Exploring Effects of Classroom Instruction:
Teaching Giving and Receiving Compliments in ESL Classrooms

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Abstract

Although some studies in interlanguage pragmatics have investigated learners’ developmental processes in acquiring pragmatic competence, there have been few longitudinal studies examining long-term effects of formal instruction. This case study explores immediate and delayed effects of formal instruction on the speech act set of giving and receiving compliments in a real ESL classroom setting. Classroom instruction for 200 minutes, administered to 31 intermediate adult learners enrolled in a university intensive English program, facilitated learners’ outside-of-class observation and interaction. Their performance in and awareness of giving and receiving compliments were described as measured before, during, immediately after, and one year after the instruction. As the instruction progressed, learners were able to produce longer written complimenting dialogues on appropriate topics and increased variety in syntactic structures of compliments and in response types and strategies. Even one year after instruction, a subset of the learners demonstrated their retention of central skills and knowledge although a few response strategies were marginally employed and may have been forgotten by most of the learners. The instruction also contributed to the learners’ higher level of confidence in giving and receiving compliments in English, understanding of the culturally specific nature of the speech act set, awareness of age, gender, and relative status in the interaction, and motivation for learning other speech acts. The analyses lend support to the positive effects of formal instruction in pragmatics reported in previous studies.
1. Introduction

When interacting in a native language, observation and interpretation of the rules of speaking are shared and mostly unconscious. Speakers communicate and addressees understand the meaning as the manifestations of the speakers' intent and personality. Similarly, learners' pragmatic behavior is also interpreted as a manifestation of their character. Their misuse of rules of speaking could be negatively viewed not as the result of their limited linguistic proficiencies but as an indication of their flawed personality. Whereas linguistic mistakes such as faulty grammar and pronunciation are likely to be tolerated as long as the utterance is intelligible, their pragmatic errors may not be excused. "An inappropriate question or the failure to utter the customary apology, compliment, or congratulation will not be judged as an error natural to the process of language learning or, indeed, of intercultural differences, but as a personal affront" (Wolfson, 1989, pp. 25-26). Moreover, the more native-like learners' proficiency becomes with fewer mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, the less conscious interlocutors become of the limitations of the learners' pragmatic competence. Their pragmatic competence is often assumed to be as good as their linguistic proficiency; thus violation of these rules may readily be attributed to the speakers' negative intent or personal traits.

This paper is a case study of teaching the speech act set\(^1\) of giving and receiving compliments in a real classroom in an effort to prevent or minimize such offense or

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1. Speech acts are actions performed via utterances and functional units in communication such as apologies, requests, complaints, invitations, and compliments (Yule, 1996; Cohen, 1996a). Whereas speech acts focus on a single utterance that realizes the act, speech act sets are sets of communicative acts that serve particular functions consisting of sets of strategies (Cohen, 1996). This study attempts to investigate not merely the speech act of complimenting but rather the speech act set, including the responses to compliments in sequences of interactions.
communication breakdown that learners may experience due to their lack of pragmatic competence. The instruction was administered to two heterogeneous groups of high intermediate ESL students at the University of Minnesota, and its effects will be explored in terms of learners’ performance and awareness of the speech act set. This paper first reviews past research and published teaching materials on compliments and responses to compliments. Then, the design of this study and classroom instruction will be described which consisted of teaching for approximately 200 minutes administered to the 31 international adult ESL students at the Minnesota English Center in the spring of 2000. The findings on the learners’ performance and awareness of the speech act set before and after the classroom instruction and what these findings suggest with regard to the effects of the formal instruction on the learners will be reported. Finally, the limitations of this study and suggestions for further research will be discussed.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Rationale for Compliments

As is true of any other speech acts, the speech act set of giving and receiving compliments is culturally bound communicative behavior; largely reflecting the social and cultural values of the interlocutors. While a simple compliment about a possession of the addressee is not unusual between close friends or even strangers in the United States, in another culture like Samoan complimenting rarely takes place since paying a compliment is synonymous to requesting the object (Holmes & Brown, 1987). Arabic speakers frequently employ proverbs or set phrases when responding to compliments; Chinese speakers customarily refuse compliments stating that the recipient of the
compliment is not worthy of praise (Dunham, 1992). Instances of embarrassment, dismay, and offense in interactions with native English speakers experienced by ESL learners in giving and receiving compliments have been documented in the literature (Dunham, 1992; Holmes & Brown, 1987).

Compliments serve multiple functions conveying a variety of intentions speakers wish to communicate. Wolfson (1989) views compliments as a “social lubricant,” often replacing greetings, gratitude, or apologies. Compliments are also employed in combination with criticism, scolding, apologies, or requests and soften such effects and minimize the face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Holmes, 1988; Wolfson, 1983, 1989). Considering the fact that native English speakers pay compliments to acknowledge and praise positive attributes, failing or neglecting to do so can be interpreted as a sign of disapproval (Billmyer, 1990). Performing such a multifunctional social strategy is a complicated task for learners. The wrong use of compliments and inappropriate responses create embarrassment or offense.

In addition, compliments can also be employed as a conversation strategy with which to open an interaction to establish ties of solidarity (Billmyer, 1990; Dunham, 1992). Compliments normally nominate topics and provide opportunities to develop the conversation by discussing further details about the topic and beyond. Compliments can also be initiated by learners in a natural setting to initiate a conversation, get acquainted and connect with the native English speakers. It is a conversational tool with which learners establish friendships and become more integrated into the target culture. Such integrative motivation is closely related to achievements in the target language and facilitate pragmatic development (Kasper & Schmidt, 1996).
2.2 Research Findings on Compliments and Compliment Responses

Past research has also uncovered the way native English speakers exchange compliments which serves as basis of instruction on giving and receiving compliments. Wolfson and Manes (1980) and Manes and Wolfson (1981) collected 950 and 686 naturally occurring compliments respectively in their studies and found compliments to be an extremely formulaic speech act. Adopting an ethnographic data collection approach, the compliments were gathered from middle-class native English speakers, both male and female of varying ages and occupational and educational backgrounds. They found that 85% of the compliments used one of the first three syntactic categories below and 97% fell into the nine categories (Manes & Wolfson, pp. 120-121).

1. NP is/looks (really) ADJ. (Your blouse is beautiful.)
2. I (really) like/love NP. (I like your car.)
3. PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP. (That’s a nice wall hanging.)
4. You V (a) (really) ADJ NP. (You did a good job.)
5. You V (NP) (really) ADV. (You really handled that situation well.)
6. You have (a) ADJ NP! (You have such beautiful hair.)
7. What (a) ADJ NP! (What a lovely baby you have!)
8. ADJ NP! (Nice game!)
9. Isn’t NP ADJ! (Isn’t your ring beautiful?)

Eighty percent of compliments were adjectival and two-thirds of them included the most common five adjectives (nice, good, beautiful, pretty, and great) whereas two verbs (like and love) were dominant among the compliments containing a semantically positive verb (86%). Most of the other adjectives and verbs occurred only once or twice in their data of 686 compliments.

Since compliments were observed typically independent of the previous topic or initiating a conversation, the use of deixis was prevalent in efforts to identify the referent of the compliment unambiguously (Manes & Wolfson, 1981). The majority of the
compliments (70%) utilized second person pronouns (You look wonderful in that shirt) or demonstratives (That's a nice hat you're wearing). Otherwise, the complimented object had already been mentioned and was clear from the context (I like your jacket. It's a great color), or was identified in some other manner by means of the verbal or nonverbal context. Identification of the referent was crucial in a compliment and the deixis in compliments seemed to serve an important function in this role.

In terms of the topic of the compliment, two categories have been identified: the appearance and/or possessions and the abilities and/or the accomplishments of the interlocutors (Wolfson, 1989). The former category includes a wide range of topics, largely reflecting what is culturally considered preferable in the society. Positive remarks are offered regarding some attributes that are noticeably different such as newness and weight loss in mainstream American culture (i.e. "noticings", Hatch, 1992). Whereas compliments on appearance and possessions can be given relatively freely regardless of the status and role of the interlocutors, those on abilities and accomplishments are more restricted in their distribution. With regard to the relative status of the interlocutors, interlocutors in higher positions are capable of evaluating the performance of those of lower status, thus utilizing compliments as positive reinforcement. Regardless of the topic, compliments are so expected or even required as a recognition of positive attributes and performances that their absence could communicate disapproval in mainstream American culture.

Gender difference in the use of compliments is also evidenced in research. Wolfson (1989) states that women appeared to both give and receive compliments much more frequently than men. Qualities in the appearance of American males seemed to be
an inappropriate topic for compliments from either gender; especially compliments on appearance directed to males of higher status have been found to be highly restricted. Herbert (1990), investigating American compliments, confirmed some of Holmes’ (1998) findings on New Zealander compliments. Women predominantly used first person compliments (I like/love...) and exclamatory forms (What lovely earrings!), whereas men preferred to employ impersonal expressions (Great shoes). Male compliments were more likely to be accepted, especially by females, than female compliments possibly due to males’ relatively higher status than females. Female compliments are likely to be a negotiation of social distance and used to increase or consolidate solidarity between the interlocutors while male compliments might be viewed as face-threatening acts expressing desire for the object complimented on (Holmes, 1988), or as genuine expression of admiration (Herbert, 1990).

