

## **Compliments and Compliment Responses among Palestinian EFL University Learners: A Sociolinguistic Study**

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**Received on: 14-4-2021**

**Accepted on: 9-8-2021**

### **Abstract**

This study investigates compliments and compliment responses from a sociolinguistic perspective as realized by forty Palestinian EFL university learners. The investigation focused on identifying how the participants perform compliments and compliment responses in English. Moreover, it addressed the asymmetries in this field among male and female participants. The researchers created a discourse completion task (DCT) to collect data. The collected data were analyzed based on the analytical framework of Yuan (2002) of compliment strategies and the analytical framework of Herbert (1990) of compliment responses strategies. The findings of the study show that Palestinian EFL university learners tend to perform explicit compliments more than other compliment strategies. The learners also tend to accept compliments more than reject them. Besides, there are no significant gender asymmetries among Palestinian EFL university learners in terms of how they perform compliments and compliment responses. Finally, the findings reveal that social status does not affect the way Palestinian EFL university learners express and respond to compliments.

**Keywords:** Compliment, Compliment Responses, DCT, Compliment Strategies, Gender, Social Status.

### **Introduction**

In EFL classrooms, emphasizing linguistic knowledge and deemphasizing the pragmatic knowledge creates real problems in intercultural communication. These problems are basically pragmatic as EFL teachers do not give them attention. Some researchers stated that such lack of such knowledge might cause EFL learners to have breakdowns in their communication with native speakers (Cutting 2002; Eslami-Rasekh, Abbas and Fatahi 2004). Insufficient exposure to the target culture and community causes Arab EFL learners to have difficulty in understanding or performing some speech acts. Moreover, such speech acts are sometimes translated word by word. This causes learners to misunderstand the translated speech acts. Thus, to bridge this gap, enhancing the acquisition of pragmatic competence is indispensable although it is a challenge for Arab EFL learners. Foreign learners, with reference to Arab EFL learners, should be aware of the surface and deep dimensions of communication in a certain social setting or when talking with people of different social statuses (Zhan 2010). Arab EFL learners find learning a language

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\* Doi: <https://doi.org/10.47012/jjml.14.4.7>

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complicated because when it comes to communicating with other foreigners, they do not succeed. Therefore, fruitful and positive communication with foreigners demands much emphasis on the linguistic-pragmatic competence.

In the Palestinian context, compliments are understudied. Compliment-related studies have been conducted in many Arabic-speaking countries like Egypt (Nelson, Bakary and Al-Batal 1993), Kuwait (Farghal and Haggan 2006), Yemen (Qanbar 2012) and Saudi Arabia (Alqarni 2020). Despite all of these studies, a generalisation of their findings to other Arabic-speaking countries cannot be made. In Arabic, the use of religious expressions is common in all Arab countries. Such expressions mainly compose compliments. Yet, different Arab countries such as Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Kuwait have different lifestyles, which definitely denotes the possibility of different occurrences of compliments and compliment responses. Arab speakers use more social utterances that are religious in content than other speakers (Al-Khateeb 2009). Palestinian society is a society that has strong ties with religion, and it is worth studying the expressions of compliments in such a context.

### Terminology

- 1. Compliments (C):** Compliments are defined as positively valued speech acts which give credit to the addressed person for some good merits or skills (J. Holmes 1986).
- 2. Compliment Responses (CR):** Compliment responses are defined as the expressions used when appreciating one's words when they praise someone for their behaviour or action (R. K. Herbert 1986).
- 3. Sociolinguistics:** Sociolinguistics is "the study of language in relation to society" (Hudson R. 1980, 1).
- 4. Pragmatics:** Pragmatics is defined as "the study of the meaning of linguistic utterances for their users and interpreters" (Leech & Thomas 1990, 94).
- 5. Pragmatic Competence:** Pragmatic competence is defined as "the knowledge underlying abilities to interpret, express, and negotiate social activities and their meanings beyond what is really expressed" (Austin T. 1998, 328).
- 6. Speech Acts (SA):** Speech acts are considered as expressions having meanings in communication. Many things can be done by expressing a sentence. Performing an action through language means performing a speech act. Speech acts are performed when a compliment, refusal, invitation, complaint, request, greeting, or apology is offered (Austin 1962; Searle 1969).
- 7. Discourse Completion Task (DCT):** A DCT is defined as an instrument originated in order to collect data to compare the realization patterns of the native speakers and learners' speech acts (S. Blum-Kulka 1982).
- 8. Gender:** Gender is "the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive," prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts" (Butler 1999, 11).
- 9. Social Status:** Social status is "the prestige, respect, and esteem that a party has in the eyes of others" (Blader & Chen 2014, 74).

