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**COMPLIMENT RESPONSES OF THAI AND PUNJABI SPEAKERS OF  
ENGLISH IN THAILAND**

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**Abstract**

This variational pragmatics (VP) study investigates the similarities and differences of compliment responses (CR) between Thai and Punjabi speakers of English in Thailand, focusing on the strategies used in CR when the micro-sociolinguistic variables are integrated into the Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The participants were 20 Thai and 20 Punjabi students selected based upon the results of an English language test. The results of the study revealed that despite the similarities of the CR strategies, there were also marked differences between the two groups of participants. The variables incorporated into the DCT were shown to be an important factor in determining the CR strategies of the participants. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants took micro-sociolinguistic cues into consideration in responding to a compliment. Furthermore, both groups of participants transferred the pragmatic norms of their native language when interacting in English. The findings lead to the pedagogical implication that pragmatics need to be integrated into English language classrooms in order to facilitate intercultural communication and to enable the learners to use socially appropriate language.

**Keywords:** variational pragmatics, speech acts, compliment responses, Tran's Continuum Hypothesis

## **Introduction**

Successful communication in the globalized world requires that speakers be equipped with both grammatical and pragmatic competence because they are likely to be influenced by their own social norms and constraints that shape their speech. What is acceptable in terms of appropriateness in one language or culture may not be in another. For example, asking someone if they have eaten today may be considered an acceptable greeting in the Chinese culture but may be perceived to be misplaced and inappropriate in another. Intercultural competence can help solve problems that EFL and ESL learners face. Since pragmatic rules are rarely taught purposefully in the classroom, students are expected to learn them through the osmosis process that has been proven to be ineffective. Recent studies (e.g. Cohen, 2008; Rajagopalan, 2004; Silva, 2003) advocate that pragmatics be explicitly taught to raise learners' awareness and prevent pragmatic failure. As suggested by Smith (2009), authentic language use is an active, inventive, and culturally sensitive and expressive attempt. Therefore, an increasing focus is now evident in the literature on pragmatic competence, reflecting an increasing interest among researchers and educators in fostering pragmatic competence in language learners.

Compliment responses are a type of speech act that differs considerably across cultures. Comparing the native cultures of interlocutors to the English language culture or the cultures of the language being taught offers great opportunities for teachers and provides a basis for improved understanding of persons from different backgrounds, as well as supplying new insights into second language teaching. The understanding of other cultures also helps people avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping, since they cannot expect all members of a culture to fit broad generalities. Consequently, in English classrooms, students' pragmatic understanding needs to be promoted and integrated into language lessons.

Furthermore, the emergent trend of English as an International Language (EIL) triggers the notion that native usage should no longer

be the sole point of reference in designing teaching materials (Intachakra, 2004). In this regard, Kachru (1992) notes that non-native speakers of English should also be considered an essential part of materials and curriculum development. The present study is anchored in the field of variational pragmatics (hereafter VP) to investigate comparative pragmatic perception of politeness in compliment responses across the two cultures of Thai English speakers (TES) and Punjabi English speakers (PES) in Thailand. Having appropriate grammatical and lexical knowledge does not guarantee successful communication. The inability to understand what is meant by what is said (Thomas, 1983) often occurs due to negative transfer of L1 to L2, and can lead to offensive stereotypes or cross-cultural misunderstanding.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Variational pragmatics***

Variational pragmatics (VP) refers to the study of the effects of macro-social factors, e.g. social class, gender, ethnicity, and intra-lingual pragmatic conventions on language use. VP is the interface between pragmatics and dialectology, aiming at the systematic investigation of the effects of macro-social pragmatic variations on language in action. It is based on the assumption that the social factors analyzed in sociolinguistics have a systematic impact not only on pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, but also on language use in interaction. The frameworks employed in VP include two components: one in which social factors are specified and one in which levels of pragmatic analyses are distinguished.

Schneider and Barron (2005) distinguish social factors, region, social class (educational background and socio-economic status), ethnicity (ethnic identities affecting linguistic choices), gender (concerned with social construct of gender identities), and age as factors influencing variation in a language. In addition, education and religion may also be considered. Each of these factors has an impact on language use, resulting in a variety of specific preferences and features employed to construe and project speaker identities. These

are also called the macro-sociolinguistics factors. On the other hand, micro-sociolinguistic factors include power, distance, and other situational factors. While macro factors are related to individual speakers, micro factors are concerned with speaker constellation.

