Compliment Response Continuum Hypothesis[1]

Giao Quynh Tran

The University of Melbourne

Abstract

While there has been a large corpus of studies on how people respond to compliments and how the first language (L1) and culture influence their compliment responses (CRs) in a second language (L2) in cross-cultural communication, studies of this kind are usually based on taxonomies of compliment response (CR) strategies which seem not to be connected with each other. When studying CRs and the first linguistic and cultural influence on L2 acquisition and performance (technically known as pragmatic and discourse transfer) in CRs, I realized that existing frameworks of CR strategy categorization could not explain for all of the empirical data in my study. Therefore, I developed a new framework of CR categorization and validated it through the Intercoder Reliability Test. Unlike existing frameworks, this one consists of continua of CR strategies which are linked together. Based on this new framework, I discovered hitherto unknown patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer which laid the foundations of a new hypothesis: the CR Continuum Hypothesis. The purposes of this article are to suggest new CR continua, to present my newly found patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer, and to propose the CR Continuum Hypothesis. Not only can this hypothesis inform researchers, L2 teachers and learners of the transferability of various CR strategies, it can also account for cross-cultural differences on the basis of universality.

Key words:

Cross-cultural communication, pragmatic and discourse transfer, compliment response, continuum, hypothesis

Compliment Responses

> "You look great today!"
> "Thank you"
>
> "I like your coat"
> "Really?"

We all have come across exchanges of compliments and responses like these but how often do we stop to wonder how we, as apposed to people in other cultures, respond to compliments? What do CRs inform us culturally? In spite of being usually short, CRs constitute an interesting reflection of culture and a necessary social function in cross-cultural interaction. CRs are interesting to study because they reflect sociocultural norm(s) as stated by Herbert (1989):

CRs are an interesting object for study since there is relatively strong agreement within the speech community as to what form constitutes a "correct response" (p. 5).

Like other communicative acts[2], replying to compliments reveals "*rules of language use in a speech community" and "critical elements of face maintenance devices*". Therefore, studying CRs can "*enhance our understanding of a people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and meaning of language use in a community*" (Yuan, 2001, p. 273). Moreover, responding to compliments

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[1] This hypothesis is one of the outcomes of Tran's PhD research (2004c, 2006a). For correspondence purposes, contact: giaoquynhtran@yahoo.com.
[2] For the use of the term "communicative act", see Tran (2003, 2004b, 2004c, 2006a).

is "*of great interests to researchers*" (Saito and Beecken, 1997, p. 364) also because CRs "*differ from culture to culture*" (Wierzbicka, 1991, p. 144).

Pragmatic and discourse transfer

As defined by Tran (2006a), pragmatic and discourse transfer[3] refers to the learners' carrying over their L1 pragmatic and discourse norms of politeness and appropriateness into their L2 production. In other words, it is the influence of learners' L1 sociocultural and linguistic norms of politeness and/or appropriateness on their L2 performance of communicative acts (p. 50).

The following is an example of pragmatic and discourse transfer in CRs4. In Vietnamese culture, people often respond to compliments negatively or reject the compliments to show modesty (Tran, 2004c, 2006a). When Vietnamese speakers of English do the same in English, they are showing pragmatic and discourse transfer from their L1 into their L2 performance in the communicative act of replying compliments.

Different frameworks of cr strategy categorization in previous studies of crs

CRs have been examined in a wide range of pragmatics5 studies (Baba, 1996, 1999; Chen, 1993; Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001; Gajaseni, 1994; Golato, 2002, 2003; Herbert, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991; Herbert and Straight, 1989; Holmes, 1986; Jeon, 1996; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Saito and Beecken, 1997; Yu, 1999; Yuan, 1996, 2001; etc.). What is worth noticing is that previous studies of CRs have presented different frameworks of CR categorization, of which the most popular ones are presented below. It is, therefore, difficult for researchers to decide on the most appropriate one to adopt.

It can be said that the classic frameworks of CR categorization are those suggested by Pomerantz (1978) and Herbert (1989). Table 1 shows the framework by Pomerantz (1978) with examples in broad transcription as cited in Herbert (1989, p. 10).

Table 1 Taxonomy of CR types (Pomerantz 1978)

I. Acceptances

	Appreciation Token	A. That's beautiful.
		B. Thank you.
	Agreement	A: Oh it was just beautiful.
		B: Well thank you. I thought it was quite nice.

II. Rejections

| | 1. Disagreement | A: You did a great job cleaning up the house. |
| | | B: Well, I guess you haven't seen the kids' room. |

III. Self-praise Avoidance Mechanisms

1. Praise Downgrades

	Agreement:	A: That's beautiful.
		B: Isn't it pretty?
	Disagreement:	A: Good shot.
		B: Not very solid though.

2. Referent Shifts

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[3] For a detailed explanation of the term "pragmatic and discourse transfer", see Tran (2004b, 2004c, 2006a).

[4] For a review of previous studies on pragmatic and discourse transfer in CRs, see Tran (2002, 2004c, 2006a).

[5] For an explanation of "pragmatics", see Tran (2003, 2004c, 2006a)

Reassignment	A: You're a good rower, Honey.
	B: These are very easy to row. Very light.
Return	A: Ya' sound real nice.
	B: Yeah, you soun' real good too.

Herbert (1989) suggested another framework of CR types based on American and South African ethnographic data. Table 2 is a summary of Herbert's framework with examples from his American ethnographic data.

Table 2 Herbert's CR types (1989)

1. Agreements

Appreciation Token

Thanks/ Thank you (p. 11).

Comment Acceptance

(19) F1: I like your hair long.

F2: Me too. I'm never getting it cut short again.

(20) M1: I like your jacket.

M2: Yeah, it's cool (p. 12).

Praise Upgrade

(23) F: I like that shirt you're wearing.

M: You're not the first and you're not the last

(p. 13)

Comment History

(25) F1: I love that outfit.

F2: I got it for the trip to Arizona (p. 13).

Reassignment

(31) F: That's a beautiful sweater.

M: My brother gave it to me (p. 14).

Return

(35) F: You're funny.

