Compliment Responses in Italian and German

Miriam Ravetto

Università del Piemonte Orientale

ABSTRACT

Using a conversation analytic methodology, the paper compares Italian and German compliment responses given in informal situations, among university students and friends. The study includes some statistics on the data analyzed. The findings reveal that both Italian and German native speakers frequently accept compliments. Compliment rejections are rare in both Italian and German interactions. The two language and cultural groups differ in the frequency of the single compliment response strategies. Italians prefer to reply to compliments thanking the interlocutor, while the German corpus analyzed includes many samples, in which the complimented person tests the truthfulness of the speech act and the sincerity of the compliment giver by means of direct questions. Furthermore, in both participant groups, the selection of the compliment response type is influenced by the complimented attribute. In Italian data compliments on physical appearance and possessions are often directly accepted, whereas positive evaluations of character traits and skills favor the displaying of *Limited Acceptance* or *Non-Acceptance* responses. In contrast, in the German corpus, compliments on character aspects are accepted more frequently than the ones on appearance, possessions or personal abilities.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is the analysis and comparison of compliment responses (CRs) in Italian and German conversations. The data were taken from a corpus of audiotaped face-to-face interactions between close friends or university colleagues in Italy and Germany. The samples are examined according to a framework of CRs categorization I postulated applying and developing past taxonomies and classifications such as Frescura (1996) and Golato (2002; 2005).

The study opens with a definition and a description of the act of complimenting. Compliments are examined in conversational sequences as speech acts normally involving two or more turns: the formulation of the compliment itself and the CR, i.e. the reaction of the complimented person. In its second part the paper focuses on the description of the methodology for the data collection and on the corpus analysis. Italian and German data are examined and compared according to their distribution in the four broad typologies I postulated for the present study (*Direct Acceptance*; *Limited Acceptance*; *Non-Acceptance*; *Ignoring*), as well as in the subcategories, such as *Thanking*, *Minimization*, *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* and so on. Furthermore, I observe the influence of the kind of complimented

77

attribute (physical appearance, owned object, character, and ability) on the selection of CR typology. In the last section, I summarize the results of the empirical study in terms of strategy use and frequency in responding to compliments in Italian and German interactions.

For the punctual description of the samples, I refer to recent studies about conversational analysis (Deppermann, 2007), whereas for the study of the different functions of compliments I briefly mention the Politeness-Theory of Brown & Levinson (1987), as well as Leech's (1983) Politeness Maxims. The samples are transcribed using some symbols and conventions from the GAT2-transcription notation (Selting, et al., 2009), since these notations are well suited to capture characteristics of speech delivery, pauses, overlaps, loudness, which are relevant in the analysis of complimenting. The transcription includes the language (IT for Italian segments and DT for German ones), the gender and the age of the complimented persons. In each example I will use C to indicate the complimented participant and G for the compliment giver. If other participants take part in the interaction, they will be indicated with A and B. For every example, I will underline the CR, and propose the English translation without using the same transcription notations of the original samples.

Italian and German CRs are selected for the present cross-cultural study for different reasons. First, although a body of knowledge exists on the formulation of compliments in different languages (Wolfson, 1981; Manes, 1983; Barnlund, 1985; Yang, 1987; Nelson, El Bakary & Al-Batal, 1996; Cordella, Large & Pardo, 1995; Mulo-Farenkia, 2005; Grein, 2008), fewer researches have compared the responses to compliments in different cultures (Herbert, 1989; Chen, 1993; Nelson, Al-Batal & Echols, 1996; Mironovschi, 2009). As a second reason, many studies have been conducted on the speech act of complimenting in English, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Russian, Polish, while very few have investigated CRs in Italian and German; additionally, none of the existing studies so far has focused on the comparison of complimenting behavior in these two different speaker groups.

BACKGROUND

The speech act of complimenting

Definition and functions

You Compliments have been said to be a 'verbal present' consisting in the expression of personal admiration, in the positive evaluation of a specific item/trait (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1987). Wierzbicka (1987) describes the speech act of complimenting and identifies its semantic components as follows:

- "I perceive something good about your Y

- I want to say something good about you because of that

- I say: (something good about X and X's Y)

- I feel something good about thinking about it

- I say this because I meant to cause you to know that I am thinking something good about you

- I assume that you will feel something good because of that" (p. 201).

The definition highlights the necessary existence of a person whom the compliment giver addresses the compliment to. Other studies essentially argue along the same line as Wierzbicka (1987) and underline the presence of a listener, whose characteristics, possessions or abilities are appreciated. This aspect is pointed out by Holmes (1988) who defines the compliment as:

78

> "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some "good" (possession, characteristics, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. Compliments normally attributed the value "good" to the addressee, and even when a compliment apparently refers to a third person, it may well be indirectly complimenting the addressee" (p. 446).

Holmes' definition identifies another important element of the speech act of complimenting: the topic. Complimentable values, such as appearance (apparel, hair-do) or possessions (home, furniture, and car), greatly vary across cultures: compliment topics are, in fact, closely related to a variety of cultural norms of societies. According to Cheng (2003), for example, Chinese speakers give more compliments on skills and abilities, whereas the most popular topics in Egyptian interactions are appearance natural attributes, such as the color of one's eyes or the hair (Nelson, El Bakary & Al-Batal, 1996). Bettoni (2006) pointed out that in western speech communities – on which also the present study focuses – physical appearance, clothing, personal qualities, abilities and possessions are normally praised.

More in general, compliments fall into two major categories with respect to the topic: 'exteriority' including participants' external characteristics and their possessions and 'performance', i.e. talents and abilities (Probst, 2003). Moreover, compliments can comment a trait referred to positive personality characteristics. Hence, we can identify four main compliment attributes I will name as follows (see also Manes, 1983):

- Physical appearance (natural attractiveness/physical aspects as results of deliberate efforts),

- Owned object,

- Character,

- Ability (practical and intellectual).

The choice of complimented topics is characterized by repetitiveness and regularity. Manes & Wolfson's (1980) findings reveal that the overwhelming majority of compliments place positive value upon objects or traits which are new, temporary and which are the results of one's effort (e.g., new pair of shoes, hair-dye, make-up). In contrast, intimate characteristics or taboo situations are rarely mentioned topics. The reference to quite 'neutral' and inoffensive items contributes to reinforce the fatic function of the speech act, as Probst (2003) outlines:

> "Es wird [...] eher ein 'neutrales', unverfängliches Thema gewählt, das genauso wie die formelhafte   Struktur den phatischen Charakter des Sprechaktes unterstützt. Phatische Gesprächselemente dienen im Allgemeinen als 'soziale Schmierstoffe', die von der inhaltlichen Ebene aus betrachtet, keine große Bedeutung haben" (p. 5). ('Like the formal structure, speakers select a quite 'neutral', inoffensive issue, which supports the fatic character of the speech act. In general, fatic elements of the discourse serve as 'social lubricants', which have not a wide meaning').

Probst's (2003) statement reveals the relevance of the act of complimenting from the socio-linguistic point of view and its main function as a "social lubricant" (Wolfson, 1983: 89). Compliments are expressions of cognitive judgments and perceptions (in this regard Johnson & Roen, 1992, p. 31 talks about the 'ideational' function). However, their primary function is to show approval and admiration toward the listener, to make him/her feel good and so to create, negotiate and consolidate the solidarity between interlocutors in the interaction (Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988).

As a "social accelerator" (Johnson & Roen, 1992, p. 31), as a means to reduce the distance with the interlocutor, the compliment is to be defined as a positive politeness strategy, according to the model of Brown & Levinson (1987).

