

---

## An Investigation of the Compliment Responses in Cross-Cultural Communication between Persian and Arabic Native Speakers as EFL Learners

Zeinab Azadbakht<sup>1\*</sup>, Hadi Heidari<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English Language, Faculty of Language and Literature, Arak University, Markazi Province, Iran

<sup>2</sup>PhD Graduate of TEFL, Imam Khomeini International University (IKIU), Qazvin, Iran

Correspondence Email : [zei.azadbakht@gmail.com](mailto:zei.azadbakht@gmail.com)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received : October 9, 2025

Reviewed : October 11, 2025

Revised : October 14, 2025

Accepted : December 4, 2025

Available online : December 5, 2025

#### Keywords:

*Compliment Responses; Cross-Cultural Communication; Interlanguage Pragmatic; Persian and Arabic Native Speakers; WDCT*

### Abstract

The study followed an explanatory mixed-methods design and investigated the effect of cultural differences on the cross-cultural communication (CR) pattern. For this aim, sixty Persian and Arabic Native Speakers as EFL Learners were divided into two groups based on their native languages, each group with thirty participants. At the onset of the study, the Oxford Placement Test examined the homogeneity of the groups in terms of language proficiency. Moreover, a test consisting of 12 WDCTs was utilized to assess the initial ILP competence of the participants. All of the learners responded to the items individually. Finally, based on Holmes' (1986) classification consisting of three main categories (i.e., Accept, Reject, and Evade), the collected data were coded by three raters as a Persian and an Arabic native speaker, who were professors of Applied Linguistics, as well as the researcher herself. The findings of the quantitative phase indicated that Arabic speakers are generally more inclined to acknowledge compliments directly, while Persian speakers tend to downplay praise or respond it indirectly, which reflects deeper cultural norms around humility and face-saving communication. The results of the qualitative phase showed that the speech events of CRs are determined by the shared beliefs and values of the speech community and they are contextually restricted within the communicative patterns, which can only be interpreted as parts of the social and cultural context. However, both groups indicated that they struggled with the pragmatic norms of English, such as how to appropriately make requests, apologize, or refuse offers. The findings indicate that due to the inherent socio-cultural differences and implemented strategies of speakers of different languages, they need to acquire the norms of the target culture in order to respond to compliments in an L2. To put it another way, the interlocutors need to

find ways to meet the social expectations, in line with the target culture norms.

---

## INTRODUCTION

Pragmatic competence is the ability to communicate efficiently, which necessitates the knowledge beyond grammatical and structural knowledge (Senowarsito, 2013). It has gained prominence within the communicative competence model, initially proposed by Bachman (1990). Research has shown that native speakers rarely pinpoint pragmatic breakdowns of L2 learners, which can be considered as rude or unfriendly (Ueda, 2006), or it may be regarded as a sign of arrogance and intolerance for native speakers (Azizi Abarghoui, 2012). Meanwhile, research in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (henceforth ILP) has shown that even competent L2 users' pragmatic performance can dramatically deviate from the L2 established patterns and may fail to transfer the illocutionary meaning intended by the speakers (Kostromitina, 2024).

As important features of language learners' pragmatic competence, compliments are integral to daily interactions, reflecting cultural values and social hierarchies. Speakers often utilize different linguistic constructions to express compliments, which may not always align with Persian practices. This divergence underscores the importance of understanding the sociolinguistic frameworks that govern complimenting behaviors in different cultures.

The responses to compliments can vary widely across cultures, influenced by factors such as politeness strategies, social context, and cultural values. Research indicates that Persian speakers often utilize specific strategies when responding to compliments, which can differ markedly from those employed by other speakers. For instance, Shabani and Zeinali (2015) highlighted that Persian speakers tend to reject compliments more frequently than their English counterparts, reflecting a cultural inclination towards humility. This aligns with findings from Pour and Zarei (2016), who emphasize that education level influences the use of compliment responses among Persian speakers, suggesting that more educated individuals may adopt different strategies compared to their less educated peers. In contrast, Arabic speakers, as noted by Alqarni (2020), often respond to compliments in a manner that seeks to maintain social harmony and avoid offense. The study by Jamil (2016) further supports this notion, demonstrating that Omani speakers exhibit similar tendencies in their compliment responses, prioritizing relational dynamics over individual acknowledgment.

Despite a growing body of research on CRs in cross-cultural pragmatics, the comparison between Persian and Arab EFL learners is not studied yet, particularly in face-to-face communication settings, and these speakers are mainly compared with native English speakers (Sharifian et al., 2019), or they have examined CRs among Persian learners using English as a benchmark for pragmatic norms (Modarres, 2012).

In order to determine the compliment responses in cross-cultural communication, the current study investigates the differences between Persian and Arabic native speakers as EFL learners. The study tries to determine how these two culturally rich groups differ in their use of CR strategies—such as acceptance, evasion, and rejection—across various compliment types, in order to contribute to a better understanding of intercultural communication among EFL learners.