In giving compliments, spontaneity of the remarks plays a crucial role in making the compliments sound sincere. Despite the fact that compliments themselves are highly structured and formulaic, the use of exclamatory forms and “framing remarks” allows compliments to seem original and unprepared. Framing remarks are found to precede or follow compliments and either “identify and focus attention” (Did you get your hair cut?) or “requests further information about the object complimented” (Where did you buy it?) (Manes & Wolfson, 1981, pp. 128-129). Such framing remarks, along with exclamatory intonation, intensify the compliments and render them original and sincere.

Studies of native English speakers’ responses to compliments have also revealed cultural norms shared by the society. Although Pomerantz (1978) recommended appreciation of compliments (Thanks) as the most appropriate response, she found a large
portion of responses employing self-praise avoidance strategies such as praise
downgrades (A: Oh it was just beautiful B: Well thank you, I thought it was quite nice),
disagreements (But I don’t think they were too good), referent shifts (It wove itself), and
returns of compliments (You sound really good too). Drawing on such Pomerantz’s
labels of response strategies, Billmyer (1990) grouped responses to compliments into
three categories: accept, deflect, and reject. Acceptance of compliments were
characterized as polite but as not sustaining the conversation, while deflecting them was a
preferred reply by native speakers and typically assisted in sustaining the interaction.
The repertoire of deflect types consists of the following behaviors: comment on the
history of the referent (I got it at Wanamakers), shift credit away from self (My mother
gave it to me), downgrade the compliment (It was on sale), question the compliment or
request reassurance (Do you really think so?), and return a compliment (Yours is nice
too) (pp. 36, 42). Rejection of compliments tends to occur much less frequently due to its
potential face-threatening nature, thus normally restricted between intimates. Simple
acceptance of compliments is often considered more appropriate and graceful particularly
in asymmetrical relationships (Wolfson, 1989).

In Nelson, Al-Batal, and Echols’ study of American and Syrian compliment
responses (1996), the empirical distribution of response types is reported. Half of the
American compliment responses were acceptance,² while nearly all the other half were
mitigated (deflected) and few were rejected. Among the mitigated compliment

² However, in Nelson et al.’s classification (1996), acceptance includes “compliment return”, which is a
subcategory of deflection strategy in Billmyer (1990) and the present study.
responses, they find such strategies as deflecting or providing qualifying comment\(^3\) and reassurance or repetition request.\(^4\)

Empirical research on complimenting behavior in other languages has revealed a variety of social norms and characteristics of complimenting behavior that are different from those of American behavior. Barnlund and Araki (1985) found that Japanese compliments occurred much less frequently and were given more on the basis of personality traits and performances than American counterparts. While more Americans were found to compliment close friends than did the Japanese respondents, a greater proportion of acquaintances were praised by Japanese than by Americans. Japanese respondents also had a greater tendency to deflect or reject a compliment than Americans, either by questioning its accuracy, denying it, explaining why it was not deserved, or by responding with a smile or by saying nothing at all. Although they documented that Americans tended to mainly accept compliments (58\%) or to justify or extend them (15\%), they did not report the distribution of the other responses.

Among Japanese compliments, Daikuhara (1986) also observed that Japanese in natural settings used compliments to pay deference to addressees. The interlocutors occasionally denied compliments and subsequently returned another compliment to the original complimenter. While American compliments were seen to create solidarity between interlocutors, Japanese counterparts were employed to create distance between them. Thus, a compliment would be denied in order to sustain harmony and emphasize

\(^3\) The qualifying comment provides additional information as in “I bought it at REI” or downgrades the compliment as in “It's one of my oldest”.

\(^4\) The reassurance or repetition request asks for an expansion or repetition of the original compliment (“You don’t think it’s too bright?”) or questions the sincerity of the complimenter (“Do you really like them?”).
commonality shared by the interlocutors. Such instances were also found in Chinese compliments (Ye, 1995).

Considering the number of discrepancies in complimenting behavior across cultures, learners’ transferring such first language pragmatic rules could induce instances of embarrassment and offense in interactions with native English speakers. In an attempt to minimize potential misunderstanding and communication breakdown caused by negative pragmatic transfer and a pragmatic gap on the part of learners, classroom instruction has been implemented and researched in order to determine whether learners would benefit from such formal instruction.

2.3 Effects of Classroom Instruction in Compliments

Some studies have compared the instructed experimental group of learners with those in uninstructed control groups and have reported advantages for those receiving instruction. Billmyer (1990), for example, studied the effect of six-hour tutorials about compliments and compliment responses on Japanese ESL learners and found considerable improvements in performance of the tutored group of learners in such areas as: number of appropriate compliments, spontaneity of compliments, use of semantically positive adjectives, and deflecting replies. She contended that “formal instruction concerning the social rules of language use given in the classroom can assist learners in communicating more appropriately with native speakers of the target language in meaningful social interaction outside the classroom” (p. 44).

Research on classroom instruction has explored the relative effects of explicit and implicit instruction and found learners’ improvement in pragmatic competence with
either approach. However, explicit instruction generally appears to be more effective than the implicit approach (Kasper, 1997). Similarly, Rose and Ng (Chapter 8 in Kasper & Rose, in press) examined the effects of inductive and deductive instruction on learners' performance in compliments and compliment responses. The findings indicated a striking improvement in the utilization of compliment formulas by learners instructed with both approaches, while only the deductive group revealed positive effects in responding to compliments. They concluded that inductive and deductive instruction might both assist in pragmalinguistic\(^5\) improvement, although only the deductive approach may lead to sociopragmatic development.

Since classroom instruction cannot comprehensively provide the pragmatic knowledge that learners need, the learners' awareness of pragmatic rules in the target language plays an integral role. While Schmidt (1993) emphasizes the importance of conscious learning and noticing, Kasper (1997) contends that learners can acquire sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic information through awareness-raising activities, such as observational tasks involving assignments outside the classroom with a focus on sociopragmatic or pragmalinguistic features. Such tasks help learners to integrate linguistic forms and their pragmatic functions in context (Kasper, 1997). Hinkel (1994) argues that instruction should begin with self-awareness and non-judgmental observation. However, besides these observational tasks, there does not seem to be sufficient discussion on the development of awareness or on the effects of instruction on learner

\(^5\) The terms pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic are based on Thomas' distinction between the two types of pragmatic failure: pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure. The former is basically a linguistic problem which occurs as a result of misunderstanding the intended illocutionary force of an utterance. The latter results from cross-culturally different perceptions of what constitutes appropriate linguistic behavior (Thomas, 1983, p. 99)
awareness. What exactly characterizes "awareness" and how can instructors facilitate learners' awareness of pragmatic use of the language?

Another question about classroom instruction regards teaching material and native norms that serve as a basis for instruction. What should be utilized as the linguistic and pragmatic model of classroom instruction? Published teaching materials have generally been written based on material developers' intuition and thus known to inaccurately represent the way native speakers use the language. Bardovi-Harlig, Harford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan, & Reynolds (1991) in their study of 20 textbooks contended, for example, that very few of them describe the use of closing phrases accurately. Similarly, Boxer and Pickering (1995) surveyed the speech act set of complaint/ commiseration in seven sets of ELT textbooks and found a mismatch between the empirical findings on the use of the speech act in spontaneous speech and in the teaching materials. They further argued that while "indirect complaints" were observed frequently in natural speech which rather positively function as a conversation opener and relationship builder, textbooks centered on "direct complaints" in negative contexts. Therefore, an important function of complaints as a social strategy failed to be represented in the textbooks that they consulted.

Several chapters on giving and receiving compliments in ESL and EFL textbooks were examined to see to what extent they reflected spontaneous complimenting behavior in light of the research findings on the speech act. (Mosaic Two: A Listening/ Speaking Skills Book, Ferrer-Hanreddy & Whalley, 1996; Speaking Naturally: Communication Skills in American English, Tillitt & Bruder, 1985; Culturally Speaking, Genzel & Cummings, 1994; Hear to Heart: Overcoming Barriers in Cross-Cultural
Communication, Yoshida & Sophia University Applied Linguistic Research Group, 2000). None of them have a comprehensive description of or instructions on complimenting in any of the areas such as: the topics of compliments, syntactic categories, gender, relative status of the interlocutors, and response types. Sample compliments and responses are either not listed at all or partially represented but accompanied by inaccurate or misleading interpretation of the way native English speakers employ compliments. Furthermore, compliments are not included in many of the textbooks that teach functional use of English (Jones & von Baeyer, 1983; Madden & Rohlck, 1997; Mathews, 1994)

The usefulness of films in language learning has been underscored not only in the area of listening and speaking skills but also in pragmatic development. Rose (1997) advocates the use of American and Cantonese films for classroom instruction and attempts to validate the use of scripted language. He compared compliments in 408 compliments in American feature films with those in the Manes and Wolfson corpus (1981) and found a similar distribution of syntactic categories. However, the compliments in the films demonstrated a “contrived creativity” not found in spontaneous interactions. Whereas Manes and Wolfson found that compliments were highly formulaic with two thirds of the compliments employing five adjectives (nice, good, beautiful, pretty, great), the scripted language displayed more variety in the use of adjectives. As Rose suggests, analysis of further aspects of compliments must be conducted in order to draw any conclusions as to the accuracy of scripted language in the films. Although he argues that such preliminary results regarding compliments were promising, the use of such unauthentic material has already been admonished. Films
could probably supplement the instruction but they should not be a major source of information to be presented in instruction. As Kasper (1997) argues, since native speakers’ intuition is an unreliable source of information about the pragmatic use of language in their own communities, teaching materials on pragmatics must be research-based.

