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**Politeness in contemporary Chinese:
A postmodernist analysis of generational variation in the use
of compliments and compliment responses**

A Doctoral Thesis

by

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University, UK

November 2011

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Abstract

There is some evidence from scholarship that politeness norms in China are diversified. I maintain that a study aiming to provide systematic evidence of this would require an approach to politeness phenomena that is able to address such diversity. Drawing upon the insights of recent scholarship on the distinction between the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness, I survey relevant literature. I show that many current works on politeness argue that the modernist approach (Lakoff 1973/1975, Brown and Levinson 1987[1978], Leech 1983) generally tends to assume that society is relatively homogeneous with regard to politeness norms. By contrast, I demonstrate that the postmodernist approach to politeness (e.g. Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003) foregrounds the heterogeneity of society and the rich variability of politeness norms within a given culture. I argue that, by using a postmodernist approach to politeness, it is possible to show evidence of differences between groups of the Chinese in their politeness behaviour and the informing norms of politeness.

I then explore this issue in depth by focusing on compliments and compliment responses (CRs). I show that studies on these speech acts in Chinese have to date tended to adopt a modernist approach to politeness and often assume a compliment and a CR to be easily identifiable. Moreover, I show that they do not address the heterogeneity of Chinese society and generally assume interactants to be homogeneous in terms of politeness norms that inform compliment and CR behaviours. On this basis, I raise the questions as to whether, by adopting a postmodernist rather than modernist approach, there is empirical evidence that politeness norms informing compliments and CRs vary among the Chinese, and whether these norms correlate with generation.

To this end, by audio-recording both spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and follow-up interviews, I construct a corpus of compliments and CRs generated by two generations of the Chinese brought up before and after the launch of China's reform. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of these data show that there is variation in compliment and CR behaviours in Chinese and the informing politeness norms. Furthermore, the result shows that this variation is correlated with generation. I then show how, by using a research methodology which emphasizes the interactants' perceptions obtained through follow-up interviews, my study brings to light problems with previous studies on compliments and CRs which hitherto are not addressed. By showing evidence that compliments and CRs are not as easy to identify as many previous researchers have indicated. I argue that my *emic* approach to data analysis provides a useful perspective on the complexity of intention in studies on speech acts and perhaps beyond. My study, therefore, makes an interesting contribution to the debate over this notion central to politeness research. Moreover, I argue my methodology which is able to categorize and analyze data according to participants' self-reported perceptions allows me to draw out differences in the two generations' compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms.

Keywords: *Politeness norm, Chinese, compliment, compliment response, spontaneous naturally occurring conversation, interview, postmodernist approach, intention, generation*

To my husband Chengyu Zhuang and my son Monty Diansitan Zhuang, whose never-tiring love and support have sustained me through the highs and lows of this research

Acknowledgements

My most heartfelt thanks go to my supervisor Dr Chris Christie for her kindness, encouragement, unfailing help and support, academically and in daily life. I have benefited enormously from every one of her fortnightly, hour-long professional supervision sessions. The development of my ideas throughout this research owes an immense debt to her insightful, detailed comments and constructive suggestions. Without her dedicated and warm-hearted support, this research would have been impossible.

My sincere thanks go to Professor Julian Wolfreys, my director of research, and Professor Elaine Hobby, head of the Department. I also thank Mrs Caroline Flynn-Ryan, Professor Bill Overton, Dr Carol Bolton, Dr Nick Freeman, Dr Arianna Maiorani, Professor Clyde Williams and Dr Jianxun Kong.

I would like to thank the participants who provided the data. Human subjects protocol prevents me from listing you, but you know who you are. This thesis could never have been written without your kind participation. I am also grateful to Judith Hilton and Clive Hilton who jointly proof-read my thesis.

My special thanks go to my parents, Ruqing He and Shubiao Qian, for their love and immeasurable support. My thanks also go to my sisters and brother for their love and substantial help.

The research was funded by an Overseas Research Studentship Award (Higher Education Funding Council for England), a Research Studentship in the Department of English and Drama at Loughborough University, UK, and Great Britain–China Educational Trust: Chinese Student Awards. I am deeply grateful for their support.

Preface

Although interactants in my thesis are referred to as speakers and hearers, the theories I address are designed to cover all types of communication – both speech and writing in all its various forms.

As detailed below, throughout this research process, I presented four conference papers and have published a full-length article based on part of this thesis. I am grateful for the invaluable comments and suggestions I received at conferences and from the anonymous reviewers and copyeditor of the *Journal of Politeness Research*.

The Departmental Conference Fund (Sept. 2007–Aug. 2010), Department of English and Drama, Loughborough University and the Graduate School Conference Fund (Sept. 2008–Aug. 2011), Loughborough University supported my conference paper presentations financially; their contribution is hereby gratefully acknowledged.

Conference papers

- (1) He, Yun. 2011 (invited). Constructing group identity through politeness strategies in dinner party conversations. Paper presented at the 12th International Pragmatics Conference, Manchester, UK, 3–8 July.
- (2) He, Yun. 2010. Complimenting as intended: From the perspectives of the investigator, hearer and speaker. Paper presented at the 5th International Symposium on Politeness, Basel, Switzerland, 30 June–2 July.
- (3) He, Yun. 2009 (invited). Face and politeness in compliment responding in contemporary Chinese. Paper presented at the International Symposium on Face and Politeness, Brisbane, Australia, 10 July.
- (4) He, Yun. 2008. ‘Buzz off’ or ‘thank you’? Politeness strategies in compliment responding in contemporary Chinese. Paper presented at the 4th International Symposium on Politeness, Budapest, Hungary, 2–4 July.

Journal article

He, Yun. 2012. Different generations, different face? A discursive approach to naturally occurring compliment responses in Chinese. *Journal of Politeness Research* 8(1): 29–51.

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List of Transcription Symbols and Abbreviations

Transcription symbols

[simultaneous or overlapping speech
=	break and subsequent continuation of a single utterance
(.)	micro-pause
(0.6)	timed pause
—	speech emphasized or stressed
::	prolongation of sound
—	halting, abrupt cutoff or interruption in utterance
.	stopping fall in tone
,	continuing intonation
?	rising intonation
!	animated tone
(text)	text inserted to make translation more comprehensible
((laugh))	transcriber's annotation
*	complimenter's verified compliment
[]	implied meaning
→	utterance under discussion
...	intervening utterance omitted

Abbreviations

AAI	analyst's assigned intention
AC	analyst's compliment
ACR	analyst's compliment response
B&L	Brown and Levinson
CA	conversation analysis
CP	Cooperative Principle
CR	compliment response
DCT	discourse completion task
FTA	face-threatening act
HAI	hearer's attributed intention
post-OCPG	post-One-Child-Policy generation
PP	Politeness Principle
pre-OCPG	pre-One-Child-Policy generation
SI	speaker's intention
VC	verified compliment
VCR	verified compliment response

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

My aim in this chapter is three-fold: (a) to introduce the objectives and theoretical perspectives of the current research; (b) to present an overview of the methodology I adopted in my study; and (c) to outline the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Objectives and theoretical perspectives

The present empirical research is designed to advance the existing scholarship on compliments and compliment responses (CRs) with the following objectives:

- (1) to characterize the spontaneous naturally occurring compliment and CR behaviours performed by two generations of the Chinese brought up before and after the launch of China's reform;
- (2) to identify the politeness norms that inform the two generations' compliment and CR behaviours;
- (3) to explore the relationship between compliment and CR behaviours, politeness norms, and generation.

Current scholarship shows that politeness norms in Chinese are diversified. Among others, Qu and Chen (1999:41) note that traditional and modern norms of politeness coexist in contemporary Chinese. The authors also claim that politeness norms in China vary across generations and regions. Literature shows that these assertions can be supported by some scattered evidence, particularly from studies based on data collected using the instrument of the discourse completion task (DCT) (e.g. Lee-

Wong 2000, Wang 2005). This then raises the issue as to which approach to politeness currently available is suited to explore, in a systematic way, the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese.

Therefore, drawing on insights from recent scholarship on the distinction between the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness (e.g. Watts 2005), I critique the politeness literature discussing these two approaches. I show that the modernist approach to politeness is shared by the classical theories of Lakoff (1973/1975), Brown and Levinson (1987[1978]) (B&L) and Leech (1983). As many scholars such as Eelen (2001), Watts (2003) and Terkourafi (2005) note, the modernist theories are all premised on Grice's (1989) theory of meaning and communication and Searle's (1969) speech act theory. Thus, I contend that the viability of the modernist approach to politeness depends largely on whether this theoretical basis can still be upheld as currently formulated.

Literature shows that Grice's and Searle's theories are biased towards the speaker and speaker intention (cf. Clark 1996, Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2005). Informed by these theories, the modernist theorists view politeness largely as part of speaker meaning, a particularized implicature intended by the speaker. Also, as scholars such as Schiffrin (1994) and Levinson (1995) note, Grice's and Searle's theories indeed appear to suggest the existence of a second intention, i.e. the intention that the addressee recognizes in the speaker's utterance.

However, many scholars argue that in the sense-making process in interaction, hearers may attribute different intentions to the speaker (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995, Toolan 1996, Gibbs 1999, Christie 2000, Haugh 2007a). For these theorists, an utterance is always open to different interpretations. Following this argument, I show that Grice and Searle appear to assume that speaker intention and hearer's assumption about speaker intention are so matched that speaker intention is self-

evident to the hearer. Their theories thus do not address the multiplicity of intentions attributed by hearers. Therefore, I argue that a major limitation to Grice's and Searle's theories lies in their assumption that intention is self-evident. Furthermore, drawing on the insights of scholars such as Gibbs (1999) and Haugh (2008), I argue that intention is not self-evident. As Eelen (2001) notes, in empirical research on politeness both speaker intention and hearer's attributed intention should be emphasized. I thus maintain that a speech act should be viewed as dynamically generated in interaction.

Moreover, there is evidence from the existing scholarship that a politeness norm is generally conceptualized by the modernist theorists as being an *a priori*, static and prescriptive entity shared by interactants. I also show that studies taking a modernist approach tend to assume that a norm unidirectionally affects politeness behaviour. Building on recent politeness scholarship (e.g. Eelen 2001, Haugh 2003, Mills 2003, Locher 2004, Culpeper 2011), I argue that a norm is always in a state of flux and subject to participant's interpretations. Further, drawing upon insights from studies on structure and agency (e.g. Carter and Sealey 2000, Elder-Vass 2010), I argue that the nexus between norms and politeness behaviour is dynamic. That is, norms influence politeness behaviour, but the behaviour can also function as a structuring power of norms. I conclude that while notions such as intention and speech act are certainly essential in politeness research, the modernist approach is not adequate to address the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese.

However, as an alternative to the modernist approach to politeness, the postmodernist approach (e.g. Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003) is chiefly informed by Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice (cf. Terkourafi 2005, Mills 2011b). I show that with the notion of *habitus* as a unifying theme, politeness is viewed as dynamically generated in social interaction. Unlike the modernist conceptualization of politeness as speakers' implicatures, the postmodernist theorists argue that

politeness is ‘a discursive concept arising out of interactants’ perceptions and judgements of their own and others’ verbal behaviour’ (Locher and Watts 2005:10). Furthermore, the literature shows that rejecting the modernist theorists’ bias towards the speaker, the postmodernist theorists (Eelen 2001, Locher 2004, Haugh 2007a) agree that the speaker and hearer should be placed on a par in politeness research.

Moreover, since the linguistic *habitus* is viewed as a sub-set of the dispositions comprising the *habitus* ‘acquired through socialization’ (Watts 2003:149), interactants who are socialized in different sociocultural contexts are very likely to have different *habitus* or dispositions. Consequently, for the postmodernist theorists, politeness behaviour and the informing politeness norms can vary across individuals. Following Bourdieu’s thesis that individuals with similar socialization tend to acquire a similar *habitus* or what counts as appropriate, postmodernist politeness theorists (e.g. Culpeper 2011) argue that politeness norms involve a certain amount of sharedness in addition to variability and discursiveness.

Also, I show that rather than assuming utterances to be self-evidently polite or impolite, the postmodernist theorists (Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Locher 2004, Davies *et al* 2011) force a focus on participants’ situated and dynamic evaluations of politeness. As Haugh notes, they are united in their determination “‘to pay closer attention to how participants in social interaction perceive politeness’ (Watts 2005:xix)” (2007b:296). Moreover, I show that as Terkourafi (2005:242) notes, by questioning modernist theories’ notions such as ‘norm’ and ‘culture’, the postmodernist theorists attribute many of the modernist theories’ shortcomings to their assumptions of cultural homogeneity and shared norms. Considering all of these arguments and assumptions, I maintain that the postmodernist approach to politeness is well equipped to address the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese.

To further explore the adequacy of the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness in addressing the diversity of politeness norms in China, I focus on the speech acts of compliments and CRs.

A survey of the literature shows that most studies (e.g. Holmes 1986/1988) of compliments and CRs, implicitly or explicitly, adopt a modernist approach to politeness, particularly B&L's (1987) 'face-saving' theory. Evidence from relevant scholarship suggests that studies (e.g. Ye 1995) taking this approach tend to assume that a compliment is easily identifiable and a compliment topic is homogeneously shared by interactants. Moreover, evidence from the literature shows that under the general rubric of the modernist approach to politeness many previous studies generally assume or claim that a CR is readily recognizable and a CR strategy can be largely assigned in a rather straightforward manner. Their data is thus analyzed in a top-down manner. I also show that current scholarship on CRs tends to assume that Chinese interactants are homogeneous in terms of CR strategies. Further, it appears that in many empirical studies (e.g. Chen 1993, Yuan 2002, Cheng 2003) a politeness norm such as modesty has been widely assumed to be uniformly informing the compliment and CR behaviours of interactants. With respect to methods of data collection, relevant literature shows that the DCT is used predominantly, particularly in studies concerning compliments and CRs in Chinese (e.g. Chen 1993, Ye 1995, Tang and Zhang 2009, Chen and Yang 2010).

I show that in making the above assumptions concerning compliment and CR behaviours and norms, previous studies appear to assume speaker intention to be self-evident and interactants' judgements and evaluations to be homogeneous. Studies taking a modernist approach to politeness, therefore, cannot explore the diversity of norms in Chinese. I argue instead that foregrounding social heterogeneity, the postmodernist approach provides an appropriate framework for

empirical research on Chinese compliment and CR behaviours and politeness norms that inform these behaviours.

1.3 Research methodology

This research uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis so as to draw out differences and similarities in the compliment and CR behaviours of two generations of the Chinese and the informing politeness norms.

In line with the postmodernist politeness theorists' emphasis on the contextualized analysis of extended stretches of conversation and their assumption that speaker intention is not self-evident, I collected two sets of comparable data by audio-recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and the follow-up interviews. The recorded conversations allowed me to focus on actual utterances embedded in stretches of conversation. The interview data were used not only to verify compliments and CRs, but also to elicit information regarding the participants' perceptions of compliment topics, CR strategies, and the politeness norms informing their behaviours.

Altogether, 16 dinner party conversations were audio-recorded in mainland China. The participants, nearly balanced in gender, varied in occupation and education, came from a large number of provinces (cf. 3.4.1). The number of parties involved was equally distributed among the two generations. Moreover, to ensure that the methods of data collection and the research procedure I devised were appropriate and feasible for my research, I carried out a pilot study in the UK before I set off for my four months fieldwork in China.

1.4 Organization of the thesis

My thesis is organized into eight chapters, followed by an appendix and references. In Chapter Two, I first set the scene for the subsequent chapters by showing various

types of evidence of the diversity of politeness norms in China. I then assess scholarship on the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness. I argue that the postmodernist approach to politeness is able to address the diversity of politeness norms in China. In evaluating literature on compliments and CRs, I identify the main theoretical and methodological issues that remain untackled in this field of research and on this basis I formulate my research questions.

In Chapter Three, I detail my research methodology. I argue for the suitability of recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and conducting follow-up interviews as multiple methods of data collection in my study. I then explain in turn the research procedure and issues concerning transcription and translation of conversations and interviews. In this chapter, I also provide an account of two preliminary studies I carried out.

In Chapter Four, I make a case for which utterances should be included in my compliment data. I present my findings about the complex relationship between analyst's assigned intention, speaker's intention and hearer's attributed intention.

In Chapter Five, I analyze compliment behaviour and the underlying norms of politeness. I report findings concerning the frequency of compliments, compliment topics, and norms informing the compliment behaviour. I also present the generational variation in compliment behaviour and the informing politeness norms.

In Chapter Six, I perform analyses of CR behaviour and the norms of politeness identified. I present my findings on the CR strategies, politeness norms informing CR behaviour. Also, I show in this chapter that CR behaviour and the identified norms correlate with generation.

Chapter Seven is devoted to the discussion of my findings reported in the preceding three chapters. I show how my research contributes to our understanding of the speech acts of a compliment and a CR in Chinese and beyond. Particularly, I show how, by emphasizing interactants' perceptions and judgements obtained through follow-up interviews, my methodology is able to bring into view problems not addressed previously and the generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and politeness norms.

Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter Eight. I recapitulate the main arguments in my critique of the literature on the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness and compliments and CRs. I summarize my major findings and highlight my major contributions to the existing scholarship on compliments and CRs. Also, I point out the limitations to the present research and outline some directions for future research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I begin in 2.2 by showing evidence from relevant scholarship that has pointed to the diversity of politeness norms in China. I maintain that a systematic study which provides detailed evidence of this would require an approach to politeness phenomena that is able to address such diversity. I then show in 2.3 that there is a growing body of scholarship that argues for a postmodernist rather than a modernist approach to politeness. In my review of the relevant literature, I argue that scholarship provides a great deal of evidence to suggest that a postmodernist approach to politeness is better able to address diversity of norms.

In 2.4 I explore the above issue by assessing literature on the speech acts of compliments and CRs. I show that previous studies generally adopt a modernist approach to politeness and tend to assume that intention of a compliment and a CR is easily identifiable. I also demonstrate that most empirical studies generally assume interactants to be homogeneous with regard to politeness norms informing compliment and CR behaviours. I argue that these studies are not able to address the participants' evaluations of politeness in performing these behaviours. Therefore, I propose that it is plausible to hypothesize that there would be evidence of generational differences in these two speech acts and the underlying norms in Chinese. On this basis, in 2.5 I specify the research questions to be addressed in the present study.

2.2 Evidence of diversity of politeness norms in China

This section aims to demonstrate that evidence from current scholarship shows that the Chinese are not homogeneous with respect to politeness norms. Taking as the point of departure Qu and Chen's (1999) observation of politeness phenomena in contemporary Chinese, I review the scholarship which discusses the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese.

According to the literature, the Chinese have long been perceived by many Westerners as inscrutable: 'mysterious, unfathomable, [and] inexplicable' (Young 1994:1), and they are stereotypically seen as either 'traditionally polite' or 'direct and pragmatic' (Kádár and Pan 2011:125). Nevertheless, some literature (e.g. Young 1994, Lan 1999) shows that these apparent paradoxical perceptions may well be just an indication of the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese and the heterogeneity of Chinese society. Particularly, this is noted by Qu and Chen who remark how politeness principles may vary synchronically and diachronically in the Chinese cultural context:

Conspicuous changes have taken place in politeness principles in Chinese and this gives rise to the distinction between modern and traditional principles of politeness. We observe that the younger generation view politeness from a perspective quite different from the older. This deviation indicates that the younger people's views of self-image have largely diverged from the traditional convention and tend to converge towards the Western norm. Further, the realization of traditional politeness principles and their content may vary across regions within this populous and massive country. (1999:41)
[Author's translation from Chinese]

In this quotation, Qu and Chen call our attention to the diversity of politeness principles or norms in contemporary Chinese. According to them, politeness in

Chinese varies along three dimensions: (a) traditional and modern politeness norms, (b) generational variation, and (c) regional variation. In the subsequent three subsections, I survey the relevant literature and show evidence of this variation of politeness norms in Chinese.

2.2.1 Evidence of differences between traditional and modern politeness norms

A survey of previous literature shows that linguistic politeness is a historical phenomenon, and is therefore always in a state of flux (see e.g. Gu 1990/1992/2001, Sifianou 1992, Pan 2000, Watts 2003/2005, Keevallik 2005). Ehlich, for example, argues that linguistic politeness is ‘constructed historically’ (2005:73). Moreover, it is ‘not only a historical phenomenon...but that the recognition of its historicity is an almost inalienable condition for understanding it’ (2005:105–106). A similar argument also resonates in literature on politeness norms. For example, when critiquing Lakoff’s (1973) assertion that in a Chinese context belching is a polite thing for guests to do after a meal whereas it is quite impolite in an American context, Sifianou argues that ‘Chinese society is a society undergoing social change and any claims about their norms of politeness should take this into consideration’ (1992:25). Here Sifianou points directly to the dynamic nature of politeness norms in Chinese. Concretely, she suggests that politeness norms in the past do not necessarily hold under current conditions.

Indeed, many recent studies (Pan 2000, Wang and Zeng 2000) provide empirical evidence of changes of politeness norms in Chinese. Clear evidence emerges from survey studies. For instance, using a questionnaire as the tool of data collection, Wang (2005) tested out three of Gu’s (1990) politeness maxims: the Self-denigration Maxim, the Address Maxim and the Refinement Maxim. Her data show that many politeness linguistic forms such as *bǐrén* (‘humble self’) and *bǐxìng* (‘humble surname’) which are viewed by Gu as polite self-addressing terms have become obsolete. Wang (2005), like Wang and Zeng (2000), demonstrates that while the

informants still value deference they tend not to denigrate themselves. Thus the view that the self-denigration is one of the 'four essential notions underlying the Chinese conception of politeness' (Gu 1990:245) is in a sense contested by findings such as this.

Similarly, some studies based on natural data also provide evidence of the co-existence of traditional and modern norms of politeness in contemporary Chinese. Pan (2000), for example, identified a striking contrast between strategies of politeness used in traditional state-run and newly-established privately owned stores in China. Precisely, she found that service encounters in a traditional store, set up in accordance with the old laws and regulations, are task-oriented, and the language use is limited to that necessary to the commercial transaction without considering any facework unless the clerk and customer are acquainted with each other. Conversely, in a store established under new economic policies, the verbal interaction 'is prolonged, with elaborate opening and closing remarks and heavy use of positive politeness strategies' (2000:56).

Perhaps the fundamental change in the way the Chinese address and greet each other may provide the best evidence of diachronic variation in politeness norms in Chinese. For example, the past few decades have witnessed a semantic generalization of address terms which used to show respect to a person of higher status. To illustrate, Li's (1997) study reveals that the term *lǎobǎn* ('proprietor') which was used to exclusively address people of high status, particularly a successful businessman is now found common in addressing a stranger of equal or lower social status. Similarly, Yang and Wang (2005) found that the address terms *lǎoshī* ('teacher') and *shīfu* ('master') used to refer to 'teacher' (opposed to student) and 'master' (opposed to apprentice), but they have now been extended to a variety of people to show politeness by elevating the addressee. Such changes in address terms seem to indicate that politeness norms in Chinese have diverged from the

tradition: terms which used to address exclusively a person of higher status can now be used to address a wider range of addressees.

Apart from the scholarship, the following address terms embedded in slogans illustrate a sharp contrast between traditional and modern norms of politeness. Traditionally, as theorized by Gu (1990), the norms underlying the use of address terms seem to emphasize Confucian social hierarchical order. In contemporary China, however, norms stressing informality and egalitarianism seem to be gaining favour.

(1) pre-reform China: *Máo Zhǔxí wànsuì!* ('Long Live Chairman Mao!')

↓

(2) reform-era China: (a) *Xiǎopíng, nǐnǎo* ('Hello, Xiaoping'); (b) *Húgē, jiāyóu!* ('Elder Brother Hu, come on!')

(1) was used to greet Chinese first president Zedong Mao (1893–1976) at the founding ceremony of New China in 1949 and on many other occasions in pre-reform China (Chen 2010:98). (2)(a) was used to greet president Xiaoping Deng at the 35th National Day parade in 1984 (Zou and Li 2002:17), and (2)(b) to greet visiting president Jintao Hu at a welcoming ceremony in Paris in 2008 (*Shizhengyusiyulu* 2008:12). Clearly, in the past sixty years or so the address terms have moved from a conventional, formal, and distant one (title plus surname: 'Chairman Mao') to an informal first naming ('Xiaoping') or a very casual one ('Elder Brother Hu') expressing equality, solidarity and mateship. The way these public figures are addressed in face-to-face interaction may differ. Yet, the stark contrast between terms of address used in different historical periods suffices to suggest a shift in norms from traditional emphasis on hierarchy to contemporary stress on egalitarianism. These changes could be accounted for by drawing on a range of scholarship. Sun, for example, argues:

there are many more customary practices central to Chinese culture that are imperative in marking politeness...Within the Confucian world, knowing one's own position and behaving accordingly are taken to be fundamentals of a regulated society...in a Chinese speech community, only the parents, or seniors, may greet their children, or juniors, by their names, but not vice versa, not even in the most casual moment. (2006:128–129)

As Sun suggests here, using the formal address term 'Chairman Mao' shows properly the hierarchical relationship between the speaker and addressee prescribed by the Confucian teaching. Thus the address term in (1) follows the traditional norms of politeness. Nonetheless, signs have emerged in the decades of reform that this norm is being challenged. The new trend emphasizes egalitarianism as typified by the use of first naming i.e. 'Xiaoping' in (2) and kinship terms i.e. 'Elder Brother Hu' in (3). The first slogan is widely interpreted by the media and academia as reflecting the Mao personality cult while the recent two are understood as indicating that, in Li *et al*'s (2000) terms, heads of state have stepped down to the public from the altar. Moreover, Mr. Siyu Jin, one of the initiators of slogan (2), says in an interview that they chose to use the first name 'Xiaoping' in order to show camaraderie¹. And he was quoted as saying that 'Xiaoping Deng [the addressee] gave a happy smile upon seeing the slogan'², openly showing his approval.

The scholarship cited above raises questions about the causes of the diversity of politeness norms. In the next subsection I consider evidence related to the question of whether generational variation could be one of the causes.

¹ *Nanfang Daily*, 10 Aug. 2004

² Retrieved 16/01/2010, from <http://mnc.people.com.cn/GB/54849/72046/131235/8685386.html>

2.2.2 Evidence of generational variation in politeness norms

The literature suggests that the diversity of politeness norms in China is largely attributable to China's socioeconomic reform (e.g. Qu and Chen 1999, Pan 2000, Gu 2001). In this subsection I first outline China's reform, highlighting the 'One-Child-Policy'. I then sketch out some differences in politeness norms and values between the younger and older generations identified by previous studies. My aim is to establish a link between the existence of traditional and modern politeness norms and generational variation in politeness norms in Chinese.

First of all, to provide a sociocultural background for the present research, I outline, very briefly, China's reform. The three-decade reform launched in 1978 involves politics, economy, education, commerce and trade, etc. and has transformed almost every aspect of life in China. Among all the policies adopted, the 'One-Child Policy' seems to be unique to China. Briefly stated, this family planning policy stipulates that a married couple can normally have only one child while allowing exemptions for some cases. Article 25 of the Constitution of P. R. China adopted in 1982 states that 'the State promotes family planning so that population growth may fit the plans for economic and social development'. The policy was enacted to curb the explosive population growth in China, but studies (e.g. Gu 1994, Su 1994) show that its fundamental impact on Chinese society reaches far beyond this aim. For example, Feng (2002) argues that the psychology, behaviour, education, etc. of the generation born under this policy display considerable differences from those of the older. The literature also suggests that there is a difference in politeness norms between generations that have an impact on contemporary Chinese.

As an illustration of whether, in popular culture, there is evidence that supports the claims of the scholarship, a row about a 'compliment' reported in the *China Newsweek* is worth quoting.

I switched on TV to find that on the education channel Mr. Jiang, a reputed basketball coach in the Chinese Basketball Association, was berating furiously a reporter at a press conference in Shandong. It turned out later that Mr. Jiang felt greatly hurt by being referred to as a *gǔhuījī jiàoliàn* ('bone-ash-level coach', i.e. 'hardcore coach' in English) in a local newspaper. Mr. Jiang yelled, 'You young lad, your words in the media amount to claiming my life!' Hearing this, I was also greatly shocked: obviously 'bone-ash-level' is an extremely vicious swear word, hence I sided with Mr. Jiang against both the reporter and the publisher. But overhearing me, my son explained with surprise: "Well, (the coach flew into rage) simply because he did not know that 'bone-ash-level' is an adjective describing someone deserving the highest assessment in video games. It accredits one who is determined to be loyal and dedicated to a cause in whatever circumstances. A coach has reached the highest status if s/he is 'bone-ash-level'". (Lei 2006:84) [Author's translation from Chinese]

Lei discusses how social change may cause miscommunications between generations, among other things. Highlighted in the quotation is a row over a 'compliment'. The four people involved fall into two generations: Lei, professor in history, and the coach belong to the older generation; the reporter and Lei's son are the younger. The two generations have opposing opinions about the appropriacy of evaluating the coach as 'bone-ash-level'. The article indicates clearly that the younger generation evaluate the term as appreciative. By contrast, the older generation perceive it as extremely negative, even insulting. This explains the coach's rage and the author's failure to "associate 'bone-ash-level' with a compliment" (Lei 2006:84).

This example appears to be just a minor incident of miscommunication between generations, but it raises the interesting question of whether there is systematic

difference in politeness norms between the younger and older generations. Although much previous scholarship on Chinese has generally assumed homogeneity in norms, recent literature suggests that this is not the case. For example, the above example seems to suggest that two distinct subcultural groups have emerged in China and they may have different sets of norms. Moreover, this is indeed documented by recent scholarship on politeness.

Some DCT-based studies (e.g. He 2008, Chen and Yang 2010) suggest some generation-linked differences in politeness norms. For instance, Lee-Wong's (2000) study shows that the older respondents (40–60) said that they would use a higher percentage of direct requests while the younger informants (20–29) said they would prefer indirect requests (cited in Lin 2005). Similarly, in their quasi-longitudinal survey study of CRs in mainland China, Chen and Yang (2010) found that the majority of informants in 2008 said they would accept a compliment, whereas the overwhelming number of respondents in 1991 claimed they would reject a compliment. The authors explained that 'the subjects [in two studies] happen to have grown up in two very different times, hence representing two very different generations' (2010:1959). They attributed this difference to 'the societal changes that have taken place in the region' (2010:1959). Here, the authors suggest that the change is a reflection of generational variation in cultural values internalized in two different sociocultural contexts. The above studies are both based on DCT data, thus their findings, as scholars like Yuan (2001), Golato (2003), Kasper (2004) argue, merely indicate what people say they would do but not what they actually do. Nevertheless, these scholars argue that DCTs can reveal stereotypical norms of politeness.

Apart from the above politeness scholarship, studies of Chinese value systems also provide circumstantial evidence that politeness norms in Chinese vary across generations. For example, as many scholars such as Hofstede (2003) and Feng

(2002) note, Chinese culture has traditionally been regarded as group-oriented. This is in line with many politeness theorists' (Gu 1990, Mao 1994, Ting-Toomey 1994) argument that facework or politeness behaviour in Chinese is traditionally motivated by the Confucian value of collectivism. Nevertheless, recent research shows that the younger generation, particularly those who are socialized in reform-era China, have become increasingly individualism-oriented and egocentric. If this is the case, then the politeness norms of the older and younger generations may have diverged in a certain way. Similarly, Zheng and Guo also found that 'the values in contemporary China are diversified' (1995:10). For example, their analysis of questionnaire data shows that more than three quarters (84.7%) of the older respondents respect honesty, but only about two thirds (64%) of the younger emphasize this value. This is because, the authors explained, 'the older generation largely observes the traditional value systems as they completed their earlier socialization before the economic reform; however, the younger generation's earlier socialization was completed in a changing society' (1995:12). These findings are particularly relevant to the concerns of my thesis because, as many scholars like Pan and Kádár (2011a) note, cultural values are almost inseparable from politeness norms.

To take modesty as an example, in discussing the importance of Chinese modesty and humility in intercultural communication, Hu *et al* (2010) note that valuing humility is part of time-honoured Chinese tradition. Like Gu (1990), the authors maintain that many honorific and self-deprecating terms were in common use in ancient China. However, they observe from some MA theses at Beijing Foreign Studies University that most of the young people surveyed tended to accept compliments instead of trying to deny them. Hu *et al* (2010:45) argue that:

Chinese society along with its customs is changing rapidly. More and more Chinese have learned to respond to compliments with appreciative remarks, especially those in the cities. An increasing number of younger Chinese are

adopting behaviour patterns that seem to run counter to traditional principles of modesty.

Thus the value of modesty, widely referred to as a ‘norm of modesty’ (e.g. Wierzbicka 1996/2003), informs the way people respond to compliments. Moreover, the authors suggest that the norm tends less to influence the CR behaviour of the younger rather than the older generation.

Therefore, a range of evidence shows that politeness norms in Chinese differ across generations. Some studies (Lee-Wong 2000, Chen and Yang 2010) identified some generational differences using the instrument of the DCT, which, as many scholars (e.g. Byon 2004, Golato 2005, Marti 2006, Jucker 2009) argue, is useful in investigating stereotypical politeness norms. Also, as Hu *et al* (2010) note, the younger Chinese are less likely than the older to say that they would observe the value of modesty in responding to compliments. An interesting question arising here is whether politeness norms and politeness behaviour correlate with generation in natural interaction.

2.2.3 Evidence of regional variation in politeness norms

Although Qu and Chen’s observation that ‘the realization of traditional politeness principles and their content may vary across regions’ (1999:41) is not yet fully documented, there is some evidence to suggest that this can be the case (e.g. Zhang 1988, Hu 2001). Kádár and Pan, for example, maintain that:

politic behaviour in historical China was also influenced by several other ideologies [besides Confucianism]...as well as ‘local’ ideologies such as the traditional opposition between Southern and Northern Chinese. (2011:131)

The authors thus suggest that there are differences in politeness norms between speakers of Chinese inhabiting the north and south of China. Moreover, results of some DCT-based studies suggest evidence of regional variation in politeness norms. For example, in her study on compliments and CRs in Kunming dialect of Chinese, Yuan (2002) identified some politeness strategies which are claimed to be different from the standard Mandarin Chinese. Precisely, the author found that ‘speakers of Kunming Chinese are gradually beginning to deviate from the tradition of disagreeing to or downgrading a compliment to a more accepting attitude’ (2002:214). Also, by comparing Chen’s (1993) and Yuan’s (2002) studies of CRs respectively collected in Xi’an and Kunming, Chen and Yang (2010:1953) found that the percentage of Acceptance strategy reported by Xi’an Chinese is 1.03%, whereas the same strategy claimed by Kunming Chinese accounts for 50.28% of the total data. This finding appears to indicate that there is regional variation in politeness norms in Chinese.

Besides the above scholarship, given the fact that there are 56 ethnic groups in China, which are identified on the basis of common territory, common language, common economic life and common psychological trait (cf. Huang and Shi 2005), it seems plausible to assume the existence of regional differences in politeness norms. To date politeness studies in Chinese (Hu 1944, Gu 1990, Mao 1994, Qu and Chen 1999) have been overwhelmingly concerned with standard Mandarin Chinese (‘modern Chinese’ in Gu’s 1990 study) which is mainly constrained by the dominant Confucian ideology emphasizing hierarchical interpersonal relationships. However, scarce attention has been given to the fact that many of the minority groups such as the Bulang, the Dulong, the Luoba have been living for centuries in remote and somewhat isolated areas. Hence they have relatively little contact with the mainstream Chinese culture. Moreover, the varieties of Chinese used by many groups straddling the national boundaries such as the Dai, the Jingpo and Russian have been in centuries’ contact with Southeast Asian and central Asian cultures.

Hence politeness norms observed by Chinese inhabitants in these regions are very likely to differ from those in other regions.

To sum up, a survey of the literature shows that there is evidence of regional variation in politeness norms in Chinese. This could be attributed to different historical and cultural traditions, geographical isolation, language and cultural contact, etc. Regional variation in politeness norms in Chinese hitherto has been scarcely studied. As the most influential Chinese politeness theorist, Gu (1990) is concerned with politeness in ‘modern Chinese’, which “is meant to refer to the officially standardized *pǔtōnghuà* (literal translation, ‘common language’), i.e. the language used by the mass media and taught at schools and to foreign learners” (1990:237). Thus Gu does not seem to expect his theory to account for the diversity of politeness norms documented by the literature I have just reviewed.

2.2.4 Summary

In this section, I showed that there is evidence of the diversity of politeness norms in China. Specifically, the relevant literature shows that politeness norms, as historical phenomena, have changed considerably in the past decades. Current scholarship suggests that this might be partly explained by the evidence that politeness norms of the younger generation have diverged from the traditional convention, which is mostly observed by the older. Additionally, I also showed evidence suggesting that there is regional variation in politeness norms in China.

However, in order to adequately describe and account for this diversity, a systematic study of politeness norms and politeness behaviour is needed. This raises the question of whether there are any models of politeness that can address such diversity. Many current politeness scholars claim that recent approaches to politeness taking a social-theoretical perspective are more suitable for studying diversity in politeness norms than the older approaches in the Gricean and Searlean

paradigms. In the next section I discuss these claims and evaluate two general approaches to politeness in the light of their ability to address the diversity of politeness norms in China.

2.3 Approaches to politeness

In this section I use Watts' (2005:xlii/xliii) distinction between 'modernist' and 'postmodernist' approaches to politeness as a way of structuring my discussion of current scholarship on theories of politeness. The literature shows that 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' are labels for a complex set of ideas used in a wide range of disciplines including architecture and literature, among others. Therefore, as Haugh (2007b) and Mills (2011b) note, both concepts resist precise definition. However, as I show below, in the field of politeness research there seems to be a general consensus about their basic views.

Watts (2005), drawing on Scannell's 1998 work, distinguishes between modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness. According to Watts, the modernist approach to politeness, 'tends to isolate language from the set of language users, even in speech act theory and Gricean pragmatics, and it leads to a denaturalization of language' (2005:xlii). However, a postmodernist approach to politeness, for Watts, assumes that 'language is within the individual as a social being and therefore that talk instantiates social interaction' (2005:xlii). Moreover, throughout his introductory chapter in the reissue of *Politeness in Language*, Watts emphasizes repeatedly the modernist as synonymous with 'rationalist' in nature (cf. 2005:xii/xxxv/xlii). In contrast, a postmodernist approach, Watts argues (2005:xliv), starts from the assumption that 'the discursive dispute over terms like *polite*, *rude*, *impolite*, *brash*, *courteous*, etc. can only be observed by paying careful attention to instances of interaction' (see also 2005:xxi).

In my subsequent review of the existing literature of politeness theories, I take up Watts' proposal and evaluate scholarship on these two approaches to politeness. First, I show that many recent studies argue that the theories of Lakoff (1973/1975), B&L (1987[1978]) and Leech (1983) share the modernist view of politeness. There is evidence from pragmatics scholarship that provides grounds for critiquing the theoretical premises of modernist politeness models. Drawing on recent scholarship (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995[1986], Clark 1996, Eelen 2001), I argue that while its central notions such as intention and speech acts are still useful in describing and explaining politeness behaviour, the modernist approach is not well-equipped to address the diversity of politeness norms in China. This is because, I maintain, modernist theorists assume that interactants are homogeneous in norms.

Second, I show that studies such as Terkourafi (2005), Watts (2005), and Haugh (2007b) maintain that politeness theories formulated by Eelen (2001), Mills (2003), and Watts (2003) are, to some extent, informed by the social theory of practice (Bourdieu 1990). I demonstrate that this shared theoretical basis has led postmodernist theorists to conceptualize politeness as interactants' situated evaluations in interaction and to emphasize the hearer's crucial role in the sense-making process. I show evidence that many postmodernist theorists such as Locher (2004), Terkourafi (2005), and Geyer (2008) argue for a bottom-up manner of theorization. Rather than assuming speaker intention to be self-evident, scholars such as Sperber and Wilson (1995) and Christie (2000) argue that it is hearer's interpretation that brings into view the speaker intention. Moreover, I show evidence from the relevant scholarship that foregrounding the speaker intention and the hearer's attribution of intention, the postmodernist theorists view norms of politeness and politeness practice as heterogeneous and varied.

I draw the conclusion that given the rich diversity of norms in Chinese as evidenced in 2.2, the postmodernist approach provides a better theoretical and analytical

framework for research on politeness in Chinese. However, I acknowledge that some insights of the modernist approach, for example, their core notions such as intention and speech acts can and should be retained in politeness research.

2.3.1 Modernist approach to politeness

In the following three subsections I review scholarship on the theoretical grounding and assumptions shared by the modernist politeness theories formulated by Lakoff (1973/1975), B&L (1987[1978]) and Leech (1983). I begin by assessing their Gricean and speech-act theoretical perspectives. I then evaluate their conceptualization of politeness norms. Following theorists such as Sperber and Wilson (1995[1986]), Clark (1996), Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003), I show that the modernist approach focuses on speaker and speaker intention, marginalizing the hearer's perspective. I also show evidence from current scholarship that this approach to politeness tends to assume that speaker intention is self-evident and norms are generally shared among interactants. I argue that the modernist approach therefore is not able to address the diversity of politeness norms in China.

2.3.1.1 The Gricean contribution to modernist politeness

A review of the literature shows that many studies maintain that the politeness theories of Lakoff (1973/1975), B&L (1987[1978]) and Leech (1983) share the Gricean basis (e.g. Eelen 2001, Watts 2003, Félix-Brasdefer 2008, Geyer 2008). While this theoretical grounding is largely assumed in the works of Lakoff and Leech, B&L explicitly characterize their theory as presupposing 'his [Grice's] account of the nature of communication as a special kind of intention designed to be recognized by the recipient' (1987:7). For Terkourafi, the Gricean perspective shared by these three theories adopting what she terms 'the traditional view' is seen in their definition of politeness:

[Politeness is conceptualized as] a greater or lesser degree of departure from the Cooperative Principle (which is thereby presupposed), and in their speaker orientation, whereby politeness is part of speaker meaning, a particularized implicature m-intended by the speaker. (2005:240)

Similarly, Watts (2003) notes that the above classic politeness models are all hinged in a certain way on the assumption that interactants aim at establishing communicative cooperation. He maintains that for these theories Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP) is 'the cornerstone of models that explain polite utterances as one way of achieving mutual cooperation or contributing towards the establishment and maintenance of mutual face' (2003:203). Therefore, as Watts notes, the modernist models of politeness must be evaluated on whether Gricean pragmatics can still be upheld as currently formulated. Below I evaluate scholarship on the modernist view of politeness as part of speaker meaning, a particularized implicature intended by the speaker (see also e.g. Eelen 2001, Watts 2003, Geyer 2008).

To begin with, it would be necessary to briefly overview Grice's theory of meaning. Grice (1989) distinguishes between natural meaning (as 'Those spots mean measles') and non-natural meaning (meaning-nn) (as "Those three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that 'the bus is full'"). While natural meaning is devoid of human intention, meaning-nn is roughly equivalent to intentional meaning, which is characterized as follows:

'A meant_{NN} something by *x*' is (roughly) equivalent to 'A intended the utterance of *x* to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention'. (Grice 1989:220)

Grice's formulation seems to suggest that meaning-nn is largely speaker meaning. Also, as scholars like Schiffrin (1994) note, implicit in this formulation is the existence of a second intention, i.e. the intention that a hearer recognizes in the speaker's utterance. Furthermore, as summarized by Levinson (1995), the central idea of Grice's theory is that communication is achieved when a hearer recognizes speaker intention with which a communicative act is performed. To work out that a particular conversational implicature is present, Grice argues, the hearer will rely on five types of data, two of which are 'the CP and its maxims' and 'the context, linguistic or otherwise, of the utterance' (Grice 1989:31). Grice does not seem to intend his theory to go beyond this. It appears, for example, that his theory is not concerned with how a hearer recognizes speaker intention (see e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995[1986], Werkhofer 2005[1992], Levinson 1995, Christie 2000).

As many scholars (Clark 1996, Toolan 1996, Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003) note, Grice's theory is characterized as focusing on speaker intention or speaker meaning. Moreover, in Grice's theory, to understand the speaker meaning, the hearer has to share with the speaker the context, knowledge of the CP, background knowledge, the conventional meaning of the words used, etc. (Grice 1989:31). From this assumption we can see that Grice's theory does not address the issue of how a hearer may attribute to the speaker different intentions.

Bearing this in mind, I can now proceed to assess the modernist theorists' view about how polite implicature is generated in an utterance. By examining in detail an example Leech uses to illustrate his Politeness Principle (PP) as a necessary complement to Grice's CP, I aim to demonstrate that an interactional bias towards the speaker and speaker intention and the assumption that intention is self-evident are evidenced in Leech's analysis:

P: Someone's eaten the icing off the cake.

C: It wasn't ME.

Leech (1983:80–81) contends that this exchange cannot be satisfactorily explained by the CP because it apparently breaches the Maxim of Relation: C seems to 'exonerate himself [sic] from the evil deed in question'. Leech offers his explanation, saying that C's reply is due to an implicature of P's utterance, i.e. indirect accusation. For Leech, 'C responds to that implicature, the indirectness of which is motivated by politeness, rather than to what is actually said'. According to Leech, his PP thus successfully rescues the CP from a 'serious trouble'.

Here Leech appears to have somewhat misconstrued Grice since the explanation Leech offered here seems to be able to be captured by Grice's theory of conversational implicature. Moreover, as Watts (2003) notes, the problem with Leech's aforementioned analysis is that P's utterance is open to other interpretations. For example, Watts maintains, C could have given the response to express disappointment that it was not C that had eaten the icing. In this sense, Leech's analysis of C's response as reacting to P's indirect accusation seems to suggest that the author assumes that P's intention is self-evident. Furthermore, clear evidence of this assumption also seems to have emerged from Leech's assertion that 'C's denial is virtually predictable in such a situation' (1983:81). This is because in doing so Leech appears to suggest that he had already known P's intention, i.e. what he interprets as an indirect accusation.

Leech's analysis of this short encounter, in excluding alternative interpretations, reveals his overemphasis on speaker meaning and scant attention to the hearer's role in generating meanings in interaction. Furthermore, in not providing an explanation of such exclusion, Leech appears to assume that he assumes speaker intention to be self-evident. However, drawing on works of scholars, particularly Clark (1996),

Christie (2000), and Watts (2003), I argue that speaker intention is not self-evident and that any utterance is subject to different interpretations.

Many scholars (Sperber and Wilson 1995[1986], Toolan 1996, McConnell-Ginet 2005[1998], Gibbs 1999, Mills 2003) maintain that the attribution of intention plays a significant role in explanations of communication. For them, when a hearer like C in Leech's example thinks P is making an accusation, C is assuming P has got the intention to accuse C. But rather than assuming speaker intention to be self-evident, they argue that a hearer attributes intentions to the speaker. Christie, for example, argues that:

[A] hearer always and inevitably, whether she or he is conscious of this or not, makes sense of an act of communication by attributing intention to the speaker. (2000:66)

This is in consistence with Toolan's argument that intentionality 'must in essence be the intentions that a hearer attributes to a speaker, without hope, possibility, or need of confirmation (by the speaker) of their accuracy' (1996:19). These authors suggest that speaker intention is not self-evident and the speaker meaning can only be made manifest if the hearer successfully recognizes what is intended by the speaker. Also, they seem to emphasize the active role played by the hearer in sense-making activities in interaction.

In summary, I have shown that there is a body of scholarship which argues that the modernist approach to politeness premised on Grice adopts an exclusive focus on speaker and speaker intention. I have shown that while there is some evidence to support the claims made by modernist politeness theorists such as B&L (1987[1978]), and Leech (1983) that to understand speakers' meanings or their implicatures, it is crucial for the hearer to recognize their intention. Nevertheless, within this approach to politeness the issue of how a hearer recognizes speakers'

intention and implicatures remains unaddressed. Drawing on recent advances in pragmatics scholarship, I showed that Grice's theory is designed to account for speaker intention and how speakers generate implicatures. I argued a major limitation to Grice's theory of meaning is that he appears to assume that intention is self-evident. Therefore, while speaker intention is certainly indispensable in politeness research, Grice's theory and hence the modernist politeness models relying heavily on his theory would be inadequate to account for the rich interpretations of different hearers.

2.3.1.2 The contribution of speech act theory to modernist politeness

The literature shows that apart from the Gricean framework, Searle's speech act theory is another premise on which the modernist theories (Lakoff 1973/1975, B&L 1987[1978], Leech 1983,) are predicated (see e.g. Terkourafi 2005, Félix-Brasdefer 2008). Many critics argue that the modernist theorists tend to use isolated utterances, invented sentences, etc. to illustrate their points, thereby failing to capture the complexity of human interactions (e.g. Schegloff 1984/1988, Duranti 1997, Márquez-Reiter 2000, Arundale 2005, Cooren 2005, Haugh 2007a). Moreover, the feasibility of a speech act theoretical analysis of utterance function has been questioned by scholars such as Levinson (1983) and Schegloff (1988). These authors have argued, as Van Rees notes, that 'there is no straightforward way to link utterances to acts: utterance units are extremely varied in kind and these various utterance units are often used to perform more than one speech act at the same time' (1992:32).

Such criticisms seem to be levelled against speech act theory in which utterance function is considered part of linguistic form. However, evidence from scholarship on speech acts shows that not all versions of speech act theory presuppose a direct relationship between utterance function and sentence meaning. It is true that Searle's speech act theory makes use of the principle of expressibility: 'whatever can be

meant can be said' (Searle 1969:19–21), i.e. every speech act can, in principle, be made explicit by an expression which, by virtue of its meaning, can be used to perform that act. But, as Van Rees argues, 'this cannot be turned around; it does not imply that the use of such an expression automatically ties it to the performance of that act' (1992:33). For example, Searle remarks:

The meaning of the sentence determines an illocutionary force of its utterances in such a way that serious utterances of it with that literal meaning will have that particular force. (1973:143)

Thus, in order to establish the force, at the very least one has to ascertain whether the expression is, on that particular occasion, used 'seriously' and 'literally'. In Van Rees' words, that depends on whether or not the felicity conditions have been fulfilled. Therefore, we can see that although Searle may indeed tend to use isolated and invented utterances to illustrate his arguments, the theorist, contrary to what his critics' claim, never builds into his theory a straightforward link between utterance meaning and illocutionary force.

Similarly, evidence shows that predicated on Searle's speech act theory, B&L's theory takes utterances as equivocal in force. They state explicitly as follows:

For many reasons, we now think this not so promising; speech act theory forces a sentence-based, speaker-oriented mode of analysis, requiring attribution of speech act categories where *our own thesis requires that utterances are often equivocal in force*. (1987:10, italics added)

Clearly, rather than assuming an immediate link between utterance meaning and its illocutionary force, B&L's theory 'requires that utterances are often equivocal in force'. I therefore maintain that it is important to distinguish between criticisms

levelled against B&L's theory of politeness and its application in empirical studies. Mills (2011b:21) rightly notes that:

Brown and Levinson relied on speech act theory to underpin their model of politeness, and this is a theoretical grounding which has been adopted by many politeness researchers...much work on politeness post-Brown and Levinson has focused especially on apologies and requests, assuming that these speech acts have some simple existence in linguistic form.

Mills suggests here, unlike the above criticism, assumption that there exists an automatic link between linguistic form and the illocutionary force is largely an issue arising from applications of speech act theory and/or B&L' model, for example in studies on apologies and requests.

Another criticism levelled against speech act theory is that it leads the modernist theorists to view politeness as residing in individual utterances. Terkourafi, for example, criticizes that theorists such as Lakoff (1973), B&L (1987[1978]) and Leech (1983) are only concerned with 'act-by-act analysis, seeking politeness at the level of individual utterances' (2005:240). However, I argue that while this appears to be true with Searle's version of speech act theory, such a mode of analysis does not seem to be inherent in all versions of speech act theory. As my aforementioned quotation from B&L suggests, in Searle's (1969) version, even in its precursor (Austin 1962) the sentence is the unit type to which the speech act is tied. Thus Searle (2002) himself appears to reveal skepticism about his speech act theory in investigating conversational mechanism.

Nonetheless, as Cooren (2005) notes, in some revised versions both sub- and supra-sentential units can also be used to perform a speech act. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984), for example, work out the notion of 'complex speech act',

specifically with regard to the complex speech act of argumentation, in which at least two assertions are combined, and which is defined in terms of the relationship of this combination to a third assertion, the standpoint, on a higher, textual level. Similarly, Jacobs (2002) shows that arguments can be considered as speech acts subordinated to a superordinate act, the expression of an opinion, to which they provide support or objection. In fact, B&L acknowledge that speech acts are not always generated by a single utterance:

Implicitly we have already used such notions [units of analysis larger than utterances], especially in our definition of off-record strategies. One basic observation to be made is that FTAs [face-threatening acts] do not necessarily inhere in single acts (and hence the concept might be better labelled 'face-threatening intention'). (1987:233)

Thus Searle's mode of analysis does not necessarily inform the modernist theories, for example, that of B&L. Searle (1969) does indeed seem to force a sentence-based mode of analysis, but speech act theory, as Van Rees notes, 'is not a static canon' (1992:34). And, as B&L acknowledge, units larger than a sentence can be used to perform speech acts, particularly in argumentation. Alternatively, as Márquez-Reiter's (2000) study suggests, one way to address this criticism of Searle's speech act theory is to examine the speech acts embedded in a discursive model.

In the remainder of this subsection, I argue that Searle's version of speech act theory, analogous to Grice's theory, assumes that intention is self-evident. To begin with, consider Searle's following claim:

In the case of illocutionary acts we succeed in doing what we are trying to do by getting our audience to recognize what we are trying to do. (1969:47)

For Searle, if an utterance performs the act as the speaker intends, it is because the addressee has recognized that this is the speaker's goal. Much recent scholarship, for example relevance theory, supports the view that in the sense-making process speaker intention matters, but hearers always make assumptions about speaker's intentions. In other words, in order to understand the speaker, the hearer has to make guesses about the speaker's meaning by the utterance. However, Searle appears to assume that speaker intention and hearer's assumption about speaker intention are so matched that speaker intention is self-evident to the hearer. This is reinforced by Searle's further assumption that an utterance can have force in its own right as indicated in the following quotation:

The meaning of the sentence determines an illocutionary force of its utterances in such a way that serious utterances of it with that literal meaning will *have that particular force*. (1973:143, italics added)

Moreover, what Searle is working with is the sense that speakers and hearers belong to a homogeneous speaking community and therefore speaker intention is obvious to the hearer.

However, recent scholarship (Christie 2000, Mills 2003/2011b, Watts 2003, Locher 2004) argues that an utterance in itself cannot have force. Rather, force is not recognizable until there is evidence that the hearer has attributed intention to the speaker (e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1995). This argument then converges to the one I made in 2.3.1.1. As such, in empirical research, not only speaker intention, but also the hearer's attributed intention need to be focused on. This is because interactants' attributed intentions can vary due to differences in their values, beliefs, norms, interactional history, etc.

In summary, by reviewing the recent literature on speech act theory, I argued that the criticism that the modernist theorists view politeness as residing in individual utterances is not legitimate. I showed evidence from recent scholarship that the assumption that speech acts have simple existence in linguistic forms is largely an issue arising from applications of speech act theory and B&L's theory of politeness.

Also, I showed that Searle's version of speech act theory assumes that speaker intention is self-evident to the hearer. I maintained that this weakness could be minimized by embedding the theory in a framework which emphasizes interactants' situated judgements. I showed evidence from recent scholarship that to pin down the illocutionary force of an utterance investigators need to give more attention to the hearer's attributed intentions. I argued that speech acts are best viewed as dynamically generated in interaction.

2.3.1.3 The conceptualization of norms in modernist politeness studies

Here I survey the literature which discusses norms theorized by modernist politeness studies. I show that a norm is generally viewed by modernist theorists as objective and static entities homogeneously shared among interactants. I also show that a norm is understood by them as producing a unidirectional effect on politeness behaviour. I argue from a poststructuralist perspective that a norm is subject to participants' evaluations in interaction. Thus, analogous to structure and agency, norms and politeness behaviour both form and are formed by each other in interaction.

