

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Compliments and Compliment Responses on Chinese Social Media: Gender Variation

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Received: 26 July 2024 Accepted: 06 August 2024 Published: 16 August 2024

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Abstract

This study examines the practices of giving and responding to compliments from Chinese university students on social media, focusing specifically on the gender differences that exist in this context. The data for this study was collected from online platform WeChat Moments, and was analyzed by using two analytical frameworks, Yuan's (2002) framework for compliment strategies and Herbert's (1990) framework for compliment response strategies. The findings of this study revealed that firstly Chinese university students tended to employ explicit compliments more frequently than other compliment strategies. Secondly, they are more inclined to accept compliments rather than reject them. Thirdly, significant gender disparities were observed among Chinese university students in the use of compliment strategies and response behaviors, including the subcategories of acceptance, deflection, and disagreement. Additionally, the paper suggests that compliment and compliment response behaviors of Chinese university students may be influenced by western cultures and online settings.

Keywords: Compliment, Compliment Responses, Gender, Chinese, Social Media.

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, the behavior of compliment has been widely studied in the field of naturally occurring verbal communication (Holmes, 1986). Compliments and complimentary responses are considered essential speech behaviors in everyday life, used to praise and congratulate others or respond to their praise (Holmes, 1986). They are particularly important not only because they involve judgement and appreciation of others' work but also because they reflect cultural values (Nelson, Baker, & Al-Btal, 1993). Speakers employ various terms and linguistic structures to express compliments and compliment responses, showing different patterns. The frequency of these behaviors depends on the social context, as well as the participants' gender and social status (Cutting, 2002; Levinson, 1983).

Due to the increasing prevalence of online communication, there is a growing interest in studying how interactions unfold in the digital environment.

Currently, there is a significant difference between the digital environment and the linguistic phenomena studied by linguists (Vazquez, 2022), with global platforms like Twitter or Facebook attracting academic attention. In China, WeChat has become an indispensable communication platform for people's daily life, study, and work due to the rise of the Internet. According to Tencent's official report, there were 1.29 billion monthly active accounts on WeChat as of March 31, 2022. WeChat not only serves as a means for people to connect with each other but also enables them to share their lives through the "Moments" function. Users can view, like, and comment on others' shares in Moments, leading to a significant number of users compliment and responding to compliment in their circle of friends.

Recent studies have shown that the proliferation of social media platforms has given rise to new modes of interaction involving praise (Rudolf von Rohr & Locher, 2020). Specifically, research in recent years

Citation: Ya Xu, Yi Zhang. Compliments and Compliment Responses on Chinese Social Media: Gender Variation. *Annals of Language and Literature* 2024;8(1): 29-39.

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has focused on patterns of compliment behavior found on social networking sites like Facebook and Instagram, where communication takes place among peers, acquaintances, friends, or family members. However, research on compliment primarily focuses on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, with research subjects largely being users from English-speaking countries. There is still room for research on the local Chinese software WeChat and Chinese people's discourse on compliment. Therefore, this study aims to examine compliment behavior and reactions to compliments employed by Chinese college students on the social media platform WeChat with the following three questions:

1. What compliment strategies do Chinese university students use on Moments?
2. How do Chinese university students respond to compliments on Moments?
3. Is there any gender difference in the distribution of compliments and compliment responses on Moments?

2. Literature Review

Researchers have varying definitions of compliment, depending on their context, culture, and perspective. Hyland (2000) defines compliment as "a behavior that attributes certain characteristics, skills, etc., to another person and receives positive comments from that person" (p. 44). Holmes (1986) defines compliment as "a speech act that explicitly or implicitly gives credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person being addressed, for something 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.)" (p. 485). Both the speaker and the listener positively comment on this. Compliment can be described as an affirmation of the actions and efforts of others (Farghal & Haggan, 2006). Compliments involve praising the characteristics of others and usually arise from the social relationships between individuals.

Compliment serves a variety of social functions (Leech, 1983). The nature of expression is influenced by several variables, including gender, social status, and participants' cultural identity (Ruhi, 2006). Compliments may be motivated by a desire to maintain a harmonious relationship, preserve face, adhere to social etiquette, or serve as part of an interaction strategy. These different motivations account for the various forms of language used to express praise. The functions of compliment include maintaining social relations and fostering solidarity. One of its main purposes is to promote social solidarity between the

speaker and the recipient (Holmes, 1988). Compliment primarily conveys an emotional meaning (Schmidt & Richards, 1980). It is used for specific social purposes such as showing respect, obedience, or closeness and solidarity (Watts, 2003). Complementors seek to strengthen social bonds by making individuals feel good about themselves.

