

**COMPLIMENT RESPONSES AMONG MALAY
UNDERGRADUATES**

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UNDERGRADUATES**

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DECLARATION**

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Title of Dissertation ("this Work"):

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Field of Study: **Pragmatics**

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ABSTRACT

As communicative competence becomes a central pedagogical objective, more studies on speech act, which is one of the branches of pragmatics, are widely researched. One particular speech act that has been increasingly studied is compliment responses. This study aimed to investigate two major issues: the types of compliment response strategies and the factors that affect the choice these compliment response strategies demonstrated by 30 Malay undergraduates in one local university. The data which were in English language were analyzed by using two different frameworks; (1) Herbert's framework (1998) was used to determine the types of compliment response strategies; and (2) Fukushima's framework (1993) was used to determine factors that affect the choice of these compliment response strategies. Role plays and semi-structured interviews were employed as the main instruments for data collection method in this study. Findings showed that there were similarities and differences in the types of compliment response strategies employed by Malay male and female undergraduates. Although compliments paid to the people in the Eastern countries were normally denied (Chen, 1993), this research recorded different findings. Male participants had preferences for accepting compliments by praise upgrading themselves, while female participants had more preferences for rejecting compliments by using scaling-down strategies. Some of the compliment response strategies observed in this study were appreciation-token, comment-acceptance, and comment-history. It is also interesting to note that formality of situation, gender of complimenter and topic of compliment were the three major factors that affected the way participants responded to compliments. Therefore, it can be concluded that Malay undergraduates preferred different strategies in responding to compliments and they were mostly affected by three main factors mentioned above.

ABSTRAK

Oleh kerana komunikasi percakapan menjadi sasaran utama pedagogi, kajian telah dijalankan secara meluas dalam kata kuasa yang merupakan salah satu cabang dalam bidang pragmatik. Sejenis kata kuasa yang kerap dikaji adalah respons terhadap kata pujian. Kajian ini dijalankan bertujuan untuk mengupas dua isu utama: perbezaan strategi terhadap kata pujian dan faktor-faktor yang memberi kesan kepada pilihan strategi terhadap kata pujian oleh 30 pelajar Melayu di sebuah universiti tempatan. Data kajian adalah dalam bahasa Inggeris yang telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan dua rangka kerja yang berbeza; (1) rangka kerja dari Herbert (1998) yang digunakan untuk menentukan jenis-jenis respons terhadap kata pujian; dan (2) rangka kerja dari Fukushima (1993) yang digunakan untuk menentukan faktor-faktor yang memberi kesan kepada pilihan penggunaan strategi dalam respons terhadap kata pujian. Sketsa dan temubual separa berstruktur telah digunakan sebagai instrumen utama bagi kaedah pengumpulan data dalam kajian ini. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa terdapat persamaan dan perbezaan dalam jenis strategi yang digunakan dalam respons terhadap kata pujian oleh pelajar lelaki dan wanita Melayu. Hasil kajian membuktikan respons terhadap kata-kata pujian selalunya ditolak oleh masyarakat di negara-negara Timur (Chen, 1993), walau bagaimanapun penyelidikan ini mencatatkan hasil kajian yang berbeza. Pelajar lelaki memilih untuk menerima pujian dengan menaikkan taraf diri mereka sendiri, manakala pelajar wanita memilih untuk menolak pujian dengan menggunakan strategi merendah diri. Beberapa strategi dalam respons terhadap kata pujian yang dikenal pasti dalam kajian ini adalah tanda penghargaan, komen penerimaan, dan komen bersejarah. Ia juga adalah menarik untuk mengambil kira bahawa formaliti terhadap situasi, gender pemberi pujian dan topik pujian merupakan tiga faktor utama yang mempengaruhi cara peserta kajian memberi respons terhadap kata pujian. Kesimpulannya, pelajar-pelajar Melayu mengaplikasi strategi yang berbeza dalam

tindak balas terhadap kata pujian dan mereka dipengaruhi oleh tiga faktor utama yang dinyatakan di atas.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The study of compliment and compliment responses has become a significant aspect in the field of pragmatics. Since the 1970s, linguists and pragmatists have paid more attention to the study of speech act behaviours including the conception of compliments and its responses. According to Holmes (1988), compliment behaviours play a significant communicative role and serve to establish, consolidate and promote interpersonal relationships. Compliments and compliment responses as research variables have been investigated thoroughly as they have been recognized as an important speech act in a socio-cultural context and served a serious socio-cultural linguistic function (Heidari, Rezazadeh & Rasekh 2009). A great number of studies into compliment behavior have also concentrated on the general evaluation of compliments and compliment responses in a diverse cultural dimension.

The present study entitled “Compliment Responses among Malay Undergraduates” is grounded in Pragmatics, in particular, the Speech Act Theory propounded by prominent linguists, Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Actions performed through utterances are generally called speech acts, and in English, are commonly given more specific labels such as apology, compliment, complaint, invitation, promise or request. These utterances have their own specific functions including the notions of compliment and compliment responses. The study of the speech act of compliment contributes valuable information not only on the context of when, who and how it occurs but also to interpret appropriate strategies used by people from different cultures. In this study, Herbert’s (1998) and Fukushima’s (1993) analytical frameworks are used

to achieve the objectives of the study.

In brief, this chapter firstly provides an introduction to the background of the study. Next, it will provide details on the statement of problem followed by the objectives of the study and the research questions. Next, the scope and limitation of this study will be discussed briefly. This chapter ends with the significance of this study.

1.1 Background of the Study

One approach to learning human communication is to determine the nature and functions of individual speech acts. Generally, descriptions of these speech acts may provide insights on how communication works. Searle (1970) reports that an understanding of why and when specific speech acts are employed can help resolve the rules by which interactions may take place.

In pragmatics field of study, numerous cross-cultural studies investigating the speech act of compliment and compliment responses showed that although speech act appear to be distinctive, their conceptualization and verbalization can vary to a great extent across cultures (Blum-Kalka, House and Kasper, 1989). Although those studies generally focused on a variety of acts including mostly apology, request (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper, 1989) and invitation and refusal (Beebe, Takahashi and Uliss-Weltz, 1990), only a few studies have been conducted on the act of complimenting. The present study is conducted to explore the similarities and differences in compliment response strategies among Malay undergraduates.

The study of compliment behaviour is usually comprised of two parts; compliments and compliment responses. A compliment is a positive speech act which brings solidarity and reduces distance between the complimenter and complimentee (Manes & Wolfson, 1981). They reported that by paying a compliment, it indicates

respect to the recipient's needs and wants. Edmondson and House (1981)) on the other hand argues that compliments are not always successfully received or understood and can only be established through social strategy. Holmes (1986) puts forth that the simplest analysis of the function of compliments is to consolidate solidarity between the speaker and addressee.

Compliment responses on the hand are referred to a verbal acknowledgement that the recipient of the compliment heard and then reacted to the compliment. Compliment responses are believed to provide an invaluable but underutilized insight in to speakers' reaction to external appraisals of their personal and social identity (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). Searle (1975) classifies compliment responses as expressives, i.e. utterances that convey the speaker's attitude to a certain state of affairs specified in the propositional content. Herbert (1998) has made a general conclusion that the ideal response to a compliment is to accept it in a way that does not imply self-praise.

As far as research into the structural aspect of compliment behavior is concerned, Wolfson and Manes (1980) were the first to examine the formulaic patterns of complimenting, both on syntactic and semantic level. Later, Holmes (1986) put forth the functions of compliments using Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as a framework. For compliment responses, the first extensive study and categorization performed in Herbert's (1986) research. He based his taxonomy on Pomerantz's (1978) categories. Differences in the use of pragmatics strategies in general and compliment/compliment responses in particular have increasingly been in the focus of research particularly as mirrors of cultural values (Manes, 1983).

Compliments and compliment responses occur quite often in everyday situations and are considered as one of the most important speech acts. The area of study of these two related speech acts may involve a variety of variables such as gender, power and

status. Structural forms in compliments and strategies in compliment responses are also different from one person to another. Since complimenting strategies are influenced by and associated with social factors, it has intrigued more researchers from diverse fields to carry out studies on this topic.

In addition, it is interesting to see that culture may also help someone to understand speech acts more (Goddard, 2004) as every culture differs in terms of rules and regulations especially when a certain speech act is carried out (Benthalia & Davies, 1989). Culture is a broad conceptual aspect which is shared by the entire or almost all members of a community, or something that is passed on by the elderly to young people or something such as customs that creates behaviour or shapes one's understanding about the world (Adler, 1997). It has always been understood that communication is influenced by culture. In Malay culture, one practice that is rather ubiquitous in daily utterances is giving and receiving compliments. Compliments and compliment responses are dictated by cultures, but when the acts of complimenting are done in another language, for instance English, would the trend to give and receive compliments change? As Wierzbicka (2006) describes it, the English language itself is not culturally and ideologically neutral; rather it is steeped in culture.

Besides, Schiffrin (1994) describes the relationship between culture and communication in which both shapes and is shaped by language. Jamaliah Mohd Ali (1991) observes that the three major cultures of Malaysia place a high value of humility and modesty, hence it is considered inappropriate to accept or acknowledge complimentary remarks. She added that Malaysians general aptitude is to play down their abilities and competence when confronted with complimentary remarks". Notwithstanding a lot of research have been conducted on compliment responses, they are mostly carried in English-speaking countries. Only a few studies have investigated

compliments in Malay context. This study, which is to look into the strategies of the Malay compliments and compliment responses in English, will surely provide useful information for cultural studies.

Research in the area of speech act compliment has also provided ample evidence that the complimenting speech act varies according to some social and linguistic variables such as the use of English as a second language. Since English has been a dominant factor in the communication of people in Malaysia, this study aims to look at the compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates in English language as well as to investigate the factors that affect these compliment response strategies. In conducting this study, a few considerations have been made such as the right selection of data and the way data procedures are conducted so that it meets the purposes of the study. In this research, compliments and compliment responses were gathered from a group of Malay male and female undergraduates to provide a better understanding of the concepts of compliment responses used among Malays.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Before the commencement of this research, a preliminary study was carried out on a small group of Malay undergraduates to look at the strategies employed in compliment responses. The findings discovered that there were some similarities and differences in the use of compliment response strategies between Malay male and female undergraduates. Male participants seemed to accept the compliments most of the time by upgrading themselves while female participants seemed to be more modest by toning down the compliments. Due to that, it was intriguing to attempt a further discussion on the use of compliment response strategies on a larger scale of participants so that it can reveal more interesting findings.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to explore the responses obtained from the compliments in relation to Eastern culture, specifically Malay. According to Chen (1993), compliments in Eastern culture are generally denied or rejected while Western people would appreciate the compliments paid to them (Holmes, 1988). Thus, the execution of this study helps to investigate how Malays produce compliment response strategies as well as to know the factors that affect the choice of the strategies used in compliment responses.

Moreover, another aspect that is also important is the language used in compliment response strategies. The use of compliment response strategies is widely researched in native language of the speakers. Many studies have been conducted on compliment and compliment responses particularly in different languages and cultures, yet only a few have been carried out on the use of English compliments among Malays. Normala (2011) investigates the pragmatics of Malay compliments among Malay speakers in Malaysia. Another study carried out by David (2002) researched on the acceptance and rejection of Malay compliments among Malaysians. Nevertheless, the use of English in compliment responses has not been widely researched in this field of study. Thus, it is interesting to look at how second language learners of English produced compliment responses in English. Not only that, the language forms of compliments can also be researched in their responses to compliments with regards to the use of English as their second language.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study is an investigation of the types of compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates. It will further examine the factors that affect the choice of these compliment strategies by male and female undergraduates.

1.4 Research Questions:

Two research questions were formulated to aid in the investigation:

1. What are the types of compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates?
2. What are the factors that affect the choice of these compliment response strategies?

Through these questions, the study attempts to examine the types of compliment response strategies used by both Malay male and female undergraduates. It also seeks to investigate the factors that contribute to the choice of adopting different strategies when they respond to the compliments.

1.5 The Scope and Limitation of Study

The study limited its investigation to identifying compliment response strategies demonstrated by Malay undergraduates in role plays as well as analysing the factors that affect the choice of compliment response strategies using semi-structured interviews. The data were collected within two weeks and there were possibilities that participants might have reproduced similar compliment responses because some of the participants were aware of the situations and topics of compliment used in the role plays by their course mates beforehand.

Apart from that, the participants were Malay undergraduates and they were required to produce compliment responses in English. Even though their English proficiency was taken into account, a small number of participants committed some obvious grammatical errors. However, it did not really affect the meaning of the responses. Moreover, the analysis of the data was limited to content analysis of the compliment responses. This study did not focus on other linguistic features such as pauses and turn taking which might contribute to more interesting findings. Hence, it might not produce similar findings as to other research relating to this area of study. The

analyses of data mainly focused on Herbert's framework (1998) for compliment response strategies and Fukushima's framework (1993) for factors that affect compliment response strategies.

In addition, a number of participants had a tendency to use particle *lah* in their responses. The particle *lah* is a feature in colloquial Malay word and it is widely used among Malaysians. Despite the grammatical issue and the use of colloquial English, it can be summarized that these limitations were not a major concern as most of the students were able to understand the instructions and managed to follow them accordingly. As Blum-Kalka (1991) pointed out, behaviours that are consistent across L1 and L2 usually result in communicative success. With respect to the use of English in this study, it also interesting to see that the respondents were able to come up with diverse patterns of compliment responses and able to use higher order adjectives in giving compliments such as *tremendous*, *stunning* and *fabulous*. This can be considered as a very positive outcome as the participants managed to acquire both grammatical and pragmatic competence successfully.

Finally, the subjects of the study were limited to 30 Malay undergraduates enrolled in an English course equivalent to the *Preparatory English for MUET*. These undergraduates were in the same course, Applied Science, and aged between 18 to 20 years old. The number of participants was quite small, hence it might not represent the actual investigation of compliment response strategies among Malay undergraduates.

1.6 Significance of the study

This study may provide some form of empirical data for future research in this area. The main emphasis of this study is to explore the compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates in responding to compliments. It may also discover a

number of new strategies used by Malay undergraduates when they respond to compliments.

In addition, there has been an interesting need for the researchers to investigate the factors that affect the choice of compliment response strategies used by different genders. Males and females are known to have different communication styles, thus there may be factors that affect the way they respond to the compliments. These factors are important as they indicate their strong reasons and preferences in choosing different strategies in compliment responses. There are a few investigations relating to the effect of gender in communication, such as Holmes (1988), Herbert (1990) and Tannen (1996). These researches reveal the different outcomes, thus it is very interesting to have a deeper investigation on this particular topic.

Apart from that, it is also significant to investigate the various patterns of compliment responses in one culture. Compliment responses can serve as one of the indices of a cultural way of speaking or cultural philosophies, which is operative in different societies (Han, 1992). Malays are assumed to reject compliment most of the time to avoid self-praise (Normala, 2011), thus it is very essential to see whether this assumption is still valid or not. Even though a huge number of researches have been conducted in compliment response study, only a few of them are associated with Malay culture. Thus, it would be very interesting to conduct this study as it will reflect the background of the people being studied. Thus, this study is hoped to contribute towards the enhancement of existing literature in the field of pragmatics as it further uncovers the different types of compliment response strategies used by people from this culture.

1.7 Summary

This chapter is a brief introduction to the research. Based on the previous research, there have been many different strategies used in compliment responses by Malay male and female undergraduates. Not only that, culture would also influence the way people give and respond to the compliments due to some factors such as formality, gender and compliment topics. Many researchers such as Holmes (1986) and Al Falasi (2007) claimed that complimenting behaviour varies cross culturally and differences have always arisen when it comes to responses to compliments. This research was carried out to extend the investigation in compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates as well as to look at the factors that affect these compliment response strategies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the related literature that shapes the theoretical background of this study. In this section, a few terms are defined and accompanied by the reviews of some fundamental theories related to the study. It introduces the theory of Speech Act and the two important branches, compliments and compliment responses. This chapter also reviews the theoretical frameworks of the study which are the macro and micro level of compliment response strategies founded by Herbert (1998) and also by Fukushima (1993) on the factors that affect the choice of compliment response strategies. Last but not least, there are some reviews on the previous studies on compliments and compliment responses.

2.1 The Overview of Speech Act Theory

Since the present study is concerned with the speech act of compliment response, it is vital to highlight major contributions relating to Speech Act Theory which is the first major theory in the study of pragmatics. It is a theory that analyses the role of utterances in relation to the behaviour of interlocutors in verbal communication (Austin, 1962). Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) are among the first scholars who defined speech act and is later redefined by the sociolinguist, Hymes (1972). According to Austin's (1962) speech act theory, people perform various kinds of acts when they are speaking such as to apologize, to thank, to give warning, to compliment, to threaten, to request and so forth. Actions performed through utterances are generally called speech acts, and in English, are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, compliment, complaint, invitation, promise or request.

