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# When Beautiful Thai Smiles do not Count: CLT for Receiving Compliments in English

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***Abstract***

*Differences in how one says the same thing in two distinct languages often give rise to challenges for second language learners, which when addressed, allow them to become more competent language users. The present study investigates the use of communicative language teaching (CLT) on compliment responses in Standard American English for English major students at a university in Northeast Thailand. Results from analysis of the data from the pretest, posttest and questionnaires indicate that not only do the CLT lessons designed with blended mechanical, meaningful, and communicative activities help students improve skills in responding to compliments in Standard American English, but these activities together with peer teaching also provide them with plenty of opportunities to practice other skills in English which they previously acquired. The discussion of these findings offers practical suggestions for optimal use of CLT in Thai EFL teaching contexts.*

## INTRODUCTION

For decades, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been a popular teaching method that rivals other methods such as grammar translation and audio–lingual methods for second language (L2) teaching. Despite obstacles and weaknesses (Li, 1998; Bock, 2000; Tan, 2005), CLT has been found to be effective in both Western countries (Kaufman, 1987; Aski, 2000; Magedanz, 2004) and in Thailand (Inthapat, 2011; Chanwijit & Duangwilai, 2018; Techathammawong, 2018; Hongwaingjan, Sujaree & Janghan, 2019). Studies which report successful implementations of CLT in Thailand tend to apply a few specific CLT ideas out of the pool of core CLT ideas while others rely on related communicative ideas in developing lessons and instructional procedures. While these studies claim certain advantages to using CLT, the claimed results reflect only a partial reality because CLT was rarely implemented fully in observed test cases. In addition, for researchers, such implementations might have "weakened their understanding by missing the larger picture" that CLT ought to represent a paradigm shift in language teaching (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003, p.5).

Meanwhile in Asia there are also a number of recent studies related to CLT (Hiep, 2007; Chang, 2011; Bruner, Singwongsuwat & Bojanic, 2014). The Asian studies show that enhancing language learning using CLT in class continues to involve some obstacles. For instance, Hiep (2007) found that in Vietnam, there are conflicts between beliefs about CLT and actual teacher implementation, while the progress in the classroom was revealed to be teacher–centric rather than student–centric. Furthemore, Chang (2011) revealed that the Taiwanese education system does not support CLT practices, while Bruner, Singwongsuwat and Bojanic (2014) noticed that unrealistic role plays were used with large classes in CLT in Thailand. These studies give one the impression that there is much to think and rethink about existing CLT practices in Asia. Although the approach is widespread and a number of people claim to have used it in their teaching, there are fundamental misconceptions about it and the use of non–CLT practices. Due to these misconceptions, an urgent need exists to return to the core CLT principles so that CLT can more effectively be utilized in countries such as Thailand.

In this study, the CLT lessons will be on responding to compliments as this language function is something different in English compared to the Thai students' L1. Cedar (2006) identified responding to compliments in English as one area that causes a communicative problem for Thai students. Like most Thais, people in Northeast Thailand are used to conventions in how they respond to compliments in their local languages and Thai. For instance, students are used to responding to compliments through verbal acceptance, or gestures such as silence or smiles. Problems arise in how they respond to compliments in English because the language is not yet part of their linguistic repertoires.

In English, the common kinds of responses in Thai and local languages may be perceived negatively by native English speakers. Responses like silence and smiles are not the usual responses to compliments in an English speech community (Gajaseni, 1994). To examine whether a customized CLT approach can help Thai students produce appropriate verbal responses to compliments in American English and whether it can improve student performance, the CLT lessons were used in a case study design with a group of first year English major students at a university in Northeast Thailand. The study includes all four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the development of the CLT lessons to help the participants develop the skills necessary to respond to compliments in meaningful situational activities in the hope that this will support them to achieve the goal of having real–life communication competence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to provide a theoretical basis as well as foundations for a methodological framework for the study, three topics are included in this review. These are CLT concepts, research on receiving compliments, and peer teaching.

### CLT concepts

The CLT approach was influenced by concepts developed by Hymes (1972) who debates Chomsky's idea of linguistic competence, which placed emphasis on the need to obtain

knowledge of language structures. Hymes (1972) argues that there is an equally important need to stress performance or communicative competence to be successful communicators. Canale and Swain (1980) clarified the term of communicative competence to make the concept more inclusive. They suggest that communicative competence should include grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Canale (1983) later added discourse competence into its dimensions, which has been popularly adopted as the main theoretical framework of the teaching approaches that have collectively been labeled communicative language teaching (CLT).

