

# **A Survey of Japanese Compliments and Compliment Responses among Undergraduates with Specific Focus on Gender**

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## **Abstract**

Compliments are an important speech act for building social relationships among friends and acquaintances in everyday conversation. Compliments relate to linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), since they can help build solidarity among speakers. However, they can also be used as a face-threatening act, and interlocutors might believe that speakers respond to compliments for themselves as they would to self-praise. Additionally, compliments are used differently among different cultures and social backgrounds. The social environment affects the use of compliments in Japanese conversation.

This study surveys Japanese students' use of compliments and compliment responses. Japanese undergraduates use compliments differently according to specific purposes, such as admiring someone's achievements. They also tailor compliments to addressees in certain social relationships. Overall, compliments are used as positive politeness to make speakers happy and to help make a conversation seem more enthusiastic. The survey reveals participants' psychological reasons behind the use of compliments.

Further, the results of this survey show several gender differences in the use of compliments. Female participants sometimes understood compliments differently from male participants. For example, women were concerned with praising someone's appearance more often than men were, and they often explicitly expressed their solidarity and admiration towards friends while using emotional comments. In compliment responses, women tended to honestly accept compliments in order to help build a good relationship

among friends. Moreover, women tended to express their feelings and to use compliments to maintain a collaborative relationship with interlocutors. On the other hand, in this study, men tended to give less compliments than women, and they might not express their honest thoughts when paying compliments. Male participants also sometimes found it difficult to accept received compliments, which reflected the gender difference in which women tend to express their feelings more explicitly than men.

Key words: compliment, compliment response, gender, Japanese speech interaction

## 1. Introduction

In everyday conversation, people praise other people's appearance and achievements in order to engage the interlocutor in conversation and form a good relationship with him or her. Compliments are used to negotiate solidarity among interlocutors in conversation (Herbert, 1986; Holmes, 1986). Holmes (1986 and 1988) states that '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'.

The ways in which people speak and express themselves differ among cultures. Speakers learn verbal and social behaviours in the environment in which they live. Therefore, compliment behaviour in speech interaction is influenced by the speakers' own societies and varies according to speakers' culture and social environment.

This article will illustrate the way in which young Japanese speakers use compliments and compliment responses in conversation, focusing on how and why they use them. First, previous studies on compliments and compliment responses will be briefly introduced, and compliment behaviour will be defined while discussing compliment formulas. Asian cultures and gender differences in compliment use will also be discussed. Next, the methodology of this study, wherein Japanese compliments and compliment responses by both male and female undergraduates were surveyed to

understand how young Japanese speakers understand and use compliments, will be discussed. The final part of this study will discuss the survey results. The results will reveal the status of the use of Japanese compliments and the importance of social and environmental factors in speech interaction in Japanese society.

## 2. Studies on compliments and compliment responses

Compliments have been studied since the 1980s as a part of speech acts. Wolfson (1981) and Herbert (1986, 1989) first studied American compliments, and Holmes (1986) studied compliments in New Zealand English. They revealed the English compliment formula, which includes particular verbs such as 'like' and 'love', and adjectives such as 'nice', 'good', 'beautiful', 'pretty', and 'great', which are frequently used in English compliments (Herbert, 1986, 1989; Holmes, 1986; Wolfson, 1981).

### *Examples of English compliments*

1. Setting: Group of students talking before class starts

F: I like your shirt.

F: Oh, thanks!

2. Setting: Snack bar at dinner time

M: That was a good game today.

M: Nah, it wasn't my best.

(Rees-Miller, 2011: 2675)

In general, four common objects are considered when speakers use compliments: appearance, personality/characteristics, skill and ability, and possessions (Chick, 1996; Herbert, 1986; Holmes 1986; Lewandowska-Tmoaszczyk, 1989; Wang and Tsai, 2003; Wolfson, 1981). The frequency of compliments according to these objects differs among cultures. For example, while the Chinese tend to give compliments on ability and performance to show their admiration to addressees, Americans tend to give compliments on appearance and performance (Yu, 2005). Polish people often pay compliments on possessions such as a house or a car in order to show admiration for someone's achievements (Herbert, 1991).

