COMPLIMENT RESPONSES IN TURKISH: AN INVESTIGATION OF L2 TRANSFER

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Abstract

While there has been a considerable amount of literature which has been published on compliment responses (CRs), studies of this kind are usually based on CRs strategies of a particular language or cross cultural similarities and differences between languages. However, there is an increasing concern of the effects of second language (L2) on CRs strategies in native language (L1). The purpose of this study is to widen the scope of compliment speech act studies by examining variations in the use of CRs strategies among a group of English Language teachers and Turkish teachers who do not know English, in their workplaces and by identifying if there is an effect of L2 on their responses to compliments in Turkish. The participants of the study were consisted of 30 English teachers and 30 Turkish teachers who do not know English. All of the participants were Turkish. Turkish teachers who do not know English were experts in different fields such as history, geography and mathematics. The data included short responses of the participants collected through the use of a discourse completion task with 8 situational settings about physical appearance (hair style and beatiful eyes), personality (interpersonal skills), skill/work (cooking, writing a lesson plan, and teaching ability) and possessions (brand new car and smart clothes). The analysis of the data were yielded by the responses to the discourse completion test was done by using descriptive statistics under the framework of Holmes taxonomy of CRs. The results of the study show that there might be a transfer from second language (L2) to CRs in native language (L1) in a particular working place.

Keywords: *Compliment responses in L1, L2 transfer, workplace.*

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1. Introduction

Since we are living in the era of global world, language becomes a versatile tool to achieve global communication which requires using a global foreign language appropriately in different situations. It is a well-known fact that each county has its own unique cultures which are reflected in its languages. Thus, it is essential for us to equip ourselves with the cultural properties of the language we are learning in order to communicate effectively in that language. In other words, communication is achieved through internalizing and transmitting sociolinguistic norms as well as linguistic forms and functions (Searle, 1969, as cited in Razi, 2012).

In the literature, there are a number of studies carried out on specific language properties of a particular language or cross cultural similarities and differences between languages. One of the most striking properties of a language studied in most researches is compliments and more specifically, compliment responses (CRs). Recent studies on CRs have suggested a variety of results explaining cultural universal or cultural specific properties of CRs in different social contexts (Cedar, 2006; Chen & Rau, 2011; Huth, 2006; Lin, Woodfield & Ren, 2012). Yu (2005) claims that the reason underlying these studies is that foreign language speakers face with serious problems owing to lack of sociolinguistic awareness.

When it comes to the effects of a sociolinguistic environment, a few studies have dealt with the use of compliment responses in a particular social environment. The existing literature mostly deals with school environment (Golato, 2003; Huth, 2006; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). It appears that the functions of compliment responses differ in terms of socio-cultural contexts. Another point is, L1 plays a significant role in the maintenance of compliments. Al Falasi (2007) proves that Arabic non-native speakers of English transfer some of their L1 pragmatic norms to L2 due to their perception of universal norms among languages.

However, far too little attention is paid to the impact of L2 on L1 compliment response strategies. With these considerations in mind, this study seeks to find out whether there is an L2 (English) transfer to L1 (Turkish) compliment response strategies by Turkish non-native speakers of English in their workplaces. It is expected that findings from these data may add a new dimension to the studies of CRs.

The following research questions constituted the essence of this study;

1- How do Turkish EFL teachers and Turkish teachers who do not know English respond to compliments in Turkish in their workplaces?

2- Is there an L2 transfer on the compliment response strategies of Turkish EFL teachers in their native language (L1) in their workplaces?

2. Literature Review

Apparently, compliments are important components of speech acts and play a prominent role in pragmatic studies since they cover both linguistic and social norms. Besides, they hold a mirror to cultural values and norms (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). Holmes (1990) explains that "Compliments are appropriately regarded not as put-down or socialization devices, nor as patronizing linguistic strategies, but rather as positively affective speech acts. They

serve as signals of solidarity and as such, one might expect them more frequently in same-sex interactions than cross-sex interactions" (p. 267).

