

Compliment Response Strategies in Mandarin Chinese: Politeness Phenomenon Revisited¹

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This study investigated compliment response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan in two situations, one in which the complimenter was of equal status, and the other of higher status relative to the responder. The study was carried out through the use of Discourse Completion Tests (DCT), in which 8 daily life events were described, 4 for each situation. Sixty college students were asked to provide more than one compliment response they found socially appropriate. Their responses were categorized by single super strategy following Holmes (1988), and combined super strategy, calculated for frequency occurrences, and analyzed by Chi-square tests. The results indicated that although Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan tended to accept rather than reject compliments, there were, however, variations across the situations, in terms of the weight each strategy carried, the frequency occurrences of the Accepting strategy in general and the Returning strategy. The findings of the present study revealed that compliment response strategy varied as a function of social status relationships, and indirectly lent support to Wolfson's (1983) claim that compliments tended to go "downwards." The paper also discusses cross-linguistic as well as intra-lingual similarities and differences between the present study and previous studies on compliment response.

Key words: speech act, compliment responses, socio-cultural variable, cross-linguistic and intra-lingual variations

1. Introduction

In recent decades, the cross-cultural aspects of speech act behaviors have become one of the major foci in studies of language use. Following cross-linguistic studies by Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), there have been a wide range of cross-linguistic studies on speech act realizations in various behaviors (Manes and Wolfson 1981; House and Kasper 1981; Wolfson 1983; Manes 1983; Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984; Herbert 1988; Holmes 1988; Herbert and Straight 1989; Matsumoto 1989; Chen 1993; Kasper 1990, 1995; Nelson et al. 1996). In these studies of speech act performance, the issue of universality versus culture-specificity has received heated debate. Despite some claim for semantic universals, cross-linguistic differences in the realization patterns in

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different speech act behaviors have also been identified. For example, the studies on compliment response in Mandarin and English (Herbert 1988; Holmes 1988; Chen, 1993) found that English-speakers tended to accept compliments while Mandarin Chinese speakers tended to reject compliments. Along the two extreme points representing the degree of politeness continuum, variations of additional strategies including Returning (returning compliments, offering object of compliment, encouraging etc.), and Mitigating (explaining, doubting, etc.) were also reported (Herbert 1988; Holmes 1988; Wolfson 1983). The variations are attributed to differences in social-cultural factors in face semantics and politeness concepts, which lead to variations in the actualizations. However, the relative weight that was placed on each type of compliment response strategy varies from culture to culture.

Different theoretical models of politeness have been proposed to help account for variations in the actualization of compliment responses across cultures. As one of the first pioneer researchers on the studies of compliment response, Pomerantz (1978) proposed two of the most influential conversational principles which govern the act of compliment responses. Principle I states that the recipients agree with and/or accept compliments, and Principle II states that the recipients avoid self-praise. To negotiate solidarity between the interlocutors, neither praising oneself nor disagreeing with the complimenter contributes to the social solidarity of the relationship. To get out of the dilemma, people actualise compliment responses in various ways. Pomerantz classified the actualisation of compliment responses into the following categories: Acceptance, including tokens of appreciation and agreement; Rejection, entailing disagreement; and Self-praise avoidance mechanisms in which praise is downgraded (agreement and disagreement) and in which referent shifts (reassignment and return) occur (Pomerantz 1978, pp. 81-109). Manes & Wolfson (1981) held similar points of view to Pomerantz's. Wolfson (1983) pointed out that one solution to get of the dilemma is to downgrade the compliment by mentioning another characteristic of the object or offering object of compliment. The force of the compliment can, thus, be mitigated without violating the two principles because the recipients neither disagree with the speaker nor praise

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themselves.

Variations of compliment response actualization across cultures can also be accounted for in terms of Leech's (1983) Model of Politeness. To Leech (1983), one of the primary motivations for people to apparently violate conversational principles is to be polite. Leech proposed six maxims in his Politeness Principles to account for a wide range of compliment responses, such as accepting, returning, mitigating, rejecting, by the application of one or more than one maxim. For example, accepting compliments can be seen as Adherence to the Agreement Maxim; returning compliments as an Application of the Agreement Maxim and the Approbation Maxim; offering object of compliment or help as an Application of the Agreement Maxim and the Tact Maxim; deflecting a compromising strategy between the needs to adhere to the Agreement Maxim and the Modesty Maxim; and Rejection as adherence to the Modesty Maxim.

In terms of Brown & Levinson (1987)'s model of politeness, accepting compliment, in Western context indicates the responder's attention to the complimenter's positive face wants because the former anoints the face of the addressee to be liked and approved (Brown & Levinson 1987: 70). However, the model cannot explain the use of other kinds of strategies, such as returning, or deflecting by English speakers (Herbert 1988; Holmes 1988; Wolfson 1983) or the predominant use of the rejecting strategy by Mandarin Chinese speakers on Mainland China (Gu, 1990; Chen 1993).

Unlike those in western countries, Chinese people predominantly use the Rejection strategy in compliment responses. Based on Chinese culture, Gu (1990) claimed that Chinese concepts about face and politeness are different from that of western culture. In western culture, high value is placed on individualism while in Chinese society, the conceptualisation of face is not an individual aspect of face but a public, communal image, which is determined by the participation of others. As spelled out in Gu's Self-denigration Maxim, to denigrate self embraces the notions of respectfulness and modesty while to elevate self is construed as being arrogant or self-conceited. Predominant use of Rejecting strategies is driven by politeness concerns to satisfy Chinese face, in particular.

