بررسی کنش کلامی پاسخ به تحسین در زبان فارسی: تأثیر سن

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دریافت: ۱۳۹۵/۰۶/۰۹ پذیرش: ۱۳۹۵/۱۲/۱۲

A Study on the Speech Act of Compliment Response in Persian: The Effect of Age

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Abstract

Compliments and their responses are of high frequency in daily speech acts and carry a special cultural-sociological load. This study aimed at identifying the effect of the variable of age on Persian speakers' compliment response strategies. To this end, 200 Persian speakers (100 women and 100 men) from four different age-groups (10-18, 19-30, 31-40, and above 40 years old) were asked to respond to the written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) consisting of four imaginary situations. The results indicated that the participants used accept strategies the most and the evade ones the least but the most common sub-type of response strategies they used was the downgrade strategy. Return and appreciation tokens were the second and third most frequently used strategies. However, topic shift and reassignment strategies were never used. The results also revealed that the effect of age on the patterns of compliment responses was remarkable. While the age-group under 18 used appreciation tokens the most, the other age-groups preferred downgrade ones the most. However were used, disagreement and reassurance strategies the least in all groups.

Key Words: Pragmatic competence, Speech acts, Compliment Responses, Discourse Completion Task (DCT), Age**,** Persian.

چکیده

تحسین و پاسخ به آن در میان کنش‌های کلامی روزانه از جایگاه پربسامد و از بار فرهنگی–جامعه‌شناختی ویژه‌ای برخوردار است. هدف پژوهش حاضر بررسی تأثیر متغیر سن بر راهبردهای کلامی فارسی‌زبانان در پاسخ به تحسین بوده است. بدین منظور، از ۲۰۰ زن و مرد فارسی‌زبان (به تعداد برابر) در چهار ردۀ سنی مختلف (۱۰–۱۸، ۱۹–۳۰، ۳۱–۴۰ و ۴۰ سال به بالا) تقاضا شد که به آزمون کتبی تکمیل گفتمان در چهار موقعیت فرضی پاسخ دهند. نتایج بدست آمده نشان داد که شرکت‌کنندگان در پاسخ به تحسین از راهبرد پذیرفتن بیشترین و از طفره رفتن کمترین استفاده را می‌کنند اما متداول‌ترین زیرمجموعه از راهبردهای استفاده‌شده در پاسخ به تحسین توسط آنها راهبرد شکسته‌نفسی است. برگرداندن و قبول تحسین دومین و سومین راهبرد پرکاربرد محسوب می‌شود. از راهبردهای تغییر موضوع و انتقال هرگز استفاده نشد. علاوه بر این، نتایج نشان داد که تأثیر متغیر سن بر الگوهای پاسخ به تحسین چشمگیر است. درحالی‌که گروه سنی زیر ۱۸ سال از راهبرد قبول تحسین بیشترین استفاده را داشت، دیگر گروه‌های سنی تمایل بیشتری به استفاده از راهبرد شکسته‌نفسی داشتند. اما راهبردهای مخالفت و اطمینان‌یابی کمترین استفاده را در همۀ گروه‌های سنی داشتند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: توانش منظورشناختی، کنش‌های کلامی، پاسخ به تحسین، تکلیف تکمیل گفتمان، سن، زبان فارسی.

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Introduction

During the last few decades, there has been a plethora of research on pragmatics and its different aspects, especially speech acts. Speech acts appear to contribute significantly to construction of everyday communication. The performance of speech acts relies on sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge. While the former refers to the ability to select appropriate speech act strategies with respect to social variables of age, gender of the speaker, social class and status in interactions, the latter conforms to the skill at selection of appropriate linguistic forms, registers or levels of formality to express speech acts (Leech, 1983). It is probable for people from different first language (L1) backgrounds to have communication breakdowns when interacting with each other. One possible reason of such miscommunication is related to different value systems underlying each speaker's L1 cultural group (Chick, 1996). Different value systems are reflected in speech acts; hence, inappropriate interpretation of a particular speech act can cause misunderstanding of the speaker's intention.

In particular, Compliments (Cs) and Compliment Responses (CRs) are among speech acts that frequently occur in everyday conversations. The speech act of complimenting has attracted the majority of researchers' attention. It is loaded with cultural and socio-cultural factors and therefore requires a great deal of pragmatic insight to properly employ and understand it.

