

Pragmatic and Cultural Considerations of Compliment Responses among Malaysian-Malay Speakers¹

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Abstract

Janet Holmes defines a compliment as “a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (485). Compliments vary from one culture to another. As suggested by Holmes (1986), compliments are generally paid and appreciated in the Western culture. However, in the Eastern culture, when compliments are paid, they are either rejected or denied (Gu, 1990; Chen, 1993). Malaysia is a multicultural society with a colonial history. English is spoken widely in the country, side by side with several vernacular languages. The study investigates the pragmatics of Malay compliments using Brown and Levinson’s (1987) “face” framework and Searle’s (1969) speech act framework among Malay speakers in Malaysia. The results show that compliments when given are more appreciated than denied or rejected by Malay speakers now than before, indicating a shift in the culture of compliments and compliment response in Malaysia. Results also show that compliment responses differ according to the subject of compliment and its relative “distance” to the compliment receiver; closeness causes more compliment rejections, while distance results in compliment acceptance.

Abstract in Malay

Janet Holmes memberi definisi kata pujian seperti berikut: “kata kuasa yang secara langsung atau tidak langsung memuji seseorang, selalunya kepada rakan setutur, kerana sebab-sebab ‘murni’ (barangan yang dimiliki, paras rupa, kebolehan, dll.) yang dianggap istimewa dan positif oleh petutur dan rakan setutur” (485). Kata pujian berbeza dari satu budaya ke budaya yang lain. Seperti yang dicadangkan oleh Holmes (1986), pujian wajar diberi dan diappresiasi di barat. Tetapi, di timur, apabila pujian di ajukan, kata-kata ini akan ditepis atau ditolak (Gu, 1990; Chen, 1993). Malaysia termaktub sebagai sebuah negara yang mempunyai masyarakat berbilang kaum dan sejarah penjajahan. Bahasa Inggeris merupakan bahasa pertuturan yang luas digunakan di negara ini, dengan beberapa bahasa vernakular yang ada. Kajian ini bertujuan menyelidik pragmatik kata

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pujian Bahasa Melayu menggunakan kaedah “face” (muka) Brown and Levinson (1987) framework and kaedah kata kuasa Searle (1969) di kalangan petutur Bahasa Melayu di Malaysia. Kajian mendapati petutur Bahasa Melayu sekarang lebih mengappresiasi kata pujian daripada menepis dan menolak, menandakan perubahan dalam budaya memberi dan menerima pujian di Malaysia. Keputusan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa respon untuk pujian berbeza mengikut pemberi pujian dan jarak kemesraan antara pemberi dan penerima pujian; hubungan yang akrab membuahkan lebih banyak penolakan terhadap kata pujian, dan hubungan yang tidak akrab menyebabkan kata pujian lebih diterima.

Keywords

Compliments, compliment responses, postcolonial, distance, negative face, positive face

Keywords in Malay

Kata pujian, respon untuk pujian, post-penjajah, hubungan tidak akrab, muka negative, muka positif

1. Introduction

When a society decides to adopt another language, in a way it also decides to adopt the culture of that language. We can observe this in the social norms which are heavily manifested in language use, as we express things according to the perceived expectations in society and the situations we find ourselves in. In Malaysia, for example, the ways in which simple everyday conducts are carried out by Malays show the influence of other languages that are used by the community. With the act of greeting, for example, it is very common to hear English greeting exchanges such as “hi-hi” and “hello-hello” in different contexts. Arabic “Asalamualaikum-walaikumassalam” is common due to the popularity of Islam in the country. These two examples easily show the dominance and influence of other languages and cultures, in this case English language and Islamic/Arabic culture on the Malay language and culture, eventually causing the linguistic topography to change. This in turn slowly effects changes in the culture itself.

