**VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

**UNIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

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**A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF RESPONDING TO COMPLIMENTS IN AMERICAN ENGLISH AND VIETNAMESE**

*(Nghiên cứu giao văn hóa trong việc hồi đáp lời khen giữa tiếng Anh Mỹ và tiếng Việt)*

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**SUMMARY OF DOCTORAL THESIS**

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# PART 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1. Research aim and questions

This study attempts to discover the tendencies of the two language and cultural communities and their preferences when it comes to the speech act of responding to compliments. Apart from the general descriptive results in terms of macro- and micro-level strategies, the thesis will provide insight into a possible influence of gender, status, and the topic of compliments onto participants’ choice of a compliment response strategy. The four main research questions and hypotheses that will be tested employing inferential statistics and qualitative analysis include the following:

* *Compliment response strategies on macro-level:*

What are the similarities and differences between American English and Vietnamese regarding compliment response strategies on the macro-level?

* *The impact of gender on the choice of compliment response strategies:*

How does gender affect the choices of compliment response strategies?

* *The impact of status i.e., social distance on the choice of compliment response strategies:*

How does status affect the choices of compliment response strategies?

* *The impact of topics of compliments on responding to compliments:*

How does compliment topic affect the choices of compliment response strategies?

## 2. Scope of the study

This study focuses on the contrastive analysis of the speech act of responding to compliments between American English and Vietnamese under the influence of three social parameters, namely gender, social distance, and compliment topic. Though highly recognizing the importance of paralinguistic and extra-linguistic factors in producing compliment responses, this study primarily investigates the verbal aspects of this speech act. It attempts to delve into the differences in the choices of compliment response strategies between two groups of cultural communities.

The theoretical framework applied to this study is pragmatics, speech act theory, and linguistic politeness.

## 3. Contribution of the study

The main empirical merit of this study is that the up-to-date strategies Vietnamese native speakers used to respond to compliments are identified and contrasted with those used by the American. The study aims to make a substantial contribution to knowledge by enriching the growing body of comparative, cross-cultural research, especially that which is couched in terms of speech act theory, as the comparison of two markedly different cultures such as those of the U.S and Vietnam can provide valuable insights into theoretical issues concerning the nature of communicative acts, the relationship between types of communicative acts and the general principles of human communication, the social implications conveyed by performance as well as the relation between the culture-specific and the universal features of communicative acts types.

Furthermore, this research attempts to draw connections among the perceptions about and the performance of the linguistic communication of compliment responses. This provides a more multi-dimensional perspective as it gives an insight into the informants' thought patterns or cognitive styles.

# PART 2. DEVELOPMENT

## Chapter 1. Literature review

### 1.1. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a linguistic discipline that investigates language use, the very utterances people make in a certain context (Levinson 1983, p. 9). It studies the meaning of the uttered words not only from the speaker’s point of view, but also from the hearer’s (Yule 1996, p. 3; Stadler 2013, p. 2). One can further deduce that pragmatics aims at disclosing the meaning of an utterance on three levels i.e. speaker’s intentions behind what s/he has said, what s/he has actually said and a hearer’s interpretation of what s/he has heard.

 As opposed to linguistic competence that supposes one’s knowledge of a language in terms of its grammar rules and vocabulary at a native speaker’s level (Chomsky, 1965), Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence that covers both a speaker’s grammatical competence and his/her competence of contextual communication. Being pragmatically competent means to be able “to communicate your intended message with all its nuances in any socio-cultural context and to interpret the message of your interlocutor as it was intended” (Fraser 2010, p. 15; Stadler 2013, p. 2).

### 1.2. Politeness

Politeness is a social phenomenon of human interaction that is closely related to one’s good manners and principles of etiquette, which should be complied with so that the interaction is smooth and socially appropriate. In relation to linguistics, Ide (1993, p. 7) argues that politeness encompasses strategies and forms of language use needed for achieving effective and pleasant communication. Furthermore, it is indicated (Ide 1993, p. 7) that the scholars’ awareness of and attending to the issue have borne seminal works starting from Grice, Austin and Searle, which were a solid basis for the introduction of the politeness theories by Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987).

#### 1.2.1. Lakeoff’s politeness theory

Robin Lakoff s theorizing on politeness as a pragmatic construct has been argued to be the cornerstone of politeness research. In her book *A critique of Politeness Theories*, Eden (2001, p. 2) expresses that Lakoff (1973a) was a pioneer of modern politeness theory. Lakoff (1973a, p. 296) believes that certain pragmatic rules should be identified according to which a linguistic utterance could be assessed i. e. is the utterance well-formed or not. In her opinion, these rules for a pragmatically suitable utterance are as essential to the study of language as syntax rules or semantics principles. Having based her politeness theory on Gricean Cooperative Principle, she proposes a set of three politeness rules and provides guidelines and settings description which are most appropriate for each of the rules (Lakoff 1973a, p. 298).

#### 1.2.2. Leech’s politeness theory

The most transparent influence of the Gricean Cooperative Principle could be seen in Leech’s theory on politeness (Leech, 1983). Like Grice, Leech (1983) makes use of principles and maxims to theorize on interaction taking into consideration both the language produced - the content of an utterance - and conversational factors such as relationships between interlocutors that might have an impact on how an utterance maybe formed. Leech (1983, p. 15) employs the term *rhetoric* to represent those two sets of conversational principles, emphasizing that he makes use of the term in a different sense from the one present in traditional understanding i.e. the well-versed language use that can have versatile goals - to persuade, to literary express or to eloquently express oneself in front of a public. Furthermore, he explains (Leech 1980, p. 10) that, *rhetoric* stands for a good linguistic behavior and one may make a distinction between *Textual Rhetoric* and *Interpersonal Rhetoric* (see Figure 1 below). The two *Rhetorics* are further divided into sets of principles and they are classified into maxims.

#### 1.2.3. Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory

One of the main theoretical approaches to politeness is Brown and Levinson’s theory (1978, 1987), which has been most frequently utilized and thus, has become one of the most influential and valid politeness theories. In their book *Politeness across cultures*, Bargiel Chappini and Kádár (2011, p. 3) aggrandize the authority and influence of the theory, arguing that Brown and Levinson’s politeness model has become a classic and that their theoretical considerations have shaped the development and direction of the politeness research. Similarly to Lakoff’s theory of politeness as conflict-avoidance process, Brown and Levinson base their theory on the assumption that politeness means non-imposing and non-intruding on other people, their needs and their feelings (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987).

#### 1.2.4. Scollon and Scollon’s politeness system

Scollon and Scollon seem to see communication as a process which involves the negotiation of meaning through discourse. Scollon and Scollon propose a more social interactional perspective on politeness and the negotiation of face relationship. Scollon and Scollon’s (1995) politeness theory is also well-known in the intercultural communication field aiming to realize the entire communicative system as part of politeness system. Scollon and Scollon’ (1995) face is analyzed taking into accounts individual and group needs. Due to the ambiguity of language and the fact that meanings are jointly constructed by the interlocutors, it is essential that the receiver draw inferences about the sender’s intentions (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). They define politeness systems as “general and persistent regularities in face relationships” (Scollon and Scollon, 1995, p. 42). Their politeness systems consist of three subsystems: the solidarity politeness system, the deference politeness system, as well as the hierarchical politeness system. These three systems are distinctive generally based on the existence of social distance (+D or –D) and power difference (+P or – P) among the interlocutors.

### 1.3. Speech acts

One of the most important and relevant concepts in the philosophy of language and linguistics, especially in pragmatics is the concept of a speech act, the concept introduced by Austin (1962, 1970, 1996) and later elaborated by a number of linguists and philosophers of language (Searle, 1969, 1976, 1979; Bach & Harnish, 1979).