While one of the major functions of Cs is to establish and develop solidarity between interlocutors (Manes & Wolfson, 1981), they are considered primarily as what Brown and Levinson (1987) called Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). Based on Brown and Levinson (1987), complimenting is a kind of positive politeness strategy which addresses the hearer's positive face with the complimenter noticing the complimentee's interests and needs; at the same time, it can be perceived as a FTA when the complimenter is understood to envy the addressee or try to obtain something belonging to the complimentee. In other words, Cs are a multi-faceted speech act with various types and features, and the acts can be regarded as either face-saving behavior or face-threatening (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Moreover, an interlocutor who offers a C normally expects a response in some way which is called CR. Like Cs, CRs have a role in establishing and maintaining the solidarity of relationships.

Therefore, as Brown (2007) suggests, how to pay appropriate Cs, how to identify them and how to give appropriate responses are important aspects of communicative competence that everyone in a given society needs to develop to avoid pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic failure. Studying complementing can enhance our understanding of a people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and intended meaning of language use in a community (Yuan, 2001).

On the other side, second/foreign language learners have to achieve a proper level of linguistic proficiency as well as sociocultural norms in the second/foreign language to survive in a new society and culture (Long & Doughty, 2003). Persian can be a second/foreign language (PSL/PFL) whose pragmatic strategies may differ significantly from other languages. Persian has received a great deal of scholars' attention for its complex socio-cultural system (Sharifian, 2005). Even learners with accurate linguistic knowledge still have problems in real life communication. Wolfson (1989) asserts that although an error in grammar or pronunciation can be simply forgiven and forgotten by the native speakers of a language, a pragmatic error can cause an offence. Therefore, second/foreign language learners not only should acquire grammatical competence to achieve linguistic accuracy, but also need to internalize sociolinguistic rules to help them communicative appropriately.

Although a plethora of studies have been conducted so far on pragmatics and speech acts, in general, and Cs and CRs, in particular, only a few have investigated the relationship between different CR strategies employed by native speakers across social variables in Persian. Hence, the present study is an attempt to investigate the relatively unexplored CR strategies employed by native speakers of Persian across the social variable of age since there seems to be a gap in literature regarding this issue. To do so, the present study addresses the following research questions to fill the above mentioned gaps:

1. How do Persian native speakers respond to the compliments made on them?
2. How do compliment response strategies differ across age as a social variable among Persian native speakers?

Review of Literature

Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and the users of those forms. Kasper and Rose (2001) define pragmatics as the

study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraint they encounter in using the language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication. Pragmatic competence enables speakers to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meanings, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting (Bachman & Palmer, 2000). Native speakers of any language acquire such competence during their language learning and use pragmatic rules unconsciously in interaction with others. Non-native speakers, however, as Bardovi-Harlig (2001) holds, differ significantly in their performance even if they have access to good amount of pragmatic input. Several researchers (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, 2001; Kasper, 1997) claim that learners of high grammatical proficiency do not necessarily possess comparable pragmatic competence. Even grammatically advanced learners may use language inappropriately and show differences from target-language pragmatic norms. However, for a long time, pragmatic competence, or the ability to behave appropriately in different situations had been ignored in language pedagogy. The inability of learners to handle different situations on the one hand, and the emergence of Communicative Competence Models (Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980) in which pragmatic competence was considered as an integral part of language competence on the other hand, gave a new prominence to the subject of pragmatics in language pedagogy and research (Mohammad-Bagheri, 2015).

Austin (1962) proposes speech act theory claiming that a speaker produces three types of act: first, the locutionary act referring to the act of uttering (phonemes, morphemes, sentences) and also saying something about the world. The second type of act is the illocutionary act referring to the speaker's intention realized in producing an utterance. Finally, the perlocutionary act is the third type of act referring to the intended effect of an utterance on the hearer. This classification reveals that in producing an utterance, not only we say something, but also we mean something from what we say, and we seek to have an influence on our interlocutor. According to Austin's speech act theory, Cs and CRs are speech acts in which the former can be seen as an illocutionary act and the latter as a perlocutionary act.

Cs have been defined as speech acts which explicitly or implicitly give credit to the addressee, for positive qualities which are appreciated by the speaker or even the whole speech community (Holmes,1988). People often give Cs on topics like possessions, appearance, skills and achievements (Holmes, 1988). Wolfson (1983) metaphorically and succinctly argues that Cs are employed to "grease the social wheels" and thus to serve as "social lubricants" (p. 89). They help people initiate, maintain, or terminate a conversation, indicate gratitude and appreciation, and have closer conversational interaction by strengthening the rapport between them.