Another practice that is rather ubiquitous in daily utterances is giving and receiving compliments. A compliment generally consists of two parts: the compliment and compliment response, and is categorised as a speech act. Compliments and compliment responses are dictated by cultures, but when the acts of complimenting is done in another language, say English, would the trend to give and receive compliments change, following that of the English culture? As Wierzbicka (2006) describes it, the English language itself is not culturally and ideologically neutral; rather it is steeped in culture, i.e. the Anglo culture. Thus it is unlikely that this culture is filtered out when the language is used in a country that was formerly colonised by the British and has inherited the language as a colonial legacy. Goddard and Wierzbicka (2004) explain that what

is shared in all languages is the universal core which they termed as “semantic primes” that will “surface” as the meanings of words or word-like expressions in all languages.

The remainder of the paper will look at the effects of the enculturation of the English language in the Malay society particularly on compliment responses among Malay speakers, arguing that English has affected not only the Malay language, but also the Malay culture. Since English has been a dominant factor in almost every aspect of Malaysia’s development, comparisons of complimenting behaviours will be made between the ways Malay speakers accept and reject compliments in English and compare these with their responses to compliments in Malay. This will lead to a critical discussion and description of issues related to the postcolonial Malay identity and culture according to the changes reflected in their linguistic habits.

In the context of English as a second language, in many parts of the world, in general, the myriad effects of British colonisation could be seen from the way of dressing to language use, ranging from perceptions of positive to negative. On the positive side of the continuum, colonised countries have received an array of benefits from education and development to links to the outside world; while on the negative side, most countries are still trying to come to terms with their new identity mainly brought about by the massive use of English, with some countries like Trinidad and Guyana totally adopting the language as the first language, while in countries like Malaysia and Singapore, it has become a significant second language. Since the interest of this paper stems from the changing identities and perceptions that can be observed in the languages of the respective countries, particularly Malaysia, be it in the local vernaculars or English, let me begin with a brief history of the presence and significance of English in the country. In Malaysia, in the immediate postcolonial era, those who spoke English did so to appear educated and of high class, because it was the language of the former colonial masters and of the upper middle class. English maintained its status quo even after the British withdrew from the country in the late 1950s due to its use in education and government administration, and it was also the language that linked the ethnic groups which were extremely segregated at the time (Platt and Weber, 1980; Lowenberg, 1991).

In the 1960s, radical policies replaced English with Malay as the sole official language, to promote national identity with a national language. English-medium schools slowly went through a transformation to Malay medium, and by early 1980s the process of change was complete. English is maintained as a compulsory subject in both primary and secondary schools mainly due to commonwealth affiliations, and in the higher learning institutions, it remains crucially significant because books tend to be mostly imported and are mainly in English (Platt and Weber, 1980; Augustin, 1982). Thus the English

language as well as culture has continued to permeate through the lives of the people in Malaysia from early on.

2. Compliment Exchanges

A compliment is a speech act (Searle, 1969), defined by Holmes (1986) as one that “explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and hearer” (485). As compliments are generally given and accepted as a praise, they are often studied under the pragmatics of politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Yule, 2003), and this involves recognising the why’s, how’s and when’s in the linguistic choices on exactly what to use in expressing oneself.

Compliment exchange is a genre as they occur in formulaic expressions that are recognisable by the community that uses them. They occur in units of exchange called adjacency pairs, which consist of two parts, each part influencing the production of the other. For example, the speaker’s expectations of the second part would determine the selection of the first part (Yule, 2003). Since the study will look at the responses to compliments made by Malaysian Malay subjects, the analysis will be based on the unit of exchange within a discourse framework. An example of a unit of exchange, expressing mutual appreciation is given below:

- (1) Speaker A: You presented your speech well yesterday.
- (2) Speaker B: Thank you very much.
- (3) Speaker A: You’re welcome.

In the above compliment exchange, in fact, we have two adjacency pairs between Speaker A and Speaker B. The first adjacency pair is (1) and (2), where the first part is Speaker A complimenting Speaker B who in turn replies with a “typical” compliment response, that is expressing appreciation for the compliment; this is the second part of the compliment. The second unit of exchange in this brief discourse is (2) and (3), because the expressions are recognisable and rather fixed, as Speaker A accepts Speaker B’s appreciation. In this pair, utterance (2) is the first part, while (3) is the second part. The second exchange is a speech act of appreciation. However, in (3) Speaker A’s answer is in fact dictated by B’s utterance, and could be one out of several fixed forms of reply to an expression of “Thank you” such as “It’s my pleasure,” “don’t mention it” or “not at all.” The response to a simple “thank you” would, on further analysis, depends on the context (who A or B is, what he or she is thanking for, etc.). Since there is more than one response in such exchanges, although the number is quite limited, most often the use of each response is governed by context, such as the register, formality and informality of the

utterances involved, and the distance perceived between speakers. Distance in turn is determined by the various degrees of politeness often shown in language use, such as in compliments and compliment responses (Grundy, 2000).

