CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Previous Relevant Studies

There have been many studies on compliment responses in English as a second or foreign language. Farenkia (2014) examines strategies employed by students at Cape Breton University (Canada) in performing the speech act of responding to compliments in eight different situations. Using Discourse Completion Task (DCT) distributed to 25 participants the study suggests that the respondents exclusively use verbal responses and display a very strong preference for complex responses (e.g. thanking + commenting, shifting credit + offering) to boost the face of the compliment giver. The study found appreciation tokens combined with comments is the most preferred compliment response. This is in contrast to the finding found in several studies that found appreciation tokens (e.g. ‘thank you’) is the most preferred responses. In general, the respondents do not use negative compliment responses and they generally employ appreciation tokens in the construction of complex responses.

Jinpei (2013) studies compliments and compliment responses in Philippine English to particularly find out the compliment strategy and the syntactic and lexical features of compliment and compliment response strategies used by college students. The study uses DCT distributed to 33 college students and suggests that the Filipinos who speak English mostly give compliment explicitly with acceptance is the most common strategy used. Filipinos are more likely to accept the compliment, rather than reject it, when they receive one. The study also
shows that the compliments in Philippine English are as formulaic at syntactic and lexical levels as other varieties of English.

Chen (2003) investigates compliment response strategies in Mandarin Chinese to determine the role of status in compliment response behaviours, discover intra-lingual similarities and differences in the Chinese-speaking communities as well as to find out crosslinguistic similarities and differences. Using DCT, distributed to 60 native Chinese college freshman students, in Taiwan, the study shows that there is not much differences in type of strategies of CR used by complimenters of equal status and of different status. Accepting strategy in general is more frequently used in the situation in which the complimenter is of equal status while the Rejecting strategy is in the situation in which the complimenter is of higher status. It also reveals that there are similarities and differences in compliment responses across or within cultures. Mandarin-Chinese speakers in Taiwan generally tend to accept rather than reject compliments.

Bergqvist (2009) explores compliment responses among native and non-native English speakers in Stockholm. The research aims to find out the extent of Swedish speakers of English as a second language transfer their first language pragmatic rules of responding to compliments when using English as a second language. She used DCT with 10 designed situations to 25 Stockholm University students of Swedish native speakers to prove that pragmatic rules from first language transferred to second language domain can cause pragmatic failure between English native and non-native speakers. The responses is analysed using Chiang and Pochtrager's (1993) categories of compliment responses. The results
suggest that there is no significant difference between the compliment responses given in Swedish and those given in English by Swedish native speakers. Hence, pragmatic transfer could have taken place in their English responses.

Another study that examined the compliment response in English learners was conducted by Farghal and Haggan (2006). In this study the authors found the influence of native language norms of express to be very strong, detracting from the authentic nature of English responses. Studies such as these show the necessity for further research into the acquisition of compliment response in English.

The speech act of compliments and compliment strategies must be introduced comprehensively to the students of English. It might be introduced in skill subjects such as speaking or linguistic subjects such as sociolinguistics and pragmatics. This present study is aimed to identify the pragmatic competence of students of English Department in responding to compliments in English and to find out factors determining the strategies used.

2.2 Speech Act Theory

Modern speech acts can be traced to Austin in his book How To Do Things With Words, it would go on to influence countless philolinguists and continues to be considered a pivotal work in the field of linguistics. Austin proposed the term speech act as the basic or minimal units of linguistic communication (Searle 1969). Austin was never completely satisfied with his speech act classification, mainly because certain verbs could belong to more than one act. Linguists such as Geoffrey Leech (1983) would later criticize Austin for
what became known as the ‘Illocutionary Verb Fallacy,’ or Austin’s theory that verbs corresponded with a particular speech act on a one-on-one level. Austin proposed many revolutionary linguistic concepts other than speech acts but was aware that much of his work needed further study. The most famous expansion of Austin’s work was done by John Searle who proposed what came to be known as Speech Act Theory.

Searle (1975) wrote that Austin’s classification “needs to be seriously revised because it contains several weaknesses”. He departed from Austin by proposing his own set of speech acts and additionally proposed the operation of felicity conditions which must be performed for a speech act to be successful. Searle’s taxonomy of speech acts includes representatives/assertives (telling people how things are), directives (trying to get people to do things), commissives (committing ourselves to doing things), expressives (expressing our feeling and attitudes), and declarations (bringing about changes through utterances) (Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2005: 24). Mey (2001) writes that Searle’s proposal “is more oriented than Austin’s towards the real world, in as much as it takes its point of departure in what actually is the case, namely that people perform a speech act whenever they use language, irrespective of the ‘performative’ criterion,” yet notes that both sets of speech acts definitely share similarities.