Furthermore, pragmatic instruction must reflect current trends in target language use. In Wolfson’s analysis (1989), in complimenting appearance and possessions, women were found to be the recipients of the compliments from both men and women, complimenting behavior from men to men being extremely rare. Similarly, it was men of a higher social status who were found to generate compliments to their male and female subordinates about their abilities or accomplishments. Tannen (1994) also claims that compliments tend to be offered from those of higher rank to those of lower rank, a complimenter being able to judge the recipient of the compliment. Considering current workplace situations in which an increasing number of women are in a position to evaluate their male subordinates’ performance, social status might override gender in complimenting behavior. It has also been reported that college professors have been admonished these days not to compliment students since it might be interpreted as sexual harassment (A. Cohen, personal e-mail communication, November 23, 1999). Although these current trends may be limited to particular settings, if learners are situated in a similar setting or social status, such updated information might in fact prove beneficial to them.
2.4 Purposes of Classroom Instruction for the Present Study

In the previous section, the case was made that the language model to be presented in the classroom must be empirically based and updated. Bearing in mind such challenges in teaching pragmatics, a set of sample material was created and taught in order to explore the effects of classroom instruction on learners' performance and awareness of a speech act set. The purposes of the instruction were as follows:

(1) To increase ESL learners' exposure to giving and receiving compliments in natural/naturalistic settings and provide pragmalinguistic practice in and outside the classroom.

At one point, the instructional materials required learners to collect American compliment responses outside the classroom. This provided learners an opportunity to observe and analyze both linguistic and social aspects of the model as if they were ethnographers (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991). Learners engaged in real conversations performing the target speech act and were simultaneously exposed to the authentic input of their interlocutors. Such input was the most relevant to individual learner's realistic use of language, and thus the most appropriate model for the learners.

(2) To inform the learners of American norms in giving and receiving compliments and yet allow them to find ways to express themselves in a comfortable manner.

Pragmatic use of language involves both linguistic and social representation of learners' intention. It is required of a teacher to provide sufficient information on the way the speech act set is performed by Americans and to provide linguistic practice, but then, it
should be left to the learners to decide whether or not to utilize the newly learned skills. Classroom instruction should assist learners in conveying what they wish to communicate as a way of comfortable self-expression. As Thomas (1983) stated:

It is the teacher’s job to equip the student to express her/him in exactly the way s/he chooses to do so — rudely, tactfully, or in an elaborate polite manner. What we want to prevent is her/his being unintentionally rude or subservient (p. 96).

(3) To ultimately raise learners’ awareness of pragmatic use of American English in general.

Since realistically speaking, it is unreasonable to expect formal instruction to teach everything learners need to know, classroom instruction should equip learners with the tools and the motivation necessary to facilitate their further learning outside the classroom. The importance of cognitive awareness of social uses of language is also discussed in a number of studies (Holmes and Brown, 1987; Judd, 1999; Kasper, 1997; Kasper and Schmidt, 1996).

2.5. The Research Questions for the Present Study

(1) How can intermediate ESL learners’ performance in and awareness of giving and receiving compliments be characterized?

(2) What are the effects of classroom instruction on the learners’ performance in and awareness of compliments and responses to compliments?

As mentioned above, although the importance of learners’ cognitive awareness has been discussed in the literature, there does not seem to be a definition of awareness in interlanguage pragmatics. In this study, learner awareness is analyzed in terms of the
extent to which learners noticed the existence of culturally-bound rules within the target language, their attention to pragmatic use of the target language, the understanding that they have of their pragmatic competence, and their level of comfort and motivation.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The instruction was administered to two groups, representing 31 international students from 20 countries who were enrolled in intensive high-intermediate-level ESL courses at the University of Minnesota during the Spring I and Spring II terms, 2000. The course met every day for two hours for seven weeks at the Minnesota English Center. The first group during Spring I consisted of 13 students from 11 countries: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, Cameroon, France, Mexico, Brazil, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Myanmar. The second group was a larger class of 18 students from 13 countries including Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, Senegal, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Russia, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan. Prior to instruction, the students had been in the United States anywhere from several weeks to three years. While most of them were enrolled full-time in the ESL program at the Minnesota English Center and planned to enter college in the United States, several of them were part-time students with jobs and with a family.

3.2 Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

There are five written measures in this study: a before-measure, two interim-measures, an after-measure, and a delayed after-measure (see (1)-(5) below). These
measures were implemented as regular classroom activities in the course of oral skills instruction except for the delayed after-measure. Although the course was team-taught, discussions on compliments were planned and implemented by me and the other instructor assisted me with modeling role-plays.

(1) At the beginning of instruction, an initial inventory was given which learners worked on individually (Appendix 1). This inventory was designed as a before-measure to probe the ESL students' initial performance in giving and receiving compliments as well as their awareness of such complimenting behavior. Learners wrote down oral dialogues of giving and receiving compliments and answered several questions as to their present knowledge about American complimenting behavior, level of comfort in such interactions, and first language compliments.

(2) An interim-measure was implemented during the second stage of instruction in the form of an outside-of-class assignment. Learners complimented native English speakers and jotted down both the compliments they had given and the responses from their interlocutors immediately after each conversation. Instead of relying on memory, learners could have audio-recorded their interactions with native English speakers to transcribe later. This would probably have raised the level of linguistic accuracy in the learner-collected data. However, the note-taking approach was employed, since in order to audiotape learners would have needed to obtain permission first and therefore, the data would not have been spontaneous at all. While those compliments that were received and responded to by the learners are excluded from the analysis here, learner-initiated compliments served as an interim-measure for their performance. On the other hand, native English speakers’
compliment responses reported by the learners functioned as the baseline data to be compared with learners’ response strategies in subsequent stages.

In this data collection activity, some variants had to be controlled. For instance, gender, age, and social status of the complimenter were predetermined and the interactions took place mostly among college students of similar age and equal status. In this respect, the data were contrived and the initial offer of compliments was not spontaneous. However, having the learners observe speakers of their own gender, age, and status, does have the advantage of offering language models from similar speakers. In this respect, the learners were exposed to the most current native-speaker input and obtained the most appropriate and relevant language model for themselves.

(3) The other interim-measure was implemented through a reading assignment of excerpts from Wolfson (1983) to stimulate learners’ awareness and analysis of compliments (Appendix 4). This assignment was optional for the learners and approximately half of them (12 learners) completed it.

(4) At the end of the instruction learners filled out an exit inventory (Appendix 7) individually in class. This after-measure evaluated their written complimenting dialogues, received feedback about the instruction, and probed their level of awareness. Learners wrote down imaginary spoken complimenting interactions and answered several questions designed to investigate the learners’ level of confidence and awareness in complimenting behavior and level of motivation toward learning other speech acts.
(5) About one year after instruction (in March 2001), another delayed after-measure was administered in order to assess long-term effects of the classroom instruction. Ten learners who were still in touch with me volunteered to participate through e-mail or regular mail. They were asked not to review their notes or handouts on giving and receiving compliments, to write down two complimenting interactions as if they would say it, and to indicate the interlocutors’ gender and relationship (Appendix 8).

3.3 Treatment

In planning classroom activities, I utilized empirical research findings and analysis from Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Wolfson (1989), and adapted classroom instruction methods teaching compliments and replies to compliments by Billmyer (1990) and Dunham (1992). I also incorporated the wisdom learned in conversations with my team teacher and colleagues at the Minnesota English Center. The instructional procedure consisted of the following seven stages.

Stage I. Introduction: Day 1

The purposes of this introduction was to assess learners’ initial pragmatic competence in and awareness of giving and receiving compliments and to motivate them to learn complimenting and speech acts in general. Initially, learners were asked to think about some of the most challenging aspects of learning English. They learned that acquiring native-like functional skills would normally take approximately ten years in an ESL setting. This was not meant to discourage them but to motivate them to speed up their learning process so that it would not take them as long.
Second, in order to introduce the concepts of compliment and flattery, a sample dialogue of complimenting behavior was modeled between instructors and such vocabulary and related concepts as *compliment, flatter, brown nose, apple polish*, and *butter up* were taught. Then, learners individually worked on the pre-instructional inventory (Appendix 1) as a before-measure for this study.

**Stage II. Student research**

This portion of instruction was designed to inform learners of ethnographic research\(^6\) and to familiarize them with a set of findings from Manes and Wolfson (1981). In addition, the aim was to motivate them to observe native English speakers’ complimenting behavior. First, the major findings on native speakers’ compliments from Manes and Wolfson (1981) were introduced (Appendix 2-A, 2-B). The nine most frequently occurring syntactic categories for giving compliments were laid out and the learners were told that 85% of the compliments consisted of the first three categories and 97% employed the nine categories. Learners practiced in pairs giving compliments using these syntactic categories. Then, findings on the influence of gender and status of the interlocutors in speech act realizations were discussed in order to motivate the learners to collect notebook data for themselves to verify these findings as of today in a college environment in Minnesota. The learners were to compliment at least three native English speakers outside of class to record their own compliments and their interlocutors’ responses. A note pad was given to the learners for this purpose and they later copied their notes onto a handout (Appendix 3) to be submitted. In offering a compliment,

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\(^6\) Ethnographic research is generally conducted via thorough observation and no researcher intervention.
learners were advised to be mindful of appropriate topics in relation to the gender of the addressee in each interaction. Learners had two days to complete this assignment. These written interactions were reviewed repeatedly during subsequent class sessions when different aspects of compliments were brought to the students in the class. Such aspects included contextual variants that influence pragmatic behavior (Stage III), various strategies to respond to compliments (Stage V), and compliments as a conversation opener (Stage VI).

