.2) in the study, which took a large proportion of 49% of all CRs. It shows that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were more likely to agree with others when received positive comments. Among the three strategies, *Appreciation* was the most preferred one with 163 (84%) CRs strategies out of 195; another two were used by 8% respectively. In addition to showing agreement with others, *Appreciation* also shows

great thanks after receiving the nice compliments so that majority of participants applied it as the most favorable response (Table 4.14).

Specific to the situations that are shown in Table 4.10-4.13, Malaysian Chinese participants kept the Accordance Maxim most on topics of ability (62.6%) and appearance (51%), however, the least with character (32.5%). Therefore, this result justifies that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to show politeness by following the Accordance Maxim with the compliments on personal ability, reversely, they did not pay much attention to this maxim when compliments were paid to personality.

Based on the analysis of CRs shown in Table 4.10-4.13, participants preferred to show agreement with familiar lecturers (64%) rather than unfamiliar friends (44%) in situation 1 on appearance. When it comes to situation 2 on character, the strategies following this maxim respectively occupies 17.9% in situation 2a and 47.7% in situation 2b, which obviously indicates that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to show politeness by agreeing with their familiar friends other than unfamiliar officers. When the ability or achievement was praised in situation 3, the participants applied this maxim more by using 86.4% of *Appreciation* and *Qualifying* in situation 3a, nevertheless, 40.4% of *Appreciation* in situation 3b, in which the accordant expressions were also generated with familiar lecturers instead of unfamiliar classmates. In situation 4 with the topic of possession, participants applied 49.9% of CRs strategies in situation 4a which accounts for the Accordance Maxim, in situation 4b, its percentage

is 43.7%. Malaysian Chinese preferred to keep this maxim with unfamiliar speakers whose social status is higher when their personal belongings are complimented.

On the other hand, out of 30 participants, only three of them had performed *Rejection* in which the expressions are direct disagreements. This small amount of disagreements indicates that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates did not regularly violate the Accordance Maxim in order to show politeness and improve harmonious interaction with the interlocutors. In details, two disagreements were found in situation 4b while another one appeared in situation 1b, therefore, if giving disagreements, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates tended to disagree with familiar speakers on the topic of possessions.

4.2.5 Analysis of the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim

Gu (1992) stated that speech and virtue are important elements in Confucian School which is the dominant idea in the daily communication of Chinese. Through analysis of the contents of this maxim, *Returning*, *Offering* and *Credit-shifting* (see Examples 117-119 for each strategy) have been identified as strategies that meet the requirement of this maxim. In responding to the compliments, it hardly revealed the contents of minimizing cost of the complimenter since there would not be any expenditures in time or materials, so all the politeness strategies used in the study were to maximize benefit to others.

Example 117:

No 9: Thank you. I think you have a very nice hair-cut. (1b)

Example 118:

No 10: Oh yes. Do you want to have a look? (4b)

Example 119:

No.16: Thank you. It's bought (...) my (...) father (...) Oh this is my present from my father. (4b)

As shown in Table 4.2 and Table 4.3, there are 64 (16%) strategies of CRs in the study showing the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim, in which the *Credit-shifting* has been employed most by 34 (53%), followed by *Returning* (25 CRs: 39%) and *Offering* (5 CRs: 8%). *Credit-shifting* and *Returning* were mainly used to maximize the benefit to the interlocutors or in a few cases to family members. However, *Offering* which was mainly occurring for CRs on possessions shows that both maximizing benefit to others while cost to self by showing the smart phone to the interlocutors. Therefore, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to enhance the benefit to others while frequently violated the rule of maximizing the cost to self in their CRs.

