COMPLIMENT RESPONSE STRATEGIES AMONG STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITY OF BALIKPAPAN

Retnowaty
University of Balikpapan
Email: Retnowaty@uniba-bpn.ac.id

Abstract

When someone gives a compliment, the hearer should response it to smoothen the relationship and communication. This study attempts to explore how the University of Balikpapan Students respond to compliment. This was a qualitative study. The data in this study were collected using a discourse completion task (DCT) to elicit compliment responses from students in University of Balikpapan as the participants. Moreover, the data were analyzed with the Continua of Compliment Response Strategies proposed by Tran (2007). It was found that most participants used variation of compliment response strategies. However, they tended to use the acceptance to denial continuum responses.

Keywords*: Pragmatics, Speech Act, Compliment Response Strategies, University Students*

1. INTRODUCTION

In English, specific labels are commonly given for speech acts, such as apology, complaint, compliment, invitation, promise, or request (Yule, 1996). These descriptive terms for different kinds of speech acts are directly related to the speaker's intention in producing an utterance, since he/she normally expects that the hearer will recognize his/her communicative intention. If someone says "Open the door", it is a direct speech act of requesting, "I'll come in time", it is a direct speech act of promising, "You are very beautiful", it is an example of complimenting speech act, etc.

One of the most frequently occurring speech acts in our everyday lives is complimenting. Complimenting can be understood in two ways, making compliment and responding to compliment. For example, a lecturer compliments a student when he/ she gives a good presentation by saying "Today is your best performance". The student then replies it by saying "Thank you, Sir. It is because of your guidance". This situation tells us about how compliment happens frequently in our lives as human especially in

communicating with each other. Compliment can be intended to show people's appreciation on success or accomplishment of others, may increase the solidarity between the speaker and the hearer, and can be used to express many other human purposes.

Some usual purposes of giving compliment to others are appreciating about appearance, achievement, success, etc. Of course when someone gives us compliment about those things, we have to respond in return. There are several ways in replying compliments. According to Nelson in (Dung, Languages, & Ria, 2016), knowing how to compliment is important, but it is equally important to know how to respond to a compliment. Sometimes, we respond to the compliment by accepting it. On the other hand, there are other people who do not feel easy to get a compliment, therefore he or she can reject the compliment.

Tran (2007) suggests the Continua of Compliment Response Strategies based on the work done by Herbert in 1989 and Pomerantz in 1978 to analyze compliment response in his research. Tran divides compliment response into two types. They are the acceptance to denial continuum and the avoidance continuum.

The classifications of acceptance to denial continuum are:

a. Compliment upgrade

The complimentee agrees with and increases the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion.

Example:

A: Nice car.

B: Thanks. Brand new.

b. Agreement

The complimentee agrees with the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion probably by providing a response which is semantically fitted to the compliment.

Example:

A: I like your car. It's very good.

B: Oh yeah. Thanks, it's not bad.

c. Agreement token

The complimentee may agree with the compliment assertion with a simple "Yes" or "Yeah". An agreement token is classified as an agreement whether it occurs in a full agreement (e.g. "Yes, I think so, too") or in isolation (e.g. "Yes" occurring by itself in a CR).

Example:

A: It's really stylist.

B: Yeah.

d. Appreciation Token

Compliment Response.........................

The complimentee recognizes the status of the other speaker's previous utterance as a compliment and shows appreciation for it. The agreement token itself is not semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment

Example:

 A: What a lovely dress!

B: Oh, thank you, thank you.

e. Return

The complimentee reciprocates the act of complimenting by paying back the compliment to the complimenter.

Example:

A: You're looking good today.

B: Thanks, so are you

f. Explanation/ Comment history

The complimentee impersonalizes the complimentary force/ compliment assertion by giving further information, which may frequently be irrelevant, about the object of the compliment.

Example:

A: I like your tie. It suits you   well.

B: Thanks. Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again.

g. Reassignment

The complimentee redirects the praise offered by the complimener to the third person or to something else (referent/credit shift)

Example:

A: You look good today.

B: Oh, thanks. It must be the jacket.

h. Non Idiomatic Response

The complimentee implies or would like to express that he/she does not agree with the compliment assertion. However, this is done through the use of non-target-like responses.

Example:

A: I like your car. Cute looking car.

 B: Uh. That's OK (nothing special).

i. Compliment Downgrade

The complimentee qualifies the praise force/compliment assertion, or downplays the object of the compliment.

Example:

A: It's a nice car. I really like it.

B: Well, it's just a normal   and   not very reliable car.

j. Disagreement

The complimentee directly disagrees with the praise force/ compliment assertion. He/she asserts that the praise within the compliment is overdone or undue.

