Tanulmány

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Gender differences in complimenting strategies with special reference to the compliment response patterns of Hungarian undergraduate students

Abstract

After a brief overview of the literature on complimenting strategies, we present the results of research aimed at finding gender-based differences in compliment response strategies based on Hungarian undergraduate students' responses to discourse completion tasks. We found that in native language contexts, the patterns of the use of macro compliment response strategies are similar to those in previous research based on native speakers of English, however, female respondents participating in our research used more Agreement macro CRs in response to female compliments than to male ones, while male respondents offered Agreement macro strategies to male and female compliments with close to equal frequency. We have also found gender-based differences in the patterns of micro CR strategies as well as differences between Hungarian and EFL responses that are either due to misperceptions about native English norms or the lack of positive pragmatic transfer.
Keywords: cross-cultural pragmatics, gender-preferential differentiation, compliment response strategies

1   Introduction

Differences in the use of pragmatic strategies in general and compliments/compliment responses in particular have increasingly been in the focus of research especially as "mirrors of cultural values" (Manes 1983). Since complimenting strategies are influenced by and associated with social as well as cognitive factors, it has intrigued researchers from a variety of diverse fields, including Gricean pragmatics, Relevance Theory, psycholinguistics, anthropology, sociolinguistics, etc.

As far as research into the structural aspects of compliment behaviour is concerned, Wolfson and Manes (1980) were the first[1] to examine the formulaic patters of complimenting, both on a syntactic and semantic level. Later, Janet Holmes (1986 and 1988) put forth the functions of compliments using Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory as a framework. As for compliment responses, the first extensive study and categorization was

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[1]   In the relevant Anglo-Saxon literature.

performed in Herbert's (1986 and 1998) research, who based his taxonomy on Pomerantz's (1978) categories.

A great number of the studies into compliment behaviour have concentrated on the general evaluation of compliments and compliment responses, however, the use of various compliment response strategies poses more important questions since they are determined by cultural values and norms. Herbert (1997), for example, proposed that "compliment events provide interesting information on socio-cultural values and organization" (1997: 497). In other words, complimenting reflects the relation between the participants' linguistic choices and their socio-cultural norms. As a result, the use of compliments by specific socio-cultural groups may be at variance, reflecting the multifunctional dimension of these speech acts. One of the most important cross-cultural variations is the difference one can observe between the strategies used by men and women. Holmes (1988 and 1995) explored the fundamental linguistic differences between the two sexes, including the various techniques of the speech act of complimenting. In her New Zealand data, she detected that compliments are greatly influenced by the gender of the speaker. New Zealand women are prone to taking compliments as expressions of solidarity, whereas men do not always consider them positively and perceive such acts as potentially face-threatening, as is clear by the manner in which they respond to them.

As Pomerantz (1978) has noted, compliment responses are often constrained by additional considerations that are external to complimenting behavior per se. The most notable example is the avoidance of self praise that usually affects the formulation of compliment responses. Such communicative dilemmas and their gender-preferential variations are at the core of the present study.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the first part we introduce some of the fundamental notions of complimenting and provide a critical review of the literature on the forms, functions and topics of compliments and compliment responses with special reference to gender-based differences. In the course of the review presented in the first two sections, we will also be highlighting the main criteria and categories that will function as bases for the empirical part of the research presented in the remaining part of the paper, where we test the validity of the categories introduced in previous sections in the form of a survey on the compliment response patters used by native speakers of Hungarian both in their English and Hungarian discourse completion task output.

The ultimate goal of the empirical part of our research will be aimed at answering the following two research questions:

1. What are the most frequent strategies of responding to compliments that are used by Hungarian undergraduate students?
2. How does gender influence the choice of response strategies in undergraduate students' (native) Hungarian discourse and in their English (EFL, i.e. non-native) discourse?

By way of conclusion, we will discuss some of the theoretical and practical implications of our research and will provide directions for further research.

The speech act of complimenting – definitions, formal-functional characteristics and topics

Compliments are utterances that express polite behaviour and convey to interlocutors (usually friends, partners and acquaintances) how much their ideas are valued: complimenting is, therefore, crucial to the formation of mutual solidarity. The aim of complimenting is to attribute something praiseworthy to the addressee(s) so that they can experience being liked and appreciated. According to Holmes a compliment is "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 the hearer" (1988: 446). Hobbs (2003) proposes that a compliment is a "speech act which explicitly or implicitly bestows credit upon the addressee for some possession, skill, characteristic, or the like, that is positively evaluated by the speaker and addressee." (2003: 249)

Brown and Levinson (1987) make reference to compliments as positive politeness strategies which are directed at (1) approving of the hearer's appearance, personality, possessions and needs as well as at (2) his or her desire of being treated as a member of a group rather than as a single individual.

