
COMPARISON OF THE PERSIAN NATIVE SPEAKERS AND PERSIAN EFL LEARNERS' USE OF COMPLIMENT RESPONSE STRATEGIES IN THEIR L1

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to compare the use of Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners' use of compliment response strategies in their L1. For this purpose, a convenient sample of 120 participants was deployed, which included 60 Persian native speakers. Also 60 intermediate EFL learners from a private language institute in Isfahan. The participants were all female; they shared Persian as their mother tongue and their ages ranged between 18 to 35 years old. To ensure the homogeneity of the EFL learners' group, a quick Oxford placement test was administered. The data of this study were collected through oral discourse completion tasks, which elicited the speech act of compliment response in four different situations. Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners responded to the tasks in Persian. The results of chi-square analysis on Persian native speakers' Compliment Responses and Persian EFL learners' Compliment Responses in their L1 demonstrated a significant difference. Although the agreement was the most common response type in both corpora, Persian EFL learners used a wider range of subcategories of the agreement Compliment Response compared to Persian native speakers. Furthermore, Persian EFL learners used non-agreement Compliment Responses much less than the Persian native speakers. The analysis indicated that Persian EFL learners tended to use more English-like acceptance strategies even when they responded to compliments in their mother tongue. This research has evidence for the occurrence of backward pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1 for CRs.

Keywords

Backward Pragmatic Transfer, Compliment Response Speech Act, Pragmatic Competence, Speech Act

Introduction

There is no doubt that compliment is very important among speech acts. A compliment is a speech act that explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker. This is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer (Holmes, 1988). The compliment event is a two-unit turn adjacency pair operation- the compliment and the compliment response in which the first pair part and the second pair part are linked by both temporal and relevancy conditions. Compliments and compliment responses (CRs) in English have been studied for decades (e.g., Herbert, 1986; Herbert & Straight, 1989). Not only have these studies focused on how native English speakers give and respond to compliments, but many research works aim at investigating the use of CRs by English learners

of different first-language (L1) backgrounds (e.g., Al Al Falasi, 2007; Bulut & Ozkan, 2005; Cedar, 2006; Qu & Wang, 2005; Sattar, Lah, & Suleiman, 2009).

It has been revealed that different cultures have different ways to deal with compliments (e.g., Chen, 1993; Gajasen, 1994; Herbert & Straight, 1989). For example, Americans usually regard saying Thank you in response to a compliment as the most common practice, whereas speakers of Asian languages often reject or disagree to show modesty (Al Falasi, 2007). These people could likely transfer their pragmatic norms in L1 when encountering English compliments, which may result in pragmatic failure or communication breakdown in the target language (Lin, 2008).

Iranian English students apply various strategies to respond to compliments on social networking sites (Dehkordi & Chalak, 2015). The strategies

they employ are acceptance and non-acceptance in general in which acceptance strategies are appreciation token, comment acceptance, and praise upgrade while their non-acceptance strategies are comment history, return, scale down, reassignment.

Pragmatic transfer or sociolinguistic transfer, as defined by Kasper (1992), describes “the influence exerted by learners’ pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than the second language (L2) on their comprehension, production, and acquisition of L2 pragmatic information” (p. 207). From its definition, pragmatic transfer mainly concerns how language learners’ pragmatic knowledge of language and culture in their L1 influences their pragmatic knowledge or behavior in L2, the pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2, also called forward pragmatic transfer.

Since the introduction of multi-competence by Cook (1991), the pragmatic transfer from the learners’ newly learned language to the previously mastered language or from L2 to L1 as well as the bi-directionality (from L1 to L2 and L2 to L1) of pragmatic transfer has aroused attraction. Cenoz (2003) examined the fluent Spanish-English bilinguals’ request behavior, the results showed that they adopted the same way of request making in their L1 and L2. Su (2012) investigated the bidirectional pragmatic transfer on the speech act of request and apologizing behavior among intermediate and advanced L2 learners.

It can be noted that being competent at pragmatic transfer and speech acts is more challenging in EFL contexts. Since most studies that have been conducted on pragmatic transfer were on forward pragmatic transfer (e.g., Cao, 2016; Fouser, 1997; Kwon, 2003; Qu & Wang, 2005; Tavakoli & Shirinbakhsh, 2014). In addition, not much research has been conducted on compliment responses in the Iranian context (Motamedi, 2018; Sharifian, 2005). The aim of the present study was to Comparison of the Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners’ use of compliment response strategies in their L1.

