

Investigating Choice of Compliment Response Strategies on Social Networking Sites by Different Gender

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Abstract

Introduction of online communications and social networking sites have provided a new channel for sharing ideas and opinions all over the world. The present study aimed to investigate how gender can play a role in the realization of Persian and English compliment responses commented by EFL learners on social networking sites. To this end, a sample of 30 Iranian EFL learners was selected based on convenience sampling. Observing the ethical issues, participants' compliments and compliment response strategies were recorded, coded, and analyzed in terms of frequency and percentage. The Chi-Square test was applied to examine how the choice of response strategies is predictable across different genders. The statistical results revealed that gender plays a role when participants use Persian as the medium of communication to English compliments. However, male and female participants had the same response strategies when they used English response to English compliments and Persian responses to Persian compliments. The findings indicated that the most frequently used response strategy to English compliments was acceptance strategies, while it was non-acceptance strategies in Persian compliments. The study concluded that male and female participants applied different response strategies when they shifted the language of communications. The findings may benefit EFL learners and language teachers and it may contribute to understanding the concept of cultural linguistics.

Key Words: Compliment, gender, EFL, response strategy, online, social networking sites.

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) have already gained great popularity in computer-mediated communication. They have provided users to converse with their friends, share ideas, pictures, events, and connect with more people. Creating a profile just in a few minutes and sharing photos, personal information, and ideas do not require a particular literacy. It is believed that SNSs are as populated as a country, but users are from different countries. Although almost all SNSs are English-based, people of different countries, including EFL learners, have a high tendency to share and represent their thoughts, opinions, and even their social lives.

Most SNSs are web-based and provide users with a mean to interact over the internet. According to Carr et al. (2012), "SNSs afford a unique lens through which human examine interaction and self-presentation online by countless of them users interact with others and self-present themselves in a medium enabling both interpersonal and mass communication. SNSs afford individuals new means of communicating to both mass and interpersonal audience and as such, represent an interesting new medium of communication" (p.176).

A compliment is a speech act in which "explicitly or implicitly attributes some pleasant qualities to someone other than the speaker; usually the person addressed, for some good..." (Holmes, 1988, 446) In Brown and Levinson's terms, paying compliment is a positive strategy that addresses the good quality in the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The primary purpose of compliments is to please the addressee; however, they can have functions among the interlocutors as well. They are used to express sarcasm, disapproval, to put someone down, to manipulate and to perform various functions (Holmes,1988). Within the dynamic conversational mechanism, compliment and compliment response are considered as a pair in which compliment responses are made to maintain solidarity between interlocutors as well. Having analyzed compliment responses, it was revealed that responses are of different types and can be classified into different categories (Holmes 1986, 1988; Herbert, 1990; Pomerantz, 1987). The type of responses applied to compliment is considered as the compliment response strategy and they can be classified into different categories (Holmes, 1988).

Although the number of studies on the speech act of compliment and compliment responses abounds, little attempt has done on this speech event on SNSs as the context of naturally occurring setting in computer-mediated communications (Dehkordi & Chalak, 2015;

Rohmai et al., 2017). Furthermore, as the popularity of SNSs soared, many bilinguals, including EFL learners, are logging into SNSs and become a member to communicate and update their information, interest, beliefs, ideas, etc. The mediation of communication in SNSs is in English, and many speakers of other languages are frequently using them from all over the world; thus SNSs are the most popular mediation of cyber communications. SNSs are potentially valid sources of data collection for the speech act particularly the speech act of compliment as individuals frequently pay compliments and respond to compliments in order to consolidate their relation and friendship, keep their conversation going, show their politeness and maintain their intimacy. However, in SNSs, we are frequently encountering a naturally occurring speech event where individuals' utterances are produced without the features of face to face communication like voice features and facial expressions.

