

# A Comparative Study of Compliment Responses Among Italian and Mexican Spanish Speakers

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## Abstract

This paper explores compliment response (CR) strategies in Italian and Mexican Spanish from a cross-cultural pragmatics perspective. The research is based on a corpus consisting of 2400 compliment responses elicited through 12 written Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) which were administered to 200 participants in the form of open-ended questions. The data were categorised according to Castagneto and Ravetto's (2015) taxonomy. The main aim of this study is to identify differences and similarities between the two cultural groups which have never been compared before, and to examine how gender can influence recipients' responses. The results suggest cross-cultural similarities in Italian and Mexican CRs. The strategies used by both groups align with broader norms of positive politeness, confirming the view of compliments as face-enhancing acts. However, although Direct Acceptance is preferred in both languages, Mexicans tend to use opaque Acceptance strategies more frequently than Italians, with gender also playing a role. This behaviour is particularly evident among Mexican male participants, who often respond to compliments more evasively, using irony, proverbs, ritual formulas, or by deflecting the topic. Other differences include the average length of CRs in words. The data reveal that Mexicans tend to give longer responses than Italians, regardless of strategy or gender.

**Keywords:** Compliment responses, Italian, Mexican Spanish, Socio-pragmatic perspective, Gender conditioning

## 1. Introduction

Early works on compliments conducted in American English (Pomerantz, 1978; Wolfson & Manes, 1980; Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1984) stimulated a growing interest in this field of research, extending the analysis to an increasing number of languages. Such comparative studies have revealed significant differences not only at the interlinguistic and intercultural level, but also regarding the very conceptualisation of verbal politeness, the domain in which compliments are inscribed. Among the methodological approaches used, the ethnographic method of early American scholars prevails, while studies based on recordings of spontaneous speech are less common.

Compliments are hybrid speech acts, characterised by a dual illocutionary force (Alfonzetti, 2009) (Note 1). As expressions of admiration, they fall within the category of Searlian expressive acts (Searle, 1976: 12-13). In this sense, they are conceptualised as a «verbal gift» aimed at fostering conviviality (Leech, 1983), that the speaker offers to the interlocutor with the goal of gratifying him/her and strengthening mutual friendship (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1987: 15). However, the compliment also has a verdictive component: as a judgment, it is subject to the sincerity condition and can be evaluated in terms of truth and falsehood. The interlocutor can, in fact, agree or disagree with the expressed opinion, treating the compliment as an evaluation. Thus, its illocutionary purpose is not only to express a psychological state of admiration, but also of belief (Pomerantz, 1978).

In terms of verbal politeness, the act of complimenting functions as a positive strategy, that allows the speaker to express their appreciation or admiration for the interlocutor's physical qualities, abilities or possessions. Indeed, it belongs to the class of supportive actions (Held, 1992: 134), as it aims to fulfill the recipients' positive face needs, by paying attention to their interests and desires (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Compliments are, therefore, face-enhancing acts (Sifianou, 2001: 398), through which the recipient shows gratitude and satisfaction, in accordance with Leech's (1983: 131-138) *Approbation Maxim*. This view is conveyed through the addressee's acceptance, expressed verbally through thanks and gratitude, and non-verbally through smiles, hugs and kisses (Alfonzetti, 2011: 215).

Brown and Levinson (1987: 66) categorise compliments as intrinsically face-threatening acts (FTA<sub>S</sub>) to the interlocutor's negative face, as they may reveal envy or make the listener feel indebted, compelling them to defend or relinquish the praised object (Note 2). Additionally, as judgements, they could be perceived as infringing on other's freedom (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1987: 36). According to Alfonzetti (2011), this is empirically confirmed by compliments perceived as intrusive by the recipient, which lead to silences or abrupt topic changes. Moreover, this interpretation is supported by those cases in which the compliment takes on a manipulative value. The recipient, recognising it as an attempt at flattery aimed at personal gain, tends to reject it with polemical disagreement. This category includes, for instance, compliments that have the explicit purpose of mitigating a previous behaviour that was judged inappropriate.

## 2. Cross-cultural Studies

Over the past thirty years, research in the field of intercultural pragmatics has highlighted the intricate nature of the speech act of complimenting. While compliments are a universal socio-pragmatic phenomenon present in all cultures, they are subject to several factors of variation, including frequency, situational context, linguistic form, function, the addressees' reactions (Knapp et al., 1984), gender, and geographical influences, even within the same language or across dialects (Mulo Farenkia, 2012; Lau, 2025).

What primarily varies is the frequency with which compliments occur, which is closely linked to sociocultural dynamics. In general, compliments tend to be less frequent in Eastern cultures, where there is a strong sense of community belonging (Barnlund & Araki, 1985). Similarly, in Northern European cultures, which prioritise individual autonomy, compliments may be perceived as intrusions into others' personal space (Wieland, 1995). On the contrary, in cultures that prioritise positive politeness, such as North American, Spanish, Italian, or more generally Mediterranean cultures, compliments appear to occur more frequently, as they are considered a «welcome communicative practice» (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001: 119), which enhances interpersonal solidarity and reduces social distance.

Comparative studies on Eastern (mainly Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) and Western languages have shown a clear difference in the way they respond to compliments. In Eastern cultures, there is a predominant tendency to reject or deflect praise in order to uphold modesty and humility, whereas in Western cultures, people are more likely to accept compliments directly and express gratitude (Chen, 1993). According to Daikuhara (1986: 103-135), the rejection of compliments by Japanese speakers does not represent an expression of disagreement, but constitutes a politeness strategy aimed at preserving solidarity between interlocutors. Praising another person creates a superiority-inferiority dynamic that Japanese speakers tend to avoid, preferring instead to maintain a humble attitude instead. In Eastern cultures, the *Maxim of Modesty* plays a much greater role than the *Maxim of Agreement*. In the same vein, in Chinese culture, this maxim essentially corresponds to self-denigration, which, according to Gu (1990: 246), is structured into two sub-maxims: a) denigrate self (modesty); b) elevate other (respectfulness). However, more recent research suggests an overcoming of such traditional tendencies. Chinese culture, in particular, seems to be undergoing a gradual and complex process of westernisation of compliment response strategies. Nevertheless, the Self-denigration Maxim still plays a crucial role, especially in triadic contexts. Xia et al. (2021) show a significant increase in the frequency of compliment acceptance among Chinese college students compared to Chen's (1993) findings.

According to Manes (1983), compliments are a «mirror of cultural values», providing insight into what a society considers valuable and appreciable. Consequently, the topic of the compliment is also shaped by cultural influences, as what is considered praiseworthy can vary across societies. For instance, compliments in Western cultures tend to emphasise youth, whereas in Chinese and Japanese cultures, old age is celebrated as a symbol of wisdom (Gao, 1984). Moreover, certain topics may be considered taboo in some cultures. While parents in

many societies appreciate compliments about their children's health or growth, in Egypt and other Arab countries, the fear of the 'evil eye' often leads to such praise being avoided, as it may be interpreted as a negative wish or a sign of envy (Mursy & Wilson, 2001). This issue was also confirmed by Sidraschi (2014) in the small southern Italian town of Grottaglie (in the province of Taranto), and by Castagneto & Italiano (2022) with regard to the practise of complimenting in Baselice, an Italian mountain community in the province of Benevento. The researchers, analysing a corpus of 105 semi-spontaneous compliments, highlighted how the choice of topic is closely linked to a complex system of popular beliefs.

