

Compliment Responses and Study Abroad¹

Emi Fukasawa

Abstract

This study revealed the changes of compliment responses of seven Japanese university students after five months study abroad. Bi-weekly questionnaire exchange displayed a variety of activities and attitudes during the stay. After the stay, compliment responses of students who had short amounts of outside classroom communication in English became directly expressed their self-assessment in English. However, some still retained the influence of Japanese. On the other hand, students who had long hours of meeting with native speakers of English outside classroom explained more details to verify their self-assessment of the topic of compliment.

1. Introduction

Recently in Japan, there are many schools offering study abroad programs. It seems useful for students, but some questions came up to my mind. Is it really effective if students just go to English-speaking countries? During the study abroad, what do students actually do after class? And what kind of activities can foster students' pragmatic competence? These questions are the motive of this study.

This study analyzed the change of compliment responses and outside classroom interaction during study abroad from the perspective of Interlanguage pragmatics. There are two main focuses of the study. One is to look at the change of compliment responses in English after the study abroad. The other is to show how students spent some free time during the stay. By combining the two, this study will explore the relationship between the time they spent outside classroom and the development of their pragmatic competence.

1. The original version of this study was presented at the 18th International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning held at Kobe University on July 21, 2010. The present paper has been revised reflecting the comments and suggestions from the participants at the poster presentation. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to them for their helpful suggestions and comments.

2. Previous Studies

2.1. Compliment Responses

Compliment responses are one type of social interaction in everyday life. When a compliment is given by a speaker, normally a compliment response follows. It is an ordinary exchange, but also it can be an object of study if we look at it as a cultural behavior. Although there are plenty of previous studies on compliment responses, most of them focused on the difference of compliment responses between languages (e.g., Pomerantz, 1978; Herbert, 1986, 1989; Herbert & Straight, 1989; Valdés & Pino, 1981; Saito & Beecken, 1997; Chen, 1993; Han, 1992; Nelson, Al-Batal, & Echols, 1996; Rose, 2000; Shimizu, 2004, 2009; Ruhi, 2006; Yokota, 1986; Terao, 1996; Hirata, 1999; Satoh, 2005; Ohno, 2005; Nakamura, 2008; Matsuura, 2007). To clarify the difference, the authors categorized compliment responses into several groups. One of the categorizations was offered by Holmes (1987). She divided compliment responses into three major categories: acceptance, deflection or evasion, and rejection. Acceptance is to accept the compliment, and it is the category includes such sentences as “Thank you”, “I think it’s lovely, too”, while deflection or evasion means to avoid saying either agreement or disagreement. For example, it can be an explanation of the target of the compliment, such as “My mother knitted it.” Rejection means to disagree with the compliment; it would be “I’m afraid I don’t like it much” (Holmes, 1987, p. 492). Dividing responses in different languages into these categories shows how compliments differ between languages and cultures. However, aside from this great contribution on studies of compliment response, most previous studies just focused on cross-sectional aspects. In other words, developmental aspects have not been fully investigated except for a few studies (e.g., Rose, 2000; Kasper & Kite, 2002; Ishihara, 2003 for teaching).

2.2. Study Abroad

Previous studies on study abroad have been conducted from a wide range of perspectives such as focus on development of skills (reading, listening), individual aspects (motivation, attitude), and comparison with immersion programs. Furthermore, there are some studies focused on development of pragmatics and study abroad or learning context (Kondo, 1997; Matsumura, 2003; Kim, 2000; Taguchi, 2008; Regan, 1995, 1998; Hassal, 2006). Matsumura (2003) and Kim (2000) suggested that how they spent their time outside classrooms could influence on pragmatic development.

Matsumura attempted to reveal whether the amount of exposure to English during study abroad in Canada might be an indicator of pragmatic development (p. 467). By using a multiple choice questionnaire before, in the middle, and after the study abroad, he mentioned that amount of exposure can indicate development of pragmatic competence. Also the amount of exposure is influenced by levels of proficiency. Another speech act study was conducted by Kim (2000). Kim examined the correlations of English informal input and pragmatic ability (apology and request) of Koreans in ESL context.² The variables were the amount of input outside the classroom, such as office, roommates, English books, magazines, radio, and TV. As a result, the time spent with English-speaking friends and working in an English environment office gave the correlations with performance. This study suggests that the importance of contextual factors which would exert influence on the learner's acquiring pragmatic competence should be considered for further studies (Kasper & Rose, 2001). From these studies, it is assumed that social context might have some influence on learners' pragmatic competence. However, it is still unclear from previous studies what the students actually do in the outside classroom contacts in order to develop pragmatic competence.

