

An Expanded Study of Compliment Responses in Chinese

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Abstract: This study is an expanded investigation of compliment responses (CRs) in Chinese. Participants' CRs were elicited through a discourse completion task (DCT), supplemented by a retrospective interview. An analysis of the CRs obtained through the DCT showed that more compliments are accepted than rejected across locations in China. The retrospective interview revealed that a range of factors affect actual CRs, such as culture protocols, interlocutors, contexts and individual differences. This study largely supports the findings in recent studies on Chinese CRs, showing that CRs may change in tandem with social and economic changes in a culture. It was suggested that future CR studies should focus more on actual use of CRs as well as individual case studies, and include more diverse populations.

Keywords: Compliment response, Chinese, accepting, rejecting, modesty, discourse completion task, retrospective interview

1. Introduction

Compliment responses (CRs) are speech acts that are used to respond to compliments. While compliments are used across languages and cultures, they are not responded to in the same way. By examining how people respond to compliments in different languages and cultures, we can learn about the ways people from different cultures interact with each other so that we can reduce or avoid possible misunderstandings in intercultural communication (Fujimura-Wilson, 2014). CRs have been widely examined in face to face interactions (see Chen, 2010 for a thorough review on CR studies focusing on various languages prior to 2010; Razmjoo, Barabadi & Arfa, 2013) and in virtual contexts (Cirillo, 2012; Eslami & Yang, 2018; Placencia & Lower, 2013; Placencia, Lower & Powell, 2016). Although the ways that compliments are responded to are mostly language specific, some regularity does exist (Chen, 2010). For example, all or most CRs fall within a continuum with accepting and rejecting on the two ends. As Chen (2010) noted, this pattern of compliment response is largely in alignment with Pomerantz's (1978) two constraints on CRs (i.e., to agree with the complimenter and to avoid self-praise) and Holmes' (1988) three-pronged system of CRs (i.e., acceptance, rejection and deflection/evasion). CRs across cultures have been interpreted in Leech's (1983) Model of Politeness (for example, accepting is considered to be an application of the Agreement Maxim, rejecting to be an application of the Modesty Maxim, while deflecting to be a compromising strategy between the Agreement Maxim and the Modesty Maxim), and Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. Chen's (2010) review of compliment responses show that Arabic speakers accept compliments the most, followed by English speakers in South Africa, America, and New Zealand, and then non-English European language speakers, such as German and Spanish, and Irish English speakers, with Turkish, Chinese, Japanese and Korean rejecting the most.

Recent studies on Chinese CRs (Chen & Yang, 2010) showed that in China, which falls on the rejection end of CRs (Chen, 2010), changes have taken place over the past

two decades. In Chen's study in 1993, the participants in Xi'an, China, accepted only 1% of the compliments but rejected 96% of them. However, in Chen and Yang's reduplicated study in 2010, the younger Chinese generation in Xi'an accepted more compliments (from 1.03% rising to 62.6%) than rejecting (from 95.73% to 9.31%). Chen and Yang (2010) attributed the change in Chinese CRs to social and economic changes, and influence from western cultural values in Xi'an and China over the past few decades, as well as the changed view of modesty and self-confidence among the Chinese people. With the change in Xi'an, China, it is worth investigating whether CRs change in other cities in China and among the overseas Chinese community, such as the USA. In this sense, this study is a replicated study of Chen and Yang (2010), but with participants from more diverse regions.

2. CRs in General

Similar to compliments, CRs open an important window to understand interpersonal and cross-cultural communication. The ways that compliments are responded to demonstrate how people interact with each other. For example, while English speakers tend to accept compliments more than reject them, there is striking difference across English speakers from different cultures. American English speakers accepted 36% of compliments and rejected 9.98% of them (Herbert, 1986); however, New Zealand English speakers accepted 61.1% of the compliments and rejected 10% of them (Holmes, 1988). On top of the difference in acceptance/rejection, previous studies found that speakers from different countries use different strategies to respond to compliments. For example, American English speakers use CRs to establish, maintain and negotiate solidarity, whereas South African English speakers use CRs to affirm a confidently assumed social solidarity with their white middle-class status-equals (Herbert & Straight, 1989). In addition to strategies, CRs vary with interlocutors, such as interlocutors' gender. For example, Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Herbert (1990) found that women's CRs are more to create social harmony (Manes & Wolfson, 1981), and that men's compliments are more likely to be accepted and women are more likely to accept compliments, showcasing the gender imbalance in CRs.