The social function of complimenting is evident in different conversational contexts, particularly when compliments are combined with dispreferred actions (Levinson, 1983), such as refusals of offers and invitations. In this regard, my Italian and German corpora show some interesting examples:

      (1) ((*At dinner*))

          01   C: gibs noch (.) willstu du noch n [stück]?

                there's more would you like another piece?

          02   G: [nee:] danke;

                no thanks

          03   das war aber !LE!cker

                anyway it was tasty

          (DT/Man/25)

In (1) the compliment (*das war aber !LE!cker*) follows a dispreferred action, i.e. the declination of an offer. The negative particle nee: is immediately followed by a thanking (*danke*). As a second step, the speaker G formulates a compliment on the food prepared by C and marks prosodically his positive evaluation (*!LE!cker*). In this case, the compliment has the function to mitigate an offer rejection, i.e. a speech act that damages the hearer's positive face.

Furthermore, compliments involve other functions. In some cultural contexts, the complimenting is used as an information seeking means. That is frequent, for instance, Poland Jaworski (1995) "giving a positive evaluation Polish speakers often want to have information about the complimented item (e.g. the price of the object, the place where it was bought and so on". Even if it is marginal in my data, this function can be found out in some interactions in both languages. There are cases, in which the reply to the compliment is not considered exhaustive by the compliment giver, who starts a new turn asking more information about the complimented attribute:

      (2) ((*Aperitif with friends*))

          01   G: ma che bella sta MA:glia

                what a nice pullover

          02   C: GRAzie.

                thanks.

          03   G: dove l'hai presa?

                where did you buy it?

          04   C: a barcello:na eh lo scorso anno [quando]

                in barcellona eh last year when

          05   G: [VEro] lì si compra bene,

                yes there you can buy well,

          06   l'ho ehm l'ho visto anch'io

                I have ehm I have seen it too

          (IT/Man/27)

In addition, compliments may be interpreted as implicit requests: the speaker's expression of admiration for an object imposes, in general, an obligation on the hearer to offer that object to the interlocutor (Herbert & Straight, 1989). While this function is very rare among western cultures, it is often attested in other languages and cultural groups. Holmes & Brown (1987) notice, for example, that it comes as no surprise to find that Samoan speakers may respond to a compliment such as "What an unusual necklace. It's beautiful" with something like "Please take it".

The first turn: the formulation of the compliment

At the level of the conversational structure, compliments do not occur in particular moments in the interaction, in contrast to other speech acts, such as thanking or greeting. They can open, close a conversation (Manes & Wolfson, 1981) or they may also be embedded in it. Like other speech acts, the complimenting generally involves two or more turn-takings and so it is normally structured in adjacency pairs (Schlegloff & Sacks, 1973). The first part consists in the formulation of the compliment by the compliment giver, while the second turn in the reply of the compliment recipient (Herbert, 1990).

Regarding the first turn, compliments adopt a very narrow range of syntactic and semantic patterns and a very restricted set of lexical items (Knapp, Hopper & Bell, 1984).

With reference to German language, Golato (2005) argues that the utterance patterns are characterized by a high-frequency used formula <PRO+ist+ADJ (NP)> ("die ist hervorragend die melone"). German compliments include positive adjectives, such as *schön* ('nice') or *lecker* ('tasty'), they are often introduced with para-verbal signals ex pressing the speaker's appreciation (*mmh*, *oh*) or with particles, e.g., *übrigens* ('among other things'), which are used as turn initiators ("übrigens, du hast schöne schuhen!", 'among other things, you have nice shoes!'). Intensifiers, such as *wirklich* ('really'), *richtig* ('very') or *total* ('fully'), are also adopted with some frequency.

Concerning the Italian language, studies of the compliment formula do not exist so far. The examination of my samples and an investigation of the examples mentioned in previous works, reveal – like in German – repetitiveness in the syntactic patterns and in the lexical items used in Italian compliments. The majority of compliments are adjectival showing the presence of the positive adjectives *bello* ('nice'), *bravo* ('good', 'clever'), *buono* ('tasty', 'good') depending on the praised attribute (appearance, ability, cooking skill). The most common syntactic structures are the following ones: <(intensifier of the illocutionary force)+ADJ+NP> (e.g., "che bello questo telefonino!", 'what a nice mobile phone!'; "bel vestito!", 'nice dress!') or <VERB+ADJ+NP> (e.g., "hai un bel paio di scarpe", 'you have a nice pair of shoes'). Italian utterance patterns are also characterized by the use of intensifiers, such as *proprio* or *davvero* ('really') and of superlatives (*bellissimo*, 'very nice'; e.g., "hai un bellissimo carattere!", 'you have a very good character!'). Like German speakers, Italian participants use para-verbal signals (*mmh*, *oh*) opening the complimenting sequence.

The limited number of syntactic formulae and lexical items serve, on the one side, the purpose to make compliments easily identifiable and distinguishable from other acts in the stream of speech and so to avoid misunderstandings in the interaction (Ayaß, 1999). On the other side, the formulaic nature of complimenting has also a function concerning the social relationship between speaker and listener. The use of few standardized structures leads to a linguistic simplification and reduces the distance, which may emerge from participants with different socio-cultural background and linguistic competences. In this way, the act of complimenting performs its primary function, as we noticed above: the creation and consolidation of solidarity between the interlocutors.

The second turn: the compliment response

In contrast to the first turn of the adjacency pair, which has – as seen above – a formulaic nature, the reply to compliments does not show the use of the same constructions but it varies both in its typologies (see below acceptance, rejection, thanking and so on) and in its semantic as well as syntactic structure.

Pomerantz (1978) pointed out the state of *in between-ness* of compliment recipients: CRs pose a dilemma for the complimented person in that they involve two conversational principles:

Principle I: Agree with the compliment

Principle II: Avoid self-praise (see also Herbert, 1989)

The two principles stay in potential conflict. If recipients agree with the compliment, they praise themselves and so they violate the second principle. By rejecting the compliment they disagree with their interlocutors and so they violate the first principle. Neither of these alternatives contributes to the social solidarity of the relationship.

Past studies classified CRs as belonging to two categories, *Acceptance* and *Non-Acceptance*, in which some subcategories were identified, such as *Return*, *Deflection*, *Rejection* and so on (Holmes, 1988). Golato (2002) added a third category that includes responses lying between the simple acceptance and the rejection of the compliment. Responses belonging to this solution type respect both principles I described above. An example of these CRs typologies can be seen in the following data-sample taken from Golato (2002):

A: Oh it was just beautiful

B: Well, thank you uh I thought it was quite nice (p. 553)

In this segment the compliment recipient agrees with the positive evaluation of his/her interlocutor and uses an appreciation token (*thank you*). Then he/she gives a second assessment that is scaled down, i.e. that includes evaluative descriptors that are less positive than the ones used in the compliment formula (*quite nice*). The CR shows here features of both acceptance/agreement (see above Principle I) and self-praise avoidance (Principle II).

