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Compliment Responses by Iban ESL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The speech act of complimenting and how speakers give and respond to compliments have been much researched. This study attempts to investigate one major source of pragmatic misunderstanding among learners of English in Malaysia, specifically the different responses to compliments produced by a sample of Iban speakers of English in Sarawak. It also aims to classify response types according to pre-existing taxonomy and discuss any significant issues and implications for the teaching of English. The study was timely in the sense that there is currently a lack of data regarding the production of the speech act of complimenting and its elicited responses among the Iban community when they interact in English. The method used for this study was a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The study revealed that the respondents generally accept the compliments given when complimented in both English and Iban. By accepting and giving positive elaboration, it can be said that the respondents are influenced culturally by the English language to a certain degree. The results of this study have provided some implications for the teaching of English as a second language in Malaysia. In order to produce students who are competent in the language, teachers must not only concentrate on the grammatical aspect of language teaching. Instead, they must also produce students who are aware of certain pragmatic rules of the L2 speech community in order to avoid communication breakdown.

Keywords: Compliment responses, Pragmatics, Iban speakers of English, TESL

1. Introduction

Studies on the speech act of complimenting so far have not dealt with the types of compliment responses produced by native speakers of other unstudied speech communities such as the Ibans of Sarawak. The Ibans form the largest percentage of Sarawak's population, numbering over 600,000 some 30% of its population (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010). They are the original inhabitants of the Borneo Island. Like the Malays, the Ibans are of Proto-Malay descent and their origins can be traced back to Yunnan, China (Culture and Society, 2011). Many Iban have moved to the cities for job purposes. However, some of them still live in traditional longhouses found along the Rajang and Lutar rivers. Due to modernisation and assistance from the Government, their longhouses are now equipped with modern facilities including electricity and water supply (Kedit, 1980). The Ibans today are becoming increasingly urbanized while retaining most of their traditional heritage and culture. Hence, when learning English, the traditional cultural values of the Iban might become influenced by Western values. Against this background, this study sets out to explore common compliment response types used by this particular speech community when they interact in English. For instance, there is an issue concerning whether they would be able to produce compliment

responses in English other than the typical ‘thank you’ response which was taught to them after many years of being exposed to English. On the other hand, are their responses influenced by their traditional culture whereby they may downplay or reject compliments in order to appear modest and polite?

In addition to that, non-native speakers who are not aware of the rules of complimenting practiced by native speakers may be caught in a difficult situation. A reason for this is because speakers who are not aware of the way different cultures respond to various speech acts may be seen as impolite and thoughtless (Al Issa, 2003). This happens when their responses are misinterpreted. However, the fact of the matter is, their responses are sincere. Iban speakers may have difficulty in expressing what they really mean. Hence, the speech act of complementing is potentially difficult for Iban speakers as their responses would reflect their personality. For example, by denying a compliment, they may want to appear humble and modest. By studying compliment patterns among Iban speakers, language teachers would be able to make non-native speakers aware of other strategies which native speakers employ when they respond to compliments in the target language.

1.1 Objectives of Study

This study aims to provide quantitative analysis of compliment response types used by Iban speakers when they interact in English and Iban. Secondly, it aims to identify if pragmatic transfer occurs when Iban speakers respond to compliments in Iban and English.

1.2 Significance of the study

This study is undertaken to address a need for information on the usage of the speech act of complimenting and focuses on Iban speakers learning English. So far, studies of this sort have never been carried out. Therefore, by investigating the types of compliment responses produced by native speakers of other unstudied speech communities such as the Ibans in Sarawak, others, especially those in the education sector will be able to gain valuable insights.

Other than that, this study will also contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of pragmatics as well as the teaching of English as a second language in Malaysia. This study will attempt to indicate areas which may help teachers to be aware of the conversational strategies employed by these students when they accept compliments in English. Should there be areas which need to be improved; this study will help teachers to understand the problems faced by these students.

1.3 Scope of the study

The scope of the study will only focus on the speech act of complimenting among a selected sample of Iban ESL learners from an institution of higher learning in Samarahan due to time and financial constraints. For the purpose of this study, a purposive sample of Iban undergraduates of the Diploma in Tourism Management from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management was selected.