These variations also concern the norms governing the exchange of compliments between speakers in terms of role, status, age, and gender, although two intercultural constants can be identified. First, the exchange of compliments appears to be more frequent in dynamic and negotiable relational contexts, such as between friends, acquaintances, and colleagues of equal status. In contrast, in asymmetric relationships, such as those between strangers, or people with status differences, this type of communicative exchange seems to be rarer (Alfonzetti, 2009). Second, numerous studies in the field have shown that women, regardless of their social status or age, tend to receive and give more compliments than men (Wolfson, 1983; Holmes, 1986, 1988; Herbert, 1999). The greater frequency with which women use compliments supports the hypothesis of a female communication style, which Tannen (1990) defines as «rapport speaking», being more oriented towards affiliation and cooperation compared to the male style (Holmes, 2007: 36-41).

This aspect is particularly significant when considered in relation to the object of the compliment. In fact, women exchange compliments primarily on physical appearance (Wolfson, 1983; Holmes, 1988). Meanwhile, men receive more compliments on skills, possessions, and achievements (Parisi-Wogan, 2006). It is also interesting to note that certain response strategies are linked to gender. A contrastive study between Spanish and English reveals that responding to compliments with irony, often by reciprocating them, is a characteristic trait of the male gender in Spanish culture (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001: 107-127).

According to Mir & Cots (2019), humour can be used as a mitigating tool to counterbalance face loss. In their comparative study between Peninsular Spanish and US speakers, the scholars show how teasing is employed to strengthen closeness and familiarity bonds between interlocutors, in line with the positive politeness nature of Spanish culture.

The complexity of this sociolinguistic speech act is evident in the different response modes that can range from acceptance/non-acceptance to agreement/disagreement, which can co-occur within a single sequence. According to Pomerantz (1978), the compliment and its response within a conversation form a structural configuration that can be traced to a «chain action event» that takes place between at least two individuals (the complimenter and the complimentee). As pointed out by the author, and later taken up by Alfonzetti (2009), the recipient of a compliment faces an interactional dilemma arising from the conflict between the *Agreement Maxim* and the *Modesty Maxim*, which hold different importance depending on the cultural context. The necessity of responding to the compliment places the recipient in a state of «in-betweenness» (Pomerantz, 1978). By accepting the compliment, one respects

the *Agreement Maxim* (which entails maximising the expression of agreement with the interlocutor), but violates the *Modesty Maxim*. Conversely, by not accepting the compliment, one adheres to the *Modesty Maxim* (which discourages self-praise), but violates the *Agreement Maxim* (Leech, 1983). Faced with such a conflict, the recipient, as confirmed by the relevant literature on CRs, tends to lean towards intermediate responses between full agreement and radical disagreement, through mitigation strategies.

### 3. Literature Review

#### 3.1 Studies on Compliment Responses in Italian

A fair number of studies on Italian compliment responses (CRs) can be found in the scientific literature. Marina Frescura initiated this line of research in 1996. The scholar analysed a corpus of 979 compliment-response sequences collected in Italy over a period of two years, using an ethnographic method. The study showed that *Direct Acceptance* occurred at a low frequency (10.82%), and that the adoption of *Refusal* strategies was even rarer (6.23%). The results suggested a clear preference for “opaque” acceptance strategies, particularly *Downward Shifting* and *Lateral Shifting* (merit or quality) of the compliment. Within an attested rate of 82.93%, this strategy seems to align Italian culture with the *Modesty Maxim*.

However, these data contrast with the results of more recent studies conducted within the framework of variational pragmatics which take diatopic and diastratic variables into account (Castagneto & Ravetto, 2015; Castagneto & Sidraschi, 2020; Castagneto, 2016, 2019, 2023). The findings show that a pragmatic change in the management of the compliment speech act is currently being observed in Italy. This shift seems to be leading speakers to prioritise the *Agreement Maxim* over the traditional *Modesty Maxim*, in line with the pragmatic models prevalent in English-speaking countries. This evolution appears to indicate a gradual shift in Italian culture away from the «conflict culture» (Chen, 1993) previously attributed to the Italian speech community by Frescura (1996). In detail, Castagneto & Sidraschi (2020) conducted a study on a corpus of 321 CRs related to physical attributes elicited in semi-spontaneous interactions in the Eastern Piedmont area. It is significant to note that most responses fall under *Direct Acceptance* (50.16%), with *Limited Acceptance* (28.97%) being the second most common strategy. These data are in line with the main studies conducted in English-speaking areas, but contrast with the results of Frescura (1996).

However, the type of response to a compliment can also vary within different geographical areas of the same country. In the context of variational pragmatics, Castagneto (2023) found differences in the CRs between young speakers from eastern Piedmont and Cancellorino, a small rural town in the southern province of Caserta. In particular, Piedmontese speakers gave short and often indirect responses, tending towards an individualistic model of negative politeness. This behaviour minimises the perceived indebtedness to the person giving the compliment, while protecting their own positive face. On the other hand, the speakers of Cancellorino and Arnone show various characteristics of a collectivist community. They tend to give long CRs, which occupy a significant portion of the conversation and are expressed through multiple dialogic turns. Individuals are integral members of social groups, and the



concept of face cannot be considered with reference to a single individual, as it has an inherently interactional nature.

A significant contribution to this topic also comes from Alfonzetti (2009, 2013, 2015) and Alfonzetti & Scivoletto (2023). The research is based on a corpus of spontaneous speech recorded mainly in Catania and Rome (Alfonzetti, 2009; Alfonzetti & Scivoletto, 2023). The analytical approach used is based on Leech's (1983) maxims of politeness. *Acceptance* is the most frequent compliment response in contexts characterised by marked asymmetries in age, role, or between strangers and acquaintances. However, it is rarely observed in more familiar contexts between people of the same age and with equivalent status. In such circumstances, compliments are part of longer and more articulated interactional sequences. A higher frequency of *Acceptance* is observed in CRs regarding physical attributes or natural talent. In such contexts, recipients tend to express appreciation and gratitude rather than showing agreement, which would directly violate the *Maxim of Modesty*. In her analysis, Alfonzetti refers to the dual value of compliments, building on Pomerantz's studies. As can be seen, disagreement does not necessarily imply rejection of the compliment, just as acceptance does not always indicate agreement. This is evidenced by the co-occurrence of disagreement and acceptance within the same sequence. The recipient may express disagreement with the positive judgment, questioning its truthfulness, while still thanking the giver for the linguistic gift received.

Among the most recent studies, Samu (2024) investigated the use of compliment response strategies among Italian native speakers, American English native speakers and American learners of Italian, aligning with previous research by Frescura (1996) and Samu & Wang (2020). According to the scholar, Italians rarely resort to direct or transparent acceptance, as they tend to avoid self-praise and generally adopt a more modest stance. In accepting a compliment, in fact, they typically rely on opaque strategies, such as *Minimising*, *Shifting* or *Downscaling* the compliment, in order to satisfy interlocutors' expectations of agreement while preserving modesty. Americans, on the other hand, tend to accept compliments more directly, being concerned with maintaining the hearer's positive face. This research, however, seems to contrast with Castagneto's findings, offering an interesting perspective on the complex issue of this pragmatic feature in the Italian context. While Italians may be moving away from a "conflict culture", the *Modesty Maxim* has not been completely abandoned. This highlights the idea that Italian culture is evolving towards a more flexible politeness system, in which both the *Agreement Maxim* and the *Modesty Maxim* are negotiated depending on the context.

