Investigating the structural patterns and pragmatic functions of compliments made by Iranian EFL learners

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Abstract

This study aims to delve into the unobservable dimensions of deciding and acting in a pragmatically significant speech event. Utilizing a Discourse Completion Test questionnaire, it seeks to find out the structure and pragmatic functions that lie behind EFL learners' choice of specific wording while engaged in performing a recurrent speech act in Iran i.e. compliments. To this aim, 30 EFL learners were requested to self-assess their performance in a number of presumed situations in which they were required to make compliments to different addressees. The participants were adult intermediate EFL learners in 18-35 range of age. They were of both sexes and studied English between 1.5 to 5 years. To complete the tasks, they both made notes of their responses and uttered out simultaneously why they complimented in a certain way. Their responses along with transcriptions of their recorded think-aloud protocols were subsequently analyzed in this paper as for their structures and pragmatic functions according to Manes & Wolfson (1981), and Brown & Levinson (1987).

Keywords: compliment, structural pattern, pragmatic functions, protocol analysis.

INTRODUCTION
1.1. An Overview of Compliments

The speech act of complimenting has so far been overwhelmingly regarded as one of the most obvious positive politeness strategies.That was because speakers noticed and attended to addresses' interests, wants, needs, goals, and so forth. The rapid development of studies in complimenting went hand in hand with the existing body of work on speech acts, linguistic politeness and language and gender studies which came to flourish during the 1960s-80s (Adachi, 2011).

Yu (2003) viewed compliment as a commonly-used speech act behavior the nature of which is culture-specific. Research on complimenting behavior, as described by Dunham (1992), demonstrates the importance of understanding the cross-cultural perception associated with such behavior.It should be recognized that cultural values and norms dictate not only the perception of the speech act but also the behavior associated with that speech act.As David (1999) puts it, knowing and learning about these intercultural processes involved in communication is crucial for the success of developmental projects.

1.2. Theoretical Frameworks Underlying This Study

1.2.1. *Brown and Levinson's (1987) sociolinguistic theory of politeness phenomena:*

This theory is useful for the analysis of compliments as politeness strategies because the theory's interest in compliments lies primarily in their use in redressing FTAs. In Brown and Levinson's terms, paying a compliment is a positive strategy that addresses the hearer's positive face.This is due to the fact that the act of complimenting signals concerns about the addressee's positive face by noticing or attending to the addressee's face desires (Johnson, 1992).

1.2.2. *Manes and Wolfson (1981):*

These researchers have focused on the topics of compliments, how interpersonal relationships relate to complimenting behavior and also cross-cultural differences. They have found that compliments are

highly formulaic, both in their syntactic form and in the lexical items that carry the positive evaluation. Manes and Wolfson (1981) found that 85 percent of the spoken compliments they gathered consisted of three core syntactic patterns: (1) NP is/looks (really) ADJ; (2) I (really) like/love NP, and (3) PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP. They also found that five positive evaluative adjectives *nice*, *good*, *pretty*, *beautiful*, and *great* accounted for two thirds of the adjectives that speakers used. Similarly, only two verbs, *like* and *love*, accounted for 86 percent of the positively evaluative verbs.In the present study a similar structure analysis is made but in Persian language structure and morphology.

Wolfson (1989) argued that the relationship between addresser and addressee is an important factor affecting the compliment behavior. Accordingly, in the current study we distinguished every question in the questionnaire in terms of the addresser-addressee relationship. Any one of these conditions may be the case: Recipient higher in status; recipient equal in status; recipient is lower in status.

As for the functions of compliments, the followings are derived from Manes (1983); Wolfson(1989); Herbert(1990); Holmes(1988); and Yu(1999):
- to establish solidarity between speaker and addressee,
- to expresses approval or admiration toward the listener,
- to strengthen or replace other speech acts like apologizing, greeting, reprimanding, or thanking,
- to soften acts such as criticism.
- To offer praise to reinforce or encourage the desired behavior in specific situations, such as teaching and learning,
- as sarcasm,
- as a conversation opener.