Speech acts have been discussed to be culturally specific and to vary from one culture to another on various grounds (Baicchi, 2009; Huang, 2010). Baicchi suggests (2009, p. 212) that speech acts vary in the degree of appropriateness they express in versatile cultures and language communities.

With regard to Austin’s Speech Act Theory (1962), compliments appear as speech acts within the category of behabitives (1962, p. 159). When it comes to compliment responses, Searle (1979, p. 15) names ‘thank’ within expressives and the logic behind classifying any compliment response as an expressive. A compliment and a corresponding compliment response concoct a complex speech situation, a binary speech act that has attracted a great deal of attention in pragmatics, especially from the perspective of cross-cultural communication.

### 1.4. Compliment and compliment response

Compliments have attracted so much attention in the field of socio-linguistics and a definition that is quite frequently used in the literature is the one by Holmes (1988, p. 446):

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.

A speech act that completes a complimenting event is a compliment response. It is important that compliment responses should be analyzed as well in order to discern linguistic politeness patterns regarding complimenting behaviour. There are many studies that investigate compliments, compliment responses or perceptions of compliments.

* ***Compliment responses in American English***

One might say that in English speaking cultures, accepting a compliment by saying a single “Thank you” may suffice and at the same time be considered the most adequate response (Johnson, 1979, p. 43-44). However, Pomerantz (1978) argues that this might not be the case in the American English setting. Her theory supposes two conflicting principles that put pressure on an addressee when s/he is to respond to a compliment. She suggests that in any conversation, it is preferable to avoid disagreement and as such, a preferred compliment response should be one of acceptance and agreement. However, a response of this kind would correlate with one’s expression of self-praise, which may be regarded negative by the complimenter.

Based on two general principles of Pomerantz (1978), Herbert (1986) came up with three categories of compliment responses: Agreement, Nonagreement, and other interpretations, each of which includes several sub-types.

* ***Compliment responses in Vietnamese***

The earliest cross-cultural contrastive study that sheds light on the communicative events of complimenting and responding to compliment is Nguyen Quang (1999), namely “Some verbal differences in complimenting and responding to compliments in American English and Vietnamese”. In that study, he offers in-depth verbal analysis of the speech acts of paying and giving compliments through the lens of addressing terms, directness-indirectness and modality.

In Tran’s (2007a) study of complimenting behavior between Australia and Vietnamese, a different approach for categorizing compliment responses is created. Based on her data, she develops two compliment response continuums, whereby she presents specific compliment response strategies as inseparable components. The first continuum (acceptance continuum) captures responses from acceptance to denial, represented in compliment upgrade and disagreement on the extreme ends, whereas the second (avoidance continuum) shows responses from expressing gladness on one end to opt out on the other.

A recent study by Pham (2014) explores the strategies employed by the Vietnamese to respond to compliments and the influence of compliment receivers’ perception of the compliment on their responses. In that study, she categorizes compliment responses according to three broad strategies: accepting, rejecting and deflecting. Within these strategies, she identifies specific compliment responses and arranges them on continua relative to their level of strength, from strongest to weakest.

## Chapter 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Research methodology

#### 2.1.1. A mixed methods, interpretive study

Researchers working in the interpretive paradigm prefer qualitative methods because these enable them to understand how people interpret human interaction (Guba & Lincoln, 1999). This present research study employed interpretivism as its theoretical perspective, aiming to investigate complimenting practices and examine perceptions of the use of compliments in both Vietnamese and English.

To address the research questions listed in the first chapter of this study, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed, necessitating a multiple discourse data collection method.

#### 2.1.2. Discourse completion tasks (DCTs)

Discourse completion task (DCT) has been the most extensively-used method for data collection in pragmatics research. It was first employed by Blum-Kulka (1982) to investigate pragmatic speech act realizations. In DCT, participants are provided with a number of described situations with spaces to be filled by what they would say if they were in such situations in real life. Kasper and Dahl (1991, p. 221) define it as ‘written questionnaires including a number of brief situational descriptions, followed by a short dialogue with an empty slot of the speech act under study. This indicates that it is a type of unfinished dialogue which should be complemented by a rejoinder which is a sociolinguistic appropriate speech act.

#### 2.1.3. Role plays

Role-play situations are an imitation of actual social communications presumed and performed by participants’ identified roles within particular situations. Kasper and Rose (2002, p. 86) define role-play as “a social or human activity in which participants ‘take on’ and ‘act out’ specified ‘roles’, often within a predefined social framework or situational blueprint (a ‘scenario’)”.

#### 2.1.4. Interviews

Two types of interviews have been identified: structured closed- ended interviewing and semi-structured open-ended interviewing. According to Burns (2000) and Corbetta (2003), structured closed-ended interview entails asking the interviewees the same questions using the same wording in the same order. Semi structured interview is also advantageous in terms of giving more time to interviewing the informant, hence getting more detailed responses (Burns, 2000). This means that answers will be given from the informants’ viewpoint using their native language, not being influenced by the interviewer’s standpoint trying to use expressions to meet his/her expectations.

### 2.2. Data collection

#### 2.2.1. Participants

The overall population of participants in this study was 237, which was divided quite evenly into two big groups- American natives and Vietnamese natives. In the American group, the number of female respondents was 61 while 56 of them were male. The Vietnamese group also had a tendency that more female informants took part in the study than male ones. Out of 120 Vietnamese participants, 68 ones were female while the number of male ones was 52.

#### 2.2.2. The DCTs

A pilot DCT was designed and tested. The purpose of this trial run was to identify the existing flaws in the wordings and order of the questions as well as potential practical problems in following the research procedure. The DCT used in this research consisted of two parts, the first one is the introduction to the survey and the second section contains 12 situations which were discreetly constructed to investigate the gender, social status and complimenting topic variables.

#### 2.2.3. Role plays

The number of role play participants in both groups is 46, which comprise of 21 coming from the U.S and 25 from Ha Noi, Viet Nam. They were fully informed about the nature, purposes and procedures of the role plays in advance, and consented in writing to participate and be video-taped. Role-play participants were asked to act out in pair the set of 4 scenarios namely "Thesis defense", "Helping friend", "Weight loss", and "A new MacBook". Those 4 situations are taken from the DCTs and they are actually the ones which come up with many compliment response strategies. I briefly informed the participants which role they were to act and what they would be expected to say in such a scenario by Scenario Card.

#### 2.2.4. Interviews

The semi-structured interview is a follow-up instrument after using the instrument DCT and role play (the gap between these approaches is 1 to 2 weeks) - an approach I designed to follow up the DCT participants and investigate their reflections on complimenting behaviors, in particular, with compliment responses. 23 interviewees from the American cohort, 25 from the Vietnamese cohort took part. They were all chosen on a volunteer basis and were well informed about the purpose of the interviews. The questions raised in the interviews were similar for all participants. Besides, the interviewees could decide whether to meet in-person or have Skype, ZALO, and Facebook Messenger Video call with the researcher at any time.

### 2.3. Data analysis

#### 2.3.1. The DCTs

The DCT data will be statistically analyzed using IBM statistical software package SPSS. I used the Chi-square statistical tool for analysis frequency distributions, chi-square goodness-of-fit test, cross-tabulations and tests of significance. It also allowed investigation of relationships among variables: gender, social status and compliment topics, as well as the 2- cohort-types of respondents and their choice of macro-level strategies and micro-level strategies used to respond to compliments. The standard of P <0.05 was used to show the significance level.

