

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPLIMENT RESPONSES BY JAPANESE LEARNERS IN INDONESIA**

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### **Abstract**

Responding to compliments has the potential to cause a polemic for its speakers. Either responding with acceptance at the risk that it would be considered as arrogant or responding with rejection at the risk of disrespecting the interlocutor's opinion of the compliment's content is where the polemic lies. How Japanese language learners in Indonesia respond to complimentary speech acts is the question addressed in this research. This research is a descriptive study aimed at finding the characteristics of responses given by Japanese language learners in Indonesia to complementary speech acts. The respondents are Japanese language learners with Javanese backgrounds, currently studying at university level in Central Java and Yogyakarta. Data obtained from 53 respondents resulted in 636 speeches of compliment responses obtained using the ODCT. Based on the results of the data analysis, acceptance responses to compliments were found to be very high, reaching 65 percent of all data. Subsequently, an interesting finding was revealed in the context of compliment pertaining to ability in every context of relationship between the speech participants, wherein most of the respondents rejected the compliment in the respective relationship context, which differs with the context of compliments pertaining to appearance, possession, and personal traits. The strategy of rejecting compliment is very dominantly used by students in the context of compliment for appearance, possession, and individual behavior. This indicates that there is still a lack of variety of strategies used by students in responding to compliment in Japanese.

**Keywords:** compliment, compliment response, acceptance, rejection, deflection

## **KARAKTERISTIK TANGGAPAN TINDAK TUTUR PUJIAN PEMBELAJAR BAHASA JEPANG di INDONESIA**

### **Abstrak**

Merespons tuturan pujian berpotensi menimbulkan polemik bagi penuturnya. Apakah ditanggapi dengan penerimaan, tetapi beresiko akan dianggap sombong atau ditanggapi dengan penolakan yang beresiko dianggap tidak menghargai pendapat mitra tutur terhadap isi pujian. Dalam masyarakat Jepang, tanggapan tuturan pujian berupa penolakan dinilai sebagai sebuah "kebiasaan". Namun demikian, bagaimana tuturan pujian ditanggapi oleh para pembelajar bahasa Jepang di Indonesia. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif yang bertujuan untuk menemukan karakteristik

tanggapan pujian pembelajar bahasa Jepang di Indonesia. Respondennya merupakan pembelajar bahasa Jepang dengan latar belakang sebagai orang Jawa, dan sedang menempuh pendidikan di tingkat universitas di area Jawa Tengah dan Yogyakarta. Data yang diperoleh dari 53 orang responden tersebut menghasilkan 636 tuturan tanggapan pujian yang diperoleh dengan metode ODCT (*oral-discourse completion task*). Berdasarkan hasil analisis terhadap data, diperoleh temuan diantaranya tanggapan penerimaan terhadap tuturan pujian sangat tinggi, mencapai 65 persen dari keseluruhan data. Temuan yang menarik adalah pada konteks isi tuturan pujian terhadap kemampuan di tiap konteks hubungan antarpeserta tutur (hubungan simetris, hubungan asimetris-dekat, dan hubungan asimetris-jauh) tuturan penolakan merupakan jawaban terbanyak pada masing-masing konteks tersebut, dan hal tersebut berbeda dengan konteks tuturan pujian terhadap penampilan, kepemilikan, dan perilaku individu. Strategi penolakan terhadap pujian sangat dominan digunakan oleh mahasiswa pada konteks pujian penampilan, kepemilikan, dan perilaku individual. Hal tersebut mengindikasikan masih minimnya variasi strategi yang digunakan mahasiswa dalam merespons pujian dalam bahasa Jepang.

**Kata kunci:** tuturan pujian, tanggapan pujian, penerimaan, penolakan, pengalihan

## INTRODUCTION

In learning a foreign language, learners are required to be able not only to use the correct syntactic rules but also to consider non-linguistic rules. In other words, foreign speakers need to consider the socio-pragmatic rules of the target language. That cross-language communication with foreign speakers became research objects has been widely discussed by researchers including Daikuhara (1986), Han (1992), Chen (2003), Falasi (2007), Wilson (2014), Zhaojingya (2016), and Aryanto (2021). Broadly speaking, these researchers in their studies found the fact that foreign speakers often make mistakes in verbal interaction using a foreign language. The error is at the level of verbal form and the inclusion of social “rules” in the mother tongue that arise when the target language is used. The linguistic

and non-linguistic phenomena of the mother tongue still affect foreign language learners.

Leech (2005) explained that in Eastern languages the “battle for politeness” phenomenon has the potential to emerge, especially in speech acts pertaining to offering, invitation, and compliment. This phenomenon appears as a form of politeness in verbal communication of Eastern societies such as Japan. Matsuoka (2001: 113) shows the phenomenon of “battle for politeness”, particularly in the speech act of compliment.

T: (1) “*Katsuyaku shite imasu ne.*”

‘You’re really amazing huh?’

Y: (2) “*E! Boku desu ka.*”

‘What? Are you talking about me?’

T: (3) “*Ee. So desu.*”

‘Yes, that’s right (I’m talking about you).’

Y: (4) “*ie, Sonna koto nai desu.* “  
“I don’t think so (I’m not an extraordinary person).”