Austin (1962) classifies three types of forces in a speech act; locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Among those three types, the illocutionary act is the central issue of most concern. It is an act performed in saying something and is identified by the explicit performance via the communicative force of an utterance (Austin, 1962). The basic utterance is a locutionary act, it produces a meaningful linguistic expression. Besides, it can be recognised as a simply the literal description of things such as *The watch is broken*, which does not have more implication than its literal meaning. Meanwhile, a perlocutionary act refers to the result of saying and involves many psychological and social factors.

Searle (1969) classifies illocutionary act into the following five categories; 1) Expressives 2) Declaratives 3) Representatives 4) Directives 5) Commisives. Expressives is a type of speech act that expresses the speaker's attitudes and emotions towards the proposition, (e.g congratulations, excuses and thanks). Declaratives refer to the speech acts that change the reality in accordance with the proposition of the declaration (e.g. pronouncing someone guilty). Meanwhile, representative speech acts are utterances in which the speaker's words reflect the world truthfully. Directives on the other hand are speech acts that are to cause the hearer to take a particular action such as requests and commands. Finally, commissives refer to speech acts that commit a speaker to some future actions like promises and oaths. In this case, compliments and compliment responses belong to the category of "Expressives" since they are used to express positive meaning to create or maintain rapport as well as to please the hearers.

The term speech acts is later redefined by Hymes (1972). She postulates speech acts as "the minimal terms of the set" of speech, which are subsumed under speech situations based on the contexts such as ceremonies, meals, etc., and speech events such

as classroom speech and political debates. She hypothesizes that speech acts have multivariate functions and that each function and the way it is expressed are relative to certain cultures. As compared to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), Hymes (1972) denies a one to one correspondence between sentence type and speech act.

2.2 The Speech Act of Compliments and Compliment Responses

The concept of compliment allows positive expressions, commendation or admiration that can boost the morale of the recipients. Different definitions on the speech act of compliment have been provided according to the different viewpoints. Wolfson (1983) asserts that a compliment serves a purpose to create or maintain solidarity between interlocutors by expressing admiration or approval. Holmes (1988) fundamentally agrees with Wolfson's idea by treating compliments as positively affective speech acts directed to the addressee which serve to consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. She points out that compliments are used to reinforce desired behaviour, for instance in classroom situation. They often serve to strengthen other speech acts such as apologies, thankings and refusals. Besides, the most interesting part is compliment can also be employed to express sarcasm. Sometimes people tend to be indirect and the best way is to compliment people in a sarcastic way.

Manes (1983) defines compliment as a window through which a society can view what is valued by a relevant culture. Knapp, Hopper and Bell (1984) assert that the majority of compliments are given to the recipients of the same age and social status for many reasons such as:

- a) to express admiration or approval of someone's work, appearance and taste
- b) to establish, confirm and maintain solidarity

- c) to soften face-threatening acts such as apologies, requests and criticism
- d) to replace greetings, gratitude, apologies and congratulations
- e) to reinforce desired behaviours

Furthermore, compliments can be positive speech acts which can satisfy the recipient's positive face requirements; they can be defined as face-threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), compliments could be considered as face-threatening acts to a certain extent to indicate that the recipient of the compliment is envious with the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987) also believe that compliments serve other functions such as to express encouragement or gratitude and even to soften criticism. In this study, Wolfson's (1983) definition is used as it suits with the aims and objectives of the research.

On the other hand, a compliment response is defined as a verbal acknowledgement that the recipient of the compliment heard and then reacted to the compliment (Holmes, 1988). Searle (1975) classifies compliment responses as expressives, i.e. utterances that convey the speaker's attitude to a certain state of affairs specified in the propositional content. Most of the researchers agreed with the idea that compliment responses normally cause problems to the receiver because of a conflict between the receiver's wish to avoid disagreement and at the same time, a wish to refrain from implying or expressing self-praise (Cheng, 2011). In relation to this issue, Leech's (1983) theory of Politeness Principle has categorized this dilemma as a clash between the maxim of agreement and modesty. By and large, Herbert (1998) concludes that the ideal response to a compliment is to accept it in a way that does not imply self-praise or expresses modesty.

Pomerantz (1978) was the first researcher who studied the topic of compliment response. She claimed that two general maxims of speech behaviour conflict with each other when responding to a compliment. These conflicting maxims are “agree with the speaker” and “avoid self-praise”. She concluded that when engaging in compliment response, complimentees often seek a solution to, or resolution of this conflict by striking a balance between complete avoidance of self-praise and complete acceptance or agreement. Interestingly, she found that American English complimentees often expressed token acceptance or agreement with a compliment while at the same time scaling down or refocusing praise. Scaling down is achieved by utilizing a less positive evaluative descriptor than the compliment, by which the complimentee performs an evaluation shift in the form of a praise downgrade. Meanwhile, the sociolinguist Hymes (1972) introduces the concept of communicative competence, which means the ability to use speech appropriately in varying social contexts, depending on the social circumstances to know who should talk and how, when, where and to whom one should talk. In terms of the concept of compliment response, Hymes (1972) believes that it is determined by the community, the situation and the event which function to show solidarity between two equals.

2.2.1 Topics of Compliment

Topics of compliment are one factor that affects the way people produced compliment responses (Fukushima, 1993). A number of studies in the study of compliment and compliment responses showed that the role of compliment topics influenced the strategies employed by the receivers when responding to the speakers' compliment. Herbert (1990) stated that compliments are affected by their subject matters which is also known as compliment topics. He categorised three subject matters of compliments as the most common topics: 1) appearance and possession, 2)

performances, skills and abilities and 3) personality traits. Baba (1999) in her study divided compliment topics into two categories: compliments on external characteristics and compliments on internal characteristics. Internal topics included skills, abilities, and personal attributes. On the other hand, external topics included compliments on physically tangible things such as physical attributes or attire.

A number of studies conducted on the speech act of complimenting reveal that most compliments fall into certain broad categories of topics. Wolfson (1983) claimed that compliments fall into two major categories: those having to do with appearance and those who comment on ability. Studies in compliment topics also demonstrated that most of compliment topics focused on a few general life topics; personality, possession, appearance, accomplishment and skill (Holmes, 1988; Wolfson, 1989; Herbert, 1990). Herbert (1990) used these topics in her compliment study as general life topics appeared common in the society. Fukushima (1993) in her study categorised compliment topics into two groups; internal stable uncontrollable (appearance, ability) and external unstable controllable (work, belongings).

Furthermore, past compliment studies also showed the connection between compliment topics and compliment responses. Chen (1993) reported that both American English speakers and Chinese speakers believed compliment topics influenced how they responded to compliments. Ruhi (2006) claimed that Turkish perceived topics of compliment an influential factor when responding to compliments. A more current study conducted by Katsuta (2012) revealed that the majority of Japanese college students in her study were affected by the compliment topics in the way they produced compliment responses.

2.2.2 Intensity of Compliments

The intensity of a compliment may affect the choice of strategies in compliment responses. Intensity refers to the linguistic encoding that gives effect to a compliment (Baba, 1999). Most of the time, the emotion of the speaker is encoded in both paralinguistic and linguistic cues. There are a few linguistic devices from Baba's (1999) study that indicate the intensity of the compliments:

- 1) Semantically exaggerated adjectives (e.g., "great", "wonderful", "excellent")
- 2) Syntactic manipulations (e.g., "What a beautiful sweater it is!")
- 3) Interjections (e.g., "Wow!" "Gosh!")
- 4) Intensifiers (e.g., "really", "very")

Baba (1999) found out that Japanese females used more linguistic devices that indicated intensity as compared to males. Intensity was measured on a scale according to how many intensifiers, interjections, complimentary words and syntactic manipulation employed by the participants. In relation to the present study, it is interesting to consider intensity as one of the factors that affects the choice of compliment response strategies.

2.2.3 Humour in Compliment

Humour is defined as a psychological response characterized by the positive emotion of amusement, the appraisal that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh (Gervais & Wilson, 2005). The element of humour is sometimes found in the act of complimenting between the speaker and addressee. Herbert (1990) introduced one category of acceptance, praise upgrade and joking as one way to respond to compliment. Humour is indicated by at least one of three responses: behavioral (laughing), cognitive (appraising something as "funny"), or emotional (experiencing the

positive emotion of amusement) (McGraw & Warren, 2010). One study of compliment responses conducted by Syed Hayyam (2015) indicated that Iranian learners of English inserted some elements of humour in their compliment responses. He found out that the use of humour among participants can improve social interaction and mitigate intensity of negative life events.

2.3 Past Studies on Compliment Responses

There has been a surge of studies conducted comparing compliment response strategies in various languages, genders as well as cultures. A few studies indicate that these varieties contribute to the different findings in their study.

2.3.1 Categorisation of Compliment Responses

It is interesting to look at the different categorisations in the study of compliment responses. Most of the studies conducted in this field based their premise on Pomerantz's (1978) work as she was the first researcher who discussed compliment responses from a pragmatic perspective. She reports that the way people respond to compliments are basically constrained by two contradictory conversational principles which are agree with speaker and avoid self-praise. These two conditions have to be complied with when they respond to a compliment. Nevertheless, the act of complying with the principles would inevitably lead to violation due to the pressure on the recipient to either agree or disagree with the compliments. She believes that there is strong pressure to avoid self-praise. Therefore, she contends that the recipient of the compliment would simply accept the compliments, otherwise he or she resorts to other strategies which could be found in her data:

“That most compliments lie somewhere in between (not at the polar extremes of) acceptances and agreements on the one hand and rejections and disagreements on the other” (Pomerantz, 1978, p.81)

She then developed compliment response strategies from her findings by categorising them into three broad categories:

Table 2.1: Compliment Response Categorisation (Pomerantz, 1978)

Categories	Types	Examples
Acceptance	Agreeing Utterance	I think it's lovely too.
Rejection	Disagreeing Utterance	I'm afraid I don't like it much
Self-praise Avoidance Mechanism	Credit Shifts	A fantastic meal – a nice meal (praise downgrade)
	Referent Shifts	I was just lucky – What a good golf play (credit switch)

From her data, some findings appear to be the solutions to the conflict posed by the above mentioned principles which is Self-praise Avoidance Mechanism. Pomerantz (1978) further categorised them as *credit-shifts* and *referent-shifts*. One category that falls under credit-shifts is praise downgrade (E.g: changing *a fantastic meal* to *a nice meal*). As for referent-shifts, the recipient switches the credit for the praise elsewhere (E.g.: changing *I was just lucky* to *what a good golf play*). Hence, it is noted that either of the strategies could be used to accept or reject a compliment. As other researchers conducted studies on compliment response strategies, they began to revise and adapt

Pomerantz's taxonomy to cater the suitability of their findings on the categorisation of compliment responses.

Holmes (1988) argued that it is important to categorise and analyse the CRs strategies with consideration to the credit attribution of compliment response strategies. She claimed that positive comments to a husband on his wife's appearance for instance, would not necessarily be interpreted as a compliment to the husband in all social groups. Therefore, she asserted that there is a need to ensure that the credit is implicitly attributed solely to the recipient of the compliment. With regards to this issue, Holmes (1988) devised three broad categories with 12 sub categories as in Table 2.2:

Table 2.2: Compliment Response Categorisation (Holmes, 1988)

Categories	Response Types	Examples
ACCEPT	Appreciation/ Agreement Token	Thanks/Yes
	Agreeing Utterance	I think it's lovely too
	Downgrading Utterance	I think it's not too bad is it
	Return Compliment	You're looking good to
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 that Vibrant Knits place
	Ignoring the Positive Effect	It's time we were leaving isn't it?
	Legitimate Evasion	Context needed to illustrate
	Request Reassurance	Do you really think so?

Holmes (1988) classified compliment responses into three broad categories: Accept, Reject and Deflect/Evade. The *Accept* category constitutes responses which may implicitly or explicitly accept the credit attributed by a compliment. This would range from the explicitly way of acceptance to implicitly accepting some of the credit attributed by agreeing with the recipient or returning the compliment to the recipient. If the addressee does not agree with the evaluation in the compliment, the compliment response would be assigned to the *Reject* category. The compliment responses which genuinely query the validity of the credit attribution in the compliments also give an implication that the recipient disagrees with the complimenter, thus rejecting the credit attributed (Holmes, 1988). On the other hand, the *Deflect* category comprises compliment responses which reflect avoidance to the compliment through various strategies including shift credit, informative comment, ignoring the positive effect, legitimate evasion and request reassurance.

In addition, another prominent researcher who has extensively worked on the compliment response categories is Herbert (1990). Initially, he researched compliment responses among American English speakers. Expanding and refining Pomerantz's (1978) categorisation of compliment responses, Herbert (1990) introduced three categories of compliment responses including 12 types of micro strategies. He then later made some revision in terms of renaming and reordering, which is illustrated in the Table 2.3:

Table 2.3: Herbert's (1990) Taxonomy of CRs

Agreement	
Types	Examples
Appreciation token: a verbal or non-verbal acceptance of the compliment.	Thank you? [nod]
Comment acceptance: addressee accepts the compliment and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.	Yeah, this is my favourite, too!
Praise Upgrade: addressee accepts the compliment and contributes to the force of the compliment.	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
Comment History: addressee offers a comment on the object of the compliment, usually some information about how s/he has acquired it.	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
Reassignment: addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person.	My mother gave it to me.
Return: the praise is shifted or returned to the addresser.	So is yours.

Non-agreement	
Types	Examples
Scale down: addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaws in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated.	It is really quite old.
Question: addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the	Do you really think so?

compliment.	
Disagreement: addressee asserts that the object of the compliment is not praiseworthy.	I hate it.
Qualification: addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with <i>though</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>well</i> , <i>etc.</i>	Well, it is all right but Kim's is nicer.
No acknowledgment: addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment. The addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment or gives no response.	Topic shift/ no response
Request interpretation	
Addressee interprets the utterance as a request rather than a simple compliment.	You want to borrow it?

The table above displays a paradigmatic example of the compliment events that is very comprehensive, clear and holistic. In fact, Herbert (1990) is one of the prominent researchers in the area of compliment responses who distinguishes the diverse types of strategies by providing distinct explanations for each type of strategy. His taxonomy provides macro and micro level of compliment responses. The macro level of compliment responses consists of three broad categories: Agreement, Non-Agreement and Request Interpretation. On the other hand, the micro level of compliment responses include 12 strategies as displayed in Table 2.3.

On the other hand, David (2002) who carried out a study using the compliment "You look good" on a total of 176 Malaysians, found out that a large majority of respondents accepted the compliments. Table 2.4 displays the types of response patterns to accepting compliments used by the participants in his study.

Table 2.4: Response Patterns to Accepting Compliment (David, 2002)

No	Accepting	Example
1	Accepting Compliments	Thank you very much.
2	Accepting and/by Providing Reason	My wife gave for my birthday.
3	Accepting & Returning Compliment	Thanks, you look good too.
4	Accepting & Joking	Thank you. Want me to spend you?
5	Questioning then Accepting	Sure? Thanks.
6	Paralinguistic/Non-verbal/Non-verbal & Elaboration	Open eyes widely

David (2002) reports that a total of 11 compliment response patterns has been designated a self-explanatory label which is fairly transparent. Apart from the patterns to accepting compliment, there are also five variations to rejecting compliments:

Table 2.5: Response Patterns to Rejecting Compliment (David, 2002)

No	Rejecting	Example
1	Doubting	Me! Are you sure?
2	Rejecting	Nothing funny.
3	Rejecting & Returning	Is it beautiful? Your dress is nicer than mine.
4	Rejecting and Providing Reason	I won't wear it until my mom starts to grumble.
5	Negating & Demeaning Compliment	Very cheap.

Based on a number of categorisation of compliment responses introduced by various researchers, the categorisation introduced by Herbert (1990) seems to be the most suitable taxonomy for the current study as it is more detailed and provides suitability to the findings of data. This is because the main objective of this study is to investigate the types of compliment response strategies used by the Malay undergraduates. Herbert's (1990) taxonomy provides detailed explanations for each strategy in compliment

responses. Furthermore, the study does not only look at the agreement and non-agreement type in compliment responses, it explores the specific strategy used in the micro level of compliment responses. Thus, Herbert's (1990) taxonomy provides a more holistic description of compliment responses which suits the research objective.

2.3.2 Cross Cultural Studies on Compliment Responses

A number of research have been conducted in the pragmatics area especially on compliment responses, and it has often been researched in a contrastive pattern to investigate cultural differences between two communities. The studies indicated how users in two different languages responded to the compliments in different ways. The methodology used in each study also varied from one another.

Wolfson (1989) examined the differences between Asian ESL students and Americans in responding to compliments. He commented on two types of problems in English compliment responses as expressed by ESL learners; one is pragmatic transfer from their L1 and the other is the error in their perception of the norm, as evidenced by their saying "thank you" regardless of the social context. Pertaining to pragmatic transfer, Wolfson (1989) found that the way Asian ESL students downgraded compliments as a way to deflect them was different from the practice of native English speakers. The Asian ESLs students downgraded the compliments by scaling down the compliment and shifting it to the addresser. On the other hand, Americans responded to compliments by giving unfavourable information about themselves or the object complimented. While pragmatic transfer from the L1 learners might cause misunderstanding, the author pointed out that the overuse of "Thank you" by ESL learners could be even disturbing. This is because a "Thank you" at inappropriate times creates distance rather than solidarity and fails to support the continuation of talk when the learners attempt to communicate with native speakers.