In addition, the complimenter, who gives a C, normally expects a response in some way which is called CR. Pomerantz (1978) was the first researcher who pioneered study on CR strategies and she identified a wide range of CR types. She also argued that a CR is constrained by two general conditions: agree with the complimenter and avoid self-praise. Consequently, the complimentee is faced with a dilemma: on the one hand, he/she is expected to agree with the complimenter and thus accept the compliment. On the other hand, there is strong pressure on how he/she can accept the C without seeming to praise himself/herself.

Therefore, it is necessary for those people who learn L2 not only to acquire grammatical competence to achieve linguistic accuracy, but also to internalize sociolinguistic rules to help them use appropriate linguistic forms to survive in a new society and culture. Particularly, to respond to a C in a language correctly and appropriately, the speaker requires to have not only linguistic proficiency, but also socio-pragmatic perception of the C. In fact, the linguistic variations between the languages and the variations between cultures make the successful understanding of complementing in both L1 and L2 very challenging.

Researchers have conducted many studies on Cs and CRs so far; however, only a few have investigated the relationship between different CR strategies employed by native speakers across social variables in Persian. A majority of studies have attempted to compare different ways of complimenting and responding to Cs across different languages, communities, and cultures (e.g., Huth, 2006; Jin-pei, 2013; Sadeghi & Zarei, 2013), or others have taken other factors such as gender differences in Cs and CRs in English into consideration (see, for example, Heidari, Rezazadeh, & Eslami-Rasekh, 2009; Mohammad-Bagheri,

2015). Allami and Montazeri (2011), among few examples, conducted research to examine the effect of cultural and social variables on the use of CRs in Persian. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, there has been little research investigating CRs in Persian in relation to age yet. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the relatively unexplored CR strategies used by native speakers of Persian across the social variable of age since there seems to be a gap in literature regarding this issue. The author's hope is that the findings of this study can contribute to the interlanguage pragmatic competence of both Iranian learners of other languages and those who want to learn Persian as their second/foreign language.

Regarding the above-discussed issues, the study thus tries to find out what major categories and subcategories of compliment responses (CRs) are used by native speakers of Persian and whether or not these features are influenced by their age.

Methodology
Research Framework
The present study made use of a framework proposed by Holmes (1986) to analyze different CR patterns used by the participants. According to Holmes (1986), CRs can be divided into three types: Accept, Reject, and Evade (see Table 1). The first type of responses includes appreciation token, return, and upgrade. Appreciation token refers to verbal or non-verbal signs that a C has been noticed and accepted. Return refers to the case that the complimentee returns the Cs to the complimenter. Upgrade refers to the case that complimentee accepts the C and thinks that the complimenter under-compliments him/her or the complimentary force is insufficient. On the other hand, downgrade or scale down and disagreement are types of rejections. Downgrade refers to the case that the complimentee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object. Disagreement refers to the case that the complimentee does not agree with the Cs. Finally, evade strategies are explanation (informative comment), reassignment (shift credit), request interpretation (offer), topic shift, and reassurance. Explanation refers to the case that complimentee offers a comment on how he/she does something. When the complimentee uses reassignment, he/she transfers the credit to another person. Request interpretation refers to the case that the complimentee interprets the C he/she receives as a request. Topic shift is used when the complimentee is not limited to the CR and he/she initiates a new topic. Finally, reassurance refers to the case that the complimentee is asking confirmation from the complimenter that the C is directed to her/him.

Table 1. Holmes' (1988) framework of CR strategies

	CR Strategies	Context	Example
Accept	Appreciation Token	Your friend says: "You look good at a party".	Thanks a lot.
	Return		You look good too.
	Upgrade		I know my shirt is the best.
Reject	Downgrade	Your friend says: "You speak English very well".	I can speak English but not very well.
	Disagreement		No, I still have a lot to learn.
Evade	Explanation	Your friend says: "You have a nice laptop".	It took me a lot of time to choose the nice one.
	Reassignment		My father gave it to me.
	Request Interpretation		Do you wanna try?
	Topic Shift		Everything is expensive. How was your English class?
	Reassurance		Really? I didn't know that.

Participants
The participants of the study were 200 Persian native speakers from different age groups (50 between 10-18, 50 between 19-30, 50 between 31-40, and 50 above 40 years old). It has to be noted that100 of the participants were male and 100 were female and the age and gender factors were equally distributed. They were also from various cities of Iran including Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Shiraz, Qom, Zanjan, Qazvin, and Urmia in order that they could be as representative of the target population, Iranian people, as possible. The sites from which participants were chosen were as diverse as possible,

as follows: parks, streets, academic settings, family gatherings, markets, e-mails, and social networks.

