

Ahmed Rawdhan Salman. (2022). Compliment Responses among Non-native English Speakers: Evidence of Pragmatic Transfer from Persian into English. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)*, 14(1): 864-874. DOI: 10.9756/INT-JECSE/V14I1.221101

Received: 12.10.2021 Accepted: 26.12.2021

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## Compliment Responses among Non-native English Speakers: Evidence of Pragmatic Transfer from Persian into English

### Abstract

*Pragmatic failure contributes to misunderstanding in intercultural communication. Hence, language learners must not only acquire the correct forms of the target language, but also the knowledge of how to use the language pragmatically appropriate in the target culture. This study probes the evidence of pragmatic failure in the English Compliment Responses (CRs) of Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The participants were EFL students in a national university in Iran who were asked to take part in a Discourse Completion Test (DTC). This test included some hypothetical situations where the participants were requested provide responses to the compliments. Herbert's (1986) taxonomy was used to classify the types of the CRs. Findings indicated that the participants transferred some of the Iranian cultural schemas to their CRs expressed in English. It is implied from this study that the teachers should make the EFL learners sensitive to the form and the sound use of CRs in intercultural communication with native English speakers. The results have useful implications for stakeholders in the field of TEFL in general and in Iran in particular.*

**Keywords:** Pragmatic Transfer, Pragmatic Failure, Iranian EFL Learners, Compliment Response.

### Introduction

Patterns of speech act realization are a central pragmatic concern (Kasper, 1992). Therefore, one line of research focuses on the pragmatic transfer by English language learners when they use speech acts in their intercultural communication with English native or non-native speakers (e.g., Al-Falasi, 2007; Cedar, 2006; Jing & Li-ying, 2005; Phoocharoensil, 2012; Salameh, 2001; Sucuoğlu & Bahçelerli, 2015). This is probably due to the reason that "different cultures may have different norms for interaction in terms of the structure of conversation as well. The way that Iranian EFL learners perform English CRs speech act could be different from English language, and thereby, it could lead to misunderstandings, or pragmatic failure

(Thomas, 1983). More precisely, pragmatic failure could be occurred when Iranian learners of English follow up the Persian language pragmatic competence in performing the speech act of CR in English.

The realization of Persian cultural schemes (Sharifian, 2005) in English CRs might contribute to stereotyping about Persian speech community. Therefore, if a Persian speaker is fluent in English; inappropriate use of English CR speech act may cause him or her to appear unintentionally rude, uncultured or awkward. On the other hand, since teaching pragmatics is challenging (Amaya, 2008), English instructors usually might not focus on pragmatic awareness in the classrooms (Al-Falasi, 2007; Thomas, 1983) but concentrate on the formal features of the language (Amaya, 2008). Therefore, Iranian

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teachers of English language may overlook the pragmatic devices instruction, particularly the speech acts of compliment and CR in language classrooms.

Yuan (2001) believes that CRs deserve scholarly attention since similar to other speech acts, the CRs could easily reflect the rules of language use in a speech community. Accordingly, the analysis of CRs could bring insightful understanding concerning the target language users' cultural and social values in a community. Hence, investigating the pragmatic transfer in the CRs generated by Iranian EFL learners could disclose the potential sources of pragmatic failure which may run the risk of communication breakdown among Iranians and native speakers of English.

## Literature Review

### **Pragmatic Transfer**

Pragmatic transfer refers to "the influence exerted by learners' pragmatic knowledge of languages and cultures other than L2 on their comprehension, production and learning of L2 pragmatic information" (Kasper, 1992). Put it simply, pragmatic transfer does occur when the second/foreign language learners fall back on their first language norms while performing in the target language.

Pragmatic transfer can be either positive or negative. Positive transfer is considered an evidence of sociocultural and pragmatic universality among languages. However, the negative pragmatic transfer, which is the main cause of pragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983), refers to the situation where the language speakers use their native pragmatic knowledge in intercultural communication with native or non-native speakers of the target language. Pragmatic failure takes place whenever two speakers fail to understand each other's intentions (Thomas, 1983).

