A Socio-pragmatic analysis of compliment responses among students at the University of Botswana*

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Abstract

Using tape-recorded interviews as well as Discourse Completion Tasks on compliment responses as elicitation methods, this study set out to investigate the linguistic resources that students at the University of Botswana use in responding to compliments in English. It examined whether the Batswana respondents show any preference for certain types of compliment responses, and if such preferences are affected by such variables as level of education, sex and social status. By using Herbert's (1986) taxonomy of compliment responses, the study has shown that subjects preferred to agree with their complimenters. It has demonstrated that the interlocutors' level of education and sex were not significant factors in the choice of compliment response types. Recommendations for the teaching of the pragmatics of

compliments in language contact situations, and especially in ESL classrooms, are made in light of these findings.

Keywords: compliment responses, pragmatics, speech act, Botswana, ESL

Introduction

Traditional pedagogy in most ESL and EFL environments has generally focused on the teaching of form rather than function. In spite of the proven importance of communicative approaches to teaching, the expediency of national examinations, which focus on form rather than function, has meant that teachers focus on those aspects of the language that are covered in examinations. Invariably, these are issues of form and not those of function and usage. The language education system in Botswana, for instance, produces students who are able to recount the grammatical rules of the English language but are unable to function in it appropriately. This paper therefore, draws its impetus from this realization as well as from other studies that have examined this problem elsewhere (e.g., Al Falasi, 2007; Grossi, 2009; Taguchi, 2009).

Al Falasi (2007, p. 29) noted that "communicating with speakers of other languages is a complex behavior that requires both linguistic and pragmatic competence." She averred that many of the problems that ESL and EFL learners face in intercultural communication are mainly pragmatic. This is because some of the rules that govern interactions are not immediately obvious and are generally invisible (Crozet, 2003). Furthermore, these problems arise because teachers often focus on linguistic knowledge (competence) and downplay pragmatic competence in their classrooms. For instance, the mode of teaching English in Botswana encourages formulaic memorization rather than spontaneous learning through purposive use (Arthur, 1994). In addition, the societal use of English is limited, which results in a limited functional range in the language for many learners. This contributes to stunted pragmatic competence.

Pragmatic competence is "the ability to use language appropriately in a social context" (El Samaty, 2005, p. 341; Taguchi, 2009, p. 1). Pragmatic competence is understood as the knowledge of forms and strategies to convey particular illocutions and to use these forms and strategies in an appropriate context

(Dippold, 2008). McNamara and Roever (2006) stated that for one to be pragmatically competent, one has to be able to map his or her knowledge of forms and strategies to appropriate communicative situations. Any failure to map these peculiarities results in pragmatic failure or communication breakdown (Eslami-Rasekh et al., 2004; Liu, 2004). This pragmatic failure may also occur when learners transfer first language (L1) pragmatic rules into second language (L2) domains. One way to minimize pragmatic failure among non-native speakers (NNSs) in ESL contexts is by acquiring pragmatic competence which matches or approximates that of native speakers (NSs) of the target language.

Pragmatic competence is required for many speech acts such as giving and receiving compliments. As Holmes (1986, p. 488) stated, complimenting "is a complex sociolinguistic skill." Holmes (1988, p. 485) defined 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 hearer." Holmes (1995) further pointed out that compliments pose a challenge as they may be interpreted as offensive, patronizing, sarcastic, ironic or even as put-downs. Giving a compliment may be considered a face-threatening act because it leads to "the complimenter's debt" (Holmes, 1986, p. 487), where compliment receivers may feel obliged to return the compliment.

Compliment responses differ considerably from language to language. Native speakers of English might consider the way second language speakers respond to compliments as offending or strange because the latter understand only the words without the cultural rules that govern them and vice versa. As pointed out by Rizk (2003), what is considered appropriate in one language context might not be so in another. For example, complimenting a girl for being fat is acceptable in most African societies while it is considered an affront in an American context. This is because what constitutes appropriate linguistic behaviour differs in both environments. This pragmatic skill is too often ignored in the teaching of English.

Drawing its impetus from the paucity of pragmatic knowledge in Botswana's ESL environment, the present study focuses on the ability of NNS to respond to

compliments in English as part of their ability to communicate effectively beyond the level of English grammar. It attempts to find out whether Batswana learners of English produce target-like compliment responses and whether pragmatic transfer occurs. Specifically, the paper answers the following research questions:

i.   What types of compliment responses are often used by Batswana speakers of English as a second language?

ii.   Do variables such as level of education, sex of interlocutors, and the formality of the situation play a role in the use of compliment responses?

iii.   What are the similarities and differences in compliment responses between native speakers (NS) of English and Batswana non-native speakers (NNS) of English?