The following section tries to cast a chronological overview of the body of research into the speech act of compliments followed by the introduction of the purpose of this study.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Among the earlier studies in this realm was van Dijk's (1981) which took a pragmatic stance towards speech acts and described some possible formal and informal contexts for compliments. Another

seminal study was carried out by Manes and Wolfson (1981) who found the semantic composition of the compliments to be highly regular. In 1992, Han drew attention

n to different realizations of speech acts across different cultures, and compared the compliment responses of Korean females in English and Korean interactions. The findings showed differences in responses and indicated little pragmatic transfer. This study along with Dunham's (1992) corroborated earlier fundamental research by Wolfson (1981, 1983, 1989), Holmes & Brown (1987), and Herbert (1990) that had revealed variation in complimenting behavior with regard to cultural background, values and norms.

Wang and Tsai (2000) explored compliments and compliment responses in Taiwan Mandarin with regard to syntactic preference and compliment topic. Similarly, Ibrahim and Riyanto (2000) investigated Indonesian and American responses to compliments socio-linguistically, and found differences in terms of both the types of compliment responses chosen and the frequencies made.

In the line of studies on cultures and compliment, Golato's (2002) made a comparison of preference organization of compliment sequences between German and American families and friends. Occasionally, these cultural differences lead to severe repercussions. An interesting instance of such is presented by Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) in misinterpretation of compliments in Chinese and British business meetings.

Compliments have been studied theoretically as well in such research as Ruhi (2006). In this paper, Turkish compliment responses were analyzed according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory and Leech's (1983) conversational maxim approach. An excellent examination of theoretical and practical aspects of compliments was presented comprehensively in Wu's (2006) dissertation. Set in the Chinese context, this study sought to find out the common strategies of compliment responses used by senior high school students and gender preferences for the strategies of compliment responses.

In an extension of studies on culture and compliments, Yu (2007) focused on British people's patterns of this speech event, trying to find out the cultural assumptions native speakers of British English adhere to. Besides that, a supplementary material was devised in this

research for Chinese EFL learners to equip them with both pragmalinguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge of complimenting behavior.

The grammatical and sequential organization of compliments has been investigated by Golato (2005) in German conversations. The author also critiqued several methodologies commonly used to study compliments and argued for the necessity of a methodology which utilizes data recordings of naturally occurring interaction, in order to study complimenting behavior.

Sociolinguistic studies of compliments went on with Xiole's (2009) investigation of the sociopragmatic perspective of compliment behavior of Chinese EFL learners at different stages of general proficiency. In the same year, Tang and Zhang made a contrastive study of compliment responses between Australian English and Mandarin Chinese speakers.

Bergqvist (2009) provided evidence of pragmatic transfer from Swedish into English in giving and responding to compliments, and Jucker (2009) offered a critical review of the range of different methods and approaches employed in investigating different aspects of compliments. Alkhateeb (2009) dedicated a whole dissertation to the study of the speech act of thanking as a compliment response used by non-native speakers of English among Arabs. This study sought to find the effect of different cultural backgrounds, specializations, levels of evaluation and the gender of the speakers on their use of the speech act of thanking as a compliment response.

In a renovating study, Xiole (2010) examined the amount of pragmatic transfer in compliment responses by Chinese learners of English. In the Iranian context, Kariminia and Afghari (2010) compared compliment response behavior of native Persian speakers with that of native American English. Adachi (2010) took a further step from the utterance level of compliments to the discourse level and introduced topics related to compliments that are actively involved with building up felicitous conditions for compliments to appropriately occur.

In a quasi-longitudinal research, Chen and Yang (2010) studied the patterns of acceptance and rejection in the Chinese compliment responses. In the same context, Bu (2010) investigated pragmatic

transfer in compliment response strategies of EFL learners. Intonation of English compliments was referred to as an important means of social interaction by Trykashna (2010). This author specified the most pertinent intonation patterns of compliments used in different socio-cultural situations.

