

An Exploratory Study of Compliment Response Strategies across Gender among Thai EFL Learners

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Abstract

Compliment responses are one of the most frequent speech acts in everyday conversation which are claimed to reflect gender differences. Apart from the compliment response behavior of native speakers, it is interesting to explore whether the assumed gender-based differences are also found in EFL context. The current study aims at examining Thai EFL learners' usage of compliment responses in English, in relation to the gender of the interlocutors and the topic of the compliment. The data was collected from a role-play task designed to elicit compliment responses on four different topics from six male and six female Thai EFL learners. The findings suggest that the gender of the interlocutors and the topics of the compliments, to some degree, influence the employment of compliment response strategies at the micro level. This relationship is possibly a reflection of and thus attributable to the function of gender-based social values.

Keywords: Gender, Speech Act, Compliment Responses, Thai EFL Learners

การวิจัยเพื่อการสำรวจการตอบคำชมของผู้เรียนชาวไทยเพศชาย และเพศหญิงที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

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บทคัดย่อ

หนึ่งในวัจกรรมที่พบบ่อยที่สุดในการสื่อสารในชีวิตประจำวันและถูกอ้างว่าสะท้อนความแตกต่างระหว่างเพศคือ การตอบคำชม นอกเหนือจากการตอบคำชมในภาษาแม่ การศึกษาการตอบคำชมในแง่ของความแตกต่างระหว่างเพศในบริบทของผู้ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศเป็นสิ่งที่น่าสนใจ บทความวิจัยเรื่องนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาการตอบคำชมในภาษาอังกฤษตามปัจจัย

ด้านเพศของผู้สนทนาและหัวข้อคำชมของผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ โดยข้อมูลที่นำมาใช้ในการวิเคราะห์ได้มาจากการแสดงบทบาทสมมุติในสถานการณ์ต่าง ๆ ตาม หัวข้อคำชมสี่หัวข้อของกลุ่มตัวอย่างเพศชายและเพศหญิงกลุ่มละหมาด ผลการศึกษาชี้ให้เห็นว่าเพศ ของผู้สนทนาและหัวข้อคำชมอาจมีอิทธิพลต่อการเลือกใช้กลวิธีอย่างในการตอบคำชมของกลุ่ม ตัวอย่าง ความสัมพันธ์ดังกล่าวอาจเป็นการสะท้อนให้เห็นและอธิบายได้โดยบทบาทของค่านิยมทาง สังคมที่เกี่ยวข้องกับเพศ

เพศ วัฒนธรรม การตอบคำชม ผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ

1. Introduction

One of the most common speech acts in everyday communication concerns compliments and compliment responses (CRs). (Yu, 2003). According to Talbot (2010), responses to compliments are influenced by a number of social variables, including power, degree of intimacy, social distance, culture, and gender. Given the complexity of these variables, it is interesting to study compliment response strategies employed by EFL learners in relation to these factors.

Most studies on the speech act of compliments have been in the field of pragmatics and have had a socio-cultural aspect, for example, examining compliment behaviors of L2 learners (Chen, 1993; Jaworski, 1995; Cedar, 2006; Tang & Zhang, 2009; Chen & Boonkongsaen, 2012). Studies on compliment responses across gender, both in the native language and the ESL or EFL contexts have also been undertaken (Holmes 1988; Herbert, 1990; Heidari, Rezazadeh, & Eslami, 2009; Kaneshan & Bonyadi, 2016). The results showed that gender played a role in the strategies of CRS adopted in both contexts.

Also, some contrastive studies on the distribution of compliments, focusing on compliment topics and gender, have been conducted (Parisi & Wogan, 2006; Rees-Miller, 2011). In these studies, it was argued that social values might account for the high percentages of women's compliments on appearance and men's compliments on performance. Regarding Thai native speakers, gender-based compliment responses in

Thai have also been investigated by Boonyasit (2005). However, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no research focusing specifically on gender has been conducted to examine Thai EFL learners' compliment responses in English, taking both compliment topics and the gender of the complimenter into consideration. Thus, this study aims to investigate CR strategies of Thai EFL learners across gender, addressing the following research questions:

- 1) What are compliment response strategies employed by male and female Thai EFL learners?
- 2) Are there any differences across gender in their use of compliment response strategies regarding the gender of the complimenter?
- 3) Are there any differences across gender in their use of compliment response strategies regarding the topic of the compliment?