## Literature Review

### *Speech Act Theory (SAT)*

The speech act theory was developed by Austin (1962) in his book *How to Do Things with Words* as a reaction to logical positivism. Austin (1962) differentiated between two concepts: performative and constative. The former indicates that providing an utterance means performing an action, whereas the latter denotes declarative sentences judged either true or false. Examples of performative utterances are “*I bet you two dollars it will rain tomorrow*” and “*I do*” (when uttered as acceptance in a marriage context). Achieving the speech acts performative function requires that the utterances must meet particular contextual conditions. Speech act theory provides an account of conditions called felicity conditions. In addition, Austain (1962) argued that language was used to make right or wrong speeches, to promise, to perform actions, to ask, to say sorry and so on. These actions are not right or wrong; however, they are recognised as felicitous or infelicitous. Whereas the utterance “*the sun is made of cheese*” is assessed for its truthfulness, the case for the utterance “*can you lend me 50 dollars?*” is not the same (Taguchi and Roever 2017). These felicity conditions lead the receiver to infer indirect meanings for statements from their literal meanings.

## Compliments

### 1. Definitions

Herbert (1986) was stimulated, due to the compliments’ friendly nature, to discuss that a compliment is viewed as a small talk which helps in strengthening bonds through exchanging words. Furthermore, a compliment is seen as a positive appraisal delivered to the addressees that they have good qualities either directly or indirectly (Fraser 1990). A compliment is considered as a deed which credits someone for some effectively valued attribute, skill, characteristic, etc. (Hyland 2000). Farghal and Haggan (2006) described a compliment as confirming one’s acceptance of another’s endeavours and actions. That is to say, compliments indicate the praises of the characteristics and/or the actions of others. Besides, the social links between the interactional groups are normally the source from which compliments spring.

### 2. Compliments Functions

- 1. Pragmatic Success:** Speakers tend to appear polite when they communicate with people in everyday situations by picking the strategies of the discourse that can help them do so. Consequently, speakers attempt to keep their faces and smooth the flow of the conversation by using compliment strategies by trying to be polite. By respecting the desires of other people’s faces, speakers seek to meet such desires (Brown and Levinson 1987).
- 2. Consolidating Solidarity:** Holmes mentioned, as cited by Alqarni (2020), that compliments serve several purposes. Maintaining connections and social ties is certainly one of these purposes. Most compliments are expressed to fulfil sentimental and societal purposes rather than informative purposes. Compliments are speech acts that basically attempts social solidarity consolidation

between the interlocutors. Usually, affronts may cause some gaps between people, and compliments are used to place emphasis on solidarity and heal such gaps (J. Holmes 1986).

**3. Informative Purposes:** Some compliments are uttered to achieve vigorous purposes of conveying information although most compliments serve purposes of emotional meanings. Many research writings were examined; the findings revealed that two meanings to the compliments were found in these writings: referential and emotive (Johnson and Roen 1992).

### **3. Responding to Compliments**

A compliment response is defined as appreciating an individual's attempts at praising one's conduct or deed (R. K. Herbert 1986). Generally, it is described as a speech act performed by the hearer of a compliment as to reply to a compliment's performer. To put it differently, compliment responses are realised as what the hearer says to the praiser of their actions or performance, also to those who have faith in them. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the social links and the type of the compliment performed between the speech groups determine what compliment response should be performed.

"Compliment responses" was a focal point for several research. Such research investigated the diverse utterances connected to compliments and compliment responses' production. Three major kinds of responses to compliments were introduced: acceptance, rejection, and evasion. Acceptance was reported as the most commonly used compliment response's form in New Zealand. Receivers of compliments had a tendency to accept and return the compliment to the performer of the compliment (J. Holmes 1986). An analysis of compliment responses of American and British English speakers, at the State University in New York, was conducted. Nearly, sixty per cent of the responses expressed acceptance. The investigation revealed that the American speakers accept compliments less often than the British speakers. This variation is claimed to be due to various factors: religious, cultural, environmental and political (Herbert, 1986). Researchers pointed out that male and female speakers tend to realise compliments and responses to compliments differently (Holmes 1986; Herbert 1986).

### **4. Compliments and Gender**

Many variances in using compliments between females and males have been found in various researches. Holmes (1995) examined the asymmetries between both genders in the way they compliment in a study she conducted in New Zealand. The researcher deduced that female speakers compliment and hear compliments more than males do. Besides, compliments are seldom performed by male speakers. In the English and Yemeni settings, Qanbar (2012) testified that male speakers expressed compliments less often than female speakers. Wolfson (1984) investigated compliments and their responses in terms of gender in the American society.