Compliments are acknowledgement of solidarity in the shape of admiration (Wolfson, 1983; Herbert, 1989, as cited in Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). On the other hand, Yu (2005) highlights that compliments are routines of everyday conversations. However, they can be viewed as a face-threating act, a criticism or a judgment by the addressees, so they may use a variety of strategies while responding to a compliment. A compliment response may be defined as verbal behavior which complimentees utilize as a reaction to a compliment (Nelson, Al-Batal, Echols, 1996). Spencer-Oatey et al. (2004) remind us that Pomerantz (1978) traces the dilemma that complimentees have to deal with: "to agree with the compliment and to avoid self-praise" (p. 99). They further identify the strategies used by the complimetees which are proposed by Pomerantz (1978) and Holmes (1995): "acceptance, rejection/deflection, and evasion/self-praise avoidance" (p. 99).

Studies on compliments have included compliment formulas, topics and distribution, functions and compliment responses and compliments as a sex-preferential strategy (Şakirgil, 2011). A considerable amount of literature has been published on cross-cultural similarities and differences of compliment responses. In her cross-cultural study, Golato (2003) concludes that American speakers use the strategy of acceptance while German speakers prefer to agree with compliments. Yu (2005) details sociolinguistic features of responding to compliments through a contrastive study of Chinese and native American speakers' performances. Cultural norms play a pivotal role in the use of compliment response strategies. Chinese speakers have difficulty in understanding the compliments made by American speakers.

Numerous studies have also attempted to explain the variables affecting the use of compliment responses such as gender, social environment, topics... In his quantitative study Bulut (2009) provides a new understanding of complimenting speech acts in terms of gender differences in particular cultures. Being conducted in the English Department of Saudi university, the study reveals that Saudi female university students who study English are more aware of native speaker complimenting expressions than the male students and there is a positive correlation between rankings of Saudi female students of the complimenting expressions and native speaker rankings. Milinkovic (2010) investigates compliments on possessions in Australian English and reports that compliment possessions in Australian English are simple and short.

When sociopragmatics is concerned, it appears that there has been a limited literature. Owing to the similarities and differences between L2 and L1, it is a common tendency to make a transfer of sociolinguistic norms of L1 to L2 while interacting in L2 (Odlin, 1989, as cited in Allami & Montazeri, 2012). Wolfson (1989) claims there are sociolinguistic transfers when non-native learners of English communicate in English. In other words, when they have little understanding of sociolinguistic behavior of the target language, they inappropriately transfer their native sociolinguistic norms in interactions with a native speaker of English as seen in the examples:

Two female students are looking at photos. A is American, B is Japanese. The photos are of B's family.

> A: Your brother is handsome.
> B: Not so much.
> Two American female graduate students are talking;
> A: Your son is great.

B: Yes, I'm proud of my son (p. 227).

As can be concluded from the examples, Japanese have a tendency not to accept the compliments.

Allami and Montazeri (2012) investigate the pragmatic competence of Iranian EFL learners in responding to compliments in English using a discourse completion test (DCT) consisting of 24 items. The results confirm that the cross-linguistic behavior of Iranian EFL learners is under the influence of culture-specific behavioral norms. Namely, they unconsciously transfer their cultural norms to target language context, which may cause embarrassment in the foreign language culture. Kim (2010) demonstrates that a pragmatic transfer exists from Korean and Japanese sociolinguistic rules into complimenting acts in English in terms of syntactic patterns, topic of compliments and compliment responses.

Overall, the existing literature has tended to focus on the transfer of sociolinguistic rules from L1 to L2. However, no literature has emerged that compliment response strategies may be transferred from sociolinguistic behavior of second language (L2) when interacting in native language (L1). Therefore, this study seeks to find out whether there exists a transfer of sociolinguistic rules from L2 to L1.

3. Methodology

3. 1. Participants

This study constituted a pilot study in which 5 English Language teachers and 5 Turkish Language teachers working in different schools in Kahramanmaraş had participated. The main study was conducted in Kahramanmaraş in 2013-2014 school year. It consisted of a group of 30 English Language teachers or instructors and 30 Turkish teachers who do not know English. The participants worked in different schools (state and private schools) in Kahramanmaraş. Some English instructors who are working at Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University also participated in this study. Convenience sampling was used to select the participants owing to the limited time. As Gravetter and Forzano (2009) state, in convenience sampling, subjects are selected with regards to "their availability and willingness to respond" (p. 151).