The teaching of English and Setswana in Botswana

The linguistic profile of Botswana is a three-tier structure, comprising English, Setswana, and minority languages such as Ikalanga (Batibo, 2005). English is the official language in Botswana. It is the language of government, business, commerce, mass media and much of international communication. Because of its official status in the country, English is taught as a second language in government schools. Some private schools, however, teach English as a first language. Arthur (1994) argued that despite this high status, English has limited domains of use at the societal level, which renders it a foreign language in the context of everyday life.

Setswana is Botswana's national language. It is the dominant language in Botswana in terms of day-to-day usage and demographic spread. The vast majority of the citizens speak Setswana as their mother tongue, and most people who have another language as their mother tongue speak and/or understand Setswana as a second language. Estimates of Setswana speakers vary from 70 to 90% of the total population (Bagwasi 2003, p. 213). The 2001 Census results showed that at least 78% of the total population uses Setswana in the home environment as a language of communication. Chebanne and Nyati-Ramahobo (2003) have stated that Setswana is the language of national pride, unity and

cultural identity. It is the language through which Botswana's statehood is expressed and maintained.

In 1977, the Government of Botswana adopted a language-in-education policy that made Setswana the medium of instruction in Grade 1 through 4 across all subjects, followed by a change-over to instruction in English from Grade 5. A National Commission in 1993 recommended a change in this policy to make English the medium of instruction from the beginning of primary school, thus totally excluding Setswana as a medium of instruction. In 1994, the government decided that instruction should be in Setswana in the first year of primary education, and thereafter switch to English, save in the teaching of Setswana as a subject. Thereafter, Setswana should be taught as a compulsory subject throughout primary school to the highest level of secondary school for all Botswana nationals in government schools. English and Setswana, as a result, coexist in Botswana. It would be interesting to see whether Setswana speakers of English are inclined to give English native target-like responses when they encounter compliments, or if pragmatic transfer occurs.

In spite of the official proclamations regarding the co-official status of Setswana and English in schools, English is the de facto medium of instruction throughout the educational system. Entry into tertiary institutions requires, among other things, a credit pass in English in the national secondary school examinations. This covert language-in-education policy has affected the teaching of English. Given the centrality of English in the national examination system, English teachers do little more than prepare the students for examinations. Those skills or areas of the English language curriculum that are seldom examined, such as language usage, are consequently not fully covered in the classroom. This is part of the problem that Alimi (2011) notes when she asserts that there are contradictions between policy and practice in the teaching of English in Botswana secondary schools. Specifically, she avers "that though the teaching methodology prescribes Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teachers rarely use the approach because it does not guarantee their students the kind of correctness and accuracy examined in the BGCSE examinations in English language" (Alimi 2011, p. 320).

Previous studies on compliment responses

There have been a number of studies on compliment responses, particularly in Asia where the ESL/EFL enterprise seems to be strong (see Yu, 2004 on Chinese; Yoko, 1995 on Japanese; and Gajaseni, 1994 on Thai). Earlier studies mainly focused on describing English compliments and compliment responses used in the United States (see Wolfson and Manes, 1980). Later studies focused on how this speech act of compliment responses differs across cultures (see Salameh, 2001).

The first study on compliment responses was carried out by Pomerantz (1978) on American English NSs. She observed that compliments are either rejected, downgraded or only accepted with qualification. When responding to a compliment, a speaker has a choice between two conflicting maxims of speech behaviour: (A) 'agree with the speaker' and (B) 'avoid self-praise' (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 71). Pomerantz stated that these two maxims are "concurrently relevant but not concurrently satisfiable" (p. 81). Urano (1998) also noted that these maxims cause a dilemma because when a recipient of a compliment responds by agreeing with the speaker (Condition A), he or she violates Condition B as this response goes against the sociolinguistic expectations of the speaker. In other words, by accepting a compliment, the complimentee is indirectly involved in self-praise. Alternatively, if the speaker does not accept the compliment to avoid self-praise, the response will be face threatening as it violates Condition A. To mediate this conflict, recipients of compliments resort to a variety of solutions: (1) Acceptance, (2) Rejection, and (3) Self-praise avoidance.

