

Pragmatic Transfer in Compliments Responses by Chinese College EFL Learners

Shuhan Yang^{1,a,*}

¹Guangzhou Huashang College, Guangzhou, China

^a86yangshuyue@163.com

*Corresponding author

Abstract: *Compliment is the speaker's praise or flattery of the addressee and the addressee often answer the speaker through the speech act of compliment response. In most speech communities, compliment is a widely used speech act. Foreign language learners with insufficient pragmatic knowledge unconsciously applied pragmatic norms of their native language to foreign language and cause pragmatic transfer from mother tongue to English. On the contrary, learners also transfer the language patterns and politeness principles of foreign language to their mother tongue. Firstly, this thesis reviews relevant studies of pragmatic transfer, pragmatic norms, politeness principles, compliment response strategies and pragmatic transfer in compliment responses. Then, it compares compliment response strategies of English speakers and Chinese college EFL (English as a foreign language) learners. Finally, it comes to the analysis of the pragmatic transfer in compliment responses in both languages, and the discussion of the causal factors for pragmatic transfer in compliment responses by Chinese college EFL learners.*

Keywords: *compliment response; ELF learners; pragmatic transfer; positive transfer; negative transfer*

1. Introduction

Complimenting to others is a social activity and Compliment is widely used in people's daily communication. By virtue of such social activity in speech communities, individuals learn language knowledge, skills and politeness necessary for daily social interaction. If Foreign language learners apply pragmatic norms and cultural conventions of their mother tongue in the use of their target language, then pragmatic transfer would occur.

Compliments are to "grease to the social wheels" and thus to be appreciated as "social lubricants"[1]. Compliments are commonly performed to make the receiver feel happy by nice praise of him/her. Structurally speaking, compliment often occurs in an adjacency pair, as it is always followed by a response from the addressee, that is, the complimentee give responses to the compliment, either to accept or to reject it[2].

Many scholars have made their primary contributions to the field of studies of responding to compliments in cross-cultural communication. The pioneer of such researches of compliment responses is Pomerantz. She claims that speakers face a dilemma when they are responding to a compliment because they have to balance two conflicting principles in their conversation: (1) to agree with the compliment maker and (2) to avoid self-praise. Receivers of complimentary force employ various solutions to mediate this conflict, categorized by Pomerantz as five responding strategies[3].

This study aims to explore the evidence of the existence of pragmatic transfer in Chinese college EFL learners' compliments responses in English interaction in comparison with that of Chinese Native Speakers (NSs) and English NSs and to investigate whether there exist possible relations between the degree of pragmatic transfer and the learners' language proficiency of English. The study further explore the causal factors for pragmatic transfer and the influence of contextual factors such as topics and social status between the speakers on the responding strategy selection of Chinese college EFL learners.

2. Theoretical basis and concept definition

2.1. *Interlanguage and Negative Pragmatic Transfer*

Interlanguage is a key concept in the process of learning a foreign or second language. The term "interlanguage" was first used by Selinker which refers to "the systematic knowledge of language that is independent of the learner's L1(the First Language) and L2(the Second Language) system he is trying to learn"[4]. The term refers to the relevant connotation as a particular mother tongue/target language combination. It mainly connect with learners' linguistic competence in views of morphology, phonology, and syntax. Since 1990s, scholars in and abroad began to do researches on Interlanguage from the perspective of pragmatics and they called it interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). As mentioned above, "pragmatic performance" of foreign language learners in their target language interaction is influenced by their native language culture, which may results in certain problems in learners' interlanguage consciousness and feedback of their target language in inappropriate form[5]. In other words, learners' previously acquired linguistic forms and cultural conventions influence the acquisition of their target language. If EFL learners make use of pragmatic norms and cultural conventions of their mother tongue in their use of target language, then pragmatic transfer would occur.

Kasper defines that negative pragmatic transfer is observed "when a pragmatic feature in the interlanguage is (structurally), functionally, (distributionally), the same as in L1 but different from L2"[6]. In other words, negative transfer is pragmatic knowledge of L1 deviant from L2. Negative pragmatic transfer involves a wide range of knowledge and it includes many kinds of language barriers relate to communication in a foreign language/L2. The major features of negative pragmatic transfer can be explained are as follows: 1) most of negative pragmatic transfer originate from the interference influence of learners' NL (native language) on TL (target language) including the established pragmatic norms of NL, all initial experience, mode of thinking and living, cognitive competence, personal experience, culture and customs. 2) negative pragmatic transfer accompany learners' understanding of TL in the whole process, it seems be commonly accepted that negative pragmatic transfer is a process in TL learning which can not be passed; 3) Learning of TL is tied down by NL. Due to this factor and this the stress of cross-cultural communication, learners from many countries have interest in the research of negative pragmatic transfer and various research methodologies were applied in this field[7].

2.2. *Politeness Theories Proposed In Western Countries and China*

As mentioned early in the introduction, responding to compliments is a dilemma for the addressee, as they have to balance two conflicting principles: a) to agree with compliment maker and b) to avoid self-praise at the same time[8]. Hence, it is necessary to briefly mention some politeness theories especially Leech's politeness principle and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Based on principles and theories of western scholars, the rejection of compliment responses of the Chinese EFL learners' is deemed as extremely impolite[9]. However, a viewpoint on the differences of politeness notion between the west and China will deny this point. Gu Yueguo is the representative of the research on face and politeness notion in China.

