

Interlanguage Pragmatics Study of Compliments among Thai EFL Learners

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This study compares how the native speakers of Thai (TTs) and American (AEs) as well as the Thai learners of English as a foreign language with high exposure to English (TEHs) and those with the low exposure (TEs) perform the speech acts of compliments (Cs) by taking the context of age into their consideration. The data were collected by means of a written discourse completion task (WDCT). The analysis of the data examined the pragmatic structures and in particular, strategies of Cs. The six pragmatic structures in terms of head acts [H] and supportive moves (S) were found. They were [H] only, [H]+(S), [H]+(S)+[H], (S)+[H], (S)+[H]+(S), and (S) only. Surprisingly, as opposed to other speech act studies, the AEs showed their preferences towards (S)-oriented structures while the TEs tended to favour [H]-oriented structures in giving Cs in all given situations in the context of age. A closer look at the C strategies exhibited cultural specific preferences among the AEs and the TTs which explain the interlanguage phenomena among the TEHs and the TEs. The interlanguage phenomena found in the two groups of learners may be seen as their incomplete mastery of English but they also could be interpreted as the communication strategies of the TEHs and the TEs to smooth their interactions in English.

Keywords: compliments, pragmatic structures, compliment strategies, interlanguage pragmatics, Thai EFL learners

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1 Introduction

People's conceptualization and verbalization of compliments (Cs) varies to a great extent across cultures (Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988; Mane & Wolfson, 1981). While Cs are seemingly common and simple, they can cause a great deal of trouble in cross-cultural communication because of different perceptions and variations of Cs (Holmes, 1988; Wolfson, 1983). They can also cause problems in interaction between native speakers of English and non-native speakers because of the cross-cultural and English linguistic constraints which limit the non-native speakers to reach their goals in giving Cs. Such differences and variations are cultural-bound or context-dependent. Hall¹ (1976) categorized different value systems of cultures into two broad types: (1) high-context cultures such as Thai, which value non-verbal cues, indirectness or implicit meaning, small talk, and collectivism; (2) low-context cultures such as American, which value verbal cues, directness or explicit meaning, straight talk, and individualism. The two types of value systems of cultures can be studied through contexts of situation, the experiences of members and speaker-hearer relationships (Firth, 1950).

The study of the two types of cultural value systems contributes to research on cross-cultural influence of the learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)'s native language (L1) in performing speech acts and try to get their messages across or sound like native speakers of English.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Cross-cultural pragmatics study of compliments

The issue of universality (or similarity) versus culture-specificity (or differences) in cultures has been of great interest in the field of contrastive or cross-cultural pragmatics. In this field, speech acts are one of the main foci of investigation. Some scholars have argued that speech acts are operated by universal principles of pragmatics (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Based on such principles, Searle (1976) proposed that Cs are expressive speech acts in which the speaker's propositional content specifies some reactions to the hearer. Searle's principle of Cs was criticized for the fact that it did not take

¹ In the realm of cross-cultural pragmatics studies, classic works of the four following proponents have generated a wealth of theoretical background in many of the studies up to present (e.g., Mustapha, 2012; Taavitsainen & Jucker, 2008) as related to the importance of contexts. Austin (1962) and Searle (1969; 1976) proposed principles of pragmatics. Firth (1950) highlighted the significance of context of communication as related to contexts of situations and contexts of experiences of participants or speaker-hearer relationships. In Hall's (1976) theory, the key factor was context of cultures.

into account the interactional or ‘appellative’ function of language (Bühler, 1934, 1990). Later on, Wierzbicka (1991) added the ‘appellative’ function of language as the sixth component in her semantic components of Cs:

1. I perceive something good about your Y.
2. I want to say something good about you because of that.
3. I say: (something good about X and X’s Y).
4. I feel something good about thinking about it.
5. I say this because I meant to cause you to know that I am thinking something good about you.
6. I assume that you will feel something good because of that.

(Wierzbicka, 1991, pp. 136-145).

However, the hearer may not always feel good because of the speaker’s C. For instance, in Thai culture the recipient of a C about body appearance or weight from a non-intimate or person of a younger age may not be well received. This is because body appearance or the issue of weight is sensitive topics and are usually used as topics of Cs among intimates or people of equal age.

Grice (1975) contended that speech acts were governed by principles of cooperation. To many low-context cultures, such as American, the speaker is likely to give Cs in a set of predictable semantic-syntactic structures or compliment formulae, such as [*NP is/looks (really) ADJ*], [*I (really) like/love NP*], and [*PRO is (really) an ADJ NOUN*]. The speaker offering such Cs could be said to be cooperative. However, in many high-context cultures, the speaker tends to give a C to a close friend, equal in age on his/her cooking by uttering “How can you make a dish like this?” The example, according to Grice, may be considered as a violation of the maxim of manner. This is because the hearer may interpret the utterance as asking for information, and not as a C.

Other scholars claim that speech acts are also governed by politeness in which relationships between speaker and hearer affect strategies of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Leech, 1983). For Brown and Levinson (1978), giving Cs was relevant for adhering to other individuals’ positive face wants which Goffman (1955) defined as the desires of individuals to be liked by others. This was also an output of the ‘give gifts to the addressee’ strategy through which the addresser shows sympathy, understanding, and cooperation to the addressee or as Farenkia (2011) put it, provides a ‘face-boosting act’ or FBA. However, to some extent giving Cs can be associated with degrees of exaggeration. Giving Cs in this manner can be interpreted as face-threatening acts or FTAs. For instance, if the exaggeration is reflected through words containing negative meaning which co-occur with positive lexical markers such as ‘ridiculously beautiful’ in English or ‘สวยเวอร์’ /suuaj4

wq2²/ ‘beautiful over’ in Thai, this variation of C may be taken as a FTA towards the hearer’s positive face when the speaker and hearer do not know each other well. Put simply, Cs in this light could be considered impolite. Thus, giving Cs without respect of specific linguistic and cultural norms may lead to misunderstandings in interpersonal and intercultural communications.