Furthermore, compliment responses have been analysed across different cultures. There are three major categorizations of compliment responses: agreement/acceptance, disagreement/rejection/downgrading, and deflection/evasion/neutral stance (Chen and Yang, 2010; Chick, 1996; Golato, 2002; Herbert, 1986; Holmes, 1986, Pomerantz, 1978). Chen and Yang (2010) illustrated the sixteen strategies of Chinese compliment responses in the three major categories, which are shown as follows:

*Strategies in Chinese compliment responses*

Accepting

1. Agreeing: 'Yes'.
2. Thanking: 'Thanks'.
3. Expressing gladness: 'I am very happy'.
4. Returning: 'You look good, too'.
5. Encouraging: 'You should buy one for yourself'.
6. Acceptance-Explaining: 'Yes. I saved hard for it'.

Deflecting/Evading

7. Offering: 'I can help you with it next time'.
8. Using humor: 'Joking'.
9. Seeking confirmation: 'Really'.
10. Doubting: 'Are you just saying it?'
11. Deflecting avoids responding to compliments.
12. Deflecting/Evading-Explaining provides information about the thing being complimented without indicating if the complimentee is accepting or rejecting the compliment.

Rejecting

13. Disagreeing: 'No. No'.
14. Denigrating downplays the praiseworthiness of the thing being complimented.
15. Expressing embarrassment: 'What you said embarrassed me'.
16. Rejecting-Explaining refers to compliment responses that offer information about the thing being complimented for the purpose of rejecting the compliment.

(Chen and Yang, 2010: 1954-1957)

Studies on compliments and compliment responses have been widely carried out among different cultures and languages, including among English-, German-, Spanish-, Polish-, Chinese-, and Japanese-speaking countries. For example, Golato (2002) found that German speakers tend to say 'Yes' instead of 'Thank you' when receiving compliments and tend not to disagree with the compliments they receive. In a study of British and Spanish undergraduates, Spanish university students offered compliments more directly than British university students, since they explicitly expressed their emotions (Lorenzo-Dus, 2001).

In Asia, Chinese speakers tend to use compliments to show genuine admiration rather than solidarity and friendliness, and they tend to feel embarrassed when receiving compliments (Yu, 2005). Wang and Tsai (2003) and Yu (2005) also stated that Chinese speakers do not often use 'like' and 'love' the way native English speakers do. When receiving compliments, because of modesty, Chinese speakers tend to use negative responses, including disagreement and asking questions, and Chinese women tend to use questions to create solidarity among speakers (Wang and Tsai, 2003).

Japanese compliments and compliment responses reflect Asian culture and are similar to Chinese compliments. Japanese speakers often use compliments to show admiration rather than friendliness. While American students tend to use compliments often to praise someone's appearance and personal traits, Japanese students tend to use them to praise someone's skills (Barnlund and Araki, 1985). Japanese speakers give compliments to acquaintances rather than to close friends, and they also tend to disagree with them out of humility (*kenson*) (Daikuhara, 1986; Tsuda, 1992).

These compliment studies have shown that compliments highly relate to politeness. The studies have often discussed compliments using the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). In terms of linguistic politeness, compliments could be interpreted as positive politeness, wherein interlocutors feel good about sharing common ground and values (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 1986; Rees-Miller, 2011). However, compliments could also deliver negative meanings when interlocutors interpret them as harassment and face-threatening.

When giving responses, interlocutors face dilemmas about whether to accept compliments, since the compliments carry the risk of being understood as self-praise (Brown and Levinson, 1987). For example, in Chinese contexts, Chinese people tend to avoid direct responses when receiving compliments, since modesty is important to them (Wang and Tsai, 2003). Additionally, in Japanese contexts, Japanese compliment responses often express humility (*kenson*) (Tsuda, 1992), and when receiving compliments about family members, Japanese speakers are likely to decline them (Daikuhara, 1986; Tsuda, 1992). For instance, in the study conducted by Tsuda (1992), when a mother received compliments about her daughter's good grades at school, her mother disagreed by saying, '*Iie, tondemo arimasen. Otaku no ojoosan no hooga yoku odekini narimasu mono*' ('Oh, no, your daughter is far better than my daughter') (Tsuda, 1992: 143). This indicates that although Japanese people are pleased when they receive compliments, they are also embarrassed (Kojima, 2005).