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of social factors on language use, and specifically to investigate the interplay of age and gender. The two groups of participants of this study are: Thais and Punjabis. The Thai participants are Buddhists; they are grounded in the Thai ways of upbringing, and are from a Thai school. The Punjabi participants, on the other hand, are Sikhs, and are deeply rooted in the cultural backgrounds of their forefathers.

### ***Compliments and compliment responses***

As Goffman (1967) puts it, compliments are primarily used for a variety of reasons, but most significantly to express admiration or approval of someone's work, appearance, taste, skill, or possessions. A compliment response, in the present study, refers to any response following an identifiable compliment. Thus, any response by the complimentee is considered a compliment response. Compliments can have a number of functions, for example, serving as a conversational opening or functioning as social suppressors. Compliment responses can sometimes be the cause of communication breakdowns because of the differences of the native language norms of the speakers.

Due to the theoretical paradigm of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Habermas, 1970; Hymes 1972, 1974; Wolfson, 1981, 1983), research on L2 learning and teaching has largely been extended to include learners' pragmatic knowledge. Thomas (1983) defines pragmatic competence by contrasting it with grammatical competence. Whereas grammatical competence is related to the abstract of decontextualized knowledge, namely, intonation, phonology, syntax, semantics, and so forth, pragmatic competence is the ability to use language effectively in order to achieve specific purposes (Thomas, 1982).

Previous studies on compliment responses have been carried out using existing taxonomies by Pomerantz (1978), Herbert (1986) or

Urano (1998). The data in these studies are tallied against taxonomies. Because of the dynamic nature of language, and also due to the many variables that may affect complimentees' responses, previous taxonomies have not thoroughly covered the strategies used by the complimentees, particularly the type of population that is the focus of the present study. Tran's (2007) continuum hypothesis taxonomy tends to be more suitable for inter-cultural and variational studies because it allows for CR to be placed on the continuum, rather than making a clear cut off where it belongs. Therefore, this study employed Tran's taxonomy as a point of reference.

Furthermore, according to Tran (2007), the recipient of a compliment is usually in a dilemma as to whether to agree with the compliment or to be polite and modest, and thus disagree in order to avoid self-praise. The notion of continuum is likely to solve this sort of compliment receiver's dilemma. The response may lean towards one or the other point because it is neither entirely disjoined nor entirely separate. This taxonomy is especially useful for the response of an Eastern culture, like the Thai culture, which values humility and modesty. Although Thais feel happy about compliments, they are careful in responding to them to avoid being perceived as proud or arrogant. They also need to show modesty and refrain from showing any outward signs of pleasure towards compliments. Based on Tran's Continuum Hypothesis, there are two continua: the acceptance to denial continuum and the avoidance continuum as shown below.

#### **The acceptance to denial continuum.**

Compliment Upgrade-->Agreement -->Appreciation Token-->Return  
 --> Explanation-->Reassignment-->(Non-idiomatic Response)-->  
 Compliment Downgrade-->Disagreement (including Disagreement  
 Token)

#### **The avoidance continuum**

Expressing Gladness-->Follow-up Question-->(Doubting)Question  
 -->Opting out.

The compliment response strategies of Tran's taxonomy adopted in this study are shown in the following table.

**Table 1:** Tran's (2007) Taxonomy

<b>Strategies along the continuum from acceptance to denial</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Compliment Upgrade	"Thanks. Brand new."
Agreement	"Yeah! I'm happy to say that's correct."
Agreement Token	"Yeah!"
Appreciation Token	"Thank you."
Return	"So are you!"
Explanation Comment History	"Thanks. My mom bought it for me."
Reassignment	"Thanks. It must be the jacket."
Non-idiomatic Response	"Uh! That's OK."
Compliment Downgrade	"Oh, no. It's just a normal but not a very reliable car."
Disagreement	"No. I don't think so."
Disagreement Token	"Umm, no."
Suggestion	You should get one.
<b>Strategies along the avoidance continuum</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Expressing Gladness	"Well, great"
Follow-up Question	"Thanks, what do you find interesting?"
(Doubting) Question	"Really? I don't think so."
Opting Out	"Ha ha."
Opting Out	(Silence), (Smile)

In order to compare and contrast the compliment response strategies of the Thai and Punjabi speakers, two research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What are the similarities and the differences in compliment responses between Thai English speakers (TES) and Punjabi English speakers (PES)?