3. 2. Materials

A Discourse Completion Test (DCT) was adapted from Lorenzo-Dus (2001) to collect the data. He explains that there are mainly three variables that affect the risk of imposition of face threatening acts: a- the social distance (D), b- the relative power between them (P), c- the ranking imposition (R). Thus, the DCT used in this study will have three variables: P, D and R variables. Being independent theoretical variables, it would be impossible to figure out how D factor operated independently from P variable. In order to overcome the effects of D factor, a symmetrical power relationship between interacts in situations is provided. For the remaining situations power symmetry is achieved for the subjects to cope with D variable. The presentation of identical topics and wording of Cs helps to ensure the R variable.

The data were collected via a nine item DCT. Gass and Houck (1999) state that a DCT reflects the participants' beliefs in a particular context. It has the potential of gathering a large amount of data in a relatively short amount of time. In the original version, the compliment responses (CRs) in the questionnaire included the following topics: physical

appearance, personality, skill/work and possessions. Situation 1 (hair style), 6 (smart clothes) and 9 (beautiful eyes) were related to physical appearance. Situation 7 was designed to cover personality. Regarding the praise on skill/work and possessions, Situation 2 (brand new car), 3 (cooking), 4 (sport), 5 (essay writing), and 8 (computer ability) were involved.

In order to make the DCT suitable for this study, some modifications were made. Firstly, Situation 4 which was about sports was omitted since it did not match with the aims of this study. It was about "regarding the praise" like Situation 3, 5, and 8. So, this content area was taken into consideration in the adapted version. For the rest of the situations in the DCT, just the places of the situations and the people taking place in them were changed regarding the aims of the study. For instance, instead of "your friends", "your colleagues" was used in the situations (Appendix 1). Great care was taken to ensure the variables in the adapted version mentioned by Lorenzo-Dus (2001).

Based on the purpose of the study, the DCT was translated into Turkish by the researcher (Appendix 2). The Turkish version was checked by both an English Language instructor and a bilingual Turkish Language teacher. The validity and reliability of data collection tool were ensured through a pilot study which was carried out in a group of 5 English Language teachers and 5 Turkish Language teachers. The participants of the pilot study were different from those of the main study.

3. 3. Procedures

The first step to conduct this study was to choose the schools randomly and to obtain permission from the heads of the schools to apply the DCT there. Secondly, English Language teachers or instructors and teachers who do not know English were informed about the framework of the study but not the exact purpose of the study. Otherwise, their metacognitive awareness might be raised and they might respond to the compliment situations in a way they are supposed to (Boxer, 1996; Tran, 2004, as cited in Yousefvand, 2010). Then, they were kindly asked to answer the DCT. Another procedure to obtain data was to send the DCT via email. Teachers were also informed about the framework of the study in the emails.

3. 4. Analysis

The analysis of the data yielded by the responses to the completion test was done by using descriptive statistics. Johnson and Christensen (2010) explain that descriptive researches aim to provide an accurate description of a particular situation and the relationships among the variables affecting the situation. The data was analyzed statistically, using percentage values not only to state the CRs strategies of subjects but also to determine whether second language (L2) would affect the individual's use of different strategies of response.

The analysis of the present study was rested on Holmes' taxonomy of compliment responses which has 3 macro strategies and 10 micro-strategies as shown in Table 1. Morales (2012) explains that *Accept* means the recognition of an utterance as a compliment, *Reject* accounts for the amendment of a compliment by a complimentee, and *Evade* stands for avoidance from a given compliment.

