

中英文稱讚反應之對比分析-以中級英文學習者為例

吳蕙伶*、賀豫菁**

摘要

如何適當的表達對他人的稱讚及正確理解稱讚的含意被視為是溝通能力中重要的一環。然而，表達及解讀稱讚的含意卻可能因文化背景不同而有所差異。多數人認為中英文對稱讚的解讀及回饋模式會因為文化上的不同而有明顯的差異。根據本研究結果顯示，兩者之間僅有些微不同。造成此結果的原因可能為(1) 受測者的英文能力影響對英文稱讚的回饋反應、(2) 因西方文化的影響，可能改變受測者中文的稱讚回饋反應及(3) 中英文之間的相互影響也可能改變受測者的回饋反應。

關鍵字:回饋反應、文化差異、言談情境填充問卷

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A Contrastive Study of Compliment Responses between English and Mandarin Chinese Languages

- A Case Study of Intermediate EFL Learners

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Abstract

Paying appropriate compliments and identifying them accurately is an aspect of communicative competence which may differ in a variety of ways from one culture to another. Most of us believe that the patterns of compliment responses for Mandarin and English would be quite different because of culture differences. However, the result revealed that there were only slightly differences between two languages. There might be some possible reasons. Firstly, the proficiency level of subjects might affect their English responses. Secondly, the learning of Western culture might also influence their Mandarin responses. Also, it is possible that language learners might have inter-influences on their native language and target language. They might, therefore, have more “neutral” way to give compliment responses.

Key words: compliment response, culture difference, Discourse Completion Task

I. INTRODUCTION

Language learners know that they need to be polite within their own language and culture, but when they try to transfer their native conventions to the target language, they might have some problems. Politeness, such as responding to a compliment, might result in a difficult situation for speakers because they need to balance two conflicting conversational principles which are to agree with one's conversational co-participants and to avoid self-praise (Herbert, 1989). Besides, speakers with different cultures might also have different patterns to respond to compliments and might, therefore, influence or misunderstand the way people respond to compliments. As a result, this study wanted to investigate compliment responses (CRs) between Mandarin Chinese and English for EFL learners and see whether there is any different pattern in different situations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Compliment and compliment responses

Compliments are recognized as an important speech act in a socio-cultural context. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it defines a compliment as “a ceremonial act or expression as a tribute of courtesy, ‘usually understood to mean less than it declares’; now, esp. a neatly-turned remark addressed to any one, implying or involving praise; but, also applied to a polite expression of praise or commendation in speaking of a person, or to any act taken as equivalent thereto.” What is more, Holmes (1988) mentioned that “a compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.” Researchers (Wolfson, 1983; Holmes, 1988) also stated that compliments are “positively affective speech acts, the most obvious function they serve is to oil the social wheels, paying attention to positive face wants and thus increasing or consolidating solidarity between people.” However, compliments may also be regarded as a threat to negative face, even while paying attention to positive face.

While a compliment may be regarded as a positive speech act, it may also be regarded as a face-threatening act (FTA). Yu (2003) argued that “due to the fact that compliments can be threatening to the addressee’s face as they, like criticisms, are an act of judgment on another person, many people feel uneasy, defensive, or even cynical with regard to the compliments they receive, and thus may have trouble responding to such compliments appropriately.” Also, Brown and Levinson (1987) pointed out that compliments may be significant FTAs in societies where envy is very strong and where witchcraft exists as a sanction.

CR is a response to a compliment. The speech acts of compliment and CR are conversational devices of interpersonal relationships in daily life. The use of CR as a phatic expression may also play a particular role in maintaining the solidarity of interpersonal relationships and the harmony of social interaction.

Classification of compliment responses

In order to classify the categories of compliment responses, Holmes (1988, 1993) separated CR strategies in to three parts, including accept, reject and evade. Related subcategories were under each part (see Table 1). Yu (2003) also classified compliment responses into six different categories which were slightly different from Holmes (see Table 2). The current study adapted Holmes’ CR categories.