As Locher (2004) notes, no politeness theories seem to have sufficiently tackled the task of defining norms (see also Terkourafi 2005). Yet, norms or normativity, as some politeness scholars (e.g. Blum-Kulka 2005[1992], Eelen 2001) note, are, in one way or another, built into all the existing theories. The modernist conceptualization of a norm has been extensively discussed in the literature (e.g. Ide

1989, Blum-Kulka 1990, Gu 1990, Sifianou 2000[1992], Christie 2000, Eelen 2001, Haugh 2003, Mills 2003, Watts 2003). In this section, I show evidence from current scholarship that a norm is generally conceptualized by the modernist politeness studies as being an *a priori* and static entity, prescriptive, and homogenously shared by a society. Below I assess these characteristics in turn.

Firstly, many scholars, including Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003), among others, argue that the modernist theories assume a norm to be an *a priori* entity. Eelen, for example, remarks that in the modernist accounts of politeness ‘norms are fairly straightforward – objective cultural entities as well as cognitive realities’ (2001:230). That is, under the modernist view, a norm is *a priori* and does not seem to change.

Secondly, as scholars like Haugh (2003/2007b) suggest, a norm is often conceptualized by the modernist studies as something about what one should or should not do. In this sense, a norm for modernist studies is prescriptive or proscriptive. As Terkourafi (2005) notes, while evidence for this view can be found in all the modernist theories, it seems to be particularly clear in Lakoff’s (1973/1975) and Leech’s (1983) conversational-maxim approaches to politeness (see e.g. Eelen 2001, Locher 2004). This is mostly indicated in their view of politeness as a set of prescriptive or proscriptive maxims, i.e. a set of dos and don’ts. For the modernist approach, these norms function to regulate and explain social behaviour. They are thus treated as standards against which behaviour is judged. Gu (1990), for example, explicitly remarks that in the Chinese context politeness exercises normative functions in constraining interactants’ speech behaviour. Moreover, norms conceptualized as such are closely associated with sanctions. That is, as noted by Gu, failure to observe these norms will ‘incur social sanctions’ (1990:242).

Thirdly, apart from being objective, static and prescriptive, norms are also theorized within the modernist politeness studies as being shared by members of a society (see

e.g. Eelen 2001, Locher 2004, Xie 2007). Put differently, a uniform consensus on what counts as politeness is assumed to be shared among interactants.

However, there is evidence in the literature that recent scholarship has taken issue with the foregoing conceptualization of norms. Scholars such as Eelen (2001), Haugh (2003), Mills (2003), Locher (2004), and Culpeper (2011) argue that the modernist view of a norm does not capture the variability of individuals and the dynamic relationship between norms and politeness behaviour. They maintain that a norm is a socio-historical phenomenon, which is discursively disputed among interactants. Rather than being objective, static, prescriptive and shared, norms for these scholars are always subject to interactants' judgements and evaluations. For example, Locher argues that norms are 'in a flux, shaped, altered and maintained' (2004:85) in society. Among others, the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese I showed at the outset of this chapter illustrates well how norms may vary diachronically and synchronically within a culture.

Moreover, a corollary of the prescriptive stance toward norms taken by the modernist scholars seems to be their belief that norms exert unidirectional causal influence on politeness behaviour. However, following postmodernist politeness scholars and poststructuralist social theorists, I argue that this is not the case. In the current politeness literature, Eelen (2001) and Mills (2003) discuss this issue in great detail. Eelen, for example, argues that by subsuming the hearer's evaluation in their definitions of politeness, the modernist theories 'become predictive, not only in the sense of outward empirical predictiveness, but also of internal conceptual predictiveness' (2001:120). That is, within the modernist approach to politeness norms are fixed and pre-exist in social interactions and social practices. Thus, norms conceptualized as such affect politeness behaviour unidirectionally without negotiation. Against this, Eelen argues that evaluativity and argumentativity are two fundamental aspects of norms. To put it plainly, he seems to mean that a norm is not

an *a priori* and static entity. Rather, a norm for Eelen is subject to interactants' evaluations and negotiation in interaction. Similarly, Mills (2003) criticizes the modernist theories' conceptualization of norms as prescriptive in nature. She argues that norms are discursively negotiated by participants of conversation. For these scholars the relationship between norms and behaviour cannot be unidirectional. Rather, as further expanded in the subsequent paragraphs, they can influence each other.

The argument for the bidirectional relationship between norms and politeness behaviour could be more effective when we draw on insights from studies (Archer 2003, Elder-Vass 2010) on structure and agency. Carter and Sealey's (2000) work exploring the dynamic relationship between language, structure and agency from a poststructuralist perspective seems to be particularly pertinent to my present concern. They argue that structure and agency are so interwoven that to give primacy to either of them would be a fundamental error (see also Callinicos 2004):

Too great an emphasis on structures denies actors any power and fails to account for human beings making a difference. Too great an emphasis on agency overlooks the (we would claim) very real constraints acting on us in time and space. And reducing each to merely a manifestation of the other...necessarily results in a theory which is unable to capture the complex relations between them. (Carter and Sealey 2000:11)

In a sense, structure is to agency just as a norm is to politeness practice. Thus, in accordance with Carter and Sealey's argument, giving too great an emphasis on norms (i.e. structure), as the modernist approach does, does not address interactants' (i.e. actors') creative power. As a result, any theory overemphasizing either will fail 'to account for human beings making a difference'. Simply stated, it is not norms that impact politeness behaviour only. Rather since it is only human beings who can

have intentions and purposes and actions, individuals and their behaviour also function as ‘structuring structures’ (Bourdieu 1990:53), i.e. influencing norms creatively. Therefore, the modernist conceptualization of norms as deterministic and unidirectional in terms of their relationship with politeness behaviour cannot fully capture the complex nexus of norm and politeness behaviour.

To summarize, in this subsection, I showed evidence from the existing scholarship that a norm is generally conceptualized by modernist studies as being an objective and static entity, constituting the causal power of politeness behaviour. Moreover, I showed that under the modernist approach to politeness a norm is viewed as homogeneously shared by interactants. Building on recent discursive scholarship, I maintained that a norm is in a state of flux. I acknowledged that a certain amount of sharedness is the basis of interpersonal communication, but a norm is subject to interactants’ subjective evaluations. Moreover, drawing on insights from recent studies on structure and agency, I argued that there is a dialectical relationship between a norm and politeness behaviour.

2.3.2 Postmodernist approach to politeness

In this subsection I evaluate literature on the postmodernist approach to politeness as shared by theorists such as Arundale (1999/2010), Eelen (2001), Terkourafi (2001/2005/2008), Watts (2003/2005), Mills (2003/2009/2011b), Locher (2004/2006), and Haugh (2007a/b). I focus on scholarship concerning their shared theoretical premises, the main tenets of this approach and conceptualization of norms. I demonstrate that the postmodernist approach to politeness provides a productive analytical framework for addressing the heterogeneity of Chinese culture. I argue that within the postmodernist approach to politeness it is plausible to hypothesize that there would be differences in politeness behaviour and norms between different groups of the Chinese.

2.3.2.1 The contribution of social theory to postmodernist politeness

The literature shows that a premise the postmodernist theories share is ‘the incorporation of social-theoretical insights, in particular Bourdieu’s practice-based sociology of language, with the notion of *habitus* constituting a unifying theme across the three approaches [Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003]’ (Terkourafi 2005:240–241). Similarly, according to Mills, many postmodernist theorists “draw on the work on Pierre Bourdieu (1991), particularly his focus on ‘habitus’” (2011b:30). Geyer even notes that all theorists taking a discursive paradigm ‘subscribe to a certain extent to the view of politeness as a social practice created through human interaction’ (2008:5)

To begin with, Watts expressly states that his social model of politeness ‘frames the study of (im)politeness¹ as an ongoing struggle over the differential values of appropriate social behaviour within a social-theoretic approach which owes a lot to the work of Pierre Bourdieu’ (2003:25). Watts claims that his notion of politic behaviour is similar to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, which is defined by Bourdieu as “a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are ‘regular’ without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any ‘rule’” (1991:12, original italics).

Similarly, Mills draws on ‘this notion of habitus together with the model of communities of practice to describe the dynamic way in which the relation between individual and the wider social group is [con]figured’ (2003:36–37). As Murray (1990) argues, habitus represents the practices that are involved in structuring a person’s world and his/her place in it. It is specifically this aspect of habitus that is related to the concept of communities of practice. Also, as Terkourafi (2005) notes, intimately related to the Bourdieuan legacy are the notions of ‘communities of practice’ Mills (2003) employed in research on gender and politeness and ‘emerging networks’ in Watts (2003). Furthermore, Watts contend that ‘[b]oth concepts are

important in accounting for the ways in which individuals construct their social habitus' (2005:xlvi).

Drawing on the Bourdieuan notion of *habitus* and insights from discursive psychology, Eelen proposed the notion of politeness as a discursive, evaluative, and argumentative phenomenon, stressing the importance of 'concentrating on the processes of social production' (2001:240). And Terkourafi (2001/2005) adopts a frame-based view of politeness, in which frames are thought of as 'psychologically real implementations of the habitus' (2005:253). She further argues that "politeness is a matter not of rational calculation, but of habit, and frames (which aim to capture polite 'habits') may be thought of as implementing the Bourdieuan habitus" (2005:250). The author expressly asserts that Bourdieu's work on habitus can be used to describe the 'conductorless orchestration' (Bourdieu 1990:59) that is observable in the analysis of the regularities of politeness usage. Terkourafi argues for the strength of the postmodernist theories' incorporation of insights such as the Bourdieuan habitus as follows:

[I]t is by questioning notions such as 'norm' and 'culture' (most explicitly done by Eelen 2001:121–187) that post-modern theories are led to attribute many of the traditional theories' shortcomings to the latter's assumptions of cultural homogeneity and shared norms, and to propose the study of politeness¹ as the only viable alternative. In this sense, post-modern theories' focus on politeness¹ results from their focus on social struggle. The study of politeness is now placed firmly within social theory. (2005:242)

Besides, Bourdieu's social theory of practice helps bring to light the way politeness is perceived by interactants in social activity. Very roughly, this is because, as Watts argues, the linguistic *habitus* can be viewed as a sub-set of the dispositions comprising the *habitus* 'acquired through socialization' (2003:149). Moreover, the

habitus or dispositions, according to Bourdieu, are ‘inculcated, structured, durable, generative and transposable’ (1991:12). Therefore, people with different socialization processes (during which different life experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, etc. are shaped) in different sociocultural and material conditions naturally internalize different *habitus* or dispositions. It thus seems plausible to hypothesize that politeness behaviour of individuals with different habitus and/or norms informing this behaviour are expected to vary. In the case of China, the older and younger generations (2.2.2), among others, would reasonably differ in their politeness practices due to their childhood socializations in different historical environments.

Meanwhile, as Eelen (2001) argues vigorously, since *habitus* is largely acquired through socialization and experiences of various social interactions, politeness norms can be expected to involve simultaneously a certain amount of sharedness apart from variability and discursiveness. As Meisenhelder (2006) maintains, since *habitus* is in large part the product of how social positions structure a person’s earliest experiences, similar conditions of existence will foster a more or less common habitus. Indeed, as Swartz (1997) notes, Bourdieu himself argues that individuals who internalize similar life experiences share the same habitus:

‘Personal’ style...is never more than a *deviation* in relation to the *style* of a period or class so that it relates back to the common style not only by its conformity...but also by the difference. (1977:86, original italics)

Habitus in this sense operates as a principle of ‘conductorless orchestration’, emphasizing the ‘regularity, unity and systematicity to practice’ without conscious coordination (Bourdieu 1990:59). Bourdieu writes that ‘[t]he practices of the members of the same group or, in a differentiated society, the same class, are always more and better harmonized than the agents know or wish’ (1990:59).

Moreover, Bourdieu's discussion of this individual-class habitus seems to be a reflection of his view about the agency and structure nexus. As Swartz notes, '[i]t is primarily in reaction to Lévi-Strauss's structuralism...and its view of action as a mere reflection of structure that Bourdieu formulates his theory of practice and his concept of habitus' (1997:101).

As such, since the different generations of the Chinese share a similar cultural heritage (e.g. Confucianism) and live in the same cultural context (e.g. reform era), they may well share components of habitus or subsets of dispositions. This gives rise to the questions of how different systems of *habitus* and hence indirectly politeness norms operate in daily interaction and how the difference and similarity in habitus may be made visible in politeness behaviour.

Before summing up the contribution of social theory to postmodernist politeness, it would be necessary to make more explicit the similarity and difference between norms and habitus. As suggested in this subsection, norms are similar to Bourdieu's habitus in the sense that both are closely related with cultural conditions and life experiences. They are thus subject to change and vary across groups due to sociocultural reforms and differences in socialization. Nevertheless, norms are narrower than habitus. That is, by using norms postmodernist studies emphasize the sharedness of cultural tradition, beliefs and values, interactional experiences, etc. among groups.

In summary, recent scholarship shows that the postmodernist approach to politeness is, in a large sense, informed by Bourdieu's social theory of practice, particularly his notion of habitus, which, according to Eelen, is characteristic of 'argumentativity (which incorporates evaluativity), historicity and discursiveness' (2001:247). I showed that scholars using this approach to politeness recognize a certain amount of sharedness of norms as the basis for successful interpersonal communication. A

widely held consensus among postmodernist scholars is that people are disposed to do or speak in a way that is constrained or regulated by their socializations in different cultural and material contexts. Thus, for them individuals' politeness behaviour and the informing norms tend to vary in interaction. Therefore, according to this approach, there would be differences in behaviour and norms between groups of the Chinese socialized in different cultural conditions.

2.3.2.2 The postmodernist view of politeness as manifested in interaction

I review the literature that discusses the epistemological and ontological issues of politeness research. I start by showing that there is a current debate about the politeness1-politeness2 distinction. In evaluating the relevant literature, I show that although postmodernist theorists disagree on the viability of this distinction, they are uniform in an effort to force their view of politeness as manifested in interaction. My ultimate aim is to show that given its emphasis on situated politeness and the heterogeneity of interactants' judgements about politeness within and across cultures, the postmodernist approach is well equipped to address the diversified politeness norms in Chinese.

Watts *et al* first proposed the need to distinguish between first-order politeness, 'the various ways in which polite behaviour is perceived and talked about by members of sociocultural groups' (1992:3), and second-order politeness 'a term within a theory of social behaviour and language usage' (1992:3). This has since provoked considerable debate in pragmatics (see e.g. Meier 1995, Kasper 1997, Eelen 1999/2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003, Locher 2004, Locher and Watts 2005, Terkourafi 2006/2011).

On the one hand, Eelen (2001) takes up Watts *et al*'s (1992) proposal and argues strongly for the distinction between what he renames politeness1 and politeness2. In Eelen's work, politeness1 is meant as a set of lay perceptions of politeness, referring

to the notions of politeness from the insiders' or ordinary speakers' perspective and politeness₂, as a socio-psychological concept constructed by outsiders or researchers. For Eelen, politeness₁ has an evaluative character, involves social norms, and covers different aspects of the lay notion of politeness. He maintains that by examining politeness₁ we can observe interactants' perceptions and evaluations. A theory of politeness, Eelen argues, "should first and foremost be an 'examination of politeness₁' of the everyday phenomenon of politeness" (2001:252). For Eelen, a theory embracing such a view is able to shed light on the dynamics and complexity of politeness phenomena in social interaction.

Building on Eelen's development, Watts (2003) revisits and elaborates on the distinction he and his collaborators posited a decade earlier. Watts argues that the theories of Lakoff (1973), Leech (1983) and B&L (1987) make the same mistake in abstracting away from real data and creating a concept of politeness for which they claim universal validity, i.e. politeness₂. He argues that such a concept 'has been lifted out of the realm of lay conceptualizations of what constitutes polite and impolite behaviour and how that behaviour should be evaluated' (2003:11). Thus, for Watts, "investigating first-order politeness is the only valid means of developing a social theory of politeness" (2003:9). Also, Kasper assesses, in passing, the politeness₁/politeness₂ distinction as 'useful and uncontroversial' (1997:375).

On the other hand, this distinction has recently come under critical scrutiny in politeness research. The focus of debate is mainly on the viability of such a distinction, which is first assessed by Eelen as 'neither a simple nor a straightforward one' (2001:30). Unlike Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003), many other postmodernist theorists (e.g. Locher 2004, Bousfield 2008, Arundale 2010) do not align to such a distinction. For example, Mills remarks that 'I consider this distinction...to be less easy to maintain than Eelen, since politeness is always by its very nature a question of judgement and assessment' (2003:8).

More critically, the viability and utility of this distinction is questioned by scholars such as Terkourafi (2005/2006/2011), Xie *et al* (2005), Glick (2006), Vilkki (2006), Haugh (2007b) and Kádár (2011). While Watts claims that throughout his 2003 *Politeness* ‘I shall make a concerted effort to keep the two perspectives apart’ (2003:4), critics contend that in the proponents’ accounts politeness₁ is often masqueraded as politeness₂. Terkourafi, for example, argues that “what Watts actually does...is to provide a politeness₂ definition of politeness₁ as ‘mutually cooperative behaviour, considerateness for others, polished behaviour’” (2005:243). Similarly, Haugh notes that the “‘discursive approach to politeness’ (Watts 2003/2005, Locher 2004/2006, Locher and Watts 2005)” (2007b:296) does not always succeed in avoiding the constant vacillation between commonsense and technical notions of politeness, namely, politeness₁ and politeness₂. Therefore, difficulties with making a clear-cut demarcation between politeness₁ and politeness₂ seem insurmountable. As a result, operationalizing this distinction would pose a problem in empirical research.

Nonetheless, as detailed in the following subsection, both the proponents and opponents of this distinction share the view that politeness is a matter of participants’ evaluations and assessments of their own and others’ behaviour in interaction. As Haugh notes, despite some subtle differences between them, theorists (Watts 2003/2005, Mills 2003/2011b, Locher 2004/2006, Locher and Watts 2005, Christie 2007) from a broadly postmodernist paradigm of politeness are united in their determination to ‘offer an alternative epistemological and ontological framework in which to conduct politeness research’ and emphasis on “‘the need to pay closer attention to how participants in social interaction perceive politeness’ (Watts 2005:xix)” (2007b:296). To use Culpeper’s words, the postmodernist theorists all focus on ‘participants’ situated and dynamic evaluations of politeness, not shared conventionalized politeness forms or strategies’ (2011:122). Similarly, Mills states:

[W]hat I focus on throughout this book [*Gender and politeness*] is the analysis of what people judge to be polite and this involves me both in discussing with individuals what they consider to be polite and also examining the way individuals relate to each other in conversations. (2003:8)

By focusing on ‘what people judge to be polite’ in her work towards ‘a more community-based, discourse-level model’ (Mills 2003:1), Mills’ research engages with the *emic* conceptualization of face and/or politeness. Although some theorists such as Terkourafi (2001/2005) and Bousfield (2008) retain tenets of B&L’s model, they all take a data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness. Their approaches are thus compatible with those of other postmodernist scholars such as Eelen (2001), Mills (2003), Watts (2003), Locher (2004) and Geyer (2008). This postmodernist turn in politeness research could be summarized as ‘advocat[ing] a greater focus on the evaluations made by participants through interaction’ (Haugh 2007b:302).

To summarize, by focusing on how politeness is achieved in contextualized evaluations in conversation, the postmodernist approach provides an epistemological vantage point from which to conduct fine-grained analyses of interaction. Hence it is able to capture nuanced differences in politeness across and within cultures. In the light of its assumption and premise that a same norm of behaviour does not necessarily hold across a society, this approach to politeness is concerned with a micro-level analysis of interaction, including the speaker’s and hearer’s assessments of politeness. Therefore, it is well equipped to address the diversity of Chinese politeness.

2.3.2.3 The postmodernist view of politeness as participants’ evaluation

A review of the literature shows that politeness is widely understood by the postmodernist theorists as evaluative judgement made by interactants in interaction (see e.g. Terkourafi 2005, Watts 2005, Geyer 2008, Schnurr *et al* 2008, Mills 2011b).

Culpeper notes what the postmodernist theories have in common is the argument that politeness ‘is a matter of the participants’ evaluations of particular forms as (im)polite in context’ (2008:20). That is to say, evaluations of politeness presuppose specific interactants in specific contexts. For example, Eelen pushes for ‘an evaluation-centred approach’ (2001:110–113) to politeness. He argues that:

Politeness1 has a notably *evaluative* character: the notions of politeness and impoliteness are used to characterize (other) people’s behaviour, and to do so judgementally. In this sense politeness involves what could be called an ‘evaluative moment’. (Eelen 2001:35, original italics)

Eelen proceeds to argue that ‘one of the basic characteristics of politeness1 is evaluativity’ (2001:44) and the ongoing evaluation of speech behaviour is ‘the basic, primordial mode of being of (im)politeness’ (2001:109).

Apart from Eelen, Mills (2003), Watts (2003) and Locher (2004) are among the postmodernist theorists who make similar arguments. As noted by Terkourafi, the central theme of Watts’ 2003 book is the idea that ‘politeness is a matter of subjective, situated evaluation’ (2006:418). Rejecting the modernist theorists’ quasi-objective description of (im)politeness as an abstract term, Watts seeks to offer a way of assessing how interactants themselves may evaluate verbal behaviours as polite or impolite:

This term [(im)politeness] is derived from an adjective attributing a subjectively or inter-subjectively negotiated quality ‘polite’ or ‘impolite’ to social acts carried out by an individual. It is a consequence of the ways in which individual participants in a verbal interaction perceive those acts. Not only are the qualifications of social acts as ‘polite’ or ‘impolite’ highly

subjective and a matter for discursive dispute, but the acts themselves may be evaluated negatively, positively, neutrally, etc. (2003:252)

In doing so, Watts argues for interactants' evaluation as the core of politeness research. What's more, this quotation suggests that individuals may differ in their subjective evaluations, hence in their politeness behaviour.

Like Watts, Locher maintains that 'the final decision as to whether something is perceived as polite or impolite lies in H's interpretation, who judges the relational aspect of an utterance with respect to H's own norms' (2004:90). In Locher's view, this judgement is made against norms and frames. Moreover, Locher contends that the knowledge of these norms and frames, 'which is acquired while growing up in a specific culture, cannot easily be dismissed after having been learnt' (2004:48). Thus, for Locher, interactants' politeness behaviour is fundamentally influenced by their understanding of appropriateness, expectations, personal history, speaking style, etc. Under this view, interactants can differ in their judgement of social acts as polite, impolite, rude, etc. This conceptualization of politeness leads us to adopt a bottom-up approach in empirical studies. This is emphasized by Locher and Watts as follows:

We consider it important to take native speaker assessments of politeness seriously and to make them the basis of a discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness...there may be a great deal of variation in these assessments. (2005:16)

It is worth noting that the postmodernist approach's stress on individual variation in subjective evaluations does not mean that it ignores the relation between individuals and the wider group or culture. For example, Mills (2003/2011b) argues that individuals always belong to certain social groups and members affiliated to a same

group share a great deal of similarity. Specifically, rather than assuming the existence of a homogeneous group of speakers and total autonomous individuals, Mills' research explores the mutual impact of individuals' and groups' linguistic behaviour. She argues that 'the group [community of practice] defines itself and is defined by its set of linguistic practices which change over time and which are subject to negotiation by members' (Mills 2003:30).

Similarly, as indicated earlier, Eelen (2001) contends that *habitus* is a primary tool interactants use to make politeness evaluations. This is because, in Bourdieu's words, 'the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices' (1977:82) and similar conditions of existence can give rise to 'homologous habitus' (Bourdieu 1990:55). Furthermore, Bourdieu formulates a dialectical relation between class or group, *habitus*, and the organic individuality as follows:

it [habitus] is in a relation of homology, of diversity within homogeneity reflecting the diversity within homogeneity characteristic of their social conditions of production, that the singular habitus of the different members of the same class are united; the homology of world-views implies the systematic differences which separate singular world-views, adopted from singular but concerted standpoints. Since the history of the individual is never anything other than a certain specification of the collective history of his group or class, *each individual system of dispositions* may be seen as a *structural variant* of all the other group or class habitus. (1977:86, original italics)

Bourdieu argues here that *habitus* reflects 'diversity within homogeneity'. Since individuals' judgements of politeness are largely based on their *habitus*, their politeness behaviour will simultaneously display some convergences and divergences. Building on such a theory, the postmodernist approach emphasizes

individual differences in judgement of politeness while recognizing a certain degree of sharedness.

Moreover, as indicated in 2.3.2.2, evaluation of linguistic behaviour as (im)polite is manifested in interaction. Firstly, as postmodernist theorists argue, (im)politeness does not reside in individual utterances or sentences (see Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003, Locher 2004, Fukushima 2003, Terkourafi 2005, Christie 2005/2007, Haugh 2007b, Bousfield 2008, Arundale 2010). Thus linguistic behaviour cannot be evaluated as (im)polite when divorced from its context since variables like class, gender, social distance, life experience, settings, and social activity types may all impact on the evaluation.

Secondly, Eelen notes that ‘the same stretch of behaviour is not always unanimously evaluated as polite or impolite’ (2001:45), thus many scholars argue that perspectives of the speaker and hearer are equally significant (see e.g. Clark 1996, Eelen 1999/2001, Arundale 1999/2005/2010, Locher 2004, Haugh 2007a, Locher and Watts 2005). Since individuals’ life experience, interactional history, family background, attitudes, etc. vary, an utterance may be evaluated differently by the speaker and hearer. In Locher’s words, ‘politeness for the speaker’ and ‘politeness for the hearer’ may differ (2004:91/212). Thus, as Locher (2004) notes, to investigate politeness, either politeness on the part of the speaker or politeness on the hearer’s part, we need to look in detail at the context, the situation, the invoked norms, etc. Locher maintains that ‘politeness will always be identified and evaluated by both the speaker and the hearer as norm-based and, in this sense, ultimately also moralistic’ (2004:91). As I showed in 2.2.2, the speaker’s and the hearer’s politeness norms may vary considerably, which is largely attributable to differences in their habitus.

In sum, building on the recent politeness scholarship, I have argued in favour of the view of politeness as evaluation. I showed that in making evaluations, perspectives of the speaker and hearer are equally important. I also showed that for postmodernist theorists, rather than the utterance or sentence level, politeness or impoliteness is manifested at the discourse level in the process of interactants evaluating linguistic behaviours in interaction. Drawing on insights from Bourdieu's works, I argued that individuals differ in their evaluations about what counts as (im)politeness, but people who belong to a similar group and/or are socialized in similar cultural conditions are also likely to display similarities in evaluations.

2.3.2.4 The conceptualization of norms in postmodernist politeness studies

In this subsection I review the scholarship on norms as conceptualized by the postmodernist politeness theorists. I show that they view a norm as contested by interactants within interactions. I also demonstrate that for the postmodernist approach to politeness, individuals and their social behaviour can structure and/or restructure rather than merely be affected by norms.

To begin with, it is important to legitimize briefly the use of the concept of 'politeness norms' in this approach. As already shown in the preceding subsections, the postmodernist approach to politeness foregrounds the heterogeneity of society. Thus it does not focus on norms at the macro level. However, as detailed below, every group needs to have a norm; otherwise they could not interact. Put it differently, without shared knowledge about what counts as politeness, interactants could not make judgements about politeness. Therefore, politeness norms are arguably at stake in a postmodernist approach although postmodernism generally emphasizes the fragmentary nature of human existence.

The literature shows that the postmodernist politeness theorists reject the view of norms as static entities. They maintain that norms are dynamic and contested in

nature (e.g. Haugh 2003, Watts 2003, Locher 2004, Culpeper 2011). For example, Eelen argues that norms are ‘highly versatile argumentative tools’ (2001:233). That is, a norm is open to various interpretations by interactants. Thus, Eelen does not assume that specific norms to be shared by all members of society. This conceptualization of norms, therefore, allows for nuanced analysis of rich variability of politeness evaluations made by participants in interaction.

Moreover, as Mills’ (2003) study shows, while the postmodernist theorists emphasize the variability of individuals’ interactional experiences and politeness norms, they do not deny sharedness of norms. Culpeper, for example, discusses this point explicitly as follows:

[...] many experiences are shared; in fact, all social interactions are shared in some way. Thus, although all individuals have different norms, we can expect considerable overlap with the norms of those with whom we interact. Indeed, it is those shared norms that facilitate understanding and communication. (2008:29)

Under this view, norms are closely associated with social interactions. And the existence of shared norms provides the basis of successful communication within and across cultures. Culpeper’s argument also suggests that interactants with similar interactional history are likely to share norms, whereas people from different historical background tend to differ.

In the recent politeness literature (e.g. Eelen 2001, Haugh 2003, Terkourafi 2005), a distinction between prescriptive (theoretical/moral) and descriptive (empirical) norms has been proposed. Norms are prescriptive in the sense that they prescribe ‘what one *should* do’ and descriptive ‘what one is *likely* to do’ (Terkourafi 2005:244, original italics). In line with their emphasis on participants’ situated evaluations of

politeness, the postmodernist theorists give more attention to the empirical norms. For example, as Terkourafi notes, scholars like Usami (2002) reject the prescriptivist stance on norms and ‘seek to establish empirical regularities in a bottom-up fashion...’ (2005:244). The importance of emphasizing descriptive norms and theorizing about norms from a bottom-up manner is summarized by Haugh as follows:

A theory of (im)politeness thus ultimately deals with the evaluative and normative nature of (im)politeness, seeking to understand how such evaluations of (im)politeness are made in interaction, as well as studying the construction of the moral and empirical norms, which underpin those evaluations through social life. It is critical, however, that such evaluations and norms should be based on participants’ understandings not those imposed by the analyst. (2007b:309)

A major message this quote conveys is the dynamics of moral (prescriptive) and empirical norms. Moral norms are meant to be about ‘what people think *should* happen’ and empirical norms ‘what people think *is likely to* happen’ (Haugh 2007b:308). By emphasizing ‘the construction of the moral and empirical norms’, Haugh highlights the critical role played by individuals in reproducing and creating norms. This is because, as the quote suggests, (im)politeness is by nature evaluative. In other words, in making politeness evaluations, individuals have a choice as to whether or to what extent they abide by existing norms and in doing so they reproduce or create norms.

To use the terminology of structure-agency research as already discussed in 2.3.1.3, prescriptive norms can be understood as constituents of the social structure and individuals and their behaviours as agency. Thus, according to poststructuralist scholars like Wight (1999), Elder-Vass (2010), and most notably Carter and Sealey

(2000), in terms of influence there exists a bidirectional relationship between norms (i.e. structure) and politeness behaviour (i.e. agency): they both have structuring power and both are structured in the process of interaction. Therefore, while acknowledging the top-down influence of norms (prescriptive), the postmodernist approach to politeness attends to the evaluative aspect of norms (descriptive).

What this scholarship suggests therefore is that, in empirical studies, our primary task is to seek evidence that norms of politeness are made visible in interaction. This entails the need to collect data such as taped real-life conversations which allows for nuanced analysis of participants' evaluative behaviour. It is worth noting that in remarking that her frame-based approach 'acknowledges norms *to the extent that* these can be empirically observed' (2005:247, original italics), Terkourafi appears to assume all norms empirically observed as operational. However, I maintain that observed norms may not necessarily operate in interaction. Here, Eelen's proposal of a further distinction between two types of norms merits quoting:

Observational norms must be carefully distinguished from operational norms. As a posteriori derivations from empirical reality, the former are part of the practice of observation, while the latter are a priori principles structuring behaviour, and can never be directly observed. (2001:231–232)

To clarify Eelen's argument, intuitively there are cases in which a norm can be observed, for example, when it is transgressed by interactants in interaction. Clearly it is an observational norm, but the operational norm which actually informs the transgression may still remain hidden from view to investigators. This suggests that we need to find new evidence of the underlying norms, for example as Mills (2003) does, by resorting to interviews to access the interactants' perceptions of norms.

In this subsection so far, I have shown that a norm is understood by the postmodernist approach to politeness as being subject to participants' evaluations in interaction. While prescriptive and empirical norms are respectively formulated as involving what one ought to or is likely to do, the postmodernist theorists do not seem to have attempted a definition of norms. Yet, they (e.g. Locher 2004, Culpeper 2011) do suggest that cultural values, beliefs, rules, or social conventions can be norms which prescribe or affect interactants' politeness behaviour. Moreover, Cialdini and Trost define norms as 'rules and standards that are understood by members of a group; and that guide and/or constrain social behaviour without force of law' (1998:152). Building on this, I propose that norms can be roughly defined as a set of cultural values, beliefs or interactional rules that inform interactants' social behaviour. They may operate either as motivations for speakers performing certain speech acts or as expectations about how these acts should be performed.

To sum up, rejecting the modernist theorists' conceptualization of a norm as a static and objective entity, the postmodernist theorists view a norm as highly contested by interactants within interactions. For them a certain norm is not necessarily shared among individuals. I showed that in line with the poststructuralist social theorists' discussion about the dialectical relationship between structure and agency (2.3.1.3), the postmodernist approach to politeness conceptualize norms as being subject to interactants' evaluations while recognizing their causal power. On this basis, we can hypothesize that there would be differences between generations of the Chinese in their evaluations of politeness norms as a result of their socializations in differing historical contexts.

2.3.3 Summary

In 2.3 I evaluated recent scholarship on the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness. The literature shows that the modernist approach is mainly built on the dual premises of Grice's theory of communication and conversational implicature

and Searle's speech act theory. I showed that a major limitation to these theories lies in their assumption that intention is self-evident. I also showed that they do not address the issue of how an utterance can be interpreted differently. Following scholars such as Sperber and Wilson (1995), Toolan (1996), Christie (2000), I argued that a hearer, in the process of interpreting a given utterance, always makes hypotheses about the speaker's intention. I maintained that speech acts need to be addressed as dynamically generated in interaction. Moreover, the literature shows that the modernist theorists assume that politeness norms are *a priori* entities and they are shared by interactants and inform their behaviour unidirectionally. I argued that despite a certain amount of sharedness, a norm is always subject to participants' evaluations.

By contrast, I showed that theorists adopting a postmodernist approach to politeness question the assumption that norms are 'homogeneous and consistent across the society as a whole' (Mills 2011a:73). Unlike the modernist approach to politeness, the postmodernist approach is chiefly informed by Bourdieu's sociological insights, particularly his social theory of practice, central to which is the notion of *habitus*. The postmodernist theorists share the view that politeness is evaluative judgement made by interactants about linguistic behaviour in interaction. They assume that society is heterogeneous with respect to norms. For them norms inform linguistic behaviour and are also subject to interactants' evaluations in interaction. They thus vary across time and space. The postmodernist theorists focus on nuanced analysis of the way how meaning is generated and negotiated in ongoing interaction in contexts. This raises the question of whether it is possible to carry out a systematic study on the diversity of politeness norms as I discussed at the outset of this chapter.

I have argued that broadly the postmodernist rather than modernist approach provides an appropriate framework within which to pin down the diversity of politeness norms in contemporary Chinese. To explore this issue in depth, it would

be useful to focus on the speech acts of compliments and CRs, which, according to Ruhi, are ‘central to furthering our understanding of politeness’ (2006:44).

2.4 The speech acts of compliments and compliment responses

In this section I review the literature on compliments and CRs. I show that previous studies generally adopt a modernist approach to politeness and tend to assume a compliment and a CR to be easily identifiable. I also show that current scholarship on these speech acts tends to use DCTs as their instrument of data collection and analyze data in a top-down manner. I maintain that previous studies cannot address interactants’ evaluations of politeness in performing a compliment and a CR. I argue that it seems predictable that compliment and CR behaviours and the informing norms may vary among individuals and across groups.

2.4.1 The speech act of compliments

In this subsection, I review scholarship on the definition and identification of a compliment, formulaicity of a compliment, categorization of compliment topics, and the politeness norms informing compliments. I show that previous studies of compliments tend to adopt a modernist approach to politeness. I also show evidence from the existing scholarship that previous studies generally assume that a compliment and a compliment topic are easily identifiable; a compliment topic is equally preferred by interactants; interactants are homogeneous in norms informing their compliment behaviour. I argue that since politeness is a matter of participants’ evaluations of behaviour whether an utterance functions as a compliment can vary among interactants.

2.4.1.1 What counts as a compliment?

The literature shows what counts as a compliment remains debated. This debate surrounds the question of defining a compliment. For example, a compliment is described as an ‘expression of admiration’ (B&L1987:16) and ‘expression of

personal praise' (Herbert and Straight 1989:37). In a recent article, 'a compliment is defined broadly as an expression of praise or positive regard' (Nelson *et al* 1995:111). Scholarship shows that there are limitations to these definitions. For instance, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk argues that '[c]omplimenting always involves a *human addressee*, typically in a *direct interaction*' (1989:74, original italics). According to the author, utterances like 'That's a beautiful house' can be judged as a compliment only if they are addressed to the owner in a direct interaction. Similarly, the author (1989:74) argues, 'This girl has beautiful hair' is an instance of praising rather than complimenting if the interlocutor is not meant to be heard by the addressee. However, compared with the aforementioned definitions, Holmes' formulation is more elaborate:

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer. (1986:485)

A survey of relevant scholarship shows that this definition is widely cited in the literature, for example, Johnson (1992), Cheng (2003), Hobbs (2003), Jucker (2009), Tang and Zhang (2009), and Holmes' subsequent works (e.g. 1988/1995/2003).

Holmes' definition seems able to solve the issues raised by the definitions assessed above. For example, for Holmes a compliment occurs when the speaker 'attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed'. Thus she has built into her definition the interactional property of complimenting, which, as Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989) argues, is essential for an utterance to function as a compliment. For instance, with this definition, it becomes possible to distinguish between compliments, praise, expressions of general positive evaluation,

boasting, etc. The following example from Holmes (1986:486) may elucidate this point.

Context: Two elderly women discussing a new TV news-reader.

A: Oh but you must admit she's got a lovely voice.

B: She certainly has.

Holmes maintains that the first utterance in this brief encounter may well be a positive evaluation about the TV news-reader, but not the addressee present, hence it does not count as a compliment. Thus Holmes' definition of a compliment can be used by analysts as initial criteria for seeking occurrences of potential compliments.

However, recent scholarship shows that formulated within the framework of a modernist approach to politeness (Holmes 1986:486), Holmes' definition is still found wanting in two respects. First, there may be cases in which some utterances are perceived by participants as compliments but do not necessarily meet Holmes' criteria. Second, as theorists such as Mills (2003) note, Holmes' definition cannot capture the rich variability of interactants' judgements. For example, Mills criticizes that:

Because Holmes does not consider the responses to compliments, whether they are accepted, deflected, or challenged, in any detail, she is unable to claim to be able to know that the linguistic behaviour she categorizes as compliments functions as such for the hearers. (2003:221)

Following Mills, I argue that formulated within the framework of the modernist approach to politeness, i.e. B&L's (1987) face-saving model (Holmes 1986:486), Holmes' definition cannot account for the judgements and evaluations made by

participants. To begin with, it bears re-analyzing an exchange from Holmes' (1986:493) study on compliments in New Zealand English:

Context: Male complimenter to female acquaintance in an informal private setting.

C: It's nice to see you in a nice skirt.

R: What you mean is 'My goodness what's happened to the trousers.'

This is an example Holmes uses to illustrate her assignment of CR types. She asserts that 'responses which challenge or question the sincerity or intentions of the complimenter belong in the REJECT category, since they imply the addressee does not accept the attribution of credit involved' (1986:493). Holmes categorizes R's utterance as rejection, but she still sees C's utterance as a compliment because she assumes that 'the attribution of credit [is] involved' in the speaker's utterance. However, a careful examination of the exchange shows that C's utterance is interpreted by R as showing indirectly C's disapproval of her trousers: 'My goodness what's happened to the trousers'. That is, it does not function as a compliment for R. In the terminology of speech act theory, the speaker's intention of paying a compliment, if any, is not recognized by the hearer, and thus the utterance in question does not carry the pragmatic force of a compliment as Holmes asserts. Viewed through this lens, Holmes' definition, in conjunction with her analysis of compliment exchanges as illustrated above, appears to assume a general uniformity between interactants about which utterance functions as a compliment.

To conclude, literature shows that Holmes' definition could be used by analysts in initial identification of compliments in interaction. However, drawing on the recent scholarship, I argued that Holmes' definition cannot address the rich variability of participants' judgements of which utterance functions as a compliment. This raises

the question of whether there is evidence that participants with different socialization experiences may evaluate an utterance differently.

2.4.1.2 Formulaicity of compliments

A survey of the literature shows that previous studies on compliments are carried out predominantly within the framework of B&L's politeness model. In her studies, highly cited in compliment literature, for example, Holmes 'consider[s] complimenting behaviour within this [B&L's] framework' (1986:486, 1988:448). Hence my review focuses on studies of compliments adopting a modernist approach to politeness.

Many studies show that a compliment is a remarkably formulaic speech act. This seems especially true in American English (see e.g. Manes 1983, Herbert 1989). Manes and Wolfson, for instance, remark that '[t]he speech act of complimenting is, in fact, characterized by the formulaic nature of its syntactic and semantic composition' (1981:123). Their data show that 85% of compliments in American English are phrased using three syntactic patterns: (1) NP is/looks (really) ADJ; (2) I (really) like/love NP; and (3) PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP. Semantically five positive evaluative adjectives – *nice*, *good*, *pretty*, *beautiful*, and *great* – account for two thirds of the adjectives that speakers use. And the nonadjectival compliments depend heavily on semantically positive verbs such as *like*, *love*, *admire*, *enjoy* and *be impressed by*. Among them, *like* and *love* account for 86% of the compliments in this category. Such formulaicity is replicated in New Zealand English (Holmes 1986/1988), Polish (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989, Herbert 1991/1997), Chinese (Ye 1995, Yuan 2002) and Greek (Sifianou 2001).

As Aakhus and Aldrich note, the fact that a few grammatical and semantic patterns describe such a considerable percentage of compliments is 'taken as evidence that compliments are recognizable' (2002:398). Relevant scholarship shows that such an

assumption is made implicitly or explicitly in many studies. First, implicitly, it can be discerned from the studies of Sifianou (2001), Yuan (2002) and Cheng (2003), among others. For illustration, Jucker uses 'looks really nice', 'you look wonderful' and 'I love you' as search strings to retrieve what he believes to be instances of compliments from the *British National Corpus* (2009:1613). In so doing, these authors appear to assume that the speaker's intention of a compliment can be easily accessed via the syntactic and semantic form of an utterance.

Second, a direct link between formulaicity and complimenting is explicitly assumed by many studies (e.g. Wolfson 1981a, Manes 1983, Herbert 1989, Ye 1995, Wierzbicka 1996). Manes and Wolfson (1981:125), for instance, claim that formulaicity makes compliments 'readily identifiable in any context' (see also Wolfson and Manes 1980:405). Wolfson also claims that formulaicity 'has the function of making compliments readily identifiable *across social groups* whose speech patterns differ in many other respects' (1981b:20, italics added). In a recent study, Ye asserts that '[t]he findings concerning compliment formulas indicate that compliments are readily recognizable items of discourse' (1995:212).

In claiming compliments to be readily identifiable 'in any context' and 'across social groups', these authors assume that a compliment is self-evident. Moreover, in so doing, they assume that there is a general consensus among interactants about which utterance functions as a compliment.

However, recent scholarship indicates that the question of whether an utterance functions as a compliment is far more complex than the aforementioned studies assume. For example, as Irvine (1986) notes, analyses of speech acts such as formulaic compliments in studies like Manes and Wolfson (1981) are often circular in that the analysts do not provide information which would enable one to identify a compliment, unless one already intuitively knows what utterances count as

compliments. Irvine criticizes that Manes and Wolfson ‘never tell us how compliments are to be identified as such, other than by conforming to the formula discovered in the material’ (1986:243).

Recently Watts argues that there is a dynamic relation between linguistic structure and politeness. He maintains that the meaning of an utterance is always subject to negotiation between participants:

It is...in instances of linguistic practice that the structures of language are negotiated and the meanings that these structures encode are the constant object of social negotiation. In this process, knowledge acquired by the individual is repeatedly constructed, changed, updated, reconstructed and reproduced. (2003:172)

Watts’ argument suggests that a compliment can be formulated in different forms and the meaning of a formulaic compliment is subject to interactants’ judgements in interaction.

More directly, Mills argues that in studies assuming speech acts like apologizing to have some simple existence in linguistic form, ‘different linguistic realizations would not be counted in the analysis’ and a non-apologetic utterance bearing the conventional feature ‘would in fact be counted as an apology’ (2011b:22). Mills contends that in the former case the analysis gives ‘an incomplete view of the way interactants apologize’, whereas in the latter it exhibits ‘a false view of the way that interactants draw on politeness resources in order to be insincere, ironic or impolite’ (2011b:22).

Presumably Mills’ argument also applies in the analysis of other speech acts like compliments. For example, according to scholars like Wolfson utterances like ‘I

love your outfit' (1981a:122) is identifiable as a compliment. However, evidence shows that this does not seem to apply in Chinese. For instance, Ye's data on compliments in Chinese show:

Even though the interlocutors can always feel free to negotiate the meaning of the utterance 我喜欢 *wǒ xǐhuān...* [I love/like...], the hearing of it is often directed to an interpretation of an indirect request by [Chinese] native speakers. (1995:266)

This example was presented by Ye to illustrate the syntactic difference between compliments in Chinese and American English. But it also suffices to show that the intention underlying an utterance like 'I love your outfit' is not self-evident. Instead, it is open to various interpretations by different interactants. Therefore, I maintain the illocutionary force of a compliment cannot be simply 'read off' from the propositional content and/or the syntactic form of an utterance.

In sum, I have shown that there is evidence in the scholarship that studies of compliments adopting the modernist approach to politeness overemphasize the formulaicity of compliments. The literature shows that they tend to assume that a compliment to be readily identifiable. I argued that this is tantamount to assuming that a speaker's intention of a compliment is easily recognizable. I also showed that recent scholarship has pointed out that such an assumption may produce a negative impact on the reliability and validity of their data: the authors may take as compliments utterances which are not used as such in interaction or miss compliments which do not carry the formulaic features. In line with the postmodernist account of politeness, I argued whether an utterance functions as a compliment is subject to participants' judgements. This gives rise to the question as to whether an utterance, either formulaic or not, may be perceived differently by different groups of population.

2.4.1.3 Topics of compliments

Previous studies show that compliments in English generally concentrate on only a few broad topics (e.g. Holmes 1986/1988, Hebert 1989). For example, Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Wolfson (1983) observe that compliments in American English fall into two general categories: those which focus on appearance and/or possessions, and those which have to do with ability and/or accomplishments. Knapp *et al* (1984) also found that compliments in American English most often focus on performance and appearance/attire. Similarly, Holmes' (1986) study demonstrates that compliments on ability and performance account for the majority of the total data provided by speakers of New Zealand English.

Regarding compliments in Chinese, Yuan's (2002) and Yu's (2005) studies reveal somewhat similar patterns of topics. For example, Yuan's study shows that the topics of compliments in Kunming Chinese focus on Ability, Appearance, Possession, Child, Attire and Whole Person. And Yu's (2005) study shows that compliments in (Taiwan) Chinese focus on Ability and/or Performance, Appearance and/or Possessions and Others.

These authors assume what counts as an appropriate compliment topic is shared by interactants speaking Kunming Chinese and Taiwan Chinese. For example, as indicated in 2.2.3, unlike some studies such as Ye's which were designed to characterize the compliment behaviour in Mandarin Chinese as a whole (cf. 1995:219), Yuan's study was aimed to describe compliments 'executed in Kunming Chinese' (2002:183). Thus it appears that the author did not intend her claim to go beyond this. However, Yuan refers to 'speakers of Kunming Chinese' throughout the article as if they are an undifferentiated whole. This provides evidence that she seems to assume all interactants speaking the dialect to be homogeneous in their compliment topic preference.

A similar assumption is also tacitly made by Yu. The author notes that '[t]he Chinese subjects in this study come from Taiwan. Thus, the claims made about Chinese speakers' behaviours are based on the Taiwanese data and may not fit the behaviour of Mainland Chinese speakers' (2005:92). In this sense, the author does not assume all speakers of Chinese to be homogeneous in their preference for compliment topics. Yet, judging from his use of 'speakers of Chinese' throughout his article as the general term for Taiwan Chinese speakers, Yu appears to assume that Taiwan society is homogeneous in terms of compliment topic preference.

However, there is evidence from scholarship that appropriate topics of compliments may vary among interactants and across (sub)cultural groups. Most notably, Holmes and Brown (1987:526–527) argue this strongly by giving the following example:

A: You've lost a lot of weight. What have you been doing?

B: Thank you. I've started jogging regularly and it seems to work.

A: you shouldn't overdo it. You are looking quite thin.

According to Holmes and Brown, speaker A initially expresses concern over B's loss of weight, believing it to be disadvantageous to her health. In the first instance, however, B interprets A's remark as a compliment. The authors note that the basis for the miscommunication lies in the different perceptions of appropriate topics for compliments. They argue that weight loss viewed by some cultures to be a cause of concern whereas in others it may be something worth complimenting. Moreover, Holmes and Brown pointed out that severe and sudden loss of weight would cause concern. According to them, 'what counts as desirable and undesirable weight loss will vary from individual to individual' (1987:527).

Therefore, compliment topics may not only vary cross-culturally as Wolfson (1981a) and Yu (2005) found but may also vary intra-culturally. This raises the question of

whether there is evidence that compliment topics preferred by the Chinese may differ among, for example, groups of different socializations.

2.4.1.4 Politeness norms informing compliment behaviour

In this subsection I review the literature which discusses politeness norms informing compliment behaviour. I show that previous studies tend to assume that compliments are uniformly informed by certain norms. However, my review of recent scholarship shows that the postmodernist approach would predict that norms informing compliments, for example in Chinese, can be various and may vary among interactants and across groups.

As already discussed (2.3.1.3, 2.3.2.4), politeness norms can be understood as a set of cultural values, beliefs or interactional rules that inform interactants' social behaviour. As detailed below, in the existing scholarship, it is widely claimed that expression of solidarity and/or concern for the addressee's positive face appear to be the norms for compliments in English³; by contrast, respect or 'assertions of admirations' (Yu 2005:106) and other-face concern are described as informing compliments in Chinese.

To begin with, in studies of compliments in English (e.g. Manes 1983, Holmes 1986/1988, Herbert 1989, Lorenzo-Dus 2001, Yu 2003/2005) a compliment is usually viewed as being motivated by what can be called a norm of solidarity. For example, in a pioneering study, Manes and Wolfson claim that the expression of

³ South African English is probably an exception. According to Herbert and Straight (1989), speakers of South African English are very unlikely to pay compliments but very ready to accept a compliment. This, the authors explained, is due to South African ideology of 'social stratification and inequality', as opposed to American English speakers' ideology of 'mutual worth and equality' (1989:43).

solidarity 'is the *raison d'être*' (1981:124) of a compliment. According to them, creating or reaffirming solidarity is the driving force behind the compliments in American English. Wolfson also contends that speakers of American English pay compliments in order to 'create or maintain rapport' (1983:86). Similarly, compliments in New Zealand English, Holmes argues, are performed to 'oil the social wheels, paying attention to positive face wants and thus increasing or consolidating solidarity between people' (1988:462).

As regards Chinese, seen from the few studies (Cheng 2003, Yu 2005) that examine norms underlying compliments in Chinese, showing admiration or respect seems to be the norm that informs compliments⁴. In a comprehensive inquiry into the sociocultural norms underlying compliments in Chinese, Yu (2005) claims that '[i]n Chinese culture, the speaker is generally expected to employ compliments as assertions of admiration' (p.106). He claims that 'Chinese compliments are usually an expression of genuine admiration, rather than an offer of solidarity' (p.115). All these seem to suggest that for Yu compliments in Chinese are informed by the 'cultural norm' of showing admiration (p.106).

Moreover, a survey of relevant literature demonstrates that both in English and Chinese, positive concern for the addressee's face is widely seen as the motivation, or very loosely, the norm for compliment behaviour. Most notably, following B&L (1987), Holmes (1986/1988) argues that complimenting is primarily used as a positive speech act to "ameliorate the threat of an FTA by 'anointing' the addressee's positive face, by 'noticing' or 'attending' to the addressee's interests" (1988:448). Similarly, Yu suggests that attending to the addressee's positive face want is also the motivating norm underlying compliments since in doing so the

⁴ Most previous studies focus on CRs rather than compliments, e.g. Chen (1993), Loh (1993), Tang and Zhang (2009), and Chen and Yang (2010).

speakers 'take the addressee's face into account' (p.106)0 (cf. Mao 1994:455–456). In a similar vein, Cheng also maintains that giving a compliment 'is a verbal manifestation of addressing the positive face of the addressee' (2003:30).

This range of scholarship appears to assume that the influence of a norm on compliment behaviour does not vary among interactants. For example, Manes and Wolfson claim that compliments in American English are motivated by speakers' desire to express solidarity. In so doing, the authors appear to assume that all speakers of American English homogeneously observe this norm in performing a compliment despite the fact that in their study 'the speakers and addressees were men and women of all ages and from a range of occupational and educational backgrounds' (1981:116).

Similarly, in Holmes' study the informants who provided the compliment exchanges 'were predominantly middle class New Zealanders of European descent' (1988:446). And the author states explicitly that it is the norms of this group which are the focus of her study. In this sense, Holmes clearly did not intend her claim about norms to go beyond that scope. Even so, it seems that the norms Holmes identified (perhaps an exception is the consideration of face, when viewed as a norm in a broad sense) may not be commonly shared by the aforementioned group of New Zealanders. In a similar spirit, Yu's claim that 'Chinese compliments are usually an expression of genuine admiration, rather than an offer of solidarity' (2005:115) may well be an indication of the author's underlying assumption that the norm equally informs the compliments of all speakers of Taiwan Chinese.

However, recent scholarship shows that a norm is always subject to participants' judgements and evaluations in interaction. For example, such scholars as Eelen (2001), Mills (2003), Locher (2004) (2.3.1.3) argue that a norm is not only in a constant state of flux but also may vary from one group to another and even among

individuals. To illustrate, evidence from DCT-based studies (e.g. Lee-Wong 2000) shows that there are generational differences in the use of politeness strategies when performing speech acts such as requests (cf. 2.2.2). This suggests that, in contrast to Yu's foregoing assumption, norms informing compliments in Chinese may also differ across generations. Similarly, as Yuan's (2002) study shows (2.2.3), the politeness norms of the speakers of Kunming Chinese living on the frontier seem to have deviated from those practiced by the standard Chinese speakers such as Xi'an Chinese. With this circumstantial evidence from DCT-based studies and the postmodernist politeness theorists' (e.g. Mills 2003, Locher 2004) extensive argument for the heterogeneity of norms and values, it is plausible to hypothesize that politeness norms informing compliments in Chinese cannot be as homogeneous as previous scholars like Cheng (2003) and Yu (2005) assume.

To sum up, I have shown that previous studies tend to consider showing positive concern for the addressee's face want as the motivation, or loosely conceived, the norm for a compliment in both English and Chinese. Besides, my survey of the literature demonstrated that in English showing or affirming solidarity has widely been assumed to be the norm informing compliments, whereas in Chinese showing admiration or respect is often viewed as the informing norm of politeness. I showed that these studies seem to assume that a norm such as one's desire to show admiration is shared by interactants. Against this, I argued the literature suggests that norms informing compliment behaviour can vary among speakers of Chinese.

2.4.2 The speech act of compliment responses

Here I review literature on CRs, particularly studies in Chinese which explore the definition and loci of a CR, categorization of CR strategies, and politeness norms informing CR behaviour. I demonstrate that under the general rubric of the modernist approach to politeness, previous studies tend to assume that a CR is easily identifiable and that assignment of a CR strategy is more or less straightforward. I

also show many studies of CRs assume that a norm uniformly informs all interactants' CR behaviour. However, the postmodernist politeness scholarship suggests that neither a CR nor a CR strategy is as readily identifiable as these studies assume. It also suggests that a norm informing CRs, despite a certain level of sharedness, is subject to interactants' evaluations.