Furthermore, some studies revealed that speakers' gender reflects how compliments are used. For example, Herbert (1990) explained that males use compliments with regard to the form-function relationship, while females use compliments to show solidarity. Males tend to pay compliments on skills and performance, while females tend to pay compliments on appearance as well (Daikuhara, 1986; Rees-Miller, 2011). In Farghal and Al-Khatib's (2001) study, Jordanian male college students used simpler responses when complimented by males than by females, and they also chose to use non-verbal responses when complimented more often by females than males.

More recently, compliments have been studied in the context of social networks like Facebook. American English and Spanish compliments on Facebook have been analysed (Maíz-Arévalo, 2013; Placencia and Lower, 2013). The functions of compliments on Facebook are similar to those of compliments in conversation, however, in American studies, senders often attach photos; visual insertion is often used when giving compliments in a social network (Placencia and Lower, 2013). In a Spanish study, disagreements were not sent back in responses, since Facebook is intended to be used for maintaining and creating social relationships among friends (Maíz-Arévalo, 2013). This was also why the person receiving compliments could choose

whether to respond or ignore them, or opt for giving a non-verbal response such as an illustration, smiley symbol, or other emoticon (e.g. a heart or exclamation mark) (Maíz-Arévalo, 2013).

These compliment studies suggest that compliments and compliment responses differ according to situations and social backgrounds, such as cultures, generations, and particular circumstances. Therefore, this study focuses on the use of Japanese compliments and compliment responses, specifically among undergraduates, and reveals how young Japanese people understand compliments in speech interaction and to what extent compliments are differently understood between genders.

### 3. Methodology

This study used survey questions for undergraduates in order to examine the extent to which Japanese students understand the use of Japanese compliments and compliment responses. The survey consisted of three parts: (1) 33 situations were introduced, and participants had to choose in which situation they usually use compliments; (2) written discourse completion tasks (DCTs) were used to obtain data on compliments and compliment responses which participants use in certain situations; (3) in order to determine interlocutor's understanding, thoughts, and feelings when giving and receiving compliments, participants were asked to answer several questions, such as 'Do you think that compliments are necessary in conversation?' 'How do you feel when you receive (do not receive) compliments?' and 'How do you feel when you give compliments?'

A total of 158 Japanese undergraduates (70 males and 88 females) took the survey. They took approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey. However, some participants did not fill out all the questions, therefore, the number of responses was slightly different depending on the different parts of the survey. All results, except those for the comments writing section in the final part of the questionnaire, were statistically analysed. They are discussed both quantitatively and qualitatively in the following sections.

The validity of this methodology (DCT and Conversation Analysis), has often been discussed in the study of compliments (Lin and Woodfield, 2012; Rose, 1994; Tang and Zhang, 2009; Yuan, 2001). For studying compliments,

a note-taking method and written and spoken DCTs, which provide a large sample of controlled data in a short period of time (Lin and Woodfield, 2012), have sometimes been used. Tang and Zhang (2009: 329) state that ‘DCTs may be adequate when the aim is to make probability-based assertions and/or broad generalizations, while recording naturally occurring talk-in-interaction will suit better if the aim is to study actual language use and/or provide a description of the organization of talk-in-interaction’. Furthermore, when analysing strategies of speech acts, speakers’ psychological reasons have not been explored much in previous studies. As such, DCTs and survey methods could be useful for revealing the psychological reasons behind the use of compliments.

