

# Thanks! You look rather dashing yourself.

A contrastive pragmatics investigation of Singaporean and American compliment responses

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## **Abstract**

Set within the framework of the newly established field of variational pragmatics (Schneider and Barron, 2008), this study investigates pragmatic variation between two different regional varieties of English, namely American English and Singaporean English. Specifically, the speech act of compliment responses is compared. The data were collected through written discourse completion tasks (DCT) and responses were analysed and coded using an adapted version of Holmes' (1988) categorization system for compliment responses (CRs). The CRs come from a total of 40 participants and a total of 320 compliment responses were analysed. The DCT was supplemented by an introspective-recall with six participants. The findings demonstrate that the preferred strategy for both groups is in the order of accept, evade and reject. Even so, the Singaporeans use more reject strategies and less accept strategies than the Americans do. Further, the Americans employ more combination strategies than the Singaporeans. The Singaporeans however, employ more non-verbal and paralinguistic cues than the Americans. The results also show differences in the two varieties' attitudes to and perceptions of compliment responses. In addition, the study suggests that compliments in Singapore might be undergoing a change. The findings are particularly important for pedagogical purposes.

## **Keywords**

Variational pragmatics, Compliment responses, CRs, Cross-cultural communication, Intralingual pragmatics, Singaporean English, American English.

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# 1. Introduction

Most research within the field of cross-cultural pragmatics has focused on variation between different languages (see e.g. an overview in Trosborg, 2010). Indeed, the definition of cross-cultural pragmatics has become synonymous with interlingual pragmatic research (Barron & Schneider, 2009), even though the words “cross-cultural” would imply that different cultures, not different languages, were under investigation. In fact, Barron and Schneider highlight that this use of the term “tacitly ignores that there is no one-to-one relationship between languages and cultures” (2009, p. 425). Thus, the term implies that language and culture go hand in hand, i.e. that the one cannot be separated from the other. However, this is necessarily not always the case as different native speakers of a specific language might engage and participate in different cultures. In other words, although people share the same language, they might not share the same culture, and vice versa (c.f. Schneider, 2008; García, 2008). This is important to emphasise as pragmatics, or language in use, is determined and influenced by cultural values.

Further, Barron (2005) points out that most intralingual research that has been carried out within the field of pragmatics has focused on situational variation and little attention has been given to regional and social variation. Research within the field of dialectology has, on the other hand, investigated regional and social variation within a language variety, but emphasis has predominantly been put on phonological, syntactical and lexical features, whereas pragmatic features in large have been ignored (Schneider and Barron, 2008, Mesthrie et al, 2009).

A research gap can thus be identified for studies investigating regional and/or social variation within the same language variety. The term *variational pragmatics*, first used by Barron in 2005, has been proposed for studies aiming to fill this gap. Variational pragmatics “investigates intralingual differences, i.e., pragmatic variation between and across L1 varieties of the same language” and can be conceptualized as the “intersection of pragmatics with sociolinguistics, or more specifically, with dialectology as the study of language variation” (Barron & Schneider, 2009, p. 426).

Responding to the need for more variational pragmatics research, this study aims to investigate pragmatic variation between two different regional L1 varieties of English, namely American English and Singaporean English (for a detailed outline of Singaporean English, see e.g. Alsagoff, 2010; Kachru & Nelson, 1995; Melchers & Shaw, 2011). The pragmatic level of analysis will be at the action level (Schneider and Barron, 2008). Specifically, the speech act of compliment responses (see e.g. Chen, 2010, for an overview) will be compared.

After an overview of seminal theories and models within pragmatics, a literature review of research on cross-cultural/variational pragmatics and compliment responses is presented. A methodology section follows in which decisions and considerations for the study are presented and discussed. Next the results are presented. Finally, the findings are discussed and interpreted in light of previous research, the study’s limitations are examined, areas for future research are explored and the implications of the findings are discussed, particularly in relation to the teaching of pragmatic competence.

## 2. Theoretical background and previous research

### 2.1 Pragmatics: Meaning in interaction – seminal theories and models

#### 2.1.1 Speech act theory

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context and focuses both on the process of meaning-making and the product of communication in interaction. Yule defines pragmatics as “the study of speaker meaning, the study of contextual meaning, the study of how more gets communicated than is said and the study of the expression of relative distance” (1996, p. 3). Knowing the words, the pronunciation and the grammar of a language, does not automatically mean that communication will be successful. We need to be able to decipher the underlying meaning of an utterance, i.e. what the communicative function of the utterance is. Contextual clues and accurate background knowledge help us do so (Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011).

Language philosophers John Austin, John Searle and Paul Grice are considered to be the founding fathers of pragmatics. Austin and Searle’s work focused on how speakers can mean more than what their actual words say, and Grice’s work focused on how hearers deduce the meaning of what is being said (Thomas, 1995). Austin and Searle argued that speakers perform acts when we use language, in other words that we *do* things with words. Language is hence used to do things that go beyond the literal meaning of the words we say. This area of pragmatics has come to be known as *speech act theory*. Austin distinguished between three different kinds of acts that happen whenever we say something; the locutionary act, the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act. The first act refers to the literal meaning of an utterance. The illocutionary act refers to the meaning that goes beyond the locutionary act, i.e., what the speaker’s intention with the utterance is. The perlocutionary act refers to the effect the illocution has on the hearer (Thomas, 1995).

The notion of felicity conditions is central to speech act theory. Austin argued that certain contextual conditions have to be met for an act to function. The utterance must be said by the right person, at the right time, at the right place and with a certain intention. If these conditions are not met, the speech act will not work (Paltridge, 2012). Recognising the illocutionary force behind an utterance is, however, not always an easy task. This is why context and background knowledge are crucial in interpreting the underlying meaning. Moreover, utterances may have more than one illocutionary force, which further can complicate the interpretation of the utterance. The fact that people often choose to be more or less indirect when performing a speech act is another example of the difficulty that lies in interpreting the meaning of the utterance. Further, and relevant to this study, culturally embedded norms for indirectness exist, which adds to the difficulty of deciphering the underlying meaning of the utterance (Paltridge, 2012).

### 2.1.2 The cooperative principle, maxims and implicatures

According to Grice (1975), on the whole, people assume that there is some kind of cooperative principle at work when they go about interpreting what somebody says. This means that people will assume that all participants engaging in conversation will try to make their contribution “such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange” (Grice, 1975, p. 45). Further, Grice proposed that people generally abide to certain sub-principles, or maxims, when interacting with each other. These maxims are the maxims of *quality* (do not say what you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence), *quantity* (make your contribution as informative as is required for the particular purpose and do not make it more informative than is required), *relation* (be relevant) and *manner* (avoid ambiguity and obscurity of expression and be brief and orderly) (Grice, 1975).

It is important to note that Grice was not oblivious to the fact that there are many occasions when people fail to abide by these maxims and that they indeed at times even have to. People may for example flout a maxim, i.e. purposely fail to abide by it, and expect the hearer to understand this, without any intentions of misleading or deceiving. If somebody violates a maxim, on the other hand, he or she might be liable to mislead the other person. Also, maxims may clash, i.e. people will need to choose which maxim to follow if they cannot abide by them all at the same time. The first example, the flouting of a maxim, gives rise to a so called conversational implicature (Grice, 1975). Conversational implicatures refer to “the inference a hearer makes about a speaker’s intended meaning that arises from their use of the literal meaning of what the speaker said, the conversational principle and its maxims” (Paltridge, 2012, pp. 50-1). To work out an implicature, hearers will thus draw on the conventional meaning of the words used, the cooperative principle and its maxims, the linguistic and non-linguistic context of the utterance as well as other items of background knowledge and the fact that all of these are available to both participants and that both participants know or assume that this is the case (Grice, 1975). As we can see, the process of inferencing implicatures is extremely context-sensitive. Different people’s ideas and expectations for what degree maxims can and should be adhered to vary depending on situational, cultural, social and regional factors (Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011).

### 2.1.3 Politeness theory and face

Another key area within pragmatics is the notion of politeness and face. As we have seen, for a number of reasons people do not always abide by the maxims, or they do so to different degrees. Politeness theory, first developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), helps us understand why people sometimes choose to deviate from directness and explicitness. Politeness theory “aims at explaining contextual and cultural variability in linguistic actions: what social motivations are inherent in and what social meanings are attached to the choice of verbal [politeness] strategies for the accomplishment of communicative goals” (Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011, p. 152). Politeness strategies are intentional and are used to maintain one’s own and the other’s face. The notion of face, which politeness theory draws on, comes from the works of Goffman (1967) and refers to the public self-image of a person and when speaking to someone, people need to look



out for other people's face as well as their own. Both Goffman and Brown and Levinson further distinguish between positive and negative face. Positive face is a person's wish to be thought well of by others, whereas negative face concerns having the right not to be imposed on (which resembles the notions of involvement and independence discussed by Scollon, Wong-Scollon & Jones, 2011). Maintaining face, both yours and that of your interlocutor, is seen as a basic motivation of human interaction (Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011). As many speech acts are imposing, or face threatening, speakers must use different politeness strategies to tone down or redress any face threatening acts (FTA). Being direct or telling someone the full truth, is therefore not always a possible option. Brown and Levinson recognise different strategies that speakers employ when interacting. Which strategy is chosen depends on the assessed size of the FTA based on the contextual variables of social distance, power and rating of imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Another politeness model was introduced by Leech (1983): the politeness principle with conversational maxims, which are in many ways similar to Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. These maxims are: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy. Pomerantz's (1978) work on compliment responses, discussed below in section 2.3, is much centred on the maxims of modesty and agreement. As will be seen, these two maxims are central in responding to compliments. These maxims were, just as Grice's, not seen as rules but statement of norms which speakers might follow (Thomas, 1995).

