Chinese ESL Speakers' Compliment Behavior in English and in Chinese[*]

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This study compares Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior in Chinese and in English, and the latter to that of Americans. Twenty Chinese speakers completed a questionnaire in both languages and ten Americans completed the English one. The questionnaire elicited compliments and responses in various scenarios. The results show that in giving compliments, the Americans were more likely to say "I like NP" than the Chinese, while the Chinese using English preferred focusing on an object rather than on a person. Moreover, the Chinese using Chinese showed a higher frequency of indirect or no compliment, reflecting their even more reserved attitude. As for the responses, accepting compliments was most common for all groups. However, the Americans and Chinese using Chinese rejected compliments more often than the Chinese using English. This is probably due to Chinese ESL speakers' overgeneralized impression about the American way of responding to compliments.

Key words: compliments, compliment responses, language in use, Chinese ESL speakers

1. Introduction

Giving and responding to compliments are ubiquitous behaviors in daily communication. They are commonly regarded as positive speech acts that enhance the solidarity between people (Wolfson & Manes 1980, Holmes 1988). However, paying someone a compliment may also be viewed as a face-threatening act in some cultures because it implies that the complimenter is judging and may be envious of the addressee (Holmes 1988, Yu 2003). In addition, responding to compliments is often a choice between being cooperative or humble, which may be prioritized differently in different societies (Pomerantz 1978, Herbert 1986). Accordingly, the appropriate use of compliments and responses is essential yet challenging in inter-cultural communication because the norms often differ from culture to culture.

Coping with this challenge is probably part of a daily life for ESL (English as a Second Language) speakers, who live in an English-speaking country but speak a native language (L1) other than English. When ESL speakers give or respond to a compliment in their second language (L2), do they completely adapt to the host culture and behave similarly to native English speakers, or do they follow their L1 conventions? Is there a pragmatic transfer between their L1 and L2 compliment behavior? This study will address these questions by comparing Chinese ESL

speakers' compliments and responses in English and in Chinese. In the following section, critically relevant studies are reviewed to provide a basic understanding of English and Chinese speakers' compliment behavior to help set the framework of this study.

2. Literature review
2.1 Compliments in English and Chinese

It is clear from previous studies that the syntactic structures of English and Chinese compliments differ in some aspects. According to Wolfson (1981), English compliments tend to have fixed syntactic compositions. In his corpus of nearly 700 naturally occurring compliments collected in the U.S., the most common three syntactic structures comprise 85% of their data. These structures along with their frequency in the corpus are listed below:

1) NP is/looks ADJ (e.g., "This chicken is great.")   *53.6%*
2) I like/love NP (e.g., "I love your skirt.")   *16.1%*
3) PRO is (a) ADJ NP (e.g., "That's a very nice briefcase.")   *14.9%*

Holmes (1986) conducted a similar survey on New Zealand English compliments and found a very similar distribution to that of Wolfson (1981), suggesting that the syntactic structures in English compliments are largely predictable. As for the syntactic construction of Chinese compliments, studies have suggested that Chinese speakers rarely use the 'I like/love NP' structure in their compliments (Zuo 1988, Ye 1995, Jia 1997, Yuan 2002, Wang & Tsai 2003, Yu 2005, Yu, Fu & Hou 2007). Some have proposed that Chinese speakers may refrain from emphasizing their subjective feelings in paying compliments. Additionally, the verbs "like" and "love" have stronger semantic force in Chinese than in English, and thus are usually not used in Chinese compliments. Instead of the first-person pronoun, Jia (1997) observed that Chinese speakers used the second-person pronoun most frequently in her corpus of oral compliments, whereas Yu, Fu & Hou (2007) found that their Chinese participants used more third-person pronouns in written compliments than their American counterparts in Gousseva (1998). Yuan (2002), on the other hand, found that her participants used second- and third-person pronouns equally frequently in the DCT (Discourse Completion Task) data, and yet predominantly used third-person pronouns in natural conversations. Taken together, it seems that there is not yet a consensus regarding the most common syntactic structures in Chinese compliments.

Regarding the relationship between interlocutors in compliment exchanges, Holmes (1986) showed that New Zealand English speakers were most likely to pay compliments to people of equal status as themselves (nearly 80% in her corpus), whereas compliments upwards (to someone of higher status) and downwards (to someone of lower status) were less common. In addition, she observed a difference in compliment topics when the relationship between interlocutors varied. Specifically, when the compliments occurred between equals, the topic was twice as likely to be on appearance as to be on performance, while the opposite was true when the compliments were directed upwards or downwards. Wolfson (1983), on the other hand, showed that American English speakers were twice as likely to compliment on appearance as on performance no matter whether the compliments were between equals or directed upwards to someone of higher status. These findings illustrate a cross-cultural difference between New Zealand and American English speakers in the interaction between compliment topics and interlocutor relationship. As for compliments in Chinese, Ye (1995) and Yu (2005) found that Chinese speakers were more likely to give compliments on performance than on appearance, yet Wang & Tsai's (2003) corpus revealed that appearance was the most common topic. When it comes to the status of the interlocutors, Yu (2005) showed that both American and Chinese speakers were most likely to give compliments to interlocutors of equal status, yet the Chinese were less likely to compliment people of higher status than the Americans were.

2.2 Compliment responses in English and Chinese

Holmes (1988, 1993) classified compliment responses (CRs) into three major categories: Accept, Deflect, and Reject, and this has become the most widely adopted categorization scheme in the literature. Previous research has shown that native English speakers predominantly preferred the Accept CR to other strategies (Herbert 1986, 1990, Holmes 1986, 1988, Chen 1993, Tang & Zhang 2009). As for the CRs of Chinese speakers, different studies have yielded diverse findings. Some studies illustrated that Chinese speakers chose to reject compliments in the majority of cases, which was attributed to the high regard for modesty in Chinese society and the common practice of self-denigration as a means of politeness (Gu 1990, Chen 1993, Wang & Tsai 2003). However, more recent studies such as Tang & Zhang (2009) and Chen & Yang (2010) found that Chinese speakers were most likely to accept compliments and least likely to reject compliments. It is worth highlighting two studies in particular. In an earlier study, Chen (1993) showed that his Chinese participants recruited from one university in China accepted compliments 1.03% of

the time and rejected compliments 95.73% of the time. Seventeen years later, Chen & Yang (2010) recruited Chinese speakers from the same university and found that the Accept CR was used 62.6% of the time whereas Reject was used only 9.13% of the time. The authors suggest that the opening up of China and its increasing exposure to Western culture may have resulted in a substantial change in modern Chinese society, which is reflected in the growing similarity in the CRs between English and Chinese speakers.