Table 1: Holmes' CR strategies

Macro Level CRs	Micro Level CRs	Examples
Accept	Appreciation token	"Thanks", "Thank you", "Cheers", "Yes", "Good"
	Agreeing utterance	"I know", I am glad you think so", I did realize I did that well", " Yeah I really like it"
	Downgrading/qualifying utterance	"It's nothing", "It was no problem", "I enjoy doing it", "I hope it was ok", "I still only use it to call people", "It's not bad"
	Return compliment	"You're not too bad yourself", "Your child was an angel", "I'm sure you will be great", "Yours was good too"
Reject	Disagreeing utterance	"Nah, I don't think so", "I thought I did it badly", "Nah, it's nothing special", "It's not", "Don't say so"
	Question accuracy	"Why?", "Is it right?", "Really?"
	Challenge sincerity	"Stop lying", "Don't lie", "Don't joke about it", "You must be kidding", "Don't come on"
Evade	Shift credit	"That's what friends are for", "You're polite", "No worries", " My pleasure"
	Informative comment	"It wasn't hard", "You can get it from ...", "It's really cheap"
	Request reassurance	"Really?"

(taken from Tang & Zhang, 2009).

4. Findings of the Study

4. 1. Findings of the Pilot Study

Figure 1 shows the macro level strategies of CRs used by the English Language teachers (EFL) and Turkish teachers who do not know English (TLT). An apparent trend seen in Figure 1 is that both groups preferred to use *Accept* and *Evade* strategies the most and *Reject* strategies the least. What is most striking in the pilot study was Turkish teachers who do not know English preferred not to respond some compliments especially when it is about their physical appearance (Situation 5 and 8). Therefore, *No comment* category was included in Holme's CRs strategies in this study.
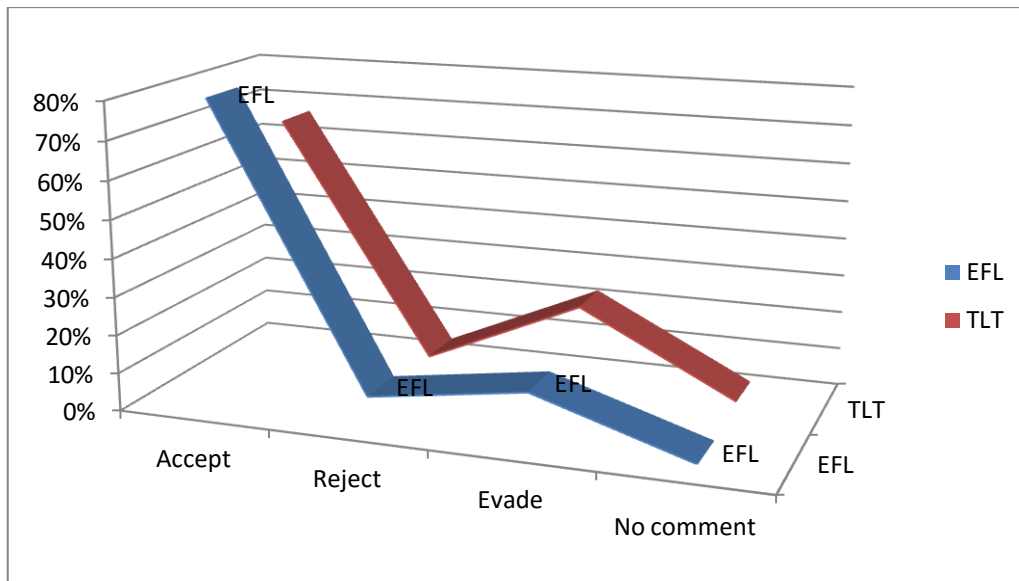
Figure 1: The macro level of CRs (Pilot study)