Table 1 Holmes’ CR Categories

| Macro level CRs | Micro level CRs | Examples |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|--|
| Accept | Appreciation token | <i>Thanks; Yes; Good</i> |
| | Agreeing utterance | <i>I know; Yeah, I really like it.</i> |
| | Downgrading / Qualifying utterance | <i>It's nothing; I enjoyed doing it.</i> |
| | Return compliment | <i>You're not too bad your self; Yours was good too.</i> |
| Reject | Disagreeing utterance | <i>I don't think so; Don't say so.</i> |
| | Question accuracy | <i>Why? Really?</i> |
| | Challenge sincerity | <i>Stop lying; You must be kidding.</i> |
| Evade | Shift credit | <i>You're polite; My pleasure.</i> |
| | Informative comment | <i>It was not hard; It's really cheap.</i> |
| | Request reassurance | <i>Really?</i> |

Table 2 Yu's CR Categories

| Compliment response strategies | Examples |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Acceptance | <i>Thank you; I am glad you liked it.</i> |
| Amendment | <i>Just so so; You played very well, too.</i> |
| Non-acceptance | <i>No.</i> |
| Face relationship related response | <i>I'm embarrassed.</i> |
| Combination | <i>Thank you. Did you really think it's good? (Acceptance + Amendment)</i> |
| No acknowledgment | <i>Speaker chooses not to respond to the compliment.</i> |

Different compliment responses among different language speakers

Golato (2005) found that Germans 'completely' accept compliments. The two most common German ways of expressing appreciation of a compliment are to agree with it or provide an assessment of it. Besides, according to Marks (1995), American and Chinese cultures are at polar opposites. An American hostess, complimented for her culinary skills, is likely to say, "Oh, I'm so glad you liked it. I cooked it especially for you." Not so a Chinese host or hostess (often the husband does the fancy cooking), who will instead apologize profusely for giving you "nothing" even slightly edible and for not showing you enough honor by providing proper dishes. Furthermore, Gu (1990) summarized four basic notions of Chinese politeness, of which two were respectfulness and modesty (self-denigration). While self-denigration is considered polite in Chinese culture, this may not be the case in cultures like Australia's. As a result, it is not surprising that expressions of politeness in Chinese and Australian English are culturally different. This may cause cross-cultural misinterpretation and misunderstanding if the parties involved do not know each other's cultural contexts. According to Wolfson (1981), Americans use compliments frequently. However, for Indonesian culture, compliments are relatively rare and are used only among members of the educated class who have been exposed to Western customs. As for New Zealanders, they tend to feel that Americans pay too many compliments and judging by their own norms, assume that American

compliments are often insincere. From the research above, it is obvious that each culture has different ways and meanings when responding to compliments. However, little research investigated the differences between how EFL learners respond to the same compliment in their native language and target language. If differences exist, what are the differences and what causes the differences? It's anticipated that the current study could figure out the answers and provide some suggestions for language teaching and learning.

III. METHOD

Participants

A total of 68 subjects in an academic setting participated in the present study. However, following the deletion of cases of missing data, only 32 subjects completed the whole procedure. Subjects were required to complete "Discourse Completion Task for Compliment". Besides, all subjects are intermediate EFL learners according to their GEPT scores. The ages of these participants were from 18 to 22 and they all majored in English.

Instruments

The present study employed one instrument which is discourse completion task for compliment. This task was revised from N. Lorenzo-Dus (2001) and Tang & Zhang (2009) versions (see appendix).

In the DCT, eight situational settings relating to four different topics were included: appearance, character, ability, and possession. For each situation, the subjects need to give responses in both English and Mandarin. The subjects were informed that they did not have to give answers which were exactly the same but in different languages. They would write anything to respond the given situations.

Appearance

Situation 1: Your friends have organized a party to celebrate the end of semester. You've dressed up for the party. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends says, "Hey, you look great. You're really handsome / beautiful today."

Situation 2: You're the new sales manager of a large department store. You're out for coffee with a group of people from work. One of your male/female employees, who's been with the store for many years, says to you, "You've got beautiful eyes."

Character

Situation 1: You've helped your friends (a couple) to look after their child for a whole day at your place. When they come back to pick up the child, they say, "Thank you. You're really helpful, patient and caring."

Situation 2: Over the past week you've been helping to organize a conference at your university. A male/female friend, who has also been helping, says, "You're the right person for this job. You're ever so nice to the others and know how to avoid disagreements with everyone."

Ability

Situation 1: You have completed a presentation. After that your classmate says, "Wow, that's brilliant. I hope I can do it in the way you did. Well done."

Situation 2: You're a teacher in a language school. You've invited a group of your students to your house for a meal. After eating, one of your male/female students says, "I didn't know you were such a talented cook. The food was wonderful."