### **5. Compliments and Social Status**

Researchers confirmed that compliments occur among people of equal social status. In other words, complimenters most often produced compliments people of equal status and age as them (Herbert 1990; Holme 1988; Wolfson 1983). It was also reported that highly positioned women were more complimented

than men of equal social status. That is to say, complimenting women with high social ranks is more common than complimenting men with high social ranks. This notion was explained as females are secondary to males in a social context, and males are more dominant than females (J. Holmes 1986). In contrast, as women had a tendency to be socially connected to people and highly valued social solidarity, they can be easier than men to approach (J. Holmes 1988).

## **6. Compliments and Pragmatic Awareness**

Pragmatic awareness means that interlocutors should be conscious of the suitable use of language and the customs and rules of the social context where they are communicating. Pragmatic awareness as a field attracted many researchers to investigate various issues. Issues that were investigated in this field were Matsumura's study (2001) on language proficiency and Schauer's study (2006) on the learning environment.

The impact of the participants' proficiency in the TL on the learner's pragmatic awareness development was studied by Matsumura (2001). The researcher involved one hundred eighty-seven Japanese learners of English in this study. These learners were participating in an academic exchange program that lasted for eight months at a Canadian university. Their language proficiency level was measured on the basis of the TOEFL scores they got. In this investigation, a closed-question survey was used to measure pragmatic awareness. The researcher concluded that the learner's pragmatic awareness level increases when s/he is exposed more to the TL.

The effect the learning environment had on pragmatic awareness was investigated by Schauer (2006) through studying two groups of German English learners in two different institutions: English and German. It was concluded that the pragmatic awareness level was significantly affected by the learning environment. Moreover, the impact the residency length in the host country had on pragmatic awareness was studied considering various residency lengths. In this study, it was reckoned that the pragmatic awareness level was not affected by any rise in the residency length.

## **7. Politeness**

Two rules governing the principle of compliment responses were revealed: agreeing with the speaker and avoiding self-praise. Leech (1983) followed the same way in analysing politeness. He is a theorist of politeness who first analysed politeness with reference to speech acts theoretically. The purpose of developing a theory of politeness was to explain the reason behind people being indirect when they want to convey a message. Leech (1983) considered politeness as an influential element smoothing the relation involving the addresser and the addressee. He suggested two principles: lessening the impolite-belief expression and augmenting the polite-belief expression. He provided a description to politeness principle, in a negative form, as "minimize (other things being equal) the expression of impolite beliefs", in a positive form, as "maximize (other things being equal) the expression of polite beliefs" (p.81).

## Methodology

### *Participants*

The participants in this research were forty university students majoring in the English language from both genders, male and female. Also, they were senior and junior students learning English as a foreign language, at the Department of English, the Islamic University of Gaza – Gaza, Palestine. The researchers involved twenty males and twenty females. See **Table 1**. Arabic was their mother tongue. In Palestine, based on the CEFR (The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) standards, students who pass the secondary school exams are expected to be in level B2, which is intermediate (English for Palestine Curriculum Document 2015). Consequently, the proficiency level of the participants in English language ranged between intermediate and advanced. It is worth noting that the participants were either of low or middle socioeconomic status.

**Table 1:** Gender and Ages of Participants in this Study

Gender	Number	Age Range	Average Age
Male	20	20-23	21.5
Female	20	20-23	21.5

## Study Instruments

### *Discourse Completion Task (DCT)*

#### **1. What is a DCT?**

Many researchers conducting studies about speech acts have used discourse completion tasks (DCTs). Levenston and Blum-Kulka (1978) initially developed the DCT to examine how language learners acquire and use lexis. Later, Blum-Kulka (1982) applied this instrument to investigate how learners of Hebrew as a second language perform speech acts. Blum-Kulka & Olshtain's (1984) research of requests and apologies made the DCT the most popular instrument of its time to collect data. Brown (2001) defined a written DCT as a tool which includes written situations, with roles, topic, setting and status described, which entails the participants to read and write what they would say in each condition. DCTs help researchers elicit specific speech acts depending on how they are designed.

Kasper and Dahl (1991) confirmed that there is no specific system telling the number of items to include in a task or the number of participants to complete the task. That is to say, there are great variations in studies in terms of the number of items in the task and the number of participants taking the task. A suggestion made by Kasper and Dahl (1991) says that twenty items and thirty participants should help researchers on speech act realization issues. However, the number of items in the task might affect the completion and the quality of the participants' responses. Lengthy tasks are considered a burden on participants' time; therefore, they might complete the task with a certain reluctance. Thus, considering the time needed to complete the task is necessary in order to have reliable findings. For example, Wolf (1997) suggested that questionnaires should not take more than thirty minutes to do. It is also preferred that questionnaires be less than fifteen or twenty minutes. Kasper (2000) also highlighted that less competent readers might find it problematic to read detailed and lengthy descriptions of the situations as this

increases the time needed to read. So, researchers should design questionnaires taking into account this notion.

