University of Reading

Compliment responses of female German and Italian university students: a contrastive study

Article

Published Version

Payne, S. ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3341-4245
(2013) Compliment responses of female German and Italian university students: a contrastive study. Language Studies Working Papers, 5. pp. 22-31. ISSN 2040-3461 Available at https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/92463/

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See Guidance on citing.
Published version at: https://www.reading.ac.uk/elal/our-research/LSWP

Publisher: University of Reading

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the End User Agreement.

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

University of Reading

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

Vol. 5 (2013) 22-31 University of Reading ISSN 2040-3461
LANGUAGE STUDIES WORKING PAPERS
Editors: C. Ciarlo and D.S. Giannoni

Compliment Responses of Female German and Italian University Students: A Contrastive Study

Sophie Payne

This paper presents the results of an empirical contrastive analysis of compliment responses between female interlocutors in Germany and Italy. Drawing on previous research on compliment behaviour in Western cultures, the study examines new data from 24 native German speakers and 28 native Italian speakers at undergraduate level, elicited by a Discourse Completion Task comprising nine compliment situations. The results indicate some notable differences in compliment behaviour between the two cultures. Positive politeness appears to play more of a role in Italian responses, as the Italian participants tended to favour agreement strategies. In comparison, German respondents tended to favour qualification strategies, suggesting that negative politeness plays more of a role in their compliment behaviour. The results from this paper could be useful in forming initial hypotheses for more in-depth research based on observations of natural speech in these cultures.

1. Introduction

Compliments are a part of everyday speech and their most basic function is as "positively affective speech acts" that "normally attribute 'good' to the addressee" (Holmes 1988: 44), thereby increasing solidarity between interlocutors. As a speaker praises the hearer, however, this creates an imbalance by putting the hearer in the speaker's debt with their praise. A compliment response, if correctly executed, can redress the balance. Children are socialised from a young age to say 'thank you' to a compliment, but adult speakers report that they find responding to compliments embarrassing (Herbert & Straight 1989). When responding to a compliment, one must choose one's strategy carefully to avoid appearing conceited, dismissive or too eager to please. Despite the assertion that adults have been conditioned to say 'thank you', research shows that a vast proportion of speakers do whatever they can to avoid baldly accepting compliments (Herbert & Straight 1989).

This study is specifically concerned with the responses used by women in all-female compliment exchanges in an undergraduate-level university setting, and uses a cross-cultural comparison of German and Italian to highlight any similarities or differences in compliment response strategy preference and compliment function between the two cultures.

1.1. Compliments and politeness theory

The concept of face – the representation of oneself in society – is important in the analysis of compliment responses. Brown and Levinson (1987: 67) propose that all interlocutors, both as speaker or hearer, have negative and positive face wants: negative face pertains to "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" and positive face to "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others". Negative politeness strategies tend to negative face wants and in turn positive politeness strategies tend to positive face wants. Compliment exchanges can be delicate to execute in order to attend to both interlocutors' face needs. A compliment implicitly puts the speaker in a position of judgement of the hearer, imposing on the hearer's negative face. Rejecting,

deflecting or ignoring the compliment could damage the positive face of both interlocutors. While agreeing can appeal to the positive face of both interlocutors, it can also be damaging for the compliment-giver if they interpret acceptance of the compliment as immodest or arrogant. Both of these options risk adversely affecting the solidarity of the interlocutors, which the compliment was presumably meant to enforce.

Compliments have been identified in the linguistic routines of small talk or 'phatic communion' (Laver 1981) in a number of Western cultures, including German and Italian, especially in greetings (Alfonzetti 2009; Mironovschi 2009). In this way, a compliment functions to demonstrate shared values as well as offering an opening to the conversation. Use in linguistic routines as well as their formulaic nature has led to the classification of spontaneous and conventional compliments (Wolfson 1983; Duttlinger 1999; Nicolaysen 2007). Conventional compliments function as tokens of solidarity and may not always be sincere. Insincere compliments are not an intentional deception of the addressee, but an incidence of expectations of politeness overruling expectations of honesty. In situations where a compliment may be expected, such as to the chef after a dinner party, its absence would be seen as impolite (Holmes 1988; Watts 2003. According to Wolfson (1988), compliments occur most frequently between acquaintances and friends, rather than intimates or strangers, because the former, unlike the latter, must use positive politeness strategies to constantly work on their relationship.