As for the formal characteristics of compliments, it was Manes and Wolfson (1980) who first studied the syntactic structure of compliments in their American English data and pointed to the formulaic nature of compliments and the limited range of lexical items used in performing the speech act of complimenting. They identified three syntactic patterns which accounted for 85% of their data:

No.1 NP is/looks (intensifier) ADJ.
e.g. "That shirt is so nice", "It looks so comfortable."

No.2 I (intensifier) like/love NP.
e.g. "I really like those shoes", "I love your hair".

No.3 PRO is (intensifier) (a) ADJ NP.
e.g. "This was really a great meal.", "That's really a nice piece of work."

The remaining 15% of the compliments in Manes and Wolfson's (1981) data followed one of the following patterns:

No. 4 You (V) (a) (really) ADJ NP
e.g. "You did a good job."
No.5 You (V) NP (really) ADV (PP)
e.g. "You cook really deliciously."
No. 6 You have (a) really ADJ NP
e.g. "You have such a great figure!"
No.7 What (a) ADJ NP
e.g. "What a great job you did!"
No.8 ADJ NP
e.g. "Good work!"

No. 9 Isn't NP ADJ!
e.g. "Isn't your work praiseworthy!"

Holmes and Brown's (1987) New Zealand data based on 200 compliments also demonstrate similar syntactic and semantic patterns. In their data the first three syntactic structures (listed above) accounted for 78% of the total number of compliments, while compliment structure No.1 occurred in 48% of the cases. On the lexical level, they also found that the five most frequently occurring adjectives in compliments are *nice, good, beautiful, lovely* and *wonderful*. Most of the non-adjectival compliments are realized through the use of a few semantically positive verbs, such as *like, love, enjoy, admire* and *be impressed by*, with *like* and *love* accounting for 80% of the New Zealand data compared to 86% of the compliments paid by American speakers.

Similarly to the categories that have been proposed to describe the formal properties of complimenting strategies, a small number of clearly defined socio-pragmatic functions have been identified. According to Manes and Wolfson, the most important function of compliments is to establish, reinforce and maintain solidarity and social rapport, as well as to ensure that the interaction proceeds smoothly between the speaker and the addressee (Manes & Wolfson 1980: 124). Holmes (1988) holds a similar view and proposes that compliments function as "social lubricates" which "increase or consolidate the solidarity" (1988: 447) between the interlocutors. She, however, proposes two additional functions of compliment exchanges: compliments can serve as politeness strategies (pre-sequences) before face-threatening acts, what is more, compliments themselves may even function as face threatening acts, for instance, as signs of the complimenter's jealousy with regard to the complimentee's possessions. This illustrates the possible negative functions of compliments and the fact that they might also convey a hint of sarcasm or insult that results in the interlocutor's loss of face. Wolfson (1983) points out that compliments are also used as conversation starters and, in particular contexts, they can strengthen or weaken other speech acts such as criticism, apologies, greetings and the expression of gratitude.

Although the core function of compliments is to maintain harmony, (re)establish social relationship and promote people's good feelings, because of the great variety of additional functions, the interlocutors are, from time to time, likely to misinterpret each other's intentions. As it appears, most researchers agree that the misinterpretation of the functions of compliments can be most frequently traced back to gender-based differences in complimenting behaviour. Both Herbert's (1998) and Holmes' (1988) investigations point out that women tend to give and receive more compliments than men and apply compliments as ways of establishing solidarity, whereas men are more inclined to view compliments as face threatening acts.

The topics of complimenting strategies are, for the most part, centred on the following areas: appearance, possessions, performance, ability and skills. According to Wolfson, in American English there are generally two topics that are utilized in everyday conversations, namely "those having to do with appearance and those which comment on ability" (1983: 90). She also states that Americans are more likely to comment on personal appearance, such as new clothes and hair-dos. Holmes' (1986) New Zealand data showed that the general topics of compliments in New Zealand English are similar to those in American English. Although different researchers may prefer to use different terms such as appearance, possessions,

performance, skill, ability, work, personality and friendship, these topics can be grouped into two broad categories: appearance and performance.

Appearance includes "outward or visible aspect of a person or thing, something that appears and could be seen such as clothes and hair" (Holmes 1995: 40). Marpaung (2005) summarizes different aspects of appearance as topics for complimenting and states that appearance involves an "outward show; pretence; expression; face; figure; form; image; look; looks; manner and impression" (Marpaung: 2005, online resource).

Examples include the following: "You look really beautiful tonight", "Your dress is so elegant", "You are so pretty."

