

A Comparative Study on Compliment Response between Indonesian EFL Students and English Native Speakers

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Abstract : In second language interaction, an EFL student always carries his knowledge of targeted language and sometimes gets influenced by his first language cultures which makes him transfer his utterances from the first language to the second language. The influence of L1 cultures somehow can lead to face-threatening act when it comes to responding on speech act, for instance, compliment. A speaker praises a compliment to show gratitude, and in return, he expects for compliment respond uttered by the hearer. While Western people use more acceptance continuum on compliment response, Indonesians utter more denial continuum which can somehow put the speakers into a face-threatening situation and offense. This study investigated compliment response employed by EFL students and English native speakers. The study was distinct as none compliment response studies had been conducted to compare the compliment response between English native speakers and two different Indonesian EFL proficiency groups in which this research sought to meet this need. This study was significant for EFL teachers because it gave insight on cross-cultural understanding and brought pedagogical implication on explicit pragmatic instruction. Two research questions were set, 1. How do Indonesian EFL students and English native speakers respond compliments? 2. Is there any correlation between Indonesia EFL students' proficiency and their compliment response use in English? The study involved three groups of participants; 5 English native speakers, 10 high-proficiency and 10 low-proficiency Indonesian EFL university students. The research instruments used in this study were as follows, an online TOEFL prediction test, focusing on grammar skill which was modified from Barron TOEFL exercise test, and a discourse completion task (DCT), consisting of 10 compliment respond items. Based on the research invitation, 20 second-year university students majoring in English education at Widya Mandira Catholic University, Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia who willingly participated in the research took the TOEFL prediction test online from the link provided. Students who achieved score 75-100 in test were categorized as high-proficiency students, while, students who attained score below 74 were considered as low-proficiency students. Then, the DCT survey was administered to these EFL groups and the native speaker group. Participants' responses were coded and analyzed using categories of compliment response framework proposed by Tran. The study found out that 5 native speakers applied more compliment upgrades and appreciation token in compliment response, whereas, Indonesian EFL students combined some compliment response strategies in their utterance, such as, appreciation token, return and compliment downgrade. There is no correlation between students' proficiency level and their CR responds as most EFL students in both groups produced less varied compliment responses and only 4 Indonesian high-proficiency students uttered more varied and were similar to the native speakers. The combination strategies used by EFL students can be explained as the influence of pragmatic transfer from L1 to L2; therefore, EFL teachers should explicitly teach more compliment response strategies to raise students' awareness on English culture and elaborate their speaking to be more competence as close to native speakers as possible.

Keywords : compliment response, English native speakers, Indonesian EFL students, speech acts

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