1.2. Compliments and women's language

The language used in all-female groups can differ from that of mixed-sex groups and all-male groups. Women's language in private discourse has been identified as being generally more co-operative than men's, as women more frequently use inclusive strategies that avoid social imbalance, such as simultaneous speech, question tags and hedging; however, these patterns can change according to contextual and other extra-linguistic factors (Coates 1989). Overall, women tend to use more positive politeness strategies and have more affective speech than men, which means that emotions and feelings are often important in female discourse (Coates 1989; Holmes 1995).

Holmes (1988) deduces that women characteristically use compliments as positively-affective speech acts to build rapport. In almost all compliment studies that analyse gender as a variable, women give and receive far more compliments than men (Manes & Wolfson 1981; Herbert & Straight 1989; Duttlinger 1999; Alfonzetti 2009; Mironovschi 2009; Werthwein 2009). Rees-Miller (2011), however, refutes the assertion that compliments occur far more often between female interlocutors than male interlocutors. In her 2010 corpus, 41% of compliments were exchanged between female interlocutors and 40.6% were exchanged between male interlocutors. She puts this down to improvements in methodology, as her corpus was collected by an almost equal ratio of female to male researchers, unlike the other compliment studies quoted, which used mostly or exclusively female researchers. Despite this, she still records notable differences between genders, such as the much higher frequency of compliments concerning appearance when a woman is involved in an exchange.

Women produce characteristic compliment formulas, with stronger terms, more intensifiers and more personalised forms than men. These structures are more pronounced between exclusively female interlocutors, further supporting the theory that women have different compliment behaviour to men. As a result, compliments between women justify separate attention from mixed-sex and all-male compliment exchanges.

1.3. Compliments and cross-cultural communication

Many researchers have recognised that compliments reflect the social norms of a speech community and give an insight into how a society weights the importance of positive and negative face (e.g. Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Yuan 2001). To this end, comparative studies of

compliments can identify important differences between the social norms of two or more cultures (Wolfson 1983). Mazzotta (2007) has identified German and Italian cultures as more accepting of social power imbalances than Anglophone cultures, which means that they pay less attention to negative politeness and put more emphasis on positive politeness. Alfonzetti's (2009) Italian compliment study and Golato's (2002) German compliment study identify two compliment response types that do not occur in Anglophone research: confirmation of the compliment assertion (cf. example 1 below, from Alfonzetti 2009: 71, my translation) and assessment of compliment assertion (example 2, from Alfonzetti 2007: 59, my translation). These responses do not redress the social imbalance created by the compliment because they accept the position of judgement taken by the compliment giver, which demonstrates the relative unimportance of addressing negative politeness in German and Italian.

(1) A: hai degli anelli bellissimi! li ho notati in questi giorni … sono molto particolari
you have some beautiful rings! I noticed them recently … they are very unusual
B: sì mi piacciono molto
yes I like them a lot

(2) A: io sono in buona compagnia allora!
so I'm in good company now!
B: sono proprio contento
I'm really glad

Golato (2002: 558) also identifies a second assessment response that includes the 'response pursuit marker' *ne*[1], unique to German speakers (example 3). With this response, speakers fish for more compliments, impinging on the compliment giver's negative face.

(3) A: das fleisch war exzellent
the meat was excellent
B: super, ne?
tasty, wasn't it?
A: exzellent
excellent
B: ja
yes

Research into compliment behaviour in Italian and German has recorded occurrences of all the other strategies present in Anglophone data, which suggests that preference for positive politeness is not absolute. Strategies that do pay attention to modesty and self-praise avoidance are frequently recorded, and in general, acceptance of the compliment is preferred over rejection of the compliment (cf. Mironovschi 2009; Werthwein 2009).