Social variables have also been shown to be determining factors in evaluating the patterning of speech act behaviours (Gumperz 1979). Based on her work on social

interaction in American middle-class society, Wolfson (1983) highlighted the role of status that may come into play in compliment behaviors. She pointed out that “the overwhelming majority of all compliments are given to people of the same age and status as the speaker (p.91). Compliments can also occur in interactions between status unequals. Wolfson (1983) pointed out that “the great majority of compliments which occur in interactions between status unequals are given by the person in the high position (p.91).” In the New Zealand data (Holmes, 1988), it was also found that compliments “upwards” were fewer than those “downwards.” Compliments upwards tended to occur only when the interlocutors knew each other and the complimenter was often an older rather than a younger person. Compliments to someone of superior status seem to require some confidence on the part of the complimenter to counteract the possibility of a negative interpretation.

In addition, intra-cultural or intra-lingual variations are also important factors that need to be taken into consideration in cross-cultural studies of speech act behaviours. As Kasper (1990) noted, intra-culturally determined values may lead to intra-cultural variations, as have been manifested in a number of studies on compliment response by English speakers. In English-speaking communities, people tend to maximize strategies by increasing the force of a compliment to enhance the receiver’s positive face. However, there are differences across English-speaking communities pertaining to the degree of invested maximization. For example, American English speakers frequently use the structure *I love you*— as compliments. However, in Hawaii Creole English, the verb *love* is often replaced by the verb *like*, the less affectively charged verb (Lee, in press). It is because in Hawaii, under the influence of Japanese cultural ethos on interactional norms, people are restrained in showing affective expression of appreciative emotion while mainstream American culture opts for emphatic enthusiasm.

Although there have been some studies on compliment response in western contexts, there are only a few that were carried out in Chinese-speaking communities. In order to understand more about cross-linguistic as well as intra-lingual similarities and differences in compliment response, this study was intended to investigate compliment response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan in two different social situations. The purposes are threefold: to determine the role of social

status in compliment response behaviors; to discover intra-lingual similarities and differences in the Chinese-speaking communities; and to identify cross-linguistic similarities and differences. The research questions that will be addressed in this study include: (1) What strategies are used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan when they respond to compliments in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status and of higher status relative to the responder respectively? Does each strategy carry equal weight? (2) How might the social variable of status relationships affect the selections of compliment response strategies? and (3) Are there cross-cultural similarities and differences as well as intra-cultural or intra-lingual variations among speakers in the Chinese speech communities?

2. Methodology

This study aimed to investigate compliment response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan in the two situations in which the complimenter was of equal status and of higher status relative to the responder respectively.

2.1 Subjects

Sixty native Chinese college freshman students from National Taipei Teachers College in Taiwan participated this study. They were all of a similar educational background and at the time of the study the students were all between 18-19 years of age.

2.2 Materials and Procedures

The study was mainly carried out through the experimental methodology by using a DCT (Discourse Completion Test) questionnaire, following the work of Blum-Kulka et al. (1984, 1989) and Chen (1993). In the questionnaire, there were descriptions of 8 situations, four for the situation in which the complimenter was of equal status, and four for the situation in which the complimenter was of higher status (See Appendix). The situations were about the events that commonly take place in real life in Chinese society in Taiwan. Under the description of each situation, there was a blank space saved for writing down what our subjects would say in each situation. They were asked to provide more than one response, which they would consider to be socially appropriate. To avoid

the potential effects of fixed response patterns, no similar situations were presented in sequence.

2.3 Coding

Subjects' responses were basically coded by the following super strategies: Accepting, Returning, Mitigating, Rejecting/Denigrating as adopted by Holmes (1988), and the combined super strategies, each of which was composed of several strategies. The overall frequency occurrences of super strategies and the percentage each accounted for among the total were calculated. A two-factor Chi-square test was first conducted to examine if there were significant differences in frequency occurrences as a function of status relationship and super strategy type. Then, post-hoc tests were conducted to examine distribution of frequency occurrence in strategies within each super strategy in each of the two situations.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of a two-factor Chi-square test showed that there were significant differences across situations and super strategy type ($\chi^2=207.944$, $p < 0.001$). To further examine differences, the following section presents the distribution of compliment response strategies used by Taiwanese-Mandarin speakers in Taiwan respectively for each of the two situations, in which the complimenter was of equal status (hereafter SCE) and for the situation in which the complimenter was of higher status (hereafter SCH)).

3.1 Compliment response strategies in SCE

A total of 745 responses were elicited from the Mandarin Chinese subjects in Taiwan in the situation in which the complimenter was of equal status relative to the responder. Their compliment response strategies were coded into 11 categories of super strategies, each of which was composed of several strategies (See Table 1): (1) Accepting, (2) Returning, (3) Mitigating, (4) Rejecting/Denigrating, (5) Accepting and Mitigating, (6) Accepting and Returning, (7) Mitigating and Returning, (8) Mitigating and Rejecting, (9) Accepting and Rejecting, (10) Rejecting and Returning, (11)

