Face-Enhancing Strategies in Compliment Responses by Canadian University Students

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Abstract

This study examines strategies employed by students at Cape Breton University (Canada) in performing the speech act of responding to compliments in eight different situations. The data were collected by means of a Discourse Completion Task questionnaire. The findings suggest that the 25 participants exclusively use verbal responses and display a very strong preference for complex responses (e.g. thanking + commenting, shifting credit + offering) to boost the face of the compliment giver. Contrary to several studies that found appreciation tokens (e.g. 'thank you`) to be the most preferred responses in many English-speaking regions, the respondents in our study most commonly combine appreciation tokens with comments. Overall, the participants do not use negative compliment responses and they generally employ appreciation tokens in the construction of complex responses. The present study is a contribution to research on speech acts in Canadian English and it offers a basis for comparison with other regional varieties of English or other languages.

Keywords: Compliment responses, Politeness, Canadian English

1. Introduction

The present study examines the strategies displayed by a group of English-speaking Canadian University students in responding to compliments. Holmes (1988: 485) defines a compliment as "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer". Compliments are generally viewed as positive expressive speech acts with multiple functions. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005), for instance, considers compliments as "verbal gifts", aimed at enhancing the face of the recipient. According to Herbert (1989) and Holmes (1988), compliments are employed to negotiate or affirm solidarity between speaker and addressee. In spoken discourse, the speech act of complimenting can be used to: a) encourage desired behaviour in specific situations; b) intensify or indirectly realize speech acts such as apologies, thanks, requests for information, etc.; c) mitigate face-threatening acts like criticizing, reprimanding, etc.; d) open conversations (Traverso (1996: 107). In written discourse, book reviews for instance, "compliments contribute to establishing rapport and solidarity with the reviewee while redressing the face-threatening acts in the genre" (Gea Valor, 2000: 24).

Nevertheless, responses to compliments may not always be positive. Whether a compliment is viewed as a face-flattering or a face-threatening act depends on the context, cultural norms, realization forms of the compliments, gender, topic, individual considerations, etc. Overall, compliment responses may also boost or threaten the face of the compliment giver. In terms of types, functions and preferred / non-preferred patterns, compliment responses differ across languages, varieties of the same language and cultures. The great wealth of research on compliment responses from various fields such as sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, pragmatics, etc., has immensely highlighted how speakers of different languages and members of different cultural settings react to appraisals of their appearance, possessions, behavior, abilities, etc. Numerous comparisons have been carried out with regard to linguistic and cultural specificities in terms of choices, frequencies, realization forms and interpretations of compliment response patterns. Some researchers have shown that compliments responses are expressions of the recipients' interpretations of compliments as *supportive actions* or *assessment actions* (Downes, 1998), as manifestations of positive politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987) or as illustrations of politeness maxims of (Leech, 1983; Ruhi, 2006). More precisely, some scholars have argued that while the Agreement Maxim plays a key role in English speaking countries (Homes, 1988); Herbert, 1989), the Modesty Maxim is most relevant in Chinese (Chen, 1993; Pu, 2003). In other words, compliment acceptances dominate in English, whereas rejections are the most common responses in Chinese. The abundant literature on compliment responses includes studies on languages such as English (*American English* (Pomerantz, 1978 ; Herbert, 1989, 1990 ; Wolfson, 1989) ; *New-Zealand English* (Holmes, 1988) ; *South-African English* (Herbert, 1989, 1990), *American English and Irish English* (Schneider, 1999), *Nigerian English* (Mustapha, A. S., 2011), French (*French spoken in France* (Wieland, 1995 ; Traverso, 1996 ; Pu, 2003 ; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1998, 2005); *Cameroon French* (Mulo Farenkia, 2004, 2005, 2006), German (Golato, 2005; Mulo Farenkia, 2004, 2006), Chinese (Chen 1993; Pu,

2003 ; S. E. Chen, 2003), Japanese (Daikuhara, 1986; Barnlund & Araki, 1985), Arabic (e.g. *Egyptian Arabic* (Nelson, G. L., El-Bakary, W., & Al-Batal, M. 1993); *Syrian Arabic* (Nelson, G. L., Al-batal, M. & Echols, E., 1996); *Arabic spoken in the United Arab Emirates* (H. Al Falasi, 2007)), Persian (Sharifian, 2008), Turkish (Ruhi, 2006), Thai (Gajasemi, 1994; Cedar, 2007), etc.