Johnson and Rom (1992) note that while compliments are primarily used for emotional purposes, some compliments also serve an informative function. Polite compliment is one type of speech act that contributes to pragmatic success (Golato, 2004). In everyday situations, speakers often employ discourse strategies that convey politeness. The strategy of compliment is used to facilitate conversation and protect the speaker's face. When using compliment, speakers must consider the face needs of others and carefully choose their words and language.

Compliment response refers to the expression used by the recipient of a compliment in reaction to the praise they receive. Herbert (1986) defines a compliment response as an appreciation of another's efforts to praise one's actions or behavior. This suggests that a compliment response is generally regarded as a response or attribute of the recipient to the person who compliments them. The response to compliment depends on the type of compliment and the social relationship between the individuals.

Compliment responses have been extensively studied in linguistic research. Pomerantz (1978), one of the pioneers in discussing compliment responses, examined compliment responses in American English and proposed that recipients face the dilemma of adhering to two conflicting ideas: (A) agreeing with the speaker and (B) avoiding self-praise. The person receiving the compliment can choose to accept the compliment, downplay its importance, or respond in a way that diminishes its significance. Recipients face the challenge of conveying the level of humility they wish to project. An analysis of American responses indicates that Americans typically disagree and reject compliments. Pomerantz (1978) inferred that compliment respondents employ various strategies such as praise downgrading, reference shifting, and self-praise avoidance to resolve the conflict presented by compliments.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The present study focuses on data collected from Moments of WeChat, one of the most popular

platforms for computer-mediated communication (CMC) in China. The participants in this study are 43 graduate students (male=18, female=25) from an intact University with ages from 22 to 25. They were asked to provide three Moments released in recent three months (2023.3-2023.5), with comments containing compliments and compliment responses. On average there were 6.2 compliments and compliment responses per Moment and finally a total of 334 compliments and 199 compliment responses were collected.

3.2 Coding Scheme

The purpose of present study was to analyze how the complimenting act and complement response were realized in naturally online settings by Chinese university students. A number of researchers have empirically developed classifications of compliments and compliment response. In this study, Yuan (2002)' classification of compliments and Herbert (1990)' classification of compliment responses were adopted.

According to Yuan (2002), compliments can be categorized into two groups based on the semantic formulas used to express them: unbound semantic formulas and bound semantic formulas (Table 1). Unbound semantic formulas can function independently as compliments, while bound semantic

formulas require extra information to be considered as compliments. Unbound semantic formulas can be further divided into two sub-categories: explicit compliment and implicit compliment. Explicit compliment consists of general statements with at least one positive semantic carrier, for example, 你的字真好看 Your handwriting is so beautiful. Implicit compliments, on the other hand, may or may not have a positive semantic carrier, but the positive meaning can be inferred from the context in which they are said, for example, 要是我的字和你的一样(好看)就好了 If only my handwriting were as same (beautiful) as yours (Yuan, 2002, p. 192). Bound semantic formulas involve explanations, information question, future references, contrasts, advice and requests. The definition of each bound semantic formulas is provided in Table 2 with the examples in italics.

The classification pattern of Holmes (1990) was the most influential one in research of compliment responses, which divides compliment response strategies into three categories involving agreement, non-agreement and other interpretation, and further categorizes several subtypes under each (See Table 3). Appreciation Token refers to that a verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment, acceptance not being tied to the specific semantics of the stimulus, e.g.,

Table 1. Categories of Compliments

Semantic Formulas	Compliment Strategies	
Compliment	Unbound Semantic Formulas	Explicit Compliment
		Implicit Compliment
	Bound Semantic Formulas	Explanation
		Information Question
		Future Reference
		Contrast
		Advice
		Request