Mitigating & Accepting & Returning. Table 1 presents frequency distribution and percentage for each super strategy and strategy in SCE.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of Chinese compliment responses types in SCE

| Super strategy type | N | % |
|---|-----|-------|
| Super Strategy 1: Accepting | N | % |
| 1. Agreeing | 82 | 11.00 |
| 2. Thanking only | 58 | 7.79 |
| 3. Joking | 50 | 6.71 |
| 4. Thanking & Agreeing | 8 | 1.07 |
| 5. Expressing gladness | 6 | 0.81 |
| 6. Thanking & Expressing gladness | 3 | 0.40 |
| 7. Accepting + Formula | 2 | 0.27 |
| 8. Thanking & Joking | 1 | 0.13 |
| 9. Agreeing & Joking | 1 | 0.13 |
| 10. Agreeing & Thanking & Expressing gladness | 1 | 0.13 |
| Subtotal | 212 | 28.46 |
| Super Strategy 2: Returning | | |
| 11. Offering object of compliment | 59 | 7.92 |
| 12. Returning compliment | 51 | 6.85 |
| 13. Encouraging | 33 | 4.43 |
| 14. Offering help | 20 | 2.68 |
| Subtotal | 163 | 21.88 |
| Super Strategy 3: Mitigating | | |
| 15. Explaining | 101 | 13.56 |
| 16. Doubting | 63 | 8.46 |
| 17. Doubting & Explaining | 18 | 2.42 |
| Subtotal | 182 | 24.43 |
| Super Strategy 4: Rejecting and Denigrating | | |
| 18. Rejecting & denigrating | 50 | 6.71 |
| 19. Expressing embarrassment | 4 | 0.54 |
| 20. Rejecting + Formula | 5 | 0.67 |
| Subtotal | 59 | 7.92 |
| Super Strategy 5 Accepting & Mitigating | | |
| 22. Doubting & Thanking | 17 | 2.28 |
| 23. Thanking & Explaining | 15 | 2.01 |
| 24. Doubting & Agreeing | 8 | 1.07 |
| 25. Doubting & Expressing gladness | 6 | 0.81 |
| 26. Doubting & Joking | 5 | 0.67 |
| 27. Doubting & Accepting & Thanking | 3 | 0.40 |
| 28. Agreeing & Explaining | 3 | 0.40 |
| Subtotal | 57 | 7.85 |
| Super Strategy 6: Accepting & Returning | | |
| 29. Thanking & Returning compliment | 15 | 2.01 |

| | | |
|---|-----|------|
| 30. Thanking & Offering object | 6 | 0.81 |
| 31. Agreeing & Encouraging | 2 | 0.27 |
| 32. Thanking & Offering help | 2 | 0.27 |
| Subtotal | 25 | 3.36 |
| Super Strategy 7: Mitigating & Returning | | |
| 33. Doubting & Returning compliment | 9 | 1.21 |
| 34. Explaining & Encouraging | 4 | 0.54 |
| 35. Explaining & Offering help | 2 | 0.27 |
| 36. Explaining & Offering object | 1 | 0.13 |
| 37. Doubting & Encouraging | 1 | 0.13 |
| 38. Doubting & Offering object | 1 | 0.13 |
| 39. Doubting & Explaining & Returning compliment | 1 | 0.13 |
| Subtotal | 19 | 2.55 |
| Super Strategy 8: Mitigating & Rejecting | | |
| 40. Doubting & Rejecting | 8 | 1.07 |
| 41. Rejecting & Explaining | 5 | 0.67 |
| 42. Doubting & Expressing embarrassment | 1 | 0.13 |
| 43. Doubting & Explaining | 1 | 0.13 |
| Subtotal | 15 | 2.01 |
| Super Strategy 9: Accepting & Rejecting | | |
| 44. Thanking & Rejecting | 8 | 1.07 |
| Subtotal | 8 | 1.07 |
| Super Strategy 10: Rejecting & Returning | | |
| 45. Rejecting & Returning compliment | 3 | 0.40 |
| 46. Doubting & Offering object | 1 | 0.13 |
| Subtotal | 4 | 0.54 |
| Super Strategy 11: Mitigating & Accepting & Returning | | |
| 47. Doubting & Thanking & Returning compliment | 1 | 0.13 |
| Subtotal | 1 | 0.13 |
| Total | 745 | 100 |

The differences of frequency occurrences across super strategy type were significant ($\chi^2= 918.422, p < 0.001$). This indicates that each super strategy does not carry equal weight. The three most frequently used super strategies (above average number of frequency occurrences 745/11), in the descending order of frequency occurrences, are Accepting, Returning, and Mitigating. Within the super strategy of Accepting, the most frequently used strategy is Agreeing; within Returning, it is Offering object of compliment; and within Mitigating, it is Explaining.

Within each super strategy, the frequency occurrences of the strategies were significantly different across strategy type for 8 categories among the following 11 categories: Accepting ($\chi^2 = 387.245$, $p < 0.001$), Returning ($\chi^2 = 22.791$, $p < 0.001$), Mitigating ($\chi^2 = 56.912$, $p < 0.001$), Rejecting & Denigrating ($\chi^2 = 70.603$, $p < 0.001$), Accepting & Mitigating ($\chi^2 = 23.684$, $p < 0.01$), Accepting & Returning ($\chi^2 = 18.04$, $p < 0.001$), Mitigating & Returning ($\chi^2 = 19.684$, $p < 0.01$), Mitigating & Rejecting ($\chi^2 = 9.267$, $p < 0.05$), Accepting & Rejecting ($p > 0.05$), Rejecting & Returning ($\chi^2 = 1$, $p > 0.05$), Mitigating & Accepting & Returning ($p > 0.05$).

Strategies whose frequency occurrences were above average in each super strategy will now be presented for further discussion²:

Super Strategy 1: Accepting

1. Agreeing. This is the most common response strategy to indicate acceptance, which accounts for 11% among the total, and 38.68% within the Accepting super strategy. By agreeing, the responder (hereafter referred as B) ‘accepted the complimentary force of the complimenter’s (hereafter referred as A) utterance by a response semantically fitted to the compliment’ (Herbert 1988; 12). For example, in Situation 1, the adjacency pairs are:

Situation 1:

- i. A: ‘Ua, zhe zhi shoubiao hen piaoliang o
 Wow, this CL watch very beautiful, PRT
 ‘Wow! This is a beautiful watch.’
 B: Wo tongyi ni shuode
 I agree you say DE
 ‘I can’t agree with you more.’