3. CRs in Chinese

Studies on Chinese compliments and CRs have flourished for the past two decades (Chen, 1993; Chen, 2003; Chen & Yang, 2010; Schneider & Schneider, 2000; Yu, 2004; Yuan, 2002; Tang & Zhang, 2009, among others). Table 1 summarizes previous studies on Chinese CRs, largely built upon Chen (2010).

Table 1. Chinese CRs in Previous Studies

Study	Participants	Acceptance percentage	Rejection percentage
Chen (1993) (discourse completion task, DCT)	Northwestern Mandarin speakers in Xi'an	1.03%	95%
Yuan (2002) (DCT)	Southwestern Mandarin speakers in Kunming	7%	28.93%

Yu (2004) (DCT)	Taiwan Mandarin speakers	13%	24%
Yuan (2002) (natural)	Southwestern Mandarin speakers in Kunming	15.63%	33.98%
Schneider and Schneider (2000) (DCT)	China	20%	80%
Tang and Zhang (2009) (DCT)	Chinese in Australia	49%	38%
Chen and Yang (2010) (DCT)	Northwestern Mandarin speakers in Xi'an	62.6%	9.31%
Chen (2003) (DCT)	Taiwan Mandarin: Equal-status complimenter Higher-status complimenter	88.46% 80.65%	11.54% 19.35%

As Table 1 shows, previous studies on Chinese CRs do not show a consistent picture, in that the acceptance rates of Chinese compliments range from 1.03% to 88.46 %. However, it can be seen that overseas Chinese and Mandarin speakers in Taiwan tend to accept compliments more than those in the mainland, and that more recent studies show the trend of accepting more compliments by Chinese speakers. Being modest and humble is something deeply rooted in the Chinese culture (Gu, 1990), which naturally leads to rejection of compliments according to Leech's Modesty Maxim (1983). However, Chen and Yang's (2010) study showed that even such culturally-loaded behaviors may change due to internal and external factors. Although enough research has been done in Chinese CRs, there are some gaps: 1) The differences in CRs between mainland China (Chen, 1993) and Taiwan (Chen, 2003) led Chen (2003) to suggest that there might be intra-cultural or intra-lingual variations in CRs within the greater China region, likely due to the socioeconomic and cultural differences across regions. Therefore, more studies on CRs in greater China are warranted to see whether there are wide intra-cultural differences in CRs (Chen, 2003) and whether Chinese CRs show a new trend of accepting more than rejecting (Chen & Yang, 2010); 2) most studies on Chinese CRs use the canonical DCT. As Cheng (2010) pointed out, other data, such as retrospective interviews, are required to complement data collected from the DCT. With these gaps in mind, this study examines CRs in Chinese by extending Chen and Yang's (2010) study to more diverse locations in China and overseas Chinese students.

4. Methodology

In this study, we utilized a discourse completion task (DCT) in data collection, supplemented by a retrospective interview. The discourse completion task was to identify the ways the compliments are responded to in the so-called tier-1 cities¹, such

¹ <http://multimedia.scmp.com/2016/cities/>

According to SCMP, Chinese cities are often categorized into four tiers according to three criteria: GDP, politics, and population. For example, Tier-1 cities, such as Beijing and

as Beijing and Shanghai, and the tier-2 cities, such as Ningbo, Hangzhou and Chengdu, and by the overseas Chinese, while the retrospective interview was to complement the discourse completion task by tapping into idiosyncratic aspects of CRs. It should be pointed out that DCT is different from the natural occurrence of CR in that DCT only elicits responses that the participants deem appropriate. The discourse completion task in this study was based upon Chen (1993), Chen and Yang (2010) and Tang and Zhang (2009). Chen (1993) and Chen and Yang (2010) used four compliment scenarios to elicit participants' responses to compliments: physical appearance, clothing, performance, and possession. Tang and Zhang (2009) also used four scenarios in their study: appearance, character, ability and possession. While physical appearance and clothing are different from each other, character seems to add more diversity to the scenarios used. Therefore, the scenario related to character, cited below, was used in this study.

