

Analysis of Mandarin Learners' Compliment Response from Interactional Perspective*

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Abstract—Compliment and its response are widely used in the communication. In the recent sixty years, they are the focus in the research of anthropology and linguistics. However, the existing study on the acquisition of compliment response by learners of Mandarin is weak. This study will use the theoretical frame of Conversation Analysis to investigate and compare the interactional features of compliments responses of Mandarin native speakers, learners of Mandarin with lower and intermediate levels and further explore the influence of Mandarin proficiency on the acquisition of compliment response.

Keywords—*acquisition; compliment response; learners of Mandarin*

I. INTRODUCTION

Compliment and its response is a common communicative act. For this reason, compliment and its response is receiving increasing attention from linguists and anthropologists. Relevant research results include pragmatics, sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, discourse analysis and psycholinguistics and so on. From a linguistic point of view, the compliment response should be considered a strategy of speaker selection; from an anthropological point of view, the compliment response should be considered to be the result of interaction. Foreign language learners not only learn the target language but also learn the culture in the target language. Therefore, it is particularly important to study the acquisition of compliments and their responses.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Most of the studies on compliment response in the context of the existing mother tongue are based on the background of English language culture (eg Pomeranz, 1978; Herbert, 1990; Golat, 2005; Zou Weicheng, 1990; Wu Zhangyong, 1996; Zhao Yingling, 1998; Li Wenting, 2013, etc.). American scholar Pomeranz (1978) conducted a comprehensive survey of the American compliment response, analyzing and summarizing the three response strategies commonly used by the people who are complimented: acception, rejection and avoiding self-approval. Later, on the basis of the Pomeranz study, Herbert (1989) further refined the compliment response. In the

research on compliment response with Chinese background, Li Ping (1999), Jiang Yaping (2003), Li Junru (2007), Yi Hong and Fu Dongmei (2010) and Gong Min (2012) compared the strategies of Chinese and foreign compliment response; Quan Lihong (2004) compared the differences in Chinese compliment response strategies from the perspective of gender; Fang Ruifen (2008) explored the influence of age on Chinese compliment response strategies. Although the study of Chinese compliment responses has gradually increased in recent years, the number is still relatively small. In the existing research on the response of Chinese compliments, the compliment response is regarded as a speech act rather than a social interaction.

According to the investigation, there is only one empirical study on the acquisition of Chinese learners' compliment response. Li Ying (2013) investigated the strategy of Chinese compliment response for American students studying in China. Her research results show that the main response strategy used by American students in China is the approval strategy, especially the explicit approval strategy; American students in China tend to use implicit acceptance and indirect rejection strategies in the process of communication; female students use explicit acceptance and indirect rejection strategies, while male students tend to adopt implicit acceptance and direct rejection strategies; with Chinese proficiency improving, the strategies used by international students are more various. In Li Ying's research, the compliment response is also seen as a pragmatic strategy rather than the result of negotiation between speakers. Li Ying also analyzed the reasons for these differences, such as gender, second language acquisition time and pragmatic transfer, but the language level need to be explored because it is an important factor affecting the choice and interaction characteristics of pragmatic strategies.

Brown and Levinson's (1978) face-saving theory is the main theory for the description, comparison, even acquisition in existing study. However, Gu Yueguo (1992) proposed that part of the politeness strategy is not applicable to Chinese culture by a study on an interactive routine of inviting behavior between Chinese native speakers. Gu's study makes the theoretical framework turn to another important analytical theory, that is, Conversation Analysis. Conversation analysis originated from anthropology, and it discovers the "law of conversation in conversation" by observing social behavior (ten Have, 2007).

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In short, the existing research results show the following shortcomings: the study of compliment language response is mostly based on English language culture, only a small number of studies touch Chinese culture; the study of compliment language response is based on the first language survey and the comparison of the two languages; the study of the acquisition of compliments is extremely scarce; almost all studies regard the compliment response as speech act, analyze it with politeness principle, and ignore its human cultural attributes and interaction process; there is hardly any research on the impact of the second language level on the acquisition of compliment response features.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research Questions

According to the literature review, the shortcomings of the current second language compliment response acquisition research have been clearly found. This study will try to make up for the above deficiencies and shortcomings, by investigating and comparing the characteristics of compliment response of Chinese native speakers and Chinese second language learners (primary and intermediate), so as to further discover the influence of Chinese learners' Chinese proficiency on their compliment response acquisition.

