

Male and Female Students of English Department of State University of Medan in Compliment Responses and Their Meanings

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ABSTRACT

Giving and responding to compliments can be a challenge for non-native speakers whose social attributes are different from those in the target language culture. Complimenting is one of the most important speeches used to negotiate interpersonal meaning and to build and sustain rapport and solidarity among speakers. This study is to investigate the types of compliment responses (CR) and the meaning of the compliment responses realized by male and female students. The respondent of the study is the English Department students for six semesters. The total respondents of the study is 70 students consisting of 30 males and 40 females taken by random sampling technique. The Discourse Completion Test (DCT) is used to collect the data. The data are analysed descriptive qualitative technique. The results of the research show that a) almost all types of compliment responses are used by males and females except the comment history type but they are different in types and frequencies, b) like types of compliment, males and females also use a significantly different way to realize the meaning of compliment response, especially in terms of frequency, for example, more female use comment acceptance than male.

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1. Introduction

As a matter of fact, in any social occasions and circumstances and in every moment, people often give and receive compliments. People usually deliver compliment for many reasons such as respect, admiration, praise, etc. In addition, in communication setting, giving compliment may to smoothen and or to start the conversation between speaker and hearer (Austin, 1975; Holmes, 1996).

In terms of response of the compliment, people have a diverse number of ways to respond it. The response, of course depends on the social context, occasion, circumstance, and psychological condition of the hearer. One may response directly by saying 'thank you,' or another one may prefers having 'not really,' or the other one responds 'you want it?' etc. Relating to compliment, (Holmes, 1996) states that compliments are common in various cultural and social contexts and are generally considered as a way to build or increase solidarity between the speaker and the addressee.

Then, Morales (2012) defines compliments to be more comprehensive. He states that compliments are not only convey honest admiration or positive qualities but they are also used to substitute greetings, thanks, apologies, and minimize face-threatening acts. The compliment expressions are frequently used in communication. Delivering and responding compliment is one of media to build and create good relationship between and among people when communicating. It is also considered as a politeness strategy in order to make the communication run in harmony. Generally, when someone is complimented, he or she naturally and psychologically feels excited and happy. However, few people are not really excited due to many reasons.

These two different feelings of responses probably happen because responders have different perceptions regarding to the compliment itself. Also the compliment and its typical responses are assumed likely influenced by culture. The example of the dialogue below show how the compliment and compliment responses used by the teaching and the students.

Situation: Jonathan is a teacher in an adult school class in the United States. After class, he is speaking to Anh, one of his student.

Jonathan : Anh, your English is improving. I am pleased with your work.

Anh : (looking down) Oh, no. My English is not very good.

Jonathan : Why do you say that, Anh? You are doing well in class.

Anh : No, I am not a good student.

Jonathan : Anh, you are making progress in this class. You should be proud of your English.

Anh : No, it is not true. You are a good teacher, but I am not a good student.

Jonathan : (He is surprised by her response and wonders why she think her English is so bad. He does not know what to say and wonders if he should stop giving compliment) Levina. R.D, Baxter, Jim. McNulty, Piper (1987).

Referring to the quoted dialogue, there are some points which can be implied regarding to the compliment, its functions, responses, and topics. First, it shows that the speaker (teacher) tries to appreciate or praise to the addressee (student) due to his achievement in English. Second, the topic/theme of the compliment delivered by the teacher is about an achievement or performance, or skill. Third, the typical response of compliment is regarded no-agreement with the response “*Oh, no. My English is not very good.*”

Another issue of responding compliment is the how male and female respond the compliment. It is generally known that male and female are assumed having different way communicating including in responding compliment. (Holmes, 2003) in her study about compliment and gender shows that compliment patterns appear to be quite different when the compliment giver and compliment receiver are the same gender from when they are different genders, and differences between males and females still arise even within same-gender interactions.