M: You're a good audience (p. 14).

2. No agreements

Scale Down

(37) F: That's a nice watch.

M: It's all scratched up. I'm getting a new one

(p. 15).

Disagreement

(38) F1: Nice haircut.

F2: Yeah, I look like Buster Brown.

(39) F1: Your haircut looks good.

F2: It's too short.

(40) M: Those are nice shoes.

F: They hurt my feet.

(41) F1: Nice haircut. You look good.

F2: I hate it (p. 15).

Qualification

(42) F1: Your portfolio turned out great.

F2: It's alright, but I want to retake some pictures.

(43) M: You must be smart. You did well on that last linguistics test.

F: Not really. You did better (p. 16).

Question/ Question Response

(44) M1: Nice sweater

M2: You like it?

M1: Yeah

M2: Why?

M1: It's a nice color.

M2: Yeah, it's a nice color.

(46) M: Nice sweatshirt.

F: What's wrong with it?

(47) M: That's a nice sweater.

F: Do you really think so? (p. 16)

No Acknowledgement

(48) M1: That's a beautiful sweater.

M2: Did you finish the assignment for today?

(p. 17)

3. Request Interpretation

(50) F: I like your shirt.

M: You want to borrow this one too?   (p. 17)

The frameworks of CR categorization by Pomerantz (1978) and Herbert (1989) have been widely used with or without adaptation. For example, in order to contrast CRs by British and Spanish university students, Lorenzo-Dus (2001) adopted Herbert's (1989) taxonomy but used only the following CR types: compliment acceptance, comment history, return, praise upgrade and reassignments.

In addition to the above classical frameworks, many others have been developed as exemplified below. Among these, an interesting framework of CR categorization was proposed by Saito and Beecken (1997) when they studied CRs by American learners of Japanese. They analyzed CRs in two ways: Initial Sentence Analysis (quantitative analysis) and Semantic Formula Analysis (qualitative analysis). In the Initial Sentence Analysis, they categorized a CR based on the first sentence rather than all sentences in the CR. The first sentence in the CR was classified as positive, negative or avoidance. Accordingly, a CR like: "Thank you. I'm glad you like it. I know" was considered positive; "No, I'm still not good, you know" was negative; and "Really? Well, it's OK" was avoidance (Saito and Beecken, 1997, p. 368). In the Semantic Formula Analysis, they used the following framework of CR categorization (See Table 3).

Table 3: CR categorization based on Semantic Formulae (Saito and Beecken, 1997)

Semantic Formulae Used in the Analysis

Semantic Formula	Examples

1) Gratitude	Thank you; Appreciate it.
2) Affirmative explanation	I have confidence; I'm good at cooking.
3) Agreement	Yes; I know.
4) Acceptance	I'm glad you like it.
5) Joke	You need to practice ten more years to beat me.
6) Avoidance/Topic change	Really?; Let's play again.
7) Mitigation	It happened by chance.
8) Return	You're good, too.
9) Denial	No; I'm not good.

(Saito and Beecken, 1997, p. 370)

Saito and Beecken's framework is not the only one which was founded on more than one way of analysing CRs. Farghal and Al-Khatib (2001) also used two types of distinctions (i.e. binary distinctions) to categorize CRs by Jordanian college students (See Table 4).

Table 4 CR categorization on the basis of binary distinctions (Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001)

1. Simple responses (i.e., responses featuring one illocution, e.g., thanking, offering, denying, and responses which are exclusively non-verbal) vs. complex responses (i.e., responses featuring two illocutions, e.g., thanking + offering, doubting + denying, invocation + thanking).
2. Macro-functions, e.g., accepting compliment, vs. micro-illocutions, e.g., invocation or offering.
3. Intrinsically-complex responses (i.e., responses featuring two micro-illocutions within the same macro-function, e.g., thanking + offering or doubting + denying) vs. extrinsically-complex responses (i.e., responses featuring two micro-illocutions which belong to different macro-functions, e.g., tagging + denying or thanking + questioning).

Farghal and Al-Khatib (2001, p. 1491)

Although the frameworks of CR categorization cited are well-designed and well-grounded, they may not be able to account for all CR data in a certain study, for example this one. Therefore, it is at times necessary to develop another CR categorization framework which is more suitable for a specific study. Moreover, among existing pragmatics studies of CRs, none was particularly concerned with and presented a framework of CR categories in Australian English and Vietnamese. As regards Australian English, Cordella et al. (1995) studied the complimenting behavior in Australia but their study only tested and validated Wofson's Bulge Theory in Australian English without suggesting any framework of CR categorization. In Vietnamese, no study of CRs has been documented. Therefore, the framework of CR categorization suggested herein is the initial taxonomy of Australian English and Vietnamese CR types.

Data collection and analysis

In my PhD dissertation (Tran, 2004c, 2006a), one of the research aims is to investigate the nature of pragmatic and discourse transfer. Using my new methodology named Naturalized Role-play (Tran, 2004a, 2004c, 2006a, 2006b), I collected CR data in English from Australian English native speakers (NSs) and Vietnamese speakers of English in Australia, together with CR data in Vietnamese from Vietnamese NSs in Vietnam. My analysis of data revealed as yet unknown patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer. This article reports on a part of my dissertation _ the part which is relevant to the proposal of the CR Continuum Hypothesis.

Data collection

There are two instruments of data collection in this study. Those are my new methodology _ the Naturalized Role-play6 _ and Intercoder Reliability Test (See Appendix). The majority of empirical data for this study comes from the Naturalized Role-play. This methodology of data collection is capable of eliciting spontaneous pragmatic data in controlled settings7. Such a capability, the lack of which has caused the long-standing methodological problem in pragmatics research, has been a hitherto unfulfilled desirable goal in this field.

The Intercoder Reliability Test (See Appendix) consists of a sample of 15% of Naturalized Role-play data. It was designed to verify the validity of the proposed CR categorization framework.

Participants in this study fell into three categories including role-play informants, role-play conductors and coders.