CLT approaches may differ in the detail, but the core concepts of CLT are similar through the influence of the emphasis on communicative competence. These concepts are student–centered learning, teacher as facilitator, balance of explicit and implicit learning, meaning–focused interaction, real–life based communication, and use of authentic materials (Littlewood, 1981; Harmer, 1982; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Savignon, 1987; Celce–Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1995; Richards, 2006). Drawing from these concepts, it can be concluded that every CLT approach is designed to follow these three essential principles related to teachers, learners, and learning activities.

## Teacher–related principles

In the CLT classroom, the teacher is a facilitator who must monitor activities, observe, and adjust tasks to motivate students to participate in the activities (Maley, 1986). The role of the teacher changes from feeding information to the students to being a facilitator; that is, teachers are required to speak less while students are encouraged to speak more. Nevertheless, the importance of the teacher is not diminished, as Littlewood (1981) underlines, while the CLT teacher does not perform the same dominant role at the center of the class, they do not merely become a class supporter either. Instead, in a CLT classroom the teacher plays a significant role in ensuring that the students are fully supported and have the opportunity to use the target language. Richards and Rodgers (1986) add that the teacher is not simply a facilitator, but they play the role of co–learner who considers how activities should be organized and arranged according to the needs of the students. Being a co–learner will then help teachers open their mind and understand the students' perspectives. By learning together, the teacher and students can find solutions to fix any flaws in the students' learning. Another CLT teacher–related principle is for the teacher to consider what to do when students make errors; teachers must avoid immediate correction so that they do not discourage the students. Instead, the main concern for the teacher is to focus on the meaning, while feedback can be done later and given in many different ways (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003).

## Learner–related principles

CLT students must also change their role to enhance the success of a CLT classroom. Firstly, passive learners must become more active learners in the CLT classroom. CLT students are required to not simply passively follow the lesson; rather they are required to take responsibility for their learning and play the main role in the classroom (Maley, 1986). This student role change makes them the main actors in the learning process, resulting in CLT

being very different from traditional classrooms. To be the main actors, learners must cooperate with other actors, including with the other students and the teacher.

Social communication is a part of the learning process and students should communicate with each other and with the teacher (Littlewood, 1981), with the activities being used as an aid for them to become negotiators in group conversations (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Language learning occurs when students use patterns of language to fulfill a communicative purpose. CLT activities seek to provide the learners with opportunities to practice interacting with others in an environment where they feel free to communicate using their own words (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). Put alternatively, active students should understand the purpose of the CLT activity and draw on all their existing and newly learned competence to help them successfully perform a task.

A cooperative attitude is also important, as Basta (2011) indicates that students should focus on cooperating in group work rather than competing against other classmates to get higher scores. These characteristics of CLT learners derive from the idea that the CLT classroom is not a place where students should focus on competing against each other, but rather should work together to achieve a communication goal. Developing a positive attitude is crucial for students to make the most of CLT activities. While a positive attitude towards language learning is required, active engagement is expected. Savignon (1991) specifies that it is important for students to 'take a risk' to use language because they can acquire and develop their language skills thorough productive learning. Moreover, L2 learning also requires motivation to enable learners to put in the effort to develop their L2 implementation (Dornyei, 1998). Through these requirements, it could be said that achieving communicative learning goals requires the participation of everyone in the classroom.

## Principles related to learning activities

The use of CLT emphasizes the new teacher and student roles. The next principle which is as important is CLT activities. The design of CLT activities is quite different from other approaches. The main characteristic of CLT activities is their focus on individual and group learning. Jacobs and Farwell (2003) write that CLT does not emphasize learning flow for each individual in the class, but instead emphasizes that the whole class should develop as an individual person. To achieve this goal, CLT activities require all the individual students to use their skills to complete a task. This can be done through sharing and discussion with other students, whether seeking to find solutions to a problem or to make a decision (Maley, 1986). Students will learn to use language from their peers or other group members as well as from the class. CLT activities should create opportunities for students to use all their skills and communicative competence to deal with a communicative task. Through well designed activities, learners will have the chance to exploit previous knowledge and practice new language patterns to meaningfully and effectively convey messages in the particular situations where the interaction takes place (Littlewood, 1981). As a result, the success of a CLT class depends on the CLT activities which differ according to the activity's purpose.