B. Research Methods

1) *Research object:* The study invited 10 Chinese students, 17 primary Chinese proficiency students, 16 intermediate Chinese proficiency students and 3 teachers. In order to minimize the possible interference caused by gender, age, mother tongue and distance between teachers and students, the students and teachers selected were all male. Chinese students are first-year undergraduate students in a college between the ages of 18-19. Primary Chinese proficiency students and intermediate Chinese proficiency students study Chinese in a pre-university education college between the ages of 17 and 22. These Chinese learners are all from Pakistan and their native language is Urdu. Teachers and students were not familiar with each other before.

2) *Corpus:* This study will obtain the corpus of the compliment response in an elicit manner. In the native language group, teachers and students chat in English one-on-one. After 3-5 minutes of chatting, the teacher praises the students' English proficiency in Chinese, such as "Nide yingyu hen hao (Your English is really good)". The other two teachers chat with students of primary Chinese proficiency and intermediate Chinese proficiency respectively. After 3-5 minutes, the teacher praises the Chinese level of the students in Chinese, such as "Nide hanyu hen hen hao (Your Chinese is very good)". Before the data collection, the author has explained the purpose and process of this study to each student and teacher, and obtained the consent from the students and teachers. In the whole process, two recording pens were used to record the

whole process. In order to reduce students and teachers' pressure and tension, the researcher didn't appear in the conversation room. The collected corpus was transcribed. The transcription conventions used in the process (see appendix) are the transfer systems invented by Jefferson (2004). Then, according to the principle of discourse analysis, all the corpora were carefully observed.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After data collection, analysis and observation, the interactive features of a series of compliments in the three groups of subjects are found. This section will describe in detail the sequential features of the compliment response and the interactive features of the turn design of the compliment response.

A. Sequence Structure Characteristics of Compliment Response

First, it was found that the three groups of respondents responded to the interlocutor's compliment by giving thanks, rejection or agreement in the second turn. However, learners of primary Chinese and intermediate Chinese level also expressed thanks, rejection or agreement in the fourth turn. In other words, primary or intermediate Chinese learners will thank, refuse or agree to push back the turn order in response to a compliment.

1) *The second turn:* As in Excerpt 1 ("Table I"), when the speaker expresses praise in the first turn, both the native speaker and the Chinese learner will respond to the compliment of the interlocutor in the next turn.

TABLE I. EXCERPT 1 (PRIMARY 08:42)

1		Laoshi	:	Nide hanyu hen hao your Chinese very good your Chinese is very good.
2	→	Zhang Wen	:	Xiexie laoshi Thank teacher Thanks, teacher.

After a short chat between the teacher and the primary Chinese level learner Zhang Wen, the teacher praised Zhang Wen's Chinese (line 1). Subsequently, Zhang Wen expressed her gratitude (line 2) responding to the teacher's praise.

2) *The fourth turn:* Different from the order of the turn of the compliment in the above example, it was found that the primary and intermediate Chinese learners may not express thanks, rejection or agreement in the second turn, but confirm, give a laugh or request clarification. After the complimenter responded to these, the primary and intermediate learners responded to the compliment in the first turn. The confirmation, laughter or clarification occurring in the second turn causes the delay of the learner' thank, rejection or agreement to compliments in the first turn.

TABLE II. EXCERPT 2 (INTERMEDIATE 19:11)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo juede nide hanyu hen hao I feel your Chinese very good. I think your Chinese is very good.
2	→	Waxi	:	Zhende Really Really?
3		Laoshi	:	Zhende. Sure Sure.
4		Waxi	:	Xi xie laoshi Thank teacher Thanks ,teacher.

After the teacher and the Chinese intermediate level student Waxi chat, the teacher praised Waxi's Chinese (line 1) ("Table II"). On the next line, Waxi said "Zhende (really)" with a rising tone. On the third line, the teacher said "Zhende (sure)" with a falling tone. Until then, Waxi expressed thanks (line 4). Through the teacher's third line "Zhende (sure)", it could be determined that the "Zhende (really)" by Waxi (line2) seek a confirmation of the teacher's compliment in the first line. Waxi didn't thank the next turn after the teacher gave a compliment, instead, after he sent a confirmation and received the confirmation from the teacher, he expressed thanks. The confirmation from the second line of Waxi and the confirmation made by the teacher on the third line constitute an insertion, which is between the teacher's compliment on the first line and the fourth line of Waxi's responding to the adjacent pairs in the compliment, Waxi's response to the first line of teacher's praise has been pushed back.