2.2 Interlanguage pragmatics study of compliments

While cross-cultural pragmatics explore the differences between the L1 and L2’s structures and strategies in communication and focus on the hypothetical language errors L2 learners could produce, interlanguage pragmatics investigate how close the L2 learners perform to the target language, how their perception and production are influenced by their own L1, and what the path of their L2 acquisition is (Modehiran, 2005).

Selinker (1972) proposed the continuum of interlanguage phenomena which could be applied to interlanguage study of Cs as follows:

1. L1 transfer is the phenomenon that L2 learners use their L1 in their realizations of speech acts
2. Transfer of training is the influence of the classroom explicit and implicit instruction of pragmatic competence that affects the errors L2 learners produce.
3. Strategies of L2 learning refer to the situations L2 learners try to simplify the concept of language use.
4. Strategies of L2 communication refer to the avoidance strategy when L2 learners try to avoid using the structures they are not sure of by repeatedly using the ones they are well understood when producing L2 speech acts or responding to them.
5. Overgeneralization of L2 linguistic materials is when L2 learners learn some language rules and try to apply them to every situation, e.g., the rule of –ed form with verbs in past tense. The application of –ed form to the verb ‘go’ results in the overgeneralized form of ‘goed’ instead of the correct irregular past tense ‘went’.

Although the interlanguage phenomena, such as, (3) and (4) have been used to explain the learners “lexical deficit” (Bongaerts & Poullisse, 1989, as

² To ease the process of transcribing Thai phonetic transcription to computer input, we used the phonetic transcription of the Linguistic Research Unit of Chulalongkorn University (LRU) system (Schoknecht, 2000). The system deviates from IPA: 4 changes in the consonants, i.e., ng=/ŋ/; c=/tɕ /; ch=/tɕʰ/; ?=/ʔ/, 4 changes in the vowels, i.e., v =/w/; q=/ɤ/; x=/ɛ/; @=/ɔ/, and double letters represent length of vowels. Number 0-4 are used to mark the 5 tones, i.e., 0=mid, 1=low, 2=falling, 3=high, 4=rising conforming to the traditional names of Thai tones.

cited in Aston 1993, p. 225), and speakers' personal "avoidance" (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, as cited in Aston, 1993, p. 225), L1 transfer has been considered as a prime phenomenon in the continuum accounted for L2 learners' idiosyncrasies in many cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatic studies (e.g., Baba, 2010). A very little research on Cs has touched upon the phenomena.

Despite the fact that previous research has been carried out on speech act of C in cross-cultural perspective (e.g., Yousefvand, 2010), very few studies highlighted those in English and Thai. The very few studies focused on compliment responses and ignored Cs (e.g., Cedar, 2006; Gajaseni, 1994) assuming Cs are universal. Very little research has been done on the interlanguage aspect of Cs among Thai EFL learners (e.g., Phoocharoensil, 2012).

3 Research Questions and Statements of Hypothesis

In order to fill the gap, this research study explored the research questions (RQ) with the formulated statements of hypothesis as follows:

RQ1: What are the similarities and the differences of Cs among the AEs, TTs, TEHs, and TELs?

Hypothesis 1: While the AEs use overt-oriented compliments, the TTs use covert-oriented compliments.

RQ2: How are the similarities and the differences of Cs found in (1) realized?

Hypothesis 2: The TEHs are more likely to perform close to the AEs do whereas the TELs tend to behave in the same manner as the TTs.

4 Method

4.1 Participants

The current study involved four groups of participants. In order to do cross cultural study of Cs, native speakers of American English (AEs) perform Cs in English while native speakers of Thai (TTs) do it in Thai. To do interlanguage study, the two groups of Thai learners of English were selected to perform Cs in English. They were the Thai learners with high exposure (TEHs), and Thai learners of English with low exposure (TELs).

The cross-cultural study of Cs was taken up in order to explore the similarities and differences in the two languages' structures and strategies in giving Cs performed by the AEs and the TTs. The interlanguage study of Cs was conducted in order to investigate the hypothetical language problems of

the TEHs and the TELs when giving Cs in English. It was to clearly examine whether or not a cross-linguistic influence or transfer occurred.

In each group, there were 30 participants: 15 males and 15 females. The total participants were 120. The participants in the AE group were university students residing in the United States and never visited Thailand or were hardly exposed to the Thai culture. Those in the TT group were Thai university students of non-English majors in Thai universities. Those in the TEH and TEL groups were Thai university students of English and non-English majors in Thai universities who completed the English language exposure questionnaire³. This questionnaire was selected as an alternative to a standardized English proficiency test because of two main reasons. Firstly, it was cost effective as compared to a standardized English proficiency test in which it required a great deal of expenses per participant. Secondly, this questionnaire was developed under the principle that the higher degree of English language exposure entails the higher degree of English proficiency. This principle has been proven in many research studies since 2002 to clearly differentiate such higher degree in the various language performances of L2 learners of the high as opposed to the low exposure groups. The studies included Sudasna Na Ayudhya's (2002) research in lexical access in bilinguals with high and low L2 exposure; Modehiran's (2005) work in pragmatics study of correction makings by Thais and Americans; Tarnisarn's (2011) study in English language experience and identification ability of English words with vowel reduction by Thai students; Thavorn's (2011) research in syntactic ambiguity in English sentences by Thai students of high and low English language exposure; Wongaram's (2011) work in word formation of Thai students with high and low English exposure; Pongprairat's (2011) study in interlanguage English intonation in Thai learners. Thus, the scores close to 333 indicated the higher degree of English language exposure which implied the higher degree of English proficiency of the participants. The findings from the questionnaire indicated the descriptive statistics of English exposure scores of these two sample groups as in Table 1.