Previous studies have also shown that the topic of compliments significantly affects the response. For example, Chen (1993) showed that Americans were more likely to accept compliments on appearance rather than on ability or possessions, yet the Chinese were less likely to accept compliments on appearance. On the other hand, Tang & Zhang (2009) found that while the Australians adopted the Accept strategy most frequently on all topics, the Chinese most often accepted compliments on appearance and ability and most often evaded compliments on personality and possessions. The authors propose that the difference between their study and Chen (1993) could be due to the fact that their Chinese participants were ESL speakers residing in Australia while Chen's participants were EFL (English as a foreign language) speakers living in China. This suggests that the experience of living in an English-speaking country may lead to a change in Chinese speakers' compliment behavior.

2.3 Compliment behavior of Chinese ESL and EFL speakers

As can be concluded from the reviewed studies, English and Chinese speakers differ in some major respects with regard to giving and responding to compliments. It is thus interesting to investigate Chinese ESL and EFL speakers' compliment behavior and see how they reconcile the pragmatic differences between these two languages. Some of such studies have shown that Chinese speakers' compliment behavior in English often deviates from that of native English speakers, either because of pragmatic transfer from the L1, or because of learners' misconception about appropriate L2 compliment exchanges. For example, Chen & Rau (2011) found that English compliments and CRs given by Chinese EFL speakers were often judged to be inadequate by native English speakers because they gave an improper amount of information, appeared rude and intrusive, or adopted nonnative-like phrasing or wording. The authors attributed most of the learners' errors to the influence of the Chinese language and culture. In another study, Cheng (2011) showed that Chinese ESL and EFL speakers deviated from native English speakers in overusing the Accept CR in a naturalistic role-play task. Her participants explained in a retrospective

interview that they accepted compliments so often because "thank you" is the proper response they learned in English classes and textbooks. Yet in reality, the native English speakers would not simply say "thank you" to respond to a compliment, but would instead supplement the appreciation by returning the compliment or providing more information. These two studies illustrate some of the difficulties Chinese speakers face in acquiring native-like compliment behavior in English.

In Yu's (2004) study, on the other hand, Chinese ESL speakers behaved similarly to native English speakers in responding to compliments whereas the EFL speakers patterned more similarly to native Chinese speakers. Specifically, the results show that among the four groups, the monolingual English control group used the Accept strategy most often (55%) while the monolingual Chinese control group used it least often (13%). The Chinese ESL group was closer to the English control group (42%) while the EFL speakers' responses resembled those of the Chinese control group (21%). As for the Non-acceptance (Reject) strategy, the Chinese control group used it most often (24%) while the English control group rarely used it (5%). The two learner groups were in between, with the ESL speakers being closer to the English control group (14%) and the EFL group closer to the Chinese control group (19%). These findings suggest that living in an English-speaking environment helps Chinese ESL speakers reduce negative L1 transfer and adopt more native-like CRs in English.

While the L1 pragmatic transfer to Chinese ESL speakers' L2 compliment behavior has been evidenced in previous studies, the pragmatic transfer from the L2 to the L1 remains largely unexplored. One study that addressed this question, though focusing on a different language group, was conducted on female Korean speakers' CRs in English and Korean interactions. Han (1992) collected 20 CRs in English and 20 CRs in Korean made by ten female Korean students who had spent at least one year in the U.S. She found that in English interactions, her participants accepted compliments 75% of the time and rejected them 20% of the time. In Korean interactions, on the other hand, they accepted compliments 20% of the time and rejected them 45% of the time. They deflected the compliments in the remaining cases. Han concluded that these Korean students had acquired the typical CRs in English through their interaction with Americans and formal English instruction in Korea, yet there was little evidence of pragmatic transfer from the L1 to the L2 and vice versa.

2.4 The present study

Whereas the existing studies on Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior are informative, research findings are lacking in some crucial areas. First, previous

studies on Chinese ESL speakers mainly focused on their L2 CRs. Hence whether they would adopt native-like linguistic structures in giving English compliments or resort to their L1 conventions is an unaddressed issue in the literature. Second, to the author's knowledge, no study has compared Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior in their L1 and L2 to investigate the pragmatic transfer from the L2 to the L1. Third, former research has considered either topics (Cheng 2011) or interlocutor status (Yu 2004) in accounting for Chinese ESL speakers' CRs, but not both. In view of these gaps in the literature, the present study compares not only Chinese ESL speakers' compliments and CRs in English to those of native English speakers, but also their compliment behavior in English to that in Chinese. As the topics and interlocutor statuses are systematically varied in different scenarios, three research questions will be discussed in the current study: 1) How does Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior in English differ from that of native English speakers? 2) How does Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior in English and in Chinese differ from each other? 3) Do topics and interlocutor statuses affect Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior? It is my hope that the findings of this study will explicate the connection between language and culture as well as supplement the extensive research on compliment speech acts.

3. Methods
3.1 Participants

Twenty native speakers of Chinese (10 male, 10 female) participated in this study as the experimental group. Their average age was 21.5 years and they were recruited from an English language class for international students in a university in the U.S. The majority of these participants had studied English for approximately ten years before going to the U.S. for their undergraduate studies, and they had resided in the country for less than two years (mean = 8.45 months). Additionally, ten native speakers of English (5 male, 5 female) from the same university served as the control group. Their responses to the questionnaire were regarded as the native norm for English compliment behavior.