However seminal and influential these models and theories of pragmatics are, it must be mentioned that they have been critiqued and questioned, among other things for being too ethnocentric – the norm for the models have been western- and Anglo-specific and differences in the manner people interact due to cultural variation has largely been ignored (cf. Wierzbicka 2003; Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011; Cutting, 2008). In relation to this, Thomas argues that Leech's approach, despite having many flaws, is the best for comparing and explaining cross-cultural differences in the understanding of politeness and the use of politeness strategies (1995). This brings us to the study of cross-cultural pragmatics.

## **2.2 Cross-cultural pragmatics and variational pragmatics**

As already touched upon, different people's perceptions of what counts as appropriate/expected/polite etc. to say in different situations, varies greatly depending on context. Cultural variation is also a crucial component in interaction between people. People from different cultures often follow different norms and patterns when dealing with pragmatic issues and these norms are often rooted in different cultural values (Wierzbicka, 2003). Hence, what people mean when they say something, and how it is interpreted, often differs across cultures. The study of cross-cultural pragmatics focuses on how people from different cultures communicate, in different contexts. Both pragmalinguistic strategies (linguistic competence, i.e. knowing how to use the language to get across one's meaning) and sociopragmatic strategies (sociological competence, i.e. knowing what is appropriate to say when based on the customs and values of the culture) are compared, often focusing on situational variation. Cross-cultural pragmatic studies are synchronic and often contrastive in nature (Cutting, 2008). One major focus of study within cross-cultural pragmatics compares realization

patterns of individual speech acts, such as apologies, requests, compliments, etc., across different languages and cultures (Blum-Kulka & Hamo, 2011).

Much of the research discussed in section 2.1 is based on the assumption that interaction builds on universal principles. However, some scholars, such as Wierzbicka (2003), believe that human interaction is not based on universal principles, and that it hence would be beneficial to describe interaction through a so called ‘natural semantic metalanguage’ as the rules for interaction differ so greatly between different cultures. Although the debate and discussion of whether speech acts are universal or not is still ongoing, many scholars believe that speech acts themselves are universal, but the sociopragmatic norms deciding the appropriate form and execution of a given speech act vary between cultures (DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Yu, 2003; Schneider & Barron, 2008; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Herbert 1991).

However, as mentioned in the introduction, most cross-cultural research within pragmatics has focused on variation between different languages, under the influence of situational factors such as social distance, power and rating of imposition. Languages have been viewed as homogenous wholes and cross-cultural pragmatic comparisons between them have paid little attention to social and/or regional variation. The same applies to intralingual pragmatic research – focus has been on situational variation and social and regional variations have been largely neglected (Barron, 2005; Schneider and Barron, 2008; Clyne, 2006). Dialectology, which *does* study social and regional variation within a language, has on the other hand overwhelmingly focused on phonological, grammatical and lexical features, leaving pragmatic features almost ignored. Pragmatic variation due to social and regional factors has hence been a heavily neglected field of study (Schneider and Barron, 2008). This research gap gave rise to a new sub-field of pragmatics named *variational pragmatics*, which can be seen as the intersection between dialectology and pragmatics. Before Barron and Schneider established the field (2008), only a limited amount of studies had investigated regional and/or social pragmatic variation (most of them had been conducted on variation in Spanish, e.g. García, 2008; Márquez Reiter & Placencia, 2004), but as the need for more research within the field has become better known, more research is starting to take place in the field. Naturally, many researchers were sensitive to social and regional variation in pragmatics before the new sub-field was established. Wierzbicka (1985), Schlieben-Lange & Weydt, (1978) and the researchers involved in the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) (1989) did, for example, discuss the fact that social and regional variation has an impact on language use conventions (Schneider and Barron, 2008). Nevertheless, most studies continued to focus on pragmatic variation between different languages or on intralingual pragmatic variation, both from situational perspectives, disregarding regional and/or social variation.

Schneider and Barron (2008) provide a detailed analytical framework for variational pragmatics, which consists of two parts. The first part specifies type of intralingual language variation and the second part specifies the level of pragmatic analysis. Five different types of intralingual language variation are recognised: regional, socio-economic, ethnic, gender and age variation (mostly referred to as macro-social variation). Although not included in the framework, educational and religious variation are also discussed as factors likely to influence language use. Regional variation (which

is the focus of this study) originally referred to sub-national varieties (different regional varieties of German spoken in Germany for example). However, in the present context, regional variation also includes national varieties of a language (for example Spanish spoken in Colombia, Spain and Argentina). Other examples (apart from those mentioned above) of pluricentric languages include English, French, Arabic and Dutch. At the present stage, variational pragmatics focuses on the different types of macro-social variation discussed above, and not on micro-social variation (also referred to as situational variation) such as power, social distance and ranking of imposition.

Schneider and Barron (2008) argue that by contrast to phonology, syntax and semantics, no well-established levels for analysis of pragmatics seem to exist. The reasons for this, they argue, are many. For the framework of variational pragmatics, they distinguish five different levels of pragmatic analysis, which are the formal, actional, interactional, topic and organisational level. These different levels are founded on an “integrative model of spoken discourse which incorporates approaches to pragmatics from different disciplines, including speech act theory, discourse analysis and conversation analysis” (Schneider & Barron, 2008, p. 19). The present study will investigate regional variation through the analysis of the actional level, a level which concerns speech acts, often studied in terms of directness and politeness, both in terms of its communicative function and communicative form.

Although I would prefer to use the term ‘cross-cultural’ (cf. Thomas, 1983) for investigating regional and/ or social pragmatic variation within a language (as in essence, we are dealing with cross-cultural comparisons), I feel it is wiser to adopt the term ‘variational’ as Barron (2005) proposes, since the term ‘cross-cultural’ carries heavy connotations toward comparisons between two different languages.

### **2.3 Compliments and compliment responses**

The speech acts of compliments and compliment responses have been extensively studied, both from an intralingual perspective (cf. Pomerantz, 1978; Holmes, 1988; Herbert, 1989; Maíz-Arévalo, 2013) and cross-culturally (cf. Wolfson, 1981; Tang and Zhang, 2009; Golato, 2005; Nelson et al, 1996; Razi 2013; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). Following are two examples (taken from Tang and Zhang, 2009) of what defines a compliment:

To be heard as a compliment an utterance must refer to something which is positively valued by the participants and attributed to the addressee. (Holmes, 1988, p. 454)

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly bestows credit upon the addressee for some possession, skill, characteristic, or the like, that is positively evaluated by the speaker and addressee. (Hobbs, 2003, p. 249)

Generally speaking, compliments come with positive connotations, as seen in the definitions above. Holmes states that compliments are “positively affective speech acts, the most obvious function they serve is to oil the social wheels, paying attention to positive face wants and thus increasing or consolidating solidarity between people” (1988, p. 462). Compliments are, however, not always viewed as positive speech acts.

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's notion of positive and negative politeness (1987), many researchers stress that compliments can be seen as face-threatening acts, if they for instance are uttered in the 'wrong' circumstances or by the 'wrong' person, leading the receiver of the compliment to feel for example uneasy or defensive (Holmes, 1988; Maíz-Arévalo, 2012; Tang and Zhang, 2009). Given this, Tang & Zhang stress that "whether a compliment is a positive or negative speech act depends upon a number of factors, including context, cultural protocol and individual interpretations" (2009, p. 327). In a sense one could claim that whether a speech act is perceived as a compliment or not, depends on the interpretation of the receiver.

Seeing as giving compliments can be a rather complicated and delicate business, it is no surprise that responding to compliments can be so too. Pomerantz (1978) stresses that responding to compliments can impose a problem for the interlocutor as a compliment response (CR) often entails a clash between different politeness maxims – recipients of compliments have to avoid disagreeing with the compliment and at the same time avoid self-praise (Leech, 1983). We do however most often respond to compliments – unless the complimenting and responding takes place online, in which case people often opt out of responding to a compliment entirely (cf. Maíz-Arévalo, 2013), and we seem to use different types of strategies when we do so. Pomerantz (1978) recognized four different strategies that the recipient of a compliment could use to respond: accept, agree, reject or disagree. Holmes (1988) also recognized different strategies recipients used in replying, and developed Pomerantz's categories further, namely to; accept, reject or evade, each with several sub-categories (referred to as macro and micro levels respectively).

Further, some research has found that because of the delicate and difficult nature of responding to compliments, responders often use a combination of strategies, by for example thanking and then giving an informative comment or warding off the compliment to an object or third party (cf. Tang & Zhang, 2009; Yu, 2003).

The study of CRs in cross-cultural contexts is important, as compliments are recurrent elements of interaction, but at the same time, as we have seen, frequently problematic speech acts (Tang & Zhang, 2009). In fact, much cross-cultural research comparing the speech act of CRs has found that the way people respond to compliments across languages and cultures varies greatly. This fact is important to be aware of for anyone communicating cross-culturally (which in essence means everybody). Golato (2005), for example, found that Germans generally accept compliments. Other studies have found that Chinese people speaking in English tend to reject compliments, whereas Americans are more inclined to accept them (Chen, 1993). Tang and Zhang found that Chinese speakers of Mandarin used less accept and more evade and reject strategies than Australian speakers of English (2009).

Furthermore, different cultures seem to differ in how they respond to compliments depending on what it is that is being complemented, i.e. appearance, character, possession or ability (Chen, 1993; Tang & Zhang, 2009). For example, Tang and Zhang (2009) found that Australians used more accept strategies regardless of what they were being complemented on, whilst the Chinese used evade more for the settings of character and possession.