Although the end goal of a CLT lesson is to provide opportunities for learners to actively use

the target language for communication, CLT activities can be as diverse as mechanical grammar drills to social activities so long as they meet the learners' needs. While cooperative learning is a must, discarding grammar teaching from CLT practice is inadvisable, especially for lower proficiency learners. Richards and Rodgers (1986) forward the view that beginner–level learners should learn language structures from small practices to help them make links with their background knowledge. After that, they can then begin more communicative activities such as roleplay or other oral productive group work. Grammar teaching therefore continues to be necessary for beginners. Much research agrees with Richards and Rodgers on this point. For instance, Savignon (1991) states that when operating a CLT class, teaching grammar or language structure is unavoidable. Students will not be able to perform a communicative task until they have an understanding of target language patterns. Savignon believes that grammar is a component which can be integrated into communicative activities. Likewise, Jacobs and Farrell (2003) reveal that CLT activities in class are divided into two groups: the first section aims to provide students with the knowledge of that they should grow, while the second section is a performance in which students act out what they have learned.

Richards (2006) echoes a similar opinion in his suggestion that grammar teaching should be considered. Richard clearly separates the steps of CLT practice into three parts, beginning from what he refers to as 'mechanical practice' (language structure teaching), then 'meaningful practice' (language–use practice), through to communicative practice (the use of language in situational tasks). Richard's typology of CLT activities provides a clearer picture of how CLT can be used with low proficiency students. That is, CLT practice is not simply leaving students to work in a group and watch them interact. In contrast, the teacher must consider the learners' needs and prepare activities accordingly that can help them gradually learn to be more active CLT learners, by providing them with knowledge of language functions before they begin interactive practices.

## Responding to compliments in Standard Thai and American English

Compliment responses can be perceived differently in different cultures. As the present study deals with compliment responses in English by Thai learners of English, this section contrasts responses to compliments in both Standard Thai and American English. The Standard American English variety and speech convention was selected for the study because it is one of the most widely used varieties of English in the world and most common in Thailand at the present time. A number of researchers have investigated types of compliment responses. Herbert (1989) is one such researcher who has been widely cited in this field. Herbert analyzed and grouped compliment responses into three main categories: agreements, non–agreements, and request interpretation. Each category includes sub–categories, as follows.

In the response grouping 'agreements', the compliment receiver accepts the compliment. There are several additional sub–categories: acceptances, comment history, and transfer. Acceptance is the simplest way of accepting a compliment, and is further divided into three dimensions: a) appreciation tokens, b) comment acceptances, and c) praise upgrades. While short responses are generally referred to acceptances, 'comment history' always provides more details. A comment history is a way of accepting compliments and in the response the speaker

adds more impersonal details into the response. The final sub–category in the agreement group is 'transfer' which is a limited degree of acceptance. It is divided into two dimensions; a) reassignment, or b) return. This is seen as an indirect acceptance because the responses refer to a third person.

The second type of compliment response is called 'non–agreements' which are different from agreements because they are used to reject the compliment. The speaker can show their rejection in one of four ways, whether to scale down, non–acceptance, question response, or giving no acknowledgement, as described below. A scale down response is used when the speaker disagrees with the compliment and tries to point out hidden flaws in the compliment. A non–acceptance type of response is a stronger type of rejection to display the speaker's strongly disagreement with the compliment. This response is divided into two further divisions. First, it is a disagreement, in which the speaker disagrees with the compliment and asserts that the compliment is overdone. Second is the use of a qualification, in which the speaker chooses not to accept the full compliment, and instead adds words to the end of the disagreeing statement, such as through, but, yet, and so on. The third sub–category in the non–agreement group is question response. Question response is used when the speaker requests for an expansion of, or a repeat of the compliment assertion.

No–acknowledgement is the final sub–category of non–agreement. There are two possible explanations. First, the compliment receiver may not hear the compliment utterance. Otherwise, they may need to react somehow. To interpret the meaning, the compliment giver must be able to understand the compliment receiver's intentions. The final type of compliment response in English is 'request interpretation', which is related to a compliment response that the speaker produces for a purpose other than a compliment. For instance, the receiver believes that the compliment giver may have a motive so returns the compliment to make a request from the compliment receiver.

As discussed, there are many ways for people to respond to a compliment, but a typical style of response can be found in each speech community and can lead to incorrect interpretation when used in a different speech community. People in different speech communities may act differently depending on their familiarity of the responses. Gajaseni (1994) and Cedar (2006) share interesting studies on the contrast between Standard Thai and American responses. Although Thai students were most likely to use the acceptance strategy, a strategy found used by Thai students but not by American students was a 'smiling strategy' (Cedar, 2006), or 'smiling and nodding' (Gajaseni, 1994) when given compliments. Cedar (2006) mentions that in Thai culture, smiling or nodding the head can either show politeness or imply that the receiver does not want to show too much self–praise that could disrespect the compliment giver, especially when the giver is in a higher social position. In addition, those two studies found that Thai students tended to downgrade the compliments or used a scale down strategy more often than American students.