Brown and Levinson (1987) in their seminal work on politeness in the English language claim that languages have similar linguistic strategies but their use is determined largely by local contexts. According to Brown and Levinson, politeness is often dictated by the notion of “face” which refers to one’s self esteem. What this entails is that in daily encounters, our face is put at risk. When we ask someone for something, such as a book, we are performing a face threatening act to the person to whom the request is directed. The evidence of this “threat” is that the request is often accompanied with redressive language designed to mitigate or compensate the threat to face. Thus we could request for loan of the book for “just a second,” as phrases such as these will compensate what Brown and Levinson called “face-threatening behaviours” (102).

Furthermore, there are two types of “face” which, according to Brown and Levinson, are “positive face” and “negative face,” and both are evidenced by the use of polite mitigating expression in the speech, although in markedly different ways (131). Positive face is a person’s wish to be well thought of. Its particular manifestations may include “the desire to have what we admire admired by others” (Grundy 133), the desire to be understood by others and the desire to be treated as a friend and confidant. Thus, if we complain about a friend’s house, this threatens his or her positive face. In contrast, negative face is our wish not to be imposed on by others, and to be allowed to go about our business unimpeded with our rights to free and self-determined action intact (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Telling students that they cannot hand in their assignments after a stipulated time is a threat to their negative face, according to Grundy (148). Simply asking for time from a stranger on the street would be threatening his or her negative face as we would be imposing on that person. This is inherent knowledge and part of linguistic competence, indicated by people using the “right” words in the “right” situations, thus indicating their awareness of the hearer’s face.

The notion of face and universality of the politeness theory, as posited by Brown and Levinson (1987), have not gone undisputed by scholars, especially with regards to its relevance to culture. Cultures are argued to influence complimenting behaviours in different ways such as in the way people perceive and respond to compliments, acceptable entities to be complimented, who should compliment in terms of age, social class, gender and so forth (Blum-Kulka, 1990; Gu, 1990; Holmes 2001; Watts, 2003; Fukushima, 2004). Moreover, the speech act of complimenting may result in different interpretations of the function of a compliment, which may be due to the influence of culture within which the compliment is given. Therefore,

compliments and compliment responses are culture specific. Due to this, applying Brown and Levinson's universal theory of face and politeness has been rejected, and modified, time and again, as it only describes the linguistic habits of native English speakers and pays attention only to the "face" of the receiver (Gu, 1990; Chen, 1993).

In the Asian context, Gu (1990) criticises Brown and Levinson's (henceforth, B and L) theory of the universality of face for its unsuitability to account for his Chinese data. In the Chinese culture, the notion of negative face seems to differ from B and L's, e.g., offering, inviting, and promising, under ordinary circumstances, will not be considered as threatening the hearer's negative face as in Western cultures. Other Asian studies which argue along the same line are Matsumoto (1988), Chen (1993) and Mao (1994). According to Mao (1994), B and L's notion of face may not apply to the Chinese culture, as the Chinese face is not a natural human right, but must be earned in society by being considerate to others' needs at all times. Studies on politeness appear to have significance as politeness intrinsically affects language behaviour, in fact dictating fixed exchanges recognisable to the particular community. The studies on the Eastern cultures described here serve as the background for the current study due to the fact that Malays and the Malay language share similar Eastern values in terms of culture and language.