Example:

A: Hey, I like your tie. It suits you very well.

B. I don't think so.

k. Disagreement Token

The complimentee may disagree with the compliment assertion with a simple "No". A disagreement token is classified as a disagreement whether it occurs in a full disagreement (e.g. "No, I don't think so") or in isolation (e.g. "No" occurring by itself in a CR).

Example:

A: Oh you're looking well.

B. Uhm. No.

The avoidance continuum classifications are:

a. Expressing Gladness

The complimentee does not address the compliment assertion itself, which makes the response a type of avoidance, but expresses his/her gladness that the complimenter likes the object of the compliment.

Example:

A: I read that article you published last week it was very good.

B: Well, great.

b. Follow-up Question

The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which elaborates the compliment assertion. It is equivocal whether this question is meant to fish for more compliments, or to gain specific information about the worthiness of the object being complimented.

Example:

A: You know, I just read your article last week. I thought it was excellent.

B: Thanks a lot. What do you find interesting about it?

c. (Doubting) Question

The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which corresponds to the request for repetition and/or expansion of the compliment assertion. The question is ambiguous in terms of whether the complimentee intends it to provide repetition/expansion of the original assertion or to question the sincerity/motives of the complimenter.

Example:

A: You're looking very nice tonight.

B: Really?

d. Opting Out

(1) Opting out with laughter: The complimentee responds to the compliment with mere laughter.

Example:

Compliment Response.........................

A: Oh, that's nice. How lovely! It's my favorite color. I wanna buy a blue car one day.

 B: Heh heh.

(2) Opting out with filler(s): The complimentee just utters (some) filler(s) in response to the compliment.

Example:

 A: I was just reading your paper, that paper you submitted to the journal the other day. It was really good.

 B: Uhm.

(3)Opting out without anything/No Acknowledgement: The complimentee does not   respond to the compliment at all verbally or nonverbally probably because he/she does not hear the other speaker's previous utterance or is occupied with something else.

Example:

A: I read your article the other day, too. It was really good.

B: (Silence)

(4) Opting out with topic change: The complimentee provides a response which cannot be understood as being linked to the compliment. He/she does not respond to the compliment itself but changes the topic to something else.

Example:

 A: I like your lovely dress.

B: I heard that you (were) not well last time. So do you feel well now?

With the help of framework above, we can analyze and demonstrate that compliments differ across culture and the responses may also differ from one culture to another.For example, Indonesians might not want to receive a compliment. This phenomenon can occur because Indonesians in general also honor the modesty values as part of their culture. No wonder they would likely reject the compliments given by downgrading the quality of themselves or things when they receive the compliment.

We can find the quality of Indonesians characters in university students because they can be role models in society. They are going to be adult who can differentiate good and bad. They also know Indonesian culture very well since young until now. Therefore, university students, especially in University of Balikpapan match the need for this research because in this university, the students are from all over Indonesia, not only typically Javanese, who are likely to down-grade themselves; thus, they might reject a compliment (Manipuspika & Sudarwati, 2016).They come from other tribes, like

Retnowaty...

Banjar, Bugis, Dayak, etc. whichalso have different culture. Although they are different, they are still Indonesians that honor the modesty values as part of their culture. Furthermore, they are majoring Indonesian Literature, Language, and Education that study about Indonesian Language better than other majors. Therefore, it is compulsory to concern these issues to avoid misunderstanding and communication failure. Due to the importance of complement response in different cultures, this study attempts to explore how the University of Balikpapan students respond to compliment.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This part presents the participants, data collection, instruments, and data analysis.
Participants

The participants of this research are twenty six students who study at University of Balikpapan in the fourth semester. We are able to discover the quality of Indonesian characters when we see university students. They are adults that play role models in society. They also learn Indonesian culture very well since they were born in this country. Although they come from different culture, they are still Indonesians that

honor the modesty values as part of their culture. Furthermore, they are majoring Indonesian Literature, Language, and Education that study about Indonesian Language better than other majors.

In this study, some steps to get the data are:

1) Reading the theory aboutcompliment response (CR)numerous times until the researcher fully comprehendthe concept.
2) Modifying a DCT (discourse completion task) about refusal strategies based on many theories that have been read.
3) Picking the participants and making appointment with them.
4) Asking them to do a DCT (Discourse Completion Task) about compliment response (CR)anonymously.

One of the qualitative research characteristics is the researcher as the key instrument (Creswell, 1998)because the researcher herself is the one who actually gathers the information. The researcher was also supported by other instruments, like a discourse completion task (DCT) to collect the data. This kind of instrument was chosen for the

following reasons; first, DCT could be under control over the variables such as gender, social distance, and social status, second, it was convenient to collect and analyze the data, and third, DCT questionnaire served to gain insights into social and pragmatic factors (Cai, 2012).