“You have helped your friends look after their child at your place for a whole day. When they come to pick up the child, they say, ‘Thank you so much. You’re really helpful, patient, and caring’”

Unfortunately, in this scenario the majority of participants only responded to the speech act of thanking and only a few responded to the speech act of compliments in DCT as well, very likely due to the relatively greater importance of the speech act of thanking than that of complimenting. As a result, the CRs elicited from the character scenario were not included when reporting results. The other three scenarios adapted from Chen (1993) and Chen and Yang (2010) are cited below.

Scenario 1 (on clothing): You met an old acquaintance that you have not seen for long. After chatting a little, he/she said, “Your clothes is good looking. You look really handsome/pretty.”

Scenario 2 (on performance): You just completed a presentation on your research/work. One of your classmates/co-workers walked up and said, “Your presentation is really good. I wish that I could do it equally well.”

Scenario 3 (on possession): You recently bought a new cell phone. Your friend saw you using some cool apps on your phone and said, “Your new cell phone is really good, with so many new functions. I wish mine could have these functions, too.”

The retrospective interview was semi-structured and guided by the following two questions:

- 1) How do you usually respond to others' compliments on clothing, work performance and possession of something?

Shanghai, have a GDP over \$US300 billion, are directly controlled by the central government, and have a population of more than 15 million people.

- 2) Do you notice any difference in people's way of responding to compliments? If any, what do you think about it?

4.1. Participants

Altogether 171 participants were recruited for this study, 52 from Tier 1 cities (32 female and 20 male), 79 from Tier 2 cities (48 female and 31 male), and 40 from the US (16 female and 24 male). The average age of the participants is 24.92, with $sd = 7.23$. All have BA degrees or were currently working on their bachelor degrees at the time of study; some even have MA or Ph. D degrees.

For the retrospective interview, ideally participants should be recruited in China. However, due to geographical limitation, we recruited 12 Chinese undergraduate students (average age = 19.1, $sd = 0.7$) from a public university in the USA. All these students had been in the US for less than four years and seven of them were freshmen at the time of the interview.

4.2. Procedure

The questionnaire for the discourse completion task was posted online. The questionnaire had two sections: 1) the first section elicited participants' demographic information, such as age, gender, birth place, current location and duration, and overseas work and study experience; 2) the second section consisted of the four scenarios used to elicit participants' CRs. Participants were recruited through social media, friends and friends' friends at different locations. Participants were instructed to respond to the compliment scenarios and were encouraged to provide as many responses as possible. However, most participants only provided one response to each compliment scenario.

5. Results

In this section, we first analyze the CRs obtained through the discourse completion task, followed by a discussion of the retrospective interview.

5.1. Discourse Completion Task

When categorizing and sub-categorizing CRs in the discourse completion task, we followed Chen (1993) and Chen and Yang (2010). That is to say, compliment responses were grouped into three categories: accepting, deflecting/evading, and rejecting. Examples of the three categories and their respective subcategories from this study are illustrated with participants' responses below.

5.1.1. Accepting

1a. Agreeing: This strategy is used by the complimentee to show their agreement with the complimenter. One example is:

我也觉得很好看. "I also think that it is very good-looking."

1b. Returning: This is the most frequently used strategy used to accept a compliment. By returning compliments, the complimentee shows his/her politeness. One example is: 你也很漂亮. “You are also very good-looking.”

1c. Thanking: This strategy is often used in combination with other strategies, such as agreeing and/or returning. One example is: 哈哈, 谢谢. “Haha, thanks.”

1d. Seeking confirmation: One typical CR used in seeking confirmation is 是吗? “Really?”. As Chen and Yang (2010) noted, “really” can be accepting, rejecting or evading. Whether it is categorized as accepting or rejecting depends upon whether the response includes other components. For example, when “really” is used together with 我也觉得好看 as in 1a, it is interpreted as accepting. And when “really” is used together with 我觉得不适合我 “I do not think that it fits me”, it is interpreted as rejecting. If “really” is used alone, it is deflecting or evading.

1e. Explaining: This strategy is used when the complimentee attempts to explain the thing/action that is being complimented. One example is: 这是我前两天在商场买的, 当时第一眼就看中了它, 然后果断买了. “This is what I bought in the supermarket the other day. I loved it upon the first sight of it and bought it right away.”

1f. Expressing gladness: This strategy is used when the complimentee wants to express his/her gladness upon hearing the compliment. One example is: 真开心. “I am really glad.”

