

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **A. Background of the Study**

In today's rapidly growing era of globalization, simply having knowledge is not enough to survive in an increasingly competitive world. It encourages us to have skills that can be used in various fields. Mastery of foreign languages, especially English, is an important skill in today's generation, to establish, build, and also expand relationships with interests in various fields around the world ranging from education, business, to cross-country communication. Therefore, many people, especially university students, take up foreign languages and start competing to learn and try to master these skills. However, in reality, mastering English is not just about knowing the grammatical aspects and vocabulary. In practice, the success of communication in the use of a foreign language is highly dependent on the learners' ability to use the language appropriately and in accordance with its social context. For this reason, the role of pragmatic competence becomes very crucial.

Pragmatic competence entails a variety of abilities concerned with the use and interpretation of language in contexts. It includes speakers' ability to use language for different purposes-to request, to instruct, to effect change (Bialystok, 1993, p.43). Therefore, to have a successful conversation, speakers need to master the three aspects of language listed above.

This is in line with the field that examines how learners learn their target language, namely Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP). Kasper (1989b) as cited in Blum-Kulka & Kasper (1993, p.3) defines Interlanguage Pragmatics as the study of nonnative speakers' use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language (L2). In essence, Interlanguage Pragmatic (ILP) highlights the process of language formation (interlanguage) that occurs when learners are in the process of adjusting pragmatic norms in the target language (L2). In this process, there is often an influence of the first language (L1) that still appears when learners use the target language (L2), known as pragmatic transfer. Bermillo & Generoso (2023) defined pragmatic transfer as the interaction between old and new knowledge. Which means, pragmatic transfer will be formed if the speaker still uses the norms of their mother tongue when in the process of learning the target language in communicating.

Its transfer can then be further categorized as either positive or negative. It can be positive if the learner's use of L1 can support proper communication. On the contrary, it will result in negative pragmatic transfer if it causes a mismatch with the L2 context and meaning, which later leads to misunderstanding or what is commonly called pragmatic failure.

Kasper & Blum-Kulka (1993, p.12) also explained that differing from grammatical errors, pragmatic failure is neither easily recognizable by interlocutors without training in pragmatics, nor explained away by recognizing the speaker as nonnative. Broadly speaking, if people will know

we are wrong in grammar, maybe people will be easier to understand because they are not native speakers. Meanwhile, if it's pragmatically wrong, for example the answer sounds arrogant or disrespectful, people will feel offended, feel strange, or misunderstand. This is because they don't know that the speaker might actually just have a wrong strategy in the process of learning the target language (L2), not with bad intentions.

The form of communication that is prone to the most frequent communication errors is speech acts. Although requests are one of the most frequently researched types of utterances that fall within the large area of speech acts, it is known that compliments are recognized as an important speech act in a socio-cultural context (Tang & Zhang (2009). Holmes (1986) defined the 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.

Then, as a form of response to compliment given by the speaker, Cedar & Setiadi (2016) giving action given in response to a compliment that has been shown previously, called compliment responses. Compliment responses (CRs) are used as phatic expressions to sustain solidarity in interpersonal relationships (Bas, 2021). In this case, compliments and their responses are important areas that have the potential to cause pragmatic failure, such as misunderstanding.

The sentence is reinforced by the findings quoted from Holmes (1986), which shows an example, in which a female Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) compliments a Samoan friend whom she is visiting, illustrates another such miscommunication, namely when a female Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) compliments her Samoan friend by saying, “*What an unusual necklace. It’s beautiful.*” The friend responds, “*Please take it*”. The response made the compliment-giver feel bad and awkward, as he didn't mean to ask for a gift. However, in Samoan culture, it is normal and polite to offer the complimented object as a sign of respect.

This situation shows that there are different perception and understanding from cultural norms in responding to compliments. If we don't understand each other's cultural backgrounds, responses that are intended as a form of politeness or friendliness may be interpreted incorrectly. This reinforces the importance of understanding pragmatic strategies, especially in the context of compliment responses, which in some cultures have very different social values and meanings.

Yu (2003) stated that Compliment responses are worthy of study because they are ubiquitous, yet frequently problematic speech acts. Compliments come up frequently in everyday conversation with its responses, that is considered a common and integral part of communication (Shahsavari, 2014). Therefore, in general, responses to compliment often reflect the socio-cultural values and variations of a particular speech community.

Most researchers have investigated compliment responses among English speakers and non-English speakers, such as those conducted by Chen (1993), Tang & Zhang (2009) Razi (2012), and Shahsavari (2014). However, studies on non-native speaker groups with different contexts of English use are still rare.

Indonesia and the Philippines are two non-native English speaking countries in Southeast Asia that share some cultural similarities. However, studies comparing how English learners from different cultural backgrounds respond to compliments are still very limited, especially within the framework of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP). In the context of ILP, learners's pragmatic competence is also influenced by various factors, including the status of English in the country and the cultural norms that shape everyday language use.

In Indonesia, English is learned as a foreign language (EFL). So, its use in daily communication that is still limited and more influenced by local socio-cultural norms. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, English is a second language (ESL) and has become a more integrated part of daily life and education, so learners there have more exposure to more tangible uses of English. This difference in context may affect how learners from both countries develop their pragmatic strategies in (L2) usage including in the context of responding to compliments.