To Thomas (1983), pragmatic failure "is not immediately apparent in the surface structure of utterances and can be revealed only by discussing with students what force they intended to convey". Thomas further distinguishes two kinds of pragmatic failures: (a) pragmalinguistic failure and (b) sociopragmatic failure. The former takes place whenever a learner attempts to perform the right speech act but uses the wrong linguistic means. The latter occurs whenever a learner fails to perform an illocutionary act required by the situation. Thomas argues that pragmalinguistic failure is language-specific and the teacher could simply

correct it whereas the sociopragmatic failure is culture-specific and the teacher needs may find it challenging to correct. In such situation, the language teacher can make the students sensitive to the organization of the target culture by discussing its values, beliefs, and conventions (Thomas, 1983).

### **Research on Pragmatic Transfer**

Literature review evidences that in EFL context research on pragmatic transfer mainly examines the function of speech acts and the negative transfer of L1 conventions to L2 (Saito & Beecken, 1997). For example, in an earliest pragmatic analysis, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) comparatively investigated the speech act of apology generated by Israeli EFL students and native speakers of English. The findings showed that EFL students followed the Israeli values in performing the speech act of apology in English language.

The relevant studies also show that since the advanced learners have an adequate control over the formal features of English language for expressing their ideas, they could usually transfer more L1 sociocultural conventions to the English language compared to the low proficient students (Takahashi & Beebe, 1987). For example, Eslami et al. (2004) reported that Iranian linguistically competent learners transferred Persian speech acts of requesting, apologizing, and complaining more than their less linguistically competent counterparts. However, this finding was challenged by Al-Falasi (2007), where she found that the language proficiency was not significant to motivate the Emirati EFL learners to generate target like CRs.

### **Studies on Compliment Response (CR)**

Pomerantz (1978) was the first scholar who analyzed CRs from a pragmatic approach. This study concluded that speakers of languages have to agree with the speaker or avoid self-praise in responding to the compliments. Therefore, they use different strategies including *praise*, *downgrade* and *return* to overcome this dilemma. In a similar study, Herbert (1986) found that native speakers of English used 12 strategies to respond the compliments cast toward them. These findings motivated her to develop a taxonomy for analyzing CRs produced by EFL/ESL students. Table 1 indicates this framework:

**Table 1.**

*Taxonomy of CRs*

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

**Research on Pragmatic Transfer in English Compliment Responses (CRs)**

Responding to compliments is a troublesome aspect of English for learners from different cultural backgrounds (Holmes & Brown, 1987). Previous works show that speakers of English with various cultural backgrounds usually use different strategies to respond to the complements cast by native or non-native speakers of English language (Jing and Li-ying, 2005; Phoocharoensil, 2015; Salameh, 2001). These studies raise a concern that non-native speakers' deviation from the English language norms may lead to communication breakdown (Saito & Beeckon, 1997).

In a primary analysis, Salameh (2001) confirmed that the Saudi EFL participants used *Formulaic Acceptance*, *Duty* and *Return*, common in Saudi culture, in their responses to English compliments. The study also found that Saudi EFL students resorted to their native cultural norms in generating CRs in English language. For example, the learners used religious expressions, dedication to family bonds, the abidance by social and religious codes. It was also reported that this group of Saudi Arabic EFL learners frequently employed the proverbial and idiomatic expressions common in their daily life communication.

Similarly, Jing and Li-ying (2005) reported that both the pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic failures were observed in the CRs produced by the Chinese EFL students. For

instance, in responding to the English compliment of "You are really helpful" the learners answered with the CR of "That's what I should do". In Chinese culture, this CR used by the speakers to show the politeness and modesty in accepting the compliment (Jing & Li-ying, 2005), but for English native speakers this CR could be interpreted differently. Cedar (2006) also found that some of the Thai participants answered the American English compliments through smiling. In Thai culture, it is not appropriate to accept the praise overtly; instead, the Thais resort to smiling strategy in responding to the compliment to lessen the embarrassment and tension between the interlocutors, thereby avoid self-praise. This pragmatic failure was also evident in Phoocharoensil (2012) study in which some of the Thais EFL learners answered the English compliments based on their native language norms.

Al-Falasi (2007) showed that the Arabic pragmatic conventions were observed in the CRs cast by English female learners. Interviewing with the participants, Al-Falasi found that the majority of participants did not know that CRs were culture-specific, but they wrongly perceived that these norms were universal in all languages.