2.4.2.1 What counts as a compliment response?

A survey of the literature shows that while what counts as a CR is rarely discussed in most studies, a CR is tautologically defined by Tang and Zhang as 'a response to a compliment' (2009:326). Although Yuan's definition appears inadequate it certainly constitutes a good point of departure for evaluating current scholarship:

Compliment responses are defined as anything that follows a compliment, verbal or non-verbal. (2002:194)

Intuitively, Yuan's definition could be useful in the sense that a CR can be 'anything that follows a compliment' and can be either 'verbal or non-verbal'. However, evidence from the existing literature shows that 'anything that follows a compliment' may not necessarily function as a CR. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk's (1989) study shows that in natural conversation a CR can sometimes be delayed due to various reasons like interruption, inserted sequences, elaboration of the compliment, etc. The author argues that:

The response does not have to immediately follow a compliment. There are cases with inserted sequences in which these two elements are discontinuous or performed in two or more moves and/or turns. (1989:89)

Thus, Yuan's definition of a CR cannot fully capture the complexity of the juxtaposition of conversational moves and turns in real-life interaction. For instance,

Yuan does not clarify what is meant by ‘anything that follows a compliment’. For example, does it refer to an utterance, a move or a turn, etc. that comes immediately after the compliment? This weakness of Yuan’s definition could become particularly salient when examining CRs embedded in multiparty conversations, the conversational turns of which, according to Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2004), tend to become increasingly complex with the rise in the number of participants.

Viewed from this angle, Yuan’s definition largely assumes that identifying a CR is straightforward. As mentioned at the very outset of this subsection, most studies simply gloss over the issue of how a CR is located. In a sense, this itself seems to suggest that a CR has to date been assumed as self-evident. Among others, Herbert and Straight claim explicitly that compliment-responses ‘pose no identifiability problems, whether within or between speech communities: They can be identified simply as anything that follows an identifiable compliment’ (1989:38).

Moreover, postmodernist politeness scholarship, particularly the Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995, Christie 2000) suggests that there may be cases in which a CR is given to a perceived compliment which is intended by the first speaker to perform other illocutionary acts than complimenting. In this sense, previous studies within the modernist approach, including Yuan’s (2002) miss CRs of this type. This could be exemplified by the following example from Levinson (1983:39):

A: I could eat the whole of that cake

B: Oh, thanks

Levinson contends that B’s response implicates that ‘I compliment you on the cake’ (1983:39). However, in discussing linguistic structures of politeness, Watts (2003) argues that in exchanges like this the first utterance is interpretable in multiple ways. Watts suggests, for example, that there may be some situations in which A does not

actually mean to pay a compliment (e.g. announces his/her hunger) whereas B perceives it as a compliment. Therefore, unlike Yuan's definition of a CR as 'anything that follows a compliment', it is predictable that a CR may sometimes be used as a response to a prior utterance which does not actually function as a compliment.

In summary, evidence shows that the issues of what counts as a CR and identifying a CR can be much more complex than many studies assume (e.g. Herbert and Straight 1989, Yuan 2002). Scholarship within the postmodernist framework suggests that while a compliment usually triggers a verbal response as a second turn, the response does not have to immediately follow in the sequence. I also showed that an utterance counts as a CR in its own right if the hearer evaluates the preceding utterance as a compliment no matter whether or not it is intended as such by the speaker. We may conclude that Yuan's definition could be useful but participants', particularly the addressees' judgements need to be considered seriously to identify a CR in interaction. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate systematically how interactants judge an utterance as a CR in spontaneous and natural conversations.

2.4.2.2 Compliment response strategies

A survey of the literature shows that the tripartite taxonomy of CR strategies, Accept, Deflect/Evade and Reject, is adopted by most studies (Herbert 1986, Holmes 1986/1988, Herbert and Straight 1989, Chen 1993, Tang and Zhang 2009, Chen and Yang 2010). While many simply take it for granted, Chen and Yang offered the following justification:

[It] has the potential to be theory-neutral. Regardless of one's theoretical orientation, one can use this macrostructure as a starting point to categorize her findings about CRs...the three broad categories – Acceptance,

Deflection/Evasion, and Rejection – seem general enough for researchers to create subtypes tailored for their own corpus. (2010:1952–1953)

The taxonomy of CR strategies per se may really be ‘theory-neutral’ as Chen and Yang claim. However, scholarship shows how a particular CR is assigned to a certain strategy raises an important ontological issue. As Haugh (2007b) notes, the postmodernist politeness theorists advocate a focus on the evaluations made by participants through interaction. For example, Locher and Watts (2005:16) argue for interactants’ assessments of politeness as the basis of a discursive or postmodernist approach to politeness. Eelen argues that a top-down analysis has ‘the effect (and indeed the purpose) of reducing surface variability so as to facilitate theoretical interpretation of the data. In this sense the data are simplified’ (2001:143). Thus, in categorizing strategies in a top-down manner by the investigators themselves, they appear to assume that the strategies they assign are necessarily intended by the interactants.

Moreover, there is clear evidence from previous studies that such an assumption indeed exists in the way a CR strategy is categorized. For example, Herbert claims that ‘in cases of compound responses, the perceived intention of the speaker was crucial in determining category assignment’ (1986:80). Nevertheless, the author himself seems to categorize the responses, hence in a sense assuming speaker’s intention to be evident. To illustrate, the author codes the compound response ‘Isn’t it funky? Kevin gave it to me’ (responding to ‘Neat scarf’) as ‘reassignment’ rather than ‘comment acceptance’. It can be seen that this coding is based on the second utterance (i.e. Kevin gave it to me) other than the first (i.e. Isn’t it funky?). Without explanation, ‘the perceived intention of the speaker’ can only be understood as the author’s attributed intention which does not necessarily coincide with the speaker’s intention.

For another example, in a study of Turkish compliments Ruhi (2006) gives a word of caution concerning the inclusion of smiles as a form of appreciation. She states that several of her informants note that the best response to a compliment is a warm smile; yet a few entries of the author's observation notes also indicate paralinguistic features such as 'averted gaze', 'embarrassed' and 'cold smile' (2006:53–54). In Ruhi's view, this suggests that the samples could be either acceptance or rejection. Nevertheless, she contends that given the limitations of written recording, the samples have been classified under the strategy of acceptance. An interesting issue arises here: if a researcher categorizes 'warm smile' as appreciation, it would be highly disputable to categorize it together with 'cold smile' under acceptance. More seriously, the author's categorization appears to go totally against the informants' own evaluations (warm or cold).

In a similar vein, it appears that the utterance 'thanks' is predominantly categorized as the strategy of appreciation in the existing CR scholarship (e.g. Pomerantz 1978, Holmes 1986, Ye 1995, Tang and Zhang 2009). However, as politeness theorists like Mills (2003) and Watts (2003) argue, there may be some cases in which the respondent, by saying 'thanks', does not show any appreciation at all. Consider the following example from Knapp *et al*:

A couple of interviewees in the 12- to 17-year-old age group remarked that they replied to a compliment such as 'You look nice for church' by saying 'Thanks a lot.' (1984:16)

In this example, if analyzed within the modernist approach, CRs like 'Thanks a lot' could be straightforwardly categorized as expressing appreciation subsumed under acceptance. However, Knapp *et al* adds that "[b]ut the reply meant much more than 'acceptance'. The vocal tone of the reply (sarcasm) indicated that the adolescent perceived the compliment as an attempt to reinforce an action s/he wanted to avoid"

(1984:16). Hence, for a particular speaker a seemingly appreciative response may convey different illocutionary force, either acceptance or rejection, or even sarcasm as in the above example. Moreover, this suggests that a CR strategy is not self-evident. Therefore, we should take into consideration participants' own evaluations in categorizing CR strategies.

The issue of categorizing CR strategies is crucial in that they would later on be labelled by analysts as (im)polite, (in)appropriate, face-enhancing or face-threatening, etc. Therefore, in categorizing CR strategies, the interactants' own perceptions, which are not always accessible in the texts, need to be given more emphasis.

In summary, my review of scholarship on CR strategies showed that in previous studies it is generally the analysts who categorize CR strategies. I showed evidence that in doing so these studies tend to assume that a CR strategy is self-evident. Following postmodernist theorists, I argued that an analyst's interpretation is not necessarily consonant with participants' perceptions and therefore there is a need to take into account participants' perceptions in categorizing CR strategies. My evaluation of relevant literature in this subsection thus raises the question of whether interactants of different generations may differ in their perceptions of CR strategies.

2.4.2.3 Politeness norms informing compliment response behaviour

Here I review the literature discussing politeness norms that inform CRs, focusing in particular on studies in Chinese. I demonstrate that previous studies tend to assume that a norm like modesty informs uniformly CRs of Chinese speakers. However, my review of recent scholarship shows that the postmodernist approach would predict that norms informing CRs in Chinese can be multiple and more importantly, they may vary depending on different interactants.

The CR literature shows that previous studies generally relate different norms of politeness to different CR strategies. Below I evaluate respectively the scholarship on norms underlying the strategies of rejection and acceptance, and the strategy that lies between these two.

Firstly, the literature shows that CR behaviour in Chinese has long been viewed by previous studies as governed by modesty. As a pioneer in studies of CRs in Chinese, Chen (1993), for example, claims that modesty is the only motivation or politeness norm for Chinese CR behaviour. Precisely, based on his findings from DCT data provided by university students, Chen claims that Leech's (1983) Modesty Maxim is 'the sole motivation for her [the complimentee's] response' (1993:63). On the basis of similar data, Ye also asserts that showing modesty in responding to a compliment is culturally required and expected in China:

The speaker denies the proposition but accepts the complimenting force, thus emphasizing the value of modesty. This preference is a cultural choice of the Modesty Maxim over the Agreement Maxim (Leech 1983). (1995:272)

The author argues that according to this norm 'No matter how pleased *Chinese people* may feel upon hearing a compliment, they must withhold any expression of gratitude or delight (Young 1987:26)' (Ye 1995:272, italics added). This suggests that for Ye and Chen modesty is the only norm of politeness informing rejection of a compliment. Moreover, by using such general expressions as 'Chinese people' they seem to assume that the Chinese are homogeneous with respect to norms for rejecting a compliment.

More recently, Cheng found that in intercultural conversations CR strategies used by the native speakers of Hong Kong Chinese 'range from absence of a verbal response to a back-channel signal to an (implicit) agreement to an outright rejection'

(2003:232). Cheng claims that this can be explained by “the Chinese notion of politeness, which takes the forms of ‘self-denigration’ and ‘other elevation’ (Gu 1990) and ‘reciprocity’ (Hong 1985)” (2003:232). Moreover, Cheng argues that this is because in Chinese culture ‘being modest and respectful as a manifestation of humility is considered ideal in daily communication’ (2003:232–233). Thus, following Ye and Chen, Cheng seems to suggest that the norm of modesty or self-denigration homogeneously informs the rejection strategies of speakers of Hong Kong Chinese.

All of the aforementioned claims combine to suggest that for these scholars the Chinese are a homogeneous group in terms of norms for rejecting a compliment. However, some scholarship shows that norms for rejecting a compliment can be many and may not be homogeneously shared by speakers of either mainland or Hong Kong Chinese. For example, the study of Spencer-Oatey *et al* (2004) shows that for both groups of the Chinese disagreement responses are open to various interpretations such as conceit. Therefore, the authors note that it would be oversimplistic to regard ‘rejection strategy as being closely linked with modesty’ (Spencer-Oatey *et al* 2004:113).

Secondly, norms underlying the strategy of acceptance are hardly explored in studies like Chen (1993) and Ye (1995). In Ye’s study, for example, nearly one fourth of CRs (24.4%) that the author assigned to Acceptance were simply ignored in his discussion section. In presenting his finding about the sub-level strategy of Appreciation (16.4%) under Acceptance, Ye indeed touches upon this issue: ‘Appreciation is not regarded as a prescribed norm of compliment response in Chinese’ (1995:254). Then when discussing the ‘polite formula’ of *xièxie* (‘thank you’), the author notes that it is ‘a more recent compliment response...reflects the cultural contact and social changes happening in the observed speech community, in which the native speakers of Chinese begin to consider accepting a compliment by

appreciation as socially acceptable' (1995:254). Thus, while Ye suggests that accepting a compliment breaches modesty, the norm that actually informs the strategy remains unexplored.

Similarly, accepting a compliment is interpreted broadly as resulting from western influence in Yuan's (2002) study. Specifically, Yuan's findings show that acceptance CRs take up 36.73% (observation) and 60.48% (DCTs) of her total data. Comparing these results with the low occurrence rate of acceptance (1.03%) in Chen's (1993) study, the author found that speakers of Kunming Chinese accept compliments much more frequently than speakers of Xi'an Chinese. This has led the author to make the following claim:

Speakers of Kunming Chinese are gradually beginning to deviate from the tradition of disagreeing to or downgrading a compliment to a more accepting attitude, probably because of western influence through movies and the media. (2002:214)

Like Ye (1995), Yuan did not articulate what politeness norms actually inform the acceptance of compliments in her data. Thus in their studies the strategy of acceptance and the underlying norms are both being marginalized.

Nevertheless, in a recent DCT-based study, Chen and Yang (2010) argue that accepting a compliment is a self-politeness strategy used by the complimentees to show self-confidence. The authors argue that their finding that 62.6% of CRs come under Acceptance suggests Xi'an Chinese "have 'given up' much of their modesty for the sake of agreeing with others when responding to compliments" (2010:1960). That is, 'agreeing with the complimenter' as initially discussed by Pomerantz (1978) (see also Leech's 1983) was inferred by the authors to be a motivating value. Furthermore, they argue that:

Chen's (1993) subjects rejected compliments overwhelmingly because they viewed modesty as an important aspect of their face. Our subjects accept compliments most of the time because they, instead, view self-confidence as important. (2010:1960)

Chen and Yang thus imply that accepting a compliment may be motivated by complimentees' desire to show agreement or self-confidence, respectively for the sake of the complimenter's positive face and/or the recipient's self-face. Their analysis has really extended our understanding of the norms for accepting a compliment, especially when compared with Ye's and Yuan's vague interpretation.

However, there is evidence in current scholarship that there are two major limitations to Chen and Yang's interpretation. To begin with, empirical studies show that there may be more norms than is discussed. For example, as Manes notes, on occasions speakers of American English 'may accept a compliment outright, or they may play down a compliment by jokingly agreeing with it' (1983:101–102). Similarly, Lorenzo-Dus found that Spanish interactants, particularly male respondents, 'generally opted for ironic/humorous upgrades' (2001:114). These findings therefore raise important questions concerning the possibility that speakers of Chinese may accept a compliment following other norms in addition to what was presented by Chen and Yang.

Moreover, Chen and Yang seem to assume that the norms they analyzed inform uniformly the use of accepting a compliment by all speakers of Xi'an Chinese. This is partly suggested in their recurrent reference to Xi'an Chinese as if they are a homogeneous group. However, as discussed earlier (2.3.1.3, 2.3.2.4), a large body of scholarship has argued that despite a certain level of sharedness, norms are subject to interactants' evaluations, which, according to theorists like Watts (2003) and Locher (2004), are closely associated with individuals' socialization,

interactional history, etc. Moreover, as Mills' (2003) study suggests, an individual usually belongs to various sociocultural groups practicing different norms of politeness. According to the author, a different norm may be invoked in interaction with people from different groups. In this light, it would be possible that norms informing CR behaviour will vary among interactants.

Thirdly, the current literature shows that the CR strategy which comes between rejection and acceptance is generally interpreted by previous studies in Chinese as motivated by such norms as showing modesty and gratitude⁵. For example, Chen's (1993) study based on DCT data shows a strategy which takes the form of thanking and denigrating. Chen commented on this strategy as follows:

It is unlikely that thanking signals agreement or acceptance, for it is followed, invariably, by self-denigration. What seems to be going on is that the responder acknowledges the good intention of the complimenter and expresses her gratitude for it before she adheres to the self-denigration maxim. (1993:62)

As Chen argues, it is very likely that by prefacing the response with 'thanks', the responder uses such a strategy partly to express their gratitude for the complimenter's good intention. However, his assertion that the speaker 'adheres to the self-denigration maxim' in saying 'But the watch is not what I really like' appears to assume 'self-denigration' (even if this really is the case) to be the only motivation for the response. Relevant scholarship suggests that it is also possible that rather than intending to show modesty, the recipient may give such an answer,

⁵ This strategy is labelled differently in previous studies. For example, it is termed Deflect/Evade in Holmes (1986/1988), Tang and Zhang (2009), Chen and Yang (2010), Acceptance with Amendment in Ye (1995), and Amendment strategies in Yu (2003).

for example, only to state the fact that she really does not like the watch. Thus, in establishing an easy link between this strategy and modesty, Chen appears to assume that speaker intention is self-evident. Moreover, in asserting that such a strategy is solely informed by modesty, the author also seems to assume that Chinese society is homogeneous in norms for CRs.

Literature shows that Ye (1995) also made a similar assumption. Applying the DCT as the method of data collection, Ye categorized nearly half of the responses provided by Chinese respondents under acceptance with amendment, a strategy positioning somewhere on the continuum between rejection and acceptance. Taking a top-down approach to analysis, Ye assesses this strategy as deviating from the norm of rejection. At the same time, the author observes that responses which scale down the complimentary force were chosen by the subjects as the most preferred substrategy. According to Ye, this indicates that the respondents still acknowledge the prescriptive norm of showing modesty:

The Chinese compliment responses are closer to *Non-acceptance* [i.e. rejection] than *Acceptance*. Instead of disagreeing with the proposition of the compliment, the speaker shifts the focus to the weak points of the referent of the compliment. By doing this, the speaker releases the elements of disagreement contained in the prescriptive norm of compliment response [modesty] (1995:273).

Thus, like Chen, Ye associated the CR strategy of acceptance with amendment with the traditional norm of modesty. The author mentioned afterwards what he considered as one feature of CR behaviour shared by speakers of Chinese and American, viz. 'the avoidance of explicit agreement with the compliment propositional utterance' (1995:273). In so doing, Ye may attempt to indicate what could be called 'avoidance of explicit agreement' norm also informs acceptance

with amendment. In either case, the author did not seem to drop a hint about the possibility that these norms may vary among interactants or across groups of the Chinese. This could be evidence that the author assumes that whatever the norms are, they uniformly affect the CR behaviour of all the Chinese.

2.4.3 Summary

In this section, I began by reviewing the literature on what counts as a compliment and a CR. I argued that although Holmes' definition of a compliment and Yuan's definition of a CR can be used as initial criteria to identify potential compliments and CRs, they do not address the judgements and evaluations made by participants. I showed that previous studies tend to overemphasize the formulaicity of a compliment. And in so doing, I argued, these studies appear to confuse form and force of an utterance, and more importantly they seem to assume speaker intention to be self-evident and interactants to be homogeneous in politeness norms. As a result, these studies often over-analyze or under-analyze their data, hence cannot address the rich variability of participants' judgements in interaction. In evaluating literature on compliments and CRs, I argued that in categorizing compliment topics and CR strategies, there is a need to consider the participants' evaluations.

In reviewing the scholarship on norms informing compliment and CR behaviours, I showed that previous studies of compliments in Chinese tend to view compliments as informed by what could be roughly called norms of showing one's positive concern for the addressee's face want or showing admiration or respect for the addressee. Moreover, I demonstrated that the literature on norms for CRs in Chinese have a tendency to assume that the strategies of rejection and acceptance with amendment used by different complimentees are uniformly informed by the norm of modesty. I showed that while the norms for accepting a compliment are treated lightly in most studies, Chen and Yang interpreted it as motivated by the complimentee's desire to show self-confidence. I showed that these studies appear

to assume, implicitly, that norms are uniformly shared among interactants. I argued that politeness norms for compliments and CRs may vary considerably, for example, from one group to another. An important question facing us now is whether there is empirical evidence that politeness norms informing different interactants' compliment and CR behaviours may vary in interaction.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by showing that there is some limited and fragmentary evidence from current scholarship that argues the Chinese are not homogenous in politeness norms. In reviewing this literature, I argued that although the literature suggests diversity of politeness norms in Chinese a systematic study that provides detailed evidence of this would require an approach to politeness phenomena that is able to address such diversity. Therefore, drawing on the insights of recent scholarship on the distinction between the modernist and postmodernist approaches to politeness, I surveyed the existing politeness literature on these two approaches. I showed that many current works on politeness argue that the modernist approach generally tends to assume that society is relatively homogenous. I argued that the modernist approach is therefore not able to account for the diversity of politeness norms in Chinese culture that the existing literature has pointed towards. In my review of the scholarship on the postmodernist approach I showed that work within this perspective foregrounds the heterogeneity of a culture and the rich variability of politeness norms within a given culture. I argued that this approach would predict that the same norm would not necessarily hold across different sections of a society and that similar behaviour may be informed by different norms. I also argued that, given the evidence of diversity of Chinese society in the literature, this raises the question of whether it would be possible to show, by adopting a postmodernist approach, that different groups display different politeness behaviour and whether it would be possible to explain any differences by relating them to differences in the norms informing that behaviour.

I then explored this issue in depth by reviewing literature on the speech acts of compliments and CRs, particularly in Chinese. I showed that there is evidence from the literature that studies on these two speech acts in Chinese have tended to adopt a modernist approach to politeness and often assume that a compliment and a CR are easily identifiable. I also showed that compliments and CRs have been researched predominantly using DCTs as the instrument of data collection and therefore data were analyzed in a top-down manner. Finally, I showed that previous studies do not address the heterogeneity of Chinese society and therefore generally assume that politeness norms underlying compliment and CR behaviours are commonly shared among interactants. I then raised the question of whether, by adopting a postmodernist rather than modernist approach, it is possible to show that there are differences in the identification and interpretation of compliments and CRs and whether it is possible to show that norms informing compliment and CR behaviours may vary among individuals and groups of the Chinese.

On the basis of my evaluation of the literature I therefore argue that, if a study of politeness in Chinese is to account for the diversity evident in Chinese society, and if it is to address the problems of categorization and interpretation that are raised by postmodernist studies of politeness, the following questions need to be addressed:

Major research questions:

- A. Is there evidence that there is variation in the politeness norms informing compliment and CR behaviours in Chinese?
- B. Is there evidence that these norms correlate with generation?

Given the evidence in the literature on compliments and CRs that the modernist approach tends not to address evaluations of politeness phenomena, I address the above questions by specifically focusing on compliments and CRs using a

postmodernist approach. Given that this approach would predict that norms within a given culture will vary, I propose that these major questions are best addressed through an engagement with the following five sub-questions:

Sub-questions:

- (1) What evidence is there that the two generations of the Chinese differ in their interpretation of an utterance as a compliment and a CR?
- (2) What evidence is there that there are differences in the compliment behaviour of the two generations?
- (3) Is there evidence that the two generations' compliment behaviour is informed by different politeness norms?
- (4) What evidence is there that there are differences in the CR strategies used by the two generations?
- (5) Is there evidence that the two generations' CR behaviour is informed by different politeness norms?

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

To address the research questions formulated in the previous chapter, I built a corpus of compliments and CRs by audio-recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations. I also conducted follow-up interviews for the purpose of categorizing and interpreting utterances. In this chapter I begin by showing how my choice of these instruments of data collection was informed by relevant scholarship. I then provide an account of two preliminary studies I carried out, one surveying the notion of Chinese *chēngzàn* (roughly ‘compliments’) and the other pilot-testing the methods of data collection. Following this, I describe and explain in detail the research procedure I adopted in my study. Finally I provide two notes respectively delineating transcription and translation used in the thesis.

3.2 Multiple methods of data collection

As Milroy and Gordon (2003) note, in linguistic research the assumptions that underlie the methodology have to be derived from, and consistent with, the assumptions that generate the research questions. Similarly, in research on politeness, Arundale argues:

Sound research requires that the assumptions basic to one’s methodology be arguably consistent with the assumptions basic to one’s theoretical framework. If they are not, the data one gathers and the analyses one conducts produce evidence that is inconsistent with the premises of one’s theory, and hence are incapable of providing empirical grounding for one’s interpretations in terms of the theory. (2010:2094)

More explicitly, scholars like Yuan (2001) and Jucker (2009) maintain that a method of data collection for a particular study is determined by research questions

and objectives. My research is concerned with the questions of whether in natural interaction there are differences in compliment and CR behaviours, identification and interpretation of compliments and CRs, and of whether norms informing these behaviours may vary among groups of the Chinese. This section justifies the appropriateness of recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and follow-up interviews in addressing these questions.

It is worth noting that although, as indicated in 2.4, questionnaires such as the DCT are widely used in studies of compliments and CRs, there is now a general consensus that these data reflect what informants think they would say in created situations (see e.g. Yuan 2002, Golato 2003/2005, Kasper 2004, Jucker 2009). Consequently, as Spencer-Oatey *et al* note, their value mainly lies in the ability to ‘provide a useful starting point for further more authentic research’ (2004:102). Therefore, questionnaires are unable to generate appropriate data for the present research focusing on politeness as realized in performing compliments and CRs in real-life interaction.

3.2.1 Recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations

As the basic source of data, spontaneous naturally occurring conversations among friends at dinner parties were recorded mainly to address the research question of whether there are differences in compliment and CR behaviours among groups of the Chinese. In this subsection I argue for the use of this method of data collection in my study by evaluating its merits and limitations and some effective solutions discussed in the relevant literature.

3.2.1.1 Merits

The literature shows that the features of spontaneous naturally occurring conversations that make this type of data particularly useful have been extensively explored by previous studies (e.g. Milroy 1987[1980], Beebe and Cummings 1995,

Yuan 2001, Golato 2003/2005, Kasper 2004, Jucker 2009). Spontaneity and naturalness have been identified as two of the most prominent features. According to Jucker, this is because such a conversation ‘has not been elicited by the researcher for the purpose of his or her research project but...occurs for communicative reasons outside of the research project for which it is used’ (2009:1615). Thus, this instrument is able to provide compliments and CRs performed in natural and spontaneous conversations. With these data, one is able to examine whether or not there is evidence that these behaviours vary among interactants and whether this variation correlates with generation.

Moreover, building on Sinclair’s (1983) research on what he calls ‘discourse principles’ (cited in Warren 2006:13) of conversation, Warren (2006) identified and delineated a number of features of natural conversation, including discourse coherence, being fully interactive, cooperation, unfolding, open-endedness, inexplicitness and shared responsibility. The author argues that these features do not operate on the same level. He maintains, for example, that unfolding and open-endedness are mostly connected with the time dimension; multiple sources, cooperation and shared responsibility concern the interactional relation between co-participants. According to Warren, all of them are ‘compulsory components of any conversation’ (2006:245). These features, for Warren, combine to distinguish spontaneous naturally occurring conversations from all other forms of spoken discourse.

Similarly, Kasper (2004[2000]) notes that authentic discourse is highly interactive and demonstrates a wide range of discourse features such as the overall structuring of talk exchanges, the distribution of turns at talk, sequencing of conversational contribution, speaker-listener coordination, and participants’ joint achievement of transactional and interpersonal goals. The author argues that, unlike other types of spoken interaction such as elicited conversation and open-ended role-play,

‘authentic discourse is motivated and structured by participants’ rather than the researcher’s goals’ (Kasper 2004:317).

Clearly, collecting spontaneous naturally occurring conversations is in line with the postmodernist politeness theorists’ call for ‘the need for real-life spontaneous conversational data’ (Eelen 2001:255). In such conversations, as Cohen (1996:391) notes, the speakers are reacting to a natural situation rather than a contrived and possibly unfamiliar situation. Data collected using this method thus provides information about the context of an ongoing interaction and represents what occurs in real-life interaction. Moreover, they are able to capture ‘what the speakers say rather than what they think they would say’ (Cohen 1996:391). Therefore, data collected by recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations allow me to examine compliment and CR behaviours that are performed in actual conversations.

3.2.1.2 Limitations and solutions

In current scholarship, apart from the benefits as just discussed, there are also some limitations to the method of recording natural conversations. According to Kasper and Dahl (1991), Beebe and Cummings (1995) and Kasper (2004), the major limitations are as follows. Firstly, it cannot guarantee that enough tokens of the speech act under study can be collected. Secondly, it is difficult to control variables like gender, social distance, etc. Thirdly, the recording may intrude the interaction. I show below evidence from relevant scholarship that some effective ways can be used to overcome these limitations.

To address the first limitation, I argue the relevant literature indicates that sufficient tokens of speech acts can be collected by taking into account such factors as relationship between interactants and the social situation. For example, many studies (e.g. Wolfson 1988, Wieland 1995, Golato 2005) show that compliments occur very often spontaneously between friends and status equals. Also, some scholarship (e.g.

Holmes 1986/1988, Ye 1995, Tang and Zhang 2009) shows that status is a major factor affecting the frequency of occurrences of compliments. For instance, in analyzing American data from a wide range of settings, Wolfson observes that ‘the overwhelming majority of all compliments are given to people of the same age and status as the speaker’ (1983:91). Similarly, Knapp *et al* note that ‘utterances described as compliments by our informants were most likely to occur in close relationships and in contexts in which the participants were of similar status’ (1984:28). Furthermore, Knapp *et al* (1984) note that if one collapses the ages of compliment givers and receivers into a ‘younger’ group (10–29 years old) and an ‘older’ group (30 and older), then 77 percent of the compliments from younger givers were directed toward younger receivers, and 74 percent of the compliments from older givers were directed toward older receivers. These studies thus indicate that to obtain sufficient tokens of compliments, the relationship between participants should be considered.

Moreover, empirical studies (e.g. Cheng 2003, Golato 2005) show that collecting compliment data does not pose a problem if recording is carried out in such situations as dinner parties. Wieland, for example, contends that ‘[t]he dinner party context provides a particularly interesting arena for the study of speech acts’ (1995:796) because, as the author notes, a wide range of speech acts such as compliments occurs very often. Indeed, Wieland identified 149 compliments from seven French/American cross-cultural conversations she audio-recorded at table. Thus recording dinner party conversations is most likely to ensure sufficient sample size of compliments and CRs.

Furthermore, Wolfson’s (1988) ‘bulge’ theory suggests that certain linguistic behaviours such as compliments occur more frequently between friends than between strangers. Therefore, to ensure that enough compliment exchanges are collected in recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations, investigators should consider

all such factors as the social relationship and social distance between interactants, and social situations when designing their research.

The second limitation is related to the difficulty of controlling extraneous variables. With evidence from current scholarship, I argue that it can be solved, to a large extent, by designing an appropriate method and procedure of research. I show how a careful selection of social situations can greatly enhance investigators' control over sociological variables.

As Wieland's (1995), Tannen's (2005[1984]) and Turnbull's (2001) studies suggest, in recording conversational interaction, many social variables like age, gender and social distance can be largely controlled by organizing social events such as dinner parties in certain social settings. This is because variables of this type can be largely controlled in the process of organizing the parties. Social distance and age, for example, can be largely controlled by restricting a party to friends from the same generational group. This is not to deny that however carefully planned, investigators may fail to control a certain variable at a particular party due to reasons such as an invitee's sudden cancellation of her appointment minutes before the start of a party. In a word, clear evidence shows that a viable way to control social variables in recording natural conversations is to select certain social situations and interactional settings.

The third limitation, i.e. the potential intrusion of the recorder, comes under what Labov (1972) called the observer's paradox. To enhance the reliability and viability of conversational data, the issue of how to alleviate this problem is a paramount concern in my study. I thus discuss solutions to this problem in detail.

Firstly, studies (Tannen 2005[1984]) based on natural conversations show that the impact of the observer and/or the recording device on the interaction is usually

temporary. Duranti (2009[1997]), for example, argues that the initial disturbance of routine transactions with the presence of either an observer or an artifact such as a recorder will subdue with the novelty fading away. Similarly, Tannen (2005[1984]) found that conversationalists at dinner parties may be fully aware of the existence of the recording device, but very often recording does not influence the natural interaction when they become highly involved. According to these scholars, the presence of a digital recorder is unlikely to jeopardize the naturalness and spontaneity of conversations at table.

Secondly, as many scholars (Labov 1972, Milroy 1987[1980], Duranti 2009[1997]) note, the impact of the researcher on the routine linguistic behaviour of the informants can be dealt with in various ways. For example, as Labov (1994) proposes, observers should redefine their role as a conversationalist instead of an interrogator. According to the author, the naturalness of conversations being recorded could be largely guaranteed if the researcher is part of the interaction. Moreover, Labov suggests that it would be a great advantage if the researcher herself is a member of the speech community under investigation.

Similarly, Duranti (2009[1997]) maintains that the number of participants, the relationship between interactants and the observer's relation with them, and formality, etc. may all affect the naturalness of conversations being recorded. The author implies, among others, that in a recording session, groups of people who have close relations both with one another and with the researcher are less likely to alter their usual interactions than vice versa. The author also argues that in an informal situation the informants would behave more naturally than in a formal one. Therefore, although tape recording has potential limitations, as I have showed, they can be alleviated, to a large degree if not completely.

In summary, spontaneous naturally occurring data are contextualized and reflect what speakers actually say rather than what they think they would say. If the limitations are solved successfully, tape recording is the most suitable instrument of data collection which is able to capture the ‘most accurate picture’ (Yuan 2001:289) of what is going on in giving and receiving compliments. To conclude with Kasper’s words:

[I]f the research focus centres on the complimenting *event* in its social and discourse context, including compliment responses and their uptake, electronically recorded data is crucial. (2004:319, original italics)

Therefore, recording naturally occurring conversations is an unrivalled method of data collection to explore whether there are differences in compliment and CR behaviours among groups of the Chinese.

As stated at the outset of this chapter, in my study follow-up interviews were carried out for the purpose of data categorization and interpretation. In the following subsection I justify the employment of this data collection method.

3.2.2 Follow-up interviews

My goal is to argue why, by reviewing recent scholarship, follow-up interviews are appropriate for the research questions of whether there are differences in the identification and interpretation of compliments and CRs, and whether norms informing these behaviours may vary among groups of the Chinese. I begin by showing how my adoption of this method was informed by relevant scholarship. I then evaluate two types of interviews frequently used in social science research: structured and open-ended interviews. I acknowledge the analytical complexity of interpreting interview data and propose some ways to deal with it.

As many studies (Mills 2003, Haugh 2007a, Spencer-Oatey 2007) indicate, transcripts of conversations do not always provide sufficient information regarding politeness evaluations made by conversationalists in interaction. Also, in discussing the usefulness of interview in social science research, Patton points out that 'we cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time' (2002:341). This entails that analysts need to draw not only from the locally occasioned normative structures but also the wider context which may prove salient to the analysis. According to Arundale, this context may include 'aspects of the currently invoked identity of the participants' or 'the history of the participants' interaction both prior to and within the talk being examined' (2010:2096). Similarly, Mills (2003) views an utterance as a result of a long process of thinking, habit, and past experiences. She argues, clearly influenced by Bourdieu's (1977) practice theory of language, that perceptions of (im)politeness are dependent on both the interactants' assessments of what is appropriate within a particular context and the prior interactional history that affects those interpretations.

These theorists all suggest that to access 'those things we cannot directly observe' (Patton 2002:340) in conversations, interview can be very useful to elicit interactants' perceptions of specific language use. Moreover, as Kasper notes, it can 'triangulate the researcher's interpretation of authentic discourse data' (2004:333). The literature shows that structured and open-ended interviews are often distinguished in social science studies (see e.g. Grindsted 2005, Axinn and Pearce 2006, Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006, Hutchby and Wooffitt 2008). In what follows I evaluate them in detail to show the appropriateness of structured interviews in my study. To begin with, according to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, by a structured interview, it means:

[Y]ou will ask each participant the same series of questions. If the participant strays too much from the topic at hand, or says some interesting things but

things that aren't directly relevant to the study, the interviewer guides the conversation back to the interview questions...Ultimately a structured interview allows for a greater degree of comparison between interviews because the resulting data has a higher degree of standardization. (2006:125)

We can see that a major advantage of structured interviews lies in their ability to collect comparable sets of data, which is guaranteed by asking 'the same series of questions'. Moreover, as argued in 2.4, intention of compliment and CR behaviours is not self-evident. Hence it is hardly accessible by examining the transcribed texts alone. Thus, follow-up interviews can be useful in accessing speakers' perceptions or judgements of an utterance. In Grindsted's terms, they can be used 'to verify people's behaviour, opinions, beliefs, values, etc. at any given moment' (2005:1015). Therefore, interviews can be used to elicit interactants' perceptions, for example, concerning norms informing their compliment and CR behaviours.

By contrast, in open-ended interviews informants are allowed to change the course of interview interaction and bring up new issues in the process. According to Patton (2002:342), no predetermined set of questions would be appropriate in such fieldwork. In other words, in this type of interview, a researcher is free to improvise questions at a point where interesting issues arise. Data gathered in this fashion 'will be different for each person interviewed' (Patton 2002:343). Consequently, these data lack comparability which is crucial for my present research exploring evidence of generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and the underlying norms.

In sum, to tease out aspects of the context beyond those available from the conversation, structured interviews can be used to access participants' judgements and perceptions of their own and their co-participants' behaviour, for example, a compliment and a CR. Moreover, the literature shows that a structured interview

allows for a greater degree of comparison between interviews. Therefore, it was adopted in my research examining compliment and CR behaviours and the informing norms from a cross-generational perspective.

In spite of this, I am fully aware of the analytical complexity of interpreting follow-up interview data. For example, Haugh argues that '*post facto* evaluations do not necessarily reliably reflect evaluations made during the actual interaction itself' (2007b:310). However, Spencer-Oatey (2007:654) argues that face is always a subjective perception and can never be judged in true or false terms. For the author, post-event comments not only help 'identify people's face sensitivities and evaluative reactions', but also 'provide insights into the cognitive underpinnings of their reactions' (2007:654). Nevertheless, the issue raised by Haugh suggests that follow-up interviews should be conducted as soon as possible. Also, provision of extended extracts in which potential compliment events are embedded would greatly help the interviewees to 'relive' the social interaction. Moreover, as Spencer-Oatey and Xing's (2005) study indicates, playback of the recordings is very effective in this regard. In a nutshell, participants' interview accounts show alternative interpretation of their utterances, so it brings into view alternatives to the analyst's perspective. Therefore, although participants may sometimes be positioning themselves differently in this interaction, interview data is still showing how they rationalize the use of that utterance.

3.3 Preliminary studies

This section provides an account of two preliminary studies that I carried out before I set off for my four months fieldwork in mainland China. One study surveyed the notion of *chēngzàn* in Chinese and the other pilot-tested audio-recording of dinner party conversations and follow-up interviews.

3.3.1 A survey of the notion of *chēngzàn* ('compliments') in Chinese

The motivation for surveying the notion of *chēngzàn* arose from my observation that in the literature on compliments in Chinese inconsistent terms are used as the equivalent of 'compliments' in English. This brief survey is thus intended to show that *chēngzàn* is an appropriate term in Chinese for compliments among friends and should be used in my interviews. Below I focus on delineating the differences between *chēngzàn* and *gōngwéi*, which are used widely in previous studies on Chinese compliments.

The existing literature shows that a range of terms is used to refer to compliments in Chinese. Among them, *chēngzàn* (e.g. Zou 1990, Shi 1997, Zhao 1998) and *gōngwéi* (e.g. Wu 1996, Duan 2001, Gu 2008) appear to be most favoured. Moreover, these two terms seem to have to date been assumed to be equivalent. Thus it is necessary to sketch out their differences.

Etymologically, as Gu (2003) notes, according to the earliest intelligible inscriptions carved on oracle bones excavated from the ruins of the Shang Dynasty (16th to 11th BCE) capital Anyang in China, the character *gōng* depicts a person worshipping the dragon. Since in ancient China the dragon was an exclusive symbol for the emperor, the image appears to indicate the unequal relationship between the worshiper and the worshipped (i.e. the emperor). This semantic meaning seems to be retained in terms like *gōngwéi* in modern Chinese. Moreover, Gu (2003) contends that the character *wéi* originally meant rope and was later extended to mean maintenance. We may thus assume that when compounded, the term *gōngwéi* was used in ancient China to refer to the social act or ritual of worshipping mainly to maintain the hierarchical order.

In modern Chinese, Gu maintains that the term *gōngwéi* means 'say good words merely to please others' (2003:531). Evidence shows that the behaviour of *gōngwéi*

is often evaluated negatively in social interaction. For example, this is clearly suggested in Zhou and Wang's remark that '*Chēngzàn* should be sincere and well-based. It should be from the bottom of the heart, or it will be taken as *gōngwéi*' (2004:121). Furthermore, the strong negative implication seems to have been ingrained in some Chinese proverbial sayings. The most pertinent one is perhaps *Gōngwéi jiù hǎobǐ shì xiāngshuǐ kěyǐ wénwén, dàn qiānwàn bù yào hē* ('*Gōngwéi* is just like perfume. It is fragrant to smell but never drink it.'). In this sense, *gōngwéi* is equivalent to flattery in American English, in which, according to Knowles, a similar proverb is found, i.e. 'Flattery, like perfume, should be smelled, not swallowed' (2009:278). One thing the saying tells us is that you can accept *gōngwéi* with grace, but never take it as true. Probably for this reason, *chēngzàn* between friends is sometimes prefaced with a phrase indicating the speakers' sincerity. A common one, for instance, is *búshì wǒ gōngwéi* (literally, 'I'm not *gōngwéi*').

By contrast, while its pragmatic meaning is certainly open to participants' negotiation, *chēngzàn* generally tends more to be somewhere towards the positive end on the negative-positive semantic continuum. According to *Xīnhuá zìdiǎn* (2004), presumably the most popular Chinese dictionary, the character *chēng* means 'say good words' and *zàn* refers to 'praise and compliment'. Clearly, neither component of the compound *chēngzàn* suggests a trace of negative meaning. Moreover, it does not appear to imply unequal relationship between interactants as *gōngwéi* does. I may now conclude that *chēngzàn* seems to be a more appropriate term for compliments between equals like friends. And for this reason, *chēngzàn* is used in the present study.

3.3.2 Pilot study

To ensure that the methods of data collection I proposed are suitable for my present research, they were pilot-tested with following objectives:

- (1) To test out the whole recording procedure (i.e. organizing parties, solutions to the observer's paradox, control of variables, ethical issues, etc.)
- (2) To observe instances of compliments performed by native speakers of Chinese in spontaneous naturally occurring dinner conversations.
- (3) To identify possible problems with my interview scheme and revise it accordingly.

Due to time and logistical constraints, the pilot study was carried out in England rather than in China. I hosted a dinner party in my flat at Loughborough and audio-recorded the whole conversation after obtaining the participants' informed consent. Specifically, I issued an informal invitation to four friends studying or working at the town two weeks in advance. I told them that the dinner conversations would be audio-recorded and used in my research. Without exception, they were all interested in the social activity. As a result, six participants attended the party, i.e. four friends, my husband and me. They are all native speakers of Chinese in their thirties, with higher education or vocational school education background. Females and males were not equally represented, which was precisely due to my limited social network in England.

Like researchers such as Wieland (1995), and Tannen (2005[1984]), I was a participant throughout the party. The switched-on digital recorder was set up on the table before the party started and was not switched off until after the table was cleared. To minimize its intrusiveness, the recorder was put alongside my mobile phone case, with the flashing indicator facing downwards. Consequently, I recorded approximately two hours of conversation. Thanks to the recorder's technological sophistication, different participants' contributions turned out to be extremely clear and highly distinguishable except for the overlaps. Then in the subsequent two days, I transcribed all the extended extracts in which potential compliments are embedded.

The second step was to test out the two sets of structured interview questions I devised (3.4.2.3). The first set consists of six questions. Some of them were to elicit the potential complimenters' perceptions of their intention regarding a particular utterance and the compliment topic and of the politeness norms that may inform their compliment behaviour. The others were designed to seek their anticipated responses and comments on their co-participants' responses. Illustrated below is the evolution of wording of the question aimed to access the speaker's intention of a compliment.

The first version is *Nǐshuō zhèjùhuà de yìtú shì shénme* 你说这句话的意图是什么? (i.e. 'What was your intention when you said *Y*?'). The key word in this question is *yìtú*, which is used as the equivalent of 'intention' in English by most Chinese pragmatics studies (e.g. Lin and Yu 2002/2006, Chu and Huo 2004). However, two problems arose in my interviews. First, when asked this question, the interviewees tended to be guarded or say something which is not closely relevant. For example, they elaborated on the propositional content rather than to articulate or explicate their illocutionary force of the utterance. Second, some interviewees appeared uncomfortable when I asked about their *yìtú*, which, according to my observation, seems to suggest that the interviewer doubted their sincerity or was interested in their ulterior motives.

Given this, I used *yòngyì* which, as some Chinese pragmatics studies (He 1991, Ran and Hou 2009) suggest, is synonymous with *yìtú*. However, the interviewees' responses indicated that *yòngyì*, like *yìtú*, appears to suggest a hidden motive. I then tried the term *yánxiàzhīyì* ('underlying intention') and found it more neutral and hence useful to elicit the speaker's intention of an utterance. Thus, the key word in the aforesaid question evolved from *yìtú* through *yòngyì* to *yánxiàzhīyì*.

The second set of questions aimed to seek the potential complimentee's perceptions and classification of CRs as well as evidence of the politeness norms that informed their CR behaviour. For example, to access their classification of CRs, I first asked the question: 'By saying Z, were you trying to convey acceptance and rejection of, vague attitude towards, etc. the compliment?' However, difficulties arose again in the interviews. One interesting problem, for instance, is that sometimes it was premature to ask the above question before I could establish what the respondent was actually responding to. It is illustrated below with an extract from the party.

Extract 3.1 (pilot study)

- 1 H: 研究生 就 很难 叫 在一起.
 postgraduate be very difficult ask together
 'it's really hard to organize a party for postgraduates.'
- 2 A: 嗯 (.) 是 是.
 (particle) yes yes
 'um (.) yeah, yeah.'
- 3 H: 研究生 就是 两三个 或者 一两个, 一对一对的 那种.
 postgraduate be two three or one two a couple a couple like that
 'postgraduates often stay in very small groups, or they just stay with their partner.'
- 4 A: 对了, 对了, 嗯 (.) 那 你的 另外一半呢 ((laugh))
 yes (particle) yes (particle) (particle) so your other half (particle)
 'yeah, yeah, what about your other half [boyfriend] ((laugh))'
- 5 H: 我的 另外一半 到 现在 没有 啦,
 my other half to now no (particle)
 'my other half [boyfriend] has gone now,'
- 6 A: ((laugh))
- 7 H: 也 请 A 老师 帮 我 选 一 选.
 also please teacher help me choose one choose
 'could you please introduce one to me.'
- 8 A: ((laugh)) 你 太 会说话 了.
 you too eloquent (particle)
 '((laugh)) *you've got a really able tongue.'
- 9 H: 我 没有.
 I not

'I don't have.'

10 A: 嗯 (.) 还年轻, 现在 还 早 呢.
(particle) still young now still early (particle)
'um (.) still young, it's too early.'

11 H: 没有.

no
'no.'

In this extract, the arrowed utterance could be interpreted ambiguously either as responding to the prior formulaic compliment (i.e. 'you've got a really able tongue') or as stating the fact that she did not have a boyfriend. Thus it is critical to first establish what H actually denied by saying 'I don't have' before a CR response type could be assigned. When asked the pre-designed question, the interviewee answered: "I meant I don't have a boyfriend. I didn't respond to 'you've got a really able tongue'. I just wanted to complete what I had said earlier". Therefore, what appear to be adjacency pair parts are actually irrelevant. In other words, the prior formulaic compliment seems to misfire.

Therefore, I concluded, perhaps for the first time in empirical research on compliments and CRs, that a researcher needs to establish what the hearer is actually responding to rather than assuming it as a CR (2.4.2.1). For this reason, I added to the existing list the question 'Did you respond to *Y* when you said *Z*? / What did you respond to when you said *Z*?' to legitimize the categorization of CR strategies. Based on this, a revised version of interview questions was created, which is detailed in the subsection of data collection (3.4.2.3).

The pilot study was conducted partly to explore the availability of compliment tokens in dinner conversations. As in Wieland's (1995) study, many compliments were identified and the majority was paid to the hostess and host. Besides, as Jucker (2009) notes, the dishes were complimented very frequently in the conversation. Nonetheless, my recording displays a wide variety of compliment topics. To

illustrate, among the 22 instances of compliments identified in a 10 minutes extract, food compliments occurred most frequently (e.g. 'it tastes delicious' and 'I really want to have some more, really delicious'), but appearance (e.g. 'you have a really good figure'), clothes (e.g. 'this shirt is very nice'), ability (e.g. 'you are capable'), possession (e.g. 'your bag is really nice'), and child (e.g. 'your son is very smart, he is that kind of smart kid') were also complimented.

To conclude, the pilot study achieved nearly all the objectives stated at the outset. Firstly, the data collection procedure is viable. The dinner party was informal and was organized at home without any pre-defined constraint. Thus all the friends conversed spontaneously and naturally with the recorder on the table. Participants were involved in the conversation over food. The researcher and invitees are friends, and thus she is not an intruder. A justifiable advantage is that it is easier to control the social variables very naturally in the process of organizing the party.

Secondly, since the party was held at home where there was no noise made by non-participants, the quality of recording is extremely good. It greatly facilitates the subsequent transcription. Moreover, the recording was stored in mp3 format, thus it can be easily transferred to a computer, on which I can easily locate any extract of conversation for greater scrutiny. Finally, as suggested above, I gathered substantial tokens of compliments.

Nevertheless, some difficulties were indeed encountered in the pilot study. First, I controlled extra-linguistic variables such as relationship, social distance, and generation, but failed to balance the gender of participants. As I said earlier, the unequal representation of genders stems from the researcher's limited social connections in Loughborough. However, this problem does not seem insurmountable because in their homeland many researchers generally have more

friends and friends' friends, the social capital which linguists can resort to (see e.g. Milroy 1987[1980]).

Second, the compliments were overwhelmingly directed at the host and hostess. This may pose a real problem in the actual fieldwork because in the Chinese cultural context it is usual for the older generation to host dinner parties at home whereas it is uncommon for the younger, particularly students, to have such social gatherings at home. Even if parties are held at home, the one-child generation are much less likely than the older generation to prepare their dishes themselves. As a result, nice words about the food may count as compliments for the older but not for the younger (cf. 2.4.1.1). Therefore, to ensure greater comparability, it would be better to collect data in such venues as restaurants where we just need to place orders with the waitresses.

Finally, some interview questions were found in need of further refining. In particular, the wording of questions to elicit the speaker's intention of a particular utterance is critical and needs to be thought through.

3.4 Research procedure

From October 2008 to January 2009, I carried out my fieldwork in four cities and four towns in the provinces of Sichuan and Yunnan, China. Such a wide range of different field sites were selected in order to minimize the influence of possible regional variation on the speech acts under investigation. To be precise, the reasons for this selection are threefold.

First, Sichuan Province could largely represent China's heartland closer to Xi'an where Chen's (1993) data on CRs were collected. In contrast, Yunnan is a frontier province where Yuan (2002) did her fieldwork. Thus my data would be able to address what Yuan (2002) and Chen and Yang (2010) claim to be regional differences in CR behaviour (2.2.3). Second, Yunnan is known as *mínzú dà shěng*

(‘ethnic province’) since twenty-five ethnic groups have been identified here. It hence boasts the most ethnically diversified province in China. Third, in Yunnan sixteen ethnic groups are distributed across the international boundaries for centuries (Gao 2008). As I reviewed in 2.2.3, these groups of Chinese living somewhat in isolation and in frequent contact with foreign cultures such as Vietnam, Laos and Burma may differ from other groups in the speech behaviour under study. Moreover, as a means to keep regional variation under control, it was ensured that the participants were selected from parts of China as varied as possible.

Apart from the above considerations, I selected the field sites also because I have wide social connections there, which as indicated earlier (3.3.2), would facilitate my population sampling. In total, 16 intra-generational multiparty spontaneous naturally occurring conversations were audio-recorded in restaurants. The number of parties involved was equally distributed among the generations brought up before and after the launch of China’s reform (cf. 2.2.2). In the current study the older generation are referred to as the pre-One-Child-Policy generation (pre-OCPG) and the younger generation as the post-One-Child-Policy generation (post-OCPG). There was no control or manipulation of any kind over the conversations. Thus, every conversation recorded was spontaneous and naturally occurring. What comes next describes the selection of subjects and data collection.

3.4.1 Selection of subjects

In the light of Milroy’s (1987[1980]) method of locating subjects, I started by enlisting 8 friends from the pre-OCPG and another 8 from the post-OCPG in my social networks. I restricted my subjects among adults since Holmes’ study suggests that ‘complimenting [and hence compliment responding] tends to be an adult behaviour’ (1986:505). Given that the post-OCPG group are smaller in age range and most were still students, every effort was made to ensure that the first 8 friends selected are varied in educational backgrounds (including the programmes on which

they were registered), occupations and places of origin. It is worth noting here that as indicated in places such as 2.2.2 the pre- and post-OCPG are, in the strict sense, subcultural rather than age groups. My focus is on the changes of people's linguistic behaviour as a result of sociocultural reforms but not of aging. Since China's reform, particularly what is commonly known as 'One-Child Policy' came into force in 1978 (2.2.2), the post-OCPG participants can range in age from 18 to 31.

I asked each of these 16 friends to invite 4 to 9 friends from their generational group and organize dinner parties in restaurants. This number of participants (5 to 10) was required at each party partially because in China many standard tables in restaurants seat ten. Moreover, this is because, as Duranti (2009[1997]) notes, social interaction among a large group is less likely than a small one to be influenced by the recording device. To keep the gender variable constant, the organizers were asked to try to ensure that males and females were represented as equally as possible at each party.

Nevertheless, participants at the first five parties of both generational groups turned out to be unbalanced in gender. Thus to achieve a global equal representation of genders, the organizers of the last three parties were asked to invite the number of male and female friends as needed. It is worth noting that in the third party among the pre-OCPG members, the organizer originally invited 8 friends including me. But on our way to the restaurant, we came across two friends and they joined us at that party. In China, a friend can, in most situations, take part in such an informal social gathering even without prior invitation. I also talked with the two friends about my intention of recording the conversation for the purpose of my research and they both gave their consent. Consequently, there were as many as 11 participants at the third pre-OCPG dinner party.

Altogether, a total of 16 dinner conversations were recorded. 119 participants vary in age (18–65), occupations and majors of study, and education. Their places of

origin include the provinces of Guangxi, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Hubei, Hunan, Inner Mongolia, Jiangsu, Liaoning, Shaanxi, Shandong, Sichuan, Tianjin, Yunnan and Zhejiang, covering nearly half of China. The numbers and gender of the pre- and post-OCPG participants were nearly balanced: of all the 61 participants in the 8 pre-OCPG conversations, 30 were males and 31 females. Similarly, of all the 58 participants at the 8 post-OCPG parties, 29 were males and 29 females. The overwhelming majority were friends though intimates such as married couples were involved on some occasions (Appendix: Profiles of Participants).

3.4.2 Data collection

Two types of data were collected: audio-recorded spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and follow-up interviews. The recorded conversations allow me to focus on actual utterances embedded in stretches of conversation. In the light of the postmodernist approach to politeness, I did not assume that compliments and CRs are readily recognizable. Thus I used interview data to verify whether or not these utterances function as compliments and CRs. Also, the interview data were used to categorize compliment topics and to classify CR strategies. Moreover, they provided evidence of politeness norms that inform compliment and CR behaviours.

3.4.2.1 Audio-recording conversations

As noted earlier, some subjects were approached before others. When they were happy to act as organizers of the dinner parties, they were asked to inform their friends of the recording to be done and analyzed in my research. It was their friends who decided whether to join the party or whether their conversational contributions could be used for the research purpose. As Tannen (2005[1984]) and Wieland (1995) did in their research, I participated in all of the pre-OCPG dinner conversations since I belong to this generational group. Following the same procedure tested in my pilot study (3.3.2), I did all the recordings by myself.