2.3. Research Question

From the literature review, this study aims to clarify the following points:

- To show what students do and how long students meet native speakers of English outside the classrooms during study abroad
- To reveal the pragmatic development (i.e., compliment response) after study abroad

Therefore, the research question is:

Can students who had spent longer times with native speakers outside classrooms develop their pragmatic competence (i.e., compliment response) more?

3. Methodology

As for the participants, seven university students (sophomores at the time of data collection) voluntarily took part in this study. Their major was English communication.

2. The participants were people who lived in an English-speaking country instead of people who were in a study abroad program.

The level of English proficiency was in TOEIC score between 400 and 450. Their assumed names are *Aki, Ikuko, Izumi, Orie, Natsu, Hiroko, and Miyuki*.

3.1. Program Description

This study abroad program is required as part of the credit by a private women's university in Japan. The students stayed in the U.S. for 5 months. The aims of this program are to develop English skill intensely in the second language context and to learn American culture. During the program, they stayed in a dormitory with Japanese roommates and took language classes with them. The classes were held at the dormitory every weekday with teachers who were native speakers of English. Along with them, there were native English speaking staff at the dormitory, such as the director who organizes the stay, a school nurse who checks the students' health, security guards, chefs, school bus drivers, and so on. Although students could meet them frequently, they didn't live in the dorm with the students. However, there were also RAs (resident assistants) who help students' life. They were native speakers of English living in the same dormitory as students and took care of them. Also, students could meet local people outside the dormitory. The program offered a conversation partner who is a family or an individual so that the students could choose either one. The partners are native speakers of English and they could spend some time together. There were no requirements to meet, so it was up to the individual negotiation how many times they met. Lastly, all of the students had almost the same amount of formal teaching at their dormitory, not at an American university or college. Therefore, especially for these students, it was assumed that how they spend their time outside classrooms can differentiate their lives.

3.2. Data Collection

Data 1: Compliment responses

Data collection was held before and after the study abroad to collect their compliment response by oral discourse completion test (hereafter, ODCCT). The participants were asked to read the descriptions of the situations and replied to what they had heard (in this case, compliments) from IC recorder. After the participants listened to the recorded compliment, then they reply to it as if they were in the real situation. There are three reasons that ODCCT was used in this study. First of all, ODCCT could control variables of compliment situations. Secondly, the stimulus (i.e.,

compliment) should be the same for every participant. If the compliment is recorded, it will be deprived of the effects of other audio-related issues, such as the variation of tone of voice or the way of speech of each compliment. Thirdly, writing a response could be different from speaking in conversation. When writing, the participants can consider the response before writing it, but this pause is not realistic in the actual situation. Therefore, the oral version of DCT was used in this study. Eight situations of complimenting were designed by a combination of three variables (Table 1): complimenter (the person who gives a compliment is higher or equal status: teacher or friend), topic of compliment (accomplishment or belongings: speech or shoes), and self-evaluation (positive or negative: positive self-evaluation means that the students thinks the object of compliment is good, and negative self-evaluation means that she thinks it is not good). These variables were introduced from previous studies of compliments and were found to be important factors for hearers to determine the response (Holmes, 1988; Matsuura, 2007 for complimenter's status and topic; Saito & Beecken, 1997; Shimizu, 2004 for self-evaluation). Since the combinations of these three variables have not been investigated yet, they will be the object of this study. See below for examples of situations.

Examples of situations³

[Situation A: Teacher, Speech, Positive self-evaluation]

You make a speech in your class. You think you did a beautiful speech. After the class, your teacher comes up to you and says "Your speech was good!" Then what would you say?

[Situation H: Friend, Shoes, Negative self-evaluation]

You are wearing a pair of shoes that you don't like. At school, your friend says to you "I like your shoes!" Then what would you say?

3. Situations were written in Japanese for the Japanese participants, but the compliment was given in English.

Table 1. *Situations of ODCT.*

Situations	Complimenter	Topic of compliment	Self-evaluation
A	Teacher	Speech	Positive
B	Teacher	Shoes	Positive
C	Friend	Speech	Negative
D	Friend	Shoes	Positive
E	Teacher	Speech	Negative
F	Teacher	Shoes	Negative
G	Friend	Speech	Positive
H	Friend	Shoes	Negative

To compare the learners' data with the response of native speakers, the researcher also collected baseline data. The data were obtained from Americans who were exchange students in Tokyo at the time of the data collection. They took the same ODCT as Japanese participants but used an English prompt.