Sucuoğlu and Bahçelerli (2015) also reported that Turkish cultural knowledge affected the Turkish EFL learners' CRs in different situations. The participants transferred the literally translated Turkish formulaic expressions

in their responses. For example, Turkish EFL learners answered the praise on their appearance by giving explanations normative in Turkish culture.

These studies indirectly show that the norms or conventions for responding the compliments are specific in each culture. The majority of participants in these studies wrongly thought that the norms for casting the CRs are universal (as observed in AL-Falasi, 2007), and this is probably the main factor that cause EFL learners to report to their native pragmatic or cultural norms to respond the compliments. Therefore, it seems that the teachers need to make the students sensitive to the norms or strategies appropriate for formulating CRs in English language.

Iranian sociolinguistic researchers have also examined the CRs produced by the students in Iranian EFL context. A body of studies comparatively analyzed the CRs in Persian and English languages (Ebadi, et al., 2015; Sadeghi & Zarei, 2013; Shamsavari, et al., 2014; Sorahi & Nazemi, 2013; Yousefvand, 2010). Some investigations examined the learners' knowledge concerning how to respond to the English compliments appropriately (e.g., Allami & Montazeri, 2012; Yousefvand, Yousofi, & Abasi, 2014). One study (i.e., Sharifian, 2005) has intensively discovered the Persian cultural schema of *shekasteh nafsi* in Persian EFL learners CRs. Sharifian (2005) explored how Persian cultural schema of *shekasteh nafsi* was instantiated in responses that speaker of Persian would produce in responding to English complements. He recruited 30 native speakers of Persian and 30 native speakers of English languages. Comparing the results with Australian data, his findings confirmed that the native Persian speakers frequently preferred to deny or downplay a talent, skill, or a possession. It was also found that Persian respondents usually reassigned the compliment to the person who cast the compliment. Sharifian further reported that Persian native commonly attributed what was being complemented to God, family members, or a friend. Sharifian argued that the instantiation of Persian cultural norms in the English CRs could lead the communication with native speakers of English into a blind alley.

In continuation of the contextualized studies on Persian EFL CRs, this study attempts to find the pragmatic failure in the CRs produced by the Iranian EFL learners. This study is significant since to the best knowledge of the researcher no investigation has probed the pragmatic failure in the CRs produced by the Iranian EFL students at the University level. Once research question guides this study as follows:

- Is there evidence of pragmatic transfer in Persian learners of English CRs?

## Method

### Participants

The statistical population of this study was a total of 130 undergraduate BA students majoring in the field of English Language and Literature in a top national university in Iran. They all were native Persian speakers with an age range of 19 to 24 years, and they were selected based on available sampling procedure. A sample size of 40 students volunteered to participate and provide answers to the Discourse Completion Test (DCT).

### Instrument

The researcher consulted the relevant literature (i.e., Al-Falasi, 2007; Heidari, et al., 2009; Sadeghi & Zarei, 2013), and adapted a an appropriate English version of DCT. This instrument was used to elicit the participants' CRs in 12 different situations. A compliment was paid in each situation and the students were expected to provide their possible responses to each compliment. The twelve situations were about appearances, ability, achievement, personality trait and possession. In these situations, the relationship between the complimenter and the complimentee was limited to friends and acquaintances. Only in two situations, the compliments were from the unknown people.

The researcher motivated to use DCT since it controlled the procedure for eliciting the required data representing socially differentiated contexts. Moreover, DCT is considered as a common method for analyzing different types of speech act (such as CRs) in pragmatic-based investigations (Mackay & Gass, 2005).

### Procedures

DCT was piloted in two phases prior to the main experiment conduction. First, two professors along with four MA students in applied linguistics were kindly requested to evaluate the content and the structure of this data collection instrument. Their comments were followed and some minor modifications were practiced accordingly. Then, 15 BA students were randomly asked to provide responses to each compliment in the test. These students were majoring in English Language and Literature at the same English Department. The findings of this phase of piloting procedure motivated the researcher to extend the numbers of situations in the DCT to 12 contexts.