3.2 Questionnaire

A written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was used to elicit the participants' compliments and CRs. In the compliment section, there were nine scenarios that consisted of three interlocutor statuses and three topics. The three interlocutors were by design moderately familiar with the participants to facilitate compliment

exchanges (Manes 1983, Wolfson 1983, 1989, Yu 2005), yet they differed in status in comparison to the participants: higher (a professor), equal (a classmate who was not a close friend), and lower (a student whom the participants tutor). One topic was about appearance and the other two were about types of performance. The first one was the interlocutor's performance that partially resulted from the participant's contribution. For example, one interlocutor had done a good oral presentation on a group project with the participant. The second type was the interlocutor's performance that had no direct relevance to the participant. For instance, one interlocutor had gotten on the Dean's list due to getting straight A's in all their classes. These two types of performance may elicit different compliments because when a participant compliments the former type of performance, the praise may extend to himself. There was a cue, "What would you say to them?", at the end of each scenario to elicit a compliment from the participants. Five compliments employing different syntactic structures were provided for the participants to rank how likely they would be to use each of these, with a 5 given to the most likely one and a 1 given to the least likely one. The five compliments included the 1st person-construction (1P-construction: e.g., "I like your shirt"), the 2nd person-construction (2P-construction: e.g., "You look good in this shirt"), the 3rd person-construction (3P-construction: e.g., "That is a nice shirt"), an indirect compliment (e.g., "Where did you get a shirt like that?"), and No Comment (i.e., "I would not say anything").

The second section of the questionnaire elicited CRs from the participants. The nine scenarios consisted of the same types of interlocutors and topics, but were not identical to those in the first section. Similarly, three possible CRs exemplifying the Accept, Deflect, and Reject strategies (Holmes 1988) were provided for the participants to rank how likely they would be to use each of the responses. A 3 would be given to the most likely response while a 1 would be given to the least likely one.

The questionnaire was first designed in English in consultation with a native English speaker, and then translated into Chinese by the author, a native speaker of Chinese and fluent in English. The English version of the questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

3.3 Procedure

The English control group completed the English questionnaire while the Chinese ESL speakers completed both versions. Half the Chinese participants (5 male, 5 female) completed the English version first and then the Chinese version, while the other half followed the opposite order. There was no break in between.

3.4 Analysis

Every participant's top two choices were included in the analysis because some participants noted that they would use the two interchangeably. To quantify their responses, a likelihood score was computed for each option by multiplying the number of participants who chose that option with its ranking. For example, when the interlocutors were of equal status and the topic was on appearance, six American participants ranked the 1P-construction compliment as their top choice (score = 5) while three other participants ranked it as their second choice (score = 4). Then the likelihood score for that option would be 42 (6×5 + 3×4 = 42). The computation of the likelihood scores for the CRs was carried out in the same way, the only difference being that the score for the top choice was 3 because there were only three options in each scenario. The higher the likelihood score, the more participants selected the given option as their preferred response. Hence the likelihood scores could be considered equivalent to frequency counts of each option. These scores were used in chi-square tests to compare the response distributions between groups.

4. Results
4.1 American vs. Chinese participants' compliments in English

The American and Chinese participants' likelihood scores for each compliment option in each scenario are listed in Table 1, with the Americans on the left and the Chinese on the right. Because there were twice as many participants in the Chinese group as in the American group, the American group's raw scores were multiplied by two in Table 1 to facilitate a direct comparison between the two groups. The overall percentage of each option, shown at the bottom of the table, was calculated by adding up all the likelihood scores for each option in all scenarios and then dividing by the sum of all the likelihood scores across all the options. This percentage represents the overall likelihood of one option being selected among all options. As a reference point, if all five compliment options were selected equally often, the percentage for each option would be 20%.

A chi-square test comparing these two groups' preferred compliments revealed a significant difference ($\chi^2(44) = 232.12$, $p < .001$). The sources of these differences were further identified by examining the adjusted residuals between the observed and expected values in each cell. That is, if the adjusted residual is higher than 1.96, it indicates a significant difference between the two groups. These significant differences are marked by shading in the table. Specifically, the options that are shaded received a significantly higher likelihood score in one group than the other group.

Table 1. Likelihood scores of American and Chinese participants' compliments in English

Topic	Status	AMERICAN					CHINESE				
		I	*You*	*It*	*Indirect*	*No Comment*	*I*	*You*	*It*	*Indirect*	*No Comment*
$A_{ppearance}$	Higher	74	36	40	0	30	23	77	47	4	29
	Equal	84	10	24	8	54	52	29	45	5	49
	Lower	96	34	26	16	8	36	43	68	18	15
$P_{erformance}$ R_{elated}	Higher	72	30	32	26	20	56	51	39	30	4
	Equal	42	58	16	54	10	31	62	73	14	0
	Lower	78	78	0	24	0	42	67	49	10	12
$P_{erformance}$ $N_{ot} R_{elated}$	Higher	48	34	54	24	20	67	8	31	54	20
	Equal	48	56	40	8	28	50	55	45	5	25
	Lower	68	52	8	42	10	63	35	33	32	17
Overall percentage (%)		37.7	24.0	14.8	12.5	11.1	25.9	26.4	26.5	10.6	10.6

As can be seen from the overall percentages of each compliment option (the bottom row), the Americans generally rated the 1P-construction as the more preferred compliment type, followed by the 2P-construction. As for the Chinese, they favored the I-, You-, and 3P-constructions to a similar degree. A closer look at the shaded cells reveals that the topic and interlocutor status also affected the participants' compliment choice. To keep it simple, this article will only highlight some major patterns. Across the board, the American participants utilized the 1P-construction compliments (e.g., "I like your shirt") more frequently than the Chinese in 4 of the 9 scenarios with 3 of these 4 scenarios about the addressee's appearance. This shows that when complimenting others on their appearance, the Americans were more inclined to express their personal sentiments than the Chinese. The Chinese participants, on the other hand, seemed to prefer the 3P-construction ("That is a nice shirt") more than the Americans did, which can be seen in 5 of the 9 scenarios. This suggests that the Chinese tend to focus directly on the object of the compliment when using English.