Stage III. Awareness of Social Variables and Practice: Day 2

The purposes of this stage were to make the learners aware of different variables in giving and receiving compliments and to have them analyze their own data. The nine most frequently occurring syntactic categories were reviewed and learners identified the categories used in their own complimenting assignment from Stage II. Manes and Wolfson’s findings on gender and relative status of the interlocutors were discussed again and learners analyzed their own data in terms of such variables and filled in the table (Appendix 3). Although the learner data did not include diversity in interlocutors’ age and status difference, learners discussed these variables and took them into consideration in determining appropriateness of their own complimenting interactions.

Finally, sincerity and spontaneity in giving compliments was considered and learners determined the appropriateness of their own recalled interactions, taking into account the gender, role, relative status, compliment topic, and sincerity in the interactions.
Stage IV. Pragmatic Insights: optional homework

This optional assignment was given to sharpen learners’ insights on complimenting behavior (Appendix 4) and completed by approximately half of the learners. The handout included excerpts about positive values of mainstream Americans (Wolfson, 1983). This assignment was collected and feedback was given in writing, as well as discussed briefly in class for the benefit of the whole class.

Stage V. Responses to Compliments: Day 3

This section was designed to teach learners a variety of strategies for receiving compliments. Learners practiced not only accepting but also deflecting compliments. First, the data collection assignment was returned to the learners with good examples marked, and those examples were role-played between the learners.

Second, the instructors demonstrated sample short complimenting interactions (Appendix 5) to stimulate the learners’ powers of observation, and four self-praise avoidance strategies were taught inductively. Such strategies included “downgrading the compliment,” “questioning the compliment,” “shifting the credit away from themselves,” and “returning a compliment” (Billmyer, 1990, p. 36). Some more written interactions from the learners’ data collection assignments were shared with the whole class and the class identified the responding strategies used in the interactions.

Finally, the learners practiced giving and responding to compliments in a mingling activity. They formed two concentric circles, each one facing a partner. One complimented the other and the other responded. Then, the outer circle rotated and each
student had a new partner, repeated the process, and switched roles after practicing sufficiently.

Stage VI. Compliments as a Conversation Opener: Day 4

This section was intended to discuss another function of complimenting behavior as a conversation opener. A prolonged conversation among family members (Appendix 6) was role-played by the instructors during which the learners looked at the written dialogue on the handout and highlighted the rapidly shifting topics of the conversation. Through this activity, the learners identified another function of complimenting as a conversation opener. They also practiced in pairs opening a conversation with a compliment and sustaining the interaction.

Stage VII. Closing and Relating to Other Functions

This closing was to assess learners' after instructional production of giving and receiving compliments, to receive their feedback about my instruction, and to probe their level of awareness, confidence and motivation toward learning speech acts. Learners completed the after-measure inventory individually (Appendix 7). The final item on the inventory included a list of nine other major speech acts which were explained before learners indicated their interests in learning them.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Regarding learners' performance of compliments, the learners' written work was collected and analyzed in terms of four aspects: length of each complimenting
conversation, compliment topics, syntactic categories, and response strategies. Length of each written dialogue was measured by the number of turns in the dialogue. Some dialogues started with greetings and such portion of the interaction before a compliment was excluded. The length of the dialogues was assessed order to investigate to what extent learners develop the interaction after the compliment.

The compliment topics were categorized following Wolfson (1989): addressee’s appearance or possessions, and abilities or accomplishments (see p. 5). A great majority of the data fell into these two categories while a small percentage of compliments was deviant, which will be discussed in the following section. Similarly, syntactic categories of compliments were sorted based on Manes and Wolfson (1981) (pp. 3-4), and deviations will be reported in the result section.

Responses to compliments were analyzed with regard to the response types and strategies involved in the written dialogue (see Table 4, p. 40). The classification was based on Billmyer (1990, see p. 6) with a few alterations. The response types were: simple acceptance, deflection, and conversation development. Simple acceptance of a compliment was a mere appreciation token (thank you) which was not followed by any comments about the compliment topic. Deflection was further classified into four strategies (downgrading, shifting credit, questioning, and returning), and conversation development consisted of two strategies: commenting on history and expressing surprise.

The type “Reject” (Billmyer, 1990) did not constitute an independent category for a number of reasons. First, there did not appear to be a clear definition of rejection in the literature and the distinction between rejection and deflection can be obscured. While rejection could occur immediately after the compliment (It's not all that nice), it can also
happen as a result of a series of deflection strategies (*This old thing? It's a rag my sister gave me*) without acceptance. Moreover, among the native English speaker responses, such outright rejection was not observed. Since Billmyer (1990) characterizes this response type as “a potentially face-threatening act” (p. 36), the frequency of occurrence may be considerably low. For the instructional purpose also, this high-stake response type was not highlighted as a separate category but introduced as the consequence of not ultimately accepting the compliment.

Although commenting on history is categorized under the deflect type in Billmyer (1990), it is classified under a new response type, *conversation development* in the present study. While commenting on history may in some cases involve deflection such as downgrading (*I bought it at a K-mart bluelight sale*), it does not seem to necessarily lead to avoidance of self-praise (*I bought it [my watch] in Switzerland when I was there on vacation last month*). This example could even occur with an acceptance of the compliment (*Thank you, I bought it when...*). Such a distinction was often obscured in the data, yet either case appeared to have a clear intention of developing the conversation. Therefore, commenting on history is classified as a strategy for a response type, *conversation development*. However, it should be noted that deflection and conversation development semantically overlap (see Figure 1 below) and deflection may also be viewed as an intention to sustain the conversation.
In the analysis of the learner data, another small category of responses similar to questioning was observed (Thanks, you like it? /Really? Thank you). Although such responses employed an interrogative form, the function is not actually to question the compliment but to express surprise with the intention to sustain the conversation. Therefore, such questioning responses occurring with an acceptance of a compliment (thank you) were termed as expressing surprise and classified as a strategy under the conversation development type. Such classification of compliment responses in the present study was a preliminary analysis in an effort to categorize the learner data mainly for instructional purposes and by no means an exhaustive description of American compliment responses.
4. Results

Section 5.1 will first describe learners' performance (5.1.1) in and awareness (5.1.2) of giving and receiving compliments as assessed through the before-measure. In 5.2, learners' interim and post instructional performance (5.2.1) and awareness (5.2.2) will be discussed in the interim-measures, after-measure, and delayed after-measure in this order. Learners' feedback and assignment results will be reported in their own writing from collected handouts to reflect their awareness and performance accurately. Due to some irregularities in learner attendance, participation, and nature of the tasks, the total number of participants, compliments, and compliment responses vary and will be reported for each measure.

4.1 Research Question 1: Learners' Performance in Giving and Receiving

Compliments Prior to Instruction

4.1.1 Learners' Performance of Compliments and Compliment Responses

Prior to classroom instruction about giving and receiving compliments, 28 learners wrote down 54 complimenting interactions as they would say them in English (Appendix 1, Item 2). Such learner compliments were analyzed in terms of the length of the dialogue measured by the number of turns, topic of each compliment, and the syntactic category of the compliment. At this stage, learners' imagined interactions were fairly short and simple; the average number of conversational turns\(^7\) was 1.9 among 54 interactions created by the learners.

\(^7\)The average number of turns was obtained by adding the number of turns in every dialogue written by the learners and dividing it by the number of the total dialogues.
Most of the compliments (85%) centered on appearance and possessions of the interlocutor while the rest were on abilities and accomplishments. (For the complete distribution of syntactic categories, see Table 3, p. 39.) Some learner compliments facilitated a discussion on what and what not to compliment on:

(1) A: nice jacket or nice color on your lips [nice lipstick].
   B: Thanks. I buy this ~.

(2) A: You have a nice eyes.
   B: Thank you. You, too.

Such topics would probably be acceptable in Spanish conversation between a male and female as it is termed as “piropo” (Campo & Zuluaga, 2000). Even in English, they would be appropriate if given between close female interlocutors. However, if delivered from a male to female, such compliments could carry unintended romantic connotations, and therefore, learners were warned against such potentially inappropriate topics.

Most of the learners’ compliments (79%) fell into the nine syntactic categories reported by Manes and Wolfson (1981) (also see Table 3 for the details, p. 39), although 44% of them employed the eighth category (Nice game) which is the shortest and simplest. Fifteen percent of the compliments did not fall into any of the nine syntactic categories.

This 15% (eight compliments) displayed a few conspicuous features. Two compliments (11%) given by Uzbekistan and Senegal complimented their interlocutors occasionally starting the sentence with you in interrogative sentences (You look good? /You have a very nice shirt?). Four (7%) Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese, and Russian
learners omitted the referent (*Looks nice*) or used a pronoun (*That is especial* [special/unusual]) without providing specific referents.

Prior to classroom instruction, 19 responses out of 54 (40%) simply accepted compliments, while 33% already employed deflection strategies, and 10% extended the conversation up to six turns, commenting on the history of the object (see p. 37 for more details). Some creative responses that were deviant from native English speaker norm were found in the data:

(6) A: I like your hat.
   B: Keep liking.

(7) A: You look good?
   B: Thanks, I’ll try be better.

(8) A: You look nice today.
   B: Oh, really? Thank you.
   A: You’re welcome.