Ravetto (2012) directly contrasts German and Italian compliment responses. She concludes that, while respondents in both languages strongly prefer acceptance of compliments in general, Italian respondents show an inclination towards direct acceptance strategies with little disagreement or avoidance, and German respondents prefer limited-acceptance strategies that avoid self-praise while still displaying some elements of agreement. Her study, however, does not control for gender. As discussed, all-female complimenting behaviour can differ markedly from all-male compliment behaviour, as well as mixed-sex complimenting behaviour.

One should also bear in mind that attitudes to politeness can depend on an individual's personality. In a comparative study of Polish and English compliments, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989) found that, in both languages, there was a continuum of attitudes towards compliments: those at one extreme saw complimenting as a positive act and frequently gave

[1] In this context, equivalent to the role of a question tag in English.

compliments; those at the other extreme saw complimenting as an overly obvious attempt to create solidarity, thus increasing social distance (they tried to avoid compliments altogether). This did not take into account individual attitudes, but it is important to recall that cross-cultural studies are an indicator of general social norms and not necessarily of individual preferences.

2. Methodology

The compliments used in the present study were presented to participants in the form of a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) comprising nine compliment situations. Each participant was invited to respond in written form to a compliment whose context had been briefly framed (see Appendix for the questions presented in the DCT). Although not effective in eliciting natural speech, questionnaires are useful for understanding the values of a community and the responses they expect others to give (Alfonzetti 2009; Jucker 2009).

The structure of the DCT was based on that used by Lorenzo-Dus (2001), but as it was not possible to perform pre-studies of the cultures, existing literature on complimenting in German and Italian was used to ensure the situations and syntactic formulas were cross-culturally comparable. Each version of the DCT was translated with guidance from native speakers. The situations comprised two performance compliments (Situations 3-4), one character compliment (9), four appearance compliments (5-8) and two possession compliments (1-2)

Participants were selected according to gender, age and mother tongue language, as only female undergraduate students who were native speakers of either German or Italian were pertinent to the study. Mature students (aged over 30) and non-native speakers (regardless of language ability or residence length) were considered as falling outside of the desired demographic. After controlling for these variables via initial questions on the DCT, which was handed out in university lectures, 24 German and 28 Italian comparable DCTs remained. Responses were categorised according to the taxonomy set out by Holmes (1988), with the additions from Golato (2002) and Alfonzetti (2009) noted above. The main results are summarised in Section 3, while the three aspects considered to be most relevant are discussed in greater depth in Section 4.

3. Results

The first finding is that compliment rejection comprised less than 10% of all responses. Acceptance of the compliment was the most preferred response strategy and evasion of the compliment the second-most preferred; however, in relative terms, Italian respondents showed an overall tendency towards acceptance and German respondents showed an overall tendency towards evasion.

Secondly, the appreciation token (directly thanking the compliment-giver) was the most frequently recorded strategy in both corpora, with 71.4% of Italian responses and 67.6% of German responses containing an appreciation token. Its persistent presence could reflect the fact that this is also considered the most ‘standard’ response in German and Italian, as in English (Herbert & Straight 1989).

Possession compliments commonly provoked responses giving a history to the item (comment history) and performance compliments provoked responses that negated natural talent in place of hard work, which are strategies previously reported in Manes (1983), showing general concurrence with Anglophone compliment response data.

Three Italian and five German respondents interpreted Situation 2 (possession; from a new student within a seminar setting) as phatic communication, which suggests that compliments

can also function in the linguistic routines of conversation openings in Italian and German culture, as mentioned in 1.1.