Problems with Speech Act Theory often stem from the fact that it was conceived, Mey (2001: 112), writes from a “philosophical-semantic it is based on strict reasoning and certain basic principles of logic” that did not easily translate into actual language situations. A pragmatic perspective is more concerned with actual, real-life realizations of these speech acts and authors such as Wierzbicka
(1983) have questioned their application to languages and contexts other than English, and have noted the lack of a cultural variation component in Searle’s theories.

Blum-Kulka and House (1989: 1) write “one of the most compelling notions in the study of language use is the notion of speech acts. Their modes of performance carry heavy social implications and cultures have been shown to vary drastically in their modes for speech act behavior.” A growing number of research studies, such as those which will be highlighted in this section, have examined how speech act theory related to languages other than English. Studies by researchers such as Haverkate and Koike attempted to shed light on the complexities of speech acts in Spanish and how they relate to the original speech act theories posed by Austin and Searle.

2.3 Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatics is a subfield of linguistics that has been defined as “the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication” (Crystal, 1997: 301). This term was originally placed within philosophy of language (Morris 1938), but has developed from this field to be related to sociolinguistics and other subdisciplines.

The notion of pragmatic competence was early on defined by Chomsky (1980: 224) as the “knowledge of conditions and manner of appropriate use (of the language), in conformity with various purposes”. This concept was seen in
opposition to grammatical competence that in Chomskyan terms is “the knowledge of form and meaning.” In a more contextualized fashion, Canale & Swain (1980) included pragmatic competence as one important component of their model of communicative competence. In this model, pragmatic competence was identified as sociolinguistic competence and defined as the knowledge of contextually appropriate language use. Later on, Canale (1988: 90) expanded this definition, and stated that pragmatic competence includes “illocutionary competence, or the knowledge of the pragmatic conventions for performing acceptable language functions, and sociolinguistic competence, or knowledge of the sociolinguistic conventions for performing language functions appropriately in a given context”.

According to Bialystok (1993) pragmatic competence includes: 1) the speaker’s ability to use language for different purposes; 2) the listener’s ability to get past the language and understand the speaker’s real intentions (e.g. indirect speech acts, irony and sarcasm); and 3) the command of the rules by which utterances come together to create discourse.

Rintell (1979: 98) asserted that “pragmatics is the study of speech acts”, arguing that L2 learner pragmatic ability is reflected in how learners produce utterances to communicate “specific intentions,” and conversely, how they interpret the intentions which these utterances convey. Fraser (1983: 30) also describes pragmatic competence as the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle “attitudes” in the speaker’s utterance.
The acceptable situational circumstances for a particular speech act are culturally relative. Examples abound. While Americans often use indirect complaints (complaints not directly about the addressee) as a solidarity strategy, Japanese learners of English tend to avoid this speech act because it is perceived to be face-threatening behavior and problematical in their L1 (Boxer, 1993). In Alaska, Athabaskan Indians find Americans ridiculously garrulous because it is inappropriate to talk to strangers in Athabaskan culture. Silence is an acceptable type of conversation in Athabaskan culture, and people often sit quietly with each other without saying anything (Scollon, 995), whereas in American culture silence is uncomfortable once interlocutors have been introduced to each other.

Another example, American learners of Indonesian may not understand why it is a compliment to mention someone’s new sewing machine or shopping habits, unaware of the fact that in Indonesian culture such remarks imply approval of an addressee’s accomplishments (Wolfson, 1981). And finally, learners of Arabic must know that in Egyptian culture, complimenting pregnant women, children, or others by saying they are attractive is believed to draw harmful attention from the Evil Eye, jeopardizing the safety of the addressee (Nelson, El Bakary, & Al Batal, 1996).

Pragmatic competence is concerned with the ability to bridge the gap between sentence meaning and speaker meaning in order to interpret the indirectly expressed communicative intention. The process by which interlocutors arrive at speaker meaning involves inferencing, which is guided by a set of rational and universal principles that all participants are expected to observe for successful communication, namely, the Cooperative Principle. According to Carrell (1984:
“one aspect of pragmatic competence in an L2 is the ability to draw correct inferences”. Fraser (1983) also includes the ability to interpret figurative language as part of pragmatics because utterances that are overt and deliberate violations of the conversational maxims (e.g., the future is now as a violation of the maxim Quality, I wasn’t born yesterday as a violation of Quantity) require the ability to recognize and interpret conversational implicature.