To reflect the nature of the data collected, both regarding the American and Vietnamese data sets, I decided to embed some of the compliment response strategies nominated by Yu (2003). The annexation of Ruhi’s taxonomy (2006) is reflected through the inclusion of the sub-category of Appreciation (token + comment,) as an acceptance strategy and addition of three combination strategies on macro-level. This macro-level strategy - Combination - accounts for the responses manifesting two sub-categories of the macro-level strategies of Acceptance, Deflection/Evasion or Rejection. The following table depicts the chosen taxonomy of compliment responses that I have adapted and employed for the analysis.

Table 11: Adapted taxonomy of Compliment responses

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Macro-level strategies** | **Micro-level strategies** | **Example** |
| ***I. Acceptance*** | * 1. Appreciation token | - Thank you!  (Cám ơn!) |
| * 1. Agreement | - Yeah, it is.  (Đúng vậy!) |
| * 1. Expressing gladness | - I am so glad that I can help!  (Mình rất vui vì có thể giúp được cậu!) |
| * 1. Upgrade | - Maybe it's because I'm very active.  - Damn it, I'm perfect.  (Chuyện! Tao chỉ có là hoàn hảo!) |
| * 1. Joke | - What a cute chubby little boy!  - Cute as his mom and chubby as his dad!  (- Ôi em bé dễ thương mũm mĩm yêu quá!  - Uh, dễ thương giống mẹ còn mũm mĩm giống bố!) |
| * 1. Laughter | You look smarter with this new laptop! – [Loud laughter]  (- Có con máy mới nhìn ngon hẳn!  - Haha) |
| * 1. Acceptance association | - Thank you! I am so glad you like it!  (Cám ơn! Mình rất vui vì bạn thích!) |
| ***II. Amendment*** | * 1. Return | - Your mother used to cook very well, too.  (Mẹ bạn nấu ăn cũng rất ngon đấy!) |
| * 1. Downgrade | - It’s my duty, I do it with pleasure.  (Đây là trách nhiệm của mình mà!) |
| * 1. Question | - You look smart with the new laptop! - What do you mean to "look smart"?  (Bạn trông thật bảnh với chiếc máy tính mới! - Ý bạn “bảnh” là thế nào? ) |
| * 1. Comment | - Your dress looks nice.  - I bought it yesterday.  (Váy đẹp nhỉ!- Mình mới mua hôm qua!) |
| * 1. Transfer | - I couldn’t have done it without you.  (Nếu như không có cô, em không thể có được ngày hôm nay!) |
| * 1. Amendment association | - Really? You think so? Honestly I just thought I was lucky.  (Thật sao? Bạn nghĩ vậy ư? Thực tình mà nói mình chỉ ăn may thôi!) |
| * 1. ***Non-acceptance*** | * 1. Disagreement | - I don’t think so.  (Mình không nghĩ vậy!) |
| * 1. Qualification | -You must be very smart. You did well on the previous exam.  - Not really, you did better.  (Cậu giỏi thật đấy! Bài kiểm tra hôm nọ làm siêu thật!- Không hẳn, cậu làm tốt hơn.) |
| * 1. Diverge | - You did well on the previous exam!  - Let’s try to study harder and get the scholarship!  (Bài kiểm tra hôm nọ cậu làm giỏi thật!- Chúng mình cùng cố gắng học hành chăm chỉ hơn để lấy học bổng nhé!) |
| * 1. Non-acceptance association | - No, you did a better job. Why don’t we get a drink after school?  (Không, cậu làm tốt hơn. Chúng mình sau giờ học đi uống nước đi!) |
| ***IV. Combination*** | * 1. Combination 1 (accept+amend) | - Thank you. I couldn’t have done it without you.  (Cám ơn thầy. Em không thể được như vậy nếu không có thầy chỉ bảo.) |
| * 1. Combination 2 (accept and non-accept) | - Pleasure was all mine. Let’s study harder next term.  (Đây là niềm vinh hạnh của tớ. Kì tới học hành chăm chỉ hơn nhé!) |
| * 1. Combination 3 (amend and non-accept) | - I tried really hard to get the scholarship but honestly you deserved it more than me.  (Tớ đã cố gắng rất vất vả để giành học bổng đấy nhưng kì thưc, tớ thấy cậu xứng đán hơn tớ.) |
| ***V. Opting out*** | * 1. Opting out with fillers | - You look great!- Awwwww  (Uầy! Trông ngon đấy!) |
| * 1. Opting out without anything/ no acknowledgement (silence) | - You look smart with the new laptop! - [Silence]  (Có máy tính mới nhìn sáng sủa hẳn!- [Im lặng]) |
| * 1. Opting out with topic change | - What a nice car! – What do you think of the color?  (Xe mới đẹp nhỉ!- Cậu nghĩ sao về màu sơn xe?) |
| * 1. Expressing embarrassment | - You are so good at it! – Oops, I am embarrassed.  (Giỏi quá cơ! – Ôi, ngại quá!) |

#### 2.3.2. Role plays

In addition to being coded for complimenting macro-level and micro-level strategies, the role plays were also coded for alerter, head, and supportive moves (Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989). This was done because the role plays had features of more natural interaction.

#### 2.3.3. Interviews

The interview data were coded and categorized using NVIVO software version 11 for common and emergent themes. NVIVO software is a robust and reliable program, appropriate for qualitative data analysis of text transcripts of interviews.

#### 2.3.4. Triangulation

Triangulation was incorporated in this research study through the use of multiple methods: literature review, questionnaires, role plays and interviews; different sources: questionnaires, transcripts; and from different sites of data collection (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hue, other provinces in Vietnam; Iowa, New Hampshire, Minnesota, New York, Texas and California) and from different participants (teachers, teacher educators, native speakers of Vietnamese, and native speakers of American English).

### 2.4. Reliability and validity of the study

#### 2.4.1. Intrument’s valitiy

To attain face-validity, the DCT questionnaire versions and the interview questions were examined by 2 two linguistic professors (one in Vietnam and one in the U.S) and an experienced PhD candidate specialized in translation and TESOL.

The content validity of the DCT, role-play and interview was substantiated through a pilot study done on a number of students to develop the final discourse completion task (DCT) and the role-play version, as well as the interview questions. Cheng’s (2005) pilot study DCT was adopted and piloted.

To maintain the construct validity, developing the research instruments was a two-stage process which involved identifying the nature of the instruments as well as determining the contextual variables to be examined.

#### 2.4.2. Research reliability

The reliability of the findings of the pilot study was ensured by co-analysis of the content of the participants’ DCT data. The present researcher and the co-analyst (a bilingual linguist Dr. Trieu Thu Hang did a preliminary classification of some DCTs’ and RPs’ responses in light of the coding scheme to ensure agreement between both classifications.

To ensure that the reliability of the coding scheme and minimize the instrumental errors, the researcher checked and confirmed the new scheme with a bilingual linguist in the field. After revisions were made, a random sample of 6 role-play transcripts and 6 DCT questionnaires from six participants from both native groups were given to two linguist raters: Dr. Trieu Thu Hang from University of Languages and International Studies and Dr. Diana Duzik from University of Minnesota to classify the responses.

# Chapter 3. Presentation of results and findings

### 3.1. DCT analysis

#### 3.1.1. Analysis of American compliment responses

##### 3.1.1.1. Macro-level findings

A total of 1404 compliment responses were collected from 117 American native speakers and they are classified according to the taxonomy of compliment responses adopted for the present research analyses.