As shown in Table 4.10-4.13, in situation 1 on appearance, 15% of all strategies are *Returning* which is the only one that keeps the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim. Comparing situation 1a and 1b, participants returned more compliments (21.8%) to unfamiliar friends in situation 1b but less to familiar lecturer in 1a (8%). When it comes to compliments on character in situation 2, participants applied more Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim (35.9%), particularly, 57.8% in situation 2a, while 13.9% in situation 2b. Moreover, participants did not obey the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim

much when they have got praises because of their great achievements in situation 3, only 12.1% of total as well as 4.5% in situation 3a and 19.2% in situation 3b. In situation 4 with compliments on possession, only 4.5% of the strategies involved the Virtue-Words-Deeds Maxim, 5.4% in situation 4a and 3.6% in situation 4b. As a conclusion, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates prefer to show their politeness through the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim in responding to compliments on character. They tended to maximize the benefit to unfamiliar interlocutors with higher social status when they were complimented due to their great help.

4.2.6 Participants' Views on Politeness and Compliment Responses

In this section, answers to the questions 5 and 6 in the questionnaires are analyzed with the purpose of answering the research question 2 of this study: How is face maintained when responding to compliments under different circumstances?

Table 4.16 shows the results of the question 5 in questionnaires: How do you feel when you receive compliments? It is shown that 25 out of 30 participants said that they would feel happy, excited or pleased when receiving compliments; another 5 participants admitted that sometimes they might feel embarrassed if they were praised. Therefore, on the whole, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates did not regard compliments as face-threatening acts, which is also shown by the large number of *Giggling/Smiling* strategies they used.

Table 4.16: Feeling When Receiving Compliments

Answers	Number of Participants
Happy / Excited / Pleased	25
Embarrassed	5

Nevertheless, in responding to the question 6: Is politeness shown when you respond to compliments? Is Chinese culture expected in your English speech? (see Table 4.17), 28 participants said that politeness is an important part in communication. Two participants mentioned that they hardly took politeness into consideration in responding to compliments. As explained by these two participants, compliments were very common in daily communication; therefore, they should not be concerned much about them. On the other hand, the majority of the participants claimed that compliments and responses strengthen relationships although they are usually short or given in a casual way. Therefore, most Malaysian Chinese participants employed politeness strategies when performing CRs to maintain relationships.

Table 4.17: Showing Politeness in CRs

Answers	Number of Participants
Yes	28
No	2

Table 4.17 shows the answers to questionnaires about question 6: Is Chinese culture expected in your English speech? There were 28 out of 30 participants said that they used politeness in their CRs. When they were asked if Chinese culture expected in their English speech, 8 participants said 'Yes' that they thought about Chinese culture in

responding to compliments. On the other hand, 4 participants answered ‘No’. They did not consider Chinese culture in CRs. However, the majority of the participants, namely 18 out of 30, answered ‘*I am not sure*’ or ‘*I don’t know*’. Instead of giving direct answers of ‘Yes’ or ‘No,’ they explained what they considered polite in compliment responses (see Table 4.18).

Table 4.18: Participants’ Views on Realizations of Politeness

Realization of Politeness	Number of Participants
‘Thank you’ or ‘Thanks’	24
Smiling	16
Displaying modesty	4

As Table 4.18 shows, 24 participants said ‘Thank you’ or ‘Thanks’ is polite. These expressions are typical *Appreciation* strategies. As explained by the participants, they believed ‘Thank you’ should be their response to compliments because it will be rude not to accept compliments. Half of the participants pointed out that showing their gratitude is their duty if others pay compliments. The participants explained that as a minority in Malaysia, Malaysian Chinese need to interact with people from other ethnic groups who may have different religions, languages and cultures; therefore, they need to maintain a harmony. In order to avoid conflicts in daily communication, they generally tend to agree with others and accept others’ comments.

16 participants said smiling which is a CRs strategy is polite. The traditional Chinese value of modesty was not much considered by the participants. It was only mentioned

by 4 participants. The participants said they tended to be straightforward and direct when speaking in English.

4.2.7 Discussion and Summary of Analysis of Politeness Strategies

According to the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires, it can be concluded that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates generally felt happy and appreciated to compliments and rarely regarded compliments as face-threatening acts. This finding is in tandem with Tang & Zhang's (2009) finding of Mandarin Chinese who viewed compliments more as positive speech acts than FTAs.