As Leech (1983) and Thomas (1995) note, indirectness increases the degree of optionality and negotiability on the part of hearer and thereby reduces the imposition on the hearer. However, as a number of cross-cultural pragmatic studies on politeness point out, the application of this principle differs systematically across cultures and languages. Greek social norms, for example, require a much higher level of indirectness in social interaction than American ones, while Israeli norms generally allow even more directness than American ones (Blum-Kulka, 1982, 1987). Similarly, House and Kasper (1981) observed that German speakers generally selected more direct politeness than Americans when requesting and complaining. Wierzbicka (1985) found that some Polish requests use the imperative form as a mild directive when in English this might be considered rude. All these studies demonstrate that the ability to choose the appropriate linguistic directness with reference to the L2 norm is crucial for pragmatic competence.

Therefore, in developing pragmatic competence, learners have to become familiar with the cultural ethos associated with politeness as shared by members of the L2 community.
Achievement of communicative intent in naturally occurring conversation requires a number of turns at talk between two interlocutors. According to Blum-Kulka (1997b: 49), a full pragmatic account would need to consider the various linguistic and paralinguistic signals by which both participants encode and interpret each other’s utterances. Van Dijk (1981: 195) also extends the notion of speech act to apply to a sequence of utterances constituting a stretch of discourse, that is, the “macro speech act”. Kasper (2001a) notes that speech act performance is often jointly accomplished throughout the whole discourse through a sequencing of implicit illocutionary acts rather than any explicit expression of the communicative intent.

Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) express the concern that learners need to be aware of discourse differences between their L1 and the L2 in order to acquire pragmatic competence. At the observable behavioral level, what should L2 learners acquire in order to communicate their intentions successfully in discourse? It seems that two types of discourse management ability are at work: (a) the ability to interpret and fill the discourse slot as L2 conversational norms dictate, and (b) the ability to recognize and produce discourse markers correctly in terms of their pragmatic functions.

In (Austin, 1998), the interdisciplinary nature of pragmatic competence calls forth a need to acquire pragmatic knowledge in a holistic context, encompassing all the discrete components of pragmatic ability, including discourse management ability and, most importantly, culture. If L2 learners acquire L2 cultural knowledge about archetypal structures of speech events, they will not only be able to better understand a given speech event in general, but effectively participate in
that given speech event using appropriate speech acts. In order to acquire L2 cultural knowledge, however, a more precise and conceivable description of L2 cultural rules of behavior is necessary.

2.4 Pragmatic and Politeness

Politeness is the largest and most researched area of pragmatics. Politeness theory is a large and complex field of study. Since pragmatic competence involves knowing more than just the grammar and lexicon of a language, the area of pragmatic and politeness acquisition has been studied in depth by various researchers.

One facet of politeness is the facesaving view and the ground-breaking concept of “face” that is explored by Brown and Levinson (1987: 66). They write that face is something that is “emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly be attended to in interaction”. Brown and Levinson assumed that we as humans are interested in preserving our “face,” or how the world views us.

Márquez-Reiter and Placencia (2005: 154) describe the two types of face as positive face is defined as a person’s desire to be desirable to at least some other person who will appreciate and approve of one’s self and personality while negative face is described as a person’s desire to be unimpeded by others. That is, to be free to act without being imposed upon. They also explore the interrelated issue of positive politeness (speaker wants hearer’s wants) and negative politeness (the speaker recognizes the hearer’s negative face wants) which is crucial in many cross-cultural studies.
Negative politeness “is redressive action addressed to the addressee’s negative face, his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded” and includes being direct, not assuming, not coercing the hearer, and redressing other wants of the hearer”. Brown and Levinson’s final politeness strategy consists of “off record” communicative acts. They write that “such off-record utterances are essentially indirect uses of language in which the hearer must make some inference to recover what was in fact intended”. Off record strategies include giving hints, giving association clues, presupposing, and understating.

More recent politeness models take into consideration politeness norms from cultures other than whose language users are speakers of English. Watts (2006) discusses a new term for ‘politeness,’ noting a negative connotation that many have with this term, likely stemming from “eighteenth century definitions and the social applications of the term” and introduces the term “politic verbal behaviour”. Watts also takes issue with the idea of universal politeness, noting “I hesitate to suggest that linguistic politeness is a universal of language usage, unless it can be shown typologically that every culture makes use of volitional strategies of marked egocentric political behavior”.