Table 12: Compliment responses on macro-level (American data)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Macro-level strategies*** | ***Frequency*** | ***Percent*** |
| Acceptance | 756 | 53.85% |
| Amendment | 243 | 17.31% |
| Non-acceptance | 177 | 12.61% |
| Combination | 204 | 14.53% |
| Opting out | 24 | 1.71% |

##### 3.1.1.2. Micro-level findings

There are 24 micro-level strategies. Out of this list, the three groups of strategies are categorized, which are group 1 with the highest percentages, group 2 with the second highest percentages and group 3 which comprises strategies with the lowest percentages.

Table 13: Compliment responses on micro-level (American data)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ***Micro-level strategies*** | ***Frequency*** | ***Percent*** |
| 1. Appreciation token | 418 | 29.77 |
| 1. Agreement | 73 | 5.20 |
| 1. Expressing gladness | 115 | 8.19 |
| 1. Upgrade | 43 | 3.06 |
| 1. Joke | 51 | 3.63 |
| 1. Laughter | 1 | 0.07 |
| 1. Acceptance association | 55 | 3.92 |
| 1. Return | 41 | 2.92 |
| 1. Downgrade | 26 | 1.85 |
| 1. Question | 49 | 3.49 |
| 1. Comment | 111 | 7.91 |
| 1. Transfer | 14 | 1.00 |
| 1. Amendment association | 2 | 0.14 |
| 1. Disagreement | 136 | 9.69 |
| 1. Qualification | 18 | 1.28 |
| 1. Diverge | 20 | 1.42 |
| 1. Non-acceptance association | 3 | 0.21 |
| 1. Combination 1: Yes & more response | 149 | 10.61 |
| 1. Combination 2: Yes & no response | 34 | 2.42 |
| 1. Combination 3: No & more response | 21 | 1.50 |
| 1. Opting out with fillers | 6 | 0.43 |
| 1. Opting out with silence | 8 | 0.57 |
| 1. Opting out with topic change | 2 | 0.14 |
| 1. Expressing embarrassment | 8 | 0.57 |

##### 3.1.1.3. Gender-based results

The distribution of a total of 1404 compliment responses across gender collected from the American native speakers appears to be balanced. Out of 1404 responses, 732 ones were from female respondents whereas 672 ones were produced by male. Despite the residuals of 30.0 and -30.0, indicated in figure 3, the chi-square goodness-of-fit test determined that the observed values were not statistically significantly different from the expected ones (the p-value= 0.109, which is above the significance level of 0.05). These findings imply that the data sample is not biased in terms of the informants’ gender i.e. the number of compliment responses given by both men and women are balanced.

As can be seen from Table 16 (See Appendix 5/ Table 16), Chi-square exact test suggests the chi-square statistic of 7.815, the degrees of freedom of 4 and the p-value of 0.099. Being above the significance level of 0.05, the p-value shows that there is no statistical significance in the association between macro-level compliment response strategies and the variable of gender\_informant.

##### 3.1.1.4. Status-based results

Table 20 highlights adjusted residuals which explain that compliments given by someone of higher status are tended to be more accepted (adjusted residual= 2.6) and ones given by someone of equal status are less accepted (adjust residual= -3.0). Whereas, non-acceptance is found to be overrepresented between status equals i.e. friends or classmates (adjusted residual= 4.9) and underrepresented with someone from higher status (adjusted residual= -3.9).

When it comes to micro-level strategies (See Appendix 5/ Table 21), interesting results are found in the choice of some strategies namely expressing gladness, acceptance association, return, comment, disagreement, combination 1, combination 3 and opting out with fillers. As can be seen from the highlights in figure 2, there is a small overrepresentation of acceptance association (in people of lower status), return (in people of lower status), comment (in people of higher status), combination 1 (in people of lower status) and opting out with fillers (in people of equal status). This is reflected by the number of adjusted residuals ranging from 2.0-3.0.

##### 3.1.1.5. Topic-based results

It can be seen from the figure 9 that compliments on performance, personality, appearance and possession mark the acceptance rate as the highest whereas opting out is the least favored macro-level strategy out of 5. However, within each group, the ranks of the other three macro-level strategies are quite different. In personality and possession group, the pattern is amendment-non-acceptance- combination. Whilst, in performance group, the second and third pattern are somewhat different, which are non-acceptance- amendment- combination. Lastly, in appearance group, the third highest rank belongs to both non-acceptance and combination strategy. An in-depth analysis of the impact that topics of compliments might have on a compliment response strategies ensues.

There are many differences among the choices of 5 macro-level strategies in 5 groups of complimenting topics. In terms of acceptance strategy, performance compliments (adjusted residual= 4.5) were responded more than personality ones (adjusted residual= -5.4). In amendment, there is an underrepresentation of this strategy when replying to performance compliments (adjust residual= -3.9). Two striking findings concerning the use of non-acceptance and combination strategy are found. Regarding the combination strategy, a noteworthy number of respondents chose it to respond to performance compliments (adjust residual= 5.4).

Table 23 (See Appendix 5/ Table 23) indicates the specific preferences for 24 micro-level strategies and as a matter of fact, when the topic of compliment changed, the way American native respondents replied indeed differently. One of the most remarkable point of contrast is in the personality compliments. The American tended to overwhelmingly prefer to express their gladness (adjusted residual= 9.0) rather than say “thank you” as an appreciation token (adjusted residual=-4.7) or reject the compliments (adjusted residual= -5.0). However, when the compliments were about one’s appearance, instead of expressing gladness or saying no to the complimenters, the American respondents showed an inclination to just express their appreciation by thanking (adjusted residual= 8.2).

#### 3.1.2. Analysis of Vietnamese compliment responses

##### 3.1.2.1. Macro-level findings

Macro-level analysis suggests that nearly one third of all responses are accepted (32.08%) whereas 25.97% account for amendment in responses and 20.07% reflect non-acceptance. As regards combined compliment response strategy, they constitute 16.60%. Meanwhile, opting out was rarely employed (5.28%).

Table 24: Compliment responses on macro-level (Vietnamese data)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Macro-level strategies** | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
| Acceptance | 462 | 32.08% |
| Amendment | 374 | 25.97% |
| Non-acceptance | 289 | 20.07% |
| Combination | 239 | 16.60% |
| Opting out | 76 | 5.28% |
| Total | 1440 | 100% |

##### 3.1.2.2. Micro-level findings

Table 25: Compliment responses on micro-level (Vietnamese data)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Micro-level strategies** | **Frequency** | **Percent** |
| 1. Appreciation token | 218 | 15.14 |
| 1. Agreement | 56 | 3.89 |
| 1. Expressing gladness | 25 | 1.74 |
| 1. Upgrade | 51 | 3.54 |
| 1. Joke | 40 | 2.78 |
| 1. Laughter | 14 | 0.97 |
| 1. Acceptance association | 58 | 4.03 |
| 1. Return | 44 | 3.06 |
| 1. Downgrade | 76 | 5.28 |
| 1. Question | 48 | 3.33 |
| 1. Comment | 130 | 9.03 |
| 1. Transfer | 64 | 4.44 |
| 1. Amendment association | 12 | 0.83 |
| 1. Disagreement | 200 | 13.89 |
| 1. Qualification | 9 | 0.63 |
| 1. Diverge | 75 | 5.21 |
| 1. Non-acceptance association | 5 | 0.35 |
| 1. Combination 1: Yes & more response | 125 | 8.68 |
| 1. Combination 2: Yes & no response | 53 | 3.68 |
| 1. Combination 3: No & more response | 61 | 4.24 |
| 1. Opting out with fillers | 1 | 0.07 |
| 1. Opting out with silence | 30 | 2.08 |
| 1. Opting out with topic change | 21 | 1.46 |
| 1. Expressing embarrassment | 24 | 1.67 |

Table 25 reveals the frequencies as well as the percentages of 24 micro-level strategies that Vietnamese native speakers used when responding to compliments. This table can be summed up by the representation of three groups. Group 1 contains four micro-level strategies with the biggest number of choices. Subsequently, group 2 with the second highest rate of percentages is made up of 17 sub strategies. Lastly, group 3 covers three micro-level strategies with the lowest number of choices.