As for the effect of instruction, Tajeddin and Ghamary (2011) investigated the learnability of compliments in a formal foreign language context in Iran. In the same setting, Dastjerdi and Farshid (2011) examined the role of input enhancement in teaching compliments. Another study which provided essential pedagogical implications in second language teaching was done by Duan (2011). This study raised second language cross-cultural pragmatic awareness by analyzing the complimenting speech act of Chinese EFL learner. Besides the cross-cultural issues, cross-gender variation of complimenting was also scrutinized by Rees-Miller (2011) who found divergent use and pattern for males and females in structured and unstructured settings.

Adachi's (2011) comprehensive dissertation sociolinguistically examined complimenting among young Japanese, and favored the application of localized cultural knowledge in unfolding the social and linguistic systems of complimenting.In a pilot study, Bhatti and Zegarac (2011) investigated the production and reception of compliments in the relatively proximate cultures of England and Poland. Cheng's (2011) exploration of compliment responses produced by Chinese ESL and EFL speakers as well as native speakers of American English provided new insights on compliment responses. In the same year, Mustapha analyzed Nigerian English compliments ethnographically to show persistent patterns and compared them to the other English speaking communities.

The most recent study in the realm of compliments has been carried out by Hiba Qusay (2012) in the Iraqi setting. This study investigated compliment responses among Iraqi postgraduates in English. This study recommends second language teachers to help learners enhance their knowledge or competence of appropriate use of speech acts in the target language.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The present study aims to analyze compliments made by Iranian EFL learners in a number of discourse situations designated in the questionnaire. This analysis is once made at the structural level of the compliments and once again on the pragmatic functions served by the choice of a given response. The following questions are, therefore, addressed:

RQ1: Are there any patterns in the structure of compliments made by Iranian intermediate EFL learners in the designated discourse situations? If there are any, which are the commonest in every discourse situation?

RQ2: What pragmatic functions do the compliments made by these subjects serve in every situation they are presented with?

2. METHODOLOGY
2.1 Participants

There were 30 participants in this study consisting of 4 males and 26 females, between 18 to 34 years of age. They were Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level of English proficiency who were learning this language at private language institutes of Iran. They shared a common native language and a common national/cultural background.

2.2 Instrumentation

In order to gather the data, a DCT questionnaire was employed which assessed participants' performance in 7 pre-designated discourse situations (see the Appendix). At the beginning, respondents were required to fill out the blanks about their personal information including: date of birth, sex, last educational degree and field of study (which was at the top of the questionnaire). They also mentioned whether English was their native language or not, and in case of the latter, how many years they have been learning it as a foreign language. Subsequently, the discourse situations were preceded by a sample question at the start. It was followed by descriptions of the 7 target situations (in question forms) in which the respondents were to imagine themselves in encounters with people of different characteristics in formal or informal settings. They were supposed to

make compliments to the addressees and also explain why they chose to compliment in a certain way in every situation. Gaps were provided so that respondents could write their actual responses.

2.3 Procedures

Before the questionnaires were submitted to the participants, they had a briefing with the researcher. The overall aim of the study along with instructions on how to respond to the questions was explained. The whole data analysis process can be summarized as in:

1. Data transcription
2. Question analysis
3. Response analysis (mixed with protocol analysis):

Compliment structure

Compliment function

The initial step was to transcribe the data and prepare it for subsequent analysis. Then the 7 questions in the questionnaire each of which represented a particular discourse situation were analyzed in terms of the relationship between addresser and addressee proposed by Wolfson (1989). This was believed to be affecting compliment behavior.