A significant number of comments made on SNSs are speech act of compliments which can be an area of research in pragmatics. Studies on compliment and compliment responses were mostly limited to questionnaires, structured surveys, and interviews with rather some shortcomings. That is, compliments and their adjacent parts have been studied through everyday conversations, field observation, role plays, and TV program or through a naturalistic method of data collection known as discourse completion test; it would be appropriate to examine this phenomenon through SNSs, where individuals are constantly paying and receiving compliments. The present study is significant in that it introduced a new context of data collection. Thus, SNSs were viewed as the primary source of data collection in which complimenting occurs frequently and naturally.

2. Literature Review

In both early and recent investigation of compliments, gender has been examined as one of the main variables (Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988; Wolfson 1983, 1984; Heidari et al. 2009; Motaghi-Torabi & Beuzevile, 2012; Yousefvand, 2010, Morady Moghadam, 2017). It is reported that compliments are more frequently applied by women than by men. According to Holmes (1988), women pay and receive compliments to maintain intimacy within the conversations. Women also pay compliments more implicitly to maintain longer conversational flow. Holmes was the first one who extensively examined the effect of gender on type and purpose of compliments. She found that since men do not pay compliments as frequent as women, then compliments are not a preferable male strategy to demonstrate

friendship, they usually ignore or evade the compliments and shift to other topics. She reported that men believe compliments are “face-threatening act” and are not feeling comfortable by them; however, women enjoy perceiving compliments and take them as a positive strategy.

Lesmana (2009) studied compliment responses on SNSs across genders in Indonesia. He analyzed the type of compliment responses used by male and female and those responses that have occurred most frequently by both genders. The researcher concluded that accept type compliment response strategy was the most dominated strategy through SNSs. However, female tended to answer compliments with some form of evading.

Mansson and Myers (2011) examined how college students express affection through SNSs and gender differences in the amount of expressed affection through those SNSs. They found that women were more likely to express affection and perceive expressions through SNSs more appropriately than men do. They have found that men and women not only differ in their amount of expressed affection, but they also expressed and interpreted affection differently.

Rohami et al. (2017) investigated the syntactic structure of compliments made on Instagram. They found that compliments on Igers (as they write) are mostly short if they are on skills and ability and users prefer to use adjectives rather than verbs. They also found that the most frequent strategies to compliments are acceptance.

The Spanish speech act of compliments serves as a politeness strategy so that Barros Garcia (2018) reported that compliments function as constituting and reinforcing the face of addressees and the ‘face-enhancing’ politeness encourages Spanish to pay compliments. As the main function of compliment, the researchers indicated that Spanish compliments are mean of showing closeness and solidarity.

Studies on the speech act, particularly the speech act of compliments have shown that "certain speech acts and their realizations in language use are closely associated with the underlying pragmatics schemas that serve as the common ground of speakers (Sharifian, 2017, 52). The cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi* or ‘modesty’ that was first proposed by Sharifian (2005) encourages Persian speakers to disagree with the compliments and attribute it to

someone other than speakers like the teacher, parents, or God. This manner of responding suggests that Persian speakers tend to reject or return the compliments to save their face and politeness. Most studies on Persian or English compliments were trying to examine the effect of pragmatic transfer across the languages.

Motaghi-Tabari and Beuzeville (2010) showed that Persian speaker tends to disagree with the compliments and transfer their cultural schemas when responding to the compliments. Similarly, Mohajernia and Solimani (2013) found that compared to Australian, Iranian EFL learners are less willing to accept a compliment. Iranian EFL learners also showed more modesty and humanity, which is rooted in Iranian cultures. In addition, Iranian EFL learners and Australian were not different significantly with regard to strategies of acknowledgement and rejection of compliments.

However, Sadeghi and Zarei (2013) reported that EFL learners use both acceptance and non-acceptance strategies. Heidari et al. (2009) reported that the dominant response strategy falls in the category of acceptance and both male and female speakers tend to accept the compliments. Following that, Yousefvand (2010) compared compliment responses used by male and female to find out the degree of differences in responding to compliment between Persian and English speakers and the effect of gender on patterns of compliment responses. She argued that Persian speakers rarely disagree with the compliment, but they tend to make a comment to show their modesty. In gender differences and their effect on the compliment response strategies, her data revealed that male Persian speakers tend to use formulaic expressions more than female Persian speakers while the later show their appreciation.