##### 3.1.2.3. Gender-based results

Table 26 and 27 make a suggestion that the majority of Vietnamese responses (56.7%) were given by women. The residuals of ±8.0 may imply that the numbers of responses given by men and women are statistically different; however, the chi-square goodness-of-fit test prove that those discrepancies are statistically insignificant (the p-value =0.144 is above the significance level of 0.05). This signifies that the results could not be deemed biased on the ground of a potential preponderance of responses given by women.

Looking at the frequencies and percentages in table 28 and replying on a visual representation of the male and female distribution of responses on macro-level that figure 10 provides, there is only one difference in the rank of the third favored macro-level strategy. Women chose to refuse a compliment as the third favored choice whereas men opted for combination in the same vein. Despite that minor divergence, one can hypothesize that men and women do not differ so much in responding to compliments i.e. gender does not exert any influence on the choice of a response strategy.

##### 3.1.2.4. Status-based results

A look at the chi-square test table in table 33 (See Appendix 5/ Table 23) reveals that status does exert an influence on the choice of macro-level strategies among Vietnamese native speakers. The p-value is 0.00, which is smaller than the significance value of 0.05.

Concerning Table 34, (See Appendix 5/ Table 34), as regards micro-level strategies and their distribution with respect to status factor, some intriguing and thought-provoking results were obtained (see table 34). First of all, the p-value is smaller than the significance level of 0.05, which reveals a great statistical influence of status relation on the choices of micro-level strategies. This means that the great differences can be found within 24 sub strategies.

When responding to compliments, ones of lower status were more inclined to shift credit to the complimenters or to the third party (adjusted residual=10.8) whereas they made less use of diverge and question strategy (adjusted residual= -4.0 and -4.4, respectively). This may be seen as an act of politeness from the Vietnamese complimentees since just saying thanks and asking someone of higher status questions may be regarded as being rude.

Regarding the response choices of Vietnamese respondents who were at a higher social distance, it is proven that they rarely chose to reject the compliments (adjusted residual= -7.5) or shift credit to other (adjust residual=-5.0). On the contrary, they were more at ease to opt for sub strategies such as giving comment (adjusted residual=3.8), diverging the compliments (adjusted residual= 3.8) or making jokes (adjusted residual=2.9).

Lastly, in stark contrast to the choices from ones from lower and higher status, only Vietnamese status equals showed a consuming preference towards the disagreement strategy (adjusted residual= 8.5) and a certain predilection for asking questions (adjusted residual=4.0). Perhaps, since the interlocutor was friend or classmate, the respondents felt more comfortable to express their inner feelings by rejecting the compliments without the fear of being judged or embarrassing the complimenters.

##### 3.1.2.5. Topic-based results

The most apparent remark that can be made is on the choices of acceptance strategy. As a matter of fact, this strategy is often regarded as the most preferred one (this can be ascertained by previous findings from a great amount of research in the same field). However, when it comes to the changes of topics, acceptance does not prevail to rank the first anymore. When responding to possession, appearance and performance compliments, this strategy is mostly chosen. However, on replying to personality compliments, only one fourth of Vietnamese respondents said yes to those. In contrast, they chose to refuse the compliments when it comes to talk about how good their personalities were.

In relation with the choices of non-acceptance, it also comes as a surprise that very few Vietnamese native respondents selected this macro-level strategy to respond to appearance compliments (it only accounts for 6.67%).

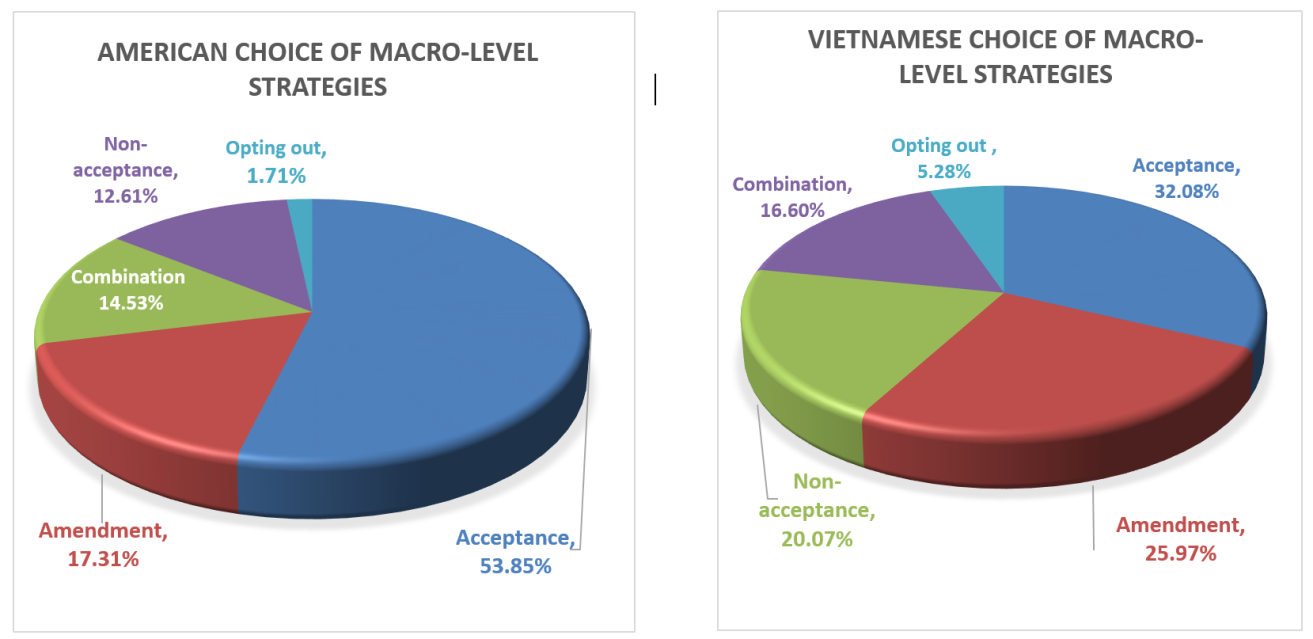
Finally, another point that worth considering is on the choices of the least preferred strategy, which are opting out. In case of responses to performance compliments, there was a very little rate of occurrence (only 1.11%). Meanwhile, as regards answering positive remarks on possession, there is nearly one tenth of the Vietnamese respondents choosing to do so.

As observed from table 36 (See Appendix 5/ Table 36), the p-value (<0.01) reflects a certain amount of statistical influence of topics on micro-level strategies. Out of 24 sub strategies, 19 ones underwent changes which are either lower or higher than the expected counts. In terms of the responses to possession compliments, Vietnamese native informants preferred to upgrade their compliment (adjusted residual= 6.7), opt out by changing the topic (adjusted residual= 3.9) whereas they were more reluctant to make use of strategies such as question (adjusted residual = -2.4) and transfer (adjusted residual= -3.5).

3.1.3. American vs. Vietnamese compliment response strategies

Regarding the choices of acceptance strategy, there also exists a point of divergence. If more than half of the compliment responses were accepted by the American informants, only a third of Vietnamese chose to do so. In fact, it can be seen that the gap between each macro-level strategy in the Vietnamese group is not as big as in the American one.