This type of response occurred more frequently in the sample we collected than in the work of Chen (1993), and Herbert (1988), but was approximately similar to that by both American and Syrian Arabic speakers as reported by Nelson et al. (1996). Within the super strategy of Accepting, this type is indeed a very prevalent one used by Mandarin-speakers in Taiwan.

² The Pinyin system was used to transcribe Chinese examples.

2. Thanking only. This type of strategy is sometimes referred to as Appreciation Token, which was defined as ‘response that recognized the status of a previous utterance as a compliment, but was not semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment’ (Herbert 1988; 11; Pomerantz 1978:83). When responding to a compliment, the responder just gave an appreciation token, without giving other additional information. This type of strategy accounts for 7.79% of the total, but around 27.36% within the super strategy of Accepting. This type of strategy occurred much more frequently in the sample of Chen’s American English speakers (1993), Nelson et al. (1996), and Herbert (1988). But, it occurred less frequently in the sample of Chen’s work with Mandarin-Chinese speakers, and Syrian Arabic speakers reported by Nelson et al. (1996).
3. Joking. The type of strategy accounts for 23.58% within the super strategy of Accepting, and 6.71% of the total. For example, in Situation 7 the adjacency pairs go like this:

For Situation 7:

(2) A: Ni kanqilai qise hen hao, bi
 You look complexion very good compare
 uo shangyici kan dao ni shi haihao
 I last time see ASP you time better
 ‘You look so nice. Even nicer than when I saw you last.’
 B: Shangyici? Na shi duojio qian
 Last time that COP howlong before
 ‘Last time? How early was last time?’

This response type occurred more frequently in our sample than in the work of Chen (1993) with American English speakers.

Super Strategy 2: Returning

4. Offering object of compliment. This type of strategy is the most common one within the super strategy of returning. It accounts for 7.92% among the total, and 36.20% within the super strategy. The frequency occurrence is much higher in this sample than in the work of Chen (1993) with American English speakers. For example, in Situation 5, the adjacency pairs are:

- (3) A: Ua, Hao piaoliang de yangzhuang o, ni
 PRT Very pretty DE dress PRT you
 chuangqilai hen haokang
 Wear very good-looking
 ‘What a dress! You look great in it.’
 B: Ni yiaobuyao shishi?
 You A-not-A try
 ‘Do you want to try it on?’

5. Returning compliment. This response type makes up 6.85% of the total occurrences, and 31.29% within this super strategy. The frequency occurrences of the strategy in this study much lower than in the work of Chen (1993) with American English speakers. For Situation 7, the adjacency pairs are:

- (4) A: Ni kanqilai qise hen hao, bi
 You look complexion very good compare
 uo shangyici kan dao ni shi haihao
 I last time see ASP you time better
 ‘You look so nice. Even nicer than when I saw you last.’
 B: Ni kanqilai ye bucuo a
 You look also not bad PRT
 ‘You look good, too.’

Super Strategy 3: Mitigating

6. Explaining. This type of strategy is the most frequently used response among all strategies. It makes up 13.56% of the total occurrences, and 55.49% within this super strategy. Just as Wolfson pointed out, the recipient mitigates the force of the compliment without disagreeing with the complimenter and without praising him/herself. In this way, the recipient will find a solution to the dilemma as claimed by Pomerantz. The recipient accepts the compliment without violating the principle of avoiding self-praise. This is the most commonly used strategy among Mandarin-speakers in Taiwan. For example, in Situation 3, the adjacency pairs go like this:

- (5) A: Wo hen sihuan nide fangjian
 I very like your room
 'I like your room very much.'
- B: Wo jingxin buzhi le henjiu
 I painstakingly arrange ASP long
 'I have spent a lot of time working on it.'

7. **Doubting.** This strategy makes up 8.46% of the total occurrences, and 34.61% within this super strategy. This is comparable to Nelson et al.'s (1996) findings of Syrian Arabic compliment responses. However, the percentage is a little bit higher than American English speakers as reported in Chen's study (1993).

In addition to the single type strategy, Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan also employ combined super strategies which account for 17.32% of the total. The use of combined strategies was not reported in any of the previous literature on compliment responses. In previous studies, combined strategies in compliment rejoinders were collapsed into a single super strategy without being elaborated in detail. Since compliment responses are far more complex than complimenting, the collapse of combined strategies into one type may not reflect the real picture of actualizations in compliment rejoinders. From a functional perspective, the use of switched strategies can be regarded as a way to extricate oneself from getting into the dilemma of violating politeness principles.