At this point, learners did not specify who was speaking in the imaginary dialogues, and did not appear to take into account contextual variables such as age, gender, relative status, and role of the interlocutors. Two Arabic and Turkish learners wrote extended dialogues of six turns between themselves and the instructors; in one case, the female learner complimented the female instructor, and in the other case the male instructor complimented the male learner. These dialogues discussed the history of the referent and why the instructor was dressed nicely that day, but the topic did not branch out from the object.
4.1.2 Learners’ Awareness of Compliments and Compliment Responses Prior to Instruction

Prior to classroom instruction, several questions were asked to probe learners’ initial awareness of giving and receiving compliments. In response to the question, *Are you always comfortable with the way you exchange compliments in English?* (Item 3, Appendix 1), 9 learners out of 28 (32%) answered “yes,” whereas 18 (62%) answered “no” or “not always.” One learner responded that he did not compliment in English at all. Answering when and why they did not feel comfortable, five learners (18%) from Ecuador, Saudi Arabia, and Korea mentioned that they did not know how to give and respond to compliments. The Korean learner wrote:

(6) I’m worry about if I miss understood what they say or I don’t know how I give compliments to others.

Some Asian learners expressed shyness that they had not overcome. A female Korean learner also mentioned that Korean people did not directly compliment others and that she usually felt uncomfortable when she received compliments. As a male Taiwanese learner stated:

(7) [I feel] uncomfortable because the Chinese people is very shy, and they are not used to getting a compliments.

Four learners commented on what they perceived as an excessive number of compliments as a reason for their perceived discomfort. Three of them (from France, Jordan and Egypt) mentioned that they felt uncomfortable when they received too many compliments. Another female learner from Myanmar commented:

(8) Just one or two things is ok. [If not, I get] suspicious. It’s depends on men and women.
Six learners discussed sincerity and truthfulness in giving and receiving compliments. Four of them stated that they felt uncomfortable or skeptical when the compliments seemed untrue or insincere. One Venezuelan learner had the following concern.

(9) [I don’t feel comfortable] when the person doesn’t respond to my compliment or just change the topic. Maybe the people sometimes think that it’s a big lie.

A Korean learner reported that she occasionally felt obligated to give compliments.

(10) When I give compliments, I think I must always do something like this. It’s terrible!!

Some learners compared complimenting behavior in their native language to that in English. A Venezuelan student and two Saudi Arabian students had the following to say:

(11) [I am not comfortable with they way I exchange compliments in English] because in my country we use other ways when we exchange compliments. In USA, we must be careful when we say compliments because some people don’t like that.

(12) [I feel uncomfortable] because words have a deep meaning in my native language that I can’t express in English.

(13) [I feel uncomfortable] when I don’t [know] what people say in this situation. Even if I know it in my native language, if I translate it, it won’t work.

With regard to a question as to what people compliment others on in English (Item 5, Appendix 1), learners enumerated physical appearance and possessions such as: clothing, cars, houses, shoes, bags, hats, glasses, watches, hair, physical fitness, eyes, pets, television, accessories, pictures, girlfriends, husbands and wives. Achievements and abilities included: jobs, test results, grades, behavior, attitude, pronunciation in a foreign language, meals, intelligence, personalities, and morals.
Learners were also asked who was likely to give and receive compliments (Item 6, Appendix 1). Excluding the responses that did not clearly indicate who gave and who received the compliments, four learners from Venezuela, Brazil, Turkey and Taiwan guessed that men usually gave compliments to women. Two from Colombia and Uzbekistan mentioned that women were likely to receive compliments but did not indicate from which gender they received them. One Japanese learner indicated that women complimented women; no one mentioned that men received compliments at all. Two Korean and Turkish learners speculated that teachers and bosses (namely, those of higher status) were more likely to compliment students and employees (those of lower status). However, two learners from Taiwan and Uzbekistan believed that compliments tended to be given by those of higher status to those of lower status, such as employees to bosses, students to teachers, and players to coaches.

With regard to compliment responses, some learners seemed to believe that Americans always accept compliments as stated by three learners in the before-measure. Mexican and Venezuelan learners reported as follows:

(14) People like [compliments] and said OH thank you
A: Nice hair
   Nice car
   Nice shoes

(15) Americans: Just they smile and say than you.
In my country the people say:
Person A: I like your shirt.
Person B and the other responds: It's yours.
   Thank you.
   I can buy one like this for you.
   Lier.
   Do you think?
4.2 Research Question 2: The Effects of Classroom Instruction on the Learners’ Complimenting Performance and Awareness

4.2.1 Learners’ Performance

Interim-Measure

In the second stage of instruction, 19 students transcribed 62 complimenting interactions outside the classroom (Appendix 3). The compliments were given by learners who had already studied what to say, what to and what not to compliment others on, and who was more likely to give and receive compliments in English. A majority of these learner-initiated compliments were on respondents’ appearance and possessions (89%) and the rest was about abilities and accomplishments. Three male learners complimented on their female interlocutors’ eyes (5%). The length of the complimenting interactions, measured by the number of turns in a written dialogue, increased from an average number of 1.9 turns in the before-measure to 2.8 in the learner-collected data.

Learners utilized a wider variety of syntactic categories in giving compliments (see Table 3, p. 39). Although Category eight (Nice game) was still one of the most common used in 14 compliments out of 62 (22%), Category two (I (really) like/love your dress) was equally frequent (22%), and 18% of the compliments employed Category three (That’s a (really) nice watch). In two compliments (3%), referents were not specified and therefore, did not fall into any of the nine categories.

In terms of response strategies, the learner-collected data were rich in variety (Table 4, p. 40). Twenty-seven percent of the 62 native English speaker responses were simple acceptance of the compliment. Thirty-four percent deflected the compliment, while 31% developed the conversation discussing the history of the object.
The following are some examples found in the learner data.

Simple Acceptance:

    B: Thak you vy muth.
    A: Good.

Downgrading:

(17) A: Nice T-shirt!
    B: Well, A, I bought it at a thrift store.
    A: But it looks new!
    B: Oh, no, it's used, I bought it for $1.
    A: That's really cheap.
    B: Thanks you, I have go to home.

Questioning:

(18) Jeff: You really did a nice work. You made a delicious food.
    Ricardo: Do you really think so?

Shifting Credit:

(19) A: I like your watch.
    B: Thanks, my fatehr give to me in my birthday.
    A: I think is really cool.

Returning:

(20) Paula: Hi, S.
    S: Hi. I like your hair. Did you cut your hair?
    Paula: Thank you. Your hair is nice, too.
    S: Thank you.

Commenting on History:

(21) A: Nice watch!
    B: Thank you, I got it from Jamaica.
    A: It looks expensive, doesn't it.
    B: It's kind of expensive but I think it was will worth it.
A: Which kind of watch is it?
B: Seiko, it’s very good brand of watches.

After-Measure

In the after-measure, 22 learners produced 23 complimenting dialogues. The length of each written dialogues was greatly increased to an average of 5.4 turns. The compliments were focused on the interlocutors’ appearance and possessions (91%) and not on abilities and accomplishments (9%) (see Table 2, p. 38). As for the distribution of the syntactic categories, five were fairly commonly employed (Table 3, p. 39): Category three (*That’s a nice car*) in five instances out of 22 (23%); Category seven (*What a beautiful house*) and Category eight (*Nice game*) for 18% respectively, and Categories 1 and 2 for 14% respectively. With regard to responses to compliments (Table 4, p. 40), simple acceptance of a compliment occurred in only one case (3%) whereas deflection strategies were employed in a majority of the interactions (87%). The most frequently used deflection strategies were shifting credit (29%), downgrading (26 %), and questioning (29%).

Below are some complimenting dialogues learners wrote in the after-measure.

One Venezuelan learner used questioning and downgrading strategies:

(22) A: Hi Honey...oh I like your shirt.
B: Really?
A: Oh, yeah, it’s fabulous.
B: It’s just too cheap, I bought it in Marshall’s last week.
A: I want to buy one shirt like this.
B: I can tell you which floor.
A: That’s a good idea.
A Korean learner used a compliment as a conversation opener and developed the conversation:

(23) A: That’s nice jacket!
    B: Do you really think so? This is old thing.
    A: When?
    B: When I graduated University. So... 3 years ago.
    A: Oh. You graduated University! Which university? Where is it?
    B: I graduated Y N University. It’s in my country, my hometown ~
    A: ...
    B: ...

Another compliment by a Taiwanese learner would probably lead to shopping together:

(24) A: That’s a nice watch!
    B: Thanks. You like it?
    A: Yes, I want to have one like you. Where did you buy it?
    B: My friend gave me for birthday present. So I don’t know where to buy it.
    But I think in Target, there are some nice watch like mine.
    A: OH! Maybe I can go there to see. Or someday you want to go with me?
    B: OK! If you want to see, I can go with you.

Delayed After-Measure

In the delayed after-measure, the length of 18 dialogues written by 10 learners was increased to an average of 7.8 turns. Below is the table indicating the shift in the length of each dialogue in each measure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total Number of Dialogues</th>
<th>Total Number of Learners</th>
<th>Average Number of Turns in Dialogues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before-Measure</td>
<td>(54)</td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interim-Measure</td>
<td>(62)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-Measure</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delayed After-Measure</td>
<td>(18)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the delayed after-measure, 89% of the 18 dialogues were on the addressees’ appearance or possessions while 11% were on their abilities and accomplishments. The following table summarizes the findings on learners’ compliment topics throughout the four measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before (54)</th>
<th>Interim (62)</th>
<th>After (22)</th>
<th>Delayed After (18)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Dialogues</strong></td>
<td>(28)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Number of Learners</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>Interim</th>
<th>After</th>
<th>Delayed After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appearance &amp; Possessions</strong></td>
<td>46 (85%)</td>
<td>55 (89%)</td>
<td>20 (91%)</td>
<td>16 (89%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abilities &amp; Accomplishments</strong></td>
<td>8 (15%)</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>2 (9%)</td>
<td>2 (11%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The number and percentage includes one compliment (2%) on a color of a lipstick, and another (2%) on eyes.
2 The number includes three compliments (5%) on eyes.