Dehkordi and Chalak (2015) examined the frequency of response strategies to English compliments paid by Iranian EFL learners on SNSs. They found out that in responding to English compliments users tend not to transfer their Persian cultural schema and keep up faces by appreciating the compliments; this proved that no Persian pragmatic strategies were transferred in the context of SNSs. They also showed that acceptance is the most frequently used strategies, and Persian cultural schema is not manifested on the response strategies.

Morady Moghadam (2017) examined the issue of politeness and its realization in compliments responses. He showed that politeness is highly culture-specific, and women

respond diversely depending on the topic of the compliments, cultural burdens, and complimenters' gender.

Most studies on compliments response strategies examined the cross-gender variations in applying responses to compliments, and almost all have used the Discourse Completion Test (DCT) to collect the target data. However, the present study is significant in that it examined the compliment response strategies through social networking sites (SNSs) as a naturally-occurring context of compliments and responses. To do so, the present study aims to find out if the choice of compliment response strategies and gender can relate in the context of social networking sites.

3. Method

3.1 Design and Context

This study enjoyed naturalistic and controlled observation by the recording of naturally occurring compliments and compliment response strategies among Iranian EFL learners on social networking sites (Facebook). Compliment responses were recorded and classified within the defined specific time, and they were further analyzed in terms of frequency and percentage. The data then were coded for investigation of the most frequent response strategy in Persian and English compliments and their distribution cross-gender. The test of chi-square was applied in order to see if gender and choice of strategy are related. The detailed information regarding, participants, instruments, and procedure will be presented in the following sections.

3.2. Participants

The participants of the present study were a group of 30 graduate and undergraduate Iranian EFL learners; both male and female (9 males and 21 females). As data were collected naturally, there was no control on the equal distribution of male and female participants. In addition, during data collection procedure it was revealed that male SNSs' users do not engage in online communication as much as female ones, this can explain why the number of male and female participants is not equal. The participants were chosen conveniently from a pool of SNSs users based on their field of study at university. All participants were native speakers of Persian, and they were learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). The main reason for selecting the participants was that they were studying English as a foreign language. Table 1 summarizes the demographic background of the participants taking part in the study.

Table 1. Demographic background of the participants

Number of Participants	30
Gender	9 Male 21 Female
Mother Tongue	Persian
Age	23-43
Level of Education	Graduate and undergraduate

3.3. Instruments

To answer the research questions, two different instruments were designed to collect the data. These instruments were applied to ensure the authenticity of data collection and data analysis procedures. a) Consent Forms: To observe ethical issues for data collection procedure, the potential sample participants were sent consent forms in which they were asked to express whether they agree to let the researchers use the compliments they pay or receive on their profile photos. The consent forms informed the potential samples that the data are used only for research purpose. Moreover, to ensure confidentiality, they were informed that their names and other personal information would not be shared and published. To prevent any confusion or misunderstanding, the consent forms were in Persian. The potential participants were asked to fill out the forms and express their agreement by sending the forms back through personal messages. b) Herbert's (1986) Taxonomy: This taxonomy was selected as it covers a wide range of response strategies, and it could fit well with the strategies that Persian speakers apply in their everyday communications. In addition, this taxonomy is robust enough for deciding the types of compliment response strategies and most previous works have applied that. All compliment responses were coded and classified according to Herbert's Compliment Response Strategy Taxonomy where response strategies were divided into three macro levels of agreement, non-agreement, and other interpretations. When the data were analyzed, it was observed that most strategies in the non-agreement level were not used at all by the participants; as a result, the taxonomy was modified, and compliment response strategies were divided into two macro levels of acceptance and non-acceptance strategies. The data, then, were classified according to the modified version of Herbert's taxonomy.