#### 4. Survey Results

##### 4.1 Situations in which compliments are given

In the first part of this survey, participants had to choose when they would give compliments from out of 33 situations. These consisted of a combination of the four common characteristics of compliments—praising someone’s appearance, skill and ability, characteristics, and possessions—and particular addressees, such as friends, parents, and a senior or junior at university. These four characteristics have typically been defined as objects of compliments in previous studies (Chick, 1996; Herbert, 1986; Holmes, 1986, Lewandowska-Tmoaszczyk, 1989; Wolfson, 1981).

The first three questions were ‘Do you give a compliment to your friends when s/he changes her/his hair style?’ (*tomodachi no kamigata ga kawatteita toki homemasu ka*) ‘Do you give a compliment to your mother when she changes her hair style?’ (*okaasan no kamigata ga kawatteita toki homemasu ka*) and ‘Do you give a compliment to your senior when s/he changes her/his hair style?’ (*senpai no kamigata ga kawatteita toki homemasu ka*). All the situations used in this survey are shown below.



*Situations used in this survey:*

1. Sporting a new hair style (*kamigata ga kawatteita*) [appearance]
2. Wearing a new jacket (*atarashii jaketto o kiteita*) [appearance]
3. Getting a job promotion (*shoushin shita*) [skill and ability]
4. Obtaining an award in a competition (*nyuushoo shita*) [skill and ability]
5. Making delicious food (*gohan ga oishikatta*) [skill and ability]
6. Giving a good presentation (*prezen ga yoku dekita*) [skill and ability]
7. Devoting energy to cleaning up at work every day (*souji o mainichi shiteita*) [characteristic]
8. Being kind and generous (*shinsetsu datta*) [characteristic]
9. Being fun (*omoshirokatta*) [characteristic]
10. Obtaining a new smart phone (*atarashii sumaho o koonyuu shita*) [possession]
11. Buying a new car (*atarashii kuruma o koonyuu shita*) [possession]

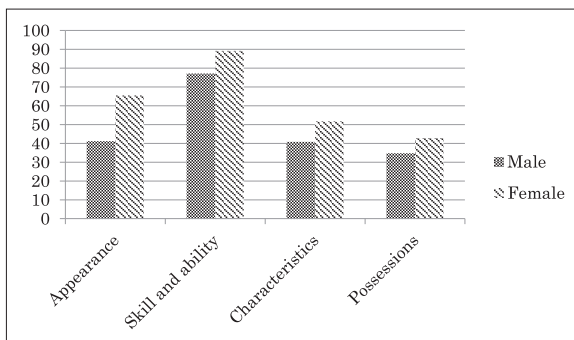
The overall results revealed that Japanese university students try to give compliments on people's skill and ability the most (84%), on appearance the second most (55%), on people's characteristics the third most (47%), and on possessions the least (39%).

Among gender, the overall results revealed that female students tried to give more compliments than male students, that female students paid more attention to appearance as well as skill and ability, and that male students only tried to give compliments on skill and ability (see Figure 1). For male students, possessions, characteristics, and appearance seemed less important, and they were more concerned with achievement and skill. This showed that male compliments generally relate more to performance than to any other topic.

Additionally, the fact that male students chose to give compliments less frequently than female students showed that female students used compliments to maintain a social relationship among interlocutors more frequently than male students did. Giving compliments directly might not be a common strategy in male conversation. When asked the reason that male students did not give compliments on certain situations, male participants stated that 'Because it is difficult to verbally compliment people' (*'kuchini*

*dashite wa iinikui kara*'), 'Because I do not need to pay compliments' (*homeru hitsuyou ga nai kara*), 'Because it is nothing special' (*atarimae dakara*), 'Because it is not worth praising' (*homeru ni atai shinai kara*), and 'Because I am not interested in these topics' (*kyoumi ga nai kara*). These comments might show male students' competitiveness and the difficulty they face in giving compliments directly to others.