## Review of the Literature

Compliment responses (henceforth, CR) as the second part of an adjacency pair are utterances used to respond to statements put forward by speakers, which are characterized by positive values by interlocutors towards the addressees (Al-Gamal, 2017; Farenkia, 2014). In fact, A CR is a “verbal acknowledgement that the recipient of the compliment heard and reacted to it” (Nelson et al., 1996, p. 413).

One early study focusing specifically on CRs in the context of America is Pomerantz's (1978). The results of her study showed that a large number of American speakers preferred to disagree and

reject CR. In another study, Herbert (1989) assembled a corpus of 1062 CRs among American native speakers and South African learners over a three-year period. The corpus of American native speakers indicated that males' compliments were twice as likely to be granted as females', that female were twice as likely to grant compliments as males.

In an important study in the field, Sharifian (2005) collected the data from 42 male and female EFL learners in Iran via two versions of DCT. The results showed that Persian speakers' responses to the L1 and L2 compliments included some unique characteristics. The study indicated that Persian speakers deny, or talk down a talent, skill, or a possession and somehow attribute the compliment to the person who initiated it.

In line with same study, another study conducted by Yousefvand (2010) extracted and categorized the strategies which Persian speakers used to respond to compliments. The findings suggested that Persian speakers generally tended to respond to agree with a compliment. It was followed by showing their modesty, as a factor contextualized within their culture. However, this study ignores the critical role of sociopragmatic parameters like social position and distance of the two interlocutors in such results.

Besides, Behnam and Amizadeh (2011) cross-culturally studied the compliments and CRs of American and Persian speakers. The data contained two sets of interviews with celebrities, adopted from Oprah Winfrey's programs and MBC4 channel by American and Iranian celebrities. The results revealed that in both interviews, compliments were mainly utilized as devices to introduce the guests. However, they served multiple other functions (e.g., in acknowledgment or affective performances like establishing rapport and common ground). Generally speaking, paying compliments and responding to them was more often with Persian speakers than English users. The researchers attributed this overemphasize on compliments in the Persian data to the undeniable role of cultural norm of what is called *taarof* in Iranian culture.

Due to the consensus over the need to intercultural study, Karimnia and Afghari (2011) attempted to explore whether CR behavior of Persian and American native speakers exemplify the politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson's (1987) universal model. To this aim, they collected a corpus of live interviews from 5 Persian TV channels and 4 English ones. The results showed that Persian speakers generally tended to avoid acceptance responses in contrast to English speakers. The reason underlying such tendency among Persian native speakers was that in Persian culture, the norm of *shekasteh nafsi* more often makes Persian speakers withhold expressions of happiness or gratitude.

Moreover, the ritualistic nature of compliment responses is noted in the work of Moalla (2013), who suggests that these responses often serve as formulaic expressions shared within specific speech communities. Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2022) also observed that many EFL learners struggle with the pragmatic aspects of complimenting, often relying on their native linguistic frameworks, which can lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions. Such challenges highlight the necessity for integrating cultural and pragmatic knowledge into language education to enhance communicative competence.

Razi (2013) also contrastively studied the compliment responses between Australian English and Iranian Persian speakers and found that cultural protocols significantly affect how compliments are perceived and responded to. This is supported by Tayib (2018), who emphasized that the strategies for complimenting and responding can vary widely across cultures, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the social contexts in which these interactions occur.

Alotaibi (2016) highlighted the need for EFL learners to be aware of the cultural nuances associated with compliment responses, as failure to do so can result in inappropriate or ineffective communication. This is particularly relevant for Persian and Arabic speakers, who may encounter each other in diverse contexts, such as business or academic settings, where effective communication is paramount. Likewise, Pomerantz (2021) illustrates the complexities involved in responding to compliments, where multiple constraints and social expectations can influence the response. This

complexity is further compounded by individual differences in personality and socialization, which can lead to varied interpretations of the same compliment across different cultural contexts.

Research indicates that explicit instruction in compliment response strategies enhances their ability to respond appropriately, suggesting that educational interventions can significantly improve pragmatic competence in this area (Sadeghi & Foutooh, 2012). For instance, Dehkordi and Chalak (2015) found that after receiving explicit instruction, Iranian learners showed a marked improvement in their use of acceptance strategies, such as appreciation tokens, which were the most frequently employed responses. This aligns with findings Sa'd (2015) that emphasize the importance of cultural context and educational materials in shaping learners' responses to compliments.

Moreover, the complexity of compliment responses is underscored by the work of Yu (2005), who discusses the sociolinguistic competence required for effective communication across cultures. Herbert (1990) also notes that cultural variability significantly influences how compliments are perceived and responded to, with different communities exhibiting distinct norms.

Drawing upon the gap, the current study builds upon the classical view of Wolfson (1981), which proposes that people of different regions and cultural backgrounds can have different communicative demands and norms, which can impact their perceptual underpinning and their related practices of compliment responses. In spite of the numerous studies on CRs (e.g., Allami & Montazeri, 2012; Golato, 2005; Maíz-Arévalo, 2013; Mohajernia & Solimani, 2013; Yousefvand, 2010) there is a scarcity of the study that compared compliment behavior of Persian with Arabic speakers. Bearing this gap in mind, the following research questions are formulated:

1. RQ1. Are there any cross-cultural differences in implementing CR strategies between Persian and Arabic speakers as EFL learners?
2. RQ2. What are the perspectives of Arab and Iranian EFL learners on CR, their implemented CRs, and their main challenges in cross-cultural communication?