3.4. Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

The present study examined English and Persian naturally occurring compliment responses among Iranian EFL learners on SNSs. In order to collect the desired data, the third researcher

used her SNSs account and selected 45 SNSs users who were all Iranian EFL learners. In order to observe ethical issues, all potential participants were sent consent forms by personal messages and they were required to express their agreement by sending back messages in the following 10 days. From all 45 participants, 30 participants returned the messages, 9 male and 21 female Iranian EFL learners were finally selected as the participants of the study. To uncover any problem of proposed procedures and methods, a pilot study was carried out before the main study. The pilot study was done to assess the feasibility and usefulness of the data collection method and to revise any necessary stage. The result of the pilot study proved the feasibility of data collection and method to finalize the method of the study. Having received contest forms from the participants, their profiles were examined within a defined period of time (from March first to June first) and any English and Persian compliments and compliments responses uttered by the participants on their profile pictures were recorded. Compliments pairs were classified at two Levels. The Levels were on the base of the language by which participants gave and received compliments; that is Level One comprised those pairs which their first parts, the compliments, were in English and the responses were in English, Persian, or mixture of English and Persian are known as code-switching. Level Two, on the other hand, were those pairs that their first parts, the compliments, were uttered in Persian and the responses were in Persian as well. Table 2 elaborates the manner of data classification.

Table 2. Compliment responses classification

Level One	
a.	English Compliments
b.	Compliment Responses in English
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>You look so beautiful</i> b. <i>Thank you, dear,</i>
a.	English Compliments
b.	Compliment Responses in Persian
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>So nice</i> b. <i>Mamnon Azizam</i>
a.	English Compliments
b.	Compliment Responses in Persian and English
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>So cute</i> <i>Cheshat cute mibineh.</i>
Level Two	
a.	Persian Compliments
b.	Compliment Responses in Persian
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Akset kheili ghashange</i> b. <i>Merci azizam lotfdari</i>

Compliment responses were categorized according to Table 2. Having recorded and classified compliment responses, the data were coded on the base of the modified version of Herbert's (1986) taxonomy. The number of recorded compliment pairs at Level One and Level two were 132 and 110, respectively. As the data were naturally occurring speech acts, there was no control over the number neither of responses nor on the distribution of utterances across males and females and the language of the participants. The data were classified and the frequency and percentage of each strategy were measured. The data in both Levels were first divided at macro-strategies (acceptance and non-acceptance) and then were further divided into micro-strategies. Micro-strategies in acceptance were strategies such as appreciation token, comment history, and praise upgrade and in non-acceptance were return, scale down a question.

As mentioned earlier, in Level One, compliments were expressed in English and responses were in English, in Persian, as well as in mixing English and Persian known as code-switching. Since the number of code-switching responses was not high enough, they were put in Persian responses. The data were classified on the base of compliment responses taxonomy. The data, then, was coded and classified in terms of frequency and percentage to measure the most frequent response strategy in Level One (English compliments). In Level Two, on the other hand, compliments were in Persian and so were the responses. In this Level, again, compliment responses were classified on the base of the same taxonomy and were measured in terms of frequency and percentage to find the most frequent response strategy in Persian compliments.

As participants were male and female Iranian EFL learners, gender was considered as the main variable which could affect response strategy choices. Therefore, response strategies were divided across gender and the test of Chi-square was applied to see if the data were statistically significant, or they were just by mere chance.

To finalize this section, it is worth adding that the researchers were actively engaged in data collection procedure. The researchers were both an observer and a participant who frequently gave and received compliments both in Persian and English to stimulate the participants in complimenting as naturally as possible, and compliments were constantly checked and recorded by the researchers.

4. Findings

Having recorded all compliments and compliment responses in the defined period of time, they were divided into two Levels. The number of compliment pairs in Level One (the first part of compliment pairs were in English) and Level two (compliment pairs were in Persian) were 132 and 110, respectively. Response strategies were classified and coded into nominal categories and they were analyzed in terms of frequency and percentage. The Chi-square test was used to determine whether the frequency of the data is statistically significant, or they were just occurred by mere chance. Strategy categorization was based on Herbert's (1986) taxonomy with some modification made by the researchers.