Context: a conversation between two Japanese on a talk show on TV. Tamori (T), a famous interviewer on Japanese television shows, around 50 years old; Yoichi Atsumizu (Y), actor around 30 years old. Y responded to a compliment given by T (speech 1) with expressions of doubt about the compliment (speech 2). Then, T reassured Y that the compliment was true, and T considered Y as being worthy of such compliment. However, Y responded by denying it (speech 4). The conversation scheme above is as follows:

T: compliment

Y: doubt

Q: reinforcement of compliment

Y: denial

Daikuhara (1986) conducted a study of Japanese complimentary speech acts by comparing it to Wolfson’s (1981) research on American English complimentary speech acts. Four topics became the focus of his research, namely: 1) verbal form of compliment (linguistic patterning); 2) topics of compliment; 3) compliment response; and 4) functions of compliment. Based on the obtained data, the verbal form of Japanese complimentary speech acts is dominated by the adjectives “*ii*” (good, nice), “*sugoi*” (extraordinary), “*kirei*” (beautiful, clean), and “*kawaii*” (beautiful). There is also the adverb “*yoku*” (very), and nouns followed by “*~ mitai*” (like ...)

Accordingly, Daikuhara (1986: 119-120) found in the data that Japanese

compliment response is considered as “the self-praise avoidance”, which is similar to one of the categories of compliment response coined by Pomerantz (1978). Here are some examples taken from Daikuhara (1986)

5. A: “*Ii ja nai*” (‘wow, pretty’, praising the clothes worn by B)

6. B: “*yaa, demo Shiwa darake ni nacchatte.*” (hmm, but it has lots of wrinkles)

7. A: “*Okusan wa daigaku wa doshira desu-ka*” (“Where did you graduate from?”)

8. B: “*XX daigaku desu*” (XX University’)

9. C: “*E ?! Sugoi desune. XX daigaku desuka.* “ (‘Wow! That’s great.)

10. A: “*Sugoi, ojousan*” (‘yes, you are great’)

11. B: “*Sonna. Yoku yuu ... ZZ daigaku no hou ga sugoi desho?* “ (‘Ah, not really. In fact, I have heard that ZZ University is greater’)

The speeches above were spoken by native speakers as the respondents of compliments and compliment responses. What about a study on complimentary speech acts carried out by non-native speakers, especially Japanese speakers in Indonesia?

Here are some examples of conversations between native Japanese speakers and Japanese language learners which were obtained when a pilot research with closed role-play method was conducted:

Context 1: A native Speaker (NS) (Japanese, volunteer, 40s) complimented a Student’s (NNS:Nonnative speaker) ability in making Japanese cartoon (anime).

NS: (12) “*watashi, insutaguramu no e wo mitan desu kedo, totemo jouzu deshita*”  
'I saw your painting on your Instagram, (you are) very skillful (in painting)  
NSS: (13) “*arigatou gozaimasu*”  
(smiling) 'thank you'

Context 2: A Native Speaker (NS) (Japanese, volunteer, 40s) complimented a student's appearance wearing batik during a presentation.

NS: (14) “*sou sou, kaiwa no toki, X sensei no jugyo de, A san wo mite, suteki da naa*”  
'Yes, yes, during the conversation class, Ms. X's class, (I) saw A (you), nice (your batik)'

NNS : (15) “*Hee, sou desuka. Hazukashii*”  
“  
'Gee..? (I feel) embarrassed' (laughing)

Context 1, the NS complimented the student's ability. The compliment response in the form of acceptance was stated in speech 13 “*arigatou gozaimasu*” (thank you). The response was also simultaneously accompanied by a non-verbal response in the form of a small laugh let out by the student.

Next, in context 2 a compliment was given to one's appearance which was responded with an affirmation of acceptance (speech 15). However, the student added the word “*hazukashii*” (embarrassed) which can be interpreted as an effort to downgrade the self-praising attitude. The word “*hazukashii*” when analyzed using the Brown-Levinson politeness strategy can be assessed as an effort to mitigate face-threatening acts, whereas in terms of Leech's politeness maxim, it can be categorized as a modesty maxim.

In other contexts, it was found that the compliment response may be assessed as self-praise and this speech is indicated as a form of pragmatic failure. Here is an example:

Context 3: A Native Speaker (NS) complimented a student's ability in doing several things (designing clothes, sewing, painting).

NS : (16) “*Sugoi desune. Fafa ga nan demo dekirun desune*”

'That's great. Fafa can do everything'

NNS : (17) “*hi, soudesu*”

'Yes, that is true'

In context 3 NS (16), it can be observed that the student responded to the compliment by not only accepting the compliment but also reinforcing its acceptance with the word *soudesu*. Functionally, *soudesu* is used when the speaker directly agrees to what she/he hears or the opinion of the speech partner. The student's response in context 3 NS (17) has the potential to threaten the face of the speech partner (NS) because in Japanese culture this speech can be categorized as self-praising. The compliment response is also indicated as a form of pragmatic failure because in Japanese society self-praise is highly avoided when responding to compliments, especially if there are differences in social status (vertical relations) between the speakers.