As a students who are studying English, responding compliments and realizing their meanings are important for them. These can be a challenge for non-native speakers whose social values and norms are different from those in the target language culture. It also may be unique and different in terms of gender perspectives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Nature of Compliment

In terms of world class, the word compliment can be a noun and a verb. The use of compliment whether it is a verb or a noun it depends on the sentence. For examples, “*The teacher almost never gives the compliment to his student*” (1) “*The teacher almost never compliments his students*” (2). In sentence (1) the word compliment is a as noun but in sentence (2) it is as a verb (Dirgeyasa, 2015). While by definition, textually compliment is defined as an expression of praise, or respect (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, (1978)). Then, more comprehensive definition is stated by Webster’s New World College Dictionary (1995). It states that compliment is a formal act or expression of courtesy or respect, or something said in admiration, praise, or flattery, or courteous greetings; respects, or to present something to (a person) as an act of politeness or respect. In addition, it is generally known that compliment also means good wishes, congratulation, gesture of civility, and to show fondness.

In line with the definition of compliment, Holmes (1988) states that compliments are utterances that express polite behavior and convey to interlocutors such as friends, partners and acquaintances, etc.) how much their ideas are values. Therefore, compliment is crucial to the formation of the mutual solidarity. The aim of complimenting is to attribute something praise worthy to addressee (s) so that they can experience being liked and appreciated. Then, he further states that compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attribute credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed for some ‘good’ such as possession, characteristics, skill, competences, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.

Then, Manes (1983) and Herbert (1990) argues that instead of offering solidarity, compliments are likely to reflect the relationship between the complimenter and the complementee, because praise is often directed towards the subordinate or less powerful participant. Then, they state that compliment is classified as one type of speech act subsumed under the category of positive politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned that complimenting conveys agreement, approval, and a sense that the compliment deliver and compliment receiver may share similar view.

2.2 Compliment Responses

It has been widely argued that responding to compliments appropriately is equally important in maintaining rapport or positive face of both the speaker and the addressee. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) terms, failing to do so may '*hurt the speaker's face*' and hence, compliment responses can be seen as potential FTAs. Numerous studies have been done in this area, especially in the Mandarin Chinese contexts. In order to compare results from the two different speech communities more easily, I use Spencer-Oatey and Ng's (2002) three broad categories of compliment responses, with examples in both languages.

In communication process, the compliment responses are the important point regarding to compliment. In line with compliment responses, Holmes (1988) proposes three main categories of compliment responses, based on the credit attribution component of compliments namely Accepting, Rejecting, and Deflecting or Evading. Her point of view, is actually based on Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and considered compliments to be, on the one hand, positively affective speech acts, and other hand, potentially face-threatening acts.

In line with the compliment responses, Herbert proposes a taxonomy of compliment responses known as Herbert's Taxonomy of Compliment Responses (1990). A detail taxonomy of compliment responses is shown by table 2 below.

Tabel 2: Herbert's Taxonomy of Compliment Responses

No	Types of Responses	Meanings	Language Expressions
1	Agreement Acceptance	1. Appreciation token 2. Comment acceptance 3. Praise upgrade	<i>Thank you</i> <i>Thanks, it's my favourite too.</i> <i>Really! Brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?</i>
2	Comment history		<i>I bought it from a trip to Arizona.</i>
3	Transfer	1. Reassignment 2. Return	<i>My brother gave to me</i> <i>So is yours</i>
4	Non-agreement	1. Scale down 2. Question 3. Non-acceptance a) Disagreement b) Qualification	<i>It's really quiet old.</i> <i>Do you really think so</i> <i>I hate it</i> <i>It's all right but Len's is more beautiful.</i>
5	Other interpretation	c) No acknowledgment Request	<i>(silence)</i> <i>You want to borrow this one too?</i>

2.3 The Compliment and gender

Gender plays a large role in compliment behavior in many language varieties. It is especially important to consider. The relationship and connection between gender and compliment some questions may arise such as "Is it always appropriate for males to compliment females?" or "How about males complimenting females?" or "Does the topic vary depending on the gender of the person receiving the compliment?"

