Compliments and Compliment Responses in Thanking among Chinese Buddhists
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Abstract. In order to help the whole world people recognize the social values and cultural differences when doing business with Chinese, this paper seeks to explore one of the politeness phenomena, compliments and compliment responses, in thanking among Chinese Buddhists. The participants were 60 citizens in Quanzhou city of Fujian province, aged from 40-60. The primary data was collected by Discourse Compliment Test and classified according to Holmes’ three-way classification. The findings show that deflecting is the most favored response type with shifting praise to Buddha, which could reflect the great impact of Buddhism values on people's life in the southeast coast of China. Further researches on this area could be explored in more cities.

Introduction
Politeness as a prevalent concept in human interaction has drawn considerable attention from numerous scholars in many fields from different perspectives in last half century [1,2,3,4,5]. Linguistic politeness focusing on how people express politeness verbally pervades in scholars’ researches, especially on a cross-cultural perspective to depict the differences of politeness strategies among different languages and cultures.

One of the major discussions in this area is the study of how a particular speech act is implemented in different languages; for example, how politeness is achieved in apologies, requests or thanking. In reviewing the literature on compliments and compliment responses, many studies place particular emphasis on the contrast between two different communities to see the politeness behaviour influenced by identity or sex; however, few of them focus on religious impact on politeness.

This paper seeks to explore compliments (Cs) and compliment responses (CRs) in thanking in Chinese Buddhism among people (aged 40-60) in Quanzhou of Fujian province, a city in the southeast coast of China, with the purpose to recognize the social values and norms that they contain, and the gendered differences between male and female to answer the following questions: 1. Which response type is most favored in responding to compliments? 2. What does the pattern of compliment responses reveal about religious values? 3. Do men’s pattern of responses in accordance with women’s?

People in this age group are still the main force in boosting the development of economy in China. A study on this area would be beneficial for people all around the world to recognize the social values and cultural differences when doing business with Chinese, and to find out the specific characteristics of politeness behaviour in this religious community.

Literature Review
In Brown and Levinson’s [1] politeness theory, politeness is based on the notions of positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to a person's desire for identification as a member of a group. Negative face refers to a person’s need to be independent. In order to interact with other people, people need to perceive the face of others. However, according to Gu and Mao [3,6], the nature and characteristics of the two kinds of face in Brown and Levinson’s face dualism is irrelevant to Mainland Chinese culture.
As mentioned in the introduction, compliments and compliment responses behaviour would be different because of culture, context, gender, etc. In 2003, Yu [7] examines cross-cultural politeness behaviour among native Chinese speakers and native English speakers and finds out that culture plays an important role in its speakers’ speech act performance. Sharifian [8] finds out the compliment responses in Persian speakers’ L1 and L2 (English) largely are informed by various aspects of the shekasteh-nafsi schemas. In terms of religious impact on politeness strategy, Mustapha [9] explores gendered patterns in responding to compliments in a Nigerian evangelical community. As Mustapha [9] suggests, shifting praise to God turns to be an emerging acceptable response type.

As regards classification of CRs, Holmes [10] classifies the CR strategies into three main acts: accept, reject and deflect/evade. This study adapts his three-way classification as shown in Table 1 below, as it suits Chinese Buddhism data in Quanzhou city with its clear and comprehensive coverage.

Methodology

In order to receive the goal of the study, primary data was collected by a Discourse Compliment Test (DCT), which was conducted with four patterns of open compliments and responses.

Participants

There were two kinds of participants in this study, cameo participants and lead participants. Cameo participants were 30 students in Minnan University of Science and Technology in Quanzhou city. A total of 60 lead participants, aged from 40-60, contributed to this research, 30 Chinese male Buddhist and 30 Chinese female Buddhist.

Instrument

A DCT was prepared in Chinese version with four patterns of both open Cs and open CRs. They were women’s CRs to men’s Cs, women’s CRs to women’s Cs, men’s CRs to women’s Cs, and men’s CRs to men’s Cs. Although DCT has been criticized as a research method, it still enables people to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time, for example, the study of Sharifian [8] and that of Tang and Zhang [11]. In order to receive relatively credible information, four patterns of open compliments were designed in DCT. The range of compliments could cover clothes, jewelry, jobs, home decoration, partner, offspring, and so on.

Procedures

The cameo participants, receiving the DCT in email, were asked to select 2 adults around them, aged from 40 to 60, one male and one female, who might be their parents, teachers, relatives or acquaintance. These two adults were further asked respectively with the following two questions: What’s your compliment to a person of the same sex in your age and his/her response? What’s your compliment to a person of the opposite sex in your age and his/her response? Students recorded the information they got in the DCT form and then sent the finished one back to me.

Findings

Response Types of Participants

The 30 cameo participants provided a total of 120 compliment responses, which are categorized into ten response types. And the distributions of these ten types are depicted in Table 1.
Table 1. Distribution of Response Types of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response types</th>
<th>N.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accepting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Thanking</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Agreeing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Joking</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Returning compliment</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Downgrading</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>43</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rejecting</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Disagreeing</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Challenging sincerity</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deflecting/Evading</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Explaining</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Shifting to Buddha</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Doubting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sum total</strong></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that there are three main response types and no equal weight among them. Table 1 shows that deflecting (at 39 percent) is the preferred response type. Accepting is second (at 36 percent), while rejecting is the least preferred (at 25 percent). It is interesting that shifting credit to Buddha number more than the other nine response types, at the percentage of up to 24 percent. This suggests that people in this community prefer to shift praise to Buddha when they do not accept praise to self.