Research Questions

This study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What are the compliment response strategies used by Persian native speakers in L1?

RQ 2. What are the compliment response strategies used by Persian EFL learners in L1?

RQ 3. Are there any significant differences between Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners’ use of compliment response strategies in L1?

RQ 4. Is there any evidence of backward transfer from L2 to L1 concerning the compliment response strategies among Persian EFL learners?

Methodology

Design of the Study

The present study employed a descriptive design because there were no treatments and tests and the necessary data were collected via administrating an oral Discourse Completion Task. Descriptive research includes a set of methods that aim to describe the circumstances or phenomena under investigation. Descriptive research can only be used to understand existing conditions or to assist in the decision-making process. An effort was made in this study to describe compliment response strategies used by Iranian Persian native speakers and EFL learners and the effects of the backward pragmatic transfer on this issue.

Participants

The intended sample of this study was 60 female Persian native speakers and 60 female intermediate EFL learners that their ages ranged between 18 and 35 years old. The Persian native speakers were the students of accounting, art, and architecture in Feizoleslam Institute, and intermediate EFL learners were chosen from Shakeran Institute. The EFL learners’ general English knowledge was evaluated via Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT). Convenient sampling was used for this study.

Instruments

The instruments included Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT) and Oral Discourse Completion Task (ODCT) which are elaborated in this part.

Oxford Quick Placement Test (OQPT)

The OQPT (Appendix A) helps English teachers place students into the appropriate level class for a language course. They can also use it as a quick measure of a student’s general language ability (Allan, 2004). The test contained 60 questions where the participants had to choose the correct

answers among the alternatives that were provided. After conducting the test, the results were collected and the participants whose levels of proficiency were suitable for the study were selected to partake in the study. The participants whose scores were between 30 and 40 were recognized as intermediate learners.

Oral Discourse Completion Task (ODCT)

ODCT employed in this study is one of the most frequent forms employed in interlanguage studies to collect the data (Yu, 2004). An ODCT is a tool used in linguistics and pragmatics to elicit particular speech acts. It consists of a one-sided role play containing a situational prompt which a participant will read to elicit the responses of another participant.

Procedure

As the first step, the OQPT was given to the EFL learners to evaluate their level of proficiency and to make sure they were all intermediate learners. Then, the ODCT was given to both groups of participants. The participants were asked to tick out their personal information and they were told that the information was kept confidential. The participants were asked to respond to each situation the way they respond to them in the real life. The situations were given to the participants one by one and then their answers were recorded. Following that, the data were collected, transcribed, and analyzed.

Data Coding and Analysis

The compliment responses from the two groups of participants were coded according to Herbert's (1989) taxonomy. This taxonomy divides compliment responses into three main categories: (1) agreement, (2) non-agreement, and (3) other. These categories are further divided into several subcategories.

Codification of compliment responses was done by two raters. The results of inter-rater reliability confirmed a high level of reliability with a reliability coefficient of 0.89. The coded data were further submitted to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for statistical analysis including frequency and chi-square test. Two sets of Chi-square tests were employed to compare the frequencies of compliment strategies that were used by Persian native speakers and intermediate EFL learners.

Results

Results for the first research question

The first research question of the study addressed the CR strategies used by Persian native speakers. A corpus of 120 CRs was codified according to Herbert's (1989) taxonomy for this group of participants. The main categories in this taxonomy include agreement, non-agreement, and other. The results of descriptive statistics (i.e., frequency and percentage) for these main categories of CR are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of the Compliment Response Strategies Used by Persian Native Speakers

| Compliment Response Strategy | F | % |
|------------------------------|----|-------|
| Agreement | 62 | 51.70 |
| Non-agreement | 58 | 48.30 |
| Other | 0 | 0 |