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

The study followed an explanatory mixed-methods design, based on which, the results coming from the initial quantitative phase through answers to WDCT were utilized to conduct an open-ended interview with the participants.

### **Participants**

The following two groups of participants participated in the study; Persian native speakers (n=30) and Arabic native speaker (n=30). The groups consisted of 31 females and 29 males who were between 19 and 23 years of age, with the mean of 21. Participants were 3rd- and 4th-year students of English Literature and English Translation at universities of Arak who were selected based on convenience sampling as well as the results of the Quick Oxford Placement Test, which determined the homogeneity of their language proficiency. They had a good command of English to express their ideas and the rationale behind their choices of CR strategies in English. Moreover, their families' educational level and socioeconomic status was controlled. They were from families with mid-educational levels and mid socioeconomic status. From out of each group, 5 participants were selected to speak open-endedly about their responses to the initial quantitative phase.

### **Instruments**

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 2004) is a reliable and valid test that is highly effective in grouping students according to their proficiency levels. Additionally, the OPT was also used to determine the homogeneity of their language proficiency. It included 60 items to measure

participants' English proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and cloze tests. The reliability index of the OPT, calculated with Cronbach's alpha, was 0.84 which is acceptable for the current study.

### Written discourse completion task

Twelve written discourse completion tasks (WDCT), as a pretest, consisted of two main parts be used to assess learners' ILP competence. In the first part, participants be asked to provide information about their age and level. In the second part, participants be asked to read and react to a modified version of Moalla (2013) along with some items added by the researcher to assess their ILP competence. There are two reasons beyond selecting the WDCT task. DCTs can determine a sound pattern of the need to choose socially suitable CRs among the participants. Moreover, it can be used to get adequately enough data in short periods of time based on the purpose of the study (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001).

### Interview

The second phase included interviews based on which, 5 participants were selected from each group to speak open-endedly about their responses to the initial quantitative phase, as the study followed explanatory mixed-methods design. They were asked to explain the rationale behind the specific answers for each task in the initial quantitative phase.

### Procedure

At the onset of the study, OPT was used to determine the homogeneity of participants' language proficiency. Moreover, 12 WDCT propositions were administered to the participants to determine their initial ILP competence in authentic conversations in 60 minutes. Additionally, for the purpose of having a more comprehensive knowledge and following the qualitative research questions of the current study, ten participants (5 participants from each group) were asked to explain the rationale behind the specific answers for each question in the initial quantitative phase.

### Data Analysis

The collected data from each phase was coded by the raters who were 2 professors of Applied Linguistics (Persian and Arabic native speakers) and the researchers themselves, based on Holmes' (1986) classification which consists of three main categories: Accept, Reject, and Evade. To ascertain the raters' consistency in rating the scores, Kappa Measure of Agreement was run as the inter-rater reliability. According to Peat (2001; cited in Pallant, 2007), a value of 0.5 for kappa shows moderate agreement, above 0.7 represents good agreement, and above 0.8 represents a very good agreement. The inter-rater agreement coefficients in the present study were 73% and 77% which represents a good agreement. To make the process of coding easier, the researcher designed a rating matrix.

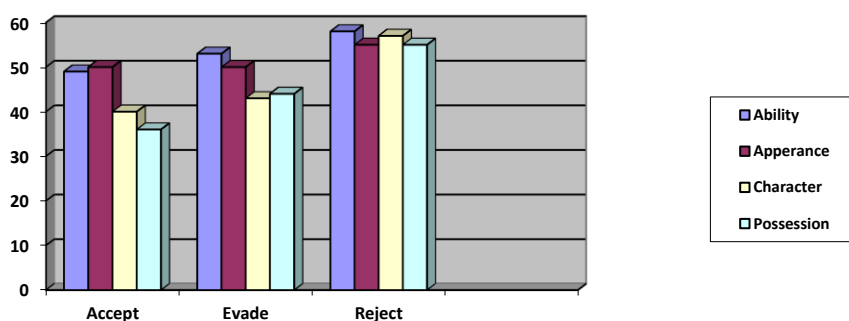
**Table 1. Holmes' (1986) CRs categories**

Macro level CRs	Micro level CRs	Examples
Accept	Appreciation token	"Thanks"; "Thank you"; "Cheers"; "Yes"; "Good"
	Agreeing utterance	"I know"; "I am glad you think so"; "I did realize I did that well"; "Yeah, I really like it"
	Downgrading qualifying Utterance	"It's nothing"; "It was no problem"; "I enjoyed doing it"; "I hope it was OK"; "I still only use it to call people"; "It's not bad."

