Compliments in Some Ethnic Groups in Indonesia:
A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT*:* Using the concept of national culture in cultural studies can be useful, but there can be some limitations for not being able to capture specific cultural phenomena in a nation with multifaceted nature such as Indonesia. The current popular assumption about compliments in Indonesia is that Indonesian people tend to reject compliments they receive. This generalisation needs to be investigated further by studying compliment behaviours in various culture across Indonesia. In this study, the researchers discussed compliment behaviours in some ethnic groups in Indonesia by using a systematic literature review. The results show that in Java, Sunda, and Bali ethnic groups, disagreement responses are dominant; while in Makassar, Toraja, Saluan, and Minangkabau, agreement responses are commonly used. As for Buginese people, there are contrastive findings. In addition, it has been noted that further studies need to pay attention on the scope of the research, the effects of some variables on compliment behaviours, and the influence of methodology.

KEYWORDS - *compliment, Indonesia, compliment responses*

I. INTRODUCTION

STUDIES ABOUT CULTURE HAVE BEEN BASED MORE ON THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL CULTURES. FOR EXAMPLE, MANY STUDIES ABOUT VARIOUS CULTURAL ASPECTS IN INDONESIAN SOCIETY CULTURES USE POPULATION AND SAMPLES FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF INDONESIA, AND THE FINDINGS HAVE BEEN GENERALIZED FOR THE SO-CALLED "INDONESIAN CULTURE". INDONESIA CONSISTS OF MANY DIFFERENT CULTURES, AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO DO MORE STUDIES ON INDONESIAN CULTURAL ASPECTS WITH POPULATION AND SAMPLES FROM SPECIFIC CULTURES IN INDONESIA. THE CURRENT STUDY REVIEWS SEVERAL STUDIES ABOUT COMPLIMENTS IN DIFFERENT ETHNIC GROUPS IN INDONESIA TO ANALYSE THE DIFFERENCES IN COMPLIMENTING MECHANISMS BETWEEN VARIOUS ETHNIC GROUPS IN INDONESIA.

Herbert (1997, pp. 487-488) said that there is a common understanding of what a compliment means. He explained that in general people understand that compliments are expressions produced when people admire what other people have, what they accomplish, or how they behave. Similarly, Holmes (cited in Liyana and Rusdi, 2022: 97) defines compliments as "a speech act within explicitly and implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed for some 'goods' (possession, skill, characteristics, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and hearer" (Holmes cited in Liyana and Rusdi, 2022: 97).

A compliment is usually followed by a response. When a person (compliment provider) compliments another person (compliment receiver), the compliment receiver will respond to the compliment provider (Herbert, 1989: 5). The system that connects a compliment and a compliment response is called "chained actions" (Pomerantz, 1978: 82). In her explanation, Pomerantz proposed two structures of action chains. In the

first structure, a compliment from A to B will be followed by B's acceptance or rejection. In this first form, the compliment can be considered to be supportive. In the other structure, after a compliment from A to B, there is an agreement or disagreement from B. This pattern occurs usually when the compliments are considered evaluations. Pomerantz emphasized that "… most compliment responses lie somewhere in between … acceptances and agreements on the one hand and rejections and disagreements on the other" (p. 81).

A list of compliment responses was offered by Pomerantz (cited in Herbert, 1989: 10). In Pomerantz's list, there are three types of compliment responses, including acceptances, rejections, and self-praise avoidance mechanisms. Acceptance responses can be realized in the forms of appreciation tokens and agreement, while rejections are realized with disagreements. Self-praise avoidance mechanisms consist of praise downgrades (including agreement and disagreement) and referent shifts (including reassignment and return). Herbert (1989: 19) added new types of compliment responses based on data from American respondents. The American data resulted in a list consisting of agreements, non-agreements, and request interpretation. Agreements include appreciation tokens, comment acceptance, praise upgrade, comment history, reassignment, and return; while non-agreements consist of scale down, disagreement, qualification, question, and no acknowledgment.