Furthermore, Chen (1993) did an investigation comparing compliment responses produced by Americans and the Chinese. The objective of his study was to investigate the similarities and differences in compliment response strategies employed by people from two different cultures. 30 participants were involved in the study with Discourse Completion Task (DCT) as the main instrument in data collection. The two groups were found to use different compliment strategies in their compliment responses. The majority of Chinese respondents rejected the compliments while American accepted the compliments most of the time.

Chiang and Pochtrager (1993) investigated similarities and differences between the Chinese-born speakers' and American-born speakers' of English compliment responses by conducting interviews. As gender and status became the main variables, they found that in most of the situations, American-born speakers were more likely to give positive elaboration on responses while the Chinese-born speakers were more likely to deny the compliments.

Gajaseni (1994) also applied the speech act of compliments to Americans and Thais. A study investigated the extent to which the gender and social status of the complimenter as well as the gender of the receiver accounted for the choice of strategies Americans and Thais used to respond to compliments. Subjects were 40 American university students in the United States and 40 Thai students in Thailand. In a Discourse Completion Task (DCT), each subject responded orally to 16 compliment situations; each was then interviewed. Results suggested that there were both similarities and differences in both groups. Americans gave more lengthy responses by combining different strategies or repeating a strategy. In comparison with Thais, they produced shorter and simpler sentences in their responses. The researcher also found that

Americans and Thais tended to accept compliments more from an interlocutor of a higher social status and rejected those more often from someone of a lower status.

Besides, Nelson, Al-Batal and Echos (1996) compared Arabic and English compliment responses by conducting interviews on 50 Arabic-speaking Syrians and 50 Americans. They discovered that both groups were more likely to use acceptances rather than rejections. The researchers highlighted the finding which indicated that Americans used appreciation tokens such as thanks while Arabic-speaking Syrians used formulaic forms such as return compliment and upgrade. In this research, the researchers discussed the importance of pragmatic acquisition as pragmatic failure may cause communication breakdown, misunderstandings or frustration.

Furthermore, Yu (2004) compared compliment responses between two groups of Chinese learners of English, one group lived in Taiwan and the other group lived in the United States. Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used to collect the responses from the two groups of participants. It was found that learners in the United State were likely to accept the compliments whereas the learners in Taiwan chose to reject the compliments. Another interesting finding revealed that the learners in the United States employed a combination of strategies in compliment responses while the other group only used one strategy.

In a more recent study, Nurizah (2009) investigated a comparison between Malay and American responses to compliments in English. The respondents of her research comprised of 10 Malays and 10 Americans aged between 20 and 22 years old. The respondents were undergraduate students in one local Malaysian university. Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and short interviews were employed to investigate the similarities and differences in compliment response strategies. Findings suggested

that compliment response patterns produced by the two groups showed differences. Americans accepted the compliments using lengthy responses while Malays rejected the compliments using shorter responses. It can be concluded that people from two different cultures employed different strategies in compliment responses.

With the growth of interests in the study of compliment responses, Aliakbar, Masoud Rahimi and Samira (2016) also contributed one finding in this study area. The study compared the compliment responses of native Persian speakers with those of native speakers of American English in television series to find similarities and differences in the use of compliment responses in both languages. The data were from the two television series broadcasted in 1994 and 2013. Herbert's (1990) three main categories including agreement, non-agreement, and request interpretation was employed to identify different strategies of compliment response used by the speakers. The findings of this study revealed that in each language, the varieties of compliment responses were different from one to another. Native Persian speakers used more agreement strategies while native speakers of America English used more non-agreement strategies. Taking the results of their study into account, they concluded that the practices in one culture contributed to the different strategies taken by the two groups being studied.

2.3.3 Compliment Response Studies Relating to Gender

There are a number of studies conducted on compliment responses in relation to gender as one of the main variables. Holmes (1988) carried out a research to explore complimenting behaviour among New Zealander men and women middle class. Using a corpus of 484 compliment exchanges, the findings of the study revealed that both men and women employed compliment strategies in similar ways in which the

compliments were readily accepted and least likely to be rejected. The topics characterizing the compliments of female and male New Zealanders were also described; women received more compliments on their appearance while men received more compliments on their possessions.

Herbert (1990) analysed compliment responses among American English speakers. The analyses of his data were very detailed and thorough. He categorized compliment responses into four: males to males, males to females, females to females and females to males. He found out that the majority of women accepted compliments from their male counterpart. He added that females were more likely to agree with the semantic content of compliment than males. Males on the other hand rejected the compliments given by female speakers. Males also employed some combination of strategies when rejecting the compliments given by females.

Han's (1992) study compared interactions of Korean female speakers with Korean female ESL learners and American female speakers. Using ethnographic observation and note taking as her method of collecting data, the major finding revealed that Korean female learners accepted compliments at a greater rate than American female speakers. Nevertheless, Korean female ESL learners rejected compliments more frequently when they were within their own language group. The researcher also did interviews with the respondents to probe further. Han (1992) discovered three possible reasons that Korean ESL learners responded differently to compliments from American speakers than they did to compliments from speakers of their own language : (1) their acquisition of a perceived norm in the United States through the acculturation process; (2) their learned knowledge through English textbooks in Korean stated that the only correct way to respond to compliments is with "thank you"; and (3) their belief that Americans are always frank and direct in accepting compliments.

Al-Falasi (2007) did a study to find out whether Arab female learners of English produced compliment responses in English, and whether pragmatic transfer could take place. Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used to investigate the strategies used in compliment responses followed by several interview questions to 25 Arab female learners of English. The findings suggested that Arabic expressions were sometimes being transferred to English and the Arabs sometimes had some false impressions about native speakers of English which affected the way they responded to the compliments.

Using Discourse Completion Task (DCT) as a form of questionnaires to obtain data, Davis (2009) carried out a study to examine compliment responses across gender within Australians as well as to investigate males perceiving compliment as flirtatious. The results revealed that Australian speakers of English used acceptance token when responding to non-intimate compliments. The study also employed interviews to investigate the factors that affected the choice in compliment response strategies. The majority of male respondents were found to identify compliments from female speakers as neither flirtatious nor innocent.

A more recent study on gender in compliment responses was conducted by Zhao (2013). She carried out a study on gender differences in compliments and responses of 60 international Chinese students in Malaysia. Using questionnaire as an instrument in data collection, she discovered that females used more explicit compliments than males while males employed implicit compliments. Females were also found using acceptance strategies while males used non-acceptance strategies in responding to compliments. She concluded that the gender differences in compliments and compliment responses among Chinese international students did not only reflect Chinese traditional culture and different roles males and females play in the societies, but they also show the different viewpoints about the function of compliment behaviours.

Another study investigating gender differences was conducted by Mohammad Yahya, Nosimah and Khaziyati (2016) on compliment responses among male and female Jordanian university students. The corpus consisted of 611 compliment responses collected from 36 participants through a note-taking method. Adopting Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of compliment response strategies as a method of analysis, the researchers found out that females used agreement strategies more frequently than males. Nevertheless, males employed more request interpretation strategies than their female counterpart. . The researchers concluded that the linguistic manipulations of compliment responses shown in their study indicated that different genders had different sets of strategies in compliment responses.

2.3.4 Local Studies on Compliment Responses

The compliment speech act has been attracting an increasing amount of attention among researchers including Malaysians. There have been a few studies conducted on compliment responses among Malaysian speakers.

Normala (2011) conducted a study on the pragmatics of Malay compliments among Malay speakers in Malaysia. Her study was based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) "face" framework and Searle's (1969) speech act framework. Using DCT as a method of data collection, she found out that compliments are more appreciated than rejected by Malay speakers now than before. Thus, it indicates a shift in the culture of compliments and compliment response in Malaysia. This is because Malay speakers have begun to increasingly adopt the Western ways of responding to compliments, which are accepting or appreciating rather than to maintain the Eastern style of rejecting and denying the compliments.

Meanwhile, Siti Yuhaida Anniah and Tan (2014) have done an investigation on compliments and compliment responses on Twitter among Malaysian male and female celebrities. The aim of the study was to identify the functions and topics of compliments and also the patterns and strategies of compliment responses across gender among Malaysian celebrities on Twitter. Forty celebrities consisted of 20 males and 20 females were selected and the data was collected from their twitter accounts. A total of 220 compliments and compliment responses were extracted from the celebrities' tweets as to form the corpus for investigation. The results indicate several differences on how compliment responses were used by men and women. Female addressees adhered to the first principle that governed the act of politeness, to accept the compliment in order to give face to the complimenter. However, male addressees preferred comment acceptance when receiving compliments.

Ummul Khair and Grace (2016) conducted a study on the act of complimenting in Malaysian English. The purpose of the research was to find out how the act of giving and receiving of compliments were done among 32 English speaking Malaysians. The method used for this research was the recording of naturally occurring casual conversations which was then transcribed and broken into individual tokens. Results showed that English speaking Malaysians mostly accepted the compliment given, but at the same time they also shifted the compliment to avoid self-praise. According to the researchers, the implications of their study were that there were many strategies to respond to compliments and people can still be polite. By teaching the appropriate ways to respond to compliments, teachers can expose the students to different ways of using language without having a communication breakdown in their conversation.

By and large, it can be seen that even though numerous studies are carried out on compliment responses, the study on Malaysian speakers is still largely undiscovered.

Hence, it is important to highlight that this study attempts to enhance more on the existing literature review and share some new discoveries pertaining to the main objectives of this study.

2.4 Research Gap

Many previous research employed Discourse Completion Task (DCT) (Furko & Dudas, 2012; Davis, 2009; Al-Falasi, 2007, Chiang & Pochtrager, 1993) as an instrument to collect data. However, this study chooses a different setting of data collection which is role play, accompanied by semi-structured interviews. Kasper and Dahl (1991) put DCT at the lower level of data collection due to its weaknesses especially in terms of its reliability and authenticity. Even though DCT may trigger productive responses, it is limited in the authenticity of the data. Nevertheless, the use of role plays allows participants to become more creative and spontaneous in producing the compliment responses. This is a good indicator to allow more variation in the findings.

Apart from that, previous studies on compliment responses have focused more on the comparison between two different cultures. For instance, Chen (1993) compared compliment responses produced by Americans and the Chinese. Gajaseneni (1994) also analysed the comparison in compliment responses of Americans and Thais. Nevertheless, the current study did not focus on the contrastive aspect of two cultures, yet it only involved the production of compliment responses by Malay speakers. This could be an insightful research gap as it only focuses on the diverse strategies used by Malays in compliment responses.

Studies on compliment responses in the local context have always focused on the production of compliment responses in Malay. Normala (2011) investigated the pragmatics of Malay compliments using Brown and Levinson's (1987) face framework

and Searle's (1969) speech act framework among Malay speakers in Malaysia. Besides, another study carried out by Siti Yuhaida Anniah and Tan (2014) researched the patterns and strategies of Malay compliment responses across gender among Malaysian celebrities on twitter. The current study is different as it revealed the strategies used in compliment responses by Malay undergraduates in English language as a second language (ESL).

2.5 Summary

In this chapter, the review of literature has attempted to explain the speech act of compliment and compliment responses. Studies on compliments and compliment responses were explored by looking at the view of cross cultural studies, gender differences and local context. Many extensive research on compliment responses within or across languages had been carried out by the researchers in Eastern and Western culture. Some analyses compared native speakers with non-native speakers, while others chose second language learners as their focus of study. Apart from that, many studies on compliment responses employed discourse completion tasks (DCT) as the instrument to elicit data for the studies. Some studies also used role play technique and interview in order to collect data. The present study would like to add insight to the existing body of pragmatics knowledge concerning the choice of strategies in compliment responses and the factor that affect these strategies.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology carried out in the study. This study aims to investigate the strategies in compliment responses as well as the factors that affect the choice of these compliment response strategies. In order to achieve the objectives, a few frameworks are selected and a few segments are discussed, particularly the design of the study, the selection of the subjects, the instruments as well as the procedures adopted for the data collection. At the same time, a pilot study is elaborated at the end of this chapter as it is a part of the preliminary findings for this study.

3.1 Research Design

The present study employs a qualitative analysis method to gain insight into the compliment response strategies and factors that affect the choice of these strategies by Malay undergraduates. It is very important to understand each strategy listed in the theoretical framework as it provides a more holistic picture of compliment response strategies introduced by Herbert (1990) and Fukushima (1993). According to Denzin & Lincoln (2004), qualitative study focuses on interpretive and naturalistic approach to its subject matter. Thus, it suits the objective of this study as it involves the collection of data in a natural setting.

In this study, two instruments are employed to collect the data: role plays and semi structured interviews. Role plays is chosen to obtain the data on the compliments response strategies used by Malay undergraduates while semi structured interviews

function to assess the factors that affect these strategies. These two instruments are important in the stage of data collection as they help to obtain precise and detailed data.

3.2 Sample of the Study

This study involved a collection of data from a group of university students, with the variables such as age, social relationships and educational background controlled. The number of subjects was 30, which consisted of 15 males and 15 females. Generally, the participants were between the ages of 18 and 20. They were second year undergraduates studying Applied Science in one local university. These 15 male and 15 female participants belonged to the same English class, namely *BEL 260* which is equivalent to the *Preparatory English for MUET (Malaysian University English Test)*. The participants were also informed about the confidentiality of their participation in this research and they were required to fill in an informed consent form as a part of the ethical procedure for this study.

3.3 Ethical Consideration

Although the area of research for this study was familiar, careful ethical considerations were necessary to be taken into account before its execution. One of the considerations which had been taken into account was confidentiality of participations' information in this research. An informed consent form was produced (see appendix A) to get the consent of the participants before they involved in this research. They were also informed regarding the procedures, purpose and eligibility of the research. Apart from that, the data obtained were only used for research purposes and were not manipulated.

3.4 The Instruments

To carry out the study, two instruments were used. They were role plays and semi structured interviews.

3.4.1 Role Plays

This research employed role plays due to a number of reasons. Firstly, role play was chosen because it was one of the best options to be researched in the production of speech acts. Role-plays can be defined as simulations of social interactions in which participants assume and enact described roles within specified situations (Tran, 2003). He stated that there are closed and open role-plays. The closed role-play usually consists of one turn by the role-play conductor and another one by the informant. Meanwhile, in the open role-play, participants take turns speaking leading to the production of data in focus.

Furthermore, another advantage of role-play is that it provides spoken data that approaches life performance in at least two ways. Role-play data allows the researchers to examine not only the content of the utterance but also its discourse features. For example, the production of utterances in role plays can be assessed on many discourse features such as pausing, intonation and fillers. Although this study does not focus on the discourse features, it really helps to obtain more natural utterances from the participants. Moreover, as found by Margalef-Boada (1993), role-play allows more negotiation, repetition and avoidance strategies than written questionnaires. For example, role plays allow participants to produce longer responses and repetition of strategies. Moreover, in conducting the role play, participants have to act out the situations after the instructions are given. Hence, participants are expected to act

Table 3.1: Topics of Compliment (Adapted from Herbert, 1990)

Topics	Examples
Appearance	Dress, looks, make-up, etc Example: You look stunning today
Presentation	Skills, Competencies, etc Example: Your presentation was great!
Exam Results	Achievement, etc Example: Congrats! You are the highest scorer for English subject.
Personal Belonging	Bags, Phones, Watches, etc Example: Your bag looks nice on you.
Ability to Play Games	Skills, Performances, etc Example: You played very well last night.

In the second stage, the second group of participants was required to carry out the role plays using the same procedures. This time around, male participants were required to compliment their female counterparts based on the same topics. These acts of role plays were audio recorded for the purpose of data analysis. In total, there were 75 responses obtained from the first group of role plays; 15 responses times five situations. The other 75 responses were obtained from the second group, thus the total number of responses obtained for both groups were 150.

3.4.2 Semi Structured Interviews

After conducting the role plays, all 30 respondents were required to answer a number of questions in the interview sessions. The process of conducting the interviews

was similar to role plays. The first group of participants was called in the following week to answer some questions. They were called pair by pair during the interview sessions. The recordings were played back to them to ensure that they remembered the responses produced during the role plays. The purpose of having semi structured interviews was to get further explanations in regards to the production of compliments and compliment responses in the role play. The interviews were necessary as they assisted the researcher to obtain justification based on the participants' preferences or strategies in compliment responses. According to Patton (1990), the method of interviewing is one of the important techniques in a qualitative research as people cannot directly observe everything, and there is a need to facilitate in depth questions. In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2004) are also in agreement about this matter. They reported that spoken or written word has always a residue of ambiguity, no matter how careful people word the question or code the answers. They added that interviewing is one of the most common and most powerful ways to understand the communication among people.

In this study, the execution of semi structured interviews was very helpful to examine the factors that affected the choice of strategies used in the participants' responses to compliments. The questions posed to the participants were:

- 1) Do you think the way the compliment is given affects how you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reason(s).
- 2) Do you think gender of the complimenter affects the way you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reason(s).
- 3) Do you think topic of the compliment influences the way you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reason(s).