	Return compliment	“You’re not too bad yourself”; “Your child was an angel”; “I’m sure you will be great”; “Yours was good too.”
Reject	Disagreeing utterance	“Nah, I don’t think so”; “I thought I did badly”; “Nah, it’s nothing special”; “It’s not”; “Don’t say so.”
	Question accuracy	“Why?”; “It’s right”; “really?”
	Challenging sincerity	“Stop lying”; “Don’t lie”; “Don’t joke about it”; “You must be kidding”; “Don’t, come on.”
Evade	Shift credit	“That’s what friends are for”; “You’re polite”; “No worries”; “My pleasure.”
	Informative comment	“It wasn’t hard”; “You can get it from (store name); It’s really cheap.”
	Request reassurance	“Really?”

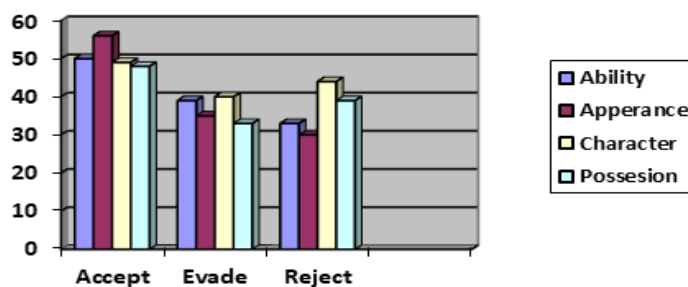
## RESULTS

The results of the quantitative phase of the study spotted the differences between Persian and Arabic speakers in choosing CRs strategies. The findings revealed clear cross-cultural differences in CR strategies between Persian and Arabic speakers across four compliment types of appearance, character, ability, and possession. The findings are depicted in the following figures (Figure 1 and 2):



**Figure 1. The Macro Patterns of CRs In WDCT Used by Persian Native Speakers**

Initially, Figure 1. shows the macro patterns of CRs in WDCT used by Persian native speakers. The explanations of the data from this figure and the following figure are provided after presenting the data for Arabic native speakers.



**Figure 2. The Macro Patterns of CRs In WDCT Used by Arabic Native Speakers**

### ***CRs for appearance***

The findings at a macro level pattern showed that in the appearance situation, Persian speakers showed the preferences of reject, evade and accept strategies in row (Figure 1). However, Arabic speakers showed the preferences of accept, evade and reject in order (see Figure 2).

### ***CRs for character***

The order of preference for compliment responses on character compliment, Persian speakers showed reject, evade, and accept strategies (Figure 1). However, Arabic speakers showed the order of accept, reject, and evade strategies (Figure 2).

### ***CRs for ability***

In the setting of ability compliment for Persian speakers, preferences for Persian speakers were reject, evade and accept strategies in row (Figure 1). However, it was different for Arabic speakers, and the order was accept, evade, and reject strategies in row (Figure 2).

### ***CRs for possession***

Moreover, regarding the compliments on their possessions, Persian speakers preferred to use reject, evade and accept strategies subsequently (Figure 1). While for Arabic speakers, the preferred order of CRs for possession was accept, reject, and evade strategies in row (Figure 2).

Overall, based on the qualitative findings, Persian speakers consistently favored the sequence of reject, evade, and accept strategies across all categories, which suggests a cultural inclination toward modesty and indirectness in responding to praise. In contrast, Arabic speakers demonstrated a consistent preference for accept, followed by either evade or reject, depending on the compliment type. For appearance and ability compliments, Arabic speakers preferred accept, evade, and reject, and for character and possession compliments, the order shifted slightly to accept, reject, and evade.

These findings indicate that Arabic speakers are generally more inclined to acknowledge compliments directly, while Persian speakers tend to downplay praise or respond it indirectly, which reflects deeper cultural norms around humility and face-saving communication.

## **The results of the qualitative phase**

Based on the results of the interview with 5 Persian and 5 Arabic participants and according to their answers to the initial quantitative phase, overall, the following emergent themes were identified:

### **Compliment Responses**

The interview results showed that Arab and Iranian EFL learners often had similar perspectives on compliment responses more specifically due to their cultural backgrounds. Arab participants showed that modesty was highly valued for them, therefore, Arab EFL learners were more likely to downplay or deflect compliments to avoid appearing boastful. They indicated that they responded to the situations with phrases like *"Thank you, but it's nothing"* or *"You're too kind,"* reflecting their cultural emphasis on humility. Therefore, they asserted that *"Arab learners might find it challenging to balance their cultural norms with the expectations of English-speaking cultures"* (Participant 4).

Similar to Arab cultures, Iranian participants also valued modesty and humility. A participant indicated that *"In Iranian culture, compliments might be deflected or minimized to avoid seeming arrogant"* (Participant 6). Meanwhile, Iranian EFL learners reported to use indirect and rejecting responses like *"It's nothing special"* or *"You're flattering me,"* which align with their cultural values.

Similar to Arab participants, Iranian EFL learners reported that they had struggles with the directness of Western compliment responses since they might find it difficult to simply accept a compliment without adding a modest disclaimer.