2. Literature Review

2.1 General Background of the Iban People and Their Language

The Iban people or formerly known as the Sea Dayaks are the largest ethnic group in Sarawak with a population of 713,421 in 2010 (Sibon, 2012). Traditionally, the Ibans live in longhouses in different parts of Sarawak. However, due to modernisation, some of them have migrated to various cities in and out of Malaysia. Most would return to their respective longhouses during the Gawai Dayak Festival, which marks the end of the harvest season.

A longhouse is literally a long house which consists of several individual family units living together under the same roof (Jawan, 2001). Each longhouse is headed by a ‘tuai rumah’ or headman. The ‘tuai rumah’ holds various responsibilities for example; looks after the welfare of those under his care, acts as a judge, solving any disputes among members of his community and also an mediator between the Government and his community to name a few (Metom, 2001).

The Ibans are confined to ‘adat’ which also means “*rules of logic*” (Sandin, 1980: xi). The term itself covers not only “*customary laws*” but also the way in which one conducts himself in society. A person with good ‘adat’ refers to someone who is well-mannered, verbally polite and courteous. Someone who possesses these qualities is thought to have good ‘adat’ and that will further reflect on his upbringing. Those who dishonour ‘adat’ will be fined (Metom, 2001).

The Iban language is used by 30% of the whole Sarawak population (Metom, 2001). It is not a difficult language to master and that is why it is common to see various races in Sarawak converse in Iban when they meet an Iban acquaintance. A plausible reason for this is because of the close similarity it has with the Malay language, which is Malaysia’s national language. Asmah Omar (1981) points out that these similarities can be seen in some of their structural and lexical patterns. Other than that, according to a study done by Sutlive and Sutlive (1994), about 60 percent of Iban and Malay words are cognates.

2.2 The Speech Act of Compliment and Its Functions

A compliment is defined as “...a speech act which explicitly and implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skills, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (Holmes, 1988, p. 485, cited in Han, 1992, p. 18). Based on this definition, it can be said that compliments are flattering remarks or admiring comments used to praise someone for their traits, skills and their belongings among others.

Compliments are used for a variety of reasons. The main function of compliments is to foster good relationships between the speaker and the addressee (Bruti, 2006). Having nice things to say about someone’s effort in looking presentable or for achieving something will definitely make them feel appreciated. Here it may also function as a conversation starter as in the case of native English speakers (Thomas, 1995.). By elaborating on what is being complimented, the speaker and addressee will keep the conversation going, thus, further enhancing their social bond.

Another function of compliments would include the fact that they are used to reinforce good behaviour as in the classroom (Wolfson, 1983, cited in Han, 1992). For instance, by complimenting students' good conduct, it is believed that they would be at their best behaviour in class. At times, compliments help to reduce criticism and may be followed by 'but' or 'though' and a criticism (Han, 1992). For example, "You scored higher this time but I feel that you can do better than this."

As mentioned earlier, compliments are not only used as a conversation starter but also for sarcasm (Wolfson, 1983, cited in Han, 1992). For example the sentence "You sound as good as Mariah Carey – when she's in pain that is", allows the speaker to convey a subtle message to the addressee, which is perhaps, asking her to stop singing for she sounds horrible. In conclusion, the many functions of the speech act of complimenting allow speakers to achieve various goals. Not only does it acts as a tool to further enhance social relationships among interlocutors and a conversation starter, it also helps to reinforce good behaviour, soften criticisms and also allows the speaker to be indirect, hence the use of sarcasm.

2.3 Previous Studies

There are various studies on patterns of compliment responses among non-native speakers of English. The following are some of the most prominent. Various studies on the speech act of compliment have so far focussed on cross-cultural differences between ESL learners during social interactions with native speakers of the target language (Cedar, 2006; Cheng, 2011; Chiang & Pochtrager, 1993; Daikuhara, 1986; Han, 1992; Normala Othman, 2011; Yu, 2011;), and the pedagogical implications for the teaching of English to non-native speakers (Billmyer, 1990; Golato, 2002).

Billmyer (1990) proposed that learners of the target language must be given formal instruction of social rules of language use. This is to enable them to communicate appropriately with native speakers of the target language. In her study, she compared the differences in compliment data gained from recorded conversations between tutored and untutored groups of Japanese students. Likewise, Golato (2002) was also concerned with the need to produce L2 speakers who are pragmatically competent users of the target language to avoid communication problems. Hence, Golato suggested that foreign or second language teaching must include L1 pragmatics in the classroom.