3. Compliment Responses among Native English Speakers and That of Other Cultures

In terms of compliment responses by native English speakers, we are fortunate to have the work of Chen (1993) who analysed and compared compliment responses of Chinese speakers to that of English speakers (American). Chen's findings on Chinese speakers' responses to compliments are broadly categorised into three Super Strategies, which are:

Super Strategy 1: Rejecting (disagreeing and denigrating, expressing embarrassment, and explaining);

Super Strategy 2: Thanking and denigrating;

Super strategy 3: Accepting only (thanking).

It would appear from Chen's study that Chinese speakers still largely reject compliments, in the various strategies indicated, as compliment responses of type Super Strategy 1 shows 95.73% in occurrence. Explicit rejection alone was given 50.70% of the total responses (56).

Americans' responses to compliments show four Super Strategies, as follows:

Super Strategy 1: Accepting (thanking, agreeing, expressing gladness, joking)

- Super Strategy 2: Returning (returning compliment, offering object of compliment, encouraging);
 Super strategy 3: Deflecting (explaining, doubting);
 Super strategy 4: Rejecting (rejecting and denigrating).

Rejecting was the least favoured compliment response, making up only 12% of the total responses. According to Chen, these findings are similar to that of Holmes' (1986) in her study of New Zealand compliment responses.

Lee (2009) found that Singaporean Chinese speakers differ in their methods of complimenting and responding to compliments according to age and gender. Compliments in this study were mostly of the non-acceptance type, with belittling one's self being the most common compliment response. Nevertheless, in doing so, the speakers of the compliment exchange would understand that the compliment has been acknowledged and accepted, even though outwardly there appears to be a rejection. Consider the following compliment exchange between two Malay speakers:

- Speaker A: That colour looks really nice on you.
 Speaker B: Is that right? I look like a cheap curtain.
 Speaker A: No, you really look nice.
 Speaker B: You should have your eyes checked.³

In all probability, Speaker B agrees with Speaker A's compliment that she looks nice; otherwise, why would she be wearing the outfit? But, following the Eastern culture, in the event of a compliment, Speaker B must put herself down, as openly accepting a compliment in the Malay culture will make her appear pompous and may not even be acceptable to the person giving the compliment, Speaker A, in the first place. Consider, on the other hand, the following created exchange, if it were to occur between two Malay speakers:

- Speaker A: That colour looks really nice on you.
 Speaker B: Thank you. I think so too.

In this case, Speaker B by agreeing to and accepting Speaker A's compliment may be seen as praising herself and this is quite unacceptable in the Malay society, and thus acceptance of compliments is rarely articulated. In short, in Malay as in Chinese, compliments must not only be denied and rejected by the receiver, but the compliment giver must also put herself (or himself) down as much as possible, as in the following utterance, which reflects the typical rejection of compliment in the Malay culture:

- Speaker A: What a lovely baby you have. She is absolutely adorable.

³ This excerpt is literally translated from Malay.

Speaker B: You think so, my slanted-eyed and flat-nosed baby? Your kids are adorable.

Speaker A: Those devils at home?⁴

In the above exchange, Speaker B not only rejects the compliment, she also denies them and downgrades the object of the compliment. Instead, she “offers” the compliment back to Speaker A, by complimenting the latter’s children. This would be a typical three-part compliment response found among Malay speakers. Similarly, Speaker A does the same thing. Thus we can see that unlike in the Western culture, compliments in the Malay culture are not overtly accepted and appreciated. In fact, in the local Malay context, rejection of compliments should occur regardless of the language used by the speakers at the time the exchange is taking place. In some cases, an offer is even made of the thing complimented, as in the following exchange:

Speaker A: Your handbag is really gorgeous.

Speaker B: Gorgeous, this old thing? If you want, you can have it.

In the above exchange, Speaker A appears to be complimenting Speaker B’s personal belonging; Speaker B aptly denies the compliment and then makes an offer of the handbag to Speaker A instead. Speaker B’s reaction of offering the handbag to Speaker A can be interpreted in two ways by Speaker B, or anyone in the vicinity: (1) Speaker B understands the indirect speech act given by Speaker A in the form of the compliment, that is she is making a request for the handbag; (2) Speaker B understands that Speaker A is indeed only praising her handbag. In either interpretation, Speaker B immediately denies and rejects the compliment (*this old thing?*) and if the first intention is interpreted, offers the item to Speaker A. If the second intention is interpreted, Speaker B may also offer the bag to Speaker A out of politeness.