Although compliment responses have been widely examined in several regional varieties of English, there seems to be very little or no information on compliment responses in Canadian English. This is in line with Kachru's observation that

> not much systematic effort so far has been directed toward determining how conventions of language use differ across varieties and how they may have a role in characterizing varieties as distinct. For instance, there is very little information available on questions such as whether the American, British and Canadian varieties differ as to when an apology or compliment or command is appropriate (Kachru, 1998: 79).

It should be noted, however, that the recent years have witnessed a rapid growth in the number of studies, within the framework of 'variational pragmatics' (Schneider & Barron (2008), on two or more varieties of English in the realization of speech acts such as offers (Barron, 2005), responses to thanks (Schneider, 2005), requests (Barron, 2008), expressions of gratitude (Jautz, 2008), etc. Nevertheless, a great deal of work still remains to be done on speech act patterns in Canadian English.

The present study attempts to shed light on compliment response strategies by a group of English-speaking Canadian University students. The results of this research may serve as a starting point for comparative studies on compliment responses and other speech acts in Canadian English and other varieties of English or other languages.

3. Methodology

3.1 The participants

Twenty-five (22 females and 3 males) students at Cape Breton University (Canada), in the age range of 18-26, participated in this study. These students were taking courses in degree programs in a range of disciplines offered by the institution (e.g. English, Communication, Business administration, Political science, etc.). All the respondents were Canadian native speakers of English.

3.2 Instrument and Procedure

The instrument employed to elicit compliments responses was a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) questionnaire consisting of sixteen situations (eight situations for compliments and eight for compliment responses) in which either an interlocutor initiation (for the eight compliment response situations) or a rejoinder (for the other eight compliment situations) was provided. The present study focuses on the eight compliment response situations. Each situation comprised a brief description setting "the general circumstances […] and the relevant situational parameters concerning social dominance, social distance and degree of

imposition" (Barron, 2008: 43). The students were asked to write what they would say in the given situations. The synopsis of the situations is presented below.

1) **Situation 3 (Academic award):** The respondent received an award or scholarship excellent academic work and receives a compliment from his/her mother or father.

2) **Situation 5 (Class presentation):** The respondent gave a presentation in class. At the end of the lesson one of his/her friends/classmates offers him/her a compliment on the job well done.

3) **Situation 8 (Exam):** The respondent passed his/her final exam. He/she meets his/her former professor who is happy to learn of the good news and gives him/her a compliment.

4) **Situation 9 (Cooking / Baking skills):** To celebrate his/her birthday the respondent brought a big cake to class that he/she made himself/herself. His/her friends/classmates like the cake and compliment it.

5) **Situation 11 (Sports skills / performance):** The respondent played well during a soccer/hockey game where his/her university/faculty was competing against another university/faculty. After the game his/her teacher offers a compliment on the good performance:

6) **Situation 12 (New phone):** The respondent just bought a new cell phone model. His/her professor likes the phone and compliments the respondent.

7) **Situation 13 (New shoes):** The respondent is wearing a new pair of shoes. One of his/her classmates looks at them for a long time and praises the respondents for his/her good taste.

8) **Situation 15 (Sports skills / performance):** After the respondent's soccer/hockey/basketball game, a spectator that he/she does not know comes up to him/her and offers a compliment on his/her sports skills.