The mechanism of compliment can be culture-specific. Referring to some experts (Wolfson, Holmes and Brown, and Herbert), Dunham (1992: 75) concluded that "…the function of compliments is quite diverse based on cultural values and norms". The author exemplifies this point with native people in Costa Rica, Indonesia, or Timor who may not accept compliments from foreign people for things they own; while in English culture, such compliments occur frequently. Another writer (Chick, 1996: 270) referred to data from Herbert's research on Americans and South Africans. The data showed that there was a low tendency among Americans to accept compliments, although they provide compliments frequently. South Africans, on the other hand, have the reverse preference. Similarly, "You must have been tired doing all the shopping" and "Your earrings are pure gold, aren't they?" are two examples of compliments in Japanese and Indonesian cultures (Wolfson in Herbert, 1989: 5), but not in English culture (Herbert, 1989: 5).

A common assumption about Indonesian compliments is that Indonesians tend to reject compliments. Denial becomes a dominant response among Indonesians in responding to compliments (Herlisa, 2022: 6). With the Modesty maxim, the possibility of dispraising oneself will be higher in responding to compliments (Hapsari, 2020: 299). The author provides the following example in which the participants tried to deny the compliments given to them.

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II.   METHODOLOGY

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This article was written based on a systematic literature review. The writer collected several articles related to complimenting Indonesian culture. The writer read the articles thoroughly and took note of the important findings particularly related totopics of compliments and responses to compliments. The information was classified and analysed, and some conclusions were made based on the results of the analysis.

III.   STUDIES RELATED TO COMPLIMENTS IN SOME INDONESIAN ETHNIC GROUPS

3.1   Responses to Compliments Within Minangkabau Families InPauh, Indonesia (Flores et al (2019))

In this study, the researchers aimed to determine the kinds of responses Minangkabau people use towards compliments provided by other family members; how the responses vary in different kinds of relation; and the factors that possibly influence the choice of compliment responses (p. 59).

The data were collected, analysed, and interpreted using the qualitative method (p. 59). Primary data in the form of compliment responses were obtained through in-depth interviews with 20 nuclear families from Pauh district, Padang that were unlikely to be influenced by foreign cultures (p. 59). In addition, the researchers interviewed an expert on Minangkabau culture to obtain secondary data for triangulation (p. 59). The data were classified based on the compliment responses categories by Herbert (p. 60). Data elicitation from the parents and children were separated, and the provided situations were also different (p. 61). The situation for the parents was

that they receive compliments from their husband/wife and children when they dress up for a wedding party; while the situation for the children was that they receive compliments from their sisters/brothers and parents for an achievement (p. 61).

The findings revealed that the respondents produced several types of compliment responses which fit in Herbert's list, including appreciation token, comment acceptance, reassignment, return, question, and disagreement (p. 61). In addition, two kinds of responses, "praising God" and "other explanation", are not on Herbert's list (p. 61).

Based on the data, the researchers said that the most preferred response in the study was comment acceptance, which is listed by Herbert under the category of agreement (p. 65). The respondents said that comment acceptance was mainly used because the family members were very close to each other (p. 65). This was confirmed by the expert on Minangkabau culture (p. 65).

Interestingly, this study found that compliments are not frequently used in the Minangkabau families (p. 65). It is not common either for a man to compliment his wife in front of the children, and some women said that they never receive compliments from their husbands after they get married (p. 65). Furthermore, the respondents and the Minangkabau cultural expert said that "thank you" expression is not commonly used within a nuclear family (p. 65). The appreciation token was mainly found in the communication of children to parents (p.66). Some nonverbal responses were also found in this study (p. 66). Importantly, the value of hierarchy in Minangkabau culture is expressed in the local language as "*kato nan ampek*", meaning that "speech to older interlocutors has characteristics distinct from speech amongst equals or to younger interlocutors" (p. 68) is also found in the study. The data showed that return strategy and appreciation tokens were used more by younger children than older ones (p. 68). In contrast, types of compliment responses commonly used by older children to the younger ones were other explanations and reassignment (p. 68).