In the above exchange, the analysis shows that there appears to be a discrepancy in form and function. Clearly, Speaker A is not really complimenting, if her intention is to implicitly request for the handbag and then have it explicitly offered to her. The utterance then has the illocutionary force of an indirect request. Strategically, even though Speaker A intended to have the bag offered to her, Speaker B may strategically and deliberately interpret the utterance as a compliment, and thus not offer the bag to Speaker A. If the handbag is offered to Speaker A upon her compliment, which is genuine, Speaker A should interpret Speaker B’s gesture in offering the handbag as mere politeness and turn down the offer. Clearly, the objective of giving compliment has gone up a notch in complexity as it is not really perceived as an actual compliment.

⁴ The excerpt has been literally translated from Malay.

Another type of compliment response could be seen when Speaker B rejects Speaker A's compliments and compliments Speaker A instead, as seen in the following example:

A: Your house is really nice.

B: No, it is just a small house. Your house is nicer.

In Malay culture, and the other local cultures in Malaysia, such an exchange is common and cultural. When a comment is given, it must first be rejected, supported by a reason, and return it via complimenting the speaker instead. In light of these negotiations taking place in the "simple" compliments, the study will see if compliment responses by Malay speakers today still follow these cultural patterns of complimenting in light of Westernisation brought by the British and the English language. Since English is widely spoken in Malaysia, particularly among the subjects of the study, and education is largely based on the Western concepts and ideologies, compliment responses will be collected from both languages, Malay and English, from the subjects of the study. The latter is for the purpose of investigating the cultural transfer taking place when Malay speakers use the language of another culture.

4. The Study

Different methods have been employed in studies of compliments and compliment responses, depending on the objectives. They include: (a) discourse completion tasks and questionnaires (e.g., Tang and Zhang, 2009) and (b) recall (e.g. Knapp et al, 1984). For this study, fieldwork and immediate recall were combined to produce authentic and reliable data.

Over 1000 compliments were given in a period of a month by a group of student assistants who were given specific instructions and training. The compliments given were to elicit compliment responses from the persons complimented. They were also asked to be sincere in giving the compliments, that is, the recipient of the compliment should be worthy of receiving a compliment (e.g., achieving a good grade in a quiz). Each assistant was asked to carry around a notebook and record the compliment responses as soon as they were received. Even though it was elicited, the compliment responses were considered authentic as the receivers perceived the compliments as genuine. The compliment recipients were students at a local English-medium university. From the over 1000 responses collected, only 876 were used for the analysis, as the others were either not compliment responses or could not fit into the categories that emerged.

The subjects were all Malay, a factor which is significant as the knowledge of Malay culture and etiquette would be inherent in them. They come from various parts of Malaysia and being students majoring in English, the subjects

have considerable proficiency in the English language. Compliments given were either in Malay, English or in code-mixed structures of the two languages. The code-mixed utterances were included to allow the subjects to perceive the situation as informal and thus they would respond informally, as desired, or choose between the three varieties of response, that is either in Malay, English or code-mixed type.

5. Results and Discussions

5.1 Types of Compliment Responses

The data collected were sorted and categorised. Four patterns of compliment exchanges emerged, whereby the types of responses given by the subjects appeared to be influenced by the distance between the compliment receiver and the item being complimented. The four types of compliments are given to illustrate each type, as follows:

Type 1: Complimenting personal achievement (item very close to compliment receiver)

Type 1 compliments are compliments that refer to the recipient's physical and mental characteristics, such as body features or personal achievement.

Speaker A	Pandai nya awak sebab dapat pegi university Smart poss you because got go university (You're really smart as you get to go to a university)
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Type 2: Complimenting belongings close to the person

Type 2 compliments are those that refer to the recipient's personal belongings such as clothing or anything on the person's body.