Naturalized Role-play informants

There were sixty role-play informants who were Australian English NSs, Vietnamese NSs and Vietnamese speakers of English as an L2 in Australia. All of them were university students, ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-one years. So they showed homogeneity in terms of age, education and profession. Following are details of the role-play informants.

The English group (E group) included 20 NSs of Australian English in Melbourne, Australia. There were 10 male and 10 female informants in this group. These informants provided the baseline data on CRs in Australian English.

The Vietnamese group (V group) consisted of 20 NSs of Vietnamese in Ho Chi Minh City and My Tho, Vietnam. 10 of them were men and the other 10 were women. They gave the baseline data on CRs in Vietnamese.

The group of Vietnamese learners of English (VE group) was composed of 20 Vietnamese international university students in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. The number of men and women in this group was equally 10. They provided the non-native speaker (NNS) data on CRs in English. Their length of stay in Australia averaged one and a half years. Specifically, the average duration of stay is 1.55 years and the length of stay of each informant did not vary greatly as the standard deviation is 0.426. Their level of English proficiency was advanced: they had scored at least 577 for Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or 6.5 for International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Such L2 test scores have been widely used to define the advanced level of learners in interlanguage pragmatics research (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1990, 1991; Dogancay-Aktuna and Kamisli, 1997; Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig, 1992; Yuan, 1996; etc.).

Role-play conductors

Role-play conductors assisted in eliciting data from informants in role-plays. They were recruited and trained to conduct role-plays naturally in the direction designed in the same way with different informants.

There were ten role-play conductors including six Australian English NSs (three men and three women) and four Vietnamese NSs (two men and two women). They role-played with informants of the same gender. Australian English speaking conductors role-played in English with Australian English NSs and with Vietnamese speakers of English in Australia, which means each of them conducted role-plays with two to three E role-play informants and two to three VE role-play informants. Vietnamese speaking role-play conductors role-played in Vietnamese with Vietnamese NSs in Vietnam, which means each of them conducted role-plays with five V informants.

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[6] As there is a limit to the length of this article, it is not possible to describe the Naturalized Role-play to readers' satisfaction here. Therefore, readers are recommended to refer to my other article (Tran, 2006b), my PhD dissertation (Tran, 2004c) or my book (Tran, 2006a) for more information.

NS intercoders

The group of NS intercoders consisted of two NSs of English (one man and one woman) and one male NS of Vietnamese.

In the present study, each informant participating in the Naturalized Role-play produced four CRs to compliments on skill, possession, appearance and clothing. The total number of CRs collected was eighty CRs in English by Australian English NSs, eighty CRs in Vietnamese by Vietnamese NSs and eighty CRs in English by Vietnamese speakers of English.

Data analysis

Qualitative analysis

CR data was coded by the researcher according to the strategies selected to reply to compliments. Strategy selection was categorized on the basis of the semantic formulas used in a CR and its content. The term "strategy" is not limited to the semantic formulas used in a CR but also refers to its content because it is impossible to categorize strategies used in a CR without also taking into consideration its content.

Quantitative analysis

In the quantitative analysis in this study, inferential statistical measures[7] were used to support results of the qualitative analysis and strengthen the overall analysis. Cohen's kappa was computed on Intercoder Reliability (See Table 5 & Appendix) to measure inter-coder agreement. A high kappa value confirms the[8] validity of the suggested CR categorization framework.

Continua of cr strategies

The qualitative analysis of the semantic formulas and content of the CRs in this investigation resulted in a new framework of CR categories. This framework consists of two continua of CR strategies: a continuum of CR strategies from acceptance to denial strategies (Figure 1) and a continuum of avoidance strategies (Figure 2). The new framework of CR categories is proposed because of two reasons.

First, as presented above, previous studies about CRs have suggested various frameworks of CR categories (Baba, 1999; Chen, 1993; Farghal and Al-Khatib, 2001; Gajaseni, 1994; Golato, 2002, 2003; Herbert, 1986, 1989, 1990, 1991; Herbert and Straight, 1989; Holmes, 1986; Jeon, 1996; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Pomerantz, 1978, 1984; Saito and Beecken, 1997; Yu, 1999; Yuan, 1996, 2001; etc.). None of these frameworks can fully account for the data in this investigation. Moreover, there has not been any documented framework of CR categories in Australian English and Vietnamese. Therefore, I developed a new framework of CR continua to categorize data here.

Second, unlike the frameworks in previous studies of CRs, mine indicates that CR strategies are not separate but connect with one another and form a continuum. According to Pomerantz (1978), the compliment receiver is in the dilemma of whether to agree with the complimenter to be polite or to disagree with the complimenter to avoid self-praise. Pomerantz also found that "*most compliment responses lie somewhere in between (not at the polar extremes of) acceptances and agreements on the one hand and rejections and disagreements on the other*" (p. 81). The best way to capture this "*in between-ness*" (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 81) is by means of continua. For example, CR strategies in my framework can be placed on the acceptance to denial continuum with compliment upgrade at one end and disagreement at the other. The strategies, in between, resolve the compliment receiver's dilemma. In addition, avoiding strategies form the avoidance continuum with the ones at the right end showing avoidance more clearly than those at the left end. The strategies along my two continua vary in terms of the degree to which they agree or disagree with the complimentary force, or the degree to which they avoid the praise.

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[7] Statistical measures were applied in consultation with the Statistical Consulting Centre at the University of Melbourne.

[8] For a better understanding of the significance of this capability, see Tran (2003, 2004c, 2006a, 2006b)

The following are the proposed continua together with the definition and illustrative example(s) of each strategy. Examples are printed in italics. They are among the data collected for this study. The under-lined words in each example represent the CR strategy that the example illustrates. In the examples in Figures 1 & 2, A represents the complimenter and B the complimentee. Moreover, on the acceptance to denial continuum, the strategy "Non-idiomatic Response" was placed in parentheses because it occurred only in NNSs' data, not in data provided by NSs.

Figure 1

The acceptance to denial continuum

> Compliment Upgrade → Agreement (including Agreement Token) → Appreciation Token → Return → Explanation → Reassignment → (Non-idiomatic Response) → Compliment Downgrade → Disagree-ment (including Disagreement Token)

Compliment Upgrade: The complimentee agrees with and increases the complimentary force/praise force/compliment assertion.