Figure 13: Compliment responses on macro-level across nationality relation



As can be viewed from table 37, the p-value of the chi-square goodness-of-fit test for the variable “nationality” is 0.456 which is higher than the significance value of 0.05. This means that the compliment responses of American and Vietnamese group were quite equally distributed. Also, it affirms that the chi-square test of independence to elaborate on the relationship between nationality and micro-level, macro-level strategies can be proceeded.

There was an overrepresentation of acceptance strategy in the American group of informants meanwhile in the Vietnamese one, the total number of accepting choices was much below the expected count (adjusted residual= ±11.7).On the contrary, regarding the choices of amendment, non-acceptance and opting out, the Vietnamese respondents seemed to prefer those strategies more than the American fellows. It is illustrated by the adjusted residuals of 5.6 for amendment, 5.4 for non-acceptance and 5.2 for opting out.

### 3.2. Role play analysis

#### 3.2.1. Overall tendency of compliment response macro-level strategies across groups

* Acceptance strategies

The number of American respondents opted for acceptance strategy was only 31, which accounted for more than one third of the total strategies used. Meanwhile, only half of that number was from Vietnamese respondents. This finding is similar to that in the DCT data that the American native respondents showed more preference on accepting a compliment whilst the Vietnamese native ones tended to make use of more various strategies upon receiving a positive compliment.

However, within the macro-level strategy of acceptance, there are many intriguing remarks that can be observed. In terms of the American group of informants, the most preferred micro-level strategy was still appreciation token and thanking to be specific. However, the way they expressed their gratitude also varied. Most American informants responded in naturalized role-plays by saying “Thanks” since it was an equal interaction among friends in scenario 2 and 4. Just a small number of respondents replied “Thank you” to show more formality towards the complimenters.

* Amendment strategies

Both group of respondents rarely opted for amendment as the single strategy to respond to compliments. This is somewhat different from the results gained from the DCT data, in which amendment actually stands as the second most preferred macro level strategies within Vietnamese group (25.97%).

When it comes to the naturalized role-play, the informants were asked to immerse themselves in a real life situation and they also had to familiarize with the context as well as the complimenters. That may help explain why some might respond differently from what they thought.

* Non-acceptance strategies

Another striking divergence that can be found in the role play data is seen in the way the American and Vietnamese native participants declined a compliment. Within the American group, only a minority chose to turn down compliments whereas within the Vietnamese group, more than 25% of them said no when it comes to being complimented.

* Combination strategies

Combination turns out to be the most preferred strategy of Vietnamese respondents and the second most preferred one that the American might use on responding to compliments. This is quite a surprising finding since from the DCT, combination ranks rather modestly within 5 macro level strategies. However, on conducting the role-play, the informants in both groups were found to make longer responses and they tended to bring more details to their answers by combining more than two macro level strategies to reply.

* Opting out strategies

In accordance with the results from the DCT, opting out is still the least preferred strategy. This can be seen by the rare occurrence of only 2 responses in the American group and 5 ones in the Vietnamese group.

#### 3.2.2. Gender-based differences in compliment responses

The American male respondents preferred to simply accept the compliments as the percentage of acceptance macro-level strategy constitutes nearly half of the total share. Meanwhile, on the Vietnamese male side, they showed substantial favors towards declining a compliment or combining two macro-level strategies together. This is marginally different from the Vietnamese results gained from the DCT data, in which Vietnamese native males used acceptance strategy most often out of 5 macro-level ones. (28.53%)

When the complimentee was a female, surprisingly both American and Vietnamese groups of informants opted for combination as the most favored strategy. In comparison with the findings from the DCT data, combination strategy only made up for 15.3% in the American female choices and 14.22% in the Vietnamese female choices. However, in the role-play, a great emergence of combination strategy is witnessed.

#### 3.2.3. Status-based differences in compliment responses

* Lower status:

The ways Vietnamese and American groups of native speakers responded to compliments from ones of higher status reveal many noteworthy differences. First of all, in terms of the differences between the American and Vietnamese participants of the role-play, the most preeminent one can be seen in the utilization of combination strategy. There was nearly one fifth of the American respondents chose combination strategy. However, at the same time, the Vietnamese native respondents seemed to significantly prefer to lengthen their responses by combining two macro level strategies altogether (76%).

* Higher status:

First of all, there is an absolute overrepresentation of non-acceptance and opting out strategy in the group of Vietnamese native respondents in comparison with the American group. None of the American ones chose to deny or opt out their answers on being complimented by a subordinate. Instead, the total percentage of American compliment responses choices are shared between acceptance (38.10%) and combination strategy (57.14%). In another words, when the American native respondents were complimented by a subordinate, in this case, by his/her nephew/niece, they were inclined to accept by thanking and expressing gladness and by combining two strategies altogether (appreciation and comment). This can be explained by the fact that the complimentees were of higher status. They found it easy to welcome and accept the positive comments by someone younger. Hence, they were more comfortable to thank, make jokes, asking questions and adding more background information to their answers rather than declining or trying to neglect the compliments.

* Equal status:

Regarding the American native group of respondents, acceptance and combination were chosen at the highest frequency (33.33% and 30.95% respectively). Meanwhile, in terms of two most preferred strategies of the Vietnamese ones, non-acceptance and combination still prevail. (38% and 28% respectively).

Though both groups of American and Vietnamese respondents opted for combination at such a high rate, the ways they made use of this strategy were rather dissimilar. More often, when responding to compliments from a friend, American native ones tended to blend acceptance and amendment. To be more specific, a majority of them answered by saying thanks first to accept the compliment then they added a comment to provide further background information to their reply.

#### 3.2.4. Topic-based differences in compliment responses

To respond to appearance-related compliments, the American native informants still showed a great preference towards acceptance strategy more than the remains. Once being complimented on being well-proportioned as in the scenario 3, nearly half of the American ones chose to agree or thank the complimenters. Approximately one fifth of them chose to produce a longer response by combining acceptance and amendment strategies. Following is the non-acceptance and amendment with 14.29% and standing at the bottom of the list is the opting out strategy with 9.52%.

However, in terms of the Vietnamese preferred strategies to respond to appearance positive comments, it is apparent that the distribution of five macro level strategies is substantially equal. A look at the bar chart above reveals the gap between the most and the least preferred strategy are not too wide. Acceptance is not the mostly chosen strategy as it in the choices of the American group; instead amendment and non-acceptance are more preferred with 24%. Conversely, the least preferred strategies are acceptance and opting out with 16%.

Performance-related compliment response distribution suggests many similar features in both American and Vietnamese groups of participants. First of all, a glance at the bar chart reveals that the strategy that was favored most by both groups is combination instead of acceptance. Specifically, combination are chosen at a surprisingly high rate (57.14% by American respondents and 76% by Vietnamese respondents). Secondly, it is also revealed that there is a non-occurrence of opting out strategy in both groups. Another strategy that also records a low frequency is non-acceptance. Taken together, it can be seen that when it comes to performance-related compliments, both American and Vietnamese participants tended to reply in a positive way.

In response to possession-related compliments, no general conclusion can be made in terms of approximation between the American and Vietnamese groups of native participants. Moreover, this is somewhat similar to performance-related compliment responses in the way that both groups picked up combination as the most preferred strategy and none of the American and Vietnamese ones chose opting out to reply.

In responding to personality-related compliments, the most favored strategy of American native participants is acceptance (38.10%) and following is combination with 23.81%. Amendment and non-acceptance were chosen at such a low rate of 19.05%, leaving opting out with none of the chosen responses.