Possession

Situation 1: You have bought a new cell phone. When you receive a call, your friend notices that your phone is a different one. Having looked at it and tried some functions. He says, "Wow, how smart. My cell phone does not have such functions. It is really great."

Situation 2: You're the manager of a company. You have your brand new car at work and offer to give your colleague a lift. When he/she sees the car, he/she says, "It's wonderful. I love the model. And you've got good taste in choosing the color."

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the different compliment responses between English and Mandarin Chinese languages. The following research questions attempt to address this issue.

Research Question 1: What are the general patterns in terms of compliment responses in English and Mandarin Chinese languages?

Research Question 2: What are the patterns in four situational settings in terms of compliment responses in English and Mandarin Chinese languages?

Research Question 3: Are there any differences in terms of compliment responses between English and Mandarin Chinese languages?

Procedures

The present study started from the Discourse Completion Task for Compliment. Each subject were required to write down their answers in both English and Chinese. The answers did not have to be the same. Subjects were informed that they did not have to write down exactly the same answers for one situation. They could write anything they want as long as the responses were real and true responses when they encountered the same situations. After the completion of the task, valid data would be gathered and analyzed.

Data Analysis

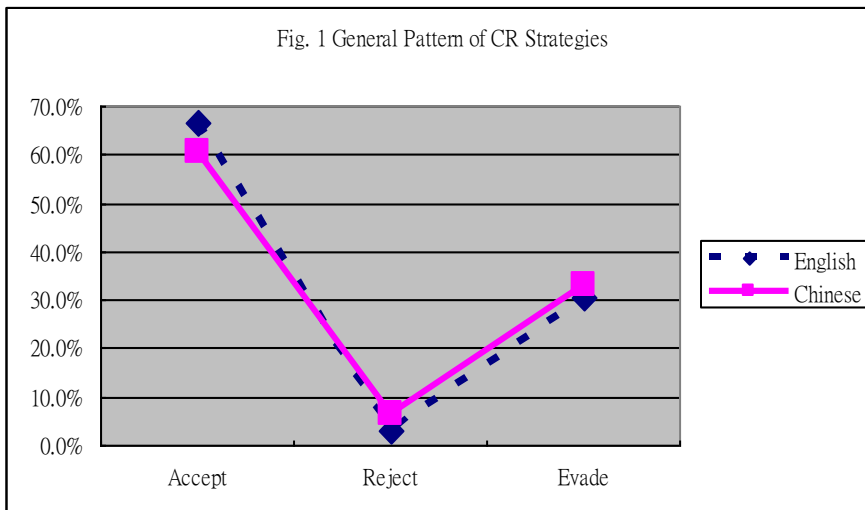
Holmes' (1988, 1993) categories of CR strategies were adapted. According to Holmes' CR categories, there are three macro strategies which are accept, reject and evade and ten micro-strategies. (see Table 1)

Each answer was categorized according to Holmes' CR categories and each frequency of responses would be shown in figures and tables.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The general pattern of CR strategies

According to Figure 1, it revealed that the general patterns of CR strategies in English and Chinese languages are similar. However, subjects used nearly 6% more accept strategy in English and 2.5% more evade strategy in Chinese. It was not surprising that accept strategy was used more frequently in English. However, the high frequency use of accept strategy in Mandarin might be an interesting result. According to Gu (1990), Chinese tend to show their modesty in order to be polite. This indicated that reject or evade strategies should be considered to be more common strategies when responding to compliments in Mandarin. However, in terms of the result shown in figure 1, it was clearly to observe that there is no significant difference in terms of the general pattern of CR strategies. What would be more closely related to cultural concept is that speakers tended to use more accept strategy in English (66.4%) than in Mandarin (60.6%) and more reject (3.1% in English, and 6.5% in Chinese) and evade (30.4% in English and 32.9% in Chinese) strategies in Mandarin.