Figure 2 summarizes the micro-level strategies of CRs. As it seems clear, *No comment* responses occurred only among Turkish teachers and *Question accuracy* response strategies were mostly used by English Language teachers. Obviously, each type of the CR strategies did not carry equal weight but the category that carried the most weight was Accept strategies (Appreciation token, Agreeing utterance, Downgrading/qualifying utterance, Return compliment). Turkish teachers tended to use *Informative comment* (60%) and *Shift credit* (65%), which belong to *Evade* strategies at macro level. Thus, it would not be wrong to conclude that Turkish teachers are most likely to show their modesty by using these two strategies.
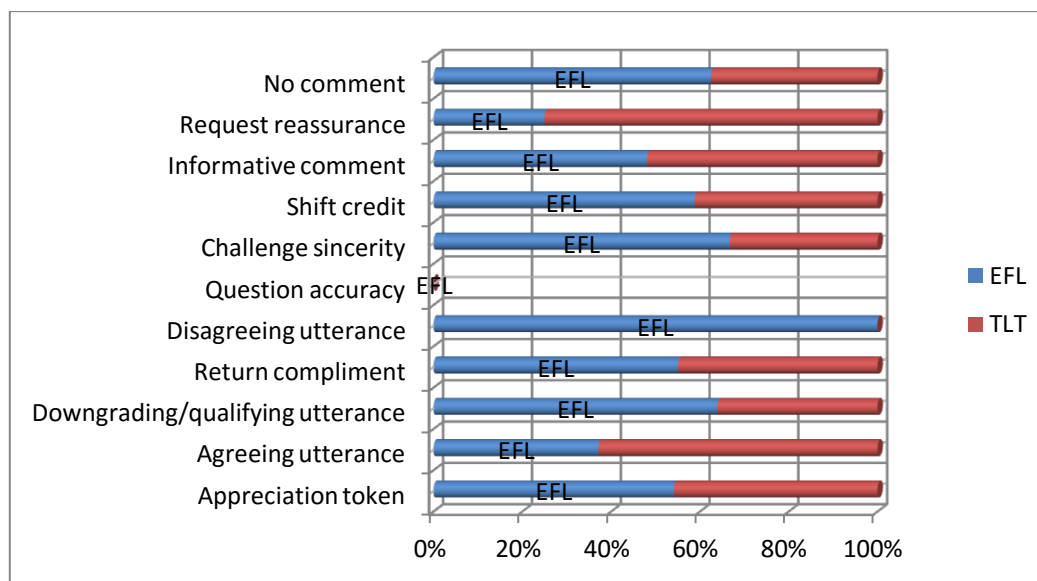
Figure 2: The micro level of CRs (Pilot study)

4. 2. Findings of the Study

As displayed in Figure 3, the CRs strategies of EFL teachers and of teachers who do not know English (TLT) at macro levels. It shows that both groups of the participants preferred to use the CRs strategies in this order: Accept, Evade, Reject and No comment. As can be seen, the majority of both groups accepted compliments. Farghal and Al-Khatib (2001) state that Accept strategy is the most widely used strategy in English speaking countries. Thus, this result may reflect the universality of CRs strategies employed by Turkish speakers in their mother tongue. For the macro level of Evade, 17% EFL teachers and 19% Turkish teachers who do not know English (TLT) evaded the compliments in the DCT. Kyzy (2012) highlights that Turkish students mostly prefer to use Accept strategies and Evading strategies in the second place. Reject and No comment strategies constituted the rest of CRs strategies successively as seen in the Figure 3.
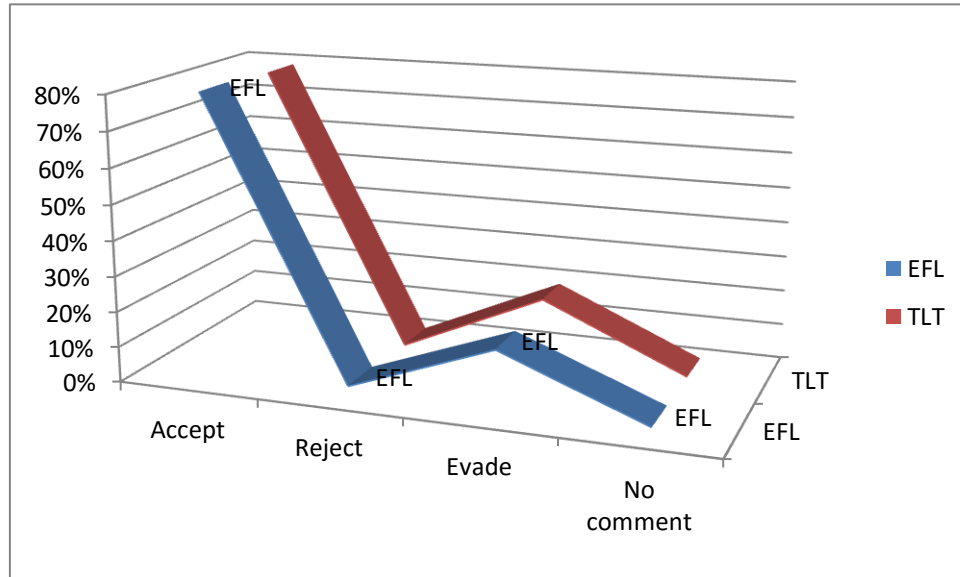
Figure 3: The macro level of CRs