The responses from the interviews were audio recorded to ease the process of data transcription and data analysis.

3.5 Analytical Frameworks

This research adopted a number of frameworks. Firstly, Herbert's (1990) model of types of compliment responses was used to identify the diverse strategies employed by male and female undergraduates in responding to the compliments. This framework was very useful as it provides holistic categories of compliment strategies used in the study of this speech act. In addition, a framework by Fukushima (1993) was used to analyse the factors that affect the choice of these compliment response strategies.

3.5.1 The Analysis of Compliment Response Strategies

The first research question aimed to look at the strategies used by Malay undergraduates in compliment responses. Thus, one theoretical framework by Herbert (1990) was adopted to fulfil the objective of this study which was to look at the varieties of strategies in compliment responses. Herbert's (1990) model of types of compliment responses proposed the macro and micro compliment responses of agreement, non-agreement and request Interpretation. The framework is illustrated in the following table:

Table 3.2: Herbert's (1990) Model of Types of Compliment Response Strategies

Agreement	
Types	Examples
Appreciation token: a verbal or non-verbal acceptance of the compliment.	Thank you? [nod]
Comment acceptance: addressee accepts	Yeah, this is my favourite, too!

the compliment and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.	
Praise Upgrade and Joking: addressee accepts the compliment and contributes to the force of the compliment.	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
Comment History: addressee offers a comment on the object of the compliment, usually some information about how s/he has acquired it.	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
Reassignment: addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person.	My mother gave it to me.
Return: the praise is shifted or returned to the addresser.	So is yours.

Non-agreement	
Types	Examples
Scale down: addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaws in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated.	It is really quite old.
Question: addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment.	Do you really think so?
Disagreement: addressee asserts that the object of the compliment is not	I hate it.

praiseworthy.	
Qualification: addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with <i>though</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>well</i> , <i>etc.</i>	Well, it is all right but Kim's is nicer.
No acknowledgment: addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment. The addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment or gives no response.	Topic shift/ no response
Request interpretation	
Addressee interprets the utterance as a request rather than a simple compliment.	You want to borrow it?

As can be seen in Table 3.2, the macro levels include the following: agreement, in which the remark is recognized as accepting the compliment; non agreement, in which the complimentee tries to reject the complimentary force; and request interpretation, in which the recipient interprets the compliment as a request. At the micro level of agreement type, six categories were presented: appreciation token, comment acceptance, praise upgrade, comment history, reassignment and return. Meanwhile, non-agreement type includes five micro categories: scale down, question, disagreement, qualification and no acknowledgement. These micro levels of compliment responses have their own functions which are very helpful in categorising the strategies of compliment responses used by Malay undergraduates.

3.5.2 The Analysis of Factors that Affect the Compliment Response Strategies

One of the objectives of this study was to analyse the factors that affected the way participants employed different strategies in compliment responses. Fukushima (1993) introduced three variables to analyse her study: intensity of the compliment, gender of the complimenter and compliment topic. To achieve the objective of this study, Fukushima's (1993) framework was adopted to analyse the factors that influenced the choice of compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates.

Semi structured interviews were conducted where the interviewer and the participants engaged in a formal interview. The participants were required to answer a few questions in regards to why they chose certain strategies in responding to compliments. These questions were formulated based on Fukushima's (1993) framework and they were in a close-ended format. The participants were allowed to provide more elaboration where necessary. The questions posed to the participants were explained in detail so that the participants clearly understood the meaning of each question. Below is the list of questions posed to the participants:

Table 3.3: The List of Questions Posed During Semi-structured Interviews

Aspects	Questions
Intensity of compliment	1) Do you think the way the compliment is given affects how you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reason(s).
Gender of complimenter	2) Do you think gender of the complimenter affects the way you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reason(s).

Topic of compliment	3) Do you think topic of the compliment (e.g.: look, personal belonging) influences the way you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reason(s).
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Table 3.3 shows three different factors that may influence the participants to respond to compliments in different ways. Firstly, intensity of the compliment was assessed by looking at the use of certain linguistic devices and the length of the compliment. Fukushima (1993) explained that intensity of the compliments can be referred to the use of linguistic devices such as interjections, intensifiers and higher order adjectives. To support this framework, Baba (1999) provided a detailed explanation on the intensity of the compliments. Intensity may be referred to the use of exaggerated adjectives (e.g. *great*, *wonderful*, *excellent*), interjections (e.g. *Wow!*, *Gosh!*) and intensifiers (e.g. *really*, *very*). Besides, the length of the compliments can be analysed by looking at the number of words used in the production of compliment responses. The second aspect was to look at the gender of the complimenter, whether a female participant felt comfortable being complimented by a male participant or vice versa. Finally, the topic of compliment might be another factor that indicated whether the participants were affected or not by the various topics such as appearance, ability to play games, etc. To analyse the data, content analysis was carried out to categorise the responses based on the questions in the semi-structured interviews. These responses were transcribed and analysed in order to meet the objective of the study.

3.6 The Methods of Analyses

This section provides an overview of the data analysis method in answering the two research questions posed in the introduction. This study adopted a few procedures

in analysing the data such as categorisation of data, codification of data, interpretation and analysis of data.

3.6.1 Categorisation of Data

To categorise the types of compliment responses, Herbert's (1990) topics of compliments was used to analyse agreement and non-agreement responses used by the participants. Compliment topics might be one factor that influenced the choice of compliment responses. Table 3.4 shows five different topics of compliment:

Table 3.4: Topics of Compliments for Role Plays (Herbert, 1990)

Situations	Topics
A	A compliment on appearance
B	A compliment on presentation
C	A compliment on exam results
D	A compliment on personal belonging
E	A compliment on ability to play games

After the types of responses were categorised, the categorisation compliment response strategies by Malay undergraduates was carried out based on Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of compliment responses (refer to Table 3.2). The categorisation was done carefully according to the macro and micro level of compliment responses.

3.6.2 Codification of Data

For the first research question, females were labelled F1 to F15 while males were labelled M1 to M15. The data were transcribed based on the content of the actual responses. To ease the data analysis stage, the sample extracts were coded as follows:

Table 3.5: Coding of the Data

Element	Coding
Male	M
Female	F
Number of participant	1-15
Situation	a-e

For example:

- A. M3(a) refers to male participant number 3 role playing the first situation (a).
- B. F7(e) refers to female participant number 7 role playing the fifth situation (e).

To analyse the second research question, females were labelled F1 to F15 while males were labelled M1 to M15. Label (a) refers to the answer in the first aspect of the question (intensity of compliment), (b) refers to the second aspect of question (gender of complimenter) and (c) refers to third aspect of the question (topic of compliment).

For example:

- A. F2(a) refers to female participant number 1 answering the question on gender of complimenter
- B. M3(c) refers to male participant number 3 answering the question on the topic of compliment.

3.6.3 Interpretation and Analysis of Data

Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of macro and micro compliment responses was used to analyse the strategies used by Malay undergraduates in compliment responses. For example:

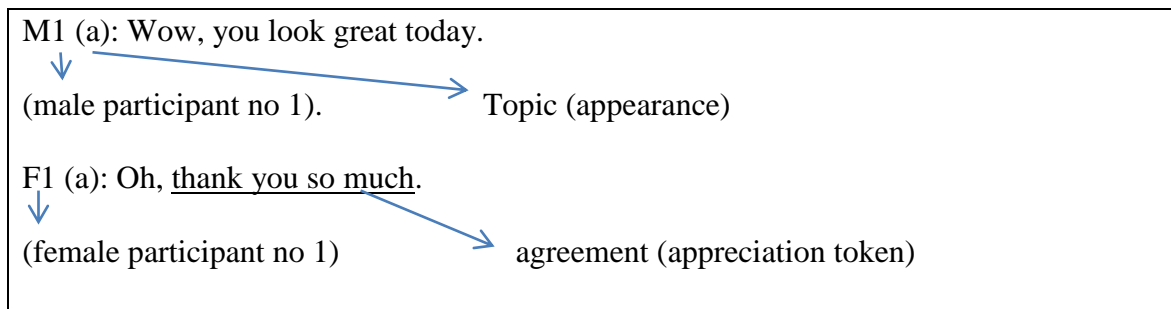


Figure 3.1: The example of compliment response strategy

If the participant employed a combination of strategies, the analysis was done as below:

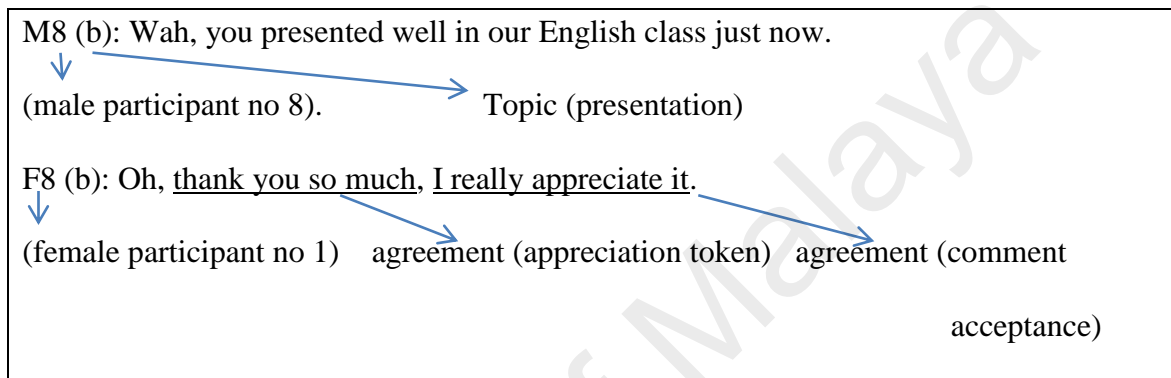


Figure 3.2: The example of compliment response strategy

After that, the second framework by Fukushima (1993) was used to analyse the factors that affected the choice of these compliment response strategies. For example:

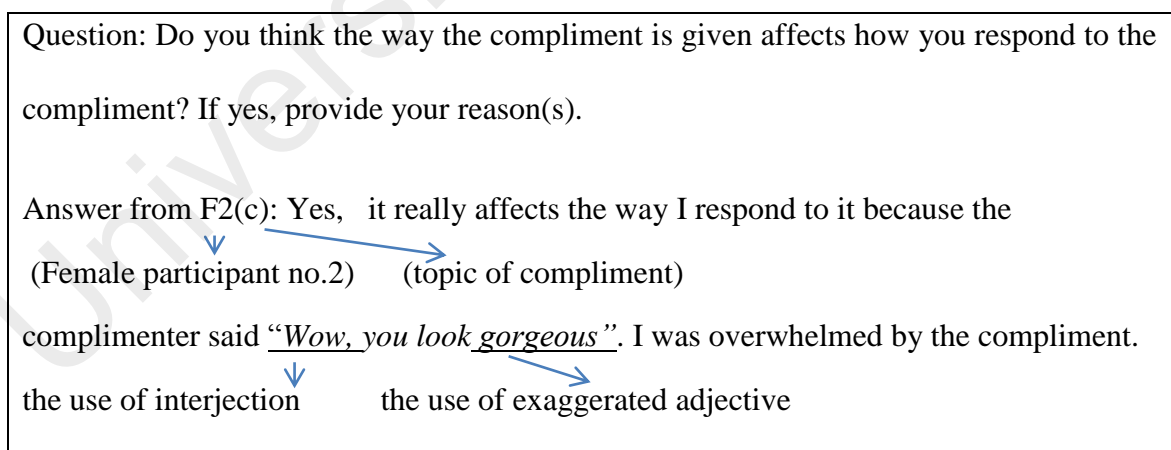


Figure 3.3: The example of response in semi structured interview.

These steps were carried out to all responses in the data. The final stage includes detailed description of the findings to answer both research questions.

3.7 Pilot Study

Before the commencement of the actual research, a pilot study was carried out to determine the strategies used in compliment responses among Malay undergraduates in one of the local universities in Malaysia. This pilot study served to obtain some preliminary findings for the current research. The procedures used in the pilot study were adapted in the present study and it might give early assumptions about the actual data collection. Furthermore, the purpose of the pilot study was to identify the appropriate data and test out the situations used in the role plays. Thus, it is important to identify the drawbacks that might be encountered in the stages of this research.

In the pilot study, a role play was used to obtain compliments and compliment responses among Malay undergraduates. To begin with, ten students were selected to participate in the role play: five males and five females. The participants were from a Civil Engineering course taking the same English subject, *Basic English*. The participants came from diverse demographic backgrounds, however they belonged to the same level of English proficiency. The participants were given detailed instructions about the role play. They were required to work in pair, a male participant was paired with a female participant and vice versa.

Firstly, all participants were given five different situations (appearance, presentation, exam results, personal belonging and ability to play games). One female participant was required to give a compliment based on the situation and the male partner was asked to respond to the compliment. After that, another male participant was required to compliment his counterpart and the female partner had to respond to it. This process was conducted until all of the participants participated in the role play. The role play was recorded using audio recorder and all of the data were transcribed and

analysed. The findings were tabulated and analysed according to the framework introduced by Herbert (1990).

Table3. 6: Frequency distribution of Malay Undergraduates' Compliment Response

Strategies

CR strategies (macro and micro)	Compliments from Female to Male	Compliments from Male to Female
<u>Agreement</u>		
Appreciation token	1	1
Comment acceptance	-	-
Comment history	-	-
Praise upgrade and joking	3	-
Reassignment	1	1
Return	-	-
<u>Subtotal</u>	5	2
<u>Nonagreement</u>		
Scale down	-	2
Question	-	-
Disagreement	-	1
Qualification	-	-
No Acknowledgement	-	-
<u>Subtotal</u>	0	3
Request Interpretation	-	-
Grand total	5	5

The above findings evidently revealed that male and female undergraduates had different ways of responding to compliments. Based on the 10 responses obtained from the role plays, the males preferred to accept the compliments and contributed to the force of the compliments by upgrading the praise using the phrases such as *I know it* and *you know me*. In this context, it can be concluded that most males liked to be complimented, however they had the tendency to upgrade themselves. On the other

hand, three out of five female respondents preferred disagreement as compared to agreement. They rejected the compliments and toned down the compliments by saying *Don't say like that*. This expression explained that some females did not prefer to be complimented and they were reluctant to accept the compliments by males. They also received the compliments using normal expression of *thanks* and *thank you*.

By and large, the findings from the pilot study clearly show that the strategies employed by males and females were different. There might be certain factors that contributed to the different approaches taken by both genders which can be explored in the actual research. It is also very interesting to analyse more data as well as to investigate the factors that affect the way the participants respond to the compliments. Thus, the use of role plays and interviews in the actual research may help to investigate the strategies of compliment responses and the factors that affect the way they respond to the compliments.

3.8 Summary

This chapter focused and explained the research methodology carried out in the study and the research design of the study which involved steps in data collection and data analysis. Pragmatics analysis was employed using a framework by Herbert (1990) to determine the agreement and non agreement to the compliments as well as to explore the strategies used in compliment responses. Another framework by Fukushima (1993) was also used in determining the factors that affected those strategies used in compliment responses. All frameworks selected for this study were sufficient to answer both research questions provided in the first chapter. Finally, ethical considerations were also taken into account before the execution of this study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter reports the analysis of data followed by a discussion of the research findings. The findings relate to the research questions that guide the study. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the types of compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates?
2. What are the factors that affect the choice of these compliment response strategies?

The data in this study were analysed and the results were interpreted to answer the research questions. The analysis of the study was carried out in three different phases. In the first phase, the types of compliment response were identified. The second phase was the analysis of the compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates. This analysis was conducted based on the framework of compliment response strategies proposed by Herbert (1990). In the final phase, factors affecting the compliment response strategies were analysed using Fukushima's (1993) framework on intensity of the compliment, gender of the complimenter and topic of the compliment.

4.1 Types of Compliment Responses Used by Malay Undergraduates

The first research question seeks to investigate the types of compliment responses used by Malay undergraduates, whether they agree or disagree with the compliments paid to them. Types of compliment responses were analysed based on the five different topics given during the role plays. Table 4.1 below illustrates the findings obtained based on the responses produced by the male and female participants.

Table 4.1: Frequency of Compliment Response Types According to the Topics

Topics	Female Compliment Responses				Male Compliment Responses			
	Agreement		Non-agreement		Agreement		Non-agreement	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Appearance	5	33.3 %	10	66.7%	14	93.3%	1	6.7%
Presentation	13	86.7%	2	13.3%	12	80%	3	20%
Exam results	12	80%	3	20%	13	86.7%	2	13.3%
Personal belonging	13	86.7%	2	13.3%	11	73.3%	4	26.7%
Ability to play games	11	73.3%	4	26.7%	11	73.3%	4	26.7%
Total no. of responses	54		21		61		14	

Table 4.1 summarises the frequency of compliments from male and female participants according to the topics. In this study, the compliments analysed consisted of 150 responses collected based on five different topics of compliments from 30 respondents: 15 females and 15 males. In the first stage of the role play, five topics were given to 15 females and they were asked to compliment their male counterparts. After that, the roles were changed, male undergraduates were required to compliment their female counterparts. Based on the frequency of compliment responses from Table 4.1, it can be seen that 54 responses were obtained from female's agreement with compliments while only 21 responses were non-agreement responses. Meanwhile, 61 agreement responses were found in male undergraduates' compliment while non-agreement showed 14 responses only.