The CRs classification adopted in the present study is outlined below. It was adapted from previous categorization frameworks (Frescura, 1996; Golato, 2002 and 2005), which were – where necessary – modified and integrated with new CR types (see also Castagneto/Ravetto, in press). It consists of fourteen subcategories which are grouped into four major categories:

CR type	Example
I. *Direct Acceptance* (DA)	
1. Thanking	I: What a nice hat! C: Thanks
2. Pleased Acceptance	I: You lost weight C: I know, everybody notices that!
3. Acceptance	I: Your dress is really nice! C: Yes
4. Nonverbal Acceptance	I: You are very kind C: (smiling)
5. Reassignment	I: You are a very good cook! C: You too
II. *Limited Acceptance* (LA)	
6. Ironic Acceptance	I: You have nice eyes! C: They reflect the color of

		the sky! Ah ah!
7.	Minimization	I: Your bag is nice C: Yeah, pretty nice
8.	Deflection	
	8a. Lateral Deflection of the Merit	I: Good job! C: Clara helped me
	8b. Lateral Deflection of the Quality	I: Your pullover is really nice C: It is warm
	8c. Lateral Deflection of the Topic	I: You have nice shoes C: I bought them in Germany
9.	Reassurance Request	I: You always have good ideas C: Really?
III. *Non-Acceptance* (NA)		
10.	Reductive Deflection	I: This lasagna is tasty! C: They are insipid!
11.	Discredit of the compliment giver	I: What a nice hairstyle! C: You are blind!
12.	Discredit of the complimented item/person	I: You cook very well C: I always burn something!
13.	Rejection	I: Good, you can explain very well! C: I don't think so
IV. *Ignoring* (I)		
14.	Ignoring	I: Your dress is really nice C: Can you give me my mobile phone?

Following the model proposed by Tran (2007), the CRs strategies are ordered, within each macro-typology, according to their acceptance degree (from the highest to the lowest degree of acceptance).

Regarding the conversational structure, in case of *Rejection*, *Ignoring*, *Thanking* and *Reassignment*, the speech act of complimenting is generally performed in an adjacency pair consisting of two turns. After the reply to the compliment, the interaction can close (the participants do not continue the conversation), the speakers may refer to the previous topic of the conversation that was interrupted by the formulation of the compliment or they can introduce a new topic too (example 3).

    (3) ((*At dinner*))

      01 C: ich war ähm inzwischen mit ähm mit der arBEIt
             I was ehm in the meantime

      02   beschäf[tigt]
             busy with my work

      03 G: [ja;]
             yeah

      04   ich kann mich gu:t vorSTEln (.) ich war so auch.
             I can imagine, I was busy too

      05   (---)
      06   laRIssa (.) du hast aber eine sehr SCHÖne kette.
             larissa, you have a very nice necklace

      07 C: ich?
             I?

      08   !DAN!ke
             thanks

      09   (---)
      10 G: un_und biste mit deiner arbeit ähm ENDlich FErtig?
             and did you at last finish your work?

(DT/Woman/24)

In (3) the complimenting consists of two turns (lines 6-8): the speaker G appreciates C's nice necklace (*du hast aber eine sehr SCHÖne kette*, 'you have a very nice necklace'). The complimented person replies with *!DAN!ke*. Then the two participants close the sequence of the compliment and refer to a previous topic again, i.e. C's work (*und biste mit deiner arbeit ähm ENDlich FErtig?* 'and did you at last finish your work?').

CRs such as *Deflections* or *Reassurance Request* normally force the compliment giver to react to the complimentee's assertion. In these cases, the speech act of complimenting is performed in more than two turns:

    (4) ((*Waiting in the refectory line*))

        01 G: annamaria du siehst heute SCHÖN aus.

              annamaria, you are nice today

        02   ich mag wirklich deine HAAre;

              I really like your hair

        03 C: <u>meine HAARE (.) waru:m?</u>

              my hair, why?

        04 G: ich glaub,

              I think,

        05   sie sind gut blo:nd und SEHR glänzend.

              it is right blond and very brilliant

        06   (--)

        07 C: also (.) was nimmst du?

              so, what would you like?

    (DT/Woman/23)

Replying to the compliment on her hair (*ich mag wirklich deine HAAre;* 'I really like your hair'), the speaker C selects, in Example (4), the *Reassurance Request* strategy and forces her interlocutor to explain the reasons for the formulation of the compliment (*meine HAARE (.) waru:m?*, 'my hair, why?'). The compliment giver must initiate a new turn (the third turn of the complimenting sequence) in order to support her compliment: the speaker G mentions the aspects of the hair that are in her opinion particularly appreciable, i.e. the color and the brilliancy (*sie sind gut blo:nd und SEHR glänzend*, 'it is right blond and very brilliant'). After this turn-taking the sequence of the complimenting closes and the participants change the conversation topic (*also (.) was nimmst du?*, 'so, what would you like?').

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Methodology

The present study examines a corpus of tape-recorded samples and transcriptions of face-to-face interactions. Data are analyzed mainly using a conversation analytic methodology. Golato (2002; 2005) argued that the conversational analysis is well suited for cross-cultural studies of speech acts since it allows the investigation of different facets of the phenomena (e.g. sequential organization, frequency or distribution). With respect to other methods of data collection, such as the *Discourse Completion Task* (DCT), recall protocols or role-plays, the advantage of the conversational analysis lies in the authenticity

of data samples since it does not show speakers' intuitions, which are not often reliable, but it represents how speakers are actually reacting in conversations and what they are actually saying (Jucker, 2009).

In my corpus, compliments were voluntary elicited by a speaker, CRs and the following turns were, on the contrary, fully spontaneous. Compliment senders recorded the conversation or they transcribed it shortly after its end. Participants were Italian and German speakers who were similar in age, gender balance, educational background and social status. They all were university undergraduate/graduate students who ranged in age from twenty-tree to thirty-three years old. Interactions took place during activities that the speakers would normally engage in with each other, such as lunches in the cafeteria, studying together, dinners, get-togethers over drinks and so on.

Regarding the Italian corpus, Italian students gave compliments to their Italian colleagues or friends. German data were collected by Italian students and post-graduate students living and studying in Germany. They have a very good knowledge of the German language (language knowledge level B2-C1 and C1-C2) and they offered compliments to German native speakers in German language.

All participants spoke standard Italian and German and came from North-Western Italy (Piedmont region) and central-Western Germany (Hessen, Baden-Württemberg). In order to obtain comparable samples, for both languages, I tried to collect as homogeneous data as possible, regarding both the complimented item/trait and the gender variation. Compliments concerned every item considered in this study and were formulated both by male and female speakers and addressed both to male and female compliment recipients (the sex of speakers as a probably influencing factor in complimenting behaviour will be discussed in future researches. A few studies have investigated this aspect within single languages, see Johnson & Roen, 1992). All in all, the speakers produced 307 compliment sequences for the Italian corpus and 316 samples for the German one.

Data are analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. In the qualitative analysis, CRs are coded according to strategies selected to reply to compliments. The quantitative analysis aims to evaluate the different frequency in the use of each CR type in the two language groups.

For the categorization of each CR in the taxonomy of CR types I considered the 'dominant' strategy. For instance, for a response to be coded as a Thanking, it included only an appreciation token, a statement of appreciation (*grazie*, *danke*; see below example 5). If additional information, longer explanations or justifications were given together with the *Thanking*, the reply has to be coded as another CR solution type (example 6).

    (5) ((*Dinner by Cinzia*))

        01 G: sara,

               sara

        02   che BElli sti orecchini.

              what nice earrings

        03 C: <u>grazie</u>;

              thanks

        (IT/Woman/26)

        Direct Acceptance: Thanking

    (6) ((*At university*))

```
01  G:  BEllo sto taglio
            nice haircut
02  C:  grazie ma  ma è troppo COrto;
            thank you, but it's too short
03  G:  ma NO: (.) è particoLAre
            no, it's original
04  C:  mm troppo scalato ehm l'ho dico sempre al mio parrucchiere ehm
            mm too many layers ehm I always tell that to my hairdresser ehm
05          (.) non tagliare qui corto perché poi mi stanno tutti SU (-)
            don't cut short here because then it stands all up
06          VE:di?
            you see?
```
(IT/Woman/27)
Non-Acceptance: Reductive Deflection
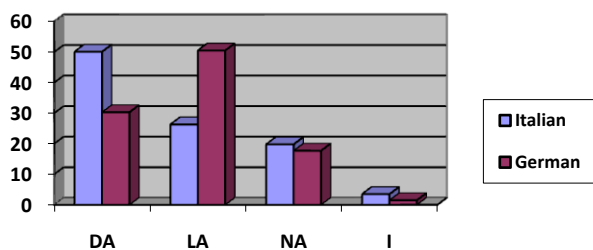
Corpus analysis

Table 1 provides a summary of the distribution of the 307 Italian CRs and the 316 German CRs among the four broad typologies.