> A: Nice car!
> B: Thanks. Brand new.

Agreement: The complimentee agrees with the complimentary force/praise force/compliment asser-tion probably by providing a response which is "semantically fitted to the compliment" (Herbert, 1989, p. 12).

> A: Hey you're looking really well today.
> B: <u>Yeah</u> I'm happy to say that <u>that's correct</u>. Heh heh heh.

An agreement can be scaled down to mitigate or minimize the force of the compliment.

> A: I like your car. It's very good.
> B: Oh. <u>Yeah.</u> Thanks. <u>It's not bad.</u>

Agreement Token: The complimentee may agree with the compliment assertion with a simple "Yes" or "Yeah". An agreement token is classified as an agreement whether it occurs in a full agreement (e.g. "Yes, I think so, too") or in isolation (e.g. "Yes" occurring by itself in a CR).

> A: It's really stylish.
> B: <u>Yeah</u>.

Appreciation Token: The complimentee recognizes the status of the other speaker's previous utter-ance as a compliment and shows appreciation for it. The agreement token itself is not "semantically fitted to the specifics of that compliment" (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 83).

> A: What a lovely dress!
> B: Oh. <u>Thank you.</u> <u>Thank you.</u>

Return: The complimentee reciprocates the act of complimenting by paying back the compliment to the complimenter.

> A: You're looking good.
> B: Thanks. So are you.
>
> Or
>
> A: You're looking good today.

Explanation/**Comment History**: The complimentee impersonalizes the complimentary force/ compli-ment assertion by giving further information, which may frequently be irrelevant, about the object of the compliment.

> A: I like your tie. It suits you well.
> B: Thanks. <u>Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again.</u>

Reassignment: The complimentee redirects the praise offered by the complimenter to some third per-son or to something else (referent/credit shift)

A: By the way, I read your article that was published last week.
B: Alright?
A: Very very good.
B: (Laughter)
A: It is.
B: Oh, no. Actually my supervisor helped me a lot. So I couldn't do it by
myself. (Laughter).

Or

A: You look good today.
B: Oh, thanks. <u>It must be the jacket.</u>

Non-idiomatic Response: The complimentee implies or would like to express that he/she does not agree with the compliment assertion. But this is done through the use of non-target-like responses.
A: I like your car. Cute looking car.
B: Uh. <u>That's OK</u>. (Intended meaning[9]: It's just OK. Nothing special)

Or

A: I just read your article uhm published last week. I thought it was really
good you know.
B: Oh. <u>That's alright</u>. (Intended meaning: It's just alright. Nothing
special)

Compliment Downgrade: The complimentee qualifies the praise force/compliment assertion, or downplays the object of the compliment.
A: It's a really nice car.
B: Oh no. <u>It looks like that but actually it has a lot of problems</u>.

Or

A: It's a nice car. I really like it.
B: Oh well. <u>It's just a normal and not very reliable car</u>.

Disagreement: The complimentee directly disagrees with the praise force/ compliment assertion. He/she asserts that the praise within the compliment is overdone or undue.
A: You're looking radiant.
B: Oh. <u>No, I don't think so.</u>

Or

A: Hey, I like your tie. It suits you very well.
B: Really? <u>I don't think so.</u> Hah hah hah.
A: You're a hard man to flatter.

Disagreement Token: The complimentee may disagree with the compliment assertion with a simple "No". A disagreement token is classified as a disagreement whether it occurs in a full disagreement (e.g. "No, I don't think so") or in isolation (e.g. "No" occurring by itself in a CR).
A: Oh you're looking well.
B: Uhm. <u>No</u>.

Figure 2

The avoidance continuum

Expressing Gladness → Follow-up Question → (Doubting) Question → Opting out.

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[8] Statistical measures were applied in consultation with the Statistical Consulting Centre at the University of Melbourne.

[9] Intended meanings were elicited in retrospective interviews.

Expressing Gladness: The complimentee does not address the compliment assertion itself, which makes the response a type of avoidance, but expresses his/her gladness that the complimenter likes the object of the compliment.

> A: By the way, I read your article that you published last week. It was
> very good.
> B: Oh, that's good. Thank you.
> Or
> A: I read that article you published last week. It was very good.
> B: Well, great.

Follow-up Question: The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which elaborates the compliment assertion. It is equivocal whether this question is meant to fish for more compliments, or to gain specific information about the worthiness of the object being complimented. In the data for this research project, the latter seems to be the case.

> A: You know I just I just read your article that you published last week. I
> thought it was excellent.
> B: Thanks a lot. What do you find interesting about it?

(Doubting) Question: The complimentee responds to the compliment with a question which corresponds to the request for repetition and/or expansion of the compliment assertion. The question is ambiguous in terms of whether the complimentee intends it to provide repetition/expansion of the original assertion or to question the sincerity/motives of the complimenter.

> A: (Referring to B's article published last week) Fantastic actually.
> B: Really?

In the data for this investigation, questions of this type often occur with an agreement, disagreement, etc., especially in the VE corpus of data. This shows that the VE informants seem to have picked up this expression as a way to introduce the disagreement that follows.

> A: You're looking very nice.
> B: Oh really? I don't think so.

Opting out:

> *Opting out with laughter:* The complimentee responds to the compliment with mere laughter.
> A: Oh, that's nice. How lovely! It's my favorite color. I wanna buy a blue
> car one day.
> B: Heh heh.

> *Opting out with filler(s)*: The complimentee just utters (some) filler(s) in response to the compliment.
> A: I was just reading your paper, that paper you submitted to the journal
> the other day. It was really good.
> B: Uhm.

> *Opting out without anything/No Acknowledgement:* The complimentee does not respond to the compliment at all verbally or nonverbally probably because he/she does not hear the other speaker's previous utterance or is occupied with something else.
> A: I read your article the other day, too. It was really good.
> B: (Silence)

> *Opting out with topic change:* The complimentee provides a response which cannot be understood as being linked to the compliment. He/she does not respond to the compliment itself but changes the topic to something else.
> A: I like your lovely dress.
> B: I heard that you (were) not well last time. So do you feel well now?