4.2 Chinese participants' compliments in English and in Chinese

To compare Chinese ESL speakers' compliments in their L1 and L2, a chi-square test was conducted on the Chinese participants' likelihood scores for the five compliment options in English and in Chinese. The results indicate that their

compliments in these two languages are significantly different ($\chi^2(44) = 148.24$, $p < .001$). Their likelihood scores are presented in Table 2, with the English compliments on the left and Chinese compliments on the right. The scores in the shaded cells are significantly higher in one language than the other.

Table 2. Likelihood scores of Chinese participants' compliments in English and in Chinese

Topic	Status	CHINESE IN ENGLISH					CHINESE IN CHINESE				
		I	*You*	*It*	*Indirect*	*No Comment*	*I*	*You*	*It*	*Indirect*	*No Comment*
$A_{ppearance}$	Higher	23	77	47	4	29	9	47	65	8	51
	Equal	52	29	45	5	49	30	47	32	20	51
	Lower	36	43	68	18	15	30	46	76	8	20
$P_{erformance}$ R_{elated}	Higher	56	51	39	30	4	62	64	22	24	8
	Equal	31	62	73	14	0	46	49	58	17	10
	Lower	42	67	49	10	12	41	45	54	23	17
$P_{erformance}$ N_{ot} R_{elated}	Higher	67	8	31	54	20	41	16	46	63	14
	Equal	50	55	45	5	25	44	55	15	44	22
	Lower	63	35	33	32	17	71	36	34	27	12
Overall percentage (%)		25.9	26.4	26.5	10.6	10.6	23.1	25.0	24.8	14.4	12.7

Table 2 reflects that, as far as Chinese ESL speakers' use of compliments in English and Chinese is concerned, a great resemblance exists in the overall percentages of the five compliment types between the two languages. The percentages of the three pronouns are similarly high with the 1P-construction being slightly less frequent than the other two. Nonetheless, the shaded cells reveal some significant differences between these two data sets. Broadly speaking, the Chinese participants utilized more personal pronouns (I, you, it) when giving compliments in English, while they chose Indirect Compliments or No Comment more often in Chinese. Among the significant differences, two notable patterns are worth highlighting.

First, the Chinese ESL speakers used the 1P-constructions significantly more often in English than in Chinese in 3 scenarios. Taken together with the data in Table 1, it can be stated that the Americans utilized the 1P-construction more often than the Chinese ESL speakers, whereas the Chinese ESL speakers chose the 1P-construction more often when operating in English mode than in Chinese mode. A second conspicuous pattern was observed when the compliment topic was on appearance and the addressee had a higher status than the participant, e.g., when the participant's

professor was wearing a nice shirt. The Chinese ESL speakers chose compliments such as "I like your shirt" or "You look nice" more often when they were in English mode while they chose to give no compliment more often in Chinese mode. This suggests that the Chinese ESL speakers were more reluctant to compliment their professor on his or her appearance when using Chinese than when using English.

4.3 American vs. Chinese participants' CRs in English

A chi-square test conducted on the American and Chinese participants' CRs in English reveals a significant inter-group difference ($\chi^2(26) = 123.13$, $p < .001$). The likelihood scores for each CR in each scenario are listed in Table 3 with the Americans on the left and Chinese on the right. The shaded cells indicate that the scores are significantly higher in one group than the other (adjusted residual > 1.96).

Table 3. Likelihood scores of American and Chinese participants' CRs in English

Topic	Status	AMERICAN			CHINESE		
		Accept	*Deflect*	*Reject*	*Accept*	*Deflect*	*Reject*
A$_{ppearance}$	Higher	58	20	22	57	37	6
	Equal	48	26	26	56	37	7
	Lower	54	28	18	55	43	2
P$_{erformance}$ R$_{elated}$	Higher	26	48	26	42	53	5
	Equal	60	16	24	53	36	11
	Lower	36	52	12	36	54	10
P$_{erformance}$ N$_{ot}$ R$_{elated}$	Higher	54	10	36	57	37	6
	Equal	44	50	6	38	51	11
	Lower	60	36	4	46	38	16
Overallpercentage (%)		*48.9*	*31.8*	*19.3*	*48.9*	*42.9*	*8.2*

The overall preferences of CRs are very similar between the American and Chinese groups. The most commonly selected response is Accept, followed by Deflect with Reject being the least common response. There are nevertheless apparent differences in various scenarios. The most pervasive pattern is that the Americans rejected compliments more often than the Chinese in 6 of the 9 scenarios, especially when the topic was on appearance or when the complimenter had a higher status. Even though Reject is never the most commonly adopted strategy in any of these scenarios, the Americans ranked it as a more likely response than the Chinese did. There is an additional and less prevalent trend in which the Chinese participants

deflected compliments more often than the Americans did in 3 scenarios which spanned all topics and which usually involved an interlocutor of a higher or equal status. An interesting observation is that in these 3 scenarios, the Americans consistently chose to reject more often than to deflect compliments while the Chinese chose to deflect more often than to reject compliments.

4.4 Chinese participants' CRs in English and in Chinese

The Chinese participants' CRs in English and in Chinese, when compared in a chi-square test, showed a significant language effect ($\chi^2(26) = 44.28$, $p < .05$). The likelihood scores of the CRs are illustrated in Table 4 with the English compliments on the left and Chinese compliments on the right. The shaded areas represent significantly higher likelihood scores of a given CR in one language than in the other.

Table 4. Likelihood scores of Chinese participants' CRs
in English and in Chinese

Topic	Status	CHINESE IN ENGLISH			CHINESE IN CHINESE		
		Accept	*Deflect*	*Reject*	*Accept*	*Deflect*	*Reject*
Appearance	Higher	57	37	6	56	25	19
	Equal	56	37	7	53	25	22
	Lower	55	43	2	53	37	10
Performance Related	Higher	42	53	5	33	55	12
	Equal	53	36	11	41	37	22
	Lower	36	54	10	27	57	16
Performance Not Related	Higher	57	37	6	54	38	8
	Equal	38	51	11	30	45	25
	Lower	46	38	16	48	36	16
Overall percentage (%)		48.9	42.9	8.2	43.9	39.4	16.7

The overall percentage of each CR in these two data sets shows that the Chinese ESL speakers, whether responding in English or in Chinese, selected the Accept strategy most often, followed by the Deflect strategy with the Reject strategy being used the least frequently. As for the shaded cells, all the differences between the English and Chinese CRs are observed in the likelihood scores of the Reject strategy. Specifically, the Chinese participants invariably rejected compliments more frequently in Chinese than in English when the topic was on their appearance. In addition, they selected the Reject CR more often in Chinese when the compliment

came from a peer who addressed their performance in an area unrelated to the interlocutor, e.g., on their acceptance into a law school.

