

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Politeness is one of the cores of communication enabling either the speaker or the hearer to hold a proper conversation while maintaining considerations on the counterpart's feelings. There are certain rules of politeness which limit people's behaviors and attitudes in order to shape a considerably good manner. Courtesy becomes an essential part of social interactions between people, relating to the human beings' basic needs of feeling respected and relevant. Politeness Principles are, thus, integrated in order to construct constraining guidance for developing an interpersonal relationship. A recent investigation on politeness explored different strategies used for speech acts in different languages involving certain circumstances for different functions, substantially influenced by peculiar cultural background of each (Wolfson, 1981). Leech's theories of politeness principles, for instance, are contemplated as the universal way of implementing politeness in daily life when they are actually based on Western culture (Zhu & Bao, 2010). That cross-cultural boundaries might occur in conversations is necessary to be investigated, in this case the ways people respond to compliments in East Asia. Westerners perceive the acceptance of compliment as a means to respect the counterpart, while Chinese people regard self-depreciation more

to do so (ibid). That being said, it is essential to understand the more suited strategies to implement in a particular culture to avoid misunderstandings in communication.

Each region puts weight on a certain behavior or attitude which is considered as a norm in the society, resulting in cultural differences. Speaking of CR strategies, Westerners mostly accept them and express gratitude, while Asians are often seen denying the achievements in order to enhance modesty. The whole concept of compliment denial is considered self-enhancing in Chinese culture, which is inevitably not the case for Americans (Cai, et al., 2011). Relevant to the maxims of Leech (1983)'s Politeness Principles, there are two points to provide contradiction on the whole Western vs Eastern culture. While Agreement Maxim represents the strategies of Westerners, Modesty Maxim represents those of Asians, particularly the Chinese ethnic groups. East Asia, including Japan, China and Korea, is well-known for its attachment to Confucian beliefs, one of which is regarded by Confucius Institute Magazine in the May 2010 edition (Kim L. , 2010) as suggesting how the people are less likely to exaggerate their own strengths (p. 114).

In order to address the issue, East Asia is depicted to represent the Asian continent considering its dominance in many aspects compared to any other countries in Asia. Holcombe (2001) explained the characteristics of East Asia in one of his popular works:

“(East Asian civilization) may even be said to represent the single most important major alternative historical evolutionary track to Western

civilization on the face of this planet, with a continuing history of success that can rival what we call the West.” (p. 3)

East Asia has played a more increasingly significant role worldwide due to several reasons. Firstly, trade relations formed among East Asian countries benefit Europe and the United States in many aspects. Secondly, East Asia also becomes the catalyst for China’s communism and also for countries with history of strong nationalism, such as Japan and South Korea, to develop a more global mindset and attitude. Finally, East Asia is responsible for encouraging other Asian countries to resolve global issues related to the environment, infectious diseases, international crimes, etc. (Ogoura, 2009). That being said, East Asia appears to be relatively more superior in comparison with other parts of Asia such as Southeast Asia and Middle East Asia. However, it does not necessarily lessen the relevance of other regions in Asia.

As a way to represent East Asia regarding the politeness principles, South Korea is selected rather than other powerful countries such as Japan and China, considering how hugely has Korean Wave’s popularity spread impacts to many parts of the world. It started with several breakthrough TV series. One known as the oldest was *Autumn in My Heart/Gaeul Donghwa*, produced by KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) in 2000. The series brought its main actors rose to fame throughout Asia. Another melodramatic series *Winter Sonata*, produced by KBS in 2002, has brought the main actor *Bae Yong Joon* into becoming a top star of the country and even in Japan as well. It was followed with continuing trends of South Korean TV series as more produced dramas hit big both domestically and internationally. The portrayals of daily

lives in Korean TV series are pertinent to issues on politeness, one of which is about how people respond to compliments considering the social class and age gaps.

On the other hand, Korean pop music or known as K-Pop started showing its presence when the considerably first-generation idols debuted in the early 2000s. It was not until the second generation of K-Pop debuted, such as *TVXQ* or *DBSK* (2003), *Super Junior* (2005) and *Big Bang* (2006), that their pop culture began receiving worldwide recognition. A vivid example is how *BoA* and *TVXQ* managed to break the Japanese market despite the tensions between two countries. *BoA*'s first Japanese album "*Listen to My Heart*" became the first album of a Korean singer to top the Japan *Oricon* chart. *TVXQ* even had established a Japanese name *Tohoshinki* and literally worked their way up to achieve a top star status. One of the reasons triggering the popularization of Korean Wave is that the public perceive Korean Wave as "an Asian reaction to Western-dominated globalization" (Hogarth, 2013, p. 135), in that Korean Wave attempts to create their version of Hollywood. The Hollywood entertainment industry is dominated with mostly Caucasian performers and underpinned with Western cultures which some Asian viewers may find offensive (ibid, p. 149), i.e. blatant overexposure of sex and violence. South Korean TV series, displaying the modern and traditional values of Asia, and K-Pop, the pop music trend which showcases masculinity, femininity and perfection, are two major factors prompting the globalization and cultural hybridization of Korean Wave.