It can be noted that most studies investigating compliment responses have compared CRs between two different languages. Above, only a handful of these studies were mentioned. A few exceptions do however exist and among these are Herbert's (1989) study on compliments and CRs in South African and American English (discussed in section 2.3.2 below) and Holmes' (1988) study on compliments and CRs among men and women in New Zealand, both of which investigated compliment responses at an intralingual level.

As section 2.3 illustrates, what counts as an appropriate and polite response to a compliment varies depending on the norms and values of each culture (Herbert, 1989). It thus seems likely that the compliment responses given by speakers of Singaporean and American English may vary, which this study has as its aim to investigate.

### 2.3.1 Previous research on Singaporean CRs

To my knowledge, the only study that has previously investigated Singaporean compliment responses is Lee's from 2009. In this study, compliments and CRs were collected from naturally occurring data in the context of Chinese New Year festivities. Informants were both men and women, all ethnically Chinese. The exact age intervals are unclear, but the oldest informants were around 50 years of age. The study shows that compliments and CRs in the context of the investigation mainly play an important phatic role. Moreover, most CR strategies used were those of the non-acceptance type, which conforms to the findings from other research on Chinese CRs (cf. Gu 1990; Chen 1993; Tang & Zhang, 2009). Another interesting finding was that a jury consisting of 250 students majoring in Chinese, judged the non-acceptance responses (through a survey) to be largely conventional in nature, rather than a genuine rejection. The researcher argues that it is typical of Chinese politeness culture for people to reject a compliment outwardly, while secretly accepting it with joy internally (2009).

### 2.3.2 Previous research on American CRs

Studies on compliment responses from an American English perspective have, on the other hand, been extensive and it would thus be impossible to discuss them all in this space. Nevertheless, a few studies will be discussed here. One of the first studies on compliment responses to be conducted on American CRs was the one by Pomerantz in 1978, who studied CRs from a Conversation analysis (CA) approach (which meant that no background data of the informants were compiled). As mentioned in section 2.3, Pomerantz found that CRs often entail a clash of maxims. This resulted in recipients both agreeing and disagreeing in their response to the compliments, often in the form of downgrading, meaning that the compliment is neither totally agreed with nor totally disagreed with. Herbert (1989), comparing American and South African English compliments and CRs, using naturally occurring data, found that American speakers of English tend to accept or evade/deflect CRs. Informants were university students; gender ratio was not specified. A total of 1062 compliment/CR exchanges were gathered and analysed. Chen (1993), comparing American CRs and Chinese CRs through Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), similarly found that Americans tend to accept compliments. The reason for this, Chen argues, is closely tied to the notion of

self-image: Americans accept compliments because they see self-denigration as damaging to one's face. Informants were university students and provided a total of 339 compliment responses. In Nelson et al's study (1996), American English and Syrian Arabic compliment responses were compared. Data were collected through interviews, which yielded 87 American compliment/compliment response exchanges. The interviewers were middle class graduate university students, two females (ages 26 and 46) and one male (age 32). 87 compliment responses were collected from 47 females and 40 males. Results showed that 50 percent of the CRs used acceptance strategies, 45 percent used mitigation strategies (a mix of Holmes' accept and evade strategies) and only three percent used reject strategies.

It should be mentioned, that the researchers in the above studies used somewhat different systems for coding the CR strategies (cf. Chen, 2010 for a discussion on this). This means that certain category overlaps exist, as became clear by the comparison of Nelson et al and Holmes' categories. Consequently, comparisons between studies using different coding systems become difficult.

## **2.4 Research question and hypothesis**

The research question for this study is thus: What differences/similarities can be found between a group of Singaporean English speakers and a group of American English speakers, with regard to their perceptions of the speech act of compliment responses?

Based on previous research it seems reasonable to hypothesise that the Singaporean speakers of English in this study (all of whom are ethnically Chinese) would employ more evade and reject strategies and less accept strategies when responding to compliments than the American English speakers.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Data collection instrument

The methodology underlying variational pragmatics consists of two rules of thumb, outlined by Barron and Schneider (2009). In short, these two principles are that research within variational pragmatics always ought to be contrastive (two or more varieties of a language are contrasted) and empirical. In the present study, a written discourse completion task (DCT) was constructed to elicit comparable and empirical data from two different varieties of English, namely Singaporean English and American English (see appendix A). The DCT was adapted from the one used in Tang & Zhang's study (2009), and consisted of eight situations relating to four different topics (two of each), namely appearance, character, ability and possession. The topics of appearance and ability were twofold – one compliment for appearance was assigned to clothes and the other to the person him/herself, and one compliment for ability was assigned to physical ability and the other to mental ability.

#### Situation 1 (appearance)

Your friends have organised a party to celebrate the end of semester. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends says: "Hey, you look great! You're really handsome/beautiful today."

#### Situation 2 (character)

You have helped your friends (a couple) to look after their child for a whole day at your place. When they come back to pick up the child, they say "Thank you so much! You're really helpful and kind."

#### Situation 3 (ability)

After you have completed a presentation, your classmate says: "Wow, that's brilliant, I hope I can do it the way you did. Well done!"

#### Situation 4 (possession)

You have bought a new mobile phone. When you receive a call, your friend notices that your phone is a different one. Having looked at it and tried some functions, s/he says: "Wow, how smart! My mobile does not have such functions. This phone is really great!"

#### Situation 5 (appearance)

You and your friend meet up for lunch at a café. After having greeted you, your friend says: "I really like your trousers! That colour really suits you."

#### Situation 6 (character)

You and your classmate have been trying to fix a computer problem for a few hours when your friend cries out: “Wow, you are so incredibly patient! This thing is driving me crazy and you’re staying all calm and determined.”

#### Situation 7 (ability)

You are a member of a sports team and have just come off the field after a game. Some of your friends come to meet you, and one of them says: “Hey, you did such a good job out there today. I’m really impressed by how fast you run!”

#### Situation 8 (possession)

You have recently bought a new car, and are putting it to use by giving your friend a lift into town. Your friend says: “I like your car, it’s really cool! You’re so lucky!”

Situations 1-4 were taken and adapted from Tang and Zhang’s study (2009), and situations 5-8 were constructed by me, keeping to the same style as Tang and Zhang’s. The reason four more situations were added was to be able to do a more in depth analysis of the strategies used. Further, previous research has shown that most compliments are given on the four different topics used in the DCT (appearance, character, ability and possession) (cf. Chen, 1993; Holmes, 1988). It therefore seemed reasonable to use and build on Tang and Zhang’s DCT situations. With respect to situational factors, the situations in the DCT are set as interactions between friends/classmates. Consequentially, findings from this study might not be representative for interaction between people outside of this context.

DCTs have been widely used in cross-cultural pragmatics research, but the instrument has also been much debated and criticized. The main objection to using DCTs is that they do not necessarily represent real word interaction. In other words, DCTs elicit what people *think* they would say in different situations, and not what they *actually* say (Golato, 2003; Yuan 2001). Also, a written DCT is not a so called *on-line* task in which language is used spontaneously, but rather an *off-line* task in which the participant has time to consciously think about what he or she is going to say (Golato, 2003). There are, however, both strengths and weaknesses to every data collection technique. DCTs allow researchers to control for certain variables, gather sufficient data quickly and efficiently and provide a guide for stereotypically perceived requirements for a socially appropriate response (Beebe & Cummings, 1996; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). Depending on the aim of the research, one data technique may be better suited than the other. A DCT was deemed an appropriate data gathering technique for the present study as it focuses on participants’ perceived appropriate CRs, enables control for variables and allows sufficient data to be gathered in a short period of time, from outside of the countries whose language varieties are being researched.



The DCT was created in Google Drive as a survey and was posted online in order for the participants to gain easy access to it. Participants were provided with information about the research and were informed that they by taking the survey gave their consent to the answers being used in the research outlined for them (see appendix A).