Instruments

As Ellis (2008) points out, Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) have been extensively used by many studies in the area of pragmatics to elicit participants' intuitions about how to perform specific acts appropriately in different situations. Such popularity is partly due to their simplicity of use and high degree of control over variables that lead to easy replicability (Yuan, 2002). Golato (2003) similarly offers some advantages of DCTs over other data collection techniques such as allowing the researcher to control for certain variables (i.e. age of respondents, features of the situation, etc.) and to quickly gather large amounts of data without any need for transcription, thus making it easy to statistically compare responses from different speakers. It is worth noting that the way data are collected may influence the results. For example, data obtained from DCTs can be similar to or different from those from observational methods. Aston (1995) and Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) claim that data collected via DCTs do not always correspond to natural data. Likewise, Golato (2003) suggests that "a DCT is metapragmatic and it is a valid instrument for measuring not pragmatic action, but symbolic action" (p. 92). DCTs are written questionnaires containing a number of hypothetical scenarios or situations used to elicit particular speech acts (Yuan, 2002). Participants are required to supply, in writing, what they would say in real life if similar situations happen to them. However, the answers are not always the same and are situation and addressee- related.

Considering DCTs' advantages and disadvantages, the present study employed a DCT developed by Yuan (2002) and translated into Persian to elicit data from the participants. The current Persian DCT was checked, modified, and verified for the authenticity of language by several native speakers of Persian. It started by asking demographic questions regarding the participants' gender, age, and L1. The DCT questionnaire aimed to elicit the possible CR strategies used by Persian native speakers in hypothetical contexts. As Table 2 shows, four scenarios, in which the informants were the recipients of Cs, were designed. The context of Cs was explained in the DCT questionnaire and the participants were asked to play the role of the complimentees and respond to Cs they received from their friends.

Table 2. Topics of CRs in DCT questionnaire

Context	Topic	Object of C
1	You look good at a party.	Appearance and Attire
2	You do favors for your classmate.	Kindness
3	You speak beautifully and politely.	Ability
4	You have a nice laptop.	Possession

Procedures

First, based on the social variable considered in the study, age, more than 200 Iranian males and females coming from different parts of Iran were selected. They were asked to write their age, gender, and L1 in the DCT questionnaire. Those participants whose L1 was not Persian were excluded from the study. In addition, the age and gender factors were equally distributed. As a result, the number of participants was reduced to 200 (25 males between 10-18, 25 females between 10-18, 25 males between 19-30, 25 females between 19-30, 25 males between 31-40, 25 females between 31-40, 25 males above 40, and 25 females above 40 years old).

Second, the Persian DCT was made available to the participants in a variety of ways, including direct encounters, electronic communication, friends, registered posting, and relatives, who were given adequate time to complete the questionnaires at their own pace. The collected date were organized and prepared for further analyses.

Results and Discussion
Distribution of CRs across Participants

To address the major CR strategies employed by Persian speakers, 1172 CRs were elicited from 200 Persian native speakers in four different scenarios, in which the informants were the recipients of Cs. The participants were asked to play the role of the complimentees and respond to Cs they received from their friends. Four scenarios were designed in a way that the complimentees received Cs from their friends on their good characteristics regarding their appearance and attire, kindness, ability, and possession. According to Table 3, the most frequently used CR strategy by Persian native speakers was accept, accounting for 48.45% of the total responses. On the other hand, the participants used evade strategies the least, accounting for 23.01% of the total tokens. It has to be noted that the participants also used reject strategies (28.4%) more than evade ones. On the whole, participants

followed accept, reject, and evade trend when replying to Cs. This suggests that participants were more likely to accept rather than reject a C. However, it was found that participants used reject strategies which were rooted in their modesty, seen as an important component of Persian culture. This lends credence to Pomerantz's (1978) finding that complimentees have to do two challenging tasks simultaneously: they must agree with the complements given by the complimenter and avoid self-praise. It is also in harmony with the modesty and agreement maxim principles proposed by Leech (1983). In fact, he proposes six conversational maxims in relation to his politeness principle: tact maxim minimizing cost to hearer and maximizing benefit to hearer; generosity maxim minimizing benefit to speaker, maximizing cost to speaker; approbation maxim minimizing dispraise of hearer and maximizing praise to hearer; modesty maxim minimizing praise to speaker, maximizing dispraise of speaker; agreement maxim minimizing disagreement between speaker and hearer and maximizing agreement between them; and sympathy maxim minimizing antipathy between speaker and hearer and maximizing sympathy between them.