Macro-Typology	Italian	German
Direct Acceptance	154 (50.16%)	96 (30.37%)
Limited Acceptance	81 (26.38%)	159 (50.31%)
Non-Acceptance	61 (19.86%)	56 (17.72%)
Ignoring	11 (3.58%)	5 (1.58%)
Tot.	307 (100%)	316 (100%)

Table 1: Distribution of CRs among the four macro-typologies for the Italian and German groups

Italian corpus shows a strong preference for the macro-typology *Direct Acceptance* which accounted for 50.1% (154 samples) of the Italian compliment responses. The use of *Limited Acceptance* is less frequent (81 samples; 26.3%), then we have *Non-Acceptance* (61 samples; 19.8%) followed by *Ignoring* which accounted only for 3.5 per cent (11 samples) of the CRs. In German, most samples are cases of *Limited Acceptance* (159 samples; 50.3%). In 96 interactions (30.3%) compliment recipients accept the compliment directly. *Non-Acceptance* (56 samples; 17.7%) and, in particular, *Ignoring* (5 samples; 1.5%) occur infrequently in German data.

Table 1 is further illustrated by the diagram in *Figure 1*, which clearly shows the variation in the frequency of each macro-typology in the two language groups.

(DA=Direct Acceptance / LA=Limited Acceptance / NA=Non-Acceptance / I=Ignoring)
Figure 1: Distribution of CRs among the four macro-typologies for the Italian and German groups

Figure 1 shows that both Italian and German native speakers do accept compliments rather than reject or ignore them. The main difference between the two languages concerns *Direct Acceptance* and *Limited Acceptance*. The proportion of *Direct Acceptance* strategies is much larger in Italian corpus than in German data. In contrast, compared to Italian native speakers, Germans make a wider use of *Limited Acceptance* CRs.

The high frequency of *Direct Acceptance* in Italian data seems to point out the tendency of Italian speakers to express agreement with their interlocutors and to avoid the disagreement (in accordance with Leech's Agreement Maxim). Regarding the German data, German native speakers preferably choose CRs of compromise, which express agreement with the interlocutor and avoid the self-praise (in this case both the Agreement Maxim and the Modesty Maxim are fulfilled).

As far as the Italian language is concerned, my results are partially different from the ones summarized in Frescura (1996), who identified a predominant use of *Limited Acceptance*. This difference could be better explained, if we would have more detailed socio-linguistic information about the study of the researcher (age of participants, their relationships, conversational situations and so on).

Concerning German data, my analysis mainly confirms the findings in Golato (2005), who indicates the inclination of German speakers to accept the positive evaluation of their interlocutors. In contrast, the present results differ from the ones in other studies (e.g., see Mironovschi, 2009) highlighting a frequent refusal of compliments in German conversations. This difference may depend, in my opinion, on the different methodology of data collection. Like Golato (2002; 2005), I examine authentic data coming from real interactions. Mironovschi (2009), as well as other researchers, based their studies mainly on results from questionnaires, which only represent speakers' intuitions and not the real use of speech events.

Table 2 summarizes the similarities and differences between the CR types in Italian and German.

CR types	Italian	German
Direct Acceptance		
1. Thanking	48 (15.63%)	42 (13.29%)
2. Pleased Acceptance	31 (10.09%)	18 (5.69%)
3. Acceptance	36 (11.72%)	14 (4.43%)
4. Nonverbal Acceptance	29 (9.44%)	1 (0.31%)
5. Reassignment	10 (3.25%)	21 (6.64%)

Limited Acceptance		
6.　Ironic Acceptance	14 (4.56%)	1 (0.31%)
7.　Minimization	8 (2.6%)	16 (5.06%)
8.　(a) Lateral Deflection of the Merit	4 (1.3%)	16 (5.06%)
(b) Lateral Deflection of the Quality	9 (2.93%)	11 (3.48%)
(c) Lateral Deflection of the Topic	41 (13.35%)	50 (15.82%)
9.　Reassurance Request	5 (1.62%)	65 (20.56%)
Non-Acceptance		
10.　Reductive Deflection	22 (7.16%)	23 (7.27%)
11.　Discredit of the compliment giver	6 (1.95%)	1 (0.31%)
12.　Discredit of the complimented item/person	9 (2.93%)	29 (9.17%)
13.　Rejection	24 (7.81%)	3 (0.94%)
Ignoring		
14.　Ignoring	11 (3.58%)	5 (1.58%)

Table 2: Distribution of CR types in Italian and German

As can be gathered from *Table 2*, Italians and Germans display the same CR types: every strategy is attested, more or less frequently, in each language group. On the other hand, *Table 2* presents some significant differences between Italian and German speakers with reference to CR type selection.

In Italian data, the most frequent strategies are the *Thanking* (48 samples; 15.6%), the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* (41 samples; 13.3%) and the *Acceptance* (36 samples; 11.7%), whereas the *Lateral Deflection of the Merit* (4 samples; 1.3%) and the *Reassurance Request* (5 samples; 1.6%) are the least popular CR solution types.

In the case of *Thanking*, the strategy with the maximum degree of acceptance in my categorization framework, the compliment recipient agrees with his/her interlocutor by uttering an appreciation token, mostly *grazie* ('thanks'), without adding further explanations or details about the complimented item:

　　　(7)　((*Meeting with friends*))

　　　　　01　G:　ti trovo proprio !BENE! (.) finalmente in FOrma.

　　　　　　　　　you are looking well, fit at last

　　　　　02　C:　((sorridendo)) <u>grazie</u> (--) allora andia:mo?

　　　　　　　　　((smiling)) thank you, so let's go?

　　　(IT/Man/27)

　　　Direct Acceptance: Thanking

By means of the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic*, speakers give a non-evaluative comment on the complimented item, adding some information or explanations about it. This can be seen in the following example:

　　　(8)　((*Meeting with university colleagues*))

　　　　　01　G:　MAmma mia scrivi in tedesco per!FE!tto (.) credo credo che non

　　　　　　　　　my God, you can perfectly write in German, I think that

　　　　　02　　　ci sia niente da correggere;

　　　　　　　　　no correction will be needed

　　　　　03　C:　ma sai perché (.) <u>ho dovuto impararlo bene o male eh dove</u>

　　　　　　　　　do you know why? I had to learn it somehow eh where

04 lavoravo pri:ma c'erano SOlo ehm o almeno io dovevo gestirmi

   I worked before, there only were ehm almost I had to manage

05 solo clienti TEDEschi (.) sai, quando impari un po' di formule

   only German customers, you know, when you learn a few

06 fisse [poi]

   fixed formulations then

07 G: [sì:] sì comunque COmplimenti.

   yes yes, anyway compliments

(IT/Woman/24)

Limited Acceptance: Lateral Deflection of the Topic

In (8) the compliment recipient C, whose ability to write in German is praised by G (*MAmma mia scrivi in tedesco per!FE!tto*, 'my God, you can perfectly write in German'), replies to the compliment by deflecting the topic away from the positive evaluation and by explaining the reasons of her language skills. The intention of the complimentee to shift the attention to another issue related to the complimented trait is signalized in the opening of the CR turn by the use of *ma sai perché* ('do you know why'), through which the speaker does not express disagreement with her interlocutor but lets her understand that she wants to add some information or details. In concluding the conversational sequence the compliment sender opens a new turn (see the use of *sì: sì* to open a new turn), reiterates the compliment and scales lightly down the intensity of her previous assessment (*sì: sì comunque COmplimenti*, 'yes yes, anyway compliments').