Response to complimentary speech acts is interesting to study because it causes a dilemma in the complimentee, particularly in how she/he responds to the compliment which will bring about a phenomenon called the politeness par-

adox. As noted by Pomerantz (1978, p 81-82), there is a dilemma experienced by the complimentee. The dilemma comes in the form of pressure whether she/he accepts the compliment or rejects it in an effort to avoid self-praise. The framework of Leech's politeness theory can be analogous to the existing dilemma that the recipient of compliment experiences. If she/he accepts the compliment, then there is a tendency she/he will violate the modesty maxim, which is to be humble by moderating self-praise. On the other hand, if she/he rejects the compliment, then there is a tendency to violate the principle of the agreement maxim because fostering compatibility with the speech partner is one of the politeness strategies.

Al Falasi (2007, p.30) argues that communication is an activity that cannot be separated from sociocultural norms in a society. These norms differ from one language to another. Foreign language learners have the potential to be affected by their native language (L1) when communicating in their partner's language (L2). Such influence does not only apply to the language structure but also to the pragmatic ability that often unfolds in the process of cross-cultural communication activities. Misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication are often caused by speakers who habitually use the norms of their mother tongue when communicating with speech partners of other linguistic origin. The ensuing pragmatic failure is caused by the speech partner's misunderstanding regarding the purpose of the speech which may even lead to

damaging interpersonal relationships due to politeness issues.

Thomas (1983, p.91) states that non-native speakers tend to apply the cultural conventions of their mother-tongue even when speaking a foreign language. This has the potential to produce different interpretations when the speech partner has a different cultural background, or in other words, the speech partner is a native speaker of the language used by the speaker. As a result this may lead to pragmatic failure, with damaging human communication relations being the most serious effect it may entail.

Based on the above phenomenon, it is important to examine how non-native speakers (specially Javanese native speakers who learn Japanese) respond to compliments expressed in a foreign language. The response can be manifested in the form of grammatical and pragmatic strategies. So, what are the characteristics of responses to complimentary speech acts given by non-native speakers, especially Japanese speakers in Indonesia?

## **METHOD**

The study used audio-visual DCT to produce data from respondents. The data collection technique started by making a video of compliments expressed by three native Japanese speakers. Each native speaker said four utterances based on Holmes' classification (1986), namely compliment for appearance, ability, possession, and personal traits. They played their role as complimenters who acted as close friends (representing symmetrical relationships and



close social relations), and one native speaker acted as a lecturer (representing asymmetrical relationships). Therefore, there were 12 contexts of complimentary speech acts, namely the first video containing four complimentary speech acts (appearance, ability, possession, and personal traits) that were played by native speakers.

The criteria for the respondents are: (1) Japanese language learners at tertiary level institutions in the Central Java and Yogyakarta regions, (2) native Javanese speakers, (3) had never lived in Japan. Given the said criteria, 53 respondents were gathered and 636, both verbal and non-verbal, data were collected.

The Oral Discourse Completion Test (ODCT) was used in this research. ODCT is an audio-visual media used to obtain data in the form of verbal speech and non-verbal responses. The ODCT method was selected for use in the study in order to obtain sufficient data from respondents to find stereotypical manifestations of verbal and non-verbal features, as well as the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic abilities the respondents have.

#### ***Variable Control***

In the study, the variables were controlled in the following four aspects:

1. Respondents.

- a. Description of respondents: Javanese mother tongue; having completed elementary level Japanese learning; have never been to and stayed in Japan for more than 1 month.

- b. Number of respondents: 53 students
- c. Domicile: the respondents were students studying in a third-level Japanese language study program in the Central Java and D.I. Yogyakarta region.

2. Research conductor.

The research conductor functions as an instrument for provoking speech data acquisition. This research involved three research conductors who are native Japanese speakers in their 20s and 40s, and they respectively acted as a person who has a vertical-top-down relationship and a close horizontal variable relationship, namely: a lecturer who has asymmetrical social relationship with the respondents and close social proximity; a lecturer with distant social proximity (not too close in the relationship); and a native speaker who acted as a student (a person who has symmetrical relationships with the respondents). These three native speakers were asked to perform complimentary speech acts corresponding with the four classifications: 1) complementing appearance; 2) complementing ability; 3) complimenting possession; 4) complimenting personal traits. Their speech acts were taken using audio-visual recording in a soundproof room/ studio so that with the given audio-visual quality the respondents can be expected to properly understand them.

3. Conversation contexts.

Based on a theoretical study, complimentary speech acts are divided

into 4 types of classification based on their contents, namely: 1) compliments on appearance; 2) compliments on abilities; 3) compliments on possession; 4) compliments on personal traits. The four classifications were subsequently developed by placing three research conductors with differing roles to show asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships with the respondents. Consequently, there were 12 utterances that each respondent must respond to.

### **Research instruments**

There were several stages in preparing the research instrument, namely:

1. Making an ODCT video. Participants: native speakers (research assistants/ research conductors). There were 3 people (lecturer-student with close social proximity relationship, lecturer-student with distant social proximity relationship, friends with close social proximity relationship). Accordingly, there were 3 relationship categories prepared based on social proximity and vertical relationship. The three categories are respectively based on the relationship of the native speaker and the respondents, divided into 4 contexts based on the compliment content, namely compliments on appearance, ability, possession, and personal traits. Consequently, there were twelve conversation contexts to be made. Here are the categorizations:

### Category 1:

Symmetrical relationships (code: MHS).

