

Cultural and Pragmatic Aspects of Compliment Responses: A Study of Indonesian EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

Compliment responses play a vital role in academic communication as indicators of pragmatic competence and cultural values. In multilingual contexts such as English and Minangkabau, they further reflect how students negotiate cultural identity through language use. This study examined university students' compliment responses in English and Minangkabau using Searle's (1969) speech act theory—focusing on expressive acts—and Chung's (2010) classification of strategies: acceptance, amendment, non-acceptance, and combination. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed. Data were collected through a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) administered to 20 participants and follow-up interviews with 10 of them to explore the reasoning behind their choices. Analysis revealed that students used ten distinct strategies across both languages. The acceptance strategy, particularly through appreciation tokens, was most frequently employed, accounting for 66.7% of responses in English and 52.9% in Minangkabau. These results suggest that while students tended to accept compliments, they also adapted their responses to align with sociocultural expectations in each language. The findings indicate that students' pragmatic competence is shaped by both linguistic proficiency and cultural norms. Their bilingual practices reflect an effort to balance modesty with acknowledgment, reinforcing their cultural identity in communicative exchanges. Integrating cultural awareness into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction is essential to develop learners' pragmatic competence and promote effective intercultural communication.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of students' responses to compliments in English is important because it offers insight into their pragmatic competence, which involves the ability to use language appropriately in social interactions. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to use language appropriately in context, going beyond grammatical understanding (García, 2021). Students' responses to compliments show how well they understand the social and cultural aspects of language use. For example, in Indonesian culture,

rejecting compliments may be considered modest, while in Western cultures, directly accepting compliments is more common.

Speech act theory views language as a form of action rather than mere representation of meaning (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Every utterance performs a function, such as requesting, apologizing, or complimenting, which are shaped by both linguistic form and social context (Yule, 1996). Austin (1962) distinguished three levels of action—locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary—while Searle (1976) refined this into five categories: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. Among these, expressives are central to this study, as compliments belong to this category, reflecting speakers' psychological states and social evaluations (Holmes, 1988).

In applying Searle's framework, this research operationalizes compliment responses as expressive speech acts and classifies them into four main strategies—acceptance, amendment, non-acceptance, and combination—following Chung (2010). Each student's response was coded according to its illocutionary force (e.g., acceptance through appreciation tokens like "thank you"), allowing systematic categorization. This theoretical lens is crucial because it not only identifies the type of speech act but also reveals the pragmatic intentions behind the utterances. For instance, when a student replies, "No, it was nothing special", the response is coded as non-acceptance, but the deeper interpretation reflects cultural modesty, a key component of pragmatic competence. Thus, the application of Searle's theory ensures both accuracy in coding and depth in analysis.

Cultural norms significantly influence how compliments are received and responded to. For instance, while Western cultures often favor direct acknowledgment of compliments, many Asian cultures, including Indonesia, lean towards modesty and self-deprecation in their responses (Gong, 2020). In the EFL classroom, this cultural nuance may lead students to struggle with appropriate responses in English, as they may inadvertently transfer cultural habits into their second language use. Understanding these tendencies is critical for educators, as it helps them design instructional strategies that enhance students' pragmatic competence and intercultural communication skills...

Phoocharoensil (2012) conducted a complement reaction. He studied how Thai EFL learners employed the compliment response. Tran (2007) sought to investigate the compliment response utilized by Thai EFL learners. Surprisingly, the results differ from those of Tran's 2007 study. The results clearly support the Compliment Response Continuum Hypothesis, which holds that commend response techniques are more likely to be applied toward the end of the acceptance denial spectrum. Golato (2002) found that German speakers tend to accept compliments without using expressions of appreciation like "Thank you," contrasting with American norms where tokens of gratitude are common. Such findings underscore how social norms in different cultures affect both the giving and receiving of compliment

Sorahi (2013) did a comparative analysis of the production of complement response speech acts in Iranian Persian and Australian English cultures. Australian English speakers are more likely than Iranian Persian speakers to accept compliments. The study was conducted using the DCT. It indicates that receiving compliment is not as polite in Iranian society as it is in Australian culture.