### **3.2 Participants**

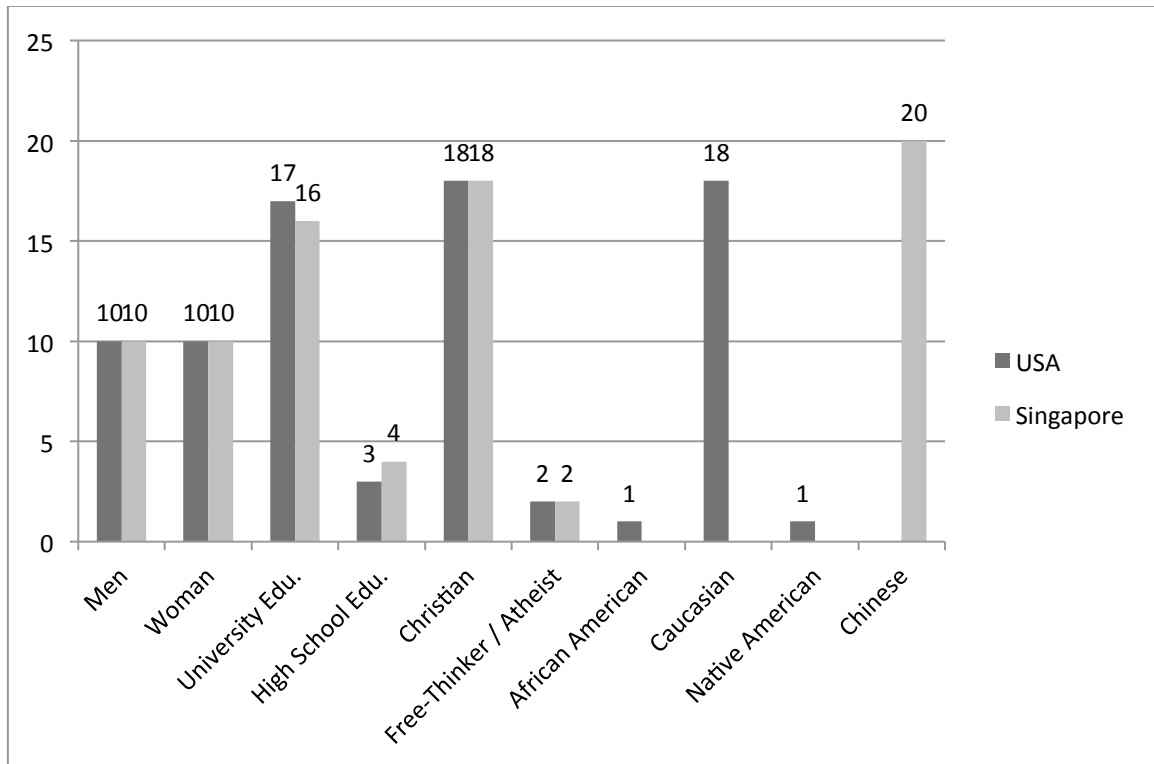
After having piloted the DCT, the link to the online DCT was distributed to people in the USA and Singapore, and they in their turn were asked to distribute the link to more people. The American and Singaporean varieties were chosen out of convenience, as I knew I would be able to easily access people willing to participate. Before completing the DCT, participants were asked to provide some background information about themselves (see appendix A), to ensure participants were suitable informants. Because of the online format of the DCT it was impossible to control exactly who took the survey. Participants were therefore asked to state how long they had lived in America and Singapore respectively. This information was needed to give some indication of possible influence from other regional varieties. Further, all participants were asked to state first language and Singaporean participants were also asked to state official mother tongue for clarification purposes<sup>1</sup>. Age, gender and to a large extent ethnicity were controlled for to ensure homogeneity. Accidently, religion and education level turned out to be very similar for both groups as well. A total of 55 participants took the survey (29 Singaporeans and 26 Americans), but five of those did not meet the set requirements (too old, too young, had lived most of their life abroad, did not follow instructions, belonged to nationality not tested), which meant that the CRs from these participants were disregarded.

Further, gender was unevenly distributed among the American participants (10 males vs. 12 females), which meant that in order to keep the gender variable controlled, two female participants' responses were randomly eliminated. Moreover, to keep the number of participants equal for both varieties, six participants' responses were randomly eliminated from the Singaporean data, resulting in 20 participants from Singapore and 20 participants from America, each with an even distribution of gender (10 males and 10 females). The analysed CRs thus come from a total of 40 participants and a total of 320 compliment responses were analysed. In diagram 1 below, a profile of the 40 participants can be found.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Singapore, a person's official mother tongue might not be the same as a person's first language. For example, a person's first language might be English but the official mother tongue Chinese (which was the case for all of the Singaporean informants). Participants were asked to state both to make sure they had interpreted the first language question correctly.

**Diagram 1. Participants.**



The 40 participants whose CRs were analysed were all aged between 20-35 years. The average age of the Americans was 27.2 years and the average age of the Singaporeans were 22.45. As already mentioned, the participants were equally gendered. Further, as the diagram above illustrates, most of the participants came from the same level of educational background. 85 % of the American participants and 80 % of the Singaporean participants came from a college/university background. The two groups were also very homogenous in respect to religious beliefs. 90 % from both groups stated that they were Christian. Further, 100 % of the Singaporean participants were ethnically Chinese, 90 % of the American informants were white/Caucasian, 5 % were African American and 5 % were Native American.

### **3.3 Coding and analysis of data**

The data were coded and analysed using mainly Holmes' (1988) categorisation system for CRs. This CR categorisation system has three macro strategies – *accept*, *reject* and *evade*, and eleven micro strategies, as shown in table 2 below. This categorisation system was chosen for its clear treatment of CRs and because it is the most preferred and well-received categorisation system for CRs (Chen, 2010). However, when analysing the data, it became clear that a few additional categories were needed. Three categories from Chen's (1993), were added to the accept strategy, namely those of *Joking*, *Offering object of compliment or help* and *Encouraging*. Further, a fourth new

category was added by myself as no other category seemed to exist for this type of strategy, namely those CRs that are impossible to categorize, as there is no way of knowing whether the CR is an acceptance or a rejection of the compliment. This category was named *Uncategorizable response* (see examples below in table 2).

In addition, following Tang and Zhang (2009), Yu's (2003) category of *combination strategies* (a strategy consisting of two or more strategies) was employed in analysing the responses, as many responses show an employment of this strategy. This category thus provides a possibility to examine CRs at a discourse level.

**Table 2. Adapted version of Holmes' CR categories (examples from my data)**

Macro level CRs	Micro level CRs	Examples
Accept	Appreciation token	"Thanks"; "Thank you"
	Agreeing utterance	"I know"; "I agree"; "I really like it too"
	Downgrading/qualifying utterance	"It's nothing"; "I still only use it to call people"; "No problem"; "My pleasure"; "It's just today"
	Return compliment	"I'm sure you'll do better"; "Your kids are really well behaved"
	Joking	"I'm not handsome other days?"
	Offering object of compliment (or help) Encouraging	"Next time you can borrow it"; "Let me know if I can help" "You should get one too!"
Reject	Disagreeing utterance	"I don't think so"; "Nah it's nothing special"
	Question accuracy	"Are you serious?"; "Really?"; "Am I patient?"
	Challenge sincerity	"Stop lying"; "Don't joke about it"
Evade	Shift credit	"Couldn't have done it without my teammates"
	Informative comment	"I got it from..."
	Ignore	"Are you sure your phone doesn't have that?"
	Request reassurance	"Really?"
Uncategorizable response		"mmhmm"; "Laughs"; "Ok"

As is always the case when categorizing and coding data, some dubious cases arise. Several steps were however taken in ensuring that the data were coded accurately. For example, the word *really*, or the phrase *are you serious*, could be categorized in different ways depending on the intonation of the utterances. With a rising intonation, the utterances would most likely be *requests of reassurance*, whereas with a falling intonation the utterances would most likely be a *questioning of accuracy*. As there was

no way to find out the intended intonation, textual clues were examined. If what followed these utterances were accept strategies, the utterance was coded as *request reassurance* (belonging to the macro category of *evade*). See examples in table 3 below.

**Table 3. Examples of CRs**

---

CR 229: Really? Thanks.

CR 185: Huh are you serious? -blushes- thanks!

CR 259: Really? It went better than I thought it would, thanks!

---

However, if what followed these utterances were reject strategies, the utterance was coded as *question accuracy* (belonging to the macro category of *reject*). See examples in table 4 below.

**Table 4. Examples of CRs**

---

CR 235: Really? I think I screwed it up quite badly ):

CR 237: Are you serious? I did not plan for this to happen; I literally just picked the pair that was sitting on top of my trousers pile.

---

Further, compliment situation 2 (see section 3.1) elicited responses which were rather difficult to categorize. Most participants from both groups replied using phrases such as *no problem, you're welcome, my pleasure*. It could be argued that the participants thus are ignoring the compliment given to them, replying only to the "thank you so much" utterance. If this were the case, the reply would have been categorized as *ignore*, a sub-category of *evade*. However, it could also be argued that the participants were not ignoring the compliment but were simply using a *downgrading/qualifying* strategy, which is a sub-category of the *accept* strategy. In this case, as well as in any dubious cases from the data, two people were asked to help with the interpretation and categorization of the responses. After separate discussions with each one of them, the types of responses given in situation 2 were categorized as *downgrading/qualifying*.

Moreover, it was difficult to decide whether some responses were intended as a joke or not. For example, CR 30 states "Patience is a virtue!" (in response to situation 6). One interpretation of this response is that it was said in a joking manner, but it could also be argued that the person responding this way was serious and meant it as an agreeing statement, or as an informative comment. In order to decide which response is the most likely, the other responses given by the same person were examined. This participant had responded with jokes in other situations, and therefore it was deemed very plausible that CR 30 was intended as a joke as well. This CR was thus categorized as using the strategy of *joking*.

Further, at times some limitations of the categorization system became clear, especially when categorizing combination strategies, which there were many. For example, in CR 307; "no lah I don't think so. but I'm sure yours will be good!" (in response to situation

3), the person disagrees with the compliment but then returns the compliment. The model classifies this as a reject + accept strategy, which means that this response will count as an instance of using an accept strategy, when really the person cannot be said to accept the compliment, but is rather disagreeing and then turning the praise back to the person giving the compliment. It is thus difficult to categorize combination strategies such as this strictly according to a model, but one must study what is actually happening at discourse level. Hence, this particular CR, as well as others which followed very similar patterns, were coded as rejections and not combination strategies of reject + accept.

Relating to this, Groom and Littlemore (2011), for example, discuss and emphasize the inevitable dilemmas that arise when categorizing data. They stress that categories are “ad hoc creations that emerge from a particular research context, are susceptible to change, and have fuzzy boundaries” (2011, p. 87). Much data from this study support this view on categories, as the categories proposed in the model (and other similar models) are not simple and uncomplicated reflections of reality.

As already mentioned, all dubious cases were discussed with two other raters. It would have been ideal to have these raters go through all the data for double-checking, but time limitations did not make this possible.