In a similar vein, Sharifian (2005) refers to this modesty maxim as the Persian cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi*, 'modesty', which motivates the speakers to downplay their talents, skills, achievements, etc. while praising a similar trait in their interlocutors. Participants, for example, employed the following CRs to downgrade their good qualities as a means of expressing their modesty and as a result their politeness (in all the examples, the italics are Persian and the non-italics are their English equivalents):

1. A: *To hamishe mofid-o-mehraboni!*
   You are always helpful and kind!
   B:*Intoram nist keh migi aslan, kheiliam mehrabon nistam!*
   It isn't at all like what you say, I am not very kind!

Besides, this finding is partially in line with that of Sadeghi and Zarei (2013), who found that the category which was employed the most in Persian through the overall pattern of complimenting was the accept one. However, the finding suggests that the evade category was used the least whereas they found that the reject category was used the least by the participants. This finding also corroborates that of Herbert (1986), Holmes (1986), Pomerantz

(1978), Razmjoo, Barabadi, and Arfa (2013), Motaghi-Tabari and de Beuzeville (2012), Yousefvand (2010), and Yousefvand (2012), who found that the accept category occurred most frequently in the C exchanges. Accordingly, such a finding partially contradicts the results reached by Sharifian (2005), who showed that native speakers of Persian largely tended to reject Cs rather than accepting them. Such discrepancy would be due to the fact that Persian speakers usually use multiple expressions in response to the C. That is, they initially start with expressions of gratitude (*Merci,* Thanks) followed by the formulaic expression of return (*Lotfdarid,* Kind of you) and go on by denying the praise (*Intorinist,* It isn't like this). Sharifian put more emphasis on the third expression and took the previous expressions for granted. Another reason is related to the categories and subcategories of CRs. Considering subcategories of CRs, Sharifian`s findings are similar to the present study's. It means that both studies found that downgrading, as a subcategory of rejection, wasthe most popular among Iranians. However, the results might differ from each other at major categories.It will be discussed more as follows.

Interestingly, the most common subcategory of strategies used by Persian native speakers to respond to Cs was downgrade which accounts for nearly 25.76% of raw tokens of CR. Return and appreciation tokens were the second and third most frequently used strategies by Persian native speakers, accounting for 23.54% and 19.11%, respectively. Concerning the frequency of different response types in Persian, it can be concluded that the accept category comes at the top of CRs with return and appreciation tokens showing high frequency. The main characteristic of this type of CR is that at the same time that the complimentee accepts the illocutionary force of C, he or she tries to accompany this type of response with one or two forms of formulaic expressions in order to avoid self-praise. These types of responses to Cs could be assumed to come from Persian speakers' culture that allowed the addressees to avoid acceptance of the Cs, which were assumed as self-praises. Take a look at the following CR employed by the participants to respond to the C given on possession. They first accepted the C and then they used a formulaic expression to avoid the self-praise.This finding corroborates that of Sharifian (2005), reporting that Persian native speakers prefer multiple expressions, even up to four, in replying the C.

2. A: *Laptopetkheiliziba-o-bahale!*
Your laptop is really beautiful and nice!
B: *Merci! Cheshmatghashangmibine!*
Thanks! Your eyes see it beautiful.

Moreover, it can be argued that the function of these expressions in Persian speakers' culture was to mitigate embarrassment and tension between complimenters and complimentees. Like Cs, CRs have a role in preserving and establishing the solidarity of relationships and the harmony of it (Heidari, Rezazadeh & Eslami-Rasekh, 2009; Sharifian, 2005).

The relatively high frequency of return strategy in responding to Cs may be due to the fact that Iranians tend to make offer when they are given a C on their possessions which can be explicated in light of the concept of *ta'arof*(i.e., offer) in Iranian culture. Herbert (1986) argues that the complimentees use this type of CRs when they perceive the C as a request rather a true C. Persians, however, offer the object of C not necessarily because they perceive the C as a request, but rather due to the *ta'arof* concept rooted in Persian culture-specific politeness system. Moreover, it is a very common strategy in Persian conversations in general, which reflects the extent to which Persian culture encourages the speakers to hold their interlocutors in high esteem. Look at the following example of Iranian complementing to understand how this culture may affect CR patterns.

3. A: *Laptopet kheiliziba-o-bahale!*
Your laptop is really beautiful and nice!
B: *Merci. Ghabele shomar-o-nadare!Baraye khodetone!*
Thanks. It is not worthy of you! It's yours!