Table 2. The Categories of Bound Semantic Formulas

Type	Definition and example
Explanations	To describe the good aspects of the addressee's appearance/performance, e.g., 我知道修复笔记本电脑多困难。 <i>I saw how difficult it was to fix a laptop.</i>
Information Question	To request more information, e.g., 你在哪里学会修电脑的呀？ <i>Where did you learn to fix it?</i>
Future References	To refer to the upcoming, e.g., 你做维修电脑的工作很有前途。 <i>You have a bright future in fixing laptops.</i>
Contrast	The contrast between the addressee and others, e.g., 你比你的哥哥能乐于助人。 <i>I think you are more helpful than your brother.</i>
Advice	To give a recommendation, e.g., 你可以开个电脑店呢。 <i>You'd better open a laptop store.</i>
Requests	To ask the addressee for his/her opinion, advice or experience, or to request the addressee to do something, e.g., 你可以帮忙看看我的手机吗？ <i>Can you check my cell phone too?</i>

谢谢 *Thanks*. Comment Acceptance-Single means addressee accepts the complimentary force and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic, e.g., *这也是我最喜欢的 It's my favorite too*. Praise Upgrade will be labelled when addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient, e.g., *真的吗?它衬得我皮肤更白了,不是吗? Really? It makes my skin whiter, doesn't it?* Comment History refers to the situation that addressee offers on the object complimented; these comments differ from Comment Acceptance-Single in that the latter are impersonal, that is, they shift the force of the compliment from the addressee, e.g., *我买它是为了去云南旅行 I bought it for the trip to Yun Nan*. Reassignment means that addressee agrees with the compliment assertion, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person or to the object itself, e.g., *我哥哥给我的 My brother gave it to me*. Return, as with Reassignment except that the praise is shifted

(or returned) to the first speaker, e.g., *你的也很漂亮 So is yours*. Scale Down will be coded when addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is overstated, e.g., *这个已经很旧了 It's really quite old*. Question means that addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment, e.g., *你真的这样想吗? Do you really think so?* Disagreement means addressee asserts that the object complimented is not worthy of praise, e.g., *我讨厌它 I hate it*. Qualification is weaker than Disagreement: addressee merely qualifies the original assertion, usually with *though, but, well, etc.*, e.g., *这个还行,但她的更好 It's alright, but hers is nicer*. No Acknowledgment means addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment: The addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment (i.e., Topic Shift) or gives no response. Request Interpretation means that addressee, consciously or not, interprets the compliments as a

Table 3. *Types of Compliment Responses*

Types of Compliment Responses			
Agreement	Acceptance	Appreciation Token	
		Comment	Single
			Praise Upgrade
	Comment History		
	Non-Acceptance	Transfer	Reassignment
Return			
Non-Agreement	Acknowledgement	Question	
		Acceptance	Scale down
		Nonacceptance	Disagreement
	Qualification		
	No Acknowledgment		
Other Interpretations	Request Interpretations		

3.3 Data Analysis

All the data provided by participants were in the form of screenshots. Firstly, we transcribed them into text to facilitate coding. Then, the UAM Corpus Tool was

used to establish the framework for both compliments and compliment responses. Finally, we manually coded the text and performed a Chi-Square test to determine if there were significant differences between genders.

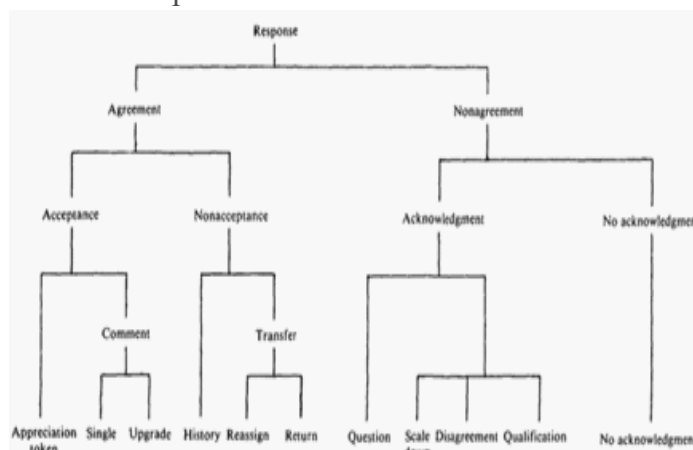


Fig.1 *Coding Framework in UAM Corpus Tool*

request rather than a compliment, e.g., 你也想买一个吗? *You want borrow this one too*. Such responses are not compliment responses per se as the addressee does not perceive the previous speech act as a compliment.