Finally, compliments from strangers were considered the most face-threatening to the receiver, with some respondents expressing the "awkwardness" of a stranger's compliment in additional comments for the researcher. Compliments from friends provoked more direct, more inclusive, less formulaic responses. Intimacy can change the boundaries of speech acts and reduce the need to tend carefully to the other interlocutor's face (Herbert 1990). It also demonstrates their use as positively-affective speech acts between friends and acquaintances noted in 1.2.

4. Discussion

Given that all-female compliment behaviour in German and Italian differs, and that Italians prefer positive politeness strategies more than Germans, it is particularly interesting to look at the two response strategies used across the whole corpus (reinterpretation and neutral-stance questions) and to consider different responses to appearance compliments.

4.1. Reinterpretations

Receivers can interpret a compliment as an indirect request for help or to borrow the complimented possession (Pomerantz 1978). Alfonzetti (2009) classifies reinterpretation as a request response strategy slightly differently in Italian: i.e. request for information on an item's background for the speaker's personal gain, so that they too can purchase the complimented item. This attitude towards compliments as requests for information was frequently explicit in the Italian data, particularly the two possession situations (example 4), in Situation 5 (hair) and Situation 7 (weight loss).

(4) 'Grazie!' E le dico dove l'ho preso così se vuole lo puo acquistare anche lei!
'Thanks!' And I tell her where I bought it so that she can buy it too if she wants!

In the German data, there were no such responses to Situations 1, 2 or 5; the only comparable case is Situation 7 (discussed in 4.3). Situation 5 was designed to be a compliment on natural beauty, and the German respondents appeared to have understood it in this way, showing a higher amount of evasion and disagreement. Italian respondents appeared to have understood it as a compliment on haircut or style, with half favouring reinterpretation or comment history responses. They gave information on their hair care routine or details about their hairdresser, with ten openly offering to share such information with their friend for their benefit (example 5). This indicates implicit awareness of a tendency to give compliments in order to elicit information.

(5) 'Grazie. Ti consiglio di non asciugarli e di usare molto balsamo. Sono più morbidi e voluminosi. Prova anche tu!'
'Thanks. I suggest not drying it and using lots of conditioner. It is much softer and more voluminous. You try it too!'

Twenty-one (75%) of the Italian respondents reinterpreted Situation 8 (make-up) as a request for the compliment-receiver to help do her friend's make-up, contrasting Alfonzetti (2009) and supporting Pomerantz (1978). Only six German respondents reinterpreted the compliment in this way, with the remaining two-thirds preferring instead to use a neutral qualification (see 4.2) or to return the compliment.

One German respondent gave an enlightening condition: if her friend had already done her make-up, she would return the compliment, but if not, she would offer to do her make-up for her, which demonstrates flexibility in the function of compliments (example 6). The

conditions show recognition that the request could be either a simple positive politeness strategy to build friendship through mutual compliments, or an implicit request for help.

(6) 'Danke!' Wenn sie geschminkt ist: 'Deins ist aber auch toll!' Wenn nicht: 'Soll ich dir das auch machen?'
'Thanks!' If she has done her make-up: 'Yours is great too!' If not: 'Shall I do it for you too?'

Reinterpretations as a request function as a positive politeness strategy that demonstrates solidarity between interlocutors. Their frequent presence in a number of different situations in the Italian corpus suggests a tendency towards positive politeness in Italian compliment behaviour that is not present in the German data. It also suggests that German speakers may not use compliments to elicit information in the same way as Italian speakers.

4.2. Neutral-stance questions

Compliments create a double-bind for the interlocutor, who has to navigate between options when responding: agree with the compliment-giver and risk self-praise, or disagree with the compliment-giver and avoid self-praise (Pomerantz 1978). Neutral-stance questions are often seen as fishing for more compliments, which violates the constraint for self-praise avoidance. According to Alfonzetti (2009) and Lorenzo-Dus (2001), as they are an inclusive strategy that prompts multiple turns, they are common in Mediterranean cultures because of their emphasis on positive politeness.