Persians commonly make formulaic offers such as above, but they can be misunderstood as real offers and be accepted by people from other cultures. The English speaker might also feel awkward for being offered a gift for no reason and feeling obliged to accept to be polite. According to Sahragard (2004), *ta'arof* is a part of Iranian culture which shows *Adab* (politeness), *Tavaazo* (humility), *Ehteram* (respect), *Rudarbaayesti* (being shy or ceremonious), and finally *MehmanNavaazi* (hospitality). Whether or not the offer is a genuine one or simply a gesture of politeness depends on the degree to which the speaker would insist on the offer (Sharifian, 2005).

The popularity of downgrade strategy among Iranian complimentees is also the result of their modesty through the strategy of *shekasteh-nafsi,* humbling oneself or modesty, which can be considered as one of the culturally specific Iranian features. Although modesty can be widespread in many other cultures, especially eastern cultures, this schema not only encourages Iranians to deny the praise, but also encourages them to attribute the Cs to a family member, a friend, a teacher, God, or another associate. This finding supports the role of modesty in Persian speakers' society. This schema motivates the Persian speakers to reject the Cs rather than accepting them (Sharifian, 2005). For example, the following complimentee rejected the C due to the mentioned reason.

4. A: *Kheili ghashang harf mizanid!*
You speak very beautifully!
B: *Na baba, kimige man ghashang harf mizanam?*
No way, who says that I speak beautifully*?*

This is comparable to the modesty maxim principle proposed by Leech (1983) who believes that the modesty maxim puts the recipient in an uncomfortable position to accept the C and pressure him or her to decline the C and at the end disagree with the complimenter. These two maxims obviously contradict each other. This confirms Pomerantz's (1978) finding, who was the first scholar to focus on the conflict between agreement and modesty. As illustrated in example 4, when an Iranian receives praise for an achievement or success,the cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi*or modesty encourages the receivers of the praise todownplay or reject their own role in the achievement or the success that is the target of the praise.

Furthermore, the participants never tended to use reassignment (0.00%) and topic shift (0.00%) to respond to Cs. In these subcategories of evade*,* there is no sign of modesty, respect,politeness, and *ta'arof*. These are possible reasons why Iranians are reluctant to use them. However, who gives Cs to whom, the topic of Cs, when, where, why, and how Cs are made may play a crucial role in determining whether they are evaded or not. In addition, the reason why the participants used the subcategories of evade strategies the least might be probably due to the way data were collected. It is worthwhile to recall that the kind of data collection technique used in a study influences the results. The DCT used in the present study might favor the production of accept strategies rather than evade ones. If one

adopts a different methodological approach (e.g., recording spontaneous speech), results will be probably different. For the sake of brevity, the author will not repeat these strategies in the following although they were the least used CR strategies by all the participants.

The second and third least frequently used CRs by the participants were also other strategies and reassurance strategy, accounting for 1.10% and 1.36%, respectively. It has to be noted that other strategies include silence, smile, blame, insult, or thanking God as a response to a compliment.

New categories of CR strategies also emerged in this situation which have been called 'Other' strategies. This might be the result of misunderstanding from the C receiver side who misinterprets the C as, what Brown and Levinson (1987) called, FTAs rather than as face saving ones. In other words, the C receiver might had interpreted the C as a sign of envy, tease, sarcasm, or things alike rather than a true Cand this had led him to respond with being silent, smiling, blaming, or insulting. The following example illustrates that speaker B sees the C given by speaker A as a sign of tease rather than a C.

5. A: *Khoshtip shodi emrooz!*
    You look handsome today!
    B: *To hamash maskhare kon mano!*
    You always tease me!

Another strategy seen in Persian speakers' responses was thanking God (e.g. Thank God, or By the grace of God). Due to their strong ties with their religion, Persian speakers showed their faith in God deeply embedded within their speech acts. Some of the CRs were in the form of a small prayer to the effect that the speakers be blessed from God, and get whatever they wanted with the help of God. It also reflects the role of *shekasteh-nafsi* in which the speaker may not attribute their success to only themselves but rather attribute it to God, too (See example 6). These patterns might be linked to such larger aspects of socio-cultural organization as religion.

6. A: *Kheili ghashang harf mizani!*
    You speak very beautifully!
    B: *Harchi hast lotfkhodast!*
    Everything is by the grace of God!