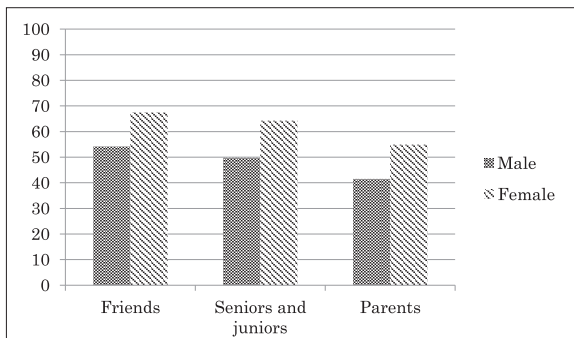
Figure 1. *Reasons for giving compliments (%)*



In terms of addressees, participants chose friends the most often when giving compliments, and both male and female students chose friends (62%) in all situations. The second frequent addressees were seniors and juniors (58%), and parents were chosen the least to give compliments to (49%). These results showed that Japanese university students are more concerned about their friends and people outside their family when using compliments.

With regard to gender (see Figure 2), only half the male participants chose to give compliments to friends and people of a different status. For some male students, compliments do not seem the preferred way to express solidarity towards interlocutors, particularly to family members. As indicated by the following comments, some male students said that they do not often express their honest feelings towards their parents: 'I do not want to give compliments to my family' (*miuchi wa hometakunai*) and 'I sometimes do not give compliments because they are my family' (*miuchi dakara homenai koto mo aru*).

Figure 2. *Giving compliments to different types of addressees (%)*



#### 4.2 The results of the DCT

In the second part of this survey, participants completed the DCT for particular situations in which compliments are given and received. As both male and female students tended to give compliments on achievement and skill, the analysis focused on these topics. There were six questions in this part of the survey, as follows:

- (1) At your part-time job, what would you say to a person who is working really hard?
- (2) What would you say to your friend who is studying hard to take a TOEIC test? (see example below)
- (3) What would you say to your senior in your club who won an award?
- (4) You received a compliment at work. How would you respond?
- (5) When you obtained a good score on your TOEIC test, your friend said that you got a score of 700 on the TOEIC test and how great that was. How would you respond to your friend? (see example below)
- (6) When you were working hard at your club, your senior complimented you for working so hard. How would you respond to him/her?

*Examples of the questions used in the DCT*

- (2) TOEICで目標の点を取るために勉強をがんばっている友達にあなたは  
何といいますか。(What would you say to your friend who is  
studying hard to obtain a good score in the TOEIC test?)  
友達：今、毎日夜1時までTOEICの勉強してるんだ。  
(Your friend: I am studying for the TOEIC test until one o'clock  
in the morning every day.)  
あなた (You): \_\_\_\_\_
- (5) TOEICでいい点が取れたときにほめられました。あなたは何といま  
すか。(What would you say when you receive a compliment for  
obtaining a good score in the TOEIC test?)  
友達：TOEICで700点が取れたんだって。すごいじゃない。  
(Your friend: I've heard that you received a score of 700 in the  
TOEIC test. Well done!)  
あなた (You): \_\_\_\_\_

For (1), participants generally said thanks to their co-workers. Only 15% of female students and 20% of male students gave compliments to a person at work, saying 'You are working really hard' (*yoku ganbatte imasu ne*). Many participants chose to say 'Thank you' (*arigatou*) to the person without adding any further compliments, and 59% of females and 34% of males said 'Thank you' to the person at work.

For (2), participants gave compliments while mentioning their friends' health. A total of 70% of female students and 50% of male students gave compliments to a friend who was studying hard for a TOEIC test. They said things like 'That's great' (*sugoi ne*), and they also gave encouragement, saying 'Good luck' (*ganbatte ne*). A total of 36% of females and 14% of males were worried about the friend's health and said 'Do not work too hard' (*muri shinai de*) and 'Take care of yourself' (*karada ni ki o tsukete*). Moreover, 10% of female participants and 13% of male participants sometimes expressed their competitiveness, saying 'I also need to work hard' (*ore/watashi mo ganbaranaito*).