The detailed analysis of response strategies revealed that the participants used interestingly different strategies to both English and Persian compliments. It was noticed that participants used different strategies at the same time to a single compliment. In the following, the frequency of each strategy in both levels is presented. Then the data were analyzed to see if gender played a role in the choice of each strategy. The data were analyzed as the following.

As it is shown in Table 3, from the total number of 132 English compliments less than half of the compliment responses were in English and more than half of the compliment responses uttered in Persian. This distribution can suggest that in natural setting Iranian EFL learners are not biased in using their mother tongue or their second language in responding to the compliments.

Table 3. Frequency and percentage of responses to compliments for male and female (both levels)

		Level One (132 compliment pairs)	
		Frequency	Percentage
English Responses	Acceptance	56	86.15
	Male	32	57.14
	Female	26	46.42
	Non-acceptance	9	13.85
	Male	6	66.7
	Female	3	33.3
	X2	0.29	0.59
	Persian Responses	Acceptance	48
Male	13	27.1	
Female	35	72.9	
	Non-acceptance	19	28.37
	Male	17	89.47
	Female	2	10.53
	X2	21.4	30.00
		Level Two (110 compliment pairs)	
Persian Responses	Acceptance	41	37.28
	Male	8	19.5
	Female	33	80.5
	Non-acceptance	69	62.72
	Male	18	26.1
	Female	51	73.9
	X2	0.616	0.0433

N=30

Because the participants were both male and female and gender the main variables, the responses were analyzed based on gender. It was found that Iranian female EFL learners tend to use the English language less than male counterparts when responding to English compliments. As Table 3 shows, less than half of English responses were uttered by female participants while more than half of English responses were uttered by male participants. When the English responses (Level One) were analyzed according to the modified version of Herbert's (1986) taxonomy, it was known that the majority of response strategies fell into the category of acceptance at macro-Level where participants showed their agreement by appreciation token, comment acceptance, praise upgrade or they used other strategies like comment history, or reassignment at micro-Level the compliment to show their agreement.

The data were fed to the test of Chi-square by which the relationship between using compliment response strategies, acceptance and non-acceptance, and gender in Level One was examined. As it is indicated in Table 3, the Chi-square test showed the statistical value of the Chi-square and meaning level. The statistical value is 0.29 and the meaning level is 0.59. Since the meaning level is greater than 0.05, it can be inferred that the variables are independent, in other words, choosing acceptance or non-acceptance strategy is not dependent on the participants' gender. This result proved that male and female participants are not greatly different in choosing compliment response strategies to English compliments.

Analysis of Persian compliment response strategies to English compliment showed that the majority of response strategies fall into the category of acceptance; that is, three-quarters of all Persian strategies are acceptance strategy, while around a quarter falls into the category of the non-acceptance response strategy. In this part, participant proved that their choice of language, English or Persian, to respond to the compliment do not influence the choice of compliments strategy that is in both cases participants used appreciation token strategy as the dominant compliment response strategy to English compliments at micro-level.

However, male and female participants showed great differences in their choice of strategies. Around one-third of male participants used non-acceptance strategy while female participants showed a greater tendency to acceptance strategy. As illustrated in Table 3 female participants used acceptance much more, on the contrary, in non-acceptance strategies male showed greater tendency; that is, most of the non-acceptance strategies were uttered by male speakers while this figure was not significant for female participants. According to the results of Chi-square tests, the statistical value is 21.43 and the meaning level of the test is 0.00. Since the meaning level is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that variables were not independent, that is the choice of compliment response strategy depended on the gender of the participants. The choice of acceptance strategy among female participants suggested that they show a great tendency toward keeping solidarity and friendship as well as expressing their politeness.