### **Politeness and Pragmatic Strategies**

The interview results also indicated that both Arab and Iranian EFL learners used various politeness strategies to manage compliment responses and situations, such as deflecting, minimizing, or reciprocating the compliment. These answers suggested that Arab and Iranian cultures placed a strong emphasis on politeness and maintaining social harmony. Based on the results, both groups followed cultural norms that prioritized avoiding disagreement or conflict in responding to compliments.

When they were asked to speak about their strategies in EFL settings, they suggested that *“Due to differences between their native languages' pragmatic norms and those of English, language learners from these backgrounds struggle with the nuances of compliment responses in English, which may result in communication breakdown”* (Participant 9).

To confirm this statement, an Arab participant asserted that *“Arabs value politeness but may differ slightly in how they express gratitude or humility when receiving a compliment”* (Participant 5).

A participant stated that *“Persians often use modesty strategies like downplaying achievements or possessions when responding to compliments”* (Participant 7). He also believed that *“Since Iranian EFL learners mainly do not know the target culture, it's better to respond to such challenging situations with modesty and through face-saving strategies”* (Participant 7).

The findings showed that Iranian EFL learners frequently used strategies like rejecting the compliment and downgrading themselves when responding to compliments. However, they also tended to rely on positive politeness by accepting compliments as a way to maintain rapport. Moreover, although the issue of the gender was not given priority in this study, female Iranian participants indicated to use more diverse compliment strategies than males. However, it was not the case with Arab language learners. However, there should also be more response strategies specific to females than males which needs further investigation.

One answer was common between these two groups; participants indicated that developing intercultural competence is crucial for English language learners. Therefore, they indicated that *“Understanding the cultural norms of English-speaking countries is necessary for EFL learners as it can help them respond to compliments in a way that is culturally appropriate and effective”* (Participant 3).

Among the differences, Persians used specific formulaic expressions (e.g., *“Ghabeli Nadare”*, meaning you deserve more than it) to show humility. However, Arabs employed different linguistic structures reflecting their own cultural norms. When interacting with speakers from other languages (like English), both groups suggested that they often transferred their native pragmatic norms into these new contexts, which led to misunderstandings. Something interesting about Persian culture was that responding to compliments often involved humility and politeness strategies like downplaying one's achievements or possessions (e.g., saying *“It's nothing”* or offering the item as a gift which is called *Taarof*). This emphasizes politeness through self-deprecation or offering items as gifts when receiving compliments.

Educational background was also believed to be a major factor leading to different use of compliment responses and strategies by these two groups, as both groups believed that more educated people often try to save face more through using complements frequently. However, a participant indicated that *“As language learners get more intertwined with English language and culture, they may try to follow western and accepting strategies, rather than rejecting ones”* (Participant 10).

It was suggested that “*EFL learners should try to understand the cultural nuances of English-speaking countries through participating in cultural awareness and sensitivity training*” (Participant 3). Among the teaching interventions, they referred to focused instruction on the pragmatic aspects of English, such as how to perform speech acts appropriately, to enhance learners' communicative competence. Moreover, they indicated that engaging with authentic materials, such as movies, TV shows, and conversations with native speakers, can provide valuable insights into the cultural norms and practices of English-speaking communities.

### **Challenges in Cross-Cultural Communication**

According to the participant, Arab and Iranian EFL learners faced several challenges in cross-cultural communication, which can vary based on their cultural background and their experiences with the English language:

Arab participants tended to use indirect communication for their responses, especially in polite situations. Therefore, they indicated that “*This strategy can lead to misunderstandings when interacting with English speakers who are more direct*” (Participant 4).

They also believed that “*We use gestures and body language, like personal space and eye contact, frequently in our Arab culture, while it may not be understood or may be misunderstood by English speakers* (Participant 1). These findings show that for Arabs who value their cultural norms, such as hospitality and collectivism, western cultures with more individualistic and personal-value oriented norms may be challenging.

On the other hand, Iranian learners often used elaborate politeness strategies, which can be perceived as excessive or insincere by English speakers. A participant indicated that “*I know that sometimes I use compliments obsessively however, I cannot violate the cultural norms, since it has become part of our cultural norms*” (Participant 6).

Based on the inspection of the responses, there seemed to be some differences between Iranian and Arab EFL learners, especially in how speech acts like requests, apologies, and refusals were performed. For example, it was shown that Iranians used more mitigated forms of refusals, which might be misinterpreted as ambiguity or lack of clarity by English speakers. As an instance, a participant indicated that “*I find it hard to show my dismay and disagreement in communication, since my interlocutors may become annoyed*” (Participant 8).

Moreover, they indicated that they should be cognizant about topics that are considered off-limits; “*Since the differences between cultures may be annoying, understanding and respecting cultural sensitivities, such as taboos, sexual issues, and, adult content can be challenging for Iranian learners*” (Participant 9).

Similarly, both groups struggled with acquiring the pragmatic norms of English, such as how to appropriately respond to compliments, make requests, or handle disagreements. A participant truly said that “*Understanding the sociocultural context and usage of various expressions and idioms in English can be difficult, and it can lead to potential miscommunications*” (Participant 4). Moreover, accents and pronunciation were believed to pose challenges, “*As the differences and varieties in pronunciation can affect how easily learners are understood and how they perceive the speech of native English speakers*” (Participant 1). Therefore, they indicated that EFL learners should develop their pragmatic and cultural ability (including language and cultural awareness) to manage different cultural norms and practices.