Data 2: Bi-weekly questionnaire and interview

To learn about their outside classroom activities, a questionnaire⁴ was used. The questionnaire was based on the Language Contact Profile (LCP) by Freed et al. (2004), and was modified to fit the case of this study. The questionnaire that is used in this study consists of 16 questions, mainly asking the amount of time that the subjects spent with native speakers outside class. For example, "how many hours did you spend with RA (teachers, staff, friends, host family, volunteer workers⁵, and others)?" There was also a free comment section to fill in whatever they would like to write about what kind of activities they did with them. Since the students stayed five months and the questionnaire was given once in two weeks, ten questionnaires were collected in total. The language of the questionnaire was Japanese, which was the subjects' native language in order to make it easier to write their comments freely without feeling the stress of writing English.

In addition to the questionnaire, interviews were used to support the questionnaire data. The interviews were held twice: before and after the study abroad. After the ODCT, the researcher asked several questions about the ODCT and impressions on

4. The questionnaire was designed after conducting pilot tests to the students who participated in the same program previously.

5. If the students wanted, they could participate in several volunteer programs offered by local institutions.

study abroad. Allotted time on interview session varied depending on the participants' characteristics. Some were very friendly and some were very shy. The subjects were not taught the aim of the study except that my interest was in communication in English.

3.3. Analysis

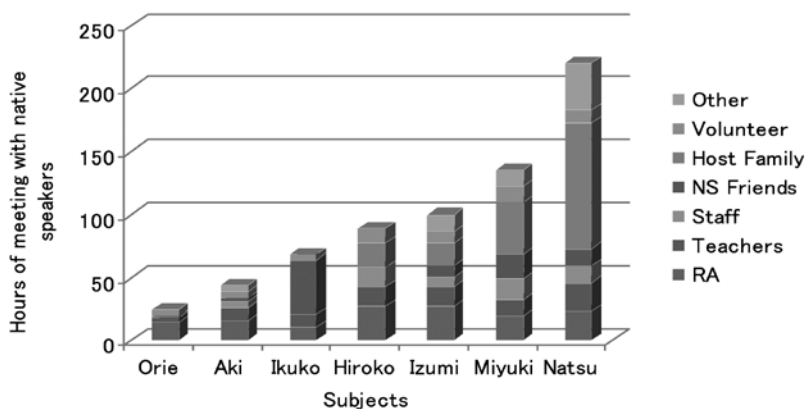
For the analysis, students' responses which were collected by ODCI were transcribed and coded using semantic formula analysis (Yokota, 1986; Saito & Beecken, 1997; Shimizu, 2004). In this study, the results will be shown as a comparison of the responses according to the amount of outside classroom interaction. Students' responses were categorized into three groups (long group, middle group, and short group). At the same time, ten questionnaires were collected in order to know how long and what they did during the stay after the classes. Their comments from their bi-weekly questionnaire and interviews before and after the study abroad were also examined to show their attitude toward the study abroad.

4. Results

4.1. Amount of Outside Classroom Interaction

By collecting questionnaires, we could know how long and with whom the students met after the classes. Figure 1 is the total amount of outside classroom interaction with native speakers outside class.

Figure 1. Total amount of outside classroom interaction with native speakers outside classroom.



As we can see from this graph, RAs and teachers seemed to be popular since all of the students had interaction with them. RAs and teachers were the closest native speakers whom students could contact with. Especially for Orié, who had the lowest amount of interaction, more than half of her total hours of meeting with native speakers was spent with RAs. In other words, she didn't seek for other opportunities to use English outside class even though she was in the second language situation. Aki has the second lowest amount of interaction, but she participated in various interactions with native speakers. Ikuko has third lowest amount of interaction and her outside classroom interaction was mostly with native speaker friends. Hiroko and Izumi had different kind of opportunities to use English outside classrooms. Hiroko had a problem with her roommate so that she needed to consult with several staff members constantly to solve her problem. Izumi voluntarily participated in the public ESL classes after school. Miyuki and Natsu both spent a lot of time with their host family. They could meet their host family frequently, which is why they had long hours to meet them. Natsu's host family invited her to come to family gatherings on Thanksgiving and Christmas. Miyuki had good relationship with her host family, especially with her host grandfather.

Also, their attitude almost correlated with the number of hours spent outside the classrooms. It was shown from the students' comments, and we could know that the students who had positive comments had more variety and spent longer times with native speakers. There was a tendency that the longer amount of time and wider variety of occasions they had spent with native speakers, the more positive their attitude was (Fukasawa, 2008b). Also, a positive attitude toward study abroad and target language may influence the opportunities to have a variety of interactions (Fukasawa, 2009).