In Indonesia, learners tend to follow cultural norms emphasizing humility, which often leads to rejecting or deflecting compliments instead of accepting them directly. This behavior aligns with the Indonesian cultural values of "rasa malu" (modesty) and "tepo seliro" (consideration for others) (Putri & Arifin, 2020). While these strategies are culturally acceptable, they may not align with English-speaking cultures, where direct acknowledgment of compliments is more common. The misalignment can result in pragmatic failure, causing misunderstandings in intercultural communication. This highlights the importance of explicitly teaching pragmatic norms related to compliments and other speech acts in EFL classrooms.

Research on compliment responses has shown cultural variation in strategies. Holmes (1988) found that English speakers tend to use acceptance strategies more frequently, whereas Asian contexts often show tendencies toward modesty and non-acceptance (Chen & Yang, 2010; Cheng, 2011). In Indonesia, studies (e.g., Wijayanto et al., 2013; Savitri, 2019) highlight that learners frequently mix acceptance with downgrading, reflecting cultural norms of humility. Other studies (Han, 2017; Chen,

2019) emphasize the role of pragmatic competence in shaping how EFL learners balance between literal meaning and intended social effect.

However, most prior studies focus on either English or local languages separately, rarely addressing bilingual or bicultural contexts. This creates a gap in understanding how learners navigate dual cultural frameworks simultaneously. Moreover, existing studies often describe strategies but pay less attention to how pragmatic intentions are systematically coded and interpreted through Searle's theory.

This study offers two main contributions. First, it systematically applies Searle's speech act theory to code and analyze compliment responses of Indonesian EFL learners, providing a more rigorous framework than descriptive categorization alone. Second, it investigates responses across two languages—English and Minangkabau—within the same academic context, highlighting how learners shift between cultural norms and linguistic repertoires. This dual perspective not only strengthens the analysis of pragmatic competence but also demonstrates how cultural identity is negotiated through language. By doing so, this study extends previous research and underscores the importance of integrating cultural awareness into EFL instruction to enhance learners' intercultural communication skills.

2. METHODS

This section outlines the research type, participants, research instruments, and data analysis procedures.

2.1. Research type

This study employed a descriptive research design to investigate how first-semester university students at the English Department, Universitas Negeri Padang, respond to English compliments. Descriptive research is commonly applied in sociolinguistics and educational studies because it provides systematic and detailed descriptions of behaviors without manipulating variables (Nassaji, 2015). This design is particularly suitable for speech act studies as it enables researchers to observe authentic patterns of interaction and analyze how pragmatic strategies are employed in context. In this study, data were elicited through the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), which presented participants with academic scenarios where compliments naturally occur.

2.2. Participants

The participants of this study were 20 first-semester students of the English Department in the 2024 academic year. The total population consisted of 198 students across classes K1–K7. A purposive sampling technique was used, focusing on first-semester students as they were in the initial stage of developing pragmatic competence and negotiating between English and Minangkabau in academic interactions. According to Singh (2006), a sample size of 10–20% of the accessible population is adequate, while Kothari (2004) recommends a minimum of 10% for representativeness. The 20 selected participants represented 10.1% of the population, thereby fulfilling both methodological requirements and research objectives. Purposive sampling was chosen over random sampling to ensure that the selected group possessed the specific characteristics needed for this investigation.

2.3. Research instruments

The main instrument of this study was the Discourse Completion Test (DCT), which was administered to 20 students. The DCT contained academic situations that participants typically encountered in their learning process. This method was selected because, although responses are written, they are considered to reflect the pragmatic features of spoken interaction (Mohajernia, 2013). The use of DCT made it possible to collect comparable data across participants while maintaining control over the contexts in which compliments occurred.