To record post-OCPG conversations, I arranged a short meeting with the organizer the day before the party or in some cases hours before the party. This was to ensure that they knew how to use the recorder properly and some basic techniques of audio-recording conversations at table. For example, to reduce the recorder's influence on the naturalness of conversations, I requested that the recorder should be switched on before their friends arrived and placed together with the accompanying case somewhere on the table. Towards the end of the party, the organizer would text me and I would join them before the participants dispersed.

In the subsequent thirty minutes or so, I had a casual chat with the participants 'in order to build up a good rapport with them' (Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2005:61). This is because '[t]he relationship which is established between the interviewer and those being interviewed is important in determining the quality of the [interview] data' (Jones 1991:208). Also, by doing so, in Spencer-Oatey and Xing's words, the participants 'would be honest and open' (2005:61) with me in the follow-up interviews. For example, the chat can provide relevant contextual information (e.g. their hobbies, character, interpersonal skill, etc.) which may be useful in data analysis and discussion. For another, by chatting with the participants, the researcher got familiar with their voice, conversational style, etc. which would make it easier to distinguish between their conversational contributions in transcribing.

Moreover, as indicated in my invitations, the participants were asked to read and sign the Informed Consent Form, and enter their personal information including name, age, gender, education, occupation/major of study, place of origin, mobile number and interlocutors' relationship to each other. Finally, I proposed taking a group photo, the seating arrangement of which facilitated later transcribing and data analysis.

Consequently, about 30 hours of recordings were obtained and the recordings among the two generations were nearly equal in length, with each conversation running from about 50 minutes to 3 hours. The detailed duration of recorded conversations is shown below.

Table 3.1: *Duration of recorded conversations among two generations at different parties*⁶.

	<i>Party 1</i>	<i>Party 2</i>	<i>Party 3</i>	<i>Party 4</i>	<i>Party 5</i>	<i>Party 6</i>	<i>Party 7</i>	<i>Party 8</i>	Total
Pre-OCPG	2:42:16	1:23:55	1:53:00	1:34:06	2:21:28	0:50:58	3:10:00	1:05:16	15:00:59
Post-OCPG	1:40:00	2:00:50	0:48:34	2:00:00	1:20:04	2:28:57	2:00:00	2:47:00	15:05:25
Total (hours)									30:06:24

3.4.2.2 Coding compliments and compliment responses

Upon the completion of each recording, I transcribed the extended stretches of conversation embedded with potential compliment and CR sequences. By a potential compliment, termed an ‘analyst’s compliment’ (AC) in my study, I mean an utterance which fits Holmes’ definition of a compliment (2.4.1.1).

The coding of CRs was based on Yuan’s definition of a CR as ‘anything that follows a compliment, verbal or non-verbal’ (2002:194). Specifically, I located as a potential CR the first utterance, if any, made by the potential complimentee after an AC. In cases where no utterance was produced by the addressee, a potential non-verbal response was assumed. A potential CR subsumed under either of these types was referred to as an ‘analyst’s CR’ (ACR).

For interrater reliability, I asked my colleague, a native speaker of Chinese, to independently transcribe ACs and ACRs in the first four conversations. To ensure that the same criteria for coding were used, we started by examining Holmes’

⁶ The parties are arranged chronologically according to the order of recordings.

definition of a compliment and Yuan's definition of a CR. This yielded an interrater agreement coefficient of 91%, showing a high degree of agreement. Drawing on insights from previous studies (e.g. Achiba 2003) on speech acts, we discussed those items that were not agreed upon until we came to a full agreement. Building on this interrater agreement and my discussion with the colleague about the disagreements, I transcribed and coded all the remaining 12 conversations. At this stage, the colleague did not transcribe ACs and ACRs as in the first four conversations. Instead, he read through all my coding and the corresponding conversations for possible points of disagreement. The final versions of ACs and ACRs benefited substantially from my discussion with him.

3.4.2.3 Follow-up interviews

With ACs and ACRs coded, I conducted and audio-recorded follow-up interviews, normally two or three days after the party. Since intention is not easily identifiable (2.3, 2.4), interview data were used to verify whether these utterances function as compliments and CRs for the interactants. Another major aim of carrying out interviews was to elicit the participants' own views on the classification of compliment topics and CR strategies. Moreover, this method of data collection was employed to gather participants' perceptions concerning politeness norms informing their compliment and CR behaviours.

Precisely, I started this process by preparing interview questions specifically for each of the potential complimenters and complimentees according to the pre-designed list as shown below. I then contacted them for the appointment of face-to-face individual interviews. The interviewees were free to choose a place where they would feel comfortable and which was suitable for tape recording. It is important to point out explicitly that I just interviewed those participants who issued a potential compliment and/or produced a potential CR.

In the interview I first asked them to listen for the seemingly unintelligible or inaudible utterances and unclear overlaps by replaying the recording. Their recollections and explanations helped produce a more faithful transcript, some parts of which may otherwise have simply been treated as ‘indecipherable’. In the remaining time, I asked and recorded all the questions prepared in advance. In terms of length, the interviews varied approximately from 15 to 60 minutes.

Interview questions

1. For the potential complimenter

1.1 你说这句话的言下之意是什么？

What was your intention when you said *Y*?

1.2 你是在称赞对方吗？

Did you intend to pay him/her a compliment?

1.3 你为什么称赞？

Why did you pay a compliment?

1.4 你称赞对方的什么东西？

What were you complimenting him/her on?

1.5 你希望对方怎么回答你的称赞？

What response did you expect him/her to give to your compliment?

1.6 你怎么评价他/她的这个回答？

What is your comment on his/her response?

2. For the potential complimentee

2.1 认为对方说这句话的言下之意是什么？

What did you think was his/her intention when s/he said *Y*?

2.2 你认为对方是在称赞你吗？

Did you perceive *Y* as a compliment?

2.3 称赞你的什么东西？

What did you perceive was complimented on?

2.4 当你听到这一称赞时，是什么感受？（高兴/不好意思）

What was your feeling upon hearing the compliment (e.g. happy, embarrassed, etc.)?

2.5 你的这句话‘*Z*’是对前面那句话‘*Y*’的回答吗？/你的这句话‘*Z*’是对什么的回答？

Did you respond to *Y* when you said *Z*? / What did you respond to when you said *Z*?

2.6 你的回答‘*Z*’是表示对称赞的接受、拒绝，还是表示什么？

By saying Z, were you trying to convey acceptance and rejection of, vague attitude towards, etc. the compliment?

2.7 你为什么这样回答?

Why did you give such a response?

2.8 你为什么没有回答对方的称赞?

Why didn't you respond to the compliment?

3.5 Notes on data transcribing and translating

To produce a quality transcript, I used a transcription procedure consisting of three stages. First of all, soon after each dinner party, I transcribed the stretches of conversations containing potential compliment events. At this stage, the apparently indecipherable parts were left blank to be dealt with in my subsequent interview. They mainly include overlapping speech, unclear utterances, utterances I found hard to assign the speaker, etc. This proved especially useful in transcribing post-OCPG conversations in which I did not participate. For example, an utterance from a post-OCPG conversation concerns dance learning. In my first attempt, I took participant B as receiving an AC on his knowledge about different dance styles. However, in my subsequent interview with B, he corrected that A was mistaken for him because he knows nothing about dance. A number of such embarrassing transcription mistakes were identified and corrected by the interviewees, which can be viewed as an integral part of transcribing multiparty conversations.

At the second stage, I re-listened to the recording, focusing in particular on what had been checked in the interviews. On the completion of these two stages, a more faithful and readable transcript was produced.

The third stage was to shape a more detailed transcript using techniques pioneered in the Conversation Analysis. They allow me to capture the complex features of natural conversations including such details as sequencing, intervals and characteristics of speech delivery. The transcription conventions I used was mainly based on the Jefferson system, which is extensively explained in Atkinson and

Heritage (1984:ix–xvi, see List of Transcription Symbols and Abbreviations). In the conversational extracts participants' direct quote and *pinyin*, a romanized alphabet for Mandarin Chinese, are italicized. For ease of reading, the English free translation is given in single inverted commas.

I transcribed all the interviews in their entirety, but without details such as overlapping speech, pause and intonation as exhibited in the conversational extracts. I found it much easier to transcribe interviews than to transcribe the multiparty conversations. This is because in the dyadic conversation between the researcher and interviewee, many features characteristic of multiparty conversations such as overlapping occurred much less frequently. Another reason is that as Labov (1994) notes, in the one-to-one interviews the interviewee was more ready to use standard language.

Apart from transcribing, a note is needed for data translation. In my study translation of the English interview questions into Chinese for the participants involved three steps. Firstly, as indicated in 3.3.1, I justified my use of the Chinese term *chēngzàn* in my interview given that the English term of 'compliment' does not map simply onto a single Chinese term. Secondly, my colleague, the co-coder I mentioned in 3.4.2.2, checked my draft translation before it was used in the pilot study. Thirdly, I revised the Chinese translation based on the findings from the pilot study, for example, the wording of 'intention' in Chinese (3.3.2).

As regards the presenting of transcripts with translation, I used the vertical three-line format: original, interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme gloss and free translation, one on top of the other. That is, Chinese characters provide the original talk in the top line, followed by interlinear glosses in the second, with the free translation at the bottom. This format is used not only because it is the standard format for leading linguistics journals such as the *Journal of Politeness Research* but also because, as

Duranti (2009[1997]) notes, it allows readers to follow my translation process closely. And finally, for the sake of faithfulness, all the translation was verified by two Chinese-English bilingual researchers.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, I began by showing how my adoption of multiple methods of data collection was informed by relevant scholarship to address my research questions. I argued that recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations was able to address the research question of whether there are differences in compliment and CR behaviours and provide a basis for follow-up interviews. I also argued that structured interviews were appropriate for addressing the question of whether there are differences in the identification and interpretation of compliments and CRs and whether norms informing compliment and CR behaviours may vary among groups of the Chinese. I then provided an account of my survey of *chēngzàn* in Chinese and the pilot study to test out the feasibility of my research design. I also presented a detailed account of the research procedure, including the selection of subjects, audio-recording conversations, coding compliments and CRs, and follow-up interviews. Finally, I provided two notes, outlining respectively the processes of transcription and translation in my study.

Chapter Four

Compliments and Compliment Responses from the Participants’ Perspective

4.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to make a case for which utterances are to be included in the data. I begin by showing two types of compliments which were excluded from the data. I then report on the findings concerning four relationships between the analyst’s assigned intention (AAI), speaker’s intention (SI) and hearer’s attributed intention (HAI), which were derived from the process of coding and verifying compliments. I conclude by providing a figure showing the complex relationship between ACs, ACRs, verified compliments (VCs) and verified CRs (VCRs).

4.2 Two types of compliments excluded from the data

In this section I show that considering my study examines compliments and CRs among dinner party participants, two types of compliments were excluded from my data: (a) ACs paid and/or received by waitresses; (b) positive assessments on non-participants of the party identified by participant raters as compliments.

Applying the coding scheme as articulated in 3.4.2.2, I identified a total of 530 ACs. Among them 6 ACs were directed at waitresses of the restaurants where the conversations were recorded. Consider the following two arrowed utterances:

Extract 4.1 (pre-7)⁷

1 Waitress: 今天晚上 有 招待 不周呢 地方 请 多多原谅.

⁷ ‘pre’ is the abbreviation for pre-OCPG and 7 for the serial number of the party. Participants are anonymized via the use of letters. Place and people’s names that appear in the conversations are pseudonymous. This rule applies throughout the thesis.

this evening have serve not considerate place please many forgive
'please forgive us if our service doesn't fully meet your high expectations this evening.'

→2 G: 哦, 可以: 你说 这句话 越发觉得 你招待 太周到 了.
(particle) OK you say this utterance more feel you serve very considerate (particle)
'oh, good: your words make us feel even stronger that the restaurant's service is very satisfactory.'

3 F: ((laugh))

4 Waitress: 不好意思 不好意思.
embarrassed embarrassed
'(I'm) embarrassed, embarrassed.'

→5 F: 可以 了 可以 了.
good (particle) good (particle)
'good enough, good enough.'

Lines 2 and 5 are two ACs on the service provided in the restaurant, but they were both paid to the waitress who was only temporarily involved in the dinner conversation. My study is concerned with interactions among the participants at table, ACs and in turn ACRs involving waitresses are thus beyond my scope of research. All the 6 ACs directed at waitresses were thus excluded from the data.

As argued in 2.4.1.1, there may be cases in which some utterances are seen by participants as compliments but do not meet Holmes' criteria. Here I explore this issue in depth using the first two of my recorded conversations, respectively among the pre- and post-OCPG participants. As the first step, I and my colleague, the co-coder I mentioned in 3.4.2.2, independently coded ACs. Then following my interviews of the participants who gave and/or received ACs, I asked one participant from each of the conversations to transcribe what they judged as compliments in the conversations. Thus one of them represents pre-OCPG participants and the other post-OCPG interlocutors. I did not discuss with them about what counts as *chēngzàn* ('compliment') or any relevant scholarship. This was to ensure that the two participant raters used their own judgements as criteria for identifying *chēngzàn*. As they found it difficult to transcribe spontaneous conversations, I later asked them

to simply listen for *chēngzàn* according to their folk knowledge and I transcribed the stretch of conversation in which what they judged as compliments are embedded.

Not surprisingly, they both picked up some utterances which do not fit Holmes' definition. These utterances are of two subtypes. The first subtype attributes credit to the speaker's own child while in the second subtype certain credit is given to someone who was not at the party. In total 23 such utterances were identified by the participant raters as *chēngzàn* in the two conversations. They are exemplified below.

Extract 4.2 (pre-2)

- 1 B: 当老师, 都不在乎 这个学生的成绩 好坏, 关键 是 道德.
as teacher all not care this student's performance good bad matter be ethic
'for us teachers, a student's integrity matters more than their academic performance.'
- 2 C: 我们 都有 点 共同点.
we all have little commonality
'we share the same view.'
- 3 B: 你 学习 再差 我 不会 歧视 你.
you(r) study very bad I not discriminate you
'I won't discriminate against anyone however poorly s/he performs in studies.'
- 4 C: 那跟 小娃 没有 养 废 嘛.
that child not raise bad (particle)
'that child is well disciplined.'
- 5 B: 就是 要 会 做人.
be want can do man
'a child should learn to behave with integrity.'
- 6 C: Li 见着 我们 都 肯 叫得 很.
see us all ready greet (particle)
'Li is always ready to greet us whenever we come across him.'
- 7 D: 他 ((D's 儿子)) 道德品质 各方面 都 还是 好=
he son integrity every aspect all still be good
'he ((D's son)) is a man of integrity='
- 8 F: [是 啊, 好 呢.
yes (particle) good (particle)
'[yeah, (he is) good.'

9 D: =[就是 那点 学习 成绩 会呢的差.
be that study performance so poor
'=[but he is so poor in his studies.'

The arrowed utterance in line 6 was identified by the participant rater as a compliment. Speaker C said some nice words about Li, who is the son of one of C's colleagues. Neither the colleague nor the son was present at the party. Similarly, line 7 illustrates the case in which an utterance was viewed by the participant rater as a compliment which bestows credit upon the speaker's own son, who is not present, either.

In addition, some comments about food like 'Delicious', 'Really tasty' and 'This dish is really special' were also identified by the two participants as compliments. In my pilot study (3.3.2) and many previous studies (e.g. Wieland 1995, Golato 2005), such positive assessments do function in many cases as compliments on the culinary skills of the host/hostess. Nevertheless, since the conversations in my study were recorded in restaurants, no dishes were cooked by any of the conversationalists. Positive assessments like these were not directed to any participant and thus did not have complimentary force. Consequently, three subtypes of compliments identified by participant raters were not included in the data since they were paid to a non-participant of the party.

To sum up, I have shown two types of compliments were excluded from my data: the ACs received by waitresses and the positive assessments on the non-participants. My research is concerned with compliments among dinner party participants, so they were beyond the scope of the present study. As a result, 524 out of the 530 ACs were established for further analysis.

4.3 Compliments from the participants' perspective

4.3.1 Introduction

This section aims to make a case for which utterances are to be included as verified compliments (VCs). As I showed in the research methodology (3.2.2), studies (e.g. Mills 2003, Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2005, Spencer-Oatey 2007) that adopt a postmodernist approach are increasingly drawing on interview data. Following them, I used follow-up interviews to look for evidence of the speaker's intention in making an utterance as well as the intention attributed by the hearer to the speaker. I show that participants' judgements provide the yardstick for categorizing an utterance as a compliment.

My verification of 524 ACs by interviewing the participants involved revealed four relationships between AAI, SI and HAI: (1) AAI overlaps with both SI and HAI; (2) AAI differs from both SI and HAI; (3) AAI differs from SI but overlaps with HAI; (4) AAI overlaps with SI but differs from HAI. These four relationships are illustrated in the following subsections.

4.3.2 Analyst's assigned intention overlaps with both speaker's intention and hearer's attributed intention

To begin with, there is evidence from interview accounts that an utterance identified by the researcher as a compliment (an AC) was really intended by the speaker and simultaneously perceived by the recipient as such. This can be well illustrated as follows.

Extract 4.3 (pre-2)

→1 E: 来 (.) F, 我 敬 你们 一口, 看 你们 呢的 幸福.
come I propose you (pl.) a toast see you (pl.) so happy
'come on (.) F, I would like to propose a toast to you couple ((F and C)), *you enjoy so happy life.'

2 F: 哎哟,

- (particle)
 ‘oh,’
- 3 E: 祝 你们 天天 幸福.
 wish you (pl.) every day happy
 ‘wish you happy every day.’
- 4 F: 谢谢.
 thank
 ‘thank you.’
- 5 C: ((喝了 一口 酒)) E 都 幸福.
 also happy
 ‘((sips his wine)) and you too.’
- 6 E: [(laugh) 个个 都 幸福.
 everyone all happy
 ‘[(laugh) all of us.’
- 7 F: [(laugh) 是 啊, E 都 精神 好成 酿呢.
 be (particle) all look good (particle)
 ‘[(laugh) *really, E looks really fabulous.’

The utterance ‘you enjoy so happy life’ in the arrowed line was coded as an AC on the couple’s enjoyment of ‘happy life’. But as I said earlier, the coding was done by applying Holmes’ criteria. This means that intent to pay a compliment may have been imposed on speaker E. To access the speaker’s and the hearers’ (i.e. F and C) opinions about their intention and attributed intention, I interviewed all the three participants involved. The transcript is reproduced as follows.

Interview speaker E

Researcher: What was your intention when you said ‘you enjoy so happy life’?

E: I think it’s very easy for two persons to establish friendship, but it’s not easy for a married couple to maintain a stable relationship and live a happy life together for so long. My long friendship with them tells me that they seldom argue. This is a kind of happiness. Moreover, I find that they differ from many other couples in that they ((F and C)) genuinely love and care about each other. Many others

appear to maintain a good relation outwardly while their mutual disapproval just lurks beneath the surface.

Researcher: Did you intend to pay them a compliment?

E: Yeah, I think I did. I simultaneously expressed my admiration...It's been years since they came to know each other, understood and trusted each other.

Interview recipient F

Researcher: What did you think was her intention when she said 'you enjoy so happy life'?

F: She showed admiration for the happiness we enjoy. You know, she's still single.

Interview recipient C

Researcher: What did you think was her intention when she said 'you enjoy so happy life'?

C: E is not married and has not built a happy family yet. She might end up childless in her life. Unlike her, we are married and have a child who is already at university. We don't need to worry about the child's education. In a word, she meant to show her admiration for my family. She often says that it's good to have a happy family.

From the above interviews we can see that by uttering 'you enjoy so happy life' in Extract 4.3, the speaker, a single, meant to pay a compliment on the couple's happiness of marriage life by expressing her admiration. At the same time, the two recipients, i.e. the couple also attributed to the speaker the intention of a compliment. This is an instance in which AAI overlaps with SI and HAI. Then exemplified below is the case in which AAI differs from both SI and HAI.

4.3.3 Analyst's assigned intention differs from both speaker's intention and hearer's attributed intention

My data show that some utterances identified by the researcher as compliments (ACs) were neither intended by the speakers nor perceived by the hearers as complimentary. For illustration, consider the following extract and related interviews.

Extract 4.4 (post-2)

- 1 B: ((打手机开两个标间)) 明天 我来 签, 好(.) 谢谢 ((打完 电话)).
tomorrow I come sign good thank
‘((books two hotel suites on the phone)) I will come and sign tomorrow, OK (.) thank you ((B ends the call)).’
- 2 F: 我们 B 同志 太 有 面子 了!
we comrade too have face (particle)
‘comrade B really has much face!’
- 3 G: 可以 签单 啊.
can sign bill (particle)
‘(he) can sign the bill.’
- 4 F: 咋个只有你 可以 签? 人家 Xi 队 都签 不成.
why only you can sign people superior all sign no
‘only you can make the signature? your head Mr. Xi can’t.’
- 5 B: 正常, 领导 签 哪样 单, 都是 小兵 签单.
normal leader sign what bill all be subordinate sign bill
‘that’s normal, leaders simply don’t sign a bill, that’s a subordinate’s job.’
- 6 F: 不过 (.) 也是, 我们 单位 也是, 我们 克 签得成=
oh also be our company also be we go sign can
‘oh (.) yeah, actually, that’s the same in our company, we sign the bills=’
- 7 A: [领导 从来不 克 签,
leader never go sign
‘[leaders never sign the bills,’
- 8 F: =[老板克 倒反 签 不成.
boss instead sign not can
‘=[and superiors can’t.’
- 9 A: 我们 单位 是 我 签.
our office be me sign
‘it’s part of my duty in my office.’

'Having face means both commanding social influence over others as well as being influenced by others' (Ho 1994:272). It is generally valued and pursued by the Chinese. According to the Chinese tradition, the utterance 'comrade B really has much face' thus could be interpreted as a positive comment implying B's high social position, authority and power associated with his post within a social group. Thus it seems plausible to code the arrowed utterance as a compliment (an AC). To gain the participants' perceptions, I examined their interview accounts.

Interview speaker F

Researcher: What was your intention when you said 'comrade B really has much face'?

F: In such a situation (when B said so), I said so quite naturally.

Researcher: Did you intend to pay him a compliment?

F: I don't think it's a compliment. Well, things like booking hotel rooms are part of his job. It's not a personal matter. It's his job, and it's within his job responsibility.

Interview recipient B

Researcher: What did you think was F's intention when she said 'comrade B really has much face'?

B: She's teasing me. This is because Mr Xi is deputy head of my office and I signed the bill as part of my job. That's why she ((F)) said I can sign while deputy head can't.

The interviews, therefore, demonstrate what had been coded as an AC was not deemed as a compliment by the speaker and hearer. Moreover, the interview responses show that both the speaker and hearer seem to use, though unconsciously, Holmes' criteria of complimenting to locate a compliment: briefly, whether or not the speaker bestows credit upon the hearer. Speaker F did not think she attributed credit to the hearer and similarly, the hearer reported that he did not perceive what F

said as a compliment. Moreover, they offered similar reasons for this: things like booking hotel rooms and signing bills are part of the hearer's work. In addition, for both of them it is a subordinate who does this kind of job, and for this reason B's behaviour is not compliment-worthy.

4.3.4 Analyst's assigned intention differs from speaker's intention but overlaps with hearer's attributed intention

Evidence from my interview data also shows cases where a compliment identified by the researcher was not intended by the speaker as a compliment whereas such an intention was attributed by the hearer. The following extract from a conversation among university students illustrates this relationship between AAI, SI and HAI.

Extract 4.5 (post-6)

1 C: 嘿 (.) 再 说 一遍, 很 好听的, 你 说 这个=
 (particle) again say one time very good listening you say this
 'oh (.) say it again, *(E's voice is) very sweet, you say this='

2 E: ((laugh))

3 C: =[赶紧 好好 录 一下.
 at once good record one
 '=[*have it recorded.]'

4 H: 不是[声音 好听=
 not voice good listening
 'not [the voice which is sweet='

5 C: [好 温柔 啊!
 very soft (particle)
 '[*really gentle!'

6 H: =(E's) 声音 非常柔, 柔波似水.
 voice very soft as soft as water
 '=*(E's) voice is very soft, as soft as water.'

7 B: 啊:: 更 能说话!
 (interjection) more eloquent
 '*oh:: more eloquent!'

8 H: ((laugh))

- 9 E: 哇! 太 能说话 了!
 (interjection) too eloquent (particle)
 ‘*wow! really eloquent!’
- 10 H: 没有, 跟 他 ((C)) 学的 ((laugh))
 no from him learn
 ‘no, *just learned from him ((C)) ((laugh))’
- 11 C: 太 会说话 了!
 too eloquent (particle)
 ‘*really eloquent!’
- 12 H: 跟 他 ((C)) 学的 ((laugh))
 from him learn
 ‘*learned from him ((C)) ((laugh))’
- 13 G: 这就 叫作 高手 遇见 蒙面人.
 this call master-hand meet masked man
 ‘*this is *diamond cuts diamond*.’
- 14 C: ((laugh))
- 15 H: 我 遇到 他, 我就 不 敢 说话.
 I meet him I not dare speak
 ‘in front of him, I don’t dare to speak.’
- 16 C: 没有.
 no
 ‘no.’
- 17 G: 怎么 会 不 敢?
 why can not dare
 ‘why not dare to speak?’
- 18 C: 我[这个 人 就是::
 I this man be
 ‘I [am a person who::’
- 19 H: [我 不敢, [你 看 那个 眼神,
 I not dare you see that eye
 ‘[I don’t dare, [look, his eyes,’
- 20 C: [长得 一副 长得 一副 人模人样—
 grow one grow one person’s look
 ‘[has, has a person’s looks—’
- 21 H: ((laugh)) 人模人样.
 person’s look
 ‘((laugh)) a person’s looks.’

The extract of conversation mainly surrounds the topic of eloquence, a topic brought up by C's comment on E's voice in line 1. The utterance 'in front of him, I don't dare to speak' in line 15 was coded as an AC on the following grounds: Judging from line 6, H is praiseworthy for her eloquence as displayed in her timely use of the idiomatic phrase *róubōsishuǐ* 柔波似水 ('as soft as water') to characterize E's voice. For this, H immediately received three ACs respectively from B, E and C in lines 7, 9 and 11.

Also, there is evidence that C is eloquent: first, B evaluates C as eloquent: 'oh:: more eloquent'; second, H herself remarks that she just learns eloquence from C; third, in line 13 G's utterance 'this is *diamond cuts diamond*' suggests both H and C are eloquent. Moreover, the Chinese saying appears to hint that C is even more eloquent. Therefore, we have good reasons to interpret the utterance 'in front of him, I don't dare to speak' as a compliment. Put differently, it is very plausible to hypothesize that speaker H intended to compliment C on his eloquence. Furthermore, this seems to be supported by C's response 'no', which, according to many previous studies (e.g. Chen 1993, Ye 1995, Cheng 2003), is a conventional response to a compliment in Chinese. Yet, examined within the postmodernist approach to politeness, the issue of whether this utterance was actually intended by the speaker and interpreted by the recipient as a compliment remains unsolved. It is this view of politeness that led me to interview the recipient and speaker for their perceptions of the utterance under scrutiny.

Interview recipient C

Researcher: What did you think was H's intention when she said 'in front of him, I don't dare to speak'?

C: Her intention, I think, was to compliment me. In her eyes, I was sort of eloquent. After our first talk on the phone, I thought that she was a suitable candidate for a position in the Students' Union, of which I was president. That day, on the phone,

she said repeatedly something like ‘you are really eloquent’. So the day before yesterday, at the dinner party, by saying that, she meant, I feel, to pay me a compliment, expressing a sort of admiration for my eloquence.

Thus, by making the response ‘no’ in line 16, interviewee C clearly perceived H’s words as a compliment on C’s eloquence. More interestingly, the interviewee offered to justify his perception by relating this to his past interaction with H in which H complimented him on the same merit. Therefore, we can see now that the hearer attributed intention of a compliment to the speaker. Thereafter, I interviewed the speaker to look for her intention.

Interview speaker H

Researcher: What was your intention when you said ‘in front of him, I don’t dare to speak’?

H: Perhaps when I first came to know C, I felt he appeared very serious. What I said is neither completely positive nor entirely negative. When I said ‘in front of him, I don’t dare to speak’, I think, I just spoke my mind. They might not be the right words. I remember that when I first met him, I didn’t think he was easygoing and approachable, thus I didn’t dare to speak with him freely.

Unlike recipient C, speaker H did not actually intend to pay a compliment in saying ‘in front of him, I don’t dare to speak’. This is especially made explicit in H’s comment on C: ‘I didn’t think he was easygoing and approachable’. Thus, the utterance under investigation does not have the illocutionary force of complimenting because H was just describing how she actually felt. Interestingly, this seems to suggest that H is conforming to Holmes’ criteria: she did not attribute any credit to C. More precisely, she rejects the categorization of her utterance as a compliment on the grounds that she did not intend to attribute credit to C.

Therefore, regarding the AC ‘in front of him, I don’t dare to speak’, the speaker did not intend to pay a compliment whereas the hearer attributed to the speaker the intention of a compliment. Again, it seems that hearer C conforms to Holmes’ criteria – he is assuming the attribution of some credit. This example thus exemplifies the case where an AC was not intended by the speaker as a compliment but was interpreted by the hearer as such.

4.3.5 Analyst’s assigned intention overlaps with speaker’s intention but differs from hearer’s attributed intention

Finally, there is also evidence that an AC was indeed used by the speaker to pay a compliment, but such an intention was not attributed by the hearer. This is illustrated below by an extract of conversation among middle school students.

Extract 4.6 (post-3)

- 1 B: 在英国 那边 E 很 有 当歌手的 潜力 ((inaudible))
in England there very have be singer’s potential
‘*E has the potential to become a pop singer in England ((inaudible))’
- 2 C: [放 在哪里.
place where
‘[where to place the dish.]’
- 3 B: [你们 唱歌, 咋个 唱 (.) E.
you (pl.) sing how sing
‘[*you sing, how did you learn to sing (.) E.]’
- 4 D: 干脆给 它 搁=
simply it place
‘simply put=’
- 5 E: 你 想 学[唱歌 嘎, 不然 你 问 我 怎哪样.
you want learn sing (particle) otherwise you ask me why
‘you want to [learn singing, or what did you mean.]’
- 6 D: =[搁 在 这跟 高处.
place in this top
‘=[put it on the top of these (plates).]’
- 7 B: 夸奖 你, 对 你的 赞扬 你应该 虚心 接受.

- compliment you to your compliment you should modestly accept
 ‘compliment you, and you should accept the compliment modestly.’
- 8 E: 对 我的 批评, 虚心 接受.
 to my criticism modestly accept
 ‘a criticism, I accept it modestly.’
- 9 A: 来, 吃肉 吃肉.
 come eat meat eat meat
 ‘come on, eat meat, eat meat.’
- 10 C: 这跟 给是 他呢?
 this be his
 ‘is this cup for him?’
- 11 E: 是 是 是.
 yes yes yes
 ‘yeah, yeah, yeah.’
- 12 B: 对 你的 表扬 (.) 要 接受.
 to your compliment want accept
 ‘compliment you (.) and you should accept it.’
- 13 E: 接受 呢 接受 呢.
 accept (particle) accept (particle)
 ‘accept, accept.’

In this extract, the arrowed utterance ‘you sing, how did you learn to sing (.) E’ was in the first case identified as an AC. This is because in normal circumstances the utterance could be interpreted as either requesting information about learning to sing or complimenting on E’s ability to sing (cf. Ye 1995, Yuan 2002). To verify this interpretation, I interviewed the two participants involved.

Interview recipient E

Researcher: What did you think was his intention when he said ‘you sing, how did you learn to sing (.) E’?

E: He said that he was complimenting me, but I thought he was satirizing me. In our class, he sits in a front row, and I am behind him. Sometimes my desk-mate and I sing songs. Sometimes he would just turn around suddenly and say ‘how did you learn to sing’ while we were singing. And then he keeps satirizing us...

Interview speaker B

Researcher: What was your intention when you said ‘you sing, how did you learn to sing (.) E’?

B: I complimented her since she sings really well. However, whenever I compliment on her being good at singing, she doesn’t look happy. I don’t know why. She always says ‘I can’t sing well, I can’t sing well’ when she sings a song on occasions like class parties while the classmates feel her performance actually impressive. So it’s a little strange. I felt perplexed even the first time I heard her say like that. On her birthday, my classmates asked her to perform a song in the classroom. But she said she couldn’t sing well before her performance. I thought everyone has her own strengths and weaknesses. But we were really impressed by her first performance on her birthday. So we found that really strange.

The above two interviews show that speaker B really intended to compliment on E’s talent for singing while hearer E perceived B’s utterance as ironic. As in Extracts 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, the speaker and hearer in this illustration also appear to use Holmes’ criteria: they share the view that a compliment has to involve an assignment of credit to the addressee. The mismatch between SI and HAI suggests that they differ in their assumptions about the pragmatic meaning of an utterance – and this is derived from hypotheses about intention.

Adopting the same procedure of data verification as illustrated above, I collected evidence of the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s attributed intention in regard to all the ACs. Statistical analysis of the interview data demonstrates a complex relationship between AAI, SI and HAI as presented below.

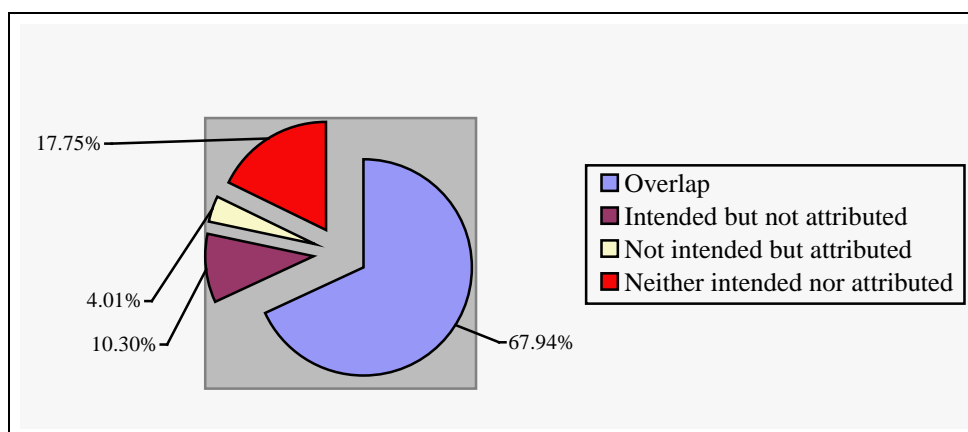


Figure 4.1: *Relationship between analyst's assigned intention, speaker's intention and hearer's attributed intention.*

This figure shows the percentages of ACs which have been verified by participants as compliments and what Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989) and Ye (1995) term 'non-compliments'. A major finding is that the participants seem to use the same criteria when categorizing utterances as compliments, i.e. briefly, whether or not the speaker attributes credit to the recipient. Nevertheless, the complex relationship between AAI, SI and HAI serves empirical evidence that the interactants at dinner parties do not always agree which utterances function as compliments. Precisely, while the Chinese interlocutors share a substantial consensus about which utterances function as compliments (67.94%, n=356), in nearly one third (32.06%, n=168) of the ACs speakers and hearers disagree on their pragmatic meanings of the utterances I identified as compliments. My interview data show three types of disagreement between speakers and hearers in their perceptions of the ACs. First, the speakers mean to pay a compliment, but the hearers do not perceive what the speakers say as a compliment (10.30%, n=54). Second, the speakers do not actually intend to issue a compliment whereas the hearers take speakers' utterances as complimentary (4.01%, n=21). Finally, 17.75% (n=93) of the ACs are neither intended by the speakers nor heard by the addressees as compliments.

In summary, in this section the 524 compliments identified by the researcher were verified by the participants through follow-up interviews. The interview data revealed a complex relationship between the compliments identified by the researcher, those intended by the speaker and those perceived by the recipient. The process of verification showed that the two generations of Chinese interactants both appear to use Holmes' criteria of complimenting to locate a compliment. The lack of overlap between AAI, SI and HAI was not because of differences in their perception of what counts as a compliment, but difference in their interpretation of what the speaker meant by what s/he was saying.

4.4 Compliment responses from the participants' perspective

The aim of this section is to make a case for which utterances are to be included as verified CRs (VCRs). I begin by outlining the procedure I used in verifying an analyst's CR (ACR). I then provide two conversational extracts for illustration. This section concludes with a figure which shows the complex process of CR verification and the relationship between ACs ('analyst's compliments'), ACRs, VCs ('verified compliments'), and VCRs.

Building on the verification of ACs in the preceding section, I set out to verify ACRs by interviewing the participants. ACs verified by complimentees were termed VCs. Following the establishment of VCs, I further asked the recipients to verify whether they produced the ACR as their response to the VC. As stated in 3.4.2.2, I located the first utterance made by the potential complimentee after receiving the VC as a potential CR. Specifically, I started by reading out the transcribed extract in which the VC is embedded. I then asked the question 'Did you respond to Y [the VC] when you said Z [the ACR]?' or 'What did you respond to when you said Z [the ACR]?' If the potential complimentees did not agree that the ACR actually was a response to the VC, I then proceeded to ask them to identify the utterance they intended as their response or to check whether they really gave any response. In

cases where a non-verbal ACR was assumed, I asked the interviewees to identify whether they had given a response to the VC by replaying the related segment of their recording.

This procedure is illustrated with the following two extracts of conversation and the corresponding follow-up interviews.

Extract 4.7 (post-6)

- 1 H: 嗯(.) 这样(.) 我们 说 方言 听得 懂 吗?
(particle) this we speak dialect hear understand (particle)
'uh(.) well(.) can you understand us if we speak our dialect?'
- 2 E: 听得 懂.
hear understand
'(I) can.'
- 3 F: 听得 懂.
hear understand
'me, too.'
- 4 H: B: 说话,
speak
'speak, B:'
- 5 B: 嗯? 说 方言?
(particle) speak dialect
'um? speak (my) dialect?'
- 6 H: 可以(.) 说 方言 都可以.
OK speak dialect all right
'yeah(.) it's OK if you speak your dialect.'
- 7 B: 我的方言 标准得 很, 我 是 讲 普通话.
my dialect standard very I be speak *pǔtōnghuà*
'my dialect is very standard, I speak *pǔtōnghuà* ((common language)).'
- 8 H: 哎: 这个((B)) 很 有 绅士 风度的.
(particle) this one very have gentleman demeanour
'oh: *he's ((B's)) quite of a gentleman.'
- 9 C: ((递饮料给 B)) 来, 交给你, 长得 最好看的 一个.
come hand you grow best-looking one
'((passes the drink to B)) there you go, *the most handsome one.'

- 10 H and D: [(laugh))
- 11 B: [好(.) 谢谢 谢谢 谢谢.
 OK thank thank thank
 ‘[OK(.) thanks, thanks, thanks.’
- 12 C: 哎(.) 开 了 6个小时 了, 什么会! 这 简直...
 (particle) have (tense marker) hour (particle) what meeting this utterly
 ‘pew(.) the meeting lasted 6 hours, what a meeting! it utterly...’

In this segment of conversation, I first identified C’s utterance ‘the most handsome one’ in line 9 as fitting Holmes’ definition of a compliment and hence as an AC. I then located B’s response ‘OK (.) thanks, thanks, thanks’ in line 11 as the ACR. However, a closer examination of the context shows that B’s utterance is also interpretable as thanking for C’s non-verbal behaviour of passing the drink. To pin down the exact function of B’s response in line 11, I interviewed the participants about their perceptions. Transcripts of the interviews with B and C are both reproduced below as justification for VCs and VCRs.

Interview recipient B

Researcher: What did you think was his intention when C said ‘the most handsome one’?

B: I felt I was being praised.

Researcher: What did you respond to when you said ‘OK (.) thanks, thanks, thanks’?

B: He complimented me, that day, pointing to me. I then said ‘thank you for your praise. Thank you for your praise’. He passed me the drink. I then said ‘OK’ to mean that I was happy to serve them drinks.

Interview speaker C

Researcher: What was your intention when you said ‘the most handsome one’?

C: B’s really good-looking (particle), so I asked him to serve the drink.

Researcher: What did you think B responded to when he said ‘OK (.) thanks, thanks, thanks’?

- 2 D: 么: 给可能 年轻, 50岁的人 还 年轻? 哦:=
 (particle) impossible young year-old people still young (particle)
 ‘oh: it’s impossible to look younger, 50-year-olds still looks young? oh:=’
- 3 B: [么就 48 岁 该.
 (particle) year-old (particle)
 ‘[you’re 48, are you.’
- 4 D: =[50 岁 都 只 差 两 年 就得 退休.
 year-old all only to two year can retire
 ‘=[only two years to go before retirement.’
- 5 A: ((to B, E’s 丈夫))这个 象个 小伙子 的点!
 this one look like young lad (particle)
 ‘((to B, E’s husband)) *you really look like a young lad!’
- 6 F: ((laugh)) 是呢 嘛, 你 ((B)) 说.
 yes (particle) you say
 ‘((laugh)) yes, you ((B)) say.’
- 7 D: 以前 还经常 在一处, 来 玩玩嘎, 嗯(.) 这会是—
 in the past still often together come play (particle) (particle) now be
 ‘we spent much time together in the past, (you sometimes) just popped in our flat for
 a chat, right, but now—’
- 8 E: 这会点 这会点 是 忙 啊.
 now now be busy (particle)
 ‘now, (we are) now very busy.’
- 9 A: 时间 都 没得 了, 这会.
 time all no (particle) now
 ‘we all live a busy life now.’
- 10 D: ((laugh))

In this extract, potential complimentee B does not appear to have made a response to A’s utterance in line 5. Thus, as said earlier, a non-verbal ACR was assumed here on the first occasion. I then proceeded to verify whether this was really the case via interview. I began by asking B to verify the prior utterance ‘you really look like a young lad’ as a compliment. With his confirmation, I then asked him to identify whether he gave a response to A’s utterance by listening to the segment of conversation from which the extract is taken. Surprisingly, B said that ‘I couldn’t praise myself (i.e. say ‘yes’ to the compliment), so F made a response on my behalf’.

Hearing this, I realized that the interviewee's answer can be suggestive of a special type of CRs, so I decided to turn to F for verification. In the interview F remarked that she said “‘yes, you ((B)) say’ to give a response on behalf of B”. According to her, at that moment she sensed that it was hard for B to say anything to A's utterance ‘you really look like a young lad’, which is obviously hyperbolic considering his ((B's)) age.

All of the evidence considered, the arrowed utterance, although not made by the complimentee himself, was finalized as the CR to the prior compliment. Overall, five occurrences of such responses were identified in my data. They do not appear to occur frequently but this finding seems to suffice to show the strength of the postmodernist approach to politeness in bringing into view a new type of CRs: a CR may sometimes be produced by a third party on behalf of the complimentee.

Following the same procedure as illustrated above, I collected speakers' and recipients' perceptions of all the ACs and ACRs. In doing so, the ACs and ACRs were all verified by the complimenters and complimentees themselves. As displayed in the following figure, evidence gathered from this process shows that there exists a complex relationship between ACs, ACRs, VCs and VCRs.

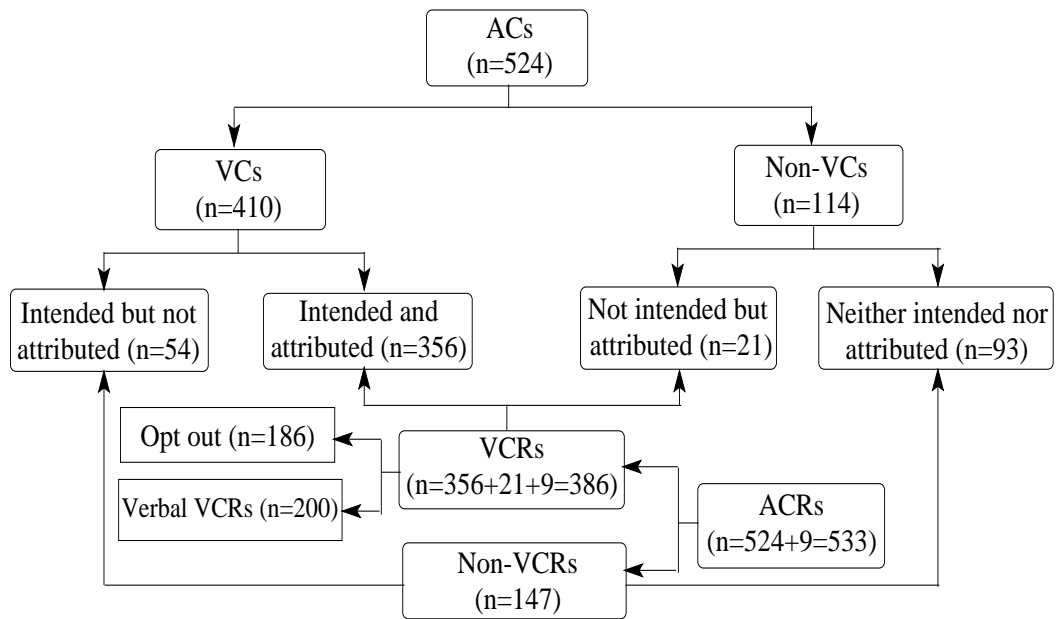


Figure 4.2: Relationship between analyst's compliments, analyst's CRs, verified compliments and verified CRs.

This figure shows clearly that a total of 524 ACs and 533 ACRs were identified in my study. The gap between these two numbers results from the finding that in 9 of the ACs a same compliment paid to two participants received two ACRs. In accordance with the postmodernist approach to politeness, I maintain that in research focusing on compliments it is the complimenter's judgement that provides the most appropriate basis for categorizing an utterance as a compliment. Thus complimenters' VCs consist of ACs which were used intentionally by the speakers to pay a compliment. Therefore, as shown on the left-hand side of the figure, VCs (n=410) include the two types of ACs which were intended by the speakers but not perceived by the hearers as compliments (n=54) and those which were both intended and perceived as compliments (n=356). Likewise, in research focusing on CRs, I contend that it is the complimentee's judgement that provides adequate evidence for categorizing an utterance as a CR. Thus VCRs consist of ACRs to ACs which were really perceived by the hearers as CRs. Therefore, as shown on the bottom right-hand side of the figure, VCRs (n=386) include the ACRs to ACs which were both

intended and perceived as compliments (n=356) and those ACRs to ACs which were not intended but perceived as compliments (n=21). In addition, as seen on the bottom left-hand side of the figure, 186 out of the total 386 VCRs were verified by the complimentees as Opt out.

Consequently, I constructed a corpus of 410 VCs and 386 VCRs to be analyzed and discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, I verified through follow-up interviews the ACs and ACRs from the vantage point of a postmodernist approach to politeness. With evidence provided by the interviewees, 410 and 386 utterances have been respectively verified by the participants as compliments (VCs) and compliment responses (VCRs) for further analysis and discussion.

It was found that the interactants in my study, the pre-OCPG and post-OCPG alike, use the same criteria when categorizing utterances as compliments. That is, they both invariably use the presence of the speaker's intention to assign credit to their addressee to judge whether the speaker pays a compliment. However, careful analysis of the interview data shows that speakers and hearers differ significantly in their judgements about the pragmatic meanings of utterances. This is clearly reflected in the complex relationship between ACs, ACRs, VCs, and VCRs as shown in Figure 4.2.

Chapter Five

Compliment Behaviour and Politeness Norms

5.1 Introduction

My goal in this chapter is to show there is generational variation in compliment behaviour and the underlying politeness norms. I begin by demonstrating generational variation in the frequency and topics of compliments. I then show that there exists variation in the politeness norms that inform compliment behaviour. Finally, I show evidence that this variation in the politeness norms correlates with generation.

5.2 Generational variation in frequency of compliments

This section aims to demonstrate that there is a noticeable difference between the pre- and post-OCPG in the frequency of compliments they issued in the dinner party conversations. Data analysis in this section is mainly quantitative.

The finding that there are 410 VCs in my data allowed me to carry out more detailed analysis in relation to generation. To contrast the frequency of compliments respectively produced by the pre- and post-OCPG interactants, the number of VCs occurred at each of the parties is reproduced as follows:

Table 5.1: *Frequency and distribution of verified compliments across generations and parties.*

	<i>Party 1</i>	<i>Party 2</i>	<i>Party 3</i>	<i>Party 4</i>	<i>Party 5</i>	<i>Party 6</i>	<i>Party 7</i>	<i>Party 8</i>	Total
Pre-OCPG	38	86	38	10	52	12	55	13	304
Post-OCPG	7	4	18	6	5	43	6	17	106
Total									410

This table shows a considerable generational difference in the overall frequency of compliments at the dinner parties. Roughly speaking, the pre-OCPG generate far more compliments than the post-OCPG. Precisely, about three quarters (n=304) of the total compliments are produced by the pre-OCPG and only about one quarter (n=106) by the post-OCPG. To put it another way, interactants from the older generation pay compliments nearly three times as frequently as those from the younger generation. Further, on average, 38 instances of compliments occurred in each of the pre-OCPG conversations, whereas the average number of compliments found in the post-OCPG conversations is only about 13.

In terms of distribution, every pre-OCPG party generates more than ten compliments, whereas there are only three post-OCPG parties in which more than ten compliments are identified. Moreover, a very small number of compliments (n=7, 4, 6, 5, 6) are issued in five of the post-OCPG parties. Furthermore, the number of compliments at the most productive pre-OCPG party amounts to as high as 86 while there are only 43 occurrences of compliments at the most productive post-OCPG party. All these findings combine to suggest that compared to the younger generation the older generation as a whole are far more likely to pay compliments at dinner parties among friends.

To sum up, in this section I presented my findings concerning generational variation in the frequency of compliments. To recapitulate the main finding, the compliments of the older generation in the dinner party conversations are nearly three times as many as those of the younger. Then in the next section, my analysis focuses on compliment topics and the generational variation identified.

5.3 Compliment topics from the participants' perspective

The aim of this section is to show generational variation in compliment topics. I do not assume that categorizing a compliment topic can always be carried out by

examining the linguistic form only. I thus took into account other factors that may affect the validity of identifying compliment topics such as the discourse context and participants' interview accounts. Drawing on insights from previous studies (e.g. Manes and Wolfson 1981, Knapp *et al* 1984, Holmes 1986/1988), I categorized all the compliments in my study into four general topics: Ability, Character, Appearance and Other. Yet unlike previous studies (e.g. Yuan 2002, Yu 2005) in which topics are coded according to the author's and sometimes another coder's interpretation, the assignment of topics in my study was based on the participants' own judgements revealed in the follow-up interviews. In what follows I show that complimenters' judgements provide the most appropriate basis for topic categorization. Compliments on these four topics are each illustrated in the following subsections.

5.3.1 Ability

To begin with, a close examination of the 410 verified compliments shows that a participant's ability is frequently complimented in my study. Illustrated below is an extract containing a compliment on the addressee's ability.

Extract 5.1 (post-5)

- 1 A: 今天 我 郑重地 跟你 提出 这个问题, 就是你的 说话 问题,
 today I seriously with you raise this problem be your speak problem
- 2 当着大家的面 我跟你 说 这个问题, 说话 的时候, 多 经过
 face all I with you speak this problem speak time much pass
- 3 脑子 一点, 不要 太宠, 对吧? 然后 还要 多
 brain a little no too impudent right then still much
- 4 照顾 一点 别人的 感受, 好吧?
 consider a little other people's feeling right
- 'today I want to raise a serious issue with you, that is, I want to call your attention in front of the friends, that before you speak you should think twice, don't be too impudent, right? and you should consider the hearer's feelings, right?'
- 5 E: 你 觉得 我 什么 地方 呢, 说 呀.

you think my what aspect (particle) speak (particle)
 ‘be specific, tell me.’
 6 H: [看来::
 look
 ‘[um::’
 7 D: [很 受启发 啊!
 very thought-provoking (particle)
 ‘[really thought- provoking!’
 →8 H: 还是 很成熟的, 是的, 以后 要是 因为 你们, 毕竟 已经
 still be very mature yes later want be because you (pl.) after all already
 9 18岁 了, 做 任何事情 都要 顾及 后果,
 year-old (particle) do anything all want consider consequence
 10 顾及 你 身边 的人.
 consider you(r) beside people
 ‘*(E is) really mature, yeah, after all you’re adults now, later whatever you do you
 should first consider the result and think about the feelings of your hearers.’

In this extract, participant A publicly reprimands E, his girlfriend. E does not appear to understand A and demands A that he specify the issue. At this time, participant H seems to perceive a serious conflict arising between A and E, and thus attempts to mediate between them in line 6. Upon D’s completion of his turn, H takes the floor and mediates the ‘issue’ in lines 8, 9 and 10. She begins by paying a compliment to E, who is criticized by her boyfriend A: ‘(E is) really mature’. In my interview about the intention underlying this utterance, H said:

I meant that after hearing A’s complaint about E’s social *faux pas* in the past, I stressed that although E had just turned 18, she’s already very mature. Her interpersonal communication skills are far beyond her age.

This interview account suggests that by saying ‘(E is) really mature’, H means to compliment on E’s good communication skills. Therefore, the topic of this compliment was categorized as Ability. However, as indicated in the introductory paragraph of this section, it does not follow that the topic of a compliment on one’s

being mature can be automatically coded as Ability. To illustrate, an extract embedded with a similar compliment is reproduced as follows:

Extract 5.2 (pre-3)

- 1 K: 看来是 过呢 越来越 滋润, 是 越来越 帅.
look be spend more and more happy be more and more handsome
'*it looks like you live a very happy life, and appear more and more handsome.'
- 2 G: 哎呀, 哪样滋润, 咋个会有 你们 滋润, 天天 到处 跑.
(particle) not happy not like you (pl.) happy every day everywhere run
'oh, not happy at all, not so happy as you, I'm always on business trips.'
- 3 K: 真呢, 我 觉得 你 ((G)) 更 年轻 还.
really (particle) I think you more young (particle)
'*really, I feel you ((G)) look younger.'
- 4 G: 哪个?
who
'who?'
- 5 K: 确实 是 呢.
really be (particle)
'really.'
- 6 H: 没有, 更 成熟 了.
no more mature (particle)
'no, *(he looks) more mature.'
- 7 K: 没有 没有, 是 年轻 呀.
no no be young (particle)
'no, no, *he looks younger.'
- 8 G: 是 呢 是 呢.
yes (particle) yes (particle)
'yeah, yeah.'
- 9 K: 成熟 是 有点 老 塞.
maturity be little old (particle)
'maturity somewhat suggests signs of aging.'
- 10 G: ((laugh)) 成熟 显 老 该?
maturity look old (particle)
'((laugh)) being mature makes one look old?'
- 11 H: 成熟 并不一定 代表 老, 成熟 是 有魅力.
maturity not necessarily represent old maturity be charm

‘being mature doesn’t necessarily mean aging, instead it signifies charm.’

Here following participant K’s two compliments to G in lines 1 and 3, H paid G a compliment in line 6. Judging from the syntax and positive semantic carrier, the compliment ‘(he looks) more mature’ appears the same as the one in Extract 5.1. However, evidence from my interview showed that this compliment is on a different topic. H said that ‘by saying that, I meant G appeared more charming, and he was in good demeanour. I think I was complimenting on what is internal, such as elegance’. Thus, the topic of the compliment ‘(he looks) more mature’ was identified by the complimenter as Character, rather than Ability as in Extract 5.1.

Apart from the aforementioned examples, there are still many other instances of compliments which use the same semantic carriers but were identified as being on different topics in different conversations. For instance, student participant E (post-3) offered the compliment “oh, (A is) really *cōngmíng* 聪明 (literally ‘intelligent’)” following A’s utterance ‘in fact, the financial crisis won’t affect science’. According to E, what A said was always related to foreign countries while she knew nothing about that. She thought that A was compliment-worthy because of his wide knowledge. Thus it could be inferred that this compliment was on A’s Ability. However, the same compliment *cōngmíng* (literally ‘intelligent’) was classified as Character in G’s (pre-2) compliment “people with curly hair are *cōngmíng* (‘intelligent’)”. Thus rather than depending on the linguistic form alone, when categorizing compliment topics we should give more attention to such factors as participants’ perceptions as revealed in interviews.