Speaker A	I really like your <i>baju</i> . Is it new? I really like your outfit. Is it new? (I really like your outfit. Is it new?)
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Type 3: Complimenting belongings away from the person

Type 3 compliments are those that target items away from the recipient but they belong to him or her, such as house, car, and even persons related in some way to the hearer, such as the hearer's mother.

Speaker A	Wahh, your house is so <i>cantik</i> . It's really nice. Wow your house is so beautiful. It's really nice. (Wow, your house is so beautiful. It's really nice.)
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Type 4: Complimenting non-personal items of a person

Type 4 compliments are compliments that refer to items that may belong to the

compliment receiver, but are not related very much to the recipient’s immediate being. In the example below, the item is a newly-received gift.

Speaker A	Thank you very much for your nice painting.
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The data used in the analysis were the compliment responses that were generated by the subjects, in either Malay or English. Responses were then further categorised as either “Accept” or “Reject” and tabulated as shown in Table 1, according to the types of compliments. “Accept” responses, as mentioned, refer to all responses, either in the Malay or English languages. These, as stated in the review, should not be according to that expected in a typical exchange between Malay speakers, as compliments are generally not accepted, that is rejected, and not appreciated, at least not directly, in the Malay culture. Therefore, any acceptances to compliments shown in the data would indicate a change from a typical Malay response to a non-Malay compliment response pattern, similar to those by native English speakers.

On the other hand, “reject” responses were typical of the Malay culture, produced by the recipients, regardless of the language used, either Malay or English. If these were the case, this means that the responses typically follow those of Malay compliment response patterns. The overall results are tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1: Compliment responses to the four types of compliments

	“Malay-type” (reject) %	“English-type”/ non-Malay (accept) %
1. Type 1: Complimenting personal achievement (e.g., grades)	94	6
2. Type 2: Complimenting belongings close to the person (e.g., an outfit)	60	40
3. Type 3: Complimenting belongings away from the person (e.g., a house)	56	44
4. Type 4: Complimenting non-personal items of a person (e.g., a newly-received gift)	25	75

The results show that for Type 1 compliments, most of the responses were either rejections or denials, which conforms to the Malay compliment response. For Type 2 and Type 3 compliments, preference would indicate that the subjects also tended to reject compliments rather than accept them; however, the frequency of acceptance in both types is quite high and untypical. For Type

4, the result clearly shows acceptance, at 75% of the time. Only 25% of the responses for this type of compliment were either “reject” or “denial.” It would appear that when compliments target a person’s personal achievements or attributes, the responses would follow the Malay pattern, as suggested by Azura Azman (1986), that is the compliment would be rejected or denied. Thus, it would appear that distance between the person and item complimented affects the compliment response. Personal achievement is indeed the closest to the person, psychologically; it is, in fact, a virtue within the person. Compliments directed to this type of items are thus rejected. Types 3 and 4, referring to items such as an outfit and a house, respectively, which are also items close to the person complimented, are physically outside the person, compared to personal achievement. Thus, they are further away from the person. A newly-bequeathed gift is not only further away from the person physically, but it also has no attachment to the person psychologically, since it has been given away.

According to the “face” theory discussed earlier, compliments would pose a positive threat to the face of the person. However, in the Malay culture, as mentioned, accepting compliments would mean self-praise and one does not agree that one is intelligent or looks nice, for example, and therefore would reject such compliments. Thus, the “closer” the item being complimented is to the person, the more it is rejected by the latter, as it might imply perceptions of self-praise. The rejection of the compliment is also caused by part of the inherent desire of the compliment receiver not to be bonded to the giver for his kindness in presenting the “good deed” of complimenting. Thus, Malays perceived compliments as a threat to the negative face and not the positive face, unlike native English speakers, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). When the item being complimented is distant, the compliment receiver might not perceive himself or herself bound to it and therefore would have no consideration of being obligated to the kindness of the compliment giver. This would mean that the theory that Malays accept compliments due to the influence of the British culture brought by their use of the English language is not wholly true, as proposed earlier in the paper. In this study, object distance is also shown to influence the acceptance or rejection of the compliment. More examples of compliment responses according to the compliments given are provided below. They are written here as “English-type” (non-Malay) and “Malay-type” responses. As explained previously, both English-type and Malay-type responses are either in Malay or English, with translations provided, as shown in the following table.

