INVESTIGATING AGE–BASED COMPLIMENTS IN PERSIAN

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Abstract: The present study was an attempt to investigate differences in the use of compliments in Persian across age as a social variable. Data was gathered through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with imaginary situations in which 200 native Persian speakers were asked to put themselves in those situations and give compliments. The results indicated that the most frequently used compliment strategies by Persian native speakers were explicit unbound semantic formula and non-compliment strategies. However, the participants used 'other' strategies, future reference, contrast, and request strategies the least. The results also suggested the effect of age on the distribution of compliments. While the younger participants preferred non-compliment strategies the most, the older participants preferred explicit unbound semantic formula strategies the most. However, despite minor differences, all age-groups rarely tended to use future reference, contrast, request, and 'other' strategies. The results cashed light on the cultural and socio-cultural factors affecting the way people offer compliments.
Keywords: *Pragmatic competence, Speech acts, Compliments, Discourse Completion Task (DCT), Social variables*

INTRODUCTION

The last two decades have witnessed a plethora of research on pragmatics and its different aspects, especially speech acts. Speech acts appear to contribute significantly to construction of every day communication. The performance of speech acts entails sociocultural as well as sociolinguistic knowledge. Sociocultural knowledge refers to the ability to select appropriate speech act strategies with respect to social variables of age, gender of the speaker, social class and status in interactions. Sociolinguistic knowledge conforms to the skill at selection of appropriate linguistic forms, registers or levels of formality to express speech acts (Leech, 1983). Many people who communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries have experienced communication breakdowns with people from different first language (L1) backgrounds. Sociolinguists recognize that such intercultural miscommunication is partly due to different value systems underlying each speaker's L1 cultural group (Chick, 1996). Different value systems are reflected in speech acts; therefore, improper interpretation of a certain

speech act can cause misunderstanding of the speaker's intention.

Among different speech acts, complimenting has attracted the majority of researchers' attention. This speech act involves both compliments and compliment responses which are loaded with cultural and socio-cultural factors and therefore require a great deal of pragmatic insight to properly employ and understand them.

Compliments are speech acts that frequently occur in everyday conversations. Based on speech act theory proposed by Austin (1962), a speaker produces three types of act: first, the locutionary act referring to the act of uttering (phonemes, morphemes, sentences) and also saying something about the world. The second type of act is the illocutionary act referring to the speaker's intention realized in producing an utterance. Finally, the perlocutionary act is the third type of act referring to the intended effect of an utterance on the hearer. This classification reveals that in producing an utterance, not only we say something, but also we mean something from what we say, and we seek to have an influence on our interlocutor. On the basis of this classification, compliments are speech acts in which they can be seen as an illocutionary act.

Compliments are commonly defined as speech acts which explicitly or implicitly give credit to the addressee, for positive qualities which are appreciated by the speaker or even the whole speech community (Holmes, 1988). The most common topics which receive compliments are: possessions, appearance, skills and achievements (Holmes, 1988). Compliments are often used to initiate, maintain, or terminate a conversation and they can also indicate gratitude and facilitate the conversational interaction by reinforcing

the rapport between the interlocutors (Jin-pei, 2013). Wolfson (1983) metaphorically argues that compliments are used to "grease the social wheels" and thus to serve as "social lubricants" (p.89). However, although compliments seem to be simple at the first glance, they may act differently which leads to their complexity. While one of the most primary functions of compliments is to consolidate and increase solidarity between interlocutors (Manes & Wolfson, 1981), Brown & Levinson (1987) consider compliments primarily as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). That is, as Brown and Levinson (1987) assert, complimenting is a kind of positive politeness strategy which addresses the hearer's positive face with the complimenter noticing the complimentee's interests and needs; at the same time, it can be perceived as a FTA when the complimenter is understood to envy the addressee or try to obtain something belonging to the complimentee. Likewise, Holmes (1988) maintains that compliments may act both as positive politeness strategies increasing or consolidating solidarity between people as well as a threat to the negative face. In other words, compliments are a multi-faceted speech act with various types and features, and the acts can be regarded as either face-saving behavior or face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In fact, in some cultures, or even within the same culture in some situations, a compliment used by a complimenter makes the complimentee feel good; meanwhile, in the others, it connotes negatively that the complimenter aims to take advantage of the complimentee's good qualities, which possibly causes embarrassment. The actual effect of a compliment on the complimentee can sometimes be very different from what the complimenter