5.3.2 Character

In addition to ability, character is also complimented very often in my data. The following extract illustrates this type of compliments.

Extract 5.3 (pre-2)

- 1 G: 哦 哦, 姐姐 ((laugh))
(particle) (particle) elder sister
'oh, oh, elder sister ((laugh))'
- 2 D: 你 瞧 瞧—
you look look
'you know—'
- 3 G: 好久 都 没有 见.
long time all no see
'long time no see.'
- 4 D: 哎哟, 变 都 没有 变.
(particle) change all no change
'*oh, (you) haven't changed.'
- 5 G: 是 啊.
yes (particle)
'yeah.'
- 6 D: 是还, 我 就说 长大 不是.
yes (particle) I say grow up no
'really, though you've grown up, I think.'

The arrowed utterance was verified by participant D as a compliment to the researcher. In my interview about its topic, she said: '(Although you) have been abroad for quite a long time, you still remember our dialect. Unlike others who speak different languages and speak with a different accent, you speak our dialect. In any sense, you are so lovely and familiar, like my own younger sister, and you haven't changed'. Based on this, the compliment topic in this example could be finalized as Character. As the compliment recipient, I did not even realize that the friend complimented on my character but not appearance as the existing literature (e.g. Chen 1993, Ye 1995) generally assumes.

I now seem to be in a position to show that such a compliment phrased in the formula '(sb.) have/has not changed' tends to be on appearance in other conversations of my data. For example:

Extract 5.4 (pre-1)

- 1 F: 她 ((D))只 小 我 两 岁(.)么 是多点 喃?
she only young me two year-old (particle) be more little (particle)
'she ((D)) is only two years younger than me (.) or more years younger?'
- 2 D: 两 岁 呢的 点.
two year-old (particle) little
'about two years.'
- 3 F: 她 起码 年轻 我 10 岁.
she at least young me year-old
'*she looks at least ten years younger than me.'
- 4 D: 呢的 [倒没有].
(particle) not
'not [like that].'
- 5 E: [是哇, 我 就觉得 她 ((D))在 Yuan=
be (particle) I feel she in
'[yeah, I feel that she ((D)) was in Yuan=']
- 6 D: [我 60 年 生 呢, 大捞 两 岁.
I year bear (particle) old two year-old
'[I was born in 1960, she is two years older.]
- 7 E: =[在 Yuan 一点 都 没有 变.
in a little all no change
'=[*(D) has not changed since then (when she moved from Yuan).']
- 8 D: 变, 咋个 不 变.
change impossible no change
'changed, impossible not to have changed.'
- 9 E: 年轻 成酿.
young (particle)
'*look so young.'
- 10 D: 多少 点 变 哦.
much little change (particle)
'more or less changed [look a little older].'

Here the utterance in line 7 was verified by both E and D as a compliment on D's young appearance. This example may indicate that a compliment like the one under focus here is much likely to be on the topic of appearance. Nevertheless, Extracts 5.3 and 5.4, when examined in contrast, provide enough evidence that while the

compliment. F said that she offered a compliment on E's chic hairstyle since she had never seen E with such a bun before. Unexpectedly, in the interview E said 'I think she complimented me on my ingenuity'. And then she added: 'Actually, to make such a bun, I have told my colleagues the skills. But many of them couldn't make it. Some did make it, but it took them much time. For me, I tie such a bun very quickly, and it doesn't look bad'. Again, the complimenter's and complimentee's different perceptions of the compliment topic tell us that the intended topic of a compliment is not self-evident, to the analyst and complimentee alike. Yet, in line with the postmodernist approach to politeness, in categorizing compliment topics more weight was given to the complimenter. The topic in this example was thus finally coded as Appearance.

5.3.4 Other

Illustrated above are the three major topics of Ability, Character and Appearance identified in my data. In my corpus three compliments were paid on possession of a house and room. Besides, there are still some compliments on various topics like rapport, happiness, good fortune, high status, which did not seem to fit well in any of the general topics that have been illustrated. In my study, these topics and possession were referred to by the all-encompassing term Other. To illustrate, the following compliment, according to the complimenter, was paid on good fortune.

Extract 5.6 (pre-4)

→1 B: 你们家 ((A and D 夫妇)) 倒是个个 都有 出息, 大叔 ((A)) (.) 有福气.
 you couple be everyone all have successful big uncle have fortune
 '*your ((A and D, a couple)) children are all successful, uncle ((A)) (.) (you) have fortune.'
 2 A: 啊—
 (particle)
 'ah—'
 3 D: [各 有 各呢 各人 找 各人呢 那点 饭碗 ((laugh))

- everyone have own everyone seek everyone that rice bowl
 ‘[everyone, everyone has their own *fànwǎn* ((job)) ((laugh))’
- 4 B: [给有 65 岁 了?
 have year-old (particle)
 ‘[are you 65 years old?’
- 5 A: 有 了, 快 66 了.
 have (particle) nearly (particle)
 ‘yeah, (I’m) nearly 66.’
- 6 E: 66 都 身体 还 这么 好 嘎.
 all health still so good (particle)
 ‘*(although at the age of) 66, (you’re) in so good health.’

In this extract, the utterance in line 1 is a verified compliment. In the interview, complimenter B said he meant A has good fortune since A’s children are all successful. His answer conforms to Tang and Huang’s finding that in Chinese culture an utterance like ‘Auntie Xu has fortune’ (2004:62) often function as a compliment. Unlike the complimenter, complimentee A told me that B may have complimented on his good parenting. But as emphasized previously, in categorizing a compliment topic the complimenter’s perspective is paramount. This compliment topic was, therefore, finalized as Other.

Building on evidence from the recorded conversations and follow-up interviews, all the verified compliments have been identified as falling into the four general topics: Ability, Character, Appearance and Other. Moreover, as detailed in the subsequent subsection, there is generational variation in the topics of compliments.

5.3.5 Generational variation in compliment topics

Quantitative analysis shows that compliments on the topics of ability, character, appearance and Other respectively take up 38.49% (n=117), 31.25% (n=95), 24.67% (n=75) and 5.59% (n=17) of the VCs offered by the older generation. In a similar order of preference, compliments on these four topics collected among the younger participants respectively account for 53.77% (n=57), 29.25% (n=31), 14.15% (n=15)

and 2.83% (n=3) of the total of their VCs. To facilitate comparison of compliment behaviour between the two generational groups, these findings are presented in contrast in the following figure.

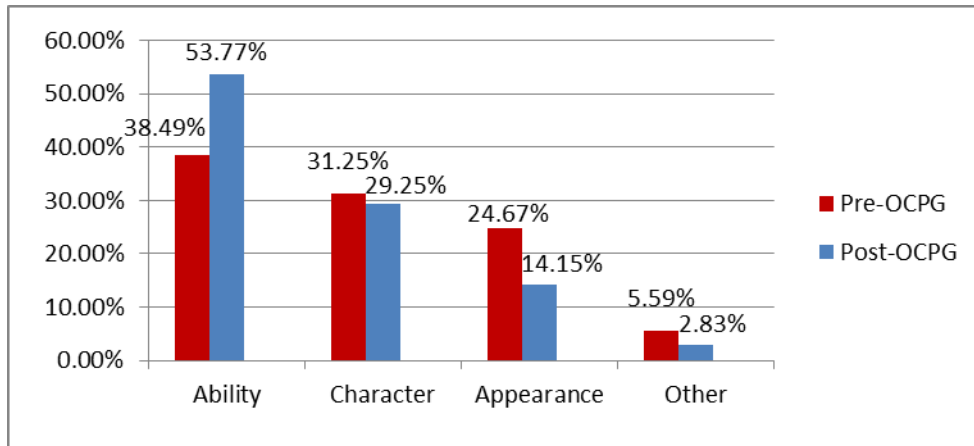


Figure 5.1: Comparison between topics of compliments issued by the two generations.

This figure shows some similarities and differences between the two generations in their compliment topic preference. To begin with, a similar pattern of preference can be observed. For both population groups Ability is the most preferred topic of a compliment, and Other is the least; for both generations, Character outranks appearance, taking the second place.

Moreover, Figure 5.1 shows some interesting generational differences in compliment topics. First, the most striking difference emerges in their preference for Ability: the younger generation are much more likely than the older to offer compliments on Ability although they both prefer this topic over the other three. Second, the younger group are significantly less likely than the older to pay compliments on Appearance. Third, among the three major topics of Ability, Character and Appearance, the older generation do not seem to demonstrate a preference for Ability as markedly as the younger do. Finally, the older generation are nearly twice as likely as the younger to compliment on an attribute other than

the aforementioned although compliments of this type did not occur often in both groups' conversations.

To summarize this section, I showed that compliment topics in my data could be categorized, in the decreasing order of frequency, into the topics of ability, character, appearance, and Other. My categorization based on the participants' perceptions gathered through follow-up interviews showed that a topic cannot be categorized as easily as it appears. Moreover, the result shows that although the two groups share the similar pattern of topic preference, the pre-OCPG compliment on appearance much more readily than the post-OCPG. In contrast, the younger generation are more likely than the older generation to compliment on ability.

5.4 Politeness norms informing compliment behaviour

Building on the findings about generational differences in the frequency and topics of compliments, I show in this section that there is variation in politeness norms informing the participants' compliment behaviour.

As argued in 2.3.2.4, norms can be well defined as a set of cultural values, beliefs or interactional rules that inform interactants' social behaviour. They operate as motivations for speakers performing speech acts or as expectations about what would be an appropriate way of performing a compliment. A norm was identified based on analysis of the stretches of conversation containing the compliment and the data from follow-up interviews. It is worth noting that the process by which I identified these norms was highly inferential. Also, the terms I used were proposed as attempts to capture the character of the norms.

Below I show two types of politeness norms that were identified in my data. Firstly, sincerity, external verification, and being playful are norms operating as expectations about how compliments should be carried out; secondly, reciprocity,

respect, approbation, social inclusion and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') are norms working as motivations for compliments. They are illustrated in detail as follows.

5.4.1 Politeness norms as expectations about appropriate ways to perform compliments

My data show that the participants had expectations about how one should perform the speech act of compliments appropriately. Evidence from my data suggests that sincerity, external verification, and being playful are some of the norms that appear to be informing the way in which the compliments were carried out. Briefly, in cases where the norm of sincerity operates the complimenters believe that speakers should be sincere when issuing a compliment. Similarly, when the norm of external verification exists, speakers appear to be appealing to a third party in order to give their compliment more substance. Likewise, in cases where the norm of being playful works, the manner of paying a compliment is expected to be playful. These norms are analyzed in detail below.

5.4.1.1 Sincerity

The relationship between sincerity and politeness is debated in politeness scholarship (e.g. Scannell 1996, Lin and Xie 2004, Kumon-Nakamura *et al* 2007, Pinto 2011) and etiquette books (e.g. Zhu 2006, Lu *et al* 2007). The focus is on whether there is a necessary correspondence between sincerity and politeness. Gu, for example, maintains that sincerity is a cardinal principle underneath the concept of *lǐmào* ('politeness') in Chinese. He argues that '[g]enuine polite behaviour must be enacted sincerely' (1990:239). Many politeness scholars (e.g. Qu and Chen 1999) and etiquette experts (Zhang and Lu 2004) also take a similar stance. However, others argue that to be polite does not necessarily mean to be *sincerely* polite. Xie *et al*, for example, note that 'there is no necessary link between politeness and sincerity: politeness does not necessarily entail sincerity' (2005:438). In my data

evidence shows that for some participants a compliment should be paid sincerely.
For illustrative purposes, consider the following extract.

Extract 5.7 (pre-2)

- 1 D: 我们 都 敬 小妹 一 杯.
we all propose younger sister one cup
'we all propose a toast to our younger sister.'
- 2 G: 哦
(particle)
'oh'
- 3 D: 真呢, 我们 都 以你为荣 ((laugh))
really we all proud of you
'*really, we are very proud of you ((laugh))'
- 4 G: 哦 ((laugh))
(particle)
'ah ((laugh))'
- 5 B: ((laugh))
- 6 D: 是嘛, 姊妹 之间 有 呢的 一个, 我们 Yuan 有
(particle) sister among have this one we have
7 呢的一个, 真呢 能 出通 英国 我 就说=
this one really can go England I say
'*yeah, we have such a sister, from such a small town, really travelled to England, you know='
- 8 E: [((laugh))
- 9 G: [((laugh))
- 10 D: =[象平常 以前 我们 是听 故事, 这话 是 在我们
like usual past we be listen story now be in front of our
11 眼前 啊.
eye (particle)
'=[usually, in the past we heard about such stories, but now seeing is believing.'
- 12 E: [((laugh))
- 13 G: ((laugh)) [哦:: 姐姐, 太-
(particle) elder sister too
'((laugh)) [ah:: elder sister, (you) too-'
- 14 D: 高兴啊, 恭喜 恭喜. 啊, 回归.
happy (particle) congratulation congratulation (particle) come back

‘so happy, congratulations, congratulations. oh, (you’ve) returned (from England).’

The two arrowed utterances are verified compliments. In both, the complimenter appears to use the word ‘really’ to show her sincerity. But more direct evidence comes from my interview with complimenter D:

I’m really proud of you. Among my friends, you’re like my sister. I’ve seen you grow up from a child. Now you’ve achieved such success, and I feel really proud. When I said so, I meant to pay a compliment and to speak my mind.

On the basis of interview responses such as this in which words like ‘really’ and ‘speak my mind’ are emphasized, it would appear that for the interviewee a compliment should be paid sincerely. More similar evidence collected in my follow-up interviews indicates that a number of complimenters believe sincerity to be the expected manner of a compliment. It thus appears to be a norm about the appropriate way of performing compliments in my study.

5.4.1.2 External verification

My data show that a number of compliments were constructed by citing the appreciative comment of a third party, either present or absent in the conversation. It is possible that the interactants paid compliments by taking such a detour so that they did not want to appear too authoritative while the citation seems able to lend greater validity to their compliment. A norm about how a compliment should be carried out thus comes to light, viz. indicating external verification of the compliment by means of citing someone else’s words. The following extract from the conversation among school teachers is illustrative of this norm.

Extract 5.8 (pre-2)

- 1 B: 么 我家呢 那点 是 读书 么 倒不会 读, 但是—
 (particle) my that be study (particle) cannot study but
 ‘my son is poor in his studies, but—’
- 2 D: 不 干 哪样 坏 事.
 not do what bad thing
 ‘doesn’t do any bad things.’
- 3 F: 我家 Meng 还 评价着 他, 哎, 这点 Rui 是做人好呢, 望克.
 my even comment him (particle) this be well-behaved look
 ‘*Meng ((F’s son)) even commented on him ((B’s son)), *oh, Rui is well-behaved, (he) looks.*’
- 4 All participants: ((laugh))
- 5 D: 为人好.
 well-behaved
 ‘well-behaved.’
- 6 F: 他 还说 跟 做人好.
 he say (particle) well-behaved
 ‘he ((F’s son)) said that (Rui) is a good person.’
- 7 B: 么 我们 也 只 要求 这点了.
 (particle) we also only expect this
 ‘this is our only expectation.’

In this extract, the arrowed utterance is a verified compliment. Speaker F cites the words of one whom both the complimenter and complimentee know in order to compliment B’s son. Rather than using her own words, F resorts to ready-made appreciative comments. The norm of external verification appears observable in the light of F’s interview account:

(By quoting my son’s words), the weight of complimenting is greater. B kept saying that his son was poor in his studies, so I changed to talk about his son’s good aspects: to say his son is well-behaved. Even my son said ‘Rui is well-behaved’. This is true. Not only I but others pay such a compliment. This is widely observed. That indicates his son is really a nice person. Look, even a child ((F’s son)) said so.

According to F, citing someone else's words gives more force to her compliment. She stressed repeatedly that the good behaviour of B's son is widely agreed. It is thus possible that in doing so F intends to indicate that she did not want to appear too authoritative or imposing in saying something nice to B. Rather, she could be trying to convey an air of objectivity about the compliment worthiness of B's son: in her words, it is 'widely observed' and 'even a child said so'. The combination of the interview and the compliment formulated by recycling a third party's words thus appears to suggest that a norm that could be called 'external verification' informs this compliment.

Moreover, the following example may further spell out this norm. Unlike Extract 5.8, the real significance of external verification in interaction is explicitly and positively assessed by the complimenter himself in the conversation.

Extract 5.9 (pre-3)

- 1 C: 从英国 回来呢 那些 也说 你 气质 好 了.
from England come back those also say you(r) demeanour good (particle)
'*those ((K)) who returned from England also said that you ((J)) are in good demeanour.'
- 2 K: 是 呢.
yes (particle)
'she is.'
- 3 C: 我 早就 说她 气质 好, 她 还 不相信.
I early say her demeanour good she still not believe
'I said long ago that she ((J)) was in good demeanour, but she didn't believe (me).'
- 4 J: ((laugh))
- 5 C: 这回 相信了 还.
this time believe (particle)
'now you ((J)) should believe (me).'
- 6 K: ((laugh))
- 7 J: ((laugh))

Like the compliment analyzed in Extract 5.8, the arrowed compliment in this example is also phrased by citing a third party's nice words. Its extra validity can be partly seen from the use of the adverb *yě* 也 ('also') in this compliment. Moreover, the complimenter's seemingly deliberate use of external verification is further made explicit in the following utterances: 'I said long ago that she ((J)) was in good demeanour, but she didn't believe (me)' and 'now you ((J)) should believe (me)'. Thus, it could be inferred that the norm of external verification operates in this compliment.

5.4.1.3 Being playful

My data show evidence that a norm of politeness that could be named 'being playful' also concerns the appropriate manner in which a compliment should be carried out. It became evident in interviews where the complimenters characterized their compliments as being playful or they said explicitly that compliments should be paid in such a manner. The following extract provides a typical illustration:

Extract 5.10 (pre-6)

- 1 A: 哦, 那份女同学来挨我背书都—
 (particle) those female student come with me recite book all
 'oh, even when reciting to me the texts from course books, the girl students were all—'
- 2 H: 哎哟, 我们A老师真呢是感觉哪会儿都是风度翩翩的,
 (particle) we teacher really be feel anytime all be handsome
- 3 我们A老师上课, 个个都最喜欢听他的课.
 we teacher teach everyone all most like listen his lecture
 '*oh, Teacher A was really handsome at that time, everyone liked his lessons.'
- 4 A: 这跟倒是—
 this be
 'that is—'
- 5 H: 是这种呢, 嗯(.) 西装革履的, 每次上都是.
 be this (particle) (particle) suit leather shoe every time give all be

‘really, oh (.) in his suit, every time he gave lessons.’

6 G: 帅 啊, 怪不得 呢的 帅 哦, 给是.
handsome (particle) no wonder so handsome (particle) right
‘*handsome, no wonder he’s so handsome, was he.’

7 H: 是 啊.
yes (particle)
‘yeah.’

→8 C: 他 属于 嫖客型的 教师 喃.
he belong to whoremonger-like teacher (particle)
‘*he’s kind of *piáokè xíng* ((whoremonger-like)) teacher.’

9 All participants: ((laugh))

This extract is taken from a conversation among a close-knit group of friends, most in their forties. They have been on good terms with each other for decades and they hold regular social gatherings. Evidence of the norm becomes explicit in my interview with complimenter C. Extracted below is part of the expanded response to my question about his intention:

It is a compliment, a playful compliment, on his ability and on his appearance as well. *Piáokè xíng* ((whoremonger-like)) is normally a negative word, but it was used here positively. I complimented him playfully before friends. Without such a way of talking, without such a convivial atmosphere at the friends’ gathering...

The quotation thus seems enough to indicate that the interviewee’s compliment to his friend at the very informal party was informed by a norm emphasizing the importance of being playful. Moreover, C appears to suggest in the last sentence of his account that at a party among close friends, to create ‘a convivial atmosphere’ on such an informal social occasion the whole conversational style ought to be playful. Interestingly, this is supported by the shared laughter in line 9 following the playful compliment.

5.4.2 Politeness norms as motivations for compliments

As made clear at the outset of this section, apart from the type of norms about how one should perform a compliment, another type identified in the present study operates as motivations for the performance of this speech act. Five norms of this type that emerge in my data are respectively termed reciprocity, respect, approbation, social inclusion, and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second'). They are analyzed in turn with illustrative extracts.

5.4.2.1 Reciprocity

Evidence from both the conversations and interview accounts shows that compliments verified in my study are often reciprocated between participants. My data show that such reciprocation occurred frequently in situations where a compliment was used as a response to a prior compliment. In some cases such behaviour of paying 'a debt of gratitude' (cf. Huang *et al* 1994) was found to be performed long after the triggering compliment. Drawing on insights from such scholars as Gu (1990:255), Heath and Bryant (2000:229–231), and Culpeper (2011:37–46/206) a norm informing this type of compliments was termed reciprocity. Illustrated below is the case in which the norm of reciprocity appears to operate in a returning compliment.

Extract 5.11 (post-3)

1 B: 但是 职业, 当初 职业 没有 选得 好 啊.
but major then major no choose good (particle)
'but my major was not a good choice.'

2 A: 职业 ((laugh)) 会有 那么 专业 啊.
major have so specialize (particle)
'major ((laugh)) is not that specialized.'

3 F: B, 我跟你讲, 不读那些, 现在 你文采 就不会 有那么好 啊.
I tell you no read those now your writing not so good (particle)
'B, I want to point it out to you that without reading those (junk books), you can't do so well in writing now.'

- 4 B: 我们班 你 ((A)) 物理 学 呢 好.
 our class you physics learn (particle) good
 ‘*in our class you ((A)) are good at physics.’
- 5 A: 作为 一个 男人=
 as a man
 ‘*as a boy student=’
- 6 B: [肯定要 学 物理.
 must learn physics
 ‘[should learn physics.’
- 7 A: =[你写出来呢 那几句话 能 呢的板扎, 我已经 很佩服 你 ((laugh))
 you write out those sentence can so nice I already very admire you
 ‘=[you write so nice compositions, I really admire you ((laugh))’
- 8 E: B 有 丰富的 中国 东方 文化 美女的 气质 ((laugh))
 have profuse China oriental culture beauty’s trait
 ‘B’s got traits which are typical of an oriental woman of letters ((laugh))’
- 9 A: 我 说话 有点 (B’s) 那点 有点 那点文采 呢, 我告诉你.
 I speak little that little that good writing (particle) I tell you
 ‘I speak as somewhat eloquently as (B) does well in writing, you know.’

In this extract, the utterance in line 4 is a compliment verified by both the speaker and addressee. Similarly, the utterance in lines 5 and 7 is also a verified compliment. A closer examination shows that the participant who paid the second compliment is the recipient of the first one and simultaneously the returning compliment itself functions as a CR. While this is my inference based on the text, recipient A’s account in my interview provides more explicit evidence of the existence of a politeness norm emphasizing reciprocal favours:

My belief is that you praise me and I must return praise. This is a kind of reciprocity of gifts. I am good at physics, and B’s got talent for writing in Chinese. So when I accepted his compliment, I would reasonably compliment him sincerely to express my opinion. Our general observation is that boy students are not as good as girls in language and communication or essay writing. Yet, his ((B’s)) writing really stands out. Whenever his essay is presented in class, our feeling is: ‘Wow, really outstanding’.

This interview account suggests that recipient A appears to reciprocate a compliment intentionally. The norm of reciprocity thus could be inferred from his explanation of the compliment as ‘a kind of reciprocity of gifts’. Precisely, in A’s opinion, his compliment is governed by what can be seen as a norm, i.e. ‘you praise me and I must return praise’. The norm he upholds in this behaviour gives substance to the important place of reciprocity in social interaction (see e.g. Gu 1990, Huang *et al* 1994, Chou and Ng 2004). This finding seems to be compatible with the Chinese traditional norm of etiquette *tóutáobào* 投桃报李 (‘you give me peaches, and I give you plums in return’, literally, ‘returning favour’) recorded in *Shīdàyǎ* 《诗·大雅》 in ancient China (see e.g. Wang 2002).

5.4.2.2 Respect

A politeness norm which could be labelled respect or deference as suggested by scholars such as Culpeper (2011:201) and Butler (2004:206) was identified as informing compliments in the present study. My data show that this norm sometimes appeared to inform compliments in which the complimenter elevates the complimentee. At other times, it seems that the norm could be inferred from compliments where other-elevation and self-deprecation are both expressed. To begin with, the first case can be exemplified by the following extract.

Extract 5.12 (pre-3)

1 G: 这里在英国 都 在 10 多年了, 我坐这边, 今日 选择.
 here in England already in more year I sit this side today choose
 ‘she’s ((K’s)) lived in England for a decade, today I choose to sit at this side.’

2 All participants: ((laugh))

→3 G: 沾点 名气 呢的点喃.
 seek fame (particle)

‘*I’m seeking some fame (by sitting here).’

4 K: ((laugh))

The arrowed utterance was a verified compliment to the researcher on her achievement or ability. In the follow-up interview, the complimenter said explicitly he fully intended to compliment the researcher because, according to him, it is not easy to get a doctorate, particularly from universities in a country with high academic standards. The complimenter's answer to my question regarding his intention provides evidence of the working norm by means of elevating others:

You didn't feel you were complimented? Complimented you, beautified you and elevated you. Your status is high. Sit next to you, and you know, we feel our status appears higher. Look, I sit next to Doctor K. Others at dinner may well thus be envious.

From the extract of conversation and the interview account we seem to be able to infer that the interviewee paid the compliment at the party by elevating the researcher. It is possible that the participant's compliment behaviour was motivated by his consideration of showing his respect for the complimentee. If so, the norm of respect could be inferred to be operating here.

In the above example, the norm of respect appears to be inferable in a compliment which elevates the recipient. Then the following example illustrates the case in which the norm is suggested in a compliment that contains simultaneously self-deprecation and other-elevation.

Extract 5.13 (post-3)

- 1 A: 我们是请 老师教, 我跟 Kan 是一起 学车 克.
we be ask teacher teach I with be together learn car (particle)
'we have an instructor, Kan and I are now taking driving lessons.'
- 2 B: 哎, 你们的 ((A and Kan's)) 业余爱好 真 广泛, 我的时间 已经
(particle) your (pl.) interest really broad my time already
- 3 浪费 在 意义 有点 垃圾的 书中 了.

- waste in meaning little junk book (particle)
 ‘*oh, your ((A and Kan’s)) interests are really broad, but my time has been wasted in reading junk books.’
- 4 E: 嗯:: 你 ((B)) 有 那么[大的 阅读量.
 (particle) you have so big reading
 ‘*um::: you ((B)) do [so extensive reading.’
- 5 F: [因为 你的 垃圾, 现在文采 很好.
 because your junk now writing very good
 ‘[*thanks to the junk ((books)), now you do writing really well.’
- 6 E: 嗯
 (particle)
 ‘um’
- 7 A: 哎呀, 就 象—
 (particle) just like
 ‘oh, just like—’
- 8 B: 没 得 作用 没 得 作用.
 no (particle) use no (particle) use
 ‘no use, no use.’
- 9 F: 嗯:: 他的 那份 文章 那份 思想 啊—
 (particle) his that composition that idea (particle)
 ‘*um::: in his composition , that idea—’
- 10 A: 任何事情 都 不会 做无用功, 绝对 是 有用 呢.
 anything all no do useless absolutely be useful (particle)
 ‘they can’t be useless, whatever you do pays sooner or later.’

In this extract, B complimented A and Kan on their wide interests, including, for example, driving. This compliment, in B’s own words from the follow-up interview, is realized by ‘deprecating self’, i.e. B devalues the books he reads as ‘junk’ whereas his extensive reading is positively evaluated by participants E and F in lines 4 and 5.

Evidence of the norm of respect in such compliments is also provided by other interviewees. For example, in one of my interviews participant C (post-7) offered the following explanation for his compliment ‘superb! it’s all Greek to us ((laugh))’ (cf. Extract 6.2).

In social interaction, you should first...what you're familiar with. He's speaking to me about something he knows well, of which I'm ignorant. I can't comment on what I don't know. But if you want to interact with him you should *put yourself in a lower position*. I then should compliment on the participant's knowledge, which I may not have. This is social interaction, I believe.

What is emphasized by the interviewee appears to be his belief that motivated the compliment: 'put yourself in a lower position' in interaction. And this can be a way the complimenter showed his respect for the complimentee at the party. Presumably, such a compliment is informed by a politeness norm that could be simply called respect, which 'remain[s] at the core of the modern conception of *lǐmào* [politeness]' (Gu 1990:238) in Chinese.

5.4.2.3 Approbation

The belief that everyone loves nice words is widely characterized as typical of Chinese social interaction (see e.g. Gu 1999, De Mente 2000, Zhu 2006). For example, Gu notes that 'the Chinese have such a tradition: they love to hear pleasant words, but not harsh words; they love to hear compliments, but not criticism' (1999:464). Many Chinese scholars (e.g. Zhu 2006) emphasize the importance of this popular belief such that it is a basic rule of successful interpersonal interaction. Analysis of my corpus of compliments shows that the participants' belief in the power of saying nice words is a motivation for paying compliments. Drawing on insights from the existing literature (e.g. Leech 1983:81, Levinson 1983:338), such a belief that motivates the give of a compliment was named approbation in the current study.

Evidence pointing towards the existence of such a politeness norm comes from interviews in which the complimenters stated or suggested that they paid compliments because they believed everyone loves to hear nice words. In some cases the interviewees even said explicitly they paid compliments because they were expected to do so by their interlocutors. For instance, participant F (pre-2) offered the following explanation for a compliment she paid: ‘When sitting together, we can’t just stay there silent. Complimenting is very necessary. A compliment is liked by everyone, to varying degrees. It shows your approval of others’. Similarly, when I asked about his expected response to a compliment, interviewee C (pre-6) answered: ‘No response is necessary. Smile is enough. He’s happy. Everyone loves to hear compliments’. This account appears to suggest that C’s compliment is motivated by his belief that a compliment is expected from him. The norm of approbation thus could be inferred here. For a full illustration of a compliment informed by this norm in a specific context, consider the following extract of conversation.

Extract 5.14 (pre-5)

- 1 E: 我 58 年.
 I year
 ‘I was born in 1958.’
- 2 F: 58 年? 59 年 喃, 我.
 year year (particle) I
 ‘58? I was born in 59.’
- 3 E: 哦, 么 你 年轻成 呢的.
 (particle) (particle) you young so
 ‘*oh, you look so young.’
- 4 F: 么 年轻 或 ((laugh))
 (particle) young (particle)
 ‘look young ((laugh))’
- 5 E: 么 是.
 (particle) be
 ‘really.’

The utterance in line 3 is a compliment paid to F, which, following my coding scheme presented earlier, was verified by E. Evidence of the norm informing this compliment is first suggested in her answer to my question aimed to elicit her intention of making the utterance: ‘Eh, she’s one year younger than me. I may have said so automatically. At that time, I think, I really had that intention [to pay a compliment]. Even if she does not look young, we should pay compliments very often and so...’. It could be her belief that ‘we should pay compliments very often’ that has motivated the compliment in line 3. Moreover, when I asked for her reason for giving the compliment, E provided even stronger evidence regarding the norm of approbation:

Everyone loves hearing nice words. Pay more compliments, pay more compliments, and you’ll surely...This is very normal. Just as insurance agents start their interaction with clients by paying compliments, frequent compliments. People love nice words, and they will buy your insurance. It ((complimenting)) is part of interaction.

On the basis of this account, it would be possible that the interviewee observed the norm of approbation when paying the compliment under analysis. Moreover, the existence of this norm is also suggested by many complimentees’ perceptions. This seems to be especially obvious in their answers to the interview question designed to obtain their feelings upon receiving a compliment. For instance, two interviewees said respectively:

I didn’t have any feeling. I’ve become used to it. Generally, people just pay compliments to others in interaction. Everyone says nice words. Hearers love hearing nice words, and speakers love saying nice words. Just as school teachers like very academic students. (B, pre-5)

Everyone is happy to be complimented...Today you compliment me. Nowadays, people are really good at interpersonal communication. In encounters with others, they say 'you're nice' or 'you're smart', to make you happy...today everyone likes saying nice words. 'Hi, beauty', they don't even greet each other by name. (D, pre-1)

These accounts support, from the complimentees' perspective, my inference that approbation could be a politeness norm informing compliments as illustrated above. My analysis in this subsection seems sufficient to show what could be termed approbation operates as a motivation for some compliments in my data.

5.4.2.4 Social inclusion

Some compliments in my study are generated by what could be called a norm of social inclusion. In my data when following this politeness norm, a speaker issues compliments to more than one co-participant so that no one present would feel left out in the multiparty conversation. Compliments of this type are often paid on attributes shared by the complimentees. The following illustration shows how this norm appears to inform compliments paid to three participants, each having a school child.

Extract 5.15 (pre-2)

- 1 D: 他 ((D's 儿子)) 道德品质 各方面 都 还 是 好=
 he son integrity every aspect all still be good
 'he ((D's son)) is a man of integrity='
- 2 F: [是 啊, 好 呢.
 yes (particle) good (particle)
 ['*yeah, (he is) good.'
- 3 D: =[就是 那点 学习 成绩 会呢的差.
 be that study performance so poor
 '= [but he is so poor in his studies.'

→ 4 F: 你家 Rui ((B's 儿子)), Yi ((A's 女儿)) 家都, 是啊, 有教养呢.
 your son daughter (particle) be (particle) well-mannered
 ‘*Rui ((B's son)) and Yi ((A's daughter)) are also both well-mannered.’

5 D: 就在 那里 说 啊.
 in there speak (particle)
 ‘(the teacher) talked with me about (my son).’

This extract of conversation among teachers centres on the topic of students' performance in studies and their discipline. According to the participants, students' good discipline is of paramount importance compared with their academic performance. In other words, good discipline or integrity is valued by them. In line 2 participant F first pays a compliment to D's son. Then she goes on to compliment B's son and A's daughter simultaneously in line 4. It seems that in so doing the complimenter wants to include B and A in a praiseworthy group. Moreover, in the interview the complimenter herself provides more explicit evidence of the norm of social inclusion in this example:

When talking about a participant's child, you should also mention the children of others present at table. Really, B's and other participants' children both have good parenting. In a conversation with friends who have children, you can't just keep talking about one child only. If you do, you will make others feel left out. This is socially expected in China. This is politeness. This is a traditional virtue, requiring that we can't attend to only one participant's need. Rather, we should attend to needs of the majority, considering the group as a harmonious whole.

Throughout this account, the complimenter stresses at several places her motivation for paying compliments to three participants. That is, F paid compliments to different friends at the party because she believes that everyone likes nice words. Further, according to her, to make sure that nobody feels 'left out', you should pay compliments to more participants, not only one. Moreover, in saying 'this is a

traditional virtue’, the complimenter appears to believe that the norm of social inclusion is handed down from the past and a compliment as analyzed in the above extract is ‘socially expected in China’.

Similar evidence is also provided by participant F in pre-7 party in my interview. For example, D gave the following explanation for her compliment to participant C ‘uncle C is an expert in (biology)’ after she told us about the nutrition of rabbit meat, the main course of the dinner.

In social interaction, when I told you the nutrition of rabbit meat, I couldn’t make him ((C)) feel left out. Moreover, biology is his expertise. To maintain the harmonious atmosphere, I’d like to make sure nobody feels left out. By saying that ((C knows that very well)), I meant to get him involved in our talk.

Clearly what the interviewee emphasizes here is the importance of social inclusion she observed in paying the compliment, i.e. to pay a compliment so as not to make the recipient feel left out of a group.

These analyses seem enough to show that a norm which could be called social inclusion inform compliments as illustrated above.

5.4.2.5 *Xiānlǐhòubīng* (‘peaceful means first, force second’)

My data show that some compliments occur regularly with criticism. To use an indigenous term prevalent in Chinese etiquette books (e.g. Zhu 2006), the norm of politeness affecting this type of compliments could be called *xiānlǐhòubīng* 先礼后兵 (‘peaceful means first, force second’), literally, showing politeness or good will to someone before delivering criticism or an attack. It is worth noting that in my data compliments informed by this norm may come before, after or between

criticisms. Illustrated below is the case in which this norm becomes observable in a compliment sandwiched between two criticisms.

Extract 5.16 (post-3)

- 1 E: 啊, 看 你 太沉默. 他 ((C)) 是 我们之中 知识
(particle) look you too silent he be us among knowledge
2 最 最 渊博的 一个, 然后 然后 他的语文 考 我们班
most most knowledgeable one then then his Chinese exam our class
3 第一名 135, 还没有 听说过 哪个的 语文 考 那么 高,
first one not hear whose Chinese exam so high
4 他来 这呢 羞羞涩涩 呢.
he come here shy (particle)

‘ah, you’re too silent. *he ((C)) is the most knowledgeable in my class, and he got 135 scores (out of 150) in the Chinese exam, ranking the first in the class, I’ve never heard such high scores in Chinese exams, he appears so shy here.’

5 All participants: ((laugh))

- 6 C: 我 老庄 思想 太 严重.
my Zhuangzi thought too serious
‘I’m heavily influenced by Zhuangzi’s thought.’

- 7 E: 老庄 思想 ((laugh))
Zhuangzi thought
‘Zhuangzi’s thought ((laugh))’

In this extract the utterance ‘he ((C)) is the most knowledgeable in my class...high scores in Chinese exams’ is a compliment verified by speaker E. Upon close examination of E’s turn spanning across lines 1, 2, 3 and 4, it becomes clear that the compliment was preceded and followed by criticisms. It appears that the complimenter hopes to invite the addressee to join in the dinner conversation by means of the combination of complimenting and criticizing. It is possible that the compliment used in this way is intended to mitigate the face-threatening act of criticizing. If this is the case, the politeness norm of *xiānlǐhòubīng* (‘peaceful means first, force second’) seems inferable in this context. As Zhu notes, *xiānlǐhòubīng* ‘is

required in all interpersonal interaction... embodies the majority's value and is an integral part of human civilization' (2006:11).

Unlike the aforementioned example in which both complimenting and criticizing are performed by the same interlocutor, my data show that these two speech acts which are probably informed by *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') can also be carried out by different participants. Moreover, the compliment may sometimes be remote from the criticism. For instance, participant B's (post-8) speech is first described by E as least standard, but later in the conversation it is evaluated by F as 'most pleasant and charming'. When interviewed about his perception of the compliment, B said that when they converse together with close friends they always tend to alternate between face-attacking and face-enhancing words in a playful manner to lighten up the atmosphere by adding an element of amusement to the party.

The following is an extract which exemplifies the case where minor criticism or reprimand is first made by some participants and then followed by compliments issued by other participants probably to enhance the positive face of the criticized.

Extract 5.17 (post-8)

- 1 B: 我 觉得 D 一直 很 安静的。
I feel remain very quiet
'I find D remains silent.'
- 2 E: 对 啊。
correct (particle)
'yeah.'
- 3 D: 吃 东西 的时候 (.) 我 就只 顾 吃 啊。
eat food time I just concentrate eat (particle)
'at table (.) I just concentrate on eating.'
- 4 F: 食 不 言 寝 不 语, [人家。
eat not speak sleep not talk people

‘*no talk at table and in bed, [he ((D)) (is).’

→5 H:

[好 习惯 嘛.
good habit (particle)

‘[*good habit.’

→6 F: 好 习惯 好 习惯.

good habit good habit

‘*good habit, good habit.’

The first utterance was perceived by addressee D as hinting at criticism or reprimand on his silence at table as intended by speaker B. This was evidenced by my interviews with both B and D. Here, B is teasing D, to D’s embarrassment as the subsequent interviews revealed. E aligns himself with B in line 2, which might have intensified D’s embarrassment. As a result, D is forced to offer an explanation for his silence in line 3. At this moment, others present come to the rescue. While F’s comment in line 4 appears to be only slightly positive, H’s and F’s compliments in lines 5 and 6 make explicit their positive evaluations of D’s table manners.

The norm of politeness I named *xiānlǐhòubīng* (‘peaceful means first, force second’) becomes inferable in my interviews with F and D as quoted below:

(1) *Researcher*: What was your intention when you said ‘no talk at table and in bed, [he ((D)) (is)]’?

F: Help rescue him ((D)) from a siege.

(2) *Researcher*: Did you intend to pay him a compliment?

F: I think I did, yes. At that time B said D didn’t say anything at all and then D gave an explanation. I wanted, in so saying, to help him ((D)), not to become too embarrassed. Anyway, it doesn’t matter to be silent at table. People’s characters vary. He doesn’t have to join in when others are highly engaged in talking. He may be introverted and it doesn’t matter to remain silent.

It is clear in these two interview responses, the politeness norm of *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') could have informed F's compliment in this example. This can be particularly seen from her belief that compliments can rescue someone from embarrassment caused by criticism. Moreover, the norm also appears to be perceived by the complimentee in this situation: When asked about his perception of F's intention under the utterance in line 4, D said 'It seems that I'm not good at oratory. He came to my rescue, from difficulty'. In a word, there is evidence to suggest that *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') may be a norm which informs compliments paid to someone whose face is threatened by speech acts like criticism.

To sum up, in this section I showed eight identified politeness norms that appear to inform some of compliments in my data. Evidence shows that these norms can be distinguished between two types. First, what I named sincerity, external verification, and being playful seem to operate as expectations about the appropriate way of performing a compliment. Second, what were termed reciprocity, respect, approbation, social inclusion, and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') appear to work as motivations for a compliment. In the following section, they are analyzed in relation to generation.

5.5 Generational variation in politeness norms informing compliment behaviour

The aim of this section is to demonstrate generational variation in the politeness norms I identified as informing compliments in my study. On the basis of the similarities and differences in the distribution of norms, I draw inferences about the possible importance for two generations.

As detailed in the following subsections, analysis of the compliments and interview data shows that the norms identified in the preceding section fall roughly into three

groups: (1) norms informing both groups' compliment behaviour; (2) norms predominantly informing one group's compliment behaviour; and (3) norms informing just one group's compliment behaviour.

5.5.1 Norms informing both groups' compliment behaviour

Reciprocity: As a norm of social interaction, reciprocity is claimed by many scholars (e.g. Gu 1990, Ng 2002) to prevail in Chinese culture. In my data this norm appears to operate predominantly in returning compliments. Evidence shows that both groups' compliments issued in the conversations were informed by this norm. Moreover, there does not seem to be clear evidence that the impact of this norm on the two generations' compliment behaviour differs. This may indicate that the politeness norm of reciprocity, analogous to balance which is theorized by Gu (1990:239) as a cardinal principle of politeness in modern Chinese, is shared between the two generations in the current study.

5.5.2 Norms predominantly informing one group's compliment behaviour

Sincerity: Consistent with many politeness scholars' (e.g. Gu 1990) emphasis on the importance of sincerity in 'doing politeness' (5.4.1.1), in my study sincerity informs both generational groups' compliment behaviour.

However, analysis of my interview data revealed that generational differences in this norm are fairly considerable in two respects. Firstly, from the complimenter's perspective, the pre-OCPG participants appear less likely than the post-OCPG to regard sincerity as important in paying a compliment. This is especially reflected in their interview accounts such as 'I think I paid the compliment partly for the sake of politeness and partly as a response to his earlier words' (E, pre-2). Since the interviewee issued a compliment mainly to perform a kind of interactional ritual, sincerity does not appear to be very much at stake in such a situation. The less emphasis the pre-OCPG give to sincerity conforms well to their stricter observance

of approbation (to be further analyzed later), a norm which suggests a strong sense of insincerity (5.4.2.3).

In contrast, it appears that the post-OCPG complimenters tend more to value sincerity in complimenting. This is partly because in the interviews they were more likely than the older generation to explain their compliments by using such words as *quèshí* ('really'), *díquè* ('really') and *zhēndì* ('really') that appear to connote sincerity. Examples include 'Because he really has very nice handwriting. I like his handwriting' (H, post-6); '(The room) is really cozy', '(Her voice) is gentle, really gentle. So I said so (paid the compliment)' (C, post-6). The younger generation's emphasis on sincerity in complimenting is consistent with their higher likelihood to observe the norm of desire to express truth in CR behaviour, a norm which is to be discussed later in 6.5.3. Also, in phrasing a compliment, the aforementioned terms appear to be used more often by the post-OCPG than by the pre-OCPG. For example, as reflected in Extract 6.1, participant C (post-6) used 'really' to phrase his compliments several times. Likewise, participant B's (post-2) compliment reads '(You) know so much about how to prevent aging, really'.

Moreover, my interviews suggest that unlike the pre-OCPG complimenters' tendency to emphasize the ritual nature of compliments, the post-OCPG are more likely to explicitly characterize their compliment behaviour as sincere. For instance, participant A (post-3) said in my interview about a returning compliment he paid 'I would reasonably compliment him sincerely to express my opinion.'

Secondly, there appears to be some generational differences in the complimentees' perceptions of complimenters' sincerity. The pre-OCPG interactants tend more to doubt the sincerity of a speaker whom they did not know quite well. In other words, among the interactions of the pre-OCPG rather than the post-OCPG a claimed compliment is very likely to be understood as *gōngwéi* (3.3.1). For example, when

participant C (pre-7) was approached for his perception of a verified compliment, he said ‘Since we did not know quite well, I think, it’s not necessarily a compliment. We may very well have paid *gōngwéi* to each other at the party. Some words were sincere, but *gōngwéi* were unavoidable’.

Similar perceptions were also observed among the post-OCPG participants, but this time between close friends. For example, when I asked about her perception of what was intended by the speaker as a compliment, interviewee G (post-4) responded: ‘Ah, nowadays people are sincere sometimes and insincere at other times. No one knows his intention’. And on another similar occasion, she said ‘He’s not complimenting me, I think. Chinese people say nice words to whoever they come across’.

Respect: This norm operated in a fairly large number of compliments issued by both generational groups. This finding seems consistent with some scholars’ (e.g. Young 1982, Gu 1990) characterization of China as a culture of deference. The two illustrations provided show that this norm is observable in compliments in which the complimenter elevates other and/or deprecates self (5.4.2.2). While notions such as *zūnzhòng* (‘deference’) and *zūnjìng* (‘respect’) were rarely mentioned by post-OCPG interviewees, they were used recurrently by the pre-OCPG participants as their motivations for compliments. Thus this norm of politeness seems to influence the older group’s compliment behaviour much more strongly.

Moreover, my interviews indicate that the pre-OCPG’s compliments that appear to be motivated by this norm are mutually paid between participants, e.g. regardless of age and gender. For example, participant A (pre-2), when asked about his perception of the utterance ‘But, Teacher A looks young, Teacher A’, he said ‘I think it should be a compliment and encourages me. She showed respect to us senior teachers. At the same time her words can also be understood as a wish for our health’. In the pre-

OCPG conversations, the norm of respect seems also to inform compliments paid by a participant to a younger one. To illustrate, in response to the compliment ‘You, oh, stay slim’ paid by participant J (pre-3) in her mid-forties, complimentee H, in her mid-thirties, provided her perception by saying ‘She ((J)) showed deference to me, and said I was so pretty and slim’.

In contrast, no post-OCPG complimenters said in the interviews that their compliments were motivated by respect. This difference from the pre-OCPG data is noticeable. There was only one interview in which some indirect evidence emerges. The compliment ‘F is really kind, so our ((indecipherable)) is ours.’ was perceived by complimentee F as showing deference to her: ‘We ((F and E)) are on very good terms. I think she meant to show deference. I give her much help in daily life, and I think she said that from her heart’. Further, this compliment was paid upwards, i.e. by the younger E to the older F.

External verification: This norm was identified as informing both generations’ compliments. However, two major differences emerge from my data. First, its influence on the pre-OCPG’s compliments seems much stronger than on the post-OCPG’s. Evidence mainly comes to light in the older generation’s relatively stronger preference for citing others in compliments. As some interviewees suggested, their purpose of citing a third party’s positive assessment in their performance of a compliment seems to make their evaluative judgements more valid and substantial. The generational difference in this norm is considerable in the sense that citing someone else appears to be a strategy that allows the complimenter to avoid claiming authority. Thus this difference seems to suggest that there may be a link between the older generation’s value of external verification and their inclination towards self-deprecation in paying a compliment (5.4.2.2). Moreover, as will be discussed in my comparison of norms informing CRs (6.5.2), the older generation’s preference for external verification and self-deprecation also seems

consistent with their more ready adherence to modesty in responding to compliments.

Second, evidence of the generational difference in the norm of external verification was suggested in interviewees' accounts of their reasons for complimenting. Although there are indeed several of the post-OCPG compliments issued by citing or quoting someone (5.4.1.2), none of the interviewees from this group explained their citation as adding any extra weight to their compliment. Thus, my inference that external verification may be a norm informing post-OCPG's compliments of this type was merely based on the conversational transcripts.

Approbation: Analysis of the interview data shows that while this norm informs both generations' compliment behaviour, it affects the pre-OCPG's behaviour much more greatly. One reason is that many of the pre-OCPG interviewees frequently emphasize the importance of this norm in interpersonal interaction. This is particularly exemplified by participant G's (pre-5) belief that in social interaction 'We should grow more flowers than thorns'. Literally, it means that we should say something nice rather than words that may hurt others, i.e. compliment rather than criticize others. By contrast, the younger generation appeared less likely to pay a compliment merely to please their addressee. Participant B (post-6), for example, explained one of his compliments as 'I felt he ((H's father)) is really like the film star. I did not compliment to be nice to her ((H))'. This difference in the two generations' emphasis on the norms of approbation and sincerity might be the major reason for the noticeable difference in compliment frequency (5.2).

Being playful: In my data this politeness norm appears to inform the compliments of both generations. However, there is evidence that generational differences in this norm are considerable. To begin with, in terms of frequency, the post-OCPG seem to be much more likely than the pre-OCPG to carry out compliments playfully. Apart

from the large number of compliments that appear to be informed by this norm in the post-OCPG data, its importance is especially well reflected in their interview accounts. For instance, participant F (post-7) commented that ‘The Chinese, when paying a compliment, don’t say so directly, but do so in a playful tone’. Moreover, many of the post-OCPG interviewees tend more to characterize their compliments as *kāiwánxiào* (‘cracking jokes’), *tiáokǎn* (‘teasing’), etc., all within the same semantic domain of fun and playfulness. For example, participant A (post-8) assessed his friend B as *shíshén* (‘god of food’). Then in the follow-up interview, A said that his intention was to pay a compliment playfully. And this appears to be partly supported by his use of the exaggerating epithet.

Secondly, consistent with their stress on the desire to express solidarity in CRs, aiming to set a casual and sociable tone of interaction (6.5.2), many post-OCPG interviewees said that a playful compliment can add a tone of amusement to their conversation, hence helps create a light-hearted atmosphere at a social gathering. Moreover, interview evidence was found in 6 out of the 8 post-OCPG party conversations. To illustrate, two post-OCPG participants said respectively that ‘in social interactions such a way of praising can enhance the atmosphere’ (A, post-3) and ‘they ((playful compliments)) are words that we use to create a relaxed atmosphere’ (B, post-8). However, in my interviews with the pre-OCPG participants, they were much unlikely to say that a compliment can serve such a social function.

Thirdly, the post-OCPG complimenters’ playful tone is very often successfully perceived by the complimentees in my data. Further, compliments carried out in this way tend more to receive the strategy of Opt out. For instance, participant B (post-8) stressed repeatedly in my interview that he generally did not give a response to a playful compliment. This might partially explain why the post-OCPG used the CR strategy of Opt out more frequently than the pre-OCPG (6.3).

Unlike the frequent recurrence of playful compliments among the post-OCPG, the example analyzed in Extract 5.10 seems to be the only compliment paid with a playful manner supported by evidence given by the complimenter himself. All the above evidence appears to indicate that the norm of being playful predominantly informs the post-OCPG's compliment behaviour.

In summary, evidence shows that the norms of respect, external verification and approbation predominantly inform the older generation's compliment behaviour whereas sincerity and being playful predominantly inform the younger generation's compliment behaviour.

5.5.3 Norms informing just one group's compliment behaviour

Social inclusion: The interview data show that the norm of social inclusion appears to affect exclusively the pre-OCPG's compliment behaviour. As said earlier, in following this norm, a participant pays compliments to different co-participants in order that nobody feels left out. In comparison, whereas a number of compliments were issued by the pre-OCPG with consideration of this norm, no evidence from the post-OCPG interviewees' accounts suggests that they seem to compliment their co-participants motivated by such a consideration.

Xiānlǐhòubīng ('peaceful means first, force second'): As the illustrations in 5.4.2.5 suggest, compliments informed by this norm of politeness occurred fairly frequently in the post-OCPG's conversations. In contrast, there is no evidence, either in the conversations or interview accounts, that this norm appeared to be informing the pre-OCPG's compliment behaviour. *Xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') thus could be seen as a politeness norm exclusive to the post-OCPG's compliments. This might be an indication that interactions among the younger generation appear more conflictive when compared with those among the older generation. Furthermore, the high value they give to this norm seems to be in

line with their closer adherence to the norm of being playful. This is because while complimenting itself with a playful manner is often a positively affective speech act, it may sometimes be intended and/or perceived as ironical and face-threatening (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997, Geyer 2008). Moreover, the post-OCPG's observation of this norm appears to be consistent with their playful acceptance of a compliment as a sign of showing solidarity (6.4, 6.5).

My analysis so far in this section has revealed that the politeness norms I identified and generation are closely correlated. This is clearly presented in the following figure.

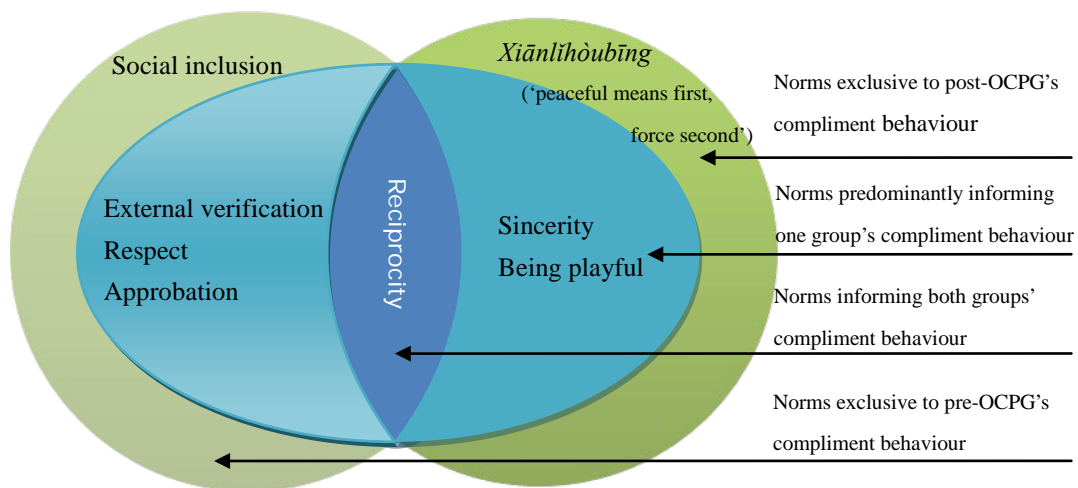


Figure 5.2: *Distribution of politeness norms informing compliment behaviour across generations.*

As the figure shows, there is no clear evidence to suggest that the politeness norm of reciprocity (centre of the figure) varies across the two generations in my study, but the remaining seven norms were found to be closely correlated with generation. Briefly, the norms named external verification, respect and approbation (left side of the oval) appear to predominantly inform the pre-OCPG's compliment behaviour, whereas the norms of sincerity and being playful (right side of the oval) seem to predominantly inform the post-OCPG's compliment behaviour. Moreover, the

norms I named social inclusion (left side outer circle without overlapping) and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') (right side outer circle without overlapping) seem exclusive to the pre- and post-OCPG's compliments respectively.