### **3.4 Introspective recalls**

The DCT was supplemented by an introspective-recall with six participants (three from each variety) who had taken the DCT in order to be able to deepen the analysis of the CRs. The introspective recalls were semi-structured, meaning that participants were first encouraged to generally reflect on their thought process while taking the survey and their experience with the DCT, and were then asked prepared follow-up questions when needed (see appendix B). These six participants were chosen based on availability. The introspective recalls took place through Skype with four participants and face-to-face with two participants. The data were recorded and transcribed, using a loose transcription as the focus was not on the language but on the ideas that the participants presented (see appendix C). The retrospective recalls added another dimension to the study in that they revealed the thoughts of some of the participants on taking the DCT, which is valuable to compare with the written results from the DCT. However, as mentioned earlier, there are strengths and weaknesses to every data collection technique. Groom and Littlemore (2011) highlight that introspective recalls have the disadvantage of being highly subjective. Participants might not be able to accurately recall what their thoughts were at the time of the activity, and they are likely to not be entirely objective in what they report. Further, participants might report what they think the researcher wants them to say. However, it is likely that introspective recalls will give some indication of the thought process of the participant, and when used with caution, they can be an important complement to another data gathering method (Groom & Littlemore, 2011).

## 4. Results

As seen, the aim of this study is to investigate the speech act of compliment responses in Singaporean English and American English. Again, the research question for this study is: What differences/similarities can be found between a group of Singaporean English speakers and a group of American English speakers, with regard to their perceptions of the speech act of compliment responses?

In this section, the findings of the use of compliment responses from the two English varieties are presented in four parts. The first part presents the overall distribution of the compliment responses, the second part presents combination strategies used, the third part highlights the use of non-verbal and paralinguistic cues when responding to CRs and the fourth part presents the results from the introspective recalls.

### 4.1 Overall distribution of CRs

In table 5 below, the overall distribution of CRs in number of instances can be found.

**Table 5. Overall distribution of CRs**

<b>Macro CRs</b>	<b>Micro CRs</b>	<b>American</b>		<b>Singaporean</b>	
Accept	Appreciation token	81		68	
	Agreeing utterance	28		19	
	Downgrading utterance	37		37	
	Return compliment	17		20	
	Joking	18		5	
	Offering object/help	5		5	
	Encouraging	5		8	
	<b>Sub total</b>		<b>191</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>162</b>
Reject	Disagreeing utterance	1		14	
	Question accuracy	0		4	
	Challenge sincerity	0		1	
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>9%</b>
Evade	Shift credit	5		13	
	Informative comment	32		9	
	Ignore	0		2	
	Request reassurance	1		4	
	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>13%</b>
Uncategorizable response		<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3%</b>

As can be seen, the preferred strategy for both groups is in the order of accept, evade and reject. In other words, both the Americans and the Singaporeans accept the most and reject the least. Even so, the Singaporeans accept less and reject more compliments than the Americans do. Strikingly, only one instance of a reject strategy was found in the American data. The Americans, however, use more evade strategies than the Singaporeans, when counting all occurring instances (see subtotal of evade strategies in table 5). Interestingly though, when looking closer at the numbers we see that the reason for this is the heavy usage of informative comments. Only five of those 32 instances (see American evade strategies in table 5) are “pure” informative comments, that is, only five instances of this strategy were used by themselves or in combination with another strategy from the same macro category. The remaining 27 instances of this strategy (informative comment), were used in combination with another strategy, all from the accept category. If only pure evade strategies are counted, that is when evade strategies are used alone without any combinations from other macro strategies, the Singaporeans do in fact use more evade strategies than the Americans, which can be seen in table 6 below.

**Table 6. Pure strategies**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>American</b>	<b>Singaporean</b>
Accept pure	121	107
Evade pure	8	12
Reject pure	1	18

Table 7 below provides examples of pure CRs.

**Table 7. Examples of pure CRs**

<b>American: Accept strategies</b>
CR 76 ( <i>agreeing utterance</i> ): I know, I love it!
CR 68 ( <i>appreciation token + agreeing utterance</i> ): Thanks, I like it too
<b>Singaporean: Accept strategies</b>
CR 217 ( <i>appreciation token + return compliment</i> ): hahaha thank you, you look great too
CR 178 ( <i>downgrading/qualifying utterance</i> ): You’re welcome
<b>American: Reject strategy</b>
CR 150 ( <i>disagreeing utterance</i> ): oh no I am pretty frustrated myself
<b>Singaporean: Reject strategies</b>
CR 184 ( <i>disagreeing utterance</i> ): nah, it’s nothing special
CR 211 ( <i>disagreeing utterance</i> ): hahaha nah
<b>American: Evade strategies</b>
CR 46 ( <i>shift credit</i> ): I drink a lot of green tea
CR 143 ( <i>shift credit</i> ): I think it was just the adrenaline

---

**Singaporean: Evade strategies**

---

CR 204 (*informative comment*): Oh it's a Samsung S3, it's not that new

CR 287 (*shift credit*): Thank God for helping me it's not my own effort!

---

*Note:* The serial numbers of CRs in the table, and in all following tables with examples of CRs, are taken from the coding of the data.

## 4.2 Combination strategies

Both the Americans and the Singaporeans used many combination strategies when responding to CRs. This means that two strategies, either from the same macro group or from a different macro group, were used. The Americans used combination strategies nearly 50 % of the time, whereas the Singaporeans only used combination strategies one third of the time. See table 8 below.

**Table 8. Usage of combination strategies**

---

**Americans**

Single strategies: 89

Combination strategies: 71

**Singaporeans**

Single strategies: 105

Combination strategies: 55

---

The most preferred combination strategy for both groups was by far to use different strategy combinations from the micro category of accept, in other words, to employ an accept + accept strategy, which table 9 below illustrates. Further, it is interesting to notice that the participants from both groups employed very similar accept + accept strategies, both in terms of which strategies were used together and how often they were used that way.

**Table 9. Accept combination strategies (shown in numbers)**

---

<b>Accept Combos</b>	<b>American</b>	<b>Singaporean</b>
Appreciation token + agreeing utterance	9	3
<b>Appreciation token + Downgrading/qualifying utterance</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
Appreciation token + Return compliment	13	13
<b>Appreciation token + Joking</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
Appreciation token + Offering object/help	3	2

---



<b>Appreciation token + Encouraging</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Agreeing utterance + Downgrading/qualifying utterance	0	0
<b>Agreeing utterance + Return compliment</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
Agreeing utterance + Joking	1	0
<b>Agreeing utterance + Offering object/help</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>
Agreeing utterance + Encouraging	2	2
<b>Downgrading/qualifying utterance + Return compliment</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
Downgrading/qualifying utterance + Joking	1	0
<b>Downgrading/qualifying utterance + Offering object/help</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>
Downgrading/qualifying utterance + Encouraging	0	0
<b>Return Compliment + Joking</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Return Compliment + Offering object/help	1	0
<b>Return Compliment + Encouraging</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Joking + Offering object/help	0	0
<b>Joking + Encouraging</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Offering object/help + Encouraging	0	0
<b>Sum total</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>36</b>

As can be seen, for both groups, most strategies employed within this category followed the pattern of an appreciation token in combination with another strategy. The strategy of *appreciation token + return compliment* was the most popular combination strategy within this category. Examples of accept + accept strategies can be found in table 10 below.

**Table 10. Examples of accept combination strategies**

---

**American**

---

CR 37 (*appreciation token + agreeing utterance*): Thank you! I loved them when I saw them too

CR 1 (*appreciation token + return compliment*): why thank you! You look rather dashing yourself!

CR 153 (*appreciation + joking*): Oh thanks. Keeping it classy.

---

**Singaporean**

---

CR 186 (*appreciation + downgrading/qualifying utterance*): Oh, thanks! My pleasure.

CR 181 (*appreciation + return compliment*): Thanks, you look great today too!

CR 258 (*downgrading/qualifying utterance + return compliment*): No problem! He/she was really good today!

---

In regard to the other two macro categories, reject and evade, there were no evade + evade strategy combinations at all and only one instance of a reject + reject strategy combination, which was provided by a Singaporean informant (*question accuracy + disagreeing utterance*).

The next most common strategy combination, again for both groups, was that of the combination of an accept strategy + an evade strategy, which can be seen in table 11 below. Macro level combinations which no participants employed (i.e., reject + evade) are not listed in the table.

**Table 11. Combination strategies at macro level**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>American</b>	<b>Singaporean</b>
Accept + evade	29	13
Reject + accept	0	1
Evade + accept	0	4

As Table 11 above illustrates, the Singaporeans employed a few more combination strategies using different macro constellations than the Americans. The evade + accept combination strategy was discussed in detail in the method section and examples of these strategies can be found in table 3.

Some differences in regard to which accept + evade strategies the participants from the different varieties used could be seen. The Americans used the evade strategy of *informative comment*, in combination with either the strategy of *appreciation token* or an *agreeing utterance*, the most. The Singaporeans on the other hand used far less combinations within this category than the Americans, and the combinations they did use followed a somewhat different pattern than those used by the Americans. Table 12 shows in detail which micro level strategies were used together from the accept + evade strategies.

**Table 12. Accept + Evade strategies**

<b>Accept + evade strategies</b>	<b>American</b>	<b>Singaporean</b>
Appreciation token + informative comment	16	6
<b>Appreciation token + shift credit</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
Agreeing utterance + informative comment	8	0
<b>Agreeing utterance + shift credit</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Downgrading/qualifying utterance + informative comment	2	0

Examples of the different combinations are provided in table 13 below.

**Table 13. Examples of accept + evade strategies**

<b>American</b>
CR 53 ( <i>appreciation token + informative comment</i> ): Thanks, I got ‘em at...
CR 60 ( <i>agreeing utterance + informative comment</i> ): I love it. It really helps having a smart phone if I am looking up directions or need to Google something.
<b>Singaporean</b>
CR 202 ( <i>appreciation token + informative comment</i> ): Thanks. It was fun to take care of your child. (And tell them of any funny incidents that happened with their child that day).
CR 231 ( <i>appreciation token + shift credit</i> ): Thanks, my coach trained me well.