has in mind. For example, in some cultures it is common for people to compliment on others' appearance while in others it can be totally misinterpreted. Similarly, Golato (2005) believes that the same utterance can be compliment, interruption, reproach, sarcasm or tease in different cultures or situations. As Tang and Zhang exemplify, "while 'you look lovely today' may make an English woman's day, it may well make a Chinese woman uncomfortable and even somewhat resentful" (2009, p. 326).That is why the speech act of complimenting can be sometimes very complicated and confusing. Hence, how to pay appropriate compliments, how to identify them and how to give appropriate responses are important aspects of communicative competence that everyone in a given society needs to develop in order to avoid pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic failure (Brown, 2007). It seems that studying complimenting, as Yuan (2001) points out, can enhance our understanding of a people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and meaning of language use in a community.

On the other hand, learning a second language has become a considerable issue for many people who go across linguistic borders. Whatever they are looking for, they have to achieve a proper level of proficiency coupled with sociocultural norms in the second language to become a member of a new culture and simply to survive there (Long& Doughty, 2003). Persian can be a second or foreign language (PSL/PFL) whose pragmatic strategies may differ significantly from other languages. Thus, if the new member does not know the proper strategies used in, for instance, Persian requestive speech acts, his/her request will be rejected due to being considered as an eccentric, if not an impolite one. Persian, as Sharifian (2005)

asserts, has received a great deal of scholars' attention for its complex socio-cultural system. In fact, foreign language speakers not only should acquire grammatical competence to achieve linguistic accuracy, but also need to internalize sociolinguistic rules to help them use appropriate language. In addition, Wolfson (1989) claims that non-native speakers of a language are easy to forgive for an error in grammar or pronunciation; however, a pragmatic one can cause an offense. Native speakers of any language acquire such competence during their learning of language and use pragmatic rules unconsciously in interaction with others. Non-native speakers, however, as Bardovi-Harlig (2001) holds, differ significantly in their performance even if they have access to good amount of pragmatic input. Several researchers (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper 1997) claim that learners of high grammatical proficiency do not necessarily possess comparable pragmatic competence. Even grammatically advanced learners may use language inappropriately and show differences from target-language pragmatic norms.

Although lots of studies have been conducted so far on complimenting, only a few have worked on the relationship between different strategies of compliments used by native speakers across social variables in Persian. A majority of studies have attempted to compare different ways of complimenting and responding to compliments across different languages, communities, and cultures (see, for example, Huth, 2006; Jin-pei, 2013; Sadeghi & Zarei, 2013), or others have taken other factors such as gender differences in only compliment responses in English into consideration (see, for example, Heidari, Rezazadeh, & Eslami-Rasekh, 2009; Mohammad-

Bagheri, 2015). However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, there has been little research investigating compliments in Persian in relation to age. Therefore, the current study aims at investigating the relatively unexplored compliment strategies employed by native speakers of Persian across the social variable of age since there seems to be a gap in literature regarding this issue. The authors' hope is that the findings of this study can contribute to the interlanguage pragmatic competence of both Iranian learners of other languages and those who want to learn Persian as their second or foreign language.

Motivated by the above-discussed issues, the study thus tries to find out what major categories of compliments are used by native speakers of Persian and whether or not these features are influenced by their age.

METHOD

On the basis of the social variable, age, considered in the study, 200 Persian native speakers were selected from different age groups (50 under18, 50 between18-30, 50 between 31-40, and 50 above 40 years old). It has to be noted that100 of the participants were male and 100 were female from various occupations, educational levels, and cities of Iran including Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, Qom, Zanjan, Qazvin, and Urmia in order that they could be as representative of the target population, Iranian people, as possible. The sites from which participants were chosen were as diverse as possible, as follows: parks, streets, academic settings, family gatherings, markets, e-mails, and social networks.

One way to collect data in the area of pragmatics, as Mackey and Gass (2005) offer, is through Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Yuan (2002)

defines DCT as a written questionnaire that contains a number of hypothetical scenarios or situations used to elicit a certain speech act. Participants are required to supply, in writing, what they would say in real life if similar situations happen to them. It is worthwhile to note that data collected via this method do not always correspond to natural data (Aston, 1995; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). The way a researcher collects data from the participants may influence the results. DCTs are in a crucial sense metapragmatic in that they explicitly require participants not to conversationally interact, but to articulate what they believe would be situationally appropriate responses within possible, yet imaginary, interactional settings. This suggests that the DCT is a valid instrument for measuring not pragmatic action, but symbolic action (Golato, 2003, p. 92). In fact, data collected through a DCT can be different from those collected thorough other methodological approaches (e.g., recording spontaneous speech).