As shown in Table 1, agreement responses in Persian native speakers' data amount to 51.70 % in the compliment exchanges. On the other hand, non-agreement responses were used in 48.30 % of cases by the Persian native speakers. Other compliment responses were not found in the corpus under analysis. It is apparent from Table 1 that Persian native speakers used both agreement

and disagreement responses almost equally in getting back to an interlocutor's compliment. In Herbert's (1989) taxonomy, agreement and non-agreement CRs are further divided into several subcategories. The results of subsequent analyses of those subcategories are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Types of Responses Used by Persian Native Speakers

| Compliment Response Strategy | Response Type | F | % | |
|------------------------------|----------------|--------------------|----|-------|
| Agreement | Acceptances | appreciation token | 33 | 27.50 |
| | | comment acceptance | 0 | 0 |
| | | praise upgrade | 0 | 0 |
| | Transfer | comment history | 0 | 0 |
| | | reassignment | 6 | 5 |
| | | return | 23 | 19.20 |
| Non-agreement | non-acceptance | scale down | 30 | 25.00 |
| | | question | 0 | 0 |
| | | disagreement | 21 | 17.50 |
| | | qualification | 7 | 5.80 |
| | | no acknowledgement | 0 | 0 |

As Table 2 suggest, among the three subcategories of agreement CR strategy, the subcategory of acceptances is the most frequent (27.50 %). It is no wonder that this response type has taken the lead in the data since thanking and appreciation, as represented in phrases such as /mersi/, /mamnoon/, /tæšækor/, /motšækeræm/, is the obvious and expected verbal reaction to a compliment. Interestingly, in the “Possession” speech act situation, the compliments on the interlocutor’s belongings (in the case of the present study, a new cellphone) were mainly responded with offering the same object to the speaker through utterances like /qabele šoma ro nædare/ (It’s not worthy of you) or /motæ’leq be šomast/ (It is yours).

The second most frequent response type in the data is the transfer (24.2 %; comprising of 19.20 % return and 5% reassignment). According to Herbert (1989), the transfer is an attempt to agree with the compliment assertion yet to make another part responsible for that specific condition. In the case of reassignment, the praise is shifted toward God or the object itself and in the case of a return, the praise is shifted to the compliment giver. As can be seen in Table 2, return is more frequently used (19.20 %) than reassignment (5%). This shows that Persian native speakers in the present study tended to return the favor to the speaker by expressions such as /lotf darid/ or /mohæbæt darid/ (It’s kind of you!) or /çešmatun qæšæng mi-bine/ (Your eyes see it beautifully).

Furthermore, the results of Table 2 demonstrate that the subcategories of comment acceptance and praise upgrade, as well as the category comment

history, were not used by the Persian native speaker respondents.

The next category in Herbert’s (1989) taxonomy is non-agreement. The frequency of the first subcategory of non-agreement; that is, scale down is 25 %. Scale down response type is used to downgrade the compliment force by downplaying a talent, skill, or ability. In this type of CR, the addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated. Two instances of such response to the “Ability” speech act situation excerpted from the data follows:

(1) /Mæmnoonæm az lotfeton. Karæam hænuz xelii jaye pišræft dare/ (Thank you. I still need a lot of improvement.)

(2) /Mersi. Vaqean kare xasi næbood/ (Thanks. It was nothing special really.)

As for the subcategory non-acceptance, the disagreement and qualification response types were used by the participants on some occasions (17.50 % and 5.80 %, respectively). Excerpts (3) and (4) are instances of these two CR types.

(3) /Næ, væqe’an oonjooi ke mixastæm næbood! / (No, it wasn’t really what I expected!).

(4) /væli geran næxæridæm/ (but I didn’t pay that much!)

Additionally, the results of Table 2 reveal that the subcategories question and no acknowledgment were not found in the data.

Results for the second research question

Regarding the second group of participants namely, Persian EFL learners, a corpus of 120 CRs was codified according to Herbert’s (1989) taxonomy. Table 3 displays the results of

descriptive statistics of the main categories of CRs; that is, agreement, non-agreement, and

others.

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of the Compliment Response Strategies Used by Persian EFL Learners

| Compliment Response Strategy | F | % |
|------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Agreement | 106 | 88.30 |
| Non-agreement | 14 | 11.70 |
| Other | 0 | 0 |