In this category, the native speakers acted as third-level Japanese students with close social proximity to the respondent. There were 4 compliments expressed to this group based on the contents of the compliment.

Context 1 (video 1):

1) Complimenting appearance; (code: AP MHS)

*“Sono batik no gara, suteki da ne. ni-atteru yo”*

‘Your batik motif is nice. It suits you.’

Context 2 (video 2):

2) Complimenting ability; (code: AB MHS)

*“Nihongo ga jouzu da ne”*

‘Gee, your Japanese is good (proficient).’

Context 3 (video 3):

3) Complimenting possession; (code: POS MHS)

*“Sono baggu suteki da ne.”*

‘Your bag is nice.’

Context 4 (video 4):

4) Complimenting personal traits (code: PT MHS)

*“Jugyochuu itsumo majime ni kiitete, erai yo ne.”*

‘(You) listen to the lecture diligently, that’s great.’

### Category 2:

Close-Asymmetric relations (code: SENSEI 1)

In this category the native speakers acted as young lecturers with close social proximity to the respondents. There were 4 compliments expressed to this group based on the contents of the compliment.

Context 5 (video 5):

1) Complimenting appearance; (code: AP SENSEI 1)

“*Sono batikku no gara, suteki desu ne. niatte imasu*”

‘Your batik motif is nice, huh. It suits you.’

Context 6 (video 6):

2) Complimenting ability; (code: AB SENSEI 1)

“*Nihongo ga jouzu desune.*”

‘Your Japanese is good (proficient) huh.’

Context 7 (video 7):

3) Complimenting possession; (code: POS SENSEI 1)

“*Sono baggu suteki desune.*”

‘Your bag is nice, huh?’

Context 8 (video 8):

4) Complimenting of personal traits (code: PT SENSEI 1)

“*Jugyouchuu itsumo chanto kiite ite, erai desune.*”

‘(You) listen to lecture diligently, that’s great.’

Category 3:

Distant Asymmetric Relationship (code: SENSEI 2)

In this category, the native speakers acted as senior lecturers (professors) who has a distant social proximity

with the respondents. There were 4 utterances of compliment to this group based on the contents of the compliment.

Context 9 (video 9):

1) Complimenting appearance; (code: AP SENSEI 2)

“*Sono batikku no gara, suteki desune. Tottemo niatteimasu.*”

‘Your batik motif is nice, huh. It suits you well.’

Context 10 (video 10):

2) Complimenting ability; (code: AB SENSEI 2)

“*Nihongo ga jouzu desune.*”

‘Your Japanese is good (proficient) huh.’

Context 11 (video 11):

3) Complimenting possession; (code: POS SENSEI 2)

“*Sono baggu, suteki desune.*”

‘Your bag is nice, huh?’

Context 12 (video 12):

4) Complimenting personal traits (code: PT SENSEI 2)

“*Jugyouchuu itsumo majime ni kiitete, erai desu ne*”

‘(You) listen to the lecture diligently, that’s great’

2. Testing of data collection instruments and verification of research instruments by native Japanese speakers who are experts in the field of cross-linguistic pragmatics.
3. Determining respondents and research locations, namely Central Java and Yogyakarta.



### **Procedures**

Procedure for collecting ODCT data of the respondents

There were five stages involved in the procedure for collecting the data of Indonesian respondents in the study:

1. The respondents filled in their personal data to reassess whether the respondents meet the criteria required in the study.
2. The respondents were notified about the twelve speech contexts that would be shown to them, and they would act as speech partners who must respond to the verbal compliments.
3. In order for the respondents to be familiar with the data collection process, before starting the data collection process, the respondents were shown several videos in Japanese acted out by native speakers and they were asked to respond to the speech. The respondents were conditioned as if they were in a video call with the native speakers. This process was carried out until the respondents became familiar with the audio-visual based ODCT technique.
4. During the data collection process, the respondents were shown a video consisting of twelve speech contexts based on the participant's social relations (asymmetrical and symmetrical relationships).
5. The respondents gave their responses orally, which were recorded using sound and audiovisual recording. The audiovisual recordings were

used to identify non-verbal responses (gestures, facial expressions). However, non-verbal responses were not used as data in the study.

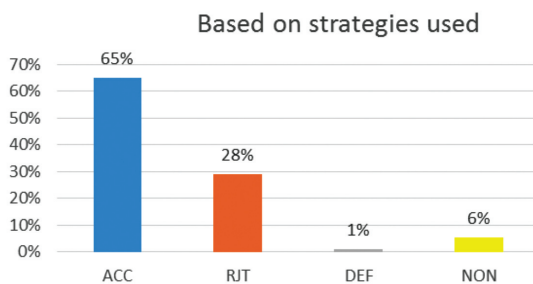
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The analysis results are presented in several categories. The first category is based on the classification of compliment responses (dynamic variables) and the second category is based on the context of speech events (static variables). The first category is based on data findings that have been grouped into similar compliment responses. There are 4 (four) types of compliment responses found, namely accepting, rejecting, deflecting, and other types (types not included in the previous three).