There have been a lot of previously conducted research in the field of compliment responses (CR), many of which are comparative studies between CR in

Western and Eastern cultures. Tang and Zhang (2009) conducted a contrastive study on compliment responses among Australian English and Mandarin Chinese speakers. The findings confirmed that Chinese speakers prefer indirect acceptance and self-praise avoidance in responding to compliments as they showcase modesty and collectivism as two important Chinese culture. However, Chen and Yang (2010) in their current study in 2008, found diverging results from Xi'an Chinese which verifies societal changes from how it used to be in 1993, during Chen's past study. Previously, only 1.03 percent of the total population accepted compliments, while the most frequent one was rejecting, with 95.73 percent. The current study on the same population results in 62.20 percent of acceptance, while rejection only appears in 9.13 percent (ibid, p. 1958). He (2012) also suggested that acceptance becomes the most frequent response spoken by both younger and older generations in a research with 119 Chinese participants of different backgrounds, deviating from the usual presumptions. In terms of compliment responses in Korean culture, Han (1992) found that Korean females tend to reject compliments in Korean interactions, but accept them in English interactions. Relating to the use of film as an instrument of the data collection, Rose (2001) referred to the validity of film as a source of pragmatics research, whether or not films could actually represent the actual language use in comparison with using ethnographic methods. The findings implied that the data taken from film "corresponds fairly closely to authentic data, particularly for major pragmlinguistic categories (such as compliment formula)" (p. 321), albeit there were major gaps in the results of comparing between disagreement

and self-praise avoidance in the film and naturally-occurring data. Regardless, films indeed provide useful resources for data collection of research.

The study is, thus, conducted in order to examine compliment response strategies in TV series. Compliment responses are commonly uttered speech acts in daily conversations as well as an element of discourse which may potentially trigger problems and misunderstandings. What is recognized as a norm in one place might become a taboo thing in another. Accepting compliments may indicate a form of gratitude directed to the counterpart, but also may be perceived as a way to boost oneself. Based on the findings on compliment responses in Western and Asian cultures, it is generally concluded that Westerners tend to do acceptance while Asians do rejection. However, it does not always apply at all cost since different circumstances influence people's behaviors as well. Not all Asians express their politeness by neglecting compliments, and vice versa in the case of Westerners. Ages and social classes may also greatly affect one's utterance to another. Understanding such matters will help enhance interpersonal relationships between people. The writer used a South Korean TV series titled "*Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo*" (역도여정 김복주). She specifically chose the series for the research because of Korea Wave's undeniable worldwide impact, as well as its interesting senior-junior, coach-student and peer group relationships in the story. The research also aimed to discover and analyze the CR patterns used in the above TV series.

1.2 Field of the Study

The research is related to the field of Linguistics, specifically Pragmatics.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study in particular encompasses the taxonomies of compliment response strategies proposed by Pomerantz (1978) and rearranged by Spencer-Oatey and Ng (2001), and the maxims of Politeness Principles from Leech (1983) which are related to the CR strategies. In comparison to previous studies on related topics, this study also examines how principles of politeness are integrated, which are represented by Modesty and Agreement Maxims. The writer limits the study to the discussion of CR strategies and the Maxims of Modesty and Agreement integrated in Asian culture, particularly analyzing the practice in South Korea, which is represented by “*Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo*”.

1.4 Problem Formulation

1. What are the common patterns of compliment responses in South Korea, represented by the TV series “*Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo*”?
2. How are Modesty and Agreement Maxims realized upon receiving a compliment in the series?

1.5 Objectives of the Study

With regard to the research questions mentioned above, the writer aims to:

1. examine the common patterns of expressing responses towards compliments according to each situation in South Korea, represented by the TV series *“Weightlifting Fairy Kim Bok Joo”*.
2. investigate the realization of Modesty and Agreement Maxims upon receiving a compliment in the TV series.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Upon conducting the research, the writer expects the findings to benefit the society considering the relevance of compliment response strategies to emphasize social relationships between people of various social classes. With regard to the cultural diversity between Western and Asian countries, both have distinctive patterns of compliment response strategies. While there have been a lot of comparative studies between compliment responses in Western and Chinese cultures, not many have explored the particular topic integrated in South Korea. Albeit belonging to East Asia as well, South Korea inevitably has different cultural and historical background which might potentially influence its ways of communication in comparison with those of Chinese people. Investigating compliment responses as depicted in the South Korean TV series will enhance the complexity of language contact and change. As for

researchers, the study will add more data to strengthen previously existing studies on the topics relevant as well as enlighten them on the particular topic discussed.

1.7 Definition of Terms

1. Compliment

A compliment is defined as a speech act which explicitly or implicitly serves to give a credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some “good” positions, characteristics, skills etc., which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer (Holmes, 1986, p. 485).

2. Response

According to Oxford University Press, a response is (1) a spoken or written answer; or (2) a reaction to something that has happened or been said (2016).

3. Strategy

A strategy is a way of doing a particular thing. It means (1) a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose; or (2) the process of planning or putting a plan into operation in a skillful way (Oxford University Press, 2016).

4. Politeness principle

Politeness principles are a series of maxims proposed by Geoffrey Leech (1983) which comprises six maxims, namely the Tact Maxim, the Generosity Maxim, the Approbation Maxim, the Modesty Maxim, the Agreement Maxim and the Sympathy Maxim.

However, it is also understood from Chinese perspectives as a sanctioned belief that an individual's social behavior is supposed to embrace respectfulness, modesty, attitudinal warmth and refinement (Gu, 1990).