In western countries, many researchers, involving Paul Grice, Geoffrey Leech, Goffman, and Brown and Levinson have contributed much effort in studies of PP. The British philosopher Paul Grice's well-known article, entitled "Logic and Conversation" lays the foundation of modern western pragmatics.[10] The logic of Grice's conversation theory is based on the belief that human linguistic communication is intentional and rational. To this end, Grice proposes a Cooperative Principle (CP), assuming that communication takes place through the cooperation of the conversation participants. Leech believes that the purpose of linguistic politeness is not just to achieve the speaker's illocutionary goal but the speaker's communicative goal[11]. He therefore, identifies six politeness maxims: (1)Tact maxim; (2)Generosity maxim; (3)Approbation maxim; (4)Modesty maxim; (5)Agreement maxim; (6)Sympathy maxim. Leech believes that different cultures determines different hierarchical arrangements of the six maxims. For example, the tact maxim is one of the important one in American English culture. However, in oriental cultures, such as Chinese and Japanese cultures, the modesty maxim is more important than all the other maxims.

The western view of politeness reflects a western view of interpersonal communication. Politeness has been closely related to the culture of a certain location or a certain group[12]. Study of politeness in China began in the early 1980s. Gu Yueguo is one of the scholars who has made significant

contribution to the study of modern Chinese "politeness." Gu proposed that Brown and Levinson's model cannot explain Chinese politeness[13]. Based on Leech's PP, he summarizes four basic elements which form the modern notion of Chinese politeness: respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement. Respectfulness is "self's positive appreciation or admiration of other concerning the latter's face, social status, and so on"[14]. Modesty can be explained as "another way of express self-denigration". Attitudinal warmth is the demonstration of one's kindness, hospitality to the other. Refinement refers to self's behavior to the other should meets certain standards. Speech act that meets any one of the four elements can be count as polite[15]. Afterwards Gu develops the above four basic elements into five maxims of Chinese politeness: (1)Self-denigration maxim; (2)Address term maxim; (3) Refinement maxim; (4)Agreement maxim; (5)Virtues-words-Maxim.

In conclusion, even politeness principle were treated as universal model, we can see politeness is culture-dependent to some extent. The differences between western researches and Chinese ones of linguistic politeness also depends on the culture that the occident is individual-centered, and the orient is group-centered.

3. Subject Selection and Research Methods

3.1. Subject Selection of This Study

Four groups of 256 subjects participate in this survey: Group One(G1), juniors of non-English majors (n=64); Group Two(G2), Chinese postgraduate students of English Major including postgraduate students in Grade 2 (n=32) and postgraduate students in Grade 3 (n=32); All the Chinese college students are from Wuhan University of Science and Technology. Group Three consist of 64 monolingual speakers of Chinese and 64 native Americans from the U.S. form Group Four. The researcher chooses four groups as the subjects for the study mainly base on: (1)The college students have learned English for many years, the figures collected from Group Two and Group Three are used to explore whether students' responding strategies are different from or the same with Americans' and whether their selections of responding strategy has correlation with their English proficiency. (2) Native speakers of Chinese form Group Four and they are claimed to be monolingual speakers of Chinese mainly because: The influence of American culture on Chinese strategies' selection can be reduced as much as possible in this way. Hence, they typically represent the Chinese thinking modes. (3) Sixty-four native speakers of American English of Group Five from U.S.A are supposed to represent the American thinking modes typically.

Table 1 shows the specifications of the selected participants.

Table 1: The specifications of testee selection

Subjects	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Age Range	18-20	23-45	33-78	20-42
Total Number	64	64	64	64

3.2. Research Methods

In this study, data collection is done mainly through the written open-ended questionnaire in the form of the "Discourse Completion Test" (DCT), the most frequently used method in interlanguage studies. It include a number of situations followed by a slot in which the subjects have to provide the appropriate linguistic form of the speech act of compliments. The contexts of compliments in the questionnaire were designed to be as close as possible to daily social communication. The questionnaire is devised to achieve systematic variation of the variable-compliment topic and it contains eight compliment response situations.

The compliment topics of the questionnaire are classified into three aspects:(1) appearance/possessions, (2) performance/abilities/skills, and (3) personal attributes.

The topic variable have been shown to be critical contextual factors in determining the compliment responding behavior, which are considered in the questionnaire design of English Version (EV): compliments in S3(EV) and S6(EV) are relative to personal attributes, and compliments in S1(EV), S2(EV), S5(EV)and S7(EV) are personal appearance related and possession-related, and S4(EV),S8(EV)are performance-related.

Compliment responses were generally classified as agreement and non-agreement and other

interpretation according to Herbert's taxonomy. In the present study, such division is also adopted, i.e., the compliment response strategies are divided into three categories, and under each category, there are some sub-categories. Herbert's categorization of three types of compliment responses was shown in table 2.