Rintell (1981) studied the level of deference employed in suggestions and requests by adult learners of English whose native language was Spanish. She asked 16 respondents to act out how they would make certain requests and suggestions to fictional interlocutors of various ages and both genders. Her goal was to see how the level of deference or politeness varied between the native and second language and what strategies were used to convey said politeness. In her
analysis of constructed requests, Rintell found requests made by native speakers and second language learners were more deferential to older individuals while in their native Spanish, the informants were more polite to the opposite sex than to members of the same sex. Suggestions showed no major effect for either age or sex of addressee. She concludes that in both languages, a greater level of deference was shown in requests, perhaps due to the inherent facethreatening nature of requests.

Koike (1996) focused on the transfer of pragmatic competence in the speech act of suggestions by American learners of Spanish. Koike notes that transfer, or utilizing a strategy that is common in the L1 into the L2, is common in language learners, no matter the language area, and various studies (Gass, Selinker, 1983) have shown that “transfer from the first language does occur in foreign language learning under various constraints” (Koike, 1996: 258).

Koike conducted a study with 114 English L1 language learners of Spanish at three different skill levels (first year, second year, and advanced – as determined by the course level at the university). She presented videotaped scenes of a “speech act by a native speaker” (264). The students were asked to respond to the video as if they were talking to the person on the screen. They were to identify the type of speech act expressed (apology, compliment, suggestion), and evaluate the other speaker in degrees of aggression/passivity, rude/polite behavior, non-communication/communication, strong/weak behavior, and unfriendly/friendly behavior.
2.5 Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

In pragmatics research, the most frequently used instrument for eliciting speech act data is the discourse completion task (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Rose & Ono, 1995). The discourse completion task was originally employed by Blum-Kulka (1982) and has been an extensively used elicitation method in cross-cultural speech act studies.

The DCT involves a written description of a situation followed by a short dialogue with an empty gap that has to be completed by the learner. The context specified in the situation is designed in such a way that the particular pragmatic aspect under study is elicited. One of the advantages attributed to this instrument consists of its allowing control over the contextual variables that appear in the situational description and which may affect learners’ choice of particular forms when writing their responses. Moreover, the use of DCTs allows the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time (Houck & Gass, 1996).

Kasper and Roever (2005) stated that they can be administered faster than other data collection instruments does not mean that this is always the easiest instrument to be employed. As these authors argue, it is designing the DCT that is best suited to the goals of the study and the evaluation process that takes time to develop.

Beebe & Cummings (1985: 13), in their study of data elicitation methods, claimed that the DCT is a highly effective means of:

(a) gathering a large amount of data quickly;
(b) creating an initial classification of semantic formulas and strategies that will occur in natural speech;
(c) studying the stereotypical, perceived requirements for socially appropriate (though not always polite) responses;
(d) gaining insight into social and psychological factors that are likely to affect speech and performance; and
(e) ascertaining the canonical shape of refusals, apologies, partings, etc., in the minds of the speaker of that language.

Additionally, Kasper and Rose (2002) claim that DCT can provide pertinent information regarding learners’ pragmalinguistic and metapragmatic knowledge on the specific pragmatic feature under study. In fact, Kasper (2000: 329) indicates that DCT is an effective data collection instrument when the objective of the investigation is “to inform the speakers’ pragmalinguistic knowledge of the strategic and linguistic forms by which communicative acts can be implemented, and about their sociopragmatic knowledge of the context factors under which particular strategies and linguistic choices are appropriate”

### 2.6 Compliment Response

It was once commonly believed that a simple response of “Thank you” was a prescriptively correct answer to a compliment (Herbert 1986, 1990). However, it was found that people were doing more than just accepting compliments in the reality of strategic compliment responses. Responding to compliment means that the recipient would face the interactional dilemma due to the clash of politeness principles (Pomerantz 1978).
Responding to compliments has a further interest for cross-cultural differences. Chen’s (1999) study shows that in Chinese society, the Modesty Maxim overweighs the Agreement Maxim in the case of complimenting. He records 96% of rejection patterns in China as opposed to 13% of Americans. Some other Asian studies also generally follow this trend: in Japanese (Koike 2000) and in Korean (Han 1992) the most preferred response strategy was to reject or be modest about the compliments. In some studies, to evade or question the appropriateness of compliments was the most preferred strategy (Barnlund & Araki 1985; Yokota 1985).