4. Result

This section presents the general and detailed distribution of compliments and compliment responses from the users of Moment. During the coding process, it was discovered that most of the compliments were related to appearance and clothing. Additionally, some compliments were made regarding academic achievements, indicating that young students tend to share their recent haircuts or research successes on

WeChat. Table 4 illustrates the general distribution of compliments and compliment responses from both female and male participants. A total of 334 compliments and 199 compliment response were collected. It is worth noting that the proportion of compliments from females (64.3%) was higher than that from males (57.7%). However, the distribution of compliment responses differed slightly. 144 compliment responses were collected from female participants compared to 55 from male students. Interestingly, the proportion of male compliment responses (42.3%) was higher than that of females (35.7%). This indicates that females tend to receive more compliments on social media, but may not always respond.

Table 4 General Distribution of Compliments and Compliment Response

Online comments	Female		Male		Comparison		
	N	Fre.	N	Fre.	ChiSqu	P	Sig.
Compliment	259	64.3	75	57.7	1.82	0.1777	
Compliment response	144	35.7	55	42.3	1.82	0.1777	
TOTAL	403	100.0%	130	100.0%			

4.1 Compliments

Table 5 presents the general distribution of compliments. Out of the 334 compliments, 254 were unbound semantic formulas and 78 were bound semantic formulas. Among females, unbound semantic formulas were used 206 times while bound semantic formulas were used 51 times. For males, unbound semantic formulas were used 48 times and bound semantic formulas were used 27 times. A Chi-square test reveals a significant difference between genders ($p=0.0037$), suggesting that females are more likely to choose a direct approach when praising others, using apparent adjectives such as beautiful, good,

cool, and slim. On the other hand, males may prefer to use other strategies such as contrast and information explanation to give compliments.

The most frequently occurring strategy for both female and male was the “explicit compliment”, accounting for 98.1% of female compliments and 93.8% of male compliments. The “implicit compliment” strategy was used only 4 times by females and 3 times by males. In the case of “bound semantic formulas”, the most frequently used strategies were “Information question” and “contrast”. These percentages indicate that both females and males tend to express their feelings by offering explicit compliments.

Table 5 Distribution of Compliments

Semantic	Formulas Compliment Strategies	Female		Male		Comparison		
		N	Fre.	N	Fre.	ChiSqu.	P	Sig.
Compliment	Unbound Semantic Formulas	206	80.2	48	64.0	8.43	0.0037	+++
	Explicit Compliment	202	98.1	45	93.8	2.70	0.1006	
	Implicit Compliment	4	1.9	3	6.3	2.70	0.1006	
	Bound Semantic Formulas	51	19.8	27	36.0	8.43	0.0037	+++
	Explanation	7	13.7	1	3.7	1.93	0.1652	
	Information Question	14	27.5	7	25.9	0.02	0.8851	
	Future Reference	1	2.0	3	11.1	3.04	0.0813	+
	Contrast	24	47.1	12	44.4	0.05	0.8256	
	Advice	3	5.9	1	3.7	0.17	0.6781	
	Request	2	3.9	3	11.1	1.52	0.2175	

Example

Female:

(1)你穿那件旗袍太哇塞了。

You look too beautiful in that cheongsam.

(2)很漂亮好有文艺气息。

You're beautiful and artistic.

(3)第二行第一张拍的很美。

The first picture in the second line is very beautiful.

Male:

(4)你妈妈也太年轻了像姐姐。

Your mother is too young, like a sister.

(5)你这张是我今天所有照片里拍的我最好。

This one of yours is the best of all the photos I took today.

Examples (1), (2), and (3) are compliments from females, showcasing their preference for directly complimenting others with positive words like beautiful and artistic to praise their appearance, clothing, and photography skills. On the other hand, males are inclined to compliment others through comparison. As shown in example (4), when a male participant wanted to praise his friend's mother, he compared her to a young sister, implying that she possesses good skin, a good body, a positive spirit, and an appealing temperament, so making her appear youthful. Similarly, when praising someone's photography skills, he compared the picture taken by others.

4.2 Compliment response

Complimentary responses pertaining to personal achievements demonstrate a high level of agreement,

with expressions of appreciation being the most common. Table 6 provides a summary of the compliment response strategies employed by university students, presenting the number and percentage for each strategy.