2. What are the similarities and the differences in the compliment responses in different situations when four contextual variables - the addressor's status, gender, age and native language - vary?

## **Research Design**

### **Population and sample**

The participants consisted of two groups of students representing specific differences according to the stated variational pragmatics frameworks. The first sample group contained 20 Thai students (10 males, 10 females) (TES, henceforth) enrolling in the English Program at Patumwan Demonstration School, Bangkok. They were recruited as the Thai samples of this study by an English language test (CULI EFL Test). An intact group of Mattayom 6 students, who were all Buddhists, participated in this study. They represent the population whose first language is Thai and are from similar backgrounds, both in terms of socioeconomic status, cultural and ethnic background. They are the Thai English speakers of this study.

The second sample group was Punjabi speakers (PES, henceforth) from Thai Sikh International School, Bangkok. Ten males and ten females were recruited as the Punjabi samples of this study by using the CULI EFL Test and a language background questionnaire. This group of students represents the Punjabi English speakers. They were an intact group whose first language is Punjabi, and all were Sikhs. The participants had been in the school since kindergarten. This group of students represents the Punjabi population because the school in which they are enrolled is affiliated with a Sikh temple. A majority of the students in this school (90%) are Punjabi Sikhs. Moreover, the school has an extensive religious program and all the students are required to take Punjabi religious

study classes, and the teachers employed in the school are also Indian teachers.

### **Research instruments**

Two data collection instruments were employed in this study: 1) CULI EFL test and 2) DCT. The detailed information of the research instruments is as follows:

#### **1. English Test (CULI EFL Test)**

The CULI EFL Test developed by the Chulalongkorn University Language Institute was used as part of the selection process in order to eliminate differences in language proficiency of the participants. The test consisted of three parts: listening, reading, and writing, and was set out in a multiple-choice format.

#### **2. Discourse Completion Task (DCT)**

This study employed a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) so that the elicited data could be used to answer the research questions. The justification for employing a DCT is threefold. Firstly, it allows for the testing of a predefined and pre-established hypothesis. Secondly, it is a case of relevance. Since the nature of research demands that the variables be highly controlled, DCTs maximize control of the study's variables. Third, in research that is comparative in nature, it is vital that the situational perceptions are similar for both groups of participants because it is not possible to assume that what appears to be the same is actually the same. The use of DCTs can be enhanced by providing additional contextual and social clues. They are thus tool that are well suited to the study of variational pragmatics since the social variables involved can be systematically manipulated (Kasper, 2000). The higher the possibility of controlling the relevant variables is, the higher the rate of compatibility of data from different varieties of the same language will be. This, in turn, can result in the greater opportunity of identifying pragmatic differences between the language varieties. Comparability is a crucial methodological issue in variational pragmatics.



Additionally, since the topic of investigation concerns cultural beliefs and values, DCTs appear to be well suited for this research. Moreover, DCTs are less-face affective. The respondents are not made to feel daunted by the task, and this may help in gaining social and psychological factors likely to affect the speech performed. In this study, there were nine situations in the DCT. The questions in the DCT were adapted from Kachru (1998) and Cedar (2006) and were written in English. The questions described nine situations which Thai and Punjabi students might encounter, and elicited responses to those situations. Experts in the fields of testing and linguistics reviewed the DCT in order to ensure reliability and validity. The nine compliment situations are provided in the appendix.

### **Data analysis**

The responses obtained from the DCT were analyzed linguistically (qualitatively) and statistically (quantitatively). The data collected were also quantified according to Tran's Continuum Hypothesis. The compliment responses were analyzed with reference to: 1) the variables incorporated in the stimulus situations; and 2) the socio-cultural background of the addressees.

To compare and contrast the Thai and Punjabi speakers' compliment responses, the collected data were tallied against Tran's Continuum Hypothesis, consisting of two continua: acceptance to denial continuum and avoidance continuum. The responses were then analyzed in accordance with the speakers' cultural norms in order to identify pragmatic transfer.

To examine the similarities and the differences in the compliment responses in different situations when four contextual variables - the addressees' status, gender, age and native language - vary, responses were analyzed according to the variables that were incorporated into the DCT to show significant similarities and differences. The response types were then analyzed linguistically to show how and why the variables influenced the addressee's responses.

## Results and Discussion

The findings of the study can be summarized in response to the research questions as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the similarities and the differences in compliment responses between Thai English speakers (TES) and Punjabi English speakers (PES)? The choices of compliment response strategies used by the Punjabi and the Thai participants are displayed in the following table.