The researcher taught the participants how to put themselves in each imaginary situation and provide answers to the compliment as they might do in a natural context. Furthermore, the

researcher did not inform the participants about the precise goal of the research since the respondents could become metacognitively sensitive to the elicitation procedures (Cohen; as cited in Yousefvand, 2010). With the assistance of two university lecturers, the researchers administered the DCT in a time limit of 40 minutes.

### Data Analysis

A total of 800 CR samples were retrieved from the participants. The researcher employed Herbert's (1986) taxonomy to code and identify the type of CRs in this corpus. It should be mentioned here that the researcher added one more category, namely, *formulaic expression* (Yousefvand, 2010) to the Herbert's framework for CRs classification. This formulaic expression was frequently found in responses of the participants in different situations. This formulaic expressions come from Persian speakers' cultural norms probably allowing the addressees to show their modesty or avoid their self-praiseness (Yousefvand, 2010).

It is worth mentioning that in coding the data, "the perceived intention of the speaker was crucial in determining category assignment" (Herbert, 1986). Therefore, the first parts of the CRs of "Thanks, your eyes see beautiful" or "Thank, that's my duty" would have been coded as "appreciation token" if they occurred in isolation. However, since the illocutionary force of the second parts is to show the compliment receiver as modest, we classified them as *formulaic expressions* specific to Persian culture.

In order to assess the reliability of the coding procedure, the researcher asked one rater (an AM student in TEFL) to code the CRs upon Herbert's (1986) framework. They were in agreement concerning the coding of CRs (approximately 95%). In the cases of disagreement (5%), one university professor expert in pragmatics was consulted and consensus reached on the coding. The basic 13 strategies exploited to categorize the response types are described as follow:

1. **Appreciation token:** A verbal acceptance of a compliment, acceptance not being semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment "e.g., *Thanks/thank you (very/so much)*"
2. **Comment acceptance:** The addressee accepts the complimentary force by means of a response semantically fitted to the compliment "e.g., *Blue is my favorite color, too*".
3. **Praise upgrade:** The addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient "e.g., *yes, I'm always handsome*".

4. **Comment history:** The addressee, although agreeing with the complimentary force, does not accept the praise personally; rather, he or she impersonalizes the complimentary force by giving (maybe irrelevant) impersonal details "e.g., *yes, my sister brought this from London*".
5. **Reassignment:** The addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person or to the object complimented itself "e.g., *this is my mother's taste*".
6. **Return:** The praise is shifted to the compliment giver "e.g., *you have a beautiful name, too*".
7. **Scale down:** The force of the compliment is minimized or scaled down by the addressee "e.g., *I was not much ready for that*".
8. **Question:** The addressee might want an expansion or repetition of the original compliment or question the sincerity of the compliment "e.g., *really?*"
9. **Disagreement:** The addressee directly disagrees with addresser's assertion "e.g., *no, it was not good at all*".
10. **Qualification:** The addressee may choose not to accept the full complimentary force "e.g., *yes, but I think that doesn't make much difference*".
11. **No acknowledgement:** The addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment; that is, he or she employs the conversational turn to do something other than responding to the compliment offered, i.e., shifts the topic "e.g., *silence*".
12. **Request interpretation:** The addressee interprets the compliment as a request rather than a simple compliment "e.g., *you wanna borrow it?*"
13. **Persian Formulaic expression:** Addressee shows his or her modesty by using a set of prefabricated utterances "e.g., *your eyes see me beautiful*".

### Result

The data collected by the DCT have been presently analyzed for the twelve situations. This analysis helps the researcher to measure whether the Persian learners of English have been able to produce target-like Compliment Responses (CRs) in English language.

#### Situation 1

Your friends have a party and invite you. You wear one of your best clothes. One of your friends says: "*wow, your suit/dress fits you very well, and you look great!*" You answer ...

Almost 80% of the Iranian Persian learners were in agreement with this compliment. Their

acceptance responses included appreciation token (37.5%) “*Thank you or thanks a lot/Thank you very much*” and comment acceptance (42.5%) “*Thanks. I am glad you enjoy it*”. However, about 20% of the participants utilized the literal translation of Iranian culture-specific formulaic expressions such as “*Your eyes see me beautiful*” or “*it reflects beautiful in your eyes*”.