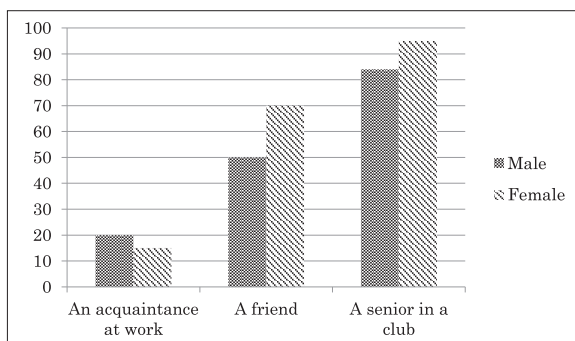
For (3), 95% of females gave compliments to their senior who had won an award, while 84% of males gave compliments, saying 'It's great' (*sugoi*)

and 'As we expected' (*sasuga*). They also congratulated their senior, saying 'Congratulations' (*omedetou gozaimasu*).

These results reveal that Japanese university students give compliments more often to their friends and seniors than to co-workers. Additionally, according to the results of the first part of this survey, the students tend to choose to pay compliments to their friends and seniors. However, in an earlier study of Japanese compliments, Daikuhara (1986) claimed that Japanese speakers give compliments to acquaintances rather than to close friends, showing that it is important for Japanese people to create a good relationship with their seniors and acquaintances in their social circle.

With regard to gender, female participants were more concerned about their friends and seniors than male participants, although male participants showed that they had great esteem for a senior's achievement (See Figure 3). These results seemed to reflect common gender theories in which collaboration with interlocutors is relevant for women (Coates, 1996; Tannen, 1990) and men are concerned with a hierarchical relationship and competition (Tannen, 1990). Toohey and Scholefield (1994: 3) stated that 'Tannen claims that women in conversation are primarily motivated by needs to negotiate community and intimacy, whereas men are motivated by competitive needs for favorable position in a hierarchy'. In other words, women can be more expressive and polite in conversation, while men can be more assertive and use conversations for the clear outcome of obtaining power (Basow and Rubenfeld, 2003; Maltz and Borker, 1982). In this sense, for males, compliments might reflect genuine admiration rather than solidarity, which Yu (2005) characterized as an aspect of Chinese compliments.

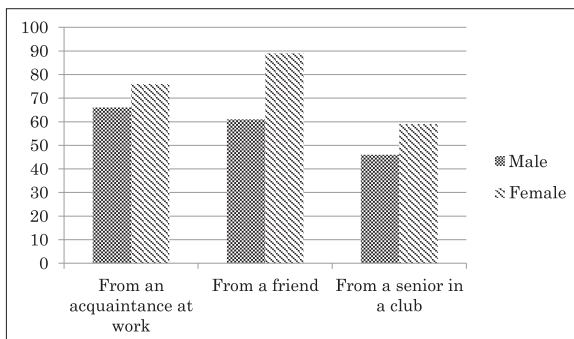
Figure 3. Addressees whom participants gave compliments to (%)



In previous studies, Asian speakers have often said that they tend to decline compliments (Daikuhara, 1986; Yu, 2005); however, the results of this survey have not reflected this. The participants in the survey, especially young women, often showed their appreciation and expressed their attitude positively to a compliment giver by agreeing with them.

In general, the results showed that female undergraduates tend to positively respond to received compliments (see Figure 4). In (4), 76% of female participants and 66% of male participants accepted compliments at work, saying 'Thank you' (*arigatou*), and some expressed their gladness, saying 'I am glad that I could be of help' (*oyaku ni tatete yokatta desu*). Some participants also responded enthusiastically, saying 'I will do my best' (*ganbarimasu*). However, 35% of female participants and 20% of male participants expressed humility, saying 'No, no, that is not true' (*ie ie sonna koto nai desu*). In (5), 89% of females and 61% of males accepted compliments from friends, saying 'Thank you' (*arigatou*), and some expressed their gladness, saying 'It was worth trying' (*ganbatta kai ga atta*). However, only 15% of female participants and 23% of male participants expressed humility, saying 'That is by pure chance' (*tamatama desu*). In (6), 59% of females and 46% of males accepted compliments at a university club, saying 'Thank you very much' (*arigatou gozaimasu*), and some responded enthusiastically, saying 'I will do my best' (*ganbarimasu*), whereas only 19% of female participants and 20% of male participants expressed humility, saying 'No, no, I still have a long way to go' (*ie ie madamada desu*).