These functions may, however, overlap in certain contexts. Thus, it is necessary to take other factors (such as relationships between participants and social status) into consideration when analysing the differences in complimenting behaviour between women and men.

Talking and discussing about gender and compliment. The linguistics professor Robin Lakoff of the University of California, Berkeley says that such characteristics of women's speech lead people to think that women are powerless compared to men when speaking. Her study is not conclusive and there are other studies and research done to find out whether women and men speak differently, but the results vary. Most people say that it is due to stereotyping and prejudice. What is definite is that today, many people consciously use gender-neutral language to veer away from the bias towards a person's gender or profession.

Then study about compliment and gender shows that Compliment patterns appear to be quite different when the compliment giver and compliment receiver are the same gender from when they are different genders, and differences between males and females still arise even within same-gender interactions (Holmes, 2003). It was noted that women tend to deliver compliment each other considerably more often than men complimented each other. This statistic is reflected in further data that showed that women gave two-thirds of the recorded compliments and received three-quarters of them. Compliments between men comprised a mere 9 percent of the data. Similar patterns have been noted in studies of English speakers from other regions as well.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Method

This research uses descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative and descriptive research methods have been very common procedures for conducting research in many disciplines, including education, psychology, and social sciences. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics.

3.2 The Participants

The participants of the study is the students of English Department Education of Faculty of Teaching Education, Universitas Negeri Medan academic year 2018/2019. The total number of the students is about 125 students. Of the 100 students there are 85 female and 40 male. By using random sampling technique, the number of participants is about 70 students. Out of 70 students, there are 40 female students and 30 male students.

3.3 The Instrument for Collecting Data

The instrument used to collect data of the study is Discourse Completion Test (Yuan, 2002) to gather data. DCT. It is a kind of a set of a written questionnaire that contains a number of hypothetical scenarios or situations. Participants are required to write in the space provided, what they would say in real life if similar situations happen to them. DCTs are widely used as controlled elicitation tools to collect written discourse for discourse analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data of the research are analysed by descriptive analysis by using Interactive models technique by Miles, Huberman & Saldana's theory (2014). There are main steps to analyze the data, namely (1) data condensation (2) data display and (3) conclusion drawing or verification.

4. Results and Discussion

After collecting the total number of compliment responses is about 205 items responses both for male and female students. Then, the distribution of the data is as follows a) male compliment responses reaches 101 items or (49.26%) responses and female is about 104 item or (50.73%) responses as shown by figure 1 below.