From the data, it seems that male and female undergraduates had tendency to accept the compliments while only a small number of them were not in favour of accepting the compliments. The majority of female undergraduates accepted the compliments on presentation, exam results, personal belonging and ability to play

games while 66.7% of the non-agreement responses were found in the topic of appearance. On average, compliments on presentation and personal belonging were the highest acceptance of topics among females, followed by exam results, ability to play games and appearance. This result was in line with Wolfson's (1983) findings that women appreciate and value the compliments rather than denying them.

On the other hand, males were found to accept compliments more than refusing them. 61 agreements were produced by male undergraduates while only 14 responses were found in non-agreement type. Evidently, 14 out of 15 males accepted the compliments on appearance and this showed contradiction with the results found in female undergraduates' responses. Holmes (1988) believed that men and women perceived compliments in different ways. For women, compliments are perceived as positive speech acts while on the contrary, men perceive compliments as a face threatening act. In addition, 86.7% of agreement responses were found in the compliment of exam results followed by the responses for presentation (80%), personal belonging and ability to play games (73.3%).

Based on the findings, it is evident that topics help to identify whether Malay undergraduates receive or reject the compliments. Wu (2008) believed that topics of compliment determined the acceptance or rejection of compliments by certain groups of people. In the next segment, the results were discussed according to the agreement and non-agreement type based on five different topics.

4.1.1 Macro Analysis of Compliment Responses

This section provides a macro analysis of compliment responses based on the topics adopted by Herbert (1998) on appearance, presentation, exam results, personal belonging and ability to play games. The responses were obtained from both male and female participants during the role play.

4.1.1.1 Agreement Type

(a) Compliment on appearance

For male compliment responses, there were 93.7% of responses obtained from agreement type while only 6.7% of responses obtained from non-agreement type on the topic of appearance. This was contradictory to the results found in female undergraduates. 33.3% of responses were agreement while 66.7% were non-agreement. The responses were recognized based on the acceptance of the compliments such as *Thank you* and *Thanks*.

Example 1

F3(a): Your T-shirt look gorgeous on you.

M3(a): Thank you my friend.

Example 2

F15(a): You look very smart Zain.

M15(a): Wow, glad to hear that. Thanks.

Findings showed that males had a tendency to accept the compliments on appearance while majority of females rejected the compliments. Holmes (1988) on her study reported that compliment acceptance using *Thank you* is the most common way of responding to the compliments. It is also believed that males felt comfortable when they were complimented, thus by agreeing to the compliments, it signified their appreciation to the complimenters. In addition, it can also be seen that some of the recipients added some additional information after saying *thank you*, for instance: *Glad to hear that*, *You are so nice* and *You also look good*. These additional information were coded according to the category of comment acceptance in compliment response

strategy. Further elaboration on this category will be discussed in the micro analysis section. The other example can be seen as follows:

Example 3

F8(a): You look very handsome today.

M8(a): Thank you. I take it as a compliment.

In Example 3, the compliment given by F8 was to express admiration on the addressee's look. The recipient, M8 replied *Thank you* and continued with the expression *I take it as a compliment* as part of his appreciation to the compliment. In the speech act of compliments, admiration is the primary function of compliments (Brown & Levinson, 1978). They added that compliments normally deliver messages that the recipient is admirable or interesting to the complimenter. Therefore, most male undergraduates appreciated the admiration by agreeing to the compliments. The next examples were taken from females' responses to the compliment on appearance:

Example 4

M6 (a): Hi, you look pretty as always.

F6(a): Thanks for the compliment

Example 5

M11(a): You look sweet today Fiza.

F11(a): Thank you so much Mirza.

Both examples above demonstrated how females accepted the compliments on their appearance. Female participants showed agreement to the compliments on appearance by saying *Thanks* and *Thank you* most of the time.

(b) Compliment on presentation

For this topic of compliment, male and female undergraduates seemed to have similar ways of responding to the compliments. 86.7% of agreement responses were obtained from female participants while 80% of agreement responses were obtained from male participants on the topic of presentation. They frequently agreed to the compliments and some of the examples can be seen below:

Example 6

M4(b): Your presentation is so great and interesting.

F4(b): Oh ya, I prepared well for the presentation.

The example above was extracted from a compliment of a male to a female undergraduate. Based on the response, the recipient accepted the compliment by saying *Oh ya* and offered a comment *I prepared well for the presentation* as part of an appreciation. This kind of response indicates that the recipient agreed on the compliment even though the common expression such as *thanks* or *thank you* was not mentioned. The recipient showed appreciation on the compliment by giving some relevant explanation related to the topic. Another similar example can be seen below:

Example 7

M1(b): I really enjoy your presentation. It was so interesting and not boring at all.

F1(b): I see. I hope our classmates also enjoy it.

F1(b) agreed on the compliment by saying *I see* and provided a comment that relates to the topic being complimented. Both examples above showed how some female

participants accepted the compliments on the way they delivered their presentations. Meanwhile, the other examples were extracted from females to males' responses:

Example 8

F9(b): I watched your presentation in Biology class just now and I liked it.

M9(b): Thanks, hope you get benefit from it.

Example 9

F7(b): You presented very well just now.

M7(b): Thanks. I think you can do better than me.

Example 10

F10(b): You did a good job on your presentation yesterday.

M10(b): Thank you. I hope you enjoy my presentation.

The recipients in the examples above agreed on the compliment by saying *thanks* and *thank you* and offered a positive statement to the complimenter. Thus, it can be said that majority of male participants accepted the compliment on their ability to do presentation.

(c) Compliment on exam results

From the findings, it is observed that male and female undergraduates preferred acceptance when they were complimented on their exam results. 80% of agreement responses were obtained from female participants while 86.7% of agreement responses were acquired from male participants. Some of the examples were illustrated below:

Example 11:

F2(c): I heard that your final results was really excellent!

M2(c): Well, hard work paid off.

Example 12

M15(c): You always get good results in Chemistry test. Good job friend!

F15(c): I believe all of us can get good results if we study hard.

Both examples above were taken from male and female acceptance on the topic of exam results. In the first example, the male undergraduate agreed on the compliment by offering a comment *Well, hard work paid off*. This is also a type of agreement where the receiver of the compliment accepted the compliment and offered a relevant comment on the appreciated topic. The latter example on the other hand had a different structure of compliment acceptance. Although there was no mention of saying *thank you*, the receiver showed an agreement by offering a comment on the object of compliment. This type of response would be discussed in detail in the micro analysis section.

(d) Compliment on personal belonging

Personal belonging topic showed that female compliment responses on agreement were 86.7% while male compliment responses on agreement were 73%. The following examples displayed some responses produced by used female participants:

Example 13

M2(d): I like your shoes! It's so nice on you.

F2(d): Thank you. It's a sport shoes, you also can buy it.

Example 13 showed how a female participant accepted a compliment on her personal belonging. She replied *thank you* and then accompanied a statement by saying “*It’s a sports shoes, you also can buy it*”. The recipient offered a comment relevant to the topic being complimented which is the sport shoes. Example 14 below showed a different response:

Example 14

M15(d): Your watch looks expensive. I like it.

F15(d): Glad you like it. It’s a gift from my dad.

The example above indicated an acceptance of compliment by a female participant. The expression *Glad you like it* was a response to the compliment *I like it*. After that, the compliment was transferred to the recipient’s dad, which is the third person in this response. This particular example fell under the strategy of reassignment and this category will be discussed in detail in the micro analysis section. The following example was taken from a male compliment response:

Example 15

F12(d): Is that your new bag? The colour is so interesting.

M12(d): *Haha*. Yes it’s a new one. Thank you for your compliment.

The example above indicated the agreement on a compliment on personal belonging. The male recipient accepted the compliment in a very appreciative way in which he laughed first, followed by a comment and then thanked the complimenter for her sincere compliment. This particular example showed that the male recipient took the compliment in a positive way and offered appreciation to the complimenter.

(e) Compliment on the ability to play game

Male and female undergraduates seemed to accept the compliments when they were complimented on the ability to play game as they shared the same percentage of agreement which is 73.3% responses. Example 16 was taken from a response from a male participant:

Example 16:

F8(e): I watched you playing basketball last night. Great skills bro. I like it!

M8(e): Haha. Really? Thank god you like it. There's another match tomorrow, come and support me.

Based on the response to the compliment, it can be perceived that the male undergraduate accepted the compliment and then followed by a long response by asking the complimenter to support him for the next match. The response showed that the male participant expressed appreciation by saying *Thank god you like it* as a way to accept the compliment. It is also interesting to note in this example that the male undergraduate produced a longer response as a way of accepting the compliment. Below is another example of the response on this compliment topic:

Example 17:

M13(e): Your friend told me that you can play well in netball. You must be a good player.

F13(e): Who told you? Thanks anyway.

From the example above, a female participant accepted the compliment given on her ability to play netball. She appreciated the compliment offered to her even though she

did not know who gave that information. However, the expression indicates that she agreed on the compliment by thanking the complimenter.

Example 18

M15(e): Wah, you are the top scorer for our faculty bowling tournament. I didn't know you can play bowling!
F15(e): Really appreciate your compliment.

Example 18 showed a compliment received by a female participant on her achievement in a bowling tournament. She expressed an appreciation to the complimenter by saying *Really appreciate your compliment*. Although expressions such as *Thank you* and *Thanks* were not mentioned, it was understood that the recipient agreed with the compliment given to her. The next section discusses the non-agreement type of compliments.

4.1.1.2 Non-agreement type

a) Compliment on appearance

Female undergraduates seemed to disagree to the compliments given on their appearance as compared to male undergraduates. Results showed that 66.7% of non-agreement responses were obtained from female undergraduates while only 6.7% of non-agreement responses were obtained from male undergraduates. A number of examples below illustrated the rejection of compliments on the topic of appearance.

Example 19

M12(a): Wah Amy. You look so pretty today.
F12(a): No <i>lah</i> . You must be joking.

In Example 19, when the recipient said “no”, it literally means that the female participant has toned down the compliment as a way of expressing her modesty in

receiving the compliment. She accompanied with the expression *You must be joking* to indicate that she denied the compliment on her look. The findings showed that the majority of the participants had tendency to use this strategy as part of a simple polite expression.

Example 20

M5(a): Wow you look so sweet with your simple make up.

F5(a): Please don't mention.

Example 20 portrays how a female participant rejected a compliment given by a male participant. She denied the compliment given to her by saying *Please don't mention*. This example clearly showed a total rejection by a female participant when she was complimented on her make up.

Example 21

F9(a): You look so smart in your blue shirt.

M9(a): No, I don't think so.

Example 21 shows a non-agreement response from a male participant. He was complimented on his appearance and he replied *No, I don't think so* to imply that he disagreed with the compliment. Based on the observation during the role plays, male and female participants showed disagreement on the topic of appearance by using *No* and *Not*. Further discussion will be explained in the next section of this chapter.

b) Compliment on presentation

For this topic of compliment, only 13.3% of female responses showed disagreement while 20% of responses from male participants indicated disagreement.

Example 22

M11(b): I'm impressed with your presentation today.

F11(b): Don't say it, you can do better than me.

The example above was taken from a compliment of a male to female undergraduate. By saying "*Don't say it*", it was comprehended that the receiver refused to accept the compliment. She returned the compliment by commenting *You can do better than me* to indicate that the praise was overstated. This is one example of non-agreement type of compliment.

Example 23

F13(b): Your presentation is better than me. You did well.

M13(b): Ah, please don't kidding.

The example illustrated above shows the rejection by a male participant on his presentation. Although the response was grammatically incorrect, it can be perceived that the male participant declined to accept the compliment. Herbert (1990) claimed that different genders utilized compliment and compliment responses differently, thus this can support the findings in this study.

c) Compliment on exam results

Results showed that 20% of non-agreement responses were obtained from female and 13.3% of responses were obtained from male on the topic of exam results. The example below was a compliment received by a male participant:

Example 24

F1(c): Congrats on your test results.

M1(c): No *lah*, not that good actually.

In Example 24, the receiver of the compliment totally negated the compliment by using the word *no* and followed by the comment *not that good actually*. This implies that the complimentee refused to be complimented on his test results.

Example 25

F3(c): Amin, congratulations. I heard you got A for Calculus. You are so brilliant!

M3(c): Well, not so brilliant. Others also score A.

Example 25 illustrates a rejection of compliment by a male participant. When the female participant said he was brilliant because he obtained A in his Calculus test, he qualified the statement using the expression *well*. After that, he claimed that other classmates also got A for the test. In this particular strategy, the male participant adopted a non-agreement strategy named qualification. In other words, the recipient did not accept the compliment, yet he used qualification strategy as a way of disagreeing to the compliment. Hence, it can be observed here that Malay undergraduates have different strategies of rejecting the compliments.

d) Compliment on personal belonging

13.3% of non-agreement responses were obtained from female participants while 26.7% of responses were obtained from male participants on the topic of personal belonging.

Example 26

M11(d): You got a nice watch! It must be very expensive.

F11(d): No it's not, not really expensive.

The female participant in Example 26 disagreed with the compliment given on her watch by saying *no, it's not*. The use of negation was used twice here, *no* and *not* to indicate the rejection. After that, she claimed that the watch was not really expensive. This example shows that the rejection can be expressed a few times to the complimenter.

Example 27

F4(d): Your T-shirt look good on you.

M4(d): Are you sure?

One type of non-agreement strategies according to Herbert (1990) was by asking question to the addressee. In Example 27, the receiver of the compliment responded *Are you sure?* when he was complimented on his shirt. Although the receiver did not directly reject the compliment, it was understood that asking question to the addressee was one of the strategies in non-agreement type.

e) Compliment on the ability to play game:

The non-agreement responses for this topic of compliment were obtained equally from male and female participants. The number of responses was 26.7%. The sample of responses of male and female participants can be seen as follows:

Example 28

M6(e): Personally, I like the way you perform in basketball game in university tournament.

F6(e): I'm so shy to hear that.

Example 29

F1(e): You played like a professional footballer that day. Great!

M1(e): Really? I don't think so. I have to practise harder.

Example 30

M2(e): I admire the way you play futsal. U can play as good as a male player.

F2(e): *Haha*. Are you kidding me?

All examples above indicated that the recipients disagreed with the compliments given. In Example 28, the female participant seemed to be very reserved by saying *I'm so shy to hear that*. She rejected the compliment by scaling down the compliment. In Example 29, the male participant replied *I don't think so* to show that he disagreed with the compliment given on his ability to play football. Finally, the female participant replied the compliment given to her by asking questioning the complimenter (see Example 30). Compliment responses can be expressed in many ways depending on how the recipients designated the use of certain strategies to reject the compliments. The discussion of compliment response strategies will be discussed in detail in section 4.1.2.

4.1.1.3 Summary of Macro Analysis of Compliment Responses

The analysis revealed that Malay undergraduates responded differently to the compliments based on the topics given. Even though gender difference was not an issue in this study, it can be seen that there were differences in the way male and female participants produced the compliment responses. It was observed that male participants produced more agreement responses as compared to female participants. 61 agreement responses were collected from male participants while 54 agreement responses were collected from female participants on five topics of compliments.

It is interesting to highlight that the majority of female participants accepted the compliments on presentation (86.7%), personal belonging (86.7%), exam results (80%) and ability to play games (73.3%). Nevertheless, only 33.3% of agreement responses were obtained from female participants when they were praised on their appearance. Chen (1993) reported that in the Eastern culture, when compliments were paid on females' looks and wearing, they were either rejected or denied. Normala (2011) in her study also found out that Malay women were known to deny the compliments particularly on their looks and make up. These findings supported the results obtained from this study where female participants were prone to reject the compliments on their appearance.

On the other hand, male participants responded positively when compliments were paid on their appearance. 93.7% of agreement responses were obtained from male participants on appearance, followed by exam results (86.7%), presentation (80%), personal belonging and ability to play games (73.3%). This totally contradicts the findings obtained from female undergraduates who preferred to reject the compliments

on this particular topic. In a study reported by Gajasen (1994), men and women reacted to compliments differently. He also added that men took compliments positively as compared to women. Also, Davis (2009) claimed that in his findings, majority of men accepted the compliments given by different gender. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of male participants in this study accepted the compliments given by their counterparts.

Moreover, female and male participants were observed to accept the compliments on their ability to do presentation as well as the ability to play games. 86.7% of agreement responses were collected from females while 80% of agreement responses were collected from males on their ability to do presentations. Meanwhile, 73.3% of agreement responses were obtained from both male and female participants on their ability to play games. In a study carried out by Holmes (1986), one of the frequent topics was ability, either ability to play games or to do presentations. The present study indicated that males and females mostly accepted the compliments when the topics concerned their skills and abilities.

