A Contrastive Study Of Politeness Strategies
Between Native Speakers of Jordanian Arabic
and Native Speakers of British English

(Responding to Compliments)

by

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Abstract

This is a contrastive study of politeness strategies which British speakers of English and Jordanian speakers of Arabic employ to respond to compliments. This study attempts to discover the widely used responses in each culture. It also aims to investigate to what extent the content of the compliment and the relationship between the conversational parties govern the way people in both cultures respond. Furthermore, this study sheds light on cultural implications related to compliment responding behavior. The impact of gender on the choice of a certain strategy is also discussed. Investigating the previously mentioned aspects helps to discover the similarities and differences between the way British people respond to compliments and the way Jordanians do which is the main issue of this thesis.

To achieve the purpose of the study, a questionnaire was designed. British subjects of the study live in Milton Keynes in Britain. They came from both sexes, different educational backgrounds and age groups. The Jordanian subjects, males and females were either undergraduate or graduate students at Yarmouk University.

Though the data of each sample were analyzed separately, the procedures followed were identical. The responses were classified into thirteen different
strategies. The first ten were developed by Chen (1993). The last three were developed by the researcher. These thirteen strategies were further categorized into seven Super Strategies. The responses to each item in the questionnaire were categorized according to strategy and sex. This enabled the researcher to establish relationships between the strategy chosen and: content of the compliment, relationship between the interlocutors as well as the sex of the responder. Then the percentage of each Super Strategy was calculated to see how different or similar their use is in the two cultures.

The findings of the study revealed that the norm of British society is to accept the compliment while the majority of the Jordanian responses returned it. It was also found out that the lexical content of the compliment sometimes caused a certain response to occur most. The responses to any compliment was also affected by the relationship between the interlocutors. As for the impact of gender, statistics have showed that sex influence is restricted only to some of the items in the questionnaire. Differences between the way Jordanian people respond to compliments and the British people do indicated that compliment responding behavior is culture-specific. Similarities, on the other hand, reflected the universal aspect of the functional patterns of speech acts.