Malaysian Chinese participants were more prone to accepting the compliments hence the Accordance Maxim was their primary consideration (see Figure 4.6). This finding is in contrast with Chen's (1993) study that mainland Chinese attached least value to Agreement Maxim of Leech (1983) when responding to compliments, moreover, it is in line with Taiwanese and Malaysian Tamils in Chen's (2003) and Thevendiraraj's (2006) studies that the participants are more governed by Agreement Maxim of Leech (1983) in CRs.

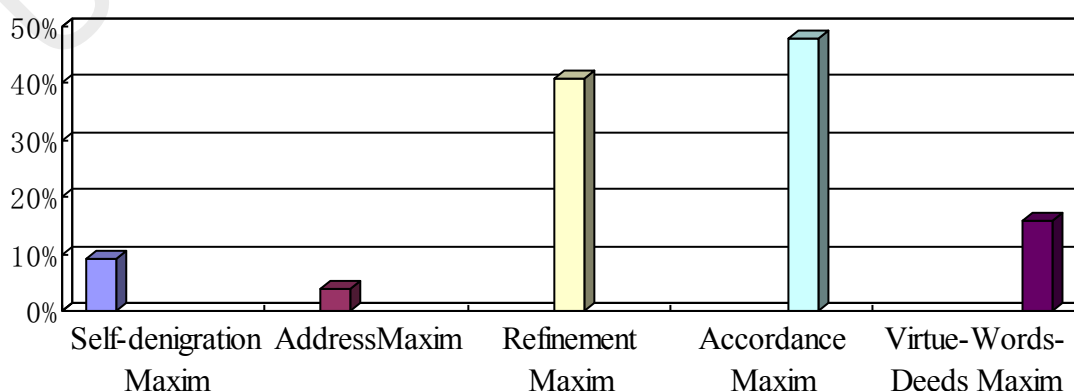


Figure 4.6: Politeness Maxims with CRs

Malaysian Chinese undergraduates also kept much of the Refinement Maxim by applying a number of indirect speeches. This finding is in contrast with the statement that Malaysian Chinese are often regarded as being direct, upfront and straightforward in communication (Kuang, 2009; Phaveena, 2010).

With reference to The Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxims, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to enhance the benefit to others. Especially, Malaysian Chinese participants would like to show their politeness through the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim in responding to compliments on character, especially tended to maximize the benefit to unfamiliar interlocutors with higher social status when they were complimented due to their great help.

There were 4 participants who claimed that they considered modesty as important when responding to compliments. However, majority of the participants did not think much about modesty when they were in English context. Therefore, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates did not attach much value on modesty as in traditional Chinese culture, thereafter, they were not prone to the Self-denigration Maxim. This finding differs from the traditional Chinese culture posed by Gu (1992), Chen (1993) and Zhang (2005) that the majority of the Chinese tend to belittle themselves and show modesty in order to respect others. Nevertheless, the less popularity of self-denigration among Malaysian Chinese participants also appears in recent mainland Chinese society where a set of neutral terms appear and are widely used instead of being self-denigrated (Gu, 1992). The later work of Chen and Yang (2010) is consistent with the finding of the present

study by saying that mainland Chinese tend to “give up” much of their modesty for the sake of agreeing with others when responding to compliments. Within Malaysia society, it is in line with Malay undergraduates in Farnia and Suleiman’s (2009) study that Malays undergraduates thought the excessive modesty to deny compliments or something else was not appropriate at all even may be impolite for the compliment givers.

The Address Maxim was seldom obeyed as face-saving for Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. This finding shows distinction with Zhang’s (2005) study that in the Chinese interpersonal communication, addressing one another is very common in all social interactions. Compared to the unfamiliar interlocutors, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates regularly attached address terms in the utterances with familiar interlocutors. This finding shows disagreement with Kuang and Maya’s study (2009) which believed Malaysian Chinese are expected to use terms of address in the communications. Participants in this study considered a few pragmatic elements such as professionally prestigious or non-prestigious, familiar and unfamiliar, on a formal or informal occasion, in which the number of the elements is less than mainland Chinese’s in Gu’s findings (1990, 1992).

By means of the infrequent denigration of self and *Rejection* as well as a large number of *Acceptance*, we see that participants do not value modesty much when responding to praises from others, which demonstrates that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates are more other-oriented (Parsons, 1951).

