The Persian Cultural Schema: Compliment Response Strategies on Social Networking SitesAmong Persian EFL Learners

Farzad Sharifian,

Professor in Cultural Linguistics, School of Language, Literature, Culture, and Linguistics, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia
E-mail: Farzad.sharifian@monash.edu

Azizeh Chalak,

Associate Professor of TEFL, English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail:azichalack@gmail.com

Zeinab Dehkordi (Corresponding Author),
MA of TEFL, English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail: adehkordi84@yahoo.com

Abstract

Introduction of Cultural Linguistics in the modern ages of communication can address the issue of cultural schema transfer in online communication. Despite a good number of studies on a compliment, this pragmatic behavior has not been examined in the context of online communications such as social networking sites where compliments are commonly paid and received. The present study aimed to examine the realization of Persian cultural schema of *Shekaste-nafsi* (Sharifian, 2005) on compliment responses uttered by Persian EFL on Facebook. To do so, 30 Persian EFL learners were selected through convenient sampling, and their compliments and compliment responses were recorded as data. Herbert's (1986) taxonomy was used to identify the strategies' types and the Persian cultural schema of *Shekaste-nafsi* was served as a model to gloss the samples. The interpretations suggested that participants applied their Persian cultural schemas and expressed their modesty while they tend to be polite and appreciate the compliments. The findings indicated the importance of cultural schema and highlighted the pragmatic knowledge transfer both in Persian and English while online communicating. The results of the present study may contribute to the issue of pragmatic transfer in the process of foreign language learning and can benefit the EFL learners in identifying the source of miscommunication.
Keywords: Compliment, Strategies, Online, Persian, EFL, Cultural, Schema

Introduction

One of the newly introduced terms in the area of research studies is the concept of Cultural Linguistics or Ethnolinguistics that has been applied to and benefited from several areas of Applied Linguistics, including intercultural pragmatics (Sharifian, 2017). One of the most practical features of the language is function or pragmatics, and in this regard, cultural conceptualization is highlighted. As it is stated in many research studies, functions of language or pragmatic aspects of language entail appreciation and interpretation of a given form. This understanding has resulted from norms, cultural schemas, cultural conceptualizations and many other factors involved in the cognitive culture of the interlocutors. "Cultural schema is one of the main tools of cultural linguistics and can be considered as the base for interoperating of speech acts and understating. The cultural schema, which is a crucial mean for the proper uptake of pragmatics entails cultural assumptions and expectations" (Sharifian, 2017, p. 52). Cultural schema is that pool of shared knowledge containing significant concepts necessary to day to day communications. The relation between culture and pragmatics is highlighted when it is found out that different cultures may apply different forms to convey a similar meaning and they may use similar forms to convey different meanings; in this regard, cultural conceptualizations play a role in appreciating a given speech.

Due to globalization and the advent of new technologies, communication or telecommunication has, to a great extent, shifted toward Social Networking Sites (SNSs). SNSs such as Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. are web-based applications allowing users to have a public or semi-public profile, with a list of other users or so-called friends to whom individuals are connected via devices like personal computers or smartphones and of course internet connection. Social networking sites are mostly in English, but the users are from different countries with different languages, culture and social backgrounds.

What they have in common is that users' language on social networking, as a virtual setting, is telegraphic and short accompanied with emoticons to compensate the lack of facial expression and intonations of face to face communications. It seems that speech acts on SNSs manifest their own forms and formats. Users are applying SNSs for two main functions: interpersonal interactions and self-impression. The primary medium of communication in SNSs is in English, and many users whose their mother tongue is not English are frequently using them and turning SNSs as one of the most popular media for cyber communication, however, people from the same country or even same ethnical group tend to communicate via their mother tongue and localize the context of the communication. But the common point in almost all SNSs is that users can share their personal ideas, photos, latest life events and communicate beyond geographic borders.

Users can enjoy sharing private messages; however, they tend to make their communications visible. These visible comments are mostly naturally occurred speech act of compliments. The compliments are on what users shared and updated

their social life, success, and sometimes possession; in many cases, users upload their most attention-getting photos as the profile photo aiming to impress the others and fish for compliments. These frequently paid and received compliments, thus, can be considered as a potential set of data for examining the speech act of compliment and compliment response strategies in online communications.

Study of compliments and compliment responses have been a quite interesting issue for many pragmatics researchers. For many years, complimenting and compliment responses have been analyzed through a different method of data collections, including interviews, field-study, observation, role-play, DCT (Discoures Complétion Tasks) questionnaires, etc. Compliments and compliment responses have been examined within and across different cultures, as well. Despite all efforts for investigating this speech event, new channels of communication, including SNSs, have been ignored as a potential context of complimenting. Since the number of compliments on social networks abounds, examining compliment response strategies as a naturally occurring speech event made by Persian speakers seems promising for the aspects of pragmatic transfer and the concepts of cultural linguistics.

Within the concept of cultural linguistics, a very important notion is culture transfer. In the case of learning a foreign language, exposure to target is rather limited. According to Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018) lack of source information and inadequate exposure of cultural schemas or themes [in the target language] can be the reasons for insufficient intercultural communication competence in Persian learners.

Although the number of studies on speech acts, particularly compliment and compliment responses abound, to the best knowledge of the author, little attempt was made on this speech event on SNSs as the context of naturally occurring setting in computer-mediated communication. The present study aimed to examine the effect of Persian cultural schema of *shekasteh-nafsi*[1] proposed by Sharifian (2005) on compliment response strategies made by Persian speakers in their online communications.