The Thais' use of downgrading was also found by Boonkongsaen (2011) who compared Filipino and Thai compliment responses in English. Boonkongsen made comparisons in four situations: appearance compliments, character compliments, ability compliments, and possession

compliments. The study showed that Thais usually used a combination of strategies, while Filipinos used the acceptance strategy the most. The combination strategy that the Thais used combined a token and downgrading, such as "Thanks, I think it was just ok," or "Thanks Mark! I think I could have done it better" (Boonkongsaen, 2011, p.52). Meanwhile, Gajaseni (1994) and Cedar (2006) found that when compliments were given, Americans required a different reaction to the compliment, such as through explicit positive feedback, else they would interpret the response as indifference. In the American culture, it is generally important that the receiver makes a verbal response. Moreover, Gajaseni (1994) construes that using a short expression like 'Thank you' may sometimes be problematic because it is ambiguous for the giver to understand whether the receiver either appreciates the compliment or simply just acknowledges it.

Hence, this study aims to design lessons on responding to compliments to help Thai students be aware of appropriate ways to respond to compliments in American English. A purpose for this is to help students develop their confidence by practicing responding to compliments in fictional situations. The present study applies the concept of peer teaching to help Thai students make the most of the CLT lessons.

## Peer teaching

Peer teaching has unique advantages which can be harnessed in order to enhance the effectiveness of CLT for Thai students. According to Arta (2012), peer teaching or peer tutoring is a learning process that requires high proficiency students to help low proficiency students to achieve the goal of an activity. When an activity is organized in the classroom, instructions or materials may be given to the students for them to practice the language. In a normal class, students have differing levels of ability to understand the lessons, instructions, and the use of materials, and the teacher may be unable to monitor large classes to help all the students. In peer teaching, more able students would be encouraged to help the less able ones.

Peer teaching can be carried out in a number of ways. Hing Wa Sit (2012) suggests that peers help explain things and contribute to large classes making them more successful. Moreover, peers can also provide mental support for each other. During CLT group work, students know that the success of the group work depends on the improvement and engagement of individuals. It is important therefore that group members take care of each other and make sure that no one is left behind in the learning process. Otherwise, the group task will fail. As a result, each member is supposed to help each other. The more proficient students explain to those who are less proficient and everyone should always provide positive feedback to encourage one another towards collaborative engagement and learning. CLT with peer teaching should create an informal co-learning space.

When peers take roles in assisting a class, it will bring about a non–threatening learning atmosphere, with the students free to share their ideas and feel relaxed because their confidence in speaking the L2 is increased. As passive learning is one of the greatest challenges in the implementation of CLT in Thailand, peer teaching may help Thai students more actively engage and reduce their anxiety in the English language classroom.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses mixed methods to gather relevant data. Quantitative data is sourced from test results, while qualitative data is derived from student opinions. The data from the two methods is used to cross–check the analysis and results against the other methods. Quantitative data is used to compare the test results before and after learning with CLT based lessons. Qualitative data is then used to explore the impacts of CLT based lessons on the students' learning through the perspectives of the students.

### Participants

The participants were sampled using the convenience sampling method (Dornyei, 2007). According to the purpose of the study, appropriate participants must able to communicate in English, but have never properly practiced responding to compliments in English. Accordingly, first year English major students at a university in Northeast Thailand were selected. There were 53 students in total, but for the purpose of this small–scale study a group of ten students was randomly selected.

### Lesson design

Some concepts in CLT as previously discussed were considered in the theoretical framework for designing CLT lessons in the present study. The most important concept is from Canale and Swain (1980) who expand the scope of communicative competence that was originally proposed by Hymes (1972). As shown in Figure 1, the concept from Richards (2006) is used as the main concept of the activity design for the study and procedure, which is divided into three steps: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative. The design uses adapted suggested activities from Littlewood (1981), including reconstructing story–sequences and a roleplay through cued dialogues.