Based on the 636 data collected, four classifications of compliment responses were found. The classification was attained based on the contents of the compliment responses using the taxonomy of compliment responses proposed by Holmes (1996), which classifies them into three categories, namely: accepting, rejecting, and deflecting. However, some data were found to be incompatible being grouped into the three classifications. Accordingly, these data were included in a new classification.

In diagram 1, it can be observed that among the four types, acceptance (ACC) is the most noticeable type of compliment response (64%), followed by rejection (RJT) at 28%, deflection (DEF) at 1%, and finally the NON category at as many as 6%.



**Diagram 1. Results based on the type of strategy used by respondents**

This finding stands in contrast with research conducted by other researchers on the compliment responses of Japanese native speakers. The compliment responses given by Japanese are generally dominated by a rejection strategy (RJT). This is understandable as the background of Japanese politeness with their concept of ‘*enryo*’, ‘*uchi-soto*’, and social hierarchy (top-bottom) would make Japanese more inclined to respond to compliments by rejecting them (RJT). In the second category,

the speech data grouping is based on 12 speech event contexts that have been used as static research variables. The second categorization aims to find the speech characteristics that appear in each speech context in order to obtain a more detailed and comprehensive mapping.

In addition to grouping based on the category of the compliment responses, the data obtained can also be grouped based on the twelve speech contexts (static variables). The twelve static variables are based on the twelve speech contexts that were used as research instruments. The grouping of the data based on the twelve speech contexts is as follows

#### *Symmetrical relationship*

In the symmetrical relationship category there are four contexts which produce the following data categorization:

**Table 1. Responses to compliment in symmetrical relationships**

Variables	Symmetrical Relationship							
	ACC		RJT		DEF		NON	
AP MHS	45	85%	6	11%	0	0%	2	4%
AB MHS	10	41%	37	70%	1	2%	5	9%
POS MHS	44	83%	5	9%	2	4%	2	4%
PT MHS	30	57%	19	36%	0	0%	4	8%

In the symmetrical relationship between friends in the research, the complimenters were Japanese native speaker while the complimentees were Indonesian respondents. From the four contexts (compliments on appearance, ability, possession, personal traits), it was found that only the compliment on ability garnered responses of the rejection type, whereas for the other three

contexts, acceptance was the dominating response type.

The level of speech used by the native speakers was the casual form (non-polite) as the speaker considered the speech partner having a close friendly relationship, resulting in the polite form not being used. However, in the respondents’ data, the polite form was still frequently used, and there were

even some inconsistencies in the use of different speech levels in a single speech. Here are some examples:

Context of complimenting appearance

Native speaker: “*sono batikku no gara suteki da ne. niatteru yo*” (casual form)

‘Your batik motif is nice, it suits you’

1: “*a, sou desuka*” (polite)

‘Ah, really’

2 “*arigatou*” (casual)

‘thanks’

3 “*arigatou gozaimasu*” (polite)

‘thank you’

4 “*he!, hontou desuka*” (polite)

‘Eh, really?’

Speech 1 and 4 are grouped into the compliment content rejection category, while speech 2 and 3 are grouped into the compliment content acceptance one. However, speech 2 is in the casual form while speech 3 is in the polite form, which is marked by “-masu” in the word “*arigatou gozaimasu*”.

Context of complimenting ability

NS: “*Nihongo ga jouzu da ne*” (casual variety)

‘your Japanese is good, yeah’

5: “*ie, mada mada*” (casual)

‘No, (I am) not yet (fluent in Japanese)’

6: “*arigatou* (casual). *Kore benkyochuu na node, chotto mada mada desu yo*” (polite)

‘Thanks’ (casual). (I) am still learning, (I am) not yet (smart)’

Speech 5 and 6 are grouped into the compliment rejection with a downgrade sub-strategy category, and in speech 6,

it is combined with the expression of gratitude, ‘arigatou’. In the context of the compliment response referring to one’s ability in a symmetrical relationship, rejection of the compliment was the most response observed to have occurred.

Context of complimenting possession

NS: “*sono baggu suteki da ne.*” (casual variety)

‘Your bag is nice.’

7: “*haha kara moratta.*” (casual variety)

‘(I) got it from (my) mom’

Speech 7 is grouped into the deflecting strategy category. Speech 7 neither provides an acceptance nor rejection response and this indicates an effort to avoid conflict so that the given response is neither considered as self-praise nor is it judged as a threat to the native speaker’s face if the compliment were rejected.

The context of complimenting personal traits

NS: “*Jugyouchuu itsumo majime ni kiitete, erai yo ne.*” (casual variety)

‘(You) are always diligent in lectures, cool huh.’

8: “*ie, sonna koto nai desu yo.*” (polite variety)

‘I don’t think so’

Speech 8 is grouped into the rejection category. However, it can be seen that the form used in speech 8 is in the polite form even though the native speaker used the casual form.