5.6 Summary

In this chapter I analyzed the compliments, the informing politeness norms and the generational variation in the compliment behaviour and norms. To recapitulate the major findings, my data show that the conversationalists produced 410 compliments on different topics. Quantitative and qualitative analyses of these compliments and the underlying norms revealed that the compliments and the politeness norms identified vary according to generation.

To be precise, the analysis shows that 410 utterances were verified by the participants themselves as compliments. Of these compliments, about three quarters were issued by the pre-OCPG and the remaining by the post-OCPG. A considerable generational difference thus emerged in the frequency of compliments. Regarding compliment topics, ability, character, and appearance, in the decreasing order of frequency, are complimented frequently. Meanwhile, the topics of some compliments do not seem to fit squarely into the aforementioned three, hence were named Other in my study. In terms of generational variation, most strikingly, the younger generation value ability much more highly than the older (53.77% vs. 38.49%) while they are much less likely to compliment on appearance (14.15% vs. 24.67%). Also, in this chapter, it was found that a compliment topic is not always easily identifiable (5.3).

Building on these findings, I analyzed politeness norms that appear to inform the compliment behaviour. There is evidence that eight politeness norms informing the compliments could be inferred based on my close examination of relevant conversational extracts and interview data. In my study, the norms I named sincerity,

external verification, and being playful work as expectations about the appropriate ways to carry out compliments. And the norms I labelled reciprocity, respect, approbation, social inclusion, and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') operate as motivations for paying compliments.

Moreover, *emic* analysis demonstrates that compliment behaviour, politeness norms and generation are highly correlated. It can be summarized in three points as follows. Firstly, the norm of reciprocity appears to inform both generational groups' compliment behaviour. Secondly, social inclusion and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') seem exclusive to the pre- and post-OCPG's compliments respectively. Thirdly, among the remaining five norms, respect, external verification, approbation seem to affect the pre-OCPG's compliments more considerably, whereas sincerity and being playful tend more to inform the post-OCPG's behaviour. Further, the pre-OCPG's more rigorous adherence to the norms of social inclusion, respect, external verification and approbation seems consistent with their considerably higher frequency of compliments. In contrast, it appears that the younger generation's emphasis on sincerity, being playful, and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') accounts well for their reluctance to pay compliments.

Chapter Six

Compliment Response Behaviour and Politeness Norms

6.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to show there is generational variation in CR behaviour and the underlying politeness norms I identified. I begin by showing CR strategies assigned based on the compliment recipients' perceptions obtained through follow-up interviews. The data show that nearly half of the total CRs were verified by the complimentees as Opt out. This led me to make a distinction between CR strategies and Opt out in my study. On this basis, I show the generational variation in CR strategies that emerged in my data. I then illustrate respectively the identified politeness norms that appear to inform CR strategies and the variation in CR behaviour and norms in relation to generation.

6.2 Compliment response strategies from the participants' perspective

This section reports on findings concerning the generational variation in CR strategies. Drawing on the postmodernist politeness theorists' argument that intention behind an utterance cannot be easily accessed by merely examining the linguistic form (see e.g. Eelen 2001, Mills 2003), I adopted an integrated method of assigning strategies. It incorporates features pertaining to the communicative event, such as the syntactic and semantic shape and prosody of the utterance, the discourse context, and particularly the compliment recipients' accounts of their communicative intention.

Adapted from previous studies (e.g. Pomerantz 1978, Holmes 1988), a threefold taxonomy of CR strategies was used in this study, viz. CRs were categorized into Acceptance, Rejection and Amended acceptance. Yet, while many scholars (e.g.

Herbert 1989, Ye 1995) seem to assume that the complimentee's intention underlying a response is easily accessible from the form and content of the utterance (2.4.2.1, 2.4.2.2), I show that to code whether a certain CR is intended as any of these strategies, new sources of evidence such as follow-up interviews are critical. Below these three CR strategies are illustrated in turn.

6.2.1 Acceptance

A CR is categorized as an acceptance strategy when it was used by the complimentees to express their acceptance of the complimenter's positive assessment. In my data this strategy is realized in a range of forms. For example, a complimentee may give an acceptance response by agreeing with, appreciating, upgrading, or returning a compliment. Illustrated below is an example showing the complimentee's full agreement with the prior assessment.

Extract 6.1 (post-6)

- 1 C: 她 ((H)) 妈 真呢 不错 啊 ((laugh)) 这样评价 对不对!
her mum really not bad (particle) this comment correct-not-correct
'*her ((H's)) mum is really great ((laugh)) how about this comment!'
- 2 A: 你 不 可能 两个 ((H and H's 妈妈)) 都 喜欢上 嘛.
you not may two mum both like (particle)
'you can't be interested in both of them ((H and H's mum)).'
- 3 C: 不会 不会,
no no
'no, no,'
- 4 H: 那个身材 (.) 是不是.
that figure yes-not-yes
'that figure (.) isn't it.'
- 5 C: 对 啊, 你 看 (.) 这个 线条 (.) 大腿 到 小腿 (.)=
yes (particle) you look this curve thigh to shank
'yeah, *look (.) the leg (.) from the thigh to the shank (.)='
- 6 A: 哦: [观察 仔细 啊!
(particle) observation careful (particle)

- ‘wow: [(your) observation is careful!’
- 7 C: =[完全 象 撇过来,
 completely like curved
 ‘=[is really curved,’
- 8 H: 还 带有 点 S 型.
 even with little shape
 ‘kind of S-shaped.’
- 9 C: 你 再 近一步 看看 (.) 哇塞! 真 受 不 了! 你 家 妈.
 you again near a step look (interjection) really bear not (particle) your mum
 ‘*you take a closer look (.) wow! really attractive! your mum.’
- 10 H: 开 玩笑 (.) 嗯.
 crack joke (particle)
 ‘(you’re) joking (.) um.’
- 11 C: 吃 饭 了, 我的 胃口 又 回 来 了.
 eat rice (particle) my appetite again back come (particle)
 ‘dishes, I feel like eating again.’
- 12 H: 我照呢 那张 相片 肯定 着 我...
 I take that photo certainly (voice marker) I
 ‘the snap of mine must have been...’

While admiring a photo of H’s mother with other participants, participant C issues three compliments on the attractiveness of H’s mother. The first one occurs in line 1; the second spreads across lines 5 and 7; and the last is found in line 9. According to the existing compliment literature, the arrowed response in line 10 would be assigned to Rejection. For instance, in Yu’s study ‘You’ve got to be joking’ is coded by the analyst as Diverge under Non-acceptance strategy (2003:1707). Similarly, ‘You must be joking’ is classified as Challenge sincerity under Reject by Holmes (1995:142) (see also Tang and Zhang 2009:330). Likewise, in Wang and Tsai’s study ‘You must be joking’ is categorized as Disagreement, by which, the authors claim, ‘[t]he addressee directly disagrees with addresser’s assertion’ (2003:139–140).

However, I maintain that the task of coding a CR strategy cannot be performed merely on the basis of the linguistic formula (2.4.2.2). As I argued in 3.2.2, interviews with the participants can provide an empirically grounded window into

their understandings of the compliment and CR. In the interview the compliment recipient said explicitly that her response *kāiwánxiào* 开玩笑 ('(you're) joking') is the same as *nà dāngrán la* 那当然啦 ('of course'). The interviewee added that she wanted to express total agreement with her friend's positive assessment on her mum's figure. Interestingly, the follow-up interview shows that the utterance under analysis was also perceived by the complimenter himself as H's agreeing with his earlier praise: "H's utterance meant 'her mum is really sexy and very attractive'".

Moreover, some textual and prosodic evidence also lends support to H's and C's perceptions. The question tag *shìbùshì* 是不是 ('yes-not-yes') in line 4 is particularly indicative. It is said in a falling tone and could be understood as a rhetorical question, to which no answer is expected. This utterance thus could be taken as contextual evidence of the complimentee oriented towards accepting the subsequent compliment. According to Chen and He, the tag *duìbùduì* 对不对 ('correct-not-correct') is normally 'used as a basic [pragmatic] marker to reinforce the illocutionary force of the sentence proposition it is tagged to' (2001:1441). Furthermore, they maintain *shìbùshì* can be a variant of *duìbùduì*. Thus it seems plausible to interpret the tag as reinforcing the complimentee's prior assertion, i.e. her mother's figure is praiseworthy. With all the above evidence, the CR strategy in this extract was finally coded as Acceptance.

6.2.2 Rejection

Rejection, as opposed to Acceptance, falls somewhere towards the other end of the continuum of strategies. It is used by complimentees to convey their intention of disagreement with the prior assessment about themselves or something associated with them. In the following example I first show that a CR is interpretable as accepting or rejecting a compliment if we only have access to the CR and its preceding and ensuing utterances. I then demonstrate that information about the

complimentee's intention gathered in the interview is critical in assigning CR strategies.

Extract 6.2 (post-7)

- 1 B: 光学 这套理论 没什么发展, 从爱因斯坦以后 没什么发展,
optical this theory little development since Einstein little development
'there has been little advance in the optical theory, since Einstein,'
- 2 C: 太 难 了.
too difficult (particle)
'(the field of study is) really formidable.'
- 3 B: 嗯 (.) 这个光 看来挺简单, 里面关系 太多 了,
(particle) this light appear very simple inside relationship too many (particle)
'uh (.) light appears very simple, but it's actually extremely complex,'
- 4 A: ((laugh))
- 5 B: [它很多 特性 现在 都搞不清楚... 爱因斯坦说 是粒子性,
its many property now all unknown Einstein say be particle
- 6 波尔 说 是量子性, 光电 效应 现象 出来 了,
Boyer say be quantum photoelectric effect phenomenon appear (particle)
- 7 谁 知道 怎么样, 反正 就 这样, 他们俩 说的 都 对.
who know how anyway like this they both say all correct
'[many of its ((light's)) properties still remain unknown... Einstein said it's composed of particles while Boyer believed it's composed of quanta, the photoelectric effect phenomenon was discovered, and nobody knows what it really is, that's all, they are both right.'
- 8 C: ((laugh)) 牛啊! 你 知道的 这些东西 我们都不知道 ((laugh))
superb (particle) you know these stuff we all not know
'((laugh)) *superb! it's all Greek to us ((laugh))'
- 9 B: 高中 物理 高中 物理 学的, 这是.
senior high school physics senior high school physics learn this
'in senior high school, (we) learned it in physics.'
- 10 A: 物理 忘得 差不多 了((laugh))
physics forget almost (particle)
'(we) nearly forgot all that (we) learned about physics ((laugh))'

Here participant C pays a compliment in line 8 after B talks about the complexity of the optical theory. Then B gives the response 'in senior high school, (we) learned it

in physics'. This utterance appears to function as an explanation for the acquisition of the complimentee's knowledge about the optical theory. If this is the case, then the response could be seen as either accepting or rejecting the compliment (cf. Yuan 2002:210). Still we do not seem to have good reasons to rule out the possibility that the complimentee may intend to signal an ambiguous stance. In other words, without further information any inference we make about the complimentee's intention would turn out to be rather unwarranted. Nevertheless, the complimentee's response to my interview question proves illuminating: 'By saying that, I meant what C commented on was not superb at all, because I've already learned it in senior high school. It was not difficult. (It was) just because they haven't learned that bit before.' Here the recipient explains why he did not think his knowledge was worth complimenting. Further, complimenter C perceived B's response as 'a way of showing modesty'. For these reasons, the CR strategy was finalized as Rejection.

6.2.3 Amended acceptance

As suggested above, Amended acceptance is a strategy that comes halfway between Acceptance and Rejection on the strategy continuum. This strategy has been labelled as such because, as in the studies of Knapp *et al* (1984) and Ye (1995), my data show that by using the strategy the complimentees accept compliments with some sort of qualification. It can be illustrated by the following example.

Extract 6.3 (pre-2)

- 1 G: 敬 姐姐 ((D)) 一口 (.) 哦: 你呢 都 没得.
 propose elder sister a sip (particle) you(r) all no
 'a toast to elder sister ((D)) (.) oh: you haven't any (drink left).'
- 2 D: 有 呢.
 have (particle)
 'I have.'
- 3 F: 么: 当真 是.
 (particle) really be

- ‘oh: really.’
- 4 G: 我们 小小呢 就记得=
we young remember
‘we remembered since our childhood=’
- 5 D: [嗯
(particle)
‘[um’
- 6 G: =[姐姐 是 随时都 多 开朗,
elder sister be always very extrovert
‘=[*elder sister has always been really extrovert,’
- 7 D: ((laugh))
- 8 F: 勤快.
diligent
‘*and (she’s) diligent as well.’
- 9 G: 嗯 (.) 勤快, 真呢 是.
(particle) diligent really be
‘*yeah (.) diligent, really.’
- 10 D: 哎哟 (.) 夸奖, 好 (.) 喝.
(particle) compliment well drink
‘oh (.) (you’re) flattering (me), well (.) cheers.’
- 11 F: 我 都 忘记 忘记 倒 点,
I even forget forget pour some
‘I even forgot, forgot to serve you some more (drink),’
- 12 D: 还 有 呢, ((F 继续给 D 倒饮料)) 好 (.) 可以 可以 啊.
still have (particle) OK enough enough (particle)
‘I still have (drink in my glass), ((F keeps pouring drink into D’s glass)) OK (.)
that’s enough, enough.’

In this extract participant G first pays a compliment on D’s character, i.e. being extrovert (line 6), which is generally valued in Chinese culture. Then F offers another on D’s diligence (line 8) and it is further reinforced by G’s agreement (line 9). In the subsequent interviews about the response *āiyo, kuājiǎng* 哎哟, 夸奖 (‘oh (.) (you’re) flattering (me)’), complimenter F said that ‘she ((D)) slightly agreed with my comment and showed modesty’. Additionally, in the interview, F’s husband C, also a participant of the party at which this compliment was issued, overheard F’s foregoing accounts and commented that D meant to say *xièxie nǐmende kuājiǎng*

(‘thank you for your praise’). Their disagreement on D’s strategy indicates that the utterance *āiyo, kuājiǎng* was interpreted differently by different hearers. This is evidence that the pragmatic meaning of the utterance is not self-evident.

When recipient D was interviewed, she remarked that she meant to show modesty, and accepted the compliment with modesty. She added that she wanted to say *kuājiǎng, guòjiǎng* (‘(you’re) flattering (me)’). The complimenter and complimentee thus share a similar view about the strategy categorization of this CR while participant C had a different opinion. This example shows that coding CR strategies is really much more complex than it would appear. I maintain that it is the complimentee’s judgement that provides the most appropriate basis for coding a CR strategy. Therefore, in assigning CR strategies we should put more emphasis on the complimentees’ perceptions as provided in their interview accounts.

Āiyo, kuājiǎng bears a striking resemblance to *āiyo, guòjiǎng* (‘oh, (you’re) flattering (me)’). *Guòjiǎng* is interpreted by Chen and Yang as ‘What I did does not deserve your good words’ (2010:1957) and is categorized under Rejection, whereas it is classified as Shift credit under Evade in Tang and Zhang’s study (2009:336). However, unlike these studies’ interpretation, interview data in the current study show that when saying *āiyo, kuājiǎng* the complimentee accepted the compliment while showing modesty. Therefore, this CR strategy was coded as Amended acceptance.

Based on the participants’ interpretations and intentions accessed by examining evidence from the recorded conversations and interviews, all the CRs in 16 conversations were assigned to three mutually exclusive strategies: Acceptance, Rejection and Amended acceptance. The result shows that of the 200 VCRs, 147 and 53 were respectively generated by the pre- and post-OCPG participants.

6.2.4 Generational variation in compliment response strategies

Further analysis shows that the strategies of acceptance, rejection, and amended acceptance respectively account for 48.98% (n=72), 42.18% (n=62) and 8.84% (n=13) of the total CRs produced by the older generation. Similarly, the three strategies respectively make up 66.04% (n=35), 20.75% (n=11) and 13.21% (n=7) of the CRs collected among the younger participants. To highlight these cross-generational differences in CR behaviour, the strategies are presented in the following figure.

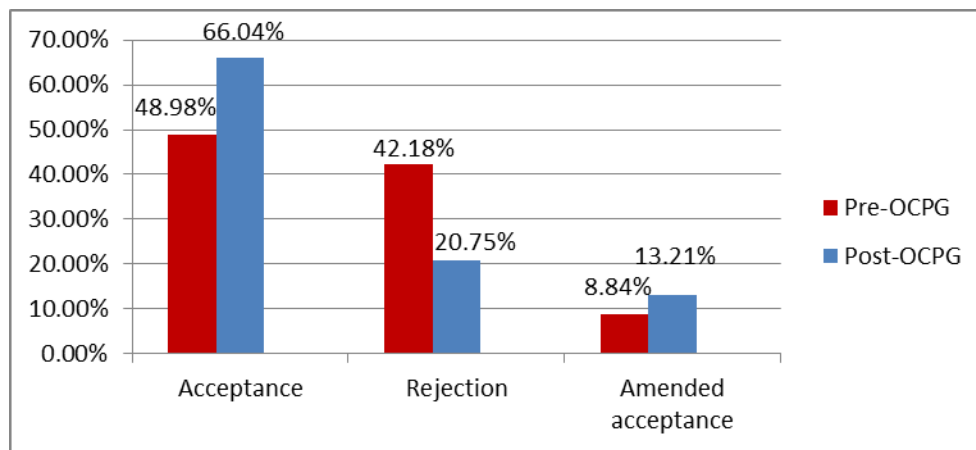


Figure 6.1: Comparison between CR strategies used by the two generations.

This figure shows similarities and differences in the CR strategies used by the pre- and post-OCPG participants. To begin with, it displays a similar pattern of strategy preference. That is, Acceptance is most preferred by both generational groups while Amended acceptance is least favoured. For both groups the traditional strategy of Rejection still counts in responding to a compliment between friends in informal spontaneous natural conversations.

Moreover, Figure 6.1 shows considerable generational differences in the use of CR strategies. Most strikingly, the older generation participants are more than twice as likely as the younger to reject a compliment. Conversely, the younger tend much

more readily than the older to accept a compliment. In addition, the older generation do not show a strong preference for either Acceptance or Rejection whereas the younger use Acceptance predominantly.

6.3 Opt out strategy from the participants' perspective

The goal of this section is to show, with evidence provided by interviewees, that there is a case that complimentees opt out of a response when complimented. This strategy is illustrated with two extracts of conversation and the corresponding interviews, respectively taken from the pre- and post-OCPG conversations.

Based on the procedure for verifying ACRs detailed in 4.4, my data show that there are two cases where the complimentees choose to use the strategy of Opt out. To begin with, the following extract exemplifies the case in which complimentees take the conversational floor after an AC is offered ('analyst's compliment', see 3.4.2.2) but they do not give a response.

Extract 6.4 (pre-2)

1 F: 我们那里呢那个 Jing, 你都教过, 她说你还记得—
we there that you all teach (tense marker) she say you still remember
'my colleague Jing, you taught her, she said you still remember—'

2 A: Jing?

'Jing?'

3 F: 嗯(.) 你还记得她呢.
(particle) you still remember her (particle)
'yeah (.) you still remember her.'

4 A: 在 Huang (.) 我刚刚克呢时候教初三喃.
in I just go time teach junior third (particle)
'in Huang (Junior High School) (.) I taught her in her third year.'

5 F: 哦

(particle)

'oh'

6 A: 她 ((Jing)) 和 Chun 是一班呢.

- she and be same class (particle)
 ‘she ((Jing)) and Chun were in the same class.’
- 7 F: 哦 (.) 挨 Chun 是 一 班 呢嘎.
 (particle) with be same class (particle)
 ‘oh (.) they were in the same class.’
- 8 A: 是 一 班 呢, 那跟 ((Jing)) 都 经老 呢嘎.
 be same class (particle) she all look young (particle)
 ‘yeah, in the same class, she ((Jing)) looks very young.’
- 9 F: 经老 呢 经老 呢.
 look young (particle) look young (particle)
 ‘(Jing) looks very young, looks very young.’
- 10 A: 你们 ((F and Jing)) 都 越发来越发 年轻.
 you (pl.) both more and more young
 ‘*you ((F and Jing)) both look younger and younger.’
- 11 F: 她家 小娃 都 工作.
 her child all work
 ‘her ((Jing’s)) child has graduated and has already found a job.’
- 12 A: 哦
 (particle)
 ‘oh’
- 13 F: 她 大 我 一 岁 喃.
 she old me one year-old (particle)
 ‘she is one year older than me.’

In this extract, F and A are talking about A’s former student Jing, who is F’s colleague about the same age as F. When the topic of appearance is developed in their conversation, A issues a potential compliment in line 10 on the youth of both F and Jing. According to my coding scheme shown in 3.4.2.2, the arrowed utterance was coded as an AC (‘analyst’s compliment). And F’s utterance that follows immediately was identified as an ACR (‘analyst’s CR’). For verification, I carried out follow-up interviews. To my question “Did you respond to ‘you ((F and Jing)) both look younger and younger’ when you said ‘her ((Jing’s)) child has graduated and has already found a job’?”, F provided the following answer:

When he ((A)) said both Jing and I looked young, I did not take up that topic, but shifted to talk about Jing's child. When others mention your merit, don't dwell on it. That's something like avoidance when you're complimented.

F's accounts thus show that she recognized A's intent to compliment on her appearance in the arrowed line. As can be seen in the extract, F takes the floor (line 11) after being complimented. Nevertheless, she does not take up the topic. Rather, she shifts to talk about Jing's child and the child's job. This, according to the interviewee, was designed as an avoidance strategy. In her words, 'When others mention your merit, don't dwell on it'. The complimentee appears to observe what may be termed 'rules of speaking' (Hymes 2004:66) or politeness norms in interaction. That is, when one's praiseworthy attributes like appearance are complimented by co-participants, she may simply opt out by means of shifting to a new topic.

The above illustration shows a case where a complimentee does not intend her utterance, i.e. the ACR, as her response to the AC. It also provides evidence that a complimentee may opt out of a response in order not to dwell on her compliment-worthy trait. Then, the following extract and interview illustrate the case where no utterance is made by the complimentee after an AC. Hence a non-verbal ACR is assumed (4.4) and the CR strategy used is finalized as Opt out.

Extract 6.5 (post-8)

- 1 B: 豆 尖, 最后再 放 最后再 放, 豆子 串味.
pea leave last again put last again put pea spoil flavour
'pea leaves, serve them in the end, in the end, since they spoil the soup flavour.'
- 2 H: 什么?
what
'what?'
- 3 A: 串 味.

- spoil flavour
 ‘(they) spoil the (soup) flavour.’
- 4 B: 串 味, 汤的 味道 就没 了.
 spoil flavour soup flavour no (particle)
 ‘(they) spoil the (soup) flavour, and the original distinctive flavour will go.’
- 5 A: 有[经验 啦.
 experienced (particle)
 ‘[*experienced.]’
- 6 C: [有经验 啦.
 experienced (particle)
 ‘[*experienced.]’
- 7 F: 哇! B=
 (particle)
 ‘*wow! B=’
- 8 A: [食神!
 god of food
 ‘[*(you) gourmet!’
- 9 F: =[B, 我 以后 吃饭 跟 你 一起 吃.
 I future dine with you together eat
 ‘=[B, I will always dine with you in the future.’
- 10 A: ((laugh)) 你 现在 不就 一直 在干 这事 吗?
 you now not always do this thing (particle)
 ‘((laugh)) aren’t you eating with him now?’
- 11 E and D: ((laugh))
- 12 H: 什么 意思.
 what meaning
 ‘what do you ((A)) mean.’
- 13 A: 看 你, H(.) 她 多长时间没 跟你一块 吃饭了.
 look you she how long no with you together dine (particle)
 ‘hi, H(.) for how long hasn’t she ((F)) dined with you.’
- 14 F: 继续 学习 继续 向 B 同学 学习.
 keep learn keep from classmate learn
 ‘*keep learning, keep learning from B.’
- 15 H: 她? 没有 啊, 我 俩 天天 在一起 吃饭 啊.
 her no (particle) we two every day together dine (particle)
 ‘she ((F))? no, we ((H and F)) have meals together every day.’

Here the arrowed utterance was initially classified as an AC. Since B makes no utterance after the AC in this context, a non-verbal ACR was assumed. I then interviewed potential complimentee B. He said that ‘I was a little happy because I felt subconsciously that she ((F)) complimented on my rich knowledge and experience about the traditional dish of hotpot’. B’s words indicate that he perceived F’s utterance in line 9 as a compliment. I then moved on to verify the ACR by asking him to listen for any response he may have given in the conversation. After listening to the relevant segment of conversation, he said:

I didn’t give a response since I had no idea about what to say. This could mean either to indicate an implicit acceptance, or just to ignore it. Due to my disposition, I wouldn’t give a reply. Moreover, it’s a girl who said like that (i.e. issued such a compliment).

It becomes clear that B remained silent after being complimented in the conversation. The strategy of Opt out was therefore established here. The aforementioned two illustrations may suffice to serve as empirical evidence that there is a case that a potential complimentee chooses to opt out when complimented.

With similar evidence as presented above, 186 ACRs were verified as Opt out. That is to say, as shown in Figure 6.2, Opt out accounts for nearly half (48.19%) of the total CRs (n=386), whereas the strategies of acceptance, rejection and amended acceptance make up the remaining half (51.81%).

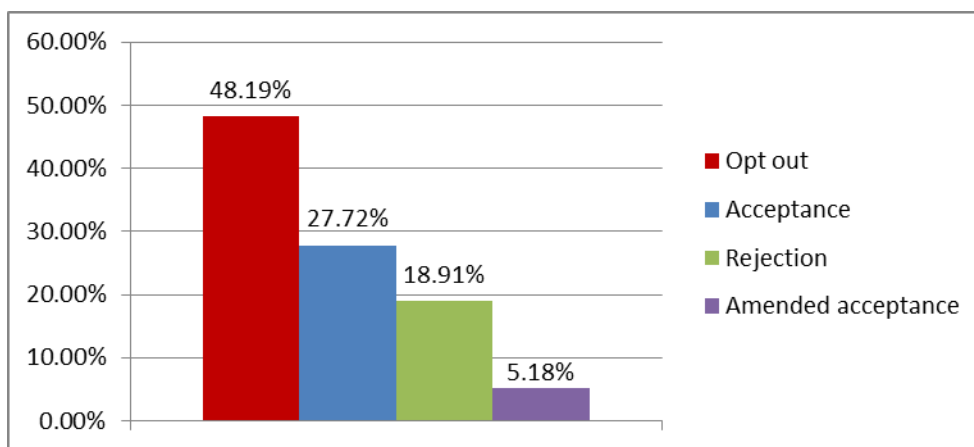


Figure 6.2: Comparison between Opt out and CR strategies.

Further analysis shows that CRs falling into Opt out produced by the pre- and post-OCPG make up 45.96% (n=125 out of 272) and 53.51% (n=61 out of 114) of their respective data set. This indicates that both generations of the Chinese use Opt out frequently in natural conversations although the younger generation tend slightly more to opt out of a response.

6.4 Politeness norms informing compliment response behaviour

The objective of this section is to show what I named *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness'), reciprocity, gratitude, modesty, desire to express truth and desire to express solidarity were identified as some of the politeness norms that appear to inform CR behaviour in the current study. My focus is on illustrating these norms by showing evidence from the conversational transcripts and their corresponding interviews.

6.4.1 *Hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness')

My data show that *hánxù* 含蓄 ('avoidance of explicitness') appears to be a politeness norm that may have informed CR strategies used in the dinner party conversations. The Chinese term *hánxù* is defined by Gao and Ting-Toomey as 'a

mode of communication (both verbal and nonverbal) that is contained, reserved, implicit, and indirect' (1998:37). Roughly consistent with this notion, *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness') was identified as a norm of politeness motivating many CRs in my data. As illustrated below, observing this norm, the complimentees were trying to avoid expressing explicitly their stance, attitude or emotion in responding to a compliment.

In my study, this norm appears to mainly inform the non-performance strategy of Opt out. For instance, participant A (pre-2) said 'We don't have to answer all compliments. For the Chinese, our words should be ambiguous and equivocal sometimes'. It also appears to impact Acceptance and Amended acceptance. Evidence for this emerges in interviews in which Opt out was taken by many complimentees as if it was a default strategy in responding to a compliment. The following extract bears this out.

Extract 6.6 (pre-7)

- 1 A: 因为 我教呢 那届 学生 在 Yuan县 教育 界呢 最多,
 because I teach that year student in county education sector most
 'because most of the students I taught in Yuan county that year work in schools now,'
- 2 G: 嗯 嗯
 (particle) (particle)
 'yeah, yeah'
- 3 A: 教育 界 最多.
 education sector most
 'most teach in schools.'
- 4 G: 是 啊.
 yes (particle)
 'yes.'
- 5 A: 看见 那些 学生 都说, 嗯(.) A 老师, 你 教呢 学生, 我们
 see those student all say (particle) teacher you teach student we
- 6 现在 是 各个 学校的 骨干 哦!
 now be every school backbone (particle)

‘when I last met them they said *Teacher A, your students all play a pivotal role in schools!*’

→7 G: 是 呢 是 呢, 桃 李 遍 天 下 啊.
yes (particle) yes (particle) peach plum over world (particle)

‘*really, really, *táolǐ biàn tiānxià* ((you’ve got successful students everywhere)).’

→8 C: 值得 骄傲 呢.

deserve proud (particle)

‘*(you) should be proud of that.’

→9 G: 嗯 (.) 对呢, 当然罗, 哦, 想 请 都 请不 来.

(particle) yes (particle) certainly (particle) wish invite all invite not come

‘yeah (.) really, certainly, *oh, even an invitation may not make you there.’

(0.9)

Earlier in the conversation, pensioner A mentioned that recently he went back to Yuan county, where he worked until retirement. In the extract provided here, he receives three successive compliments, the asterisked utterances respectively in lines 7, 8 and 9. They were all verified by the participants as compliments. In my interview, complimentee A explained his Opt out as follows:

I didn’t respond. I found it hard to express myself when you complimented on my character. I felt *it was not appropriate for me to talk about my achievement publicly*, but I felt very happy.

Here the interviewee reveals that he was pleased at hearing the compliments but chose to opt out of a response because, in his words, ‘it was not appropriate for me to talk about my achievement publicly’. Thus, it could be inferred that complimentee A probably observed the norm *hánxù* (‘avoidance of explicitness’) in avoiding displaying explicitly his position as to whether he accepted or rejected the compliment.

To further illustrate this norm, I reproduce below participant F’s (post-2) views about her lack of a response to a prior compliment:

Actually, a response to a compliment is generally not obligatory. If a friend is being too modest in responding to a compliment, we will surely take his response as being affected. If he also thinks so, outstanding in a certain area, others will recognize his credit, but it is better that the praiseworthiness be pointed out by others.

The interviewee begins by stating explicitly her general stance to CR behaviour: a response is not obligatory. She then offers an extended explanation. It seems that an important message she was trying to deliver is that *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness') is a social norm which often motivates CR behaviour, particularly opting out. Moreover, she suggests that violating the norm would be socially sanctioned. That is, on the one hand, rejecting a friend's compliment would run the risk of being evaluated as being too modest and of being judged by friends as 'affected'. On the other hand, accepting a compliment would be tantamount to praising self and this, in the interviewee's view, goes against the cultural value that one's credit is better to 'be pointed out by others'. Thus, like the pensioner's account analyzed earlier, this interview response brings to light the norm of *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness') that may have informed her non-performance upon receiving a compliment.

An interesting finding concerning this norm is that while many complimentees meant to avoid giving a clear and explicit response, they emphasized very often in the interviews that internally they accepted the compliment. For example, interviewee B (post-8) said 'I was embarrassed, not knowing what to say. It meant implicit acceptance or ignoring'. Moreover, in terms of strategies, Opt out was frequently perceived as hinting acceptance of the compliment. Evidence for this exists in the interview accounts given by the complimentees and complimenters. Terms like *mòxǔ* ('acquiescence'), *mòrèn* ('tacit agreement'), *rènkě* ('acceptance'), and *rèntóng* ('identification') were often used by them as indicating their 'inward'

acceptance of a compliment, as opposed to their ambivalent outward appearance. For instance, in Extract 4.5 (4.3.4), when I asked participant H about the reason for her smile (line 8) upon hearing B's compliment 'oh:: more eloquent' (line 7), H answered as follows:

I meant a kind of inner agreement. 'Yeah, of course', like this. I was to agree with his words. So I smiled. It indicated a feeling of embarrassment. Eh, human beings, perhaps, I did think I was good at oratory, so I *mòrèn* (literally, 'tacit agreement') and gave a smile. And it was embarrassing to say anything.

Thus probably following the norm of *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness'), the complimentees outwardly gave a smile to the compliment they received, but inwardly, they identified with the complimenter. Furthermore, similar evidence also comes to light in the accounts provided by many other interviewees who used a non-performance response like silence. As a short example, complimentee E (pre-2) said in my interview that 'if I didn't give a response, I meant I agreed with the compliment, i.e. accepted implicitly'.

6.4.2 Reciprocity

Scholars like Holmes (1988) and Downes (1998[1984]) note that returning a compliment is a common social practice for speakers of English. Typical examples include 'You're looking good too' (Holmes 1988:460). Similarly, utterances like 'You're not bad, either' (Ye 1995:225) and 'Your clothes are very beautiful too' (Chen and Yang 2010:1955) are also identified by DCT-based studies of CRs in Chinese.

In my spontaneous naturally occurring conversations, reciprocating the act of complimenting also occurred, for example, 'You look very young too'. Moreover, in my study reciprocity was identified as a politeness norm that appears to inform a

reciprocating CR. In my data this norm seems to affect the strategy of acceptance considerably.

The example of reciprocity offered in 5.4.2.1 is exemplary partially in the sense that the norm was suggested in the interviewee's explanation. To spell out the significance of this norm, I will elaborate on it a little further before showing another illustration. As in the studies cited in the preceding paragraph, my data show that a number of CRs that seem to be informed by this norm are formulated using words such as *yě* ('too', 'also', or 'either') and *yīyàng* ('the same'), which denote a clear sense of reciprocation. Sometimes a CR is simply *yīyàng ne* ('the same (particle)') (pre-7). However, as Extract 5.11 demonstrates, some returning CRs are phrased in other ways. But more often than not, it is the interview that brings to light utterances as illustrated below as reciprocation. I show that evidence of the norm of reciprocity was suggested in the conversation and was then confirmed by the complimentee in the interview.

Extract 6.7 (pre-2)

1 F: D, 你呢 那点 ((车)) 都 开 拨, 你 克 Nasha 克?
 your that car all drive (particle) you go go
 'D, you drive yours ((car)) to Nasha, do you?'

2 D: 我呢 那点 着 我 卖 了 ((laugh)) 很 没有 开.
 my that (voice marker) me sell (tense marker) very not drive
 'I've sold it off ((laugh)) I seldom drove.'

3 F: 哦 (.) 二日—
 (particle) future
 'oh (.) in the future—'

4 E: 我 就说 我 倒是 佩服 D 呢=
 I say I really admire (particle)
 '*really I really admire D='

5 F: [你 可以 买点 那份 QQ 车 来开开 嘎?
 you can buy that car drive-drive (particle)
 '[you can get a QQ ((a brand of car)), right?'

6 E: =[我 倒是 整不来 这跟车.

I really not drive the car

'=[I can't drive.'

→7 D: 这话点很没得 这跟条件. E, 你酿事 都会, 这跟 更发简单.

now no the condition you everything all can this even easy

'it's perhaps not the right time now. *E, you're good at everything, driving is even much easier.'

8 E: 开车 这跟 整不来.

drive this can not

'I can't drive.'

9 F: 我 都 一点 悟性 都没得, 开车 这份.

I also little wit no drive this

'I'm all thumbs too in this aspect.'

The utterance 'really I really admire D' in line 4 is a compliment verified by E and also perceived by addressee D as complimentary. Then the utterance 'E, you're good at everything' in the arrowed line was verified by D as her response to the compliment although an interrupting utterance is inserted (line 5) in between. In the response D evaluates E as good at everything, thus the CR is interpretable as reciprocating a compliment. To show the *emic* views about the underlying politeness norm, I reproduce D's interview accounts of her intention and then her reason for the CR:

I meant we approved of what she did. She has the ability. For example, she cycles, she cycles alone everywhere. Similarly it's not hard for her to learn driving. I meant to compliment on her ability. She said she admired me because she can't drive. I had several intentions in giving the response: she has the ability, so I meant to compliment on her all-round ability. At the same time, I responded to her words. So sometimes, our response has several intentions.

Here the interviewee, unlike participant A in Extract 5.11, does not say explicitly something like *lǐshàngwǎnglái* ('reciprocating gifts/favour'), which is characterized by scholars such as Hwang (1987), Gu (1990) and Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998) as a typical principle of politeness in Chinese. But a major point the interviewee seems to emphasize is that E admired her ability to drive and by giving the response in line 7 she meant to compliment on E's ability. Mutual respect is thus shown in reciprocating ability and this could be evidence of the operation of a politeness norm that can be called reciprocity.

6.4.3 Gratitude

Gratitude, one of the core Confucius ideas, has traditionally been associated with loyalty between the ruler and his/her subjects, between husband and wife, and filial piety (see e.g. Ren 2005). But recent research shows that it also has an effect on ordinary social interaction. Wei, for example, argues that 'Gratitude is a Chinese traditional virtue... an important moral norm, which significantly impacts on interpersonal interaction between the Chinese' (2008:5). In my data, gratitude was identified as a norm of politeness influencing CRs. Evidence was found not only in the complimentees' CRs and their interview accounts, but also in the complimenter's expected CRs including 'thank you', 'thank you, thank you' or 'thank you for your praise'. Illustrated below is a case where the complimentee seems to reveal her observance of the norm of gratitude.

Extract 6.8 (pre-3)

1 K: ((给 J 敬酒)) 敬 J 姐.

propose elder sister

'((proposes a toast to J)) (I) drink to you, elder sister J.'

2 J: 好

OK

'OK'

3 K: 很是佩服 你的 这种 领导风范, 真的 很有 气质=

very be admire your this leadership really very have demeanour

‘*(I) really admire your style of leadership and your demeanour=’

4 J: [没有 没有.]

no no

‘[no, no.]’

5 K: =[很 欣赏 ((laugh))

very appreciate

‘=[*(I) really like (your demeanour) ((laugh))’

→6 J: 好, 谢谢 你的 好 言.

OK thank your good word

‘OK, thank you for your kind words.’

7 K: 好, 一切 好.

OK all OK

‘OK, all the best.’

8 J: 常 回家 看看.

often go home look-look

‘come back home often.’

9 K: 好

OK

‘OK’

In the interview, complimentee J said: ‘When you said something nice to me, I expressed my gratitude to you’. J expressed her gratitude as if it was a straightforward way of responding to a compliment. In doing so, she appears to suggest a rule of responding to compliments: You say something nice to me, and I express my gratitude to you. Thus, as widely practiced in the English speaking world, a norm of politeness operating here could be that if someone says something nice to you, then you should show your gratitude. It is worth noting that while on many occasions complimenters expected a response of gratitude, they did not receive CRs like ‘Thank you’ so often.

6.4.4 Modesty

In Chinese culture, modesty is a much-researched norm of politeness (see e.g. Gu 1990/1992, Young 1994, Hwang 2002, Hu and Huang 2009). In the literature on CRs, modesty is uniformly related to the strategy of rejection (see e.g. Chen 1993, Ye 1995, Cheng 2003, Tang and Zhang 2009, Chen and Yang 2010). Evidence from my data also shows that modesty appears to be a norm informing many CRs, particularly the strategy of Rejection, but also Acceptance (e.g. Extract 6.10), Amended acceptance (e.g. Extract 6.3), only occasionally, though.

Evidence mainly emerges from the follow-up interviews in which consideration of modesty was recurrently attributed by the complimentees to their use of rejecting a compliment. In many accounts modesty was described as a traditional virtue shared by the Chinese. Typical responses to my question aimed to elicit politeness norms underlying CR strategies include ‘The Chinese, when complimented, generally show modesty’ (C, pre-2). Consistent with Gao and Ting-Toomey’s claim that *kèqi* (roughly ‘politeness’) ‘is a basic principle that [the] Chinese observe in their everyday speaking practice’ (1998:45), my interviews demonstrate that *kèqi* and its variant *kètào* function almost invariably as indicators of the norm of modesty. For example, when I asked about the reason for her compliment rejection, participant F (pre-7) said ‘In Chinese culture, I generally show *kèqi*, I’m sure I will definitely say so’. Modesty appears to impact on many participants’ CRs to such a degree that rejecting a compliment seems to have become a default response. Participant A (post-4), for example, said that “Whether out of *kèqi* or politeness... I would say ‘No, no’”. To show more clearly how modesty may be an informing norm of CR behaviour, consider the following extract and interview.

Extract 6.9 (pre-7)

1 G: 可以了!	尤其	我们小呢	这个	招待呢最好,	这个 F.
good (particle)	particularly	our young	this one	serve best	this

'good enough! *particularly, the service by F is the best.'

→2 F: 不 好 不 好.
not good not good

'no, no.'

3 G: 小 是 小 最 能干 了, 她 ((F)).
young be young most capable (particle) she

'*she ((F))'s young but really capable.'

4 F: ((laugh))

5 E: 哪个?

who

'who?'

6 G: F F.

'F, F.'

→7 F: ((laugh)) 只 能 说 勤快而已.
only can say diligent

'((laugh)) (I'm) just diligent.'

8 G: 能干

capable

'(you're) capable'

In this extract two compliments were paid to participant F. My focus of analysis here is on the two CRs in lines 2 and 7. These responses were made to compliments respectively on the success of the party and F's ability. While we may extrapolate from the existing literature that the norm informing these CRs is modesty, in the light of the postmodernist approach to politeness, I subscribe to the view that evidence provided by the interactants is more convincing. For this reason, F's answer to my interview question about her reason for rejecting the compliment in line 2 is worth reproducing:

It's not rejection. It's modesty. I would surely be modest because you praised me. Really the party is very good. At least, the atmosphere is very good. I think I would accept. I think it conforms to the conventional rule of politeness in Chinese interpersonal interaction. I think it's kind of a conventional politeness ritual.

Interestingly, the complimentee, a university lecturer, adhered to the Chinese cultural value of modesty such that a CR like ‘No, no’ is equivalent to showing modesty. Moreover, on her view, rejecting a compliment and showing modesty are entirely in conformity with the traditional politeness in Chinese. She even establishes a causal relationship between a compliment and modesty when she said ‘I would surely be modest because you praised me’. Similarly, F’s explanation for her response in line 7 is ‘Because you praised me as all-round, I would show modesty. I thus said, precisely, I was just diligent’. It could be inferred from this evidence that the complimentee observed the norm of modesty in this example.

As showing modesty has long been characterized as typical of Chinese interaction, this norm certainly repays further illustration. Another extract from a different conversation is thus analyzed as follows:

Extract 6.10 (post-1)

- 1 A: 哦, 我们呢 那跟 英语 老师, 幸亏 我们 去年 学过,
 (particle) our that English teacher luckily we last year learn
 2 今年 没有 学过呢 那些 老实 困惑, 从来 不讲 课文.
 this year no learn those really perplexed never not teach text
 ‘oh, our teacher of English never explained the texts of the course book, luckily we
 learned them last year, but those classmates who haven’t learned before find them
 really hard.’
 3 E: 我们 班呢 没得 准备.
 our class no preparation
 ‘our class really felt unprepared.’
 4 A: 不怕得, F, 你 给它 顶起来.
 not worry you can take responsibility
 ‘don’t worry, anyway, *F, with you, our class will make it.’

→5 F: ((laugh))

In my interview, A said: 'I meant to compliment F on her high proficiency in English, and I had confidence in her ability to help our class to progress in English'. Then in the interview with the complimentee, F said:

I am the representative of the subject of English in our class, and they are very happy about what I did in English for our class. I thought he was complimenting me, and felt confident of my ability. I was very happy to hear that. But, as a Chinese, since our childhood, we have learned to feel embarrassed when complimented. I showed modesty, so I just smiled, saying nothing. Otherwise I would appear very conceited. I meant to accept his praise by smiling. I accepted his praise, but I was very modest. So I said nothing.

It is thus made explicit that the complimentee's response by smiling was motivated by the norm of modesty. According to this interviewee, she was brought up to observe this cultural norm when receiving a compliment. Moreover, the interviewee's observance of the norm can also be inferred from her belief that she 'would appear conceited' if she did not show modesty.

Unlike the above example, evidence of the norm of modesty was sometimes explicitly displayed in the conversation when participants made evaluations about a CR. For instance, in a post-OCPG party among postgraduate students, participant C said 'let me learn from you' to compliment his close friend, and received the response 'what, what do I have for you to learn from'. The complimenter then evaluated this CR as showing modesty: 'really *modest*, you, to learn painting from you'. Also, as always, this was supported by interviews with the complimenter and complimentee.

Another type of evidence of the norm of modesty was found in situations where transgression of this norm may be socially sanctioned. It was observed when a CR

was deemed as derivational and negatively evaluated by the complimenter or other participants. For example, when interviewed about her expected response to her compliment on a classmate's academic success, participant E (post-3) responded: "If he had said 'sure, I'll surely be admitted into Tsinghua University ((widely dubbed China's MIT))', I would feel he was too conceited".

This subsection has provided considerable evidence that modesty may very well be a norm of politeness that informs CR behaviour in my data. Moreover, among the four CR strategies, this norm appeared to mainly inform Rejection.

6.4.5 Desire to express truth

Desire to express truth was identified as an informing politeness norm in my data of CRs. Briefly, this norm reads "If I feel X, I say 'I feel X'" in my study. To give a short example, participant G (post-5) said 'no, (I) have pimples (.) look' in responding to the compliment 'you have such nice complexion'. This norm was inferred from interviews where the complimentees said or implied that they accepted or rejected a compliment because they believed or did not believe themselves to be praiseworthy. To illustrate, I reproduce an extended extract of conversation and the supporting evidence from the interview.

Extract 6.11 (post-6)

- 1 C: 来, B (.) 你 要 汤, 是不是.
come you want soup yes-not-yes
'here you go, B (.) you wanna some soup, do you.'
- 2 B: 不.
no
'no.'
- 3 C: 不要 啊? 男人 要 学 会 要.
no (particle) man want learn can want
'no? men should learn to accept offers.'
- 4 H: 女人 不 能 说 随便.

women not can say as you please

‘women can’t say *as you please*.’

5 C: ((laugh))

6 H: 我妈 从小 教育我, 女人 不能轻易地 说 随便.

my mum since childhood teach me woman not readily say as you please

‘since my childhood, my mum has taught me that women can’t say *as you please* readily.’

7 C: 那 是 很 不 文明的.

that be very not civilized

‘that isn’t civilized.’

8 H: 不是 不 文明, 就显得 这个人 太 随意了 随便了.

not not civilized suggest the people too casual casual

‘not like that, but because saying so suggests too much casualness.’

9 C: 还以为 是 没有 职业 道德.

think be no profession ethics

‘I thought you mean a lack of professional ethics.’

10 H: 哎哟 ((laugh))

(particle)

‘oh ((laugh))’

11 C: 很 不 职业. 原来 你妈 真 会 教你,

very not professional originally your mum really can teach you

12 不错! 什么 时候 去你们 那里 拜访 一下 你妈.

not bad what time go you (pl.) there visit one time your mum

‘very unprofessional. *your mum is really good at parenting, good! I need to visit your mum one day.’

→13 H: 嗯 (.) 真的.

(particle) really

‘yeah (.) really.’

In this extract, the asterisked utterance in line 12 was verified as a compliment and the utterance in line 13 as H’s acceptance of the compliment. The response begins with ‘yeah’ and is then reinforced by ‘really’. It is thus possible that H observes the norm of desire to express truth in phrasing her response this way. To elicit which norm may inform this CR, I asked the complimentee ‘Why did you give such a response?’. I then followed up by asking ‘Why did you ‘identify with’ C’s compliment?’, in which the phrase ‘identify with’ was used in the interviewee’s

answer to the first question. To show the evidence she appeared to be observing the norm of desire to express truth, the two answers are both provided below:

Probably he thought highly of my mum: really good. He seemed to appreciate my mum's parenting skills. I don't think he had a tone of joking...I identify with his comment.

My mum is really good, I think. Then he expressed his hope to pay a visit to my mum. And I said 'OK, no problem'. Certainly, he might not be serious about this.

It is made explicit in these two answers that complimentee H seemed to be being truthful when accepting the compliment because she thought her mum was 'really good'. Rephrased in the formula I gave at the beginning of this subsection, the complimentee may follow the norm: I felt my mum was really good, and I accepted the compliment assessing my mum as being 'really good'.

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that desire to express truth chiefly informs Acceptance in my data. Relevant evidence was often observable in the conversations in which the compliment event occurred. For example, hearing a compliment on her healthiness, participant G (pre-5) said she agreed and added that she did not even have a cold. It appears that in so saying she accepted the compliment because she thought she was really healthy.

6.4.6 Desire to express solidarity

Desire to express solidarity was also identified as a politeness norm informing CRs in Chinese between friends in my study. Evidence emerges from the explanations recurrently given by interviewees for their preference for certain CR strategies,

particularly Acceptance. The following extract is reproduced for illustrative purposes.

Extract 6.12 (post-4)

- 1 A: 哦, 你 真呢 是 越来越 年轻 越来越 漂亮 嘛.
(particle) you really be more and more young more and more pretty (particle)
'*oh, you really look younger and younger, prettier and prettier.'
- 2 G: 哦, 你 是 越来越有 味道?
(particle) you be more and more charming
'oh, are you appearing more and more charming?'
- 3 A: ((laugh))
- 4 F: ((laugh)) 你 是 越来越 有 味道? 笑呢 才.
you be more and more have charming laugh silly
'((laugh)) are you appearing more and more charming? so silly laugh.'
- 5 A: 哦 (.) 有 苦 有 乐.
(particle) have toil have joy
'um (.) life has joy and toil.'
- 6 F: 我们 都 是 Jian 呢.
we all be (particle)
'we are all from Jian.'

Participant A issues a compliment on G's appearance in the first line. Then G responds with what appears to be a returning compliment with a rising intonation. The text alone does not seem to provide enough information concerning the underlying norms. However, extracts from my interviews with the complimentee and complimenter made the underlying norm explicit:

Interview complimentee G

But after all *we're former classmates*. First of all, our *friendship* is there, so we don't care about the words. I mean *if we were not so close*, we wouldn't have said like that. With the *friendship* that started from school, *we wouldn't consider each other's words as offensive or harsh*. If we meet for the first time, our response won't be like that. We will simply say something like 'Oh, thank you for your compliment'.

For me, *if our closeness or friendship is otherwise, you need also take this into account.*

Interview complimenter A

It may be attributable to our special *relationship*. Because *we're former classmates and we're friends*, I don't think I care about whatever she says.

The two interviewees' repeated emphasis on 'closeness' and 'friendship' appears to suggest a norm that is commonly referred to as solidarity in English (see e.g. Manes 1983, Herbert and Straight 1989, Brown and Gilman 2003) motivates G's agreement with the compliment. Their accounts indicate that the CR was perceived by both as appropriate considering their closeness, long friendship, or familiarity. The politeness norm of desire to express solidarity thus becomes observable. This is very much in line with Sifianou's (2001) finding in Greek that a usual way of indicating solidarity in the compliment event is through the complimentee employing a nonconventional response. According to many studies (Gu 1990, Chen 1993, Ye 1995, Cheng 2003), G clearly does not appear to observe the long-standing Chinese convention of showing modesty or humbleness in interaction.

Moreover, as seen in the extract, evidence of this norm was provided in the conversational transcript. First, hearing G's reply and A's laugh, another participant, F, laughed and repeated G's reply. And then she evaluated A's laugh as 'silly'. This seems to indicate the humorous element in G's response which showed closeness and familiarity between G and A, and also between F, G, and A. Moreover, line 6 further highlights clearly the shared background of all the participants engaged here, i.e. they are all from Jian. Thus, as G emphasized in her explanation for the CR, closeness or solidarity often performed in an in-group is made explicit here (cf. Sifianou 2001:423).

Unlike the aforementioned example, in Extract 6.13, the norm of desire to express solidarity appeared to show up in a complimentee's blunt rejection of a close friend's compliment.

Extract 6.13 (post-6)

- 1 C: 心 倒是 不 老.
heart be not old
'psychologically, I'm young.'
- 2 E: 你 真 是 会 讲话.
you really be can speak
'*you're really eloquent.'
- 3 C: 没有
no
'no'
- 4 H: 不然 怎么 当 主席!
otherwise how be president
'no wonder he was elected president of the Students' Union!'
- 5 C: 主你个头啊! 叫 你 别 讲话.
damn it (particle) ask you not speak
'damn it! you shut up.'

This is an extract from a conversation between university students. The utterance in line 4 was verified by participant C as a compliment. Hearing H's compliment, C appears embarrassed and utters the strong words 'damn it! you shut up'. This response, if analyzed out of context, would be viewed as an extremely rude and highly face-threatening act. However, as in the army recruit trainings Culpeper (1996) observe, this response was perceived by both the hearer and speaker as appropriate in this interaction. Rather than taking it as face-attacking, they both judged it as showing and maintaining solidarity. The following extracts of my interviews with them are intended to provide evidence of their observance of this norm.

I think his words are acceptable. *A response like this is utterly normal between close friends.* I know he was not offended, but I feel he might be embarrassed. His response sounds close and humorous. His way of responding does not show *kèqi* ('ritual politeness'). I believe such a response helped shorten interpersonal distance. It gives us pleasure to be together. We don't need to think about what to say and what not to say, or how the hearer may perceive your words. Just because there isn't any taboo, he said so automatically. (participant H)

She knew we both enjoy talking like this. There is a kind of mutual understanding between us. We know each other very well. We both like cracking jokes and enjoy talking playfully to each other. (participant C)

These two interviews tell us that, rather than following a traditional norm of politeness in Chinese, e.g. modesty as illustrated earlier, the complimentee gives more weight to expressing solidarity by giving what would be otherwise taken as an outright rejection. In other words, the complimentee's desire to express solidarity supersedes other norms in this example.

Apart from the evidence as just presented, this norm's influence on CRs in my data is also supported by complimenters. In many interviews they expected that their friends would agree, accept or upgrade their compliments. For example, complimenter B (post-2) said "He ((A)) may say something like 'certainly'"; another (F, post-8) said "I thought he ((A)) would say 'a piece of cake'. Given that we're friends, I thought he would say so. He would surely say 'Oh, just a piece of cake, I sang really well today'. I think between very close friends a response like this is very good". In my study, much evidence of this type comes from the complimenters' interview accounts.

In summary, six norms of politeness have been identified as motivating CR strategies in my study. Building on the existing literature, they were respectively named *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness'), reciprocity, gratitude, modesty, desire to express truth and desire to express solidarity. Moreover, my analysis has shown that a strategy can be informed by different norms. For example, my data show that Opt out may be (simultaneously) affected by the norms of modesty and *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness'). Similarly, compliment acceptance may be an indication of the complimentee's observance of reciprocity, gratitude, desire to express truth or desire to express solidarity.

6.5 Generational variation in politeness norms informing compliment response behaviour

The identified politeness norms informing CRs enables me to carry out a further analysis from a comparative perspective. While the preceding section showed a close relationship between CRs and politeness norms, the present section focuses on the issue of whether the politeness norms correlate with generation.

In-depth analysis of the conversational transcripts and the interview accounts of the participants involved shows that the six politeness norms identified above come in three groups: (1) norms informing both groups' CR behaviour; (2) norms predominantly informing the pre-OCPG's CR behaviour; (3) norms predominantly informing the post-OCPG's CR behaviour. They are detailed as follows.

6.5.1 Norms informing both groups' compliment response behaviour

***Hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness')**: As mentioned in 6.4.1, the strategy of Opt out is generally informed by the norm of *Hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness') in the present study. Thus, considering the finding that nearly half of the CRs were verified by the complimentees as Opt out (6.3), *hánxù* appears to be a norm which affects

most profoundly the CR behaviour of the subjects as a whole. Moreover, as interviewee B (post-6) explained his Opt out to me, ‘I didn’t know what to say. So it’s simply *hánxù* (‘implicit’) acceptance’. Many interactants tend to assume their Opt out to be a default way to avoid accepting a compliment explicitly.