2.4 Data Validation

To enhance the validity of the data, two strategies were employed. First, content validation was conducted by consulting one expert who reviewed the DCT items to ensure that the scenarios were realistic, culturally appropriate, and relevant to academic contexts. Second, triangulation was applied by complementing DCT responses with follow-up interviews with 10 selected participants. This enabled the researcher to cross-check the rationale behind the responses and to verify whether the written responses aligned with students' actual pragmatic intentions.

2.5 Data analysis techniques

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three systematic stages.

1. **Data Condensation:** Responses were collected, organized, and coded based on Searle's (1969) speech act theory and Chung's (2010) classification of compliment response strategies (acceptance, amendment, non-acceptance, and combination). Irrelevant data were excluded to maintain focus on the research questions.
2. **Data Display:** The categorized responses were displayed in tables and figures to visualize the distribution and frequency of each strategy, facilitating interpretation of the patterns.
3. **Conclusion Drawing/Verification:** Patterns were interpreted to answer the research questions. The preliminary conclusions were repeatedly verified by rechecking data with interview results, ensuring consistency between quantitative trends and qualitative insights.

Through this systematic technique, the study ensured both the reliability of analysis and the validity of findings regarding students' compliment response strategies.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

The findings of this study provided insights into the strategies used by the first-semester students of the English Department at the State University of Padang.

3.1.1. English Compliment Responses Strategies

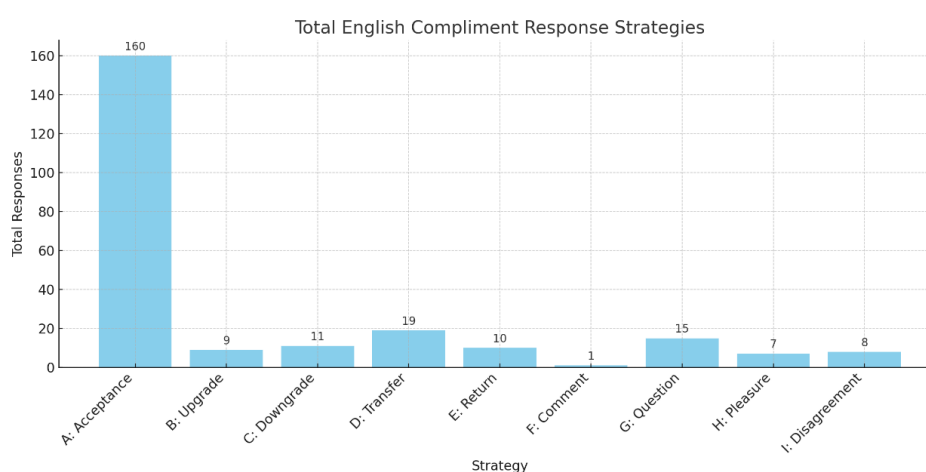


Figure 1. English Compliment Responses Strategies

The data above show how students respond to English compliments in different scenarios using various response strategies. It categorizes responses into nine distinct strategies, each representing a different way of reacting to a compliment. The total number of recorded responses across all scenarios

is 240, with each strategy occurring at different frequencies depending on the context of the compliment.

The most frequently used strategy is Acceptance (A: Appreciation Token), which occurs 160 times out of 240 (66.7%). This suggests that the majority of students tend to accept compliments rather than modify or reject them. Other strategies, such as Amendment (B: Upgrade), Amendment (C: Downgrade), and Amendment (D: Transfer), appear less frequently but still play a role in how people respond. The least used strategy is Amendment (Comment) (F), which occurs only once (0.42%), indicating that students rarely respond to compliments by making a comment.

The data covers ten different scenarios, each reflecting different contexts in which compliments are given. The scenario with the highest number of responses is Academic Achievement (30 responses), followed by Height Compliment (28 responses) and New Glasses (26 responses). This implies that individuals receive and respond to compliments more frequently in these contexts. On the other hand, the scenario with the lowest number of responses is Essay Review (20 responses), suggesting that compliments related to essay performance may be less common or elicit fewer responses.