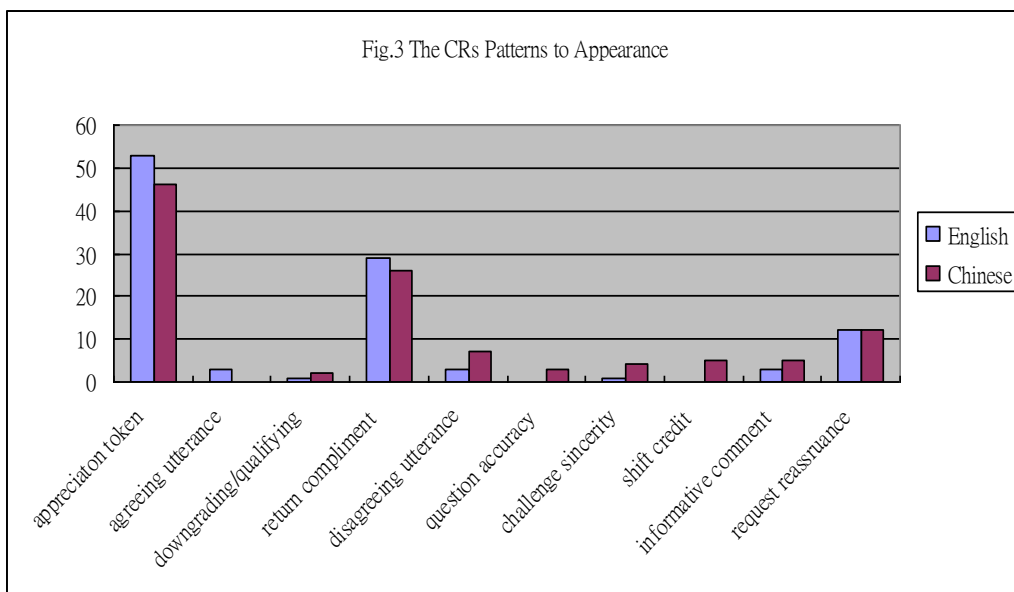
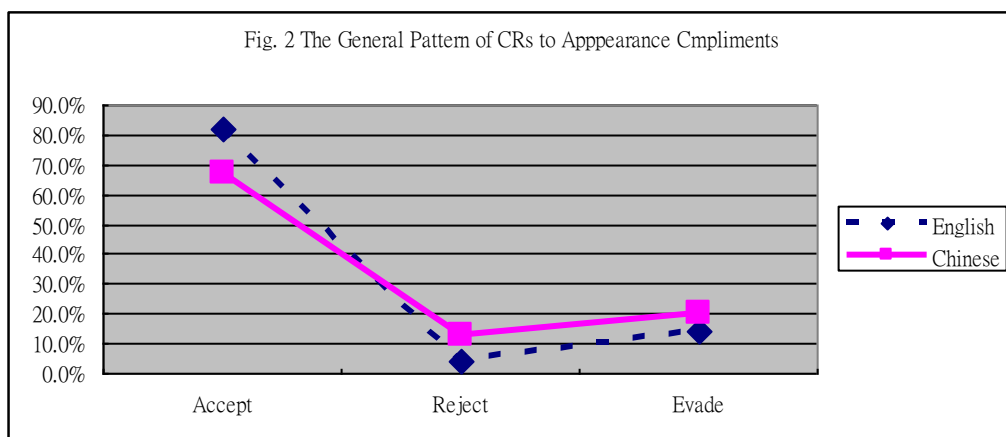


The CR patterns corresponding to the four specific situations

The following sections presented the results of 4 different situational settings.