In our view, possession, i.e. the state of having or possessing something[2] results from the complimentee's achievements, and, as such, this topic can be subsumed under performance. Examples include "It's a very nice house that you have", or "Your new car is great."

Manes (1983) states that ability[3] is a "quality of something produced through the addressee's skill or effort, a skilfully played game, a good meal" (1983: 99). It also refers to the quality of being able to do something, especially to the physical, mental, financial, or legal power to achieve something. An example for complimenting on a particular aspect of one's performance is "You speak excellent English."

Compliment responses: macro and micro strategies and gender-based differences

Having discussed the forms, functions and topics for complimenting strategies, i.e. the first pair parts of compliment exchanges, we now turn to the second pair parts, that is, compliment responses. Szili (2004: 156) categorizes compliment responses as expressives, i.e. utterances that convey the "speaker's attitude to a certain state of affairs specified (if at all) in the propositional content" (Searle 1975: 357 quoted in Szili 2004: 156). Most researchers also agree that responding to compliments usually poses problems for the receiver because of a conflict between the receiver's wish to avoid disagreement, and, at the same time, a wish to refrain from expressing or implying self-praise (cf. e.g. Grossi: 2009 or Cheng: 2001). In terms of Leech's (1983) theory of the Politeness Principle, this dilemma can be formulated as a clash between the maxim of agreement and the maxim of modesty. Consequently, as Herbert (1998) concludes, the ideal response to a compliment is to accept it in a way that does not imply self-praise and/or expresses modesty.

Most recent studies identify a range of macro and micro level compliment responses (henceforth CRs) and base their taxonomies on Pomerantz's (1978) research. Holmes (1988),[4] for example identifies Accept, Reject and Deflect or Evade as broad categories, while Cheng (2011) identifies three macro level CRs (acceptance, evasion and a combination of these two) and a range of micro CRs such as appreciation, downgrading, credit-shifting, ignoring, etc. After reviewing the four taxonomies cited above (Pomerantz: 1978, Holmes: 1988, Herbert: 1998 and Cheng: 2011) as well as applying them to a test corpus, the authors of the present study agreed that it is Herbert's (1998) model that best suits our research design and which provides us with indexing options that are most directly applicable to the data we gained.

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2   In the case of compliments, especially new items, cf. Marpaung (2005).
3   Also to be subsumed under performance in the empirical part of our research.
4   Szili (2004: Chapter 7) also uses a modified version of Holmes' (1988) taxonomy.

Therefore, at this point, we will briefly present Herbert's (1998) taxonomy of micro and macro level CRs, which will provide the basis for the empirical research described in the following sections.

Herbert (1998) proposes the macro CRs of Agreement, Nonagreement and Request Interpretation and twelve micro CRs as illustrated in the following table:

Agreement	
Types	*Examples*
Appreciation token: a verbal or non-verbal acceptance of the compliment.	Thank you! [nod]
Comment acceptance: addressee accepts the complement and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic.	Yeah, this is my favourite, too!
Praise Upgrade: addressee accepts the compliment and contributes to the force of the compliment.	Really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?
Comment History: addressee offers a comment on the object of the compliment, usually some information about how s/he has acquired it.	I bought it for the trip to Arizona.
Reassignment: addressee agrees with the compliment, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person.	My mother gave it to me.
Return: the praise is shifted or returned to the addresser.	So is yours.

Nonagreement	
Types	*Examples*
Scale down: addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated.	It is really quite old.
Question: addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment.	Do you really think so?
Disagreement: addressee asserts that the object of the compliment is not praiseworthy.	I hate it.
Qualification: Addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with *though, but, well* etc.	Well, it is all right but Kim's is nicer.
No Acknowledgement: addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment. The addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment or gives no response.	topic shift/no response

Request Interpretation	
Addressee interprets the utterance as a request rather than a simple compliment.[5]	You wanna borrow it?

Table 1: Types of CR strategies (adopted from Herbert: 1998)

As far as gender differences are concerned, we have mentioned above that, according to previous research, women, for the most part, interpret compliments as strategies of positive politeness, whereas men often perceive them as face-threatening acts. More specifically, Holmes (1988) found the following gender-based differences in the perception and production of compliment exchanges:

- women compliment each other more often than they compliment men or than men compliment each other,
- women strengthen the positive force of the compliment more often than men,
- men attenuate or hedge the force of the compliment more often than women,
- women compliment each other on appearance more often than on any other topic,
- women of higher status are more likely to receive compliments than higher status men,
- men's evasive CRs take the form of marked avoidance strategies more often than women's evasive CRs do (Holmes 1988: 462-463).