### **DISCUSSION**

According to the findings of the study, there were differences between Iranian and Arab cultures in responding to the compliments. It was found that Arab learners used more indirect strategies when making requests or apologies, reflecting their cultural emphasis on politeness and

face-saving. They also transferred pragmatic norms from their native language to English, which sometimes led to misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Arab cultures valued modesty and humility when receiving praise. Compliments might be responded to with expressions of gratitude while avoiding direct acceptance that could be seen as boasting. Arab EFL learners may exhibit different patterns in their compliment responses, often influenced by their sociolinguistic backgrounds. Studies have shown that cultural norms significantly affect how compliments are perceived and responded to among Arab learners, with many relying on strategies that reflect their cultural values of modesty and humility (Altakhaineh & Zibin, 2014). This is consistent with the findings of a comparative study by Mohajernia and Solimani (2013), who found that there were significant differences in compliment response strategies between native English speakers and Iranian EFL learners, indicating that cultural specificity plays a crucial role in shaping these interactions.

Moreover, according to the findings, Arabic participants tended to agree with the complimenter by accepting compliments, which is in line with the findings of Pomerantz (1978). Arabic participants believed that as they were raised within the culture that accepting the compliment was the best way to respond to compliments, they implemented accept strategy more frequently, which is contrary to the Persian participants, who had numerous problems in accepting compliments. This can be related to the tendency among Arabic speakers to use the accepting strategy to adhere to Leech's (1983) agreement maxim (minimize disagreement between self and other; maximize agreement between self and other). Moreover, in Iran, disagreement is viewed as a personal matter, and hence, it is not something to be displayed in public. That is why most of Arabic L2 learners in this study did not ostensibly disagree with the compliments and preferred to accept it.

Iranian learners also used indirect strategies, but their approach varied depending on the context and the social status of the interlocutor. Moreover, they believed that as Iranian learners' educational level developed, they tended to move from direct to more conventional indirectness in their speech acts. The acquired data on compliments and CRs uttered by Persian users put forward the fact that among main strategies, reject strategy was more frequently used than evade in CRs, as it is a focal politeness component, which plays a determining role in interlocutors' CRs. This finding is also supported by some researchers in the field (e.g., Beeman, 1986; Sharifiyan, 2005).

However, both groups indicated that they struggled with the pragmatic norms of English, such as how to appropriately make requests, apologize, or refuse offers. Learners were found to apply the pragmatic conventions of their native language when responding to compliments in a foreign context, which can lead to misunderstandings if these conventions differ significantly from those of the target culture. Meanwhile, when interacting with each other or with speakers from other cultures (like English), both Persian and Arabic speakers transferred their native pragmatic norms into these new contexts which can lead to misunderstandings if not recognized by all parties involved.

The impact of social status and the context of the compliment also played vital roles in shaping responses. For instance, Iranian learners' responses can vary significantly based on the perceived power dynamics in the interaction, reflecting a nuanced understanding of politeness and social hierarchy (Sa'd, 2015; Ebadi & Pursiah, 2015). Similarly, Arab learners may navigate these dynamics differently, often prioritizing relational harmony and respect in their responses (Altakhaineh & Zibin, 2014). In accordance with Sharifiyan's (2005), Behnam and Amizadeh (2011), and Karimniya and Afghari (2011) the roots of such behavior lie in their politeness paradigms. Therefore, the formulaic expressions of ta'arof, shekaste nafsi and Tavazo (modesty, humility) the abstract basis of polite interactions, are in close relationships with each other, which in turn lead to Persian native speakers' politeness. The results were also in line with Allami and Montaeri (2012) in which Iranian L2 learners transferred the sociocultural norms of their first language to their target language production. This finding was previously supported by Sharifiyan (2005), Yousefvand (2010) and Karimniya and Afghari (2011). This study along with the previous literature on sociopragmatic transfer led us to conclude that pragmatic transfer is extremely context-dependent.

Based on the findings on the differences between Persian and Arabic speakers, simplification and over-generalization of CRs among different speakers is not acceptable at all, as there are many differences among the cultures. Hence, one needs to acquire the norms of the target culture in order to respond to compliments in an L2. To put it another way, the interlocutors need to find ways to meet the social expectations, in line with the target culture norms. The findings indicate that due to the inherent socio-cultural differences and implemented strategies of speakers of different languages, they need to acquire the norms of the target culture in order to respond to compliments in an L2. Essentially, as Spada and Lightbown (1999) declared, pragmatic competence has increasingly focused on the use of language form, which is influenced by social and cultural context.