Figure 4. *When agreeing with received compliments (%)*



Over the years, the percentage of agreement with compliments among Japanese young people has increased. In a study conducted by Maruyama (1996), Japanese university students of both genders showed less agreement (30.4%) than in this study, and in a study conducted by Daikuhara (1986), only 5% of participants accepted a compliment and over 70% of participants disagreed or deflected away from received compliments. In this survey, female participants often expressed their acceptance more freely and honestly, and chose to accept received compliments. Meanwhile, male participants chose to accept compliments far less than females. Japanese undergraduates in this survey also sometimes expressed humility after showing their gratitude, and approximately 22% of participants expressed humility and/or declined received compliments.

#### 4.3 Compliments and politeness

In the last part of this survey, participants were asked about the functions of compliments in conversation. Survey questions included ‘Are compliments necessary in conversation?’ (*‘kaiwa ni oite home wa hitsuyou desu ka’*), ‘Do you pay compliments with sincere honest feelings or just at a surface level?’ (*‘honki de homemasu ka, tatemaetoshite homemasu ka’*), ‘How do you feel when receiving compliments?’ (*‘hito ni homerareta toki dou omoimasu ka’*), and ‘Why do you use compliments?’ (*‘doushite aite o homemasu ka’*).

Participants responded to these questions a little differently according to

their gender. Women generally responded positively, stating that they were honest in their compliments. Although both male and female participants agreed with the necessity of compliments in conversation, women (approximately 90%) admitted to giving compliments more often than men (approximately 79%). While 3% of women disagreed with the necessity of compliments in conversation, 6% of men disagreed with the same. A total of 1% of male and 2% of female participants admitted that compliments are both necessary and unnecessary, as they thought it depends on the situation, therefore, they could not choose one answer. Finally, 14% of male participants but only 5% of female participants chose to opt out of answering this question entirely.

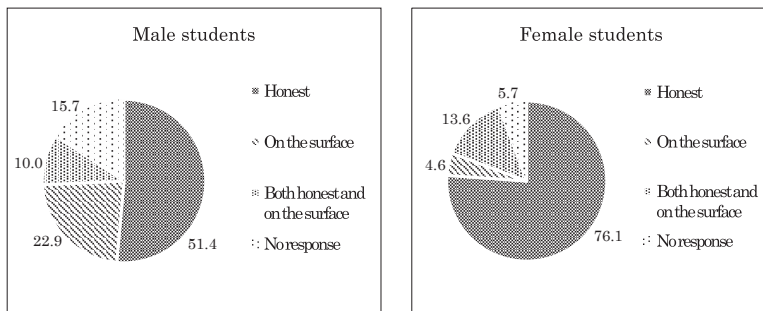
The results of the survey clarified the gender differences that arise when expressing one's feelings. Regarding the question of how honestly participants express their feelings when giving compliments, women tended to respond that they were honest, while approximately half of the male participants said that they paid surface-level compliments or opted out of answering the question (see Figure 5). It is often stated that women tend to express their feelings more explicitly than men (Basow and Rubinfeld, 2003; Coates, 1996).

Additionally, regarding the responses to not receiving any compliments, female responses were sometimes more emotional than males: *'tsumetai'* ('The speaker is cold'), *'sabishii'* ('I feel sad/lonely'), and *'jiwaru'* ('The speaker is mean'). Aoki (2005) claims that receiving compliments affects the emotions of the receiver. In this study, women tended to express how they felt, while men tended to express how a conversation could be different and/or changed.

Gender differences were also observed in how participants tried to respond to received compliments. In the question 'How do you respond when you receive compliments?' (*'itsumo donoyou ni hentou shimasu ka'*), most female participants directly expressed their gratitude (*'arigatou'*) and their happiness (*'ureshii'*), while some male participants (11%) questioned whether the compliments they received were really true and/or found it difficult to express their honest feelings. Instead, they stated that they would modestly agree or disagree with received compliments.