The above findings seem to confirm the generalization that men tend to orient themselves to the referential functions of speech, whereas women focus on the social and affective functions, as observed by, for example, Holmes (1992), who suggests that this general difference seems to be behind gender-based differences in the performance of a whole range of other speech acts and phatic utterances, such as the expression of gratitude, sympathy, jokes, friendly address forms and other positive politeness strategies.

Additional research into complimenting behaviour (cf. e.g. Wolfson 1983, Herbert 1998) also confirms that women receive more compliments than men do and that compliments between women occur the most frequently. It is interesting to consider that this fact might contribute to men's perceptions of compliments as patronizing or expressing superior status. Tannen (1990) explains this phenomenon with reference to the notion of framing. By framing an utterance, speakers send meta-messages about their reactions to what others say and do and imply closeness or status difference as well. A simple polite gesture, such as letting a woman enter a room, might convey or might be perceived as conveying the meta-message of asserting control. According to Tannen, it is the men who are in a position to grant women permission to go first so women in this sense are framed as subordinates. By the same token, compliments, if perceived as implying dominance and superiority, might cause embarrassment and discomfort for men, which might explain the finding that men pay and receive compliments less frequently.

As far as the forms of the compliments are concerned, previous research shows that, in general terms, women use more elaborate and personalized compliment forms, while men

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[5]   According to Herbert (1998), since the addressee does not perceive the previous utterance as a compliment such responses are not, technically speaking, compliment responses. We will later argue with this contention in light of the results of our own empirical research.

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prefer neutral and impersonal forms. Herbert (1998) noted that in his data 60% of the compliments given by men were impersonal statements and the 83% of female interaction utilized personal patterns.

With respect to the topic of the compliments, it is generally found that women are complimented more often on their appearance than men. In Holmes's (1988) New Zealand corpus, 57% of all the compliments were related to aspects of the receiver's looks. Women give compliments about appearance more than men do and women receive more compliments on appearance and ability than men. The predominance of appearance compliments in women's interaction supports the assumption that women consider them as solidarity-oriented speech acts. Appearance compliments between men, on the other hand, are a very delicate issue, since they might be interpreted as implying that the sender and/or the receiver of the compliment is homosexual. This is succinctly put in Paulston and Tucker (2003): "to compliment another man on his hair, his clothes, or his body is an extremely face threatening thing to do, both for the speaker and the hearer", since one has to be careful "not to send the wrong signals" (2003: 189).

Consequently, men tend to compliment each other on possessions. However, possession-based remarks may be, once again interpreted in a variety of ways, for example, they might be perceived as expressions of a desire for a particular object, thus, once again, the possibility of experiencing compliments as potential FTAs is present.

With respect to the surface realizations of the speech act of complimenting, Holmes (1988) claimed that women use the formula **I (really) like NP** (e.g. "I really like your hair") more often than **PRO is a (really)** ADJ NP (e.g. "That is a nice bag."). Men use both formulas with equal frequency. The major difference in the syntactic form of compliments occur in the form of **What (a) ADJ NP** (e.g. "What a lovely dress!") which appear in the speech of women with markedly greater frequency. The literature on gender differences in language behavior suggests, as Herbert (1998) notes, that women tend to employ more personal focus than men in their conversations and compliments are no exception to this tendency. First person compliments predominate among female speakers regardless of the sex of the addressee (cf. "I like your hair" predominantly used by women as opposed to "Nice haircut" mostly preferred by men).

The study of compliment responses provides an even more challenging issue in gender-based differences in complimenting. In Herbert's (1998) American corpus the most common responses to compliments by both sexes belong to the macro CR category Acceptance, however, there are some cases when the interlocutors responded with Qualification. It was relatively rare to reject a compliment: less than 5% of CRs conveyed disagreement. Also in his data, women were more likely to agree with the semantic content of a compliment than men. On the whole, gender-based differences in compliment responses were minor in Herbert's study. Women tended to disagree more often than men, which might be interpreted by the assumption that there is more social pressure on women to be modest. Women also feel more pressure to acknowledge a compliment than men, even if they cannot accept it. Men, on the other hand, often avoid CRs, for example by ignoring the compliment or changing the subject. Herbert (1998) also notes that men are more likely to reject a compliment from a woman than from a man.

Bolton (1994) introduces the concept of Lax Acknowledgement in her study of CRs. Such CRs (usually performed by men) included non-verbal sign such as nodding or avoiding eye-

contact. Other types of Lax Acknowledgements included non-verbal vocal responses, for instance, an embarrassed laugh as well as the use of the discourse marker *well* as a complete CR.

Empirical research: rationale, methods, research procedure

In the following, we will present the results of empirical research into compliment responses used by Hungarian undergraduate students and compare them with the findings of previous research.