The third more frequent CR strategy in Italian data is, as *Table 2* shows, the *Acceptance*, with which the speaker simply agrees with the compliment assertion without adding more information or expressing satisfaction. In these cases, my sample data attest the use of agreement tokens, such as *sì* ('yes'), or the repetition of the same positive adjective proffered by the compliment sender:

(9) ((*In the train*))

  01 G: BElla la giacca (.) è nuova?

    nice jacket, is it new?

  02 C: sì comprata IEri.

    yes, I bought it yesterday

  03 F: ((ridendo)) ah col primo stipendio?

    ((laughing)) ah with your first earnings?

  04 C: eh CE:rto-

    eh of course

  05 G: BE:lla.

    nice

  06 C: mm mm bella

    mm mm nice

(IT/Man/28)

Direct Acceptance: Acceptance

In (9), the complimenter opens the conversational sequence with a positive evaluation of an object owned by his interlocutor (*BElla la giacca*, 'nice jacket'). The compliment is followed by a question about

the complimented attribute: *è nuova?* ('is it new?'). C does not address to the compliment but instead to the question (*sì comprata IEri*, 'yes, I bought it yesterday'). At the end of the sequence the speaker G reiterates the compliment marking it prosodically (*BE:lla*, 'nice'). Now the complimentee accepts the compliment through the para-verbal signal *mm mm* and the repetition of the adjective *bella* ('nice') that his interlocutor has already used in the previous turn.

Regarding the CR types adopted in the German corpus, the most frequent reaction to compliments is, as *Table 2* illustrates, the *Reassurance Request* (65 samples; 20.5%). Then in 50 cases (15.8%) German native speakers choose the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* and in 42 interactions (13.2%) the *Thanking*. The tendency of Germans to responds to compliment with a doubting question in order to investigate the sincerity of the compliment giver is mentioned also by Golato (2002). In my data, this is often realized through direct questions, as in example (10) or, less frequently, by the use of interrogative particles, such as *ja?*

(10) ((*Sightseeing in Heidelberg*))

01 C: dann haben wir noch zeit das theaterSPIEL heute abend [zu zu sehn]

then we still have time to see the theatre play this evening

02 G: [mm ja:] mm yes

03 C: u_und MO:rgen haben wir frei.

and tomorrow we have free time

04 G: TOLL (-) du hast immer sehr GUte ideen;

great, you always have very good ideas

05 C: mm denkstu DAS?

mm do you think that?

06 G: JA: jedesmal ein GU:ter vorschlag.

yes, every time a good suggestion

07 F: also ABgemacht?

so decided?

(DT/Man/26)

Limited Acceptance: Reassurance Request

In (10) the complimented person replies to the compliment with a question, *denkstu DAS*? ('do you think that?'), in order to provide repetition or expansion of the previous positive evaluation and to request additional reassurance that the compliment was genuine. The reiteration of the compliment by speaker G (*JA: jedesmal ein GU:ter vorschlag*, 'yes, every time a good suggestion') is not followed by any more reactions. In the following turn, a third interlocutor (F) shifts the attention away from the compliment assertion to the previous topic of conversation which was interrupted by the formulation of the compliment.

Through the frequent use of *Reassurance Requests*, German speakers seem to be predominantly concerned with the truthfulness of the speech act and the sincerity of their interlocutors and to be less oriented towards the social function of complimenting (Marandin, 1987; Probst, 2003). This is what Byrnes (1986) notices, with reference, more in general, to the function of the language in German speaking contexts:

"in German style there is a greater emphasis on the information-conveying function of language as compared with its social bonding function. Such an orientation is concerned more with facts and truth-

values, and in their service seeks, or at least should not shy away from, overt disagreement and confrontation. In fact, disagreement and confrontation are valued, and have become ritualized, in that they are deemed to further the process of establishing truth" (p. 200).

The second most frequent CR strategy among German native speakers is the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic*. In these cases, as we already observed in the Italian data, the complimentee gives an explanation about the complimented item; that happens in the following example:

    (11) ((*Meeting with Gerald*))

      01 G: gerald,

               gerald

      02   deine roten SCHUhen,

               your red shoes

      03   wie !SCHÖN!

               they are nice!

      04 C: mm mm ich hab DIE bei_beim c&a gekauft (.) kennstu [WO:?]

               mm mm I bought them at c&a, do you know where?

      05 G: [ja] am FriedrichsPLAtz.

               yes at Friedrichsquare

      06 C: geNAU (-) da kannstu sehr GÜNstig kaufn

               exactly, you can buy cheap stuff there

    (DT/Man/26)

    Limited Acceptance: Lateral Deflection of the Topic

In this segment, C accepts the compliment through the para-verbal signal *mm mm* but then he shifts the attention providing a history of the object his interlocutor has been complimented on: he gives information about the place where he bought the appreciated shoes (*ich hab DIE bei_beim c&a gekauft*, 'I bought them at c&a'). The lateral deflection continues and C poses a question to G (*kennstu WO?*, 'do you know where?'), through which the following turns do not deal with the compliment assertion any more but with the place in which the praised object was bought.

The *Thanking* is attested as a third most frequent CR strategy in the German corpus. Participants utter the two forms *Danke* or *Vielen Dank* sometimes together with para-verbal signals (*ah* or *ach*) expressing surprise and pleasure for hearing the compliment assertion. In many cases, the *Thanking* closes the compliment sequence. Only in few segments the compliment sender repeats or reinforces the positive evaluation after an appreciation token, as seen in the following segment:
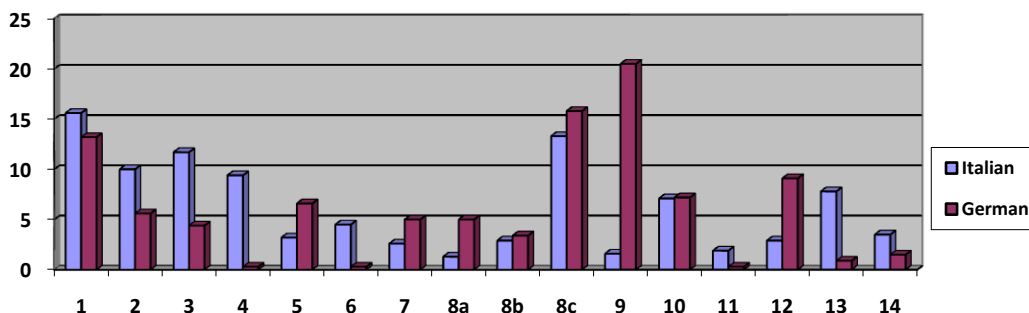
    (12) ((*In the cafeteria*))

      01 G: dein italienisch ist !SU!per

               your Italian is great

      02 C: <u>ah DA:nke</u> (-) ich fühle mich sehr geSCHMEIchelt;

               ah thanks, I feel very flattered

      03 G: ja: besonders die ausSPRAche du hast keinen deutschen [einschla:g]

               yes, in particular the pronounce, you have no German inflection

      04 C: [!DA!nke;]

               thank you

(DT/Woman/25)

Direct Acceptance: Thanking

The CR solution type in (12) is the *Thanking*: the complimentee recognizes the status of her interlocutor's previous utterance as a compliment. She introduces her turn with the particle *ah*, followed by *DA:nke* and by an assertion which shows appreciation for the compliment: *ich fühle mich sehr geSCHMEIchelt* ('I feel very flattered'). In this segment the speech act of complimenting consists of more than two turns. After the *Thanking* the compliment givers supports and reinforces the previous compliment and highlights in a new turn the aspects which are particularly positive and appreciable in his interlocutor's linguistic skill. He notices that the complimentee speaks Italian with no German inflections (*du hast keine deutschen einschla:g*, 'you have no German inflection'). C reacts to the reiteration of the compliment again with *!DA!nke*. Then the sequence of the compliment closes and the conversation moves to another issue.