Similarly, Daikuhara (1986) also studied the speech behaviour of Japanese students. In her study, it is revealed that among others, the Japanese do not praise their family members in public and many have downplayed their compliment responses so as to appear humble. As for studies of compliment responses among the Chinese, Yu (2011) discovered that non-native speakers of English like Chinese speakers do not offer compliments easily due to their culture. It was reported that among the Chinese, compliments were seen as a channel to express admiration and nothing else, for example, a conversation starter. Hence, Yu proposed that language and culture cannot be separated. In order for non-native speakers (L2 speakers) to be more competent users of the target language, they need to be more aware and tolerant of the cross-cultural differences. This means that non-native speakers transfer their L1 knowledge of communicative strategies into L2. If this persists, then pragmatic failure is unavoidable.

Similar to Yu (2011) and Cheng (2011), Chiang & Pochtrager (1993) also studied how Chinese speakers respond to compliments. It was revealed by Cheng (2011) that Chinese speakers find difficulty in responding to compliments that touch on aspects of personality (thoughtfulness). When complimented on this aspect, her subjects responded by giving non-verbal responses like giggling. Some were found to ignore the compliment completely. This shows that these Chinese speakers do not feel comfortable when complimented on certain topics.

Chiang & Pochtrager (1993) also revealed that Chinese speakers responded negatively to compliments. They also introduced a taxonomy of compliment responses which can be used to categorise types of compliment responses in other studies.

Speaking on the impact of culture on compliment response types, both Cedar (2006) and Han (1992) discovered that not knowing the sociocultural rules of the language being used may cause pragmatic failure. As a result, miscommunication or communication breakdown will occur. Cedar (2006) further reinforces the need to raise students' awareness of cultural similarities and differences between compliment patterns in both Thai and English culture. Han (1992) on the other hand, discovers that Korean females are most likely to disagree with the compliments given to them when they are engaged in Korean interactions without any forms of 'thank you' or 'thanks' being uttered. However, the opposite will happen when they are engaged in English interactions.

Still on the impact of cross-cultural variation, Al Falasi (2007) studied the occurrence of pragmatic transfer in the patterns of compliment responses produced by Arabic learners of English. He discovered that female Emarati learners do not produce target-like compliments due to the transfer of L1 expressions into L2. For example, when they were complimented, the usual response was "*I'm ashamed*". Native speakers of L1 find this response peculiar. Normally, such an expression is used when an offence is done. To these Arabic speakers, their response is perfectly appropriate as a way to show politeness. In the Arab culture, compliments given by a man are normally ignored.

As for studies on compliment responses among Malaysian speakers, Normala Othman (2011) discovered that her subjects, Malay speakers, generally accept compliments given to them. This scenario is similar to native speakers who accept compliments. She concludes that Malay speakers in her study have adopted the native speakers' way of responding to compliments. According to her, this is due to the effects of modernisation as well as advancement in communication technology whereby the English language continues to dominate.

2.4 Pragmatic Transfer

Kasper (1992) defines pragmatic transfer or sociocultural transfer as "...the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information" (p. 209). In short, pragmatic transfer happens when L1 speakers transfer the rule of speaking in their native language into the target language. This transfer can be both negative and positive, hence the term 'negative transfer' and 'positive transfer'.

'Negative transfer' occurs when L1 interferes with L2 learning while 'positive transfer' occurs when non-native speakers are able to transfer what they already know in their L1 into their L2. 'Negative transfer' will result in communication breakdown when people of different cultural background are not aware of the cultural differences (Thomas, 1995). An example from Richards and Sukiwat (1993, cited in Franch, 1998) will help to illustrate this. It is reported that a Japanese will say 'I'm sorry' instead of 'thank you' as a way to express appreciation when presented with a gift from a native speaker of English. In this particular scenario, the native speaker may find the response inappropriate as the Japanese is apologising for no apparent reason.

'Positive transfer' on the other hand, occurs when non-native speakers transfer the L1 rules of speaking into the L2. It is reported by Weizman (1993, cited in Franch, 1998), that speakers whose L1 are German and Danish used hints when performing the speech act of requesting, similar to native speakers of Hebrew and English. This is useful for learners as it helps to facilitate learning the L2 (Franch, 1998).