Then the actual responses given by the subjects were analyzed to see if there were any recurrent structural patterns in Persian compliments similar to what Manes and Wolfson found in 1981.Then, the responses were coded for the functions they served according to Manes (1983) and Wolfson (1989) as the following (the last item of which has been added by the author):

- to establish solidarity between speaker and addressee → SOL
- to express approval or admiration toward the listener → APP
- to strengthen or replace other speech acts like apologizing, greeting,   reprimanding, or thanking → OTH
- to soften acts such as criticism → SOF
- to offer praise, to reinforce or encourage the desired behavior in specific situations, such as teaching and learning →DES
- as sarcasm → SAR
- as a conversation opener → COP
- to show interest in the issue at hand for example by asking follow-up questions→FOL

Finally, the respondents' protocols were analyzed to find which functions were mainly served in each discourse situation and under what structural pattern.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The situations presented in the questions are characterized by the following two features:

1. Relative status of addresser and addressee:

Recipient is higher in status → R.H

Recipient is equal in status → R.E

Recipient is lower in status → R.L

2. Degree of formality of the situation:

Formal → F

Informal → I

Table 1 indicates the characterization of all the questions in the questionnaire:

Table. *Characteristics of the situations presented in the DCT-questionnaire*

Feature Question	Topic	Relative status	Degree of formality
Q.0 (sample)	Sister's new dress	R.L	I
Q.1	Mom's dinner	R.H	I
Q.2	Friend's party clothes	R.E	I
Q.3	Professor's lecture	R.H	F
Q.4	Stranger's swimming	R.H	F
Q.5	Granny's new purse	R.H	I
Q.6	Friend's haircut	R.E	I
Q.7	Brother's achievement	R.L	I

We are faced with a combination of situations in terms of the relationship of addresser-addressee and the level of formality. Participants' responses will be analyzed considering the characteristics of each situation.

4.1.   Compliment Structures

As for the analysis of the actual responses made by the participants, we began with the syntactic structure of the compliments. We came across the following structural patterns:

1- Yes/No questions   پرسش هایی که پاسخ آنها بله یا خیر می باشد.

مثال: به منم یاد میدید؟

(e.g. Would you help me learn it too?)

2- Wh- questions   پرسش هایی که پاسخ آن ها توضیحی است.

مثال: از کجا خریدیدش؟

(e.g. Where have you bought this?)

3- Statements (In Persian structures: "sub.+adj.+v." OR "sub.+adv.+obj./adj.+v.")

(جمله به شکل خبری ساده به منظور اظهار نظر: "فاعل + صفت + فعل" یا "فاعل + قید + مفعول/صفت +فعل")

مثال: شناتون خیلی عالیه.

(e.g. Your swimming is perpect.)

4- Exclamation (In Persian structure: "Exclamation word+adj./adv.+v.")

(اظهار تعجب: "چه/چه قدر + صفت/قید + فعل")

مثال: چه قدرقشنگه!

(e.g. How beautiful it is!)

5- One-word expressions (other than exclamation structure)

ایول/مثال: آفرین

(e.g. Bravo./Excellent.)

6- Imperatives

مثال: کیف کن./ نگاش کن.

(e.g. Look at him./ Enjoy.)

The frequency of occurrence of each structure along with the percentage it comprises is presented in table 2. Contributions of the six observed structures are more evidently illustrated in a pie chart in figure 1.

Table2. *The frequency of occurrence of the structural patterns in response compliments*

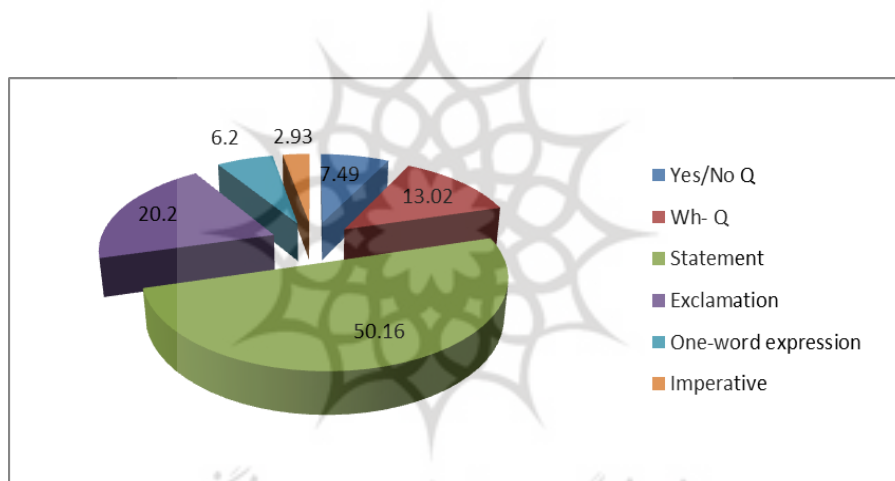| structure	frequency	percentage
Yes/No Q	23	7.49
Wh- Q	40	13.02
Statement	154	50.16
Exclamation	62	20.20
One-word expression	19	6.20
Imperative	9	2.93