2. Literature review

2.1 Compliment responses: concepts and functions

Compliment responses (CRs) play a role in maintaining and creating the solidarity and harmony of relationships (Heidari et al., 2009). According to Pomerantz (1978, p. 81), the recipients' compliment response is the interaction of two conflicting constraints: compliment acceptance and self-praise avoidance. Similarly, Leech (1983, p. 132) describes CRs in terms of an operation of two opposing maxims. The first maxim is the modesty maxim, which seeks to "minimize praise of self" and "maximize dispraise of self." The other maxim is the agreement maxim, which seeks to "minimize disagreement between self and other" and "maximize agreement between self and other." Regarding Brown and Levinson's Face Threatening Act, CRs involve the face arrangement of both complimenters and complimentees. Face, which is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself," comprises two related aspects: (a) negative face: the desire of freedom of action and freedom from imposition and (b) positive face: the desire that self-image

be appreciated and approved of (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Agreement of compliments attends to the complimenter's positive face, whereas self-denigrations may threaten the complimentee's positive face since they have potential damage to "wants of control and self-respect" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 286). Thus, CRs can be seen as the interaction of self and other face needs in connection with the conflict between agreeing with compliments and avoiding self-praise.

2.2 Compliment response strategies

Some classifications of compliment response strategies have been made in research on compliments. These frameworks seem to overlap and correspond with one another. For example, Holmes (1988) divides compliment response strategies into three broad categories: ACCEPT, REJECT, DEFLECT or EVADE, subdivided into 12 micro strategies. Similarly, Herbert (1986, 1989) distinguishes two main compliment responses categories, AGREEMENT and NON-AGREEMENT, each of which comprises six subcategories. The present study adopted Yu's (2004) classification (Yu, 2004, p. 118-119) due to its sufficient details and accountability. The framework consists of 6 main types of compliment responses, each subdivided into further categories. The strategies are classified as follows:

1) Acceptance Strategies: Utterances that recognize the status of a preceding remark as a compliment.

1.1) Appreciation Token: Utterances that recognize the status of a preceding remark as a compliment without being semantically fitted to the specifics of that praise. Generally, they are words showing gratitude, such as "Thank you." Appreciation token can also be responses like smiles or nods.

1.2) Agreement: Utterances that agree with the complimentary force of the speaker by a remark semantically fitted to the compliment. For example: "Yeah, I think it went well, too."

1.3) Pleasure: Utterances that show the complimentee is pleased. For example: “I’m glad you liked it.”

1.4) Association: Utterances that include more than one of the Acceptance substrategies above. For example: “Thank you! I’m glad you liked it.” (Appreciation Token + Pleasure)

2) Amendment Strategies: In recognizing the status of a preceding remark as a compliment, the speaker tries to amend its complimentary force.

2.1) Return: Utterances that reciprocate the act of complimenting by offering praise to the complimentee. For example: “You play very well, too.”

2.2) Downgrade: Utterances that scale down the complimentary force of the praise. For example: “Just so-so.”

2.3) Upgrade: Utterances that increase the force of the compliment. For example: “Yeah, I really killed you today, eh?”

2.4) Question: Utterances that question the sincerity or appropriateness of the compliment. For example: Is that so? Do you really think that I played very well?

2.5) Comment: Responses that, while accepting the force of a given compliment, do not accept credit for the accomplishment or attitude that is praised. Rather, the speaker impersonalizes the force of that compliment. For example: I put a lot of work into it last night.

2.6) Transfer: Utterances that switch the force or the focus of the compliment back to the complimentee. For example: “Sir, if you think it is okay, please have some more.”

2.7) Association: Utterances that include two or more of the Amendment substrategies above. For example: “It’s only O.K. I think yours is pretty good.” (Downgrade + Return)

3) Nonacceptance Strategies: Utterances that deny, question, or joke about the content of the compliment or avoid responding directly to the praise.

3.1) Disagreement: Utterances that disagree with the assertion of the compliment, or responses showing that the compliment is undue or overdone. For example: No!

3.2) Qualification: Utterances that do not accept the full complimentary force of a given compliment by questioning the quality that is praised. For example: "Well, actually I think it sort of dragged out."