With compliments on appearance, possession and especially ability, the Accordance Maxim has been kept most among the five politeness principles. In situation 2 with compliments on character, most participants were prone to the Refinement Maxim. On all topics, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates tended not to show politeness using the Address Maxim, however, this maxim may be more likely to be found in formal conditions on topic of ability with familiar speakers in higher social status.

In conclusion, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates prefer to employ more politeness strategies to reduce face-threatening acts with unfamiliar interlocutors in responding to compliments.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The data collected from the role play scenarios and questionnaires has been analyzed and compared with the related previous studies, hence, results and conclusions were made. This chapter presents the summary of the findings of compliment responses strategies and the politeness strategies used by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. The findings are summarized according to the research questions. This chapter concludes with the implications and limitations of the present research and puts forth new recommendations for further investigations.

5.1 Compliment Responses Strategies

Research question 1: What are the preferred patterns of responses to compliments employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates?

This study initially aims to seek the compliment responses strategies employed by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. To recapitulate, the findings from the previous chapter reveal that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates have used various CRs.

In this study, it was found that accepting compliments was the most favorable strategy as responses to compliments for Malaysian Chinese undergraduates, on the contrary, rejecting compliments was a rarely used strategy. In Malaysian Chinese society, it is

widely believed that they should show gratitude for the positive comments from others by accepting them such as '*Thank you*', however, being over-humble to reject the praises is unnecessary.

It shows that Malaysian Chinese participants in science & technology studies tended to accept the compliments. In contrast, participants in arts & social science studies preferred to combine *Acceptance* and *Evasion* strategies (*Acceptance* + *Evasion*) in responding to compliments.

Among all micro CRs strategies, *Appreciation* on the whole was the most popular response strategy applied by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. The ritual '*Thank you*' which is the usual expression of gratitude is found to be an adequate response by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates in the study. Additionally, *Giggling/Smiling*, a non-verbal expression that is classified as *Evasion*, was frequently applied by Malaysian Chinese undergraduates when they needed to evade the compliments by being less straightforward.

With regard to various topics of compliments, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates showed a strong preference to certain CRs strategies. Appearance and possession were the topics which were given the least and most number of CRs categories respectively. On the topic of appearance, ability and possession, *Appreciation* had been applied as the most favorable response strategy. However, *Credit-shifting* was used most on the compliments of character by the typical response '*You are welcome*'. On all subjects,

Rejection had been rarely applied.

On the whole, the majority of Malaysian Chinese were influenced by certain variables in responding to compliments in different circumstances. However, social distance (familiarity) influences more on CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. Malaysian Chinese participants explicated that familiarity is highly important in daily communication. They need to maintain a harmonious relationship with everyone in society. Malaysian Chinese undergraduates attach importance to the concept of *Ren* (仁) (goodness, humanity) by Confucius School that being kind to all members in the society is crucial. Moreover, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates do not focus on the traditional Confucius concept *Li* (礼) that if speech is used appropriately in accordance with the speaker's social status, good relationship will be maintained. Therefore, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates overlooked social status in compliment responses.

In situations involving compliments on appearance, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates tended to use *Appreciation* most with both familiar and unfamiliar complimenters. *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling* were shown more to familiar than unfamiliar complimenters. When complimented on character, they were more likely to shift credit with unfamiliar complimenters rather than familiar complimenters. On the other hand, with familiar interlocutors, they preferred to use *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling* as responses. With compliments on ability, Malaysian Chinese participants used *Appreciation* most with both familiar and unfamiliar complimenters, in which familiar complimenters were given more *Appreciation*. However, *Giggling/Smiling* was used

more with unfamiliar interlocutors. It is noteworthy that the most types of CRs strategies were used with compliments on ability, but only *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling* were used with both familiar and unfamiliar complimenters. Lastly with compliments on possession, *Appreciation* and *Commenting* were the most frequently used CRs strategies with both familiar and unfamiliar communicators, but were more frequently used with unfamiliar speakers.