Table 2: Types of compliment responses

1. Compliment responses to Type 1		
	Malay-type (Reject)	English-type (Non-Malay)

		(Accept/Agree)
a.	Takdelah. Biasa-biasa je. (No, it is very common)	Belajarlah rajin-rajin. Nanti dapat masuk universiti jugak. (If you study hard, you can also get into university)
b.	Takdelah sangat. Ramai lagi yang pandai.	Terima kasih. (Thank you)
c.	Alhamdulillah. Itu adalah rezeki dari Allah. (Thank God. It is a blessing from Allah)	Tengoklah siapa. (I expected it)
2. Compliment responses to personal achievement		
	Malay-type (Reject)	English-type (Non-Malay) (Accept/Agree)
a.	Thanks, it's not really new.	Yup, thanks.
b.	Nolah. Biasa je. (No, it is very common)	Yes, thank you.
c.	Buruk je. (It's old)	Oh, Thanks.
3. Compliment responses to Type 3		
	Malay-type (Reject)	English-type (Non-Malay) (Accept/Agree)
a.	Sure, come in. What is so beautiful anyway?	I'm glad you like it.
b.	Ala, rumah kampung saja. (It's just a village house)	Thank you very much.
c.	Malu aje. Rumah saya biasa je. (You're embarrassing me. My house is not much.)	Yes, of course. It would be my pleasure.
4. Compliment responses to Type 4		
	Malay-type (Reject)	English-type (Non-Malay) (Accept/Agree)
a.	No worries. It's just a small token of appreciation.	You are welcome. I hope you enjoy looking at it.
b.	Oh, it's nothing much.	Of course. Thank you.
c.	It's nothing, just scribbles.	Saya suka sangat-sangat. (I really like it)

Table 2 shows that acceptance and rejection of compliments are done in both languages. To show the distribution of the actual acceptance and rejection of compliments according to the languages, Malay or English, a further analysis was carried out on the existing data. The results and discussion are given in the following section.

5.2 Responses to Compliments According to the Language of Compliment

The next question is whether the language of the compliment itself might influence the compliment response, that is if the compliment is given in Malay, would the likelihood of the compliment be rejected be greater? Similarly, if the compliment is given in English, would the compliment likely be accepted? Data was sorted again according to the language of compliments, Malay or English, with the results shown in Table 3. In this case, code-switched utterances are also included (e.g., Your bag *ni cantik lah* [“Your bag is beautiful”]).

Table 3: Compliment response according to language of compliment

	‘Malay-type’ (reject)	‘English-type’/non- Malay (accept)	Total
Malay	268 80%	67 20%	335
English	137 57%	104 43%	241
Code-mixed	178 60%	122 40%	300
Total	572 65%	304 35%	876

Table 3 shows that when the compliment was in Malay, it was more rejected than accepted, at 80% and 20%, respectively. However, when the compliment was in English, it was also more often rejected than accepted, at 57% and 43%, respectively. We noted that the acceptance is much more obvious with the English compliments than the Malay compliments, and this suggests that the language might have an effect on the manner of compliment response. With code-mixed compliments, the numbers are similar to English compliments, with more acceptance compared to those in the Malay language. The overall tendency appears to be that the rejection of compliments is preferred over acceptance.

In terms of face, Malay speakers appear to adhere more often to the positive face of the interlocutors, where the compliments are accepted and

appreciated. They do not perceive the threat as negative and imposing on the speaker's behalf. If Malays have begun responding to compliments in Malay using patterns, particularly in Malay, modelled after English-type acceptance responses, this signals a change in attitudes and expectations among themselves about what counts as an appropriate response to a compliment. It is a change not at the linguistic level but at the level of social behaviour. The paper indicates a hybrid language behaviour in the postcolonial Malay society. In the results, we see an intriguing form of code-mixing that takes place beyond language, in interpersonal conversational patterning. Further research would shed light on the motivation of using English-type responses in a compliment exchange.