As can be seen from the above descriptions, the situations were controlled for situational variables such as *social distance* (to elicit responses to compliments from friends or acquaintances (Situations 5, 9, 13), parents (Situation 3), or strangers (Situation 15)), *power distance* (to generate responses to compliments from equals (Situations 5, 9, 13) or superiors (Situations 8, 11) and *topic* (to elicit responses to compliments on aspects such as appearance (Situation 13), ability (Situations 3, 5, 9, 11, 15), and possessions (Situations 12, 13)). A total of 200 compliment responses were produced by the participants and these responses were analyzed according the scheme presented in the next section.

3.3 Data Analysis

Previous studies have identified a number of super- or macro-strategies of compliment responses, which are further divided into sub-categories, categories, etc. For instance, Holmes (1988) identifies three main compliment response strategies *Accept, Reject, Deflect/Evade*, and Herbert's model (1989) also has three macro-categories, namely *Acceptances, Non-agreement, Other Interpretations*, with different denominations and sub-classification. In my data analysis, I did not consider any classification scheme based on the question whether some types of

compliment responses belong or not to categories such as *accepting, rejecting, deflecting,* etc. I examined the compliment responses collected with respect to the following aspects.

The first step was to identify two major strategies based on the difference between *non-verbal responses* (e.g. nodding, smiling, laughing, silence, etc.) and *verbal responses*, i.e. those produced by using elements of a given language (e.g. single words, groups of words, simple or complex syntactic structures, etc.).

The second step was to examine the verbal responses, taking into account the number of moves involved in each response. A distinction was made between *simple* or *one-move responses,* i.e. compliment responses that employ one speech act/illocution and *complex or multiple move responses*, i.e. compliment responses combining at least two speech acts.

The third stage of the analysis was to examine the type of speech acts and patterns used in the compliment responses in general. As will be shown in the next section, it was found that the respondents produced simple responses to compliments by choosing speech acts such as thanking (e.g. *Thank you so much.*), or commenting (e.g. *It is an old family recipe.*) Some recipients, on the other hand, chose a combination of two or more speech acts to generate complex responses such as 'thanking + shifting credit' (e.g. *Oh wow thanks, the whole team did awesome I think.*), or 'thanking + commenting + downgrading' (e.g. *Thank you, I practice for a long time so I could get good. There are much better players on the team that play better than me.).* The number of speech acts involved in the complex responses was also considered as another point for further sub-classification and comparison.

The fourth step was to examine the realization forms of some compliment response strategies in the data. In sum, the data were analyzed according to the following aspects:

- *Verbal responses* (i.e. responses involving words) vs. *Non-verbal responses* (smile, laughter, kiss, hug, nodding, etc.)
- *Simple* or *one-move responses* (i.e. responses featuring one illocution, e.g. thanking, agreeing, expressing joy) vs. complex or multiple-move responses (i.e. responses involving two or more speech acts, e.g. thanking + downgrading, expressing surprise + thanking, commenting + advising + thanking)
- *Types and patterns of complex responses*, e.g. two-move responses, three-move responses, four-move responses, etc. and the types of speech acts involved in the combinations
- *Linguistic realization forms of compliment response patterns*

4. Results

4.1 Verbal Responses vs. Nonverbal Responses

With regard to the distinction between verbal and nonverbal responses, it is noteworthy that all the informants preferred verbal responses. There were, however, two instances in which verbal responses were accompanied by nonverbal features (e.g. *Wow! I can't believe it! This is so exciting! It'll help out a lot with expenses **[tears of excitement]**[1]; What class were you in?*

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[1] The examples are quoted as they were produced by the participants, i.e. grammatical and spelling errors remained

Lol [laughter]. This result seems to suggest verbal responses as the most common reactions to compliments.