3.3) Diverge: Utterances that question the force of the compliment by suggesting other intended acts. For example: "Stop making fun of me."

3.4) Association: Utterances that include more than one of the Nonacceptance substrategies above. For example: "I don't think so. You've got to be joking." (Disagreement + Diverge)

4) Face Relationship Related Response Strategies: Utterances that do not appear to accept, amend, or reject the compliment given. Generally, it does not deal with the propositional content of the compliment; rather, it deals with the occurrence of the compliment within the interaction. For example: "I'm embarrassed."

5) Combination Strategies: The case in which the addressee's responses combine two or more of the four main strategies described above. For example: "Thank you! Did you really think it's good?" (Acceptance [Appreciation Token] + Amendment [Question])

6) No Acknowledgment: The case in which the speaker chooses not to respond to the compliment bestowed upon himself or herself.

(Yu, 2004, pp. 118-119)

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Participants

A total of 12 Thai EFL learners of English were recruited for the study, consisting of 6 male participants and 6 female participants. All of them were second year Thai undergraduates majoring in English from the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Those who were bilingual or

had studied abroad were not included in the study. Two native speakers, consisting of 1 male participant and 1 female participant, were also included as the role-play conductors. To exclude age as a potential variable, all of the students and native speakers recruited were aged 19-21 years old.

3.2 Instruments

All of the materials used in this study were in English. A questionnaire was designed to collect participants' biodata while oral role-play scripts were used to elicit participants' responses to compliments. The reason for employing oral role- plays was due to their similarity to authentic language use as confirmed in studies undertaken among EFL learners (Sasaki, 1998; Salazar, 2008; Duan, 2008). The scripts of the role-plays comprised two versions, one for the male conductor and one for the female conductor. In the separated role-play scripts, the Thai EFL learners and native speakers were provided with a brief description of four situations concerning four topics of compliments common in everyday conversation: appearance, character, ability, and possession, as confirmed by previous studies (Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988) and used in previous research on CRs (Heidari et al., 2009; Phoocharoensil, 2012). In the role-plays, the participants were two friends in the same faculty as power or status was not investigated in the study. The Thai EFL learner was represented by A and the native speaker was represented by B. The followings are example of the script on the topic of ability (situation one) and possession (situation two).

A

Situation one

B and you are looking at the mid-term exam results posted online and you got the highest score.

Situation two

You've just bought a new bag on sale from a mall / your favorite shopping place.

B

Situation one

A and you are looking at the mid-term exam results posted online and s/he got the highest score.

Situation two

You notice that A has got a new bag. You think it looks cool so you make a compliment.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The students participating in the role-play were not told the topic of the study so that the results would reflect the participants' spontaneous responses. The role-play was conducted in a classroom where two students entered the room at a time. One of them had a role-play with the male native speaker and the other with the female native speaker in separate corners of the room, and then the positions were reversed. The time limit for each role-play with a native speaker was around two minutes for each student. All the role-plays were audio recorded by the researcher and her assistant. The participants' compliment responses were transcribed and analyzed using the coding scheme of Yu (2004) as outlined earlier due to its ability to account for various combination strategies identified in the data.

4. Findings

The findings are divided into three parts. The first part presents the macro compliment response strategies by gender of the responders together with the examples. The second part presents the compliment response strategies by gender of the complimenters and the responders. The third part presents compliment response strategies by topics of compliments

4.1 Macro Compliment response strategies by gender of responders

Figure 1 Percentage of Macro CR Strategies by Gender of the Responders

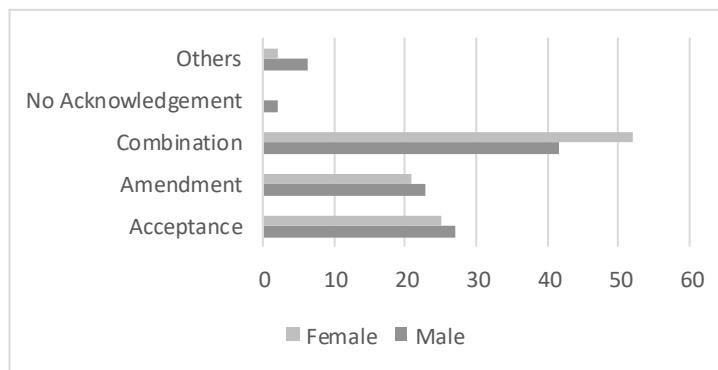


Figure 1 illustrates the main types of compliment response strategies employed by male and female participants. As can be seen, no major differences seemed to be found at the macro level. The preference for both groups was *Combination strategies*, followed by *Acceptance* and *Amendment strategies* respectively. However, female participants showed a higher tendency to use *Combination strategies* than their male counterparts (52.08% and 41.67% respectively). One male participant also employed *No acknowledgement*.