Table 2: Herbert's taxonomy of compliment responses

Response Type		Example	
A. Agreement	I. Acceptances	1.Appreciation Token	Thanks; thank you;[smile]
		2.Comment Acceptance	Thanks; it's my favorite too.
		3.Praise Upgrade	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
	II.Comment History		I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
	III. Transfers	1.Reassignment	My brother gave it to me.
		2. Return	So's yours.
B. Non-agreement	I. Scale Down		It's really quite old.
	II. Question		Do you really think so?
	III. Non-acceptances	1.Disagreement	I hate it.
		2.Qualification	It's all right, but Len's is nicer.
IV.No Acknowledgement		[silence]	
C. Other Interpretations	Request for interpretation		You wanna borrow this one too?

(Adopted from Herbert, 1986, p.79)

3.3. Procedures

The questionnaires are presented both in English and Chinese. Each version has a parallel translation and the English questionnaire version is revised by two native speakers of American English who teach IELTS in New Channel School of Wuhan. Furthermore, the questionnaire is designed by the researcher for the subjects which include two parts. In part one, the subjects are required to write their gender, age, occupation or major. Part two provides eight hypothetical situations, the subjects are asked to write their response to the compliment given in each situation.

All subjects were given a questionnaire in English or Chinese, and they were required to write down the most possible response to each compliment based on the contexts given within 10 minutes. Altogether 275 questionnaires were sent out, 266 of them were collected back, and 256 were regarded as valid. The data of native speakers of Chinese are collected by the researcher in a park of Wuhan city, where the data can be collected from various social strata, which guarantees the validity of the present research to some extent. Questionnaires are handed out to 70 people eligible for this research, 66 of which are completed and returned and 64 was selected as qualified. The first group were given questionnaires of both EV and CV(Chinese Version), the fourth group were given questionnaires of Chinese version and the other groups all use questionnaires of EV.

All the subjects who have taken part in this research are informed before they complete the questionnaire and their participation of this survey is voluntary. They can refuse to take part in the investigation for any reasons, and if they accept to take part, they will be told how to complete the DCT on time. After all the questionnaires were collected, the subjects' responses to the given compliments were categorized by the researcher with reference to Herbert 's taxonomy.

3.4. Research Questions

To further research of pragmatic transfer on compliment responses, this thesis is investigating the compliment responses strategies used by Chinese College EFL learners. This research aims to answer the following three questions.

- (1) What are the evidence for pragmatic transfer existing in the speech act of compliment response?
- (2) Is there any correlation between EFL learners' language proficiency and the degree of pragmatic transfer among Chinese college students?
- (3) What are the causal factors for pragmatic transfer in compliment response by Chinese College

EFL learners?

4. Pragmatic Transfer In Comparisons of the Compliment Responses

4.1. Pragmatic Transfer from Chinese to English

Three comparisons of the compliment responses within the four groups of subjects were involved in this chapter. Firstly, the comparison of compliment responses in their L1 between G3(Chinese NSs) and G4 (English NSs) is made for the evidence of the differences in compliment responses between Chinese NSs and English NSs, which is necessary for the finding of pragmatic transfer in the following comparisons. Secondly, the comparison of compliment responses in English version of G1 (Chinese college students of non-English major), G2(Chinese college students of English major)and G4 (American English NSs) is involved, which can help us find the existence of pragmatic transfer and the degree of pragmatic transfer in different groups. Thirdly, the comparison of compliment responses in Chinese version of G2(Chinese college students of English major), G3(Chinese monolingual speakers) and G4 (English NSs).

To briefly illustrate the comparisons, table 3 is made as follow.

Table 3: Comparison of different groups

Language	Mother tongue	English	Chinese
Comparisons of CRs	G3 & G4	G1&G2&G4	G1&G2&G3

Through the comparison of compliment responses between Chinese and English, the answer of following two questions can be found:

- A. Whether there exist differences in compliment responses by Chinese Nss and English Nss?
- B. What's the evidence of the differences?

Table 4: Comparison of Strategies in CRs between Chinese and English (G3&G4)

Response Type		Chinese G3 %	English G4 %	
A. Agreement	I. Acceptances			
		1.Appreciation Token	7.81	
		2.Comment Acceptance	6.84	
		3.Praise Upgrade	1.37	
		II. Comment History	2.54	
		11.52		
III. Transfers	1.Reassignment	2.54	4.10	
	2. Return	7.23	7.23	
Subtotal		28.32	82.43	
B. Non- agreement	I. Scale Down	25.00	3.13	
	II. Question	6.25	2.73	
	III. Non- acceptances	1.Disagreement	15.04	3.71
		2.Qualification	3.13	6.45
IV. No Acknowledgement		3.13	0	
Subtotal		52.54	16.02	
C.Other interpretation	I. Request	19.14	1.55	
Subtotal		100	100	

From table 4, we can see the percentage of types of compliment responses applied by Chinese NSs and American English NSs. In this table, the researcher attempts to prove that there exist notable differences between Chinese culture and American culture, which result in the notable different strategies of compliment responses.