### **4.3 Non-verbal and paralinguistic elements**

An interesting feature that was noticeable when coding the data was the amount of non-verbal and paralinguistic cues, such as smileys, laughter, meta comments and emphasis, that the Singaporean participants provided. The American participants did also provide this type of elements, but not to the same extent as the Singaporeans. In the Singaporean data, 50 instances of these types of cues could be found, but in the American data only 11 instances were found. Further, all but one of these 11 instances provided by the American participants were used in connection with a joke. The Singaporeans on the other hand, used them in connection with many different types of responses (jokes being in a minority). Examples are provided in table 14 below. Further, the Singaporeans used these types of cues regardless if they were accepting, evading or rejecting the compliment.

**Table 14. Examples of non-verbal and paralinguistic cues.**

---

<b>American</b>
CR 93: Did you just say trousers?! Haha
CR 97: Thanks, I try. (Sarcastically)
CR 111: it's all motivated by fear that the other team will catch me. Haha!
<b>Singaporean</b>
CR 217: hahaha thank you, you look great too
CR 225: Err Thanks. *smile awkwardly*
CR 277: Haha it's a birthday present from my best friend.

---

#### **4.4 Introspective recalls**

Firstly, the data from the introspective recalls were very homogenous within each group, meaning that all the American participants basically had the same experiences and attitudes towards the DCT and compliment responses, and that the Singaporean participants also provided very much the same reflections within their group. However, when comparing the two groups' answers, there were some apparent differences. The data from the introspective recalls provided by the American participants mirrored the American responses in the DCT very closely. The American informants who took part in the introspective recall all stated that they thought it was very easy to respond to the compliments in the DCT, and that it felt natural. Further, they all stated that they responded with what they were positive they would say in real life, and that they wrote what immediately came to mind. The data from the introspective recalls with the Singaporean participants, on the other hand, revealed rather opposite attitudes and ideas than the data collected from the Singaporean responses in the DCT. The Singaporeans all stated that they felt awkward responding to the compliments, as they usually do not receive compliments. Further, two participants stated that you are expected to disagree when somebody gives you a compliment. See table 15 below for excerpts from the recalls.

**Table 15. Excerpts from the introspective recalls**

---

<b>American</b>
<b>IR 1:</b> "Well it felt really straightforward, was a fun distraction from work (laughs)... yep, they [the situations] felt natural, I've been in similar situations before"
<b>IR 2:</b> "I really didn't think at all... I just quickly wrote down whatever came to mind... I pretty much transcribed what I would imagine myself having said in that situation.
<b>IR 3:</b> "Yeah no it was really easy to answer the compliments, I just wrote what immediately came to mind"
<b>Singaporean</b>
<b>IR 4:</b> "A little difficult to come up with answers, because I don't receive compliments often. I mean I didn't think a long time before writing down the answer, but the answer didn't come on instinct either"

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---

**IR 5:** "It felt awkward lol...not like compliments happen on a regular basis"

**IR 6:** "ya and whenever we get it's always 1. no lah no lah fake humble or 2. patronising laughter"

**IR 7:** "Yeah well it wasn't difficult, but not like I knew immediately what I was going to say...it just felt strange...I mostly answered [in the DCT] by saying thanks or no problem or giving the credit to somebody else, but really I think you should disagree, to be humble"  
[When asked why he had answered the way he had in the DCT in relation to this] "Er, I guess it seems easier to just get it over with than play the humble game".

---

As the excerpts in the table above illustrate, the Americans seemed to find responding to compliments as something very natural and easy. Conducting the introspective recalls with the Americans took very little time as none of them seemed to have much to say, which gave the impression that dealing with compliments and knowing what to say is "no big deal" to them (which is also reflected in their answers). The Singaporean answers were not as straightforward and the interviews took longer. It was obvious that the issue of compliments and compliment responses was somewhat problematic to them. Contrary to the Americans, it took some time for the Singaporeans to decide what to write down and they continually stressed how awkward responding felt. Further, and rather strikingly, the Singaporean participants reported that you are expected to disagree with compliments (see IRs 6 and 7 in the table above), but this view is not mirrored in the DCT (the Singaporean participants employed accept strategies 75% of the time, see table 5). An explanation for this could be seen in IR 7 in table 15 above.

Considering the data from the introspective recalls, it becomes evident that the Americans and the Singaporeans interviewed have very different perceptions, views and attitudes concerning compliments and compliment responses.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

As we have seen, the aim for this study has been to investigate pragmatic variation between two different regional varieties of English, namely American English and Singaporean English, in comparing the speech act of compliment responses, trying to identify any differences and similarities. This section aims to discuss and interpret the findings presented in the previous section, to examine the study's limitations, to discuss issues and areas for future research and to explore and discuss the study's implications for contexts outside academia, particularly settings within the educational domain.

### 5.1 Discussion and interpretation of findings

Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that this study deals with very small numbers and that only slight differences were found between the two groups in regards to numbers and percentage of usage of different compliment response strategies in the DCT. Therefore, it is impossible to make any generalisations from the data. In the future, more data need to be collected, to see if the small tendencies found in the data from the DCT can be said to form any kind of pattern. It is, however, possible to examine the small tendencies displayed in the data from the DCT in form of numbers and percentages, and discuss them in connection to the other findings in the study, such as the non-verbal and paralinguistic cues provided and the insights from the participants who partook in the introspective recalls, and from there obtain a somewhat more illuminated picture of how this speech act of compliment responses functions in the two English speaking varieties respectively.

#### 5.1.1 Overall distribution of CRs

As table 5 showed, the general preference for both groups is to follow the order of *accept*, *evade* and *reject* when responding to compliments. The maxim of agreement (Leech, 1983; see section 2.1.3) thus seems to take priority over the maxim of modesty for both groups (in regard to the Singaporean data, this finding proves to be somewhat dual and not so easily classified as will be seen in section 5.1.4 below). However, the Singaporean participants used less accept strategies and more reject strategies than the Americans, which is in line with what was hypothesized. The usage of evade strategies, however, proved to be a bit more problematic. The Americans used more evade strategies than the Singaporeans when looking at the number of instances of evade strategies (counting both pure strategies and combination strategies from different macro groups) but the Singaporeans used more evade strategies when the strategy was used by itself (see table 6).

These findings are very different to those of Lee (2009), who found that her Singaporean participants used reject strategies more than 50 percent of the time. Other research on Chinese CRs has also found that the participants largely favoured non-acceptance strategies when responding to CRs (cf. Chen, 1993; Gu 1990). Tang and Zhang (2009), also using university students as informants, did however find that their Chinese participants showed a preference for accept strategies. The reason studies on

Chinese CRs are compared to the responses from the Singaporean participants in this study, is the possibility that the Singaporean participants could be influenced by traditional Chinese values, seeing that they are all ethnically Chinese. As the discussion below will show, it seems however, as if traditional Chinese values are in the process of being disregarded in favour of other values, possibly influenced by other cultures.

The findings regarding the American participants align with the findings in the studies of Nelson et al (1996) and Chen (1993), in which Americans preferred to accept compliments. It is important to note however, as already mentioned in section 2.3.2, that one must be very cautious when comparing studies on compliment responses as researchers often use somewhat different systems for coding the CR strategies which results in certain category overlaps.

### 5.1.2 Combination strategies

As seen in the results section, both groups sometimes used combination strategies when responding to the compliments, especially the Americans who employed combination strategies almost half of the time. The Singaporeans, on the other hand, used combination strategies only around one third of the time. Tang and Zhang (2009) found that the participants in their study (Australian and Chinese) also showed different patterns in regard to how often they employed combination strategies. The Australians used more combination strategies than the Chinese, which the researchers interpreted as the Australians making more of an effort when responding to compliments. This could be argued to be the case also with the participants in this study. The differences in how often the participants used combination strategies could also indicate that the Americans were more comfortable (and hence probably more used to) responding to compliments than the Singaporeans (as the introspective recalls seem to support). If somebody does not feel comfortable dealing with compliments it seems likely that they would not elaborate on the response but would try to give as short a reply as possible.

A striking similarity between the two groups was the preference shown in regard to the combination strategy of *accept + accept*. This was the most preferred combination strategy for both groups and both groups employed very similar *accept + accept* strategies, both in terms of which strategies were used together and how often they were used that way. Seeing that the macro strategy of *accept* was the most preferred strategy overall for both groups, this is perhaps not very surprising. As seen in section 2.3.2, Chen (1993) argued that his American informants tended to accept compliments because they see self-denigration as damaging to one's face. It is possible that the participants in this study hold a similar self-image view. The strategy of *appreciation token + return compliment* was the most popular combination strategy within this category for both groups, which Tang and Zhang (2009) found to be true of their informants as well. Tang and Zhang speculate that the return compliment here serves as a phatic expression of politeness. If this is the case (which seems plausible), it appears as if both groups considered being polite and respectful towards the person giving the compliment as important. Moreover, both groups also employed the combination strategy of *appreciation token + downgrading/qualifying utterance* rather frequently, indicating that the Americans and the Singaporeans both find it important to mitigate

their acceptances. It could be argued that being polite in returning a compliment could also be a way to mitigate their acceptances.

The next most common strategy combination at macro level, for both groups, was to use a combination of an accept strategy + an evade strategy. Here, we can see some differences in regard to which accept + evade strategies the participants from the different varieties used. The Americans used the evade strategy of *informative comment*, in combination with either the strategy of *appreciation token* or an *agreeing utterance*, the most, whereas the Singaporeans did not make use of this strategy very much at all (see table 12 in section 4.2). The fact that the Americans rather often used the strategy of *informative comment* in combination with an accept strategy could imply that the *informative comment* is not an act of evasion but indeed a helpful comment on for example how the person giving the compliment could acquire the same piece of clothing or how and why something is useful (see examples in table 13). If this is the case, the Americans would have employed far less instances of evade strategies than the numbers indicate. This again (see section 3.3) illustrates the limitations of the categorization model, as it does not handle compliment responses employing a combination of strategies well. It seems as if compliment responses at discourse level are better understood through an in-depth analysis of the utterances, perhaps without set strategy categories.