4.2 Simple Responses vs. Complex Responses

The distinction between simple responses vs. complex responses yielded the results presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of simple and complex responses

	No	%
Simple responses	32	16
Complex responses	168	84
Total	200	100

As can be seen in Table 1, the respondents produced 32 occurrences of simple responses (16%), and 168 complex responses (84%). This finding seems to suggest that the respondents mostly tend to avoid simple and straightforward responses such as t*hanks, thank you*. Simple responses might have been considered by the informants as a sign of lack of interest in the continuation of the conversation. Complex responses were, by contrast, found to be very popular: the respondents seemed to consider complimenting and responding to compliments as a complex social act that also needs to be performed in a complex manner. Moreover, the very high frequency of complex responses also shows that the respondents interpreted compliments as "more than verbal gifts". For instance, making comments or giving some information after receiving compliments could be an indication that the compliment was interpreted as request for information. The next section examines frequencies and realization forms of simple compliment response found in the data.

4.2.1 Simple Response Patterns

The respondents produced 32 simple responses using three different speech acts. The breakdown of these speech act patterns is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency of simple response patterns

	No	%
Thanking	27	13.5
Commenting	3	1.5
Agreeing	2	1
Total	32	16

It can be seen from Table 2 that the most preferred response was *thanking* (e.g. *Oh, thanks.),* which occurred in 27 instances (or 13.50%) of the data. The strong preference for

uncorrected.

appreciation tokens to accept compliments clearly indicates that the respondents viewed compliments as supportive actions to which they also responded with a face-enhancing act (thanks). This finding concurs with results of many studies on compliment responses in English speaking countries. The second response type, namely *commenting* (e.g. *It is an old family recipe*), showed a very low percentage, appearing only in 3 examples, i.e. 1.5% of all the responses. The third simple response type was *agreeing* (e.g. *Hells yeah I did; Right on.*), found in two instances, i.e. 1% of the data.

Since *thanking* was by far the most dominant simple response type used by the informants, I also examined its major linguistic realization forms and distribution across the eight situations. It should be noted that "there are three optional elements often found along with expressions of gratitude: Speakers may name the benefactor of their gratitude, they may intensify their gratitude by adding particles […] to the expression of gratitude they use, and they may give a reason why they are grateful" (Jautz, 2008: 150). These three elements appeared in the gratitude expressions employed by the participants to accept compliments.

The most frequently used forms were the appreciation tokens *thanks* and *thank you*. These forms were generally reinforced by using adverbials of intensity such as *a lot, very much, so much* (e.g. *Thanks a lot*). Apart from these forms, gratitude was directly expressed by using the adjective *grateful* (e.g. *I am so excited and grateful.*) Some respondents combined and reinforced the appreciation tokens *thanks/thank you* with interjections of surprise such as *Haha, oh. Ha ha ha! Aw, Oh, wow* (e.g. *Oh, thank you!*).

The benefactor, i.e. the compliment giver, was either named by using the pronominal address form *you* (e.g. *thank you*) or nominal address forms such as *mom, dad, you guys, man, sir* (e.g. *Thanks mom/dad.*). *Thanks* and *thank you* were intensified by means of adverbials, interjections and/or an address forms (e.g. *Thank you guys so much!*). Some respondents used forms of appreciation of the compliment giver (e.g. *That's so nice of you to say*). A further category consisted of forms containing the verb *appreciate* which explicitly expresses appreciation of the act, i.e. the compliment (e.g. *I appreciate that coming from you.*). With other structures the respondents explicitly acknowledged the importance of the "verbal gift" (e.g. *That really means a lot to me.*).

The reason for gratitude was made explicit by expanding the appreciation tokens *thanks* and *thank you* with a clause beginning with *for* (e.g. *Thank you for the compliment/all your help also.*). Intensification of the gratitude expression was achieved by repeating or combining appreciation tokens (e.g. *That's so nice of you to say, thank you; Thanks a lot man. I (really) appreciate it/that.*). The analysis of the distribution of *thanking* across the eight situations yielded the results summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of 'thanking' across the eight situations

	No	%
Sit 3	6	22.22
Sit 5	1	3.71
Sit 8	2	7.41

Sit 9	1	3.71
Sit 11	5	18.52
Sit 12	1	3.71
Sit 13	1	3.71
Sit 15	10	37.03
Total	27	100

SIT 3 (Academic award); SIT 5 (Class presentation); SIT 8 (Exam); SIT 9 (Cooking skills); SIT 11 (Sports skills/performance); SIT 12 (New phone); SIT 13 (New shoes); SIT 15 (Sports skills).