**Table 2:** Choices of compliment response strategies used by the PES and TES

		Acceptance to denial									Avoidance continuum						
Strategies		Compliment Upgrade	Agreement	Agreement Token	Appreciation Token	Return	Explanation Comment History	Reassignment	Non-idiomatic Response	Compliment Downgrade	Disagreement	Suggestion	Expressing Gladness	Follow-up Question	Doubting Question	Opting out	Smile
Speakers																	
<b>Punjabi</b>		20	9	2	25	52	20	2	10	8	1	7	5	4	7	4	4
<b>Thai</b>		9	27	0	47	25	17	4	6	5	1	6	13	5	8	3	4
<b>Total</b>		29	36	2	72	77	37	6	16	13	2	13	18	9	15	7	8
<b>Mean</b>		14.5	18	1	36	38.5	18.5	3	8	6.5	1	6.5	9	4.5	7.5	3.5	4
<b>SD</b>		7.78	12.73	1.41	15.56	19.09	2.12	1.41	2.83	2.12	0	0.71	5.66	0.71	0.71	0.71	0

From Table 2, it can be seen that Return was the most selected strategy among the Punjabis ( $n=52$ ) while the next most frequent responses were Appreciation Token ( $n=25$ ), Compliment Upgrade ( $n=20$ ), and Explanation Comment History ( $n=20$ ). Agreement Token and Reassignment strategies were infrequently selected ( $n=2$ ) by the Punjabi complimentees. The least used response type was Disagreement ( $n=1$ ).

On the other hand, among the Thai complimentees, Appreciation Token ( $n=47$ ) was the most frequent strategy produced. The second most used response strategy was Agreement ( $n=27$ ), closely followed by Return ( $n=25$ ). The least frequent responses were of Disagreement ( $n=1$ ). No Thai complimentee used Agreement Token in their responses.

To summarise, of the two groups of participants, the Punjabi complimentees were likely to choose Return while the Thai speakers favored Appreciation Token. It is clearly seen that the great difference of the choices of compliment response types chosen by the two groups were Return, Appreciation Token, Agreement and Compliment Upgrade. Disagreement was the least selected strategy ( $n=1$ ) among both Thai and Punjabi speakers. This study has shown that predominantly there were both similarities and differences in the compliment responses of the two groups. The similarities lay in that both groups preferred to accept a compliment rather than avoid it. The differences between the two groups were in the strategies used to accept compliments.

The findings are in line with previous research studies on compliment responses (e.g., Al-Falasi, 2007; Al-Khateeb, 2009; Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Cedar, 2006; Chiang & Pochtrager, 1993; Gajaseni, 1994; Intachakra, 2004; Kachru, 1998; Sridhar, 1996), which have shown that people from different cultural backgrounds use different strategies in responding to compliments. However, the results of this study indicate some similarities between the two groups of participants. That is, the Punjabis and the Thais were unlikely to respond to compliments using Disagreement. They also equally chose Smile as their response.

According to the results from the DCT, we can see the transfer of norms from both groups of participants. The PES' frequent use of Return, Appreciation Token, and Comment on History can be seen as direct transfer from the Punjabi culture. Punjabis do not exhibit pleasure when being complimented. Also, not accepting praise, especially from one's mother, can be seen as examples of direct transfer. Regarding the Thais, we can see two kinds of transfer. The

first is cultural transfer from the native language. They do not prefer to negate the compliment or the addressor because it may be seen as being impolite. The acceptance of this phenomenon is in line with Cedar (2006), who suggests that Thais are different from Americans because their strategies reflect the norms of their native language. In this study, the TES's use of Appreciation Token (Thank you) can also be considered as a transfer, namely, transfer of training. Most books that provide adjacency pairs in teaching compliment responses give 'thank you' as the response to all compliment types; therefore, it can be assumed that Thai students transfer from L1 as well as from their teachers. Srisachanakul's (1996) study of Thai CRs shows that Thais rarely use Appreciation Token when answering to compliments. L1 norms that can be observed in responding to compliments of TES are: 1) accepting compliments more than avoiding them; 2) using Agreement and Return of compliments; and 3) avoiding disagreeing with the addressor. All of these coincide with the findings of Cedar (2006) and Gajasen (1994).