5. Discussion

5.1 Compliments of Americans using English, Chinese ESL speakers using English and Chinese ESL speakers using Chinese

The results on the preferred linguistic structures of compliments in this study reveal that the American participants tended to use the 1P-construction more often than did the Chinese, particularly when the topic was on appearance. In fact, the 1P-construction took up 37.7% (Table 1) of their compliment selection, outweighing all the other compliment types. This suggests that Americans are more inclined to express their own positive feelings toward the addressee when giving compliments. The Chinese, on the other hand, used the 3P-constructions relatively more frequently than did the Americans, exemplifying their preference for a less personal remark. That is, instead of focusing on their interlocutor (e.g., "You look nice in your new hat") or themselves (e.g., "I like your new hat"), the Chinese more often commented directly on the object (e.g., "That is a nice hat"). This suggests that the Chinese may be more neutral and less personal than the Americans when it comes to paying compliments. It should be noted that percentage-wise, the Chinese participants did not use the 1P-constructions (25.9%, Table 1) or the 2P-constructions (26.4%, Table 1) much less than the 3P-constructions (26.5%). However, when compared to the Americans, who selected the former two types much more frequently than the latter one (37.7% and 24.0% vs. 14.8%, Table 1), the Chinese participants deviated from the native norm in not using the 1P-construction often enough. The cause for such a deviation most likely comes from these Chinese speakers' native language influence. As has been observed in a number of former studies, Chinese speakers rarely use the "I like/love NP" structure in their compliments (Zuo 1988, Ye 1995, Jia 1997, Yuan 2002, Wang & Tsai 2003, Yu 2005, Yu, Fu & Hou 2007). Hence when the Chinese ESL speakers were giving compliments in English, they were probably under the influence of their L1 linguistic conventions and failed to use the 1P-construction as frequently as the Americans did. This illustrates a case of pragmatic transfer from the L1 to the L2 compliments.

When the Chinese ESL speakers' compliments in English were compared to those in Chinese, they demonstrated the tendency to use more I-, You-, and 3P-constructions when responding in English, but more Indirect or No Compliment responses when speaking Chinese. This suggests that when the participants were using Chinese, they became more indirect in complimenting others or even reluctant

to do it in some situations. An interesting case is the one in which the participants were presented with the scenario in which their professor was wearing a nice shirt. When the language mode was English, and the participants were probably imagining themselves interacting with an American professor in the U.S., they frequently used compliments such as "You look nice" and "I like your shirt". However, when the language mode was Chinese and the participants probably envisioned themselves speaking to a Chinese professor in China, they often chose not to give compliments (the second most common response for this scenario). This echoes Yu's (2005) observation that Chinese speakers give fewer compliments to people with a higher status than Americans do. Yu reasoned that this is most likely due to the traditional Chinese cultural belief that lower-status people should refrain from taking the initiative in talking to those of higher status. Thus, lower status individuals, when interacting with people of higher social rank, may avoid paying compliments that could be seen as flattery (Yu 2005:110). The Chinese ESL speakers' compliments in Chinese in the current study reflect this cultural attitude. The same pattern, however, is not observed in their English compliments. This suggests that this is an L1 cultural trait that is not transferred to the L2 by these Chinese ESL speakers.

Similar to the Chinese ESL speakers' compliments in English, the overall percentage of each compliment type in Chinese shows a relatively common usage of the 1P-construction (23.1%, Table 2), which is used only slightly less often than the 2P- and 3P-construction (25% and 24.8% respectively, Table 2). However when their Chinese compliments were compared to their English ones, they selected the 1P-construction less often in Chinese than in English in 3 of the 9 scenarios. Looking at the results in 4.1 and 4.2 together, we can depict a continuum of compliment behavior from the most personal and straightforward, the Americans, to the most detached and reserved, the Chinese using Chinese, while the Chinese using English falls somewhere in between. This also shows that the differences between these three data sets are gradient rather than categorical, and the magnitude of difference is larger in some contexts and insignificant in others.

The data in the current study are not entirely consistent with the previous findings regarding the use of the first-person pronoun in compliments. First of all, the present study shows that the 1P-construction is the most preferred compliment type for the Americans, rather than the second most common type as shown in Wolfson (1981) and Holmes (1986). Second, the use of the 1P-construction in Chinese compliments is not rare in this study, contradicting the proposition in other studies (Zuo 1988, Jia 1997, Yuan 2002, Wang & Tsai 2003, Yu, Fu & Hou 2007). Such a divergence may possibly result from the different definitions of the 1P-construction. In Wolfson (1981) and Holmes (1986), the 1P-construction specifically referred to the "I like/love

NP" sentence type. In the current questionnaire, on the other hand, it included not only the "I like NP" structure, which is used in scenarios focusing on appearance, but also the combination of a first-person pronoun with other predicates, such as "I am happy for you" or "I enjoyed working with you", in scenarios focusing on performance. This may explain why the American participants used the 1P-construction more often in the present study than in the earlier ones. As for the Chinese participants, they selected the 1P-construction as often as the Americans in some scenarios, indicating that they did not shy away from expressing their personal feelings when complimenting others. However, the main difference in the likelihood scores of the 1P-construction between Americans, Chinese using English, and Chinese using Chinese was observed precisely in scenarios focusing on appearance. That is, the Americans used more "I like NP" compliments than did the Chinese, and the Chinese used this structure more often in English than in Chinese. This suggests that the primary cross-linguistic distinction between English and Chinese compliments is probably in the use of the verb "like", which has a stronger semantic connotation and is often interpreted as "I want NP" by Chinese people, and thus it is generally avoided in Chinese compliments (Yuan 2002, Yu 2005). From this perspective, the present study is compatible with the previous findings that the Chinese speakers are more reluctant to use "I like NP" than the Americans when giving compliments.