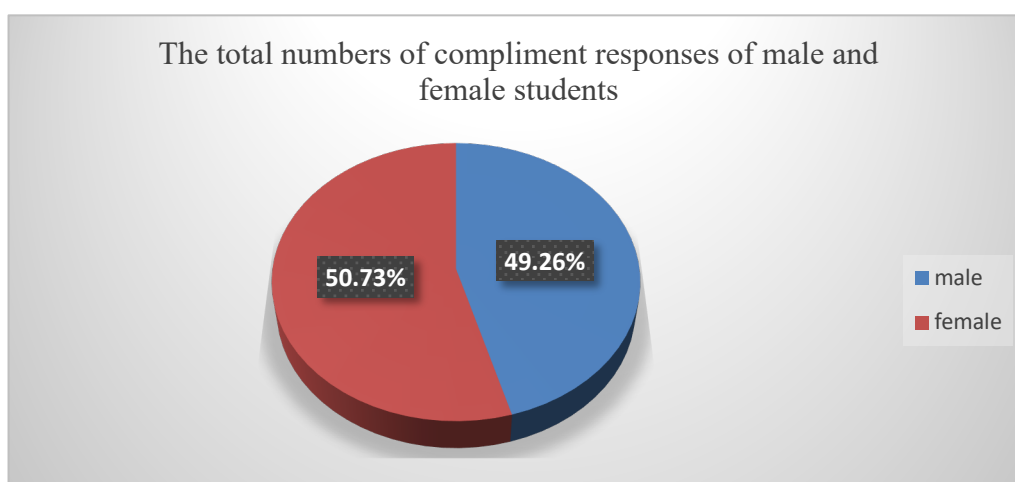


Figure 1 above shows that the numbers of compliment responses done by both male and female students are not significantly different among them. This means that both male and female students when they are responding compliments are not influenced by gender perspective. In other word, it can be said that by nature both male and female are happy with the compliment. It is similarly to what Ye (1995) state that compliments are positive expressions, commendation that can boost one's morale. Then, Matsuko (2003) in her research dealing with gender variation in explicitness of proffering compliments. Her study shows that males and females from the same culture are almost equally explicit in giving compliment and responding compliment.

4.1 The Types of the Compliment Responses (CR)

Theoretically, there are six types of compliment responses such as a) agreement acceptance, b) comment history, c) transfer, d) non-agreement, and e) other interpretation. In this research, based the data collection and reduction, the number of items of compliments responses (CR) both for male and female reaches 205 compliment responses. Of the 205 items of compliment responses made by male and female, all the types of compliment responses theoretically exist are done by the respondents either male or female.

Even though almost all types of compliment responses are done by the respondent, but the distribution of the data in term of types of compliments among them are proportionally distributed. For example, most data both for male and female are dominantly classified in type 1 of compliment responses (*agreement acceptance*). However, type 2 or comment history, is absent for male in responding the compliment. The compliment distribution of types of compliment responses both for male and female are respectively shown by figure 2 and 3 below.