Table 1
 Examples of Compliment response Strategies

CRs Example	Male	Female
Acceptance	“Thank you.” “Thank you, I think it’s very nice, yeah.”	“Yes, thank you.” “Yes, I’m happy you notice that.”
Amendment	“My pleasure.” “It’s fine.”	“That’s OK.” “You’re welcome.”
Combination	“Thank you. I spent a long time preparing for it.”	“Really? Thank you. This is the style I’ve never done before.”

CRs Example	Male	Female
	“Thank you, I got it from Central World.”	“Thank you. I can take you to where I got my hair cut.”
Others	Laugh	OK

Table 1 provides examples of CR strategies used by male and female participants. Some comprised two or more micro strategies. For example, *Acceptance strategies* used by the male participants consisted of an *Appreciation token* followed by *Agreement*, and those of the female counterparts consisted of *Agreement* followed by *Pleasure*. *Combination strategies* also comprised various strategies. From the examples, the strategies used by men were *Acceptance (Appreciation token)* followed by *Amendment (Comment)*. Those used by women were *Amendment (Question)* followed by *Acceptance (Appreciation token)* and *Amendment (Comment)*, and the other was *Acceptance (Appreciation token)* followed by *Amendment (Comment)*.

4.2 Compliment response strategies by gender of the complimenters and the responders

Table 2

CR Strategies by Gender of the Complimenters and the Responders.

CRs	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Acceptance	6 (25%)	7 (29.17%)	7 (29.17%)	5 (20.83%)
Appreciation token	3	4	4	4
Agreement	1	-	-	-
Association	2	3	3	1
Amendment	4	7	5	5
Comment		(16.67%)	(29.17%)	(20.83%)

CRs	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Combination	12 (50%)	8 (33.33%)	11 (45.83%)	14 (58.33%)
Acceptance+	12	8	11	10
Amendment				
Amendment +	-	-	-	3
Acceptance				
Amendment + Acceptance	-	-	-	1
+ Non-acceptance				
No Acknowledgement	1 (4.17%)	-	-	-
Others	1 (4.17%)	2 (8.33%)	1 (4.17%)	-
TOTAL	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)	24 (100%)

Table 2 presents the micro strategies used by L1 Thai speakers regarding the gender of the complimenters. As can be seen, no major differences seemed to be found in the micro strategies. However, *No acknowledgement* and *Laugh* (classified as others) were used only by men (8.33%). It can be observed that both genders were more likely to employ *Combination strategies* with the same gender. The most frequent *Combination strategies* employed by both male and female participants were *Acceptance* followed by *Amendment* (20 for male and 21 for female), for examples, *Appreciation token* followed by *Comment* (e.g., “Thank you. I’ve just bought it yesterday.” and *Appreciation token* followed by *Return* (e.g., “Thank you. You look nice too.”). However, the female participants used more types of *Combination strategies* than the male participants.

4.3 Compliment response strategies by topics of compliments

4.3.1 Appearance

Table 3

CR Strategies on Appearance

CRs	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Combination	4	3	3	5
Appreciation token + return	4	-	3	-
Agreement /Appreciation token	-	2	-	2
+ comment	-	-	-	2
Question + (comment) + appreciation token	-	-	-	1
Question + appreciation token + qualification	-	-	-	1
Acceptance	2	2	3	1
Amendment	-	1	-	-
TOTAL	6	6	6	6

Table 3 presents CR strategies on appearance by the gender of the complimenters and the responders. As can be seen, both genders tended to employ *Combination strategies* most frequently when receiving compliments from the same gender. *Return strategies* were used only with the male compliment, and *Question strategies*, along with other strategies (i.e. *Comment*, *Appreciation token*, and *Qualification*) were used only among women.