***Close-asymmetrical and distant-asymmetrical relationships***

Asymmetrical relationship is divided into two variables, namely close-asymmetric and distant-asymmetric. In table 2, it can be observed that the characteristics of the compliment response

are quite similar to table 1, wherein the compliment response in the rejection category of compliment on ability has a higher percentage than the compliment on appearance, possession, and personal traits.

**Table 2. Responses to compliment in asymmetrical relationships**

Variables	Close-Asymmetric							
	ACC		RJT		DEF		NON	
AP SENSEI 1	45	85%	5	9%	0	0%	3	6%
AB SENSEI 1	10	19%	38	72%	1	2%	4	8%
POS SENSEI 1	45	85%	5	9%	0	0%	3	6%
PT SENSEI 1	38	72%	10	19%	0	0%	5	9%
Variables	Distant-Asymmetric							
	ACC		RJT		DEF		NON	
AP SENSEI 2	48	91%	3	6%	0	0%	2	4%
AB SENSEI 2	13	25%	35	66%	1	2%	4	8%
POS SENSEI 2	42	79%	9	17%	1	2%	1	2%
PT SENSEI 2	43	81%	6	11%	1	2%	3	6%

Here are a few examples of the compliment responses to asymmetrical relationships. Context of complimenting appearance in close asymmetrical relationship

- NS: “*sono batikku no gara, suteki desune. Niattemasu*” (polite)  
 ‘Your batik motif is nice huh. (It) Suits (you)’  
 NNS : (9) “*arigatou gozaimasu*” (polite form)  
 ‘thank you’.  
 NNS : (10) “*hontou?*” (casual)  
 ‘really?’

NNS (9) is included in the compliment acceptance category by responding using an expression of gratitude, while Speech 10 is included in the rejection category of the doubting sub-strategy. The difference between NNS

(9) and NNS (10) also lies in the different degree of politeness used. NNS (9) uses the polite form, while NNS (10) uses the casual form.

- Context of complimenting ability  
 NS: “*Nihongo ga jouzu desu ne*” (polite)  
 ‘Your Japanese is good (proficient) huh’  
 NNS : (11) “*ie, mada mada heta desu*” (polite)  
 ‘No, (my Japanese) is still bad’  
 NNS : (12) “*mada mada benkyou desu*” (polite)  
 ‘(I’m) still learning’

NNS (11) is categorized as rejection with the negative response indicator ‘*ie*’ and the use of the adjective “*heta*” as an antonym form of “*jouzu*” (proficient). NNS (12) is included in the deflection category because it does not

provide a clear response whether the compliment is accepted or rejected.

Context of complimenting possession

NS: “*Sono baggu, kawaii desu ne*” (polite)

‘Your bag is cute, right’

NNS : (13) “*A, sou desuka*” (polite)  
‘is it?’

NNS : (14) “*arigatou gozaimasu*” (polite)  
‘thank you’

NNS (13) is a response categorized as a rejection by showing the doubt that the complimentee has regarding the speech content of the compliment given. Speech 14 is categorized as a form of acceptance by expressing gratitude. NNS (13) and (14) both use the polite form.

Context of complimenting personal traits

NS: “*Jugyouchuu itsumo majime ni kite ite, erai desu ne*” (polite)

‘You’re great, you always listen to each lecture’

NNS : (15) “*arigatou gozaimasu*” (polite)

‘thank you’

NNS : (16) “*iie, mada mada desu*” (polite)

‘No, (I’m still) not yet (diligent)’

Both NNS (15) and (16) use the polite speech level form, but NNS (15) is categorized as an acceptance response to the compliment given, while speech 16 is categorized as a rejection response by way of downgrading the compliment.

Of the four types of compliments (complimenting appearance, ability, possession, and personal traits), most of the compliment responses observed in the data are categorized as acceptance. However, there is a peculiar finding wherein the compliment given to the respondents’ ability were countered by rejection responses. The rejection given in response to the compliment on ability is seen to dominate throughout all the three relationships (symmetrical, close-asymmetric, distant-asymmetric).

The dominance of the rejection response given by the respondents when complimented on their ability needs to be examined further. There are indications that the phenomenon may have occurred on account of the respondents’ Japanese learning process. Based on information gathered during the interviews with the respondents and caretakers of the institutions where the respondents study at, it was stated that in the teaching materials they use they are indeed often taught about how to compliment and respond to compliments, particularly complimenting one’s ability.

## Discussion

### *Acceptance response*

In each type of acceptance response, there are several sub-strategies that can be grouped based on the speech contents. They are grouped into 12 (twelve) types, namely:

Expression of gratitude; affirmation-expression of gratitude; use of adjective; affirmation-adjective; non-verbal expression; affirmation; affirmation-verb; *soudesuka*-expression of grati-



tude; *soudesune*; *soudesune*-expression of gratitude; *soudesu*; and others.