The way individuals respond to compliments reflects broader cultural values such as modesty (in both Persian and Arabic cultures) versus more direct acceptance seen in some Western societies. Awareness of these differences is crucial for effective cross-cultural communication and educating learners about diverse response strategies can enhance their pragmatic competence. Moreover, gender differences in compliment responses have been explored, revealing that while Iranian EFL learners may show variations based on gender, Arab learners often respond similarly regardless of gender (Turhan & Tuncer, 2022). This suggests that cultural expectations surrounding gender roles may influence how compliments are received and responded to, with Iranian females potentially employing more diverse strategies compared to their male counterparts (Khaneshan & Bonyadi, 2016).

Based what was discussed, we can acknowledge the findings according to the Saville-Troike's (1982) conclusion that the speech events of CRs are dependent on shared beliefs and values of the speech community, which are coded into communicative patterns. Hence, they cannot be interpreted in isolation from social and cultural contexts. Natsir (2020) emphasizes that the situational context plays a critical role in determining how compliments are received and responded to, suggesting that cultural interpretations of compliments are not static but rather fluid and context-dependent.

In summary, the findings showed that both Arab and Iranian EFL learners exhibited distinct yet overlapping patterns in their responses to compliments, which was shaped by their cultural backgrounds, educational experiences, and social contexts. Moreover, they indicated that the integration of explicit instruction on pragmatic strategies in EFL curricula could enhance learners' abilities to manage these complex interactions more effectively

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, it is concluded that the patterns and norms of interaction are varying from one language to another. How the recipient perceives a communication can make a tremendous difference in cross-cultural encounters (Wolfson, 1981). The findings suggested that Arab and Iranian cultures placed a strong emphasis on politeness and maintaining social harmony. Based on the results, both groups followed cultural norms that prioritized avoiding disagreement or conflict in responding to compliments. Overall, compliment responses are deeply rooted in cultural norms, which suggests that the interpretation of the strategies can vary significantly based on cultural context.

As the findings indicated, the interplay of different factors priorities a comprehensive understanding of compliment responses in cross-cultural communication, which requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating insights from linguistics, psychology, and cultural studies. Hence, the specific strategies employed by Persian and Arabic speakers should be highlighted by researchers to gain valuable insights into the broader dynamics of intercultural communication.

The findings showed that Iranian EFL learners frequently used strategies like rejecting the compliment and downgrading themselves when responding to compliments. However, they also tended to rely on positive politeness by accepting compliments as a way to maintain rapport. However, it was necessary to study more response strategies specific to females than males which needs further investigation. The contextual factors that influence these responses underscore the

central role of cultural awareness in efficient communication, which needs to be amplified by further research to explore these dynamics, particularly in the context of globalization and increasing intercultural interactions.

To conclude, there were some limitations which caused some factors not to be considered in the study. So, the research opens up new horizons to be pursued: First, the study focused on the Persian and Arabic EFL learners, which recommends alternative ways on different language background in this topic in the future. Second, as WDCTs were used as the data collection instruments, other task types and instruments can also be used to attain more reliable and valid results in future.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Gamal, A. A. L. I. M. (2017). The speech act of compliment response as realized by Yemeni Arabic speakers: A sociolinguistic analysis. *International Journal in English*, 3(3), 1-18.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., Al-Aghbari, K., & Thakur, V. (2022). Pragmatic competence of complimenting among female Omani EFL college students: a sociolinguistic study. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences [JASS]*, 13(2), 3-15. <https://doi.org/10.53542/jass.v13i2.5117>
- Allami, H., & Montazeri, M. (2012). Iranian EFL learners' compliment responses. *System*, 40(4), 466-482.
- Alotaibi, A. (2016). An analysis of compliment responses by Kuwaiti EFL learners: a pragmatic approach. *European Scientific Journal ESJ*, 12(10), 74. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n10p74>
- Alqarni, S. (2020). A sociolinguistic investigation of compliments and compliment responses among young Saudis. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(1), 231-252. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no1.18>
- Altakhaineh, A., & Zibin, A. (2014). Perception of culturally loaded words by Arab EFL learners. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 6(3), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v6i3.4922>
- Azizi Abarghoui, M. A. (2012). A comparative study of refusal strategies used by Iranians and Australians. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(11), 24-39.
- Bachman, L. F. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beeman, W. O. (1986). *Language Status and Power in Iran*. Indiana University Press.
- Behnam, B., & Amizadeh, N. (2011). A comparative study of the compliments and compliment responses between English and Persian TV interviews. *3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 17(1).
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dehkordi, Z., & Chalak, A. (2015). English compliment response strategies on social networks by Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(2), 452-470. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0602.28>