As analyzed in 6.3, the occurrence of the post-OCPG’s Opt out is slightly higher than that of the pre-OCPG’s. But considering my finding that the norm of *hánxù* (‘avoidance of explicitness’) also informs Acceptance and Amended acceptance (6.4.1), there is not enough evidence that this norm of politeness differs to any meaningful degree across the two generations.

Reciprocity: As indicated in 5.5.1, this norm seems to exert equal influence on the pre- and post-OCPG’s CR behaviour. A slight difference identified lies in their phrasing of returning compliments. That is, although both generations tend to give a response containing words like *ye* (‘too’ or ‘also’, or ‘either’), the older generation appear more likely to use the utterance *yīyàng* (‘the same’) (cf. 6.4.2) which clearly denotes reciprocation.

Moreover, responses containing the indicator *yīyàng* (‘the same’) tend more to show modesty. For example, in a conversation participant E (pre-4) complimented her friend F by saying ‘I’m older, she’s younger’. To this, the recipient gave the response ‘oh, no, the same’. Then the subsequent interview shows that this CR was meant to show modesty. Evidence emerges from her answers to my two interrelated interview questions, one about her feeling of being complimented and the other, which I asked impromptu, was to confirm what she believed to be true about the compliment:

(1) Oh, it didn’t give me so much pleasure, and I wasn’t embarrassed either. It seemed to me what she said was reasonable. I felt what she said is a fact. I

surely look a little younger than her; (2) Yeah, certainly, but no one would say so (I look younger). Verbally you must show some modesty. So I said ‘the same’.

A vital message the complimentee is trying to get across appears to be that she was socially required to show modesty in responding to compliments. Furthermore, in my interview complimenter E commented on F’s response by saying ‘Her words are modest words’. Thus complimenter E also perceived the CR as suggesting modesty. This may be an indication that reciprocity tends to have a close relationship with modesty.

Gratitude: In both generations’ conversations, there were instances of CRs that were informed by this norm of politeness (4.4, 6.4.3). My data show that the pre- and post-OCPG’s CRs informed by gratitude are both small in number. This norm thus does not seem to play a major role in the CR behaviour of the two generational groups.

Nevertheless, while no clear evidence suggests any generational difference in the actual responding behaviour in the conversations, a noticeable difference was identified in my interviews with the participants. Precisely, in many answers to my question about their expected CRs, when compared with the pre-OCPG interviewees, the post-OCPG participants tend more to expect their complimentees to say *xièxie* (‘thanks’) or to give a response with certain degree of amendment like ‘*xièxie* (‘thanks’), yours ((voice)) is nice too’.

This difference in anticipated CRs is meaningful. This is because what is reflected in participants’ expected CRs is, as Golato (2002/2005) and Kasper (2004) suggest, largely their metapragmatic knowledge about appropriate CRs. In this sense, the aforementioned generational difference in expected CRs is very much in line with

Chen and Yang's (2010) DCT-based finding that CRs categorized as Thanking accounted for 12.27% of their data in 2008 while only 1.03% in 1991 (see also Tang and Zhang 2009). Precisely, the post-OCPG's data of expected CRs is closer to Chen and Yang's finding that their informants in 2008 provided much more thanking CRs than those in 1991.

6.5.2 Norms predominantly informing pre-OCPG's compliment response behaviour

Modesty: As suggested by the rich illustrations in the preceding subsection, modesty seems to be a norm underlying most compliment rejections. Seen from the interview data, *qiānxū* ('modesty') is one of the most important notions in the participants' metapragmatic knowledge about politeness made manifest in CR behaviour. Yet, while modesty significantly affects both generations' CRs, evidence suggests that it appears to predominantly inform the pre-OCPG's behaviour.

Firstly, my interviews show that the pre-OCPG complimentees seem more likely to explain their Rejection strategy as motivated by modesty while the post-OCPG tend more to associate this strategy with their desire to express truth. Moreover, in a number of interviews the pre-OCPG complimentees revealed they rejected a compliment merely to show modesty while they explicitly said they were really praiseworthy. This is perhaps most clearly shown in complimentee F's (pre-4) confirmation of her belief in her younger appearance: '...Yeah, certainly, but no one would say so. Verbally you must show some modesty...' (see details in 6.5.1). Similarly, in responding to a compliment on the success of his business, E (pre-6) gave the self-effacing response 'just a job'. In the subsequent interview, E explained it as follows:

I showed modesty. We Chinese are very modest. We generally don't like to show off our achievements, ability, or any other merits. This is characteristic of Chinese. We Chinese won't be very conceited. We have been brought up to be

reserved. ‘Just a job’ is an expression to display modesty.

The interviewee appears to suggest that he was indeed a successful businessman, but in order to conform to the conventional Chinese virtue of modesty, he chose to give a modest response. Moreover, he also suggests that he would otherwise be evaluated as ‘conceited’.

Secondly, my interview data show that complimenters from the older generation seem more inclined to expect a modest response to the compliment they paid while the younger’s expected response tend to be more varied. For instance, when I asked about complimenter C’s (pre-6) expected response to his compliment ‘his ((E’s)) business is very successful, he’s successful’, C answered: “(I) expect him to say ‘just so-so, you’re much more successful’”. To illustrate the aforementioned tendency of the younger generation, participant B (post-4) expected that the complimentee could opt out of a response, i.e. ‘accept implicitly’ or ‘remain silent’ or ‘give a smile’; and he added that the complimentee could also “say politely ‘*xièxie*’ (‘thank you’)”.

Thirdly, in the conversations many pre-OCPG participants used quite often self-effacing responses such as *lǎotóuzi le* (‘already a very old man now’) (pre-2), *hùnwǎnfàn chīchi* (‘just make a living’) (pre-5) and *luànzhěngxiē mǎimai* (‘just trying to make something to sell’). These seemingly humble and modest CRs seem to be consistent with my earlier analysis of the pre-OCPG’s higher tendency to deprecate self in paying a compliment. However, highly self-effacing CRs as such were not found in the post-OCPG’s conversations.

These generational differences in the norm of modesty seem to be some of the most important reasons for the older generation’s preference for Rejection as detailed in 6.2.4.

6.5.3 Norms predominantly informing post-OCPG's compliment response behaviour

Desire to express truth: As indicated in 6.4.5, there are instances of CRs generated by both the pre- and post-OCPG that appear to be motivated by the norm of desire to express truth. However, my data show that this norm seems to predominantly inform the post-OCPG's CR behaviour. Evidence in support of this is observed in the following two respects.

Firstly, there seem to be more CRs in the post-OCPG's conversations than in the pre-OCPG's interactions that seem to be informed by this politeness norm. This difference is especially salient in the younger generation's greater likelihood of showing their praiseworthiness, particularly by upgrading the complimentary force. For example, to the compliment 'the contour of your lips is really nice', complimentee C (post-6) responded by saying 'most people, including me can't resist my lips'. The recipient agrees with the compliment with a strong sense of upgrading. In so doing, the complimentee, as Wierzbicka (2003:138) suggests, believes his lips contour to be 'really' 'very' nice. Then, C said in the interview that he thought his lips were really nice, and they were irresistible. For another example, similar evidence was also suggested in Extracts 6.1 and 6.11. This is not only because complimentee H revealed in my interview that she believes her mum really had a nice figure but because she appears to comment on her mum positively, for example, by saying 'kind of S-shaped'. In contrast, although evidence suggests that some of the pre-OCPG's acceptance responses are informed by desire to express truth (6.4.5), no evidence was found that this norm appears to inform the pre-OCPG's CRs that upgrade their complimentworthiness.

Secondly, there is evidence that the younger generation appear to be more likely than the older generation to observe this norm in rejecting a compliment. To illustrate, participant G (post-5), pointing to her face, said 'no, (I) have pimples (.)

look' to show her disagreement with a compliment on her appearance. In the interview G said that 'I was speaking the truth. I wanted to show the fact that these days I have pimples on my face.' To take another example, upon hearing a compliment on his extensive reading, compliment B (post-3) responded with 'no use, no use'. In my follow-up interview he explained his rejection as follows:

I'm really interested in extensive reading, but it *really does not help to improve my academic performance so greatly*. Extensive reading does broaden my mind, but when examinations are concerned, it *does not do much good*. In this sense, my extensive reading really does not work.

Here, the complimentee tells what seems to be a truth: although his extensive reading is effective in broadening his mind, it 'really does not help to improve my academic performance so greatly' and 'does not do much good' for his examination. And because of this his interest of reading extensively is not worth praising. It is possible that in so doing, the interviewee disagreed with his classmate's compliment on the positive effect of his reading on writing because that is not true.

However, it appears that the pre-OCPG complimentees are less likely than the younger to give such an explanation. Rather, the older generation tend more to associate their rejection of a compliment with modesty. For example, as participant F (pre-7) suggests (6.4.4), rejecting a compliment and showing modesty are so closely related that they appear nearly indistinguishable from each other.

Moreover, some evidence shows that desire to express truth appears more likely to inform Acceptance rather than Rejection, Amended acceptance and Opt out, generational difference in this norm may be a reason for the post-OCPG's higher frequency of Acceptance.

Desire to express solidarity: This norm was identified as informing both generations' CR strategies. However, there is evidence that its influence on the two generations' CR behaviour is different. First, consistent with their emphasis on desire to express truth, particularly in accepting a compliment, the post-OCPG participants appear to be more likely to abide by this norm. As illustrated in Extract 6.12, it seems quite common for the post-OCPG complimentees to accept a compliment because, as they explained, they are close friends or in their words, they are 'very familiar with each other'. As analyzed in Extract 6.13, although not often, they may reject a compliment bluntly because, to use H's (post-6) words, such an outright rejection is 'utterly normal between close friends' and 'sound close and humorous'. Moreover, as my analysis in 6.4.6 shows, desire to express solidarity tends more to inform Acceptance, which, as previous studies such as Gu (1990) and Chen (1993) show, is not a conventional politeness strategy. This close connection between desire to express solidarity and the CR strategy of Acceptance may partly account for the post-OCPG's higher percentage of Acceptance as shown in Figure 6.1.

Furthermore, the younger generation's responses that were identified as being affected by desire to express solidarity appear to be more face-threatening. But my data show that CRs of this type are very unlikely to be evaluated by the complimenters as negative. For example, as Extract 6.13 shows, participant C appears to be swearing in giving the harsh, blunt rejection '*zhǔ nǐ gè tóu! jiào nǐ bié jiǎnghuà*' ('darn it! you shut up'). However, participant H (post-6) perceived it as 'acceptable' and 'utterly normal'. Moreover, according to complimenter H, such a response between friends did not show *kèqǐ* ('conventional and ritual politeness') and 'shortens interpersonal distance'. In contrast, no CRs like this were found in the pre-OCPG's conversations. This may indicate that desire to express solidarity appears to be more of an in-group norm among the post-OCPG than among the pre-OCPG.

My analysis in this section has shown that the identified politeness norms closely correlate with generation. This relationship can be summarized graphically as follows:

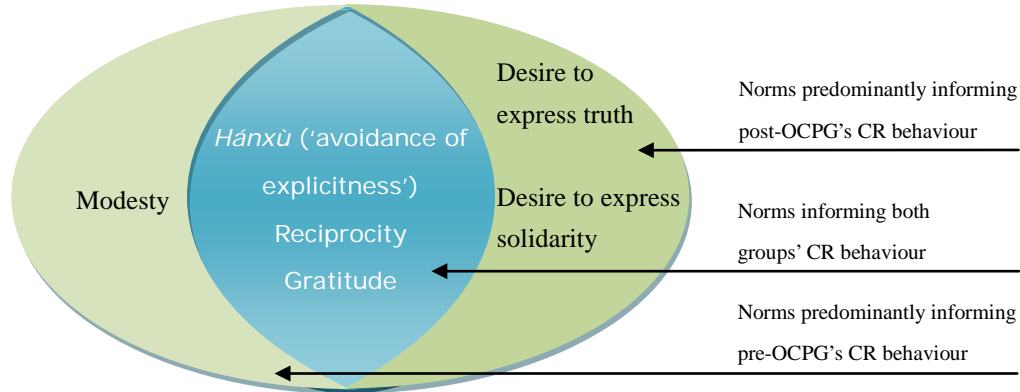


Figure 6.3: *Distribution of politeness norms informing CR behaviour across generations.*

As can be seen in Figure 6.3, six politeness norms have been identified that appear to inform the CR behaviour of my participants. In my data, they have all been found to operate as motivations for using CR strategies and to be correlated with generation. Specifically, at the centre of the figure are norms that appear to inform both generations' CR behaviour: *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness'), reciprocity and gratitude. Then, on the left side of the figure is the norm of modesty that appears to affect the pre-OCPG's CR behaviour more considerably. Finally, on the right side are the norms of desire to express truth and desire to express solidarity that have been found predominantly informing the post-OCPG's CR behaviour.

6.6 Summary

In Chapter Six, I analyzed the participants' CR behaviour and the politeness norms that appear to inform their CR strategies. My focus was on the categorization of CR strategies and the comparative analysis of strategies used by the pre- and post-OCPG. Moreover, I showed that there is variation across generations in the CR strategies and politeness norms identified. The major findings are summarized as follows.

Firstly, based on the analysis of interview data, all the verified CRs were categorized into four strategies, i.e. Opt out, Acceptance, Rejection, and Amended acceptance in order of decreasing frequency. The participants use very heavily the strategy of Opt out, accounting for nearly half of the total VCRs collected in my study. Regarding the remaining three strategies, the older generation are more than twice as likely as the younger to reject a compliment. Conversely, the younger generation are much more likely than the older to accept a compliment. Moreover, the older generation are less likely than the younger to employ the strategy of Amended acceptance when complimented.

Secondly, six norms of politeness that appear to inform CRs were identified in my analysis of the conversational transcripts and the participants' interview accounts. Drawing on insights from the existing literature, they were respectively named *hánxù* ('avoidance of explicitness'), reciprocity, gratitude, modesty, desire to express truth, and desire to express solidarity. In my data, these norms have been found to be functioning as motivations for CR strategies.

Thirdly, it was found that the politeness norms informing CRs correlate with generation (Figure 6.3). They were found to be of three types on the basis of their different degree of influence on the pre- and post-OCPG's CR behaviour: norms that appear to inform both groups' behaviour and norms that seem to predominantly inform the pre- and post-OCPG's CR behaviours respectively.

In the preceding chapters, I have presented my findings on the generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms I identified. The major findings are highlighted as follows, hoping to pave the way for my discussion in Chapter Seven.

Table 6.1: *Generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms in Chinese.*

	Pre-OCPG	Post-OCPG	Section
<i>Early socialization</i>	pre-reform China	reform-era China	2.2.2
<i>Compliment frequency</i>	significantly more frequent	significantly less frequent	5.2
<i>Appearance compliment</i>	considerably more frequent	considerably less frequent	5.3.5
<i>Ability compliment</i>	less frequent	more frequent	5.3.5
<i>CR strategy of Rejection</i>	significantly more likely	significantly less likely	6.2.4
<i>CR strategy of Acceptance</i>	less likely	more likely	6.2.4
<i>Opt out (CR)</i>	less likely	more likely	6.3
<i>Norms predominantly informing one group's compliment behaviour</i>	external verification, respect, approbation	sincerity, being playful	5.5.2
<i>Norms informing just one group's compliment behavior</i>	social inclusion	<i>xiānlìhòubīng</i> ('peaceful means first, force second')	5.5.3
<i>Norms predominantly informing one group's CR behaviour</i>	modesty	desire to express truth, desire to express solidarity	6.5.2 6.5.3

Table 6.1 contrasts the two generations' compliment and CR behaviours and the norms that appear to inform their behaviours in my study. It shows clearly that the pre- and post-OCPG, whose early socializations were completed in different sociocultural contexts, differ greatly in their performance of these two speech acts and the informing politeness norms I identified. Very briefly, the older generation pay compliments significantly more often than the younger. The appearance compliments paid by the older participants occurred substantially more frequently than those issued by the younger generation. In contrast, the ability compliments of the older generation are much less frequent than those of the younger generation. With respect to CR strategies, the older generation are significantly more likely than

the younger generation to reject compliments. Conversely, the younger generation accept compliments overwhelmingly and more frequently than the older generation. Also, the younger generation tend more to opt out of a response.

Moreover, it was found that the politeness norms I identified are correlated with generation. First, the norms named external verification, respect, and approbation predominantly inform the older generation's compliment behaviour, whereas sincerity and being playful predominantly inform the younger generation's behaviour. Second, the norms of social inclusion and *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') were found to be respectively exclusive to the older and younger generations. Third, whereas modesty appears to predominantly inform the pre-OCPG's CR behaviour, the norms of desire to express truth and desire to express solidarity predominantly affect the post-OCPG's behaviour.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

7.1 Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to show how the evidence that (a) intention of a compliment and a CR is not self-evident (Chapter Four, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3); (b) there is generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours (5.2, 5.3.5, 6.2.4, 6.3); and (c) politeness norms correlate with generation (5.5, 6.5), brings into view issues that are not addressed in previous scholarship. In particular I show how my study moves on the current debate over the notion of intention in studies on compliments and CRs. I also demonstrate how being able to categorize and analyze data according to the participants' perspectives allows me to draw out differences and similarities in the two generations' compliment and CR behaviours and the identified politeness norms that appear to inform these behaviours.

7.2 A postmodernist approach to data categorization

On the basis of my findings derived from the identification and verification of compliments and CRs, assignment of compliment topics and CR strategies, I show how my methodology emphasizing participants' perceptions gathered in follow-up interviews bring into view a number of issues unaddressed in the current literature on compliments and CRs. I show that compliments and CRs are not as easy to identify as many previous researchers have indicated. I also show categorizing a compliment topic and CR strategy is not as easy as current scholarship widely assumes. I highlight my contribution to the current debate surrounding the notion of intention in research on speech acts and perhaps linguistic pragmatics in general.

7.2.1 Categorizing an utterance as a compliment

Figure 4.1 displays that there exists a complex relationship between analyst's assigned intention (AAI), speaker's intention (SI), and hearer's attributed intention

(HAI) in compliment behaviour. Below, I show how this finding makes explicit the issue of intention of a compliment which is not addressed in previous scholarship. Web of Science shows (5 April 2011) that the studies of Manes and Wolfson (1981), Wolfson (1981a), Holmes (1986/1988), Herbert (1989/1990), Ye (1995), and Yuan (2002) are among the most cited compliment literature. This range of scholarship is thus frequently referred to in my subsequent discussion.

As argued in 2.4.1.2, a direct link between formulaicity and a compliment is assumed by such studies as Wolfson (1981a), Manes (1983), Herbert (1989), and Ye (1995). For example, Manes and Wolfson (1981) maintain that a compliment is by its very nature formulaic in its syntactic and semantic composition. It is thus ‘readily identifiable in any context’ (1981:125). According to them utterances like ‘Your apartment’s nice’, ‘I like your haircut’ and ‘You do this kind of writing so well’ are compliments because the adjective ‘nice’, verb ‘like’ and adverb ‘well’ are semantically positive (Manes and Wolfson 1981:117–118). In making such claims these scholars assume that intention is easily identifiable or even self-evident. However, my findings show that over one in five (114 out of 524) of the utterances that, as the analyst, I coded as compliments were not categorized as such by the speakers themselves. This is empirical evidence that speaker intention is not as readily identifiable as these scholars claim. Apart from the examples given in the preceding chapters (e.g. Extract 4.4), the following utterances embedded in various conversations are provided as further evidence that intention is not as easily retrievable as previously assumed.

- (1) 好厉害 ‘(you’re) amazing’ (post-5)
- (2) 太牛了 ‘(you’re) superb’ (post-5)
- (3) 多么好 ‘(it’s) really good’ (post-6)
- (4) 太聪明了 ‘(you’re) really clever’ (post-4)
- (5) 太厉害了 ‘(you’re) really great’ (post-4)

- (6) 观察呢仔细啊 ‘(your) observation is really careful’ (post-6)
- (7) D 就是典范啊 ‘D is really a good example’ (post-1)
- (8) 这个观察仔细 ‘your observation is really careful’ (pre-7)
- (9) 配呢好配呢好 ‘very good order of the main course and side dishes’ (post-6)
- (10) 逻辑倒学呢好呢嘎 ‘(you) have very good knowledge about reasoning’ (pre-3)

These are among the many potential compliments identified by the researcher on the basis of Holmes’ definition of a compliment (2.4.1.1). They are all apparently formulaic: each contains a word which carries ‘positive semantic load’ (Manes and Wolfson 1981:116), including, for example, *hǎo* 好 (‘good’), *cōngmíng* 聪明 (‘clever’), *lìhài* 厉害 (‘great’), and *niú* 牛 (‘superb’). If adopting Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) stance as mentioned above, an analyst would straightforwardly interpret these utterances as compliments. However, in my interviews none of the ten utterances was verified by the speakers themselves as intended to pay a compliment. For instance, the Chinese noun *diǎnfàn* 典范 (‘good example’) in (7), in normal circumstances, is semantically positive. But contrary to Manes and Wolfson’s claim, my data show that the utterance was used by speaker B (post-1) just to describe a state of situation rather than to compliment his addressee. Evidence comes to light in the speaker’s answer to my interview question ‘Did you intend to pay her a compliment?’ as quoted below:

It can’t be taken as a compliment. It’s just a sort of way in which I stated the fact that she’s one of them ((desk-mates of the opposite sex)). It can’t be taken as a compliment. It’s the teacher but not she ((the addressee)) who made the decision to sit with a boy student. I just stated a fact.

This account makes it explicit that ‘D is really a good example’ is meant to be descriptive rather than complimentary. As already said, adopting a similar verification procedure, none of the utterances listed above was categorized by the

speakers as compliments. This finding indicates that the intention of a compliment, however formulaic the utterance may appear, is not as easily identifiable as Manes and Wolfson (1981) claim.

Manes and Wolfson go so far as to claim that compliments are typically independent of the utterances or speech events which precede them (cf. 1981:119/123/125/132). This claim is especially explicit in the following remark:

Whether compliments occur at the beginning of a conversation, in isolation, or during an interaction, of which they are not an integral part, their independence from what precedes it makes it imperative that they somehow be readily identifiable as compliments. (1981:126)

However, evidence from my data shows that against Manes and Wolfson's assumption speaker intention is not easy to be derived from an utterance. Consider the following extract in which the utterance 太厉害了 ('(you're) really amazing') is embedded:

Extract 7.1 (post-1)

1 E: 那日 开会呢 那日 我们 补习 生 没有 克.
that day meeting that day we remediation student not go
'on the day when the meeting took place we remediation students didn't turn up.'

2 A: 嗯
(particle)
'um'

3 E: 我们 逃课 从 那里 出来 喃,
we play truant from there come out (particle)
'we just slipped out of the classroom from over there.'

4 A: 从 这里 出来?
from here come out
'from over here?'

5 E: 我们 从 这里, 然后 又 绕了 过去.

- we from here then again turn go there
 ‘from here, and then we turned the corner.’
- 6 A: 这里 都 可以 克?
 here all can go
 ‘there is a way out here?’
- 7 E: 没有, 我们 从 那高上 山上 转下 来了.
 no we from that top hill top detour come
 ‘no, we made a detour down from the hill top.’
- 8 A: 就是 那日 年级 大会 那日?
 that that day year assembly that day
 ‘on the day when the third-year students assembly was held?’
- 9 E: 嗯 (.) 我们 跳 墙 喃.
 (particle) we climb wall (particle)
 ‘yeah (.) we climbed over the wall.’
- 10 A: 跳 墙?
 climb wall
 ‘(you) climbed over the wall?’
- 11 E: 嗯
 (particle)
 ‘yeah’
- 12 A: 太 厉害了.
 very amazing
 ‘(you’re) really amazing.’
- 13 E: 我们 从 文科 一班 那个 墙 翻 出去.
 we from liberal arts class one that wall climb over
 ‘we climbed over the wall next to No.1 Class of Liberal Arts.’

As Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Ye (1995) claim, *tài lihai le* 太厉害了 (‘(you’re) really amazing’) is interpretable as a compliment judging by the semantically positive adjective *lihai* (roughly ‘amazing’). This is also because the Chinese term *lihai* (‘amazing’) is often meant to pay a compliment when used as a predicative as in *zhègè nǚ tóngzhì hǎo lihai!* (‘The woman is really amazing!’) (Wang 2002:307). The arrowed utterance in this extract conforms to the formulaicity of a compliment in Chinese as Ye (1995) identified. Moreover, it was made after the addressee revealed she climbed over a wall, which could not be easy for a girl. Thus speaker A

may well have made a positive assessment of E's agility. However, within the postmodernist approach to politeness, 'It is not self-evident that a particular linguistic utterance is unanimously perceived as (im)polite by everyone involved in the interaction' (Locher 2006:252). I thus did not assume the utterance under analysis to be a compliment. Instead, I interviewed participant A and he answered as follows:

You don't understand my words? When I said '(you're) really amazing', I meant: Climbed over the wall? How dared you do that? You didn't attend the year assembly. You even climbed over the wall and even made such a long detour from the hill, unbelievable. I didn't compliment her at all.

This account suggests that an utterance that would normally be categorized as a compliment was actually not intended by the speaker as such. This indicates that a researcher's inference of intention should be subject to the participants' verification. For another example, without interview utterance (7) in the list discussed earlier on, it would remain unknown that it was the teacher who arranged the addressee to sit with a boy classmate in the class. As the interviewee revealed, it was just for this reason that the utterance was meant to be a statement of a fact rather than a compliment. Therefore, a compliment is not easily identifiable no matter how formulaic the utterance may appear on the surface.

In Ye's (1995) and Yuan's (2002) studies a distinction is made between explicit and implicit compliments. Explicit compliments are used to refer to 'a direct positive comment in which the form contains at least one positive semantic carrier' (Ye 1995:231) and 'an utterance that contains at least one explicit positive semantic carrier to give a positive evaluation to something that is related to the addressee' (Yuan 2002:184). But since no other criteria for identifying explicit compliments is offered elsewhere in their studies, like Manes and Wolfson (1981), Ye and Yuan also

assume an immediate link between sentence meaning and speaker meaning. The underlying assumption is that speaker intention of a compliment, if not self-evident, can be easily derived from utterances. As a result, utterances containing semantically positive words like *zhēnbàng* 真棒 ('great, excellent') (e.g. 你的球艺真棒! 'Your playing skill is excellent!') (Ye 1995:232) and *piàoliàng* 漂亮 ('pretty, beautiful') (e.g. 你们这个房子漂亮了嘛。 'Wow, this house of yours is beautiful (Particle).') (Yuan 2002:184) are all treated as compliments as if they were really intended as such by the speakers themselves. However, my finding shows that apparently formulaic compliments, including the list I provided at the outset of this subsection, were categorized by the speakers themselves as non-compliments. This suffices to indicate that in real-life interaction an utterance should always be viewed as equivocal in force.

Judging from the attention Ye (1995) and Yuan (2002) gave to implicit compliments, they do not appear to assume speaker intention to be easily identifiable or self-evident. In Ye's study, implicit compliments are compliments 'which are not explicitly directed to the complimentee's appearance or performance' (1995:231). In Yuan's view, an utterance with no positive semantic carrier 'can only be regarded as a compliment if the complimentary force can be induced from the utterance itself in a situation where something good or positive is obvious and a compliment is normally expected' (2002:184). Thus it appears that effort is called for to make inferences about the complimentary force of an utterance. Nevertheless, these studies are uniform in that the inference was made by the authors themselves and in doing so, they assume that they can access the speaker's intention. However, as my aforementioned findings show, a researcher's assigned intention is very likely to differ from the speaker's actual intention.

Thus the elaborated procedure of identifying compliments informed by the postmodernist theorists' argument that 'no linguistic expression can be taken to be

inherently polite' (Locher and Watts 2005:16) (see also Watts 2003, chapter 7) brings into view the evidence that a compliment is not as easily identifiable as many previous studies assume. Moreover, as I show below, this finding has important implications for the elicitation and analyses of data in empirical studies. In what follows, by comparing my study with some observation- and DCT-based studies, I show how being able to categorize and analyze data according to the participants' perceptions allows me to make a comparison between the two generations of the Chinese.

To begin with, taking observation notes is one of the predominantly used methods of data collection in the available studies of compliments and CRs. These studies, as reviewed in 2.4, tend to assume that intention is easily identifiable. For example, in Manes and Wolfson's study the compliments were 'gathered in everyday interactions which the researchers observed or in which they participated ... Although a large proportion of these compliments were collected by the authors, a considerable number were also collected by students' (1981:116). Similarly, in Herbert's study, "Field workers were asked to record compliment behaviour overheard and to issue their own compliments 'as naturally as possible' in order to generate CR data" (1989:9). The author added that "Compliments recorded by the author are only of the 'overheard' variety, i.e. he was not a participant in any of the interactions" (Herbert 1989:31). As with studies cited above, Holmes adopted the same method of data collection (cf. 1986:488/1988:446): compliment exchanges were collected 'with the assistance of New Zealand students' (1988:446). Precisely, her students were asked 'to note down a sequence of twenty or so compliments in the order they occurred in their hearing without selection or censorship' (1988:446).

Presumably, in many, possibly most cases, participant observation as a method of data collection assumes speaker intention to be easily identifiable. This is because a (large) proportion of compliments collected in the field are clearly not issued by the

researcher/student. In these cases, the fieldworkers assume that they know the intention of other interactants' utterances. This is further suggested by the lack of data verification in these studies. Holmes notes that 'in classifying utterances as compliments, it is the attributed underlying intention that has been the guiding criterion, rather than any surface indicators' (Holmes 1986:486/1988:447). However, my data show that although there is a high degree of overlap between my own assessment of which utterance functions as a compliment and that of my participants, more than one fifth of the ACs (analyst's compliments) were not verified by the speakers as compliments (Figure 4.1). This fairly significant mismatch between the analyst's assigned intention (AAI) and the speaker's intention indicates that 'the attributed underlying intention' inferred by fieldworkers is very likely to diverge from their informants' intention.

I acknowledge that when Holmes asked her students to collect compliments in their fieldwork, she may have already realized that as members of the community these fieldworkers share similar norms with the interactants they observed. Since Herbert (1989) adopts a similar method of data collection, similar things could also be said about of his study. However, my finding shows that even in the same speech community there are still considerable cases in which speakers and addressees differ in the interpretation of what the speaker meant by what s/he was saying (cf. 4.3.5).

Moreover, there are many cases in which an utterance was not used by the speaker to pay a compliment, but it was interpreted by the hearer as such. This suggests that, as Mills (2011b) notes, a data collector like those in Holmes' studies (1986/1988) may over- and/or under-analyze their data. Precisely, the fieldworkers are very likely to note down utterances which are not actually intended by the speakers as compliments. Also, they are equally likely to miss utterances which are really used by the speaker as compliments. My findings thus provide evidence that claims such as 'compliments are, on the whole, readily recognizable items of discourse and they

are thus easily extracted from discourse for analysis' (Herbert 1989:5) are empirically inadequate. Furthermore, they provide evidence against Manes and Wolfson's claim that 'an ethnographic approach [participant observation] is the only reliable method for collecting data about the way compliments, or indeed, any other speech act functions in everyday interactions' (1981:115). My findings, therefore, substantiate the adequacy of the postmodernist approach in uncovering laymen's conceptualization of politeness.

A similar problem arises with DCT-based studies of compliments: informants' intention is assumed to be easily accessible. In Ye's study of compliments in Chinese, for instance, the author says that 'percentages were calculated for the major semantic formula and compliment and compliment responses. All of the data were independently coded by two researchers and the interrater reliability was 97.2%' (1995:222–223). A question one may ask is whether this percentage refers simultaneously to the interrater reliability of coding all or one of the three types of data: semantic formula, compliments and CRs. Moreover, it is unclear whether or not an informant really perceived the questionnaire items as 'complimenting situations' (1995:230) as the author claims.

In any case, my finding that there is a considerable divergence between compliments identified by the researcher and compliments verified by the speakers suggests that an informant's response to 'the given complimenting situations' (Ye 1995:230) in DCTs may not necessarily be provided as a compliment. Comparatively, seen from the lack of data verification in the studies of Chen (1993), Yuan (2002), Tang and Zhang (2009), and Chen and Yang (2010), their assumption that intention is easily identifiable appears even clearer. In Yuan's study, for example, 'the written DCT questionnaire was filled out by 88 of the 175 informants at their own pace and in a place of their own choice' (2002:190). Yet, without data verification, an analyst does not seem able to know whether an informant write

down the answer as a compliment.

Furthermore, in Ye's and Yuan's DCT-based studies, some responses to the created complimenting situations were identified by the authors as Non-compliments. According to Ye, a Non-compliment response refers to the cases 'where the respondents did give verbal rejoinders to the given situation but those rejoinders can hardly be categorized as compliments' (1995:230). Similarly, in Yuan's study, some of the Non-compliments 'are either bound semantic formulas occurring by themselves or other replies that do not carry any positive meanings' (2002:193). However, neither of the studies provides explanation for their coding of utterances like 'How much are these sneakers?' (Ye 1995:230) as Non-compliments and utterances like 'When did you learn it' (Ye 1995:231) and 'I want to buy one [dress] myself' (Yuan 2002:184) as compliments. In doing so, the authors, perhaps unknowingly, assume that speaker intention is easily identifiable. In this sense, my finding that there is a significant divergence between the potential compliments and actual compliments raises the issue of intention, which is not addressed seriously in compliment literature as discussed above. This may indicate that my way of approaching compliments enables me to obtain accurate data, and more importantly, these data allow me to make a comparison between the two generations.

In summary, my finding on the relationship between AAI, SI, and HAI provides strong evidence that, as I argued in my review of the modernist approach to politeness and the literature on compliments (2.3.1.2, 2.4.1.2), a speaker's intention of a compliment is not as readily recognizable as many previous studies claim (e.g. Manes and Wolfson 1981, Ye 1995). I also showed that it is the data verification procedure I devised that brings to light this evidence and raises the issue of intention in research on compliments. By comparing my research with observation- and DCT-based studies, I have demonstrated that my approach has significant implications for the elicitation and analysis of data in compliment research. Moreover, as discussed

later on in this chapter, this paves the way for my analysis of generational variation in compliment behaviour and the informing norms.

7.2.2 Categorizing an utterance as a compliment response

In this subsection, I begin by showing difficulties in identifying a CR in spontaneous naturally occurring conversations. I then show that the methodology I used enables me to uncover different types of CRs which would otherwise remain invisible. Moreover, I show that it is the approach being able to capture participants' perceptions and then to bring into view different types of CRs that allows me to make cross-generational comparisons.

Although Holmes' (1986/1988) studies are among the most frequently cited in the literature on compliments and CRs, what counts as a CR is largely taken for granted. In both of her studies, the total number of CRs is smaller than that of compliments (478 vs. 517, 440 vs. 484). According to the author, this is because there were some compliments immediately followed by a second one. This may suggest that Holmes did not experience other difficulties in identifying a CR. However, as displayed in Figure 4.2, among the utterances I initially coded as analyst's CRs (ACRs), only less than three quarters (72%) were verified by the complimentees as CRs while all the remaining (28%) fall under Non-VCRs. This finding provides evidence that a CR is not as easily identifiable as some scholars such as Herbert and Straight claim (2.4.2.1).

To show in more detail how my finding concerning the difficulty with recognizing speaker intention in coding a CR raises issues that hitherto have not been adequately addressed, consider the following compliment exchange in New Zealand English (Holmes 1986:493):

Context: Male complimenter to female acquaintance in an informal private setting.

C: It's nice to see you in a nice skirt.

R: What you mean is 'My goodness what's happened to the trousers.'

As I reviewed in 2.4.1.1, this is an example Holmes uses to illustrate her assignment of CR types. She remarks that 'responses which challenge or question the sincerity or intentions of the complimenter belong in the REJECT category, since they imply the addressee does not accept the attribution of credit involved' (1986:493). In doing so, Holmes appears to assume that R perceives C's utterance as a compliment and gives the second utterance as her response. That is, for Holmes, R recognized C's intention of a compliment and responds by rejecting the credit attributed.

However, my data show that under similar situations, it is very likely that an addressee like R (unless R is the data collector or analyst herself) in Holmes' example does not actually take C's utterance as a compliment. Hence the response is not intended as a CR. In this regard, Extract 4.6 (4.3.5) serves a typical example. B's utterance 'you sing, how did you learn to sing (.) E' was categorized as a compliment by speaker B himself. E's response that occurred after D's inserted turn was experienced by E as B's intent to satirize rather than to compliment E. Moreover, as the interview account shows, to justify her negative perception, E provided an informative comment about her past interaction with B, showing that B had a tendency to satirize E. Therefore, in saying 'you want to [learn singing, or what did you mean] B did not mean to respond to any compliment. For all these reasons B's utterance cannot be 'clearly assigned to the REJECT category' as Holmes asserts. More importantly, based on similar evidence gathered in interviews, a total of 54 utterances in my study were intended by the speakers as compliments while they were not perceived as such by the addressees. Consequently, the utterances I first identified as CRs were discarded as invalid according to

addressees' intention made explicit in interviews. This finding shows that it is the postmodernist approach to politeness with an emphasis on interactants' perceptions that enables me to exclude some data, which would be taken as valid in studies such as Holmes' (1986/1988).

Moreover, I demonstrate below how my methodology with a focus on participants' perspectives brings into view two types of CRs, which are unavailable in the current literature. Firstly, a CR, as suggested in the preceding paragraphs, can be made to a perceived compliment which is not actually intended as such by the prior speaker. As Figure 4.2 shows, altogether 21 VCRs fall into this type of CRs. Among others, the monosyllabic utterance 'no' in Extract 4.5 (4.3.4) was found to be a typical example. As made explicit in the interview, the utterer himself said he perceived the utterance *wǒ yùdào tā, wǒ jiù bùgǎn shuōhuà* ('in front of him, I don't dare to speak') as a compliment and said 'no' as his response. However, participant H revealed that she did not mean to pay a compliment by the utterance. In H's own words, she was just describing her feeling that 'he ((C)) was not easygoing and approachable'. Moreover, a CR may occur in a situation where addressees respond to an utterance they perceive as compliments which may actually be used by the prior speaker to perform other speech acts. This finding would not be predicted by Yuan's definition of a CR as 'anything that follows a compliment' (2002:194). This is because, as just illustrated, from the addressee's perspective a CR does not have to follow an utterance which is intended as a compliment by the speaker. Consonant with the postmodernist approach's *emic* view of politeness, in identifying a CR, it is the addressee's attributed intention that really matters.

Secondly, in multiparty conversations, a CR may be produced by a third party on behalf of the complimentee. As indicated in 4.4, overall five occurrences of such CRs were identified in my data. The number of CRs of this type does not seem to be significant, but it suffices to show the rigour of the postmodernist approach to

politeness, which ‘advocates a greater focus on the evaluations made by participants through interaction’ (Haugh 2007b:302).

To summarize, in this subsection I showed how evidence that a CR is not easily recognizable in empirical studies raises the issue of intention in research on CRs. I also showed how my methodology informed by the postmodernist approach to politeness emphasizing participants’ own judgements brings into view two new types of CRs which have not been reported in the existing literature. Moreover, as will be discussed later on, this methodology brings out information which allows for a nuanced analysis of generational variation in CR behaviour and norms.

7.2.3 Categorizing compliment topics

As analyzed in 5.3, my findings provide evidence that categorizing a compliment topic is not as easy as previously assumed. In a study on compliments in American English, Wolfson says ‘with respect to topics compliments fall into two major categories: those having to do with appearance and those which comment on ability’ (1983:90). Holmes also remarks that a compliment must refer to ‘something which is positively valued by the participants’ (1986:496/1988:454). The author adds that her data demonstrate that ‘the vast majority of compliments refer to just a few broad topics: appearance, ability or a good performance, possessions, and some aspect of personality or friendliness’ (1986:496/1988:455). These studies share a concern with the distribution of compliments by topics, but rarely touch upon issues like coding topics of compliments in English. This gives us the impression that for these scholars coding of compliment topics is straightforward.

However, relying on participants’ perception data from interviews, my study shows that compliment topics cannot always be coded with ease. In Yuan’s study, the formula ‘(NP) (Intensifier) ADJ/VERB (Object)’ (2002:206) reaches 61.45% of her DCT data of compliments in Kunming Chinese. My data analysis, however, shows

that even two compliments which use a same syntactic structure and a same ‘positive semantic carrier’ may focus on different topics. For example, in my data the utterances “(E is) really *chéngshú* 成熟 (‘mature’)” (Extract 5.1) and “(he looks) more *chéngshú* (‘mature’)” (Extract 5.2) are almost the same in terms of the semantic carrier and the syntactic formulaicity. On the surface, the topics of these two compliments appear to be the same. However, my interviews show they were respectively intended as a compliment on the addressees’ ability and character. Similarly, as shown in 5.3.1, the compliment “oh, (A is) really *cōngmíng* 聪明 (literally, ‘intelligent’)” (post-3) was verified by the speaker as focusing on the addressee’s ability while the similar utterance “people with curly hair are *cōngmíng* (‘intelligent’)” (pre-2), according to the complimenter, was intended as a compliment on character.

Moreover, my finding (5.3) shows that the complimenter and complimentee may have different perceptions of the compliment topic. This suggests that the intended topic of a compliment is not self-evident, to the analyst and complimentee alike. These findings thus indicate that without interview it would be impossible for a researcher to code compliment topics as the complimenters intended.

7.2.4 Categorizing compliment response strategies

The literature on CRs shows that previous studies invariably categorize CR strategies according to analysts’ interpretations (2.4.2.2). Although some scholars like Herbert claim that ‘[i]n cases of compound responses, the perceived intention of the speaker was crucial in determining category assignment’ (1986:80), the investigator’s assigned or perceived intention is very likely to differ from the speaker’s actual intention (Figure 4.2). Thus the CR categories assigned based on the researcher’s ‘perceived speaker’s intentions’ (Herbert 1989:22) are not necessarily intended as such by the complimentee.

For example, my data show that the recipients opt out of a response in nearly half of the situations when they are complimented. This finding provides a sound basis for revisiting previous studies on CR behaviour, particularly their coding of Opt out. Herbert, for example, explained his CR strategy ‘No acknowledgement’ as follows:

This CR type also incorporates two distinct subtypes. First, certain of the recorded data give no indication that Speaker₂ ‘heard’ the utterance of Speaker₁, i.e. Speaker₂ does not (verbally or nonverbally) accept the conversational turn offered. The second subtype involves an utterance which cannot be understood as being linked to the previous utterance in the sense of linkage outlined in Section 2. That is, Speaker₂ employs the conversational turn to do something other than respond to the compliment of Speaker₁, e.g. shift topic: M₁: That’s a beautiful sweater. M₂: Did you finish the assignment for today? (1989:16–17)

‘No acknowledgement’ is thus, in a large sense, equivalent to Opt out in my study (6.3). In Herbert’s article, 5.08% of the American English data and 2% of South African English data were respectively assigned by the author to this strategy. As the quotation indicates, Herbert adopts a top-down manner of categorizing CR strategies. In doing so, the author appears to assume that interlocutors like Speaker₂ in the example necessarily perceives ‘That’s a beautiful sweater’ as a compliment. Hence he assumes M₂’s utterance as the realization of the strategy of No acknowledgement. However, as I discussed in the preceding subsection, at least two alternative interpretations do not support Herbert’s categorization. First, my data analysis suggests that an utterance coded by researchers as a compliment, however formulaic it is (7.2.1), is very likely not to be intended as such by the speaker. Second, this probability is as high as 22% of the cases in my study (Figure 4.1). This is evidence that a considerable percentage of utterances identified by a researcher as

a CR, or Opt out, or ‘No acknowledgement’ may actually be used by the participants to do other things instead of opting out of a CR.

In Ye’s (1995) and Yuan’s (2002) DCT-based studies 5.9% and 3.07% of their CR data were identified by the authors as Opt out. In Ye’s study Opt out responses were collected using a DCT questionnaire on which “options for zero realization were also given in the DCT format by providing a choice of...‘You do not respond’” (1995:222). In a similar manner, on Yuan’s DCTs ‘respondents were given an opportunity to opt out if they thought they would not say anything in a given situation’ (2002:190). Thus in these two important studies of CRs in Chinese Opt out responses were gathered by providing explicit prompts. Yuan also collected a set of CRs adopting the method of participant observation and categorized 25.4% of her data as Opt out. Nevertheless, in either DCT- or observation-based studies, the authors provide very little information as to how Opt out was categorized in their studies. For example, in Yuan’s study Opt out refers to ‘no reply or just a smile’ (2002:195). Yet, she does not give evidence of what she categorized as ‘no reply’. Therefore, it remains unknown whether the utterances categorized by the authors as Opt out are really intended by the informants as such. Ye claims that a typical response from native speakers of Chinese to what he assumes to be implicit compliments such as *shénme shíhòu xuéde?* (‘When did you learn it?’) is ‘a downgrade or a ritual denial’ (1995:231). The author explains this by providing the following footnote:

This comment has to be based on the author’s native speaker communicative competence because the DCT cannot provide such information. (Ye 1995:232)

It is sufficient to suggest that his categorization is presumably based on his intuition. Further, when analyzing implicit compliments Ye makes the following assertion

concerning the reliability of a native speaker's intuition about the intention underlying an utterance:

The technical term '*Implicit Compliment*' is not that implicit emically. While the form of the utterances is implicit and allows the hearer to make other possible interpretations of meaning, this kind of utterance is perceived by native speakers as loaded explicitly with compliment force. (1995:232)

However, as displayed in Figures 4.1 and 4.2, even interactants directly involved in the compliment-response exchange, let alone outsiders like an observer, are very likely to misinterpret their co-participants. Clearly, it is my methodology that brings to light the sizable percentage of Opt out which is unavailable in the current literature.

To summarize 7.2, my discussion so far has centred on how the evidence that intention is not easily recognizable in coding compliments and CRs, and categorizing compliment topics and CR strategies brings into view issues which are not addressed in the current literature. I have showed it is the methodology which relied heavily on follow-up interviews as the means of data verification that makes visible new types of data. They include, for example, CRs in situations where the prior utterance is not actually intended by the speaker as a compliment and CRs that are offered by a third party on behalf of the complimentee. Moreover, since "some data analyses that appear in post-modern studies are selected on the basis of claims *by the researcher*, pointing to implicit evidence, that they involve politeness (or a weaker claim of 'potential politeness')" (Culpeper 2008:21, original italics) (see also Terkourafi 2006, Haugh 2007b), my research methodology seems able to largely offset this weakness. The current empirical study thus has developed the postmodernist approach to politeness by reducing the amount of the researcher's subjective interpretation of data. This is significant because data verified by the

interactants themselves are able to convey a more faithful picture of the compliment and CR behaviours performed by the two generations in real-life interaction. My study, therefore, contributes not only to scholarship on compliments and CRs but also to the postmodernist approach to politeness. Moreover, as discussed below, my findings based on data verified by the participants enable me to draw out differences and similarities in the two generations' compliment and CR behaviours and politeness norms.

7.3 Generational variation in compliment behaviour and politeness norms

My purpose in this section is to show how my approach focusing on 'participants' situated and dynamic evaluations of politeness' (Culpeper 2011:122) enables me to explore the generational variation in compliment behaviour and politeness norms. I begin by showing how being able to categorize compliment topics from participants' perspective allows me to make a comparison across generations. I then show how participants' interpretation collected through follow-up interviews makes it visible that the politeness norms informing compliment behaviour are correlated with generation in China.

7.3.1 Compliment topics and generation

The goal of this subsection is to show how the methodology I used in my study brings into view new patterns of preference for compliment topics and their generational variation. I start by showing counterevidence against the widespread claim that explicit appreciation of appearance is tabooed in Chinese culture. I then show how the methodology emphasizing interactants' perspectives allows me (a) to identify the frequent occurrence of character compliments and (b) to explore the generational variation in preference for compliment topics.

To begin with, many previous studies claim that an explicit appreciation of an interactant's appearance is taboo. For example, on the basis of his finding that the

DCT informants showed a preference for ability over appearance, Ye claims that ‘physical appearance is believed to be negatively correlated with one’s virtue and ability’. He adds that ‘explicit appreciation of one’s physical appearance is considered as uncultivated since implicitness is culturally preferred’ (1995:274). The author, following Hsu (1981) and Young (1987), argues that physical appearance ‘has a sexual implication which is a taboo in social interaction’ (1995:274). This negative association of appreciating appearance, according to Ye, constrains the Chinese from appreciating appearance openly and hence from paying compliments on appearance explicitly. In a recent study, Yu also claims that complimenting on other’s appearance is not appropriate in the Chinese cultural context (2005:108).

However, in contrast to these claims, explicit appreciation of physical appearance occurs fairly frequently in my study. Evidence is roughly of two types: (a) the terms of *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’) and *shuàigē* (‘handsome man’) are gaining popularity; (b) explicit appreciation of appearance is common in the tape-recorded conversations. To begin with, consistent with Liu’s (2007) finding about the wide use of *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’) and *shuàigē* (‘handsome man’) in the Chinese social life, these two terms were often used by my participants to address their friends. Moreover, some interviewees revealed that these terms were used partially to pay a compliment. To illustrate, a participant (post-6) said “*měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’) and *shuàigē* (‘handsome man’) are my pet phrases. They often carry a sense of a compliment”. Another participant’s (pre-1) explanation seems even more revealing when talking about her perception of a compliment containing the term *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’):

Today people are really skilled in saying nice words. When encountering a friend, they say ‘you’re beautiful’ or ‘you’re handsome’. They want to make you happy, to make you feel easy. Nowadays everyone likes saying nice words. “Hello, *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’)”, they even don’t address you by your name.

Further, a female participant (pre-3) perceived the utterance ‘so pretty, so pretty woman’ as a compliment and offered the following explanation:

This is a way of speaking in our area. I accepted it [the compliment]. It can be an expression of respect. They respect me and I respect them. Anyway, I accepted it because in our area *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’) is a deferential term for women.

The recurrent use of such complimentary terms shows that rather than taking appearance as ‘intimate and private’ (Tang and Zhang 2009:328), the participants in my study tend to use *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’) as equivalent to a compliment. This finding helps to explain Li and Zhang’s (2007) observation that *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’) is one of the most frequently used terms in the media.

Apart from the prevalence of *měinǚ* (‘pretty woman’), other utterances overtly showing appreciation of physical appearance were also found in my data. Participant C’s compliment on the nice figure of H’s mother provides convincing counterevidence to Ye’s (1995) aforementioned claim (Extract 6.1). Similarly, compliments such as ‘the contour of your lips is really nice’ (post-6) comments appreciatively on body parts. This finding indicates that my methodology, which supplements the compliment with the interactants’ explanations of their use, makes available information that can be related to cultural change in precise ways.

Moreover, character emerges as the second most preferred compliment topic, making up nearly one third of the total compliments in my study (5.3.5). As shown in Figure 7.1, this differs radically from the results of Yuan’s (2002) and Yu’s (2005) studies, two of the few that examine topics as a dependent variable.

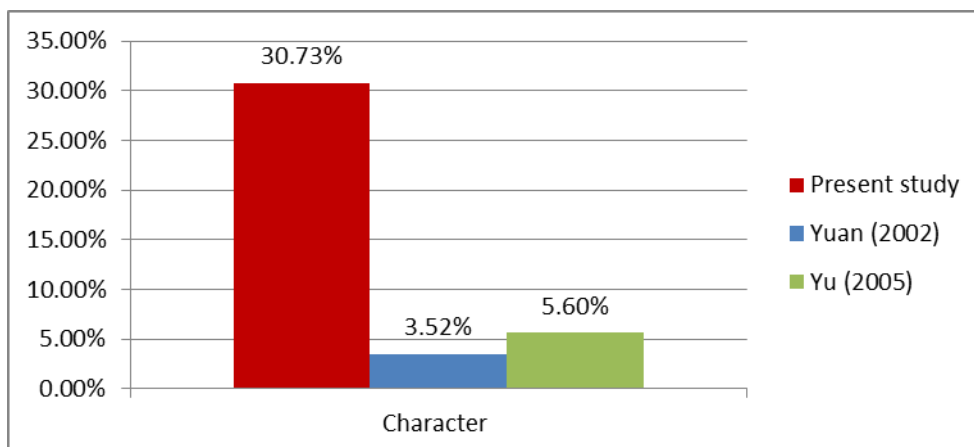


Figure 7.1: Comparison of character compliments between present study, Yuan's (2002) and Yu's (2005) studies.

The topic of character is named 'Whole Person' in Yuan's study (2002:205). In Yu's study, it is included in 'Others', the majority of which 'pertained to personality/whole person' (2005:108). Thus the actual percentage of character compliments in Yu's study would be lower than what is displayed in the figure. Yuan's and Yu's data were collected using participant observation. In Yuan's study, the author alone carried out the fieldwork without the help of assistants. As the author's analysis indicates, some of the compliments she noted down were issued by herself. Thus she clearly knows the topics of these compliments. Nevertheless, with respect to the compliments paid by the interactants she observed or interacted with, the topics she assigned are subject to different perceptions.

Yu's data were partially contributed by his assistants and the coding of topics is verified by two raters. I recognize that some of the compliments collected may be paid by the data collectors (either the author or the assistants), who may well share with the participants a set of norms. However, as I argued in 7.2.3, this cannot guarantee a correct coding of topics of the compliments issued by those observed. In addition, although the interrater agreement coefficients for the topics of compliments in Chinese were 94%, the raters' attributed intention is still likely to

diverge from that of the participants.

More importantly, this finding raises issues of the instrument of DCTs and the underlying methodology used in previous studies. For example, questions on Ye's DCTs to elicit compliments contain only the topics of performance/ability and appearance (1995:221–222). Without justifying the exclusion of other topics such as character, Ye assumes that character plays a minor role in compliments. Earlier, Chen's (1993) DCT situations involve looks, clothes, achievement, and possession. He claims that these topics 'can arguably capture a relatively full picture of compliment responses' (1993:51). However, my data collected in the actual interactions, through the complimenters' verification, show that character is a major topic, second in frequency only to ability. This seems to be an indication of Confucian emphasis on virtue and self-cultivation (cf. Lu 2004, Leung 2010). Hence the findings of a study based a DCT questionnaire without considering the topic of character is hardly able to give a full picture of compliments and CRs in Chinese. Also, without a scenario involving character on the questionnaire, it remains debatable whether the aim 'to characterize the overall characteristics of Chinese compliments' (Ye 1995:219) can be really fulfilled. My study, therefore, contributes to scholarship on compliments in Chinese by providing evidence that a person's character is highly valued in compliments in contemporary Chinese.

Moreover, generational variation was found in the compliment topic preference in my study. To be precise, the younger generation are much more likely than the older to compliment on Ability. Conversely, the older generation's compliments on Appearance occur nearly twice as frequently as the younger's (5.3.5). Further, the older generation do not demonstrate an overwhelming preference for any of the topics of Ability, Character and Appearance. Unlike the older, the younger group tend very readily to compliment on Ability rather than Character or Appearance. Besides, as just discussed, the younger generation tend more to express explicitly

their appreciation of their co-participants' physical appearance, including some apparently face-sensitive body parts such as the lips and figure of the addressee (5.3.5). This finding indicates that preference for compliment topics cannot be generalized among the Chinese as previous studies assume (2.4.1.3).

Yuan's (2002) study based on field notes is among the few that examine compliment topics in Chinese as a dependent variable. Hence a comparison of findings between the present study and Yuan's study can shed important light on the nature of compliment behaviour and hence of Chinese society.