#### Type 1 expression of gratitude

Type 1 is an expression of gratitude stated in response to the compliment, and it is the most dominant type of compliment response given by the respondents. The respondents' actual expressions of gratitude were grouped based on the speech level, namely the casual, polite, and super polite forms. Examples:

17) "*arigatou*"

'Thanks (casual)'

18) '*arigatou gozaimasu*'

'Thank you' (teineitai: polite)

19) '*Makoto ni arigatou gozaimasu*'

'Thank you very much' (teineitai: super polite)

The three types of expression of gratitude are one of the characteristics of acceptance to compliments demonstrated by the respondents. However, it should be reminded that the respondents (speakers) are non-native speakers, so their expression of gratitude can still be analyzed in terms of pragmatic acceptability, is their expression of gratitude appropriate in the context of the conversation; is there a pragmatic failure, or how is the degree of politeness as one of the strategies in responding to the compliment.

For example, the speech 18 is also often used by respondents when responding to compliment speech from equal speech partners (close friends). This phenomenon is not commonly used by native Japanese speakers. Likewise, the speech 19 is used by the respondents to

respond to compliment from their lecturers. However, the expression of "*makoto ni*" which is followed by an expression of gratitude "*arigatou gozaimasu*" is considered unusual by the Japanese. Although it is included in the formal and polite speech level, this expression is often used in the context of conversations between restaurant customer and waiters.

#### Type 2 affirmation-expression of gratitude

Type 2 is actually a type of compliment response that uses an expression of gratitude but it is preceded by an affirmation. Similar to type 1, speech in type 2 can also be observed from the level of speech. Here are the examples:

20) "*Ee, arigatou.*"

Yes (casual), thanks (casual)

21) "*Un, arigatou*"

Yes (casual), thank you (casual)

22) "*Hai, arigatou*"

Yes (formal), thank you (casual)

23) "*Ee, arigatou gozaimasu*"

Yes (casual), thank you very much (polite, formal)

24) "*Un, arigatou gozaimasu*"

Yes (casual), thank you (polite, formal)

25) "*Hai, arigatou gozaimasu*"

Yes (formal), thank you (polite, formal)

From the structures above it can be observed that some examples show agreement in the speech level between the affirmation and expression of gratitude (speech 1, 2 and 6), while the remaining structures indicate mismatches between the affirmation and expression of gratitude.

### Type 3 use of adjectives

Compliment response type 3 is expressed by the use of adjectives in several speech levels. There were six adjectives observed in the data, namely, “*suteki*” (splendid, beautiful), “*majime*” (diligent, serious), “*ii*” (good), “*erai*” (good, extraordinary), “*jouzu*” (adept, clever), “*kawaii*” (beautiful, funny). The following are some examples of data that use adjectives with different levels of speech:

26) “*Suteki*”

Splendid (casual)

27) “*Suteki da ne*”

Splendid, right? (casual)

28) “*Suteki desu ne*”

Splendid, isn't it? (polite)

### Type 4 affirmation-adjective

Type 4 is almost the same as type 3 but begins with affirmative expressions such as “*hai*” (formal, polite), “*ee*” (casual), “*un*” (casual) (equivalent to “yeah” in English). Examples:

29) “*hai, jouzu desu*” (lit. “yes, clever”)

30) “*ee, suteki desune*” (lit. “yes, proficient yes”)

31) “*un, suteki desu*” (lit. “yeah, proficient”)

### Type 5 non-verbal

Type 5 is a compliment response not verbally expressed by the respondents, as it is a non-verbal response in the form of a genial facial expression (smiling) observed via audio-visual media. Holmes (1986) categorizes non-verbal response to complimentary speech act as acceptance.

### Type 6 affirmation

Type 6 is expressed in the form of affirmative responses like “*hai*” and “*ee*” and is not followed by any other verbal expressions, although in some of the data, they are accompanied by a genial facial expression (smiling).

### Type 7 affirmation-verb

Type 7 is a form of affirmation followed by a verbal structure. The level of speech also varies. Examples:

32) “*ee, niatteru, yo*” (lit. yes (casual) it matches (normal form) right)

33) “*hai, niatteru, yo*” (lit. yes (formal) it matches (usual form) right)

34) “*hai, niatte imasu yo*” (lit. yes (formal) it matches (polite) right)

35) “*un, ganbarimasu*” (lit. yeah (casual) I'll do my best)

36) “*hai, watashi mo sou omoimasu*” (lit. yes (polite) I think so too (polite))

### Type 8 soudesuka-gratitude

The form of type 8 is similar to type 1, but it is preceded by “*sou desuka*” indicating that the speaker (complimentee) is doubtful about the compliment given or in other words the compliment expressed by the complimenter is considered as too excessive of a praise in their judgment, leaving the respondent (complimentee) feeling doubtful of the alignment between the speech act and the actual fact.

37) “*Sou desu ka. Arigatou gozaimasu*” (lit. oh yeah? Thank you (polite))

38) “*Sou desu ka. Makoto ni arigatou gozaimasu*” (lit. oh yeah? Thank you very much (super polite))

#### Type 9 *Soudesune*

Type 9 is in the form of a reply: “*sou desu ne*”, which can be considered as an expression of agreement with what the complimenter said. In other words, the respondent, as a complimentee, accepted the compliment given by the speech partner. It is also found in the casual form of the word, which is “*sou da ne*”. The final particle (*shuuji*) “*ne*” in the expression “*sou desu ne*” or “*sou da ne*” functions as a confirmation or reinforcement to the speaker’s statement of being in total agreement with the information contained in the given compliment.