Figure 2 clearly illustrates the variation in the frequency of each CR type in the two languages and shows other important contrastive features.

1=Thanking / 2=Pleased Acceptance / 3=Acceptance / 4=Nonverbal Acceptance / 5=Reassignment / 6=Ironic Acceptance / 7=Minimization / 8a=Lateral Deflection of the Merit / 8b=Lateral Deflection of the Quality / 8c=Lateral Deflection of the Topic / 9= Reassurance Request / 10=Reductive Deflection / 11=Discredit of the compliment giver / 12=Discredit of the complimented item/person / 13=Rejection / 14=Ignoring)

Figure 2: Distribution of CR types for the Italian and German groups

As can be gathered from the diagram, Italian data show a more homogenous distribution of the CR strategies, whereas the German corpus reveals a quite stronger preference for some specific typologies, in particular for the *Reassurance Request* (nr. 9 in the diagram) and the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* (nr. 8c). The strategies showing a strong difference between the two language groups in terms of frequency are the *Reassurance Request*, widely more attested in German than in Italian and the *Nonverbal Acceptance* (nr. 4). In Italian data this latter strategy is frequently adopted as CR type, while it is almost inexistent in German samples. Hence, German native speakers seem to prefer explicit formulations of their positions towards the compliment assertions, whereas Italians, in some conversational contexts, make use of nonverbal means, such as the smiling (see example 13), which has to be interpreted as an agreement but decreases, at the same time, the complimentary force, since it does not force the complimented person to react verbally to the compliment assertion.

(13) ((*Meeting with friends after the summer holidays*))

    01 G: ti trovo be:ne sai?

            you look well, do you know?

    02   (.) sei dimaGRIto (-) stai PROprio bene così.

            you have lost weight, you look really well

    03 C: <u>((sorride))</u>

            ((smiling))

    (IT/Man/27)

    Direct Acceptance: Nonverbal Acceptance

In the end, I consider the relation between the type of complimented attribute and the CR strategy selection in the two languages.

CR type   **Complimented item/trait**

Direct Acceptance (DA)	Physical Appearance	Owned Object	Character	Ability
1. Thanking	26 (32.5%)	11 (14.28%)	7 (9.21%)	4 (5.4%)
2. Pleased Acceptance	5 (6.25%)	16 (20.77%)	5 (6.57%)	5 (6.75%)
3. Acceptance	7 (8.75%)	18 (23.37%)	4 (5.26%)	7 (9.45%)
4. Nonverbal Acceptance	15 (18.75%)	-	11 (14.47%)	3 (4.05%)
5. Reassignement	2 (2.5%)	-	2 (2.63%)	6 (8.1%)
Limited Acceptance (LA)				
6. Ironic Acceptance	7 (8.75%)	-	6 (7.89%)	1 (1.35%)
7. Minimization	2 (2.5%)	6 (7.79%)	-	-
8. (a) Lateral Deflection of the Merit	-	2 (2.59%)	-	2 (2.7%)
(b) Lateral Deflection of the Quality	3 (3.75%)	6 (7.79%)	-	-
(c) Lateral Deflection of the Topic	7 (8.75%)	9 (11.68%)	5 (6.57%)	20 (27.02%)
9. Reassurance Request	3 (3.75%)	1 (1.29%)	1 (1.31%)	-
Non-Acceptance (NA)				
10. Reductive Deflection	1 (1.25%)	4 (5.19%)	7 (9.21%)	10 (13.51%)
11. Discredit of the compliment giver	-	2	4	-

93

			(2.59%)	(5.26%)	
12. Discredit of the complimented item/person	-	-	5 (6.57%)	4 (5.4%)
13. Rejection	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.59%)	12 (15.78%)	8 (10.81%)
Ignoring (I)					
14. Ignoring	-	-	7 (9.21%)	4 (5.4%)
Tot.	80 (100%)	77 (100%)	76 (100%)	74 (100%)

Table 3: Distribution of CR types according to the complimented item/trait for the Italian group

At first, *Table 3* shows that in the Italian corpus each type of complimented items favors the use of a different CR strategy. In case of compliments on 'physical appearance', the most frequent CR type is the *Thanking* (26 samples; 32.5%). If owned objects are praised, Italian speakers prefer to react with an *Acceptance* (18 samples; 23.3%). The *Rejection* with 12 samples (15.7%) and the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* with 20 samples (27%) are the most frequent CR strategies when 'character' and 'ability' are appreciated.

Moreover, as can be seen in *Table 3*, Italian native speakers tend to accept more easily compliments on physical characteristics or objects they own. Positive evaluations of character's traits or of personal abilities seem to be more dangerous for the maintenance of one's *face* and so they are mostly rejected, ignored or accepted by using *Limited Acceptance* response types.

If we compare the findings about the single items with each other, we notice that the *Minimization* (example 14) and the *Lateral Deflection of the Quality* only occur with compliments on appearance and objects. The *Discredit of the complimented item/trait* and the *Ignoring* (example 15) are attested only when 'character' and 'ability' are appreciated.

　　　　(14) ((*Graduation Party*))

　　　　　　01 *G:* *ehi criST Ina,*

　　　　　　　　　 ehi cristina,

　　　　　　02 　　 *come sei caRIna stase:ra.*

　　　　　　　　　 you are pretty this evening

　　　　　　03 F: *ne?*

　　　　　　　　　 isn't she?

　　　　　　04 　　 *glielo appena detto anch'io;*

　　　　　　　　　 I have just told her that

　　　　　　05 C: *ma sì (-) mi sono messa abbastanza elegante per ehm per*

　　　　　　　　　 well, I am quite elegant for ehm for

　　　　　　06 　　 *l'OCCAsione ehm sai non mi capita spesso ehm;*

　　　　　　　　　 the occasion ehm do you know it doesn't happen frequently to me ehm

　　　　　　(IT/Woman/28)

　　　　　　Limited Acceptance: Minimization

　　　　(15) ((*By Francesco*))

94

01   G: che BRAvo (-) le hai fatte tu tutte ste foto?
         you are great, did you make all these pictures by yourself?
02   C: mm ((*scuotendo il capo*))
         mm ((shaking the head))
03   G: bravo (.) molto Belle.
         good, very nice
04   C: (-) volete vedere il filMA:to ehm l'ultimo del concerto della scorsa doMEnica?
         Would you like to see the movie ehm the last one of the concert last Sunday?
05   (.) me l'ha ehm l'ho scaricato dal beppe.
         it was ehm I downloaded it from Beppe
(IT/Man/26)
Ignoring

Table 4 presents the frequency of each CR strategy according to the complimented item/trait in German data.