The super strategies of Returning, Mitigating, and the combined super strategies have the presence of Agreeing, and can be regarded as tokens of Accepting in general. By excluding the super strategy of Rejecting/Denigrating and the Combined super strategy, which involves rejection, the total frequency occurrences of strategies used to denote acceptance is 659, which accounts for 88.46 % of the total while those used to denote rejecting is 86, which accounts for 11.54% of the total. The differences between the two were significantly different ($\chi^2= 440.71, p < 0.001$). So, overall, in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status relative to the responder, Mandarin-speakers in Taiwan tend to accept rather than reject compliments. Compared with other studies done on Mandarin Chinese by Chen (1993), and Gu (1990), this study indicates that there are intra-lingual variations among

Mandarin-Chinese speakers in different communities. In other words, the Agreement Maxim appeared to operate more powerfully than the Modesty Maxim for Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan and vice versa for Mandarin Chinese speakers in Mainland China. The intra-lingual differences between Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan and Mainland China might be attributed to the differences in the macro-social factors. Mainland China belongs to communist system, where people are placed under a constrained rigorous social system. Exploration of self-identity, free thoughts, and individualism are not encouraged. The value of conformity, humility, and order is valued more. Just as Gu (1990) put it, to denigrate self embraces the notions of respectfulness and modesty while to elevate self is construed as being arrogant or self-conceited. Although a series of economic liberalization program were launched during the 1990s in Mainland China, the effect of a liberalized economy on changes in the liberalization of socio-cultural and conceptual systems is yet to be seen. On the other hand, boosting self-image and individual rights have long been enjoyed by people living under a democratic system in Taiwan. It is speculated that the macro-social factors might contribute to the differences revealed between the two communities in the selection of compliment response strategies.

3.2 Compliment response strategies in SCH

A total of 646 responses were elicited from the Mandarin Chinese subjects in Taiwan in the situation in which the complimenter was of higher status relative to the responder. Their compliment response strategies were coded into 8 categories of super strategies, each of which was composed of several strategies (See Table 2): (1) Accepting, (2) Returning, (3) Mitigating, (4) Rejecting & Denigrating, (5) Accepting and Mitigating, (6) Mitigating and Rejecting, (7) Accepting and Rejecting, (8) Rejecting and Returning. Table 2 presents frequency distribution and percentage for each super strategy and strategy.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of Chinese compliment responses types in SCH

| Super strategy type | N | % |
|---|-----|-------|
| Super Strategy 1: Accepting | N | % |
| 1. Thanking only | 153 | 23.68 |
| 2. Agreeing | 18 | 2.79 |
| 3. Expressing gladness | 14 | 2.17 |
| 4. Thanking & Expressing gladness | 9 | 1.39 |
| 5. Agreeing + Formula | 7 | 1.08 |
| 6. Joking | 5 | 0.77 |
| 7. Thanking & Joking | 3 | 0.46 |
| 8. Agreeing & Expressing gladness | 1 | 0.15 |
| 9. Thanking & Agreeing | 1 | 0.15 |
| Subtotal | 211 | 32.67 |
| Super Strategy 2: Returning | | |
| 10. Returning compliment | 8 | 1.24 |
| 11. Offering object of compliment | 0 | 0 |
| 12. Encouraging | 0 | 0 |
| 13. Offering help | 0 | 0 |
| Subtotal | 8 | 1.24 |
| Super Strategy 3: Mitigating | | |
| 14. Explaining | 177 | 27.40 |
| 15. Doubting | 21 | 4.18 |
| 16. Doubting & Explaining | 6 | 0.93 |
| Subtotal | 204 | 31.58 |
| Super Strategy 4: Rejecting and Denigrating | | |
| 17. Rejecting & denigrating | 57 | 8.82 |
| 18. Rejecting + Formula | 10 | 1.55 |
| 19. Rejecting & Expressing embarrassment | 1 | 0.15 |
| Subtotal | 68 | 10.53 |
| Super Strategy 5: Accepting & Mitigating | | |
| 20. Thanking & Explaining | 75 | 11.61 |
| 21. Doubting & Thanking | 15 | 2.32 |
| 22. Doubting & Expressing gladness | 5 | 0.77 |
| 23. Expressing gladness & Explaining | 2 | 0.31 |
| 24. Agreeing & Explaining | 1 | 0.15 |
| Subtotal | 98 | 15.17 |
| Super Strategy 6: Mitigating & Rejecting | | |
| 25. Rejecting & Explaining | 24 | 3.72 |
| 26. Doubting & Rejecting | 10 | 1.55 |
| Subtotal | 34 | 5.26 |
| Super Strategy 7: Accepting & Rejecting | | |
| 27. Thanking & Denigrating | 19 | 2.94 |
| 28. Rejecting & Thanking & Agreeing | 2 | 0.31 |
| 29. Rejecting & Thanking | 1 | 0.15 |
| Subtotal | 22 | 3.41 |

| | | |
|---|----------|------|
| Super Strategy 8: Rejecting & Returning | | |
| 30. Rejecting & Returning compliment | 1 | 0.15 |
| | Subtotal | 1 |
| | | 0.15 |
| Total | 646 | 100 |

The differences of frequency occurrences across super strategy type were significant ($\chi^2 = 618.025$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that each super strategy does not carry equal weight in SCH. Three of the most commonly used super strategies (above average number), in descending order of the frequency occurrences, are Accepting, Mitigating, and Accepting & Mitigating. Within the super strategy of Accepting, the most frequently used strategy is Thanking only; within Mitigating, it is Explaining; and within Accepting & Mitigating, it is Thanking & Explaining.

Within each super strategy, the frequency occurrences of the strategies were significantly different for 6 categories among the following classified 8 categories: Accepting ($\chi^2 = 816.749$, $p < 0.001$), Returning (with one strategy only), Mitigating ($\chi^2 = 263.735$, $p < 0.001$), Rejecting & Denigrating ($\chi^2 = 79.794$, $p < 0.001$), Accepting & Mitigating ($\chi^2 = 202.000$, $p < 0.01$), Mitigating & Rejecting ($\chi^2 = 5.765$, $p < 0.05$), Accepting & Rejecting ($\chi^2 = 27.909$, $p < 0.001$), and Rejecting & Returning (with one strategy only).