Our first research question was whether or not there are gender-based preferences on the macro level of compliment responses in Hungarian native speakers' (henceforth HNSs) native Hungarian and English as a Foreign Language responses, respectively. The second research question concerned finding differences on the micro level, i.e. in terms of different compliment response types of HNS undergraduate students and relating them to the gender of the respondent in an attempt to reinforce or reconsider the validity and relevance of earlier studies as well as to find out if there is any (negative or positive) transfer in terms of CR strategies used by native Hungarian students in their use of English as a Foreign Language.

The participants in the present study were selected from students of the Institute of English and American Studies at the University of Debrecen, Hungary to ensure that subjects had a similar educational background, shared the same socio-cultural norms and constituted a relatively homogeneous age group (18-23). All subjects were HNSs studying EFL at undergraduate level. In order to maximize compliment responses, which occur more frequently among people who are acquaintances and are of equal social status, we chose 38 female and 19 male students who, for the most part,[6] attended the same English seminars and classes.

The survey was designed in a way that allowed insight into the relation of gender[7] to the use of various CR strategies: the subjects were asked to provide two types of responses, first, a response to a compliment paid by a person of the same gender, second, a response to the same type of compliment that came from the opposite sex.

The data was collected via questionnaires/written discourse completion tasks (henceforth, DCTs). As Lorenzo-Dus (2001: 111ff) argues, there are two advantages for using DCTs: it enables the researcher to obtain relevant and sufficient data in a relatively short period of time and it also provides reliable information about the respondents' perceived norms of socially appropriate communicative strategies.[8] A major weakness of the DCT method is implicit in the second of the above advantages: it elicits communicative strategies that are perceived to be appropriate by respondents and which, thus, might be markedly different from naturally-occurring responses in non-experimental settings.

In addition to the advantages proposed by Lorenzo-Dus (2001), this method enabled us to control the situational factors that were targeted i.e. the gender of respondent/interlocutor,

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[6]   The research was performed in two stages, which were two academic years apart from each other: in the first stage 30 (15 female and 15 male) subjects were asked to complete the questionnaires, in the second stage an additional 23 female and 4 male subjects were surveyed.

[7]   Both the complimenter's and the complimentee's gender.

[8]   The most extensive Hungarian study into CRs to date – Szili (2004: Chapter 7) – also uses the DCT method, for similar reasons.

topic of compliment and the language in which the response was given: the DCT design enabled us to set up the contexts in which the compliments occurred and, thus, made it is possible for us to examine and compare the respondents' choices both in English and Hungarian. Moreover, participants had sufficient time to think about their responses and thus we could concentrate on their EFL competence and minimize performance errors.

The structure of the questionnaire (see appendix) is the following: the first section preceding the actual DCTs is designed to collect the demographic data necessary for this study, i.e. the age and gender of the participants. In the main body of the questionnaire there are altogether twenty (2x10) DCTs, all of which are described in sufficient detail to provide respondents with appropriate cultural-contextual information. The situations are constructed in a way that they elicit one of Herbert's (1998) twelve compliment response strategies.

As we saw above, there are 4 basic topics that can be associated with compliments: the category of appearance, possessions, abilities and accomplishments, which we subsumed under two major categories: those of appearance and performance. Accordingly, DCTs 2, 4, 7, and 10 were designed to correspond to the topic of appearance, and as such were aimed at eliciting CRs to compliments on one's outward as well as inward personality traits. Situation 6 contained a compliment/expression of admiration toward the interlocutor's belonging, while DCTs 1, 3, 5, 8 and 9 corresponded to abilities and accomplishments (i.e. performance) as described previously.

Respondents were provided with sufficient space after each DCT so that they could supply their make-believe real-life situation responses: first they were asked to respond to a compliment paid by the same gender and next they were asked to provide a CR to the same compliment paid by the opposite gender. The respondents were given the same DCTs in English and in Hungarian, in order to minimize translation effects, subjects were first provided with the English language questionnaires, moreover, a period of seven days was left between the completion of the two questionnaires.

As the final step in the research procedure, the indexing of the CRs was carried out based on Herbert's (1998) taxonomy of macro and micro level CRs (cf. Table 1 above).