CR type	**Complimented item/trait**			
Direct Acceptance	Physical Appearance	Owned Object	Character	Ability
1. Thanking	6 (7.5%)	5 (6.17%)	21 (28%)	10 (12.5%)
2. Pleased Acceptance	4 (5%)	6 (7.4%)	8 (10.66%)	-
3. Acceptance	-	2 (2.46%)	4 (5.33%)	7 (8.75%)
4. Nonverbal Acceptance	-	-	1 (1.33%)	-
5. Reassignement	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.23%)	14 (18.66%)	5 (6.25%)
Limited Acceptance				
6. Ironic Acceptance	-	-	-	1 (1.25%)
7. Minimization	3 (3.75%)	-	5 (6.66%)	8 (10%)
8. (a) Lateral Deflection of the Merit	-	2 (2.46%)	-	14 (17.5%)
(b) Lateral Deflection of the Quality	2 (2.5%)	9 (11.11%)	-	-
(c) Lateral Deflection of the Topic	11 (13.75%)	29 (35.8%)	6 (8%)	4 (5%)
9. Reassurance Request	37 (46.25%)	14 (17.28%)	5 (6.66%)	9 (11.25%)
Non-Acceptance				
10. Reductive Deflection	3 (3.75%)	9 (11.11%)	4 (5.33%)	7 (8.75%)
11. Discredit of the compliment	1	-	-	-

95

giver	(1.25%)			
12. Discredit of the complimented item/person	11 (13.75%)	-	4 (5.33%)	14 (17.5%)
13. Rejection	-	2 (2.46%)	-	1 (1.25%)
Ignoring				
14. Ignoring	-	2 (2.46%)	3 (4%)	-
Tot.	80 (100%)	81 (100%)	75 (100%)	80 (100%)

Table 4: Distribution of CR types according the complimented item/trait for the German group

Like Italian speakers, Germans display a different CR strategy depending on the kind of the complimented item. The *Reassurance Request* is often selected as reply to compliments on aspects concerning physical appearance (37 samples; 46.2%). Positive evaluations of objects clearly favor the use of the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* (29 samples; 35.8%). The *Thanking* is the most frequent CR type when 'character' is appreciated (21 samples; 28%), whereas the attribute 'ability' reveals a high frequency of the CRs *Lateral Deflection of the Merit* (example 16) and *Discredit of the complimented item/person* (both with 14 samples; 17.5%).

       (16) ((*Dinner by Lisa*))

          01 F: ich hätte gern noch ehm ein_ne ta:[sse]

                   I'd like another ehm a cup

          02 C: [ja:] bitte

                   yes, please

          03 G: das ist richtig LEcker,

                   it is really tasty

          04   diese heißschokola:de (.) oder?

                   this hot chocolate, isn't it?

          05 F: [mm mm]

                   mm mm

          06 C: [oh das] ist n ähm ALtes rezept von meiner SCHWEster;

                   Oh this is an old recipe of my sister

          07 F: ah ah

                   ah ah

           08 C: das ist ein GU:tes mittel auch gegen die: ehm den STRESS

                   it is a good means also against ehm the stress

       (DT/Woman/28)

       Limited Acceptance: Lateral Deflection of the Merit

In (16) the speaker G complimented on her interlocutor's ability to prepare a tasty hot chocolate (*das ist richtig LEcker, diese heißschokola:de (.) oder?*, 'it is really tasty, this hot chocolate, isn't it?'). The compliment recipient replies deflecting the merit to another subject, i.e. her sister, who shared the recipe of the appreciated drink: *oh das ist n ähm ALtes rezept von meiner SCHWEster* ('oh this is an old

recipe of my sister'). With this assessment, the complimentee decreases the complimentary force through the use of the adjective *ALtes* ('old') that, even prosodically marked, gives a lightly negative meaning in this sequence, downgrades the value of the praised object and discredits the complimentee's ability.

According to the data in *Table 4*, unlike Italian native speakers, Germans accept appreciations of their character more easily, whereas compliments concerning physical appearance, possessions or skills are directly accepted only in few interactions. In these cases, German speakers prefer to investigate the sincerity of their interlocutors with *Reassurance Requests* (see above) or to select *Limited Acceptance* CR strategies.

The comparison between the items/traits in German data demonstrates other important aspects concerning the displaying of CR types. The *Reassignment* – a *Direct Acceptance* CR – is a frequent reply to compliments on character features (14 samples; 18.6%); on the contrary, this is a very rare and statistically insignificant solution type for the items 'ability' (5 samples; 6.2%), 'physical appearance' (2 samples; 2.5%) and 'owned object' (1 sample; 1.2%). Moreover, like the Italian findings, the *Lateral Deflection of the Quality* is only used in interactions where objects (9 samples; 11.1%) or physical aspects are appreciated (2 samples; 2.5%), while it does not occur as response to compliments on character and abilities. The *Rejection* is a rare CR in German and it is only attested in case of complimented objects and skills. Furthermore, the *Ignoring* is adopted as a compliment reply only with the attributes 'character' (3 samples; 4%) and 'owned object' (2 samples; 2.4%). In these last cases, the complimentee does not react to the compliment at all, neither verbally nor nonverbally, but he/she does not say anything or starts a new turn referring to a previous topic of conversation or introducing a new topic (example 17).

> (17) ((*Meeting with PG-colleagues*))
>> 01 G: also wie kann ehm [wie?]
>>   well, how ehm how?
>> 02 C: [ja] ich zeig dir dann (-) wie das ehm wie dieses proGRAmm einzurichten ist.
>>   yes, I'll show you then how the ehm how this program is to be installed
>> 03 G: vielen DANK (.) du bist sehr hilfsbeREIT;
>>   Thank you very much, you are very helpful
>> 04   (--)
>> 05 C: ist mein handy DA:?
>>   is my mobile there?
> (DT/Woman/29)
> *Ignoring*

CONCLUSION

Regarding the selection and frequency of CRs types, this study shows the following similarities and differences between Italian and German:

(a) The two language groups are close to each other in terms of the small proportion of *Non-Acceptance* and *Ignoring* strategies. Both Italians and Germans strongly tend to accept compliments. The study reveals group differences at the level of the use of *Direct* and *Limited Acceptance*. Italians show a strong inclination to *Direct Acceptance* solution types, through which they do not disagree with their interlocutors. Hence, Leech's (1983) Agreement Maxim

97

seems to have a powerful influence on Italian participants' choices of CRs. The prevalent macro-typology of CRs in German corpus is the *Limited Acceptance*, which shows Germans' attempt to find a balance between agreeing with the other person and avoiding self-praise. In this way, German native speakers respect not only the Agreement Maxim but also the Modesty Maxim*.*

(b) Both Italian and German data attest the use of each of the fourteen CR types considered in the analysis. The two participant groups differ in the frequency of the single CR strategies. Italians adopt in most cases the *Thinking*, whereas Germans often reply to compliments with a *Reassurance Request*, through which they want to test the truthfulness of the speech act and the sincerity of their interlocutors. The *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* is the second most frequent CR strategy in both languages.

(c) Considering the occurrence of each CR type in the two corpora, the biggest differences concern above all the *Reassurance Request* and the *Nonverbal Acceptance.* The first strategy is predominant in German data, while it is rarely attested in Italian interactions. The use of nonverbal means is widely more frequent in Italian samples than in German ones.

(d) In both participants groups we can notice that the selection of the CR type is influenced by the complimented item/trait. If the two languages converge in this general tendency, a more punctual study of the data shows relevant differences. In Italian the attributes 'physical appearance' and 'owned objects' favor the displaying of *Direct Acceptance* CRs, while compliments on character traits and abilities are frequently accepted through *Limited Acceptance* responses or they are rejected at all. In contrast, German participants easily accept positive evaluations of character features. In case of compliments on appearance, possessions or personal skills, Germans prefer to choose *Limited Acceptance* or *Non- Acceptance* CRs types.

The study shows that typical and appropriate replies to compliments can vary across the languages. Apart from some general tendencies, within which Italian and German are similar to each other, with regard to CR type selection and frequency, the two language groups present sensitive differences.