The pragmatic task in the form of DCT was used to assess students' responses when the compliments were given to them. There were descriptions of 10 situations about the events that commonly took place in Indonesian real life contexts. Under the context of each situation, there was a blank partto write what the participants would say in each situation. They were asked to provide one response, which they would consider to be socially appropriate.

This research employed descriptive analysis in analyzing the data. The data collected from the DCT were analyzed by identifying, classifying, and interpreting thembased on Tran's (2007) Continua of Compliment Response Strategies. This new framework consists of two continua of compliment response strategies: a continuum of compliment response strategies from acceptance to denial strategies and continuum of avoidance strategies (Tran, 2007:7) with the total number 15 response strategies.In this step, the researcher displays the data

using tables consist of each participant's complement response, frequency, and percentage. Then, the researcher is able to make conclusion from the analysis result to explore how the University of Balikpapan students respond to compliment.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This part presented the results of DCT data. Responses from participants were classified into Compliment Response strategies proposed by Tran (2007). The collected data consisted of 260 responses altogether in ten situations given. After the sub-strategies were coded, each strategy was calculated for each group. Furthermore, the data were analyzed in terms of the fifteen strategies. As to the overall distribution of CR strategies, table 1 indicates the breakdown of the responses in each strategy.

Table 1 Categories of CR strategies

Types of Compliment Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. The Acceptance to Denial Continuum		
a. Compliment Upgrade	17	6.5
b. Agreement	51	19.6
c. Agreement Token	17	6.5
d. Appreciation Token	17	6.5
e. Return	10	3.8
f. Explanation/Comment History	30	11.5
g. Reassignment	9	3.5
h. Non idiomatic Response	4	1.5
i. Compliment Downgrade	27	10.4
j. Disagreement	10	3.8
k. Disagreement Token	1	0.4
Subtotal acceptance to denial	**193**	**74.2**
2. The Avoidance Continuum		
l. Expressing Gladness	1	0.4
m. Follow Up Questions	0	0.0
n. Doubting Question	8	3.1
o. Opting Out	3	1.2
Subtotal avoidance	**12**	**4.6**
3. Combination Response	**20**	**7.7**
4. Other Responses	**35**	**13.5**
Total	260	100.0

From the table above, it can be inferred that most students respond to compliment by using agreement strategies which account for nineteen point six percent (19.6%) by using expression "*terima kasih pak/bu* (thank you Sir/Mam)". The less common response was found in the disagreement token and expressing gladness accounts each zero point four percent (0.4%) of the total response to compliments. The students did not choose the follow up questions strategy in responding the compliment given.

This study attempts to explore how the University of Balikpapan students respond to compliment. It has been found that the students respond to compliments in various ways. They applied almost all types of compliment response strategies.

They were most likely to accept compliments in the form of agreement. The findings do not correspond to the character of Indonesians that are likely to reject the compliments given by downgrading the quality of themselves or things when they receive the compliment(Manipuspika & Sudarwati, 2016).It is assumed that Indonesians nowadays are influenced by the western culture that comes to Indonesia so much. They are more likely to accept a compliment instead of the traditional rejection responses. The frequent responses are "Thank you!" which shows the agreement with the speaker's appreciation. This result powerfully suggests that University of Balikpapan students are more likely to accept rather than to avoid a compliment.The reasons are two-fold: the first is because they feel more convenient with it and second, when they say "*terima kasih*" (Thank you), it helps as a strategy of being polite; that is, they do not want to show their arrogance for being too pleased because of being complimented.

However, seven point seven percent (7.7%) of the responses are combination of two strategies.They tend to combine more than one response type. The general preference of all participants is appreciation token, in which they use "terima kasih" (thank you) to express their appreciation. This type of CR (Compliment Response) strategy can be accompanied by reassignment,compliment downgrade, and sometimes even doubtingquestion. For instance, a complimentee responds to a compliment by saying "masa sih bu" (really, Mam?); and then, she says "terima kasih" (thank you).

When analyzing the DCT, the researcher found some types of compliment responses which did not fit

with Tran's compliment response framework that were used by some students, such as; "*sama-sama, senyum, alhamdulillah* (You're welcome, smiling, Praise be to God)". It is a great phenomenon.In situation number nine in DCT, there were some students had misperception and misunderstanding in responding the compliment given by thelecturer after the participant brough this/her water. We can see that 12out of 26 students responded the compliment by expressing their gratitude. They responded the compliment by saying "Sama – sama pak/bu(You're welcome, Mam, Sir)."