According to Table 3, agreement responses in Persian EFL learners amount to 88.30 % in the compliment exchanges whereas non-agreement responses comprise only 11.70 % of responses. This shows that the respondents strongly favored agreement strategies when responding to compliments and non-agreement responses were used by the Persian EFL learners to a lesser extent. Other CRs were not found in the corpus

under analysis. Thus, it could be concluded that Iranian Persian EFL learners are more willing to opt for agreement responses rather than disagreement or other types of responses in getting back to an interlocutor's compliment. Further analysis of subcategories of agreement and non-agreement CRs in Herbert's (1989) taxonomy yielded some informative results which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage of Types of Responses Used by Persian EFL Learners

| Compliment Response Strategy | Response Type | F | % | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|----|-------|
| Agreement | Acceptances | appreciation token | 40 | 33.30 |
| | | comment acceptance | 27 | 22.50 |
| | | praise upgrade | 8 | 6.67 |
| | | comment history | 7 | 5.88 |
| | Transfer | reassignment | 13 | 10.83 |
| | | return | 11 | 9.16 |
| | | scale down | 13 | 10.83 |
| Non-agreement | question | question | 1 | 0.83 |
| | | disagreement | 0 | 0 |
| | Non-acceptance | qualification | 0 | 0 |
| | | no | 0 | 0 |
| | acknowledgement | | | |

Table 4 demonstrates that among the three subcategories of agreement compliment response strategy, the subcategory of acceptances is the most frequent (62.47 %) response type used by Persian EFL learners. Acceptances is realized in the responses as appreciation token (33.30 %), comment acceptance (22.50 %), and praise upgrade (6.67 %). Excerpt (5) is an instance of comment acceptance response type and excerpt (6) is an illustration of praise update taken from Persian EFL learners' corpus.

(5) Thanks, I like it myself, too.

(6) Oh, it was expected of me.

The results of Table 4 also suggest that the category comment history was one of the response types used by Persian EFL learners (5.88 %). The subcategory transfer was also reported in the data (19.99 %). The transfer is realized through two subcategories of reassignment (10.83 %) and return (9.16 %). Excerpt (7) is an instance of this response type.

(7) I like children very much.

The next category in Herbert's (1989) taxonomy is non-agreement. Persian EFL learners used this response type less frequently (11.70 %). In this corpus, the frequency of the first subcategory; that

is, scale down was 10.83 % and the frequency of question subcategory was 0.83 %.

As for the subcategory non-acceptance, the disagreement and qualification response types were not used by the respondents. Moreover, the subcategory no acknowledgment was not reported in the data.

Results for the third research question

The third research question of the study addressed whether there exists a significant difference between Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners regarding their use of CR types. To answer this question, the frequencies of response types used by the two groups were fed into SPSS and a Chi-square test was run. The results of the Chi-square analysis are portrayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Chi-square analysis of types of responses used by Persian native speakers versus Persian EFL learners

| Chi-Square Tests | | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--|
| Test | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) | |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 38.413 ^a | 1 | .000 | | | |
| Continuity Correction | 36.687 | 1 | .000 | | | |
| Likelihood Ratio | 40.538 | 1 | .000 | | | |
| Fisher's Exact Test | | | | .000 | .000 | |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 38.253 | 1 | .000 | | | |
| N of Valid Cases | 240 | | | | | |

Based on the results portrayed in Table 5, the p-value is within the significance range ($p < 0.05$); therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of CR types.

Results for the fourth research question

The fourth research question of the study dealt with the notion of backward transfer. This part of the analysis aimed to investigate whether there is any evidence of backward transfer concerning the CR strategies among Iranian Persian EFL learners. This involved running a comparison between the CR strategies used by native Persian speakers and Persian EFL learners in Persian. This comparative analysis was already made by a Chi-square test in answering the previous question which revealed that a statistically significant and meaningful difference between the abovementioned groups exists. Nevertheless, seeking evidence for the occurrence of backward transfer necessitated delving into the compliment response strategies used by native Persian speakers and Persian EFL learners in Persian and scrutinizing the content of those CRs more thoroughly and in detail.

Going back to the macro-strategies of agreement and non-agreement in Herbert's (1989) taxonomy, the results indicated that agreement responses in

Persian native speakers' data amounted to 51.70 % in the compliment exchanges whereas non-agreement responses were used in 48.30 % cases. On the other hand, agreement responses in Persian EFL learners amounted to 88.30 % in the compliment exchanges while non-agreement responses comprised only 11.70 % of responses. In other words, for both groups, the agreement category was the most pervasive response type and the non-agreement type was way less frequent. This clearly shows that all the respondents in both groups favored agreement strategies when responding to compliments, which is an anticipated behavior considering the norms of Iranian culture. Furthermore, by comparison, the non-agreement complement response type was used by the Persian EFL learners to a lesser extent than the Persian native speakers.