On the other hand, after 'Other' strategies, disagreement and reassurance strategies were used the least which may be due to the fact that these strategies can be a sign of lack of confidence among participants. This finding is in conflict with that of Yousefvand (2012), who revealed that after appreciation tokens and formulaic expressions, the third most frequently used subcategory by participants was reassurance. This discrepancy might be related to the participants of these studies. The participants of Yousefvand's (2012) study were EFL students with Persian as their L1 background. Hence, pragmatic transfer from English into Persian might have influenced their responses in Persian. Some participants, for example, used CRs like: "Really?" or "Are you sure?" which are common in English and categorized as reassurance strategies. Whereas the participants of the present study were only Persian native speakers and they did not know necessarily other languages.

Table 3. Distribution of CRs across participants

CR Strategies		Frequency	Percentage
Accept	Appreciation Token	224	19.11%
	Return	276	23.54%
	Upgrade	68	5.80%
Reject	Downgrade	302	25.76%
	Disagreement	31	2.64%
Evade	Explanation	112	9.55%
	Reassignment	0	0%
	Request Interpretation	130	11.09%
	Topic Shift	0	0%
	Reassurance	16	1.36%
Other		13	1.10%
Total		1172	100%

Distribution of CRs across Age Groups
The present study also aimed to see whether different age groups would affect the use of CRs. To answer this question, 1172CRs were elicited from four different age groups. As Table 4indicates, different age groups have affected the type of CRstrategies. Younger participants (the between-10-and-18group) used appreciation tokens and return the most, accounting for 20.23% and 18.67%, respectively. The least frequently used strategies by the participants under 18 were other strategies and reassurance, about 1.16% and 2.72% of the total tokens, respectively. Younger people probably think that showing agreement with the complimenters through appreciation token and return strategies is better and easier way to express

solidarity and politeness compared to other ways like downgrading.

However, in responding to Cs, downgrade occurred most frequently among other age groups of the 19-30, the 31-40, and the above-40, accounting for 26.87%, 31.41%, and 25.79%, respectively. Older people tended to be more modest and hence they rejected the Cs through downgrade strategies.

Such findings lend support to both Leech's agreement maxim and modesty maxim (1983) as well as Pomerantz's (1978) finding that people tend to agree with what another says to appear more polite while they try to minimize praise of themselves to express politeness. The conflict between the agreement and modesty maxims is quite apparent in determining CRs among various age groups.

Such findings, however, differ from those of Allami and Montazeri (2011), reporting that the older age groups significantly tended toward the acceptance subcategories of appreciation token and comment acceptance. As mentioned earlier, if the function of the Cs was to make the hearers feel good, the function of the CRs might be the same. In fact, the Cs were used to make complimentees feel good; the participants tried to indicate that they and the complimenters were equal by employing the strategy of downgrade to express modesty and to avoid self-praises. It could be argued that, when complimented by others, many Persian speakers, from different age groups, scaled the Cs down with a comment to show their modesty. They also tended to attribute their own good qualities to the others like complimenters, parents, and God. The second most frequently used CR strategy by the 19-30, the 31-40, and the above-40 groups was return, accounting for 26.25%, 26.28%, and 21.90%, respectively.

On the other hand, after reassignment and topic shift, the between-19-and-30 participants made use of other strategies (0.62%), disagreement (1.25%), and reassurance (1.25%) the least. The between-31-and-40 participants employed reassurance (0.96%), disagreement (1.28%), and other strategies (1.28%) the least. Finally, the participants who were above 40 years old used reassurance (0.70%), and other strategies (1.41%) the least.

In general, findings are in agreement with those of other studies (e.g., Allami & Montazeri, 2011) suggesting that age has a role in determining CR patterns.

Table 4. Distribution of CRs across age groups

	CR Strategies	Frequency				Percentage			
		10-18	19-30	31-40	+40	10-18	19-30	31-40	+40
Accept	Appreciation Token	52	58	58	56	20.23%	18.12%	15.58%	19.78%
	Return	48	84	82	62	18.67%	26.25%	26.28%	21.90%
	Upgrade	19	21	10	18	7.39%	6.56%	3.20%	6.36%
Reject	Downgrade	45	86	98	73	17.50%	26.87%	31.41%	25.79%
	Disagreement	13	4	4	10	5.05%	1.25%	1.28%	3.53%
Evade	Explanation	48	23	19	22	18.67%	7.18%	6.08%	7.77%
	Reassignment	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Request Interpretation	22	38	34	36	8.56%	11.87%	10.89%	12.72%
	Topic Shift	0	0	0	0	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Reassurance	7	4	3	2	2.72%	1.25%	0.96%	0.70%
	Other	3	2	4	4	1.16%	0.62%	1.28%	1.41%
	Total	257	320	312	283	100%	100%	100%	100%