The following findings address research question 2: What are the similarities and the differences in the compliment responses in different situations when four contextual variables - the addressor's status, gender, age and native language - vary?

### **Age and status**

The findings from the items in the DCT which revealed the dimension of age and status are shown below.

#### ***The addressor's age and status is lower***

The responses on the DCT items aiming to elicit the compliment response strategies when the addressor's age and status is lower are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3:** Comparison of compliment response strategies used by the PES and TES when the addressor's age and status is lower

<b>Strategies</b> <b>Speakers</b>	<b>Compliment Upgrade</b>	<b>Agreement</b>	<b>Agreement Token</b>	<b>Appreciation Token</b>	<b>Return</b>	<b>Explanation Comment History</b>	<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Follow-up Question</b>
<b>Punjabi</b>	11	1	0	0	1	3	2	2
<b>Thai</b>	5	3	1	2	1	3	3	3
<b>Total</b>	16	4	1	2	2	6	5	5
<b>Mean</b>	8	2	0.5	1	1	3	2.5	2.5
<b>SD</b>	4.24	1.41	0.70	1.41	0	0	0.70	0.70

Table 3 reports that PES and TES used different strategies to respond to compliments when the addressor's age and status are lower. Both groups of participants used Compliment Upgrade most often, i.e., 11 times by PES and five by TES, respectively. From the table, the selection of Compliment Upgrade as a response among PES was significantly higher ( $n=11$ ) than other strategies, while TES used more varieties. In the Punjabi culture, someone who is younger is considered to be of a lower status and can be teased as well as oppressed, and we can see this by the way that Compliment Upgrade was used by PES. On the other hand, TES used Appreciation Token and Agreement Token, which were not used by PES at all in this situation. In the Thai culture, this is perhaps a way to tease and further the conversation with a more distant younger person. This may be due to two reasons: 1) in the case of appreciation, it could be accounted for by the textbook answer; and 2) agreement could be due to the desire to please others.

***The addressor's age is higher but the status is lower***

The figures in Table 4 compare the compliment response strategies used by the Punjabi and Thai complimentees when the addressors are of higher age but lower status.

**Table 4:** Comparison of compliment response strategies used by the PES and TES when the addressor's age is higher and status is lower

Strategies Speakers	Compliment Upgrade	Agreement	Appreciation Token	Return	Explanation Comment History	Compliment Downgrade	Suggestion	Expressing Gladness	Follow-up Question	(Doubting) Question
<b>Punjabi</b>	2	0	1	3	8	1	4	0	0	1
<b>Thai</b>	0	5	7	1	2	0	1	1	2	1
<b>Total</b>	2	5	8	4	10	1	5	1	2	2
<b>Mean</b>	1	2.5	4	2	5	0.5	2.5	0.5	1	1
<b>SD</b>	1.41	3.53	4.24	1.41	4.24	0.70	2.12	0.70	1.42	0

For the Punjabis, the compliment response strategies most significantly used was Explain Comment History ( $n=8$ ), followed by Suggestion ( $n=4$ ) and Return ( $n=3$ ). Agreement, Expressing Gladness, and Follow-up Question strategies were not selected by the Punjabi speakers.

For the Thai complimentees, the most frequently used strategy was Appreciation Token ( $n=7$ ), followed by Agreement ( $n=5$ ). Return, Suggestion, Expressing Gladness, and (Doubting) Question strategies were the least used strategies ( $n=1$ ) by the Thai speakers. Compliment Upgrade and Compliment Downgrade were not used by the Thai respondents.

***The addressor's age and status are higher***

**Table 5:** Comparison of compliment response strategies used by the PES and TES when the addressor's age and status are higher than the addressee

Strategies Speakers	Compliment Upgrade	Agreement	Appreciation Token	Return	Explanation Comment History	Reassignment	Non-idiomatic Response	Compliment Downgrade	Suggestion	Expressing Gladness	Follow-up Question	Opting out	Smile
<b>Punjabi</b>	3	5	12	21	8	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
<b>Thai</b>	4	11	18	4	7	0	2	3	2	8	1	0	0
<b>Total</b>	7	16	30	25	15	2	4	4	4	9	2	1	1
<b>Mean</b>	3.5	8	15	12.5	7.5	1	2	2	2	4.5	1	0.5	0.5
<b>SD</b>	0.70	4.24	4.24	12.02	0.70	1.41	0	1.41	0	4.95	0	0.70	0.70

Table 5 displays the compliment response strategies used with addressors who are of higher age and status. Among the Punjabi respondents, Return was used most ( $n = 21$ ), while Appreciation Token, Explanation Comment History, and Agreement were the next three most frequently used strategies ( $n = 12, 8, 5$ ), respectively. The least used strategies were Compliment Downgrade, Expressing Gladness, Follow-up question, Opting out, and Smile ( $n=1$ ).