³ The questionnaire has been developed by scholars from Centre for Research in Speech and Language Processing (CRSLP), Chulalongkorn University since 2002. The questionnaire is in English language and consists of three parts. These include 1) Information about English language experience and the amount of its exposure at home and school, including English language proficiency from past till present; 2) Information about the amount of time spent on all kinds of learning methods: formal education, extra curriculum and English self-practice activities; and 3) Intensive English language exposure. To assist the Thai participants with low proficiency in English, the Thai translation of the questionnaire was provided to them. The total score of this questionnaire was 333. These were divided into 116 points for the first part, 100 points for the second part, and 117 points for the last part.

Table 1. The Descriptive Statistics of English Exposure Scores of the TEHs and the TELs

Interlanguage sample groups (N=60)	English exposure questionnaire (333 Scores)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD
30 TEHs	130	194	154	19.25
30 TELs	47	110	83	16.33

The inferential statistics of the scores in table 1 reveals that the mean of the two sample groups was 118.33 with the SD at 39.73 ($t = 23.07$, $df = 59$, Sig. (2-tailed) .000). It means that there was a significant difference between the TEH and the TEL sample groups. The English exposure level of the TEHs was higher than that of the TELs. The higher English exposure level of the TEHs was from their higher scores in all three parts of the questionnaire, especially from partaking in more English self-practice activities and intensive English courses.

4.2 Instruments and procedures

Although there are some drawbacks in using written discourse completion tasks (WDCT) to elicit the data (e.g., Xu & Wannaruk, 2015), it enables this current study to elicit adequate data within a relative short amount of time and to be comparable among the four sample groups. A WDCT was designed based on the authors' pilot study's findings (Worathumrong & Luksaneeyanawin, 2015). It consisted of one event, 12 items of situations, and the blanks for responses (see Appendix A). The WDCT was administered to the 120 participants of the four groups to elicit Cs. The WDCT distributed to the AEs, TEHs, and TELs was in English while the WDCT provided to the TTs was in Thai (see Appendix B). All names appeared in the Thai WDCT are Thai names to allow the TTs to recognize the context of sex difference, whether they would give Cs to a man or a woman.

4.3 Data analysis

The data obtained from the WDCT were analyzed into head acts [H] and supportive moves (S) (e.g., Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Wiroonhachaipong, 2000). Then, the data were discussed in terms of explicit and implicit strategies. Each token in the explicit and implicit strategies was also the focus.

4.3.1 Head act and supportive move of compliments

Head acts [H] were defined as the nucleus of a particular speech act or the part that functions to realize the act independently (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). In this study, [H] was the nucleus of a C and was realized through

positive lexical markers, e.g., adjective—nice, pretty, or awesome; verb—to like, to love. The [H] could also be realized through positive clauses, e.g., “I’m so proud of you.”

Supportive moves (S) were defined as modifications that preceded or followed the [H] and affected the context in which the [H] was embedded (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). In this study, these modifications included (1) non-straightforward C in which context played an important role in interpretive procedures to judge if it could be considered a C. Without context, the hearer could evaluate this non-straightforward C as asking general questions, e.g., “Where did you get this blouse?”, or as initiating a conversation, e.g., “I didn’t know you wear glasses.”; (2) external modifications, e.g., interjections, or address terms; (3) opt-out or non-verbal response, e.g., smiling, laughing, or winking. Table 2 below illustrates the framework of analysis and examples of [H] and (S) in the pragmatic structures of Cs.

Table 2. Analysis Framework of Pragmatic Structures of Cs

Pragmatic structures of compliments	Examples from American English Corpus	Examples from Thai corpus
1. [H] Only	[Nice boots.]	[dii0] Good [Good.]
2. [H]+(S)	[You look beautiful.] (What’s your secret?)	[alr@@@j1 lvva4 kqqn0] (s@@@n4 tham0 n@@@j1 naa3) delicious excessively teach do little particle [Super delicious.] (Can you teach me how to cook?)
3. [H]+(S)+[H]	[I like you bag.] (Where did you buy it?) [It was gorgeous.]	[ch@@@p2 cang0] like particle [I like it particle] (maj2 khqqj0 hen4 tii2naj4 maa0 k@@@n1) never see where come before (I have never seen this anywhere.) [suuaj4 maak2] beautiful very [very beautiful.]
4. (S)+[H]	(My dear!)[Don’t you look beautiful today?]	(muk3) [suuaj4] Mook beautiful (Mook) [You are beautiful.]
5. (S)+[H]+(S)	(Darlin,) [You’re looking more beautiful every time I see you.] (What are they feeding y’all at <i>Runway</i> , huh?)	(muk3) [cha1laad1 maak2] (tham0 daj2 jang0nagaj0) Mook clever very do can how (Mook)[You are very clever.](How could you do that?)
6. (S) Only	(When did you learn to sing like that?)	(jaak0 tham0 daj2 jaang1 thqq0 baang2) Want do can like you particle (I want to do just like you did particle)

4.3.2 Compliment strategies

After the analysis of the pragmatic structures of the data as shown earlier, each C utterance under a certain pragmatic structure was categorized into the following C strategies as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis Framework of C Strategies

Main compliment strategies	Sub compliment strategies	Examples from American English corpus	Examples from Thai corpus
1. Explicit	Straightforward	[Nice boots.]	/dii0/ good [Good.]
	Conventional	[I'm so proud of you.]	/phuum0 caj0 naj0 tuua0 luuk2 na3/ proud in body child particle [I am proud of you particle.]
2. Implicit	Non-Straightforward	(What's your secret?)	/paj0 tham0 a1raj0 maa0/ go do what come (What have you done to yourself?)
	External Modification	(Wow!) (I don't know you wore glasses.)	/maj2 jak3 ruu3 waa2 tham0 pen0/ never know that do can (I don't even know you can do it.)
	Opt-Out	(Smile.) (Laugh.)	/jim3/ smile (smile.) /huua4r@3/ Laugh (laugh.)