In conclusion, this section reviews a range of previous studies that have investigated the use of compliment responses among native and non-native speakers. Some of these studies investigate not only patterns of compliment responses but also the impact of culture on compliment response types and also the pedagogical implications for the teaching of English. All these studies have shown that not knowing sociolinguistic rules of the target language will result in pragmatic failure.

3. Methodology

In this research, the data collection was done through an open-ended questionnaire in the form of a discourse completion task (DCT). Two versions of the DCT in each language (English – Appendix A; Iban – Appendix B) were used in order to compare and contrast the responses yielded.

This method of data collection was chosen not only because it has been used widely in the field of cross-cultural pragmatics (Wouk, 2006) but also because it enables the researcher to collect a large quality of data in a short time (Bergqvist, 2009; Al-Issa, 2003; Maros, 2006). Furthermore, Wouk (2006) adds that one of the main advantages to using DCT data is that it allows "*cross-situation*" analyses due to the "*controlled nature of the study*". In other words, many different situational variables can be accounted for by looking at different situations and aspects of a person, such as possessions and appearance. For example, in this study, through the use of the DCT, 8 different situations had been selected in order to elicit responses to compliments given. These situations represent 4 major variables (appearance, possessions, ability and traits) that relate to areas in which compliments are typically given.

Great care was taken so as to ensure that the 'situations' in the DCTs were representative of the types of compliments that are familiar to the respondents. For each category, equal numbers of situations were set (2 situations each) according to the aspects mentioned above. In addition to that, the speaker-addressee relationship (social distance and social status) was also taken into account in order to see if there were any differences in the way compliments were responded to. For example the interlocutors in Situations 1, 2, 5, and 8 were those who

are older and socially distant (e.g. a Professor). The English version of the DCT was translated into Iban by the researcher who is a native speaker of Iban.

3.1 Research Procedure

After the DCT was finalised based on the pilot study feedback, the respondents were asked to complete the English DCT first and after a randomly selected interval of three days, then only were they given the Iban DCT. The interval was used to avoid any Iban-English translation effects.

Upon receiving the questionnaire, the 29 participants were asked to read all the written situations carefully. Then, they had to write their responses according to how they would produce them in real situations. They were told to respond to all the items given in not more than 5 minutes. Discussion with peers was not allowed. This was done so that they would not be able to 'create' responses which were unnatural. By imposing a time restriction, more natural responses would result. The numbers of participants and situations yielded a total of 232 productions of compliment responses (8 situations multiplied by 29 respondents).

3.2 Respondents of the Study

For the purpose of this study, a purposive sample of Iban undergraduates from the Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management at a national university in Samarahan, Sarawak, was selected. Criteria for the sample were as follows: the respondents were at Diploma level (only Part 1, 2, and 3), the respondents were Iban speakers (Iban as mother-tongue at home) and were undergraduates of the Diploma in Tourism Management.

These students were chosen because in their final year of study they will be required to do a ten-week practical attachment at various agencies involved in the tourism industry (UiTM Faculty of Hotel Management, 2012). Hence, it would be interesting to note if there are any significant patterns in the way they respond to compliments when dealing with tourists of different nationalities. One of the programme outcomes of this course is to produce graduates who are able to communicate effectively with people from different walks of life. As they will be dealing with foreign tourists during their ten week practical attachment and in their future working life, thus any forms of communication breakdown due to pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1995) should be identified. Compliments are one area in which such pragmatic failure and misunderstanding can easily happen.

3.3 Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaire were then analysed according to Chiang and Pochtrager's (1993) categories of compliment responses which are given below along with definitions and examples.

No.	Category	Definition	Examples
1.	Acceptance	Ritual "thank you", agreement with no further elaboration	Thank you I think so, too I'm glad you like it

2.	Positive Elaboration	Account, history, positive comment, efforts, return of compliment	I bought this at Macy's. Red is my favourite colour. I worked very hard on the project. I like yours, too.
3.	Neutral Elaboration	Seeking conformation or shift of credit	Really? Do you think so? My assistant selected them.
4.	Negative Elaboration	Downgrading, duty or responsibility, need for improvement	The house is a bit too small for us. I still need a lot of improvement. It's my responsibility.
5.	Denial	No or negative opinion	No, not at all. No, my baby is ugly.