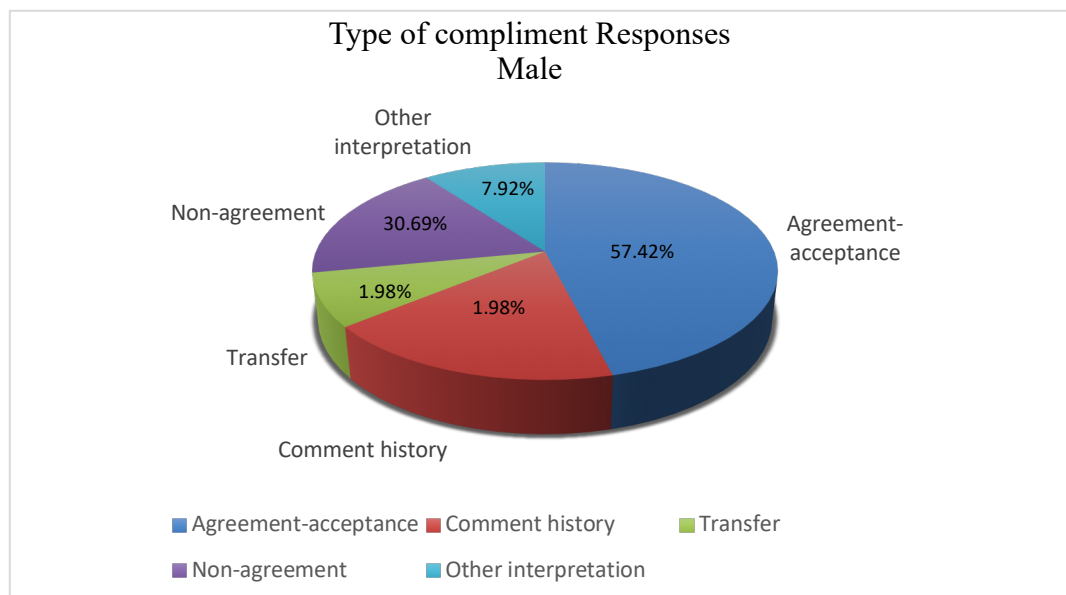


Figure 2. The percentage of compliment responses of male students

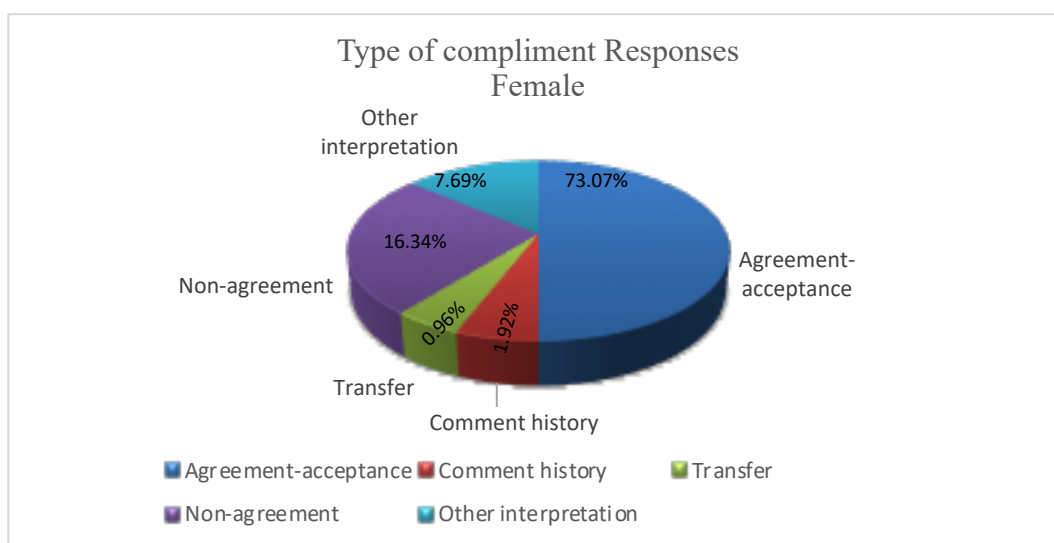


Figure 3. The percentage of compliment responses of female students

Based on the description of the data as shown by figure 2 and 3 above, they show that all types compliment response categories such as acceptance, positive elaboration, neutral elaboration, negative elaboration, and denial are used by the both male and female. However, there have been differences in responding the compliments given to male and female addressees. Even though male and female tend to respond the compliment by using *agreement acceptance* type mostly, female is more frequent and intensive to use it which reaches about (73.07%) than male in which is about (57.42%). In addition, the fourth type (non-agreement) also intensively used by male and female when responding the compliment given to them. Data show that the percentage of this type of compliment responses reach respectively (53.44%) for male and (22.36%) for female. This shows male students more often denies the compliment than female. In line with this data, Holmes (2003) argues that women tends to deliver more compliment each other considerably more often than men. Then other similar study about compliment and gender shows that compliment patterns appear to be quite different when the giver and the receiver of the compliment are the same gender from when they are different genders. Also differences between males and females still arise even within same-gender interactions.

Referring to compliment responses between male and female, Matsudo (2003) and Shahsavari, et al. (2014) conducts the research dealing with gender variation in explicitness of proffering compliments. Her study shows that males and females from the same culture are almost equally explicit in giving compliment. This happen in Japan as women become stronger, the need for flattery may be decreasing. Then, she further reports that this may or may not be similar in another countries due to the historical and cultural background of the women life during the era.

In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) state that there have been differences in responding in complimenting behaviour between women and men. They, then add that paying a compliment is a prime example of a positive politeness strategy, as it appeals to people's positive face needs; i.e., to be liked or admired by others. Then, they states that paying a compliment is a prime example of a positive politeness strategy, as it appeals to people's positive face needs; i.e., to be liked or admired by others.