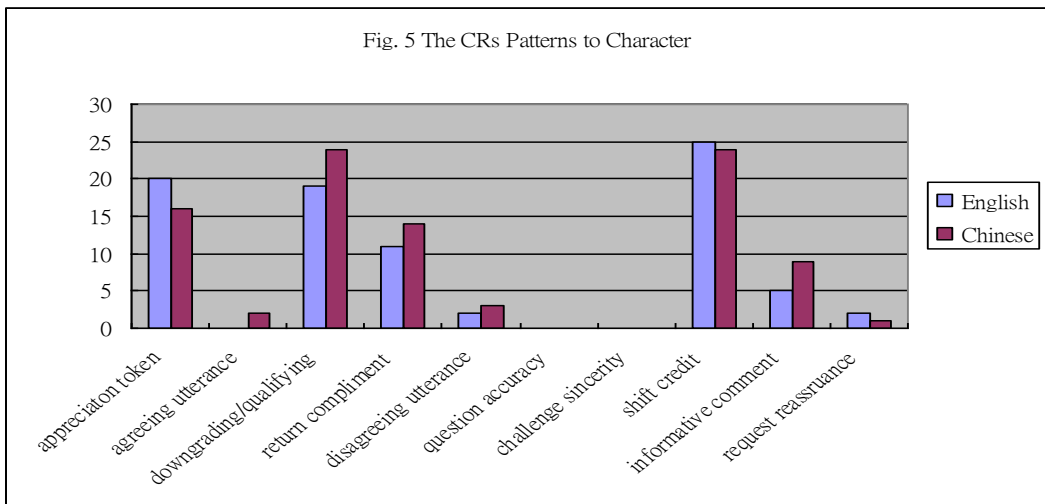
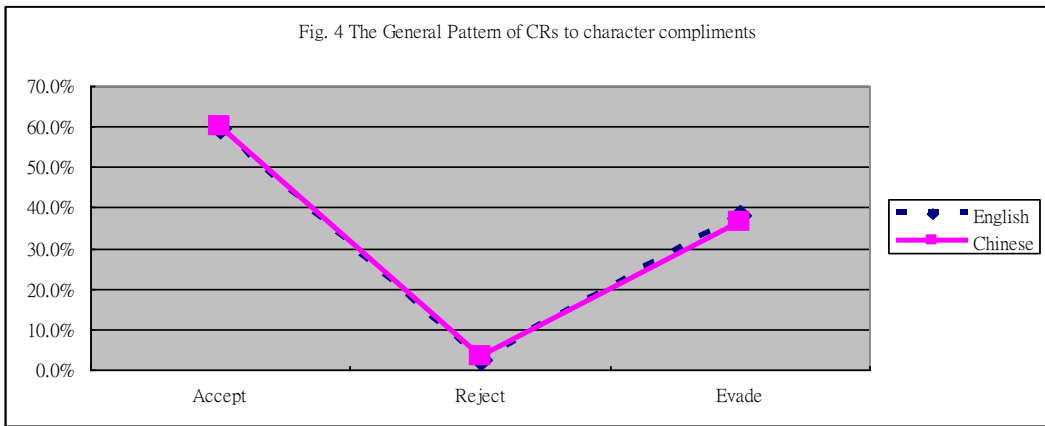
CRs for appearance

For general pattern, it was the same with figure 1. In terms of micro level, both group tended to use more “appreciation token” (53 times in English and 46 times in Mandarin), and “return compliment” (29 times in English and 26 times in Chinese). In terms of compliments