At Level Two, those compliments were examined in which the first parts, the compliment, were uttered in Persian. From all 110 Persian pairs, male participants were less active in responding to compliments as it is shown in Table 3, around a quarter of responses, were uttered

by male participants while female participants' responses were around three times greater than male participants' responses.

The analysis of data revealed that Iranian EFL learners were sensitive to the language of compliments. Based on the frequency of compliment responses, the most frequent strategies applied to Persian compliments were from non-acceptance category. When the responses strategies were analyzed, it was found that participants used a variety of strategies to respond to compliments. Accordingly, more than two-third of compliments were non-acceptance strategies while other response strategies were acceptance strategies. As Table 3 shows, male and female participants showed different tendencies in using compliment response strategies. Female participants had more contribution in both acceptance strategies and non-acceptance strategies than male participants, and the most frequent strategies for female and male participants were non-acceptance. Based on the data, the relationship between variables- Persian compliment responses strategies and gender- was analyzed by the Chi-square test. As it is indicated in Table 3, the statistical value is 6.16 and meaning level is 0.433. Since the meaning level is greater than 0.05, therefore, it can be inferred that the variables were not dependent on each other. In other words, the choice of compliment response strategies in Persian compliments was not different across gender. Accordingly, when the compliment was uttered in Persian, gender is neutral in the choice of complimenting response strategies, but when it came to English compliments, gender played a role in Persian complimenting responses. In the following section, the results will be interpreted and compared to the findings of previous studies.

5. Discussion

The present study was conducted to find out if gender and the choice of compliment response strategies could relate when applied in the context of social networking sites. The reason to choose SNSs as the context of data collection was the prevalent use of online communication among Persian speakers and EFL learners; thus, they can be considered as a great context of naturally-occurring speech act. This new channel of communication absorbed the interests of many researchers in the domain of linguistics and pragmatics in particular. Interestingly, the frequent use of compliment pairs on social media suggests that Persian speakers tend to maintain and improve their solidarity and intimacy in online communication by practicing

politeness through compliments and this solidarity is further reinforced by responding to the compliments.

As data were naturally produced as the flow of online communication on SNSs, participants were free to apply either Persian or English as the medium of communication. This let the authors have another variable of comparison. Thus data were first classified according to the language of the speech act of the compliment. Having collected the relevant data, they were first divided into two levels according to the language of the communications. Then, after classifying and nominating strategies in each level, the frequency of each strategy was specified. It is worth mentioning that in responding to English compliments (Level One) male participants showed more tendencies toward using English as the medium of communication. That is, although male participants were fewer than females ones, they tended to communicate through their foreign (or second) language. Female participants, on the other hand, used Persian more frequently to respond to English compliments (Level One). This may imply that female participants prefer to keep their solidarity and intimacy by the medium of their mother tongues, where they can express their emotion and practice their social skills freely. However, when it comes to the choice of strategy, the data revealed that male and female participants were not different in choosing compliment response strategies when responses to English compliments were uttered in English. In other words, choosing compliment strategies to English compliments was not predictable by gender. Further analysis showed that male participants showed more tendencies toward acceptance strategies and used an appreciation token strategy as the most frequent compliment response strategy while female participants showed lesser tendencies toward acceptance, however, the male-female distinction is not very clear. This supports the findings of Heidari et al. (2009) and Dehkordi and Chalak (2015) that appreciation is the most frequent strategy for responding to English compliments.

It is observed that when participants communicate in English they do not tend to transfer their pragmatic knowledge, and they are probably practicing the strategies that are commonly used in English culture. This may be due to the exposure they had in their English learnings setting, such as classrooms. The findings in Level One are in line with those of Lesmana (2009) and Mansson and Myers (2011) in that both genders tend to use the same strategies and accept the compliments while women tend to show more interest in keeping the conversation going by being more active in the process compliment pairs.