- Ebadi, S., & Pursiah, F. (2015). The effect of social class on Persian EFL learners' pragmatic performance of speech act of compliment responses. *Global Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 5(2), 157-179. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjflt.v5i2.189>
- Farenkia, B. M. (2014). Face-enhancing strategies in compliment responses by Canadian university students. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 6(3), 53.
- Golato, A. (2005). *Compliments and CRs: Grammatical structure and sequential organization*. London: John Benjamins.
- Herbert, R. K. (1989). The ethnography of English compliments and CRs: A contrastive sketch. In W. Oleksy (Eds.), *Contrastive Pragmatics* (p.p. 3-35). Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Herbert.
- Herbert, R. (1990). Sex-based differences in compliment behavior. *Language in Society*, 19(2), 201-224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404500014378>
- Holmes, J. (1986). Compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28, 485-508.
- Jamil, A. (2016). *Compliment responses at higher education institutions: a comparative study of Omani and Australian speakers*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Queensland, St Lucia, Queensland, Australia.
- Karimnia, A., & Afghari, A. (2011). Compliments in English and Persian interaction: A cross-cultural perspective. *Jezikoslovlje*, 12(1), 27-50.
- Khaneshan, P., & Bonyadi, A. (2016). The investigation of compliment response patterns across gender and age among advanced EFL learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 7(4), 760. <https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0704.17>
- Kostromitina, M. (2024). An exploratory study of intonational variation in L1 and L2 English speakers' pragmatic production of high imposition requests and refusals. *Applied Pragmatics*, 6(1), 1-30.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2001). CRs among British and Spanish university students: a contrastive study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33(1), 107-127.
- Maíz-Arévalo, C. (2013). "Just click 'Like'": Computer-mediated responses to Spanish compliments. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 51, 47-67.
- Moalla, A. (2013). Who is responsible for successful communication?. *Sage Open*, 3(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012472686>
- Modarres, A. (2012). A cross-cultural study of compliment responses: A pragmatic analysis of Persian and English. *Language Related Research*, 3(6), 83-102. [https://lrr.modares.ac.ir/article\\_6953.html](https://lrr.modares.ac.ir/article_6953.html)

- Mohajernia, R., & Solimani, H. (2013). Different strategies of compliment responses used by Iranian EFL students and Australian English speakers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.4.2.340-347>
- Natsir, N. (2020). The compliment responses used by Makassarese native speaker. *Journal of Advanced English Studies*, 3(2), 124. <https://doi.org/10.47354/jaes.v3i2.91>
- Nelson, G., Al-Batal, M., & Echols, E. (1996). Arabic and English compliment responses: Potential for pragmatic failure. *Applied linguistics*, 17(4), 411-432.
- Pallant, J. (2007). *SPSS Survival Manual: A step-by-step guide to data analysis using SPSS for windows*. McGraw Hill Open University Press, New York.
- Pomerantz, A. (1978). CRs: notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints. In J. Schenkein (Eds.), *Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction* (pp. 79-112). New York/ San Francisco/ London: Academic Press.
- Pomerantz, A. (2021). Compliment responses: notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints. In *Asking and telling in conversation*, (pp. 65-97). Oxford University Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190927431.003.0004>.
- Pour, V., & Zarei, G. (2016). Investigating the use of compliments and compliment responses in Persian: effect of educational background. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 6(1), 227. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.6n.1p.227>
- Razi, N. (2013). A contrastive study of compliment responses among Australian English and Iranian Persian speakers. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 61-66. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.038>
- Sa'd, S. (2015). The use of compliment response strategies among Iranian learners of English: researching interlocutors' relative power and gender. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 5(4), 89-107. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.118>
- Sadeghi, A., & Foutooh, M. (2012). The effect of explicit instruction of compliment responses strategies on intermediate Iranian foreign language learners' ability to respond to compliments. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 4(3). <https://doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i3.2264>
- Saville-Troike, M. (1982). *Communicative tactics in children's second language acquisition and perspective*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Senowarsito, I. (2013). Politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction. *TEFLIN Journal*, 24(1), 82-96.
- Shabani, M., & Zeinali, M. (2015). A comparative study on the use of compliment response strategies by Persian and English native speakers. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(5). <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.5p.58>
- Sharifian, F. (2005). The Persian cultural schema of Shekasteh-Nafsi: A study of compliment responses in Persian and Anglo-Australian speakers. *Pragmatics & Cognition*, 13(2), 337-361.

- Sharifian, F., Chalak, A., & Dehkordi, Z. (2019). The Persian cultural schema: Compliment response strategies on social networking sites among Persian EFL learners. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 7(2), 61–81. <https://doi.org/10.22049/jalda.2019.26628.1137>
- Spada, N., & Lightbown, P. M. (1999). Instruction, first language influence, and developmental readiness in second language acquisition. *The modern language journal*, 83(1), 1-22.
- Tayib, D. (2018). A pragmatic study of compliment responses in northern Kurmanji. *Academic Journal of Nawroz University*, 7(3), 17-22. <https://doi.org/10.25007/ajnu.v7n3a196>
- Turhan, B., & Tuncer, H. (2022). Apologies and compliment responses: a case of pre-service EFL teachers. *IJELTAL (Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics)*, 7(1), 51-69. <https://doi.org/10.21093/ijeltal.v7i1.1182>
- Wolfson, N. (1981). Compliments in cross-cultural perspective. *TESOL quarterly*, 15(2), 117-124.
- Yousefvand, Z. (2010). Study of compliment speech act realization patterns across gender in Persian. *Journal of Second Language Acquisition and Teaching*, 17, 91-112.
- Yu, M. (2005). Sociolinguistic competence in the complimenting act of native Chinese and American English speakers: a mirror of cultural value. *Language and Speech*, 48(1), 91-119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00238309050480010501>