Many studies have been carried out on either the effects of English on Malay and vice versa in various linguistic aspects. This shows the importance of English regardless of its lower status in light of national policies compared to Malay. Some of these studies have concentrated on the degree of structural divergence at each stylistic level between the formal features of Malaysian English and those of standard British English (Tongue, 1979; Platt and Weber, 1980; Augustin, 1982; Wong, 1981). Deviations discussed have included those attributed both to language contact and to other processes of language change. In contrast, Lowenberg (1991) focuses on the variable pragmatic functions of lexical borrowings, code-mixing and code-switching, along the stylistic continuum. Lexical borrowings, e.g., "gotong-royong," and the Malay "banner" word, e.g., *bumiputera* are used with a range of semantic application.

Globalisation is another effect. However, this could be another word or concept for borrowing or foreign influence, as it entails the use of a foreign language. The much wider use of English, a.k.a. the global language, is said to further isolate and challenge the position of the national language in Malaysia, and the vernacular languages in other countries (Md. Salleh Yaapar, 2000). According to Md. Salleh, the wide use of the English language provides a rich environment for the growth of foreign values because the act of speaking leads to adhering to the embedded values in the language. Thus, the pragmatic meanings of the borrowed words, i.e., contextual meaning might also be carried over and adopted in the second language environment and culture, which in turn might influence similar or related concepts in the first language. That is, when one begins to think in the second language, the cultural values of the second language might get transferred to the first language. The results of compliment response of this study certainly show the change from habitually rejecting to accepting; at some point in time, the latter will probably become the norm in compliment response in the Malay society.

English domination, through message and information transfer is at a global scale via innovative communication technology such as the PC, optic fibres, satellites, email, SMS and the worldwide web. Hence, this is seen as

another form of colonisation via language (Norah Mohamed, 2000). However, we should not be quick to conclude on the role of the English language just from these, as the population was already speaking English before the internet.

The effects of borrowing from another language can also be seen in the Malay language. For example, Teo (2000) discusses the use of the Arabic term “*khinzir*” (pig) borrowed to replace “*babi*” (pig) in 1999 in the Malay language community in Malaysia. The term “*babi*” (pig) is seen outright as rude and offensive and highly improper in polite language and in the Islamic culture which is prevalent in Malaysia, the pig is *haram* or totally forbidden, creating feelings of utter disgust to the species among Muslims. The Arabic term, translates the Malay word 100 per cent, semantically; but pragmatically it is camouflaged or softened by the Arabic word. The change was definitely pragmatically motivated within the Malay-speaking community and the term became much more preferred than the original Malay word.

The results of this study support that of Chen (2010). Chen together with Yang replicated Chen’s (1993) study, using subject population from the same location. They found that instead of rejecting compliments, the Chinese speakers were overwhelmingly accepting compliments, as commonly found in the Western cultures. This was attributed mainly to the increasing use of English in Xian, particularly in education and knowledge dissemination. In a recent study, Cheng (2011) who studied compliment responses in two groups of ESL and EFL Chinese speakers of English found that the subjects differed in their compliment responses because of their L1 culture and limited L2 linguistic forms. The EFL group tend to reject or deny compliments more than the ESL group which showed more appreciative responses.

6. Conclusion

Language change is socially driven. In the case of this paper, it is in the way Malay speakers have begun to increasingly adopt the Western ways of responding to compliments, i.e., accepting and appreciating, than to maintain the Eastern style of rejecting and denying. The difference is caused by changes in motivation which is a function of politeness. Compliments to native English speakers convey a positive threat to the face of the hearer, while to Malay speakers, a compliment is imposing on the hearer, being bound to the “kindness” of the compliment giver in paying the compliment, and thus making it a negative threat; hence, the rejection. With responses leaning towards acceptance and appreciation, compliments are now seen as a positive threat to the speaker’s face, which indicates the change in societal norms and behaviours. Nonetheless, at the end of the day, both appear to serve the same function which is to respond to a compliment. Because we behave, socially and linguistically, according to norms of society, this paper has shown the linguistic

changes that have been affected due to the changes perceived in society brought by the popular English language and culture.

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