3.2 AnalisisSosio-PragmatikTerhadapPujian Dan ResponPujian Pada Masyarakat SukuSaluan [A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Compliments and Compliment Responses in the Community of Samual Ethnic Group] (Nawir and Nurlaela, 2019)

Another research related to compliments was conducted by Nawir and Nurlaela (2019) with the Saluan ethnic group in Nambo, Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi (p. 4). The researchers intended to find out the topics of compliments provided by the Saluan people, the strategies they use in responding to compliments, and the influence of relationships on compliments (p. 4).

The data collected using observations, interviews, and filed notes were analysed with Miles and Huberman's model (p. 4) and the compliment responses were categorized based on Herbert's classification (p. 4). The findings showed that 39% of compliments made by Saluan people were about possessiveness, and 32% were about appearance. The rest were for skills (26%) and personality (3%) (p. 6). In responding to compliments, the most frequent strategy used by the community was praise upgrade (32%) (p. 8).

Furthermore, by referring to Herbert's category, the most frequent compliment response used by Saluan people was agreement (71%), followed by non-agreement (26%), and other interpretations (3%) (p. 8). The researchers also interviewed Saluan people and found that agreement responses are provided when the participants of interaction have good emotional relationship; while non-agreement responses are used when interactants are not in a close relationship (p. 9). In addition, the authors explained compliment response can be also influenced by two factors, age, and gender (p. 9).

3.3 The Compliment Responses by Buginese Community in Bone Regency (South Sulawesi) (Discourse Analysis) (Asmianti, 2013)

Another study was conducted by Asmianti (2013) to investigate compliment responses in the Buginese community in Bone Regency (South Sulawesi). The research was more complex as it used three variables (age, gender, and education level), more respondents (80), and a greater number of situations (25 situations).

It was found that in general, Bone people used the no-agreement strategy (scale-down type). In the sub-variables of old age, male, female, uneducated, and tertiary education; the most frequent strategy was the no-agreement with scale-down type. The no-agreement strategy was also the most dominant one among respondents of the secondary education variable but with a different type (disagreement). Interestingly, the sub-variables of adult and teenager mostly have the agreement category with different types, comment history, and appreciate tokens respectively.

3.4   Strategi MeresponPujian yang Digunakan di KalanganMahasiswa Universitas Hasanuddin: AnalisisMetapragmatik [Compliment Response Strategies Used by Students of Hasanuddin University: A Metapragmatic Analysis] (Herlisa, 2022)

Herlisa (2022) conducted a metapragmatic analysis to find out the strategies used by students at Hasanuddin University in responding to compliments. The research questions show that the analysis was related to three variables including ethnic groups, gender, and level of intimacy (p. 10).

The researcher used the mixed-method approach and descriptive analysis (pp. 49-50). As many as 90 respondents were involved in the study (p. 54). The data were collected using questionnaires (Discourse Completion Test) and observations (pp. 55-56); and the analysis was based on Holmes' strategies of compliment responses and Golato's theory about compliment topics (p. 57).

The findings showed that compliment acceptance was the most frequent strategy used by the respondents from Makassar and Toraja ethnic groups; while respondents from Bugis ethnic group used the strategies of compliment acceptance and agreement with the comment at the same frequency (p. 72). The strategy of compliment acceptance was also the most dominant strategy used by the population regardless their gender (p. 79). In terms of intimacy level, compliment acceptance strategy occurs most frequently in interactions with new people and best friends; while agreement with comments appeared mostly in interactions between friends (pp. 84-85).