According to this schema, "success and achievement should be viewed in collective terms and not merely as a result of one's own efforts. It is reflected in cases where a person disagrees with a compliment, tones it down, returns it to the complimenter…" (Sharifian, 2017, p. 53).

The design of the present study is as the following: section 2 reviews the related works and introduces the theoretical framework. Section 3 provides the methods and details of data collection and procedures. Section 4 presents the findings and

---

1- The cultural schema of *Shekasteh-nafsi* is interpreted as shekaste-eh "break-pp", nafs "self", and *i* (a maker of process/action/event). This schema encourages individuals to avoid any behavior that has any egotistic nature, and the individuals apply this cultural behavior to be more modest and polite (Sharifian, 2017)

interprets the data, and section 5 discusses the findings. Finally, section 6 finalizes with a conclusion and provides the shortcomings and suggestions for further studies.

Background

Holmes (1986) defines compliment as "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually, the person addressed, for some good (possessions, characteristics, accomplishments, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and hearer" (p. 446). Compliments function as a social instrument that can be served as a conversation opener, or as a strategy to maintain the solidarity between the interlocutors. Compliment and compliment responses have been investigated regarding different variables such as function, that is why individuals do apply this speech act and why bothering paying compliments. According to Holmes (1988), women pay a compliment to keep the conversation going because they enjoy having longer and friendlier conversations. The topic of the compliment, as another important variable, is different cross-culturally and varies regarding the gender, age, distance and even educational background of the interlocutors; the purpose, syntactic structure, as well as gender, are interesting topics of studies and have been examined as the variables that can play a significant role in the realization of this speech event (Manes, 1983; Holmes, 1986; Wolfson, 1983).

It should be noted that paying a compliment involves another part called the response. Both compliment and compliment responses serve as speech act and interestingly the second part of the compliment pair, the response, even gained more attention. Analyzing compliment response strategies showed that responses follow a routine pattern and mostly fall into the same classes so that they can be categorized according to their types. Holmes (1988), Pomerantz (1978), and Herbert (1986) categorized compliment responses and labelled the responses as strategies.

Herbert (1986) provided a framework for the study of frequency and distribution of compliment responses types. In her framework, disagreeing to compliments is frequently used to maintain solidarity and relationship. Later, she provided a more detailed classification of compliment responses and classified responses based on their types. Generally, responses were of two types as agreement and non-agreement (or acceptance and non-acceptance). However each class was further divided into more detailed types such as appreciation, acceptance, praise up-grade, commenting history, reassignment, return, scale down, questioning, disagreeing, qualification, no response, and request interpretation.

However, Sharifian (2005, 2008) showed that a very important factor plays a significant role in the choice and manner of responding to compliments which are rooted in the cultural conceptualization and cultural schemas of the individuals. He (2005) proposed the cultural schema of *Shekasteh-nafsi* and reported that "the schema motivates the speakers to downplay their talents, skills, achievements while praising a similar trait in their interlocutor" (p. 336). He later examined the

relationship between compliment responses and his proposed cultural schema through DCT questionnaires.

According to Sharifian (2008), "the cultural schema may be realized differently based on the context of receiving compliments" (p. 55). He also showed that a single response could be used for more than one function and connection between cultural schemas and pragmatic behavior, in this case, compliment responses, can be different across languages. In his latest report, Sharifian (2017) mentions that "when a person disagrees with a compliment, he or she may tone the compliment down and return it to the compliment, or reassign it to an interlocutor, a family member or God" (p. 397). Once again, this can suggest that Persian speakers express politeness by practising the cultural schema of *Shekasteh-nafsi.*

There have been many studies on this speech event regarding different variables in Iran as well as other countries. For instance, Karamnia and Afghari (2010, 2011), compared English and Persian culture by collecting data from Persian and English TV programs and found that self-lowering and other-raising pattern is very common in Iranian compliment response and in their later study they showed that the commonest strategy in Persian compliment response is self-lowering and other-raising strategy.

Yousefvand (2010, 2012) argued that Persian speakers rarely disagree with the compliment, but they tend to make a comment to show their modesty and agreement is the most frequently used strategy in responding to compliments and modesty plays a role in Persian speakers complimenting. Tajeddin and Yazdanmehr (2012), examined the structure of the compliment responses and found that statements have the highest frequencies while imperatives form an only small percentage of occurrences.

Motaghi Tabari and Beuzevile (2012) showed that Persian speakers show the effect of cultural transfer while responding to compliments. Shirin Basksh and Eslami Rasekh (2013) reported that younger Persian speakers do not practice *Shekaste-nafsi* as much as the middle-aged adults suggesting that traditional Iranian society is transferring to a modern one.

Moradi Moghadam (2017) examined strategies employed by women to respond to compliments, in one part of his study, he reported that Shekasteh-nafsi (modesty) is the most frequent observed strategy when the compliment is about the personality, however, when the compliment is about possession women applied this strategy the least. The author reports that this strategy can be considered as insincere politeness that is used by Persian speakers.

Dehkordi and Chalak (2015) examined the compliment responses strategies to English Compliments made by Iranian EFL learners and showed that appreciation is the most frequent responses strategies made on SNSs and Persian speakers do not show cultural transfer in the context of online communications.