One year after instruction, learners’ distribution of syntactic categories shifted and over half of the 18 compliments employed Category one (*Your blouse is beautiful*) (33%) or Category two (*I like your dress*) (28%). Seventeen percent fell into Category six (*You have such a nice jacket*). The table below shows more detail on the distributions of syntactic categories throughout the measures.
Table 3. Distributions of Syntactic Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic Categories</th>
<th>Native Speaker Baseline(^1)</th>
<th>Measures (Total Number of Compliments)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before (54)</td>
<td>Interim (62)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (NP is/looks ADJ)</td>
<td>54% 85%</td>
<td>6 (11%) 17 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 (I like/love) NP</td>
<td>16% 15%</td>
<td>8 (15%) 14 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 (PRO is ADJ NP)</td>
<td>15% 6%</td>
<td>3 (6%) 11 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 (You V ADJ NP)</td>
<td>3% 2%</td>
<td>2 (4%) 11 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 (You V (NP) ADV)</td>
<td>3% 1%</td>
<td>1 (2%) 2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 (You have ADJ NP)</td>
<td>2% 2%</td>
<td>2 (4%) 6 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 (What ADJ NP!)</td>
<td>2% 0%</td>
<td>0 (0%) 1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 (ADJ NP)</td>
<td>2% 3%</td>
<td>24 (44%) 14 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 (Isn’t NP ADJ)</td>
<td>1% 0%</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3% 8%</td>
<td>2 (3%) 8 (15%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) The native speaker distribution is from Manes and Wolfsen (1981).

Learners’ 18 compliment responses in the delayed after-measure centered around two strategies often used in combination: downgrading (47%), and commenting on history (37%). They marginally employed other deflection strategies: questioning (7%) and shifting credit (7%), but avoided simple acceptance in the vast majority of cases. Downgrading and commenting on history occurred in combination in eight conversations (44%), and over half of the interactions (55%) discussed a sale and/or the price of the object. Below is the breakdown on distribution of compliment response strategies assessed in every measure.
Table 4. Distributions of Compliment Response Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Types and Strategies</th>
<th>NS Responses Baseline from Learner Data (62)</th>
<th>Measures (Total Number of Compliment Responses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Before (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple Acceptance</td>
<td>17 (27%)</td>
<td>19 (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downgrading</td>
<td>7 (11%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>3 (5 %)</td>
<td>9 (19 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning</td>
<td>3 (5 %)</td>
<td>2 (4 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting Credit</td>
<td>8 (13%)</td>
<td>4 (8 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conv. Develop.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commenting on History</td>
<td>19 (31 %)</td>
<td>5 (10 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing Surprise</td>
<td>5 (8%)</td>
<td>1 (2 %)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7(14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some of the learner productions from the delayed after-measure are as follows:

(25) (Learner, female) : Oh, you have a nice watch. I think this is a new one I think.
(Friend, female) : Think you (learner’s name). Yes, this is a new one. I love it very much.
(Learner): I think, this is very expensive.

(Friend): No, this is not expensive. But normal prize is a kind of expensive. But this one is I got a valentines sale. I paid only $ 29.99.
(Learner): Can I see your watch carefully and It's ok with my hand or not.
(Friend): Why not! This is very match your hand. See, this top of the cover lens also you can change four different colour. Including silver colour, gold colour black colour and this dinmond cover too. They give you tenfull year limited warranty.
(Learner): Really ! I must buy this watch. Can you tell me, where can I buy that kind of watch.
(Friend): You can buy any SEARS. This sale will be until 14th Feb: If you want to go this week end, I can go with you there. Can you wait?
(Learner): Sure, I can. You want me to come and pick you up.
(Friend): That's a good idea. I'll call you and let you know the time. I think round about 11:30 am, but I'm not sure yet.
(Learner): That's ok for me. Thank you so much.
(Friend): No problem. See you. Bye!

(26) (Learner, male): Hey, you got a nice back pack. It looks really nice.
(Friend, male): Oh, this one? I just got this at the outlet mall. The price was so reasonable.
(Learner): Really? Its like new mode.
(Friend): No, the store had this bag for long time. I waited they reduce the price more.
(Learner): Wow, you are such a wise shopper.
(Friend): You wanna go the outlet mall with me sometime?
(Learner): Sure, tell me when you go there.
(Friend): OK. Maybe this coming Sunday. I'm gonna go with my friends.
(Learner): Oh, count me on.

(27) (Friend, female): (Learner’s name), I love your new jacket. It is really nice.
(Learner, male): Oh! Thanks. But this is not a new jacket. It is an old one that I rarely wear.
(Friend): No way!! Looks brand new. I just saw a very similar jacket at the store, and I almost bought it.
(Learner): Oh really!!, well, but you don’t have to worry about buying one you can borrow mine.
(Friend): Oh, thanks!!

4.2.2 Learners’ Awareness

**During Instruction**

In this section, the activities that stimulated learners’ awareness by revealing learners’ pragmatic gaps will be discussed. Learners’ reactions in and out of class that indicated their level of awareness and motivation in learning giving and receiving compliments will also be reported. In addition to the pre and post instructional data analysis, such interim observation is important to help identify when exactly learners’ awareness was raised during the instruction and in what way that happened.
Initially, learners were asked to guess some of the most challenging aspects in learning English. While some grammar points were enumerated, no one pointed out pragmatic proficiencies and the idea itself seemed new to them. They were highly surprised to hear that acquiring native-like functional use of language would take approximately ten years in a setting where the language was in daily use. This initial discussion functioned as a shock factor, leading to the learners’ increased level of motivation to learn speech act sets in order to speed up such a time-consuming language learning process.

Some classroom activities were designed specifically to raise learners’ awareness of giving and receiving compliments in English. One question in the before-measure (Item 4, Appendix 1) asked learners to translate literally what the learners would say in giving and receiving compliments in their native countries. In such culturally diverse classes, the diversity of expectations and cultural categories became evident. Asian learners were shocked by the frequency and explicitness with which Spanish speakers gave compliments in their cultures; Arabic speakers fascinated the others with the poetic way they responded to compliments in their language. Below are some of the responses that would be inappropriate or awkward in English in most situations.

(28) A: Oh you have good car.
    B: Oh it’s so expensive! (It’s from America.)
    Oh, it’s my second Mersedes. (Russia)

(29) [A:] Beautiful car. [B:] You can use it. (Ecuador)

(30) Thanks, are you kidding? (Brazil)

(31) [A:] You have a nice shirt!
    [B:] It’s not the shirt but I. (Senegal)

(32) A: You cook very good.
B: Well, your test [taste] is nice. (Saudi Arabia)

(33) You can have it. (Jordan)

(34) A: Nice job!
    B: No, I didn’t do well. (Korea)

Learners seemed to have enjoyed discovering different cultural norms in compliments. I observed, during a long break, the second group of learners writing on the board and teaching each other what they would say in their native languages and what they meant in English. Such an activity may have probably contributed to the learners’ enhanced awareness of culture-specific norms in complimenting behavior.

**Interim-Measure**

The optional assignment (Stage IV, Appendix 4) was completed by 12 learners. All of the four native English speaking teachers consulted had commented that the positive value of being slender did not necessarily apply to both male and female and that complimenting on decreased weight could be too personal and offensive and thus inappropriate in many cases. In contrast, seven out of 12 students (58%) stated that being slim was a positive value for both men and women while five (42%) indicated the inappropriateness of comments about weight. As Korean and Taiwanese learners commented:

(35) In the U.S.A. ... it will be a good compliment. But it is not used too much. It will (would) be dangerous... I think saying “You lost some weight, didn’t you?” is a compliment. But if it is used for very very scany [skinny] person, it would be not a compliment.

(36) [If you say “You lost some weight, didn’t you?”], I think you will get a pouch [punch]. People don’t like others talk about their weigh. Too sensitive.
After-Measure

Regarding the issue of confidence, in response to Item 2 (Appendix 7), *After studying about complimenting, how do you feel about giving and receiving compliments in English?*, 19 out of 22 learners (86%) indicated that they had better confidence in giving and receiving compliments and that it was important to learn the appropriate behavior. One Korean student indicated that the information was “so-so” because she had always tried to give compliments anyway. Another Colombian learner, who mentioned in the before-measure that he did not give compliments at all, indicated:

(37) The information [given in the class] don’t help me to feel more comfortable but it help me to know what kind of compliments I can use and if is possible use in the same form that I use in my own language.

On the other hand, four students commented that they had started using the newly learned complimenting and responding expressions more in their daily lives, had been practicing such expressions a lot, or would try to use various responses. Three students indicated a greater sense of security. One Mexican student wrote:

(38) [I feel] good because now I know how to answer and I can give compliment too.

Another Japanese learner indicated that knowledge about complimenting could help her overcome some of her shyness.