As we can see in Table 3, appreciation tokens were mostly employed when responding to compliments on academic award (situation 3 (n = 6 or 22.22%) and sports skills (situation 11 (n = 5 or 18.52%), situation 15 (n = 10 or 37.03%). Also, the power distance variable, i.e. responding to compliments offered by a superior/teacher in situation 11 and the social distance parameter, i.e. responding to compliments offered by parents in situation 3 and by a stranger in situation 15, seemed to have influenced the use of appreciation tokens. In the other situations, appreciation tokens were employed with much lower percentages: Situations 5, 12 and 13 (each: n = 1 or 3.71%), Situation 8 (n = 2 or 7.41%).

4.2.2 Complex Response Patterns

With respect to the number of speech acts used to construct complex responses, it was found that the 168 complex responses in the data belonged to four different sub-categories. The frequency of the various combination patterns is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Frequency of complex response patterns

	No	%
Two-move responses	114	57
Three-move responses	48	24
Four-move responses	5	2.5
Five-move responses	1	0.5
Total	168	84

Table 4 shows that the respondents most frequently employed two-move responses, i.e. complex response involving two speech acts (n =114 or 57%). Responses involving three speech acts were the second most common type of complex responses (n = 48 or 24%). Four-move responses were used with a much lower frequency (n = 5 or 2.5%). There was only one instance of five-move response. Let's now examine the types of speech acts employed by the participants to construct multiple-move responses. We will start with two-move responses.

4.2.2.1 Patterns of Two-Move Responses

The various patterns employed in two-move responses as well as their frequencies are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Patterns and frequencies of two-move responses

Patterns of two-move responses	No	%
1) Thanking + commenting	49	24.50
2) Thanking + shifting credit	11	5.50
3) Thanking + Expressing Joy	11	5.50
4) Thanking + Thanking	11	5.50
5) Thanking + Agreeing	8	4.
6) Thanking + wishing	4	2
7) Asking for confirmation + Thanking / Thanking + asking for confirmation	3	1.50
8) Thanking + Downgrading	3	1.50
9) Thanking + expressing surprise	2	1
10) Thanking + offering	2	1
11) Thanking + returning compliment	2	1
12) Asking for confirmation + Agreeing	2	1
13) Questioning + non-verbal	1	0.50
14) Doubting + thanking	1	0.50
15) Thanking + questioning	1	0.50
16) Asking for confirmation + commenting	1	0.50
17) Agreeing + expressing surprise	1	0.50
18) Expressing Joy + Commenting	1	0.50
Total	114	57

Table 5 shows that the participants used 18 different patterns of two-move responses. These patterns appeared in 114 examples, which account for 57% of the data. The most frequently used combination was 'gratitude + comment' (e.g. *Thanks! It took a lot of hard work.*). Apart from functioning as intensification devices, the comments associated with gratitude expressions were mostly destined to furnish the compliment giver with information concerning the complimented object (e.g. origin, importance, methods used, time spent, etc.). However, the content of the comment also varied according to situation and topic. The combination 'thanking + commenting' can be considered within the framework of Leech's politeness maxims (1983) as the recipient's desire to respect the Agreement, Tact and/or Generosity maxims at the same time.

The following three strategies were the second most preferred patterns and each of them occurred in 11 examples, i.e. 5.50% of all responses.