Findings and discussion

Table 2 below summarizes our findings with respect to the macro and micro level CRs used by Hungarian undergraduate students in their English as well as Hungarian DCT output:

CR strategies (<u>**macro**</u> and micro)	**Women** **English/Hungarian**	**Men**[9] **English/Hungarian**
<u>**Agreement**</u>		
Appreciation token	82/38	70/36
Comment acceptance	267/206	150/88
Comment history	124/150	54/72
Praise upgrade and Joking	5/5	30/48
Reassignment	7/67	14/10
Return	14/16	54/50
Subtotal	**499/482**	**372/304**
<u>**Nonagreement**</u>		
Scale down	54/46	64/26
Question	78/6	46/42
Disagreement	35/39	52/32
Qualification	22/40	34/4
No Acknowledgement	2/6	20/36
Subtotal	**191/137**	**216/140**
<u>**Request Interpretation**</u>	11/42	10/12

Table 2: CR strategies used by Hungarian undergraduate students based on Herbert's (1998) categorization

Gender differences in HNS' macro CRs

As table 2 above shows, on the whole, both female and male respondents preferred Agreement macro CRs to Nonagreement or Request Interpretation CRs. Female students, however, used a higher percentage of Agreement strategies (72.2% of all the strategies they used) as opposed to their male counterparts (62% of all male strategies), which might be explained by the male respondents' tendency to interpret compliments as FTAs.

As far as the effect of the complimenter's and the complimentee's gender is concerned, the following two patterns emerge from the study of macro CRs:

1. Female students were prone to using more Agreement macro CRs (over 70%) in response to female compliments than to male ones. This goes counter to Wolfson's (1983) findings, who noted that compliments offered by males were more likely to be accepted than compliments offered by females: in her research it was female compliments that were the most likely to be ignored or not to be accepted, whereas compliments from men were likely to be accepted and/or agreed with, especially by female recipients.
2. Our data also seems to contradict the finding that men are more likely to reject a compliment from a woman than from a man (cf. e.g. Herbert 1998: 63): in our data men offered Agreement macro strategies to male and female compliments with close to equal frequency (52.2% and 47.8%, respectively). However, as far as the topics of the compliments are concerned, we have found that Appearance compliments between men, are,

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[9] Because there were twice as many female as male respondents, the original numbers in this column were multiplied by 2 for ease of reference and in order to make cross-gender comparisons easier.

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indeed, a very delicate issue (cf. Paulston and Tucker: 2003 quoted above): over 60% of the male responses to compliments on their appearance offered by men resulted in utterances expressing irritation and embarrassment, the force of the resulting Nonagreement CRs was often blunted by jocular statements such as "Are you gay?", "Come on, cut that", etc. in both English and Hungarian responses.

An important outcome of our research with respect to applying Herbert's (1998) categories of macro CRs to our data is that the macro CRs Agreement and Request Interpretation are not mutually exclusive,[10] in fact, most of the Request Interpretation strategies (over 70%) were prefaced by an acceptance token, as in the following example:

> You have bought a brand new cell phone. Your friend, says to you: "Wow, your new phone is smashing; it is one of the latest models. Did you know that? You have good taste in choosing cell phones." Your response to:
> a female friend: "Thanks, let me know if I can help you pick out a new one, too."

Herbert states that utterances produced by an addressee who "consciously or not, interprets the compliments as a request rather than a simple compliment" are not compliment responses per se "as the addressee does not perceive the previous speech act as a compliment" (Herbert 1998: 60). A large number of examples similar to the one given above show that Herbert's observation does not invariably hold: an utterance can be interpreted as a compliment and an indirect request at the same time, a phenomenon that raises the issue of intentional ambiguity and highlights the deficiencies that are inherent in a Speech Act Theory approach to pragmatic strategies in general (cf. e.g. Thomas: 1995) and compliment exchanges in particular.

Gender differences in HNS' micro CRs

On the basis of our data we can observe that, in general terms, female respondents use a greater number and a wider range of micro CR strategies with respect to both Agreement and Nonagreement macro CRs. Our data has also confirmed the finding that women use more elaborate and more personal surface forms in the course of performing CR strategies (cf. e.g. Preisler 1986). Female respondents preferred Comment Acceptance micro CRs, of which they used almost twice as many tokens as men did, and Comment History micro CRs, of which there are over twice as many instances in the female as in the male responses. Our male subjects, on the other hand, used significantly more Praise Upgrade/Joking and Disagreement micro CRs. What is even more surprising is that males used over three times as many Return micro CRs as females did, especially in response to a female complimenter's utterance. Because of the small overall number of Return CRs in our corpus, this finding has to be substantiated by further research and more extensive data. However, if the finding is confirmed and male respondents are, indeed, more likely to return female compliments than vice versa, it might be interpreted in line with Davis' (2008) hypothesis, who proposes that

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[10] Szili (2004: 158) also notes that her respondents provided complex, at times contradictory, chains of utterances as compliment responses.

men are more likely to (mis)interpret female compliments as "flirtatious" and "seductive" than women.[11]

Differences between HNS' Hungarian and EFL CRs

Table 2 above shows that both female and male subjects used significantly more Nonagreement macro CRs in their English responses than in their native Hungarian ones. This finding might be interpreted as Hungarian EFL students' misperceptions of native English speakers' norms,[12] since previous research shows (cf. Szili 2004: 172) that HNSs' compliment responses are slightly more nonagreement-oriented to start with than either American or New Zealand speakers' macro CRs.