The previous research by Bibi & Sartini (2023) showed that acceptance responses are the most dominant strategy used in Indonesian

culture. However, research by Cedar & Setiadi (2016) found that Indonesians deny compliments more. In line with this, this study aims to explore which strategies are used by Indonesian respondents in the use of macro strategies. Meanwhile, findings were found in the Philippines, research by Boongkansaeng (2011), Morales (2012), Mascunana (2019) showed acceptance responses in responding to compliments.

However, studies that explicitly compare compliment responses in EFL and ESL contexts, among Indonesian and Filipino students are still rare. In addition, previous research results are often limited to gender factors (Mocija, 2002; Candan, 2021; Bas, 2021) or a combination of power and gender factors (Sa'd, 2015 and Shboul, 2022). Other factors such as power and distance, which influence responses to compliment, are still minimally analyzed. Another study by Indah (2017) also has not explored responding to compliment without distinguishing macro and micro strategy hierarchies in detail.

In relation to the main essence of ILP which is that second language learners (L2) use language pragmatically according to a social context that is different from their first language (L1), to fill this gap, it is very important to present a context that represents a real social situation. For this reason, the researcher considers the power and social distance factors between the complimenter and the complimentee. This is in line with Holmes' (1988) statement that compliments as devices for reducing social distance and reinforcing solidarity between speaker and hearer. In other words, the

compliment response does not only depend on the words spoken, but is also greatly influenced by the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Indah (2017) also states, complimenting is complex as it also concerns with power relations.

In that way, this study design the scenarios used in the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) instrument by considering the combination of social status (power: equal, lower to higher, higher to lower) and also social distance (distance: close vs distant). Thus, six different scenarios representing various communication situations were obtained, in order to present relevant social contexts to see how language learners (L2) realize their compliment response strategies. In addition, it allows researcher to find out the extent to which their pragmatic competence is reflected through the choice of strategies used.

By considering these aspects, this study aims to explore how Indonesian and Filipino students as English language learners realize macro and micro compliment response strategies in the context of Interlanguage Pragmatics. This research is expected to contribute to the understanding between pragmatic competence and social context in the use of English as a second or foreign language, as well as filling the gap of previous studies that have not discussed more broadly about compliment responses in EFL and ESL contexts in depth.

## **B. Research Questions**

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated the research question as the following:

1. How is the realization of macro-strategies in compliment responses used by Indonesian and Filipino English Language Teaching Students?
2. How is the realization of micro-strategies in compliment responses used by Indonesian and Filipino English Language Teaching Students?

## **C. Research Objectives**

Based on the research questions, the researcher formulated the research objectives of this study as the following:

1. To explore the realization of macro-strategies in compliment responses used by Indonesian and Filipino English Language Teaching students.
2. To Investigate the realization of micro-strategies in compliment responses used by Indonesian and Filipino English Language Teaching Students.

## **D. Significance of the Study**

There are several expectations that the researcher aims to achieve by conducting this study:

1. For readers, the researcher hopes that the results of this study can enrich the literature on Interlanguage Pragmatic, especially related to the compliment responses used by learners of English (L2). This research is expected to provide insight into how social contexts such as status

and social distance influence the choice of strategies in their target language communication.

2. For other researchers, the results of this study are expected to fill the gap in the literature of macro and micro strategies in compliment response by learners in two EFL and ESL contexts, and can be a guide for further studies in the field of Interlanguage Pragmatics and the development of social context-based DCT instrument design.
3. For practitioners in the field of education, the findings of this study are expected to provide a broader understanding of the variety of compliment responses used by foreign language learners, and can help language teachers and curriculum developers to design pragmatic learning that is more contextual and relevant to real social interactions.

#### **E. Delimitation of the Study**

This study allows for limitations that aims to keep the scope focuses that only involves English Language Teaching Students at two universities in Indonesia and the Philippines. Therefore, this study not represent groups with broader cultural or civilizational backgrounds. This study may be limited by diverse cultural factors that influence compliment responses. This study will focus on its main strategies, namely macro and micro, and will only be restricted to situations that influenced by power and distance factors. Other factors such as gender will not be part of this analysis even though they may be present among participants.

## **F. Definition of Operational Keywords**

### 1. Compliment Responses

Compliment responses refer to verbal strategies used by Indonesian and Filipino ELT students in responding to compliments in English. Macro and

### 2. Micro Strategies

Macro strategies include three main categories of compliment responses, namely Acceptance, Evasion, and Rejection. Meanwhile, micro strategies are specific forms of macro strategies, such as Appreciation Token, Agreeing Utterance, Shift Credit, and others, which are also based on Holmes' (1988) theory.

### 3. Power and Social Distance

'Power' in this study refers to the social status between the giver and receiver of compliments (higher, lower, or equal). 'Distance' refers to the level of closeness of the relationship between the two (knowing each other well or not). These two social factors are used in every compliment scenario in DCT.

### 4. Interlanguage Pragmatics (ILP)

Interlanguage Pragmatics is the study of how non-native speakers use and understand pragmatic features in a second language (L2). This study uses ILP as the main theoretical basis for analyzing how respondents provide socially appropriate responses in the target language.

## 5. ELT Students

ELT students refer to English Language Education study program students from Indonesia and the Philippines who are respondents. Their responses reflect their understanding and use of pragmatic elements in English as prospective language teachers.