Through his study of compliment and compliment responses among American NSs, Herbert (1986) revised Pomerantz' taxonomy of compliment responses. His results showed that speakers are "almost twice as likely to respond with some response other than acceptance" (Herbert, 1986, p. 80). In his study, only 36.35% of compliment responses were accounted for by acceptance. Herbert devised a three-category, twelve-tier taxonomy of compliment responses. He grouped them into (a) Agreeing, (b) Non-agreeing and (c) Requesting Interpretation (Table 1).

Table 1: Taxonomy of Compliment Responses (Herbert, 1986, p. 79)

Response Type	Example

A. Agreement
  I. Acceptances
    1. Appreciation Token
    2. Comment Acceptance
    3. Praise Upgrade
 	
  II. Comment History
 	
  III. Transfers
    1. Reassignment
    2. Return
	
	Thanks; thank you; (smile)
	Thanks; it's my favourite too.
	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
	
	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
	
	My brother gave it to me.
	So's yours.

B. Non agreement
  I. Scale Down
  II. Question
  III. Non acceptances
    1. Disagreement
    2. Qualification
  IV. No Acknowledgment
	
	It's really quite old.
	Do you really think so?
	
	I hate it.
	It's alright, but Len's is nicer.
	(silence)

C. Other Interpretations I. Request	You wanna borrow this one too?

Other studies using English NSs have yielded different results from Herbert's. For instance, Holmes (1988, p. 486) showed that New Zealand NSs were found to mostly accept compliments (61%) and shift credit (29%). Overt rejections of compliments were minimal, accounting for only 10% of responses. British NSs were also reported to mainly accept compliments (54%), deflect (29%) and reject them (17%) (Creese, 1991, p. 51).

Many studies have focused on contrasts between two or more speech communities in order to illuminate cultural differences in compliment response behaviour. For instance, Han (1992) contrasted how Korean females responded

to compliments in American English and in Korean. He found that Korean females responded differently depending on whether they were speaking Korean or English. They were more likely to reject or deflect compliments in Korean interactions (45%) in an effort to avoid self-praise. There was no single instance of appreciation in the Korean data. In English interactions, however, they accepted compliments (75%, e.g. Thank you) as they believed that Americans are direct and frank. Only one instance of deflection was recorded in the English data. Han (1992) found little evidence of pragmatic transfer.

Razi (2013) conducted a contrastive study of compliment responses among Australian English and Iranian Persian speakers. Results indicated that the general preference for both Iranian and Australian groups was to follow the order of *Accept, Evade* and *Reject* strategies. However, Australian English speakers preferred to accept compliments more than Iranian Persian speakers. It showed that in Iranian culture, accepting compliments is not considered as polite as in Australian culture. Razi (2013) concluded that the results support the hypothesis that there is no universal model with regard to the use of compliment responses among communities.

Closer to Botswana, the location of the current study, a number of studies on compliment and compliment responses have been carried out in South Africa by such scholars as Herbert (1986), Herbert and Straight (1989) and Chick (1996). Herbert and Straight (1989) found that South Africans made fewer compliments than Americans as they deemed them less important. He found that 66% of the American respondents' compliment responses were Agreements, 31% Non-agreements and 3% as Requesting Interpretation. In contrast, 88% of the South African compliment responses were Agreements. These results showed that South African English speakers accept compliments but do not generally compliment back, a pattern that markedly contrasts with American NS speakers of English (Herbert, 1986). Herbert and Straight (1989) explained these differences in frequency of acceptance of a compliment by pointing out the different social systems in which the interactions take place.

Chick (1996) analysed South African compliment responses at the University of Natal in Durban. He categorised compliment responses into Accepting, Deflating, Deflecting, Rejecting, Questioning, Ignoring and Reinterpreting. He

observed that there were differences in how speakers received compliments based on race. For instance, 40% of compliment responses by Whites and Indians were Acceptances while only 27% of responses from Blacks were Acceptances. Indians used more Disagreements (10.4%) than Whites (3.6%) and Blacks (3.1%).

Despite the above reviewed studies on compliments and compliment responses, the lack of studies on African learners of English in this area is obvious. In addition, despite the wealth of empirical studies conducted on speech acts in general, few data-based studies have ever focused on L1 transfer of compliment responses in L2 settings. More research is necessary in this area to better understand the relationship between L1 transfer and compliment responses in L2 use. As far as we know, there has not been any study of compliment responses among Setswana speakers.