Despite their limitations, DCTs have been widely used as controlled elicitation tools to collect data in the fields of pragmatics, intercultural communication, and second language acquisition, mainly because their simplicity of use and high degree of control over variables lead to easy replicability (Yuan, 2002). Likewise, Golato (2003) offers some advantages of DCTs over other methods of data collection such as allowing the researcher to control for certain variables (i.e. age of respondents, features of the situation, etc.) and to quickly gather large amounts of data without any need for transcription, thus making it easy to statistically compare responses from different speakers.

Taking DCTs' advantages and disadvantages into consideration, the present study employed a DCT developed by Yuan (2002) and translated into Persian to elicit data from the participants. The current Persian DCT was checked, modified, and verified for their authenticity of language by several native speakers of Persian. It started by asking demographic questions regarding the participants' gender and age. The DCT questionnaire was designed to explore the possible compliment strategies used by Persian native speakers. Positive characteristics of the complimentee such as appearance, possession, kindness, and ability are common objects of compliment (Yuan, 2002). As Table 1 indicates, eight topics or scenarios which aimed to reveal such characteristics were described to the participants so that they could have a clear picture of what the topic is, and what the relationship between the speakers is. The participants were asked to play the role of the complimenters and pay compliments.

Table 1. *Topics of compliments in DCT questionnaire*

Context	Topic	Object of Compliment
1	Your classmate helped earthquake victims.	Kindness and Generosity
2	Your friend fixed your laptop.	Ability
3	Your friend listened to your problems.	Kindness
4	Your classmate made good presentation.	Ability
5	Your friend bought a new cell phone.	Possession
6	Your friend is wearing a fashionable shirt.	Attire
7	Your classmate got a new laptop.	Possession
8	Your neighbor is wearing a new shirt.	Attire

The procedures followed in this study were divided into two main stages. First, based on the social variable, age, considered in the study, 200 male and female Persian native speakers living in different cities of Iran were selected. In the second stage, the Persian DCT was made available to the participants in a variety of ways, including direct encounters, electronic communication, friends, registered posting, and relatives who were given adequate time to complete the questionnaires at their own pace. The collected date were organized and prepared for further analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study employed a framework proposed by Yuan (2002) to analyze different compliment patterns used by the participants. The participants' responses to the situations provided were divided into three types: Compliment, Non-compliment and Opt out (see Table 2). According to Yuan (2002), semantic formulas for compliments can be divided into two types: unbound semantic formulas and bound semantic formulas. Unbound semantic formulas refer to those expressions that can function independently as compliments, while bound semantic formulas refer to those responses that cannot be considered as compliments by themselves but must be attached to or co-occur with one of the unbound semantic formulas to be interpreted as part of a C. For example, in context 5 (buying a new cell phone), a response from one participant was "Where did you buy this?" This response is not regarded as a valid compliment because it

is more of a question seeking an answer of place of shopping rather than a C. It must co-occur with a bound semantic formula to be interpreted as part of a C. Unbound semantic formulas can be further divided into two sub-types: explicit compliments and implicit compliments. Explicit compliments refer to compliments outside of context, being realized by a small set of conventional formula (Herbert, 1997). Explicit compliments are also defined as those responses that carry at least one positive semantic value (Jin-pei, 2013). Implicit compliments are those in which the value judgment is presupposed and/or implicated by Gricean maxims (Herbert, 1997). Therefore, the positive value of an expression can be inferred from what is said in a particular situation. Bound semantic formulas include explanation, information question, future reference, contrast, advice and request. Explanation alone cannot be regarded as a compliment. But it co-occurs with an explicit semantic formula. Information question is used in addition to the explicit

semantic formula by the complimenter to ask more information about the complimentee's qualification. A complimenter can use future reference to note that the complimentee will have a great future due to his/her good quality. Contrast refers to the case that the complimenter compares or contrasts the qualification of the complimentee to that of another one. Advice refers to the case that besides giving a C, the complimenter also gives advice to the complimentee. In some contexts, the complimenter makes some requests to the complimentee which is referred to the request compliment strategy.