There were few neutral-stance questions in the overall corpus, but this may be down to the nature of the DCT: because multiple turns are impossible, it would be fruitless to engage in a multiple-turn strategy. Eight of the nine neutral-stance question responses in the Italian data are followed by an appreciation token or another indicator of acceptance of the compliment:

(7) 'Davvero ti piacciono? Grazie, mi fa molto piacere!'
'Do you really like them? Thanks, that makes me really happy!'

There were sixteen occurrences of neutral-stance questions in the German data. These occur in most situations; however, only five were followed by an appreciation token or a second assessment and nine were followed by disagreement or evasion (example 8). The preference for disagreement and evasion after a neutral-stance question could help to mitigate the self-praise that occurs when using such a strategy.

(8) 'Wirklich? Das habe ich schon lange.'
'Really? I've had it for a long time.'

Although neutral-stance questions were recorded across the corpus, German and Italian usage appeared to differ, insofar as Germans were more likely to follow up the question with evasion or disagreement and Italians were more likely to provide an appreciation token and accept the compliment. This reflects the overall result of the study, whereby Italian respondents tended to favour agreement and German respondents tended to favour evasion.

4.3. Attitude to achievement in appearance compliments

Appearance is a frequent compliment topic amongst women, but an extremely rare one amongst men (Manes & Wolfson 1981; Alfonzetti 2009; Rees-Miller 2011). Guendouzi (2004) found that, although compliments about weight loss are potentially face damaging, they form a common part of all-female discourse, particularly as phatic communication. In Situation 7 (weight loss), the compliment-giver's negative attitude to her body image was included in the setting to create an extra constraint for respondents.

The responses from both German and Italian subjects were longer than in any other situation, which suggests that respondents felt they had higher face-work demands and therefore had to give more detailed responses. Appreciation tokens were only present in about half the data (15 responses for Italian; 12 responses for German), with respondents preferring to directly evade the compliment. Five German and two Italian respondents also outright disagreed with the compliment, which is unusual relative to the whole corpus (example 9). Disagreement is usually the dispreferred compliment response, as it can damage solidarity between interlocutors, but in this case respondents may have felt that agreeing would be more damaging, considering the high face-threat to the compliment-giver inherent in the compliment context.

(9) 'Beh, insomma… mi preferivo com'ero prima…'
'Oh, well... I prefer myself how I was before.'

Eleven Italian and seven German respondents included a reinterpretation or a comment history, either explaining their exercise routine or offering tips that may help the compliment-giver lose weight too. Three Italian respondents and five German respondents suggested that she and the compliment-giver could exercise or cook together, which is an interesting alternative way to mitigate the threat to face and develop solidarity:

(10) 'Danke. Hast du Lust, mal mit mir zu kochen? Wir könnten XY kochen, das hat nicht viele Kalorien.'
'Thanks. Do you want to cook with me sometime? We could cook XY, which doesn't have many calories.'

The Italian respondents emphasised working hard at their diet or exercising, confirming their weight loss as an achievement – one even mentioned making 'sacrifices' to achieve her results (example 11). This links to the 'confessional-pathological' interpretative repertoire identified by Wetherell (1996). In this discourse theme, women confess to being unable to subjugate their bodies and giving in to temptation. These Italian respondents claim to have achieved this subjugation.

(11) Grazie, è vero ho perso molto peso ma ho fatto tanti sacrifici per arrivare a come sono ora. Buona alimentazione e tanto sport.'
'Thanks, it's true I've lost a lot of weight but I made many sacrifices to get to how I am now. Good nutrition and lots of sport.'

There were no incidences of emphasising hard work in the German responses, which tended to adhere to the 'personological' interpretative repertoire (Wetherell 1996), where weight loss is blamed on external factors or character traits. While two Italian respondents did blame losing weight on stress or feeling unwell, two German respondents blamed it on stress and a further three stated that it 'just happened' (example 12). Blaming stress and illness could be seen as negating the compliment's force by suggesting that weight loss was undesired or due to undesirable reasons. In this way, respondents deny that their weight loss is an achievement deserving a compliment.