The data showed that the most frequently occurring scenario is Academic Achievement, with 30 responses, making up 12.5% of the total responses. This indicates that students tend to receive and respond to compliments more often in academic-related contexts. The high occurrence of responses in this scenario reflects that academic success is a prominent aspect where students commonly acknowledge compliment. Within this scenario, Acceptance (A: Appreciation Token) is the dominant strategy, occurring 20 times (66.7%), suggesting that most individuals are likely to appreciate compliments related to their achievements rather than rejecting or modifying them.

Example 1.

The researcher: "Wow, you got the highest score in the class on the English test! Great job!"

Participant DE: "Thank you. I work hard on it."

Here, participant AP accepts the compliment using Acceptance (Appreciation token) and combines it with Amendment (Upgrade).

The researcher acknowledges the participant's achievement by expressing admiration for his high score on the English test. In response, participant DE accepts the compliment using an *Appreciation token* ("Thank you"), demonstrating politeness and acknowledgment. This is followed by an *Amendment* in the form of an *Upgrade* ("I work hard on it"), which enhances the compliment by attributing the success to their own effort. This combination of acceptance and self-enhancement reflects a confident yet humble communication style.

Students often responded to essay feedback with gratitude and explanations, attributing their success to external factors or personal interests. For example, when the researcher praised HB's writing by saying,

Example 2.

The researcher: "I really enjoyed reading your essay. You have a wonderful way with words!"

Participant HB: "Maybe because I like to read poetry and novels,"

It emphasizes effort and linking his skill to a personal passion. Similarly, NU's response, "Thanks. I learned it from the internet," demonstrated a tendency to attribute success to external resources, reflecting both humility and acknowledgment of learning opportunities.

On the other hand, the least occurring scenario is Essay Review, with only 20 responses (8.3%). This lower frequency suggests that students receive fewer compliments on their written work compared to other aspects such as academic achievement or personal appearance. In this scenario, Acceptance (A) is still the highest response, accounting for 61.9% of the total, showing that even in contexts where fewer compliments are given, students still tend to appreciate positive feedback. However, Amendment (Comment) (F) does not appear at all in this scenario, indicating that students rarely respond to essay-related compliments by making additional comments.

Example 3.

The researcher: "I really enjoyed reading your essay. You have a wonderful way with words!"

Participant PU: "Really? Thank you so much"

The researcher compliments on participant PU's essay, specifically praising her writing style by saying, "You have a wonderful way with words." Participant PU responds with surprise and gratitude, beginning with "Really?" which indicates mild disbelief or humility, and follows it with "Thank you so much," an *Appreciation token* expressing sincere gratitude. This response reflects an *Acceptance* strategy, as the participant acknowledges and appreciates the compliment without deflecting or denying it, demonstrating a positive and receptive attitude toward praise.

Participant PU used combination strategy using Amendment (Question) and Acceptance (Appreciation Token). Here, it focuses on Amendment strategy means participant PU is not sure with her essay and appreciates the complimenter.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights that compliments related to personal achievements and physical appearance are more commonly accepted, while those related to skills or abilities are more likely to be modified or transferred. This pattern reflects that students are more comfortable accepting compliments on tangible successes rather than subjective traits.