4.3.2 Character

Table 4

CRs Strategies on Character

CRs	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Amendment (comment)	5	6	5	6
Others	1	-	1	-
TOTAL	6	6	6	6

Table 4 shows CR strategies on character by the gender of the complimenters and the responders. As can be seen, most participants employed *Amendment strategies (Comment)* regardless of gender. Other responses were *No acknowledgement* given by a male participant and “OK” given by a female participant.

4.3.3 Ability

Table 5

CR Strategies on Ability

CRs	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Acceptance + comment	6	1	4	3
Acceptance without comment	-	4	2	3
Laugh	-	1	-	-
TOTAL	6	6	6	6

Table 5 presents CR strategies on ability by the gender of the complimenters and the responders. As can be seen, both genders, especially male participants, employed *Acceptance strategies* followed by *Comment* most frequently when responding to the male compliment. In contrast, when responding to the female compliment, most of the male participants and half of the female participants used *Acceptance strategies* without *Comment*.

4.3.4 Possession

Table 6

CR Strategies on Possession

CRs	M-M	M-F	F-M	F-F
Acceptance	4	1	3	1
Combination	2	4	3	5
Appreciation token + agreement + comment	2	-	-	-
Appreciation token + comment	-	2	-	2
Agreement + comment	-	-	1	-
Agreement + pleasure	-	-	-	1
Question + Comment + Appreciation Token				
Amendment	-	1	-	-
TOTAL	6	6	6	6

Table 6 illustrates CR strategies on possession by the gender of the complimenters and the responders. As can be seen, both male and female participants employed *Combination strategies* most frequently, with a slightly higher number for those of female participants. Both genders used *Combination strategies* of *Appreciation token* or *Agreement* followed by *Comment* with the female compleinter more frequently than with the male compleinter. One female participant also employed *Pleasure* and another one employed *Question*.

5. Discussion

5.1 Compliment response strategies regarding gender of the complimenters and the responders

The findings of the study seemed to illustrate no major differences between the usage of CRs by male and female participants at the macro level. Preference was in the same order: *Combination strategies*, followed by *Acceptance strategies* and *Amendment strategies*,

respectively. At the micro level, both genders employed *Combination strategies* of *Acceptance* with *Amendment* the most. This means that they preferred to accept the compliments but try to amend their complimentary force by, for examples, giving comments about the subject of the compliment (e.g., “I bought it from my favorite mall.” and “My mom helped me with the hair style.”) or returning praise to the complimenters (e.g., “You look nice too.”). This seems to correspond with Boonyasit (2005), who concluded that the most frequent strategies used by both male and female Thai speakers were *Acceptance* strategies, followed by giving comments. This can be attributed to the claim that *Acceptance* seems to be the most expected response to compliments to maintain good relations by minimizing “disagreement between self and other” and address the complimenters’ “positive face” (Leech 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Apart from the main strategies, *No acknowledgement* and *Laugh*, though with a low frequency, were two strategies employed only by men. This supports the findings of Boonyasit (2005), who found that some male participants did not respond to compliments but only smiled instead.

Despite the similarities in terms of macro strategies, it is noteworthy that the gender of the complimenters seems to play a role in the usage of CRs. Overall, both genders were likely to employ more combination strategies with the complimenters of the same gender. One possibility might be that when receiving a compliment, responders may feel that they need to elaborate more or they may want to do so. This seems to correspond with the tendency of shared interests among each gender, which will be discussed more in the section of compliment topics. Moreover, women used more types of *Combination strategies* compared to men (3 compared to 1). This seems to be in line with Boonyasit (2005), who concluded that Thai females tended to use more strategies in responding to compliments compared to their male

counterparts, whereas Thai males were more likely to use shorter responses than their female counterparts. This may be attributable to the generally lower frequency of compliments received and given by men, compared to the higher frequency of compliments received and given by women as reported in previous studies (Holmes, 1988; Parisi & Wogan, 2006; Rees-Miller, 2011). One possibility might be that women are more accustomed to compliments and thus develop various strategies to respond to them, while men are less accustomed to compliments and thus might not employ various strategies or much elaboration.