Methodology

Study design

The study used both quantitative data from discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and qualitative data from interviews. These two data collection methods were used in a process of triangulation in order to cross-check the accuracy of the data collected and maintain the validity and reliability of the study. Data for compliment responses among native speakers of English was sourced from the numerous studies that have been conducted among NSs by other scholars.

Participants

The 314 subjects of the study were University of Botswana students drawn from all levels of study as well as all genders (N = 226; 58 Males, 154 Females, 14 Unspecified gender for the DCT; and N = 88; 22 Males, 64 Females for interviews). It was interesting, for instance, to check if there were any differences in the compliment patterns between male and female students, particularly given the fact that females have been reported to use politeness strategies more than men (see Guodong & Jing, 2005), among other differences (see Xiang 2013).

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The study population also provided a basis for comparing compliment patterns among students from all the levels of undergraduate study (39 First Year, 29 Second Year, 78 Third Year, 77 Fourth Year, 3 Unspecified from the DCTs; and 16 First Year, 24 Second Year, 24 Third Year, 23 Fourth Year, 1 unspecified female for interviews). This was necessary to check if level of study correlated with pragmatic proficiency in producing compliment responses. The distributions of the study respondents in the DCT elicitation are summarized in Table 2 and those from the interviews in Table 3.

Table 2: DCT Respondents by Year of Study and Sex

			Sex of respondents			
			Unspecified	Male	Female	Total
Year of study	Other respondents	Count	2	0	1	3
		% within Year of study	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	14.3%	0.0%	0.6%	1.3%
		% of Total	0.9%	0.0%	0.4%	1.3%
	First year	Count	0	14	25	39
		% within Year of study	0.0%	35.9%	64.1%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	0.0%	24.1%	16.2%	17.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	6.2%	11.1%	17.3%
	Second year	Count	2	9	18	29
		% within Year of study	6.9%	31.0%	62.1%	100.0%

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		% within Sex of respondents	14.3%	15.5%	11.7%		12.8%
		% of Total	0.9%	4.0%	8.0%		12.8%
	Third year	Count	5	14	59		78
		% within Year of study	6.4%	17.9%	75.6%		100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	35.7%	24.1%	38.3%		34.5%
		% of Total	2.2%	6.2%	26.1%		34.5%
	Fourth year	Count	5	21	51		77
		% within Year of study	6.5%	27.3%	66.2%		100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	35.7%	36.2%	33.1%		34.1%
		% of Total	2.2%	9.3%	22.6%		34.1%
Total		Count		14	58	154	226
		% within Year of study		6.2%	25.7%	68.1%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total		6.2%	25.7%	68.1%	100.0%

Table 3: Interviewees by Year of Study and Sex

			Sex of respondents			
			Unspecified	Male	Female	Total
Year of study	Other respondents	Count	0	0	1	1
		% within Year of study	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	1.1%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%
	First year	Count	1	5	10	16
		% within Year of study	6.3%	31.3%	62.5%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	50.0%	22.7%	15.6%	18.2%
		% of Total	1.1%	5.7%	11.4%	18.2%
	Second year	Count	0	5	19	24
		% within Year of study	0.0%	20.8%	79.2%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	0.0%	22.7%	29.7%	27.3%
		% of Total	0.0%	5.7%	21.6%	27.3%
	Third year	Count	0	7	17	24
		% within Year of study	0.0%	29.2%	70.8%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	0.0%	31.8%	26.6%	27.3%

		% of Total	0.0%	8.0%	19.3%	27.3%
	Fourth year	Count	1	5	17	23
		% within Year of study	4.3%	21.7%	73.9%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	50.0%	22.7%	26.6%	26.1%
		% of Total	1.1%	5.7%	19.3%	26.1%
Total		Count	2	22	64	88
		% within Year of study	2.3%	25.0%	72.7%	100.0%
		% within Sex of respondents	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	2.3%	25.0%	72.7%	100.0%

Data collection

Data for this project was collected through a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) and interviews in a process of triangulation.

Discourse Completion Test

The Discourse Completion Test consisted of a number of scenarios (see samples in Appendix 1) in which participants were expected to respond to compliments. These scenarios were designed to elicit data on compliment responses in English. The data collected was analysed using Herbert's taxonomy of compliment responses (see Table 1) to examine the compliment response patterns that emerged.