3.1.2. Minangkabau Compliment Responses Strategies

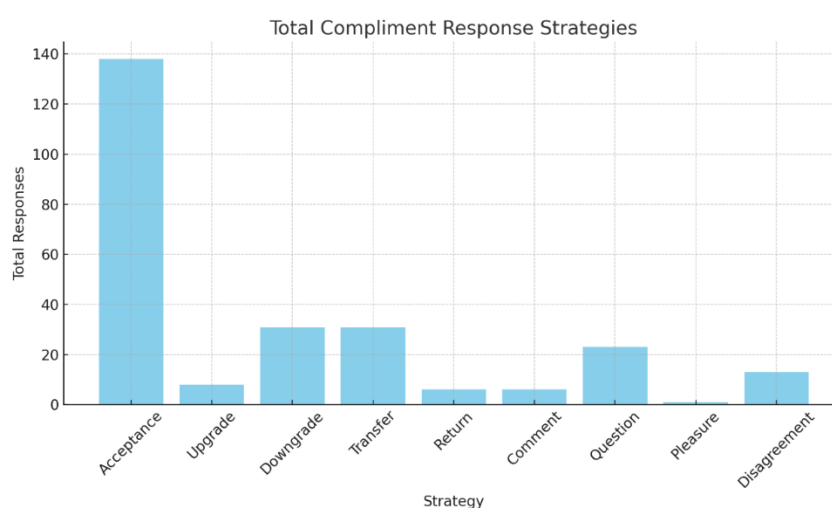


Figure 2. Minangkabau Compliment Responses Strategies

Based on the data, presents different strategies used in responding to compliments within the Minangkabau community across various scenarios. The data categorizes responses into nine different strategies, each representing a unique way of reacting to a compliment. The total number of recorded responses across all scenarios is 261, with varying frequencies for each strategy.

The most frequently used strategy is Acceptance (A: Appreciation Token), which appears 138 times out of 261 (52.9%). This suggests that more than half of the responses to compliments involve directly acknowledging and accepting them. Other strategies, such as Amendment (C: Downgrade) and Amendment (D: Transfer), each appear 31 times (11.9%), indicating that some individuals prefer to modify or redirect the compliment rather than fully accepting it. The least used strategy is Amendment (Pleasure) (H), which appears only once (0.4%), showing that explicit expressions of pleasure in response to compliments are extremely rare.

There are ten different scenarios, each reflecting different contexts in which compliments are received. The scenario with the highest number of responses is Pronunciation Skills (31 responses) and

Problem-Solving (29 responses). This suggests that compliments related to personal appearance and abilities, particularly height and pronunciation skills, are the most common or elicit the most responses. On the other hand, the scenario with the lowest number of responses is New Glasses (20 responses), indicating that compliments on this aspect are less frequent or less likely to provoke a response.

When analyzing response distribution within each scenario, Acceptance (A) remains the dominant strategy across most scenarios, particularly in Presentation Feedback (58.6%), Academic Achievement (57.7%), and Problem-Solving (55.2%). This suggests that students are more comfortable acknowledging compliments related to their achievements and abilities. However, Height Compliment shows a different trend, where Acceptance (A) accounts for only 36.8%, and other responses such as Amendment (Question) (10.5%) and Non-Acceptance (5.3%) appear more frequently than in other scenarios.

Example 1.

The researcher: *"Hebaik yo, dapek nilai paling tinggi di ujian bahasa Inggris! ("Wow, you got the highest score in the class on the English test! Great job!")"*

Participant AZ: *"Eh.. Makasi yo. Iko dek baraja tadi malam ko mah" ("Thank you. I studied hard last night")"*

Strategy: Acceptance (Appreciation Token), Amendment (Upgrade).

The researcher expresses admiration for participant AZ's achievement, praising her for getting the highest score in the English test. Participant AZ responds with *"Eh.. Makasi yo,"* which translates to *"Thank you,"* functioning as an Appreciation token and indicating an Acceptance of the compliment. This is followed by *"Iko dek baraja tadi malam ko mah"* ("I studied hard last night"), which serves as an Amendment in the form of an Upgrade, as the participant enhances the compliment by attributing their success to their effort and preparation. This response reflects both gratitude and a sense of responsibility for their accomplishment.

Example 2.