4.2 The Meaning of the Compliment Responses

Based on the data that have been collected and reduced, the total number of data for meaning of the compliment reach are similar to the total number of the compliment responses. As mentioned previously, the meaning of the compliment is derived from the compliment responses themselves. So, referring to the type of compliment responses, the total number of meaning of the compliment can be classified into 1) appreciation token, 2) comment acceptance, 3) praise upgrade, 4) commentary history, 5 reassignment, 6, return, 7) scale down, 8) question, 9) non-acceptance, 10) other interpretation. However, the distribution and the frequencies of the meaning of compliment response between male and female students are significantly different as shown by respectively figure 4 and 5 below.

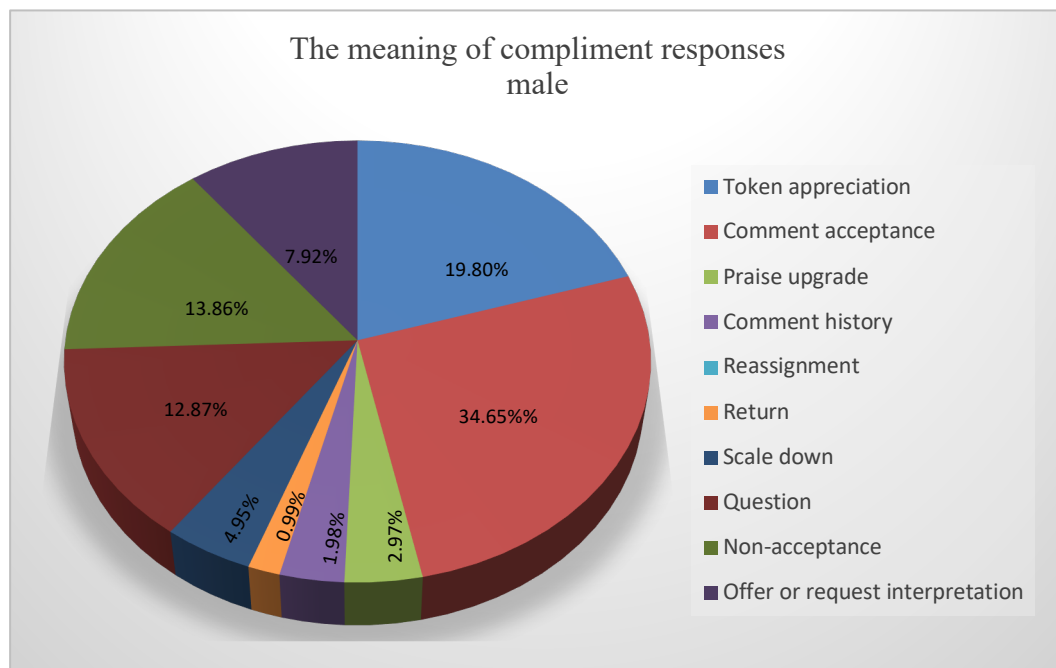


Figure 4. The percentage of meaning of compliment responses of male students

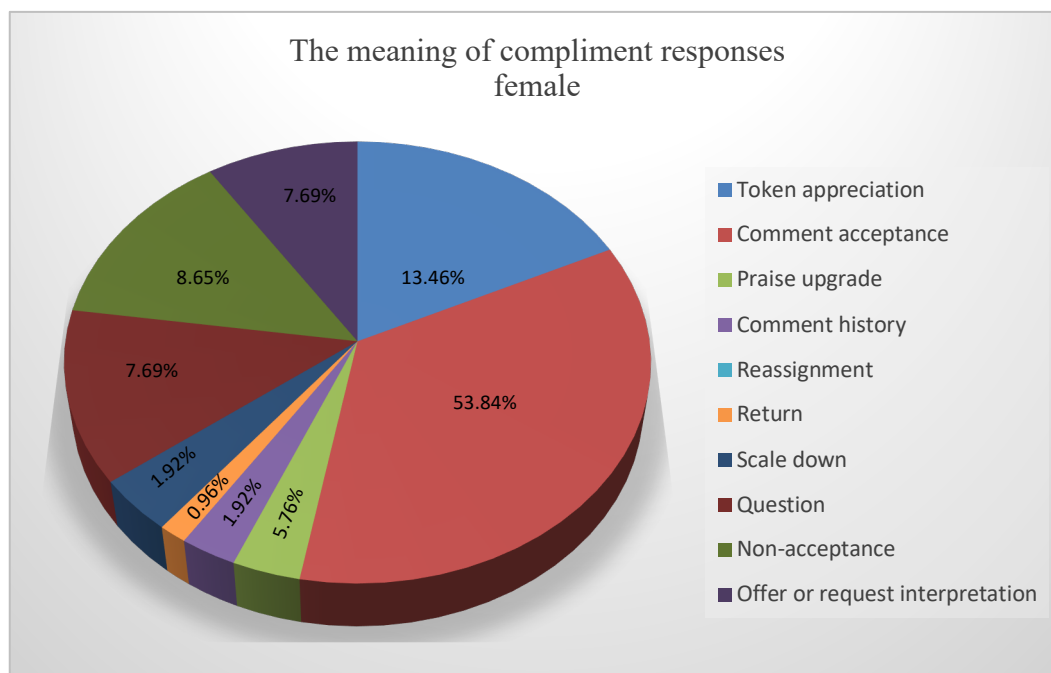


Figure 5. The percentage of meaning of compliment responses of female students

In terms of meaning or realization of the compliment responses, based on the data, both male and female realized the meaning in the way they are but the frequency and intensity among the meaning of the compliment are not proportionally distributed. Most male and female realized the meaning of compliment responses in term of comment acceptance which respectively reaches (34.65%) for male and (53.84%) for female. The second dominant meaning of compliment response both for male and female is token appreciation which is about respectively (19.80%) for male and (13.46%) for female. This is also supported by the data from Murillo (2012) and Yuan (2002) stating that Thai males use acceptance responses slightly more frequently than Thai females, however this different from American in which, American females use acceptance as a response type far more often than American males.