## **2. Pros and Cons of DCT**

Researchers discussed the validity and reliability of discourse completion tasks in detail. This instrument, unquestionably, comes with merits and demerits in terms of collecting and analyzing data. Beebe and Cummings (1996) underscored that one of the advantages of the DCT is that researchers can obtain a huge amount of data on speech acts, which are hard to notice, in various situations in a short time. For this reason, researchers use DCTs to gather data about the semantic formulas employed to perform specific speech acts. They also use DCTs as they help researchers collect demographic information concerning the participants. Houck and Gass (1996) noticed that the context consistency permits to compare responses with reference to many variables like ethnicity, age, or gender. Moreover, researchers can manage the appropriate variables provided in detailed situations by using this data collection tool, which may affect the responses of the participants.

Nelson, Carson, Al Batal and El Bakary (2002) emphasized the possibility of translating DCTs into any language as this helps researchers make a comparison, in terms of what speech act strategies participants apply and how they form them, between two or more speech communities using the same situations. Kasper (2000) established that creating effective research instruments requires devising questionnaires with care. Consequently, such instruments help researchers in understanding the pragmatic knowledge of the speakers on the linguistic forms and strategies. This knowledge assists researchers in inspecting contextual elements and in apprehending communicative acts. As a result, when data production is the purpose of the study, DCT would be a suitable tool to collect data.

On the other hand, Ogiermann (2009) assessed DCTs negatively as there are distressing divergences between the natural data and the obtained data. DCTs generate written data, which is not exactly the same as natural discourse, although they have plentiful merits for speech acts studies conducted cross-culturally. Besides, the task design receives several concerns, one of which is about the validity of the data of DCT because the situations in the task might not totally mirror the socio-linguistic restrictions encountered in real conversations. The items in DCTs do not succeed to provide enough situational and social evidence, such as the interaction frequency and the relationship between the interlocutors and the participants, setting and context of the speech act. This is due to the too brief description of the items of DCTs. Jucker (2009) stated that unusual utterances might be produced when the informants taking part in some dialogues are put into unfamiliar roles. There is no doubt that contextual and interpersonal information, which DCTs lack, affect the utterances of the speakers. Moreover, Kasper (2000) stated that paralinguistic factors, non-verbal aspects and some pragmatic strategies are neglected in questionnaires although Bardovi-Harlig (1999) claimed that examining these areas is not what DCTs are for.

Some researchers questioned the format of the task as it looks like a test. They also argued that spoken utterances are obtained via writing tasks, which provides participants with thinking and planning time to write answers. Furthermore, Jucker (2009) highlighted that the length of the utterances is

restricted to the provided space, and the participants know the reaction and the utterance of the interlocutor, which is unusual. What is more, DCTs make the participants remember some pragmatic information and write it instead of using it. Regardless of the drawbacks, various types of DCTS have been extensively utilized to obtain data on speech acts across languages (Barron 2003).

In light of the above-mentioned advantages of DCT, the researcher opted for its use.. A DCT was the main instrument for collecting data as to fulfil the objectives of the study. As a replication of a real-world situation, an open-ended statement (DCT) helped the respondents in providing verbal reaction. The participants were required to write an answer similar to the answer they would give in an everyday situation, a written answer is required. The researcher designed a DCT taking into consideration prior investigations in which researchers like Alqarni (2020), Farghal and Haggan (2006), Herbert (1990), Qanbar (2012) and Wolfson (1983) used DCTS.

### **Research Questions**

1. What compliment strategies do Palestinian EFL university learners use in English?
2. How do Palestinian EFL university learners respond to compliments in English?
3. What asymmetries can be found among female and male EFL university learners with reference to compliments and compliment responses in English?
4. How does social status affect Palestinian EFL university learners' way of expressing and responding to compliments?

### **Data Collection Methods**

The data were collected online using Google Forms directed to the undergraduates at the Department of English at the IUG – Gaza, Palestine. Prior to the involvement of participants in the study, the researchers made sure that they understood the objective and purpose of this research. They wrote the objectives of this research clearly in the first page in Google Forms and the participants could not go to the next page unless they tick the “I understand” box. Furthermore, the researchers obtained their consent to take part in the investigation. Then the participants were informed that their data is confidential and only served the investigation. They had enough time to write their responses and no limits are placed in terms of time. Finally, the researcher added the participants to the survey, so he can make sure that only the selected participants answered the DCT.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers collected qualitative data from forty students and then it was coded using NVivo program for quantitative analysis. Nvivo is a perfect tool that minimizes a large amount of manual hard work. Researchers using this program have more time to identify themes, notice groupings and draw inferences (Wong 2008). Bazeley (2007) mentioned that Nvivo helps researchers manage data, manage ideas, answer queries about the data, create graphs and tables, and formulate transcript reports about the collected data. The coding helped the researcher in answering the research questions. Certainly, coding the collected data was done according to the framework of Yuan (2002) for compliments and Herbert



(1990) for compliment responses. To analyse the coded data, the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS) was used. He used the Chi-square test to compare between the observed data and the expected data of the participants' answers to the ten situations in terms of their gender. Moreover, the researcher used Microsoft Excel software (2019) to compute the frequencies and percentages of the participants' responses to three different levels of status: higher, same and lower.