Apart from that, it can also be observed that the majority of Malay undergraduates accepted the compliments on their exam results. 86.7% of agreement responses were collected from male participants while 80% of agreement responses were collected from female participants. Baba (1999) conducted a study among American learners of Japanese in compliment response focusing on the effect of compliment referent as well as compliment topic as variables. The findings showed that achievement was one of the compliment topics that was highly accepted by the participants. This study also revealed similar findings where the majority of male and

female participants agreed with the compliments concerning their achievement in examinations.

Another highlight of the study is that majority of male and female participants accepted the compliments on the topic of personal belonging. 86.7% of agreement responses were obtained from female participants while 73.3% of agreement responses were collected from male participants. According to Brown and Levinson (1978), compliments usually conveyed messages that the recipient's possession was admirable or interesting to the complimenter. Besides, Wolfson and Manes (1981) reported that one of the primary functions of compliments is to express admiration on people's possession. In this study, personal belonging or possession was one of the topics that received positive responses from both male and female participants. Based on the findings, the objects of personal belonging that they complimented were bags, watches, shoes and shirts (see appendix C).

By and large, the results indicated that Malay male and female undergraduates had their own preference in responding to the compliments. Based on the findings, they were in favour of accepting the compliments rather than denying them. Since compliments are always believed to be appreciated in Western culture as suggested by Holmes (1986), this study has indicated a shift in the culture of compliments and compliments responses because Malay undergraduates nowadays preferred to accept the compliments given to them (Normala, 2011).

4.1.2 Micro Analysis of Compliment Responses

This section explores the choice of compliment responses strategies among Malay male and female undergraduates. The data analysis provides a micro analysis of compliment response strategies based on the framework by Herbert (1990).

4.1.2.1 Agreement Type of Compliment Response Strategies

According to the typology posed by Herbert (1990), strategies of compliment comprised of six micro levels which are appreciation token, comment acceptance, comment history, praise upgrade and joking, reassignment and return. It can be seen from the results (see table 4.2) that the participants employed various strategies of agreement responses.

a) Appreciation token

This type of agreement indicates a verbal or non-verbal acceptance of the compliment from the recipient. The results in the study showed that female undergraduates used this strategy more than males. 13.3% of responses were obtained from female undergraduates while only 8% of responses were obtained from male undergraduates. This response type acted as a clear indicator of gratitude although Gajaseni (1994) argued that it may not be necessarily a direct indication of agreement. Herbert (1990) explained that the subject would respond to the compliment by expressing a ritual *Thank you*, where she/he is in agreement and does not provide further elaboration or explanation after saying *Thanks/ Thank you*. For instance:

Example 31

M10(a): I like your dress today. It's nice on you.

F10 (a): Thank you Azmi.

Example 32

M9 (d): Is that your new phone? Nice one.

F9 (d) : Thank you my friend.

Example 33

F5(a): You look very smart and handsome.

M5 (a): Thank you so much dear friend.

Example 34

F8(b): Wah, you did such a great presentation just now.

M8(b): Thanks.

The examples above showed verbal acceptance by male and female participants with the use of expression *Thank you* and *Thanks* as an appreciation. There was no comment or question after thanking the complimenter. Wolfson's (1989) believed that "thank you" remained an appropriate response for many compliment situations. Pomerantz (1978) also stated that for a response to be coded as an appreciation token, it included only the statement of appreciation.

b) Comment acceptance

The strategy of comment acceptance means the recipient accepts the compliment and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic. The comment given basically functions to support the agreement to the compliment. This strategy was used in 20% of female and 14.7% of male undergraduates. As an example:

Example 35

M9(b): You did very well in the presentation just now. Good job.

F9(b): Oh, hope you like it.

Example 35 indicates that the female participant did not use any ritual way of thanking the complimenter. Instead, she provided a comment to show agreement with the object of the compliment. The recipient of the compliment agreed with the praiseworthiness in the compliment and expressed her acceptance by offering a pleasant comment *hope you like it*. By posing such comment, the recipient showed an appreciation to the effort put in the compliment.

Example 36

F13(e): You played so well in badminton match last night. I guess you are
Chong Wei in the making.

M13(e): You know I'm a big fan of him. I have to always perform in each
match.

Example 37

M9(c): Well done on your good results in English test. Please teach me English
after this.

F9(c): Yeah, I like English so much. We can start speaking in English from now
on.

Example 36 and 37 were accompanied by lengthy comments by the recipients. In example 36, the male participant did not thank the complimenter, yet he supported with a detailed and lengthy comment to show his agreement with the compliment. Meanwhile, in example 37, the acceptance of compliment was expressed by the saying

Yeah and then followed by a lengthy explanation. These two examples fell under the category of comment acceptance because both recipients accepted the compliments and offered relevant comments on the appreciated topics.

c) Praise Upgrade and Joking

Among all responses obtained among male undergraduates during the role plays, the highest percentage of responses was identified under Praise Upgrade and Joking strategy. 34.7% of responses were obtained from males while only 8% of responses were collected from females. This strategy occurs when the recipient accepts the compliment and contributes to the force of the compliment. For example:

Example 38

F4(a): I like your shirts, it look good on you.

M4(a): Well, I always look smart.

The use of the word *well* in Example 38 indicates that the recipient was proud of his appearance and upgraded himself in such a way as to compliment himself that he always looked smart. However, it is apparent that this strategy directly violates the requirement to avoid self-praise (Herbert, 1990). Nonetheless, this strategy shows the highest percentage as compared to other strategies. Another example is shown below:

Example 39

F8(c): I heard you scored the highest in our Math test last week. Well done bro.

M8(c): Yeah, don't you think I'm the smartest in our class?

In Example 39, the male participant upgraded himself and made a joke by asking a boastful question to the complimenter. M8(c) accepted the compliment by saying *Yeah* and then questioned the complimenter *dont you think I'm the smartest in our class?* as a way to make a joke and brag about himself. This technique was observed to be applied by a number of male participants as only a few female participants bragged. In this study, males had a higher tendency to self-upgrade themselves and females were observed to be more reserved.

Example 40

F10 (a): I like your hairstyle. Pretty much like an artist.

M10 (a): I know I'm like Aaron Aziz.

In this example, the recipient praise upgraded himself by acknowledging his hair style with Aaron Aziz. In Malaysia, Aaron Aziz is one of the well-known and famous actors in local movie scenes. This strategy also allows the male participants to exaggerate and add an element of humour while also allowing them to praise themselves. Based on the given situations, it can also be perceived that males took compliments as something positive and appreciated the praise paid to them.

d) Comment History

Comment history strategy occurs when the recipient offers a comment on the object of compliment, basically on some information of how she or he has acquired it. 18.7% of responses were collected from female participants while 12% of responses were collected from male participants. For instance:

Example 41

M12 (d): I like your watch, its looks elegant on you.

F12 (d): Oh, I bought this watch from Instagram.

A comment history strategy can be seen in Example 41 when the recipient explained how she purchased the watch, which was from Instagram page. In this situation, the female participant accepted the compliment first and then gave some information on the topic of compliment. The example below is a comment history strategy used by another female participant.

Example 42

M11 (e): You play basketball like a pro.

F11(e): Actually I learn the skills by watching NBA most of the time.

In Example 42, the recipient offered a comment on the object of compliment by explaining how she could be good at playing basketball. She explained that she learned the skills from television. It was observed that this type of strategy was frequently used by female as compared to male participants.

e) Reassignment

Reassignment strategy refers to the agreement to the compliment by the recipient and then the complimentary force is transferred to some third person. This type of strategy was only applied in a small number of responses by Malay undergraduates. 5.3% of responses were collected from female while only 2.7% of responses collected from male undergraduates. An example below was a response by the male undergraduate:

Example 43

F15 (d): Is that a new ipod? Wah it looks so attractive.

M15(d): Ya, my dad bought it for my birthday.

Example 43 shows that the recipient accepted the compliment and then transferred the compliment to his father. The acknowledgement was given to his father for the present

that he received during his birthday. Below is another example that used reassignment strategy:

Example 44

M5(d): Wow are you wearing a G-Shock watch? It's so cool.

F5 (d): Yeah, I got this from my sister.

The female participant was complimented on her brand new watch and her reply was that she got the watch from her sister. In this type of strategy, the recipient of the compliment acknowledged the other person's effort and that was the reason she or he transferred the compliment to the third person.

f) Return

In this agreement category, the compliment given is shifted or returned to the complimenter by reciprocating with another similar compliment. 4% of responses were obtained from both male and female undergraduates. Example 45 shows a response by the male participant:

Example 45

F6 (b): Your presentation just now was awesome. I bet the lecturer give you high mark.

M6 (b): Hey, you also did well.

When the male participant was complimented on his presentation, he shifted the compliment by saying *you also did well*. This indicates that the recipient received the compliment and would like to give the same acknowledgment to the complimenter. As Holmes (1988) reported, a compliment return indicates that the recipient agrees and accepts credit for the positive evaluation in the compliment. The example below is a return strategy employed by the female participant:

Example 46

M12(b): I like the way you present during our English class. You look so confident.

F12(b): You too. Your presentation is also interesting.

The example above shows how a compliment was shifted to the complimenter. The recipient of the compliment reciprocated the compliment given to her by saying “*You too*” as an indication that the complimenter’s presentation was good too. It can be concluded that this type of strategy was not frequently used by both male and female participants as compared to other agreement type of strategies.

g) Appreciation Token + Comment Acceptance

During the role plays, some respondents were found to combine compliment response strategies. One of the combinations found was appreciation token and comment acceptance. 2.7% of responses were found in female participants while only 1.3% of responses found in male participant. For instance

Example 47

M9 (a): You look so good today my friend.

F9 (a): Thank you for the compliment. I really appreciate it.

Example 47 shows the combination of two strategies produced by the female participant. Firstly, she thanked the complimenter and after that, she expressed her appreciation for complimenting on her beautiful look. The recipient provided a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.

h) Appreciation Token + Praise Upgrade

This combination was only applied by male participants. 4% of responses were found in male's compliment responses. For instance:

Example 48

F10 (c): Wow congrats Ali on your exam results. You got a very high CGPA.

M10(c): Thank you Ilya, hey but don't you know that I'm a genius student?

In Example 48, two strategies were employed by the male participant which he combined the strategy of appreciation token and praise upgrade. Initially, he offered a ritual *thank you* to his female counterpart and a statement that upgraded himself. He claimed that he was a genius student that was why he scored a high CGPA.

The micro analysis of agreement type shows that the highest number of agreement responses produced by female undergraduates was 20% which belonged to comment acceptance strategy while the highest number of responses among male was praise upgrade and joking strategy, 34.7%. A small number of participants were also found to combine two strategies when responding to compliments. This could contribute to the new findings of the existing study.

4.1.2.2 Non-Agreement Type of Compliment Response Strategies

Herbert (1990) model of types of compliment response strategies also highlighted the strategies for non-agreement type. Five micro level of compliment response strategies were discussed namely scale down, question, disagreement, qualification and no acknowledgement.

a) Scale down

This response type can be recognized when the recipient disagrees with the complimentary force and points out some flaws in the object or claims that the praise is overstated. Under non-agreement type of compliment response strategy, the findings indicate that female participants used scale down strategy more than male participants did. 12% of responses were obtained from female while only 5.4% of responses obtained from male undergraduates. A study by Holmes (1988) also suggested a similar category where she used the term “Downgrading” to show that the credit attribution is implicitly denied. Examples of the use of scale down strategy can be seen below:

Example 49

M11(d): You got a nice watch! It must be very expensive.

F11(d): No it's not, not really expensive.

In Example 49, the female participant did not want to accept the complimentary force offered to her. The words *no* and *not* indicate the act of disagreement, and the phrase *not really expensive* refers to the act of scaling down.. According to a study conducted by Normala (2011), females denied the compliments paid to them because they were perceived to be shy, reserve and more modest in their behaviour.

Example 50

M7a): Wow you look different today. Prettier I guess.

F7(a): Don't lie. I never look pretty.

The female participant in Example 50 scaled down the compliment given on her appearance. She said *Don't lie* at the beginning of her response to show a rejection and

then toned down the compliment by saying *I never look pretty*. It can be asserted here that the female participant perceived the compliment overstated.

Example 51

M12 (e): You played well in badminton match last night.

F12 (e): Not really I guess.

The female participant in Example 51 did not see the compliment as something positive, thus she disagreed with the complimentary force and pointed to a flaw by saying that she was not that good in playing badminton using the expression *Not really I guess*. This kind of rejection is also one example of scale down strategy.

b) Question

This strategy occurs when the complimentee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment. Female participants employed this strategy more than their male counterpart. 5.4% of responses were obtained from female and 2.6% of responses were obtained from male participants. Below is an example of a compliment response from a female participant:

Example 52

M14 (a): I like your make up today. It looks simple and sweet.

F14 (a): Are you sure?

The female participant rejected the compliment by questioning the sincerity of the male participant's compliment. She asked *Are you sure?* when the male participant praised on her make up. Even though common words such as *no* and *not* were not used here, asking question is believed to be one indirect strategy of rejecting the compliment.

Example 53

F11 (b): Your presentation was great. I like it so much.

M11(b): Do you really think so?

Example 53 was taken from a male compliment response. The reply indicated that the recipient doubted the compliment given on his great presentation. He replied *Do you really think so?* as a way to question the sincerity of the compliment.

c) Disagreement

Disagreement is coded when the recipient asserts that the object of the compliment is not praiseworthy. The findings show that 5.4% of responses were collected from male undergraduates while only 2.6% of responses were obtained from female undergraduates. Basically, the recipient shows total disagreement with the credit attributed. For instance:

Example 54

F11 (a): You're wearing red T-shirt today. It looks really cool man.

M11(a): Don't exaggerate lah.

Male participant negated the praise given on his T-shirt with the statement *Don't exaggerate*. In this case, the recipient showed a total rejection and obviously disagreed with the complimenter on the praiseworthiness of the object of the compliment. The recipient did not believe in the content of the compliment, thus rejected the credit attributed to him.

Example 55

M13(a): Aimi you look beautiful in your pink *tudung*.

F13(a): I don't think so.

Based on Example 55, the female participant refuted the compliment given on her beautiful scarf. She completely denied the compliment by saying *I don't think so*. Herbert (1990) claimed that disagreement occurs when the recipient feels that the object of the compliment is not praiseworthy. Han (1992) also mentioned that the addressee showed disagreement with the compliment because it was not worth to be complimented. Thus, people reject the compliments because they were not praiseworthy.

d) Qualification

It is interesting to see that only a small number of Malay male and female undergraduates used qualification strategy. This strategy occurs when recipient of compliment merely qualifies the original assertion usually with *though, but, well, etc*. The findings revealed that 2.6% of responses were obtained from female participants while only 1.3% of responses were obtained from male participants. Example 56 is taken from a female participant compliment response:

Example 56

M9 (b): You did well in bio chemistry presentation yesterday. Well done Mia.

F9 (b): But you can do better than me.

The female participant disagreed with the compliment paid to her by attributing the same qualification to her male counterpart. The use of word *but* followed by *you can do better than me* indicates her qualification of the original assertion to the complimenter.

Example 58

M8 (e): I like the way you play soft ball. I think you can represent our university.

F8 (e): Well, I think Mira also play well.

The example above shows the female participant qualified the original compliment using the linguistic marker *well*. After that, she attributed the compliment to her friend, Mira. It is very interesting to see that participants in this study used variation when responding to the compliments and one of them is qualification strategy.

e) No acknowledgement

The recipient gives no indication of having heard the compliment or responds with an irrelevant comment. Sometimes, it receives no response from the recipient. This type of strategy was not frequently employed by both male and female participants. Only 4% of responses were obtained from male participants and 1.3% of responses collected from female participants. For instance:

Example 59

F7(e): I watch you playing futsal last night. You scored a lot.

M7(e): Hey did you know that Rizal is the referee for that match?

The recipient did not respond to the compliment, yet he shifted the topic by asking another question which is not relevant to the compliment. As mentioned earlier, this strategy was hard to be found in the findings because most participants gave acknowledgement to the compliment paid to them.

f) Question + Scale Down

Only one response found in the combination of question and scale down strategy produced by a female participant. Below was the response:

Example 60

M15(a): You look sweet in your yellow *baju kurung*.

F15(a): Do you really think so? This *baju kurung* is quite old actually.

The receiver disagreed with the compliment given by combining the two non-agreement strategies; question and scale down. The recipient inquired the sincerity of the compliment and further minimized the level of compliment exaggeration by saying *This baju kurung is quite old*. This shows that the receiver considered the praise an overstatement.

g) Disagreement + Question

The combination of disagreement and question strategy was only found in female participants. There were 2.6% of responses obtained from the female participants. For example:

Example 61

M8 (a): I think you look so stunning today. Is it because of your new scarf?

F18 (a): Don't say like that. Are you joking?

The example above applies the strategy of disagreement and question. The female participant at first rejected the compliment by stating *Don't say like that*. The word *don't* indicates the rejection of compliment by the female participant. She accompanied her reply by questioning *Are you joking?* as a way to question the sincerity of the compliment.

On the basis of the findings and analysis, in general terms, it can be summarized that Malay undergraduates employed various strategies in responding to compliments with respect to both Agreement and Non-agreement CRs introduced by Herbert (1990). It is also interesting to see that a number of participants combined two different strategies when responding to compliments. Even though the percentage of participants using the combination of strategies was very small, it could be a new discovery for this study.