TABLE III. EXCERPT 3 (INTERMEDIATE 16:14)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo juede ni hanyu zhende hen hao I feel you Chinese really very good I think your Chinese is really good.
2		Waka	:	Zhende? Really Really?
3		Laoshi	:	Zhende. Sure Sure.
4		Waka	:	Wo juede bu hao I feel not good I think my Chinese is not good.

Similar to Excerpt 2 ("Table II"), Excerpt 3 ("Table III") also presents a pushback of the intermediate level student's compliment response in the turn order. After the teacher and Waka chat, the teacher praised Waka's Chinese is very good (line 1). On the next line, Waka didn't express thanks, rejection or consent, but said "Zhende (really)" with a rising tone. Unlike Excerpt 2, after the teacher replied "Zhende (sure)" (line 3), Waka refused. He said "Wo juede bu hao (I think my Chinese is not good)" (line 4). The "Zhende (really)" of the second line by Waka and the confirmation of the teacher of the third line constitute the adjacency pair, and after the inserting of teacher's compliment in line 1 and the rejection in line 4 of Waka to the teacher's compliment, it made Waka's rejection of the teacher's praise delayed in the turn order.

TABLE IV. EXCERPT 4 (PRIMARY 19:16)

1		Loashi	:	Wo juede shuo de hen hao I feel speak CSC very good I think you speak Chinese very well.
2	→	Hanfei	:	((smiled))
3		Loashi	:	A Ah Ah.
4		Hanfei	:	Wo shuo yidian hanyu I speak a-little Chinese I speak a little Chinese.

In the first line of Excerpt 4 ("Table IV"), the teacher praised Han Fei for speaking Chinese very well. Han Fei, a primary Chinese proficiency student, didn't respond immediately, but smiled. At this point, the teacher chose to pick up the turn and sent "A (Ah)" (line 3). "A (Ah)" may be that the teacher has reconfirmed his compliment to the student in the first line. Next, Han Fei said, "Wo shuo yidian hanyu (I speak a little Chinese)" (line 4). Han Fei's expression means that his Chinese level is not high and he can only speak a little Chinese. In other words, Han Fei refused the praise of the teacher. In this conversation, Han Fei's rejection didn't appear in the second turn, but later pushed to the fourth turn. It is also noticed that the primary learners' misunderstanding due to the low level of Chinese language caused the primary level learners' response to the compliment to be delayed in the turn order.

TABLE V. EXCERPT 5 (PRIMARY 33:49)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo juede nide hanyu ting hao de I feel your Chinese very1 good very2 I think your Chinese is not bad.
2		Yilan	:	(.) A xianzai? Ah now Ah now?
3		Laoshi	:	Wo juede ni hanyu ting hao de I feel you Chinese very1 good very2 I think your Chinese is pretty good.
4	→	Yilan	:	En wode hanyu mamahuhu Mm my Chinese just-soso Mm my Chinese is just soso.

In the first line of Excerpt 5 ("Table V"), the teacher praised the primary Chinese level learner Yilan's Chinese is quite good. In the second line, Yilan first paused, and then said "A (Ah)" and "xianzai (now)" with the rising tone. The teacher found that Yilan didn't understand his praise, so the teacher repeated the praise of Yilan's Chinese competence (line 3). Yilan understood the teacher's meaning at this time, and after a short hesitation, he modestly thought that his Chinese was not very good (line 4). Because Yilan misunderstood the teacher's praise in the first line, he didn't immediately respond next line. Yilan's response to the teacher's praise was pushed to the fourth turn.

B. Turn Features of the Compliment Response

In the section, the characteristics of the turn in the compliment will be discussed. Considering that the different turn forms of response to compliments, the compliment responses are divided into three categories—thanks, rejection

or agreement. The turn features are respectively observed as the below.

1) *Thanks*: In Excerpt 6 ("Table VI"), Chinese intermediate level student Sade expressed his thanks (line 2) to the teacher's praise (line 1). There was no delay within the turn of Sade's response to the teacher's praise.

TABLE VI. EXCERPT 6 (INTERMEDIATE 3:39)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo jue de ni hanyu ting hao de I feel you Chinese very good DE I think your Chinese is good.
2	→	Sade	:	Xiexie laoshi Thank teacher Thanks, teacher.

2) *Rejection*: When the compliment responds with rejection, according to the time of the rejection discourse marker appearing within the turn, the turn forms can be divided into two types, one is no delay at the turn beginning, and the other is delayed at the turn initial.