(39) I feel more comfortable to giving and receiving compliment. Maybe I will not be shy when I giving and receiving compliment.
Some of the learners commented on the sociocultural nature of the language. The Colombian, Venezuelan, and Brazilian learners, respectively, made the following comments:

(40) [I feel] comfortable. I think that is good to learn about compliment in U.S. because can be different from one culture to another. Therefore, can cause missing understandings.

(41) I feel good because is similar in my language and in my culture. However, I feel comfortable because is good to know what I can say or what I can’t say to compliment somebody.

(42) I feel more comfortable to give compliments because now I know how I can give compliments and to which people I can give it. Americans with lower status don’t give compliments to people with higher status that is normal in my country and for me. This is one of the many things that I learned.

In order to probe the students’ motivation in learning other functions of language, after-measure Item 4 (Appendix 7) asked whether or not the learners wanted to study other speech acts. Three out of 22 students stated that they would like to learn every function listed on the handout, and no one indicated lack of interest in other speech acts. There were nine votes for refusing an invitation, nine for apologizing, eight for giving condolences, eight for inviting, eight for addressing people, seven for giving gratitude, six for making a request, six for greeting, and six for congratulating.

5. Discussion

5.1 Learners’ Performance in Compliments and Compliment Responses

As determined through the before-measure, learners’ written complimenting interactions were typically very short, consisting of a single compliment and a simple acceptance of the compliment. As learners studied complimenting in class, however,
their written compliments were greatly expanded, as they deflected compliments, gave further compliments, and/or developed the conversations. One year after instruction learners appeared to have maintained and further developed these skills; the average number of turns was even larger (Table 1, p. 37). In fact in the after and delayed after-measures, most learners utilized multiple compliments in each conversation and sustained the interaction. In real life, such skills would probably prove helpful in creating sincere compliments and establishing solidarity between the interlocutors.

The topic of the compliments shifted slightly as the classroom instruction progressed (see Table 2, p. 38). In the before-measure, a few learners complimented others on potentially inappropriate items such as color of a lipstick (a Korean female) or eyes (a Colombian male). After discussing what to compliment on in the data collection activity, three male learners from Korea, Colombia, and Senegal still complimented their female interlocutors on their eyes. As male compliments on female appearance are socially allowed in Spanish (Campo & Zuluaga, 2000), this inclination may possibly be due to learners’ pragmatic transfer from their native languages. However, such compliments were again judged as inappropriate in the discussion, and thereafter, such topics did not emerge in further performance immediately after and one year after instruction. Compliments on abilities and accomplishments marginally decreased as the instruction proceeded, however, this may have been an effect of the instruction which centered on compliments on appearance and possessions.

With regard to the distribution of syntactic categories of compliments, learners’ production increased in variety as instruction progressed (Table 3, p. 39). Over 40% of learners’ initial compliments employed the simplest category (Category eight, Nice
game), while 15% did not fall into the Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) nine syntactic categories. Although such compliments were not necessarily deviant from the norm, a few nonnative-like features were found. While in native English speaker data, referents of the compliment were clearly verbalized by the use of deixis or framing remarks (see pp. 4-6), some learner compliments did not specify the referents. The omission of the referent (when placed as a subject in the sentence) might be viewed as a negative transfer from their native languages in which such structures are allowed (Chinese, Korean, Russian, and Japanese). A few of the learner compliments also employed interrogative forms.

Once the syntactic categories were taught, however, such deviations rarely occurred, which may indicate learners’ readiness to acquire such information. The more learners studied about compliments, the fewer learners preferred Category eight and more demonstrated their abilities to use various categories. The findings from the delayed after-measure, however, indicate learners’ strong preference of only a few categories but not Category eight. Considering that 85% of the Manes and Wolfson corpus fell into the first three categories, however, the distribution of learners’ syntactic categories approximated the native norm as time progressed.

The distribution of learners’ compliment response strategies shifted as was assessed in each measure (see Table 4, p. 40). Although several pre-instructional compliment responses were sociopragmatically deviant, such awkward responses were not observed thereafter. In contrast to the initial written dialogues where learners centered on merely accepting compliments, they seemed to have acquired a variety of response strategies in instruction. Particularly in the after-measure, learners employed
three deflection strategies: questioning, shifting credit, and downgrading. Although the
distribution of the learner responses was very different from that of native English
speakers’, following instruction of deflection strategies, the learners utilized these
strategies rather than simply accepted compliments.

Observing such findings on learners’ performance in giving and receiving
compliments, this study has shown another instance in which classroom instruction
assisted in learners’ enhanced performance of the speech act set. This conclusion lends
support to past studies which document positive effects of classroom instruction in
speech acts (Billmyer, 1990; Kasper, 1997; Rose & Ng in Kasper & Rose, in press). The
results from the delayed after-measure suggest, however, that learners appeared to have
maintained certain linguistic skills, awareness, and strategies (such as developing
conversation utilizing compliments, appropriate topics, syntactic categories of
compliments, downgrading compliment response strategy), while some skills and
strategies may have been forgotten (such as the use of some of the syntactic categories
and other deflection strategies).

Some particular classroom speaking activities seemed to have assisted in learners’
acquisition of complimenting and responding skills. After four deflection strategies were
introduced, speaking practice for giving and receiving compliments was implemented
with an emphasis on the response. Forming two concentric circles facing a partner,
learners gave and responded to a compliment. Learners were advised not to always
accept compliments, but to express themselves in the most comfortable way using the
newly learned deflection strategies. This practice appears to have functioned as a
springboard for even more learner-initiated practice. After this activity, learners were
found complimenting each other for pleasure before and after the class time. This activity may also have facilitated learners' acquisition of such deflection strategies. In the after-measure, a few learners volunteered to comment that this exercise was helpful. Having various tools of communication probably allowed learners to respond at their own level of comfort, in most of the cases deflecting rather than simply accepting compliments.

Although learners demonstrated their ability to sustain complimenting interactions by utilizing three deflection strategies in the after-measure, interestingly in the delayed after-measure they focused on the downgrading strategy, and combined it with another strategy, commenting on history (conversation development type) to sustain the conversation. Such findings may indicate learners’ attrition of other deflection strategies or may reflect their life situations in the United States in which a majority of them live away from their families, and thus gift giving among family members simply did not take place. The findings of their performance one year after the instruction suggest that learners maintained the conversation development skills utilizing compliments and avoided simply accepting them, while they may have forgotten how to use other strategies.

The learners’ strong preference for deflection strategies over simple acceptance of compliments may also suggest that equipped with various strategies of communication, learners may not wish to accept compliments as often as their native English counterparts do. Rather, they may feel more comfortable in deflecting compliments. Although it would require retrospective oral interviews with learners and further analysis, the learners’ preference for deflection strategies may be viewed as a tool for the learners to
express themselves as they wished in a more comfortable manner. This would raise a further research question as to whether or not learners prefer to act in a native-like fashion when performing speech acts.

5.2 Learners’ Awareness of Giving and Receiving Compliments

Initially, the learners’ awareness of giving and receiving compliments varied and indicated both linguistic and pragmatic gaps in their competence. As it was observed in the before-measure, learners were concerned not only about what to say and how to say it, but also about how to appropriately interpret and respond to compliments in the second language. Some learners expressed awkwardness in receiving compliments that were rare in their countries. Others were already aware that they could not transfer their first language norms, and therefore, they felt that they could not express themselves appropriately in English. Some learners expected those of higher status to give compliments to those of lower status, which was a norm in their native cultures.

In the subsequent stage, learners collected their own notebook data to study American compliment responses. Learners were reminded to give appropriate compliments in terms of the topic of the compliment and gender and relative status of the interlocutors. Since giving compliments is linguistically rather simple and it was convenient for learners to initiate complimenting behavior by giving one, learners did not have reservations about completing this assignment. This combined activity of production and data collection encouraged learners to use compliments in real-life interactions with native English speakers and to observe and analyze their utterances. Some learners reported to me that they continued to give compliments beyond the
classroom instruction. This learner involvement probably contributed to learners' taking the initiative in subsequent complimenting behavior, in exposing themselves to further authentic and relevant linguistic input, and in increasing their motivation as learners.

With regard to the learners' confidence in giving and receiving compliments, after instruction learners commented that they had learned about the culturally-specific nature of compliments and American norms in giving and receiving, and that through practice they learned how to do it in English. A vast majority of them also indicated their enhanced level of comfort and an extremely high level of interest in learning other speech acts. A few learners even asked whether such topics would be covered for the rest of the term or in any other courses. Considering such learner feedback, we can probably conclude that classroom instruction can assist in raising learners' confidence level in giving and receiving compliments, and stimulate their motivation for learning speech act sets in general.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The present study had limitations in its design and implementation. For one thing, in the data collection activity some variants had to be controlled. For instance, gender, age, and social status of the complimenter were predetermined and the interactions took place mostly among college students of similar age and equal status. In this respect, the data were contrived and hardly contributed to practicing high-stake compliments that involve status difference between interlocutors.

Another drawback of this assignment was that some of the written recalled interactions suggested that the learners probably did not interact with native English
speakers as instructed or that they may have had difficulty in writing down the
interactions. Since learners had to depend on their memory until they jotted down the
interaction, the learner data may not be an accurate description of the conversation.

The learner data suggest that 27% of American response strategies reflected
simple acceptance, which was close to 29% in Herbert (1990), Herbert and Straight
(1989), and Nelson et al. (1996), and 30% in Chen (1993). However, the learner data
cannot readily be generalized due to the small scale of the present study and the
difficulties learner experienced while collecting the data. In interacting with the learners,
the American interlocutors may have reacted differently from the way they would with
another American. It is required of us in further research to uncover on a larger scale,
response strategies native English speakers employ and whether or not there are any
regional differences. Reexamination of the classification of response strategies would
also be necessary based on such data.