Figure 1

The overall percentages of the comprising compliment structures

As it can be observed, simple statements, not in the form of questions, exclamation or imperatives alone comprise more than 50% of the whole compliments. 20% of the compliments have been in the form of questions of the both type (Yes/No, Wh-). The next 20% belongs to the shorter expressions in the form of exclamations. Still shorter, one-word expressions comprise 6% of the compliments. The remaining 3% (approximately) are in the form of imperatives. These

are not short expressions; however, since they function mainly as request or suggestions, they supposedly put an extra burden on the listener's shoulders which might be face-threatening. This can be part of the reason why they are of the least used structure.

It should be reminded that the above statistics describe the whole compliments the respondents made. Every question in the questionnaire, however, presents respondents with a unique situation. Therefore, now that we realized which structures with what contributions are used generally by the Iranian respondents, we are also eager to know which structures are more dominant in each discourse situation presented by each question. Examine table 3.

Teble3. *Percentages of the comprising compliment structures in each discourse situation*

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Yes/No q	0	7.69	3.70	11.76	4.65	7.27	5.55
Wh- q	2.77	15.38	0	25.49	11.62	27.27	0
statement	83.33	46.15	92.59	35.29	48.83	34.54	55.5
exclamation	8.33	25.64	3.70	17.64	34.88	27.27	5.55
One-word expression	2.77	0	0	5.88	0	0	29.62
Imperative	2.77	5.12	0	3.92	0	3.63	3.70

As table 3 indicates, the most prevalent structure in discourse situation 1 is the statement type ($\square$ 83%). This situation was characterized as informal, however, with an interlocutor who is of a higher status in age and family relationship (relationship → child to mother). The most dominant sample statements in this situation were:

خیلی خوشمزه بود./ دستت درد نکنه./ عالی بود./ واقعاً زحمت کشیدید.

(translations: It was very delicious./ It was excellent.)

Besides the statements, more than 8% of the compliments in this situation were exclamations, the commonest of which were:

عجب غذایی !/چه قدر زحمت کشیدید!/ چه شام خوشمزه‌ای!

(translations: What a food!/ What a delicious dinner!)

Situation 2 was characterized as informal and between two people of equal status (relationship → friend to friend). The commonest structures used in this situation were statements (□ 46%), exclamations (□ 25%) and Wh- questions (□ 15%) respectively. The commonest instances of statements were:

لباست خیلی زیباست./ خیلی خوشگل شدی./ خیلی بهت میاد.

(translations: Your dress is very nice./ You are so beautiful./ It suits you very well.)

The most uttered exclamations were:

چه لباس قشنگی!/ چه قدر زیبا شدی!/ چه خوشگل به نظر می‌رسی!

(e.g. What a nice dress!/ How beautiful you have become!/ How nice you look!)

And finally, the examples of Wh- questions were: کجا میری مگه؟/ از کجا گرفتیش؟

(e.g. Where are you destined to?/ Where have you bought it?)

In situation 3, except for the statements (□ 92%), the other structures were rarely used. This situation was characterized as formal, and the compliment recipient was higher in status, both in terms of age and education (relationship → student to professor). The commonest instances of statements used in this situation were:

عالی بود استاد / خسته نباشید استاد.

(e.g. That was excellent, professor./ Nice job!)