Figure 5. *Motivations for giving compliments (%)*



In terms of linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1987), the results of this survey revealed that compliments are used as positive politeness, and participants generally feel good about sharing a common ground and common values with interlocutors. In the responses to the functions of compliments in conversation, participants often stated that compliments can make a conversation positive. Without compliments, they felt that a conversation can become boring.

These responses were similar between males and females. For example, women responded '*kaiwa ga hazumu/moriagaru*' ('Conversation will become enthusiastic'), '*funiki ga yokunaru*' ('Atmosphere of the conversation will become good'), '*kaiwa ga akaruku naru*' ('Conversation will become lively'), '*egao ga deru*' ('Compliments will make us smile'), '*ii kibun ni naru*' ('Speaker will feel good'), '*aite ga yoi kimochi ni naru*' ('Addressee will feel good'), and '*kaiwa ga sumuuzu ni naru*' ('Conversation will flow smoothly').

Male participants also responded similarly: '*kaiwa ga hazumu*' ('Conversation will become enthusiastic'), '*aite ga yorokobu*' ('Addressee will be pleased'), '*ureshiku naru*' ('We/addressee will be happy'), '*kankei ga yokunaru*' ('The relationship among the speakers will become better'), and '*otagai yaruki ni naru/ganbareru*' ('Speakers will be encouraged to keep talking, and we will do our best to talk a lot').

If there are no compliments in conversation, participants generally feel themselves becoming less positive towards the conversation: '*kaiwa ga tsumaranai*' ('Conversation will become boring'), '*kaiwa ga hazumi nikui*'

(‘Lively conversation will be difficult to deliver’), *‘tada no hanashi’* (‘It will be just an ordinary conversation’), *‘kyorikan ga umareru’* (‘There will be distance among speakers’), *‘ganbarenai’* (‘I will not be able to keep talking’), and *‘kaiwa ga tsuzukanai’* (‘Conversation will stop’).

## 5. Conclusion

Compliments are a part of speech acts, and they are important for building social relationships and creating solidarity among friends and acquaintances in everyday conversation. Japanese compliments are used differently depending on the speaker’s social environment and the need to build a good relationship among the interlocutors.

The results of the survey in this study revealed that the participants used compliments according to specific purposes and according to their social relationships. For example, they often used Japanese compliments for admiring someone’s achievements. Additionally, female participants used compliments more for praising someone’s appearance. Participants explicitly expressed their solidarity and admiration towards friends more often than acquaintances. In compliment responses, participants tended to honestly accept the compliments they received in order to help build a good relationship among friends. Positive responses made speakers feel happy and helped make a conversation seem enthusiastic. In this sense, participants used Japanese compliments as positive politeness.

Gender differences were observed in the results of this survey. Female participants used compliments more for building and expressing solidarity, and they tended to convey support using compliments more often than males and also tended to agree with the compliments that they had received. Female participants were more expressive and emotional than males, as it was shown that they were more honest than male participants. They sometimes expressed their feelings and emotional reasons for compliments, such as *‘kanashii’* (‘I feel sad [if there are no compliments]’), and *‘tsumetai’* (‘Speaker is cold [if there are no compliments]’). On the other hand, male participants tended to pay attention particularly to achievements and skills when paying compliments. They found it difficult to express honest feelings and even sometimes doubted whether received compliments were genuine

or not. Although male participants admitted that compliments were used as positive politeness, compliments might not perfectly fit in a strategy of male conversation based on a hierarchical relationship and competitiveness.

This survey has revealed the reasons and sociocognitive factors behind Japanese undergraduates' use of compliments. When having a conversation, people are generally not clearly aware of how and why they use speech acts in conversation and how these speech acts affect the creation of a social relationship among interlocutors.

There might be many problems with the method of this study, and the form of the survey needs to be improved in order to find out more details about the use of compliments and compliment responses in specific situations that are similar to real speech interaction. Participants from different social backgrounds, including different generations and statuses, will also need to be focused on. Furthermore, pragmatic transfer among different social backgrounds will need to be explored when using compliments in particular situations.

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