The main C strategies in this study included explicit and implicit strategies. The explicit strategies consisted of two sub-categories: straightforward and conventional strategies. Straightforward strategy was the strategy in which at least one positive lexical marker was used. Conventional strategy was the strategy in which at least one positive clause was employed. Both straightforward and conventional compliment strategies were considered the non context-based strategies because it was possible for the hearer to discern that the speaker is giving a C. Thus, utterances with explicit or non context-based strategies were considered *overt compliments*.

The implicit strategies included three sub-categories: non-straightforward, external modification, and opt out or non-verbal response. Non-straightforward strategy was the context-based strategy in which the hearer needed to infer corresponding implicature for his/her interpretation if (1) the speaker referred to the hearer's appearance or performance, or (2) the

speaker referred to the third entity the hearer admires, works with, or has close relationship with, or (3) the speaker evaluated the hearer that he or she had something of good quality, or performed good quality conducts. Therefore, utterances with non-straightforward strategy were considered *covert compliments*. External modifications included interjections, terms of address, and different kinds of speech acts supporting Cs, such as, thanking, or requesting. Opt out referred to the non-verbal responses, such as smiling or laughing.

5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Pragmatic structures of compliments

The findings indicate the overview of six pragmatic structures of the four groups when giving Cs as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Percentage of the Six Pragmatic Structures of the Four Groups in Giving Cs

Pragmatic structures of compliments	Cross-cultural study		Interlanguage study	
	TT (n=361)	AEs (n=365)	TEHs (n=362)	TELS (n=360)
[H] Only	32.96	18.08	35.91	45.56
[H]+(S)	11.91	26.58	16.57	6.94
[H]+(S)+[H]	0.83	4.11	4.14	2.78
(S)+[H]	39.61	31.78	31.49	39.44
(S)+[H]+(S)	9.97	10.68	5.25	2.78
(S) Only	0.00	7.12	4.70	1.94
Non-Cs	4.71	1.64	1.93	0.56
Total	100	100	100	100

When giving Cs, the TTs prefer to use the (S)+[H] and the [H] only structures more frequently than the other four pragmatic structures. Although the TTs have a tendency to use the [H] only structure in a high frequency as that of the (S)+[H], the findings are still conformed to the hypothesis 1. The TTs prefer to use more (S)-oriented pragmatic structures in giving Cs or covert-oriented compliments which means they still prefer less explicit communication. The low level of explicitness of the Thais has been discussed in other speech act studies in terms of face redress or the compensation for the high degree of imposition inherent in the more explicit communication (e.g., Modehiran, 2005).

Surprisingly, the AEs are more likely to use the (S)+[H] and the [H]+(S) structures rather than giving Cs straightforwardly by using the [H] only structure. The AEs' preferences towards such structures reveal the deviation from their norms found in previous speech act studies of request (e.g., Wiroonhachaipong, 2000) or correction making (e.g., Modehiran, 2005). In those studies, Americans are oriented towards the use of [H] structures and

thus are more explicit in their interaction reflecting Anglo-Saxon cultural values. In this study, the hybrid structures used by the AEs could be viewed as to highlight their interpersonal relations with the hearers, thus, extended conversations were found in the data.

The use of more [H] structures of the TEHs in giving Cs is conformed to the hypothesis 2. That is the TEHs tend to use [H]-oriented pragmatic structures in giving Cs as the AEs do. It could be because they have learned the native speakers of English's norm of being straightforward in interaction from their high frequency of English exposure either from their English instructors, which Selinker (1972) called 'transfer of training' or in their leisure time outside of the classroom.

To our surprise, the TELs employ the highest frequencies of the [H] structures in giving Cs, especially the [H] only structure. The pragmatic structures used by the TELs deviate from their norms found in previous speech act studies of request (e.g., Wiroonhachaiyapong, 2000) and correction making (e.g., Modehiran, 2005). In those studies, Thai learners with low exposure to English use more (S)-oriented pragmatic structures and thus are less explicit in their communication. It is because the learners transfer their L1 norm into the target-language interaction and the L2 limitation of the learners themselves in terms of vocabulary use. In this study, the highest frequencies of the use of [H] only structure may come from the TELs' learning experience or 'transfer of training'. Since the Cs constitute of positive lexical markers, it may be easier for the TELs to put them into use.

Another surprising findings emerged from the data of this current study is non-compliments (Non-Cs). The Non-Cs included criticisms, offering new information, or initiating a new turn in interaction. This Non-Cs could be perceived as an implicit indicator of degree of proximity suggested in the given WDCT scenario in the context of age that they are colleagues who have worked with one another for quite some time and were invited for the potluck party at one of the staff members' house. Wolfson (1983) addressed that when the degree of proximity is perceived as fixed, it is easier for speakers to know what to expect of one another and thus *people take less care to signal solidarity or respect* (my emphasis). Therefore, the Non-Cs were found, such as the criticisms of the too sweet or salty food were found among people of equal age in all data. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's FTA theory (1978), for the Thais and the Thai learners of English, when there is very low risk to FTA, it could create a room for open discussion bringing people close together in interpersonal relationship through criticisms. For the AEs, it does not mean that the age is not an important factor to be considered. Instead, it could be viewed as the secondary factor for the Americans to perform the speech act of Cs in interactions.

A closer look at the C strategies and linguistic realizations in the [H] and (S) structures give clearer explanation cross-culturally which allow us to

better understand the speech act of Cs of the TEHs and TELs in interlanguage dimension.