On the other hand, non-compliment refers to responses that cannot be seen as compliments, be it either mere expression of thanks, or bound semantic formula occurring on their own, or replies that do not carry any positive meanings. Finally, opt out refers to the cases where the participants indicate that "I would not say anything" when a compliment is expected in that situation (Jin-pei, 2013).

Table 2. *Yuan's (2002) framework of compliment strategies*

Compliment (C) Strategies		Context	Example
Unbound Semantic Formula	Explicit C	Your friend bought a new cell phone.	What a nice cell phone you have.
	Implicit C		I wish I could have a cell phone like yours.
Bound Semantic Formula	Explanation	Your friend fixed your laptop.	I saw how difficult it was to fix my laptop.
	Information Question		Where did you learn to fix it?
	Future Reference		You have a bright future in fixing laptops.
	Contrast		I think you are more helpful than your brother.
	Advice		You'd better open a laptop store.
	Request		Can you check my cell phone too?
Non-compliment		Your friend listened to your problems.	Sorry to take your time.
Opt-out		Your neighbor is wearing a new shirt.	I would say nothing.

To address the major compliment types in Persian, the present study elicited 1598 different compliments from 200 Persian native speakers in different situations. As indicated in Table 3, the most frequently used compliment strategy by Persian native speakers was explicit unbound semantic formula. It accounts for 35.16% of the 1598 compliment tokens elicited through DCT. This finding corroborates Yuan's (2002) observation that people tend to make direct and positive statements when they pay compliments. Elsewhere, Jin-pei (2013) in his study reached the similar result that the most frequently used compliment strategy by Philippine English speakers was explicit semantic formula. Such finding also lends credence to that of Herbert (1991), who studied Polish compliments and reported that more compliments were explicit and adjectival ones such as 'nice', 'great', and 'lovely'. Moreover, it is in harmony with Yu's (2005) finding that Chinese and Americans offered compliments directly rather than indirectly. Yu went on to argue that compliments reflected genuine admiration among the Chinese people rather than solidarity; therefore, they tended to compliment on the ability of addressees.

The high frequency of explicit compliments may be attributed to the fact that people, including Iranians, usually employ compliments to have a positive effect on interpersonal relations; therefore, they try the most explicit ones to strengthen solidarity. For example, participants made use of the following compliments which explicitly valued the complimentees' positive qualities (in all the examples, the italics are Persian and the non-italics are their English equivalents):

1. *Che mobile bahali dari!*
   What a nice cell phone you have!
2. *Kheili khoshgel shodi emshab!*
   You are so pretty tonight!

However, Persian speakers often tend to offer compliments whether they really admire the qualities of addressees or not since the truthfulness of compliments was less important than *Adab* or politeness and *Ehteram* or respect. As a consequence, they prefer to pay more explicit compliments to express their politeness and respect more.

On the other hand, it is worthwhile to recall that the kind of data collection technique used in a study influences the results. The DCT used in the present study might favor the production of compliments which were direct explicit formulas. But if one adopts a different methodological approach (e.g., recording spontaneous speech), results will be probably different. In this regard, the relatively frequent use of explicit compliments is not supported by Barnlund and Araki's (1985) finding that Japanese people tended to offer compliments nonverbally and implicitly rather than verbally and explicitly. Such discrepancy can be explicated through both cross-linguistic and cross-cultural differences as well as research methodology differences. In the case of the latter, while the present study used questionnaires to elicit data, Barnlund and Araki conducted questionnaires as well as interviews. These two data collection techniques might result in producing different data.

The second most frequently used strategy was non-compliments which accounts for 27.72% of the total responses. These findings are in line with those of Yuan (2002) and Jin-pei (2013), who found that the most frequently used compliment strategies by the participants were explicit semantic formula and then non-compliments. The relatively high frequency of non-compliments, i.e., not paying compliments when the situation calls for

them, may be due to the fact that the respondents are not able to distinguish expression of thanks from expression of compliments since there are no sharp borders between the two things. On the other side, the point is not only that respondents are not able but that in real situations there might be an intrinsic ambiguity or that the respondents intend to use an avoidance strategy. Participants, for example, simply tended to thank rather than pay compliments when compliments were expected. In the following case, it seems more common for more people to thank the interlocutor because he/she has been listening to them for a long time than to compliment his/her kindness. Hence, it is important to consider a role that topics of compliments have to play in determining types of compliments.