### 3.2 Studies on CRs in Spanish Varieties

In this section will refer to Spanish varieties, focusing only on CSs (Note 3). On this issue, Lorenzo-Dus (2001) explored how British and Peninsular Spanish undergraduate students respond to compliments, using written DCTs, adopting Herbert's taxonomy (1989). She found that British participants combined *irony* with various *acceptance* strategies, such as *comment acceptance*, *history*, and *return*, while Spanish participants, particularly men, preferred ironic upgrades. Additionally, British participants were more likely to question the truth of the

compliment than their Spanish counterparts, who frequently asked for repetition of the compliment, a strategy completely absent in the British data.

Some years later, Garrote (2012) explored the politeness strategies employed by Spanish and Italian speakers, by analysing a corpus of 400 CRs collected through written DCTs. Garrote classified the data using a modified version of Chen's (1993) taxonomy to suit the characteristics of the sample. Both Italian and Spanish participants predominantly used acceptance strategy. However, the percentage of acceptance was higher in the Italian sample (74%) than in Spanish (65%). In addition, Spanish speakers used the rejection strategy more frequently than native Italians, 20% and 14% respectively. The most striking differences emerged in relation to the topic, especially when the compliment was related to personal abilities. In this context, acceptance was the predominant strategy, though it was used less frequently than compliments about physical appearance or possessions, among Italian participants.

In the same vein, Maíz-Arévalo (2012) conducted a contrastive study of CRs English and Peninsular Spanish. For this study, she used a corpus of 50 compliment-response sequences, collected from fieldwork notes in Spanish, and from Holmes' corpus in English. The data revealed that Holmes' taxonomy is not always valid or applicable to Spanish, as some responses do not fit into any of the defined categories. Moreover, it did not take into account non-verbal responses such as smiles, raised eyebrows, smirks, and other gestures, despite being present in Spanish. Additionally, while compliments in English tended to elicit brief responses, those in Spanish often generated more elaborate replies that extended over multiple conversational turns and incorporated the various functions outlined in Holmes' taxonomy. The researcher noted that, although acceptance is the most commonly used strategy in both languages, as previously observed by Herbert (1990) and Holmes (1995), it occurred less frequently in Spanish than in English. Moreover, the most significant difference concerned the refusal strategy: only 8% of English-speaking participants rejected the compliment, compared to 24.5% of Spanish-speaking participants. Rejection was not considered embarrassing, but was naturally accepted and often expressed through formulaic expressions such as *¡Qué va!*, especially among Spanish women. As shown in a previous study (Maíz-Arévalo, 2010), gender is a key variable in Spanish. Male speakers tended to evade or shift the topic, while female subjects were more likely to reject the compliment, leading to a negotiation of the compliment itself. Additionally, in exchanges between women, acceptance was often accompanied by an informative comment, whereas a more simplified acceptance was observed when the compliment came from a man. In the latter case, women also preferred to evade those compliments, which, according to Maíz-Arévalo, may be a strategy to avoid flirtatious behaviour and appear more modest.

Studies on CRs in Mexico are scarce and mostly refer to indigenous languages still spoken in the country (Curcá, 2007) (Note 4). Restricted to CRs (Note 5), Valdés & Pino (1981) compared CRs among three groups of participants: monolingual speakers living in Mexico (State of Chihuahua), monolingual English speakers residing in the United States, and bilingual Mexican-American speakers from southern Mexico. The research showed that Mexicans and Americans used the same patterns of acceptance and rejection. However,

Mexicans used different strategies depending on the degree of acquaintance with the interlocutor and tended to apply Lakoff's Rule 1, *Don't impose*, more frequently, which is closely related to Brown and Levinson's concept of *negative face*, due to the high stratification of Mexican society. In contrast, the American group tended to follow Lakoff's Rule 3, *Be friendly*, which corresponds to the concept of *positive face* in Brown and Levinson's theory. In reference to Mexican-American bilinguals, there was a tendency to treat others as if they were close friends, showing attention to the positive face of the recipient.

More recently, Flores-Salgado & Witten (2019) conducted a comparative study examining how 60 native Spanish speakers from Mexico (State of Puebla) and 60 native English speakers from Ireland (Dublin) respond to compliments using written DCTs. The responses were categorised according to the taxonomy of Herbert (1989) and Nelson et al. (1996). The data confirmed Lorenzo-Dus's (2001) hypothesis, demonstrating an inclination to avoid self-praise regarding natural talent. Furthermore, disagreement was not interpreted as inappropriate in either cultural group. However, there were significant differences. Mexican participants tended to use a combination of strategies rather than single expressions, resulting in longer responses than those of Irish participants. As noted by Flores-Salgado & Witten (2019: 29), in Mexican culture, the longer the CR the greater the level of sincerity, a behaviour already found in Arabic speakers by Nelson et al. (1996).

Moreover, the data showed that Irish speakers tend to use a single strategy when responding to compliments, whereas Mexicans do not consider a simple *Gracias* to be a sufficient response and require additional strategies. The *acceptance + formula* strategy was in fact used exclusively in Mexican Spanish with a clear social function. This combination was only used with compliments referring to possessions or abilities, conveyed through expressions such as *cuando gustes, a la orden, cuando quieras*. Regarding compliments about their outward appearance, Mexicans preferred to reject them, whereas the Irish tended to accept them. Additionally, Mexican participants used formulaic expressions to respond to compliments about their possessions or skills and to disagree with compliments about their outward appearance.

#### 4. The Research

This study aims to explore the dynamics of CR strategies adopted by native Italian and Mexican Spanish speakers from a cross-cultural perspective. The main purpose is to identify the differences and similarities between the two cultural groups and examine how gender can influence recipients' responses. In the field of cross-cultural pragmatics, there are no studies that directly compare the behaviour of Italian and Mexican with regard to CRs. Nevertheless, studies of Peninsular Spanish culture, including comparisons with the Italian language, (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001; Garrote, 2012) and of Mexican Spanish (Valdés & Pino, 1981; Mack & Sykes, 2009; Flores-Salgado & Witten 2019) provide useful points of contrast. However, comparisons with previous studies should be made with a certain degree of caution, due to methodological differences in the elicitation of CRs and the adoption of different categories for strategy grouping.



Native speakers of Italian and Spanish varieties share a relevant degree of linguistic and cultural affinity, characterised by their common use of Romance languages and the presence of similar pragmatic aspects and verbal politeness strategies (Haverkate, 2004; Fédix-Brasdefer, 2006, 2009; Mugford & Fédix-Brasdefer, 2021), (Note 6). However, a closer analysis reveals a different picture. Mexican culture is similar to, but not identical to, Peninsular Spanish culture. This discrepancy is evident not only in terms of urban and social organisation, but also in the strong influence of American culture on Mexican society. As posited by Márquez-Reiter & Placencia (2005), a different politeness orientation is exhibited by Latin American varieties, including Mexican and Peruvian Spanish, in comparison to Peninsular and Argentinean varieties. This is because they strike a balance between behaviours that demonstrate both solidarity and deference, whereas Peninsular Spanish speakers tend to prioritise solidarity. This finding is also consistent with the research of Mack & Sykes (2009) which shows that Mexicans (24.4%) are more likely to avoid self-praise than Peninsular Spanish speakers (15.4%).

#### *4.1 The Research Aims*

In light of the aforementioned differences, it is expected that Italian and Mexican speakers' CRs will differ in terms of the strategies employed and the length of their responses. The objective of this study was to address the following two research questions:

- 1) Firstly, this study aims to verify whether there are significant differences in the frequency of macro and micro strategies used to respond to compliments between Italian and Mexican participants, based on cross-cultural and pragmalinguistic convergences. To the best of our knowledge, no direct comparison of these languages regarding this topic has been conducted.
- 2) Secondly, the objective is to determine whether Mexicans produce longer responses (in terms of word count) than Italians, and whether the length is, to some extent, influenced by other variables. Previous studies (Maiz-Arévalo, 2012; Flores-Salgado & Witten, 2019) found that compliments and CRs are generally longer in Spanish varieties.