The researcher: *Rancak nyo caro ngecek baso Inggris kau lai! Bantuak urang bule Nampak dek wak! ("Your English pronunciation is excellent! You are like native speaker!")"*

Participant RA: *Ndak ndak. Makasih banyak yo kawan tapi ndak ndak lo mode bule mangecek do kawan. ("No, I dont. Thank you, friend. But I am not like a native speaker")"*

The researcher compliments participant RA's English pronunciation, enthusiastically comparing it to that of a native speaker. Participant RA responds with a mix of modesty and gratitude. The initial phrase *"Ndak ndak"* ("No, no") indicates a Rejection of the compliment, showing reluctance to fully accept the high praise. However, this is immediately followed by *"Makasih banyak yo kawan"* ("Thank you, friend"), which serves as an Appreciation token, softening the rejection and expressing politeness. RA then reiterates their disagreement with the compliment by saying *"tapi ndak ndak lo mode bule mangecek do kawan"* ("but I am not like a native speaker"), further emphasizing the Rejection strategy through Downgrade, as the participant downplays their ability. This response reflects humility and a tendency to avoid self-praise despite receiving positive feedback.

The participant rejects the compliment (Non-Acceptance using Disagreement), accepts compliment (Acceptance using Appreciation Token) and Amendment (Downgrade). It indicates that Minangkabau culture is characterized by humility and reluctance.

Outfit compliments often redirected praise to external sources, particularly family. When the researcher complimented a participant's stylish outfit and sense of fashion, saying,

Example 3.

The researcher: *"Baju kau rancak bana hari ko! Pandai bana kau milih baju." ("That outfit looks so stylish on you! You have a great sense of fashion.")"*

Participant HB: “*Amak den dek guru Bahasa Inggris lo*” (“*My mom, who is an English teacher, chose this outfit*”).

This response emphasized the role of family in personal achievements or choices, reflecting a cultural tendency to express deference and gratitude. The frequent acknowledgment of familial influence in responses reinforces the Minang cultural values of respect, humility, and the importance of family in shaping personal and social identity.

In summary, Minangkabau responses to compliments related to skills are more likely to be accepted, whereas compliments about appearance elicit a mix of responses, with some students questioning, modifying, or even rejecting them.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. English Compliment Responses Strategies used by English Department Students

The findings from this study align with recent research on pragmatic competence in second language learners, particularly in compliment responses. Complimenting behavior is an essential aspect of pragmatic competence, reflecting cultural norms, politeness strategies, and sociolinguistic awareness (Taguchi, 2019). The dominance of Acceptance (Appreciation Token) in students' responses suggests that learners prioritize politeness and social harmony, a tendency also observed in recent studies on EFL learners in collectivist cultures (Sadeghi & Zarei, 2023). However, the frequent use of modesty-based strategies, such as Amendment (Downgrade) and Amendment (Transfer), indicates a cultural influence that distinguishes Indonesian EFL learners from native English speakers, who tend to engage more actively in extended compliment sequences (Chen & Yang, 2021).

One of the most notable findings is the variation in Amendment Strategies, which demonstrates students' attempts to modify their responses based on contextual and cultural factors. Amendment (Upgrade), where students emphasize their effort, is particularly evident in Academic Achievement (5 instances), aligning with studies that show learners often justify compliments related to their abilities (Ishihara & Cohen, 2020). Conversely, Amendment (Downgrade) is used to avoid self-promotion, reflecting Indonesian and Minang cultural values of humility. This pattern is consistent with the findings of Nurhayati et al. (2022), who reported that Indonesian students frequently downplay their achievements in both academic and social settings. Similarly, the use of Amendment (Transfer), in which students attribute success to external factors such as teachers or family, mirrors findings by Tran (2021), who noted that collectivist cultures tend to emphasize group effort over individual success when responding to praise.

Despite the general preference for acceptance strategies, Non-Acceptance (Disagreement) is occasionally used, particularly in Pronunciation Skills (2 instances) and Problem-Solving (4 instances). This finding aligns with recent research by Salazar & Ramírez (2020), who found that EFL learners reject compliments when they feel the praise is insincere or undeserved. In pragmatic terms, rejecting a compliment can be a Face-Threatening Act (FTA) (Brown & Levinson, 1987), leading students to either minimize their response or avoid direct disagreement. The presence of Amendment (Question) in New Glasses (5 instances) and Height Compliment (5 instances) suggests that students sometimes question the sincerity of a compliment, a pattern also observed in the study by Yu & Ren (2019), where Chinese EFL learners hesitated to fully accept personal appearance-related compliments due to modesty norms and self-perception.