In sum, the findings of the present study indicate that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates preferred to apply diverse CRs strategies. They tended to use more *Appreciation* with familiar complimenters in most situations; however, when they dealt with compliments on possession, more *Appreciation* and *Commenting* were employed with unfamiliar communicators.

5.2 Politeness Strategies with Compliment Responses

Research question 2: How is face maintained when responding to compliments under different circumstances?

The analysis was viewed in the light of Gu's (1992) Politeness Principles, set against the cultural background of the Malaysian Chinese in this study, to investigate the application or violation of politeness strategies of Malaysian Chinese respondents with respect to CRs.

On the whole, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates did not regard compliments as face-threatening acts; however, most of them tended to think about politeness when responding to compliments, which indicates that they attach great value on collectivism by saving other's face in communication.

Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were generally governed by the Accordance Maxim. They prioritized other's need and thus agreed with compliments and were more direct in their CRs. However, some of them obeyed the Refinement Maxim in which indirect responses were used to show politeness. They giggled/smiled to show politeness indirectly.

In contrast, the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim was valued less, especially, in which participants try to avoid maximizing the benefit of complimenter by costing themselves. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the Address Maxim was overlooked when responding to compliments. However, the existing address terms all occurred in the conditions with familiar lecturers by calling their professional terms, namely, unitary addressing, which illustrates that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates overlooked the address but tended to show a stronger sense of social order in the academic circle with familiar interlocutors.

The Self-denigration Maxim has a lower impact on the CRs of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates and they were more favor of elevating others rather than denigrating self. Malaysian Chinese undergraduates were more other-oriented. The needs of others are

viewed primarily in order to protect the face of the complimenters rather than thinking about reducing self-praise.

Since it has been pointed out that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates are greatly governed by the Accordance Maxim, with reference to different topics, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates on the whole obeyed Accordance Maxim more with familiar interlocutors by accepting the compliments so that to maintain their faces.

When responding to unfamiliar complimenters, diverse politeness strategies were used to maintain others' faces. In terms of compliments on appearance, the Accordance Maxim has been considered as the most influential one; when the compliments occur on character, the Virtues-Words-Deeds Maxim has mainly governed respondents' politeness behaviors by shifting credits to the complimenters or their own parents in order to maximize the benefits to others. With reference to compliments on ability, both the Accordance Maxim and the Refinement Maxim had been greatly obeyed by showing *Appreciation* and *Giggling/Smiling* more, in which great gratitude and non-straightforward expressions were applied to enhance the mutual faces. For the possession, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates complied with the Accordance Maxim more by showing appreciation.

In sum, there is strong evidence that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates are more oriented towards the interactions that highlights a great relationship between 'the self' and 'the others' in social context while maintaining a stronger sense of the 'others' than

the 'self'.

The findings that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates are more inclined to accepting compliments is consistent with recent studies in a number of Chinese societies (Cheng, 2011; Lee, 2015; Tang & Zhang, 2009), which is different from the traditional Chinese culture. The Malaysian Chinese of current generation is greatly distinct from that of old generations in the way they interact, behave and socialize (Kuang et al, 2015).

Yuan (2002) asserted from his investigation that the response of '*Thank you*' which is prescribed textbook response is new and fashionable as a result of Western influence in Chinese culture. Yang (2010) and Lee (2015) also demonstrated that a great change of more acceptances of compliments is due to the assimilation of Western culture. In the Malaysian Chinese community, it could be Western assimilation due to the social media and business which has contributed to the development of English language and Western cultures. Furthermore, as Thevendiraraj (2006) stated that in the English-educated social environment, English has been the dominant teaching and learning language for Malaysian. Therefore, parts of Chinese culture in Malaysian Chinese community have been gradually assimilated by Western culture.

Nevertheless, the findings of the study justify that Malaysian Chinese undergraduates still stick to certain Chinese values such as face norm, interactive harmony, and senses of collectivism, which have been shown by their compliment responses. The researcher asserts that politeness in speech is still greatly valued by Malaysian Chinese

undergraduates. Although, the preference of politeness strategies may vary between nowadays Malaysian Chinese and other Chinese circles, there is still a link among them to some extent.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The findings of this study can contribute towards and enhance the existing investigations in the field of pragmatics. This study is helpful for those researchers who are interested in the study of speech acts especially in the area of compliment responses with regard of politeness strategies.