While two types of compliments, those on appearance and possessions and those
on abilities and accomplishments, were initially introduced, most of the activities focused
on the former type of compliments. Consequently, compliments produced by learners
centered more and more on appearance and possessions as the classroom instruction
progressed. So far, there does not seem to be a study specifically on American responses
to compliments regarding abilities and accomplishments. Further research might reveal
information about the strategies that Americans adopt to respond to compliments on
abilities and accomplishments and whether or not such categories of strategies differ from
compliment responses on appearance and possessions.
Since the present study was conducted in a real classroom and learners’ attendance naturally varied in such a situation, some learners partially missed the instruction or assignments. This resulted in the varying number of handouts collected for analysis. There is a possibility that those who received the instruction favorably attended and provided feedback while others did not participate as much. The assignment in Stage 4 (Appendix 4) had to be optional in consideration of other assignments learners had at the time of instruction, which created the lack of consistency in the design of this study. Although such is the reality in a classroom that an ESL instructor always has to face, these variables may well be controlled in further research.

With regard to the design of this study, the before and after-measures left room for improvement. Research has found that written tasks such as discourse completion tasks in which learners imagined themselves speaking do not precisely conform to the way they actually speak (Beebe & Cummings, 1996). The learner tasks in this study, in which learners imagined complimenting situations, were loosely defined and may not have reflected learners’ oral performances accurately. As a better alternative, use of the videotape (Cohen, 1996b) showing particular compliment-inducing situations or real-life compliment-inducing situations (Billmyer, 1990) would be better tools for instruction and assessment. Multiple measurements, such as oral-role play and retrospective interviews, would also contribute to a better description of learner performance and awareness.

6. Conclusion

Classroom instruction in speech act sets is one of the areas in which the importance of naturally occurring native speaker baseline data is emphasized. Originally
the classroom instruction in this study was planned on the basis of past research findings. Once the in-class instruction was in progress, however, additional needs to discuss other aspects of complimenting behavior immediately emerged. To illustrate, while what is likely to be complimented on, for instance, has occasionally been discussed in research (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Daikuhara, 1986; Wolfson, 1989; Ye, 1995), compliment topics that caused offense, namely what not to be complimented on, have not been brought to attention in research to my knowledge.

The number of compliments to be offered in a conversation seems to be heavily dependent on contexts but it is an important element to make the compliments sound sincere. Although at least one ESL textbook addresses this point, suggesting one or two compliments as a good guideline (Werner & Nelson, 1996), it seems that the appropriate number of compliments depends on who the interlocutors are, what object is being complimented, the way conversation proceeds, and so forth. When do multiple compliments occur in appropriate and inappropriate manners in spontaneous conversations?

Such issues naturally emerged in the classroom when we attempted to observe and analyze complimenting behavior in depth. The more comprehensive the analysis that we engaged in, the more complex the speech act set of complimenting seemed to be. In order to offer accurate descriptions of real life complimenting interactions as a model in a second language classroom, it is hoped that research and pedagogy will complement each other for a more exhaustive and current description of the speech act set.


Acquisition (pp. 82-95). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.


Appendix 1 – Before-Measure
Giving and Receiving Compliments - 1

1. How often do you hear people complimenting each other in the US?

2. What do people say and how do they respond to compliments?

3. Do you give and/or receive compliments in the US?
   Are you always comfortable with the way you exchange compliments in English?
   If no, when do you feel uncomfortable and why?

4. What do people say when they give and receive compliments in your country?
   Literally translate some examples.

5. What do people compliment others on?

6. Who is more likely to give and receive compliments?

7.
Functions of complimenting behavior
1
2
3

Pattern 1. Compliments on
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

Pattern 2. Compliments on
7.
8.
9.
Appendix 2B
Giving and Receiving Compliments – 2B

Functions of complimenting behavior
1. (establishing solidarity) = (answers to be filled in by learners)
2. (replacing thanks)
3. (opening a conversation)

Pattern 1. Compliments on (appearance/possessions)

1. Your blouse is (really) beautiful!
   Your car looks (really) cool!
2. I (really) like your dress!
   I (really) love your hat!
3. That’s a (really) nice table!
4. You have such beautiful hair!
5. What a lovely baby you have!
6. Isn’t your ring beautiful!

Pattern 2. Compliments on (ability/accomplishments)

7. You (really) did a good job!
8. You (really) handled that situation well!
9. Nice game!
For the next few days, pay attention to any compliments that you give, receive, or overhear and jot them down on your notepads. Observe carefully the circumstances in which these compliments were given and received in terms of role, gender, status, and other factors. Fill out the following form and then decide whether or not the interaction was appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gender</th>
<th>role</th>
<th>status</th>
<th>other info</th>
<th>appropriateness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>equals</td>
<td>younger</td>
<td>sincere/appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A:</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Interaction 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>A:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Positive Values of Mainstream Americans  
(N. Wolfson & E. Judd, *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*)

1. Being slim has strong positive value among mainstream speakers of American English, and the adjective *thin* (e.g., “You look thin”) is interpreted as complimentary in itself in this society. That this is very definitely not the case for speakers from other societies around the world is often a cause of some confusion, and even insult, when nonnative speakers are the recipients of such remarks. Favorable comments on the attractiveness of one’s children, pets, and even husbands, boyfriends, wives, or girlfriends seem to fall within this category, as do compliments on cars and houses. (p. 113)

Question 1. Does this positive value of being slender apply to both men and women in the U.S.?

Question 2. Would it be all right to say “You lost some weight, didn’t you?” as a compliment? What’s the possible danger?

2. It is useful for nonnative speakers to know, for example, that the quality of newness is so highly valued in this society that a compliment is appropriate whenever and acquaintance is seen with something new, whether it is a car, a new article of clothing, or a haircut. The fact that the new appearance may be due to an alteration (such as a new hairstyle or the loss of weight) as well as to a purchase leads us to conclude that the true importance of the comment lies in the speaker’s having noticed a change, thereby proving that he or she considers the addressee worthy of attention. (p. 114)

Question 1. Do you agree that newness is highly valued in the U.S.? What about in your country?

Question 2. What would be an example of the “new appearances”? 
Responses to Compliments

Response types

1. A: That’s a nice shirt you are wearing!
   B: Well, I just got it in Target, though.
      It was pretty cheap

   (downgrading)

   = (answers to be filled in by learners)

2. A: You did an excellent job yesterday, Jim!
   I really enjoyed your presentation.
   B: Do you really think so?
   A: Oh, yeah, it was fabulous.

   (questioning)

3. A: I love your clock. It looks great in your living room!
   B: Thanks. My friend brought it to me from Oregon.

   (shifting credit)

4. A: Yr lookin good!
   B: Thanks, S’r you!

   (returning)
Compliments as *a conversation opener*

A & C = daughters  
B = mother

A: That’s a nice sweater, mom.  
B: Thanks.  
C: It really is very nice. Where did you get it?  
B: I got it at Second Time Around in exchange for the red bag.  
A: Oh, you got rid of the red bag?  
B: Year, well, what else was I going to do with it?  
A: But it was a gift from Jenn.  
B: I know, but that’s okay, she wouldn’t mind. We’ve used it enough.  
C: Speaking of Jenn, how’s she doing, I wonder. We haven’t heard from her much these days, have we?  
B: No, not much, which doesn’t surprise me, since she’s gone on a whale-watching tour off the coast. She must be traveling in Canada by now.  
C: Oh, really? I never knew that! How did I miss such news?  
A: You never knew that? Oh, that’s right! You were out of town on business the last time she stopped by. Now was it when you were in New York or Chicago?
1. Write down an imaginary complimenting interaction.

2. After studying about complimenting, how do you feel about giving and receiving compliment behavior in English?

3. Did the classroom information help you to feel more comfortable with giving and receiving compliments?

4. The following are some other functions of languages.
   - Greeting
   - Addressing people
   - Giving thanks
   - Inviting
   - Refusing an invitation
   - Making a request
   - Apologizing
   - Giving condolences
   - Congratulating

Are you interested in learning other functions of English? Which ones?
Appendix 8 - Delayed After-Measure
Giving and Receiving Compliments

I would like you to take a minute to remember what you learned about giving and receiving compliments last spring in Level 5 Oral Skills at the MEC. I would ask you **NOT** to review your handouts or notes, but just to rely on your memory.

Now, please imagine and write down below **TWO conversations** starting with a compliment between you and someone else, and **indicate the relationship and gender** of the speaker in the dialogue.

Ex)
Noriko: Oh, I love your vest! It perfectly matches your shirt.
Jennifer: This old thing? I got it from Good Will a while ago.
Noriko: No kidding! It looks brand new to me. Maybe I should go there sometime.
Jennifer: Yeah, you should. They have pretty good deals all the time, you know.
Noriko: Right, I can't really afford a new outfit but I might find a real bargain in Good Will.
Jennifer: Exactly. Hey, do you want a ride next time I go there?
Noriko: Sure, thanks, Jenn. I'll come with you if you don't mind.
Jennifer: All right, I'll let you know.
Noriko: Great. Thanks!
(Jennifer = female, friend)

(Your Answer Here)

By signing below, I am giving Noriko Ishihara permission to use the information I provided above.
(Your Name Here) ___________________________ (date) ______________
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