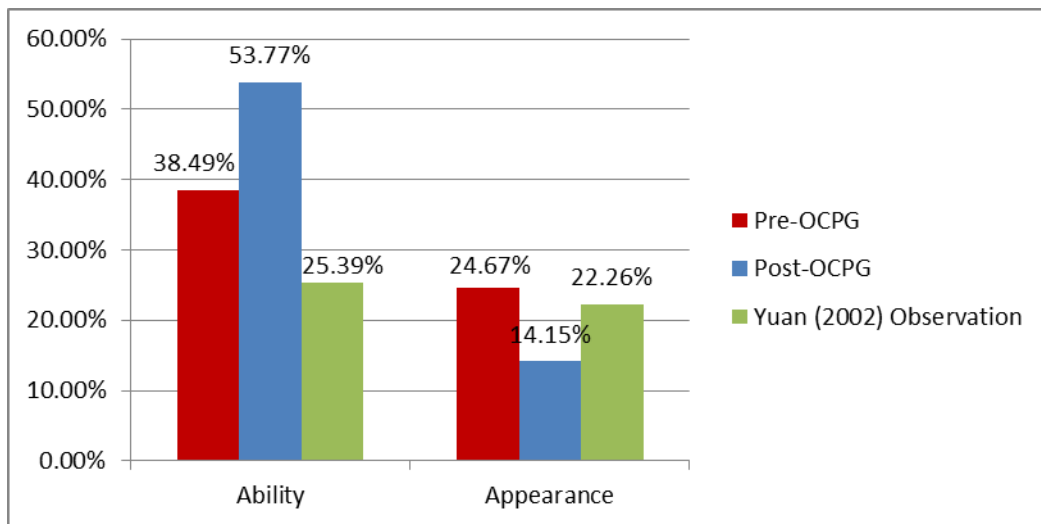


Figure 7.2: Comparison of ability and appearance compliments between present study and Yuan's (2002) study.

As shown in the figure, the older group in the present study share more similarity with Yuan's informants in their preference for ability and appearance. As in Yuan's study, the pre-OCPG's ability compliments occur more often than appearance compliments, but the difference is not so radical. In contrast, the post-OCPG's ability compliments, exceeding half of the total, occur nearly four times as frequently as appearance compliments. The younger people thus place significantly higher value on ability than on appearance, as opposed to the finding that the older

group consider appearance as substantially important though they do favour ability. This seems sufficient to indicate that compliment behaviour of the younger has diverged from that of the older. The overwhelming majority of the informants in Yuan's study are aged between 30 and 50 (Yuan 2002:191), so they are more comparable to the pre-OCPG rather than the post-OCPG. Her group's similarity to the older and their difference from the younger provide circumstantial evidence of the heterogeneity of the Chinese. Thus my methodology, which does not assume social homogeneity, has made visible the generational variation in compliment topics that is not evident in previous studies.

As regards the post-OCPG's overwhelming preference for ability, it may be attributable to the current sociocultural condition in which the younger generation were brought up. The reform-era China 'is characteristic of fierce competition' (Zhou and Wang 2004:106). The *tiěfānwǎn* ('iron rice-bowl'), the employment and human resources management system which guarantees lifetime employment and salary, has been broken. Consequently, ability is financially rewarded in this culture in a way that ability was not rewarded in the previous times. Ability is given a value that it did not have in the past. Moreover, the post-OCPG's stress on ability bears interesting resemblance to Yu's (2005) finding that ability/performance compliments account for 57.1% of his data collected in Taiwan, the job market of which has long been opened up for competition.

To summarize, studies like those of Ye (1995) and Yu (2005) propose that complimenting on appearance be inappropriate in Chinese culture. Drawing on my finding of the wide use of explicit compliments on appearance, I showed that their claims do not apply to my data. Like previous studies, my study shows that compliments tend more to focus on ability than on appearance. However, my findings diverge from those of Yuan's (2002) and Yu's (2005) studies based on observational data in that character compliments occur substantially more frequently

in my study than in theirs. Finally, drawing on the evidence of generational differences in compliment topics in my study, I showed how the methodology that captures participants' perceptions allows me to elicit accurate data, to address heterogeneity of the Chinese, and to relate it to cultural change in precise ways.

7.3.2 Generational variation in compliment frequency and politeness norms

In this subsection, I first show how, by focusing on the accuracy of categorizing compliments, my approach is able to explore the generational variation in norms operating as expectations about appropriate ways to perform compliments. I then demonstrate how, by capturing participants' perspectives, my methodology has generated the finding that politeness norms as motivations for a compliment are correlated with generation.

7.3.2.1 Compliment frequency, norms as expectations about appropriate ways to perform compliments, and generation

In this subsection my aim is to show how my methodology, which supplements the analysis of compliments with the interactants' accounts of their perceptions, brings into view that norms as expectations about appropriate ways to perform compliments correlate with generation.

As suggested in 2.4.1.4, politeness norms about how a compliment should be performed have to date attracted rare attention of studies of compliments in Chinese such as Ye (1995), Yuan (2002), Cheng (2003) and Yu (2005). The distinction I made between norms about appropriate ways to perform a compliment (5.4.1) and norms operating as motivations for compliments (5.4.2) allows me to carry out more nuanced analysis of the give and take of compliments. Furthermore, as detailed below, it is the variation across generations in compliment behaviour and norms that brings into view the specific ways in which the Chinese are heterogeneous.

Firstly, as a quality of an utterance, sincerity, in addition to external verification and being playful, was identified as a norm operating as expectations about appropriate ways to perform compliments (5.4.1.1). Sincerity was repeatedly emphasized by the participants in my study. For example, *Wǒ shì zhēnxīnde chēngzànde* ('I paid the compliment sincerely') (post-7), *Wǒ shì zhēnxīnde* ('It's from the bottom of my heart') (post-7) and *Wǒ duì rénjiā de chēngzàn shì chūzì nèixīnde* ('My compliment to her was from the bottom of my heart') (pre-8) were often used by the interviewees to explain their compliment behaviour. However, my interviews revealed some generational differences in two precise ways (cf. 5.5.2): One is that from the complimenter's perspective, the pre-OCPG participants tend less to regard sincerity as important when compared with the post-OCPG; the other is that the two generations seem to differ in their perceptions of complimenters' sincerity. The less emphasis the pre-OCPG give to sincerity conforms well to their stricter observance of approbation as discussed above, a norm which suggests a strong sense of insincerity. Therefore, this may partly explain why the older generation pay compliments more often than the younger generation. In contrast, the younger generation tend much less to consider complimenting as a necessary part of interaction.

Secondly, compliments that appear to be informed by the norm of external verification are formulated by the complimenters citing a third party's positive assessment. Similar instances were identified by Yuan (2001) in her study based on DCTs and participant observation as data collection methods: '[t]he field note method can also capture cases where a speaker provides a reported compliment which functions very much like an indirect compliment' (2001:286). Yet, the issue of which norm may have informed these 'reported and/or indirect compliments' (2001:286) remains unaddressed. My methodology, however, through the use of audio-recording natural conversations and follow-up interviews, enables me to perform a deeper analysis and establish evidence that participants, by citing a third

person, are self-deprecating. As indicated in 5.5.2, my data show that the influence of external verification on the pre-OCPG's compliments is much stronger than on the post-OCPG's. The generational difference in this norm is considerable because it indicates that the complimenters do not want to assert their authority when making a positive assessment. My finding, therefore, contributes to compliment scholarship by providing evidence that the old generation, who are being self-deprecating, tend to cite somebody else. In this sense, the older generation's politeness behaviour seems to be more consistent with the traditional conceptualization of politeness in Chinese as modesty (cf. Gu 1990:239).

Finally, being playful was identified as a politeness norm concerning the manner in which compliments are carried out. A participant even said explicitly that 'In Chinese a compliment should be paid in a playful manner' (post-7). As my interviews show recurrently, the participants' emphasis on a playful fashion of complimenting seems to be closely associated with its positive social functions of teasing among friends at informal parties. For example, my data show a major function of compliments paid in a playful manner is to create a congenial and relaxed atmosphere in social gatherings. This is well summarized by a participant who complimented his former classmate in an obvious playful manner: 'Without such a way of talking, without such a convivial atmosphere at the friends' gathering' (pre-6). As indicated in 5.5.2, my finding shows that the post-OCPG are much more likely than the pre-OCPG to carry out compliments in a playful manner. Thus, it is my methodology which can capture participants' perceptions that made explicit the generational variation in politeness norms.

In a word, compliments which appear similar on the surface are actually informed by different politeness norms. My discussion in this subsection indicates that studies based on data collected through DCTs or notetaking would not be able to explore the generational variation in compliments and politeness norms. Moreover, my

study contributes to the current literature on compliments by providing evidence that what previous scholars have cited as general norms correlate with generation. This suggests that the generational variation in compliment behaviour and the informing norms cannot be captured by a top-down approach to analysis.

7.3.2.2 Compliment frequency, norms as motivations for compliments, and generation

In this subsection, I show how my methodology, which foregrounds the heterogeneity of society, brings to light the generational variation in the politeness norms that motivate compliments.

As I argued in 2.4.1.4, the existing literature tends to view a compliment as motivated by face concern. Authors such as Holmes (1988) and Cheng (2003) suggest that it is the speaker's concern or respect for the addressee's face that motivates a speaker's compliment. The motivation for compliments are indeed found face-related, but my data show that face as a cover-all notion is not precise enough to explain the rich variation in compliment behaviour. Therefore it is necessary to look at lower-level norms or motivations in order to show how they inform facework of different subcultural groups. Approbation, social inclusion, respect, *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') and reciprocity identified as norms motivating compliments in my study are thus discussed respectively as follows.

Firstly, speakers obeying the norm of approbation believe in the positive social function of saying nice words (5.4.2.3). Motivated by this norm, they are inclined to give a compliment to their friends. Complimenting in this sense is a speech act to satisfy the addressees' interests. Within B&L's model, it is used by the speaker as a positive politeness strategy (1987:103). This, as mentioned above, is considered by scholars like Holmes (1986/1988) and Cheng (2003) as the major motivation for a

compliment.

However, while B&L (1987) assume that all competent adult members of a society have and know each other to have face wants, evidence in my study shows that conceptualization of face and facework appear to vary across generations in China. This is precisely because there is a substantial generational difference in the politeness norm of approbation, viz. it informs the pre-OCPG's compliment behaviour predominantly, whereas it only affects the younger generation's behaviour slightly (5.4.2.3). As a result, the pre-OCPG pay compliments much more frequently than the post-OCPG (5.2). This finding may indicate that the older generation are more concerned with maintaining their co-participants' positive face when compared with the younger generation. It also indicates that the amount of positive facework carried out by the two generations differs greatly in compliment behaviour.

Secondly, in my data the norm of social inclusion was found to be exclusive to the pre-OCPG (5.5.3). A compliment informed by this norm follows an earlier one given to another participant. Thus the pre-OCPG's close observance of this norm seems to explain well their high frequency of compliments. A compliment of this type is issued to get the complimentee included in a group. The generational difference in this norm tells us that the pre-OCPG make greater effort to attend to the addressee's positive face want, specifically with the goal of including the addressee within the group. In this sense, the compliment behaviour of the pre-OCPG differs greatly from that of the post-OCPG in that the older generation appear to make more effort to attend to the complimentee's *miànzi* ('face'), i.e. 'the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation' (Hu 1944:45). And this leads me to discuss the norm of respect.

Thirdly, respect closely involves face, i.e. the respectable image that one can claim

for oneself from the community in which one interacts (Ho 1976, Mao 1994). According to Young (1982), respect is characteristic of Chinese culture. And Gu notes that as in antiquity ‘respecting other remain[s] at the core of the modern conception of *lǐmào* [politeness]’ (1990:238). Gu further argues that with the founding of New China in 1949 a new order of social structure and social relations were introduced, but respect ‘remained intact’ as an essential element of politeness in Chinese (1990:239). These authors appear to assume that respect can be viewed as typical of the politeness behaviour of all the Chinese. In the literature on compliments in Chinese, Yu argues that the Chinese cultural convention legitimizes a hierarchical class structure that places a high value on respect for authorities and this concept ‘is still deep-rooted in Chinese society’ (2005:105). This tradition, according to Yu, may determine the Chinese speakers’ way of speaking, e.g. giving compliments. Like Young and Gu, Yu appear to assume that the Chinese (or in his terms, ‘Chinese society’) are homogeneously respectful.

However, my data show that the influence of respect on the two generations’ compliment behaviour differs considerably. First, notions such as *zūnjìng* (‘respect’) and *zūnzhòng* (‘deference’) were rarely mentioned by the post-OCPG interviewees as their motivation for a compliment. They do not seem to take respect (of face) as ‘central in describing complimenting behaviour’ (Cheng 2003:29–30). By contrast, respect was recurrently used by the pre-OCPG participants to account for their compliments. This norm thus has influenced this group’s compliment behaviour much more strongly. Second, in the pre-OCPG conversations speakers, whether older or younger than their addressees, may well pay a compliment out of respect. In contrast, there was only one case where an older complimentee (post-7) perceived a compliment offered by a younger friend as showing deference. All these findings show that respect is much more likely to motivate the older generation’s rather than the younger generation’s compliment behaviour. This is evidence that the post-OCPG have deviated considerably from the traditional norm, which is depicted as

characteristic of Chinese culture by scholars like Young (1982), Gu (1990) and Yu (2005).

Fourthly, as indicated in 5.5.3, *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second'), exclusive to the post-OCPG, was identified as the only norm that suggests a sort of conflict or confrontation in all the 16 conversations. This interactional style contrasts markedly with the supportive interaction among the pre-OCPG, who appear more ready to notice and attend to their interlocutors' interests in hearing nice words. As such, the younger generation's adherence to *xiānlǐhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') conforms well to the comparatively less value they place on approbation and respect, and their non-observance of social inclusion. These findings could largely explain the generational variation in compliment frequency (see 5.2).

Finally, evidence suggests that the norm of reciprocity is shared between the two generations (5.5.1). According to Hwang, 'norms of reciprocity (*bào*) are intense' (1987:944) in Chinese society. Cheng maintains that reciprocity 'explains why the Chinese do not accept compliments often' and when complimented, "a recipient is obliged to pay back, or 'return', what he or she has received" (2003:30). My finding that reciprocity seems to produce equal impact on both generations' compliment behaviour substantiates Gu's (1990:239) view of balance as a cardinal principle underneath the Chinese concept of *lǐmào* ('politeness'). But unlike previous scholarship, in my study this norm was made explicit by interview accounts such as 'My belief is that you praise me and I must return praise. This is a kind of reciprocity of gifts' (5.4.2.1).

To summarize, contrary to the wide assumption that speakers pay compliments broadly out of their concern about the addressee' face wants, as many as eight politeness norms were identified in my data. Based on my analysis of interview data,

norms such as external verification, approbation, social inclusion, *xiānlìhòubīng* ('peaceful means first, force second') were brought into view for the first time in the compliment literature. Furthermore, while the existing studies such as Cheng (2003) tend to view norms merely as motivations, two sets of norms emerge from my data, viz. norms about how one should pay a compliment and norms about why one ought to issue a compliment. Precisely, apart from the norms of sincerity, external verification, and being playful which function as norms about appropriate ways to perform compliments, reciprocity, respect, approbation, social inclusion and *xiānlìhòubīng* operate as motivations for compliments. This finding thus extends our understanding of compliment behaviour and the underlying norms. Most importantly, by focusing on these norms inferred from my interviews with the participants, I can carry out fine-grained analyses. Therefore, I may conclude it is the methodology which captures participants' perspectives that enables me to show how what previous scholars have cited as general norms correlate with generation, and hence bring into view the precise ways in which the Chinese are heterogeneous.

7.4 Generational variation in compliment response behaviour and politeness norms

In this section I aim to show how my methodology with a close focus on participants' evaluations of politeness brings into view the generational variation in CR behaviour and politeness norms. I start by showing being able to categorize and analyze data from the participants' own perspectives allows me to explore the strategy of Opt out and the generational variation in CR behaviour in 7.4.1. Then in 7.4.2 I show how my approach emphasizing participants' perceptions makes it visible that the politeness norms informing CR behaviour correlate with generation in China.

7.4.1 Compliment response strategies and generation

In this subsection I show how, by analyzing data collected through recording

spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and participants' perceptions accessed in follow-up interviews, my study has brought to light the prominence of opting out in Chinese CR behaviour and the generational variation in CR strategies. I argue that these findings would not be predicted on the basis of previous studies on CRs and hence my study contributes to the scholarship on CRs in Chinese.

To begin with, as shown in Figure 7.3, there is a noticeable difference in findings concerning the strategy of Opt out between my study and five previous studies. Precisely, no Opt out, or a namesake strategy, is available in the studies of Chen (1993) and Tang and Zhang (2009) (see the first and fourth columns). The percentage of this strategy in Ye's (1995), Yuan's (2002) and Chen and Yang's (2010) studies respectively takes up 5.90%, 3.72% and 4.33% of their data. In sharp contrast, Opt out accounts for nearly half of the total verified CRs in the present study.

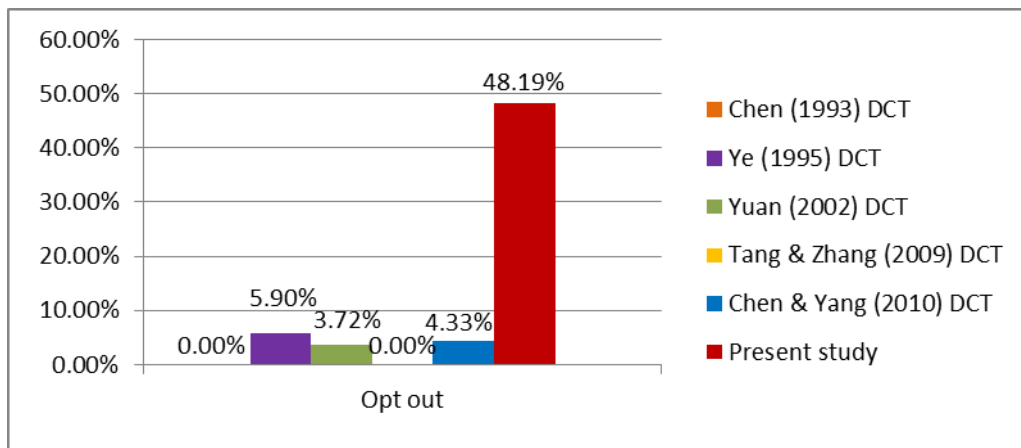


Figure 7.3: Comparison of Opt out strategy between present study and previous studies on CRs in Chinese.

The methodology I adopted seems able to account well for the above striking difference. This figure appears to indicate that it is very unlikely that in DCT-based studies there would be a high percentage of people reporting that if they received a

compliment they just would not respond. Further, it seems to provide empirical evidence of Golato's (2003/2005), Kasper's (2004) and Jucker's (2009) argument that audio-recording of natural conversations is advantageous for exploring interactants' actual social behaviour and the DCT is better suited for surveying what informants think they would say in invented situations. Furthermore, as my verification of CRs indicated (4.3.3, 4.3.5), an addressee may not actually perceive the prior utterance as a compliment where a certain CR strategy is assumed by the researcher (see also 7.2.4). This suggests that the assignment of Opt out or other namesakes in DCT-based studies would not be fully warranted. Moreover, this seems to indicate that without the precise analyses of data collected by recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and the follow-up interviews, the ubiquity of Opt out in Chinese CR behaviour would have rarely come into view.

Moreover, considerable generational differences in CR strategies were identified in my study (6.2.4, 6.3). To recapitulate the main points, the older generation are more than twice as likely as the younger to reject a compliment, whereas the younger generation accept compliments much more readily. The older generation's compliment responses are distributed more evenly across Acceptance and Rejection, while the younger show a predominant preference for Acceptance. Below I show, by way of comparison, how my methodology which foregrounds the heterogeneity of society makes visible the aforementioned generational variation.

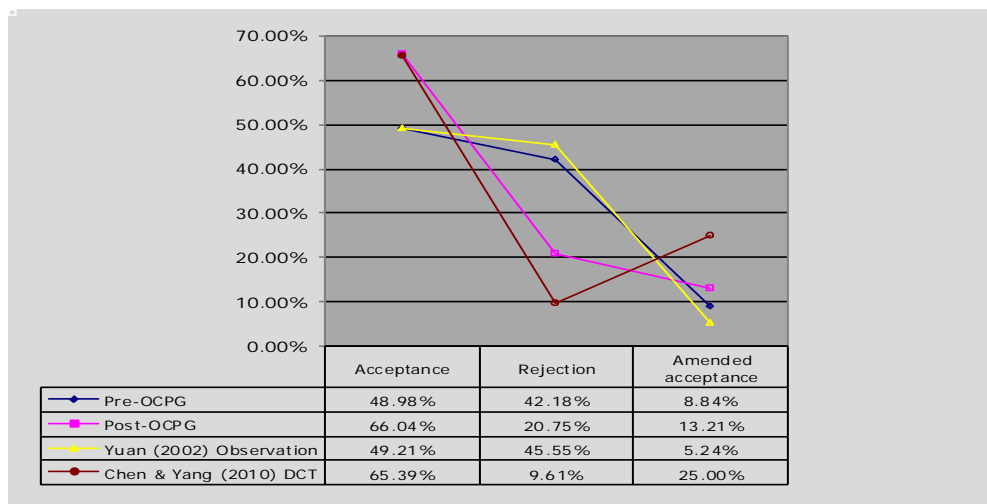


Figure 7.4: Comparison of CR strategies between present study, Yuan's (2002) and Chen and Yang's (2010) studies⁸.

This figure demonstrates some interesting differences and similarities in the CR strategies of Acceptance, Rejection and Amended acceptance between the four groups of informants in three studies. Most notably, the overall strategy preference pattern of Yuan's population group is similar to that of the pre-OCPG while it differs sharply from that of the post-OCPG. Conversely, the general preference pattern of Chen and Yang's informants bears a very close resemblance to that of the post-OCPG, but it differs significantly from that of the pre-OCPG. These findings may have important methodological implications. This is because, while the data in both Yuan's and Chen and Yang's studies were collected in China's mainland, Yuan's study is one of the few that examine CR strategies in Chinese collected through participant observation and Chen and Yang's work is the most recent inquiry based on DCT data.

⁸ The figures in the third and fourth rows are adapted respectively from Yuan's (2002:210) and Chen and Yang's (2010:1958) studies.

Although different in their use of instruments of data collection, Yuan's and Chen and Yang's studies both implicitly assume homogeneity of the speakers of Chinese at least at the place where their data were collected. Yuan notes that "the term 'Chinese' embraces numerous dialects and speech communities both within and outside China. Differences among these dialects and speech communities are bound to exist" (2002:186). However, throughout her paper 'speakers of Kunming Chinese' are referred to as though they are a homogeneous group in terms of politeness norms. For example, this can be partly discerned from the research questions Yuan's study addresses such as 'How do speakers of Kunming Chinese respond to compliments' (2002:186). Similarly, Chen and Yang (2010:1954) observe regional variation in CR strategies, for example, between mainland and Hong Kong Chinese. Nevertheless, in making such claims as 'Xi'an Chinese are now found to overwhelmingly accept compliments' (2010:1951), the authors, perhaps unconsciously, seem to assume that their findings based on data provided by their informants could be extrapolated to other groups.

However, as Figure 7.4 shows, the post-OCPG differ markedly from Yuan's informants and the pre-OCPG diverge widely from Chen and Yang's subjects in their use of CR strategies. These differences provide evidence that in terms of CR behaviour the Chinese are heterogeneous rather than homogeneous as the aforementioned studies assume. They indicate that on the basis of previous studies, it would be impossible to predict such variation across generations. However, the postmodernist approach which argues that it is 'essential that we recognize variation within cultural groups' (Mills 2003:146) leads me to look for generational variation.

In summary, in this subsection I first showed my finding that Opt out which accounts for nearly half of the total CRs contrasts drastically with its absence or low percentage in previous DCT-based research. This finding suggests that in actual interaction the most preferred CR strategy in Chinese is Opt out rather than

Rejection (Chen 1993), Amended acceptance (Ye 1995) or Acceptance (Yuan 2002, Tang and Zhang 2009, Chen and Yang 2010). Thus the prevalent use of Opt out seems to be the defining feature of CR behaviour in Chinese. I argued that unlike previous works, my study, by recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and interpreting data with participants' perceptions gathered through interviews, has brought into view the significance of Opt out.

Moreover, I demonstrated that the CR strategy preference pattern displayed by Yuan's (2002) subjects differs sharply from that of the post-OCPG and the pattern shown by Chen and Yang's informants differs significantly from that preferred by the pre-OCPG. I argued that this finding provides evidence that the Chinese are not homogeneous in CR behaviour as these studies assume. Furthermore, they indicate that unlike methodologies adopted in previous studies, my methodology is suitable for investigating behaviour and politeness variation in daily life interaction. My research, therefore, makes significant contributions to the existing scholarship on CR behaviour in Chinese.

7.4.2 Generational variation in compliment response strategies and politeness norms

In this subsection, my aim is to demonstrate how my methodology, analyzing data based on participants' perceptions accessed in follow-up interviews, has generated findings which indicate that (a) a CR strategy can be motivated by multiple norms of politeness rather than just a certain norm as current scholarship tends to assume; (b) politeness norms that have been widely treated as homogeneously informing interactants' CR behaviour are correlated with generation.

7.4.2.1 Compliment acceptance, politeness norms, and generation

As analyzed in 6.2.4, compared with the pre-OCPG, the post-OCPG attach much more importance to Acceptance than to Rejection. The younger generation's CR

behaviour thus seems to have moved rapidly to the norm generally observed by many white middle class of Americans (see Herbert 1986/1990) and New Zealanders (see Holmes 1986). Interestingly, their CR behaviour, excluding the opting out choice, also conforms well to the Chinese etiquette book's prescription that 'you must express pleasure or gratitude to a sincere compliment' (Zhu 2006:104). With these findings, it would be tempting to jump to the conclusion that my result supports Yuan's (2002, DCT), Tang and Zhang's (2009) and Chen and Yang's (2010) studies in which acceptance is strongly preferred over rejection. However, as indicated in the preceding subsection, this is only part of the story because there is a noticeable generational difference in CR strategies, viz. the older generation reject compliments much more frequently than the younger generation (e.g. Figure 7.4). Therefore, unlike previous studies of CRs as cited above, my data captured a more precise picture of CR behaviour of the Chinese. And this, as I have argued in 7.4, seems attributable to the use of my methodology which assumes social heterogeneity.

Moreover, in the studies of Ye (1995), Yuan (2002), and Chen and Yang (2010) the increased use of acceptance CRs are considered as resulting from the influence of Western values (2.4.2.3). Chen and Yang, for example, remark that '[w]e attribute this change [from overwhelming Rejection in 1991 to overwhelming Acceptance in 2008] to the influx of Western cultural influences that has occurred in the City of Xi'an since the early 1990s' (2010:1951). Yuan also asserts that her subjects accept compliments considerably 'probably because of western influence through movies and the media' (2002:214). While the upsurge in acceptance CRs, in the present and previous studies alike, may indeed be related in a certain way with the frequent cultural contact between China and western countries, none of the authors articulates what is meant by 'Western value'.

Nevertheless, following Ruhi's proposal to view accepting a compliment as

resulting from ‘speaker need for display of competence, self-confidence and individuality’ (2006:43), Chen and Yang view accepting a compliment as a self-politeness strategy chiefly motivated by the complimentee’s desire to show self-confidence (cf. 2010:1960). The authors thus seem to suggest that their so-called ‘Western cultural values’ (2010:1959) mainly refer to self-confidence. In interpreting acceptance CRs as motivated by self-confidence without distinction of subcultural groups, homogeneity of norms is apparently assumed by these authors. My data, however, show that rather than being triggered by only a certain motivation such as self-confidence, accepting a compliment is motivated by a range of politeness norms. Moreover, rather than homogeneously shared by interactants, evidence shows that they are correlated with generation.

As detailed in 6.4, accepting compliments can be motivated by the norms of gratitude, reciprocity, desire to express solidarity, and desire to express truth. In my interviews, some complimentees explained they accepted a compliment because it was true. Their behaviour thus could be understood as showing self-confidence. In this sense, my finding appears to support Chen and Yang’s (2010) interpretation of accepting compliments as a self-politeness strategy by showing self-confidence.

However, unlike Chen and Yang’s implicit assumption of sharedness among the Chinese, desire to express truth was found to be predominantly informing the post-OCPG’s acceptance of a compliment in my study (6.5.3). In their discussion about changes in the Chinese value of modesty, Hu *et al* note that it is now “quite common for young job applicants to ‘sell themselves’ in interviews” (2010:45) (cf. 2.2.2). My finding thus seems to provide empirical evidence that in contemporary China the younger people tend more to sell themselves as part of market economy. And to sell themselves successfully, they have to present themselves as distinct individuals who are confident and competent, by which they are judged in the market.

Moreover, my research differs from Chen and Yang's (2010) study in that the multiple norms in my study were suggested by the complimentees themselves in my interviews about their own CRs. Also, it is the follow-up interviews that provided evidence that the post-OCPG's acceptance seems to be predominantly informed by the norms of desire to express solidarity and desire to express truth (6.5.3). We may, therefore, conclude that it is my methodology that allows me to explore the diversified motivations for accepting a compliment as well as their generational variation.

To sum up, I started by showing that in the existing literature on CRs in Chinese, compliment acceptances are interpreted, vaguely and homogeneously, as motivated by western influence. Taking a top-down manner of analysis or an 'armchair' method in Jucker's (2009) terms, Chen and Yang's (2010) study views this strategy as motivated by the complimentees' desire to show self-confidence. Then, as counterevidence and hence contribution to the current scholarship, I presented my finding that a range of politeness norms identified as informing compliment acceptance. Further, I showed that accepting a compliment and the politeness norms correlate with generation. Most importantly, I have shown that it is my *emic* approach to data analysis informed by the postmodernist politeness theories that has enabled me to bring into view the multiplicity of norms underlying the actual behaviour, and their generational variation.

7.4.2.2 Compliment rejection, politeness norms, and generation

A cluster of politeness norms that appear to inform CRs were identified in my study. This finding thus problematizes the prevalent assumption that a CR is motivated by one or two norms shared by all members (2.4.2.3). As regards rejection, Chen argues that in rejecting a compliment the complimentee allows 'the Modesty Maxim [of Leech's (1983) PP] to be the sole motivation for her [the complimentee's] response' (1993:63). Chen claims that 'The norm of Chinese society...is to be

modest' (1993:67). Also, Ye (1995) contends that for native speakers of Chinese utterances like 'I am really abashed', 'No way', 'Not good enough' are normative CRs expressing rejection since 'Modesty is highly valued in this culture' (p.271). It seems that for these studies rejecting a compliment is solely motivated by modesty. In a more recent work Yuan also asserts that 'denying a compliment and denigrating oneself to show one's modesty have been regarded as *the* norm of compliment responses in Chinese' (2002:210, italics added). However, my data show that this strategy can be informed by a set of norms, including, for example, desire to express solidarity and desire to express truth in addition to modesty (6.4). Moreover, as analyzed in 6.5, evidence suggests that these norms, CR behaviour and generation are correlated. Precisely, modesty appears to predominantly inform the pre-OCPG, whereas desire to express truth and desire to express solidarity predominantly influence the post-OCPG. Below I show how my methodology enables me to identify these norms and the aforementioned relationship.

Consistent with their assumption that intention is readily identifiable (2.4, 7.2.3, 7.2.4), the above-cited studies adopt a top-down way of interpreting their data. They assume they are able to infer complimentees' motivation for rejecting a compliment based on the CRs they collected, either by DCTs or observation. In contrast, as Locher and Watts (2005) note, interactants' evaluations of politeness provide the basis of a data-driven, bottom-up approach to politeness. Moreover, they argue (2005:16), there is often a great deal of variation in these evaluations. Taking such an approach, my data was analyzed in a bottom-up fashion. Thus as detailed throughout Chapter Six, it is the participants' own interpretation collected through interviews that allowed me to explore the generational variation in CR behaviour and norms or motivations. In the remaining part of this subsection, I discuss in more detail how the methodology brings to light the heterogeneity of society in four specific ways.

First, my data show that both generational groups reject compliments much less frequently than the informants in Chen's (1993) study. This finding may indicate that the change of Chinese society is such that CR behaviour in Chinese has deviated from the traditional norm. Further, it suffices to suggest that modesty, valued in ancient times as *tiāndào*, 'a heavenly rule' (*Shàngshū-dà yǔmó* 《尚书·大禹谟》) (cf. Ji 2010) has diminished as a motivation for CR behaviour. More interestingly, the pre-OCPG are more than twice as likely as the post-OCPG to reject a compliment. As analyzed in 6.5, in responding to a compliment the older generation are more inclined to observe modesty, whereas the younger generation are more disposed either to index solidarity with their co-interactants or to express truth. This means that CR behaviour and norms in Chinese vary not only diachronically (cf. Pan and Kádár. 2011a/b) but also synchronically. Therefore, my research methodology has allowed me to take a rigorous and precise approach to data analysis which yielded new findings: compliment rejection, the informing norms of politeness and generation are correlated.

The finding that the two generations have diverted in their emphasis on modesty may well be accounted for by differences in the social and cultural environment in which they were brought up. Evidence from my data suggests that the older generation appear reluctant to abandon the cultural value with which they grew up, e.g. modesty which is theorized by Gu (1990) as an essential element of politeness in modern Chinese. By contrast, the younger generation tend more willing to uphold the norms of desire to express truth and desire to express solidarity, and perhaps also self-confidence as noted by Chen and Yang (2010). This provides empirical evidence of Wei's contention that brought up under a democratic and open policy, 'the post-1980 generation do not have a fixed ideology, they believe in truth...are no longer constrained by the traditional conventions' (2009:16). Also, this conforms to one of Bourdieu's (1990) central arguments that socialization disposes a speaker to act in a particular manner. Moreover, as discussed in the preceding subsection,

previous studies of CRs in Chinese such as Chen (1993) found that the informants reject more often than accept compliments, but their assumption of population homogeneity does not allow them to carry out this level of analysis.

Second, some generational differences in micro-level CR strategies and the informing norms seem to provide more interesting evidence of the usefulness of the methodology. In my interviews some pre-OCPG complimentees revealed that they rejected a compliment mainly to show modesty while saying explicitly that they did have the attributes complimented (6.5). This seems to be consistent with their observance of approbation which suggests insincerity (7.3.2). However, such data were absent in the post-OCPG's interviews. Evidence shows that this may be mainly because although the younger cohort do not view modesty as completely obsolete, they tend more to consider the norm of desire to express truth as more important (6.5.3). Further, this conforms to their emphasis on sincerity in giving compliments. Compliment rejection and norms thus correlate with generation. Therefore, it is not plausible to assume that in rejecting a compliment 'all they [the Chinese] need to do is to appear humble' (Chen 1993:67) without distinction of generation. This finding also provides counterevidence to Gu's (1990:239) argument that sincerity is a cardinal principle underneath the concept of *lǐmào*. Moreover, it suggests that by assuming that Chinese society is heterogeneous, the research methodology in my study has enabled me to contribute to this debated issue in the area of research on CRs in particular and on politeness in general.

Third, my methodology brings into view the use of highly self-effacing CRs among the pre-OCPG but not the post-OCPG. *lǎotóuzi le* ('[I'm already] a very old man') (pre-2) and *suíbiàn hùnhun le* ('Just make ends meet/Just a job') are among the typical examples (6.5.2). They are very much like 'I'm older and uglier' (Chen 1993:55), data collected by using DCTs nearly two decades ago. Interestingly, such CRs are consistent with the pre-OCPG's higher tendency to show respect by

deprecating self in paying a compliment (5.5.2). On the other hand, the lack of such data in the post-OCPG's CRs is in line with the absence of similar CRs in the most recent study by Chen and Yang (2010:1957). As Wang's (2005) study suggests (2.2.1), my finding indicates that as a pivotal norm of politeness in Chinese (cf. Gu 1990), self-denigration remains important for the pre-OCPG, but has become peripheral to the post-OCPG's performance of CRs. Thus, as a major contribution, my study, premised on the assumption that Chinese society is not homogeneous which translates into a methodology paying close attention to the detailed analysis of data, provides clear evidence of the significant generational variation in CR behaviour.

Finally, my study shows that expected CRs vary greatly across generations. The pre-OCPG are inclined to expect a rejection response. The younger, by contrast, tend to expect their complimentees to accept a compliment, particularly by giving the appreciation token *xièxie* ('thanks'). The post-OCPG's expectation thus contradicts Chen's claim that 'the social norm is such that the complimenter does not expect an agreement' (1993:67). Quantitatively, this difference appears to be in line with the high percentage of Rejection among the older and the high percentage of Acceptance among the younger. Nevertheless, the scarcity of appreciative CRs suggests a wide discrepancy between the expected and actual norm (cf. Zhu 2006:104) in the post-OCPG's CR behaviour. This may indicate, indirectly, that the informants in the studies of Tang and Zhang (2009) and Chen and Yang (2010) may have written down on their DCTs much more appreciation tokens (respectively 22.53%, 12.27%) than they would actually say in real-life interaction. Moreover, these new findings of generational variation in politeness behaviour seem to provide empirical evidence that '(im)politeness is indeed struggled over discursively' (Watts 2003:74).

To sum up, against the existing assumption that rejecting a compliment is motivated

by a certain politeness norm, I showed evidence from my data that this CR strategy can be informed by multiple politeness norms, for example, what were identified as desire to express solidarity, desire to express truth in addition to modesty. I then showed that unlike many studies' assumption that Chinese society is homogeneous in norms, in my study modesty was found to be predominantly informing the pre-OCPG's CR behaviour, whereas desire to express solidarity and desire to express truth predominantly affect the post-OCPG's CR behaviour. Moreover, I showed how, by analyzing spontaneous and naturally occurring data and participants' interview accounts, my methodology brings into view the generational variation in Rejection and the norms identified.

7.5 Summary

In this chapter, by comparing my study with relevant works, I showed how the postmodernist approach to politeness I adopted in my research brings to light issues concerning intention in interpreting utterances as compliments and CRs and in assigning compliment topics and CR strategies. I then showed that my approach to data analysis, by emphasizing the naturalness and spontaneity of conversations and participants' perceptions collected through follow-up interviews, makes inferable norms of politeness and allows me to explore the generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms.

In 7.2 I started by discussing the significance of my finding on the mismatch between the AAI, SI, and HAI (Figure 4.1). I showed that this finding provides counterevidence to the claim or assumption made by many scholars (e.g. Herbert 1989, Ye 1995) that a compliment is readily recognizable. I then showed that in most previous studies a compliment topic has largely been assigned in a taken-for-granted manner, whereas in my data topics cannot always be coded with ease. Similarly, by comparing my findings from coding CRs with the relevant scholarship, I showed evidence that a CR is not as easily identifiable as previous studies assume.

Moreover, I showed my result on CR strategies provides evidence that a CR strategy assigned by the authors or their assistants in previous studies is very likely to diverge from the complimentee's intention.

I showed all these findings indicate that intention of a compliment and a CR is not as easily identifiable as assumed by previous studies that adopt a modernist approach to politeness. I argued that this raises epistemological and ontological problems with data coding and interpretations of previous studies using a top-down approach. Therefore, I argued this indicates that without a postmodernist approach that captures the perceptions of participants, the issue of intention in compliments and CRs would not have become apparent. My study thus not only extends our understanding of compliment and CR behaviours but contributes to the current debate on the issue of intention in politeness research. For this reason, my findings may have significant implications for empirical studies of other speech acts.

In 7.3 and 7.4, I discussed my findings on the generational variation in compliment topics, compliment frequency, CR strategies and the politeness norms identified. I first showed the findings on the generational differences in compliment topic preference and compliment frequency could falsify the assumption that a compliment topic and a same compliment frequency are homogeneously shared among interactants. Also, I showed that in contrast to previous claim that explicit appreciation of appearance is not appropriate in Chinese culture, compliments of this type occur fairly frequently in my data. Furthermore, I showed my finding that character compliments make up nearly one third of the data may have significant methodological implications.

My discussion then focused on the findings of CR strategies, particularly Opt out, Rejection and Acceptance. I showed the significance of Opt out in Chinese CR behaviour. I argued my finding concerning the generational variation in CR

behaviour challenges the assumption that the Chinese are homogenous in CR strategies. I also showed what has previously cited as general norms for compliments and CRs in China were found to be correlated with generation. I showed how the adoption of a methodology that emphasizes the discursive nature of politeness has generated findings that compliment and CR behaviours are both informed by a range of politeness norms rather than a certain one such as modesty as many previous studies have claimed or assumed. Moreover, I showed how my methodology, which captures participants' perspectives by conducting follow-up interviews, enables me to examine the generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and the identified politeness norms.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

In this thesis I have presented my research on the speech acts of compliments and CRs in contemporary Chinese and the informing politeness norms in relation to generation. Adopting a postmodernist approach to politeness (2.3.2), I constructed a corpus of compliments and CRs collected in China by audio-recording spontaneous naturally occurring conversations among two generations of the Chinese. I maintained that intention is not self-evident. Thus, the data on compliments and CRs were all verified by the complimenters and complimentees by conducting follow-up interviews. Similarly, compliment topics and CR strategies were categorized based on the participants' interview accounts. Also, the politeness norms were inferred from the participants' perceptions accessed in the follow-up interviews.

Given that there is evidence of the heterogeneity of Chinese society (2.2), I hypothesized that there would be generational variation in compliments and CRs and the politeness norms that inform these behaviours. This led me to explore whether there is systematic evidence supporting this hypothesis.

In surveying the literature on politeness theories, I evaluated the two approaches to politeness as distinguished by Watts (2005) (2.3). I first showed that, premised on Grice's theory of meaning and communication and Searle's speech act theory, the modernist approach to politeness (Lakoff 1973, B&L 1987[1978], Leech 1983) focuses on the speaker and speaker intention. Politeness is conceptualized largely as the speaker's conversational implicature generated in an utterance. I contended that a major limitation to the modernist approach to politeness lies in its negligence of the hearer's active role in the sense-making process in interaction. Following Toolan (1996), Christie (2000) and Mills (2003), among others, I argued that in social

interaction it is usually the hearer's attributed intention that makes manifest speaker's intention. Moreover, I argued that Grice's and Searle's theories assume intention to be self-evident and do not address the variability of hearer's attributed intentions. I also showed that the modernist approach assumes that interactants are homogeneous with respect to politeness norms. I concluded that predicated on these assumptions this approach is not suited to address the diversity of politeness norms in China.

I then showed that largely informed by Bourdieu's theory of social practice, the postmodernist approach to politeness (e.g. Eelen 2001, Mills 2003, Watts 2003) emphasizes 'how participants in social interaction perceive politeness' (Watts 2005:xix). Under this approach, politeness is viewed as participants' contextualized evaluations of behaviour. Unlike the modernist approach's bias towards the speaker, the hearer is now put on a par with the speaker. As Haugh notes, for this approach, 'people do not always agree about their evaluations of behaviour as polite, impolite, overpolite and so on' (2007b:313). I showed that in contrast to the modernist approach, this burgeoning approach assumes that society is heterogeneous in regard to politeness norms. I contended that although Grice and Searle appear to assume intention to be self-evident, their core notions of intention and speech act of the modernist approach to politeness can and should be retained in research. On this basis, I proposed to explore the suitability of these two approaches for addressing the diversity of norms in China by focusing on the speech acts of compliments and CRs.

In the review of literature on these two speech acts, I started by showing that current scholarship on compliments and CRs to date has generally adopted a modernist approach to politeness (2.4). I maintained that Holmes' (1986/1988) definition of a compliment is useful criteria for identifying potential compliments. However, I showed that compliment studies carried out within the modernist paradigm focus on

speakers' intention and do not take into account hearers' attributed intention in sense-making in interaction. I demonstrated that many studies claim or assume that a compliment is readily identifiable. Also, I showed current scholarship tends to assume a compliment topic and politeness norm to be homogeneously shared among interactants. On this basis, I argued that these studies cannot address interactants' various politeness evaluations.

In surveying research on CRs, I showed that a CR is understood by scholars such as Yuan (2002) as anything that follows a compliment. They generally assume that assigning a CR strategy is largely straightforward. I showed in so doing these scholars appear to assume that speaker intention is easily identifiable. I argued that while Yuan's definition of a CR can be used as an initial yardstick for locating CRs, neither a CR nor a CR strategy is as easily identifiable as these studies assumed.

Moreover, I showed that in the existing literature a norm informing compliments and CRs is widely assumed to be homogeneously shared among interactants. Following the postmodernist theorists (e.g. Eelen 2001, Culpeper 2011), I argued that despite a certain degree of sharedness, norms for compliments and CRs can vary depending on different interactants. I also showed that taking a modernist approach to politeness, most studies of compliments and CRs take a top-down approach to data analysis. In terms of instruments of data collection, these studies, particularly those in Chinese, use the DCT predominantly.

For all these reasons, I concluded that by using a postmodernist rather than modernist approach to politeness, it would be possible to address the question of whether there is evidence of generational variation in the interpretations of utterances as compliments, compliment and CR behaviours, and the informing politeness norms.

To address this question, I audio-recorded spontaneous naturally occurring conversations at dinner parties respectively among two generations of the Chinese brought up before and after the launch of China's reform in the late 1970s. I constructed a corpus of analyst's compliments and CRs and another corpus of verified compliments and CRs (Chapter Four). The compliment topics and CR strategies were all categorized by the compliment givers and recipients in my follow-up interviews (5.3, 6.2, 6.3). Also, the politeness norms informing compliment and CR behaviours were inferred from their interview accounts (5.4, 6.4). The results show a compliment, CR, compliment topic and CR strategy are not as readily identifiable as previous studies have assumed. Evidence from my data also shows that norms informing a compliment and a CR are multiple. Moreover, my findings provide evidence that compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms vary across generations (Table 6.1).

In the discussion chapter, I showed how my methodology, by emphasizing the importance of interactants' perceptions obtained through interviews, brings into view issues which are not addressed in the current literature on compliments and CRs. More importantly, I showed how being able to categorize and analyze data according to the participants' perspectives allows me to draw out differences and similarities in the two generations' compliment and CR behaviours and the politeness norms identified as informing their behaviours. On this basis, I drew major conclusions concerning compliments and CRs in real-life conversations in contemporary Chinese as follows:

- (1) A compliment, CR, compliment topic, and CR strategy cannot be identified or categorized as easily as previous studies assume;
- (2) There are noticeable generational differences in compliment and CR behaviours, e.g. in the frequency and topics of compliments, and CR strategies;

- (3) There is variation across generations in compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms;
- (4) It is my methodology informed by the postmodernist approach to politeness that brings into view evidence of (1), (2) and (3).

I believe that my research contributes to our understanding of compliments and CRs in Chinese (and perhaps beyond) mainly in the following three respects:

Firstly, my research contributes to the existing scholarship by incorporating follow-up interviews into the techniques of eliciting participants' perceptions of their own speech behaviour. In this sense, my project builds on but goes beyond previous empirical studies in which the burden of interpreting interaction falls, totally or heavily, on the shoulders of the investigators, very often as outsiders. As was shown, it is very likely that there is a significant divergence between analyst's compliments and verified compliments. For example, as opposed to previous claims and assumptions, my data show that many apparently formulaic compliments were not used by speakers as compliments in the party conversations (7.2.1). Also, my findings show that, in contrast to previous research reports, compliments on character occur frequently, and that compliment and CR behaviours are informed by a range of politeness norms. This indicates, *inter alia*, that inference made by investigators about intention is always a hypothesis, hence is subject to participants' verification. Therefore, by providing a new perspective on the abstraction and complexity of the notion of intention in empirical research, my thesis represents a positive step forward in advancing speech act research.

Secondly, my research enriches current research on compliments and CRs by providing a set of new data. Relevant studies adopting a modernist approach to politeness focus too much on the speaker's intention at the cost of the hearer's various interpretations. In doing so, the authors assume a CR to be necessarily

following an utterance the prior speaker produces as a compliment. However, by using a methodology stressing the hearer's own judgements, my study shows that a CR, verbal or non-verbal, can occur in circumstances where the prior utterance is perceived by the hearer as a compliment but is not intended as such by the speaker. The possibility of a hearer making different interpretations of an utterance is thus brought to the fore in empirical research on CRs. Further, my findings show that it is also possible for a third party to give a CR on behalf of the compliment recipient in multiparty conversations. Clearly, these findings have implications for studies of other speech acts. Moreover, in stark contrast with previous studies, Opt out emerges as the most frequently occurring CR strategy in my study. My research therefore broadens our understanding of CR behaviour in Chinese and perhaps in other languages.

Thirdly, a survey of the politeness literature shows although there are some sporadic observations and circumstantial evidence from DCT-based studies and neighbouring disciplines, my research, to the best of my knowledge, is the first study that systematically examines compliments and CRs in real life from a cross-generational perspective. Moreover, while previous studies generally assume Chinese society to be homogenous, my data show that compliment and CR behaviours, politeness norms and generation are correlated. Previous studies tend to assume that the Chinese are modest in CRs and they shy away from comments on the physical appearance of their co-interactants. However, evidence in my study shows that the Chinese follow a range of politeness norms in performing compliments and CRs. Moreover, different generations tend to observe different norms. For example, in responding to a compliment, the pre-OCPG are much likely to abide by the norm of modesty while the post-OCPG have a strong desire to show solidarity and truth.

As I have acknowledged, interpreting participants' accounts of their intentions of and motivations/explanations for behaviour is analytically complex (cf. Haugh

2008). This is partly because participants may be positioning themselves in all sorts of ways vis-à-vis the researcher during follow-up interviews. Consequently, my findings and claims are also open to debate. Therefore, top on the future research agenda would be to develop a more sophisticated method, ideally from a multidisciplinary perspective, which can capture the dynamic nature of intention in ongoing interaction. In addition, it is important to note that the compliments and CRs were collected by recording informal and intra-generational conversations among friends in the context of a restaurant. Hence, future studies should examine these two speech acts performed in different situations, for example, in inter-generational interactions between strangers in institutional settings. Results of such efforts, together with my findings, would present a fuller picture of the way how the different generations of the Chinese perform compliments and CRs in a variety of social contexts.

However, with findings and claims based on evidence from the spontaneous naturally occurring conversations and interviews, I am confident that my research sheds new light on our understanding of compliments and CRs and politeness norms. Most importantly, my contribution lies in the finding that there is empirical evidence of generational variation in compliment and CR behaviours and the informing politeness norms in contemporary Chinese.

Appendix

Profiles of Participants

The profiles of all the pre- and post-OCPG participants are presented in Tables 1 and 2 respectively below, namely, age, gender, education and occupation/major of the participants. For example, in Pre-1-A, ‘pre’ is the abbreviation for pre-OCPG and 1 for the serial number of the party. Participants are anonymized via the use of letters.

Table 1. Profiles of participants in the 8 pre-OCPG conversations

Code	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation
Pre-1				
A	48	M	vocational school	chauffeur
B	44	M	2 years college	bank clerk
C	55	M	secondary education	worker
D	48	F	vocational school	nurse
E	40	F	2 years college	business woman
F	50	F	2 years college	insurance representative
G	36	F	postgraduate	research student
Pre-2				
A	57	M	undergraduate	secondary school teacher
B	50	M	undergraduate	secondary school teacher
C	50	M	undergraduate	secondary school teacher
D	45	F	undergraduate	nursery school teacher
E	43	F	undergraduate	primary school teacher
F	44	F	undergraduate	vocational school teacher
G	36	F	postgraduate	research student
Pre-3				
A	41	M	undergraduate	police officer
B	46	M	undergraduate	physician
C	34	M	undergraduate	civil officer
D	45	M	undergraduate	civil officer
E	34	M	undergraduate	administrative officer
F	33	M	undergraduate	surgeon
G	33	M	vocational school	chauffeur
H	36	F	vocational school	business woman
I	39	F	undergraduate	police officer
J	45	F	undergraduate	civil officer
K	36	F	postgraduate	research student

Pre-4				
A	65	M	secondary education	pensioner
B	52	M	secondary education	shopkeeper
C	55	M	primary education	worker
D	63	F	primary education	pensioner
E	50	F	secondary education	shopkeeper
F	50	F	secondary education	unemployed
G	36	F	postgraduate	research student
Pre-5				
A	44	M	2 years college	bank clerk
B	37	M	undergraduate	bank clerk
C	52	M	undergraduate	unemployed
D	55	M	secondary education	worker
E	50	F	2 years college	unemployed
F	49	F	secondary education	business woman
G	40	F	2 years college	unemployed
H	33	F	secondary education	warden of residence
I	36	F	postgraduate	research student
Pre-6				
A	46	M	undergraduate	civil officer
B	48	M	undergraduate	civil officer
C	46	M	postgraduate	vocational school teacher
D	46	M	undergraduate	statistician
E	37	M	undergraduate	business man
F	46	F	undergraduate	procurator
G	45	F	undergraduate	insurance representative
H	36	F	postgraduate	research student
Pre-7				
A	61	M	undergraduate	pensioner
B	64	M	secondary education	pensioner
C	61	M	undergraduate	college teacher
D	62	F	secondary education	worker
E	57	F	secondary education	pensioner
F	34	F	postgraduate	university teacher
G	36	F	postgraduate	research student
Pre-8				
A	64	M	secondary education	pensioner
B	50	M	2 years college	administrative officer
C	65	F	secondary education	pensioner
D	62	F	secondary education	pensioner
E	36	F	postgraduate	research student

Table 2. Profiles of participants in the 8 post-OCPG conversations

Code	Age	Gender	Education	Occupation/Major
Post-1				
A	18	M	secondary education	high school student

B	19	M	secondary education	high school student
C	20	M	secondary education	high school student
D	18	F	secondary education	high school student
E	18	F	secondary education	high school student
F	18	F	secondary education	high school student

Post-2

A	28	M	undergraduate	civil officer
B	30	M	undergraduate	police officer
C	31	M	undergraduate	civil officer
D	31	M	undergraduate	civil officer
E	30	M	vocational school	part-time worker
F	26	F	2 years college	receptionist
G	27	F	undergraduate	civil officer

Post-3

A	19	M	secondary education	high school student
B	18	M	secondary education	high school student
C	18	M	secondary education	high school student
D	18	F	secondary education	high school student
E	19	F	secondary education	high school student
F	19	F	secondary education	high school student

Post-4

A	24	M	2 years college	police officer
B	26	M	undergraduate	anaesthetist
C	26	M	undergraduate	surgeon
D	24	F	vocational school	nurse
E	22	F	vocational school	nurse
F	23	F	2 years college	police officer
G	23	F	vocational school	nurse

Post-5

A	19	M	undergraduate	university student (music)
B	18	M	undergraduate	university student (music)
C	18	M	undergraduate	university student (music)
D	19	M	undergraduate	university student (music)
E	18	F	undergraduate	university student (music)
F	19	F	undergraduate	university student (music)
G	19	F	undergraduate	university student (music)
H	27	F	postgraduate	university student (music)
I	18	F	undergraduate	university student (music)

Post-6

A	20	M	2 years college	university student (Chinese linguistics)
B	21	M	2 years college	university student (computer science)
C	24	M	2 years college	university student (computer science)
D	20	F	2 years college	university student (Chinese linguistics)
E	23	F	undergraduate	university student (Thai language)
F	22	F	postgraduate	university student (Thai language)
G	20	F	2 years college	university student (Chinese linguistics)
H	20	F	2 years college	university student (Chinese linguistics)

Post-7

A	24	M	postgraduate	university student (Marxism)
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B	24	M	postgraduate	university student (information and automation)
C	23	M	postgraduate	university student (socialism)
D	24	F	postgraduate	university student (journalism)
E	23	F	postgraduate	university student (sociology)
F	27	F	postgraduate	university student (fine arts)
G	23	F	postgraduate	university student (dance)

Post-8

A	18	M	undergraduate	university student (information management)
B	20	M	undergraduate	university student (information management)
C	19	M	undergraduate	university student (information management)
D	18	M	undergraduate	university student (information management)
E	19	M	undergraduate	university student (information management)
F	19	F	undergraduate	university student (information management)
G	18	F	undergraduate	university student (information management)
H	19	F	undergraduate	university student (information management)

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