Referring to above data, Sunderland (2006) and Murillo (2012) then state that gender does play a significant role in responding to English compliments. They, then strongly argue that male and female tend to have different ways to respond the compliment either in terms of types and meaninga of the compliment responses. Then, theoretically, it is also relevant to what Phoocharoensil, S. 2012 and Zhang, Jin-pei (2013) states that compliments are actually expression of positive evaluation; a speaker wishes to "make hearer feel good" through expressing that he (the hearer) has a certain positive feature.

This is also important to discuss about that the meaning of *reassignment* (meaning 5) both male and female addresses do not use this type of meaning or realization of compliment responses. This also happens to the meaning of *qualification* as a sub division of *non-acceptance* meaning. Both male and female addresses do not use this meaning when they respond the compliments. In addition, *reassignment* and *qualification*, this research also shows that the *comment history* either as type or meaning of compliment responses or a type of compliment responses is found this research. This also happen to male and female respondents.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, of the are six types of compliment responses such as a) agreement acceptance, b) comment history, c) transfer, d) non-agreement, and e) other interpretation theoretically, almost all types of compliment responses used by the male and female students, except the second type (*comment history*). Even though almost all types are used by male female but the distribution of the compliment responses is not equally shared by the students. Still the *agreement acceptance* become dominant among them either for male and female. However, to some point, sometimes male is more frequent than female but in another point female is more frequent than male. This also happens in the realization of meaning of the compliment responses. Principally, male and female have different way to convey the meaning of compliment responses. Of the ten (10) types of meaning or realization of the compliment responses, almost all are used by male and female except the meaning of *reassignment* and *qualification* meaning. These two meaning or ways of realizing the compliment responses, both male and female are not using these ways of meaning in order to respond the compliments.

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