Kim (2006) further looks at larger discourse level of Japanese compliment responses. She reports that the combination of different strategies across compliment discourse (e.g. first reject but then accept compliments as the discourse proceeds) was the most preferred strategy for the Japanese (nearly 40%). The second preferred strategy was to skillfully evade compliments, which accounted for nearly 30% of her Japanese data.

While many studies have been conducted concerning compliment response variation by language, studies that examine the compliment response strategies of second language learners are far more scarce. For this study, one study which studied American learners of German proved to be relevant in this study.

Huth (2006) studied pragmatic competence in American learners of German in the form of compliments. German compliments often differ from American English compliments in that their adjacency pair features a compliment/assessment or a compliment/assessment/agreement format in which the recipient of the compliment often responds with items such yes, I know.
American English compliments almost always follow the compliment/response format in which the recipient thanks the one giving the compliment but does not usually agree with the one giving the compliment. The author chose these items to test because “they reflect differences in the preference structure of compliment-response in the two languages” and “since structural and cultural features are demonstrably present such sequences establish a direct connection between language and culture for L2 learners”.

To carry out this study, Huth relied on the data of 20 American students of German in a beginning level German class at a University in the American Midwest. A target lesson on German CRs had been carried out before the study was conducted. Data was collected “in form of recorded telephone conversations” and was recorded twice: the first at the beginning of the semester and the second time at the end. The students worked in pairs and were each in separate faculty offices, and were recorded on the telephone. They spoke on the phone about a number of topics in the target language, one of which being compliments. Telephone data have the advantage that “understanding between interactants is exclusively achieved by verbal interaction since participants have no sensory access to each other than by audio”. The data was then transcribed and analyzed.

The author concludes that “the results of this study describe a specific stage in pragmatic development of L2 learners, characterized by initial pragmatic transfer which may then be noticed and repaired”. He notes, however, that “even after explicit instruction and repeated in-class practice, pragmatic transfer may occur”. Having seen promise and challenge in his findings, Huth seems to have had mixed results in this study, both with the conversational analysis framework
and with the study itself, noting that conversational analysis based materials should “be presented in such a way as to emphasize the differing reference frames provided by both L1 and L2 sociopragmatic conventions”. Huth included a cultural component in what might otherwise have been a purely SLA article. To reinforce this component, Huth had the participants include a separate written portion in which they reflected on their ideas about the German compliment systems, allowing them to show their own metalinguistic and cultural awareness. This type of feedback gives researchers insight into the degree that people are aware of their own CR behavior and the thought processes behind them.

2.6.1 Compliment Response Strategies

Compliment responses can be seen as solutions for maintaining a balance between a preference to avoid self-praise and a preference to accept or agree with the compliment (Pomerantz, 1978). This study adopt JB Smith classification system of compliment responses with an analysis of the data collected from Discourse Completion Tasks. The strategies was developed approximate Compliment Response classifications proposed for English CRs by Pomerantz (1978) and Herbert (1986). This classification system believed to be an effective way to analyze the data in this study. Smith (2009) distinguished 8 tpyes of compliment responses.

1. Acknowledgements

   A verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment, acceptance not being tied to the specific semantics of the stimulus (e.g. Thanks).

2. Upgrade/Agreement
Addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient (e.g. I’m really a great cook).

3. Explanation
Addressee offers a comment or series of comments on the object complimented. That is, they shift the force of the compliment from the address (e.g. I bought it for the trip to Arizona).

4. Downgrade/Refusal
Addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated (e.g. It’s old).

5. Return of Compliment
Addressee agrees with the compliment assertion, but the complimentary force is transferred to the first speaker (e.g. I like your clothes too.)

6. Insults
Addressee asserts that the object complimented is not worthy of praise, the responses seemed to disregard the compliment and instead gave an unkind verbal remark (e.g. I hate it).

7. Questioning Compliment
Addressees question the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment (e.g. Do you really think so?).

8. Topic Change
Addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment. The addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment or gives no response. (e.g. What’s your name).
Figure 2.1 - Flow chart of Theoretical Framework

Pragmatic Competence of English Students

Speech Act Theory

Pragmatic Competence

Pragmatic & Politeness

Discourse Completion Task

8 Strategies of Compliment Response

Results

8 Strategies applied by the students

Social Factors

Cultural Interference