Regarding the subcategories of CR strategies, further analysis revealed interesting differences. Although the two groups were similar in that for both of them the agreement strategy was the most commonly-used compliment response type, they appeared to be quite different in terms of the subcategories of agreement and non-agreement responses. This is displayed in the schematic representation of the CR strategies used by

Persian native speakers versus Persian EFL learners in Figure 1.

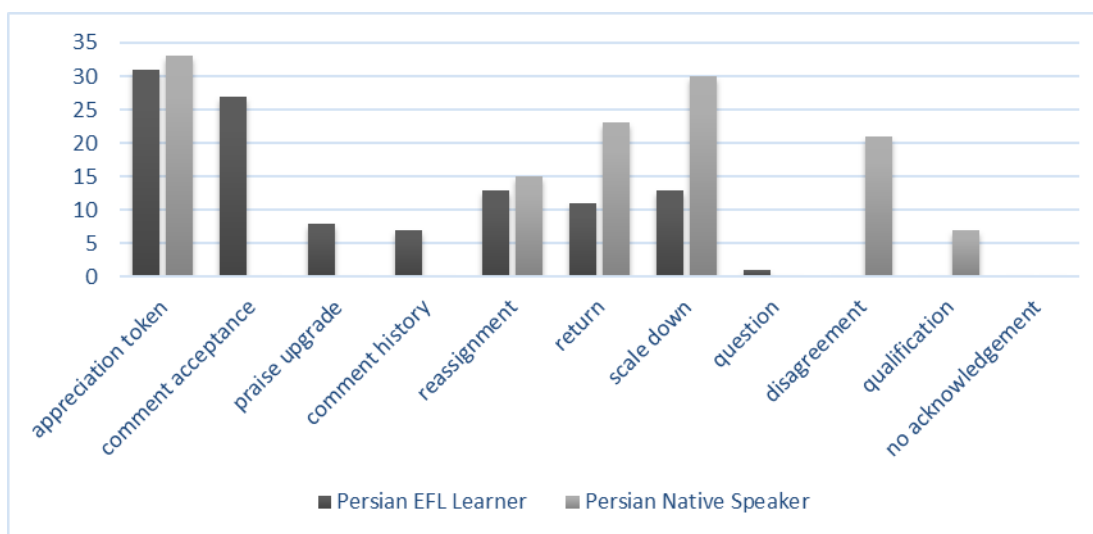


Figure 1. Schematic representation of compliment response strategies used by Persian native speakers versus Persian EFL learners

As Figure 1 illustrates, although appreciation token was the most prevalent agreement strategy for both Persian EFL learners and Persian native speakers, the two groups were quite different regarding the other subcategories of agreement CR. Persian native speakers did not use the subcategories of comment acceptance, praise upgrade, and comment history. In other words, they acted upon a limited range of compliment responses. In contrast, Persian EFL learners used the subcategories of comment acceptance, praise upgrade, and comment history many times; and therefore, relied on a wider range of acceptance compliment response strategies. These respondents did not always accept or return a given compliment via formulaic prefabricated patterns as is customary of Iranian cultural traditions. Rather, they sometimes commented on the compliments or even upgraded the compliments which is a pragmatic behavior similar to what Western people and English speakers do (Cao, 2016; Flowers, 2018).

The flexibility and variability in Persian EFL learners' agreement strategy use show a departure from established pragmatic rules of Iranian culture and a tendency toward adopting a compliment response system similar to the English-speaking culture. Thus, this could be taken as evidence for backward pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1 for Persian EFL learners.

As for other subcategories of the agreement CR, the subcategory transfer, as realized through reassignment and return, was used by both groups. However, as evident in Figure 1, compared to Persian native speakers' data, this subcategory was less prevalent for Persian EFL learners. Again, this shows that Persian EFL learners were not much bound to the Iranian politeness etiquette of reassigning and returning a compliment. This shows a pragmatic transfer from L2 to L1 and could be interpreted as a sign of backward transfer.

The next category in Herbert's (1989) taxonomy is non-agreement. Compared to Persian native speakers, Persian EFL learners used this response type quite less frequently (11.70 % versus 48.30 % for Persian native speakers). In this corpus, the frequency of the first subcategory; that is, scale down was 10.83 % and the frequency of question subcategory was 0.83 %. In other words, Persian native speakers appeared to be more willing to scale down and downplay a compliment compared to Persian EFL learners. Since Persian EFL learners did not follow the pragmatic patterns of their L1 culture and instead exhibited a strong tendency toward adopting English-like compliment response types, it would be reasonable to conclude that they were experiencing backward transfer from L2 to L1 in

their use of non-agreement compliment response strategies.