#### *4.2 Participants*

The data were collected through a questionnaire consisting of 12 written DCT<sub>s</sub> (Note 7), which was administered to 100 Italian and 100 Mexican natives, for a total of 2400 responses. Native-speaking participants were selected, ensuring they had spent most of their lives in either Italy or Mexico to guarantee culturally authentic responses. The informants were also balanced by gender (50 male and 50 female subjects for each language), with a predominantly university-level education, and fell within the age range of 20 to 40 years. The focus on young adults aimed to neutralise the influence of generational differences in responses. Regarding the participants' geographical origins, no specific regional sample was used; instead, the selection was extended to all Italian regions and Mexican states to ensure a more homogeneous data collection. It was clearly stated that participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and completely anonymous.

#### 4.3 Methodology

In order to analyse gender differences in CRs, two distinct versions of the questionnaire were created and translated into Italian and Spanish. The questionnaires were designed using *Google Forms* and then distributed via links to participants in Italy and Mexico through informal channels such as *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*. The digital format allowed for faster and more effective data collection, ensuring broad and balanced participation. The introductory section of the questionnaire provided practical information on how to complete it. The general structure of the DCT involved the simulation of everyday situations in which participants received a compliment and had to respond as if they were in the described context. The questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions, allowing participants to express themselves spontaneously, reproducing their real-life reactions as faithfully as possible. In particular, 12 situations were created for male participants and another 12 for female participants. This distinction was necessary because certain situations, such as those related to football, cooking, and manicures, were more appropriate for one gender than the other. Each scenario represented a realistic and accessible context, avoiding specific details that might have excluded some participants. With regard to the Spanish language, the proposed situations were validated by native Mexican speakers, who confirmed that they were realistic and familiar to the respondents. In this study, the impact on the type of CRs was also analysed, taking into account variations in topics and the gender of the complimenter (same-sex or opposite-sex participants), (Note 8).

The responses collected were then transferred to an Excel database and classified on several variables, such as the language, age, sex, macro and micro categories of the response, topic of the compliment, social distance. For the classification of the strategies used, we used the taxonomy proposed by Castagneto & Ravetto (2015).

In order to calculate the length of the responses, each item was also categorised by number of words; the mean and the standard deviation were counted grouping the responses by languages, gender and strategies adopted.

The Statistical significance was tested using a t-Test for the word length of the responses and a *Mixed-Effects Logistic Regression Model* for the differences between the strategies with languages and gender as fixed variable and macro or micro strategies as factors (IBM, SPSS Statistics, ver. 20.0).

#### 4.4 The Categorisation of CRs

Building on previous studies and extending them, Castagneto & Ravetto developed a new categorisation in 2015 which integrates the methodological proposal of Frescura (1996). This taxonomy organises compliment responses into four main categories: *Direct Acceptance*, *Limited Acceptance*, *Non-Acceptance*, and *Ignoring*, further subdivided into 16 subcategories (see Figure 1). Following Tran's (2007) model, the subcategories are theorised to evolve along a gradient of acceptance/non-acceptance, as opposed to the gradient of agreement/disagreement, prioritising the most representative function of the compliment, namely that of a supportive action.

*Direct Acceptance* (DA) involves clearly accepting the compliment, which may encompass the expression of gratitude towards the individual who gave the compliment, or the demonstration of a *Pleased Acceptance* at the reception of praise. Such responses are often accompanied by gestures of agreement or non-verbal signals, such as smiles, kisses, or hugs (*non-verbal acceptance*) or with a *Restitution* of the compliment.

The *Limited Acceptance* (LA) category involves strategies that tend to avoid self-praise, such as *Ironic Acceptance* which enables the recipient to accept the compliment while delivering it in a sarcastic or mocking tone; *Minimisation* which reduces or downplays the value of the praise; and three types of *Lateral Deflection* (*Topic*, *Merit*, and *Quality*). In turn, the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* can be categorised into two subtypes: *Explanation*, where the recipient provides further information on the topic, and *Justification*, which explain why they possess the praised attribute. Furthermore, the *Reassurance Request* constitutes a complex strategy. It is evident that, through this mechanism, the complimentee adopts an off-record strategy. This can be conceptualised as a form of recycling the compliment, where the speaker neither accepts nor rejects it, thus avoiding interruption of the conversational turn. It can also be interpreted as a form of disagreement or pre-acceptance, a way of fishing for further compliments; or an expression of doubt concerning the sincerity of the complimenter.

<b>CR types</b>
<b><i>Direct Acceptance</i></b>
Thanking
Pleased Acceptance
Acceptance
Nonverbal Acceptance
Reassignment
<b><i>Limited Acceptance</i></b>
Ironic Acceptance
Minimization
(a) Lateral Deflection of Merit
(b) Lateral Deflection of Quality
(c) Lateral Deflection of Topic
Reassurance Request
<b><i>Non-Acceptance</i></b>
Reductive Deflection
Discredit of the Complimenter
Discredit of the Complimentee
Rejection
<b><i>Ignoring</i></b>
Ignoring

Figure 1. Classification of macro and micro strategies of CRs (adapted from Castagneto & Ravetto, 2015)

The third macro category is *Non-Acceptance* (NA), which includes cases of milder rejection involving negative evaluations of the compliment (*Reductive Deflection*), cases of categorical rejection (*Rejection*), and cases where the recipient self-deprecates in order to obtain some form of re-evaluation from the interlocutor (*Discredit of the Complimentee*) or denigrates the other person by delivering a response that damages the face of the complimenter (*Discredit of the Complimenter*).

Finally, the process of *Ignoring* (I) falls outside the acceptance/non-acceptance *continuum*, thus representing a distinct category. In such cases, the compliment is disregarded, either through shifting the topic of conversation or through a failure to respond. This behaviour may be deliberate, for instance when the compliment is perceived as embarrassing, inappropriate, or unintentional, as when the compliment is not recognised due to misinterpretation, such as with indirect compliments (Alfonzetti, 2009).

## 5. The Results

A comparison of the two languages reveals both similarities and differences in the CRs. The similarities concern the frequency of macro strategies (§ 5.1), while the differences mainly concern the choice of sub-categories and the length of the responses (§ 5.2).

### 5.1 Macro and Micro Strategies

The present analysis first examines the macro strategies employed in the acceptance of compliments, subsequently moving on to a more detailed investigation of the sub-strategies inherent in each response type. The data show a striking similarity in the distribution across the four macro strategies, with no statistically significant differences observed between the two languages (see Figure 2). The sole exception to this is the *NA* category which merely attains the threshold of significance ( $\beta = 0.69$ ,  $SE = 0.36$ ,  $z = 3.58$ ,  $p = 0.058$ ). *Direct Acceptance* (DA) has been identified as the most frequently used macro strategy in both languages, with 743 occurrences in Italian (61.9%) and 703 in Mexican Spanish (58.6%). A comparative analysis of data sets reveals that Mexican speakers more commonly employ the *Limited Acceptance* (LA) strategy (37.3%), in contrast to the Italian speakers (30.9%). Conversely, the *Non-Acceptance* strategy (NA) is utilised less frequently, with slightly higher rates observed among Italians (4%) compared to Mexicans (1.6%). Similarly, *Ignoring* (I) is comparatively uncommon, manifesting in 3.2% of Italian responses and 2.5% of Mexican responses, once more with a slightly elevated prevalence among Italians.