Even though the Chinese participants selected the 1P-construction less often than the Americans did when complimenting others on appearance, their overall percentage in choosing the 1P-construction was not low in either English (25.9%, Table 2) or Chinese (23.1%, Table 2). The relatively frequent use of the first-person pronoun by the Chinese participants in the present study may be due to the fact that my participants were ESL speakers living in the U.S. It is likely that constant interaction with Americans has made these ESL speakers more assertive and vocal about their own viewpoints, and this has had an effect on their linguistic behavior in both their L2 and L1. Consequently, their compliments in Chinese have become different from the Chinese who lack such an immersion experience. This may thus be regarded as an example of pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1 compliments. However, to confirm the hypothesis that learning an L2 in an L2-speaking environment may affect learners' L1 use, a comparison group of Chinese participants living in China would certainly need to be examined in a future investigation.

5.2 CRs of Americans using English, Chinese using English, and Chinese using Chinese

According to the results of the present study, the ranking of the three CR strategies is the same in the three data sets. The most commonly adopted strategy was to accept the compliment, closely followed by deflection, and the least common was to reject the compliment. This shows that for both the Americans and the Chinese ESL speakers in this study, acceptance is the most preferred CR in general. The close resemblance between the Americans and the Chinese ESL speakers' CR preference may indicate that these Chinese ESL speakers, after residing in the U.S. for less than two years, have acquired the American way of responding to compliments. In addition, the great similarity between the Chinese ESL speakers' Chinese and English CRs leads to the proposition that these Chinese participants have transferred the CR strategies in their L2 to their L1. These results contradict the findings in Han (1992) which showed that female Korean ESL speakers resembled the Americans in frequently accepting compliments in English interactions, yet in Korean interactions they would most often reject compliments. Han concluded that her Korean participants had acquired the native English norm of CRs but had not transferred it to their L1. The Chinese participants in the current study responded to compliments similarly in their L2 and L1, a finding which differs from Han's observation of Korean participants. Here are some possible explanations. First, the data collection methods differed between these two studies. Han (1992) obtained her sample from natural conversations while this study elicited data through a written DCT. It has been suggested that people's compliments and CRs collected via these two methods may vary because the responses in a written DCT are utterances that people *think* they would say but not necessarily what they would actually say (Yuan 2002:211). Yuan in her study showed that some Chinese people responded with "thank you" to compliments in her DCT data, yet such a CR was never observed in her natural conversation corpus. One of her participants commented in an interview that the CR "thank you" often appears in contemporary movies and TV shows; hence, people may believe that this is the appropriate CR when responding in a DCT even though they do not use it in real life (Yuan 2002:211-212). This could be the case with the Chinese participants in this study as well as they commonly rated the Accept CR as the most likely response in scenarios described in the Chinese questionnaire. If they were to respond to a Chinese compliment from a Chinese interlocutor in a real-life situation, they might not necessarily accept compliments as often. This then would account for the different findings in the present study and those of Han (1992), which were based on natural conversations.

A second possible explanation for why the Chinese ESL speakers in the current study responded to compliments similarly in their L1 and L2 is the language environment. Even though the current study elicited Chinese ESL speakers' CRs in English and in Chinese, it is not certain that the participants were, indeed, operating in two different language modes. The reason is that they filled out both questionnaires in an English-speaking environment, and thus they may have been biased toward the English mode. If they had filled out the English questionnaire in the U.S. and the Chinese one in China, a larger degree of differentiation might have been observed.

A third possible reason explaining why we did not find a significant difference in the use of the Accept strategy in Chinese and in English is that the Accept CR may have become more favorable in Chinese society as well. This is supported by some previous studies that found Accept to be the most preferred CR not only by native English speakers but also by Chinese speakers (Tang & Zhang 2009, Chen & Yang 2010, Cheng 2011). As proposed in Chen & Yang (2010:1960), the deepening influence of Western culture on Chinese society, especially after the opening up of China in 1980 and the drastic economic and social reform that followed, may have changed the values and beliefs of younger generations. Through increasing exposure to Western media and contact with Westerners, younger Chinese people may be shifting away from traditional Chinese concepts and converging toward Western values. Some supporting evidence can be found in Spencer-Oatey & Ng (2001), who asked Chinese speakers to rate the appropriateness of various CRs in different situations and comment on their ratings. They found that the Reject CR was rated as more conceited than the Accept CR by the Chinese speakers from mainland China, and some participants commented that "*Excessive modesty equals conceit*" or "*Behaving too modestly in front of the teacher seems insincere*" (Spencer-Oatey & Ng 2001:189). Such comments might express a tendency among younger Chinese to consider honesty and sincerity as more important than modesty. Therefore, as shown in Chen & Yang (2010), Chinese university students born in the late 1980s no longer rejected most of the compliments. Instead, they more often chose to agree with the complimenter and acknowledged their own strengths. Chen & Yang argued that young Chinese people are giving up modesty for the sake of self-confidence, which is a central value in Western societies. Since the Chinese participants in the present study belonged to an even younger generation than those in Chen & Yang (2010), there is reason to believe that they may also regard the Accept CR as a more preferable response than Reject in Chinese, and as a result, their CRs in Chinese and in English have been found to be similar.

Whereas the findings of the current study diverge from those of Han's (1992), it should be noted that Han's data might not be generalizable to all ESL speakers. This

is because her conclusions were drawn from a mere 20 observations in each language, which is a relatively small sample and may easily be biased by the observer's presumptions. Furthermore, she only examined female participants, and thus some of the patterns may be gender specific. In summary, the results of these two studies may not be directly comparable because they differ extensively in subject populations, data collection, and analyses.