Table 4 shows that the strategy percentages range from 2.08% to 41.67% in English NSs' responses in "agreement", and from 1.56% to 7.81% in Chinese NSs'. The subtotal percentage of the response strategies in "agreement" occupies 82.76%, which is much higher than that of Chinese NSs (12.49%). The comparison shows that most of Americans Nss accept compliment and the most preferred response strategies by Chinese NSs is "scale down" and the least one is "praise upgrade" For the American English NSs the most preferred strategies is "appreciation token", while no "acknowledgement" strategy occurs among American English NSs. The existence of different compliment responses can

be found in many situations in the questionnaire.

For instance:

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S4)

CE: You did a great job!

CR: Thank you. It takes a lot of preparation.

Responses of Chinese NSs (EV:S4)

CE: You did a great job!

CR: No, no. I still need more improvement

In this case, by saying “No, no. I still need more improvement”, the Chinese speaker shows that his/her analysis is not worthy of being appreciated since there still exist many shortcomings in it. In such situation, the Chinese speaker lowers himself/herself to raise the complimenter so as to avoid self-praise and show his/her politeness. The American respondent takes the strategy of "appreciation token" to show his/her acceptance of complimentary force so as to protect the positive face of the complimenter.

This example above suggests that the agreement strategy is not so highly praised in China as in American, even such speech act can be considered or treated as a rude performance by Chinese people. When being praised by others, Chinese people are more likely to apply "modesty maxim" to show their politeness, while Americans more likely to apply "agreement maxim".

There are other notable differences between Chinese NSs and American English NSs in the following three strategies, i.e."overstatement of superior's help", "obligation", and "encouragement". The three strategies are not found in American English NSs' responses. The overall frequency of these four strategies in Chinese NSs' responses is much higher than that of American English NSs' which was clearly shown in the table 3 in the category of "C" (other interpretation) 18.76% of Chinese Nss and 1.61% of English Nss.

Examples collected from questionnaires and observation and interview are shown as follow.

Overstatement of superior's help:

CE:You did a great job!

CR:It is owed to your wise direction.

Obligation:

CE:You are such a warm-hearted person!

CR:It is my duty.

Encouragement:

CE:You are so intelligent!

CR:You would have worked it out if you do it

The three strategies were commonly applied by Chinese NSs through observation and interview, meanwhile, these strategies also can be easily found in questionnaires of Chinese version. So, table 5 about Herbert's taxonomy of "C" is made a little change according to the Chinese strategies of compliment response.

Table 5: The changed table of the category of "C: other interpretation"

C. Other Interpretations	1. Request for interpretation	You wanna borrow this one too?
	2. Overstatement of superior's help	It is owed to your wise direction.
	3. Obligation	It is my duty.
	4. Encouragement	You would have worked it out if you do it.

4.1.1. Positive Pragmatic Transfer

Table 6 is the the comparison of compliment responses in English version of G1 (Chinese college

EFL learners of non-English major), G2 (Chinese college EFL learners of English major) and G4 (American English Nss). Such comparison can illustrate the different figure of compliment responses in the three groups, and it also can answer the following questions:

A. Whether there exists pragmatic transfer from Chinese to English in EFL learners' compliment responses?

B. If there are, whether the language proficiency of EFL learners affect the degree of their pragmatic transfer?

Based on the answers of the above questions, the analysis of the evidence of pragmatic transfer can be analyzed. As English is a major/indispensable course of the full-time education in our country, from the view of cross-cultural communication, and foreign language teaching, the pragmatic transfer from Chinese to English is classified by the types of positive transfer and negative transfer.

Table 6: Comparison of Strategies in CRs of G1 & G2 & G4

Response Type		(EV) G1 %	(EV) G2 %	(EV) G4 %	
A. Agreement	I. Acceptances	1.Appreciation Token	37.30	50.39	41.80
		2.Comment Acceptance	6.25	7.03	15.63
		3.Praise Upgrade	4.1	2.93	2.15
	II.Comment History		2.93	3.71	11.52
	III. Transfers	1.Reassignment	5.66	4.69	4.10
		2. Return	5.86	6.84	7.23
Subtotal		62.11	75.59	82.43	
B. Non agreement	I. Scale Down		6.45	4.10	3.13
	II. Question		15.43	9.57	2.73
	III. Non- acceptances	1.Disagreement	1.95	2.15	3.71
		2.Qualification	0.98	0.78	6.45
	IV.No Acknowledgement		1.95	0	0
Subtotal		26.76	16.60	16.02	
C. Other Interpretations	1. Request for interpretation		0.78	0.78	1.55
	2.Overstatement of superior's help		4.10	2.15	0
	3.Obligation		3.13	2.93	0
	4.Encouragement		3.13	1.95	0
Subtotal		100	100	0	

Statistics shows that the percentage of agreement in G1 is lower than that of American English NSs, while the percentage of non-agreement in G1 is higher than that of American English NSs. Similar distribution of the complimenter (CR) strategies also occur during English major learner of G2.

The strategy percentages of English Responses range from 0.98% to 37.3% in G1, from 0% to 50.39% in G2, and from 0% to 41.80% in American English NSs. Of (G1) non-English major students' English responses, the most preferred strategy is "appreciation token" and the least is "Qualification". Of English major students' responses, the most preferred strategy also is "appreciation token" and the least is "no acknowledgement". Of "agreement" strategy, both the two groups of Chinese EFL learners have lower figure than that of English NSs. Although the "appreciation token" strategy of English major students(50.39) are higher than that of the American English NSs(41.80%), the whole percentage of "agreement" strategy of them(75.59%) are also lower than that of American English NSs(82.43%).