In addition, illustrating the complexity of pragmatic variation, the present research aims to underline the importance of socio-pragmatic competences for EFL learners. As Kasper & Rose (2002) argued, pragmatics is teachable and learnable, and compliments, CRs, as well as other speech acts, are very important in this regard. Students should learn about the range of pragmatic norms, the use of appropriate behavior patterns and the cultural values associated with the foreign language (Holmes & Brown, 1987; Neuland, 2009). To sum up, learners should be aware of the differences in realizing speech acts such as complimenting, complaining, and apologizing in different cultures and languages.

By investigating authentic language data, comparative studies, such as this one, can be adopted in order to introduce to learners the main tendencies in the use of speech acts and to deepen their understanding of the multiple functions of speech events in different language groups.

REFERENCES

Ayaß, R. (1999). Versachlicht oder veraltet: Positive Moralisierungen in alltäglichen und institutionellen Kontexten. In J. Bergmann & T. Luckmann (Eds.), Kommunikative Konstruktion von Moral. Von der Moral zu den Moralen. (pp. 289-327). Opladen/Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Barnlund, D. C., & Araki, S. (1985). Intercultural encounters: The management of compliments by Japanese and Americans. Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology, 16, 9-26.

Bettoni, C. (2006). Usare un'altra lingua. Guida alla pragmatica interculturale. Roma/Bari: Laterza.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). Politeness. Some universals in language usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byrnes, H. (1986). Interactional style in German and American conversations. Text, 6, 189–206.

Castagneto, M., & Ravetto, M. (in press). La risposta al complimento in italiano e in tedesco. Vercelli: Mercurio.

Chen, R. (1993). Responding to compliments. A contrastive study of politeness strategies between American English and Chinese speakers. Journal of Pragmatics, 20, 49-75.

Cheng, W. (2003). Intercultural Conversation. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Cordella, M., Large, H., & Pardo, V. (1995). Complimenting behavior in Australian English and Spanish speech. Multilingua, 14/3, 235-252.

Deppermann, A. (2007). Grammatik und Semantik aus gesprächsanalytischer Sicht. Berlin: de gruyter.

Frescura, M. (1996). The conflictual behavior of Italian speaker in responding to compliments. Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata, 28, 89-110.

Golato, A. (2002). German compliment responses. Journal of Pragmatics, 34, 547-571.

Golato, A. (2005). Compliments and Compliment responses: grammatical structure and sequential organization. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Grein, M. (2008). Der Sprechakt des Kompliments im interkulturellen Vergleich. In M. Grein (Ed.), Dialogue in and between Different Cultures (pp. 15-32). iada.online, 1(08).

Herbert, R. K., & Straight, H. S. (1989). Compliment-rejection versus compliment-avoidance: listener-based versus speaker-based pragmatic strategies. Language and Communication, 9, 35–47.

Herbert, R. K. (1989). The ethnography of English compliments and compliment responses: A contrastive sketch. In W. Oleksy (Ed.), Contrastive Pragmatics (pp. 3-35). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Herbert, R. K. (1990). Sex-based differences in compliment behavior. Language in Society, 19, 201-224.

Holmes, J. (1988). Paying Compliments: A Sex-Preferential Politeness Strategy. Journal of Pragmatics, 12, 445-465.

Holmes, J., & Brown, D.F. (1987). Teachers and students learning about compliments. Tesol Quarterly, 21, 523-546.

Jaworski, A. (1995). This is not an empty compliment! Polish compliments and the expression of solidarity. International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 5, 63–94.

Johnson, D. M., & Roen, D.H. (1992). Complimenting and involvement in Peer reviews: Gender variation. Language in Society, 21, 27-57.

Jucker, A. H. (2009). Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory. The case of compliments. Journal of Pragmatics, 41, 1611-1635.

Kasper, G., & Rose, K. R. (2002). Pragmatic development in a second language. Malden (MA): Blackwell.

Kerbrat-Orecchioni, C. (1987). La description des échanges en analyse conversationelle: l'example du compliment. DRLAV-Revue de Linguistique, 36(37), 1-53.

Knapp, M., Hopper, R., & Bell, R. (1984). Compliments: A Descriptive Taxonomy. Journal of Communication, 34, 19-31.

Leech, G. (1983). Principles of Pragmatics. London: Longman.

Levinson, S. C. (1983). Pragmatics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Manes, J. (1983). Compliments: a mirror of cultural values. In N. Wolfson, & E. Judd (Eds.), Sociolinguistics and language acquisition (pp. 96-102). Rowley (MA): Newbury House.

Manes, J., & Wolfson, N. (1980). The compliment as a social strategy. Papers in Linguistics. International Journal of Human Communication, 13, 391-410.

Manes, J., & Wolfson, N. (1981). The Compliment Formula. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardized Communication Situations and Prepatterned Speech (pp. 116-132). The Hague: Mouton Publishers.

Marandin, J.M. (1987). Des mots et des actions "compliment", "complimenter" et l'action de complimenter. Lexique et faits sociaux, 5, 65-99.

Mironovschi, L. (2009). Komplimente und Komplimenterwiderungen im Russischen und im Deutschen. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

Mulo-Farenkia, B. (2005). Kreativität und Formelhaftigkeit in der Realisierung von Komplimenten: Ein deutsch-kamerunischer Vergleich. Linguistik online, 22.

Nelson, G. L., Al-Batal, M., & Echols, E. (1996). Arabic and English Compliment Responses: Potential for Pragmatic Failure. Applied Linguistics, 17(4), 411-432.

Nelson, G. L., El Bakary, W., & Al-Batal, M. (1996). Egyptian and American compliments: Focus on second language learners. In S.M. Gass, & J. Neu (Eds.), Speech across cultures. Challenges to communication in a second language (pp. 109-128). Berlin/New York: de gruyter.

Neuland, E. (2009). Kritisieren und Komplimentieren: Ergebnisse kontrastiver Studien deutsch-italienisch zum Umgang mit sprachlicher Höflichkeit. In E. Neuland, & C. Ehrhardt (Eds.), Sprachliche Höflichkeit in interkultureller Kommunikation und im DaF-Unterricht (pp. 153-170). Frankfurt Main: Peter Lang.

Pomerantz, A. (1978). Compliment responses. Notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints. In J. Schenkein (Ed.), Studies in the organization of conversational interaction (pp. 79-112). New York: Academic Press.

Probst, J. (2003). Ein Kompliment in Ehren…Aspekte eines „höflichen" Sprechaktes in mehreren Sprachen. In N. Baumgarten, C. Böttger, M. Motz, & J. Probst (Eds.), Übersetzen, interkulturelle Kommunikation, Spracherwerb und Sprachvermittlung – das Leben mit mehreren Sprachen. Festschrift für Juliane House zum 60. Geburtstag (pp. 1-16). Zeitschrift für interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht 8 (2/3).

Schlegloff, E. A., & Sacks, H. (1973). Opening up closings. Semiotica, 8, 289-327.

Selting, M. et al. (2009). Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem 2 (GAT 2). Gesprächsforschung - Online-Zeitschrift zur verbalen Interaktion, 10, 353-402.

Tran, G. Q. (2007). Compliment Response Continuum Hypothesis. *The International Journal of Language Society and Culture* 21. Retrieved from http://www.educ.utas.edu.au/users/tle/JOURNAL/issues/2007/21-1.pdf

Wierzbicka, A. (1987). English speech act verbs: A semantic dictionary. Sydney: Academic.

Wolfson, N. (1981). Compliment in cross-cultural perspective. Tesol Quarterly, 15, 117-124.

Wolfson, N. (1983). An empirical based analysis of compliments in American English. In N. Wolfson, & E. Judd (Eds.), Sociolinguistics and language acquisition (pp. 82-95). Rowley (MA): Newbury House.

Yang, S. (1987). A comparison between Chinese and American cultures in forms of address, greetings and farewells and compliments. Cross-Currents, 13, 13-28.