### Compliments Analytical Framework

Regarding the semantic formulas used to express compliments, Yuan (2002) divided them into two over-all categories: compliments and non-complimentary replies. Furthermore, compliments can be split into two main categories: unbound semantic formulas and bound semantic formulas. See **Table 2**.

**Table 2:** Yuan's (2002) Framework of Semantic Formulas

Semantic Formulas	Compliment Strategies		Example
Compliment	Unbound Semantic Formulas	Explicit Compliment	Your son is so good.
		Implicit Compliment	Where did you buy this car? I would like to buy one myself.
	Bound Semantic Formulas	Explanation	I saw how fixing my laptop was difficult.
		Information Question	These curtains are so cool. Where did you buy them?
		Future Reference	You have a bright future in teaching English.
		Contrast	I think your son is better than mine.
		Advice	You should enjoy life when you have money.
		Request	Your car is so modern. Can you lend it to me for one day?
Non-Complimentary Replies	Non-Compliment		Sorry to take your time.
	Opt Out		No response

Utterances that can stand alone as compliments are called "Unbound Semantic Formulas", whereas utterances that cannot stand alone as compliments, and they should be combined with unbound semantic formulas are called "Bound Semantic Formulas".

### Compliment Responses Analytical Framework

As shown in **Table 3**, Herbert (1990) discussed the types of compliment responses in order to clarify how people give different responses to compliments.

**Table 3:** Herbert's (1990) Categorization of Compliment Responses

Types of Compliment Responses				Examples
Agreement	Acceptance	Appreciation Token		Thanks, Thank you, (nod)
		Comment	Single	Oh, it's my favourite too.
			Praise Upgrade	Really it brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
	Comment History	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.		
Non-Agreement	Non-Acceptance	Transfer	Reassignment	My brother gave it to me.
			Return	So's yours.
	Acknowledgement	Question		Do you really think so?
		Acceptance	Scale down	It's really quite old.
		Non-Acceptance	Disagreement	I hate it.
	No Acknowledgment	Qualification		It's alright, but Len's is nicer.
(Topic Shift), (No Response)				
Other Interpretations	Request Interpretations			You wanna borrow this one too?

## Analysis and Discussion

### *Compliment Strategies*

In this section, all the compliments that the participants performed in the first part of the instrument are presented.

### *Situations One to Five*

A summary of the compliment strategies applied by the participants in Situations One to Five is detailed in **Table 4** showing the references and percentage for each strategy of compliments.

**Table 4:** Total Summary of the Participants' Compliments in Situations One to Five

Semantic Formulas	Compliment Strategies		Sources	Refs.	%
Compliment	Unbound Semantic Formulas	Explicit Compliment	5	147	63.91
		Implicit Compliment	5	34	14.78
		Explanation	4	5	2.17
		Information Question	1	2	0.87
	Bound Semantic Formulas	Future Reference	3	12	5.22
		Contrast	3	6	2.61
		Advice	1	2	0.87
		Request	1	1	0.43
Non-Complimentary Replies	Non-Compliment		4	16	6.96
	Opt Out		1	5	2.17

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The strategy of “explicit compliment” was the most frequently occurring strategy of compliments, comprising 63.91% of the participants’ responses in the situations one to five. Next, “implicit compliment” occurred in 14.78% of the responses. After that, “bound semantic formulas” occurred in 12.17% of the participants’ responses. Additionally, “non-complimentary replies” were present in 9.13% of the responses. These percentages reveal that the Palestinian EFL speakers tend to express their feelings by paying explicit compliments.

Some of the most frequent words in the participants’ responses to the situations one to five are described in **Table 5** along with some examples from their compliments.

**Table 5:** Some of the Most Frequent Words in Situations One to Five

Word	Length	Count	Percentage (%)	Similar Words
look	4	50	4.55	depended, depends, expected, express, face, front, look, looking, looks, seems, sound, tone
good	4	46	3.46	dear, depended, depends, expert, full, good, honestly, just, near, practice, right, skills, sound
thank	5	42	3.63	appreciate, appreciated, grateful, thank, thankful, thanks
give	4	41	2.42	give, giving, handsome, make, makes, making, passed, passing, presentation, presentations
work	4	35	2.03	deed, going, make, makes, making, studied, studying, work
help	4	22	1.97	help, helped, helping, support
creative	8	21	2.11	creative, creatively, creativity
students	8	21	2.11	student, students
really	6	21	2.05	really, truly
glasses	7	18	1.81	glasses

**Table 5** introduces the most frequently occurring word “look” composing 4.55% of the participants’ responses to the situations one to five, “good” composing 3.46%, and “thank” composing 3.63%.