(taken from Chiang & Pochtrager, p.8)

After the data was analysed, the collected data was coded and entered onto Microsoft Excel spread sheets and analysed using percentages and frequencies. The results were then transferred into charts and graphs.

4. Findings

In Figure A, there exists evidence of positive pragmatic transfer from the English language (L2) to the Iban language (L1). Firstly, it can be said that the Iban speakers have 'transferred' L2 pragmatic knowledge into their native language. As shown in the graph, the total number of responses in the 'Acceptance' category is 138 responses. Out of these 138 responses in this category, 54 are made when they give compliments in Iban.

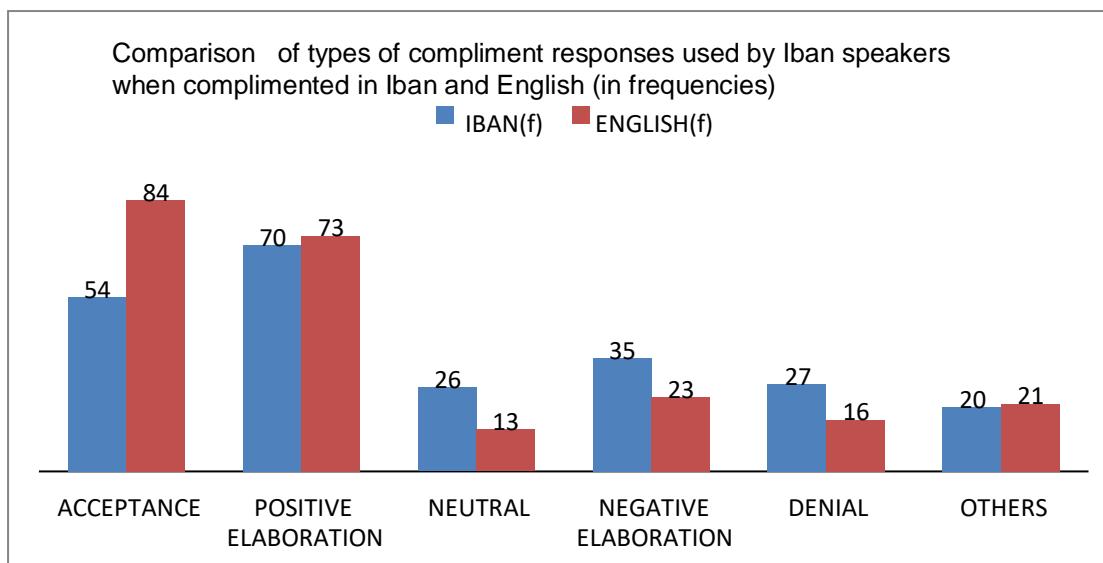


Figure A: Comparison of types of compliment responses used by Iban speakers when complimented in Iban and English (in frequencies)

As mentioned earlier, in the Iban language, there is no word to express appreciation or gratitude (Metom, 2001). Hence, by saying ‘terima kasih’ (one of the many shared cognates with the Malay language which means ‘thank you’) in response to receiving a compliment, it can be concluded that they have incorporated L2 pragmatic knowledge into the native language. It should also be pointed out that even though the number of responses in the ‘Acceptance’ category is still higher with 84 responses (when complimented in English), there exists a hint that positive pragmalinguistic transfer occurs.

Secondly, the data also reveals some interesting findings on the way Iban speakers respond to compliments when complimented in English. In such a case, native speakers may find their responses inappropriate and rude (Thomas, 1995). The examples below are taken from the responses to Situation 6 of the DCT in English:

*Do I not look good before this?
 It must be your eyes!
 Hmm... Is that so? Maybe it's just you*

However, English native speakers may view these responses differently¹. To a native speaker, the responses above may sound impolite with hints of sarcasm and rudeness. As a result, the responses above may also threaten the hearer’s positive face.

Pragmatic failure will occur as the way two different cultures interpret certain linguistic actions differently (Al Issa, 2003; Kasper, 1992). As mentioned earlier, the results of this findings show that when complimented, most Iban speakers would accept the compliment (‘Acceptance’ and ‘Positive Elaboration’). However when they reject the compliments (‘Negative Elaboration’ and ‘Denial’), evidence of negative pragmatic transfer can be observed.