on appearance, directly accepted the compliment and also gave back their compliment were used frequently for both English and Mandarin languages. For some subjects, they also combined request reassurance strategy (12 times in both English and Mandarin) as well.



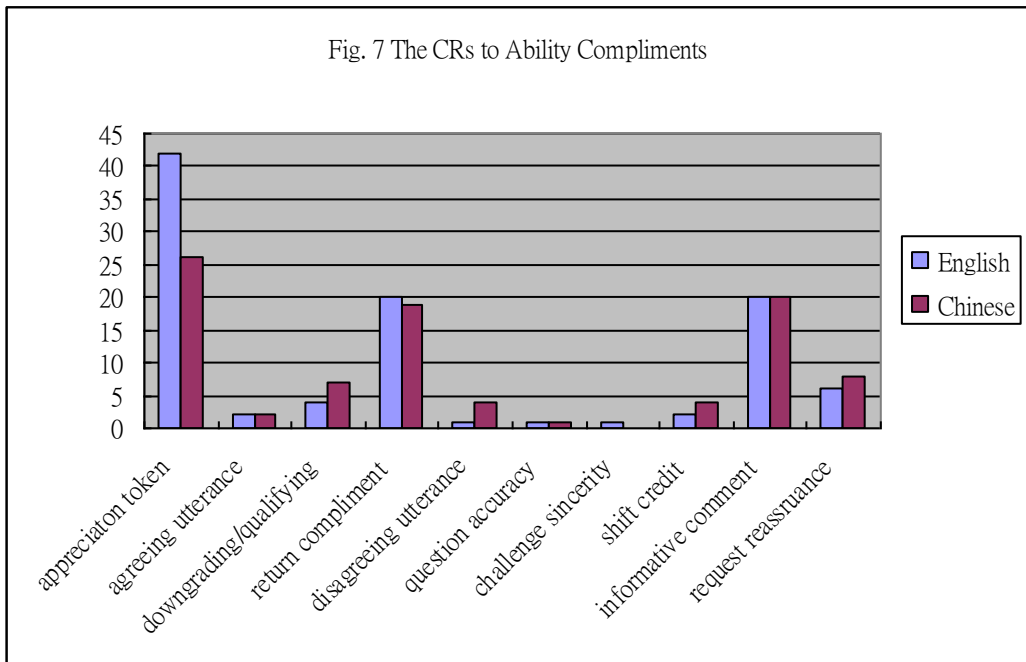
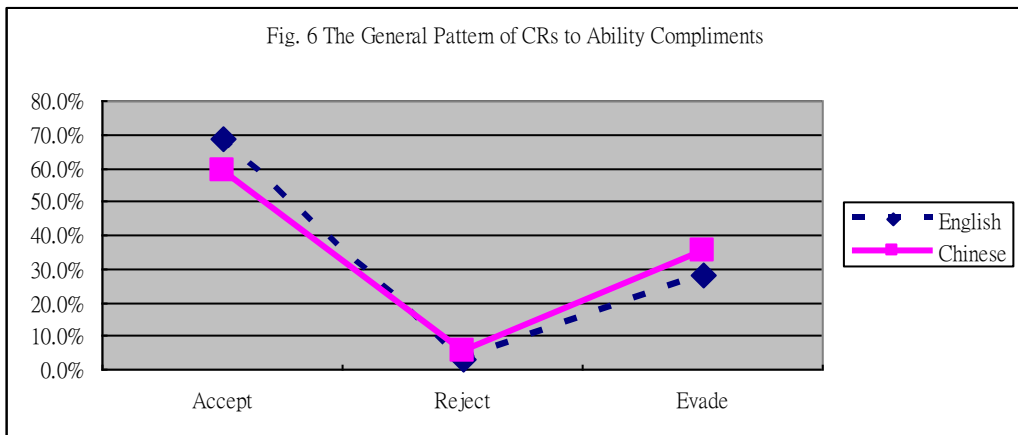
CRs for character