1g. Suggesting: This strategy is used when the complimentee makes a suggestion to the compliment or about doing something. One example is: 你也可以买一个新的. “You can also buy a new one.”

1h. Offering (help): This strategy is primarily used to respond to the compliments related to performance or possession of something. One example is: 我可以带你去. “I can take you there [to buy the new phone].”

Similar to the strategy of seeking confirmation, suggesting and offering (help) can be accepting, rejecting or evading. When suggesting or offering help is used together with the strategy of thanking, it is accepting; and when it is used together with something denigrating, such as 其实没什么 “it is really nothing”, it is rejecting. When suggesting or offering is used alone, it is considered to be evading.

5.1.2. Deflecting/ Evading

2a. Seeking confirmation: This is the most used strategy to deflect a compliment. 真的吗 “Is it really so?” or 是吗 “Really?” are the two often used responses.

2b. Thanking, as in 谢谢 “Thanks”. Note that the thanking is often used together with 真的吗 “Is it really so?”.

2c. Offering help: One example is:

你可以在 Apple store 找到. “You can find it in Apple store.”

2d. Suggesting: One example is:

你应该买一个. “You should buy one.”

2e. Returning: One example is:

你的手机也有类似功能吧? “Your cell phone also has similar functions, right?”

This strategy is often used with the strategy of seeking confirmation.

2g. Explaining: One example is:

哈哈，手机功能太多也会妨碍使用. “Haha, too many functions on the phone will distract your use.”

2h. Smiling: This is an interesting way to deflect or dismiss a compliment.

5.1.3. Rejecting

3a. Disagreeing: This is an often used strategy to reject a compliment, corresponding to the Chinese modesty. Two examples are:

过奖过奖. “You overpraised me.”

哪里哪里. “No, no.”

3b. Explaining: One example is:

其实很多功能用不上的，有没有没有区别. “Many functions are not that useful, so there is no difference with or without them.”

3c. Suggesting: One example is:

(其实没什么) 你可以下载一下. “[It is really nothing] you can download them.”

3d. Returning: One example is:

你会做得更好. “You can do it better.”

This strategy is often used together with the disagreeing strategy, such as 哪里哪里 or 过奖过奖.

3e. Seeking confirmation: See 1d above.

3f. Thanking: This strategy is often used together with denigrating or explaining and is used to show appreciation after self-denigrating, such as 过奖过奖/真的不好，但还是谢谢你 “You overpraised me/really not good, but still thank you.”

3g. Offering help: One example is:

(其实也没什么，你一样也可以做得好) 我来帮你吧. “[It is really nothing, you can also do well] let me help you.”

The counts and percentages of the three categories CRs and their subcategories are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Counts (and Percentages) of the Three Categories of CRS and Their Subcategories

Category			Count (percentage)
Accepting	Thanking	235*	267 (52%)
	Seeking confirmation	24	
	Expressing gladness	6	
	Returning	101	
	Agreeing	39	
	Explaining	26	
	Suggesting	26	
	Offering help	7	
Deflecting/evading	Seeking confirmation	15	160 (31.2%)
	Explaining	38	
	Thanking	7	
	Offering help	22	
	Returning	25	
	Suggesting	68	
	Smiling	5	
Rejecting	Disagreeing	85	86 (16.8%)
	Returning	28	
	Thanking	19	
	Explaining	22	
	Seeking confirmation	2	
	Suggesting	3	
	Offering help	1	

*Percentages of the subcategories of CRs were not calculated, in that one CR may and often include more than one strategy that fall within different subcategories

As can be seen in Table 2, more than 50% of compliments were accepted while only 16.8% of them were rejected. These results accord with the trend of CR found in recent studies, such as Tang and Zhang (2009) and Chen and Yang (2010). While these studies do not have the same percentages of acceptance or rejection, the overall trend in Chinese CR is the same. To examine whether there is any difference in CRs across locations, we calculated the percentages of the three categories of CRs across locations, namely Tier 1 cities, Tier 2 cities, and Chinese students in the US. Figure 1 presents the percentages of the three main categories of CRs across locations.