The Singaporeans employed a few more combination strategies using different macro constellations than the Americans (see table 11); *reject + accept* strategy and *evade + accept* strategies. These strategies were however very few (five instances all together), which means that not much can be said with regard to this, other than that it perhaps could be a slight reflection of the Singaporean participants displaying an ambivalence in responding to compliments (more on this in section 5.1.4 below).

### 5.1.3 Non-verbal and paralinguistic elements

As seen in section 4.3, the two groups showed some rather different patterns in how they used non-verbal and paralinguistic cues such as smileys, laughter and meta comments. The Americans only used these types of cues 11 times and always in connection with a joke. The Singaporeans on the other hand, used these types of cues 50 times, in connection with many types of responses, regardless if they were accepting, evading or rejecting the compliment. This could be argued to indicate some kind of insecurity in knowing what to respond when faced with a compliment (which the data from the Singaporean introspective recalls support). It is somewhat expected that you would smile or laugh when telling a joke (as the Americans did), but when you are not, it seems less natural. Therefore, it appears plausible that the heavy usage of these cues could be a sign of insecurity and awkwardness. It should be emphasised that this is only my own interpretation based on the other findings in this study. It could also be possible that smileys, laughter, meta comments and such are a natural part of this group of Singaporeans' discourse in general. These types of non-verbal and paralinguistic cues were also found in Lorenzo-Dus (2001) study on compliment responses.



#### 5.1.4 Introspective recalls

The introspective recalls provided some very interesting insights into the participants' perceptions of and attitudes towards responding to compliments in relation to taking the DCT. As presented in section 4.4, the two respective varieties' opinions and reflections were very different from each other; all the American participants partaking in the introspective recall stated that they found it was very easy to respond to the compliments in the DCT, that it felt natural, and that they wrote what immediately came to mind, feeling sure that they would respond the way they did in real life. The Singaporean participants provided some rather differing thoughts and attitudes toward the DCT and compliments in general. They stated that they felt awkward responding to the compliments, as they usually do not receive compliments. Further, they stated that it is expected to disagree when somebody gives you a compliment (see table 15). In relation to this, I will first discuss the Singaporeans' statement that they are not used to getting compliments. Second, I will discuss and compare the data from the DCT and the introspective recalls, for both groups.

As we have seen, the Singaporeans stated that it was difficult to respond to the compliments because they were not used to receiving compliments. This indicates that perhaps complementing is not a common practice in Singapore, or that the *types* of compliments in the DCT were difficult for the Singaporeans to answer because they do not follow the patterns for complimenting in Singapore, or perhaps that the Singaporeans simply say they were not used to getting compliments out of politeness. It thus becomes clear that to be able to answer the question as to why Singaporeans state that they are not used to receiving compliments, we need to know more about patterns for *giving* compliments in Singapore. Unfortunately however, this is beyond the scope of this study. We therefore cannot linger on what the reasons might be for the Singaporeans stating that they are not used to being complimented, but we know that the Singaporeans stated that they felt awkward because of it. This leads one to ask the question whether the Singaporeans see compliments as a FTA (Brown and Levinson, 1987; see section 2.1.3). The fact that the Singaporeans used accept strategies when responding to the compliments 75% of the time, indicates that this is probably not the case. It seems however evident that the Singaporeans found the speech act of responding to compliments as rather troublesome, which the following discussion will further illustrate.

The American data from the introspective recalls mirrored the findings from the American DCT very well, which further supports the findings that the Americans found responding to the compliments easy and natural. Responding to compliments thus seems to be a fairly unproblematic speech act for the American participants.

The Singaporean data from the introspective recalls, on the other hand, revealed rather opposite thoughts and attitudes from those of the Singaporean DCT data. The introspective recalls enabled the participants themselves to define what is culturally normal and appropriate behaviour for the particular speech act under investigation. Similarly, the results from the DCT do not reflect what people actually say, but what participants perceive as culturally normal and appropriate. It was therefore very surprising to see the answers the Singaporean participants provided in the DCT and introspective recalls, respectively. This again seems to indicate some kind of

ambivalence towards compliment responses from the Singaporeans, and it appears as if this ambivalence plays a central part in understanding Singaporean compliment responses. Excerpt number 7 (in table 15) from the introspective recalls illustrates this rather well: “I mostly answered [in the DCT] by saying thanks or no problem or giving the credit to somebody else, but really I think you should disagree, to be humble” [When asked why he had answered the way he had in the DCT in relation to this] “Er, I guess it seems easier to just get it over with than play the humble game”. (Wording in square brackets my own). It appears as if it is possible that what the Singaporeans think they *should* say and what they *want* to say are in conflict with one another. The heavy usage of smileys and laughter in the DCTs and the emphasis on awkwardness in the introspective recalls could be signs of this. Perhaps the participants saw the DCT as more of a “real task” than reflecting in the recalls, which the heavy usage of smileys and laughter (which in a sense blurs the line between spoken and written language), supports. The results from the DCTs could thus be a reflection of what the Singaporeans *want* to say but the opinions and attitudes in the introspective recalls could be a reflection of what the Singaporeans think they *should* say.

As already mentioned, Lee (2009) found that her Singaporean participants tended not to accept compliments they were given. The exact age intervals for the participants in her study are unclear, but the oldest informants were around 50 years of age. The participants in this study are all rather young (average age of 22.45 years). Perhaps the ambivalence discussed above could be an indication of a norm shift in how to respond to compliments in Singapore. Lee (2009) states that it is typical of Chinese politeness culture for people to reject a compliment outwardly, while secretly accepting it with joy internally (cf. also Chen 1993). This echoes with the attitudes presented in the introspective recalls in which a participant said you are supposed to reject compliments and be “fake humble” and another participant referred to responding to compliments as the “humble game” (see table 15). The results from the DCT, as we have seen, show a different picture. Perhaps younger Singaporeans are in a process of leaving the typical Chinese politeness culture of rejecting compliments (which evidently most of the time are phatic in nature), in favour of a more “straightforward” approach to compliments, i.e., responding with what one really feels, often resulting in an acceptance. The clash of the maxims of modesty and agreement (Leech, 1983) would thus be considerably palpable. If such a shift is taking place, it is not strange that people might feel awkward when having to deal with these changing norms. This might hence also be a reason why the Singaporeans felt awkward when responding (and not only that they are not used to getting compliments, as they themselves stated as the reason).

To sum up, given that both groups to such a large extent accepted compliments, it seems plausible to believe that both groups view compliments as positive speech acts. Further, it appears as if both groups prioritise the maxim of agreement, but also that they, to different degrees, struggle with the clash between the maxim of modesty and the maxim of agreement. For the Americans, this can be seen in the fact that they tend to use return compliments and downgrading/qualifying utterances in combination with acceptances. The Singaporeans, in addition to also doing this, use a considerable amount of reject strategies but most strikingly, display a rather ambivalent attitude towards compliments, possibly due to a shift in norms regarding compliments and politeness strategies in

general. It thus appears as if the Singaporeans are perhaps struggling with maintaining face, both theirs and that of their interlocutor, as what is regarded as polite might be changing, due to shifts of norms and values.

Evidently, this discussion and these interpretations, particularly of Singaporean CR behaviour, is highly speculative and not many certain claims can be made, which means that more research on Singaporean CRs is needed, preferably on natural data to obtain knowledge of what they *actually* say. Nonetheless, it is evident that there are certain differences in the way the American participants and the Singaporean participants view and handle the speech act of CRs.

## **5.2 Conclusions and implications**

This current study found that the two different regional varieties examined show both intralingual similarities and differences. For example, both groups show a preference towards using accept strategies. Further, both groups' most preferred combination strategies were very similar constellations of accept + accept strategies. However, the two varieties display differences in their attitudes to and perceptions of compliment responses. Furthermore, the Singaporeans employed more reject strategies and non-verbal and paralinguistic cues than the Americans did. The Americans also employed combinations strategies more often than the Singaporeans. These findings support the variational pragmatic arguments proposed by Barron and Schneider (2009), which hold that pragmatic variation exist between different L1 varieties of the same language. Furthermore, previous variational pragmatic research has shown that variation between different regional varieties of the same L1 is often more fine-tuned and less apparent than variation between different languages (cf. Barron, 2008; Barron 2005), of which the current study is an example.

This study does not attempt to make any generalisations from the data to represent American and Singaporean speakers in general. Any attempt would be impossible due to the small sample of participants and due to the data elicitation technique used, which does not represent what people actually say, but what they perceive as appropriate language use. Nor can any general claims in regard to the data obtained from the Singaporean participants be made, as it were somewhat conflicting. This does not mean however that it is impossible to speculate on the findings. As Tang and Zhang stated in regard to their findings: "in fact, the uniqueness of the data will make a valuable contribution to the development of research in this area" (2009, p. 341).

The limitations of the present study seem to primarily lie in the method gathering technique and the categorization model. As already discussed in detail in section 3.1, the use of DCTs have both its advantages and limitations. In light of the findings of the Singaporean data, it becomes evident that a data elicitation technique that examined natural data would have been more beneficial and illuminating for this particular study. This study does however, as already mentioned, offer a valuable springboard into future research in the area and the findings of this study will be interesting to compare with naturally occurring discourse, accompanied by interviews or other techniques that elicit participants' perceptions of the speech act. Another limitation with the DCT is that the perceptions of the compliment situations in it may differ between the different varieties

(of which the fact that the Singaporeans stated that they were not used to receiving compliments could be an indication). Should this be the case, this might affect the way the compliments were responded to. This aspect, as already touched upon, must be investigated further in future research.