The strategies whose frequency occurrences were above average in each super strategy will now be presented for discussion:

Super Strategy 1: Accepting

1. Thanking only. This type of strategy makes up 23.68% of the total occurrences, and 72.52% within the super strategy. There were differences of compliment responses in the situation in which the listener is of equal status and of higher status. In the former, the recipients use Agreeing, Thanking and Joking to indicate acceptance while in the latter the predominant type of response is Thanking only. This is similar to American English speakers' compliment responses as reported by Chen (1993) in that thanking only is the predominant strategy within the super strategy of Accepting.

The use of Accepting + formula was also found when Mandarin-speakers in Taiwan respond to compliments from superiors. This bears similarities to Syrian speakers as reported by Nelson et al. (1996). Some typical examples using the Pin-yin system for Accepting + formula used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan are: *Tuo nin de fu* (It is due to your blessing.), *Nin bu xian qi* (You do not look down upon me.), *Ni tai keqi le* (You are too polite.), *Ni tai kan de qi wuo le* (literal translation: You think highly of me.), and *Qing duo zhi jiao* (Please give me more advice.).

Super Strategy 3: Mitigating

2. Explaining. This type of response, which accounts for 27.40% of the total frequency occurrences, is the most frequently used strategy among the strategies used in the situation in which the responder is of higher status. Within the super strategy of Mitigating, it accounts for 86.76%. It indicates that when addressing the responder of higher status, the recipient tends not to accept the compliments offered totally without mitigating the force of the compliment. On the one hand, the recipient won't suggest that the complimenter is wrong so the compliments were not rejected. On the other hand, the recipient wants to appear humble without praising himself/herself too much. So, the recipient used explaining to mitigate the force of the compliment. Several examples were provided. For example, in situation 8, the adjacency pairs are:

For Situation 8:

- (6) A: Kao de henhao! Jinbu duo le
 Test DE well Progress much ASP
 'Great job! You really make great progress this time.'
- B: Zhishi jinwei wo zheci yunqi bijiao hao.
 This because I this time luck compare good
 Xhunbei de dou kao chulai le
 Prepare DE akk test out ASP
 'This is because I am luckier this time. I read the materials that happened to be test items.'

Sometimes, the recipient used Explaining together with Doubting. For example, in Situation 4, the adjacency pairs go like this:

For Situation 4:

- (7) A: Kao de henhao! Jinbu duo le
 Test DE well Progress much ASP
 ‘Well-done. You make great progress this time.’
 B: Zhende ma? yinwei wo shangci kao de tai
 Real PRT Because I last time test DE too
 cha le
 poor ASP
 ‘Really? This is because I did poorly last time.’

Super Strategy 5: Accepting & Mitigating

3. Thanking & Explaining. This type of response accounts for 11.61% of the total frequency occurrences. Within the super strategy of Accepting & Mitigating, this type makes up 76.53%. While accepting the compliment, the recipient also mitigates the force of the compliment without praising him/herself too much.

In addition, Mandarin Chinese speakers on Taiwan also employ combined super strategies, which were not reported in any previous literature on compliment responses. The use of combined super strategies accounts for almost a quarter of the total number of strategies used (155/646; 23.99%). A closer examination of the data shows that most of the combined strategies involve the combination of Accepting and other types of strategies (77%), which serve the function of downgrading the force of compliments in order to be more polite.

3.3 Variations across SCE and SCH

In this section, the politeness strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan across the two situations will be compared. In the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status, Mandarin speakers in Taiwan have around 11 super strategies to choose from while in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status, there are 8 super strategies available to select from. Two-way Chi-square tests showed that Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan varied their compliment response strategies as a function of status relationship and super strategy type ($\chi^2=207.944$, $p < 0.001$). To examine the differences, Table 3 lists Chi-square values for frequency occurrences of each super strategy across the two situations:

Table 3. Comparison of frequency distribution of super strategies between SCE and SCH

| Super strategy | SCE | SCH | Chi-square |
|----------------|-----|-----|----------------------|
| 1 | 212 | 211 | ---- $\chi^2=0.002$ |
| 2 | 163 | 8 | *** $\chi^2=140.497$ |
| 3 | 182 | 204 | ---- $\chi^2=1.254$ |
| 4 | 59 | 68 | ---- $\chi^2=0.638$ |
| 5 | 57 | 98 | ** $\chi^2=10.845$ |
| 6 | 25 | 0 | |
| 7 | 19 | 0 | |
| 8 | 15 | 34 | ** $\chi^2=7.367$ |
| 9 | 8 | 22 | * $\chi^2=6.533$ |
| 10 | 4 | 1 | -----1.8 |
| 11 | 1 | 0 | |
| Total | 745 | 646 | ** $\chi^2=7.046$ |

(Differences significant at the level of 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001 are indicated by *, **, ***, respectively.)

From the Chi-square value, it can be seen that the differences in the following four super strategies between the two situations were significant: Returning (Super Strategy 2), Combined super strategy of Accepting and Mitigating (Super Strategy 5), Combined super strategy of Mitigating and Rejecting (Super Strategy 8), Combined super strategy of Accepting and Rejecting (Super Strategy 9). We will now examine strategies used in each of the above super strategies, and locate the sources of the differences.

3.3.1 Differences in the use of super strategies across the situations

When we compare the frequency distribution of each super strategy and strategies used in the two situations, the following sources of differences were located.