Rohami and Nur (2017) investigated the syntactic structure of compliments made on Instagram. They reported that compliments made on the media of Instagram are rather short if the topic is on skills and ability. They also found that users prefer to use adjectives rather than verbs and the most frequent strategies to compliments are acceptance. To further examine the effect of SNSs and speech act of compliment, the present study will examine the culture which is highly involved in utterances.

In Spain the speech act of compliments serves as a politeness strategy; as Barros Garcia (2018) reported, compliments function as constituting and reinforcing the face of addresses and the "face-enhancing" politeness encourages Spanish speakers to pay compliments. As the main function of compliment, the author indicated that Spanish compliments are mean of showing closeness and solidarity.

Sharifian, Chalak, and Dehkordi (2019) examined how different genders choose different strategies to respond to compliments they receive. They found that male and female speakers do not show a clear difference in the choice of response strategies. They reported that in the case of English compliments gender could not predict the choice of the strategies. However, when Persian speakers practice politeness by their mother tongue, they tend to observe modesty and use strategies that suggest humbleness and self-lowering.

Regarding the cross-cultural studies, the literature is quite rich; however, the most relevant studies to the Persian culture were reviewed briefly above. Apart from Dehkordi and Chalak (2015) and Rohami et al. (2017) who studied the compliment response strategies on social networking, this speech act has not been examined on the new channels of online communications.

The present study is constructed based on two main frameworks as Herbert' (1986) taxonomy and cultural schemas of *Shekasteh-nafsi* proposed by Sharifian (2005). Herbert' taxonomy was used because it entails almost all strategies shared in a different culture. It had also been used in previous studies; thus, the comparison between the present study and other studies can be made more clearly. In the following, the schema of *Shekasteh-nafsi* is briefly introduced because the data will be interpreted according to this cultural schema.

Sharifian (2005) proposed the Persian cultural schema known as *Shekasteh-nafsi*, which later motivated many researchers to base their studies on this framework. *Shekasteh-nafsi* can be roughly translated as modesty or humility, and it is manifested in many Persian speech acts, including compliment responses.

> In circumstances when an Iranian receives praise for an achievement the cultural schema of *shekaste-nafsi* encourages the receivers of the praise to downplay their own role in the achievement or the success that is the target of the praise and attribute the success to the interlocutor(s) or somehow make them share the praise interlocutor(s) are clearly outside the domain of the praise, the speakers may attribute their success to the other people, like their parents, God, or simply to the fate or luck. (Sharifian, 2005, p. 343)

The cultural schema of *shekaste-nafsi* encourages the interlocutors to downplay their abilities, talent, possessions and many other topics when receiving a compliment and attribute them to others in order to enhance the face of them. This schema in Persian culture is valued and used frequently. According to this schema, scale down which is a non-acceptance strategy introduced by Herbert (1986) is an example of *Shekasteh-nafsi* "where the recipient of a compliment on knowledge or talent scales down the target of compliment and returns it to the complimenter" (Sharifian, 2017, p. 55).

Persian cultural schema, like other cultural schemas, are heterogeneously distributed across the mind of the Persian speakers and is not equally imprinted in individuals' minds. The present study aims to examine the effect of Persian cultural schema by Sharifian (2005) on the compliment responses made on Facebook. In the following method, data collection and the procedures will be elaborated.

Method

This study enjoyed naturalistic, controlled observation, and recording of naturally occurring compliments and compliment response strategies among Persian EFL learners on SNSs. This descriptive qualitative study was process-oriented where participants' response strategies to English and Persian compliments were recorded, coded and analyzed. The present study examined compliment response strategies among Persian EFL learners on Facebook, as one popular SNSs in the context of online or computer-mediated communication.

Participants

The participants of the study were a group of 30 graduate and undergraduate male and female Persian speakers who were Facebook users with an average age of 25.8 studying English at Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan, all with at least intermediate knowledge of English. Table 1 shows the demographic background of the participants. The participants were chosen from a pool of Facebook users based on their field of study at university. All the participants were Persian speakers, and they had learned English as a foreign language. The participants were sent contest forms informing them that their comments would be read and recorded only for a research study and they are supposed to show their agreement by returning the consent forms back to the correspondent author. They were assured that their names and personal information would remain confidential, and their comments would be used as the sample only.

Table 1. Demographic Background of the Participants

Number of participants (Male and Female)	30
Mother Tongue	Persian
Age	23-30
Level of education	Graduate and Undergraduate
Field of study	English Translation and TEFL

Instruments

Two different instruments were applied to collect the data. They were applied to ensure the authenticity of data collection and data analysis procedures. a) Consent Forms: To observe ethical issues for data collection procedure. The potential sample participants were sent contest forms in which they were asked to express if they agree to let the researchers use the compliments they pay or receive on their profile photos. The consent forms informed the potential samples that the data are used only for research purpose. Moreover, to ensure confidentiality, they were informed that their names and other personal information would not be shared and published. To prevent any confusion or misunderstanding, the consent forms were in Persian. The potential participants were asked to fill out the forms and express their agreement by sending the forms back through personal messages. b) Herbert's (1986) Taxonomy: All compliment responses were coded and classified according to Herbert`s Compliment Response Strategy Taxonomy where response strategies were divided into two macro levels of agreement, non-agreement. The data, then, were classified according to the modified version of Herbert's taxonomy.

Data Collection Procedures

To start data collection, the correspondence author used her Facebook account and recorded any Persian and English compliment pairs uttered by the participants to social friends' profile photos. The data were collected within a period of 2 months and were classified based on the modified version of Herbert's (1986) taxonomy. Compliment pairs were classified at two Levels. The Levels were on the base of the language by which participants gave and received compliments (Figure1). Level One (132 pairs) comprised those pairs in which the first part of the compliments, were in English and the second part, the responses, were in English, Persian, or mixture of English and Persian known as code-switching. Level Two (110 pairs) were those pairs that both parts of the compliment pairs were in Persian.

As the data were naturally occurring speech acts, it was no control over the number of responses or the distribution of utterances and the language of the participants. The data were classified, and the frequency and percentage of each strategy were measured.

Following that, data in both Levels were divided into two macro-strategies (acceptance and non-acceptance) and then were further divided into micro-strategies. Micro-strategies in acceptance were strategies such as appreciation token, comment history, and praise upgrade and in non-acceptance were return, scale down, etc.

If the participants used strategies other than appreciation and applied strategies such as scale down, return or reassign, they were put in the second level as non-acceptance. The second group is particularly interesting for the present study because they manifest the Persian cultural schema of *Sheksteh-nafsi* (Sharifian, 2005). The responses were later interpreted regarding the given cultural schema.

Compliment response strategies, then, were analyzed to see how Persian cultural schema is manifested in the compliment responses. The number of compliment pairs on social networking sites such as Facebook is huge, but this study was interested in analyzing the compliments made by Persian EFL learners. 17 Persian compliment pairs were chosen randomly to demonstrate the effect of Persian cultural schema on the responses. Each pair of compliment and compliment responses were analyzed; first, the type of responses was identified, and then each pair was examined to see how the Persian cultural schema is manifested on the responses. Next section will provide the details on the samples and the related interpretations.
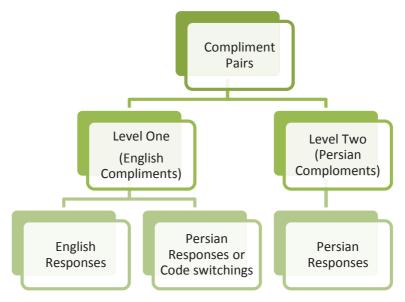

Figure 1. The Classification of the Compliment Pairs and Responses (Level One and Level Two)

Findings

Having classified and coded the data, it was revealed that participants tend to used diverse strategies to respond to English or Persian compliments and they feel free to choose either English or Persian in order to respond to compliments. Some instances of code-mixing or code-switching were observed as well. Code-mixing responses to compliments on Facebook manifested interesting yet unique strategies so that only Persian speakers who have at least some knowledge of English can understand them (sample 1 and 2).

Macro-strategies

Table 2 shows the frequency and percentage of English responses at the macro level for level One and Two. Table 2 shows the most frequent response strategies at Level one is acceptance, where the participants use English or Persian language to respond to the compliments. This shows that at Level One, when the compliment is in English, Persian speakers do not show the culture schema of modesty, and they do not tend to be modest. When the first part of the compliment pair is English, both

English and Persian responses fell in the category of acceptance strategies. In other words, participants tend to accept the compliments by appreciating the compliments, and they would rather not transfer their Persian cultural schema of *Shekaste-nafsi*. Thus, whether the medium of responses in English or Persian, participants tend to accept the compliments and they tend to show their gratitude by appreciation to English compliments.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Response Strategies at Macro Level (Both Levels)

		Response Strategies		
		Macro Levels	Frequency	Percentage
Level One	English	Acceptance	56	86.15
		Non-acceptance	9	13.85
	Persian or code-switching	Acceptance	48	71.63
		Non-acceptance	19	28.37
	No. 132			
Level Two	Persian	Acceptance	41	38
		Non-acceptance	69	62
	No. 110			

As it is in shown in Table 2, at Level Two in Persian compliments more than half of the responses are the non-acceptance type. This distribution suggests that participants used their Persian cultural schemas when responding to the Persian compliments and they tend to show their politeness by being modest and attributing the good quality to the complimenter.

Micro-strategies

The detailed analysis of non-acceptance strategies revealed that the participants used different strategies when responding to compliments. When the strategies were analyzed, it was noticed that in many cases, the participants used different strategies at the same time to a single compliment. Moreover, Persian compliment responses (Level Two) instantiated Persian cultural schema where complimentee used the scale down strategies rather than returning the compliment. Analyzing English compliment response strategies (Level One) to English compliments revealed that although appreciation was highly used to response the compliments, some other strategies are applied as well. However, this suggests that participants do not apply their Persian cultural schema when the English language is the medium of communications.

Analysis of non-acceptance strategies revealed that some responses were ambiguous in nature, and it was difficult to decide what category of strategies they belong to. Understanding the true nature of some of these responses was demands the rooted concepts of Persian culture. Although these strategies were not high in number, it is worth to analyze them. In the following 17 pairs are used as the sample in which the compliment pairs are interpreted, and the strategies applied in each pair are analyzed and compared to the Persian cultural schema.

According to Sharifian (2017), "there are particular ready-made formulaic expressions that speakers have available to respond to the compliments" (p. 55) (sample 7, 8, and 11), however, speakers use their own creativeness and produce a code-mixing expression (sample 1and 2), such examples are not very common in standard spoken or written language but they are frequently seen in the online written form of communications.

Here, some samples of compliments are examined to see how response strategies are associated with the pragmatic schema of *Shekaste-nafsi*.

1.

Pragmatic schema: politeness and modesty
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture
Macro level: non-acceptance   Micro Level: return strategy
A: You look cute
B: chesmat cute mibine (your eyes see cute)

2.

Pragmatic schema: Politeness and modesty
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture
Macro-level: non-acceptance Micro Level: return and reassign strategy
A: perfect
B: perfecti as xodetune (you are perfect)

As it is indicated in sample 1, *A* used the adjective cute to pay a compliment and *B* used the same adjective to return the compliment. *B* mixed up Persian and English and produced a kind of language which is not a common standard language and is known as code-mixing. *B* also did not accept the compliments and used a return strategy to show modesty and probably politeness.

Again in sample 2, *A* used the same adjective (perfect) to reassign and then return the compliment. Reassign and return strategies as non-acceptance strategies manifest politeness and represent the cultural schema of Persian speakers as a maxim of modesty, which is deeply rooted in Persian culture.

3.

Pragmatic schema: politeness
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture
Macro level: acceptance   Micro level: appreciation strategy
A: handsome man, good luck
B: thanks man

As it is indicated in sample 3, *B* accepted the compliment and used an appreciation token strategy to respond to *A*. As it was mentioned before, the majority of strategies to English compliments were appreciation. In some cases, *B* accepted the compliment and responded with a form of appreciation token accompanied with an assign strategy to *A* as it is instantiated in the following example.

4.

Pragmatic schema: politeness	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: acceptance	Micro level: appreciation and reassign strategies
A: very nice and romantic	
B: thank you very much, honey	

In sample 4, *B* expressed her acceptance by appreciation token strategy, *B* also used the word honey to *A* to show kindness and this kindness toward *A* can be considered as a form of reassigning strategy; that is, saying good things and giving a compliment to the complimenter. Using appreciation suggests politeness, which is highly valued in Persian culture schema.

5.

Pragmatic schema: politeness	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: acceptance	Micro level: appreciation and comment history strategies
A: I like it very much	
B: thank you, When I was young	

Here, *B* responded to compliment first by appreciating and then by a comment history strategy, as if this compliment reminded *A's* past life. In some compliment pairs, participants expressed nostalgia about the past as if pictures and friends reminded them of some good event about the past. As it is indicated in sample 6, *B* ignored the first part of the compliment and responded to the second part and expressed her nostalgia and then showed appreciation to the compliment.

6.

Pragmatic schema: politeness	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: acceptance	Micro level: comment history and appreciation strategies
A: Great picture, miss you	
B: Miss you too, by the way, thanks!	

It can be inferred that, since in SNSs individuals telecommunicate, participants may not see each other out of the cyber world; therefore, social networks can be a good means of communication and sharing their ideas, nostalgia, news, success, and their latest life events. In most compliment responses in SNSs participants' language is short and telegraphic and sometimes vague and ambiguous. In fact, it can be inferred that features of telegraphic communication are vague in social networks where facial expressions and voice features are absent.

7.

Pragmatic schema: politeness and modesty	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance Micro level: scale down and return	
A: just any time.....perfect	
B: really? that's very kind of you	

In sample 7, *B* pretends that she cannot believe the compliment by asking the so-called question "really?", this can be a strategy to scale down herself in order to show her politeness by being modest, following that *B* appreciated *A's* kindness by a fixed expression to express her politeness and modesty. This strategy has been instantiated in other compliment pairs as well.

8.

Pragmatic schema: modesty and politeness	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: acceptance	Micro level: return
A: So beautiful	
B: you see me beautiful!	

In sample 8, *B* expresses politeness by being modest, accepting the compliment as well as returning the compliment to *A*; in the first glance, the comment made by *B*, seems to be non-acceptance, however, this return strategy shows that *B* accepted the quality *A* attributed to her. This manner of returning the compliments suggests that strategies are not always straightforward and one single strategy may manifest different strategies at the same time. However, in the following cases, the participants were more straightforward and accepted the compliments without appreciation, which may represent their sense of humor:

9.

Pragmatic schema: politeness	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: acceptance	Micro level: comment accept
A: Ooooff so hot	
B: And I know it	

In the above compliment pair (sample 9), *B* accepted the compliment with a comment acceptance strategy. This kind of response to the compliment is straightforward; this strategy is used to show a kind of sense of humor showing that *B* was fishing for compliment. Therefore, he accepts the compliment without being modest.

10.

Pragmatic schema: modesty by *Sharmandegi*	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: scale down
A: Wild eyes	
B: You make me feel shy	

In sample 10, *B* used more hedges even in accepting the compliment. A critical analysis of this strategy shows that this response is a loan translation of a Persian expression (*Khejalatam nade*) known as the cultural schema of *Sharmandegi* (feeling ashamed) that encourage the speakers to feel guilty. However, there is

nothing to be ashamed of. This expression can be interpreted as scale down in order to show modesty in Persian culture.

11.

Pragmatic schema: modesty by *Shekasteh-nafsi*	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: scale down,
A: Let's give it up for Mr. handsome	
B: na baba (Oh, no!), am I really handsome?	

In this compliment pair (sample 11), *B* ignored his being handsome, the topic of compliment, and use the cultural schema of modesty and non-acceptance strategies, scale down, and asked a question to reassure *A* that he is so modest and cannot believe having this quality. In this case, this expression instantiated Persian cultural schema of *Shekasteh-nafsi*. The closest compliment response strategy for the expressions of this kind is the scale down strategy which is used frequently by Persian speakers.

12.

Pragmatic schema: modesty by *Shekasteh-nafsi*	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: scale down, reassign
A: You look great	
B: come on! Shoma ke xodet Tome Cruise hasti (You are Tome Cruise)	

In sample 12, *B* first uses "come one" to show that he is not believing the compliment, because he is too modest to accept the compliment, then *B* returns the compliment. This response strategy shows that *B* is so modest and feels that he should say something good about *A* and tells him you are better than me and you are very handsome, not like Tom Cruise, but you are the very Tom Cruise, this exaggeration is due to modesty and some ambiguity in Persian cultural schema, showing that Persian speakers are practicing modesty by *Shekasteh-nafsi*.

13.

Pragmatic schema: a sense of humor	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: question
A: Bah, Bah, che aksi, Ishalla damad shi	
(wow! What a photo! By God Help, I wish your happy marriage)	
B: Nefrin Mikoni?	
(are you cursing me?)	

In sample 13, *A* gives a compliment on the picture and wishes *B* a good future about marriage; in return, *B* showed disagreement and considered this pray as a curse. But if this piece of utterance is analyzed considering Persian culture, it can reflect the indirectness of Persian speakers in their utterance, this response strategy

is humorous and is not negative at all, actually *B* tried to show his sense of humor rather than disagreement to the compliment, this sense of humor can be seen in the following compliment pairs as well.

14.

Pragmatic schema: a sense of humor	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: question
A: Man asheqhe in tripetam (I love this style)	
B: bokoshamet? (do you want me to kill you?)-	

As it is indicated in sample 14, *B* used a non-acceptance strategy and asked a question, but this question does not show that *B* did not get the compliment or he did not understand the concept, rather this question can be seen a sense of humor of the addressee. An interesting point in sample 14 is that the very compliment is rather sardonic. This tone of paying compliments can be considered ironic, and it seems that *A* is not going to praise *B*. However, the surface structure of the compliment suggests that this piece of utterance is the speech act of compliment. In the analysis of the compliment pairs, it was found some participants used humor more, this shows that they are not so engaged in paying and receiving compliments; rather, they look for more conversation exchange and humor, this is particularly manifested when the conversation is between two male speakers.

15.

Pragmatic schema: modesty	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: scale down, return
A: che pesare xoshtipi	
(What a handsome boy)	
B: Jaye xoshtiptarinemon xalie to aks	
(We missed the most handsome in the picture)	

In sample 15, the compliment pair is an example of a return strategy in which *B* return the compliment. However, this return implies that *B* agrees on the compliment since he used the same adjective to return the compliment after scaling down himself and believing that the complimenter is more handsome.

16.

Pragmatic schema: politeness	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: acceptance	Micro level: appreciation, praise upgrade
A: vay che qadr kocholo boli, che jaleb!	
(You were so young, how interesting)	
B: Gorbane to, ama alan mardi shodam vase khodam	
(But now I am mature)	

In sample 16, *B* accepted the compliment by complimented himself. Actually, he used the praise upgrade strategy to show his acceptance. The cultural schema of

shekaste nafsi and politeness in Persian encourages speakers to express their modesty and use a scale down strategy very often. Among Persian responses to English compliments, there were some expressions like *Faday e to* or *Ghorbane to* which there are no English equivalent for them and can roughly be translated as a situation in which the complimentee is ready to scarify himself/ herself, however, this fixed expression can be used as a "thank you."

17.

Pragmatic schema: modesty	
Speech act: responding to a compliment on the profile picture	
Macro level: non-acceptance	Micro level: return
A: Akset fogholadast (your picture is wonderful)	
B: cheshmat khub mibine (your eyes see beautiful).	

In sample 17, *B* used return strategy and said something good to *A*. When the response is analyzed, it can be inferred that the wording of these utterances suggested humbleness and modesty. When *B* says "your eyes see beautiful" she was actually ignoring her quality and believed that *A* was better and she perceives better. This piece of utterance has repeatedly occurred by Persian speakers representing politeness and Persian cultural schema of modesty.

Discussion

The present study was conducted to examine the effect of the highly valued cultural schema of *shekaste nafsi* proposed by Sharifian (2005) in the context of online communication on Facebook. The reason to choose Facebook is that it is one of the most popular social networking sites where Persian speakers, particularly EFL learners who can practice their English tend to use it as a context of communication hoping to apply their foreign language. The abundance of short conversation seems promising for the study of different speech acts. The tendency of speakers for sharing their profile photos stimulate users to pay compliments and express their intimacy.

The previous section explained that the data were first classified at two Levels based on the language of the first part of the compliment pairs. Level One entailed the compliment pairs in which the first part was in English and in Level Two the first part of compliment is in Persian. Each Level was divided into the macro levels of acceptance or non-acceptance to see the frequency and percentage of each in both English and Persian compliments.

Following that, 17 samples were reviewed and interpreted to see how the Persian cultural schema of *shekaste nafsi* and politeness in Persian encourages speakers to express their modesty. Analyzing and interperating different compliment pairs revealed that, in some cases, participants transfer their cultural norms and return the compliment to the complimenter to express their modesty which is deeply rooted in Persian cultural schema of *shekaste nafsi* proposed by Sharifian (2005,

2008). This suggests that Persian speakers practice their politeness by modesty and modesty means self-lowering in Persian culture. The results of sample interpretation showed that Persian speakers used a variety of strategies and practiced different Persian cultural schemas to demonstrate their modesty and maintain their intimacy.

Analysis of the English responses revealed that participants mostly appreciate the compliment, and they have a great tendency to use acceptance strategies at macro level, and appreciation at micro level to show their politeness. This suggests that when participants use the English language to respond to the compliments they ignore their Persian cultural schema of modesty and tend to appear polite by showing appreciation. In other words, there is no pragmatic transfer in English strategies. This is in line with the study of Dehkordi and Chalak (2015) in that EFL learners tend to use acceptance strategies when responding to the English compliments on SNSs. It also supported the findings of Sharifian et al. (2019) SNSs encourage EFL learners to practice strategies they have acquired from their target language.

However, the strategies applied to the English compliments are in clear contrast with the findings of Karamnia and Afghari (201), where they reported that self-lowering and other praising is very common among Persian speakers. This can be explained by the different contexts of communication. It can be argued that in online communications people tend to feel more comfortable, and they usually get rid of ambiguity. Another point worth mentioning is that applying some expressions in which Persian speakers manifest their modesty may sound difficult for EFL learners, and they apply the easiest way to show their politeness.

The results of Level Two, however, showed that Persian speakers tend to show their politeness and modesty by practicing their Persian cultural schema and be modest to maintain friendships and enjoy online communications. Findings suggest that Persian speakers tend to use non-acceptance strategy at the macro level and scale down and return most frequently as micro strategy to display their politeness by modesty and *shekasteh-nafsi*. The findings are in line with the cultural schema of *Shekasteh Nafsi* (Sharifian, 2005) in that Persian compliment responses truly reflect the Persian culture and indicated that even in modern channels of communications users tend to manifest their Persian cultural schema of modesty.

The Persian strategies supported the findings of Yousefvand (2012) in that modesty plays a significant role in the choice of strategy and Persian speakers tend to use non-acceptance strategies even in the context of online communications. This can be due to the fact that the medium of communication, that is the language of communication, plays a much more important role than the context of the communication. Whether in online communication or other forms of conversations, the Persian language is filled by the concepts that are rooted in the Persian culture. As there are no boundaries in expressing ideas, Persian speakers feel free to apply their modesty and reinforce their intimacy.

In the case of pragmatic transfer, the findings confirmed the findings of Motaghi Tabari and Beuzevile (2012), accordingly compliment responses are influenced by the cultural background of the speakers and Persian speakers tend to apply strategies that are rooted in Persian culture. However, findings of Level Two question the results of Shirin Basksh and Eslami Rasekh (2013) in that younger generation do not apply the cultural schema of *Shekasteh Nafsi*. Although analysis of Level One showed that the most frequent strategy is appreciation, the traces of modesty which is rooted in Persian culture were visible among EFL learners who were in the young age range.

Although indirectness and ambiguity in Persian cultural schema made decision makings difficult, it was revealed that Persian users are modest and tend to reflect politeness. The finding suggested that Persian EFL learners use different compliment response strategies at the same time to respond to a compliment and the responses can be rather ambiguous when uttered on SNSs. When the strategies were analyzed, it was noticed that in many cases, the participants used different strategies at the same time to a single compliment. This is in line with Sharifian (2017) in that some English expressions only are interpretable if they are culturally understood. Otherwise, misunderstanding may arise in most cases. As the interpretation of 17 samples showed strategies were layered and idiosyncratic, that is without shared background knowledge and presuppositions, understanding the true meaning of the strategies was rather difficult.

The findings suggested that language and cultural schema are closely connected and work interactively, and the cultural schema of the users can be responsible for the choice of compliment responses strategies. The findings also support the idea that understanding the cultural conceptualizations helps us to have a better understanding of the variations or shared connotations in the commutation (Sharifian, 2008).

Conclusion and Suggestion for Further Studies

The study concludes that online communication can provide a unique context of naturally occurring data for the speech act of compliments. It was also shown that online communication provides diverse topics and purposes of compliment and users tend to choose a variety of compliments as well as compliment response strategies. EFL learners consider SNSs as a unique platform to show off their English proficiency and become engaged with giving and exchanging compliments. At the same time, their choice of speech act or the response strategies reflect different dimensions of their background knowledge and the medium of communication. Accordingly, the culture and the concepts by which Persian speakers grew up can dictate certain aspects in the language they use. Despite the fact that cultural schemas are highly valued for Persian speakers, the comparison of the present study with previous ones can prove that Persian speakers started to turn their backs to their cultural schemas partly due to lack of features of face to face communication.

The findings of the present study showed that EFL learners do not practice their Persian cultural schema of modesty when they communicate in English. However, in the medium of Persian communication, EFL learners tend to have some evidence of modesty by *shekaste-nafsi*. It can be concluded that EFL learners still manifest their Persian cultural schema in SNSs as one of the main means of self-expression by which individuals show their attachment to the modern world. This can suggest a gap in the teaching material for effective communication. It is highly required that proper plans and decisions be made to prevent pragmatic transfer across the languages.It is suggested that pragmatic transfer resulted from cultural schemas be included in the teaching materials and EFL learners become explicitly aware of them. The choice of appreciation token implies that EFL learners have picked up the right form of strategies in the realm of English culture; however, appreciation token manifests only a small part of the language in function. Thus, to understand the true nature of pragmatic acquisition or transfer, other forms of language can be investigated.

Despite all attempt for keeping the study as accurate as possible, the present study had some limitations. Larger sample size can provide a more precise result. Although 30 participants sound adequate for a study, a larger sample can produce a larger corpus, and the results can be generalized more firmly. A longer period of data collection may also allow us to have a bigger database. It is suggested that further studies examine a larger sample size and collect data in a longer period of time.

For further studies, it is also suggested that other cultural schemas such as *adab, sharmandegi*, etc. be examined in online communications. Other speech acts such as apologies, requests, criticizing, sarcasm, and congratulations can have promising results. Other social networking sites and online communication with more EFL learner users can have interesting results. Other variables such as age, the structure of speech act, and lexicon resources can be investigated as well.

The findings of the present study can be applied in the context of cultural linguistics and the study of the function of language and pragmatics. It can also benefit EFL learners to spot their failure in communication as well as syllabus designer and language teachers in improving teaching material and distinguishing the lack of knowledge and transfer of knowledge.

References

Ashrafi , S., & Ajideh, P. (2018). Exploring culture-related content in English textbooks: A closer look at advanced series of Iran language institute. *The Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances, 6*(1), 91-109.

Barros Garcia, M. J. (2018). Face-enhancing compliments in informal conversations in Valencian Spanish. *An International Journal of Hispanic Linguistics*, *7*(1), 147-168.

Dehkordi, Z., & Chalak, A. (2015). English compliment response strategies on social networks by Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *6*(2), 452-459.

Herbert, R. K. (1986). "Say thank you"- or something, *American Speech*, *61*(1), 76-88.

Holmes, J. (1986). Compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English. *Anthropological Linguistics, 28*, 485-508.

Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: A sex-preferential politeness strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics, 12(4),* 445-465.

Karamnia, A., & Afghari, A. (2010).On the Applicability of Cultural Script in Teaching L2 Compliments.*Canadian Center of Science and Education, 3*(3), 71-80.

Karimnia, A., & Afghari, A. (2011). Compliment in English and Persian interaction: A cross- cultural perspective. *Jezikoslovlije, 12*(1), 27-50.

Manes, J. (1983). Compliments: A mirror of cultural values. *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*. *Cambridge, Mass, New burry House,* 96-102.

Moradi Moghadam, M. (2017). Politeness at the extremes: Iranian women's insincere responses to compliments. *Language and Dialogue, 7*(3), 413-431.

Motaghi Tabari, S., & Beuzeville, L. (2012). A contrastive study of compliment responses among Persians and Australians: The effect of exposure to a new speech community. *Applied Research in English, 1*(1), 21- 42.

Pomerantz, A. (1978). Compliment responses: notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints. *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*, *New York, San Francisco, London: Academic Press* , 79-112.

Rohami, N, I., & Nur, F. R. (2017). The pattern of compliments in Instagram photo comments. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language and learning*, *2*(3), 57-69.

Sharifian, F. (2005). The Persian cultural schema of Shekasteh-nafsi: A study of compliment responses in Persian and Anglo-Australian speakers. *Pragmatic and Cognition, 13*(2), 337-361.

Sharifian, F. (2008). Cultural schemas in L1 and L2 compliment responses: A study of Persian-speaking learners of English, *Journal of Politeness Research, 4*, 55-80.

Sharifian, F. (2017). *Cultural linguistics and pragmatics*. Melbourne: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Sharifian, F., Chalak, A., Dehkordi, Z. (2019). Investigating the choice of compliment response strategies on social networking sites by different genders. *Journal of New Advances in English language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, In press.

Shirinbakhsh, S., & Eslami Rasekh, A. (2013). The effect of age on cultural schema: The case of *Shekaste-nafsi* (Modesty) in Persian. *International Journal of Research* S*tudies in Language learning, 2*(3), 95-107.

Tajeddin, Z., & Yazdanmehr, E. (2012). Investigating the structural pattern and pragmatic functions of compliments made by Iranian EFL learners. *Journal of English language Teaching and Learning,10*, 27-51.

Wolfson, N. (1983). An empirical-based analysis of complimenting in American English. In N. Wolfson & E. Judd (Eds.) *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition. Rowley, MA. Newbury House*, 82-95.

Yousefvand, Z. (2010). Study of compliment speech act realization pattern across gender in Persian. *Arizona Working Papers in SLA & Teaching, 17,* 91-112.

Yousefvand, Z. (2012). A Sociolinguistic Perspective: Compliment Responses Pattern in Persian. *The International Journal of Language, Culture, and Society*, *34*, 68-77.

Authors' Biography

Farzad Sharifian is Professor and holds the chair in Cultural Linguistics at Monash University. He has made significant contributions to the development of Cultural Linguistics as multidisciplinary area of research. He is the author of *Cultural Linguistics* (John Benjamins, 2017), *Cultural Conceptualizations and Language* (John Benjamins, 2011), the founding Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Language and Culture,* and the founding Editor of the *Cultural Linguistics* book series [Springer].

Azizeh Chalak is Associate Professor of TEFL at the English Department of Islamic Azad University, Isfahan Branch, Isfahan, Iran. She is the Managing Editor of *Research in English Language Pedagogy* (RELP) which is published at IAU, Isfahan Branch, and was selected as the top researcher of English Department in 2017 and 2018. Her research interests include Sociolinguistics, Intercultural/Cross-Cultural Communication, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), Genre Studies, and Integration of Technology in Teaching.

Zeinab Dehkordi holds an MA in Teaching English from Islamic Azad University of Isfahan (Khorasgan). Her current research is on the realization of Persian Cultural Schema on Persian Compliments. Her area of interests includes Pragmatics, Cultural Linguistics, and Persian Cultural Conceptualizations.