As for the subcategory non-acceptance, the disagreement and qualification response types were not used by the respondents. Moreover, the subcategory no acknowledgment was not reported in the data.

Overall, the results revealed a great difference between English majors and non-English majors in their production of CRs. According to the findings, the English majors tend to use more English-like acceptance strategies even when they respond to compliments in their mother tongue. In other words, the backward pragmatic transfer is observed in Persian EFL learners responses to the speech act of compliment.

Discussion

The results of the study revealed that there were similarities and differences between Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners regarding the way they responded to compliment speech acts. The main similarity between the two groups was the ubiquity of the agreement response type in both corpora. The most common form of agreement response was appreciation token which was manifested via formulaic expressions and phrases such as /mersi/, /mamnoon/, /tæʃækɔr/, /mɔʃækɛræm/, and so forth. This confirms the previous findings reported by previous researchers (e.g., Heidari et al., 2009; Yousefvand, 2010) who suggested that Persians are accustomed to responding formulaically to compliments, and are taught such behavior at very young ages.

The observation that the majority of respondents in the two groups chose agreement CR type more than any other response type could be explained in light of insights gleaned from Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. According to this theory, politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate threats towards the face (i.e., public self-image) carried by certain face-threatening acts toward the listener. Although politeness is a universal concept, there also exists a cross-cultural variability in that there are different ways of mitigating face threats based on each individual's culture. Sifianou (1999) asserts, "in general, when we talk about politeness, what we have in mind is relative politeness, based on

what we think is appropriate behavior in particular situations. These norms, however, vary from culture to culture" (p. 29).

Another similarity in the two corpora under investigation was the frequent use of transfer CR type. The transfer is a form of agreeing with and accepting the compliment; however, in this CR type, the complimentary force is transferred to some third person or the object complimented (reassignment), or the praise is shifted to the compliment giver (return). This observation supports previous findings (e.g., Motaghi-Tabari & Beuzeville, 2012; Razmjoo, Barabadi, & Arfa, 2013; Yousefvand, 2010) which presented transfer as a common and popular way of getting back to compliments among Iranians.

A noteworthy and interesting feature of the findings relates to the differences observed between the two corpora. The results of the Chi-square test showed that there was a statistically significant difference between Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners in their CRs. Meticulous attention to the data reveals that such a significant difference may be due to two major discrepancies in the data. Firstly, there is a major difference in the distribution of agreement and non-agreement response types in the two corpora. Although the agreement is the most common CR type in both corpora, in Persian EFL learners' corpus it has a way higher frequency than in the Persian native speakers' corpus. Put differently, Persian EFL learners used the non-agreement response type much less than the Persian native speakers (11.70 % versus 48.30%). Interestingly, the non-agreement CR type which was so common among Persian native speakers was realized through three subcategories of scale-down, disagreement, and qualification whereas these subcategories were not seen in Persian EFL learners' data. This observation is an indication of Persian native speakers' tendency toward denying or downplaying compliments (Motaghi-Tabari & Beuzeville, 2012). The downplaying of responsibility and not wanting to be praised could be a sign of modesty according to Iranian cultural norms. This is a sign that the addressee of the compliment does not want to feel as if he/she would be better than the giver of the compliment, or engage in self-admiring. These findings give weight to Sharifian's (2005, 2008b,

2009a, 2009b, 2011) claim that Persians have a strong tendency to deny or downplay a compliment in line with the cultural schema of shekasteh-nafsi which bans people from speaking about one's 'I' and achievements.

In sharp contrast to the Persian native speakers, the other group of participants, that is, Persian EFL learners did not use disagreements or scale downs. Sharifian (2005, 2008a) holds that Persians who have not been exposed to another culture are likely to be highly affected by shekasteh-nafsi cultural schema. That is why most Persians in Iran will insincerely disagree with compliments to avoid self-praise. However, once an individual embark on learning another language and develops a second cultural system, the impact of the first cultural schemas fades away and the pragmatic behavior of the individual is no longer controlled by the native cultural norms and social stigmas. The influence of L1 pragmatic knowledge on Persian EFL learners has been diminished due to their encounter with the L2 pragmatic system, and that is the reason why they showed less tendency toward following Iranian cultural standards of being too modest and humble in getting back to a received compliment.