3.5   The Compliment Responses Used by Makassarese Native Speaker (Natsir, 2020)

A study by Natsir (2020) was conducted for three purposes (p.124). The first was to analyse the responses of Americans and Makasarese people upon receiving compliments. The next objective was to find similarities and dissimilarities between the responses of Americans and Makasarese people from gender and age perspectives. The third purpose was to analyse the effects of American and Makasarese cultures on the way they respond to compliments.

Data on Makasarese compliments were collected by distributing questionnaires (Discourse Completion Test) to alumni, pupils, staff members, and instructors of SDN Ujung Tanah 1 Makassar (p. 125). Data for American compliments were obtained from videos on YouTube channels (p. 125). The American and Makasarese data were compared with the descriptive qualitative method (p. 125).

The results show two important findings. Firstly, it appears that there is a connection between compliment responses, compliment topics, and age variables. Acceptance became the strategy preferred by Makasarese male teenagers in responding to compliments related to accomplishment (p. 129). In addition, in responding to compliments about their skills, Makassarese's older and younger females preferred to apply the avoidance strategy (p. 129). Secondly, it seems that compliment responses also depend on how close the people are in the interaction. Makassarese people prefer to use acceptance when communication participants are close to each other; while avoidance strategy is chosen in a hierarchical relationship (p. 129). However, when conversation participants are from the same family (between brothers and sisters or between husband and wife for example), the rejection is commonly used (p. 129).

3.6   Compliment Response Strategy of Balinese Women on Social Media (Sartini, 2019)

Another study by Sartini (2019) is quite interesting as the researcher tried to investigate how Balinese women respond to compliments on social media (Facebook) (p. 373). In collecting the data, the researcher

observed the communication of Balinese women on Facebook in May 2019 and took some notes related to compliment responses (p. 374).

The findings revealed that the observed Balinese women responded to compliments by rejecting, returning, or accepting compliments; or by shifting the credit (pp. 374-375) with appreciation token, rejection, and return the compliment as the three most frequent response types (p. 375).

For Balinese women, expressing gratitude explicitly can be considered impolite, so it needs to be followed with the application of emoticons, the use of certain expressions, or the acknowledgment of someone's name (p. 375). This is related to a cultural value in Balinese culture, i.e. "edengadenawakbisa, depanganakengadanin", which means "do not act as the smartest and kindest person since there are still many smarter people. Act humble and not arrogant, and let people assess what we have done" (p. 375).

3.7 The Speeh Act of Compliment Response by Sasak Females and Males in Sasak Language in West Lombok Regency (Febrianti, 2019)

As many as 36 native speakers of Sasak language aged between 17 and 45 years old participated in this study, which focused on compliment responses based on gender and compliment aspects. The researcher conducted her research using the qualitative descriptive research design with two techniques of data collection: role play and interviews. The analysis was based on Herbert's taxonomy and compliment aspects.

The results showed three strategies used by Sasak males and females in responding to compliments from other males and females (p. 97). The strategies were comment history, comment acceptance, and disagreement. Comment history strategy was used mostly in responding to compliments about physical and non-physical appearance, skills/talents, and achievement; while comment acceptance was used mainly to respond to compliments about personality (p. 97).

3.8 Patterns of Responses to Compliments on Physical Appearance in Sundanese Women (Akmal, 2013)

Akmal (2013) conducted a study to answer two research questions. First, he wanted to find out the forms of compliment responses produced by women from the Sunda ethnic group. Second, the researcher wanted to analyse to what extent the Sundanese responses are different towards male and female complements.

In conducting the study, the researcher collected data by using naturalized role plays, which were conducted by eleven conductors with 68 female informants. The informants were aged eighteen to forty years old and they studied in high schools or universities, worked, or became housewives. These informants were connected to the conductors as neighbours, part of an extended family, school friends, or workmates. In the naturalized role plays, the conductors complimented the informants' physical looks or clothes to obtain spontaneous data from them in the form of compliment responses. The data were analysed qualitatively with coding procedure, and quantitatively by counting the frequencies of compliment responses.