1. Returning

Mandarin speakers in Taiwan are significantly more likely to employ the Returning super strategy in the situations in which the complimenter is of equal status than in situations in which the complimenter is of higher status ($\chi^2=140.497$, $p < 0.001$). Particularly, the strategies used in the former situation were rarely found in the latter, including offering object of compliment, encouraging, and offering help, and returning

compliment ($\chi^2=31.339$, $p < 0.001$). In the light of Leech's theory, the use of returning compliment is seen as application of the Agreement maxim and the Approbation Maxim; and offering object of compliment or offering help or encouraging are applications of the Agreement Maxim and the Tact Maxim. The Returning strategy is rarely used in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status; it may be because compliments to someone of superior status seem to require some confidence on the part of the complimenter to counteract the possibility of a negative interpretation, as noted by Wolfson (1983).

2. Accepting and Mitigating

Mandarin speakers in Taiwan are significantly more likely to employ the combined super strategy of Accepting & Mitigating in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status than in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status ($\chi^2=10.845$, $p < 0.01$). Among the strategies, the major difference lies in the use of Thanking & Explaining ($\chi^2=40.000$, $p < 0.001$). Mandarin speakers in Taiwan are significantly more likely to use the strategy of Thanking & Explaining in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status than in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status. In Chinese culture, the value of modesty has been greatly emphasized in a number of Chinese Books, such as The Analects of Confucius, Mencius, The Great Learning, etc. When the complimenter is of higher status, the responder often lightly downgrades the object of compliment after accepting compliments so that s/he would appear to be modest in order to be polite.

3. Mitigating & Rejecting

Mandarin speakers in Taiwan are significantly more likely to utilize the Combined super strategy of Mitigating & Rejecting in the situation in which the listener is of equal status than in the situation in which the listener is of higher status ($\chi^2=7.367$, $p < 0.01$). Among the strategies, the major difference lies in the use of Rejecting & Explaining ($\chi^2=12.448$, $p < 0.001$). Mandarin speakers in Taiwan are significantly more likely to use the strategy of Rejecting & Explaining for responses in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status than in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status.

4. Accepting & Rejecting

Mandarin speakers in Taiwan are significantly more likely to utilize the combined super strategy of Accepting & Rejecting in the situation in which the listener is of equal status than in the situation in which the listener is of higher status ($\chi^2=6.533$, $p < 0.05$). Among the strategies, the major difference lies in the use of Thanking & Rejecting ($\chi^2=4.481$, $p < 0.05$). Taiwanese-Mandarin speakers are significantly more likely to utilize the strategy of Thanking & Rejecting in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status than in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status. Sometimes, rejecting is conveyed through the use of formula like: *Nin tai tai ju wo le* (literal translation: You overestimate me.), *Nali nali* (literal translation: Where where), *Quo jiang le* (literal translation: You praise me too much.). The use of this type of super strategy might serve as a solution type to get out of the dilemma, as discussed by Pomerantz (1978) by agreeing with the compliment to attend to the complimenter's positive face, and rejecting the compliment to avoid self-praise simultaneously.

3.3.2 Comparison of acceptance and rejecting in general across

The use of the Accepting strategy and the use of the Rejecting strategy were often seen as two extreme points representing the degree of politeness along a politeness continuum across cultures. There are, however, various strategies reported that fall between these two points, such as Returning, or Mitigating, etc., which are used to shift the credit and lightly downplay the object of the compliment. Since agreeing was still present in the strategies of Returning, Mitigating or the combination, we should examine the general pattern of Accepting vs. Rejecting. If super strategies which are present in Rejecting are excluded, Mandarin speakers in Taiwan tend to accept rather than reject compliments in the two situations. Table 4 lists the number and percentage as well as Chi-square value for the strategy of Accepting in general and Rejecting in general for both situations:

Table 4. Frequency and percentage for the strategy of Accepting in general and Rejecting in general in both situations

| situation | Accepting in general | Rejecting in general | Chi-square |
|------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| equal | 659 (88.46%) | 86 (11.54%) | $\chi^2=440.71, p < 0.001$ |
| higher | 521 (80.65%) | 125 (19.35%) | $\chi^2=242.75, p < 0.001$ |
| Chi-square | $\chi^2=16.139, p < 0.001$ | $\chi^2=7.209, p < 0.05$ | |

In the former situation, the percentage of Accepting in general accounts for 88.46% of the total while that of Rejecting in general makes up only 11.54% ($\chi^2=440.71, p < 0.001$). In the latter situation, the percentage of Accepting in general accounts for 80.65% of the total while that of Rejecting in general makes up 19.35% ($\chi^2=242.75, p < 0.001$). These results suggest that Mandarin speakers on Taiwan tend to accept rather than reject compliments in both situations. But when we compare the frequency occurrences of the Accepting strategy in general across the two situations, it is found that the frequency occurrences of the Accepting strategy in general is significantly higher in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status. In the use of Rejecting strategy in general, the frequency occurrences were higher in the situation, in which the complimenter is of higher status. This indicates that the social variable of the status relationship between the interlocutors does affect people's choices of compliment response strategies to a certain extent. In light of Leech's theory, the Modesty Maxim helps account for the significantly frequent use of the Rejecting super strategy in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status while the Agreement Maxim helps account for the significantly frequent use of the Accepting strategy in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status. Gu's Self-denigration Maxim can also explain the significantly frequent use of the Rejecting super strategy in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status. The Self-denigration Maxim is treated as a weightier constraint than the Agreement Maxim in this situation.