The validity of the proposed CR categorization framework was verified through the Intercoder Reliability (See Appendix). Two Australian English speaking intercoders (i.e. IC1 & IC2) and one Vietnamese speaking intercoder (i.e. IC3) in their respective native language were recruited. They took part in a

training session which introduced them to the above definitions and examples of CR strategies and presented them with various examples of pairs of compliments and CRs for them to gain hands-on experience of categorizing CR data. After the training session, they were asked to categorize a sample of CR data for this investigation in the Intercoder Reliability.

The Intercoder Reliability sample consists of fifteen percent (i.e. 32 CRs) of the English CR data collected through the "Naturalized role-play". The CR data in the test belong to all the strategies above. The above definitions, examples, CRs in the training session and the Intercoder Reliability were translated into Vietnamese for the Vietnames intercoder, so each intercoder performed the whole process concerning the Intercoder Reliability in their L1. This allows comparison of test results cross-linguistically, thereby increasing the validity of the suggested CR continua.

Results of the Intercoder Reliability (See Table 5) showed that agreement between each intercoder and me was high. At least 29/32 CRs were coded identically (90.63%). Table 5 also presents comparisons between all possible pairs, the number matching, the corresponding 95% confidence interval, together with the kappa measure of agreement. According to conventional standards, all values in this table indicate excellent agreement.

Being considered simultaneously, four intercoders agreed exactly on 28/32 CRs (87.5%) at the 95% confidence interval for true agreement of (71.01%, 96.49%). Moreover, when Cohen's kappa was used to measure inter-coder agreement among all coders, it yielded the kappa value of 0.927, which was very high. It is also noticeable that the kappa for all intercoders as a group is greater than that for the pair IC1 and IC3 (0.867), for which there were the same number and percentage of exact matches. This is stronger evidence of agreement when four coders all agree than when two coders do. Therefore, results of the Intercoder Reliability confirm the validity of the suggested CR strategy continua.

Table 5 Results of the Intercoder Reliability

Intercoders	Match	% Match	95% Confidence Interval		Kappa
Researcher & IC1	31	96.88	83.78,	99.92	0.966
Researcher & IC2	31	96.88	83.78,	99.92	0.966
Researcher & IC3	29	90.63	74.98,	98.02	0.900
IC1 & IC2	30	93.75	79.19,	99.23	0.933
IC1 & IC3	28	87.50	71.01,	96.49	0.867
IC2 & IC3	30	93.75	79.19,	99.23	0.933
All	28	87.50	71.01,	96.49	0.927

Frequency of use of CR strategies by the ve, e and v groups in the naturalized role-play

Based on the above analytical framework, CR data was categorized into strategies along the proposed continua and analyzed quantitatively. CR data in the VE, E and V groups was compared in terms of frequency of use/selection of strategies and with reference to strategy combination (i.e. which strategy often occurred with which strategy in each group).

This section presents the quantitative analysis of Naturalized Role-play data regarding the frequency of use of CR strategies by each group of speakers. Table 6 presents the frequency at which each CR strategy occurred in the whole VE, E and V groups.

In Table 6 and the figures presented herein, "Opting out" represents all strategies related to opting out including "Opting out with laughter", "Opting out with fillers", "Opting out without anything", and "Opting out with topic change". The miscellaneous category of "Laughter" describes the frequency of laughter in the CRs. This category may overlap with "Opting out with laughter" in some places.

Table 6: The total number of times each CR strategy occurred in the VE, E and V groups

Strategies along the continuum from acceptance to denial	E	VE	V
Compliment Upgrade	9	0	0
Agreement	23	3	0
Appreciation Token	49	19	4
Return	10	1	3
Explanation	15	10	24
Reassignment	4	6	7
Non-idiomatic Response	0	6	0
Compliment Downgrade	3	27	29
Disagreement	1	25	27
Strategies along the avoidance continuum	**E**	**VE**	**V**
Expressing Gladness	4	0	0
Follow-up Question	3	0	0
(Doubting) Question	3	6	4
Opting out	0	13	18
Miscellaneous	**E**	**VE**	**V**
Laughter	14	30	43

According to Table 6, the total number of times most CR strategies ("Compliment Upgrade", "Agreement", "Appreciation Token", "Return", "Compliment Downgrade", "Disagreement", "Opting out" and "Laughter") occurred in the whole VE group differed from that in the whole E group. However, the frequency at which such CR strategies (except for "Appreciation Token") was used by the VE group was close to that by the V group. That is an example of pragmatic and discourse transfer.

Patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer

Evidence of pragmatic and discourse transfer indeed fell into patterns. Figures 3 and 4 give the whole picture of CR strategy use by the VE, E and V groups put together. Being grounded on Table 6, Figures 3 and 4 indicate the variation in CR strategy use among the VE, E and V groups. This variation is in relation to total number of CRs containing a certain strategy in each group or the total number of times each strategy occurred in the CRs by each group. Figure 3 shows the variation in the use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum among the three groups and Figure 4 describes the three groups' use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the lines representing the E and V groups' frequency of use of CR strategies on the acceptance to denial continuum are skewed towards opposite ends of the continuum. The line which depicts the E group's CR strategy use rises towards the acceptance end but falls towards the denial end of the continuum. By contrast, the line which illustrates the V group's use of CR strategies ascends towards the denial end but descends towards the acceptance end of the continuum. The line showing the use of CR strategies by the VE group apparently falls in between these two opposite directions though it bears close resemblance to the line describing the V group's strategy use, illustrating a pattern of pragmatic and discourse transfer.
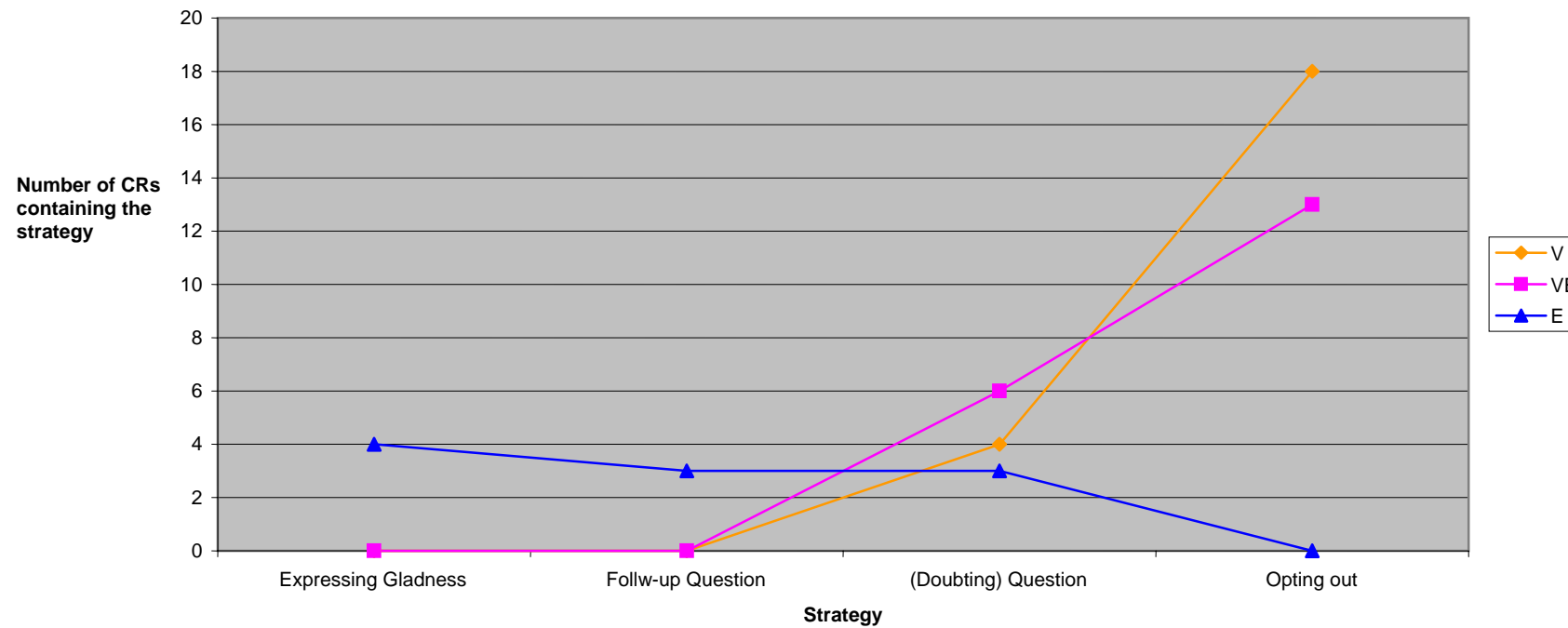
Figure 4 portrays the E and V groups' frequency of use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum as lines that rise and fall in opposite directions. The highest point of the line illustrating the E group's CR strategy use is at "Expressing Gladness" which is at the left end of the avoidance continuum. The lowest point of this line is at "Opting out" which is at the right end of the avoidance continuum. On the contrary, the highest point of the line depicting the V group's use of CR strategies is at "Opting out"

and the lowest point of this line is at "Expressing Gladness". The line representing the VE group's strategy use strongly resembles the line symbolizing the V group's strategy use, manifesting another pattern of pragmatic and discourse transfer.

The most intriguing findings about patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer are concerned with the positions of strategies that are or are not transferred on the CR continua. In my PhD research (Tran, 2004c, 2006a), I found which CR strategies were or were not transferred through further analysis of the number of members of each group who did or did not use each CR strategy and the application of the Fisher's test. It is remarkable that strategies, (i.e. "Compliment Upgrade", "Agreement", "Appreciation Token", "Return", "Compliment Downgrade" and "Disagreement"), which were transferred are at or towards both ends of the acceptance to denial continuum. Transferred avoidance strategies, (i.e. "Expressing Gladness", "Follow-up Question" and "Opting out") are also at or towards both ends of the avoidance continuum. It is, however, noticeable that strategies, (i.e. "Explanation", "Reassignment", "Non-idiomatic Response", and "Doubting Question"), which were not found to be transferred are in the middle of the continua of CR strategies. Specifically, "Explanation", "Reassignment" and "Non-idiomatic Responses" are in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum. "(Doubting) Question" is in the middle of the avoidance continuum.

Figure 4 Variation in the use of CR strategies on the avoidance continuum by the VE, V and E groups (based on the number of CRs containing each strategy in each group)

Therefore, pragmatic and discourse transfer is most clearly defined in the use of CR strategies at or towards the ends of both the acceptance to denial continuum and the avoidance continuum. As illustrated in Figures 3 and 4, it is towards or at both ends of the acceptance to denial continuum and the avoidance continuum that the lines representing the VE group's use of CR strategies resemble the lines symbolizing the use of CR strategies by the V group and differ from those by the E group the most.

Moreover, the way CR strategies are combined (See Tran, 2004c, 2006a, in press) demonstrates another pattern of pragmatic and discourse transfer. The Vietnamese-English interlanguage pattern of CR strategy combination differs greatly from the English pattern but resemble the Vietnamese one. CR strategies in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum, (e.g. "Return", "Explanation", "Reassignment"), often occur with those at the acceptance end of the continuum, (e.g. "Compliment Upgrade", "Agreement", "Appreciation Token"), in (Australian) English whereas strategies in the middle of the continuum are often combined with those at the denial end of the continuum, (e.g. "Compliment Downgrade", "Disagreement"), in Vietnamese. As a result, Vietnamese speakers of English transferred this Vietnamese pattern of CR strategy combination into their CRs in English.

So evidence of pragmatic and discourse transfer was found to fall into hitherto unknown patterns. These patterns laid the ground for the CR Continuum Hypothesis, which led to a universality-based account for cross-cultural differences in CRs.