5.2 Compliment response strategies by topics of compliments

Considering topics of the compliments, male and female participants illustrated some differences in their use of CRs on three topics: appearance, ability, and possession. Interestingly, these topics tend to correlate with the distribution of compliment topics by gender in which the prominent topic of compliments among women was ‘appearance’ and that for men was ‘ability’. (Holmes 1988; Boonyasit 2005; Parisi & Wogan, 2006; Rees-Miller 2011). It was suggested that this distribution seems to reflect shared values based on gender, in which ‘appearance’ tends to be highly valued by women, whereas ‘ability’ tends to be more valued by men. On the other hand, these distributions of compliments can be seen as a result of following “social expectations about male and female priorities” (Parisi & Wogan, 2006). In addition, the compliments can function as a form of phatic communication, “a kind of small talk that can establish and maintain social relationships through increasing a sense of solidarity and intimacy through shared values” (Rees-Miller, 2011, p. 2682). Thus, the differences in compliment responses on these two topics might be related to these gender-based compliment behaviors. The relationship will be discussed in the following sections.

5.2.1 Appearance

For the topic of appearance, two strategies appeared to be employed specifically depending on the gender of the complimenters. *Return strategies* (e.g., “Thanks. You look nice too.”) were used only with the male compliment. On the other hand, *Question strategies*, followed by *Appreciation token* and *Comment* (e.g. “Really? Thank you. This is the style I’ve never done before.”) or *Appreciation token* and *Qualification* (e.g., “Really? Thank you. I was very nervous. I thought it looked a little bit weird on me”), were used only among women. The findings correspond with those of Holmes (1988), Boonyasit (2005), and Heidari et al. (2009). In these studies, it was found that women were more likely to question the accuracy of a compliment utterance compared to men, especially in the topic of appearance.

The use of *Return strategies* by both genders in responses to male compliments was in a similar pattern of “Thank you. You too,” which is quite brief compared to other combination strategies. With the relatively low tendency of men to receive compliments on this topic, this pattern of brief answer might be a reflection of their (expected) low value on the topic as seen in their seeming unwillingness to pursue it. A possible reason for female responses in this pattern may be the potential inference of romantic interest or flirtation in compliments on appearance from men to women (Parisi and Wogan, 2006; Rees-Miller, 2011). As a result, women may think that the appropriate way to avoid this unintended interpretation is to accept the compliment without further elaboration. These strategies contrast with the use of the *Question strategies* followed by other strategies, (i.e. *Appreciation token*, *Comment*, or *Qualification*) in compliment responses among female interlocutors. This tends to be associated with the (expected) shared interest of appearance among women in that they want to be certain of the sincerity of the compliment. Their tendency of concern to

appearance is further manifested in the use of a combination of more than two strategies with female complimenters, including *Comment* and *Qualification*, for examples, “I can take you to where I got my hair cut.”, and “I was very nervous at first. I thought it looked a little bit weird on me. No?” Moreover, these kinds of compliment responses can be explained by female responders’ assumption that the female complimenter may want to pursue the conversation. Thus, it can serve as “phatic communication,” in which the interlocutors share the same interest, and thus “increase a sense of solidarity and intimacy” (Rees-Miller, 2011, p. 2682).

5.2.2 Ability

For the topic of ability, both genders seemed to accept the compliments and give comments when receiving compliments from the male complimenter more than the female complimenter. All of the male participants and more than 65% of women employed *Acceptance strategies* followed by *Comment*, for examples, “Thank you. I spent a lot of time on it. I didn’t sleep last night.” and “I’m happy with the score but next time I think I’ve to prepare more.” A possible explanation for the usage of this strategy by the male participants can be the (expected) shared value of ability among men in that they might be interested in elaborating on and continuing the conversation about their abilities. Thus, it can potentially serve as “phatic communication.” In contrast, when responding to compliments from women, all of them accepted the compliments but gave no comments, which may be a further reflection of their belief in women’s low interest in the topic. The possible reason for women employing *Acceptance* with *Comment* in responding to male compliments might be that they realized the (expected) high value of ability among men. However, half of the female participants also employed the mentioned strategies with the female complimenter. Thus, it is also possible that women may give high value to ability as well. This

point is referred to in the study of Rees-Miller (2011), where compliments on ability or performance for both genders outnumbered other topics in a goal-oriented setting (such as competitions, work, or activities). It is likely that in this era, ability or performance tends to be valued by both genders. According to a 2016 survey of 500 Thai people aged 25 upwards, 62% of women believed that they could have both good appearance and ability (Matichon online, 2016). This seems to correspond with the ratio of women in senior management positions, in which Thailand was ranked third of 36 countries in the Asia Pacific region (Grant Thornton, 2017). Hence, the employment of *Acceptance* with *Comment* in responding to compliments on ability seems to correlate with the shared value on ability, which tends to be expected for men, but seems to be increasingly valued among women.