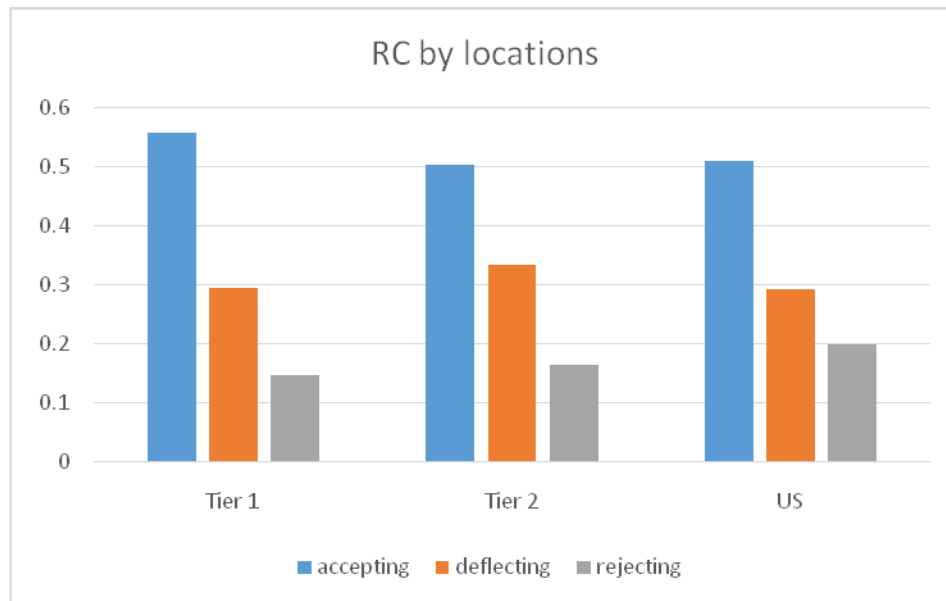


Figure 1. Compliment Responses by Locations

As Figure 1 shows, there are no big differences in the three categories of CRs between Tier 1, Tier 2 and overseas Chinese communities, namely around 50% or more compliments were accepted and around 20% or less were rejected.

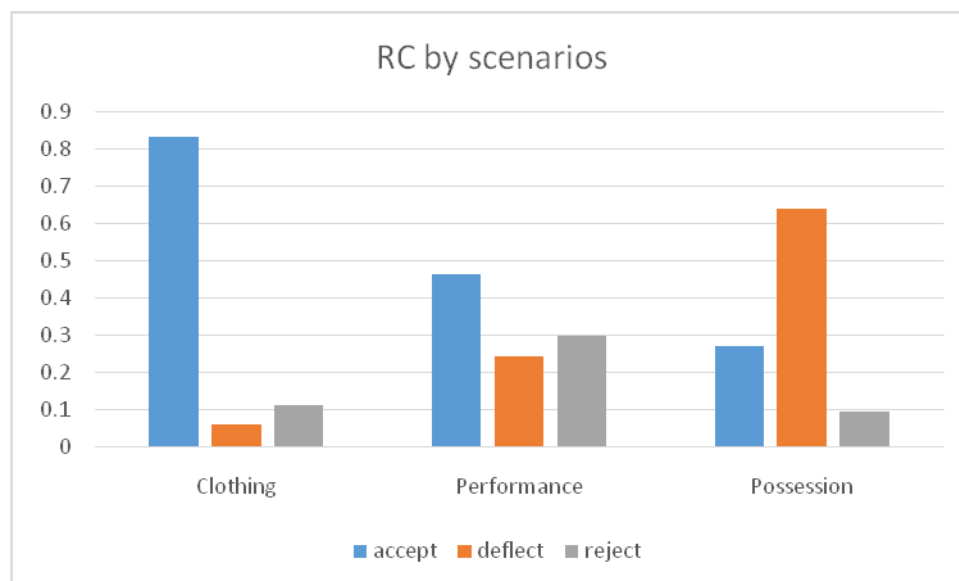


Figure 2. Compliment Responses by Scenarios

To examine whether there is any difference in CRs across elicitation scenarios, the percentages of the three categories of CRs in the three scenarios (clothing, performance, and possession) were calculated and plotted in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows that CRs do vary with scenarios. For the clothing scenario, the majority of compliments were accepted. One possible reason for the overwhelming acceptance is that clothing is something external to an individual; therefore, acceptance may not indicate the arrogance of the complimentees. Interestingly, compliments on the possession of something, such as the latest model of iPhone, were mostly evaded. An analysis of the

responses to compliments on the possession scenario shows that the complimentees downplayed the fancy functions of the phones by focusing on the apps and offering to help the complimenter find these apps on their phones. For the compliments on the good performance, the compliments were accepted more than rejected or evaded, although all three categories of CRs are below 50%.