Situation 4could be considered a formal encounter between the respondent and a stranger whose status (in terms of swimming skill) is higher than the respondent. This was the only situation in which all the structures were used. The most prevalent of them, however, were statements (□ 35%), Wh- questions (□ 25%), exclamations (□ 17%) and Yes/No questions (□ 11%) respectively. The commonest instance of the statements was: خیلی خوب شنا می‌کنید.

(e.g. You swim really well.)

Among exclamations, the following were used more often:

چه قدر خوب شنا می‌کنید.

(e.g. How well you swim!)

Common instances of Wh- questions were:

چند وقته کار می‌کنید؟ کجا شنا رو اینقدر خوب یاد گرفتید؟

(e.g. How long have you been swimming?/ Where have you learned to swim so well?)

The Yes/No question used significantly was: خیلی وقته شنا کار می‌کنید؟
(e.g. Has it been long that you swim?)

As for situation 5, the dominant structures were statements (□ 48%), exclamations (□ 34%) and Wh- questions (□ 11%). This discourse situation was informal and placed the respondent in an encounter with an interlocutor of a higher status in age and family relationship (grandchild to grandmother). Instances of the common statements were: خیلی قشنگه./ مبارک باشه.
(e.g. It's really nice./ Congrats.)

Examples of the prevalent exclamations were:

به به! چه کیف قشنگی!/ وای چه قدر خوشگله!

(e.g. Wow. What a nice bag!/ Wow. How beautiful it is!)

And the typical Wh- questions were the following: چند خریدین؟/ از کجا خریدین؟

(e.g. How much did it cost?/ Where have you bought it?)

The 6th discourse situation was an informal one in which the respondent made compliments to an interlocutor of equal status (relationship: friend to friend). Analysis of the data revealed statements (□ 34%), exclamations (□ 27%) and Wh- questions (□ 27%) as the most frequently used structures. Among statements the following were the commonest:

خوشگل شدی./ بهت میاد./ قشنگ شده موهات.

(e.g. You look great./ It suits you./ Your hair looks nice.)

The exclamations typically used in this discourse situation were:

چه قدر عوض شدی!/ چه بهت میاد!/ چه قدر قیافت تغییر کرده.

(e.g. How different you look!/ How nice it looks on you.)

The most common instances of Wh- questions were:

کدوم آرایشگاه رفتی؟/ کی اصلاح کردی موهاتو؟/ اسم مدلش چیه؟

(e.g. Where have you had a haircut?/What is this hair style called?)

And finally, the last question placed the respondent in an informal discourse situation to make compliments to an interlocutor of a lower status in age, family relationship and education (sister/brother to the younger brother). The findings were indicative of statements (□ 55%) and one-word expressions (□ 29%) as the dominant structures. The most prevalent statements which were uttered were: می دونستم می تونی./
می دونستم موفق میشی./ واقعا خوب بود./ خسته نباشی.

(e.g. I was sure that you could do it./ I knew you could make it./ that was really good./ Well done.)

And the commonest among one-word expressions were: آفرین./ بارک الله./تبریک.

(e.g. Bravo./Excellent./ Congrats.)

4.2. Compliment Functions

As mentioned previously, there are a variety of linguistic functions served by compliments. In this study, we focus on those presented by Manes and Wolfson, illustrated in figure 2, plus one other function added by the author (FOL):
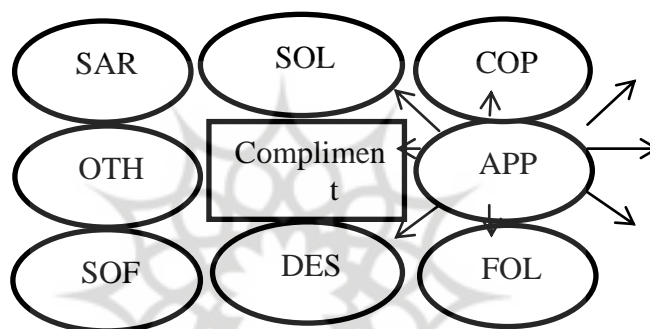
Figure 2

Manes and Wolfson's functions of compliments

SOL → to establish solidarity between speaker and addressee
APP → to express approval or admiration toward the listener
OTH → to strengthen or replace other speech acts like apologizing, greeting, reprimanding, or thanking, request
SOF → to soften acts such as criticism
   DES → to offer praise, to reinforce or encourage the desired behavior in specific situations, such as teaching and learning
SAR → as sarcasm
COP → as conversation opener
   FOL →to show interest in the issue at hand for example by asking follow-up questions

We sought to know that the compliments made in each of the situations presented in the questionnaire served which of the aforementioned functions.