### **Situation 2**

One of your friends has just moved to a new apartment. He/she ask you to help him/here. You except and help him/here until every think is done and finished. Finally he/she appreciates you: “*Thank you so much. It was very a kind of you*”. You answer ...

Given this compliment, our analysis indicated that approximately 92.5% of the Persian EFL learners transferred the literal translations of Persian culture’s specific formulaic expressions such as “*You’re welcome. It is my duty*”, “*Hey! You are my friend. It is my duty*” or “*We are friend. Today you need me and tomorrow maybe I need you*”. Only three participants (7.5%) accepted the compliment in English language form. Their acceptance responses were exclusively comment acceptance.

### **Situation 3**

You have just bought a new cell phone. Your friends find out that you have changed your cell phone. One of them gets it to find out about its applications and facilities. He/she says: “*fantastic! My cell phone doesn’t have these apps, it’s so great!*” You answer ...

More than half of the learners (55%) agreed to this compliment. Their responses varied between tokens of appreciation “*thank you (very much)*” to comment acceptance “*Thanks, that’s a kind of you*” and praise upgrade “*Yes, it is a great phone/Yes, I recommend you to change your phone*”. Whereas about 22.5% of the participants interpreted the compliment as a request “*Give me your phone to install the app for you/ it’s great you can have this*”, still 20% of them transferred the literal translations of Persian prefabricated formulaic expressions.

### **Situation 4**

You have just finished presenting your research paper. At the end of the class, one of your classmates says: “*you did an excellent job! I really enjoyed your presentation.*” You answer ...

Our data analysis indicated that nearly 75% of the Persian EFL learners were in agreement

with the compliment in this situation. Their acceptance responses ranged from appreciation token (57.5%) “*Thank you (very much)*” comment acceptance (20%) “*Thanks. That’s kind of you*” to praise upgrade (7.5%) “*Thank you, I worked a lot on my research paper*”. Only one participant was in disagreement with the compliment by scaling down the compliment (“*it wasn’t great any time*”). However, about 10% of the participants utilized the literal translation of Persian culture’s formulaic expressions such as “*Of course you helped me with your best tolerance*” or “*I can’t do it without your help/encouragement*”.

### **Situation 5**

You have some friends and relatives over for tea and cake that you baked someone says, “*Tastes Yummy!*” You answer...

Almost one third of our Persian EFL participants’ CRs fell into general strategy of agreement (32.5%). The acceptance responses were comprised of appreciation tokens (25%) “*Thanks/thank you (very much)*” and praise upgrade (7.5%) “*Thanks, you are right, I’m great in baking cake*”. Meaning while, 15% of the respondents interpreted the compliment as a request “*Do you want some more? / Take some for yourself*”. However, more than half of the responses to this compliment were the literal translations of Persian formulas expressions (52.5%) such as “*Thanks God you like it*”, “*Help yourself*”, “*I can cook anytime you want*”, “*Eat as much as you wish*” or “*Bon-appétit*” which is the literal translation of Persian prefabricated expression of *noshe jan*.

### **Situation 6**

You were shopping for a shirt and a (young male) stranger approaches you and says. “*This would look amazing on you!*” You Answer ...

Our data indicated that 45% of the participants did not acknowledge this compliment or at least ignored to answer the praise for the appearance on the part of an unknown young male person. In addition, about 5% of the Persian EFL learners questioned the compliment “*Thank you, does it? / Really?*” On the other hand, exactly half of the volunteers were in agreement with this compliment. Their responses were exclusively appreciation tokens “*Thank you (very much)*” and comment acceptance “*Thanks. That’s kind of you*”. Surprisingly, there was not any evidence of Persian culture’s formulaic expressions occurrence.

### **Situation 7**

You were shopping for a shirt and a (young female) stranger approaches you and says, "This would look amazing on you!" You answer ...

The data analysis revealed that a large number of the Persian participants were in agreement with the compliment (72.5%). Their responses varied between appreciation tokens (42.5%) "Thanks/thanks a lot/thank you (very much)" and comment acceptance (30%) "Thanks, that's kind of you". However, about 20% of the respondents decided to be silent and still 7.5% questioned the praise. Similar to situation 6, there was not any evidence of Persian language's formulaic expressions too.