Aside from the use of the Accept CR, a very interesting observation from the current results is that both the Americans using English and the Chinese using Chinese rejected compliments more often than the Chinese using English, especially when the topics were about appearance. It is not unexpected that the Chinese participants rejected more compliments when using Chinese than when using English. Most probably when they were responding in Chinese, they became more aware of the traditional Chinese politeness principle that discourages self-praise; hence, they more often disagreed with the complimenter when using Chinese than when using English. The finding involving the Americans who rejected compliments in English more than the Chinese using English, on the other hand, appears quite intriguing. This is because no previous studies comparing American and Chinese speakers' CRs in their native language have ever found that the former rejected compliments more frequently than the latter. One hypothesis is that the current finding reflects some form of hypercorrection unique to ESL speakers. A few former studies on L2 CRs have mentioned that many L2 learners seemed to believe in the overgeneralization that Americans always accept compliments, and that it is rude to disagree with the complimenter in American culture (Han 1992, Cheng 2011). Therefore, in order to speak and act like an American, such ESL speakers may refrain from using the Reject CR by all means, even in contexts when Americans would use it. This is what the current data show. The Chinese ESL speakers, whatever the scenario, almost never selected the Reject CR more frequently than the Americans. The Americans, on the other hand, used more Reject CRs than the Chinese when the compliments addressed their appearance or came from someone of a higher status (e.g., the manager of their part-time job). It could be that some Americans have reservations in appearing too confident about their looks or in front of someone who has power over them. Yet a more probable explanation is that the Americans rejected the compliments not to appear modest, but to extend the conversation. According to Wolfson (1983) and Yu (2005), compliments are used by Americans not only to express solidarity but also to initiate conversations. If a compliment is responded to by mere appreciation, such as by saying "Thank you! I really like this outfit myself" or "Thank you! I did my best", this may immediately put an end to the conversation. However, if the complimentee responds by bringing forth a contrasting viewpoint, like "I don't think so. I think my

outfit is a bit too tight" or "But I don't think I've done my best because this is not my first choice of school", this is more likely to generate further discussion on this topic and enhance interaction.

Given that compliments are often regarded as social lubricants in American society, CRs should also serve the same function. In other words, when Americans reject a compliment, it may not be because they think negatively of themselves or want to appear modest, but because they are using it as a means to prolong a conversation. It can be inferred from the current results that the Chinese ESL speakers' view of American CR strategies may be oversimplified. They resembled Americans by accepting compliments in the majority of cases, but they made less use of the Reject CR, which was preferred by the Americans in some situations. The current findings suggest that these Chinese ESL speakers have seemingly approximated the American way of responding to compliments in English, yet they have not acquired the tactic of using compliment exchanges as a catalyst for more interpersonal interaction.

6. Summary of the current study and future directions

This study compared the compliments and CRs of Chinese ESL speakers with those of Americans to see how their L2 compliment behavior resembled or deviated from the native norm. In addition, these Chinese ESL speakers' compliments and CRs in English and in Chinese were compared to examine whether there was pragmatic transfer between the L1 and the L2. The results showed that the differences between the three data sets were more pronounced in compliments than in the CRs. Specifically, Americans rated the "I like NP" structure as a more likely compliment to use than did the Chinese, while the Chinese using English preferred commenting on an object instead of on a person, as evidenced by their more common use of the 3P-construction than Americans'. As for the comparison between the L1 and L2 compliments given by Chinese ESL speakers, it was found that Indirect compliments and No Comment occurred more frequently in their Chinese compliments than in their English ones. These findings reveal that, overall, Americans are more personal than the Chinese in complimenting others, and the Chinese are more conservative in giving compliments when using Chinese than when using English. This suggests that both their native culture and language in use have an effect on the speakers' compliment choice. The CRs in this study, on the other hand, demonstrate a high degree of consistency across the three data sets: The Accept CR was almost always the most preferred strategy whereas the Reject CR was the least favorable. Some possible explanations were proposed to account for the resemblance between the Americans'

CRs and the Chinese ESL speakers' CRs in their L1 and L2 including the authenticity of responses in a written DCT, the influence of the English-speaking environment on Chinese CRs, the assimilation of the Chinese CR preference to the English conventions due to the Westernization of Chinese society, etc. These discussions demonstrate the complexity of a linguistic phenomenon. Linguistic, social, or even methodological factors should be considered in search of an explanation. Despite the overall similarity, some consistent differences between the data sets were found, particularly in the use of the Reject strategy. The Chinese ESL speakers' significantly limited use of the Reject CR suggests that they try to behave like Americans when responding to compliments in English, yet they put too much emphasis on using the Accept CR and overlook the importance of other strategies in facilitating social interactions.

The present study certainly has its limitations. First of all, the subject pool was relatively small. Hence, subsequent investigations should employ more participants to ensure that the results are generalizable to a wider population. Second, a group of monolingual Chinese participants living in China age-matched to the current Chinese ESL speakers should be recruited in the future to establish the native norm of Chinese compliments and CRs. This could determine whether Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior in Chinese deviates from that of monolingual Chinese speakers, and thus could provide more conclusive evidence regarding the L2-to-L1 pragmatic transfer. Third, there are concerns that the current data collected via a written DCT may not be the most faithful representation of actual compliment behavior. However, a written DCT has strengths that other methods lack. For instance, the topics and interlocutors can be well controlled and balanced in a written DCT, which is almost impossible in collecting natural conversations. Besides, a written DCT is a more objective data collection method because it is not receptive to the researchers' bias or memory imprecision. One solution to this dilemma would be to collect authentic conversations in addition to a written DCT, as implemented in Yuan (2002). This then would provide a more accurate and comprehensive portrayal of Chinese ESL speakers' compliment behavior. One final issue that calls for more attention is to ensure that the Chinese ESL speakers activate the target language mode when they fill out the questionnaire in the two different languages. One method worth trying in the future would be to ask Chinese participants to fill out the English questionnaire when they are in the U.S. and fill out the Chinese questionnaire when they are back in China. This way we could be more certain that their linguistic choice is minimally biased toward one language or the other, and the differences between the two data sets are truly due to their language in use.

In spite of the above limitations, it is hoped that this study has provided some insight into how Chinese ESL speakers' L1 and L2 interact and shape their speech acts. The findings of this research reveal some clear distinctions in English and Chinese compliment behavior, yet some tendencies in the two languages are strikingly similar. Does it suggest that globalization is eroding cross-cultural differences on compliments and CRs? This will have to be answered in future investigations.