The "non-agreement" strategy of the three groups are 16.02% (G4), 16.60% (G2), 26.76% (G1), which shows that Chinese EFL learners choose more "non-agreement" strategy and less "agreement" strategies in their Compliment Responses(CRs) compared with English NSs, which indicates that Chinese EFL learners make pragmatic transfer from their mother tongue to the target language. The answer of question B can also be found due to subjects in G2 (75.59%) apply more "agreement" strategy than the subjects of G1 (62.11%) do, and the degree of pragmatic transfer was obviously different between the two groups, which will be talked later.

When the Chinese College EFL learners of English respond to a compliment in English, although they try to meet the requirements of the rules of the English language consciously and try to answer the compliments as the native English speakers do. However, they cannot avoid the influence from their mother tongue completely. There are always certain types of transfer influenced by their Chinese tradition in their English usage. Such interlanguage exists in Chinese college EFL students' English.

The Chinese students' responding to compliments in English is different from native English speakers in some aspects. They transfer the language form or pragmatic norms in their mother tongue to the use of English. If these language forms or pragmatic norms was used appropriately under English context, it is positive transfer; otherwise, it is negative. Under situation 5(S5) A Chinese English speaker may be involved in the following speech act:

(1) CR: Wow, what a nice coat, cool/beautiful! (S5: EV)

CE: Thank you! You, too.

In this example above, the response strategy is complying with the Americans' pragmatic norm, there will be no difficulty in communication for the speakers, so the pragmatic transfer is positive.

In the culture of both English and Chinese, there is a shared politeness principle or pragmatic norm. The complimentee (CE) often hold such a feeling that they are in a position in debt to the compliment giver when they were praised by someone, they think they owe to the complimenter(CR) a compliment back. Thus, the Chinese EFL learners have the same response strategy as the native English speakers and return the compliment to the givers.

4.1.2. Negative Pragmatic Transfer

Pragmatic transfer of L1 transfer pragmatic information into L2 can be positive in certain context, on the other hand, it tend to be negative most of the time due to different language culture. Beebe suggested that if the two different languages were involved in the communication, negative transfer would occur because of the learner's unconscious application of pragmatic norms in his/her mother tongue, which was very likely to result in the production of errors or pragmatic failure.

As was mentioned in the the 4.1.1 that Chinese EFL learners choose more "non-agreement" strategy and less "agreement" strategies in their CRs compared with English NSs, Of G1 (Chinese college EFL learners of non-English major), the "non-agreement" strategy is as high as 26.76 %, which is much higher than that of G4((American English NSs). So, the pragmatic transfer from Chinese to English is manifested, and the negative transfer as an important part of it is analyzed in the next paragraph.

The following expressions or utterances which are not used appropriately under English context were selected from the questionnaires and collected observation and interview. A Chinese EFL learner may be involved in the following speech act:

(1) CR: You are so nice! (S6: EV)

CE: I just did what I should do.

(2) CR: You are really a warm-hearted person! (S3: EV)

CE: It's a small case. (I just do what I can do).

In Chinese, "That's what I should do" is just a modest and polite expression when we accept a compliment, but for a English native speaker, the subtext maybe changed to " It's just what I usually do and it's not worth complimenting at all or your compliment is too much for what I have done". Under such language context, the Chinese speaker of English transfer the pragmatic meaning, which is pragmatically appropriate in Chinese but inappropriate for the a native English speaker. In the following case, the different understanding of a compliment may lead to a negative transfer from Chinese to English.

Chinese college students' response:

(3) CR: You really did a great job! (S4: EV)

CE: I still have a long way to go.

Subtext for the native English speakers: I think I am not doing well enough and I am not confident, your compliment may not be true.

CE: Just so so. I think I still need more practice.

Subtext for the native English speakers: Thank you for your praise, but I think I played bad and I need more practice.

(4) CR: What a handsome boy/pretty girl! (S7: EV)

CE: Oh, teacher you are flattering me.

Subtext for the native English speakers: It's not pretty/cool at all, it is not worth complimenting at all.

(5) CR: You look great! (S1: EV)

CE: Really? I think it's a common style.

Subtext for the native English speakers: "I am ignoring your compliment, what you are saying is not true and you praised me too much".

"Modesty maxim" which is explained by Leech as "minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise of self", is highly valued in our country. The Chinese are eager to maintain the harmonious social personal relationship in this way, though refusing to accept praise of self, even it is not the real picture. However, this way is frequently viewed as hypocritical or even rude performance by the Americans. We can see that the pragmatic transfer in these cases above is negative to some extent because of the different politeness principles and pragmatic norms in two different language cultures. It may leads to the misunderstanding between the two speakers in cross-culture communication. More seriously, it may lead to pragmatic failure in cross-cultural communication due to the lack of pragmatic knowledge of the addressee.