For character, the general pattern seemed the same. However, there are slightly differences. In terms of Mandarin Chinese language, subjects used a little more accept strategy and slightly less evade strategy. As for micro patterns in both English and Mandarin, there were more strategies used in this situation, including appreciation token, downgrading, return compliment and shift credit. For Mandarin, subjects used more downgrading/ qualifying strategy (24 times) and shift credit (24 times). For English, they applied more shift credit (25 times) and appreciate token (20 times) strategies. Even though the general patter did not change a lot, more strategies used for compliment on character was obviously revealed.



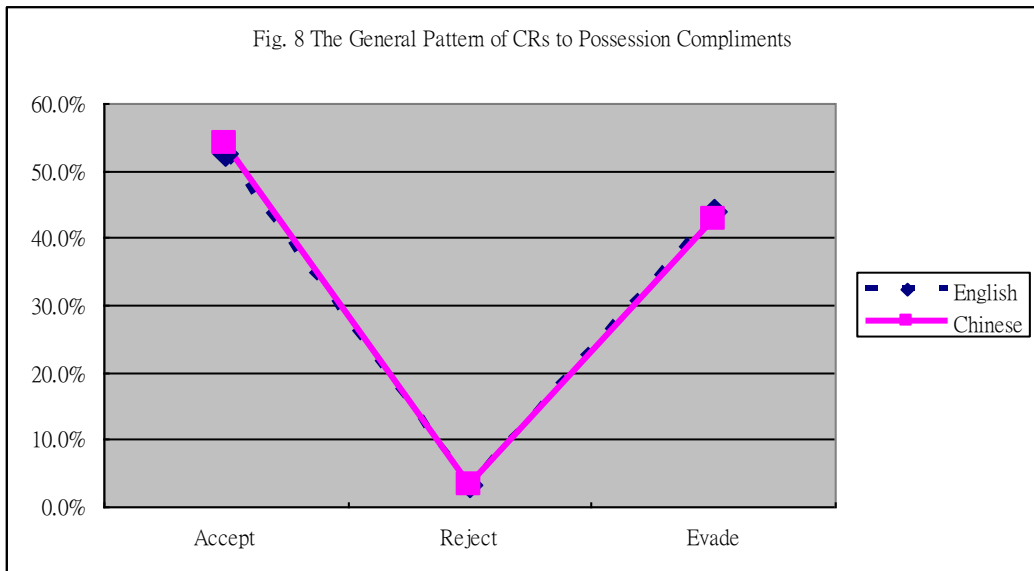
CRs for ability

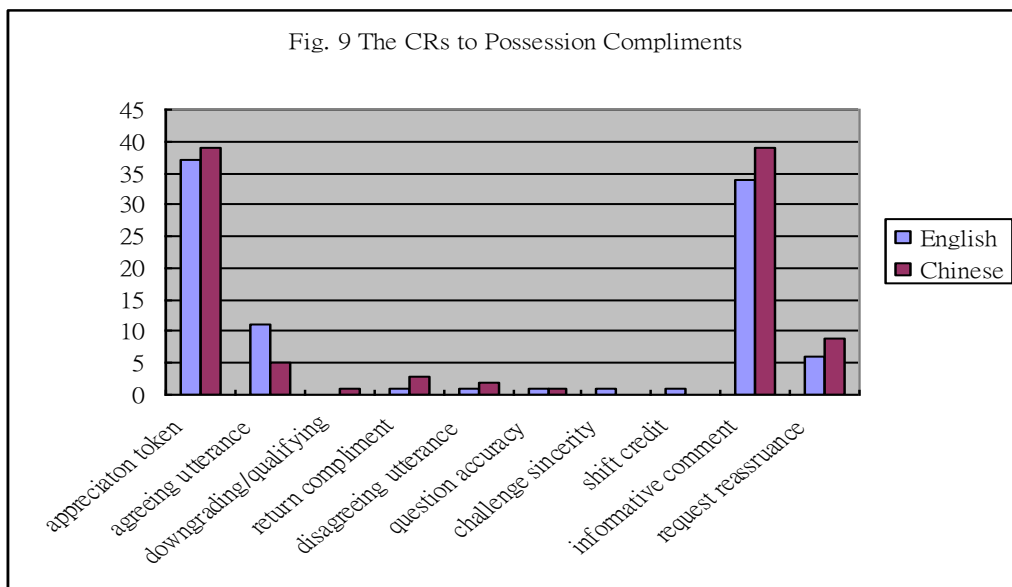
For general patterns, although the pattern is the same, subjects used less accept strategy and more evade strategy in Mandarin than English. According to figure 7, subjects used more appreciation token (42 times in English, 26times in Mandarin), return compliment (20 times in English, 19 times in Mandarin), and informative comment (both 20 times). Especially for appreciation token, subject used this strategy a lot more in English than in Mandarin Chinese.



CRs for possession

In terms of figure 8, the trend did not show significant differences from general pattern. However, two micro strategies were much more frequently used than other strategies. What was different from the other three situational settings was that appreciation token (37 times in English and 39 times in Mandarin) and informative comment (34 times in English and 39 times in Mandarin) were the most common strategies used both in Mandarin Chinese and English. This was an interesting result. It revealed that when one's possession is mentioned, subjects would accept compliments and then give more information about their possessions.





The overall micro patterns in four situational settings

According to Figure 10, it is obvious to see that the most frequently used strategy was appreciation token in both languages. The top five strategies for Mandarin Chinese are appreciation token, informative comment, return compliment, downgrading, and shift credit. As for English responses, the top five strategies are appreciation token, informative comment, return compliment, shift credit, and request reassurance.

According to Table 4, the ranking of first 3 situational settings in two languages did not have vital differences. However, for possession compliments, subjects would use more agreeing utterance in English and more request reassurance in Mandarin. This result was more close to Gu’s (1990) study that Chinese politeness emphasis on modesty. As a result, subjects tended to use other strategies more, such as informative comments and request reassurance.