## Types of Compliment Responses

In this part, the researcher introduces all the compliment responses that the participants delivered in the second part of the instrument.

### *Situations Six to Ten*

A summary of the strategies of the compliment responses employed by the participants in Situations Six to Ten is noted in **Table 6** viewing the references and percentage for each strategy of the compliment responses.

**Table 6:** Total Summary of the Participants' Responses to Compliments in Situations Six to Ten

Table 6: Total Summary of the Participants' Responses to Compliments in Situations Six to Ten						
Types of Compliment Responses				Sources	Refs.	%
Agreement	Acceptance	Appreciation Token		5	144	49.32
		Comment	Single	5	80	27.40
			Praise Upgrade	5	7	2.40
	Comment History		3	12	4.11	
	Non-Acceptance	Transfer	Reassignment	2	2	0.68
			Return	5	32	10.96
Non-Agreement	Acknowledgement	Question		0	0	0
		Acceptance	Scale down	1	1	0.34
		Non-Acceptance	Disagreement	1	1	0.34
			Qualification	2	2	0.68
	No Acknowledgment		2	11	3.77	
	Other Interpretations	Request Interpretations			0	0

The subcategory “appreciation token” was the most frequently occurring type of compliment responses, in 49.32% of the participants’ responses in the situations six to ten. Then the subcategory “single” was present in 27.40% of the responses. Next, the subcategory “return” was present in 10.96% of the responses. However, only 5.13% of the responses were under the category “non-agreement”. These findings show that the Palestinian EFL speakers are likely to accept compliments more than refuse them in various situations at the university level.

Some of the most frequent words in the participants’ responses to the situations six to ten are revealed in **Table 7** along with some examples from their compliments.

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**Table 7:** Some of the Most Frequent Words in Situations Six to Ten

Word	Length	Count	Percentage (%)	Similar Words
thanks	6	146	15.90	appreciate, grateful, thank, thankful, thanks
kind	4	26	2.91	kind, kindness
get	3	40	2.74	become, bring, come, experience, father, find, get, let, make, mother, start, take
dear	4	30	2.74	cost, costs, dear, dears, good, love
much	4	27	2.50	lot, much, practice
hope	4	26	2.49	hope, hoping, promise, trust, trusting
best	4	21	2.35	best, better
students	8	17	1.90	student, students
words	5	17	1.90	language, son, sons, word, words
like	4	21	1.84	alike, like, wish, wishes, wishing

**Table 7** introduces the most frequently occurring word “thanks” in 15.90% of the participants’ responses to the situations six to ten, and “kind” in 2.91%.

*Gender Asymmetries in Compliments*

**Table 8** presents the frequencies and percentages of the gender asymmetries in the strategies of complimenting. It also shows the Chi-Square Test of compliment strategies among both genders: male and female.

**Table 8:** Chi-Square Test and Gender Crosstabulation of Compliments

Compliment Strategies	References		Total	Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ )
	Male	Female		
Explicit Compliment	67 (57%)	80 (71%)	147	11.942a P-value= 0.217
Implicit Compliment	22 (19%)	12 (11%)	34	
Explanation	3 (3%)	2 (2%)	5	
Information Question	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	2	
Future Reference	6 (5%)	6 (5%)	12	
Contrast	5 (4%)	1 (1%)	6	
Advice	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	2	
Request	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1	
Non-Compliment	9 (8%)	7 (6%)	16	
Opt Out	1 (1%)	4 (4%)	5	
<b>Total</b>	117 (100%)	113 (100%)	<b>230</b>	

**Table 8** indicates that there are no differences in the use of the compliment strategies across the Palestinian male and female speakers. The table shows that the  $\chi^2$  is 11.942, which is less than the critical value of 16.919, and the P-value is 0.217, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. That is to say, there are no significant differences between male and female speakers in their use of the strategies of complimenting. This indicates that both participants (male and female) employed the same strategies of complimenting.

*Gender Asymmetries in Compliment Responses*

**Table 9** presents the frequencies and percentages of the gender asymmetries in the strategies of responding to compliments. It also shows the Chi-Square Test of compliment responses strategies among both genders: male and female.