4.1.3. Connection between Pragmatic Transfer and Learners' English Level

As discussed above, pragmatic transfer does occur in the use of English by the non-native learners, but there are two questions:

(1) Is there any connection between the extent of pragmatic transfer and the learners' proficiency of English?

(2) Will the pragmatic transfer be reduced with the higher proficiency of English learners? The answer can be found in the following table:

Table 7: Comparison of response strategies of G1&G2&G4

Response Type	Non-English major % G1	English-major % G2	English Nss % G4
A. Agreement	62.11	75.59	82.43
B. Non-agreement	26.76	16.60	16.02
C. Other interpretation	11.14	7.81	1.55

From the table 7 we know that both the two groups have lower figures than English NSs' in the category of agreement. Meanwhile, the notable differences exist between the two groups of English learners. The figures of non-agreement is 16.60% in students of English-major and 26.76% of non-English major students, which indicate that the pragmatic transfer of the the two groups are different to some extent, i.e., the non-English major learners tend to use "non-agreement" strategy more than English-major learners, it shows that English major learner made less pragmatic transfer in their CRs under English contexts.

The compliment responses collected from the questionnaires also show that the students with lower English level tend to make more pragmatic transfer than the students with a relatively higher English level. Nevertheless, the learners with higher English proficiency still make negative pragmatic transfer from the collected questionnaires and interview of them, which is hard to avoid. That is to say, the pragmatic transfer won't disappear with the learners' improvement of English proficiency.

The English-major learners tend to accepted the compliments more directly in the strategy of "appreciation token" (Thank you) than American English NSs. The reasons may possibly dues to "Thank you" as an appropriate and commonly acceptable strategy is short and simple to complete than other response strategies. Furthermore, the appreciation token strategy may probably has been stressed in the western culture which they have learned from textbook. Compared with the figure of American NSs', Chinese English major learners make much less "comment acceptance" and "comment history" in the compliment responding strategies of "agreement". The types of "agreement" strategies of English major learners was monotonous to some extent, which reflect that they respond to compliments a little mechanically. It indicates that the pragmatic competence of learners still need to be enhanced in present English teaching in China.

Some examples of English major learners was given below.

(3) CR: You look great! (S1: EV)

CE: Thank you.

(4) CR: You are so nice!

CE: It's my pleasure. (S6: EV)

(5) CR: You are really a warm-hearted person! (S3: EV)

CE: That's what we should do.

The speech act in example (8)&(9) are employed as the native English speakers do. The response of (10) was typically influenced by the our "mother tongue culture", which shows the complimentee's sense of obligation to the society. This suggests that through a long period of English learning, Chinese college EFL learners of English major have not only learned the linguistic forms of English but acquired western culture knowledge and pragmatic knowledge to some extent. In the process of dealing with such situations under English context, Chinese college EFL learners adjust their responding strategies to adapt to western culture, nevertheless, the pragmatic transfer is hard to avoid because they have deeply influenced by Chinese culture.

4.2. Pragmatic Transfer from English to Chinese

As Beebe suggested, there is a pragmatic transfer from a second language or foreign language to the native language by the language learners. That is, the incorporation of L2 pragmatic knowledge into the native language. Thus, a question is aroused: Whether there exist pragmatic transfer in compliment responses from English to our mother tongue in the present research?

The strategies of compliment responses (Chinese Style) of the three group was shown in table 8, by comparison of the two groups: English learners and Chinese monolingual speakers, the existence of pragmatic transfer of CRs from English to Chinese can be manifested.

Table 8: Comparison of Compliment Responding Strategies in CV of G1, G2 and G3

Response Type		(CV) G1 %	(CV) G2 %	(CV) G3 %	
A. Agreement	I. Acceptances	1.Appreciation Token	21.88	24.61	7.81
		2.Comment Acceptance	11.13	10.74	6.84
		3.Praise Upgrade	12.50	11.72	1.37
	II.Comment History		4.30	5.66	2.54
	III. Transfers	1.Reassignment	7.81	8.39	2.54
		2. Return	4.10	5.08	7.23
Subtotal		61.72	66.20	28.32	
B. Non agreement	I. Scale Down		9.37	8.20	25.00
	II. Question		3.52	3.13	6.25
	III. Non- acceptances	1.Disagreement	3.13	2.15	15.04
		2.Qualification	1.56	1.17	3.13
	IV.No Acknowledgement		4.69	1.95	3.13
Subtotal		22.27	16.80	52.54	
C. Other Interpretations	1.Request for interpretation		1.56	0.98	2.54
	2.Overstatement of superior's help		5.67	7.42	8.40
	3.Obligation		4.88	5.27	3.91
	4.Encouragement		3.90	3.33	4.69
	Subtotal		100	100	100

Through the comparison of G1 (non-English major learner), G2 (English major learners) and G3(Chinese monolingual speakers) in table 8 , we can find the most significant difference lies in the sub-categories of "appreciation token" and "scale down". In the responses of the Chinese monolingual speakers, 7.81% fall into the category of "appreciation token", the number of G1 (non-English major learner) is 21.88, which is almost two times higher than that of G3(Chinese monolingual speakers), similar situation also can be found in the number of G2 (24.61%). A Chinese people who doesn't know or know little English would rarely use "thank you" to respond to a compliment as it is considered inappropriate to accept a compliment so directly in our "mother tongue culture". However, with the overwhelming influence of western culture, most of English learners know they need to accept a

compliment with "thank you" when they are communicating under English context instead of the traditional Chinese CR strategy (disagreement), meanwhile, they transfer such usage into our Mother Tongue unconsciously.