5.2 Compliment strategies

In categorizing the [H] and the (S) structures into the C strategies, the findings are shown as below in Table 5:

Table 5. Percentage of the C Strategies of the Four Groups

Pragmatic structures of Cs	Main C strategies	Sub C strategies	Cross-cultural study		Interlanguage study	
			TTs (n=740)	AEs (n=801)	TEHs (n=695)	TEL (n=669)
H	Explicit	Straightforward	59.32	49.07	57.85	63.82
		Conventional	0	0	0	0
		Subtotal	59.32	49.07	57.85	63.82
S	Implicit	Non-straight-forward	0.27	2.37	12.37	4.04
		External modification	40.00	48.44	29.78	31.24
		Opt-out	0.41	0.12	0.00	0.90
		Subtotal	40.68	50.93	42.15	36.18
		Total	100	100	100	100

Quantitatively speaking, Table 5 shows that none uses the conventional sub strategy. This could be because the given situation is a potluck party where the hosts and the guest are familiar colleagues of age equals and unequals. Moreover, the compliment topics are about new haircut, hairstyle, or hair colour, and food. The conventional form of Cs realized through positive clauses, such as “I’m so proud of you.” may not be preferred because the given context is not relating to the high achievement of performance or unexpectedly high quality of performance, such as qualifying for graduation or receiving a promotion (e.g., Worathumrong & Luksaneeyanawin, 2015).

The four groups prefer giving Cs through the use of explicit strategies. In the context which the age comes into play, all groups tend to employ the straightforward sub strategy. For this sub strategy, the TELs have the highest frequency of use, followed by the TTs, TEHs, and AEs, respectively. The TELs’ preferences towards such use reflect their limited English expressions towards the use of simple positive lexical markers, e.g., nice, good, or beautiful. Their straightforwardness through the use of simple positive lexical markers could exemplify both ‘transfer of training’ and ‘strategies in L2 communication’—employing only the markers that they understood well. Giving Cs to people of age either equals or unequals by the four groups can

be seen as an act of face boosting or FBA (Farenkia, 2012) to satisfy their interactants' positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1978) and to maintain the interpersonal relationship among people in the group, thus, a high degree of straightforward Cs is preferred.

With regards to the positive lexical markers, the four groups tend to use adjectives, such as 'great', 'good', 'nice', and 'beautiful' as well as verbs—'to like', and 'to love'. It is observed that these markers often co-occur with the intensification phenomena. The intensification processes include elongation of the phonological units in Cs, the uses of adverbs of degree, and the use of paraphrasing.

On the one hand, phonological elongation or vowel lengthening was observed in the AE, and the TEH data. It was through written representations of the participants' intensified emotions as can be seen in novels' dialogues, or computer-mediated-communication (CMC), such as Facebook (e.g., Locher et al., 2015). For instance, some AEs and TEHs wrote 'niiiiice'. The lengthening of the vowel 'i' representing by many 'i's marks intensity of emotive meaning putting emphasis on 'being extremely fond of something, which was opted out because of the mutual understanding of the context'. On the other hand, the Thai and TEL data found the final consonant lengthening, for example, 'วาววาว' /waaw3/ in the Thai data, and 'wowwww' in the TEL data. The lengthening of the final consonant reflects the Thai intensification pattern. This same pattern occurred in the TEL data suggests the way the TELs speak English with the Thai accent. This could be an evidence of 'L1 transfer'.

The uses of adverbs of degree, i.e., very, so, really, absolutely, were found in all data. The point to raise here is that the TEL data shows an evidence of 'overgeneralization' of noun modification. A prime example is that some TELs produce their Cs with the use of adverb of degree, very, as "I very like your food." A well-formed English sentence of "I very like your food." should be "NP VP AdvP" → "I like your food very much." When the TEL learners apply an English grammatical rule of an adjective modifying a noun (i.e., the adjective precedes the noun it is modified) and place the adverb 'very' in front of the verb 'like', the learners come to the realization of this example.

All four groups use paraphrasing to give Cs that give rise to the use of multiple [H]s structure which the present study included it in the [H] only structure. For instance, "I like your food very much. It was delicious." The use of such multiple [H]s structure or the paraphrasing could be seen as the speakers want to intensify goodness quality of the person being complimented by offering a series of straightforward Cs. It is observed that this structure is used in the compliment upwards where people of younger age give Cs to people older in age. Such use could be viewed as an evidence of Cs as the FBA for the younger speaker to boost the face of the hearer of older age rather than the FTA.

In the (S)-oriented structures, table 5 illustrates that non-straightforward and opt-out sub strategies tend to be less preferred. The less preferences of both sub strategies might be because of their openness towards other interpretations. To some studies in relation to politeness (e.g., Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, 1989), these two sub strategies may be perceived as giving both the speaker an option to not risk the hearer's face damage and the hearer a choice for his/her own interpretation which could lead to the misunderstanding. However, in the context of age difference and equal it may be more necessary to maintain interpersonal relationship with quite clear Cs. The external modification sub strategy is the most preferred strategy of the four groups. The AEs have the highest frequency of use, followed by the TTs, TELs, and TEHs, respectively. The de-intensification or softening devices found in these implicit strategies, especially in the external modification sub strategy as shown in table 6 are worth discussing.