Interviews

Data was also collected from individual interviews. At the onset of the interview, the interviewer requested permission to use the content of the

interview for research purposes. However, the interviewer did not specifically state what aspect of speech would be examined. This helped to elicit compliment responses that were spontaneous and subconscious. Each subject was asked questions concerning his or her biographical background. The interviewer pursued various topics depending on the interest of the interviewees. When there was a chance, the interviewer would insert a compliment related to the topic. Compliments were made on their appearance (e.g. *I like your facial complexion*), possession (e.g. *Your shirt looks really nice*), or ability (e.g. *Your English is very good*). The interviews were tape-recorded in their entirety but only the part containing the compliment and its response was transcribed. In addition to the tape-recording, the interviewers took notes on non-verbal behaviour as a response to a compliment during the interviews. As in the case of DCTs, the data was analysed using Herbert's taxonomy.

Data analysis

The compliment responses from the interviews were transcribed. Together with the compliment responses collected through the Discourse Completion Tests, they were coded using Herbert's taxonomy. The coding was done by both the researchers and the research assistants. Inter-coder Reliability was established at 95%. Simple frequencies were then generated using SPSS to show the various compliment patterns.

Ethical issues

This study complied with all relevant ethical issues. Before the study was carried out, a research permit was obtained from the Ministry of Education, Botswana (Ref E11/17XXXXVI [17]). During data collection, informed consent of the participants was sought so that they all participated voluntarily. Confidentiality and anonymity of the research respondents were also adhered to, among other ethical considerations.

Limitations of the study

This study was limited to a relatively small sample of undergraduate students at the University of Botswana. It cannot, therefore, claim to be representative of

the entire student body. Secondly, although the study used 'year of study' as a surrogate measure of the respondents' proficiency in English, this is not entirely accurate given that language proficiency depends on a multitude of factors that are difficult to measure. Finally, it should be noted that part of the data was collected through DCTs. The scenarios that were presented may not have fully represented all authentic interactional situations in which one is likely to encounter compliments. While different measures were put in place to safeguard the integrity of the study, including using interviews to augment DCT data, the results reported here are suggestive rather than definitive.

Results and discussion

The preliminary part of the DCT sought information on some demographic variables. One of such variables was the respondents' level of education (year of study). This information was required to check whether pragmatic competence with respect to compliment responses depended on one's level of education. It was generally expected that the more years one spends learning a second language, the more pragmatically competent he or she becomes. Thus, those respondents in higher levels of study were expected to be pragmatically more competent than those in the lower levels. The study, however, showed that there were no significant differences in compliment responses among the student respondents. In part, this may be explained by the fact that the teaching of English in Botswana has traditionally focused on form rather than function, because of the exigencies of a national examination-based curriculum, among other reasons.

The teaching of English as a second language in Botswana is dominated by grammar. Very little functional and, therefore, pragmatic information is included in the teaching (see Mabutho, 2014). While pragmatic competence cannot be explicitly taught, English language learning opportunities can and should be arranged in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in the L2 (Kasper, 1997). Such opportunities are not available to the ESL students in Botswana as teachers focus on the national examinations which do not test pragmatic competence.

The gender of the respondents was another variable that was considered in the analysis of the data. Some studies have noted differences in compliment response types between the genders. For instance, in a study of compliment patterns in Persian, Yousefvand (2010, p. 91) noted that

> males were most likely to reject a compliment by using a set of formulaic expressions and scaling down the received compliment; in contrast, females tended to respond with acceptance or surprise to a compliment.

In the present study, information on the respondents' gender was cross-tabulated against the various compliment responses to check whether male and female subjects differed in the choice of compliment responses in the various DCT scenarios (Table 4). Although no major differences were noted between the genders, the qualitative data showed that female respondents tended to mitigate their responses.

Table 4: Distribution of Response Types by Respondent's Gender (%)

Response Type	Sex of Respondents		
	Unspecified	**Male**	**Female**
Appreciation token	15	23	27
Comment acceptance	15	13	16
Praise upgrade	23	19	15
Comment history	8	6	7
Reassignment	8	2	3
Return compliment	8	6	6
Scale down	8	4	7
Question	0	9	6
Disagreement	0	2	2
Qualification	0	2	1
No acknowledgement	8	4	3

Request	0	2	1
Mixed response	0	4	4
No Response	8	2	3

Another interesting pattern from the data was the preponderance of agreement response types over non-agreement and other response types. In both the DCTs and the interviews, most respondents (75.2%) opted to accept the compliment (Table 5). Within this major response type, the use of the appreciation token was the most dominant in both the DCTs (24.3%) and interviews (35.2%) (see Table 7). The appreciation token seems to be the unmarked response type, probably because of its simplicity and as a mark of modesty.