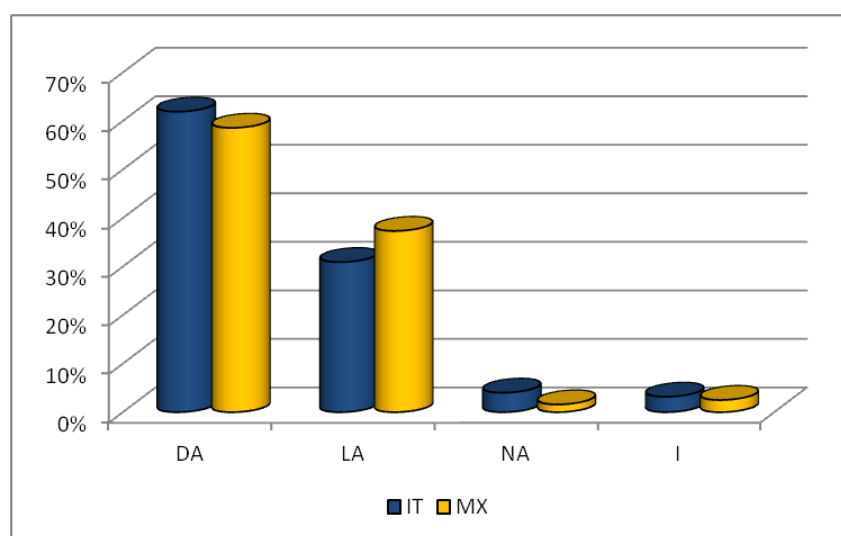


Figure 2. Italian and Mexican macro strategies: percentage values

In terms of micro strategies, both common and divergent aspects can be observed. In this regard, only the following CRs show statistical significance: *Reassignment* ( $\beta = .849$ ,  $SE = .175$ ,  $z = 23.46$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), *Ironie Acceptance* ( $\beta = .551$ ,  $SE = .169$ ,  $z = 10.68$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* ( $\beta = .218$ ,  $SE = .114$ ,  $z = 13.80$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), *Reassurance Request* ( $\beta = .497$ ,  $SE = .222$ ,  $z = 5.08$ ,  $p = 0.025$ ), *Rejection* ( $\beta = .140$ ,  $SE = .494$ ,  $z = 8.025$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ). The analysis revealed that both groups of participants showed a high prevalence of *Thanking* (It: 68%, Mx: 58%). In both cultures, the frequency of *Pleased Acceptances* (It: 21%; Mx: 22%,  $\beta = .196$ ,  $SE = .131$ ,  $z = 2.224$ ,  $p = 0.136$ ), (ex. 1) highlights the importance of explicitly acknowledging the extent to which the compliment is appreciated. The primary focus of this strategy is on the expressive aspect of communication, with the objective of strengthening the relationship with the interlocutor. A notable difference in interlingual strategies pertains to *Reassignment*, which Mexican respondents value almost twice as highly as Italian respondents (It: 7.8%, Mx: 15.6%). The practise of returning a compliment is a strategy that can help reduce the likelihood of an individual experiencing a threat to their negative face.

Indeed, the act of receiving a compliment can create a sense of obligation, and reciprocating allows one to repay it. This micro strategy is typically evidenced by the Italian word *anche* or the Spanish word *tambi én* and is often accompanied by expressions of gratitude (i.e. *thanks*) or other forms of acceptance (ex. 2), (Note 8):

- (1) It<sub>f</sub>      *Che buon profumo che hai! L'ho subito sentito quando ci siamo salutati!*  
           It<sub>f</sub>      *Grazie mille. È il mio profumo preferito e mi fa piacere ti piaccia*  
 (2) Mx<sub>f</sub>      *¡Este corte de cabello te queda genial!*  
           Mx<sub>m</sub>      *Gracias tú tambi én luces genial*

However, it is useful to distinguish between cases where the compliment is fully accepted and cases where giving thanks is a simple, ritualised formula whose primary function is to fulfil the social norm of politeness by demonstrating an attitude of respect. Distinguishing between full acceptance, polite refusal, and ritualised thanks, reveals that 18.4% of Italian responses exhibit this conventional formula. However, among Mexican subjects, this figure rises to 24.6%. In such contexts, the expression of gratitude is characterised by a sequence of micro acts that do not directly accept the compliment, but rather indicate a certain degree of reserve towards the appreciation received. It has been noted that expressions of gratitude (*thankings*) are frequently accompanied by *Justifications* or *Explanations*, (It: 11.3%; Mx: 16.2%), ironic responses (It: 1.6%; Mx: 2.9%) and *Minimisations* (It: 1.4%; Mx: 1.4%). In such circumstances, thanking constitutes an integral component of the polite formula, yet the emphasis shifts to another element of the discourse. For instance, in (3), the participant acknowledges the compliment and provides a detailed explanation about hand care. This shift in focus diverts attention away from the appreciation and towards the provision of various types of information, as if they had been requested.

- (3) It<sub>f</sub>      *Hai davvero delle mani bellissime, sono molto curate!*  
           It<sub>f</sub>      *La ringrazio e le spiego come faccio a curarle*



In the Italian example (4), the act of thanking is followed by a minimisation strategy, which aims to satisfy the mutual desire for admiration between the interlocutors without compromising the facial dynamic. The complimentee tries to protect their positive face so as not to appear vain (Castagneto, 2019). In fact, by expressing gratitude, he/she reduces the sense of indebtedness to the complimenter and avoids fully accepting it, which could imply a violation of the maxim of modesty. The act of expressing gratitude itself serves a dual purpose, encompassing both the acknowledgement of positive sentiments and the rejection of negative ones, proving that the act of thanking has many functions.

(4) It<sub>f</sub>        *Guidi davvero benissimo. Con te mi sento al sicuro!*

It<sub>m</sub>        *Grazie, ma non è nulla di speciale*

(5) It<sub>m</sub>        *Che eleganza. Sta davvero benissimo!*

It<sub>m</sub>        *Grazie mille, ma l'eleganza è un'altra, non certo la mia*

The recipient of the compliment can also disagree with the complimenter's positive judgement as shown in Example (5). However, this constitutes a partial rejection, limited to the evaluative component. At the same time, the expressive component of the act is preserved through the utilisation of gratitude, which facilitates the maintenance of an equal level of interaction. Within the AL macro category, the most common strategies are *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* (It: 55.8%; Mx: 57.4%) which occurs in two variants: *Justification* (see Ex. 6) and *Explanation* (see Ex. 7a and 7b), and *Ironic Acceptance* (It: 20.2%; Mx: 22.3%). In a general process of mitigation, Mexican participants use the aforementioned strategies with greater frequency than their Italian counterparts, probably in response to compliments that they perceive as potentially threatening to their social image.

(6) Mx<sub>f</sub>        *Manejas súper bien! Me siento segura contigo*

Mx<sub>m</sub>        *Gracias, trato de ser precavido siempre*

(7a) It<sub>f</sub>        *Mi piacciono tanto i tuoi occhiali da sole!*

It<sub>f</sub>        *Grazie amo, Dolce e Gabbana vintage, Vinted regala chicche!*

(7b) Mx<sub>f</sub>        *Tiene una sonrisa muy bonita*

Mx<sub>m</sub>        *Es por colgate*

This is followed by the *Reassurance Request*, which shows similar percentages across the two language groups (It: 10.5%; Mx: 11.6%), (see ex. 8).