'Thanking + shifting credit'. The second speech act ('shifting credit') of this response pattern was realized in two different ways: a) in form of reciprocation by which the merit for the complimented object was assigned to the compliment giver (e.g. *Aw, thanks Mom/Dad, but you know I couldn't do it without you*.); b) the addressee shifted credit to a third party (a person or group of people) (e.g. *Thank-you very much!* ***It was a team effort***.). With this complex response pattern, the recipients respected the agreement and modesty maxims stipulated by Leech (1983).

'Thanking + expressing joy'. Of the 11 instances of this pattern, joy was mostly expressed (8/11) using the adjective *glad* (e.g. *Thanks,* ***I'm glad that's over with***.). The second most preferred structure contained the lexeme *excited* (2/11) (e.g. *Thank you.* ***I am very excited to have done well***.). There was one example with *happy* (e.g. *Thank you!* ***I'm really happy I passed***.). As these examples indicate, the addressee generally expressed joy about the compliment itself or the complimented topic.

'Thanking + thanking'. The most commonly used pattern in this combination, namely the association of *thanks/thank you* and *I appreciate it/that*, occurred six times (e.g. *Thank you! I appreciate it; Thanks so much, I really appreciate it*; *Thank you, I appreciate that coming from you*.). Examples of the other least employed realization forms of this pattern are: *Oh, thank you! Yours are really nice too* (n=1); *Thanks Mom! Thank you for all your help also* (n=1); *Wow! That's so nice of you to say, it really means a lot to me* (n = 2).

Overall, the most employed speech act in two-move responses was 'thanking'. It appeared in 12 of the 18 patterns and occupied the first position in each of these combinations. In addition to the four most preferred patterns already discussed, the respondents combined 'thanking' with the following speech acts:

a) 'Agreeing' (e.g. *Thank you,* ***I really like it too[2]***.)

b) 'Wishing' (e.g. *Thank you!* ***I'm sure you will do just as well as I did***.)

c) 'Downgrading' (e.g. *Oh, thanks,* ***it was nothing don't make such a big deal of it***.)

d) 'Asking for confirmation' (e.g. *Thanks a lot.* ***I guess my hard work finally paid off***.)

e) 'Expressing surprise' (e.g. *Thanks,* ***I didn't expect it***.)

f) 'Offering' (e.g. *Thanks so much,* ***I can show you how I made the slideshow later, if you want***.)

g) 'Returning compliment' (e.g. *Thank you very much*. ***I really enjoyed your classes***.)

h) 'Doubting' (e.g. ***I don't know about that*** *but thank you!*)

i) 'Questioning' (e.g. *Oh thank you.* ***Were you watching the same game?***)

The other speech acts associated with 'thanking' had either upgrading or mitigating functions. The other least frequent patterns were:

j) 'Asking for confirmation + agreeing' (e.g. *Oh you really think so? Yeah I like them too.*)

k) 'Questioning + non-verbal' (e.g. *What class were you in? Lol.[laughter]*)

l) 'Asking for confirmation + commenting' (e.g. *You think? I tried really hard.*)

m) 'Agreeing + expressing surprise' (e.g. *I know! I was surprised I didn't burn it!*)

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[2] The examples of the "second" speech acts in question are in bold.

n) 'Expressing joy + commenting' (e.g. *I am really glad you enjoyed the cake it is my favorite kind.*)

The analysis of the situational distribution of the most commonly used two-move response, i.e. 'thanking + commenting', revealed some interesting results, as can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6. Situational distribution of 'gratitude + comment'

Situations	No	%
Situation 3 [Academic award]	4	8.16
Situation 5 [Class presentation]	3	6.12
Situation 8 [Exam success]	4	8.16
Situation 9 [Cake / baking skills]	7	14.28
Situation 11 [Sports skills / performance]	2	4.08
Situation 12 [New mobile phone]	12	24.48
Situation 13 [New shoes]	13	26.53
Situation 15 [Sports skills/performance]	4	8.16
Total	49	100%