On the other hand, of all the Thai complimentees, Appreciation Token, Agreement, Expressing Gladness, and Explanation Comment History were the top four strategies produced ( $n=18, 11, 8, 7$ ), respectively. The least used strategy was Follow-up Question ( $n=1$ ), followed by Suggestion ( $n=2$ ) and Non-idiomatic Response ( $n=2$ ). No Thai respondent employed Reassignment, Opting out, or Smile.

In conclusion, when the addressor's age and status are higher, there are significant differences between the two groups. As can be seen in Table 5 while PES preferred to use Return, followed by

Appreciation Token, TES used Appreciation Token, Agreement, and Expressing Gladness. PES and TES in this instance have three major differences. First, in responding to compliments from one's mother, TES mainly responded by using Agreement and Appreciation Tokens, while PES used Return and Explanation as common strategies. It is crucial to note that for Punjabis it is not easy to thank one's mother, as it is not a norm in the culture to be praised by one's mother. Therefore, we can see that in this case there is a direct transfer from the Punjabi culture. Second, in the case of compliments from teachers PES (55%) responded using Return, and the rest used Agreement (20%) and Appreciation (25%). While the TES mainly used Appreciation Token (45%) and Agreement (25%). Twenty percent of the TES used Avoidance Continuum in the form of Expressing Gladness and Follow-up Questions. We can see cultural transfer prominently in this situation, due to the teacher's role in society that causes the PES to feel that they are obliged to praise the teachers as well, while others show their respect by agreeing with the teachers or use the Appreciation Token to show their utmost respect. Third, in the instance of compliments from an aunt, PES responded by using Explanation Comment, History (45%), Appreciation Tokens (20%), and Return (15%), respectively. TES, too, used Explanation, Comment, and History (35%) most frequently in this instance, but also used Agreement (20%) and Avoidance Strategies in the form of Expressing Gladness (20%).



***The addressor's age and status are the same***

**Table 6:** Comparison of compliment response strategies used by the PES and TES when the addressor's age and status are the same as the addressee

Strategies Speakers	Compliment Upgrade	Agreement	Appreciation Token	Return	Explanation Comment History	Reassignment	Non-idiomatic Response	Compliment Downgrade	Disagreement	Expressing Gladness	(Doubting) Question
<b>Punjabi</b>	2	4	4	14	2	1	4	3	0	2	4
<b>Thai</b>	1	5	6	12	4	0	4	2	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	3	9	10	26	6	1	8	5	1	4	7
<b>Mean</b>	1.5	4.5	5	13	3	0.5	4	2.5	0.5	2	3.5
<b>SD</b>	0.70	0.70	1.41	1.41	1.41	0.70	0	0.70	0.70	0	0.70

In Table 6 the results clearly indicate the similarity of the two groups' CR strategies used when the addressors and addressees were of the same age. Both PES and TES preferred Return in their responses ( $n=14$ ,  $12$ ), respectively. The number of responses for Return of both groups was significantly higher than that of other strategies. The least selected strategy for PES was Reassignment ( $n=1$ ), and none of them responded using Disagreement. Regarding TES, the least preferred strategies were Compliment Upgrade and Disagreement ( $n=1$ ). Reassignment was not chosen at all by TES complimentees.

The above findings show that there were only very slight differences in responses used by the two groups. This may be due to the influence of modern technology and exposure to the social media. People who are of the same age, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, do have similarities in that they share solidarity and have common influences affecting their attitudes and world views.

This is particularly true of contemporary youth through greater consumption of targeted communication.

### Gender

In addition to differences between cultures, it is important to take differences between genders in the two cultures into account. Specifically, because men and women rely on different sub-cultural norms (hierarchical vs. equal relationship) when interpreting, it is worthwhile to study the interactions between men and women, men and men, or women and women of different cultures exchanging verbal compliments and responses. The results of the study showing differences in gender are displayed in the following table.