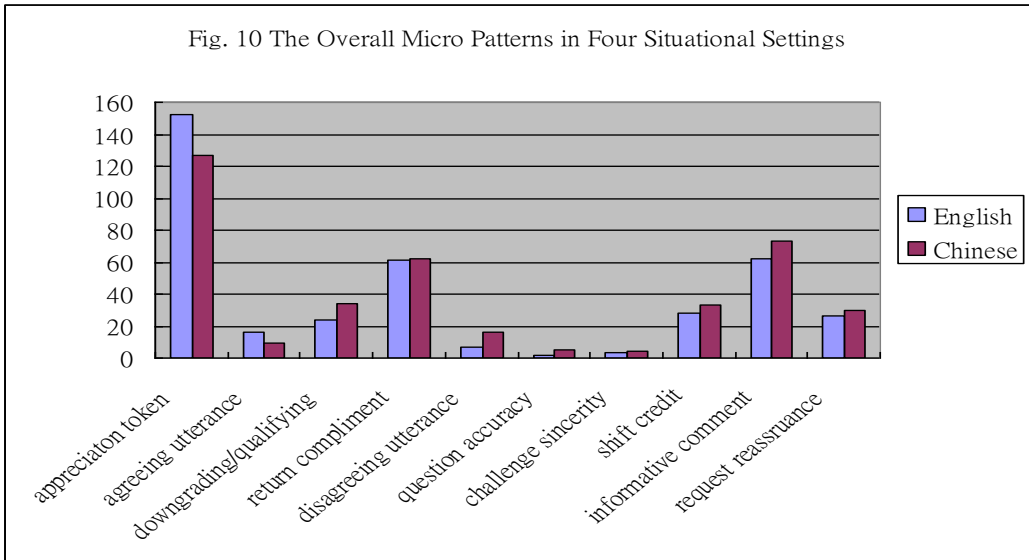


Table 3 Overall Distribution of CRs

| Macro CRs | Micro CRs | English | Mandarin |
|-----------|------------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Accept | Appreciation token | 152 | 127 |
| | Agreeing utterance | 16 | 9 |
| | Downgrading / Qualifying utterance | 24 | 34 |
| | Return compliment | 61 | 62 |
| Reject | Disagreeing utterance | 7 | 16 |
| | Question accuracy | 2 | 5 |
| | Challenge sincerity | 3 | 4 |
| Evade | Shift credit | 28 | 33 |
| | Informative comment | 62 | 73 |
| | Request reassurance | 26 | 30 |

Table 4 Ranking for Four Situational Settings

| Situation settings | Ranking | English | Mandarin |
|---------------------------|---------|--|---|
| Situation 1 appearance | 1 | appreciation token | appreciation token |
| | 2 | return compliment | return compliment |
| | 3 | request reassurance | request reassurance |
| Situation 2 character | 1 | shift credit | shift credit |
| | 2 | appreciation token | downgrading |
| | 3 | downgrading | appreciation token |
| Situation 3 ability | 1 | appreciation token | appreciation token |
| | 2 | return compliment informative comment | informative comment |
| | 3 | X | return compliment |
| Situation 4 possession | 1 | appreciation token | appreciation token informative comment |
| | 2 | informative comment | request reassurance |
| | 3 | agreeing utterance | X |

V. CONCOUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Paying appropriate compliments and identifying them accurately is an aspect of communicative competence which may differ in a variety of ways from one culture to another. Most of us believe that the patterns of compliment responses for Mandarin and English would be quite different because of culture differences. However, the result revealed that there were only slightly differences between two languages. There might be some possible reasons. Firstly, the proficiency level of subjects might affect their English responses. Subjects might not have enough vocabulary for them to respond to the situations. Secondly, the learning of Western culture might also influence their Mandarin responses. For “native” Mandarin speakers, they might have different results. Also, according to

the results, it is possible that language learners might have inter-influences on their native language and target language. They might, therefore, have more “neutral” way to give compliment responses.

For language learners and teachers, the way to learn appropriate responses and avoid misunderstanding is to learn from some real situations and analyze the differences between native language and target language from sociolinguistic perspective so that language learners are able to figure out appropriate responses and avoid mutual misunderstanding.

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Appendix

Discourse Completion Task for Compliment

1. Your friends have organized a party to celebrate the end of semester. You've dressed up for the party. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends says, "Hey, you look great. You're really handsome/beautiful today."

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

2. You're the new sales manager of a large department store. You're out for coffee with a group of people from work. One of your male/female employees, who's been with the store for many years, says to you, "You've got beautiful eyes."

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

3. You've helped your friends (a couple) to look after their child for a whole day at your place. When they come back to pick up the child, they say, "Thank you. You're really helpful, patient and caring."

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

4. Over the past week you've been helping to organize a conference at your university. A male/female friend, who has also been helping, says, "You're the right person for this job. You're ever so nice to the others and know how to avoid disagreements with everyone."

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

5. You have completed a presentation. After that your classmate says, "Wow, that's brilliant. I hope I can do it in the way you did. Well done."

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

6. You're a teacher in a language school. You've invited a group of your students to your house for a meal. After eating, one of your male/female students says, "I didn't know your were such a talented cook. The food was wonderful."

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

7. You have bought a new cell phone. When you receive a call, your friend notices that your phone is a different one. Having looked at it and tried some functions. He says, “Wow, how smart. My cell phone does not have such functions. It is really great.

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):

8. You're the manager of a company. You have your brand new car at work and offer to give your colleague a lift. When he/she sees the car, he/she says, “It's wonderful. I love the model. And you've got good taste in choosing the color.”

Your answer (in English):

你的回答(用中文回答):