Table 6 clearly indicates that the respondents used 'thanking + commenting' much predominantly in situations where a professor or a classmate complimented possessions, namely a new mobile phone (situation 12: 24.48%) and new shoes (situation 13: 26.53%), respectively. This finding seems to highlight a tendency in the community of the participants to furnish the compliment giver with explanation / comments when possessions are explicitly admired, irrespective of the type of relationship between the compliment giver and recipient. Generally, the comments added to appreciation tokens conveyed information on the origin of the possession, i.e. how/where the addressee got the object, who gave it, etc. This result may also suggest that compliments on possessions were also considered by the informants as requests for information about the compliment object. This means that comments could be interpreted as face-enhancing reactions, i.e. as positive responses to the other's desire to know more about the complimented object. Table 6 also shows that the pattern 'gratitude + comment' occurred with very low frequencies in situations 5 and 11, i.e. in cases where ability or performance was complimented. This seems to suggest that the respondents found it a (more) laborious task to explain how the admired skills came about. Let's now turn to complex responses involving three speech acts.

4.2.2.2 Patterns of Three-Move Responses

Three-move responses appeared in 49 instances or 24.5% of all responses in the data. The respondents employed 32 different combinations of speech acts, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Patterns and frequencies of three-move responses

	No	%
1) Thanking + expressing joy + commenting	10	5
2) Thanking + commenting+ Agreeing	4	2
3) Asking for confirmation + thanking + thanking	2	1
4) Thanking + commenting + questioning	2	1
5) Thanking + Shifting credit + expressing joy	2	1
6) Thanking+ commenting + offering	2	1
7) Thanking + commenting + wishing	2	1
8) Commenting + commenting + commenting	1	0.50
9 Thanking + wishing + returning compliment	1	0.50
10) Thanking + downgrading + expressing joy	1	0.50
11) Thanking + expressing joy + wishing	1	0.50
12) Thanking + downgrading + wishing	1	0.50
13) Thanking + expressing joy + advising	1	0.50
14) Asking for confirmation + thanking + offering	1	0.50
15) Thanking + thanking + offering	1	0.50
16) Thanking + thanking + thanking	1	0.50
17) Thanking + commenting + commenting	1	0.50
180 Thanking + Thanking + returning compliment	1	0.50
19) Thanking + commenting + returning compliment	1	0.50
20) Commenting + commenting + expressing joy	1	0.50
21) Thanking + thanking + downgrading	1	0.50
22) Asking for confirmation + thanking + downgrading	1	0.50
23) Asking for confirmation+ thanking + Shifting credit	1	0.50
24) Asking for confirmation + expressing joy + downgrading	1	0.50
25) Thanking+ shifting credit + shifting credit	1	0.50
26) Thanking+ downgrading + shifting credit	1	0.50
27) Thanking + commenting + downgrading	1	0.50
28) Thanking + agreeing + shifting credit	1	0.50
29) Downgrading + commenting + commenting	1	0.50
30) Thanking + comment + advising	1	0.50
31) Thanking + agreeing + questioning	1	0.50
32) Thanking + thanking + commenting	1	0.50
Total	49	24.50

Table 7 indicates that the participants mostly favoured 'thanking + expressing joy + commenting' (e.g. *Thanks, I'm so excited I won't have to pay a lot of money next year, looks*

like my hard work paid off.). The second commonly used combination was 'thanking + commenting + agreeing' (e.g. *Thanks, I like it too, that's why I picked this particular model*.) Although there were many different combination patterns, most of them (25/32) had a percentage lower than 1%. Again, it was found that 'thanking' was the most frequently used speech act in the three-move responses. Of the 32 patterns generated by the participants 'thanking' appeared at least once in 28 of them, where it generally occupied the first position.

4.2.2.3 Patterns of Four-Move and Five-Move Responses

The informants also used complex responses involving four or five speech acts, as can be seen in the Table 8.