Table 6. Percentage of the External Modification Sub Strategy of the Four Groups

Main C strategy	Sub C strategy	Cross-cultural study		Interlanguage study	
		TTs (n=364)	AEs (n=400)	TEHs (n=262)	TEL (n=225)
	External Modification				
	1. Comments	25.82	20.50	32.82	24.00
	2. Formulaic Greeting	0.00	3.75	3.82	6.67
	3. Address Terms				
	3.1 Hearer's First Name	36.26	66.25	38.55	55.56
	3.2 Hearer's Kinship Terms	26.37	0.00	0.38	0.00
Implicit	3.3 Mr/Mrs/Khun0/ +Hearer's First Name	1.37	0.25	4.58	4.44
	3.4 /Khun0/+Hearer's Kinship Terms	0.55	0.00	0.00	0.00
	3.5 Second Person Pronoun	5.22	0.00	0.00	0.00
	4. Interjection	3.30	5.50	16.03	8.44
	5. Interjection + Second Person Pronoun	1.10	0.00	0.00	0.00
	6. Initiating a New Turn	0.00	2.75	1.53	0.44
	Total	100	100	100	100

The softening devices used in the external modification sub strategy to give Cs appear to function as calling attention of the people being complimented. There are some similarities and some striking differences in the way people of the two different cultures and the Thai learners of English call the attention. That is by (1) greeting; (2) using a complex system of address terms; (3) using interjection; (4) using interjection with second person pronoun; and (5) initiating a new turn.

All four groups use non-formulaic greeting in the same degree of frequency. The TEHs use it approximately 10% higher than the other three groups. Examples of non-formulaic greeting include "Did you make this?";

“Is that a new haircut?”; “Did you just change your hairstyle?”. The ‘this’ and ‘that’ could be used to show proximity just like ‘here’ and ‘there’ in ‘Here you are.’; ‘There you are.’; ‘Here it is.’; or ‘There it is.’ The use of formulaic greeting such as “Hi” and “Hello, how are you?” remains low among the TELs, TEHs, and AEs. The TTs use none of it. Although the two types of greeting are used to open up the conversation and are usually followed by the Cs, the great amount of use of non-formulaic greeting could suggest that in giving Cs rather than a curt greeting, people usually signal the interactants being complimented of what to come next with more elaboration. This could be seen as to show their interest and attention towards their hearers or emphasizing the positive politeness in Brown and Levinson’s term (1978). The greatest amounts of non-formulaic greeting of the TEHs and of formulaic greeting of the TELs could be perceived as the two groups’ communication strategies. On the one hand, the TEHs attempt to achieve their goals of giving Cs in English by producing a great deal of utterances, specifically through forming the yes-no questions to call their interactants’ attentions. On the other hand, the TELs with limited English expressions attempt to reach the same goals by simple greetings. The use of simple greetings may also be perceived as a strategy of the TELs in their English learning.

The four sample groups use address terms to call attention of the people being complimented higher in percentage than their uses of both types of greeting. Interestingly, the realizations of the address terms found in the data reflect the groups’ different cultural values. For the TTs with the highest frequency in the use of address terms, their uses appear to highlight their cultural values on age and politeness, (1) showing respect to people who are older, thus confirming the idea of Thai culture as an interpersonal and age-sensitive culture (Modehiran, 2005), and (2) having a sense of place where the speaker and the people being complimented belong (Hill et al., 1986). They usually use hearer’s first name with people equal in age, hearer’s kinship terms with people of younger age (i.e., ‘น้อง’ /n@@ng3/ or younger sibling) as well as of older age (i.e., ‘พี่’ /phii2/ or older sibling), and use ‘คุณ’ /khun0/ which is the Thai equivalent in meaning to ‘Mr./ Mrs./ Miss’ in English. The use of use ‘คุณ’ /khun0/ could be viewed as to give deference to the speaker, as Brown and Levinson (1978) put it as negative politeness, or as to show that the hearer possesses (2). There is also a mixture use of ‘คุณ’ /khun0/ together with ‘พี่’ /phii2/ or ‘น้อง’ /n@@ng3/. Such mixture is widely seen in the Thai contemporary media and is observed to be used among females, especially in the Thai soap opera where the female characters who are just acquaintances use it to call attention of each other. Perhaps, the use could be viewed as to highlight both (1) and (2), and thus, showing the ‘mixture of strategies’ (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 236) as to balance the interaction by keeping an appropriate level of distance while recognizing each other’s relative age or the place one belongs.

For the AEs, the use of hearer's first name exhibits comity regardless of the different or equal age of people being complimented. The high frequencies of such use reflect in the high frequencies of the hybrid pragmatic structures or the (S)+[H] and the [H]+(S) structures as discussed earlier. It is clear to us now that the high frequencies of the (S)s used in the AEs' data were mainly the use of address terms, especially that of the hearer's first name as to emphasize their cultural values on solidarity. Although the use of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' is quite small in number, its use shows the AEs' negative politeness when calling attention from people of older age.

Surprisingly, the TEHs use the address terms in the same manner as the TTs do but with less frequency in the use of hearer's kinship terms and greater frequency in the use of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.'. Whereas the TELs use the address terms in the same way as the AEs do but with less degree of hearer's first name and more of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.'. The frequent use of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' among the TEHs and the TELs could be viewed as an evidence of 'transfer of training' where Thai traditional classrooms often stress the importance of such address terms as significant politeness markers in interaction.

The interjections found in all data in the context of age are mainly to call attention of the people being complimented, especially people of equal age. Examples of interjections include 'วาม' /waaw3/; 'นม' /mxx4/; 'เฮ้ย' /hqj3/ 'wow'; 'ohhhh'; 'oh my god'. The use of the interjections among TEHs was more prominent than in the other three groups. The interjections with pronouns, such as, 'เฮ้ยวาม' /hqj3kxx0/ or 'oh you' only occurred in the Thai data. The use of interjections may indicate the intensification of positive expressiveness.

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's FTAs and politeness strategies (1978), both address terms (excluding the use of /khun0/ or 'Mr./ 'Mrs.') and interjections could be considered as positive politeness strategies in paying attention to the hearer's positive face wants.

Table 6 also shows the high degree of initiating a new turn among the AEs, followed by the TEHs, and the TELs, respectively. No TTs prefer this act. The high degree of initiating a new turn occurred in the AEs' data could point to an extended conversational style among the AEs when giving Cs to people of age either equals or unequals, and thus, the use of hybrid structures are seen to be preferred.