3. *Merci ke be harfam gosh dadi!*
   Thank you for listening to me!
4. *Dastet dard nakone!*
   Thank you!

However, the participants made use of other strategies, including offer, prayer, and blame, future reference and contrast strategies the least which amounted to 0.43%, 1.37%, and 1.37% of the total tokens, respectively. These findings are consistent with Yuan's (2002) and Jin-pei's (2013), who reported that other strategies (such as joke, blame, and offer), future reference, contrast, advice, and request were among the least popular compliment strategies. In fact, the low frequency of such strategies is related to the fact that they may have more potentiality to function both as positive politeness strategies consolidating solidarity between people as well as a threat to the negative face more than other strategies, namely, explicit ones. Use of ironic or ambiguous sentences as compliments, for example, could simply lead to misunderstanding and miscommunication especially when the interlocutors are less familiar with each other. As Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, they can be understood or misunderstood as FTAs rather than face-saving behavior.

Table 3. *Distribution of compliments across participants*

Compliment Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Explicit	562	35.16%
Implicit	111	6.94%
Explanation	91	5.69%
Information Question	148	9.26%
Future Reference	22	1.37%
Contrast	22	1.37%
Advice	57	3.56%
Request	36	2.25%
Non-compliment	443	27.72%
Opt-out	99	6.19%
Other	7	0.43%
Total	1598	100%

The next area of investigation aimed to see whether different age groups would affect the type of compliments. To answer this question, 1598 compliments were collected from four different age groups. As Table 4 shows, different age groups also affected the type of compliment strategies among

the participants. Younger participants (the under-18 group) used non-compliment and explicit strategies the most, accounting for 35.76% and 25.69%, respectively. The least frequently used strategies by the participants under 18 were future reference and contrast, making up about 0.50% and 0.75% of the total tokens, respectively. The popularity of non-compliments among younger participants may be due to the fact that they cannot distinguish expression of thanks from expression of compliments or they intentionally use an avoidance strategy. Another reason is that they think that using expression of thanks would suffice for these situations and using other strategies would function as FTAs. They believe that compliments can be an act of judgment which makes addressees embarrassed, especially if their addressees are different from them in terms of age, gender, or social class.

In addition, in the compliment exchanges, explicit unbound semantic formula strategies occurred most frequently among other age groups including the 18-30, the 31-40, and the above-40 groups, accounting for 36.88%, 44.41%, and 33.24%, respectively. The second most frequently used strategy by the 18-30, the 31-40, and the above-40 groups was non-compliment which amounted to 25.24%, 22.08%, and 28.05%, respectively. As discussed earlier, most people prefer to make more direct and positive statements when they give compliments to express more solidarity and politeness. That is why people above 18 used explicit semantic formulas to offer compliments. People under 18 are perhaps less confident and sociable to pay compliments explicitly and prefer to only thank their interlocutors for positive qualities. Another reason behind the relative popularity of non-compliments among

participants may lie in a fact that the older participants usually employed multiple expressions to compliment when the situation calls for compliments. They first began with expressions of gratitude and went on with direct and positive statements. For example, one participant made use of the following expressions simultaneously to thank his addressee and value his ability in fixing laptop to show politeness and develop solidarity:

5. *Dastet dard nakone. Vaghean mokhet kar mikone. Kheily bahooshi.*
   Thank you. Your brain really works. You are so intelligent.

On the other hand, the between-18-and-30 participants made use of other (0.49%) and future reference (1.23%) strategies the least. The between-31-and-40 participants employed other strategies (0.24%) and contrast (1.45%) the least. Finally, the participants who were above 40 years old never used other strategies (0.00%) and used request (1.03%) the least. It is worth recalling that, irrespective of age, such strategies are more likely to act as either face-saving or face-threatening behavior than others such as explicit compliments; therefore, people rarely tend to use them. Another reason of low percentage of such strategies may be again related to the way that data were collected. DCT questionnaires often ask participants to pay compliments in different situations. Therefore, they simply prefer to offer more explicit compliments when questionnaires call for compliments than compliments which are perceived as advice, request, etc. and thus as FTAs. For example, such strategies would be employed more if the study, in addition to questionnaires, used other data collection techniques.