(8) It<sub>f</sub>        *Questa gonna le sta benissimo, sembra fatta su misura per lei!*

It<sub>f</sub>        *Ne è sicura?*

Therefore, in Mexican and Italian cultures, asking the complimenter to repeat a compliment is not regarded as an imposition; rather it is considered a socially acceptable way of communication that fosters mutual attention towards maintaining a positive image.

The analysis of the data indicates that this strategy may be considered a recycling move, as the speaker does not interrupt their turn to deliberate their response. This is often accompanied by a *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* (ex. 9), or it may serve as a prelude to a state of *Pleased Acceptance* (ex. 10) or *Rejection* (ex. 11). It gives the speaker time to think about how to respond to the compliment, thus avoiding the need for an immediate response and any resulting embarrassment.

(9) It<sub>m</sub>      *Ti vedo in gran forma!*

It<sub>m</sub>      *Grazie mille. Sto andando in palestra, si vede?*

(10) Mx<sub>m</sub>      *¡Qu ébonito reloj! Es muy elegante*

Mx<sub>m</sub>      *De verdad? Yo tambi én pens éeso cuando lo vi la primera vez*

(11) Mx<sub>m</sub>      *¡Qu élinda letra!*

Mx<sub>f</sub>      *Hahaha como crees?! Mi letra no es tan bonita*

An interesting finding emerges in relation to the NA sub-sample. In comparison to Mexicans, Italians have been observed to express their disagreement in a more direct manner, employing the refusal strategy. However, this action is typically preceded by an expression of gratitude, as illustrated in Example (12), to avoid any potential impoliteness.

(12) It<sub>m</sub>      *Che eleganza! Questo vestito le sta un incanto!*

It<sub>f</sub>      *Non credo, ma grazie!*

In addition, they tend to use the micro strategy of NA more frequently in response to an inappropriate compliment that poses a threat to their negative face.

## 5.2 The Gender-Conditioning

A comparison between the two languages and participants' gender reveals some notable differences (Figure 3); the data will be discussed in relation to the gender of the individual who responded to the compliment. The predominant macro strategy is DA, in particular *Thanking* and *Pleased acceptance*, which appears more frequently among women (It: 66.7%; Mx: 61.5%) than men (It: 57.2%; Mx: 55.7%). Conversely, the LA macro strategy is used more often by men (It: 36.5%; Mx: 40.8%) than by women (It: 25.3%; Mx: 33.8%). Italian women employ the I macro strategy more often (4%) than Mexican women (1.3%), but no significant gender differences were observed for this category.

Even more interesting is the gender conditioning that emerges from the micro strategies adopted (see Figure 4). The main strategy of acceptance is *Thanking* (It-f: 48.7%, It-m: 36.2%; Mx-f: 40.2%, Mx-m: 28.7%). However, women and men adopt this strategy differently in both languages; the comparison is statistically significant for both language and gender. Another micro strategy that shows a relevant gender influence is the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic*, although this is more noticeable in Italian participants than in Mexican ones (It-f: 15.5%, It-m: 19%; Mx-f: 22.8%, Mx-m: 20%). This highlights the tendency of Italian men to choose a change of topic over direct acceptance of a compliment, in contrast to women.

Notably, Mexicans are more likely to adopt *Ironic acceptance* as a strategy when receiving appreciation from both men and women, (It-f: 2.5%, It-m: 9%; Mx-f: 3.7%, Mx-m: 13%), a behaviour which occurs more frequently in female-male interactions in the Mexican context. With respect to this category, two aspects are noteworthy: Mexicans exhibit higher percentages of an ironic stance ( $t = .000$ ), and a comparison between genders reveals that men choose this response more often than women ( $t = .002$ ) in both languages. This suggests that Mexican men use positive politeness strategies less frequently when receiving compliments. They seem to accept compliments in a more indirect way, adopting evasive responses and avoiding expressing agreement or disagreement with the complimenter. This result is congruent with the cross-analysis of Peninsular and Mexican Spanish by Mack & Sykes (2009). The authors state that 18% of responses to written DCTs are ironic, but this figure rises to 35% among Peninsular Spanish participants.

However, in the area of NA, women are more likely than men to use *Rejection* (women: 2.5%; men: 1.7%) and *Ignoring* (It-f: 3.3%, It-m: 1.7%; Mx-f: 4%, Mx-m: 2.3%).

Finally, it is worth noting the total absence of *Discrediting the complimenter* among both Italian and Mexican women, and the absence of the *Lateral Deflection of Quality* in the Mexican sample.

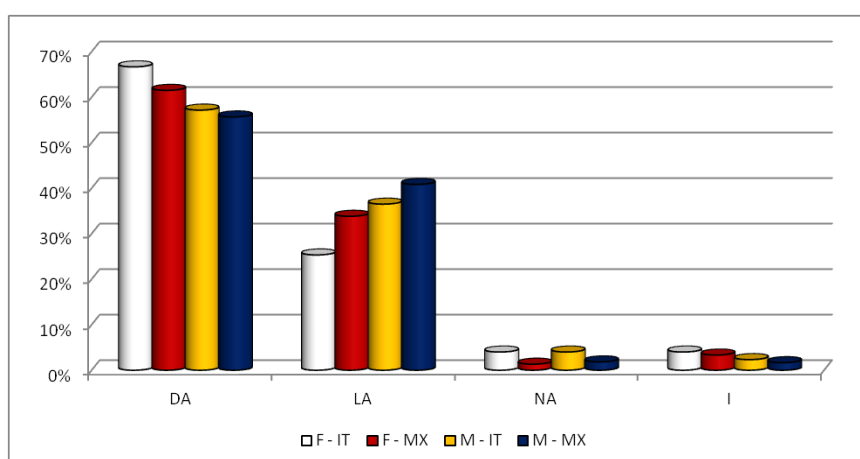


Figure 3. Macro strategies (%) of Italians and Mexicans in relation to gender: F: females; M: males

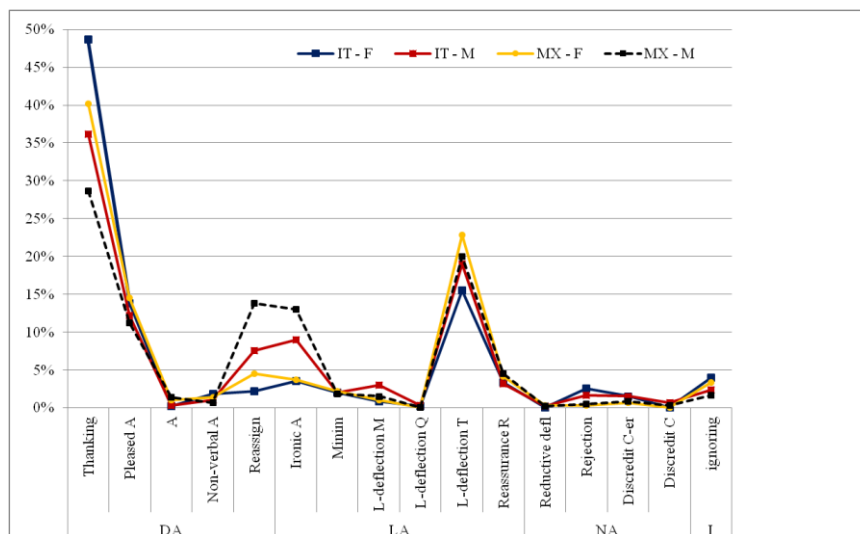


Figure 4. Percentage values of Italian and Mexican micro strategies, grouped by gender

An interesting aspect that emerged from the analysis concerns the use of certain linguistic formulas by Mexican participants, such as *cuando gustes*, *cuando quieras*, and *a la orden*, which have no direct equivalent in Italian, as shown by the following examples.