Appendix: English questionnaire to elicit compliments and CRs

Part I Instructions: Please rank the following compliments based on how likely you would be to use them in the following situations. Rank the compliments with numbers from 1 to 5 with 5 being the most likely response and 1 being the least likely. Please use the blanks next to the choices to rank your compliments.

Situation 1: Your American professor has just received an award for his/her newly published book. What would you say to him/her?

	"You deserve it."
	"I read your story in the newspaper."
	"I am happy for you."
	Would not say anything
	"It's a great accomplishment to get this award."

Situation 2: An American student who you are tutoring got 1st place in a sports tournament. What would you say to him/her?

	Would not say anything
	"I am happy for you."
	"It's well earned."
	"You deserve it."
	"I heard the tournament was very competitive."

Situation 3: An American, who is your classmate in a couple of subjects this semester but not a close friend of yours, got on the Dean's list due to getting straight As in all his/her classes. What would you say to him/her?

	"You deserve it."
	"You had a lot of competition."
	"It's well earned."
	Would not say anything
	"I am happy for you."

Situation 4: A student you are tutoring is wearing a new hat. What would you say to him/her?

	"I like your new hat."
	"You look nice in your new hat."
	"That is a nice hat."
	"Where can I get a hat like that?"
	Would not say anything

Situation 5: Your professor is wearing a very nice shirt today. What would you say to him/her?

	"You look nice."
	"That is a nice shirt."
	"Where did you get a shirt like that?"
	Would not say anything
	"I like your shirt."

Situation 6: An American, who is your classmate in a couple of subjects this semester but not a close friend of yours, got a new backpack. What would you say to him/her?

	"I like your new backpack."
	Would not say anything
	"You look awesome with your new backpack."
	"That is a cool backpack."
	"Where can I find a backpack like that?"

Situation 7: A student you are tutoring ranked in the top 5 in the class on his/her final exam in the subject in which you are tutoring him/her. What you would you say to the student?

	"You did a good job."
	"I am proud of you."
	Would not say anything
	"It's a great improvement."
	"It's not easy to score so high on this difficult exam."

Situation 8: An American, who is your classmate in a couple of subjects this semester but not a close friend of yours, did a group project together with you and gave a very good oral presentation. What would you say to him/her after his/her their presentation?

	Would not say anything
	"I enjoyed working with you."
	"That was a great presentation."
	"I think the professor was really impressed."
	"You did a good job."

Situation 9: You are filling out the end-of-semester class evaluation about a professor who has taught well. What would you write in the comment section?

	"I am lucky to be your student."
	Nothing
	"You are a good teacher."
	"I enjoyed your class."
	"It was a great class."

Part II Instructions: Please rank the following responses based on how likely you would be to use them in the provided situations. Rank the responses using the numbers 1 to 3, with 3 being the most likely and 1 being the least likely. Please use the blanks next to the choices to rank your responses.

Situation 1: The American manager at your part-time job says to you, "You dressed up today." You would respond:

	"Thank you! I really like this outfit myself."
	"I don't think so. I think my outfit is a bit too tight."
	"I think your outfit looks better."

Situation 2: The store that you work for got a good review in the local newspaper. Your American manager says to you, "We couldn't have done this without you." You would respond:

"Thank you! I did my best."
"It was a team effort."
"No, I didn't do that much."

Situation 3: You got admitted to a law school and your American manager says, "Congratulations! I am happy for you!" You would respond:

"Thank you! I worked really hard."
"Well, I know a lot of people who got admitted to better schools."
"But I don't think I've done my best because it is not my first choice of school."

Situation 4: Your American friend's younger sibling says, "You look good in your new shirt." You would respond:

"I think your shirt looks better."
"Thank you! I like it too."
"I don't think so. I think the shirt is a bit too tight."

Situation 5: Your friend's younger sibling and you played on the same sports team and you won the basketball championship game. They say to you, "We couldn't have done this without you." You would respond:

"It was a team effort."
"No, I did not play very well."
"Thank you! I did my best."

Situation 6: When he/she hears about your law school acceptance, your American friend's younger sibling says, "Congratulations! I am happy for you!" You would respond:

"But it is not a very good law school."
"Thank you! I worked really hard."
"Well, I know a lot of people who got admitted to better schools."

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Situation 7: An American classmate whom you don't talk to outside of class says, "You look great in your new shirt!" You would respond:

	"I don't think so. I think it's a bit too tight."
	"Thank you! I like it too."
	"I think your shirt looks better."

Situation 8:   Your American classmate says, "Congratulations! I am happy for you!" because you got into law school. You would respond:

	"Well, I know a lot of people who got admitted to better schools."
	"It is nothing because it is not a very good law school."
	"Thank you! I worked really hard."

Situation 9: You worked on a group project with your American classmates and your group project got an A.   He/she says to you, "We couldn't have done this without you." You would respond:

	"No, I didn't do that much."
	"Thank you! I did my best."
	"It was a team effort."

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赴美留學華人的中英文讚美行為比較

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　　本研究比較赴美留學華人中英文兩種語言的讚美行為，並將他們的英語讚美行為與美國人做對比。二十位赴美留學華人填寫了中英文問卷調查各一份，而十位美國人填寫了同樣的英文問卷。中英文問卷內容一致，皆是假設了各種情境要受試者讚美他人或是回應他人的讚美。統計結果顯示在讚美他人時，美國人比華人常使用「我喜歡你的（所有物或表現）」此種句型結構，而華人則比較常針對事物而非人；另外當華人使用華語時則比較常用間接方式或是不給予讚美，顯示華人使用華語讚美時比使用英語時含蓄。至於對他人讚美的回應，在這三組資料裡接受讚美皆是最常被使用的策略，然而美國人或華人使用華語時都比華人使用英語時較常拒絕他人的讚美。我們推測這可能是因為赴美留學華人嘗試模仿美國人的回應讚美行為，但又對他們的溝通方式了解不夠深刻所致。

關鍵詞：讚美、回應讚美、使用語言、赴美留學華人