Some students also responded by smiling gwhich was not a category from the continua fitted. So the researcher put it in other response strategy. It is still debatable whether smile is the sign of agreeing, disagreeing, or avoiding the compliment. However, there is a statement "That people just smile" without verbal acknowledge which mostly means a silent acceptance or showing politeness(Cai, 2012).

Furthermore, more than 30 responses used alhamdulillah(Praise be to God) as the response. The researcher assumed that they chose this kind of strategies because they wanted to show their modesty and were just grateful to

the God of what they got that day. They tried to be sincere because most of them were Muslims that tried to have good attitude and praised Allah (God) sincerely. To gain more understanding about the phenomena from this study, the researcher presented the examples of each strategy from Continua of Compliment Response Strategies proposed by Tran (2007) as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Examples of Continua of Compliment Response Strategies from this Study

Types of Compliment Responses	Examples
1. The Acceptance to Denial Continuum	
a. Compliment Upgrade	*Haha, biasa horang kaya* (It is usual for rich people)
b. Agreement	*Terima kasih Pak/Bu* (Thank you Sir/Mom)
c. Agreement Token	*Iya bu. Alhamdulillah* (Yes, Mam. Praise be to God)
d. Appreciation Token	*Terima kasih pak, terima kasih sambil mencium tangan Dekan* (Thank you Sir, Thank you while kissing Dean's hand)
e. Return	*Terima kasih, kamu juga ;)* (Thank you, you too ;))
f.Explanation/Comment History	*Alhamdulillah, bener usaha takkan mengkhianati hasil* (Praise be to God, It's true that effort is not betraying)
g. Reassignment	*Iya, dipilihin bapakku*(Yes, it was choosen by my father)
h. Non idiomatic	*Yaa, okelah*(Yeah,

Response	that's okay)
i. Compliment Downgrade	*Haha, hanya kebetulan saja*(Haha, it's just a coincidence)
j. Disagreement	*ah, biasa aja kok* (ah, it's normal)
k. Disagreement Token	*Ah, alay* (Indonesia stereotype meaning too much)
2. The Avoidance Continuum	
l. Expressing Gladness	*Alhamdulillah, akhirnya bisa ke luar negeri juga, terima kasih* (Praise be to God, finally I can go abroad, thank you)
m. Follow Up Questions	--
n. Doubting Question	*ah, masa sih?*(ah, really?)
o. Opting Out	*hehe* (hehe)
3. Combination Response	
p. Doubting Question+Agreement	*Oh, ya bu? Terima kasih* (really, Mam? Thank you)
q. Doubting Question+Compliment Downgrade	*Tertawa, dan berkata: Masa sih? Mungkin karena kita lama udah gak ketemu* (Laughing, and say: really? Maybe it's because we haven't met each other for a long time)
4. Other Responses	*sama-sama, senyum, alhamdulillah* (You're welcome, smiling, Praise be to God)

4. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the responses used by University of Balikpapan students in responding to the compliments given are various, which might be caused by their custom of expressing themselves spontaneously without too strictly bound to the related norms. For Indonesians, compliment responsecould be a serving to build a sense of closeness and a way to break the gap for not get-together a lot. In other words, compliment for University of Balikpapan students can be used as media to foster solidarity feeling. Finally, this study also shows that Indonesians are more likely to seek agreement to foster politeness in case of equality and solidarity among them.

Due to the limited amount of data and range of participants, generalizing to all University of Balikpapan student would be inappropriate. Furthermore, the study benefitsthe cross-cultural communication studies of speech act as a dynamic vision in exploring communicationmanners usually in real-life situation among different cultures. The varying strategies of replying to compliments may cause problems for complimentee. Furthermore, future studies need to be conducted to investigate age brackets, gender or social status in using compliment responses.

5. REFERENCES

Cai, Y. (2012). A Study on Compliment Response Strategies by Chinese College Students. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *3*(3), 543–549. https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.3.3.543-549

Compliment Response.........................

Creswell, J. W. (1998). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions. *Qualitative Health Research*. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00177

Dung, N. T., Languages, F., & Ria, B. (2016). Title : Different strategies in compliment responses between Vietnamese learners of English and English native speakers. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, *VII*, 592–599.

Manipuspika, Y. S., & Sudarwati, E. M. Y. (2016). Compliment Responses by Indonesian Lecturers of English. *SOSIOHUMANIKA: Jurnal Pendidikan Sains Sosial Dan Kemanusiaan*, *9*(1), 105–116.

Tran, G. Q. (2007). Compliment Response Continuum Hypothesis. *The International Journal of Language, Society and Culture*, (21), 1–22.

Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.