Table 5: Distribution of Compliment Responses by Major Type

Response Type	DCT Mean %	Interviews Mean %	Grand Mean %
A. Agreement	75.5	74.9	75.2
B. Non-agreement	16.6	21.5	19.05
C. Other Interpretations	4.9	3.4	4.15

The pattern illustrated in Table 5 is different from the patterns in the studies involving NSs reported earlier in this study. Studies by Herbert (1986), Holmes (1988) and Creese (1991) conducted among native speakers of English in the USA, New Zealand, and Britain, respectively, were all consistent with the current study in having *agreement* (*acceptance*) as the dominant compliment response type. The only difference with respect to this response type was the frequency. The current study has a higher frequency (75.2%) than the mean frequency of 60%[1] that the NS studies had. The other two types of response types are, however, different in the two groups of studies. In the NS studies cited above, the *other interpretation* (*deflection/shift credit*) was the second most dominant response type, a position that *non-agreement* occupies in the current

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[1] This mean frequency is based on Herbert's (1986) 66%, Holmes' (1988) 61%, and Creese' (1991) 54%.

study. The differences between the two groups of studies with respect to non-agreement and other interpretations are a result of cultural differences between the two study groups and are also consistent with other NNS studies such as Nelson et al. (1996) among Syrian Arabic speakers. These differences also confirm the hypothesis that there is no universal model for compliment responses across cultural and language communities.

The DCT responses were also categorized in terms of the relationship status between the complimenter and the complimentee. Specifically, we attempted to see if the response type would vary depending on whether the relationship of the interlocutors was formal or informal. For purposes of this analysis, the DCT scenarios that involved an employer, employee, administration assistant, and instructor were classified as formal while those involving classmates, friend's mother, cousin, friend, cake testing, and colleagues were all labelled informal. Thus, the DCT respondent being complimented by a colleague or family friend constituted an informal scenario as the two interlocutors have equal status. On the other hand, a DCT respondent being complimented by his or her boss was labelled formal as the relationship is asymmetrical. Table 6 summarizes the response patterns with respect to interlocutor status.

Table 6: Distribution of DCT Response Types by Status of interlocutors

Response Type	Formal (%)	Informal (%)
Appreciation token	28.14	21.5
Comment acceptance	18.58	14.7
Praise upgrade	19.98	16.2
Comment history	8.78	8.3
Reassignment	3.64	2.2
Return compliment	0.08	9.9
Scale down	7.6	4.5
Question	2.82	8.3
Disagreement	1.48	1.3

Qualification	0.62	0.8
No acknowledgement	1.12	3.7
Request	0.26	1.1
Mixed responses	4.26	4.0

The mean frequencies show that the complimenter's relative social status had no major effect on the DCT response type. For example, within the *agreement* group of responses, the mean frequency for the formal setting is 13.2% while that for the informal one is 12.1%. Individual agreement response types were, however, slightly different, with the formal setting registering markedly higher response sub-types of the *appreciation token* (28.14%) than the informal one (21.5%). This is probably because there is a little more pressure on the complimentee to be overly modest in formal situations in order to minimize *praise of self*. Such pressure does not exist in an informal setting where the complimenter and complimentee have a closer personal relationship. Similar patterns are evident with respect to *comment acceptance* and *praise upgrade*. Oddly, the *return compliment* had a higher mean frequency in the informal scenarios than in the formal ones. Thus, when a complimenter and a complimentee were of equal status, the latter tended to compliment back. This was not the case in asymmetrical relationships, especially where the complimenter had a higher status. In some African cultures, complimenting a high-status person, particularly one who is high in status by virtue of age, is a sign of disrespect. This may explain the avoidance of return compliments and is also a case of pragmatic transfer.

We wish to bring this discussion to an end by comparing the two elicitation methods that were adopted in this study, Discourse Completion Tests and interviews. Although this was not central to the study, it is significant to comment on the results with respect to these two data collection methods. The two methods differed in that with DCTs, respondents had time to ponder over their responses and, in some cases, revise them. Responses elicited through interviews were spontaneous. DCT responses were generally lengthier than the interview responses. Additionally, the interview method is generally more natural than DCTs given that most compliments occur in face-to-face

conversations or encounters. In the current study, the mean DCT is 24.3% and 35.2% for interviews.