**Table 7:** Table showing differences in gender

Strategies \ Speakers	Compliment Upgrade	Agreement	Agreement Token	Appreciation Token	Return	Explanation Comment History	Reassignment	Non-idiomatic Response	Compliment Downgrade	Disagreement	Suggestion	Expressing Gladness	Follow-up Question	Doubting Question	Opting out	Smile
Male	23	16	0	32	32	20	4	13	8	2	8	5	5	8	1	3
Female	6	20	2	40	45	17	2	3	5	0	5	13	4	7	6	5
Total	29	36	2	72	77	37	6	16	13	2	13	18	9	15	7	8
Mean	14.5	18	1	36	38.5	18.5	3	8	6.5	1	6.5	9	4.5	7.5	3.5	4
SD	12.02	2.83	1.41	5.66	9.19	2.12	1.41	7.07	2.12	1.41	2.12	5.66	0.71	0.71	3.54	1.41

Table 7 presents the compliment response strategies of all male ( $n=20$ ) and female ( $n=20$ ) participants. Among the male respondents, Appreciation Token and Return was used most often ( $n = 32$ ) for each strategy. Compliment Upgrade, Explanation, and Agreement were the next three most frequently used strategies ( $n = 23, 20, 16$ ), respectively. The least frequent responses were Opting Out,

Disagreement, and Smile ( $n=1, 2, 3$ ), respectively. No male participant selected Agreement Token as their responses.

Regarding the female participants, Return, Appreciation Token and Agreement were the most frequently used strategies ( $n = 45, 40, 20$ ), respectively. Therefore, this finding indicates that both males and females preferred Return and Appreciation Token strategies. The least used strategies were Agreement Token, Reassignment and Non-idiomatic response ( $n = 2, 2, 3$ ), respectively. No female participants selected Disagreement. These findings point to the significant differences between the two genders. The most outstanding difference in the number of responses between males and females was Compliment Upgrade. While 23 responses of Compliment Upgrade were found in the male group, only six responses of the same strategy were chosen by female respondents.

To conclude, the findings from the DCT reveal that the variables incorporated in DCT items had an effect on the compliment responses of the two groups of participants. The addressor's status appears to affect the choice of the strategies used in responding to the compliments of both groups of participants. Moreover, the age of the addressor also plays a significant role in deciding the response strategies of the participants. Finally, there are also gender differences in the ways the strategies are chosen. This is in line with the findings of Gajaseni (1994), who observed that gender and status have a significant effect on the strategies of the responses of Thai. Cedar (2006) also reiterates this point by stating that in her study, men and women rely on different sub-cultural norms (hierarchy and status) when responding to compliments.

Due to the differences in the choice of CR strategies, misunderstanding of the use of CRs between two gender groups may trigger communication breakdowns, and this can happen when generating polarized CRs like "Thank you" vs. "It's really bad". A successful conversation between males and females will not be achievable if, for example, females expect that modesty should be expressed by using Evade and Reject strategies, while males interpret

such strategies as hypocritical and insulting. The findings in this study confirm that males and females have different expectations and follow different linguistic and cultural protocols. It is reasonable to assume that linguistic misunderstandings will occur when communication events involve people with different perceptions of and responses to the use of CRs.

Taken together, the findings of this section have shown that when variables such as native language, addressor's status, gender, and age were determined, the two groups of participants again displayed certain similarities and differences. How one responds to a compliment can be determined by the social relationship between the interlocutors, and this has been demonstrated to be an important factor in selecting CR strategies. The results of this study mirror work by previous researchers (Chiang & Pochtrager, 1993; Gajaseni, 1994; Intachakra, 2004; Kachru, 1998; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Sridhar, 1996) in demonstrating that the relationships matter. The participants in this study were presented with compliments from interlocutors whose age, gender and social status (both in terms of levels of power and familiarity) differed.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

Because of differences in the response strategies and the ways Punjabi and Thai speakers evaluated appropriate responses to compliments, it appears that pragmatic knowledge tends to facilitate cross-cultural communication. This should also help with intercultural interactions that are likely to occur among people from many backgrounds in Thailand with the ever-increasing regional strength of ASEAN and the official commencement of the Asean Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. Consequently, to prevent miscommunication and misunderstanding, enhancing learners' pragmatic competence is needed in language classrooms. Scholars (e.g. Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980, to name a few) agree that linguistic knowledge and the awareness of appropriate language use in a given context are related. Language users need to bear in mind the situational and

contextual variables when communicating, because the essence of pragmatic competence includes the knowledge of linguistic forms and the knowledge of how to use such linguistic forms in appropriate contexts.