### 3.3. Interview analysis

#### 3.3.1. Discussing the gender variations

* ***he American native group***

The majority of American interviewees replied “yes” to the above interview question with various comments. The American male interviewees were more “careful”, “self-deprecating”, and “gentlemanly” with females, but preferred to be “manly”, “cool”, “straightforward”, “jokingly”, “laughing-off”, “shrugging-off”, or “funnily arrogant” with males, as shown in the following quotes.

Some American native interviewees also expressed another concern for a new factor that affecting their choices of responding strategies other than gender, i.e. the motives of such compliments.

Moreover, others commented that their responses depended on different variables, such as situation, the person, the relationship, context, the motive of the compliment, or the emotional connection with the complimenter.

Similarly to some native Vietnamese, a number of Native Americans also mentioned that they would feel happier if the compliment was from the opposite gender.

* ***The Vietnamese native group***

Both male and female interviewees in Vietnam answered an overwhelming “yes” to the above interview question, except a few instances of variable-dependent answers and “no” to the interview question. Male Vietnamese participants with the “yes” answer reported that they would be more “gentle”, “respectful”, “polite”, “formal”, “sentimental”, “shy”, “embarrassed”, or “nervous” when they received a compliment from a female in Vietnam, while they would try to portray themselves as more “masculine”, “humorous”, “impolite” (if the relationship is close), “informal”, “casual” and “frank” with male Vietnamese.

Vietnamese females tended to return the compliment back, or joke with and talk, more with females rather than with males, for fear of causing misunderstanding. With the opposite gender, Vietnamese females might use smile, a brief response of “thank you”, questioning or formal responses.

When the compliment was from an opposite gender, for example, from a boy to a girl, some reported on a more positive reception.

In addition to the above findings from the Vietnamese native group, the frequency of receiving compliments from the opposite gender seems to be lower than those from the same gender, as illustrated by a female interviewee in Vietnam.

#### 3.3.2. Discussng the status variations

* ***The American group***

Most of the interviewees reported that they were not much influenced when deciding on the CR strategies if the complimenter is of higher or lower social status. Some believed that their CR choices were completely independent of social status factor whereas some informed they usually did not take social status into consideration when responding to compliments from status unequals. However, a minority of interviewees still got affected by the social status of the complimenters. Sometimes, they felt that it was really troublesome to respond in a proper way toward status unequals.

What is worth noticing is that more female reckoned that they were somehow affected by the social status of the complimenters. Meanwhile, not many American male interviewees felt reluctant or pressured to deliver a compliment response towards their superiors such as their boss.

On discussing the favorite CR strategies of the American interviewees, it was by and large approved by the majority of participants that appreciation token persisted to be the most favorable one in almost every case.

* ***The Vietnamese group***

Contrary to the American group, most of the Vietnamese interviewees agreed on the fact that they were quite affected by the complimenter’s social status when responding to a specific compliment. What is more, some even went further to assert that status was the factor that mostly affect their choice of compliment responses. Those opinions are stressed by the following responses. They also gave reasons by maintaining that it was necessary to choose appropriate replies toward complimenters of varied status.

#### 3.3.3. Discussing the compliment topic variations

* ***The American group***

Upon reflecting on the influence of compliment topic on the choices of responding to compliment, most of the American native interviewees came to an agreement that compliment topic played a crucial role. 4 interviewees even stressed that compliment topic was the factor that made them care most in comparison with gender and social status.

In terms of the compliment topic that the interviewees mostly respond to. There is a variety of different opinions. However, the one that receives most correspondence from many American interviewees is they preferred to receive and respond to compliments on their performance. Reversely, compliments on appearance were rather hard to receive since some regard it as body shaming and they felt it inappropriate to comment on their body.

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* ***The Vietnamese group***

In accordance with the American group of interviewees, the Vietnamese one also regarded compliment topic as an important factor affecting their choices of compliment responses. One interviewee also added further details on her choices of strategies upon receiving different compliments.

However, different from the American group, many Vietnamese interviewees reported that they might respond differently to different topics but it did not mean there is any tabooed topic that they feel uncomfortable to reply to.

#### 3.3.4. Discussing the personal assumptions

* ***The American group***

American native speakers in their comments to ideal responses to compliments include the following views: (1) conventional answer of “thank you”, “cheers”, “thanks” with or without qualifying statements; (2) appropriate answers depend on the variable such as the formality of the situation, compliment topic, and the complimenter; (3) expression of uncertainty regarding interview question.

* ***The Vietnamese group***

The native Vietnamese interviewees expressed the following major opinions on what an ideal response to a compliment should be: (1) conventional answers such as “thank you”, “you are welcome”, “thank you, I am glad to hear that”; (2) depend on the variables of relationship, people, place or gender; (3) no ideal response or fixed answer. Both male and female interviewees mentioned their concern of politeness, face and appropriate manners.

3.3.5. Discussing the possible overgeneralizations

* The American group:

The majority of American interviewees perceive that they do not always say “thank you” when they respond to compliments. They say “thank you” with some qualifying statements, self-deprecate, brush off, and even deny the compliments. They were constantly expressing themselves in a way that it did not show “s/he blows his/her own trumpet”. Some interviewees maintained that it was polite and OK to say “thank you” in response to a compliment, regardless of what the other comments after or before “thank you” are.

* ***The Vietnamese group***

Contrary to the findings in the American group, the Vietnamese native interviewees believed that the American monolingual speakers of English would say “thank you” when they responded to compliments. They also pointed out that the responses of monolingual speakers of American English were more truth-based than those of Vietnamese.

### 3.4. Discussion of the findings

After having presented the data analysis in mixed methods research, I now reach the point of having an overall look at both quantitative and qualitative results in order to answer my primary research questions, which are shown in the following:

1. *What are the similarities and differences between American English and Vietnamese in terms of compliment response strategies on the macro-level?*
2. *How does gender affect the choices of compliment response strategies?*
3. *How does status affect the choices of compliment response strategies?*
4. *How does compliment topic affect the choices of compliment response strategies?*

#### 3.4.1. The preferences of CR strategies on macro-level in both groups

The DCT analysis has brought close together some significant findings. Firstly, acceptance is the most preferred CR strategy in both American and Vietnamese groups. It represents more than half of the choices from the Native American respondents and nearly one-third of the Vietnamese ones.

Another remarkable difference between the two groups of native informants can also be seen in the perspective that the Vietnamese group showed a more diversified preference of strategies than the American one. This can be illustrated by the humble gaps among acceptance, amendment, and combination macro-level strategies.

Intending to compare and contrast data with the DCT analysis, role-play has come up with several notable points as follows. A combination strategy emerged to occur at such a high frequency in both groups, though, in the DCT data, the numbers of combination strategies in the American and Vietnamese groups were not considerable. In both groups, more than one-third of the respondents chose to combine two (or three in some cases) altogether upon replying to a compliment. This reflects a change in CR strategies choices between the written data collecting form (DCT) and the more naturalized setting data collecting form (role-plays).

By upholding the Agreement Maxim, native speakers of American have been deemed as conceited by native speakers of East Asian languages because they flout the Maxim of Modesty. Further, under Confucian culture, to engage in the self-effacing talk is an integral part of the socialization process. Therefore, to blatantly accept a compliment is considered impolite (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 47). Moreover, Vietnamese speakers in this study regarded ‘thank you’ as insufficient appreciation. The role-play data demonstrated that Vietnamese people often elaborate on their responses with more negotiating moves to express their sincerity. Due to its brevity, ‘thank you’ shows the speaker’s lack of involvement and interest in the conversation. To the Vietnamese, ‘Thanks’ is even less appropriate. It sounds artificial and formal and, hence creates a distance between the giver and receiver of compliments.