As already mentioned, the categorization system for CRs used in this study (and any other categorization system for CRs for that matter), does not seem to be very helpful and accurate when examining CRs at discourse level, as it cannot account for the illocutionary force in combination strategies.

Further, the coding of the CRs is rather subjective and difficult. To illustrate this, I found Tang and Zhang's (2009) coding of CRs to be very contradictory. For example, they coded "I enjoyed doing it" and "It was no problem" as downgrading/qualifying utterances, but "My pleasure" and "No worries" as shifts of credit. Hence, I chose not to follow the same patterns for coding as they had. I was however faced with my own coding dilemmas (some of which were discussed in detail in section 3.3). As seen, all dubious cases in my data were discussed with two other people, which provided valuable and important validation. Ideally, *all* data should have been coded by a second or third rater. Because of time limitations, this was not possible in the present study. However, it could be worthwhile to make this a priority for any future research on CRs.

Further, time and space limitations made it impossible to examine the compliment topics (appearance, character, ability and possession) in relation to the CRs. This is an interesting area of research, which could be fruitful to investigate in future studies.

Finally, the differences found between the Singaporean and American participants most likely represent different cultural values and norms. As these norms and patterns are most of the time not immediately obvious, it is reasonable to believe that this might give rise to miscommunication and misattributions of intent (such as arrogance, rudeness, insincerity and condensation) when speakers with different perceptions of CRs interact. This risk for miscommunication is thus high when people from different cultures communicate (DeCapua & Dunham, 2007; Kasper & Blum-Kulka, 1993).

Schneider and Barron (2008) argue that the risk of making these types of pragmatic mistakes or failures is even higher between people who speak the same native language than between people who do not speak the same native language. The reason for this is that though people may, to a certain extent, overlook inappropriate discourse conventions from a non-native speaker, they do not expect there to be any pragmatic variation between native speakers of the same language. The findings from this study thus have very practical implications for bringing awareness of the fact that pragmatic variation between different L1 varieties of the same language exist. This awareness is important to establish in all areas of social interaction, such as workplaces for example, but the findings are especially useful and important for pedagogical purposes.

Given that much previous research within pragmatics has treated languages as homogeneous wholes, the teaching of pragmatic competence has in many respects suffered (cf. Clyne, 2006; Pennycook, 1999; Barron, 2005). This is something that must change. It is naturally impossible to prepare students for every possible context they will face in their real life interaction with people speaking different varieties of English. Language instructors can, however, teach awareness (cf. DeCapua & Dunham, 2007;

Barron, 2005; Grossi, 2009) of the fact that different cultures (seen both from an inter- and intralingual perspective) often follow different pragmatic norms in interaction and when studying specific pragmatic examples in class, it must be made clear to the students that the variety it represents is only one of many others. By teaching learners that variation exists *within* one language as well as across languages, they will be less likely to judge others' utterances based on their own norms and conventions, but instead build an understanding, and perhaps even an appreciation, for other cultures' pragmatic norms and patterns. In Savignon's words, successful communication depends on

empathy and openness to other cultures... [and] includes a willingness to engage in the active negotiation of meaning along with a willingness to suspend judgment and take into consideration the possibility of cultural differences in conventions of use. The "ideal native speaker", someone who knows a language perfectly and uses it appropriately in all social interactions, exists in theory only. (2002, p. 10).

To sum up, this quote illustrates very well both why cross-cultural pragmatic research (particularly intralingual but also interlingual) is immensely important and pressing, and that the findings from this type of research has serious implications in all domains of life but particularly so in educational domains, as this is where much of the foundation for our attitudes and beliefs are laid.

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# Appendix A

## Survey on compliment responses

Hi!

My name is Susanna Melin and I'm an MA student at the English department at Stockholm University specializing in English Pragmatics. For my thesis, I'm investigating pragmatic variation between two different varieties of English (Singaporean and American). Specifically, I'm investigating how speakers of these two varieties respond to compliments.

I would be very happy if you were able to take this short survey! By taking this survey you give your consent to the answers being used in the research outlined above. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed. If you have any questions about this survey, or want to learn more about the study in general, you may contact me through: [rulj7419@student.su.se](mailto:rulj7419@student.su.se)

### Participant's background

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender:  Male  Female
3. Nationality: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_
5. First language: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Official mother tongue: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Level of education: \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e. High school, University, etc.)
8. Religion: \_\_\_\_\_
9. How many years of your life have you lived in the USA/Singapore? \_\_\_\_\_

**Eight situations in which you receive a compliment are described below. Imagine that you are in these situations and write down what you are most likely to answer in each situation. Do not think too much before answering!**

#### Situation 1

Your friends have organised a party to celebrate the end of semester. As you arrive at the party, one of your friends says: "Hey, you look great! You're really handsome/beautiful today." You answer:

#### Situation 2

You have helped your friends (a couple) to look after their child for a whole day at your place. When they come back to pick up the child, they say "Thank you so much! You're really helpful and kind." You answer:

**Situation 3**

After you have completed a presentation, your classmate says: “Wow, that’s brilliant, I hope I can do it the way you did. Well done!” You answer:

**Situation 4**

You have bought a new mobile phone. When you receive a call, your friend notices that your phone is a different one. Having looked at it and tried some functions, s/he says: “Wow, how smart! My mobile does not have such functions. This phone is really great!” You answer:

**Situation 5**

You and your friend meet up for lunch at a café. After having greeted you, your friend says: “I really like your trousers! That colour really suits you.” You answer:

**Situation 6**

You and your classmate have been trying to fix a computer problem for a few hours when your friend cries out: “Wow, you are so incredibly patient! This thing is driving me crazy and you’re staying all calm and determined.” You answer:

**Situation 7**

You are a member of a sports team and have just come off the field after a game. Some of your friends come to meet you, and one of them says: “Hey, you did such a good job out there today. I’m really impressed by how fast you run!” You answer:

**Situation 8**

You have recently bought a new car, and are putting it to use by giving your friend a lift into town. Your friend says: “I like your car, it’s really cool! You’re so lucky!” You answer:

Thank you so much for your participation! /Susanna

## Appendix B

Follow-up questions for introspective recalls

1. What was your thought process when answering the survey?
2. Did the situations seem natural/unnatural to you? Why?
3. Was it difficult to come up with answers?
4. Did you think a long time before you wrote down the answer?
5. Do you think that your answers are representative of what you would answer in real life?
6. Any other thoughts?

# Appendix C

## Transcription of introspective recalls

### American participants

#### Participant 1:

It was fun and I really enjoyed it... Yeah, they seemed natural... like general compliments you'd hear. Yeah no it was really easy to answer the compliments, I just wrote what immediately came to mind... I definitely think they're representative of what I'd say to somebody's face. Yeah, don't know what else to say really (smiles). Well I think I might start giving out more compliments, it's kinda fun to get them (laughs).

#### Participant 2:

I thought it was really interesting... It made me consider my responses to different types of compliments in a way I hadn't really thought about before. Yeah I thought the situations seemed really natural, I've heard very similar compliments before. No, not at all [in reference to question 3 in appendix B] it was pretty easy (smiles)... I really didn't think at all... I just quickly wrote down whatever came to mind... I pretty much transcribed what I would imagine myself having said in that situation. Yeah I realized when I lived abroad last year that people really do seem to respond to compliments differently from what I'm used to... there was a lot of ignoring going on, or something (laughs)... people didn't really seem to appreciate them...

#### Participant 3:

Well it felt really straightforward, was a fun distraction from work (laughs)... yep, they [the situations] felt natural, I've been in similar situations before... nope, it was easy (smiles), stuff I'm used to you know (winks)... no didn't think at all before responding, wrote what immediately came to mind. Yeah, I think they're representative (smiles)... What a fun project you got going (laughs)...

### Singaporean participants

#### Participant 1:

Not really used to compliments (laughs)... it felt strange, but ya whenever we get it's always 1. no lah no lah fake humble or 2. patronising laughter...(smiles)... like every time I call my campmate handsome he just gives this very stawp-it-embarrassed-face and says nooo... urgh. yeah sometimes it was hard [to come up with answers]... like I had to think yeah... but I know this isn't maths (laughs)... but not used to it lah... oh my god... I don't know how to answer that question [referring to question 5, in appendix B]... probably (smiles big)... erm, yeah can I read your thesis when it's done, hehe, it'll give me insider info...

#### Participant 2:

Er... it was quite awkward to respond because I'm not used to receiving compliments to begin with. Some scenarios were things that I have not faced, and I had to think of something else that would be similar to that effect... so a little difficult to come up with answers, because I don't

receive compliments often...yeah I mean didn't think a long time before writing down the answer, but the answer didn't come on instinct either...so...yeah (smiles)...I would say what has been written, but I would also feel awkward when saying it... not so easy this lah (laughs)...

Participant 3:

It felt awkward lol (smiles)...not like compliments happen on a regular basis (smiles)...but I don't really give compliments either so what should I expect (laughs)... The scenarios felt pretty natural, like I can imagine things like that happening...but...yeah...yeah they felt pretty natural. Yeah well it wasn't difficult, but not like I knew immediately what I was going to say...it just felt strange...I mostly answered by saying thanks or no problem or giving the credit to somebody else, but really I think you should disagree, to be humble. [When asked why he answered the way he did then] Er, I guess it seems easier to just get it over with than play the humble game... (grins)... this is complicated business Sanna (laughs)

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