Explicit teaching of pragmatics involves making learners aware of specific linguistic forms and relevant contextual factors, and the understanding of the relationship between language and context. Knowing linguistic patterns and appropriate language use, thus, allows learners to become more competent communicators. The lack of pragmatic competence can lead to negative interpretation of the interlocutors' personal traits and stereotypes of other culture (Wolfson, 1989). This is because speech acts like CR reflect values underlying learners' native cultures. Instruction regarding cultural traits and norms can strengthen learners' cultural literacy as well as linguistic control of speech acts, and it can also assist learners to interpret others' compliment responses. A lesson can be structured, for example, around practising the negotiation of values and turn-taking in order to prepare the learners for intercultural communication in the globalizing world.

Moreover, pragmatic competence should be considered one of the core focuses of language learning because errors on appropriacy may characterize learners as lacking proficiency or competence. According to Takahashi (2001), pragmatic learnability is highly attainable through explicit intervention, suggesting that there is a positive pedagogical role for meta-pragmatic explanation. This can be marked for the learning of socio-pragmatic features. Correspondingly, Trosborg and Shaw (2008) argue that for more successful learning, a combination of both deductive and inductive methods is important.

The results of the present study confirm that pragmatic transfer does exist in compliment-responses by Punjabis and Thai learners of English. Though sometimes the pragmatic transfer is negative, it is not necessary that only negative instances can cause problems in communication. What, then, can teachers of English do to foster pragmatic abilities to try and inhibit transfer? The necessary conditions for pragmatic learning to take place involve conscious

attention to pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic information. Although the findings of this study suggest that the PES and TES show negative transfer in their compliment responses, we cannot conclude that all learners of English would show the same tendency. Even these same participants might perform differently if the target of the compliment were different.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

First and foremost, because natural data were not used in this study, and the size of the population was also small and only students were used, further research should include a more diverse range of the same target population that would truly reflect the entire speech community, as well as including a wide range of situations. Since the focus of this study was on the explicit compliment types, it would be instructive to conduct a study on implicit compliment responses in natural surroundings. Follow-up interviews are also recommended to gain more insight into respondents' chosen compliment response strategies.

### **Conclusion**

This study investigates similarities and differences between the Thai and Punjabi learners of English in terms of their compliment response strategies. In order for successful intercultural communication to occur, explicit pragmatic teaching is recommended. An approach to promote intercultural awareness is suggested, since it is necessary to explore the degree of acceptance of intercultural variation in the respective pragmatic conventions among interlocutors performing speech acts. This should prove useful to learners, since the ASEAN Union will bring an influx of people from different backgrounds and pragmatic norms. There are many Punjabis residing in the ASEAN countries and there will probably be a great number of interactions between Thais and Punjabis. Because of this, cultural awareness will prove to be crucial in successful business dealings. The problem related to the acceptance of intercultural variations is due to the fact that even though people are

aware of the rules and conventions, they may not follow them. Their own norms may override those of others. Stereotypes may be eliminated by promoting awareness and tolerance of others' languages and cultures.

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## Appendix

### Discourse Completion Task.

There are nine situations below; in each situation, you will represent yourself. Someone will give you a compliment in each situation and you will be asked to give a response to the compliments. Please write down your possible responses to the compliments you receive in one to three sentences.

1. After giving a three-minute speech in English, your teacher walked up to you and said, "You've spoken very well. Your English is very good!"

What would you say in response?

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2. On the way home, you run into your aunt, and she exclaims, "That's a really nice shirt you're wearing!"

What would you say in response?

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3. One of your classmates notices you singing at a school party, then comes and says to you "Wow! You have a great voice! I did not know that you could sing like that!"

What would you say in response?

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4. You helped your mother fill up the refrigerator. She says to you, "What a good way of organizing the shelves!"

What would you say in response?

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5. You are on an MRT and a stranger says, "You have beautiful eyes!"

What would you say in response?

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6. A person of the opposite sex says, "Wow, you have a great smile!"

What would you say in response?

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7. A worker at your house says, "Your shoes are very nice!"

What would you say in response?

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8. Your friend's younger brother says, "Wow, your phone is super cool!"

What would you say in response?

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9. You run into an old boy/girl friend at the mall. You haven't seen each other for a long time and s/he says, "Oh my goodness, you look wonderful".

What would you say in response?

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