4.2. Change of Compliment Responses

The other result is the change of compliment responses. After the study abroad, students' compliment responses differed in some ways. In this section, the change of compliment responses will be shown according to the amount of hours spent outside classroom. The students were divided into three groups according to the hours spent outside classroom: short group (less than 50 hours), middle group (50~100 hours), and long group (over 100 hours). Orié and Aki belong to short group, Hiroko, Izumi, and Ikuko are in the middle group, and Miyuki and Natsu were in the long group. Averages are 34.5, 85.7, and 177.5 hours respectively. There are several changes of students' compliment responses in each group.

Short Group

One of the changes of compliment responses for the short group was explicit presentation of self-assessment. This means that the students started to say what they thought about the topic of the compliment explicitly, both positively and negatively according to the self-evaluation of the situation. The examples are shown below.

(1) Before: Thank you.

After: Um, thank you. *I think so.* [Aki, Situation G]

(2) Before: Thank you, but I want, more good, more good, ah I want to better, than now.

After: Really? Um *I don't think so.* Um I I think uh I did uh do my speech more ... more ... good? [Orie, Situation C]

In the example (1), Aki just said “Thank you” before the stay and then after the stay, she added “I think so”. Her response expresses her positive self-assessment. This direct expression of positive self-evaluation was also found in other participants’ data. However, the only direct expression of negative self-evaluation as (2) tended to be found in the short group.

The second characteristic of compliment response of the short group is an influence of Japanese. The students did the same ODCI in Japanese also, and they sometimes said “*Hokano ga hosii* [I want to buy another one]”, or “*Kaetai* [I want to change it]”. These responses may imply that the speaker isn’t satisfied with the topic of the compliment. However, this strategy was found only in Japanese response data; the native speakers of English never used these kinds of expressions. Below is the example of Orie.

(3) Before: Really? I don’t like it. Um...*I want to another shoes.*

After: Really? Um I don’t like this shoes. *I want to... buy ah... another one.*

[Orie, Situation H]

If you look at this example of Orie, she said “I want to another shoes” or “I want to buy another one” even after the stay. Therefore, even after the study abroad, this Japanese way of response remained.

Middle Group

In the middle group, the characteristic of compliment response varied depending on the student. Izumi, for example, had characteristics of both short group and long group.

(4) Before: Thank you, but I'm not, ah I'm not satisfaction with my speech. So have to I have to study more hard.

After: Thank you, but *I didn't like it*. I want to to better presentation.

[Izumi, Situation C]

(5) Before: Thank you, but I don't like this shoes so much. I want to look for another one.

After: Thank you very much, but *I don't like this color. This is because uh this is my mother's choice, so I don't like this*.

[Izumi, Situation F]

Her response after the study abroad directly expressed her negative self-evaluation as in (4), while in (5), her response became detailed, in addition to the explicit self-evaluation. Hiroko, the other student in middle group, also responded in the similar way which contained both characteristics of short group and long group as Izumi's case. On the other hand, Ikuko who was also in the middle group, responded in relatively direct, short responses both before and after the study abroad.

Long Group

The long group showed more variety. In addition to the strategies used by the short group, it was found that Miyuki in the long group used indirect expression of self-assessment. Indirect here means without saying her self-assessment but only implying it. For example, English native speakers would say "Thank you. *I think I could have done a little better though.*" This response tells disagreement of the compliment without saying it directly. However, these indirect ways of negative self-assessment expressions were rarely found in students' responses (6).

(6) English native speakers: Thank you. *I think I could have done a little better though.*

Student / Before: I don't think so.

After: Thank you very much. *I want to do it again.*

[Miyuki, Situation E]

Miyuki from the long group said before the stay “I don’t think so.” This response is direct because it tells disagreement explicitly. Then after the stay, she said “Thank you very much. I want to do it again.” In this case, although it is not exactly the same expression as that of native speakers saying indirect negative self-assessment, it seems that she tried to tell her disagreement indirectly. Indirect disagreement is considered as a result of face-redress (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This student, Miyuki, spent a lot of time with her host family. Moreover, she spent a lot of time with self-study too. So these other factors might also affect the change of her compliment responses.

The next characteristic of long group was to be able to add detailed explanation after showing self assessment.

(7) Before: Thank you but...I I don’t think so. I want to do, more...I want to speak English more well?

After: Thank you, but I don’t think so. I...I want to *practice my pronunciation more*.