Below are some examples of negative pragmatic transfer worth highlighting in the use of negative elaboration when Iban speakers respond to compliments in English.

Example 1 (Situation 8)

Lecturer	: Wow! That's one impressive looking gadget!
You	: <i>It's nothing compared to yours, Madam.</i>

Example 2 (Situation 1)

Mom's friend	: Your mom told me that you are studying medicine. You must be very clever.
You	: <i>I study medicine but I'm not very clever, Aunty.</i>

In the examples above, when the Iban speakers are complimented in English, some demonstrate their humility by downgrading the compliments received. In the Iban culture, one must be humble at all times and self-praise is avoided². This is similar to the Malay and Chinese culture whereby compliments must be rejected (Normala Othman, 2011). Hence when these Iban speakers respond to compliments from native speakers in the manner illustrated above, they might be misunderstood. This is because in the Western culture, compliments are mostly accepted (Billmyer, 1992; Cheng, 2011).

¹ According to Associate Professor Dr. Simon Botley of the Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Sarawak. 18 February 2012, personal communication.

² A point corroborated by Tuai Rumah John Dullah, an Iban village head-man of Rumah John Dullah, Sekuau, Sarawak. 24th January, 2012. Personal communication.

Overall, the study has produced some valuable and interesting findings, from the viewpoint of cross-cultural pragmatics. Firstly, it is revealed that the Iban speakers in this study used several different types of compliment responses proposed by Chiang & Pochtrager (1993, cited in Cedar, 2006) when responding to compliments given in Iban and English. However, another element has been added to the categories given and it is characterised as ‘Others’ (Appendix C) as some of the responses yielded were unlike those mentioned by Chiang & Pochtrager (1993).

In addition to that, on the whole, it is also found that Iban speakers accept rather than reject compliments directed at them. Also this depends on speaker-addressee relationship. At the same time, this study shows that there exists evidence of both positive and negative pragmatic transfer.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the study indicated the following. Firstly, it was revealed that when they responded to compliments in English on the DCTs, more than half of the respondents (67.7%), said that they would accept the compliments. This was mostly done by reporting that they would end the conversation with a simple utterance of ‘thank you’. The same pattern can be seen with their responses to being complimented in Iban whereby more than half (55.5%) were classified under the ‘Acceptance’ category.

Similarly, when they had to imagine their response in their native tongue, most of them would rather do so by further commenting on what was complimented by giving positive elaboration. Most of the time, Iban speakers do not reject or respond negatively when being complimented in both languages. Instead, they accepted the compliments by giving more positive elaboration on what was being complimented or, injected hints of ‘humour’ so as to enhance rapport between interlocutors. This is especially so when they were complimented in their native tongue; a total of 6 responses of this nature (‘responding in a humorous manner’) were found when they were told to report their response to a compliment in English and 10 were found in their reported responses in Iban. This shows that negative pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2 occurs due to the “*social perceptions underlying participants’ interpretation and performance of communicative action*” (Rose and Kasper, 2001, p.2). For example, by saying “*Aku empu ya, nyak ia lawa dipeda*” (translation: *It’s mine, that’s why it looks good*”), may sound rude to a native speaker but is perfectly appropriate to an Iban.

Secondly, when exposed to being complimented in English, some of the respondents (36.2%) said they would accept the compliments by saying ‘thank you’. This suggested that acculturation as proposed by Spolsky (1989) was taking place. There is a strong possibility, based on the researcher’s personal teaching practice, that the respondents had been influenced by what was taught to them while learning English in school. For example, they would have been taught that when one is complimented, the ‘correct’ response in English would be simply ‘thank you’.