Table4:*The functions served by the compliments made at every discourse situation*

question structure	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
Yes/No q	--	--	--	FOL	--	--	--
Wh- q	--	FOL	--	FOL	FOL	FOL	--
statement	APP/OTH	APP	APP	APP/COP	APP	APP	APP/DES
exclamation	APP/OTH	APP	--	APP/COP	APP	APP	--
One-word expression	--	--	--	--	--	--	APP/DES
Imperative	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

As illustrated in table 4, the two functions served by the statements and exclamations in situation 1 were expressing *approval* and also *thanking*. All the participants, unexceptionally, expressed thanks to their mother. Analysis of their protocols indicated that, except for one respondent, they all admired their mother's cooking even in cases they did not really like the food, since they did not mean to hurt their mother's feeling or to threaten her positive face. *Affection* was found to be the most dominant feeling determining the respondents' choice of compliments which served the two noticeably recurrent functions in discourse situation 1.

In situation 2, except for a few, the majority of respondents cast approval of their friend's new dress either in statements or exclamations, even if they found it (the dress) unfitting. Follow-up questions were asked to know more about the issue. Particularly, they were eager to know why their friend was wearing a new dress, or where she has been to, (mostly out of curiosity). The informal, casual atmosphere of this encounter allowed such follow-up questions to be asked more comfortably. *Attention* and *curiosity* were found to be the dominant feelings in this situation, as the think-aloud protocols indicated.

Unlike the previous two situations, discourse situation 3 placed the respondents in a very formal encounter which, as the results indicated, only elicited approval and admiration from the part of the

complimenter. The unequal status of addresser-addressee demanded respect to be paid to the addressee, as the protocols ratified. All the participants, non-exceptionally looked up to their professor and expressed plain or extensive admiration to his/her lecture. Some have mentioned in their protocols that even if they did not find the lecture so impressive, they had no choice but to appreciate it since their unequal status demanded so.

Situation 4 has been the one with the greatest number of follow-up questions either in Yes/No- or Wh- question forms. The majority of these questions targeted the amount of time devoted to learning the skill. This indicates that almost all the respondents found time as the most relevant element to the achievement level. Such questions (if asked) always followed the initial approval of the addressee's skill. Since the addressee was a stranger, the initial statements uttered also functioned to open the conversation. The ice did not break by immediately asking where- and when- questions without any initial appreciation of the quality of the skill.

The most salient elements which the respondents considered in responding to the 5thsituation were age and affection which especially in familial relationships of Eastern cultures demand great respect. All the respondents made compliments to show appreciation of their grandmother's purchase (saving the positive face of the interlocutor). Both the statements and exclamation expressions were to this aim. In their protocols, they have mentioned that even if they really were not interested in the material bought, yet they could not hurt their grandmother's feelings and therefore pretended to like it. Admittedly, they asked further questions related to where, when and the price of the purchase. Unlike situation 3 in which awe and respect were the dominant feelings involved, here deep love mixed with respect made the respondents cautious in expressing their compliment.

The addresser-addressee status was considered as equal in situation 6, in which the respondents showed approval of their friend's new hair style either in statements or exclamations. As they admitted in their protocols, they all had this understanding of their friend's expectation to be admired in the public. In fact, what distinguishes this situation from situation 2 is that here the addresser and addressee are not alone, and are in the company of others in a public place. All the respondents

responded positively to their friend's need of attention and admiration. The casual and friendly atmosphere of this discourse situation allowed further follow-up questions to be asked which helped satisfy the addressee's desire to be attended to and admired still further.