A comparison of HNS and EFL DCT responses also shows that female respondents tend to interpret/perceive the same compliment as an indirect request in Hungarian contexts but as a compliment proper in EFL speech situations, which might be interpreted as their greater sensitivity to indirectness in native language situations. Another interesting gender-based difference is the result that, based on DCT tasks, female respondents are more likely to accept a compliment that is produced by an English (usually male) complimenter than one produced by a Hungarian co-patriot, as in the example below:

> You have recently changed your hairstyle. On the way to the university, you meet one of your friends and he says: "This hairstyle is very trendy and makes you look great." Your response to a male friend:
> (English response) "Thank you. I wanted to try something new."
> (Hungarian response) "Meglepő, hogy észrevetted" ("I'm surprised you noticed").

It is also interesting to note that women prefer Qualification as a micro CR in their Hungarian responses, while men use it more extensively in their English DCT output. Herbert notes that in his American corpus this micro CR is usually preceded by discourse markers such as *well*, and *you know*. In our data discourse markers such as *hát*,[13] *ó/ohh* and *hisz(en)*, are extensively used in Hungarian responses, however, one is hard put to find the corresponding English DMs in EFL utterances. The DM *of course*,[14] on the other hand, is frequently used in contexts where it might trigger unwanted implicatures for most native speakers of English:

> Some friends of yours come over to your house. One of them goes to your room and says: "I love the colour of this room, excellent choice!"
> Your response to a male friend: "Of course it is!"

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[11] A metacomment produced by one of our male respondents also suggests this possibility: "Compliment from a girl, eh?? Anyway, thanks!"

[12] It has also been proposed (cf. Schneider: 1999) that Irish speakers of English use more Nonagreement macro CRs than the British, Americans or New Zealanders, however, only a very few of the Hungarian students participating in our research are likely to have been influenced by Irish English norms.

[13] It is interesting to note that while the functional range of the Hungarian DM *hát* is extremely wide (ranging from hedging to boosting functions, cf. Schirm: 2011), in our data of CRs *hát* is invariably used as a hedging device before the CRs Disagreement and Qualification.

[14] As is suggested by, for example, Furkó (2011).

Conclusions, directions for further research

In our paper we set out to find gender-based differences in CR strategies based on Hungarian undergraduate students' DCT data. We found that in native language contexts, the patterns of the use of macro CR strategies are similar to those in previous research based on native speakers of English, however, female respondents participating in our research used more Agreement macro CRs in response to female compliments than to male ones, while male respondents offered Agreement macro strategies to male and female compliments with close to equal frequency, which is contrary to the findings of previous CR research. We have also found differences in the patterns of micro CR strategies: women prefer to use different micro CRs from men (e.g. Comment Acceptance and Comment History) and use them more extensively. As far as the non-native language contexts are concerned, our findings suggest that Hungarian speakers of English, even at university level, often misperceive the appropriate level of modesty, and, as a result, use more Nonagreement macro CRs in their EFL language output, what is more, their responses might trigger unwanted implicatures due to the lack of positive pragmatic transfer as well as to negative pragmatic transfer.

Althought the study of CRs has been a relatively well-researched field of cross-cultural pragmatics with respect to varieties of the English language, a great deal has to be done to expand the study of CRs used by Hungarians: we hope to have taken a small step in this direction. In the future, we intend to complement our findings yielded by the DCT method with methods aimed at eliciting naturally-occurring CRs so that we can compare Hungarian students' perceptions of the appropriate use of CRs with their actual speech production patterns. In addition, since student samples do not adequately represent Hungarian society at large, we also intend to gather more representative data and look at a wider range of social background variables.

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Appendix A English questionnaire

First of all, thank you very much for spending your valuable time filling out this questionnaire. You will find ten questions below that describe various situations that you might have already experienced in your daily life. When you respond to the questions please imagine yourself in a real situation and use the most natural way to express your ideas. Take as much time as you need and remember, there is no right or wrong answer to the questions. Finally, please make sure that you provide <u>enough</u> and <u>relevant</u> information for each question and please avoid one-word responses. Thank you again for your cooperation.