From the table above, we can see the the super category "agreement" Chinese EFL learners in G1 (non-English major learner) account for 61.72%; of G2 (English major learners) is 66.20%; of G3 (Chinese monolingual speakers) is just 28.63%. Namely, the category of Chinese monolingual speakers carries the most weight is "non-agreement", but the Chinese EFL learners prefer "agreement" more. It seems that by learning English, the Chinese students tend to put more emphasis on the "agreement" maxim instead of "modesty" maxim. So we call see that they transfer the pragmatic norms in English to our mother tongue to some extent, which indicates that our "mother tongue culture" was influenced by western culture overwhelmingly. Hence, it may be safe to say that the general tendency of the Chinese college EFL learner's responses to compliments in their mother tongue is "agree", which is opposite to the results of several previous studies due to the influence of western culture.

The figures of "other interpretation" in table 8 shows that the added three response strategies which were found only in Chinese people still occurs in the Chinese CRs of the three groups, and the total numbers of the three strategies are almost equal. This finding indicates that the Chinese-style strategies of CRs were still exist among Chinese college EFL learners.

4.2.1. From Topic Perspective

The compliments in the questionnaire are divided into three groups according to the classification of compliment topics: appearance/ possessions, performance/skills/abilities, and personal attributes. Through the analysis of CRs in questionnaires collected, the observation in English Class and interview of 12 college students (English majors 6; non-English majors 6), it was found that, under Chinese language culture, the subjects often choose different response strategies due to different topics, which also reflect the three Chinese-style strategies of CRs. Base on such contextual factor of topic and social status, different extent of pragmatic transfer from English to Chinese is can also be detected. The examples selected were given below.

A. appearance/possessions

(1) CR: You are so beautiful!

CE: Thank you! You are beautiful too.

(2) CR: Such a good hair style!

CE: (smile) Thank you!

(3) CR: Your newly-bought camera is so cool!

CE: Thank you! You can borrow it anytime you want.

(4) CR: Your skirt is really beautiful!

CE: It's very kind of you to say so. But the quality is just so so.

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S1)

CE: You looks great!

CR: Thank you.

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S2)

CE: What a beautiful cell phone!

CR: Thank you.

In conclusion, Chinese college EFL learners are likely to accept such kind of compliments when the topic is relevant to appearance or possession. But Chinese college EFL learners do not accept it as directly as American English NSs do. Sometimes, if they accept the compliment by saying "thank you", they may think it is not enough to avoid their self-praise. Thus, as an acceptance, they firstly accept the compliment to protect the "face" of the complimenter, then they give a comment like "It is just so so" to show their modesty. It may be safe to say that, when the topics are relate to appearance/possessions, the extent of pragmatic transfer from English to Chinese is obvious.

B. performance/skills/abilities

(5) CR: You have done a great job!

CE: Thank you, but I think I still need more improvement.

Encouragement:

(6) CR: You're really a good player!

CE: You can do it if you practice more.

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S8)

CE: You played ping-pang very well.

CR: Thank you.

As Chinese culture highly values humility and modesty, the strategies of "need for improvement" and "encouragement" were commonly accepted when the topic refers to skills/abilities or performance, and such speech act were ordinarily considered as polite responses in Chinese language culture. People would not commend themselves because their achievement should speak for itself.

In summary, when the topic is about the receivers' performance or skills, Chinese college EFL learners are tend to use amendment strategies or reject it to show their modesty in their responses. However, such kind of responses were not found in the questionnaires of American English NSs, which indicate that what is considered as a polite speech act in Chinese culture might not be a impolite one in American culture. Thus, when the topics are relate to performance/skills/abilities, the extent of pragmatic transfer from English to Chinese is not very clear.

C. personal attributes

Obligation:

(7) CR: You are really a kind-hearted person!

CE: That's what we young people should do./As a party member, that's what I should do.

(8) CR: You are so intelligent!

CE: Oh, no, I'm not intelligent, I just prepare it earlier than you.

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S6)

CE: You are so nice!

CR: Thank you for saying so.

In our daily life, topics about personal attributes were often presented as someone being of "kind-hearted" or "intelligent" quality, American English NSs tend to accept such kind of praise, however, most of such compliments were not accepted by Chinese people. They think that such kind of praise should be rejected due to the the high degree of such compliments. Thus, when the topics about personal attributes were involved, the extent of pragmatic transfer from English to Chinese is lower then the that of the appearance and abilities/skills, or it may be safe to say that, when the topics are relate to personal attributes, the pragmatic transfer from English to Chinese is hard to detect.

4.2.2. From Status Perspective

In the questionnaire of the present research, the situation of equal status and unequal status were involved. The speech contexts of the unequal status are represented by the characters of teachers/superior in S4 and S7. The typical response strategies in English version were shown in the section of 4.1.2, most of Chinese college EFL learners made negative transfer from Chinese to English under such situations. Here, through the analysis of collected questionnaires of Chinese version, and the interview/observation of Chinese EFL learners, it was found that they often tend to make responses as follow. (Translation was shown in the brackets.)