The data also showed that when participants used Persian to respond to English compliments, the most frequent compliment response strategy was still acceptance. Male and female participants, however, showed great differences in their choice of strategies. Female used acceptance strategies using Persian more than male. That is, they accepted the strategy by their native language and surprisingly, male participants used return or scale down strategies when they used Persian as the language of compliment response. In this case, male and female participants showed a clear contrast in the choice of strategies. This sudden shift of strategy choice could be attributed to the manner by which male and female practice their social skills; as in Persian culture modesty and downplaying talents or other good features is regarded a polite behavior and it is highly appreciated. This can reinforce the ideas in the cultural schema of shekasteh nafsi (Sharifian, 2005) among Persian speakers and its traces were found in online communications.

This is also suggested that the choice of acceptance strategy among female participants indicates seeking to keep solidarity and friendship through politeness. These findings support the findings of Mansson and Myers (2011) that female participants had more contribution in giving and receiving compliments. This can support the idea that female and male are different in the amount of keeping the friendship and solidarity and they interpret solidarity, politeness, and intimacy differently.

Analyzing Persian compliment pairs (Level Two) revealed interesting contrasts with English compliments. The most frequently used compliment response strategy to Persian compliments was non-acceptance strategy. Both male and female applied non-acceptance strategy as the most frequent compliment response; therefore, once again, male and female participants showed no differences in the choice of responses strategies. Persian data supports the findings of Motagi-tabari and Beuzeville (2010) and Mohajernia and Soleimani (2013) in that Persian speakers tend to transfer their Persian schemas and practice their politeness by being modest and they tend to show less willingness to accept the compliments. Although indirectness and ambiguity in Persian culture made it difficult to decide which category of strategy best fits the strategies that participants used, it was revealed that male speakers were modest and more indirect and used humor to reflect their politeness. They tended to prove that they were not concerned about giving and getting compliments, but they preferred being

humorous to keep their friendships and relationships close. The female viewed complimenting as kind of disclosure that may affect their relations and solidarities. Female participants also represented different wordings and structures and used less formulaic expressions. Finally, these findings support the findings of Barros Garcia (2018) in that exchanging the compliments is encouraged by the speakers to enhance the face, consolidate solidarity, and keep intimacy.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Studies

The present study concludes that SNSs can be served as a potential context for the analysis where natural conversations are frequently created through online communications. The speech act of compliment is frequently observed on SNSs, and accordingly, this speech act serves as a tool to reinforce the solidarity, friendship, and intimacy between the interlocutors. Persian speakers seem to enjoy communication through SNSs, and they tend to use a great deal of compliment pairs for different purposes. The findings proved that EFL learners practiced politeness through accepting the compliments and used appreciation strategy to represent their politeness.

Further analysis showed that both male and female participants tend to use diverse strategies to respond to compliments. However, in the context of online communications, the distinction between male and female is not very clear. It is concluded that both genders practiced their politeness in the same way, and gender cannot precisely predict the choice of the response strategy to compliments. However, shifting language and cross-language communication can represent pragmatic transfer and incidences of Persian cultural schemas. This could suggest that further studies would be needed to see if this variation is supported or not. In general, the distinction of strategy choice between male and female is not very clear in online communication, and gender plays a neutral role in determining strategy choice. It is worth mentioning that participants showed that they do not apply the strategies that are rooted in Persian culture. This can be due to the fact that EFL learners had enough exposure through their English learning process. Thus, the area of language learning where EFL learners manifest pragmatic transfer can be improved by increasing the amount of exposure.

The present study was not void of shortcomings. Equal number of male and female participants could provide more precise results. A longer period of data collection, as well as a larger body of data, could benefit the findings. In addition, the ever-increasing popularity of

SNSs still provides a promising context of naturally occurring communication and linguistically related data. For further studies, therefore, it is suggested that other speech acts such as congratulation, wishing, apologizing etc. be examined on social networking sites. Moreover, variables such as age and education should be examined as well. The findings could be applied in the domain of cultural linguistics and would be interesting for the study of sociolinguistics. This study could benefit the syllabus designer in providing more contextual exposure for EFL learners, where the evidence of pragmatic transfer are highlighted.

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