The subcategory "appreciation token" was the most frequently observed type of compliment response, accounting for 52.36% of the students' responses on Moments. The subcategory "reassignment" was present in 10.47% of the responses, followed by the subcategory "single" at 9.42%, and "return" at 7.85%. Besides, only 13.24% of the responses fell under the category of "non-agreement", and a mere 0.52% were categorized as "other interpretations". These findings indicate that Chinese young students are more inclined to accept compliments rather than reject them on the social website.

The Chi-square test of the Chinese university students' responses to compliments shows some variations across genders. Table 7 and Table 8 indicates that there are significant differences between males and females in compliment response strategies. It also indicates that the female and male participants used different compliment response strategies. The details are addressed in the following paragraph.

4.2.1 Agreement

Table 7 provides a breakdown of the frequencies and percentages of gender disparities in the use of "agreement" strategies for responding to compliments. Notably, "acceptance" emerged as the most common strategy for responding to compliments. The data reveals a higher prevalence of "acceptance" strategies among male participants compared to their female

Table 6 Distribution of Compliment Responses

Types of Compliment Responses				N	Fre.
Agreement	Acceptance	Appreciation Token		100	52.36
		Comment	Single	18	9.42
			Praise Upgrade	9	4.71
	Comment History			3	1.57
	Non-Acceptance	Transfer	Reassignment	20	10.47
Return			15	7.85	
Non-Agreement	Acknowledgement	Question		3	1.57
		Acceptance	Scale down	12	6.28
			Non-Acceptance	Disagreement	0
		Qualification		0	0
	No Acknowledgment			10	5.24
Other Interpretations	Request Interpretations			1	0.52
Total				199	100

counterparts. Men employed 38 “acceptance” strategies, encompassing “appreciation token”, “comment acceptance”, and “praise upgrade” in their responses, while women employed 89 of these strategies. The data suggests that female participants employed the “appreciation token” strategy more frequently than males when responding to compliments; females used this strategy 75 times, as opposed to 25 times by males. Males, on the other hand, used somewhat more “comment acceptance”

strategies than females, with 13 instances compared to 14 for females. Female participants used more “praise upgrade” strategies in their responses to compliments, with 4 instances compared to 5 for males. Strategies of “non-acceptance” were the second most common type of agreement strategy. The data indicates that both male and female participants used an equal number of “non-acceptance” strategies in their responses to compliments.

Table 7. Chi-Square Test and Gender Crosstabulation of Agreement

Types of Compliment Responses				Female		Male		Comparison		
				N	Fre.	N	Fre.	ChiSqu.	P	Sig.
Agreement	Acceptance	Appreciation Token		75	84.3	25	65.8	5.43	0.0198	+++
		Comment	Single	9	64.3	9	69.2	0.07	0.7853	
			Praise Upgrade	5	35.7	4	30.0			
	Comment History		2	1.7	1	2.1	0.04	0.8510		
	Non-Acceptance	Transfer	Reassignment	13	48.1	7	87.5	3.90	0.0482	++
			Return	14	51.9	1	12.5			

The Chi-Square Test reveals significant differences between males and females in the use of two “acceptance” subcategories. Females were more likely to use expressions of gratitude, such as “Thanks” or “Thank you”, in response to compliments. Males, in contrast, tended to respond with phrases like “I think so” or expressions like self-praise.

Example

(6) *Compliment:* 学姐的衣服好漂亮

Compliment: Your clothes are so beautiful.

Female: 谢谢学妹

Female: Thank you.

(7) *Compliment:* 好好看

Compliment: (You are) so beautiful.

Female: 谢谢夸奖

Female: Thank you for your compliment.

(8) *Compliment:* 你瘦的时候好看些。

Compliment: You look better when you are thin.

Male: 我也觉得。

Male: I think so.

(9) *Compliment:* 贵校通知书好好看。

Compliment: The admission letter from your university is very nice.

Male: 我们学校学生自己设计的, 另外我摆拍的好。

Male: The students in our school designed it by themselves, and I posed well.

Examples (8) and (9) illustrate the compliment response strategies used by males. Example (8) employs the comment strategies, in which the male concurs with the praise given by the compliment giver. Example (9) demonstrates a situation where the male attributes the compliment to the designer of the admission letter, while also praising his photography skills.