6 Conclusion

The present study investigated cross-cultural study of the Cs among the native speakers of Thai and native speakers of American English. It also examined cross-linguistic influence in the Cs of the Thai EFL learners. The two stages of the study were conducted through the use of WDCT. It compared the English Cs produced by the two groups of native speakers: the

TTs; and the AEs with those of the two groups of Thai learners of English: the TEHs; and the TELs.

This study argues that the issue of context is crucially important in investigating Cs across cultures and also among the L2 learners. Previous research contests that American culture should be categorized as a low context culture while Thai culture should be classified as a high context culture. In addition, the difference in the context of culture results in the differences of complimenting acts of people of both cultures. The age equals or differences has been set clearly in other studies (e.g., Modehiran, 2005) as an insignificant factor influencing communication among people in the low context culture, while this particular factor creates an impact towards people of high context culture's interaction.

Unlike other speech acts (e.g., correction making, and request) in which Thais employ more (S) structures as oriented towards covertness in the context of making corrections (Modehiran, 2005) and that of making requests (Wiroonhachaipong, 2000), in this study Thais and the Thai learners of English use more [H] only structures as oriented towards overtness in the context of giving Cs and even more than the Americans do. This could be because in those aforementioned speech acts the degree of FTAs is fairly high and thus the need to be more covert in the interactions exhibits. When we examine closely at the data of this current study and not only in terms of the pragmatic structures, they suggest that age as one of the context of interlocutors or the speaker-hearer interpersonal relationships influences the similarities in performing speech act of complimenting and the culture specifics in the choice of linguistic representations exhibited in American English and Thai Cs as well as the Thai EFL learners' Cs.

For all groups, C is the assertive, expressive, and positive speech act. It is as to give 'face-boosting compliments' or FBA, that is, Cs are used to satisfy the face wants of the hearers or the speakers (Farenkia, 2011), as to 'give gifts to the addressee' (Brown & Levinson, 1978), or as give 'face-enhancing compliments' (Bayraktaroğlu & Sifianou, 2001) to show sympathy, understanding, and cooperation to the hearers. Thus, to maintain good interpersonal relationship when giving compliments within the context of age equals and unequals, there is a need to elaborate the compliments being given. This is by using the hybrid pragmatic structures of (S)+[H] and [H]+(S).

The closer look at the interlanguage study of C strategies and their linguistic realizations provide some evidence that the TEHs and especially the TELs are in their incomplete mastery of English. The five interlanguage phenomena are found in this study. 'L1 transfer' is observed to be the predominant phenomenon. Although the TEHs' Cs are usually conformed to the AEs, 'L1 transfer' still exhibits in the use of address terms oriented towards the age-family cultural awareness, such as 'sister' or 'brother'. The TELs show an unexpected performance towards the use of [H] structures.

This could be interpreted as their attempts in using communication strategy in L2. It could be seen as a way the learners express their meanings of Cs. Given their limited knowledge of L2, they were trying to alleviate the hearers' problems of understanding, thus, they are being direct as to reach their intended goal in giving Cs to their interactants in English. Or, it could be the 'transfer of training' in which their English instructors provide lessons on straightforward Cs. For pedagogical application, since the directness in giving Cs could be understood as a feature in their interlanguage process, especially for the TELs, it is highly recommended that the Thai EFL learners be exposed to explicit teaching of Cs as hybrid structures where a set of predictable semantic-syntactic structures or compliment formulae, such as [*NP is/looks (really) ADJ*], [*I (really) like/love NP*], and [*PRO is (really) an ADJ NOUN*] is taught together with the (S) structures, such as the use of non-straightforward compliments, and the non-formulaic greetings in contexts as exemplified in (1) and (2) which were taken from our current study's corpora.

At a potluck party, a female colleague gave a C to a colleague of the same sex about her shoes. Both of them were at the same age.

(1) Your shoes are nice. Where did you buy 'em?

At a potluck party, a female colleague gave a C to a male colleague on his new haircut. Both of them were at the same age.

(2) Did you get a new haircut? Look great!

The hybrid structures as in (1) and (2) could provide examples of a new perspective on teaching discourse interaction in contexts as well as spoken grammars (e.g., McCarthy & Carter, 2001) or the top-down process rather than the bottom-up one for the L2 learners. Although it could be considered a challenge area to a language teaching practice, it could be worth an effort.

The findings lend support to the universalities of definition and fundamental functions of Cs as maintaining and promoting interpersonal relationships, or managing rapport. The study also supplies evidence of culture specifics in which there are some interesting points needed further investigation. Inasmuch as this study is limited in its variable to a specific context of age, other contexts (e.g., degrees of proximity, relative social status, or sex differences) should be studied in the future. The study provides some insights in teaching (interlanguage) pragmatics for intercultural communication. Further studies on cross-cultural and interlanguage compliments should investigate in-depth not only the overt compliments but also the covert supportive moves, and why they are used. In addition, compliment responses may also be co-examined as important parts of compliment events or discourses. This is to fill in the appellative function or the perception of the hearers towards the given Cs in certain contexts of communication.

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Appendix A

English Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT in English)

ENGLISH DISCOURSE COMPLETION TASK

You are ___ Male ___ Female

Guidance Information

If you were the person in each situation given, what would you say? Please write down your possible responses to each situation below.

At a Potluck Party

Richard and Anne (husband and wife) invited their colleagues to join a potluck party at their house. All of them had been working together on a big project for a few months. Before the day of the party, Richard got a new haircut. Anne changed her hairstyle and hair color. Both Richard and Anne prepared their special dishes for the party. All the guests also brought their food to the party. Everyone noticed Richard's new haircut and Anne's new hair color and hairstyle. All the guests tried each another's dishes.