Figure 4 summarizes the CRs strategies of the participants at micro-level. As shown in the figure, the CRs strategies of Appreciation Token had the highest percentage at 43 % for EFL teachers and 41 % for TLT group. The micro-functions of "thanking" occurred in almost all responses of the participants in this study. Firstly, this may indicate that just saying "Thank you" is probably the vaguest response for the participants when being complimented by their colleagues. In other words, they mostly opt for thanking in order to be both polite and solemn. It may also be used as a strategy to ignore the compliment made by their colleagues. Additionally, the results clearly showed that both groups employed the strategies of Informative Comment, Return Compliment and Shift Credit with a slight difference in the percentages.

Specifically, in the case of Agreeing Utterance, TLT groups (14 %) preferred to agree with the compliments given to them when compared to EFL teachers (8 %). On the other hand, EFL teachers utilized the CRs strategy of Downgrading / Qualifying Utterance (13%) much more frequently than their counterparts (9 %). The differences between the uses of these two strategies may be explained by the fact that there is an L2 transfer to L1 CRs strategies employed by EFL teachers. As Şakirgil and Çubukçu (2012) state Americans specifically opt to respond to compliments with an accepting act. Another strategy used by Americans is to employ Downgrading which means softening or mitigating a compliment.
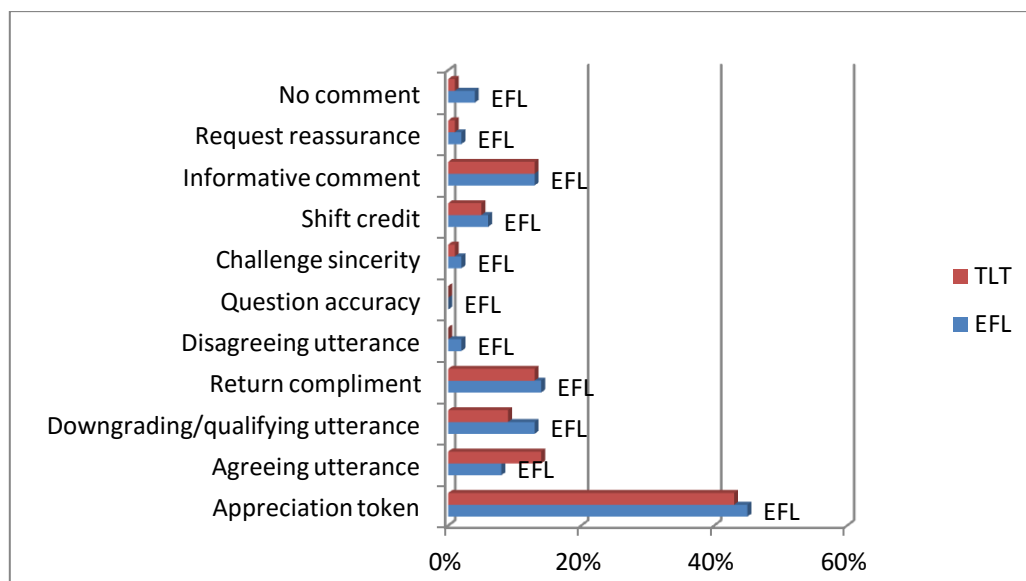
Figure 4: The micro level of CRs

Let us move on another thing to mention derived from the findings of this study. As it was stated before, No comment strategy was not originally stated in Holmes's taxonomy of CRs strategies. However, based on the findings of the data in the pilot study, this strategy was included in the taxonomy for this study. The results of the pilot study showed that only TLT groups employed this strategy. On the contrary, in the main study EFL teachers tended to use this strategy more frequently than Turkish teachers who did not know English but the participants who used this strategy wrote some small notes on the DCT which proved that some females did not prefer to respond compliments on their physical appearance (Situation 8: beautiful eyes) especially when it is made by their male colleagues. Similarly, Holmes (1990) finds that in New Zealand English possession compliments are considered to be unacceptable contrary to American English.