Moreover, significant gender differences were observed in the “non-acceptance” subcategory, specifically between reassignment and return. Females were more prone to reciprocate compliments, while males were more likely to attribute the compliment to external factors.

Example

(10) *Compliment:* 美得很。

Compliment: Very beautiful.

Female: 嘿嘿都是美颜和滤镜。

Female: It's all beauty and filters.

(11) *Compliment:* 哇, 太美啦。

Compliment: Wow, it's beautiful.

Female: 祝贺我数月没化妆但技术没退化。

Female: Congratulations. I haven't worn makeup for months, but my skills haven't deteriorated.

(12) *Compliment:* 哇塞, 红头发泰酷辣。

Compliment: Wow, red hair is hot and cool.

Female: 漂亮学妹拍的。

Female: This is taken by a beautiful sister.

(13) Compliment: 这个录取通知书太好看了吧。

Compliment: This admission letter is so beautiful.

Male: 可不嘛, 校友优秀。

Male: That's right. Alumni are excellent.

(14) Compliment: 这技术可以。

Compliment: The technique is very good.

Male: 胡拍胡拍, 主要是景儿好。

Male: I took a random picture. Mainly because of the good scenery.

(15) Compliment: 您美到我了。

Compliment: You are so beautiful to me.

Female: 艺姐您今天还不是, 美得惹人落泪。

Female: Yi Jie, you are also very beautiful today, so beautiful that you make people cry.

(16) Compliment: 你好美

Compliment: You're beautiful

Female: 你也很美呢!

Female: You're beautiful, too!

Table 8 Chi-Square Test and Gender Crosstabulation of Non-Agreement

Types of Compliment Responses			Female		Male		Comparison		
			N	Fre.	N	Fre.	ChiSqu.	P	Sig.
Non-Agreement	Acknowledgement	Question	3	23.1	0	0	0.58	0.4475	
		Acceptance	10	76.9	2	100			
		Non-Acceptance			0				
	No Acknowledgment		5	27.8	5	71.4	4.00	0.0455	++

Example

(17) Compliment: 越来越漂亮了。

Compliment: You've become so beautiful.

Female: 贺总过奖了

Female: You flatter me.

(18) Compliment: 宇宙的星星都在发光。

Compliment: All the stars in the universe are shining.

Female: 真的嘛?

Female: Really?

Example (17) illustrates the “scale-down” strategy in compliment responses and example (18) demonstrates the

“question” strategy. When females receive a compliment, they occasionally respond with a question or downplay the compliment by saying “you flatter me”.

Examples (12), (13), and (14) illustrate the reassignment strategy in compliment responses, where recipients attribute the compliment to others or to the natural scenery. Examples (15) and (16) demonstrate that when females receive compliments on their appearance, they are more likely to reciprocate, especially when the compliment giver is also female. This discrepancy in strategy choice could be attributed to the greater consideration females give to their responses, as well as the content of the compliment and the gender of the compliment giver.

4.2.2 Non-Agreement

Table 8 presents the frequencies and percentages of gender disparities in the strategies of responding to compliments in terms of non-agreement. The Chi-Square Test reveals significant differences in compliment response strategies between males and females in the context of non-acknowledgement.

The table 8 shows a *p*-value of 0.0455, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis is accepted, suggesting no significant differences between male and female speakers in their strategies for responding to compliments. This implies that males and females adopt different strategies when attempting to deflect compliments.

“question” strategy. When females receive a compliment, they occasionally respond with a question or downplay the compliment by saying “you flatter me”.

5. Discussion

The study examined the compliment and compliment response behaviors of Chinese college students in their online communication. Results showed that the main form of compliment is unbound semantic formula containing explicit or implicit comments, accounting for about three-quarters of all compliment behaviors. This strategy is the most frequently used one among all compliment strategies, which may be attributed to the function of compliment, that is, to express sincere admiration and respect. This result is consistent with the results of Yuan (2002) and Alcan

(2020). Moreover, most of the objects of compliment are related to the appearance and performance of the recipients, which is greatly contributed to the content shared by college students in the Moments. As a product of the rapid development of the Internet, Moments promotes the communication between people to a great extent, which also provides a rare opportunity for college students to show their abilities. Besides, with the influx of Western cultural thoughts into China, the younger generation are more willing to show themselves and share their lives on social platforms. This may be the reason why compliments are often used in terms of appearance and ability. In addition, in the analysis of compliment behavior, we find that female use more Unbound Semantic Formulas strategies than male, that is, female is more likely to express compliment directly in Moments, while male choose more diversified ways, such as comparing and asking questions for more information. This may be because women regard complimenting others in moments as an important way to maintain a relationship, reciprocity or expression of intimacy, while male does not care much about this conventional courtesy. And women tend to express more explicit compliment than men, and men tend to express more implicit compliment than women, which may mean that Chinese people's conservative lifestyle is changing, and women are more willing to embrace this change.

