

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

**MALAYSIANS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE
NATURE OF NONCOMPLIMENTS FROM
A GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

Being potentially interesting, the speech act of compliments has been extensively researched in aspects such as compliment responses, gender differences and compliment categories. However, an aspect that is less explored in previous research is the nature of a non compliment among gender. As research in the area of a non-compliment has not yet been fully undertaken in Malaysia, therefore this study was carried out to investigate the perceptions of respondents and understanding of the nature of non-compliment from a gender perspective. It focused on reasons for a noncompliment: which gender has a greater tendency to refrain from giving compliments and the kind of impact that a non-compliment has on interactants. It also examined the relationship between a non-compliment and cultural background.

Advocating the focus group as the methodology, the study highlighted the perceptions of the respondents ($N = 6$) in an educational organization. The respondents in this study comprised of a homogenous group of (N): 3 Malay females and 3 Malay males. The data collected through the focus group discussions was transcribed and analyzed.

The findings demonstrated how analyzing and interpreting noncompliments could generate interesting issues about gender differences. The data revealed that there were significant differences between the perceptions of men and women on the nature of noncompliments. Definitions of a compliment and a noncompliment are offered; the theoretical framework following Holmes (1988b) has been extended and refined. Additionally, a descriptive taxonomy has been outlined to best capture the essence of the nature of a noncompliment among the gender.

The findings also imply that learners must be aware of the effects of non-compliments and how they violate the norms of politeness. Similarly, in teaching and teachers' development, an understanding of the powerful effect of non-compliments will enable teachers to gain insight into its discourse. Further research is recommended on other aspects which have not been sufficiently addressed in this study.

Candidate's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations Of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the result of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This topic has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any other degree or qualification.

In the event that my thesis be found to violate the conditions mentioned above, I voluntarily waive the right of conferment of my degree and agree be subjected to the disciplinary rules and regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction to the study

Compliments are speech acts that oil the wheels of communication. They are critical to social success as oxygen is to breathing (Knapp M. L, Hopper R, Bell R. A. 1984). Similarly, they function as “social lubricants to establish or maintain rapport” (Wolfson, 1983: 86). Being hearer-oriented, they hinge on the ‘interests, wants, needs, goods’ of the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987:102). The multifaceted functions of compliments signify their role as a powerful mechanism in establishing relationships in communication. Not only is complimenting a powerful social tool, it is also one of the most fundamental.

Despite being a powerful, highly structured and formulaic mechanism (Manes & Wolfson, 1981) in establishing relationship, it is not always easy to perform compliments appropriately. There is a possibility that an absence of the verbalization of a compliment which gives rise to a situation of non compliment can break a relationship in turn. One may argue that, a non-compliment is a flipside of a compliment. It can also be a sign of disapproval, and the inappropriate use of compliments may cause embarrassment and even offense. If a compliment is viewed as a powerful mechanism in communication, an omission of a compliment or a non-compliment could be just as powerful in the maintenance and disruption of relationships.

Being able to perform the speech act of compliments appropriately is an important aspect of communicative competence of individuals in a society to avoid pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failure (Holmes and Brown, 1987). “Speech acts are not comparable across cultures” (Schmidt and Richards cited in Maya, 1999)