The second discrepancy between the two corpuses relates to the way the two groups of respondents accepted compliments. Persian native speakers showed their acceptance merely by using appreciation tokens (i.e., prefabricated, fixed formulaic expressions). In contrast, in Persian EFL learners' data, appreciation tokens only made up a limited number of the total responses subsumed under the main category of agreement. In other words, Persian EFL learners demonstrated their agreement and acceptance by using a wider range of strategies such as comment acceptance, comment history, and praise upgrade. Previous studies (e.g., Al Falasi, 2007; Motaghi-Tabari & Beuzeville, 2012) have established that among varieties of English the frequency of acceptance may vary and other responses to compliments are also very common, such as elaborative responses in which the receiver of the compliment elaborated on the comment rather than resorting to a formulaic pattern. Thus, considering that commenting on the compliment is a habitual pragmatic norm in English-speaking cultures, it could be inferred that Persian EFL

learners followed cultural norms of the English language rather than preserving Iranian cultural routines.

One last point that seems worth mentioning is that, according to the findings of the study, no acknowledgment and other types of CR were not observed in any of the corpuses. This suggests that the respondents did not show a tendency toward leaving the compliments unanswered. Rather, they provided feedback to the compliments with an agreement or non-agreement remarks. Receiving and getting back to a compliment is a confirmed general pragmatic convention shared between English and Persian (e.g., Motaghi-Tabari & Beuzeville, 2012; Sharifian & Palmer, 2007). Pomerantz (1978) explains that rejection of compliments is often regarded as a symptom of a problem, such as low self-esteem. A compliment is often used to establish, maintain, and confirm solidarity. Further, a compliment can be used to show gratitude, open, close, or uphold a conversation between the interlocutors. In addition, a compliment can also soften a request or criticism (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and express praise and admiration (Herbert, 1989). Thus, the general tendency in English and Persian as well as many other languages is that the addressee of the compliment generally receives and says something about the compliment rather than leaving it unremarked.

One major aim of the present study was to investigate whether there were any signs of backward transfer from L2 to L1 in Persian EFL learners' data. The results of a Chi-square test performed on Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners' data showed that there was a statistically significant and meaningful difference between the two groups regarding their CRs. Taken together, the findings point to a clear manifestation of backward pragmatic transfer in CRs on the part of Persian EFL learners. This is in line with other work in the field (e.g., Bu, 2010; Cao, 2016; Flowers, 2018; Tavakoli & Shirinbakhsh, 2014) which ensured the plausibility and possibility of pragmatic transfer.

Conclusions

The results indicated that, despite some similarities, there was a significant difference

between Persian native speakers and Persian EFL learners in their employment of CR strategies. Both groups tended to choose more agreement strategies than non-agreement strategies; that is, they preferred accepting the compliments instead of rejecting the compliments. This is plausible in light of Iranian cultural schemas of *taarof* and other Persian culture-specific politeness features such as *adab* (good manners), *ehteram* (courtesy, respect), *shaxsiat* (character–positive face), *tavazo* (modesty, humility), and *aberu* (roughly synonymous with credit or prestige–implying the concept of face and how people judge a person). Furthermore, Persian EFL learners seemed to accept compliments more than refusing them compared to Persian native speakers. They used a variety of acceptance strategies such as giving comments on the compliments or upgrading the received praise. Persian native speakers, on the other hand, showed a strong tendency towards either accepting the compliment or downplaying it. Persian native speakers' pattern of compliment response seems to reflect the Iranian cultural schema *shekasteh-nafsi* (modesty) (Sharifian & Palmer, 2007). Persian EFL learners' pattern of CR appears to find an explanation in backward transfer from L2 to L1. Overall, the outcome of the current study is consistent with prior findings that highlight the centrality of pragmatic competence in learning an additional language and point to the issue of backward transfer as a crucial factor that one cannot afford to ignore when considering L2 education within EFL settings. From the multicompetence perspective, as the Persian EFL learners in the current study exhibited, the different languages a person speaks work as one connected system, rather than each language is a separate system. In other words, EFL learners such as those participating in this study should be seen as unique multilingual individuals, rather than people who have merely attached another language to their repertoire. In sum, the present study is one of the few attempts to address the issue of backward transfer at the pragmatic level while providing an investigation into the characterization of the foreign language learner's multi competence.

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