4.1.2.3 The Most Common Strategies Used by Malay Undergraduates

The findings revealed that Malay undergraduates adopted different strategies in responding to compliments. As table 4.2 shows, there were 81.4% of agreement responses obtained from male undergraduates while 72% of agreement responses were collected from female undergraduates. On the other hand, the percentage of non-agreement responses was higher among female undergraduates. 28% of non-agreement responses were obtained by female undergraduates while only 18.6% of responses were obtained from male undergraduates. Table 4.2 displays the frequency distribution of compliment response types employed by female and male undergraduates.

Table 4.2: The Frequency Distribution of CR Types

CR strategies	Female		Male		Total	
	Responses	%	Responses	%	Responses	%
<u>Agreement</u>						
(a) Appreciation token	10	13.3%	6	8%	16	10.7%
(b) Comment acceptance	15	20%	11	14.7%	26	17.3%
(c) Praise Upgrade and Joking	6	8%	26	34.7%	32	21.3%
(d) Comment History	14	18.7%	9	12%	23	15.3%
(e) Reassignment	4	5.3%	2	2.7%	6	4%
(f) Return	3	4%	3	4%	6	4%
(g) Combination of (a) + (b)	2	2.7%	1	1.3%	3	2%
(h) Combination of (a) + (c)	0	0%	3	4%	3	2%
Subtotal	54/75	72%	61/75	81.4%	115	76.6%
<u>Non-agreement</u>						
(a) Scale down	9	12%	4	5.3%	13	8.7%
(b) Question	4	5.3%	2	2.7%	6	4%
(c) Disagreement	2	2.7%	4	5.3%	6	4%
(d) Qualification	2	2.7%	1	1.3%	3	2%
(e) Acknowledgement	1	1.3%	3	4%	4	2.7%
(f) Combination of (a) + (b)	1	1.3%	0	0%	1	0.7%
(g) Combination of (c) + (b)	2	2.7%	0	0%	2	1.3%
Subtotal	21/75	28%	14/75	18.6%	35	23.4%
Request Interpretation	0/75	0%	0/75	0%	0	0
Grand Total	75	100%	75	100%	150	100%

As far as the common type of strategies used was concerned, a few observations were made in regards to the findings obtained in this study. The most significant finding was the majority of male undergraduates employed praise upgrade strategy in their compliment responses. They also inserted some elements of joking, displaying their sense of humour. According to Al-Falasi (2007), joking is one positive element in compliment responses. He added that an utterance containing a sense of humour by the speaker to addressee shows solidarity. One relevant sample was illustrated in Example 40 when the recipient praise upgraded himself by comparing his hair style with a

Malaysian well-known actor named Aaron Aziz. It is very interesting to see that male undergraduates included some element of humors in responding to compliments rather than producing ritual thank you or thanks to their counterpart. Herbert (1990) also reported that praise upgrade and joking are used to negotiate solidarity with the addressee. Their aim is to make addressee feel good and minimizes the chances of compliments to be rejected.

On the contrary, in non-agreement responses, the majority of female undergraduates employed scale down in their compliment responses. Normala (2011) claimed that Malaysian female speakers toned down the compliments as a way to express their modesty. In addition, Baba (1999) reported that the social values of female speakers were to appear humble than male speakers. In this study, female undergraduates frequently scaled down the compliments paid to them rather than employing other compliment response strategies. Example 49 was the best illustration of how a female participant scaled down the compliment. The use of phrases *No, it's not, not really expensive* revealed that the participant scaled down the compliment three times; firstly with the use of *no*, followed by *it's not* and *not really*.

Moreover, appreciation token was among one of the most common strategies used by both male and female participants. 13.3% of responses were collected from female participants while 8% of responses were collected from by male participants. An appreciation token can be expressed verbally or non-verbally. In this study, most of the expressions found in this category were the use of *thanks* and *thank you* as a way to accept the compliments. Chen (1993) found out that people from the Eastern culture expressed their appreciation by thanking the complimenter. One study by Lorenzo-Dus (2001) also revealed that the ritual thank you was believed to be common among the

addressees when exchanging the compliments. However, there were also non-verbal expressions found in this study. Some participants smiled and nodded when responding to compliments (see Appendix C). Thus, it is interesting to see that participants used verbal and non-verbal expressions to show appreciation to the complimenters.

Another interesting finding that can be obtained from this study was that Malay male and female undergraduates employed comment acceptance frequently. The findings showed that 20% of responses were produced by female participants while 14.7% of responses were produced by male participants in this strategy. Holmes (1988) stated that agreeing utterance with a comment showed an appreciation from the addressee. The ritual *thank you* might not be sufficient to appreciate the value of the compliments. Herbert (1990) reported that the recipient felt comfortable if he or she offered a relevant comment after being praised. In addition, Chen (1993) in his study found out that offering a comment after saying thank you was very common among Chinese speakers. Thus, this study also revealed that comment acceptance was one of the common strategies used by the Malay undergraduates.

Apart from that, the percentage of responses in comment history was also high among the participants, particularly female. There were 18.7% of responses produced by female participants using comment history. In this strategy, the recipient provided some explanation on how he or she acquired the object of compliment. One good example can be seen in Example 41 when the recipient explained that she bought the watch from the Instagram page. It implies that when accepting the compliment, the recipient at the same time tried to provide more explanation about the object being complimented. This is similar to the findings obtained by Al-Falasi (2007) of Arab speakers. In his study, Arabs tended to return the compliment with a very detailed

description on how they acquired things because in the Arab society, it is a deeply rooted religious belief that humility is a virtue. Upon receiving compliments, one must insist offering the object of compliment or describe how he or she obtains the object of compliment.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that participants also used question as a way to reject the compliments. 5.4% of responses were produced by female participants while 2.6% of responses were produced by male participants. Herbert (1990) claimed that posing a question indicates disagreement because the addressee questions the sincerity of the compliment rather than appreciates it. In Example 53 for instance, the male participant questioned the sincerity of the compliment given on his presentation by asking the complimenter *Are you sure?*. The question was used as an indirect way to reject the compliment. David (2002) reported that asking a question was one indirect strategy to disagree with the compliment. In his study on the use of compliment response strategies among Malaysians, he concluded that asking a question is one of the options that people can use to indicate disagreement. People can always use different ways to reject the compliments, not merely by saying *no* or *I don't like it*. Therefore, it can be concluded that Malay undergraduates were able to employ various strategies when responding to compliments. The ritual *thank you* in agreement and *no* in disagreement are no longer the common ways to respond to the compliments.

4.1.2.4 Combination of Compliment Response Strategies

Apart from the categorisation of compliment response strategies introduced by Herbert (1990), the combination of strategies was also employed by the participants in the present study. In agreement type, female participants were found using the

combination of appreciation token and comment acceptance (2.7%) while male participants used two combinations of strategies: 1) comment acceptance and praise upgrade and joking (4%) and 2) appreciation token and comment acceptance (1.3%). On the other hand, in non-agreement type, only female participants were found using the combination of strategies. The combinations were: 1) scale down and question (1.3%) and 2) disagreement and qualification (2.6%).

The findings revealed that Malay undergraduates did not only use one individual strategy to respond to the compliment. In Example 47 (refer to page 78), the female participant combined appreciation token and comment acceptance upon receiving the compliment on her appearance. She firstly thanked the complimenter and after that expressed her appreciation giving a relevant comment. Meanwhile, the male participant in Example 48 (refer to page 79) used a combination of appreciation token and praise upgrade and joking in his response. He initially thanked his female counterpart and praise upgraded himself by claiming that he was a genius student.

Moreover, Example 60 (refer to page 85) shows a combination of question and scale down in non-agreement type. The female participant questioned her male counterpart by asking *Do you really think so* and further scaled down the compliment by explaining that her *baju kurung* is rather old. Another combination found in non-agreement type is the combination of disagreement and question found in Example 61 (refer to page 85). The female participant at first rejected the compliment by stating *Don't say like that*. She then accompanied her response by questioning *Are you joking?* as a way to question the sincerity of the compliment. It is interesting to see that the participants were able to produce more than one strategy in their compliment responses.

Furko and Dudas (2012) investigated complimenting strategies with special reference to compliment response patterns of Hungarian undergraduates. They found out

that male and female Hungarian undergraduates used a number of strategies in their compliment responses because they produced very lengthy compliment responses. In this study, it was also observed that the combination of strategies occurred when the participants produced lengthy responses. Moreover, the occurrence of combination of strategies in this finding could also be a new discovery in the study of compliment responses. Many studies on compliment responses in the past only focused on one individual strategy (Herbert, 1990: Herbert, 1998: David, 2002 & Cheng, 2011). This study is hoped to add to the existing literature on the study of compliment response strategies especially among Malay undergraduates.

4.2 Factors that Affect the Compliment Response Strategies

To explore the factors underlying each strategy employed by the participants, semi structured interviews were carried out after they had participated in the role plays. These interviews are important as they help the researcher to get further elaboration pertaining to the various strategies that the participants used when they responded to compliments. The questions in the interviews were close-ended, however they were allowed to provide explanation if necessary. A list of questions was prepared in accordance to the framework proposed by Fukushima (1993): intensity of compliment, gender of complimenter and topic of compliment.

4.2.1 Intensity of Compliment

Question: Do you think the way the compliment is given affects how you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reasons.

This question sought to investigate the intensity of compliment by looking at the use of certain linguistic devices as well as the length of the compliment. Fukushima (1993) further explained that the intensity of compliment referred to how the compliment was

expressed and the number of words used by the speaker when paying the compliment. She believed that the intensity of the compliment may affect the strategy used in compliment responses. Intensity can be summarized as the linguistic encoding that affects a compliment (Baba, 1999). There are a few linguistic devices that show the intensity of compliments such as interjections (*wow, gosh*), intensifiers (*really, very*), exaggerated adjectives (*gorgeous, fabulous*) and syntactic manipulation (What a beautiful sweater!). The table below shows the frequency of responses on the formality of situation:

Table 4.3: Frequency of Responses on the Intensity of Compliment

Male Undergraduates				Female Undergraduates			
Yes		No		Yes		No	
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
15	100	0	0	11	73.3	4	26.7

Based on the interviews carried out after the role play, 26 participants (15 males and 11 females) agreed with the question while the other 4 female participants claimed that the way the compliment was given did not affect their responses to the compliment.

4.2.1.1 The Analysis of Responses on Intensity of Compliment

During the semi structured interviews, one question was posed to investigate how compliments given to the recipients affected the way they responded to the compliments. Content analysis was done to interpret the responses given in the interview. Majority of the participants agreed that the way compliment was given

influenced how they responded to compliments. The factors of intensity and length of compliments were taken into consideration when analysing the question. For instance:

Response 1

M5(a): Yes, it affect the way I respond to the compliment because my friend said I'm very handsome. I feel overwhelmed.

Response 2

F11(a): Yes. I believe it gives effect because I remember Imran compliment on my appearance. He said "*You look so pretty*". So far no one said I'm so pretty, so I'm a bit shy actually.

Response 3

F15(a): I guess so. It has effect because there was one compliment on my presentation. He said my presentation was very amazing. I was very nervous during my presentation so I did not expect he can compliment on my presentation.

The responses above revealed that some participants were affected by some terminologies used in the compliments. In the first response, the male participant agreed that the intensity of the compliment affected the strategy he used in responding to the compliment. The justification given was *My friend said I'm very handsome* can be interpreted that the use of intensifier *very* gave a huge impact to the recipient of the compliment. In the second response, the female participant did not expect to receive a compliment on her beautiful look. Even though she was aware that the instruction in the role play was to compliment on her look, she was quite surprised with the compliment given to her. According to her response, no one has given any compliment saying that she is so pretty. Thus, the use of intensifier *so* can also be a reason that influenced the way she responded to the compliment. Response 3 contains the idea of using the

intensifier *very* in the compliment. The female participant appreciated the praiseworthiness of the compliment although she did not expect to receive a compliment on her ability to do a good presentation. Therefore, one element that can be highlighted in the aspect of intensity is the effect of using intensifier in the compliment.

In addition, there were also some responses obtained from the participants in regards to the effect of using exaggerated adjectives. For example:

Response 4

F10(a): Yes I think it affects the way I respond to the compliment. My friend praised me on my awesome presentation. I feel like I have done a very good presentation.

Response 5

F2(a): Ya I was so excited when my friend said I look gorgeous. It give effect to me.

Response 6

F7(a): Yes somehow it gives some effect to me. I remember one compliment saying that I look stunning. I never thought I am stunning.

The responses revealed that the use of some exaggerated adjectives gave impact on the recipients. In Response 4, the female participant claimed that the word *awesome* used in the compliment influenced the way she gave response to it. In the next response, the female participants claimed that she was affected by the use of word *gorgeous*. During the interview session, the participant explained how excited she was when her male counterpart complimented on her gorgeous look. On the same note, Response 6 indicates the use of adjective *stunning* stated in the compliment. The female participant did not expect to receive such compliment. Thus, the use of exaggerated adjectives affects the choice of compliment response strategies used among Malay undergraduates.

Furthermore, the intensity of compliment can be analysed by looking at the use of interjections. Baba (1999) reported that linguistic devices that carry the most explicit effect are interjections. Some responses using interjections can be seen below:

Response 7

M1(a): It gives effect because I remember my friend compliment me by saying “Wow, *you look great today*”. The word “*wow*” means she is surprised to see me in a great looking.

Response 8

F12(a): Yes of course, I remember my friend complimenting on my look. It affects to how I respond to him because when he said, “Wah, *you look pretty today*”, I feel a bit shy because he sound like he’s so amazed.

Response 9

F5(a): Yes I agree with the question. It gives some effect when my classmate compliment my look by saying “Wow, *you look so sweet today*”. I’m surprised with the compliment.

Some responses obtained during the interview made clear that the use of interjections affects the way the participants responded to the compliments, especially among females. According to Besnir (1990), expression affects the addressees both explicitly and implicitly. The use of interjection *wow* in Response 7 and 9 gave indication that it somehow influenced the way the recipients produced the compliment responses. In Response 8, the complimenter used the interjection *wah* in the compliment which affected the way the female participant responded to the compliment.

Another criterion that is taken into account on the basis of intensity of compliment is the length of the compliments. Fukushima (1993) stated that variations in compliment responses were revealed by the length of the compliment. In her study, the length of compliment of the Japanese students was assessed by the number of words produced in the compliment. The longer and more precise the compliment, the longer the response produced. The following are some responses obtained during the interview:

Response 10

F9(a): Yes, because the longer the compliment given, the longer I reply.

Response 11

M8(a): Ya, I agree that it affects the way I respond to the compliment. I remember one long compliment given to me on my ability to play basketball. I think I reply quite long.

Response 12

F2(a): Yes, It does give some effect because when the compliment is very long, I feel I want to reply longer than the compliment.

The responses above indicate that the length of compliments allow longer replies from the recipients. It is interesting to also consider that the use of role plays gives more freedom for both speaker and addressee to express their compliments and compliment responses without limitations. This is due to the fact that the situations were given just before the respondents acted out their relevant roles. Thus, the participants were allowed to express the compliment and responses spontaneously. In Response 12 for instance, the recipient mentioned that the compliment given to him was lengthy, thus he would like to reply using a response longer than the compliment. If Discourse Completion Task (DCT) or any other similar instrument was used, the responses produced by the

participants might be different. Thus, as far as the forms of compliments are concerned, it can be concluded that undergraduates produced longer responses if the compliments were in detail. To sum up, intensity of the compliment was one factor that affected the way the participants responded to the compliments.

4.2.2 Gender of Complimenter

Question: Do you think the gender of the complimenter affects the way you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reasons.

Another aspect of compliment that is taken into account is the gender of complimenter. The question above was posed to all participants in order to investigate whether compliments paid by different gender affected the way the participants responded to compliments. The issue of gender in compliment responses has been widely discussed in this area of this study. Holmes (1988) explored the linguistic differences between the two sexes including the various techniques of the speech act of complimenting and she discovered that compliments are greatly influenced by the gender of the speaker. Fukushima (1993) concluded that based on her past studies, women's language was known for its sensitivity especially when the compliment was commented by men. Therefore, it is interesting to look at gender as of the factors that influenced the way Malay undergraduates responded to compliments. The following table displays the frequency of responses in relation to the gender of complimenter.

Table 4.4: Frequency of Responses on the Gender of Complimenter

Male Undergraduates				Female Undergraduates			
Yes		No		Yes		No	
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
13	86.7	2	13.3	15	100	0	0

According to the findings above, all female undergraduates agreed that gender of the complimenter affected the way they responded to the compliment. 13 male undergraduates believed that gender of the complimenter affected the choice of compliment response strategies while the other 2 participants indicated otherwise.

4.2.2.1 The Analysis of Responses on the Gender of Complimenter

The question seeks to investigate the effect of gender in the choice of compliment response strategies among Malay male and female undergraduates. During the interview, many kinds of responses were received from the participants. The following are a number of responses obtained from female participants during the semi-structured interviews:

Response 13

F1(b): Yes. I totally believe that gender is one factor that affects the way I reply to compliment. I am not comfortable when my male friend compliment on my look so that's why I reject the compliment.