Another point of difference lies in the fact that native speakers of Vietnamese often make use of turning down and degrading compliments than the American ones (as shown in both DCT and role play findings).

This study also revealed that native speakers of Vietnamese used a higher percentage of return compliments than the American English respondents. This preference reflects another aspect of the Vietnamese mentality in responding to compliments.

#### 3.4.2. The effect of gender on the choices of CR strategies

How compliments are received also reflects gender differences, which are revealed in the following findings. Firstly, according to the DCT analysis, the Native American informants are not affected by gender when choosing a particular strategy to react to a compliment. It is similar in both males and females of the American group that acceptance prevails as the most chosen strategy, which constitutes more than half of the choices.

Besides, on responding to compliments, American males and females were least likely to choose to opt-out. However, the role play analysis sheds such a different light on the realization of CR choices of strategies between males and females in both groups.

Contrary to the DCT findings, the choices of American male and female respondents are quite varied. Firstly, on discussing the mostly chosen strategy, it turns out that American males preferred to agree with the complimenters (acceptance: 45%); meanwhile, the opposite sex chose to combine strategies (40.91%). There are many remarkable differences between the choices of males and females in terms of the Vietnamese group. Firstly, contrary to the DCT findings, the most preferred strategy is a combination, especially because women are more inclined to use this strategy than men. Secondly, though among Vietnamese men, acceptance is still a popular choice with a quarter of the whole proportion, it witnesses such an unexpected decline in the choices of Vietnamese female group, plummeting right to the bottom of ranking with only 4.17%.

In comparing the findings collected from the DCT and role-plays, it is observable that gender exerts influence on both American and Vietnamese groups, as seen in the DCT analysis.

#### 3.4.3. The effect of status on the choices of CR strategies

As reported statistically by the DCT analysis, social status is the factor that may affect the choices of CR strategies. However, in the case of the American group, it is shown that when communicating with one of either different or equal social status, the respondents tended to most regularly choose to accept while leaving the other three macro-level strategies i.e., amendment, non-acceptance, and combination an ordinary share of choices.

By contrast with the American group, the Vietnamese one is under significant influence of the social status factor. A glance at the figures below reveals many differences in the CR patterns of choices from one of lower, higher, and equal status.

Concerning the relative social factors of distance and power, the politeness systems suggested by Scollon and Scollon (2001) could apply to all the recorded response types.

#### 3.4.4. The effect of compliment topic on the choices of CR strategies

Different compliment topics have resulted in different distributions of CR strategies, as discussed in the previous sections, which is similar to Lin et al.’s (2012) view that compliment topic is a more influential variable than the variable of the region. In terms of the similarities between both groups of native respondents, performance-related compliments were less likely to be rejected. There is nearly a non-occurrence of non-acceptance strategy in compliments about performance, as indicated in both DCT and role play results. Besides, when people replied to compliments about appearance and performance, they were more likely to accept it. As can be seen from the pie charts, the percentages of acceptance strategy in both DCT and role play are quite high.

Concerning distinguishing the differences between the two groups, three remarkable points could be drawn. Firstly, compliments about possession were mostly attended to via acceptance by the American respondents; however, this did not happen with the Vietnamese native ones. Besides, during the role-play data collecting procedure, both Vietnamese and American informants made more use of the combination strategies, especially the Yes and More combination. Very often, they might produce responses with a similar pattern like expressing agreement or thanking the complimenter then commenting on a specific feature in the subject being complimented. Secondly, in the DCT data, performance-related compliments were replied with quite a small number of combination strategies. However, during the role play, that number was doubled in both American and Vietnamese groups of respondents. This leads to a new finding that indeed, both American and Vietnamese native informants were willing to support more details about their performance or achievements of themselves. In this regard, this is somehow contrary to the perception of being modest and trying to avoid self-praise. However, such speculation could not be overgeneralized since the numbers of role-play situations are somewhat limited.

# PART 3. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

## 1. Recapitulation

Compliments and their responses are integral communicative components which are employed every day in many cultures. They are used in different settings and with different communicating purposes. Within the scope of this study, complimenting behavior, particularly responses to compliments by two distinctive groups of cultural communities namely the U.S and Vietnam are brought into examination. This study was motivated by the absence of scholarly studies investigating the influences of important social variables such as gender, social status and compliment topic on the choices of compliment response strategies. To bridge the gap in the literature, this thesis explored from the perspective of pragmatics, how differently groups of American and Vietnamese native respondents would respond to compliment in different settings and towards different communicating partners.

## 2. Implications

The study makes a certain amount of contribution to the field of cross-cultural pragmatics. To the best of my knowledge, for the first time, the factors of gender, social status, and compliment topics are elaborated on to find out whether they exert any influences on the choices of compliment responses from the complimentees. The study unveils different types of compliment responses, familiar with the American and Vietnamese native speakers, or are found in either culture.

Besides, the study also makes an original contribution to knowledge about compliment responses by exploring the unexpressed responses of the complimentees with respect to their imagined responses to compliments, which is an unexplored area in the literature

This study's findings provide in-depth knowledge about what compliment topics are suitable to use, to whom, and under which circumstances. Lastly, the research study lays the groundwork for more effective communication for American and Vietnamese native speakers. Though it has concentrated on compliment responses as a speech act, its findings can also be useful for those who need to reside or have frequent contact with people from the United States of America and Vietnam. It can broaden the understanding of both cultural groups about the dynamics of complimenting behavior in America and Vietnam. They can make thoughtful decisions about what compliment response strategy to employ, and how to use them appropriately in specific contexts. This is very significant to establishing effective communication, and to avoid potential intercultural misunderstanding.

## 3. Limitations and avenues for future research

Several caveats need to be raised concerning the first limitation. All the instruments employed have drawbacks as they may not be the best way to obtain authentic data, as discussed previously (in chapter 3). While the Discourse Completion Task is a time-efficient instrument, participants have the chance to contemplate and modify their rejoinder, which is less likely in a naturalistic spoken setting. Nonetheless, it is still crucially needed because there are no other data collection instruments to know that have as many administrative benefits as DCT. Similarly, though the participants also responded orally to the DCT, they still gave projected responses. That is what they assumed they would say in a specific situation.

Another limitation is also related to the subject pool. The study is limited to both American and Vietnamese native speakers, with a size of 237 participants. The participants were controlled in terms of age and educational level. A majority of them were mixed-gender undergraduate non-language significant students. Consequently, the generalizations and conclusions will only apply to subjects that share similar characteristics. The data would have been complemented and enriched more if the study enrolled a high number of participants.

The study is restricted in terms of the speech community and communicative act of responding to compliments; thus, it reflects only those it applies to. Therefore, the researcher does not recommend making any generalization based on the present findings to other English speaking countries. It would be worth exploring through further research the hypothesis that cultural variation in compliment responses and other communicative acts such as the request, compliment concerns both its value and the forms it takes in various social situations in the cultures under the present study and others. This could raise cultural differences as it could help understand these speech events in the multicultural contexts, thus reducing intercultural communication breakdown.

As we have seen, this study's American and Vietnamese participants show that the compliment response strategies they have employed are relatively similar, and the slight differences, noticed on a deeper level, may explain particular cultural distinctions. Hence, it may be speculated that interaction between American and Vietnamese native speakers may trigger misunderstandings and communication breakdowns, which could be debated to have their roots in those assumed cultural differences. This speculation is a potential issue worth further exploration.

In addition to this, it would be beneficial if this research, along with the same research questions and methodology is repeated, but with an augmented data set. Here, a future researcher is well-advised to consult power and effect size as statistical measures that would come handy to determining the size of a sample.

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