(12) 'Ähm, danke. Wollte gar nicht abnehmen, ist irgendwie gekommen, vielleicht durch Stress.'
'Erm, thanks. Didn't want to lose weight at all, it somehow happened, perhaps through stress.'

Confirming weight loss as an achievement shows agreement between interlocutors, tending to positive face needs. These results show that positive politeness again plays a more prominent role in Italian response preference. They may also tentatively indicate a potential difference in the way that German and Italian cultures view body image in general.

5. Conclusion

The response strategy preferred by both Italian and German respondents was acceptance of the compliment. Disagreement was overwhelmingly the least preferred strategy, though some respondents felt that in some situations (where the threat to the interlocutor's face was particularly high) disagreement was an acceptable strategy. This tendency to agree supports the theory that women often use compliments as positively-affective speech acts to build rapport.

Overall, Italian respondents showed a stronger preference for positive politeness strategies than German respondents, which can be seen, for example, in the use of neutral-stance questions: German respondents often followed a neutral-stance question with a downgrade or a qualification, while Italian respondents subsequently accepted the compliment, concurring with Ravetto (2012). To further develop this comparison of German and Italian, future research should control for gender in greater depth, using all-male and mixed-sex exchanges in addition to all-female exchanges, bearing in mind the methodological improvements suggested by Rees-Miller (2011).

The function of compliments was similar across the two data sets. Compliments from strangers that were not interpreted as phatic were seen as marked and discomforting, while those from friends produced more direct and more inclusive responses. Results show an inherent awareness that compliments are used between friends and acquaintances to develop their relationship through displays of mutual solidarity. An exception to these functional similarities, however, is the characteristically Italian use of reinterpretations to elicit information.

It is important to remember that these results do not represent natural usage but only provide indirect evidence of social expectations and personal beliefs. Whether they are consistent with actual all-female conversation could be established at a further stage, with data collected using ethnographic methods such as audio-visual recordings of real-life situations. The findings discussed here could inform hypotheses for future research, focusing for example on different responses to body-weight compliments. A wider contrastive study into the role of politeness in Italian and German cultures could test the hypothesis suggested here that positive politeness is more prominent in the former than in the latter in response to compliment behaviour.

References

Alfonzetti, G. (2009). *I complimenti nella conversazione.* Rome: Editori Riuniti University Press.

Blom, J.-P., & Gumperz, J. (1986). Social meaning in linguistic structure: code-switching in Norway. In Gumperz, J., & Hymes, D. (eds) *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 407- 434.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coates, J. (1989). Gossip revisited: language in all-female groups. In Coates, J., & Cameron, D. (eds) *Women and Their Speech Communities*. London: Longman, 94-121.

Duttlinger, C. (1999). *Komplimente im Spanischen*. Freiburg: Hochschulverlag.

Golato, A. (2002). German compliment responses. *Journal of Pragmatics 34*, 547-571.

Guendouzi, J. (2004). 'She's very slim': talking about body-size in all-female interactions. *Journal of Pragmatics 36*, 1635-1653.

Herbert, R. (1990). Sex-based differences in compliment behaviour. *Language in Society 19*, 201-224.

Herbert, R., & Straight, H.S. (1989). Compliment-rejection versus compliment avoidance: listener-based versus speaker-based pragmatic strategies. *Language & Communication 9*, 35-47.

Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: a sex-preferential politeness strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics 12*, 445-465.

Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, Men and Politness*. New York: Longman.

Jucker, A. (2009). Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory: the case of compliments. *Journal of Pragmatics 41*, 1611-1635.