### **Situation 8**

Some friends are over at your house. One of them looks at a clock hanging on the wall and says, "I love your clock. It looks great in your living room!" You answer ...

According to our data, approximately 52.5% of the Persian EFL learners' responses to this compliment fell into the general category of agreement. Their positive responses ranged from appreciation token (37.5) "Thank you", comment acceptance (7.5%) "Thank you, I love it too" to praise upgrade (7.5%) "Yeah, it's a good clock". However, nearly 47.5% of the participants answered with the literal translation of Persian prefabricated expressions such as "It is beautiful in your eyes", "It doesn't have price for you, you can have this" or "Thank you, your welcome, you can take it as a gift from me".

### **Situation 9**

You are wearing a new shirt and colleague looks at you says, "This shirt looks great on you! Blue is a great color for you". You answer ...

Almost 75% of our participants were in agreement with this compliment. Their acceptance responses exclusively were appreciation token (42.5%) "Thank you/thank you very much" and praise upgrade (32.5%) such as "Blue is marvelous", "Thanks. Blue is my favorite color" or "Yes, I look great in blue". However, one fourth of our Iranian EFL participants utilized the literal translations of Persian culture's formulaic expressions such as "Everyone says so", "I am reflected great in your eyes" or "Everything are [sic] great to me, I just kidding you are so kind".

### **Situation 10**

You have just met a new friend. When you introduce yourself, he/she says "What a beautiful name you have!" You answer ...

Approximately, all of the responses to this compliment were categorized within the general strategy of agreement. Within this category appreciation token (47%) "Thank you" followed by return strategy (22%) "e.g., "Thank you your name is beautiful too" were the frequent kind of responses among the Iranian students of English. Furthermore, 14% of the participants utilized the comment acceptance "Thank you. It's kind of you" and still 11% of our participants reassigned the compliment to their parents such as "My mother/father chose my name". Only 6% of the respondents answered with Persian formulaic expressions such as "Really? Thanks everyone tells it to me" or "I should be thankful to my parents".

### **Situation 11**

It's friend's birthday and you get him/her a present. She/he because happy and appreciates you: "thank you, that's great". You answer...

Surprisingly almost two third of our EFL learners' responses to this compliment were the literal translations of Persian culture's formulaic expressions such as "Oh, that's nothing, you deserve more", "You're welcome, It's a rare opportunity to be friend with you", "Hope you really like it. You're very welcome" or only "You're welcome". Furthermore, nearly, 15% of the participants accepted the compliment by applying appreciation tokens. However, 10% of the respondents did not acknowledge the praise and herby kept silent.

### **Situation 12**

You won first place in a challenging competition. Your friends happily congratulate you on your success: "well done, you did a great job. You actually deserved this prize" You answer...

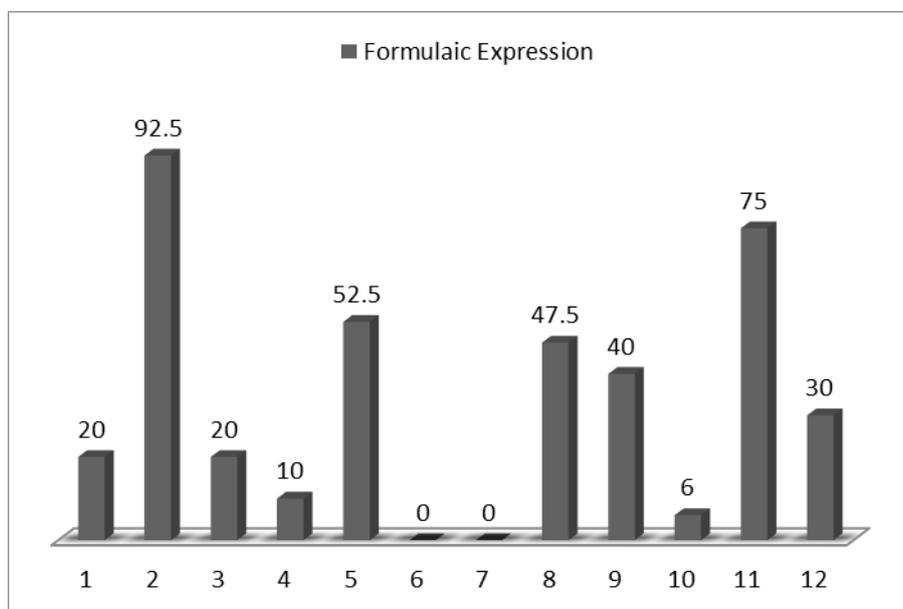
Almost 70% of our Persian participants' responses to the compliment in this situation were fallen into the agreement category. Their acceptance responses were appreciation token (52.5%) "Thanks/Thank you (very much)" and comment acceptance "That's kind of you" (17.5%). However, about 30% of the respondents' answers were the literal translations of Persian formulaic expressions such as "Thanks, God willing for yourself", "I couldn't do it without your support/encouragement", "Hardworking always does result" or "Thank you it was just by chance".