TABLE VII. EXCERPT 7 (INTERMEDIATE 18:08)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo jue de nide hanyu hen hao I feel your Chinese very good I think your Chinese is very good.
2	→	Waxi	:	Bu hao Not good My Chinese is not good haiyou wo zai bajisitan xue le yi ge nian also I in Pakistan study PFV one CL year I studied bachelor degree in Pakistan for one year. Hai meiyou xue hanyu Still not learn Chinese but I did not learn Chinese there.

In Excerpt 7 ("Table VII"), the teacher praised the intermediate level learner Waxi's Chinese is good (line 1). Subsequently, the student of Chinese intermediate level Waxi immediately said "Bu hao (My Chinese is not good)" (line 2) to deny and give the reason (line 2). Unlike Excerpt 7, the rejection discourse marker in Excerpts 8 ("Table VIII") and 9 ("Table IX") had a pushback within the turn.

TABLE VIII. EXCERPT 8 (PRIMARY 13:37)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo jue de ni xue san ge yue= I feel you learn three CL month I think although you learned Chinese only three months
2		Chenchen	:	= Dui Bajisitan zai Bajisitan Right Pakistan in Pakistan Yes, Pakistan, in Pakistan
3		Laoshi	:	[Bajisitan nide hanyu hen hao Pakistan your Chinese very good Pakistan, your Chinese is very good.
4	→	Chenchen	:	Ou xiexie wode hanyu bu hao Oh thank my Chinese not good Oh, thanks, my Chinese is poor.

On the first line, the teacher said, "Wo jue de ni xue san ge yue (I think although you learned Chinese only three months)" It is obvious that the teacher has not finished his words, but the primary level student immediately inserted for confirmation and emphasized "in Pakistan" (line 2). The teacher also repeated "Bajisitan (Pakistan)" to represent that he obtained the information, and then continued to complete his unfinished words, saying "nide hanyu hen hao (Your Chinese is very good)" (line 3). Chen Chen, a primary Chinese proficiency student, sent an "Ou (Oh)" (line 4) to express that he obtained the information, and then expressed gratitude (line 4), but then turned to refuse and said "wode hanyu bu hao (My Chinese is poor)" (line 4). Chen Chen's rejection was after expressing "Ou (oh)" and thanks for the teacher's information. From the perspective of time, the delay occurred within the turn initial. An example of another rejection mark delay within the turn is as follows.

TABLE IX. EXCERPT 9 (PRIMARY 45:20)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo jue de nide hanyu hen hao I feel your Chinese very good I think your Chinese is very good.
2	→	Feizan	:	En:: wo bu wode hanyu butaihao Mm I not my Chinese not-good Mm, my Chinese is not good.

In Excerpt 9 ("Table IX"), the teacher praised Feizan's Chinese is good (line 1). The primary Chinese proficiency student Feizan first issued the hesitation "En: (Mm)" and then turned to refuse and said "wo bu wode hanyu butaihao (my Chinese is not good)". The appearance of the hesitation mark "En: (Mm)" caused Feizan's rejection to delay within the turn.

3) *Agreement*: As in Excerpt 10 ("Table X"), Chinese learners also agree with the teacher's praise, but this situation is not found in the corpus of Chinese native speakers.

TABLE X. EXCERPT 10 (PRIMARY 2:00)

1		Laoshi	:	Wo jue de nide hanyu ting hao de I feel your Chinese very1 hao very2 I think your Chinese is pretty good.
2	→	Azi	:	Wode hanyu hen hao My Chinese very good My Chinese is very good.
3		Laoshi	:	=A= Ah Ah
4	→	Azi	:	= Wo xuexi (.) feichang nuli= I s tudy very working-hard I work hard
5		Laoshi	:	=Suoyi hanyu hen hao= So Chinese very good That's why my Chinese is very good.
6	→	Azi	:	= Wode hanyu hen hao My Chinese very good My Chinese is very good.

On the first line, the teacher praised the primary Chinese proficiency student Azi's Chinese was very good. On the next line, Azi responded in agreement and said, "Wode

hanyu hen hao (My Chinese is very good)" (line 2). It can be seen that Azi's "hen hao (very good)" has improved the evaluation of his Chinese proficiency. Later, Azi gave the reason why he learned well, which he thought was the result of his hard work (line 4). However, Azi didn't end his words, but repeated "Wode hanyu hen hao (My Chinese is very good)". The repetition led Azi to agree more with the teacher's praise.

C. Discussion

This section will summarize and compare the interactive features of Chinese native speakers, primary Chinese proficiency and intermediate Chinese proficiency students in response to compliments.