Besides of using single strategy in replying compliments, there are also some participants employing combination strategy to respond to compliments. Four typical types of combination strategy are found in the data. And examples are as follows.

- Agreeing + explaining: “Yes, my daughter bought it for me”.
- Doubting + thanking: “You do think so? Thank you”.
- Thanking + returning: “Thanks. You are beautiful too”.
- Thanking + downgrading: “Thank you for your appreciation. I do it not bad”.

**Women’s CR types and men’s CR types**

In order to find out women’s and men’s CR types and the differences of CR types between them, I see Holmes’ [10] three-way classification as a similar categorization and reclassify the data into three super response types: accepting, rejecting, and shifting credit to Buddha. The number of compliment responses turns to be 102, 51 women’s response and 51 men’s response. Details are in Table 2 and Table 3 as follows.

From Table 2 and Table 3, it is clear that the most popular response type in both men and women is accepting, 19 percent in women’s and 24 percent in men’s, respectively. Men reject compliments more than women do. Rejecting is the least preferred in women’s, while shifting to Buddha is the least preferred in men’s. Moreover, from the percentage of shifting to Buddha, women’s response covers 17 percent compared with that of men (at 10 percent). In other words, women shift credit to Buddha more frequently in their responses than men do.
Discussion

Response Types of Participants

As shown in Table 1, deflecting is the preferred response type. Gu [3] suggests that Chinese politeness includes attitudinal warmth and refinement to maintain both the complimenter and the addressee’s face. People do not accept compliments directly, while they do not reject compliments either. From Table 1, in the strategy of deflecting, people use explanations or convey praise to faith or people in their lives, especially shifting credit to Buddha (accounting for 24 percent). This pattern of compliment response reveals that the religious values of Buddhism do have a great impact on people’s daily life, which is quite similar to Mustapha’s [9] findings. Mustapha [9] finds that in the community of Nigerian evangelicalism, when people do not accept praise to self, they shift the praise to God. Cultural norms and social factors may determine the distinctive patterns of CR behavior for a speech community [7]. In addition, the finding in my data might be also interpreted to mean that Chinese Buddhists frequently use religious language in everyday conversation, which turns to be a significant linguistic feature among people’s language use.

The second most used response is acceptance. People in China nowadays are more likely to accept compliments during their daily life. This finding is quite different from other scholars’ researches on Chinese CR culture [7,11,12]. Most of the findings argue that in Chinese culture, people use less accepting and more rejecting. In Chen’s [13] findings, the Chinese non-native speakers use more rejecting CRs than the American native speakers.

As shown in the data, some participants use combination strategies to respond to compliments. Four typical types of combination strategy are found in the data. For using two or more strategies to respond, people involved in interactions could have more choice and space to maintain their own positive face and other’s negative face [1]. In Tang and Zhang’s [11] study, they also show us that combination strategies are utilized by participants and a combination of accept + evade, evade + accept, or reject + accept is more common than using accept + reject in both Australian English speakers and mandarin Chinese speakers.

Women’s CR Types and Men’S CR Types

As shown in Table 2 and Table 3, the pattern difference of women’s responses and men’s is obvious. Although acceptance is the preferred response type both in women and men, men still accept compliments more often than women do. In this community where male chauvinism is prevailing, it is reasonable that men perform more directly than women do when interacting with other people.

In terms of the language both men and women used in the compliment responses, men use shorter phrase to express their thanking than women do, and men are more likely to utilizing jokes to respond, while women use more standard forms to compliment and to respond than men do. Holmes [10] demonstrates that “women use a syntactic form which strengthens the positive force of the compliment significantly more often than men do”.

As Holmes [10] says, being a compliment, an utterance must refer to something, which is positively valued by the complimenter and attributed to the addressee. In my study, most of compliments for women are about appearance, children, and the quality of life, while for men, they tend to be complimented more on business and earning. From this point, we can also see that there are differences on the topics of compliments chosen between male and female.

Although the findings of many studies lend support to the above findings, there are exceptions to
this. Mustapha [9] shows that Nigerian women are enacting new gender identity in response to constraints on women’s freedom. He claims that men are more concerned with being polite than women are, and women seemed to become more concerned with their status by using less standard language forms than men do.

Another significant difference in women and men’s CR types is in the frequency of shifting praise to Buddha (see Table 2 & Table 3). This might be interpreted to mean that Buddhist women are more concerned with religious politeness than men are, while men are still more concerned with their social status by using more direct interaction. In the community of Chinese Buddhism in Quanzhou city, most of women are housewives, to some extent, in regard of social status; women are still regarded as playing supportive roles while men are in the leading place.

Conclusion

In summary, the nature and characteristics of the two kinds of face in Brown and Levinson’s [1] face dualism is not always suitable for all language cultures. In Mainland Chinese culture, it is irrelevant [3,6]. Deflecting is the most favored response type with shifting praise to Buddha as the most popular strategy. The language use of religion shows that the religious values of Buddhism do have a great impact on people’s daily life. The pattern of women’s responses differs from that of men, especially in the frequency of shifting credit to Buddha.

Although all the participants are Buddhists, the region only covers one city. On the other hand, the analysis on combination strategy from the data is not specific. Further research on CRs used among Chinese Buddhism in more cities could be explored to see if the findings of this study would change. More researches exploring issues like combination strategy, or gender difference in a younger age would be needed to further acknowledge the CR behavior in a given community.

References