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This investigation aimed at investigating the evidence of pragmatic transfer in English CRs

produced by Iranian EFL students. The findings indicated that some aspects of Persian culture collective knowledge and thoughts, namely, cultural schemas (Nishida, 1999) were characterized in the CRs of Iranian EFL learners.

Figure 1 indicates the percentage of literal translations of Persian culture's prefabricated expressions transferred into English CRs in 12 hypothetical situations in DCT.



**Figure 1.**

*Percentage of Persian Formulaic Expressions in English CRs across 12 Situations*

Figure 1 shows that the participants utilized Persian formulaic expressions most frequently in the situations of 2 and 11. In these situations, the target of compliment is the complimentee's personality. For example, in situation 2 a friend is praised for her/his kindness in helping to another friend to move a new apartment. Almost 92.5% of the responses were Persian formulaic expressions such as "You're welcome it was my duty", "Hey, you are my friend, it's my duty", "You are welcome; it is a duty of a friend in these times", "What are friends for?", and "We are friend. Today you need me and tomorrow maybe I need you". Therefore, it seems that Persian EFL learners tended to be modest in receiving the praise on their personality rather than to reject it with flat "no". This is an obvious instance of cultural transfer from Iranian culture in which a Persian EFL learner thinks of it as a *friendship duty* to help the others. By contrast, an English native speaker would probably think of it as a civic duty and respond with a simple "thank you". This finding lends support to Salameh (2001) and Al-Falasi (2007) investigations in which the Saudi and Emarati female EFL learners tended to mitigate the force of the compliment when they were complimented on their personality.

Iranians are often well-known for their hospitality. This feature, namely, *Mehmannavazi* is a component of Iranian cultural value of

Ta'arof (Shahragard, 2003). It is often formulated at home or any other places such as a restaurant (Shahragard, 2003). It is usually characterized as "using flowery language, expressing strong and repetitive insistence that the guest eat something, degrading the host's belongings and capabilities" (Shahragard, 2003). This Iranian cultural schema has been instantiated in some of the participants' English CRs to situation five in which a couple of friends and relatives praise the tea and cake that a friend has baked. Here are some of the examples:

1. *Bon appetite. Eat as much as you wish.*
2. *No, it is less for you. I am ashamed of this. Let me bring more.*
3. *Thanks God you like it. You can come and have like this food in any time you like*
4. *I can cook anytime you want.*

The English native speakers do not use such CRs speech acts when they tend to response to the cast compliments. In fact, these CRs are those common in Iranian culture, and the English learners have just translated them into English language. In other words, they have answered based on their conventional cultural norms, and thereby, they may lead into communication failure with native and non-native English speaker.

The Iranian cultural schema of *shekastehnafsi* (Sharifian, 2005) was also found in English CRs in situation 12, where a couple of friends were impressed by their friend's performance in winning the first place in a challenging competition. Here are some examples of their English responses:

1. *I couldn't do it without your support.*
2. *Thank you it was just by chance.*
3. *Thanks, it was by God willing.*
4. *I'm thank [sic] you about everything in my challenging competition.*

These responses are the translated versions of CR speech acts that Iranian Persian speakers use when they receive praise on their performance or success. Sharifian (2005) called these cultural schema as *shekastehnafsi* which makes the Persian speakers to attribute their success or achievement to different factors such as God, help of family members, friends, etc. The English native speaker's response to this compliment is a simple expression of gratitude such as *thank you*.