Personal information

Gender: ___Male _____Female

Age_____

1. After asking for advice about English language exams, your friend says to you: "Thank you for your help! You are very talented and your ideas have helped me a lot!" Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

2. You have recently changed your hairstyle. On your way to the university, you meet a friend of yours and he/she says: "This hairstyle is very trendy and makes you look great." Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

3. Some friends are over at your house. One of them goes to your room and says: "I love the colour of this room, excellent choice!" Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

4. You're wearing a new dress/outfit at your friend's birthday party. He/she looks at you and says: "That outfit is really cool and trendy! You really look great!" Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

5. You and one of your classmates have recently finished and successfully presented an extracurricular activity in your class. At the end of the presentation your partner says to you: "But for your help and clever ideas, our presentation would not have been so successful." Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

6. You have bought a brand new cell phone. Your friend, who also wants to buy a new one, says to you: "Wow, your new phone is smashing; it is one of the latest models. Did you know that? You have a good taste in choosing cell phones." Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

7. You and your friends are talking about the latest training, health and wellness tips. During the discussion, one of your friends tells you: "I wonder how you can maintain your figure? I would be very happy if I were as fit as you." Your response to:

   a female friend:

   a male friend:

8. You have just finished presenting your research paper. After the class (just as you are about to leave the classroom), one of your classmates says: "You did an excellent job! I really enjoyed your presentation." Your response to:

a female friend:

a male friend:

9. After a meal at your house, your friend says to you: "Excellent food, you are such a good cook." Your response to:

a female friend:

a male friend:

10. You and one of your old friends have decided to meet for a coffee. When you arrive, your friend says to you: "Hi…what's up? You are looking good. Is that a new suit?" Your response to:

a female friend:

a male friend:

Appendix B Hungarian questionnaire

Először is, köszönjük szépen, hogy segítesz a kérdőívünk kitöltésében. Az alábbiakban tíz olyan kérdést találsz, amelyek különböző szituációkat mutatnak be. Ezekkel már valószínűleg sokszor találkoztál a mindennapi életed során. Amikor a kérdésekre válaszolsz, kérlek, képzeld magad egy valódi élethelyzetbe és a lehető legtermészetesebb módon fejezd ki az ötleteidet. Annyi idő áll a rendelkezésedre, amennyit szeretnél, és ne feledd, nincsenek jó vagy rossz válaszok. Végül győződj meg arról, hogy elegendő és megfelelő válaszokat adtál a kérdésekre. Az egyszavas válaszokat lehetőség szerint kerüld. Köszönjük szépen.

Nem: ___Férfi____Nő

Életkor_____

1. Miután angol nyelvvizsgával kapcsolatos kérdésekben tanácsot kért tőled az egyik barátod, így szól hozzád: "Köszönöm a segítséged, nagyon tehetséges vagy és sokat segítenek az ötleteid." A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

2. Mostanában megváltoztattad a frizurádat. Útban az egyetem felé találkozol az egyik barátoddal, aki így szól:
   "Ez a frizura nagyon trendi és jól áll neked." A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

3. Néhány barátod meglátogatott. Egyikük bemegy a szobádba és ezt mondja: "Tetszik a szoba színe, jó választás!" A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

4. Az egyik barátod születésnapi buliján új ruha van rajtad. Mikor meglát, így szól: "Nagyon szupi ez a szerkó, jól áll neked." A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

5. Az egyik osztálytársaddal sikeresen prezentáltok egy anyagot az egyik szemináriumon. Az óra végén így szól a partnered: "A te kreatív ötleteid nélkül nem sikerült volna elkészíteni ilyen jól beszámolónkat." A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

6. Új telefont vásároltál a napokban. Az egyik barátod, aki szintén új telefont szeretne, így szól hozzád:
   "Wow, az új mobilod nagyon szupi, ez az egyik legújabb típus. Tudtad? Igazán jó ízlésed van." A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

7. A barátaiddal a legújabb edzési és wellness tippekről beszélgettek. A beszélgetés során az egyikük így szól:
   "Hm, nem tudom hogyan sikerül megtartanod a formádat, én nagyon örülnék, ha olyan fitt lennék, mint te." A válaszod:

   egy lány barátodnak:

   egy fiú barátodnak:

8. Épp most fejezted be a kiselőadásodat. Az óra végén, az egyik osztálytársad ezt mondja: "Remek munka! Nagyon érdekes beszámoló volt." A válaszod:

    egy lány barátodnak:

    egy fiú barátodnak:

9. Miután vendégül láttad az egyik barátodat vacsorára, így szól: "Nagyon finom volt, remek szakács vagy." A válaszod:

    egy lány barátodnak:

    egy fiú barátodnak:

10. Egy régi barátoddal megbeszéltétek, hogy elmentek együtt kávézni. Amikor megérkezel, a barátod így üdvözöl: "Szió! Mizujs? Jól nézel ki, ez új ruha rajtad?" A válaszod:

    egy lány barátodnak:

    egy fiú barátodnak: