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COMPLIMENT RESPONSES ACROSS GENDER AMONG 
MALAY UNDERGRADUATES

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INTRODUCTION

Since a few decades ago, pragmatists have highlighted the significance to the study of speech act behavior, such as Apology, Request, Compliment & Compliment Response, Refusal and Complaint. Based on the findings of these studies, it is proven that these two factors; social and situational are the main contributions to the influences on the use of the speech acts, including gender, age, level of education, ethnicity, social distance, social relationship and so forth. A compliment response is a type of speech act (Searle, 1969). This speech act serves a variety of functions in the light of different cultural norms. Kumaridani (1989) defines compliments as “supportive interchanges” that function as “social lubricants” by which one establishes and maintains amicable relationships with others. Other researchers assert that the main function of the compliment is to “establish and create rapport” between status equals (Herbert, 1990; Manes, 1983). While the basic function of complimenting behavior is similar among linguistic groups, the same speech act may be interpreted differently across cultures, such as among Malays. Many studies have been conducted on compliment and compliment responses, particularly in different languages and cultures, yet few have been carried out on the use of English compliments among Malays.

A number of studies have shown that there are some similarities and differences between males and females in their speech patterns when giving and responding to compliments. Previous studies