The CR continuum hypothesis and a universality-based explanation for cross-cultural differences in responses to compliments

Patterns of pragmatic and discourse transfer presented above provide the foundations of the "CR Continuum Hypothesis". It is hypothesized that strategies at or towards both ends of the CR continua (i.e. the acceptance to denial continuum and the avoidance continuum) are more likely to be transferred than those in the middle of the continua.

Strategies at or towards both ends of the CR continua are more transferable than those in the middle of the continua probably because the former are more extreme compared to the latter in solving the conflict, which is, as put forward by Pomerantz (1978) to explain American English data, between agreeing with the complimenter/speaker and avoiding self-praise. Take "Disagreement" for an example. "Disagreement" is at the right end of the acceptance to denial continuum of CR strategies. If a speaker uses this strategy, he/she has opted for being modest by avoiding self-praise at the cost of not being polite because he/she disagrees with the other speaker. This strategy is thus more extreme than another strategy like "Explanation" which is in the middle of the acceptance to denial continuum.

The extremes of agreeing, disagreeing and avoiding force in strategies on the CR continua encourage pragmatic and discourse transfer because they are culture-specific and thus so ingrained in the speakers in a speech community that these speakers continue to rely on them even when learning or speaking an L2. That extreme CR strategies are more culture-specific finds support in the fact that the weight given to these extremes differentiates cultures with reference to the communicative act of responding to compliments. When comparing American English speakers' (AESs) and Chinese speakers' (CSs) CRs, Chen (1993) adopted Leech's (1983, p.132) Politeness Principle, particularly the "Agreement Maxim" (i.e. "minimize disagreement between self and other") and the "Modesty Maxim" (i.e. "minimize praise of self") to explain the differences between AESs' and CSs' CRs. Chen suggested that

The compliment responding strategies of a particular culture can be accounted for by the relative weightings of the Agreement and Modesty Maxims. Those cultures which give the Agreement Maxim more weight (call them AM cultures), will be represented in a trapezoid like that of the AESs, while those in which the Modesty Maxim carries more weight (call them MM cultures), will end up with a trapezoid like that of the CSs. For those cultures which give approximately equal weight to the Agreement and the Modesty Maxims (call them AM&MM cultures), a rectangular shape will be an adequate representation. Lastly, if there are cultures which value compromising strategies between the Agreement and the Modesty Maxims (call them M(axims) in C(onflict) cultures), these can be represented by a diamond (Chen, 1993, p. 66).

In this investigation, CR strategies such as "Compliment Upgrade", "Agreement" and "Appreciation Token" which belong to the acceptance group accord with the Agreement Maxim while CR strategies like "Compliment Downgrade" and "Disagreement" which are components of the denial group are in

accordance with the Modesty Maxim. In light of Chen's proposition and the findings about Australian English and Vietnamese CRs in the present study as well as in my larger-scale research project (Tran, 2004c, 2006a), the Australian culture would be considered as an Agreement Maxim one and the Vietnamese culture a Modesty Maxim one with regard to CRs. Strategies at or towards the ends of the acceptance to denial continuum have a stronger impact on differentiating CRs in Australian and Vietnamese cultures and are thus considered more extreme and culture-representative than strategies in the middle of the continuum. Therefore, speakers continue to rely on these culture-specific socio-pragmatic norms of their L1 and implement them in L2 discourse through L2 strategies.

The CR Continuum Hypothesis can be used to explain the different degrees of transferability of CR strategies. That a CR strategy is more transferable than others can be attributed to their representativeness of fundamental cultural beliefs. In other words, transferability of CR strategies apparently depends on how extreme and hence how culture-representative they are, with the proposed CR continua being an index of strategy extremity.

Based on the CR Continuum Hypothesis, an account for cross-cultural differences concerning CRs is suggested. Strange though it may seem, cross-cultural differences are various manifestations of an underlying universality.

Although people respond to compliments differently in various cultures, they are in a universal dilemma when replying to compliments. As mentioned above, they have to choose between agreeing with and/or accepting the compliment to achieve solidarity proffered by the complimenter, and disagreeing with and/or rejecting the compliment to avoid self-praise (Pomerantz, 1978).

Given this universal paradox, cross-cultural differences concerning CRs can be ascribed to the different preferred solutions that cultures exhibit to the dilemma in responding to compliments. The CR continua suggested herein may be universal and underlie CR strategy use in various cultures, but CR strategy use differs cross-culturally on account of divergent preferences for CR strategy use to resolve the conflict between maintaining solidarity and avoiding self-praise. Accordingly, cross-cultural differences in CRs are manifestations of different culture-specific preferences in selecting and/or combining CR strategies along the CR continua.

Specifically, it is speculated that in every culture, when responding to compliments, people use CR strategies on the CR continua. At least, as shown, this is the case in (Australian) English and Vietnamese. However, the frequency at which speakers select a certain strategy and/or the way they usually combine strategies in their CRs may vary across cultures. The variation results from different preferences that various cultures or speech communities exhibit towards CR strategy use. A preference for accepting solidarity offered over avoiding self-praise may be typical of some cultures. It manifests itself in a tendency to agree with and/or accept compliments. However, a preference for being modest over being in agreement with the other interlocutor may be characteristic of other cultures. These cultures show a tendency to disagree with and/or deny compliments. So cross-cultural differences emerge as a result of different preferences or tendencies in the use of the same set of strategies in solving the universal dilemma in various societies and cultures.

If the acceptance to denial CR continuum is simply divided into three main groups of strategies which are the acceptance group (i.e. "Compliment Upgrade", "Agreement" and "Appreciation Token"), the denial group (i.e. "Compliment Downgrade" and "Disagreement"), and the neutral group (i.e. strategies in the middle of the continuum), cross-cultural differences as regards CRs can be explained by the different tendencies to use strategies of one or two groups more than the other(s). Certain cultures may exhibit a tendency to use strategies of the neutral group more than those of the other two groups or vice versa. The neutral groups of CR strategies also function as a way to resolve the conflict between being polite and being modest in replying to compliments.