Laver, J. (1981). Linguistic routines and politeness in greeting and parting. In Coulmas, F. (ed.) *Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardized Communication Situations and Prepatterned Speech*. The Hague: Mouton, 289-304.
Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk, B. (1989). Praising and complimenting. In: Olesky, W. (ed.) *Contrastive Pragmatics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 73-100.
Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2001). Compliment responses among British and Spanish university students: a contrastive study. *Journal of Pragmatics 33*, 107-127.
Manes, J. (1983). Compliments: a mirror of cultural values. In Wolfson, N., & Judd, E. (eds) *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 96-102.
Manes, J., & Wolfson, N. (1981). The compliment formula. Coulmas, F. (ed.) *Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardized Communication Situations and Prepatterned Speech*. The Hague: Mouton, 115-132.
Mazzotta, P. (2007). Il ruolo della cortesia nella formazione della competenza interculturale. *Studi di Glottodidattica 4*, 71-89.
Mironovschi, L. (2009). *Komplimente und Komplimenterwiderungen im Russischen und im Detuschen: Ein interkultureller Vergleich.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
Nicolaysen, S. (2007). *Das Kompliment als Höflichkeitsstrategie: Ein Vergleich am Beispiel des Schwedischen und des amerikanischen Englischen*. Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr Müller.
Pomerantz, A. (1978). Compliment responses: notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints. In Schenkein, J. (ed.) *Studies in the Organization of Conversational Interaction.* New York: Academic Press, 79-112.
Ravetto, M. (2012). Compliment responses in German and Italian. *International Journal of Innovative Interdisciplinary Research 2,* 77-100.
Rees-Miller, J. (2011). Compliments revisited: contemporary compliments and gender. *Journal of Pragmatics 43*, 2673-2688.
Watts, R. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Werthwein, D. (2009). *'Already Got a Compliment Today?' Wie Australier und Deutsche verbal auf Komplimente reagieren*. St. Augustin: Asgard Verlag.
Wetherell, M. (1996). Fear of fat: interpretative repertoires and ideological dilemmas. In: Maybin, J., & Mercer, N. (eds) *Using English: From Conversation to Canon*. London: Routledge, 36-42.
Wolfson, N. (1983). An empirically based analysis of complimenting in American English. In Wolfson, N., & Judd, E. (eds) *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 82-95.
Wolfson, N. (1988). The bulge: a theory of speech behaviour and social distance. In Fine, J. (ed) *Second Language Discourse: A Textbook of Current Research*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 17-34.
Yuan, Y. (2001). An inquiry into empirical pragmatics data-gathering methods: written DCTs, oral DCTs, field notes, and natural conversations. *Journal of Pragmatics 33*, 271-292.

Appendix (Situations used in the DCT)

Both sets of respondents were presented with a version of these questions in their respective native languages.

1. You are at a party. Another student you haven't met before compliments you on your outfit and says, "That dress is so pretty!" You say:
2. You are in the first seminar of a new term. You sit next to a student that you haven't spoken to before. She says, "I like your bag." You say:
3. You give a presentation in a seminar. Afterwards, another student says to you, "That was a great presentation!" You say:
4. You receive the results of an exam. One of your friends has done better than you. She says to you, "Well done, you worked really hard for that mark." You say:
5. You and a close friend are having lunch. In conversation, she says, "You've got such lovely hair; I wish mine was like that!" You say:
6. You are in the queue in the canteen. Another student in the queue says, "You've got really nice eyes, they're an unusual colour." You say:
7. You have lost weight recently. You meet a friend of yours, who you know has concerns about her own body image and struggles to lose weight. She says, "You've lost so much weight, you look fantastic!" You say:
8. You and your friends are getting ready to go out. One of your friends says, "Hey, I really like how you're doing your make-up tonight." You say:
9. You are paired with other students in your seminar to work on a project together. When you meet to discuss the project, one of the other students in the group says, "I'm glad you're in the group, you're so organised and good at making everything run smoothly." You say:

Sophie Payne holds a B.A. in German and Italian from the University of Reading, where she is now working towards an MA (Res) in German Studies at the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies. Email: sophie.payne@student.reading.ac.uk.