Table 4. *Distribution of compliments across age groups*

Compliment Strategy	Frequency				Percentage			
	-18	18-30	31-40	+40	-18	18-30	31-40	+40
Explicit	102	149	183	128	25.69%	36.88%	44.41%	33.24%
Implicit	40	25	15	31	10.07%	6.18%	3.64%	8.05%
Explanation	11	23	28	29	2.77%	5.69%	6.79%	7.53%
Information Question	37	48	33	30	9.31%	11.88%	8.00%	7.79%
Future Reference	2	5	8	7	.50%	1.23%	1.94%	1.81%
Contrast	3	6	6	7	.75%	1.48%	1.45%	1.81%
Advice	10	16	17	14	2.51%	3.96%	4.12%	3.63%
Request	15	10	7	4	3.77%	2.47%	1.69%	1.03%
Non-compliment	142	102	91	108	35.76%	25.24%	22.08%	28.05%
Opt-out	31	18	23	27	7.80%	4.45%	5.58%	7.01%
Other	4	2	1	0	1.00%	0.49%	0.24%	0.00%
Total	397	404	412	385	100%	100%	100%	100%

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to investigate compliments in Persian, in general, and the effect of age on the distribution of them, in particular. Generally, Persian native speakers tended to use explicit unbound semantic formula to compliment. However, the participants rarely used 'other' strategies, including offer, prayer, and blame. Taking the age of the participants into account, younger participants used non-compliments the most and future reference strategy the least. In addition, the most frequently used strategies by the participants above 18 was explicit unbound semantic formula ones. At the same time, the between-18-and-30 and the between-31-and-40 groups hardly ever employed 'other' strategies and the participants who were above 40 years old never used such strategies.

The findings confirmed that language and culture were closely interrelated. They also corroborate those of other studies suggesting that languages differ from one another in terms of speech acts and their linguistic realizations (Holmes & Brown, 1987; Wolfson, 1982). Every language speakers' compliments need to be analyzed in their social and cultural contexts. Speech events in general, complimenting in particular, are mainly dependent on shared beliefs and values of the speech community coded into communicative patterns, and thus could not be interpreted apart from social and cultural context (Halliday, 2003; Yousefvand, 2010, 2012).

On the whole, the findings have revealed that Persian speakers tend to make direct and positive statements when they give compliments. However, the high frequency of non-compliments among Persian speakers may be due to the fact that they fail to distinguish the speech act of gratitude from that of compliment giving since the boundaries between them are blurred. Hence, the nature and the felicity conditions of compliments should be focused and the difference between compliments and gratitude should be explained. If foreigners are consciously aware of the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic similarities and differences between their native languages and Persian, negative effects of transfer will most probably be avoided. Findings can also have some implications for foreigners who particularly wish to interact with Persian

speakers. Foreigners should pay attention to different cultural concepts governing compliments in Persian. Compliments in Persian are particularly employed to have a positive effect on interpersonal relations; hence, they need to be handled appropriately for the outcome actually to be positive. Iranian people, like many people around the world, seem to be very careful about status, *Adab* or politeness, and *Abero* or face and try to show their status-consciousness in their interaction.

Findings of the study can be helpful to the understanding of compliment strategies in Persian, especially the parts in which social variables interact with them. The findings may shed light on the pragmatic knowledge of the respondents and the cultural and socio-cultural factors which affect the way people compliment. Such results can present valuable insight into the cultural norms which dominate any society. Therefore, studying complimenting can enhance our understanding of a people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and meaning of language use in a community (Yuan, 2001).

Also, they can be helpful for those teachers whose students are PSL/PFL learners. Teachers can use the results of the study in their syllabi to teach them the socio-linguistic differences existing between Persian and their students' languages. Furthermore, the findings may also provide materials developers of second languages with insight into effective ways to promote sociolinguistic competence in second language learners (Billmyer, 1990). Speech acts and other pragmatic features of language should be high on the agenda. Both teachers and material developers are strongly recommended to pay more attention to this aspect of language.

As any similar study, this study had some limitations. The main limitations of the study were its number of participants, variation of participants, and data collection method. There were only 200 male and female participants from different age groups. It also used only a DCT to collect data. So, further research can be conducted on a larger scale and with a variety of participants from different social variables, for example occupations or educational levels, and with a variety of compliment topics, and should also make use of various tools for collecting data, for example recording spontaneous speech, since data elicited through a DCT will be different from those elicited through other techniques. Last but not least, all the situations in the DCT mainly concerned the interaction between two friends. Further research can also consider other contextual variables such as power, gender, and familiarity.

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