5.2. Findings from the Retrospective Interview

Most interviewees (N=12) mentioned the role of modesty in Chinese culture when responding to compliments (Gu, 1990). To be humble and modest, one is more likely to reject compliments, as found in some earlier studies on Chinese CRs (Chen, 1993). Interestingly, although most interviewees mentioned the role of modesty in responding to compliments, showing that modesty is deeply embedded in their mind, their overall response of compliments is accepting. This may be due to what Chen and Yang (2010) put forward in interpreting their findings; more specifically, the changing culture due to economic development and more contact with the western ideals, and the new interpretations of modesty (e.g., seeing accepting as reflecting self-confidence and positive face for complimenter) all contribute to the majority acceptance of compliments.

Another important concept, face, emerged in the retrospective interview and interviewees (N=10) seemed to attach great importance to this concept when responding to compliments. One interviewee stressed the importance of rejecting a compliment in order to “give face to the complimenter”. However, it should be pointed out that, to give face to complimenter, complimentees can accept by agreeing, reject by self-denigrating, and evade by being non-committal.

Several interviewees (N=8) talked about the role of the sincerity of the compliments on impacting their response. For example, if a compliment was given to a “mediocre performance in job” or the complimenter was not being sincere or truthful, they would reject the compliments, “no matter what”.

Another factor that was not touched upon in the DCT but was pointed out by half of the interviewees (N=6) is the age factor. If the compliments are “from older or senior people”, the complimentees would reject them; if from friends or peers, they would tend to accept them. This age factor is another representation of the politeness principle in the Chinese context, namely, be respectful to the senior. By rejecting the compliments, the complimentees are “being humble and modest”, hence showing respect for the senior people.

Quite a few interviewees (N=7) mentioned the difference in compliment responses between Chinese and Americans, namely, Chinese tend to reject compliments while the Americans tend to accept compliments. While this is not something unexpected, this reflects the fact that Chinese students are aware of this cultural difference and this may, in turn, lead to or contribute to their change in CRs.

Another interesting finding from the retrospective interview is that the same types of compliments may be responded to in different ways. One interviewee tended to “reject friends’ compliments” while another tended to “accept friends’ compliments”. This difference in CRs indicates another important factor affecting CRs in Chinese, namely the difference at the individual level. One’s personal experiences and upbringing may enable him/her to respond to the same compliments differently, that is to say, there exist idiosyncratic differences in CRs.

Several interviewees (N=6) also stressed the important role of compliment scenarios in compliment responses. One interviewee thought that “evading is the preferred responding strategy for compliments on possession, but accepting is the preferred responding strategy for compliments on appearance/clothing and performance”. This interviewee’s observation or perspective was largely supported by the CRs elicited through the DCT.

As found in previous studies (Herbert & Straight, 1989), interlocutors are also an important factor pointed out by some interviewees (N=5). One interviewee mentioned that she tended to “accept compliments from American friends, but reject the same compliments from the Chinese friends”, showing their awareness in cultural differences in CRs.

6. General Discussion

This study is a replicated study of Chen and Yang (2010), with the addition of participants from more locations in China and the overseas Chinese community. The analysis of the discourse completion task confirmed the findings in Chen and Yang (2010): in both Tier 1 and Tier 2 cities, and overseas Chinese communities, there is a change in CRs, namely, to accept more compliments than to reject. It was also found that there is almost no difference in CRs across locations. This finding may be related to the demographics of the participants in this study and some other studies, such as Chen and Yang (2010). Most or all participants in these studies are either college students or recent college graduates in their 20s or 30s who have grown up amid China’s rapid social and economic development (born in the 1980s and 1990s). Their daily experience with the social and economic change in China, their educational experience, their easy access to the western media, and their ever-increasing self-confidence obtained through both the better-off living and their own all-around development, physically, intellectually and artistically, all contribute to the change in CRs. This study, however, found that CRs did vary with elicitation scenarios. More specifically, compliments on clothing and performance were mostly accepted and those on possessions were often deflected/evaded. The possession of something is external to one’s quality or capability, which explains why complimentees tend to evade the compliments. As for clothing and performance, they seem to fall in different categories, in that one’s good performance in job shows one’s specialty in a discipline or one’s good preparation for the job, whereas clothing or appearance is something external but not something acquired through one’s efforts. One possible explanation for accepting compliments on clothing/appearance is that nowadays most cultures, including the Chinese culture, value one’s good appearance, both innate and brought about by dressing. In this sense, both clothing/appearance and performance are aspects that one is proud of, which seems to be able to explain the greater acceptance of compliments on these two categories. This finding accords with the retrospective interviews, that is to say, participants were aware of the differences of compliments falling in different categories and responded accordingly. The retrospective interview shows that CRs are also affected by a full array of factors, such as cultural norms, the relationship between interlocutors (close or not, from the same or different cultures), scenarios involved, age of interlocutors, sincerity of compliments, contact with other cultures, and there even exist some idiosyncratic differences across speakers. Such diverse factors, if not well controlled for, are expected to affect the results of CRs research. Actually the somewhat different findings in