5.2.3 Possession

For the topic of possession, both genders tended to accept the compliments and give comments when responding to female compliments (e.g, “Thank you. It’s casual looking but also stylish.” and “Thank you. I got it from Central World.”) In contrast, both genders, especially the male participants, tended to accept compliments without comments when responding to male complimenters. This may also be attributable to the distribution of compliment topics. Parisi and Wogan (2006) and Rees-Miller (2011) reported that percentages of female compliments on possession were higher than their male counterparts. This is possibly a reflection of women’s perceived greater interest in possessions than men. Thus, similar to the two prevalent topics discussed above, both genders may assume that the female complimenters are interested in more details of the possession being complimented, such as the place or the price, so they gave comments, such as “I bought it from Siam Paragon.” and “It’s on sale.” These types of responses can lead to further conversations and potentially serves as

“phatic communication.”

5.2.4 Character

The topic of character tended to be the only topic which both genders behaved similarly by employing *Comment*, which is a sub-strategy of *Amendment*, for examples, “My pleasure”, “You’re welcome”, and “It’s fine”. These responses tend to show the modesty of the responders by “not accepting credit for the accomplishment or the attitude that is praised.” (Yu, 2004, p. 118). This may be influenced by Thai culture, in which an acceptance of compliments on character can be seen as unexpected. The findings tend to correspond with Heidari et al. (2009) who found that both male and female Persian speakers were likely to use self-praise avoidance strategies in responding to compliments on character. This point was also mentioned by Chen & Boonkongsaen (2012), who concluded that Thai EFL teachers most frequently employed *Evade strategies*, such as “No problem” and “You’re welcome”, possibly because of the value of modesty.

6. Conclusions

The present study focuses on Thai EFL learners’ usage of compliment response strategies in English across gender. It aims at discovering potentially gender-based differences in responding to compliments in relation with the gender of the complimenter and topics.

The results of the study show similarity in the distribution of compliment response strategies of both genders at the macro level. However, at the micro level, the results suggest that both the gender of the complimenter and topics play a role in the usage of compliment responses. Both the male and the female participants seemed to use more strategies in responding to compliments from the same gender and their response patterns were different in three topics: appearance, ability and possession. These discrepancies in compliment responses might be attributed to the shared values within gender according to social

expectations: men for ‘ability’ and women for ‘appearance’, and also the possibility of women’s greater interest in ‘possession’. These gender-based values tend to be interrelated to compliment and compliment response behaviors. They may both reflect existing values and sustain these values by means of social expectations. Nonetheless, these values can change over time as in a possibility of women’s increasing interest in ability. This study by no means tries to assert that gender is a determinant factor in the production or interpretation of CRs in any simple way. It is obvious that other factors, for examples, power relations, degree of intimacy, social distance, culture, and individual characteristics also play a role in the phenomenon. Furthermore, all human communication behaviors are highly individual and varied, and thus cannot be said to be subject to stereotypes. This study is limited in the following aspects. First, due to the small number of participants, a larger population would be needed to sufficiently make the results generalizable. Also, the data elicitation is by no means without limitations. As no distractors were included in the role-play tasks, there is a possible risk of participants’ awareness of the topic under investigation, which may affect the results. Despite the limitations, the results of the study can provide some support to the function and interpretation of social values based on gender which affect compliment response behaviors. This may have implications for the understanding of inter-gender communication.

A suggestion for further research would be to investigate compliment behaviors of other genders, namely effeminate men, or examine other potential factors in compliment responses, such as power, degree of intimacy, and individual characteristics. Also, follow-up interviews could be conducted in order to gain insight into the rationales behind the participants’ strategy choices. Furthermore, studies combining different methodologies (e.g. role-play, interview, and corpus) and comparing the results of each methodology would be beneficial.

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