(13) Mx<sub>m</sub> *¡Qué bonito reloj! Es muy elegante*

Mx<sub>m</sub> *Gracias hermano, cuando gustes*

Such polite expressions are a distinctive feature of Mexican culture, with men using them more frequently than women. These formulas have a ritualistic aspect, rendering them unsuitable for literal interpretation. They serve a social function, namely the maintenance of equilibrium and the fostering of solidarity among speakers. In accordance with the research conducted by Flores-Salgado (2014) and Flores-Salgado & Witten (2019), these responses have been categorised as direct acceptances. This phenomenon entails the use of fixed expressions in response to compliments concerning the recipient's possessions or abilities. This mechanism involves figuratively offering one's possessions or praised skills to the other person, and forms part of valorising politeness (Flores-Salgado, 2014).

Interestingly, women in both cultures are more likely to personalise their CRs by offering a concrete action (see ex. 14-15).

(14) It<sub>f</sub> *Mi piacciono tanto i tuoi occhiali da sole!*

It<sub>f</sub> *Se vuoi te li presto*

(15) Mx<sub>f</sub> *¡Qué bonito reloj! Es muy elegante*

Mx<sub>f</sub> *Gracias! Cuando quieras te los presto*

This strategy, in which the complimenter offers to lend the object or share the praised skill, serves to shift the focus of the compliment. According to Herbert (1986), it falls into the

category of request interpretation and illustrates how compliments can be interpreted, either consciously or unconsciously, as indirect requests. Based on research into gendered politeness (Holmes, 1995), this approach is supported by the idea that women place greater emphasis on the emotional impact of words on others. The act of offering a borrowed object may be regarded as a gesture of closeness and trust that aims to strengthen the relationship with the recipient.

Another interesting gender-related aspect is the use of proverbs and quotations that reflect a community's values, traditions and ways of thinking, and are rooted in a language culture. This behaviour, categorised as a *Lateral Deflection of the Topic* or *Ironic acceptance*, is exclusively exhibited by men in both Italian and Mexican cultures (ex. 16-17). This provides further evidence of men's tendency to give evasive and indirect responses. This type of response does not reject the compliment received, but at the same time it does not expose the recipient to the risks of direct or pleased acceptance.

(16) It<sub>m</sub> *Ti vedo in gran forma!*

It<sub>m</sub> *Uomini forti, destini forti. Uomini deboli, destini deboli. Non c'è altra strada*

(17) Mx<sub>m</sub> *Has progresado mucho! Tienes mucho talento para el deporte*

Mx<sub>m</sub> *El que es perico donde sea es verde my friend* (Note 9)

Such comments shift the focus away from the compliment and, with an ironic twist, draw attention to a broader concept or folk wisdom. Although seemingly unrelated to the immediate response of acceptance, these culturally connoted expressions can be interpreted as inferred approval. However, the complexity of this communication mechanism lies in the interpretive effort required by the listener to identify the speaker's ironic intention, which requires shared knowledge to be fully understood.

An interesting fact emerges from the intersection of the variables gender of the complimenter and gender of the complementee. The highest percentage of acceptance is observed in male-female interactions, with identical values recorded for Italian and Mexican women. This finding lends further support to prevailing concept that women tend to respond positively to compliments from men. By contrast, Italian men show the lowest acceptance rate of compliments and the highest use of *Ignoring* strategies. They exhibit a pronounced tendency to reject compliments, particularly those concerning physical appearance and are the only informants to use all NA strategies, ranging from mild to severe disagreement. This is confirmed by the participants themselves, who regard the exchange of compliments between men as out of ordinary. This finding is also consistent with Castagneto's (2016) research, which suggests that men are more likely to interpret compliments as potential attacks of their face, causing embarrassment, as they do not conform to traditional masculine social values. This may be related to the fact that, across cultures, men tend to receive and to give fewer compliments than women, and consequently avoid the conversational obligation to respond directly to compliments.



On the other hand, Mexican men frequently use ironic comments when interacting with other men or women. The explicit violation of the Modesty Maxim induces the interlocutor to search for a non-literal meaning of the utterance, attributing a new meaning to it. However, the effectiveness of ironic acceptance is closely linked to the level of intimacy and mutual understanding between the interlocutors. If interpreted correctly, it strengthens comity between the participants, creating a climate of complicity as shown in the example (18).

(18) Mx<sub>m</sub> *¿Qué elegante, se le ve muy bien!*

Mx<sub>m</sub> *Elegante es mi apellido*

This finding suggests that, although Mexican men are more likely to accept compliments, they are still careful not to overvalue themselves, even when interacting with women. In such situations, it is common to provide explanatory or justifying comments in response to positive feedback through deflection.

### 5.3 The Length of Compliment Responses

A more in-depth analysis demonstrates that the differences observed between Italian and Mexican participants extend beyond the selection of macro and micro strategies employed in the CRs. Despite comparable percentages, discrepancies in the responses emerge with regard to their length and structure. The data show that Mexicans tend to formulate longer responses than Italians, regardless of macro strategies or gender (see Figure 5), which support findings from previous studies on Mexican compliments. However, the mean response length, calculated as the average number of words, showed considerable variability, as evidenced by the high standard deviation values. This finding suggests the presence of both short and long responses within the dataset. Despite this variability, Mexican participants tended to provide longer responses, with substantial disparities observed for both males ( $t = .002$ ) and females ( $t = .000$ ).

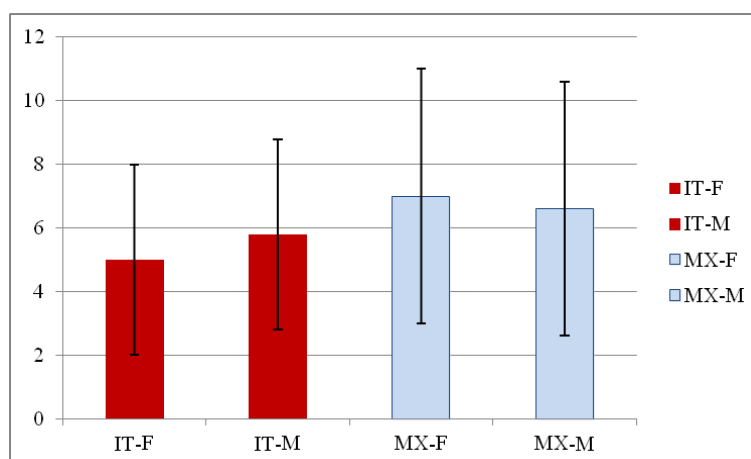


Figure 5. Mean number of words in CRs, grouped by language (IT: Italian, MX: Mexican Spanish) and by gender (F: female, M: male). The error bars represent the standard deviation values

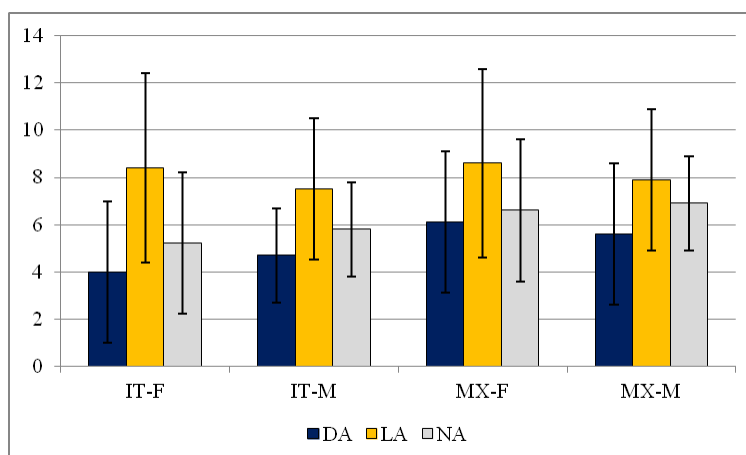


Figure 6. Mean number of words in CRs, grouped by language (IT: Italian, MX: Mexican Spanish), gender (F: female, M: male) and macro strategy. The error bars represent the standard deviation values

In order to verify the presence of a conditioning effect on response length, all responses were classified according to the macro strategy adopted (see Figure 6). For the purpose of this study, only responses from the DA, LA and NA categories were considered; responses in the *Ignoring* category were excluded, as they cannot be regarded as authentic responses. In most cases, these expressions correspond to some form of comment, such as *Nada*, *Me alejar ú*, *No responder ú* or, in Italian, *Non rispondo* (I do not answer), or *Mi allontano* (I go away).