Table 8. Patterns and frequencies of four-move and five-move responses

Patterns of four-move responses	No	%
1) Thanking + commenting + wishing + wishing	2	1
2) Thanking+ expressing Joy/Gratitude + shifting credit + shifting Credit	1	0.50
3) Thanking + thanking + downgrading + shifting credit	1	0.50
4) Downgrading + shiftting credit + shifting credit + shift credit	1	0.50
5) 'thanking + returning compliment + expressing sadness + promising + requesting'	1	0.50
Total	6	3

There are two striking phenomena in the realization of the four-move responses, as shown in Table 8, above: the repetition of 'shifting credit' and the use of 'thanking' in most of the combinations. An example of three-move compliment response is the combination 'thanking + commenting + wishing + wishing' (e.g. *Thanks! I was really nervous at first. I'm sure your presentation will be great too – Good luck!*) The only example of five-move response was realized as *Thanks, I have really enjoyed the class I am actually kind of sad it is all over, maybe I will take another course like this one next year, would you recommend it?*

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this study was to shed light on the strategies used by English-speaking Canadian University students in responding to compliments. It was found that the participants exclusively used verbal responses. This result may be interpreted as the respondents' interpretation of verbal responses as the most appropriate strategies to react to compliments. However, I have to point out that the method of data collection may have in some way influenced the participants' responses. The respondents may have deemed it not necessary to indicate nonverbal behavior in the written questionnaire situations. It is safe to say that naturally occurring conversations will certainly document instances where nonverbal responses are employed either alone or combined with some of the verbal responses found in

the present study.

The results also show that the informants employed complex responses five times much more than simple responses (84% vs. 16%). This behavior may be attributable to the interpretation of compliments as complex or multifunctional pragmatic acts that also needed to be responded to in a complex manner. It was found that 'thanking' was by far the most frequently used speech act in one-move responses. This result seems to confirm findings of previous studies on other varieties of English: these studies indicate that compliment acceptances are the most common responses (see Holmes 1988). However, if I consider all the responses found in my corpus, it appears that 'thanking' as a compliment response, ranked second, behind 'thanking + commenting', which appeared in 49 occurrences, i.e. 24.50% of all the responses. This finding shows that Canadian English-speaking respondents may be generally inclined to mitigate 'thanking' by making comments on the complimented object.

All the same, 'thanking' was the most frequently used speech act in the construction of multiple-move responses. Of the 58 patterns of compliment responses found in the data, 'thanking' appeared a) in 46 patterns as a simple response; b) in 13 patterns of two-move responses; c) in 28 patterns of three-move responses ; d) in 3 patterns of four-move responses and e) in one five-move response. The dominance of 'thanking' was also manifested in the positions of this speech act within the various combinations displayed. As a matter of fact, 'thanking' appeared in the first position in 11 of 13 two-move patterns, in 24 of the 28 three-move responses and in all four-move patterns. The very high frequency of 'thanking' in complex responses may be an indication of the strong tendency to express mitigated compliment acceptance by using one or more speech acts after the appreciation token proper.

It was also found that the respondents did not produce negative responses such as rejections, disagreements, doubts or praise upgrades. One participant expressed doubt in responding to a compliment, which, however, was immediately followed by an appreciation token (***I don't know about that** but thank you!*). This result may indicate that the respondents were very highly interested in performing positive politeness toward the compliment givers and in respecting the various politeness maxims of Leech (1083), by employing face-enhancing acts such as expressing wishes, giving advice, making offers, giving comments, shifting credit, downgrading, etc. This finding does not mean that English speaking Canadians do not reject compliments at all. Further research, based on retrospective interviews with some of the participants in this study or on a larger corpus, may help to have a better idea about the motivations behind the exclusive use of positive responses and may highlight other compliment response patterns.

It is worth mentioning that this study was based on data collected from a small group of participants, i.e. 25 students at Cape Breton University. Hence, the results cannot be over-generalized. There is need for further investigation, based on data from a larger target group and other sources (natural conversations, interviews, role-plays, etc.). This will certainly help to provide a more realistic picture of the strategies displayed by English speaking Canadians when they respond to compliments.

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