Another illustration of pragmatic transfer was found in the situations of six and seven in which the appearance of the compliment receivers was praised by unknown people. In these situations, the participants didn't explicitly transfer Persian culture formulaic expressions, however, they preferred to remain silent. This is an instantiation of Iranian culture in which it is generally not acceptable to respond the compliments cast by the strangers, especially when the stranger praises the appearance. This finding is in line with Yousefvand's (2010) investigation in which the participants followed up the Persian cultural norms in their responses to the unknown people's compliments. Similar to Turkish EFL volunteers in Sucuoğlu and Bahçelerli's (2015) study, Persian EFL learners responded the compliments with longer explanations normative in Iranian culture. To English native speakers, this commonplace feature may seem bizarre in Persian. In fact, it might be safe to say that transferring this aspect of Persian pragmatic competence might run the risk of misunderstanding and thereby lead the communication into breakthrough. Imagine how many of these pragmatic failures are still being occurred as Iranians are involved in the discourse flow in business transitions and political affairs in international arena (Sharifian, 2005).

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This study predicts that resorting to Persian cultural schema in responding to English compliments will definitely lead the communication into breakthrough unless the interlocutor is aware of Persian cultural schema.

Realizing the serious consequences that may result from inappropriate pragmatic transfer, the key question which has been asked in most of the contextualized studies is that *how can EFL teachers become more successful in promoting pragmatic competence in speech act performance among their students?*

The instruction of communicative competence is a highly sensitive issue and the EFL teachers need to raise the students awareness concerning the values, norms, and conventions in the English language culture (Kasper, 1992). This strategy could minimize the possible pragmatic failure as the students make intercultural communications with native and non-native English speaker.

Our study also confirmed that the pragmlinguistic and sociopragmatic failures were clearly evident in Persian EFL learners' English CRs. For example, in some situations (e.g., situation 2) when the participants were praised for their personality, they frequently translated the Persian normative expressions such as "*thanks, it is my duty*" or "*thanks this is the duty of a friend, we should help each other*". Although the functions of these speech acts are to make the compliment givers feel good (Herbert, 1986), the use of the linguistic forms is not appropriate for conveying the complimentary force in English. This is a clear evidence of pragmlinguistic failure. The teachers could correct this since this kind of pragmatic failure is language-specific (Thomas, 1983). The learners committed sociopragmatic failure since they resorted to their native cultures schema such as the use of *Shekastehnafsi*, *Mehmanavazi*, or *silence* etc. These are sociopragmatic failures since they are related to the social norms (Thomas, 1983; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Kasper, 1992). Thomas argues that English teachers should be sensitive to these pragmatic failures. Therefore, EFL teachers need to encourage the learners to be critical for choosing one utterance rather than another (Holmes & Brown, 1987). In other words, English language teachers are suggested to discuss the cultural norms for using English language speech acts, and motivate them to analyze the language in a conscious manner. Hence, a direct approach to teaching the pragmatics of the English language is in order for Iranian EFL instructors.

The teachers could provide the students with authentic audiovisual materials (such as films, news & TV) reflecting the use of CRs or any other speech acts. These digital-based materials could encourage the students to easily access to the pragmatic aspects of the target language (Rose, 2000). Iranian EFL teachers may design and implement the pragmatic tasks to raise the EFL learners' metapragmatic awareness. The rational underlying this claim is

Schmidt's (as cited in Ancón, 2005) noticing hypothesis that learners would turn input into intake only when they have conscious awareness of the target elements they want to acquire.

### Further Studies

The findings of this investigation cannot be confidently generalized to other EFL contexts since the study did not use a large sample. Therefore, future studies could replicate the same study by recruiting a large sample size. The future investigations can also investigate further variables including "gender", "age", "literacy" or "educational background". This study used DCT to describe the evidence of pragmatic failure in the CRs of Iranian students learning English language. The coming studies are warranted to probe the possible factors causing the students to respond the compliments based on native culture's scheme. The future studies might investigate to what extent explicit or implicit instruction can affect the learners' knowledge and ability to use different speech acts such CRs in English language.

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