Situation 1:

Mary, who is about the same age as Richard, likes Richard's new haircut and says:

Mary: _____

Situation 2:

June, who is ten years older than Richard, loves Richard's cooking and says:

June: _____

Interlanguage Pragmatics Study of Compliments among Thai EFL Learners

Situation 3:

Jeff, who is a lot younger than Richard, really likes Richard's new haircut and says:

Jeff: _____

Situation 4:

Patrick, who is about the same age as Richard, loves Richard's special dish and says:

Patrick: _____

Situation 5:

Joe, who is a lot older than Richard, likes the dish Richard cooked and says:

Joe: _____

Situation 6:

Sandy, who is ten years younger than Richard, loves the new haircut of Richard and says:

Sandy: _____

Situation 7:

Mary, who is about the same age as Anne, likes Anne's new hairstyle and says:

Mary: _____

Situation 8:

June, who is ten years older than Anne, loves Anne's special dishes and says:

June: _____

Situation 9:

Sandy, who is ten years younger than Anne, really likes Anne's new hair color and says:

Sandy: _____

Situation 10:

Patrick, who is about the same age as Anne, has tasted the food Anne cooked and says:

Patrick: _____

Situation 11:

Joe, who is a lot older than Anne, has tasted Anne's special dishes and says:

Joe: _____

Situation 12:

Jeff, who is a lot younger than Anne, loves Anne's new hairstyle and color, and says:

Jeff: _____

Appendix B

Thai Written Discourse Completion Task (Translated Version of English WDCT into Thai)

แบบสอบถาม

คุณเป็น ____ เพศชาย ____ เพศหญิง

คำอธิบาย

ลองสมมติว่าท่านเป็นตัวละครในเหตุการณ์ ท่านจะพูดว่าอะไร

กรุณาเขียนคำตอบของท่านลงในช่องว่างด้านล่าง

ทำงานสังสรรค์ระหว่างเพื่อนฝูง

ธีระและมัณฑนาสองสามีภรรยาเชิญเพื่อนร่วมงานมาร่วมงานสังสรรค์ที่บ้าน เพื่อน ๆ

กลุ่มนี้ทำ โครงการใหญ่ที่บริษัทด้วยกันมาเป็นเวลา 2-3 เดือนแล้ว ก่อนหน้างานสังสรรค์

ธีระไปตัดผมมาใหม่ มัณฑนาเปลี่ยนทรงผมพร้อมย้อมสีผมใหม่

ทั้งธีระและมัณฑนาทำเมนูเด็ดของตนเองไว้ต้อนรับเพื่อน ๆ ส่วนเพื่อน ๆ

กลุ่มนี้ก็ถืออาหารติดไม้ติดมือมาร่วมงานด้วย ทุก ๆ

คนในงานสังเกตเห็นผมทรงใหม่ของทั้งธีระและมัณฑนา

และต่างได้ลองชิมอาหารของกันและกัน

สถานการณ์ 1: สำอองซึ่งอายุเท่า ๆ กับธีระ ชอบที่ธีระตัดผมทรงใหม่ จึงพูดขึ้นว่า

สำออง: _____

สถานการณ์ 2: วิริยาซึ่งมีอายุมากกว่าธีระประมาณ 10 ปี ถูกใจอาหารที่ธีระทำ

จึงพูดขึ้นว่า

วิริยา: _____

Interlanguage Pragmatics Study of Compliments among Thai EFL Learners

สถานการณ์ 3: ยิ่งยศซึ่งมีอายุน้อยกว่าธีระประมาณ 8-9 ปี ชอบที่ธีระตัดผมทรงใหม่มาก และพูดว่า

ยิ่งยศ: _____

สถานการณ์ 4: วิวัฒน์ซึ่งอายุเท่ากับธีระชอบอาหารที่ธีระทำ จึงพูดขึ้นว่า

วิวัฒน์: _____

สถานการณ์ 5: ศิริชาติซึ่งมีอายุมากกว่าธีระประมาณ 10 ปี ชอบอาหารของธีระมาก และพูดว่า

ศิริชาติ: _____

สถานการณ์ 6: ศศิธรซึ่งอายุน้อยกว่าธีระประมาณ 8-9 ปี ชอบที่ธีระตัดผมทรงใหม่ มาก ๆ พูดออกมาว่า

ศศิธร: _____

สถานการณ์ 7: สำอางซึ่งอายุเท่ากับมัทนา ชอบผมทรงใหม่ของมัทนามาก พูดขึ้นว่า

สำอาง: _____

สถานการณ์ 8: วิริยาซึ่งอายุมากกว่ามัทนาประมาณ 10 ปี ชอบอาหารที่มัทนาทำมาก พูดขึ้นว่า

วิริยา: _____

สถานการณ์ 9: ศศิธรซึ่งอายุน้อยกว่ามัทนาประมาณ 8-9 ปี ดัดใจสีผมใหม่ของมัทนา พูดขึ้นว่า

ศศิธร: _____

สถานการณ์ 10: วิวัฒน์ซึ่งอายุเท่ากับมัทนา ชิมอาหารที่มัทนาทำแล้วชอบใจ พูดขึ้นว่า

วิวัฒน์: _____

สถานการณ์ 11: ศิริชาติซึ่งอายุมากกว่ามัทนาประมาณ 10 ปี

ชิมอาหารที่มัทนาทำแล้วดีใจ พูดขึ้นว่า

ศิริชาติ: _____

Sakulrat Worathumrong and Sudaporn Luksaneeyanawin

สถานการณ์ 12: ยิ่งยศซึ่งอายุน้อยกว่ามัธนาประมาณ 8-9 ปี

ชอบทรงผมและสีผมใหม่ของมัธนา พูดขึ้นว่า

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