Cultural values play a significant role in compliment exchanges, as demonstrated by the frequent use of Amendment (Return) in Height Compliment (4 instances). Reciprocity is a fundamental aspect of politeness in many Asian cultures (Park & Kim, 2022), where responding to a compliment with another compliment maintains social balance. This finding is supported by the research of Zangoei et al. (2021), who found that Persian EFL learners also prefer compliment reciprocity as a politeness strategy. Additionally, Amendment (Comment), which provides further context instead of direct

acceptance, is observed in Haircut (1 instance) and Essay Review (1 instance), reinforcing the notion that indirectness is a preferred communicative strategy in high-context cultures (Hall, 2020).

The high-engagement strategies, such as Amendment (Pleasure) are almost absent, suggesting a lack of full engagement in compliment exchanges. This aligns with Al-Ghamdi & Alrefae (2021), who found that Saudi EFL learners often provide minimal responses to compliments, possibly due to linguistic limitations or uncertainty about appropriate responses in English. The lack of enthusiastic responses could also indicate a gap in pragmatic instruction, as many EFL learners are not explicitly taught how to navigate compliment interactions in English discourse (Tatsuki & Houck, 2019).

In conclusion, the findings highlight that students demonstrate basic pragmatic competence but struggle with more context-sensitive compliment response strategies. Their responses reflect a blend of politeness, cultural humility, and uncertainty in pragmatic choices, similar to trends observed in other Asian EFL contexts. The results suggest the need for explicit instruction in pragmatics to help learners develop more flexible and contextually appropriate response strategies. Future research could examine how pragmatics-focused instruction influences students' ability to manage compliment exchanges dynamically, particularly in cross-cultural communication.

3.2.2. Minang Compliment Responses: Strategies used by English Department Students

The findings from the study on Minang students' responses to compliments highlight key patterns that align with broader research in pragmatics and intercultural communication. One of the most significant observations is the dominant use of Acceptance (Appreciation Token) across various compliment scenarios, particularly in academic and appearance-related contexts. This supports recent studies indicating that compliment acceptance is a prevalent strategy among Asian speakers, reflecting politeness and social harmony (Zhao et al., 2020). However, the slight variation in acceptance rates between Minang and English responses suggests a cultural tendency toward modesty, which aligns with the collectivist nature of Indonesian society (Hidayat & Hermawan, 2018).

Another critical aspect is the use of Amendment Strategies, such as Upgrade and Downgrade, which reveal how students modify the perceived intensity of compliments. The presence of Amendment (Upgrade) in academic-related compliments suggests an awareness of self-enhancement strategies, a concept also observed in recent studies on student interactions (Chen & Yang, 2019). Conversely, the use of Amendment (Downgrade) in skill-related compliments indicates a preference for humility, which aligns with Indonesian cultural norms of indirectness and self-effacement (Sukarno, 2021). This reinforces the notion that pragmatic competence is shaped by cultural expectations, requiring learners to balance positive politeness with modesty.

The findings also reveal that Non-Acceptance (Disagreement) occurs selectively, particularly in skill-based compliments. This behavior aligns with research by Liao and Wang (2020), who found that rejecting compliments often signals an effort to maintain social modesty while avoiding self-praise. Given that Brown and Levinson's (1987) Face-Threatening Acts (FTA) Theory remains a useful framework, recent research suggests that students employ disagreement as a strategic way to downplay their abilities without offending the interlocutor (Rahardi, 2019). This highlights the complexity of pragmatic decisions in compliment responses, where students must navigate politeness, face-saving strategies, and cultural expectations simultaneously.