4. Conclusion

This empirical study investigated compliment response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan in two situations in which the complimenter is of equal

status and of higher status relative to the responder respectively. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

First, in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status, the three most frequently used super strategies are Accepting, Mitigating, and Returning, while in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status, the three most frequently used super strategies are Accepting, Mitigating, and Accepting & Mitigating. Each of the super strategies, however, does not carry equal weight across the two situations.

Secondly, selections of compliment response strategies used by Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan vary as a function of social status relationship and super strategy type. The Accepting strategy in general is more frequently used in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status while the Rejecting strategy in general is more frequently used in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status. In addition, the Returning strategy is used significantly less often in the former situation, which indicated that compliments rarely go upwards. This lends indirect support to Wolfson's (1983) claim that compliments tend to go downward instead of going upward.

Thirdly, in comparison with previous studies reported, there are similarities and differences revealed in compliment responses across or within cultures (Chen 1993; Herbert 1988; Pomerantz 1978; Holmes 1988; Nelson et al. 1996). In addition to the use of a single super strategy, such as Accepting, Returning, Mitigating, Rejecting, Mandarin speakers in Taiwan also switch strategies and use formulas when responding to compliments. The use of strategy switching may serve as a solution type to get out of the dilemma. The response to a compliment is a far more complex process than giving a compliment. To capture the real actualization of the compliment response process, a broad classification of strategies by single type as reported in some previous studies might be oversimplified.

Fourthly, Mandarin-Chinese speakers in Taiwan generally tend to accept (including Accepting, Returning and Mitigating and combinations) rather than reject compliments. The findings bear similarities to Holmes' (1988) report on the distribution of compliment response strategies of New Zealand English speakers, and Herbert's (1988) discussion of responding strategies by American English speakers. Leech's Agreement

Maxim, rather than Gu's principle seems to be the overriding motivation for Mandarin Chinese speakers in Taiwan in responding to compliments. The findings run counter to Chen's study on compliment response strategies by Chinese speakers in Mainland China (1993) in that Mandarin Chinese speakers in Mainland China tend to reject rather than accept compliments. The findings of the present study suggest that there are intra-cultural or intra-lingual variations in the selections of compliment response strategies within Mandarin-Chinese speech communities.

5. Limitations and Suggestion for Future Studies

Despite some valuable empirical findings, there are, however, limitations to this study. First, the demographic background of the subjects needs to be more carefully controlled since the subjects that participated the study comprise native Mandarin speakers and native Taiwanese speakers. It must be further clarified whether there might be subtle influences coming from native Taiwanese cultural norms. Secondly, the topic of the compliment might be an intervening variable, which was not fully dealt with in the analysis. For example, in situations in which the interlocutors are of equal status, the topic of the compliment is about a possession or physical appearance; however, in the situations in which the complimenter is of higher status, the topic of compliment is about personal academic/intellectual ability or performance. Further studies can help find out whether the topic of the compliment might affect strategy choice in compliment response behaviors in Chinese cultures. Thirdly, other social variables such as familiarity or gender effect were not addressed in the present study, and can be further explored.

Appendix (translated from the Chinese version of the DCT questionnaire)

Directions: There are eight situations described below. Please first read the description of each situation, which depicts events likely to take place in your real life. On the lines below, please provide more than one response, which you find socially appropriate. You are wearing a new watch. A friend of yours sees it and says to you: "Wow! That's a beautiful watch! I wish I had one like that". You reply:

- A. _____ B. _____
C. _____ D. _____

1. You have given an oral presentation in the class. After the class, the professor comes over, and says to you: "Good job! It was impressive". You reply:

- A. _____ B. _____
C. _____ D. _____

2. You invite a friend to your room. Your friend says to you: "Your room is nice. I like your room very much". You reply:

- A. _____ B. _____
C. _____ D. _____

3. Your professor just gave back your midterm report. The paper was evaluated highly. After the class, your professor meets you in the hall, and says to you: "Well done! Your report was well written"! You reply:

- A. _____ B. _____
C. _____ D. _____

4. You are wearing a new dress. One of your friends meets you in the morning, and says: "What a dress! You look great in it". You reply:

- A. _____ B. _____
C. _____ D. _____

5. You did very well in the speech competition, and won first prize. After the

competition, your teacher says to you: “Congratulations! Your speech was very clear and well-organized”. You reply:

A. _____ B. _____

C. _____ D. _____

6. You meet a former schoolmate you haven't seen for some time. After an exchange of greetings, s/he says: “You look so nice! Even nicer than when I saw you last”. You reply:

A. _____ B. _____

C. _____ D. _____

7. You got high grade on the test, and did much better than last time. Your professor says to you: “Great job! You really improved this time”! You reply:

A. _____ B. _____

C. _____ D. _____

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華語讚美回應策略：再談禮貌問題

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本研究探討台灣地區大學生在兩種不同社會情境如何使用國語回應讚美的策略，研究採言談問卷填寫(Discourse Completion Test)實驗方式，內容描述常見的日常生活讚美情境，60位學院大一學生寫下他們認為適當的回應讚美方式，所填寫的語料依單一策略(見Holmes, 1988)及組合策略加以分類，並利用卡方檢定分析策略頻率分布異同。研究顯示，大致而言，台灣地區大學生傾向接受讚美，不過讚美者相對地位的高低會造成回應策略的不同，包括策略的比重、有接受意涵策略的使用頻率、及回讚讚美者使用的策略頻率等，研究結果亦間接印證Wolfson(1983)的論點，讚美傾向”由上而下”，本文同時進一步比較跨語言及華語區語言間回應讚美策略的異同。

關鍵詞：語言行爲、讚美回應策略、社會文化變項、語言間與語言內
差異