5. Conclusion

The first research question of this study was about the CRs strategies of EFL teachers and Turkish teachers who do not know English. The findings suggested that the CRs strategy of Accept at macro level was employed by both EFL teachers and Turkish teachers who do not know English. They also utilized Evade, Reject and No comment strategies but the percentages of these strategies seemed not to dominate the scene in the data of this study. It is worth noting that although employing different CRs strategies in particular situations, sometimes female teachers might prefer not to respond to compliments especially on their physical appearance made by their opposite sex colleagues. Similarly, Rees-Miller (2011) asserts that men give and receive more compliments than women. It is clear that at macro level, both groups had similar tendecies. They specifically used Accept strategies. So, it would be naïve to mention L2 transfer on compliment responses at macro-level. This may be explained by cultural norms of Turkish people. As supported by the findings of Lorenzo-Dus (2001) and Tang and Zhang (2009), there exist cross-cultural differences and similarities in terms of compliment responses among different cultures.

On the other hand, regarding the micro-level, Appreciation Token was the most common strategy used by all participants, which was similar to CRs strategies of American English. As Yu (2003) states, American English speakers tend to produce acceptance strategies more often than Chinese speakers. Similarly, Nelson et al. (1996) suggests that both Syrian and American English speakers are eager to accept compliments rather than to reject them. Appreciation Token is a dominant category within acceptances in the English data of Nelson et al. (1996). Thus, at micro level, we could mention a cross-cultural similarity between Turkish and American English as it occurred at macro-level.

One of the most striking results of this study was that teachers who do not know English employed Agreeing strategy more frequently than EFL teachers. This may be explained by the fact that Turkish speakers are prone to accept compliments given to them. Similarly, Kyzy (2012) proves that Turkish students are more sincere accepting the compliments and tend to use upgrading strategy. On the contrary, EFL teachers used the strategy of Downgrading/ Qualifying Utterance more often than their counterparts. It is a common strategy employed in American English as stated by Şakirgil and Çubukçu (2012). Returning to the second research question posed at the beginning of this study, it may be now possible to state that there is an L2 (English) transfer to L1 (Turkish) compliment response strategies by EFL teachers in some particular situations in their workplaces.

This research has thrown up some questions in need of further investigations. This study investigates CRs in a particular place and social variables such as age, gender, social background of the participants are not taken into consideration. What is now needed is to examine the effects of social variables on CRs strategies in different social contexts. More detailed information would help us to establish a greater degree of accuracy whether there is an L2 transfer to compliment responses in L1. It would also be necessary to use other data collection tools such as interview, video recording and observation to get more reliable data.

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Appendix 1

Discourse Completion Test

First of all thank you very much for giving up some of your time. Eight different situations are described below in which you receive a compliment from your colleagues on various matters. How would you respond? For each situation, you might find more than one response socially appropriate. In that case, please write all of them on the lines provided.

Situation 1: Hair cut

You've just had your hair cut in a different style. You bump into a colleague and after saying hello, he/she says: "That hair cut makes you look great. It makes you look younger!"

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Situation 2: Brand new car

As you leave work one day you bump into a colleague and start talking. He/she mentions that his/her car has broken down and he/she has to take two buses to get home. You have your brand new car at work and offer him/her a lift. When he/she sees the car, he/she says: "It's smashing! I love the model. And you've got a good taste in choosing the color!"

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Situation 3: Cooking

You've invited a group of your colleagues to your house for a meal. After eating, one of your male/female colleagues says: "I didn't know you were such a talented cook. The food was wonderful!"

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Situation 4: Writing a Lesson Plan

A colleague asks you to lend him/her a lesson plan that you wrote for a course. When he/she returns it to you he/she says: "It's an excellent lesson plan. You've structured it in a very clear and concise way. If only I could write something half as interesting as that!"

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Situation 5: Smart Clothes

Your head at work has organized a leaving do for a colleague. You've dressed up for the occasion. As you arrive at the dinner, he/she tells you how elegant you look and how much outfits suits you.