TABLE XI. COMPARISON OF SEQUENCE STRUCTURE FEATURES OF COMPLIMENT RESPONSE

	The second place	The fourth place		
		confirming confirming	silence silence	misunderstanding
<i>Chinese primary level</i>	X	O	X	X
<i>Chinese intermediate level</i>	X	X	O	O
<i>Chinese native speakers</i>	X	O	O	O

^a X means the appearance of discourse markers; O means that the discourse markers don't appear

"Table XI" presents the characteristics of the three sets of compliments in the sequence structure. The Chinese native speakers group and the Chinese learners responded to the compliment of the interlocutor in the second turn. The response of Chinese native speakers to compliments only appears in the second turn. However, in the corpus of intermediate learners and primary learners, the pushback of the compliment response in the sequence order is found, that is, it appears in the fourth turn. Primary and intermediate Chinese learners have different reasons for the pushback order of compliments. Primary Chinese learners may misunderstand or stay silent in the second turn, while intermediate Chinese learners asked the complimenter to confirm whether they are really good at Chinese.

TABLE XII. COMPARISON OF FEATURES WITHIN THE TURN OF THE COMPLIMENT RESPONSE

	Thanks		Rejection		Consent	
	No-delay	Delay	No-delay	Delay	No-delay	Delay
<i>Chinese primary level</i>	X	O	X	X	X	O
<i>Chinese intermediate level</i>	X	O	X	O	O	O
<i>Chinese native speakers</i>	X	O	O	X	O	O

"Table XII" presents the features within the turn of the compliment response. The three groups all share the same interactive characteristics when using the thanks as a compliment response — the discourse marker of thanks within the turn has no delay. When adopting the rejection as

a compliment response, both the primary learners and the intermediate learners will have a rejection discourse marker when they start within the turn, but no such feature is found in the Chinese native speakers' corpus. When adopting the rejection as a compliment response, Chinese primary learners and native speakers' rejection discourse marker may be delayed within the turn, but the interactive feature is not found in the intermediate Chinese learner corpus. Another significant difference is that the Chinese primary learner agrees to the compliment and agrees that the discourse marker is at the beginning of the turn without any delay. Among Chinese intermediate learners and Chinese native speakers, disagreement was found to respond to the interlocutor's compliment.

V. CONCLUSION

This study investigated and compared the interactive features and differences between Chinese native speakers and Chinese primary and intermediate level students in the sequence and turn features of compliment response. By comparison, it can be found that Chinese learners and native speakers are quite different in the sequence structure, and intermediate Chinese level learners are closer to native speakers than primary Chinese level learners. In the internal structure of the turn, learners are consistent with the characteristics of the native speaker when using the thanks; when using the rejection to respond to the compliment, the interactive mode between the learners and the native speakers is very different. Primary level Chinese learners are closer to native speakers than intermediate level Chinese learners; only primary Chinese level learners use no-delay agreement responding to compliments, and intermediate level learners and native speakers don't show such features. Although learners and native speakers have different ways of interacting in response to compliments, in general, Chinese learners are more close to native speakers when they respond to Chinese compliments with Chinese level improvement. The delay in the sequence structure of the compliment response may indicate the learner's distrust of the sender of the compliment. No-delay at the time of rejection may damage the "face" of the sender of the compliment, causing impoliteness. The use of no-delay consent in response to compliments may give an impression of not being modest. These are not in line with the rules of Chinese cultural communication, which make it necessary for Chinese teachers to pay attention to oral teaching and Chinese textbook compilation.

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APPENDIX

[A single left bracket indicates the point of overlap onset.
]	A single right bracket indicates the point at which an utterance or utterance-part terminates vis-a-vis another.
=	The equal signs (ordinarily at the end of one line and the start of the next) indicate a "latching" relationship, where there is no discernible silence between the end of a prior turn and the start of a next turn.
(.)	A dot in parentheses indicates a hearable "micropause", about 0.3-0.4 seconds.
?	A question mark indicates rising pitch, as in a question.
:::	Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. Multiple colons indicate a more prolonged sound.
-	A dash after a word or part of a word indicates a sudden cut-off of the current sound or self-interruption, often done with a glottal or dental stop.
(())	Double parentheses contain the transcriber's descriptions of events observed, such as ((body movement)), ((gaze)) and ((action)).
→	An arrow sign specifies the target of focus (agreement or disagreement) in the transcription.

^{a.} Transcription conventions

CL	classifier
CSC	complex stative construction (de)
PFV	perfective aspect (-le)
very1 very2	Ting adjective de is a structure to show very adjective

^{a.} Grammatical Glossary