Table 7: Distribution of Compliment Responses by Elicitation Method

Response Type	DCT Mean %	Interviews Mean %
Appreciation token	24.3	35.2
Comment acceptance	16.3	14.8
Praise upgrade	17.8	17.0
Comment history	8.5	3.4
Reassignment	2.8	4.5
Return compliment	5.8	0.0
Scale down	5.8	5.7
Question	6.0	9.1
Disagreement	1.4	1.1
Qualification	0.7	1.1
No acknowledgement	2.6	4.5
Other Interpretations	4.9	3.4
Request	0.7	0.0
Mixed response	4.1	3.4

Conclusion

This study had set out to investigate the linguistic resources that are available to students at the University of Botswana, an ESL environment, in responding to compliments. The study attempted to discover whether the Batswana respondents show any preference for certain types of compliment responses as well as whether such preferences are dependent on such variables as level of education, gender and the formality of the situation. Using two elicitation methods, Discourse Completion Tests and interviews, and Herbert's (1986)

compliment response taxonomy, the study has shown that the subjects preferred to agree with their complimenters, particularly by using the *Appreciation Token* 'Thank you'. It has been demonstrated that the interlocutors' level of education and gender were not significant factors in the choice of compliment response types. The results in respect of the former variable have been attributed to the fact that pragmatic competence, which is the domain of compliments and compliment responses, is not explicitly taught as part of the ESL curriculum in Botswana.

The results of this study were also correlated with results of similar studies that targeted native speakers of English. Although some similarities have been noted, there are significant differences in the choice of compliment response types. For instance, the differences between NS and our NNS with respect to the use of *non-agreement* and *other interpretations* have been attributed to differences in the sociocultural contexts of the two groups. Such differences constitute cases of pragmatic transfer from Setswana to English, a clear case of the recontextualization of the English language in Botswana. There is a need, therefore, to provide pedagogical opportunities for ESL students to acquire pragmatic competence. The teaching of English has to be extended beyond grammatical competence.

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Appendix

<div align="center">

DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST

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Please read the following situations and incomplete dialogues. Fill in your natural response in the blank space following "You:"

1.   You've just returned to school from the long vacation. Your classmate comments on your appearance.

Classmate: I can see you had a good vacation. You look great!

You: ---
----

2.   You are having a summer outdoor party for your employees. One of your employees admires your garden.

Employee: You have such a beautiful garden; you must have put a lot of work into it.

You: ---
----

3.   You are at a party with your daughter at a friend's house. Your friend introduces both of you to her mother.

Her mother: For a moment, I thought you were sisters. You look much too young to have such a beautiful, grown-up daughter.

You: ---
----

4.   Your boss accidentally locks his/her keys in his/her car. You offer to drive him/her home to get the other set.

Boss: Is your car new? It's really nice.

_____

You: --
----

5.   You have been working very hard on your new job in an advertising
        firm. Your boss calls you into the office for your first performance
        evaluation meeting.

Boss: I have been very pleased with your job performance during this first year.
You are an excellent worker.

You: --
----

6.   You are at your uncle's 60th birthday party. Your cousin comments
        about your shoes.

Cousin: I love your shoes. They are really elegant!

You: --
----

7.   You got 98% on your midterm. The instructor reads one of your essays
        to the class. One of your classmates congratulates you.

Classmate: You must have done a great job on the midterm. Your essay was so
good.

You: --
----

8.   You are the top executive in an insurance firm. You tell your
        administrative assistant that you are wearing your new contact lenses
        instead of your old glasses today.

Administrative assistant: Gee, you look very nice with your new contact
lenses.

You: --
----

9.   You run into an old friend at the supermarket. You haven't seen each other for five years.

Friend: Oh my goodness! I haven't seen you for years. You look wonderful!

You: ---
----

10.   You have put much effort into your research paper. You go to see your instructor. She/he gives back your report.

Instructor: This is an excellent report. You've done a fine job!

You: ---
----

11.   You have some friends and relatives over for coffee and cake that you baked.

Someone says: 'Tastes yummy!"

You: ---
----

12.   You are wearing a new shirt and a colleague looks at you and says: "This shirt looks great on you! Blue is a great colour for you."

You: ---