**Table 9:** Chi-Square Test and Gender Crosstabulation of Compliment Responses

Types of Compliment Responses	References		Total	Chi-Square Test ( $\chi^2$ )
	Male	Female		
Appreciation Token	64 (42%)	80 (57%)	144	16.311a, P-value= 0.061
Single	46 (30%)	34 (24%)	80	
Praise Upgrade	5 (3%)	2 (1%)	7	
Comment History	5 (3%)	7 (5%)	12	
Reassignment	0 (0%)	2 (1%)	2	
Return	19 (13%)	13 (9%)	32	
Question	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	
Scale down	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1	
Disagreement	1 (1%)	0 (0%)	1	
Qualification	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	2	
No Acknowledgment	9 (6%)	2 (1%)	11	
Request Interpretations	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0	
<b>Total</b>	152 (100%)	140 (100%)	<b>292</b>	

**Table 9** indicates that there are no differences in the use of the compliment strategies across the Palestinian male and female speakers. The table shows that the  $\chi^2$  is 16.311, which is less than the critical value of 16.919, and the P-value is 0.061, which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. That is to say, there are no significant differences between male and female speakers in their use of the strategies of responding to compliments. This indicates that both participants (male and female) employed the same compliment responses strategies.

### Social Status and Compliments

The researcher created the DCT with three-status situations: higher, same, and lower. One situation was created with a higher status receiver, two situations were created with a same status receiver, and two situations were created with a lower status receiver, see **Table 10**.

**Table 10:** Frequencies and Percentages of Compliments in terms of Social Status

Type of Response	To Higher Status Situation 1		To Same Status Situations 2&3		To Lower Status Situations 4&5	
	Ref.	Percentage	Ref.	Percentage	Ref.	Percentage
<b>Compliment</b>	36	83.72%	84	94.38%	89	90.82%
<b>Non-Complimentary Replies</b>	7	16.28%	5	5.62%	9	9.18%
<b>Total</b>	43	100%	89	100%	98	100%

The participants in this investigation were given a chance to pay compliments to a teacher (situation one), to classmates (situation two and three), and to students (situation four and five). The teacher received compliments in 83.72% of the responses, and only 16.28% of the responses were non-

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complimentary. Moreover, the classmates were given compliments in 94.38% of the responses, and the students were given compliments in 90.82% of the responses.

It is crystal clear that some participants did not give any compliments when the addressee is of higher status. Although the percentage is not high, being in a higher status prevented some participants from complimenting. Certainly, the barriers between the two interlocutors caused these non-complimentary replies to occur. However, the different levels of status did not affect the participants' choice of the compliment strategies, as most of the participants used explicit compliments in all situations.

## Social Status and Compliment Responses

In this section, the researcher also created the DCT with three-status situations: higher, same, and lower. One situation was created with a higher status receiver, two situations were created with a same status receiver, and two situations were created with a lower status receiver, see **Table 11**.

**Table 11:** Frequencies and Percentages of Compliment Responses in terms of Social Status

Type of Compliment Response	To Higher Status Situation 6		To Same Status Situations 7&9		To Lower Status Situations 8&10	
	Ref.	Percentage	Ref.	Percentage	Ref.	Percentage
<b>Agreement</b>	57	95%	103	90.35%	117	99.15%
<b>Non-Agreement</b>	3	5%	11	9.65%	1	0.85%
<b>Total</b>	60	100%	114	100%	118	100%

The participants in this investigation were given a chance to respond to compliments from a professor (situation six), classmates (situation seven and nine), and students (situation eight and ten). The professor received responses to the compliment in 95% of the responses, which were agreement, and only 5% of the responses were non-agreement responses. Besides, the classmates obtained responses to compliments in 90.35% of the responses, and the students got responses to compliments in 99.15% of the responses.

Some participants did not acknowledge the compliment when the complimenter was of same status. It is difficult to tell that the status here affected the participants' choice of the compliment responses strategies; however, it might be logical that the topic, being about possessions, caused some participants not to acknowledge the compliment. However, the various levels of status did not impact the participants' selection of the compliment responses strategies, as most of the participants agreed with the complimenter on the compliments in all situations.

## Findings and Conclusions

The study revealed that the Palestinian EFL university learners tended to explicitly compliment others. This strategy was the most predominant one of all compliment strategies, and this may be attributed to the compliment function, which is expressing genuine admiration and respect. Such a result is in line with the findings of Yuan's (2002), Jin-pei's (2013), and Alqarni's (2020) studies. However, the "Request" strategy was rarely applied by the Palestinians. Palestinian learners used explicit compliments

to express their feelings explicitly and to show their love and respect to the person being complimented. As a Palestinian, the researcher can suggest that the rare occurrence of the “request” strategy is natural in the Palestinian context as Palestinians do not ask to have something that is not theirs.

The most prevalent subcategory of the strategies of compliment responses utilised by the Palestinian EFL university learners is “Appreciation”. The participants in this study tended to use the expression “Thanks!” as it is the most suitable expression to show their appreciation from their perspective. Many participants also employed mixed strategies of compliment responses that involved the use of “Appreciation Token” and “Single Comment”. Such use of this mixed strategy might be considered as a way to maintain one’s face and follow Leech’s politeness principle. However, a few participants returned the compliment, which might be, to a large extent, an attempt from the Palestinian EFL university learners to be modest.