Situation 7 held an unequal status between addresser and addressee. What distinguishes this situation from situations 1, 3, 4 and 5 is the top-down stance. In the previous unequal situations the addresser was lower in some aspect from the addressee. In this situation it was vice-versa. All the respondents tended to appreciate their younger brother's achievement lavishly in statements. Their appreciation was also expressed in one-word intimate expressions such as آفرین/ بارک الله /ایول. The unique function which was served exclusively in this situation was DES, to encourage the addressee to always try as well in learning affairs. On the whole, all the respondents expressed deep and true joy on hearing their brother's achievement as if his achievement were theirs.

3 CONCLUSION

This study was carried out with 2 research questions in mind. The first question aimed to see if there were any patterns in the structure of compliments made by Iranian EFL learners in different discourse situations. Analysis of their actual utterances revealed such patterns to exist. Participants showed a great tendency to utter their compliments in simple statement forms. 50 percent of their compliments were made in this structure. Exclamations and Wh- question forms were also used to a lesser but considerable degree.

The second question sought for the functions which were mostly served by the compliments made by Iranian EFL learners. The two functions which were found to be prevalent in all the situations were APP and FOL. The former serves to express approval and admiration towards the addressee's new status and the latter appeases the curiosity to know more about the event by asking follow-up questions. Besides that the dominant functions of compliments for every discourse situation were found and reported which were not limited only to the two functions just mentioned. They included COP (conversation opener), OTH (replacement for other speech acts) and DES (encouragement of the desired behavior) as well.

As discussed in the introductory section, the significance of compliments as important speech acts in conversations is unquestionable. Speaking is considered as the most urgent skill for the majority of EFL learners. They need to learn to perform different speech acts (thanking, apologizing, requesting, complimenting,…) properly in different situations and with different addressees. EFL learners have already a storage of their native language criteria for performing speech acts, which is culturally-laden. Awareness of this mental storage can help EFL teachers to know on what basis learners choose to say a particular thing in a particular discourse situation. Then in cases where there are cultural and linguistic differences between what they actually say (based on their own background) and what they are expected to say (based on what is proper in the target language and culture), teachers can better provide them with correct feedback.

This research aimed to cast light on detailed features of compliments made by Iranian EFL learners. Awareness of the underlying issues that influence performing this speech act in learners' native language hopes to predict similarities and divergences of performing this act in learners' target language. Further research is welcomed to investigate these non-native English language learners' utterances in similar discourse situations in the target language.

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APPENDIX

Compliments

Dear Respondent

Thank you very much for giving up some of your time. Seven different situations are described below in which you are going compliment someone. Please choose the best item for each situation. Before doing so, please provide the following information.

Date of birth: day…..   month…… year…….

Sex: ……male   …….female

Last degree: ..…High school diploma   ……Associate degree

……B.A./B.S   …..M.A./M.S.   …..Ph.D.

Field of study/major:…………………………………

Is English your native language? ……yes   …….no

If "no," how long have you been learning it (in years)?   ……1-2   …..3-5   ……5+

Example:

0. When you come home you see your little sister is wearing a new dress that your mom has made her. What would you say to her?

1. You have finished having dinner at home that was prepared by your mother. What would you say to your mum?

2. You go to your friend's house to help her study math. She is dressed in her best clothes because she has just got home from a party. What would you say to your friend?

3. You are at a conference. Your professor has just delivered a very insightful lecture. What would you say to your professor once you see him?

4. You're in a swimming pool. Suddenly you notice that a person swimming next to you is swimming professionally. What would you say to him?

5. Your grandmother has just returned home from shopping. She has bought a new handbag. What would you say to your grandmother?

6. You are at a restaurant for a friendly get-together when you notice that one of your friends has had her hair cut in a different style. What would you say to your friend?

7. You've helped your younger brother with English. After a week he tells you that he got an "A" in his last English test. What would you say to your brother?