Overstatement of superior's help:

(1) CR: Good job!

CE: It is owed to your wise direction.

(2) CR: What a pretty girl!/handsome boy!

CE: Teacher, you are flattering me.

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S4)

CE: Well done!

CR: Thank you.

Responses of American English NSs (EV:S7)

CE: Pretty girl/ handsome boy!

CR: Thank you.(It's very kind of you to say so.)

Such kinds of responses in (19) and (20) not only exist in the questionnaires of Chinese, but also frequently occur in the interview of EFL learners. The two examples indicates that there exist notable differences in Chinese college students' compliment responses and American English NSs' when the speakers are set in different social status. By using the strategies of "overstatement of superior's help" and "non-agreement", Chinese college EFL learners show their strong respect for teachers/superiors to be polite. Such pragmatic norms are highly valued in our "mother tongue culture", however, the "agreement" strategies in American English NSs' responses were frequently applied in such situations. When the complimenter and complimentee are set in unequal social status, by the comparison the different strategies of compliment responses in Chinese and English, it can be found that the pragmatic transfer from Chinese to English are still unclear.

5. Conclusions

The notable differences between Chinese and American language culture lay the foundation of the study of compliment responses from the view of pragmatics. Through the investigation of DCT, the researcher has discussed pragmatic transfer from English to Chinese and pragmatic transfer from Chinese to English, meanwhile, another discussion was involved, which mainly concern the negative and positive pragmatic transfer existing in Chinese college EFL learners' responding to compliments in their target language interaction.

In compliment responses of English, the agreement percentages of Chinese college EFL learners' compliment responses in their target language are lower than that of native American English speakers, which indicates that Chinese college students have the tendency of transferring pragmatic norms in their Mother Tongue to the use of English.

Firstly, Chinese college EFL learners and American English NSs apply different responding strategies in compliment responses, which indicates that pragmatic transfer was hard to avoid because Chinese and Americans hold different pragmatic norms and politeness principles in their own culture. Secondly, pragmatic transfer exists in compliment responses of Chinese college EFL learners in both English and Chinese. It was discussed in in forms of positive and negative pragmatic transfer. Most studies claim that pragmatic transfer is negative, this is because negative pragmatic transfer can affect the image and the presentation of self in the cross-cultural communication, such reason made negative pragmatic transfer more attractive. As different languages have different pragmatic norms and value judgments, the pragmatic transfer from one language to another tends to cause pragmatic failure in target language. Thirdly, the frequency of agreement strategies increases with learners' English level and that of non-agreement strategies decreases with learners' English level, which shows that the extent of pragmatic transfer decreases with the improvement of learners' English proficiency. The agreement percentage of compliment responses in Chinese version by Chinese college EFL learners was much higher than that of Chinese monolingual speakers, which can be seen clearly from the high agreement percentage in Chinese compliment responses of both Group One and Group Two. This reflects that our mother tongue culture has been overwhelmingly affected by western culture. Finally, when the contextual factors of compliment topics are taken into consideration, Chinese college EFL learners are more sensitive than Americans on two kinds of topics, i.e. personal-attributes-related topic and Performance-related topic. Specifically, in the situations related to the two topics, the Chinese college students are tend to depreciate themselves to raise the compliment givers to show their politeness, while American English NSs are likely to agree with the compliment givers. From the view of social status, Chinese college students show their super respect for superiors/teachers, which was not found in American English NSs' compliment responses.

This study illustrates that after a long period of English learning, Chinese college students have learned to use different strategies according to different contexts in responding to compliments. This can bring a lot of benefit to the successful communication between people from different countries.

Meanwhile, this result proves that the input of "target language culture" was commonly accepted and applied in our country's EFL teaching. Then, the differences existing in the responding strategies between Chinese college students and American English NSs indicate that in the understanding of cultural norms in target language, Chinese college students still shows their insufficient storage of language. That is to say, the pragmatic competence of Chinese college students in their target language communication has not been enhanced significantly. So, the cultivation of pragmatic competence and the input of pragmatic norms should be further strengthened in the present English teaching of our country. To promote communicative competence in cross-cultural communication, the research suggests that pragmatic knowledge is an indispensable part of communicative competence, traditional teaching methods should be integrated with methods of pragmatic competence cultivation. Thus, more context-based teaching methods should be employed by teachers in the EFL teaching so as to help students with more successful communication, which is the goal of foreign language teaching in China.

At present, with high-speed development of information and technology, international interaction among different countries around world arise more and more frequently. In order to achieve successful cross-cultural communication, it is important for Chinese EFL learners to realize the diversity of language culture and to provide more understanding towards other cultures with the sincere attitudes. In the course of language learning, the importance of "mother tongue culture" was almost omitted in our country's foreign language teaching because "target language culture" was over stressed. It is necessary for our English teachers to help students complete the output of "mother tongue culture" successfully in cross-cultural communication through the comparison of the two cultures and the imparting of Chinese traditional culture.

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