The study ascertained that there are no significant asymmetries between male and female speakers in their use of the strategies of complimenting nor the strategies of responding to compliments. However, females tended to perform explicit compliments a little more than males. Males showed a tendency towards expressing their feelings using implicit compliments a little more than females. This is strange as, in the Palestinian context where people are conservatives, females are expected not to show admiration to a large extent on appearance, personality, and performance because society addresses them as too modest and shy. Also, this might mean that the conservative way of living is changing in Palestine as Palestinian female speakers exceeded Palestinian male speakers in revealing admiration and preserving solidarity.

Participants performed compliments to all people regardless of their status more than non-complimentary replies. However, Palestinian EFL university learners complimented people with same status more than people with lower status. Also, they expressed compliments to people with lower status more than people with higher status. They performed non-complimentary replies to people with higher status more than people with lower status. Besides, the non-complimentary replies were applied more when the addressee is of lower status than that of same status. These differences are still not of high significance.

#### *Pedagogical Implications and Conclusions*

1. Compliment behaviour is convoluted and requires speakers to be acquainted with both linguistic and pragmatic competence. In other words, the societal customs and constraints affect the way we perform or respond to compliments. Thus, successful communication can be achieved when the interlocutors know how and when to express and respond to compliments considering the cultural norms of the culture of the interlocutor.
2. Curriculum designers and teachers now understand why Palestinian EFL university learners use some specific responses that could be unsuitable in other cultures. Curriculum designers and teachers of English language should focus more on pragmatic competence rather than grammar when designing the coursebooks and teaching.
3. In this study, the researcher observed that learners did not vary their ways of expressing and responding to compliments in various situations. The variation in the use of the strategies of



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compliments and compliment responses is restricted because of the embracement of the politeness notion. University learners studying English as a foreign language need more training on how to use various strategies in expressing and responding to compliments in different cultural contexts.

4. Teachers need to find techniques that help students make progress in pragmatic competence gradually by drawing their attention to foreign social and cultural customs without appearing to be trying to replace what they already have within their life system. This is a difficult job for teachers, but raising learners' awareness of cross-cultural variances is essential.
5. A change has been noticed. This change is worth examining to explore the true nature and causes of this change. The necessity of such investigation arises as a crucial cultural change taking place in this generation is happening because of the growing exposure of Palestinian EFL university learners to western culture through the internet and social media.

*Recommendations for Further Research*

This study was conducted with a written DCT. Further research should be conducted using a spoken DCT or interviews with the participants as this would widen the understanding of the participants' selection of specific strategy and the data would be so natural. Moreover, other variables, like the topic of compliments and syntactic formulas, should be considered in future research as they might impact the way the participants apply the various strategies. A larger number of participants should be taken into consideration in any further research as it will help provide more supporting findings.

## المجاملات وردودها بين الطلبة الجامعيين الفلسطينيين (متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية): دراسة لغوية اجتماعية

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### الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في موضوع المجاملات وردودها من منظور لغوي اجتماعي عند طلاب الجامعة الفلسطينيين المتعلمين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، حيث يركز البحث على كيفية تقديم المجاملة والرد عليها باللغة الإنجليزية. وفضلاً عن ذلك، تتطرق الدراسة إلى أوجه الاختلاف بين المشاركين من الذكور والإناث من حيث الطريقة التي يقدمون فيها المجاملة والرد عليها. ولتحقيق أهداف الدراسة، قام الباحث بجمع البيانات من أربعين متعلماً فلسطينياً للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عن طريق اختبار استكمال الحوار. اعتمد الباحث في تحليله للبيانات على الإطار التحليلي لـ "يون" (2002) لاستراتيجيات تقديم المجاملة، والإطار التحليلي لـ "هربرت" (1990) لاستراتيجيات الرد على المجاملة. وخلصت نتائج الدراسة إلى أن المتعلمين الفلسطينيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يميلون إلى استراتيجية تقديم المجاملة بشكل صريح أكثر من الاستراتيجيات الأخرى، علاوة على أنهم يميلون إلى قبول المجاملة على رفضها. وكشفت نتائج الدراسة أنه لا توجد اختلافات فارقة بين الجنسين من متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشأن كيفية تقديم المجاملة والرد عليها. وأخيراً، أوضحت النتائج أن المكانة الاجتماعية لا تؤثر في الطريقة التي يقدم فيها متعلمو اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية المجاملات وردودها.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مجاملة، ردود المجاملة، اختبار استكمال الحوار، استراتيجيات المجاملة، النوع الاجتماعي، المكانة الاجتماعية.

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