The data reveal certain tendencies. In both languages, DA responses tend to be comparatively brief, especially when contrasted with those in other categories. Among the more extensive responses, those in the LA category are the most prevalent. Due to variability, only the following comparisons reached statistical significance; for the DA category: It-m/ Mx-m ( $t=.025$ ) and It-f/Mx-f ( $t=.022$ ); for the NA category: It-m/ Mx-m ( $t=.035$ ), It-f/Mx-f ( $t=.019$ ).

The analysis indicates that certain sub-categories require a more complex verbal response than the simple expression of gratitude typically found in the DA category. A detailed investigation yielded the following mean word counts: *Lateral Deflection of the Topic*= It: 8.1, Mx: 9 ( $t=.04$ ); *Minimisation*= It: 9.2, Mx: 8.5 ( $t=.031$ ); *Reassurance Requests* = It: 7.3, Mx: 6.5 ( $t=.364$ ); *Thanking*= It: 2.4, Mx: 4 ( $t=.652$ ).

## 6. Discussion

The research investigated CRs from a comparative perspective between native Mexicans and Italians, to highlight the differences and similarities between the two groups of informants. To date, no direct comparison has been made between Italians and Mexicans regarding CRs.

The results indicate that informants from both Mexico and Italy generally opted for DA strategies, with a notable preference for *Thanking* and *Pleased Acceptance*. These strategies enable the recipient to convey gratitude and complacency, thus confirming the view that compliments are face-enhancing acts. Mexican participants are also more likely than Italian



male-female interactions within the Mexican context. Men, in particular, are more likely to resort to a distinctive feature of Mexican courtesy, namely the use of ritual formulas of acceptance, such as *cuando gustes*, *cuando quieras*, *a la orden*, confirming the results of Flores-Salgado & Witten (2019). These expressions aimed at showing respect and consideration for the person offering a compliment. The findings of the present study indicate that, while Mexican men are more likely to accept compliments, they also exhibit a certain degree of caution with respect to overestimating their own worth in interactions with women, a phenomenon characterised by frequent utilisation of deflection tactics to provide explanations or justifications for positive appraisals.

In both cultures, the percentage of NA is very low. This finding lends further support to the idea of the compliment as a 'verbal gift', a concept that is particularly salient among Mexicans, who, in comparison to Italians, employ the micro strategy of reciprocation with greater frequency to rebalance situations of indebtedness. The results obtained in relation to the Italian language are consistent with those previously reported (Castagneto & Ravetto, 2015).

An interesting difference that emerges from the comparison of CRs between Italians and Mexicans is that responses vary in length, irrespective of the strategies used, thereby confirming the findings of previous studies on Spanish language. It has been observed that, in general, Mexicans tend to formulate longer responses than Italians. Despite the presence of variability in the data, a discernible tendency has emerged. In both languages and genders, the shortest strategy observed is *thanking*, while the longest strategy is the *Lateral Deflection of the Topic*. This seems to be indicative of the existence of certain socio-pragmatic differences between the Italian and Mexican languages with respect to the act of offering compliments. This topic is susceptible to diverse pragmatic considerations. The presence of longer CRs in Mexicans appears consistent with the findings of Flores-Salgado & Witten (2019). However, when confronted with the Irish language, the authors did not provide an average length of Mexican CRs. Consequently, a direct comparison with our data is not possible.

The first-time comparison of CRs between Italians and Mexicans yielded interesting results and paved the way for new research directions. However, for various reasons, the study cannot be considered exhaustive. In terms of methodology, DCT is a useful elicitation method that allows data to be collected quickly and sources of variation to be easily identified. However, there are limitations that must be considered when interpreting the results. The data collected in the present study were obtained in a controlled setting, which may have affected the authenticity and spontaneity of the interactions. As a consequence, this method failed to capture paralinguistic and non-verbal nuances such as intonation, facial expressions and gestures, which all play a crucial role in the analysis of CRs.

Furthermore, participants were not grouped by regional origin in terms of geographical distribution. Consequently, the inevitable variational component present at the diatopic level in both Italy and Mexico was neutralised.

This data could be further explored and expanded upon in future CR studies in Italy and Mexico, using alternative elicitation methods, such as spontaneous speech recordings or face-to-face interviews.

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## Notes

Note 1. Pomerantz (1978) first highlighted the dual illocutionary nature of compliments (both expressive and verdictive), a concept later taken up by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1987). According to Alfonzetti (2009), compliments are hybrid in nature, combining expressive and behavioristic aspects with evaluative components.

Note 2. Brown & Levinson (1987) briefly mention compliments as part of positive politeness strategies, noting that they can serve a reparative function by helping to mitigate the impact of threatening acts such as criticism, requests, reprimands, or refusals.

Note 3. Research comparing compliments in Spanish varieties is available in the following publications: Placencia & Lasso (1999); Félix-Brasdefer (2008); Mack & Sykes (2009); Placencia & Fuentes (2013).

Note 4. Interestingly, there are two words for ‘compliment’ in Mexican Spanish: *cumplido* and *halago*. In addition to these, *elogio* means praise, while *piropo* refers to a special type of compliment focused on physical appearance, often with an adulating tone. For this reason, many Mexican women do not always consider it a genuine compliment (Nelson et al., 1997; Nelson & Hall, 1999).

Note 5. See Nelson et al. (1997) and Nelson & Hall (1999) for information on the structure of compliments, topics, and lexical choices. Useful observations on linguistic politeness in Mexican culture, particularly with regard to indigenous languages, can be found in the works of Brown & Levinson (1987), Curcio (2007) and Félix-Brasdefer (2008).

Note 6. Despite its limitations, the DCT (Discourse-Completion Task) was deemed an appropriate tool for this study, as it is effective in eliciting responses. However, it cannot capture the nuances of spontaneous interactions.

Note 7. In the examples, *It* and *Mx* indicate Italian and Mexican Spanish, respectively. The letters *f* and *m* in subscript refer to the gender of the participant.

Note 8. The present study also considered the topic of compliments (e.g. physical appearance, possessions, skills), and the degree of social distance between the sender and the recipient, (e.g. strangers/friends). Due to space limitations, these aspects will not be discussed here.

Note 9. This Mexican proverb means that talented people can demonstrate their abilities in any situation, even in difficult ones.



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This article is the result of an extended collaboration between the authors. For academic purposes: PS: Conceptualisation, Data analysis, Visualisation, Writing - Original draft, Review and editing. RC: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data collection, Data curation, Writing - Original draft.

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