Response 14

F3(b): No doubt. It affects me especially when my male friend praised on my appearance. I am not in favour of accepting it.

Response 15

F13(b): Yes it mostly affect the way I respond to the compliment. I'm shy if a guy compliment on my scarf even though he is my classmate.

Response 16

F4(b): Yes I agree. It affect the way I reply to the compliment especially when my friend commented on my make-up. I feel a bit uncomfortable.

The responses above revealed that female participants perceived gender as one factor that influenced the way they produced the responses. It is significant to note that some female participants thought that they were not comfortable when male participants commented on their appearance. Wolfson's (1983) statement is in line with this finding as she indicates that the pattern of women giving and receiving compliments seem to be emergent especially in compliments revolving around appearance and apparent. In her study, majority of women did not accept the compliments given by men particularly on their appearance. In addition, all of the responses above imply that female participants were prone to avoid praises by rejecting the compliment given by their male counterparts based on the use of words *uncomfortable*, *shy*, and *not in favour*. These words indicate that female participants were not comfortable if compliments were paid on their look. Holmes (1988) claimed that appearance compliments between men and women are a very delicate issue as they can be categorized as a face threatening speech act; they might be interpreted as expressions of a desire for a particular object thus one has to be careful not to send wrong signals.

Moreover, the other aspect that is related to the issue of gender is whether participants agree or disagree with the compliments paid by their counterpart. The

following are some responses obtained from the interview in regards to the effect of gender:

Response 17

F7(b): Yes. I prefer not to accept the compliment given by a male friend. I think they are not sincere in giving compliment.

Response 18

F8(b): Yeah, I don't like to be complimented by a guy. Sometimes they are being sarcastic, so that's why I said no to the compliment.

Response 19

M7(b): I'm a little bit affected by the compliment given by my female friend perhaps because they are women. They have a lot of things to talk, and sometimes I don't prefer to agree.

Responses above show that gender is an issue that affects whether they chose to agree or disagree with the compliment. In Response 17 for example, the female participant preferred to disagree with the compliment because she claimed that some males were insincere in giving compliment. In Response 19, the female participant believed that males were sometimes sarcastic and that was the reason she rejected the compliments given by the male participant. On the other hand, Response 20 shows a response given by the male participant on the issue of gender. He sometimes disagreed with the compliments given by his female counterpart because females were more talkative and had a lot of things to comment.

Nonetheless, it is also interesting to look at the responses from participants who did not agree with the question. Two male participants believed that gender is not a factor that affects the way they respond to compliments as in the following:

Response 20

M13(b) : No I don't think so. It does not affect the way I respond to compliment

Response 21

M10(b): No, not really. I don't care who compliment me, be it male or female. I have no problem with gender issue.

Although the majority of male and female participants agreed that gender is a prominent issue in the choice of compliment responses, Response 20 and 21 however revealed that gender sometimes did not influence the way they employed different strategies in responding to compliments. In Response 20, the male participant believed that the compliment received by his female counterpart would not affect how he responded to compliment. In the latter response, it is noticed that gender issue is not a matter that has to be taken into consideration in compliment responses. By and large, it can be summarised that gender affects the choice of compliment response strategies employed by the participants. In fact, there have been various studies in compliment responses in relating to the effect of gender as one of the social variables in their study.

4.2.3 Topic of Compliment

Question: Do you think the topic of the compliments (e.g.: look, personal belonging) influences the way you respond to the compliment? If yes, provide your reasons.

One final aspect that is investigated in this section is the effect of the compliment topic in the choice of compliment response strategies employed by Malay undergraduates. The question sought to know how the topics of compliment affected the participants when they responded to compliment. There were five different topics given to the participants: 1) Appearance 2) Presentation 3) Exam results 4) Personal belonging

and 5) Ability to play games. Table 4.5 displays the frequency of responses in relation to the topic of compliment:

Table 4.5: Frequency of Responses on the Topic of Compliment

Male Undergraduates				Female Undergraduates			
Yes		No		Yes		No	
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
10	66.7	5	33.3	11	73.3	4	26.7

Findings above reveal that 10 male undergraduates agreed that compliment affected the choice of compliment responses while 5 of them did not. 11 female undergraduates on the other hand believed that compliment influenced the way they responded to compliments while 4 of them disagreed.

4.2.3.1 The Analysis of Responses on the Topic of Compliment

Topic of compliment is also an important aspect in compliment response study. A number of studies carried out on compliment topics demonstrated that most of the compliment topics focus on a few general life topics such as personality, possession, appearance and accomplishment (Wolfson, 1983; Holmes, 1988). To know whether these findings were in line with the findings of the current study, responses were analysed thoroughly on the aspect of compliment topic. Table 4.6 shows the number of participants mentioning specific topic of compliment

Table 4.6: Topics of Compliment Mentioned by Male and Female**Participants**

Topics	Male	Female
Appearance	2	1
Presentation	2	2
Exam Results	2	3
Personal Belonging	2	3
Ability to Play Games	2	2
Total	10	11

The sample of responses were illustrated below:

Response 22

F15(c): Yes. It give some effect. I liked to be complimented on skills but not on appearance.

Response 23

M5(c): Yes I agree. It affects how I respond to it. I prefer if someone praise on my ability to present, or to play games. I feel proud.

Response 24

F5(c): Yes it does. There are many topics given, however I prefer to be compliment on my ability to present.

The responses indicate that participants agreed that the use of certain topics affected the way they responded to compliments. Some participants had their own preference on certain compliment topics as shown in Table 4.6. In Response 22, the female participant responded that she preferred to be complimented on her skills rather than appearance,

however she did not mention the specific skills. A similar response was obtained from one male participant in Response 23. According to him, a compliment on his presentation skill or ability to play games would make him feel proud of his achievement. Similarly, Response 25 showed that the female participant chose the ability to do presentation as her preference. It can be concluded here that the participants were comfortable being complimented on their ability or skills in performing tasks. According to Fukushima (1993), ability or skill is categorised under internal stable uncontrollable. Nevertheless, she discovered in her study that internal stable uncontrollable group was not preferred in comparison to external stable uncontrollable group. Thus, the findings in the current study could be a new discovery for this area of study.

Other responses were also obtained pertaining to the different point of views of participants. The other preference of compliment topic chosen by the participants was their exam results:

Response 25

M6(c): Yes topic is one of the factor. I'm so pleasant to receive compliment on my exam results. I feel worth it.

Response 26

F14(c): Yes definitely. I choose different strategy when giving responses. I like if people compliment my results in exam, I really appreciate it.

In Response 25, the male participant believed that the compliment topic influenced how he replied to the compliments. He claimed that he would feel very “pleasant” being complimented on exam results. Furthermore, in Response 26, the female participant stated that she would choose different strategy in producing the compliment response

depending on the topics. Her preference of compliment topic was on her exam results. Baba (1999) reported that compliments on exam results fell under the category of internal topic, and this category has been accepted by most Japanese learners in her findings.

In addition, the participants also accepted the compliments when they were complimented on their personal belongings.

Response 27

M14(c): Yes I personally think that each topic has its own function. I always accept the compliment given to my possession. It indicates that people are aware of our belongings.

Response 28

M9(c): Ya it affect the way I give response. I will accept and give some comments if People compliment on my stuff. It shows that they take care of my stuff.

Based on the responses above, both participants agreed with the compliments given on their personal belongings as they believed that people are more aware of their possessions and it is an indication that people give more attention to their belongings. In Response 28, the male participant said he accepted the compliment given on his possession and further provided his justification to the complimenter.

Last but not least, 5 male participants and 4 female participants indicate that compliment topic did not influence the way the participants responded to the compliments. Some responses are as follows:

Response 29

M(11(c): No I don't think topic affects the way I respond to compliment. I am most affected by the gender, not topic .

Response 30

F10(c): Topic is not my concern. I'd rather concern about who gives the compliment, whether it's a boy or a girl.

Response 29 indicates that the female participant was not affected by the compliment topic, nevertheless she claimed that the gender of the complimenter affected her the most. Similarly, in Response 30, the female participant said that she would rather concern about the gender of the complimenter than the compliment topic. Although the participants were not required to rank the factors, it is very interesting to see that the participants made a comparison with other factors that influenced the way they produced the compliment responses.

It can be summarised that intensity of the compliment is assessed based on the use of certain linguistic devices such as interjections, intensifiers and exaggerated adjectives as well as the length of the compliment. The gender of the complimenter can also be categorised as one influential aspect that affect the way people respond to compliments. In this study, the female participants felt that they were not comfortable being complimented on their appearance by their male counterpart. The male participants also believed that gender has an effect as to how they agree or disagree with the compliments. Topic of compliment seems to be another factor that affects the way participants respond to compliments. According to the participants, topics concerning skills were their preference upon accepting compliments. Therefore, it can be concluded that the intensity of the compliment, the gender of complimenter and the topic of compliment are the factors that affect the way Malay undergraduates respond to the compliments.

4.3 Summary

This chapter has attempted to explain the compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates as well as the factors that affect the way they prefer these strategies. Out of 150 responses obtained during the role plays, 54 agreement responses were gathered from female undergraduates while 61 agreement responses were found in male undergraduates. This data was gathered based on the analysis of agreement and non-agreement type on five different compliment topics.

Meanwhile, the findings from the compliment response strategies showed that praise upgrade and joking received the highest percentage of responses from the male undergraduates. On the other hand, non-agreement strategy revealed that the majority of female undergraduates used scale-down strategy when responding to compliments. Finally, the intensity of the compliment, the gender of the complimenter and the topic of compliment were among the factors that affected the way the participants responded to compliments. These factors have been proven to influence both Malay male and female undergraduates in producing different strategies in their compliment responses.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The conclusions derived from the findings of this pragmatic study of the Malay undergraduates' compliment responses are described in this chapter. The conclusions are based on the objectives, research questions and results of the study. Apart from that, the implications of the findings and recommendations for prospective studies are also presented for future researchers.

5.1 Types of Compliment Response Strategies

Research Question 1:

What are the types of compliment response strategies used by Malay undergraduates?

This study initially aimed to investigate the types of compliment responses used by both male and female Malay undergraduates based on agreement and non-agreement response using five different topics. They were appearance, presentation, exam results, personal belonging and ability to play games. Findings indicate that the male participants produced more agreement responses as compared to the female participants. 61 agreement responses were collected from the male participants while 54 agreement responses were collected from the female participants on the five topics of compliments. On the other hand, 21 non-agreement responses were produced by the female participants while only 14 non-agreement responses were produced by the male participants. It is interesting to highlight that although gender was not an issue to be researched, there were gender differences in the way male and female participants

responded to the compliments. The majority of female participants accepted the compliments on presentation (86.7%), personal belonging (86.7%), exam results (80%), ability to play games (73.3%) followed by appearance (33.3%). It can be seen that the smallest percentage of responses was identified on the appearance. For example:

M12(a): Wah Amy. You look so pretty today.

F12(a): No lah. You must be joking.

The rejection of compliments can be recognized through the negative statement given to the complimenter such as *no*, *not* and *don't say like that*. Chen (1993) believed that females in the Eastern culture would always reject the compliments on their looks and wearing while Normala (2011) found out that Malay women used non-agreement strategy when compliments were paid on their appearance.

In comparison, the majority of male participants responded positively when compliments were given on their appearance (93.7%) followed by exam results (86.7%), presentation (80%), personal belonging and ability to play games (73.3%). Gajaseni (1994) claimed that men and women reacted to compliments differently, men took compliments positively as compared to women. In a study conducted by Davis (2009), men accepted the compliments given by different gender. Thus, it can be concluded that the majority of male participants in this study accepted the compliments given by their counterparts regardless of the topics.

Furthermore, the study also aimed to look at the strategies used by male and female undergraduates in compliment responses. An interesting feature worth noting

from the analysis was that the majority of males employed praise upgrade strategy in their compliment responses. For instance:

F8(c): I heard you scored the highest in our Math test last week. Well done bro.

M8(c): Yeah, don't you think I'm the smartest in our class?

34.7% of responses were found in males using praise upgrade in which elements of joking were also inserted as part of their humour sense. Al-Falasi (2007) reported that an utterance containing a sense of humour is a positive element in compliment responses and it also shows solidarity between the speaker and the addresser. The frequent use of praise upgrade and joking strategy is an indication that male participants in the present study have a good sense of humour.

On the other hand, in non-agreement responses, the majority of female undergraduates scaled down the compliments given to them. 12% of responses were obtained from female participants using scale down. For example:

M2(a): You look fabulous today Dian.

F2(a): No, I don't think so. Please *lah*, don't say like that.

The phrases *no* and *don't* indicated the act of disagreement while the phrase *don't say like that* was an act of scaling down. This finding supported Gu's (1990) idea that compliments were rather rejected among female speakers. Normala (2011) also claimed that Malaysian female speakers toned down the compliments as a way to express their modesty.

In addition, one interesting found in this study was participants combined a few compliment strategies in their responses. Herbert's (1990) taxonomy of compliment

responses only consists of one individual strategy for each category. Nevertheless, the findings of this study revealed that the act of producing compliment responses could be done in various ways. For instance:

F10(c): Wow congrats Ali on your exam results. You got a very high CGPA.

M10(c): Thank you Ilya, hey but don't you know that I'm a genius student?

The strategies of appreciation token (*thankyou*) and praise upgrade and joking (*don't you know that I'm a genius student?*) were applied in the response. Even though only 8% of responses were found in agreement responses and 3.9% in non-agreement responses using combination of strategies, this finding could be a new discovery to the existing literature and it allows room for more in depth research in the categorisation of compliment response strategies.

5.2 Factors that Affect the Choice of Compliment Response Strategies

Research Question 2:

What are the factors that affect the choice of these compliment response strategies?

The analysis was conducted based on the framework of Fukushima (1993). The first element in the framework was assessed on the intensity of the compliment. 100% of male participants agreed that intensity affected the way they responded to the compliments while 73.3% of female participants had the same thought. Fukushima (1993) stated that intensity of the compliment can be measured by the use of certain linguistic devices and length of compliment produced by the speaker. Both male and female participants believed that the use of intensity such as interjection (e.g: wow, wah), intensifier (e.g: really, very) and exaggerated adjectives (e.g: gorgeous, fabulous)

influenced the way they produced compliment responses. Also, the participants claimed that longer compliments would trigger them to produce longer responses.

Gender of the complimenter was also a factor that was researched in this study. 100% of female undergraduates and 86.7% of male undergraduates agreed that gender of the complimenter affected the way they responded to the compliments. Female participants pointed out that they were not comfortable when their male counterparts complimented on their appearance and look. They also claimed that male participants were being sarcastic and insincere when giving the compliments. Fukushima (1993) concluded that based on her past studies, women's language was known for its sensitivity especially when the compliment was commented by men.

One final factor that was analysed was the effect of the compliment topic in the choice of compliment response strategies employed by Malay undergraduates. Findings revealed that 73.3% of males and 66.7% of females agreed topic of compliment influenced the way they responded to the compliments. Five topics were given to the participants: appearance, presentation, exam results, personal belonging and ability to play games. From the findings, female participants did not prefer to be complimented on appearance. Male and female participants accepted compliments concerning their ability to do presentation and to play games. Both groups also accepted the compliments on their exam results.

5.3 Implications for Future Research

This study makes a small contribution to the growing body of research on compliment responses used by Malays. It explores the different strategies in compliment responses as well the factors affecting these strategies. Even though this

study may not be sufficient to build learners' linguistic competence, it may be necessary to help learners develop their understanding in perceiving their pragmatic transfer. Further studies may be conducted in this area using respondents from different cultures, different languages or using different methodologies in order to vary the findings. The pragmatic transfer of compliment response strategy from Malay Language to English is believed to be significant for future research.

Moreover, this study offers a pedagogical implication where it contributes to the inter-language development. This could be achieved by focusing on learner-centred activities like role plays and real discussions to develop efficient strategies in the target language. Furthermore, in the process of teaching and learning, the educators will have the opportunity to design relevant teaching aids and implement suitable teaching methods to the language learners so that their proficiency in the target language will be improved tremendously.

A further expansion of study could be carried out by recording the speech act of compliment responses naturally. Using role plays to elicit data is definitely better than Discourse Completion Task (DCT) due to its authenticity and reliability. Nevertheless, taking real-life conversations as compliment responses is more genuine than role plays even though it is difficult to employ that. Despite its difficulty, future researchers are encouraged to give their best to obtain data in a natural setting so that more real-life situations, unplanned and spontaneous moves can be analysed.

5.4 Summary

This chapter presented the conclusions of the study based on the two research questions. For compliment response strategies, Malay male undergraduates placed great emphasis on praise upgrade while female undergraduates preferred scale down in their responses. Malay undergraduates also believed that formality of situation, gender of the complimenter and compliment topics were the factors that influenced the way they responded to compliments. In addition, gender difference and the use of English as a second language also contributed to the value of the findings. The limitations of the study as well as the implications for future research 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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