previous studies may be explained by these complicated factors to some extent. While culture is an important part of everyone's upbringing and education, such as being humble and modest in the Chinese culture, there can be differences across generations, language use included. Both this study and Chen and Yang (2010) show that the young generation in China accept more compliments than reject, as compared to decades ago. From the sociolinguistic perspective, the change in CRs in China provides a case of language change over a short period of time, due to the rapid social and economic changes in a country.

Gu (1990) argues that the Chinese concepts of face and modesty/self-denigration can be used to explain the wide rejection of compliments in the Chinese context, because self-denigrating gives face to the interlocutor(s) in the Chinese culture. The change in Chinese CRs in this study shows that cultural protocols can change over time, due to various factors, such as social and economic ones, or maybe the young generation in China is not as collectivist as decades ago, but becomes more individualistic (Gu, 1990). As Ruhi (2006) showed, Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle can well account for such a change, namely, the young Chinese generation changes in their politeness implementation from the Modesty Maxim to the Agreement Maxim.

China being the second largest economic body in the world, there is no denying that the socio-economic development and the increasing contact with the outside world as well as the ever-increasing confidence, especially among the younger generation, explain the changes in Chinese CRs. It would be interesting to examine whether the same change in CRs occurs in other cultures, such as Japan and South Korea, and why (or why not) the change takes place. This line of research on CR change or non-change will shed light on the impact of socio-economic change on language use at the discourse level. It is also worth pointing out that DCT only provides access to participants' perception of appropriate response behavior, not actual use. Further study should investigate CRs in natural contexts and see how CRs elicited through DCT differ from those in actual settings. Eslami and Yang (2018) examined Chinese-English bilinguals' CRs and found that their CRs varied with contexts, namely, their CRs were aligned with the modesty principle more when they participated in the Chinese online community, but were aligned with the agreement principle more in the English online community of Facebook. More CR research can be conducted on second language (L2) learners to see how CRs differ for native language and L2 speakers and how the norms in CRs in one's native language and L2 shape each other.

One caveat is in place when generalizing the findings in this study and Chen and Yang (2010) to Chinese in general. The participants in these studies are mostly college students or recent graduates who were born or grew up amid China's rapid economic development. While this group of population represents a large portion of the Chinese population, it does not represent the whole population. For example, the older generation, whether educated or not, were left out in this study and other studies. More importantly, there is a large population of migrant workers in China, who are rarely included, except for studies focusing on migrant workers' language use (Dong, 2011, 2016). It can be expected that the inclusion of both the older generation and the migrant workers in China may have different findings and show inter-generational and urban/rural divides in CRs, as well as language use in general.

7. Concluding Remarks

This study investigated the CRs in the Chinese community. Our findings largely support the findings in recent studies on Chinese CRs, namely, compliments are accepted more than rejected. The retrospective interview identified a range of factors that may affect actual CRs, such as culture protocols, interlocutors, contexts and individual differences. While lending support to previous studies on Chinese CRs, this study points to some new directions for future studies, such as a focus on individual case studies of CRs, in order to gain a fuller understanding of Chinese CRs. It was pointed out that the change in Chinese CRs is also language change in process, at least, among the educated young population in urban settings. Whether this language change applies to other population in China, such as the rural population or the migrant worker population in the cities, requires further studies.

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