Cultural factors also influence the use of strategies such as Amendment (Return) and Amendment (Comment). The frequent use of Amendment (Return) in height-related compliments reflects the Minang cultural emphasis on reciprocity, a feature documented in contemporary cross-cultural politeness studies (Kurniawan & Widodo, 2020). Similarly, the use of Amendment (Comment) in specific scenarios demonstrates a preference for contextualizing compliments rather than merely accepting them, which aligns with Indonesian indirectness in discourse (Putri & Wijayanto, 2019). These patterns suggest that students are not merely adopting generic politeness strategies but are actively shaping their responses based on cultural norms.

Interestingly, the study notes the limited use of high-engagement strategies such as Amendment (Pleasure) and Amendment (Question). This is consistent with recent findings that Asian speakers often hesitate to express overt enthusiasm in response to compliments, fearing it may appear boastful (Ting & Chang, 2021). The reluctance to extend compliment exchanges suggests that pragmatic competence development in this area may require explicit instruction. Research by Kasper and Rose (2020) highlights the importance of teaching pragmatic variations to help learners engage more naturally in intercultural communication. The study's findings support the argument that while students exhibit fundamental pragmatic competence, their ability to sustain dynamic compliment interactions remains underdeveloped.

The comparison between English and Minangkabau responses shows both convergence and divergence in pragmatic strategies. In both languages, Acceptance (Appreciation Token) is the dominant strategy, reflecting politeness and acknowledgment of the compliment. However, the proportion differs: 66.7% in English versus 52.9% in Minangkabau, suggesting that while students readily accept compliments in English, they display stronger modesty when using Minangkabau.

Minangkabau responses reveal a greater tendency toward Amendment (Downgrade and Transfer) and Non-Acceptance (Disagreement), which are culturally motivated. For example, attributing success to family or external factors mirrors Minangkabau collectivist values, where achievements are rarely presented as individual. In contrast, English responses, though still influenced by cultural humility, demonstrate more openness to direct acceptance and occasional Amendment (Upgrade), where students highlight their effort. This indicates that students shift their pragmatic strategies depending on the cultural-linguistic frame, aligning with the dual identity of being Indonesian while navigating English academic discourse.

The findings have significant implications for EFL pedagogy in Indonesia. First, they underscore the importance of pragmatic competence as part of language learning. While students can produce grammatically correct responses, their strategies are shaped by cultural values that may not always align with native English norms. For instance, frequent downgrading or rejection of compliments may be perceived as unusual or even impolite in intercultural settings. Thus, teachers should incorporate explicit pragmatic instruction into the curriculum, including role-plays, discourse analysis, and reflection activities, to help learners navigate culturally appropriate responses in English.

Second, teaching should address the contrastive dimension of compliment responses. By analyzing differences between English and Minangkabau strategies, students can become more aware of how culture shapes communication. This awareness is crucial in developing intercultural competence, enabling learners to adapt their responses according to interlocutor, context, and cultural expectations.

Third, the study highlights the need for materials development that integrates pragmatic features of everyday interaction, such as compliment-giving and responding, which are often overlooked in textbooks. Authentic dialogues, exposure to native speaker interactions, and peer-to-peer practice can enrich students' repertoire of strategies.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the compliment response strategies of first-semester students at the English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang in both English and Minangkabau. The findings reveal that students employed diverse strategies, including acceptance, amendment, non-acceptance, and combinations, with acceptance—often expressed through appreciation tokens—being the most dominant. Minangkabau cultural values, particularly modesty and humility, strongly influenced students' responses, as many tended to downplay achievements or attribute success to others. Limited English proficiency occasionally caused hesitation, while responses in Minangkabau were more natural and fluent. Context also played a significant role, with academic compliments eliciting gratitude combined with modesty, while personal compliments often invited humor or deflection.

Overall, the study highlights the importance of integrating pragmatic competence into EFL teaching. Role-play, cultural discussions, and exposure to authentic interaction can better prepare students for intercultural communication. Future research may investigate the effects of pedagogical interventions or explore similar phenomena in other linguistic and cultural contexts.

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