5.1 Pedagogical implications

The results of this study have provided some implications for the teaching of English as a second language in Malaysia. In order to produce students who are competent in the

language, teachers must not only concentrate on the grammatical aspect of language teaching. Instead, they must also produce students who are aware of certain sociolinguistic and pragmatic rules of the L2 speech community in order to avoid communication breakdown. In Malaysia, the way English is taught in both primary and secondary schools has always focussed on forms and functions, and as a result, it is highly grammar based (Maros, 2006). Students are taught to memorise typical features of English response patterns. For example, the appropriate response to a compliment is always ‘thank you’ and no other. Others may argue that there is nothing wrong with that response. However, our students need to be made aware that the speech act of compliments serves not one but many different functions. For example, students need to be told that compliments also function as a conversation starter. According to Cheng (2011) and Han (1992), native speakers often use compliments as a conversation starter. Therefore, if our students were to respond by saying ‘thank you’ every time they are complimented, then they might put a stop to the conversation progressing. This may threaten the interlocutor’s ‘positive face’, as indicated by Brown & Levinson (1987 cited in Thomas, 1995). As a result, the interlocutor may be in an uncomfortable position thus delimiting further interaction between the two. Language teachers should therefore teach language and culture hand in hand (Bardovi-Harlig and Griffin, 2005; Golato, 2002; Yu, 2011).

At the same time, it should be made clear that this study is not proposing that students be assimilated into the target culture or forget their cultural identity. Kasper (1992) stresses that language teachers should make their students aware of the differences in the sociolinguistic rules of the L2 speech community so that they will not be judged inappropriately by them (speakers of the target language). For example, Dash (2004) points out that while teaching cultural pragmatics to students, language teachers or instructors need to do so carefully as some students are sensitive when it comes to their culture. For example, teachers must never put their students down by telling them that the culture of the L2 native speakers is superior to theirs.

The findings of this study also reveal to us that teachers as well as syllabus designers need to create opportunities for our students to observe and experience real social interactions so that they will become more socio-pragmatically competent in the L2. Teachers must not rely on textbooks, as some dialogues in these textbooks are very superficial, as well as being artificial (Golato, 2002; Wannaruk, 2008; Pablos-Ortega, 2011).

Instead, it would be a better strategy to allow students to watch authentic video clips in the target language and ask them to note the similarities and differences in compliment responses patterns. This is especially useful for students, as it would not only help them be more aware of the culture of the L2 speakers but also the different strategies to employ when responding to compliments given by native speakers.

5.2 Limitations of the study

It should be noted that this research is a small-scale exploratory study which provided insights into how the act of complementing is responded to among a selected group of Iban speakers of English. As the scope of the present study is narrow, the findings of this study cannot be used to make valid generalisations. A broader sample is needed to achieve that.

A second limitation is this study's lack of inferential statistics. Due to the limited sample size, it was not feasible to carry out any valid comparisons or correlations, such as between genders or age groups. As a result, the study was entirely descriptive in nature, and the results were quantitative. Future research with a larger and more differentiated sample with a wider range of independent variables will help to address this.

5.3 Recommendations for future research

For the purpose of future research, certain changes would have to be made. Firstly, in order to generalise the findings, there is a need to include a wider range of Iban respondents in the future. In addition to that, future studies should also identify factors that may lead to pragmatic failure within the speech act of compliment among these Iban speakers. Moreover, other than using DCTs, data can be collected from a corpus of natural spoken language. This can be done by audio-recording spoken exchanges as they occur.

5.4 Conclusion

To sum up, this study offers some useful insights. There is evidence that the sample of Iban speakers of English under analysis accepted the compliments given and they sometimes continued the conversation by elaborating their responses based on the aspect being complimented. By accepting and giving positive elaboration, it can be argued that the respondents are influenced culturally by the English language to a certain degree.

APPENDIX A: DISCOURSE COMPLETION TASK (ENGLISH)

Read the situations below carefully. Then, write your response as to how you would produce it in real situations. Please write down the first thing that comes into your mind. All responses will be kept confidential.

Situation 1

Your mom's friend is at your house.

Mom's friend : Your mom told me that you are studying medicine. You must be very clever.

You : _____

Situation 2

You were sitting comfortably on a chair while waiting for your turn to see a doctor. Suddenly, you saw a pregnant lady standing next to you. You decided to offer her your seat.

Pregnant lady : You are very considerate! There aren't many like you nowadays.

You : _____

Situation 3

You have decided to cook dinner for your younger brother. You cooked your famous 'Tom Yam Soup'.

Younger brother : This soup tastes better than mom's!

You : _____

Situation 4

You are in the dean's list. Your best friend was thrilled when you told him about it.

Best friend : Congratulations! You deserve it!

You : _____

Situation 5

You met your lecturer and he commented on your new haircut.

Professor : I like your new haircut!

You : _____

Situation 6

You met a former classmate at a restaurant. He commented on your appearance.

Former classmate : You are looking good these days!

You : _____

Situation 7

Your friend commented on your new phone.

Friend : Wow! I love your new handphone!

You : _____

Situation 8

Your lecturer commented on your new lap top.

Lecturer : Wow! That's one impressive looking
gadget!

You _____

Thank you very much for your time

APPENDIX B: DISCOURSE COMPLETION TASK (IBAN)

Baca pekara ba baruh tu enggau silik. Udah nyak, tulis saut ti engkeman lalu bakani chara nuan nyaut dalam 33anya ti bendar. Tulis utai ti keterubah dalam runding nuan. Semua saut ti udah di tanyak deka dipelalai.

Pekara 1

Bakih Indai nuan bisi ba rumah nuan.

Bakih Indai : Indai nuan madah, nuan belajar nyadi lutur. Mesti nuan tok pintar.

Nuan : _____

Pekara 2

Nuan benung duduk ba bangku, nganti maya betemu ngau lutur. Enda disangka, bisi siko indu mgandung bediri semak alai nuan duduk. Nuan pan meri palan duduk nuan ke iya. Indu ngandung : Mentas amat nuan tok! Nadai maioh orang baka nuan rebak ke maia ari tok.

Nuan : _____

Pekara 3

Nuan ka nyumai sup tomyam ke menyadi laki nuan kena makai lemai.

Menyadi laki : Sup sumai nuan nyamai agi ari ngi Indai!

Nuan : _____

Pekara 4

Nuan udah dalam senarai nama ke deka Dean (Dean's list). Bakih nuan gaga amat ninga rita nya maia nuan madah ngagai iya.

Bakih rapat nuan : Meri pengaga ati ngagai nuan! Sigi patut gak nuan bulih!

Nuan : _____

Pekara 5

Nuan betemu enggau pengajar lelaki universiti nuan. Ya muji kempat buk baru nuan.

Profesor : Manah kempat buk nuan. Rindu ku medak!

Nuan : _____

Pekara 6

Nuan betemu bakih sekula nuan suba. Iya (laki) muji penyigat/pemajik nuan. Bakih sekula nuan suba: Sigat /Bajik nuan diatu ne!

Nuan : _____

Pekara 7

Bakih nuan muji talipaun binching nuan ti baru.

Bakih : Apuu! Manah amat talipaun baru nuan. Rindu ku medak!

Nuan : _____

Pekara 8

Pengajar nuan muji 'lap top' baru nuan.

Pengajar : Waah! Manah endar gak perengka nuan nya!

Nuan : _____

Terima kasih

**APPENDIX C: COMPLIMENT RESPONSES UNDER THE CATEGORY OF ‘ OTHERS’
(DATA FROM ENGLISH DCT) COMPLIMENT RESPONSES FUNCTION**

COMPLIMENT RESPONSES	FUNCTION
Well, if you want one, you must buy one quickly. (Situation 7) Everyone should deserve it. Just put some effort on it. (Situation 4) Actually you deserve it too if you make an effort on it . (Situation 4) We need to change our appearance nowadays. (Situation 6) One should take care of one's looks. (Situation 6) You must watch your food. (Situation 6) You should get one.(Situation 7) Then learn how to cook! (Situation 3) Just eat it and be quiet, will you? (Situation 3) Try drinking lots of water. (Situation 6)	OFFERING ADVICE / RECOMMENDATION
Maybe it's just you (Situation 6) You should have one you know. Just kidding! (Situation 5) You must be joking! (Situation 6) Do I not look good before this? (Situation 6) Is it? It must be your eyes! (Situation 6) Don't fall in love with it. It's mine... (Situation 7)	RESPONDING IN A HUMOROUS MANNER
Do you want the same handphone as me? (Situation 7) So, do you want me to cook this for you everyday? (Situation 3) Would you like to have the same style like me, Sir? (Situation 5)	QUESTIONS BACK
I am sorry but this is the only thing I can prepare for you (Situation 3)	APOLOGISING
Owwhh..You make me feel shy. (Situation 5)	SHOWING EMBARRASSMENT

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