Situation 6: Interpersonal skills

Over the past week you've been helping to organize a conference at your university. A male/female friend, who has also been helping, says: "You're the right person for this type of job. You're ever so nice to the others and know how to avoid disagreements with everyone".

Situation 7: A teacher training course

You took a teacher training course. At the end of the course, your trainer comes up to you. He/she says: "You're very intelligent and have a flair for teaching. Besides, you show a lot of interest in what we do in the lessons".

Situation 8: Beautiful Eyes

You're out for coffee with a group of colleague. One of your colleagues, who has been with the department for many years, says to you: "You've got beautiful eyes".

(adapted from Lorenzo-Dus, 2001)

Appendix 2

İŞ ORTAMINDA SİZE YAPILAN İLTİFATLARA NASIL CEVAP VERİRSİNİZ?

Öncelikle bu anketi cevaplamak için zaman ayırdığınız için teşekkür ederim. Aşağıda iş arkadaşlarınızın farklı durumlarda size yaptığı iltifatlarla ilgili bazı durumlar verilmiştir. Bu iltifatlara nasıl cevap verirsiniz? Bazı durumlarda birden fazla cevap vermeniz mümkün olabilir. Böyle bir durumda lütfen aklınıza gelen tüm cevapları yazınız.

Durum 1: Saç Kesimi

Saçınızı yeni bir tarzda kestirdiniz ve bir iş arkadaşınızla karşılaştınız. İş arkadaşınız size "Saç kesiminiz çok yakışmış. Sizi daha genç göstermiş" der.

Durum 2: Yeni bir araba

Bir gün işten çıkarken bir iş arkadaşınızla karşılaştınız ve sohbet etmeye başladınız. İş arkadaşınız arabasının bozulduğunu ve eve gitmek için 2 otobüs değiştirmesi gerektiğini söyledi. Siz yeni bir araba aldınız ve iş arkadaşınıza onu eve bırakmayı teklif ettiniz. Arabanızı gördüğünde iş arkadaşınız " Olağanüstü! Modeline bayıldım ve gerçekten renk seçiminiz harika" der.

Durum 3: Yemek yapma

Bir grup iş arkadaşınızı evinize yemeğe davet ettiniz. Yemekten sonra bir iş arkadaşınız " Bu kadar yetenekli bir aşçı olduğunuzu bilmiyordum. Yemekler harikaydı." der.

Durum 4: Bir Ders Planı Yazma

Bir iş arkadaşınız sizden daha önce bir ders için hazırladığınız ders planını ister. Ders planını size geri verirken "Çok mükemmel bir ders planı örneği. Çok açık ve net bir şekilde hazırlanmış. Keşke ben de bunun yarısı kadar mükemmel bir ders hazırlayabilseydim" der.

Durum 5: Şık kıyafetler

Müdürünüz bir iş arkadaşınızın ayrılması nedeniyle bir yemek organize eder ve siz de duruma uygun bir kıyafet giyersiniz. Yemeğe gittiğiniz de müdürünüz şık göründüğünüzü ve kıyafetinizin size çok yakıştığını söyler.

Durum 6: İletişim Becerileri

Bir hafta boyunca okulunuzda düzenlenen bir konferans için bir iş arkadaşınıza yardım ettiniz. Bu düzenlemelerde sizinle birlikte çalışan bir arkadaşınız "Siz bu işler için doğru kişisiniz. Herkese karşı çok naziktiniz ve çıkabilecek tüm tartışmaları engellediniz" der.

Durum 7: Bir Mesleki Gelişim Programı

Bir mesleki gelişim programına katıldınız. Programın sonunda mesleki gelişim uzmanı size" Çok zekisiniz ve öğretme ile ilgili doğal bir yeteneğiniz var. Ayrıca, programda uyguladığımız tüm aktivitelere de çok ilgi gösterdiniz" der.

Durum 8: Güzel Gözler

İş arkadaşlarınızla birlikte bir kafeye gittiniz. Uzun zamandır birlikte çalıştığınız bir iş arkadaşınız size "Çok güzel gözleriniz var" der.