Through the analysis of CRs strategies, this study provides a platform for greater understanding of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates' responses to compliments. We can gain some insights into their competence in the speaking skills and the problem solving when they try to avoid face-threat. A better understanding of Malaysian Chinese undergraduates' CRs can reduce the misunderstanding of communication and build up a more harmonious conversation.

Another implication to project is that since speech acts are cultural in essence, speakers should be made familiar with the interlocutor's culture, which is good for facilitating successful communication. This study elaborated the politeness and cultural norms of Malaysian Chinese in their CRs, as a consequence, other non-Chinese communities in Malaysia can gain a better understanding of Malaysian Chinese's culture in speech.

The distinction of CRs between Malaysian Chinese undergraduates and other Chinese

societies also supports the viewpoint that there is an importance of a culture for its speakers' speech act performance and the difference to do with a culture's specific way of speaking (Yu, 2003). Therefore, the findings of this study contribute towards the research on Chinese cultures and enhance the communication among Chinese from different societies.

Additionally, this study shows that there is a need to improve Malaysian Chinese undergraduates' English proficiency both in vocabulary and social expression. Thus, an important contribution of this study is to help the English educators and caretakers in Malaysia to be better equipped in planning and designing relevant and appropriate pedagogical strategies that can nurture Malaysian Chinese learners' cognitive and communicative abilities in their English interactions, particularly when engaging in compliment responses.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations existing in the present study due to the limited time and the personal ability of the researcher. The limitations are as follows:

This study is limited to the Malaysian Chinese undergraduates who are studying in one local university. All the participants are the undergraduates studying in University of Malaya (UM) due to the fact that University of Malaya can provide a great convenience of getting data for the researcher by using random sampling.

All the English responses to compliments were collected from the participants who

reached Band 3 or above in Malaysia University English Test (MUET), therefore the proficiency of their English has not been considered in this study.

The data was collected by role play scenarios and the situations in the role play are limited. The situations in the role-play are limited with four situations with four subjects: appearance, ability, personality and possession. Despite more likely daily communicative interactions were designed, however, the data collected from the role plays may not fully reflect the authentic performance of language use in daily life.

There were two social variables (social distance and social status) influencing the CRs of the Malaysian Chinese undergraduates. The data from the questionnaires showed that social distance has a greater influence on their CRs than social status, therefore the influence of social distance on CRs was discussed in Section 5.1. However, both social variables were used in all situations thus no one can be separated from another one in the analysis. Therefore, the researcher has not fully discussed how each social variable influences the participants' CRs.

5.5 Recommendations for Future Studies

To gain a wider perspective on how compliment responses are generated by speakers, further research endeavors are strongly recommended. The data in this study is based on a sample size of 30 Malaysian Chinese who are all undergraduate students in a local university, namely University of Malaya. Therefore, further studies with a larger corpus may provide more significant and different results.

Furthermore, the data collection may be carried out by using more authentic and naturalistic communications thus distinct or similar findings may be found. Maybe in new situations with different topics, different relations between the interlocutors can be involved, the findings may change. In addition, this study solely focuses on Malaysian Chinese society which is a portion of a united country, Malaysia. As a consequence, there is a hope for further studies on other ethnic groups. Beyond that, the future explorations can be organized on other speech acts such as greetings and refusals of Malaysian Chinese community or even other social communities.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the conclusions of the study based on the two research questions. For compliment responses, Malaysian Chinese place great emphasis on *Acceptance*, especially *Appreciation*, in interactions. In order to achieve politeness, Malaysian Chinese undergraduates attach special value to social distance and are more governed by Accordance Maxim of Gu (1992). In addition, we can see how the intervention of cultural norms and social factors on CRs may be shown or altered. The implication and limitation of the study as well as recommendations for further researches were also shown in this chapter. It is hoped that the findings of this study and those of future studies would effectively contribute towards a better communication of compliment responses.

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