#### Type 10 *soudesune*-gratitude

Type 10 is a type of reply given by the respondent combining the phrase “*sou desu ne*” followed by the expression “*arigatou gozaimasu*”. After the respondent expressed his agreement to the content of the compliment given by the speech partner, he supplemented it with an expression of gratitude to reciprocate the complimenter’s kind assessment.

#### Type 11 *Sou desu*

Type 11 is similar to type 9. The difference lies in particle “*ne*” at the end of the expression which is not observed in type 11. The meaning of the speech “*sou desu*” becomes less pronounced as a form of approval/agreement to the content of the compliment when compared to “*sou desu ne*”.

#### Type 12 Others

Type 12 is the most complex type because it simultaneously combines several expressions, for example it may be

a structure using the affirmation form, followed by an adjective, an expression of gratitude, or a form of downgrading followed by gratitude, or expression of acceptance followed by another compliment given in return to the speech partner.

#### **Rejection response**

There were merely 4 types of rejection responses found, namely: negation; negation-downgrade; doubt; and denial.

#### Type 1 negation

Compliment responses categorized as rejection were dominated by the negation form of “*iie*” (no), and its variants in the lower speech level, such as “*uun*” and “*iya*”, as well as negation responses followed by additional explanations to reinforce the nuance of rejecting the compliment.

#### Type 2 negation-downgrade

Type 2 was the most one found among the rejection categories. The negation “*iie*” is followed by expressions that downgrade the degree of compliment given by the native speakers. This type was also predominantly found in the context of complimenting ability (Japanese language ability), in both symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships.

39) “*iie, sonna koto nai desu*” (lit. no, it’s not like that)

40) “*iie, mada mada desu*” (lit. no, not yet (I’m not yet proficient))

41) “*iie, mada jouzu ja arimasen*” (lit. no, (I’m) still not proficient)

### Type 3 doubt

Rejection in type 3 is expressed in the form of doubt about the compliment given by the native speakers. This doubt means that the respondent considered the compliment given to be too excessive, so the respondent assumed that the compliment is not appropriate for her/him. An example is the use of the expression “*sou desuka*” (lit. is it really like that?), and “*Hontou desuka*” (lit. really?).

### Type 4 denial

The denial type is similar to the negation-downgrade type. The difference lies in the use of adjectives that have the opposite meaning/antonym to the content of the compliment. For example, in the context of complementing the respondent’s Japanese language ability “*Nihongo ga jouzu desune*”, it is answered by:

42) “*iie, mada heta desu*” (lit. “no, (I’m still bad”)

43) “*iie, jouzu ja arimasen*” (lit. “no, (I’m not proficient yet “)

Or complimenting appearance that is answered by

44) “*iie, kawaikunai desu*” (“no, (I’m not beautiful”)

### *Deflection Response*

Only one percent (7 data) of the total data was found to be in this data group, wherein the respondents tried to neither accept nor reject the compliment, instead they responded by trying to change the subject. There are indications that the respondents used this strategy as a result of the dilemma they

experienced, if they were to accept the compliment they are worried of being considered arrogant, and if they were to reject the compliment they are worried that the speech partner would be offended because their kind assessment was being rejected. Here are some examples of responses to someone complimenting their possession.

45) “*haha kara moraimaishita*” (lit. (I got it from my mom)

46) “*kore, saikin katta yatsu desu*” (this, I recently bought it)

Accordingly, some data were found to be incompatible with the three categories above. These data are not included in the above categories because there are grammatical errors in the compliment response given.

### CONCLUSION

From the results of the data analysis found two things as follows:

1. The speech compliment of abilities that exist in each context of symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships is dominated by the compliment and rejection responses. On the other hand, compliment responses with acceptance strategies become dominant in the context of compliment for appearance, possession, and individual behavior.
2. Respondents mostly use the form of negation in the rejection strategy, and the form of affirmation accompanied by expressions of gratitude in the acceptance strategy.
3. The diversion strategy is not the respondent’s choice of strategy in responding to compliment speeches.

This can be seen that only a few students use a diversion strategy.

4. The use of *teinei* speech level is often applied by respondents in the context of symmetrical relationship speech situations. This is indicated as an unusual situation in Japanese society that uses the *futsutai* speech level if the interlocutor is a close friend (the relationship is symmetrical).

Based on these four findings, the researcher concludes that respondents (students) still cannot be categorized as good in responding to compliment speech when compared to compliment responses in Japanese society. In Japanese society, they mostly use the strategy of refusing or changing the topic of conversation.

The prevalent number of complimentary speech acts answered by acceptance responses need to be studied more deeply, especially to find the underlying causes. There is an indication of impoliteness when a person accepts a complimentary speech act. Several studies on the responses of native Japanese speakers to complimentary speech acts have seen more cases of rejection responses and many Japanese using deflecting strategies.

However, there are interesting findings in the data. The compliment responses relating to ability were dominated by expressions of rejection, yet it was not observed in the other complimentary speech acts. This particular finding also needs to be further analyzed to look for underlying causal factors, by posing questions such as whether it is

caused by the learning materials that only focus on responses to complementing ability or by other factors.

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