The findings revealed that appreciation tokens were commonly used as compliment responses, although they do not necessarily indicate agreement. What follows after the appreciation tokens will determine whether the response is an agreement or non-agreement. In fact, most of the appreciation tokens were followed by rejections or non-agreement strategies. Regarding the comparison of responses towards male and female complementors, it appeared that the informants produced a balanced number of agreement and non-agreement strategies and shorter expressions when responding to female complementors. In contrast, the informants provided more non-agreement strategies and more expressions when responding to male complementors. However, a similarity was found, i.e. the consideration that compliments were produced more for social binding, and the responses can be regarded as a way of face-saving. In few cases, compliments can be regarded as jokes or even an improper thing to do, so the responses would be in the form of non-agreement.

3.9 Politeness Strategies in Responding to Compliments in Javanese (Sukarno, 2015)

Sukarno's (2015) study started with an assumption that Javanese culture cannot be separated from three cultural principles including *tata krama, tanggapingsasmita*, and *andhap-asor* (p. 92). The author explains that

the first principle is related to the levels of Javanese language (pp. 92-93), while the second one relates to how people can interpret implied meaning in interactions (p. 94). The last principle, according to the author, encourages Javanese to elevate the other's feelings, while lowering themselves at the same time (p. 94). Sukarno believes that these Javanese cultural principles have some effects on their way of responding to compliments (p. 92).

The research involved 30 native speakers of the Javanese language who were raised in Java (p. 95). The researcher recorded and took notes of conversations between the native speakers in both formal and informal situations (p. 95).

The findings showed five types of compliment responses: an agreement to a compliment either followed or not by an offer, an agreement followed by a further talk to degrade the person getting the compliment, an agreement directly followed by an act to shift the positive value of the compliment to the person providing the compliment, a rejection followed with a query, and a rejection followed with a degradation (pp. 96-98). The last strategy, the author explains, appears very frequently and it is influenced by the *andhap-asor* principle explained above (p. 96).

Interestingly, one's response to compliments in Javanese language is also influenced by the social status of the speakers. For example, Sukarno (pp. 98-99) explains that compliments that are provided for ordinary items can be responded with an agreement directly followed by an offer to the compliment provider to take the items if the compliment provider has an equal or lower status in the interaction. Otherwise, the author continues, the response should be an agreement without an immediate offer, although the compliment receiver can bring the item to the compliment provider after some time.

3.10 A Study of Compliment Responses Used by Indonesians (Hapsari, 2020)

A study by Hapsari (2020) was conducted to find out the ways employed by Indonesian people as compliment responses. The researcher focused on answering two questions related to (1) the "speech functions" applied in responding to compliments in the Indonesian language, and (2) the ways the "speech functions" were applied (p. 299).

The study was conducted as an ethnographic research with a qualitative approach, especially the participation observation; and natural data were collected by Hapsari from people in Semarang who used both Indonesian and Javanese languages (p. 300). Therefore, this study can be considered to represent the Javanese cultural background. The data analysis started with the analysis of speech function, continued with the labeling of the speech function, and ended with a register analysis including the field, mode, and tenor (pp. 300-301).

The subjects in this research were mostly in equal power relationships with friendship and familial connections; and only in a few cases, did the participants have unequal power relations (p. 303). However, the author argues that "Although the power relationships between the interactants are unequal, these do not mean that the contacts between the interactants are infrequent, and their affective involvements are low" (p. 303).

The findings show that compliments were given to comment on people's appearance, their achievement, the things they have, and their characters (p. 303). Furthermore, out of 85 texts analysed in the study, most responses were laughing or smiling; and the researcher interprets the laughing and smiling as a realization of modesty, a highly-valued character in Indonesia; which prevents people from accepting compliments directly (p. 302). Some responses were in the form of acceptance, either directly or indirectly; but the researcher considers such responses to reflect foreign influence (p. 302). In addition, the research subjects responded to compliments through affirmation, disavowal, contradiction, confirmation, probe, resolution, detachment, rebound, re-challenge, and refusal (p. 303).