Conclusion

The present study attempted to investigate CRs in Persian, in general, and the effect of age on the distribution of them, in particular. The overall pattern was accept, reject, and evade in responding to Cs. The most common sub-type of strategies used by Persian native speakers to respond to Cs was downgrade. Return and appreciation tokens were the second and third most frequently used strategies. Yet, the participants never tended to use reassignment and topic shift to respond to Cs. Taking the age of the participants into account, the between-10-and-18group used appreciation token and return the most, and other strategies and

reassurance the least. In addition, downgrade occurred most frequently among other age groups. The second most frequently used CR strategy by these groups was return. Almost all age groups made use of other strategies, disagreement, and reassurance the least.

Generally, findings of the study may support the role of modesty and agreement maxims, proposed by Leech (1983),the conflict between agreement and modesty proposed by Pomerantz (1978),the Persian cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi*, proposed by sharifian (2005), and the Persian cultural schema of *ta'arof*, proposed by Sahragard (2004), in determining CRs in Persian. They can also have some implications for foreigners who particularly wish to interact with Persian speakers. Foreigners should pay attention to different cultural concepts governing CRs in Persian. Cs are usually employed to have a positive effect on interpersonal relations. Thus, both the Cs and CRs needed to be handled appropriately for the outcome actually to be positive. Iranian people seem to be very careful about status and politeness and try to show their status-consciousness in their interaction. On the whole, the two concepts,*shekasteh-nafsi* or modesty, despite their differences mainly motivate CR patterns in Persian. In other words, one of the important cultural concepts which clearly exists in Persian speakers' society is *shekasteh-nafsi*. It leads Persian speakers to reject the Cs rather than accept them develop solidarity and friendship. This cross-cultural difference may lead to miscommunication. Foreigners, for example, may consider Persian CRs drawing on the schema of *shekasteh-nafsi as* "stretching the truth too far", "over the top" or even "sarcastic", as Sharifian (2005) suggests. At the same time, agreement maxim encourages people to agree with what another says to appear more polite. Another important concept in Iranian culture which affects CRs is *ta'arof*. Iranians tend to make offer when they are given a C on their possessions and they also tend to return positive qualities to the complimenter rather than accept them. If foreigners are consciously aware of the pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic similarities and differences between their native languages and Persian, negative effects of transfer will most probably be avoided.

Every language speakers' complimenting need to be analyzed in their social and cultural contexts. Speech events in general, Cs and CRs in particular, are mainly dependent on shared beliefs and values of the speech community coded into communicative patterns, and thus could not be interpreted apart from social and cultural context (Haliday, 2003; Yousefvand, 2010; 2012). On the whole, the study confirmed that language and culture were closely interrelated.

Findings of the study can contribute to the understanding of CR strategies in Persian, especially the parts in which social variable of age interact with them. The findings may shed light on the pragmatic knowledge of the respondents and the cultural and socio-cultural factors which affect the way people perceive Cs and respond to the Cs made on them. Such results can present valuable insight into the cultural norms which dominate any society. Therefore, studying complementing can enhance our understanding of a people's culture, social values, social organization, and the function and meaning of language use in a community (Yuan, 2001).Also, they can be helpful for those teachers whose students are PSL/ PFL learners. Teachers can use the results of the study in their syllabi to teach them the socio-linguistic differences existing between Persian and their students' languages. Furthermore, the findings from these studies may also help materials developers of second languages to find effective ways to promote sociolinguistic competence in second language learners (Billmyer, Jakar, & Lee, 1989; Billmyer, 1990). Speech acts and other pragmatic features of language should be high on the agenda. Both teachers and material developers are strongly recommended to pay more attention to this aspect of language.

Last but not least, although this study attempted to achieve its goals, as any similar study, it had some limitations. The main limitations of the study were its number of participants, variation of participants, and data collection method. There were only 200 male and female participants from different age groups. It also used only a DCT to collect data. Therefore, further research can be conducted on a larger scale and with a variety of participants from different social variables, for example occupations or educational levels since it is believed that they are effective factors in determining CR patterns, and with a variety of C topics, and should also make use of various tools for collecting data, for example recording spontaneous speech, since data elicited through a DCT will be different from those elicited through other techniques. Moreover, all the situations in the DCT mainly concerned the interaction between two friends. Further research can also consider other contextual variables such as power, gender, and familiarity.

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