In the compliment response, Acceptance is dominant, of which Appreciation Token is the most, in addition to Comment-Single and Praise Upgrade. This may be because the social nature of Moments is different from the traditional face-to-face communication. Traditional face-to-face communication will put more pressure on recipients to respond, and a simple "thank you" does not seem to be enough, so the person receiving the compliment will usually give more information to maintain the atmosphere of the whole interaction. Besides, the social nature of Moments reduces the pressure to reply to compliments. Saying "Thank you" is regarded as a good way to express gratitude without being impolite. Moreover, the study reveals that the number of compliments and compliment responses is not equal, which may be also a characteristic of social media. Because comments are instant on social media platforms where posters may choose not to respond if they see comments long after they were posted. Additionally, there is no rejection in all the compliment responses, which also reflects the characteristics of Chinese culture that does not directly refute each other and does not

reject the kindness of others. For gender variation, the study showed that women's Appreciation Token strategies are significantly higher than those of men when accepting compliments while the proportion of men using Reassignment strategy is significantly higher than that of women, which also reflects that when the young generation accepts foreign culture, women are more willing to make changes, while men are still more likely to show humility.

6. Conclusion

This study explores how Chinese university students make and response to compliments between peers on social media. The findings of the study indicate that Chinese university students commonly use explicit compliments as their primary compliment strategy on WeChat. They aim to compliment the person by explicitly expressing their feelings and showing love and respect. Additionally, Chinese students frequently use the "information question" and "contrast" strategies in bound semantic formulas when complimenting others. However, they rarely employ the "request" and "advice" strategies, possibly because they consider requesting compliments from others, especially those who they are not close to, to be offensive.

Among the various strategies of compliment responses used by Chinese university graduates, the most prevalent subcategory is "Appreciation". Students in this study often express their appreciation with the phrase "Thanks!" along with cute emojis, as they find it to be the most suitable expression from their perspective. Additionally, many students employ "transfer" strategies in compliment responses, including "reassignment" and "return", which help them maintain modesty and adhere to Leech's (1983) politeness principle.

The study also identified significant gender differences in the use of compliment and compliment response strategies. Females tend to use unbound semantic formulas more frequently than males, while males may employ strategies of bound semantic formulas, such as contrast and information question. Males also show a tendency to accept compliments by adding comments, whereas females often reply with only appreciation by saying "Thanks". In terms of the "transfer" subcategory of compliment responses, females use the "return" strategy more often, while males are more likely to redirect compliments to something or someone else. When disagreeing with compliments, females are more inclined to

acknowledge those comments significantly more than males. In Chinese culture, where conservativeness is valued, people are expected not to directly refuse others.

There are some limitations and suggestions for future research. Firstly, this study relied on data collected from the WeChat platform, and the features of the platform could influence the pragmatic strategies used for compliment and compliment response. It is encouraged to conduct further research on different platforms such as Weibo and QQ to explore the specificity and universality of compliment and compliment response strategies across various social networking sites (Ren, 2018). Secondly, the study collected data from the authentic Moments of WeChat in order to allow for an emic analysis of compliments and compliment responses. However, this criterion for data collection may have influenced the frequencies of the strategies observed. Readers should be cautious and consider that the frequencies of pragmatic strategies of compliments and compliment responses are specific to the corpus used in this study. Lastly, although the examples of compliments and compliment responses were collected from an emic perspective, the taxonomy and analysis of individual strategies were conducted from the researchers' perspective. Future research could employ retrospective interviews or verbal reports (Ericsson and Simon, 1993) to provide insights into the reasoning behind different compliment and compliment response strategies employed by WeChat users, as well as their considerations of politeness when producing compliment responses.

7. References

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