IV.   DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that Indonesian ethnic groups can be divided into two groups in terms of compliment responses. Java, Sunda, Bali, and Bugis (Bone) ethnic groups can be classified into one group as disagreement responses are dominantly used in responding to compliments. In Java ethnic group, the tendency to reject compliments is related to the *andhap-asor* principle that values the efforts to scale down oneself and make other

people feel good (Sukarno, 2015: p. 94). The case of Sundanese in this review is limited to women, so it is necessary to find out whether the conclusion applies to Sundanese men. It is important to underline the researcher's note that an appreciation token (a response under the agreement category in Herbert's list) is commonly used, but the real intention of the speaker is found in what follows the appreciation token. This means that the meaning of an appreciation token in Sundanese culture can be different from its meaning in other cultures. Furthermore, researchers can find out whether similar phenomenon also happens in other cultures. The study with Bali culture is similarly limited to female respondents, and that requires further study with male respondents. More importantly, the data for Bali ethnic group were obtained from conversations on social media that may be different from natural conversations. Many people tend to be more polite on social media, compared to their performance in real face-to-face conversations.

The findings from the study with Bugis people in Bone, South Sulawesi (Asmianti, 2013) show the dominant use of scale-down response, which is a type of nonagreement strategy in Herbert's list. However, it is interesting to be analysed further since the findings are different from those of Buginese people in another research by Herlisa (2022). The researcher found that Buginese respondents prefer to use appreciation tokens and comment acceptance, both are under the agreement category in Herbert's list. Possibly, the difference is caused by the samples used in the two studies. Asmianti's study only used samples of Buginese people from Bone, South Sulawesi; while Herlisa's study seems to use samples of Buginese people from different parts of South Sulawesi.

The ethnic groups of Sasak, Minangkabau, Saluan, Toraja, and Makasarese appear to dominantly use agreement responses upon receiving compliments. The type of relationship between a compliment provider and a compliment receiver appears to have an important effect on the choice of compliment response. This is evident in the research with Minangkabau people and the explanation from Saluan respondents. The variables of age and compliment topic may also determine one's choice of compliment response as evident in the study with Makasarese people, although the use of agreement response seems to be still dominant. This brings an understanding that compliment response is a complex phenomenon, so carefully-designed studies are needed to explain its mechanism.

Another important lesson from this review is related to the research method. The techniques of data collection may have certain effects on the respondents, and that can influence the results. For example, the use of Discourse Completion Tests provides time for respondents to think about their answers so that their responses will be different from the ways they use in real interaction. Another example is when interviews are conducted by researchers or other people that are new to respondents, the respondents may provide answers that they assume to be 'good' answers. This might explain the difference in findings with the Buginese people explained in the discussion section above. Furthermore, although the use of the quantitative method can provide a broad picture and general conclusions, there can be certain exceptions depending on some variables such as age and social status. Therefore, it is highly recommended for further stud to work with natural data obtained by observing real conversations. The context needs to be explained in detail, and triangulation techniques need to be employed. For example, the data from natural conversations can be accompanied by data from interviews with respondents to obtain an explanation about their motivation for using certain methods. The triangulation can also include interviews with culture experts to shed light on compliment mechanisms. Examples of this triangulation method can be seen in the studies by Flores et al (2019), and Nawir and Nurlaela (2019). Researches aimed to compare the effects of using different methods on the findings can be also conducted to obtain better research designs in the future.

V.　　CONCLUSION

Based on this review, it can be concluded that Java, Sunda, and Bali people dominantly use disagreements as compliment responses; while Makassar, Toraja, Saluan, Minangkabau, and Sasak People dominantly use agreements. As for people from Bugis, there is a contrast in the findings. Some notes have been taken in terms of the scope of the studies, the effects of some variables on compliments, and the research methods. The notes can be a starting point for researchers in the future.

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