[Natsu, Situation E]

Natsu said before the stay “Thank you but...I I don’t think so. I want to do, more...I want to speak English more well.” In this response, firstly she said her self assessment then after that she just expressed her regret. On the other hand, after the study abroad, she could say what she wanted to improve in her speech as in “Thank you, but I don’t think so. I...I want to practice my pronunciation more.” In this response, she expressed not only her self-assessment, but also adding reason or explanation to back it up. Also we can know that she tries to specify what was insufficient to accept the praise confidently.

To sum up the results, the way of expressions of compliment response had changed after the study abroad. The change appeared differently in the responses of students according to how long they spent outside the classrooms with native speakers.

5. Discussion

As shown in the previous section, the amount of time spent with native speakers can lead to different uses of expressions of responses. The change found in students of shorter amount of outside classroom English use was to show their self-evaluation

clearly, especially when they disagreed with the compliment. On the other hand, the students who had longer amount of outside classroom interaction added information to validate the self-evaluation. As a result, students who spent longer time with native speakers would be able to express their thoughts clearly and gained more variety of ways to do so. Therefore, from a wider range of expressions of responses, they could choose more appropriate one that they thought was suitable to the situation. This is because that students who had more chances of meeting with native speakers might have more needs to adjust distance between the interlocutors by using appropriate expressions in order to maintain good relationship. To be safer, they might have more chances to use English at least compared to the students who had shorter amount of time spent with native speakers of English. Therefore, it would be beneficial for students to have some opportunities to meet native speakers of English outside classroom to be able to attain a wider variety of expressions of compliment responses. It is important not only to have opportunities to meet native speakers but also to maintain the relationship because this study showed the certain amount of using English outside classroom made a difference. For example, Ikuko met with native speaker friends frequently, but the times were short and her responses didn't show many changes. Therefore, when opportunities to use English outside classroom continue with good relationships, it would be an ideal chance to learn pragmatic aspect of English.

In terms of the compliment responses, even though the variety of expression had widened, the expressions were not always similar to the responses of native speakers of English. Rather, native speakers tended to respond in formulaic expressions and with less variety than the learners in all the situations. In that case, is the change of students' compliment response not the development? If "development" means to be closer to the native speakers' norm, because the students' responses didn't become the same as the native speakers' responses, the students' pragmatic competence of change of compliment responses in this study wouldn't show any development. However, "development" might mean that it is not necessary to become closer to the native speakers' use, but it would be appropriate to mean that to broaden the range of expressions that students can choose from. Ideally, the variety of expressions that the students can use should be wide because they can choose the better one according to the situation. The answer to the research question; can students who had spent longer times with native speakers outside classrooms develop their pragmatic competence (i.e., compliment response) more? is, from the results presented in this study, the students who had spent longer outside classrooms could have more variety of expressions to respond to compliments.

Then the ultimate goal of the attaining pragmatic competence is to be able to choose the one which the learner thinks it would be appropriate after considering situational aspects. As Fukasawa (2008a) suggested, there may be two levels of development in the responses to compliments. One may be expressing what the learner thinks, and the next may be considering how the interlocutor would take the responses. Therefore, learning a second language requires going beyond just expressing thoughts, considering situations and interlocutor.

As for the pedagogical implication, particularly for students in this study abroad program, keeping a diary was helpful for them to be reflective on their lives. Some of them commented that they could reflect on what they had done so far by doing so. Therefore, keeping a diary or writing essays can be helpful to be objective during the stay. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, providing opportunities to meet people outside classroom could be a beneficial chance to learn pragmatic knowledge.

One of the limitations of this study is the small number of subjects. This study was a case study but the few subjects could lead to biased results. The further study needs more data to obtain clear results. Another is uncertainty of the actual chances of being complimented or seeing compliment responses by native speakers. Even if the participants declared their amount of hours of meeting with native speakers outside classroom, it didn't guarantee that they had compliment situations within these hours. Therefore, for the further studies, the chances of compliment response should be asked in addition to the amount of the outside classroom interaction.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study had attempted to explore the relationship between development of pragmatic competence and outside classroom interaction with native speakers during study abroad. Students who had longer and more friendly connections with native speakers could express their responses in a variety of ways. They will be used in order to adjust compliment responses according to the situations and relationships with interlocutor. Therefore, it should be beneficial for study abroad students to have active participation in the social activities with local people. The students will ideally engage in social activities continuously to be able to establish more profound connections. Then the students would realize the need to learn pragmatics. The basic of learning pragmatics is always to consider the relationship with interlocutor and to choose the expressions that are appropriate for the situation in order to be polite

and maintain relationship. Study abroad is a fruitful experience for learners from foreign language context because they could be exposed to plenty of opportunities to learn pragmatic knowledge.

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