As the findings of this investigation show (See also Tran, 2004c, 2006a), Australians use strategies of the acceptance group most frequently whereas the Vietnamese often use strategies of the denial group. However, strategies of the denial group do occur in Australian English CRs and strategies of the acceptance group also occur in Vietnamese CRs, though these instances are rare. Moreover, strategies of the neutral group are present in both Australian English and Vietnamese CRs. So despite the cross-cultural differences in CRs, the same range of CR strategies exists in both the Australian and Vietnamese cultures. This lends support to the assumption that the CR continua are universal and underlie CRs in various cultures.

Although speakers in both Australian and Vietnamese cultures encounter the same dilemma between showing solidarity and being modest when replying to compliments, Australians tend to choose the

former option by accepting the compliments whereas the Vietnamese often opt for the latter by deny-ing them. When combining CR strategies, Australians also display a preference for combining strate-gies in the neutral group with those in the acceptance group whereas the Vietnamese prefer the com-bination of neutral strategies and denial ones (See also Tran, 2004c, 2006a). Therefore, surface cross-cultural differences result from various cultural preferences in selecting and/or combining CR strategies on the same CR continua.

Moreover, various culture-specific preferences for CR strategy use are manifestations of the different sociocultural values that lie beneath. The Vietnamese preference for denial strategies derives from their emphasis on modesty in social interactions. It can be perceived as arrogant in Vietnamese cul-ture to accept a compliment, especially when the recipient of the compliment is not close to the person who compliments. Saying "thank you" to a compliment is not only rare in Vietnamese but also associ-ated with lack of modesty. The only exception is jokes intended for close people. So when the Viet-namese face the above-mentioned dilemma in which they have to weigh between accepting solidarity by agreeing with the complimenter and being modest, they usually decide on the latter because in Vietnamese culture, being modest is being polite to the other interlocutors. Australians, however, often use strategies in the acceptance group to accept solidarity offered by the complimenter. In interaction with Australians, such cross-cultural differences led to pragmatic and discourse transfer by Vietnam-ese speakers of English. Therefore, although CRs differ cross-culturally, they can be accounted for on the basis of the universal dilemma that speakers encounter when responding to compliments and the same continua of CR strategies that exist across cultures.

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Appendix

Intercoder Reliability

Your Name (in print): --

Code (provided by the researcher): --

Please categorize the following data according to the strategies used. Data in focus is the underlined parts of the compliment responses. Please write the category of the data in focus next to the number preceding each pair of compliment-compliment response. Your answers will be compared to those by the researcher in the follow-up discussion.

1)
    A: I read the article that you published the other day. It was really good.
    B: <u>Thank you</u>.

2)
    A: It's really stylish.
    B: <u>Yeah</u>.

3)
    A: You're looking good.
    B: Thanks. <u>So are you.</u>

4)
    A: Hey I like your jacket.
    B: Oh, thanks. <u>I like it, too</u>.

5)
    A: I like your tie. It suits you well.
    B: Thanks. <u>Mom bought it for me. She likes to buy me nice ties now and again.</u>

6)
    A: By the way, I read your article that you published last week. It was very good.
    B: Oh, <u>that's good.</u> Thank you.

7)
    A: Uhm. You've got a nice car.
    B: (Laughter). That's all it is. OK. <u>It's brand new</u>.

8)
    A: You look good today.
    B: Oh, thanks. <u>It must be the jacket.</u>

9)
    A: (Referring to B's article published last week) Fantastic actually.
    B: <u>Really?</u>

10)
    A: I like your car. It's very good.
    B: Oh. <u>Yeah.</u> Thanks. <u>It's not bad.</u>

11)
    A: You're looking good today.
    B: Thank you very much. <u>Not too bad yourself.</u>

12)
    A: (Referring to B's car) It looks nice and comfortable, too.
    B: Yeah. <u>It is</u>. I like it.

13)
   A: You know I just I just read your article that you published last week. I thought it was excel-
lent.
   B: Thanks a lot. <u>What do you find interesting about it?</u>

14)
   A: You're looking very very nice.
   B: Oh, <u>really</u>? I don't think so.

15)
   A: I read that article you published last week. It was very good.
   B: Well, <u>great.</u>

16)
   A: I like your tie. It suits you really well.
   B: Uh. Thank you. Uhm. <u>I got this tie from my girlfriend</u>.

17)
   A: It's a really nice shirt you're wearing.
   B: <u>Thanks</u>.

18)
   A: That's a pretty nice coat actually. I like it.
   B: <u>Oh heh heh heh</u>

19)
   A: You're looking really well today.
   B: <u>Yeah, yeah, OK, yeah</u>.

20)
   A: Oh you're looking well.
   B: Uhm <u>no</u>.

21)
   A: You're looking radiant.
   B: Oh, <u>no. I don't think so</u>.

22)
   A: I just uhm I just read your article you published last week. I thought it was excellent.
   B: Oh <u>really</u>? Thanks about that but I do think it's just OK.

23)
   A: Oh nice jumper you wear in there. You look stylish today.
   B: Oh no. <u>It's cheap anyway though</u>. Heh heh heh.

24)
   A: Hey. I like your tie. It suits you very well.
   B: Really? <u>I don't think so</u>. Hah hah hah.

25)
   A: (referring to B's tie) Oh it suits you well.
   B: <u>I I I bought it in Vietnam</u>. It was very cheap. Huh huh huh.

26)
  A: I read your article the other day, too. It was really good.
  B: ------------------------------

27)
   A: It's a nice car. I really like it.

B: Oh well <u>it's just a normal and not very reliable car</u>.

28)
A: Uhm I was reading your article the other week. It was really good. I really enjoyed it.
B: Oh, come on. <u>Just not anything</u>. And you can do like us. Heh heh heh.

29)
A: That's a nice jumper you're wearing. I like that.
B: <u>I just bought it in the mall</u>. It's not so nice.

30)
A: I like your lovely dress.
B: <u>I heard that you (were) not well last time. So do you feel well now?</u>

31)
A: (Referring to B's paper published last week) Very very good.
B: (Laughter).
A: It is.
B: Oh no, <u>actually my supervisor helped me a lot</u>. So I couldn't do it by myself. (Laughter)

32)
A: You're looking really good.
B: <u>Thanks</u>. You, too.