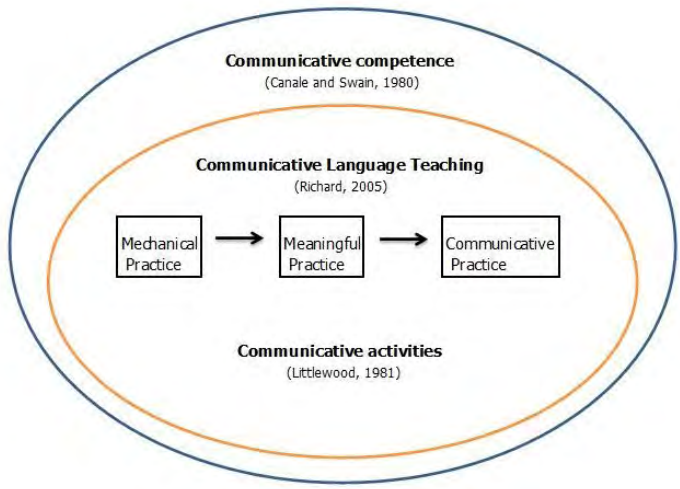


**Figure 1** Theoretical framework for the CLT lesson design

According to this design framework, the first step of the practice is 'mechanical practice'. Mechanical practice emphasizes teaching categories of compliment responses and different responses in Standard Thai and Standard American English. The purpose of this step is to ensure that the participants are exposed to the necessary language structures and the different strategies in Thai and Standard American English. The practices focus on language use for giving and responding to compliments. The activities used in this mechanical practice stage were a lecture, paper exercises and short practices.

The second step of the design is referred to as 'meaningful practice'. Participants are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge from the mechanical practice. The participants begin by working in pairs and making interactions in a cued roleplay. Fluency development is expected to start from this practice. Participants apply what they know from the previous practice and integrate their language skills to deal with unprepared conversations. The conversation situations are relevant to real life to make the activities more meaningful. The roleplays used in this step of the practices are cued roleplay, with short conversations without a prepared script. Unscripted conversations are used to prepare the students for the communicative practice in the final step.

The third step of the practice is 'communicative practice'. The participants work in a larger group to perform an unscripted roleplay. They are encouraged to use all their knowledge and skills to achieve the task goals. It is expected at this stage that the participants will exploit their communicative competence. The communicative practice in this CLT based lesson is considered as a situational task which reflects real situations that the participants may find themselves in outside of the classroom.

## Data collection tools and procedures

This study uses the concept of data triangulation in the data analysis. Therefore, two kinds of data collection tools were used to cross–reference the data and results. The quantitative tool used in this study was a pretest and posttest, which was the main tool used in the study. The questionnaire which is a qualitative data collection method contained open–ended questions. This type of questionnaire allows participants to freely express themselves (Dornyei, 2007), helping to reveal the participants' opinions about the lesson, and how the activities affected their compliment response skills and other areas of language use. The questionnaire included four parts regarding their opinion on mechanical practices, meaningful practices, communicative practices, and the use of peer teaching.

The duration of the lesson was planned to be six hours over two days, making it similar to how the university operates normal classroom teaching. The learning details of each hour are clarified in Figure 2.

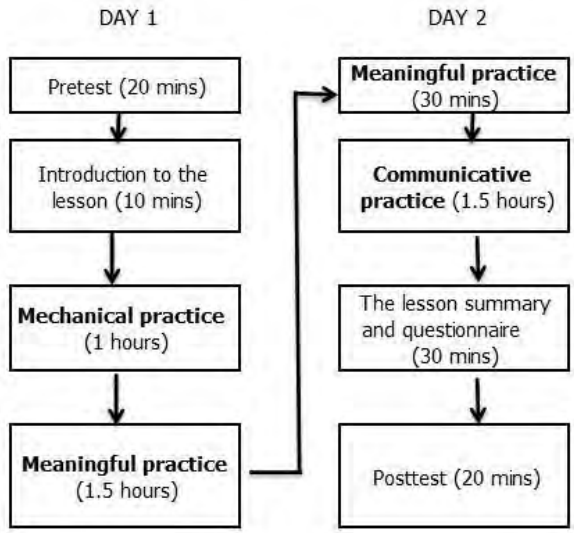


**Figure 2** A lesson plan for responding to compliments in English

The first day of the lesson consisted of three hours, with the first hour including a pretest, an introduction to the lesson, video about responding to compliments in Standard American English, and worksheets about the different compliment responses in Standard Thai and Standard American English.

An introduction to the lesson was given to present all the types of compliment responding strategies, with the teacher then allowing the participants to predict which strategies are normally found in the Standard Thai and Standard American English contexts. Next, the participants watched a video about responding to compliments in English before being asked to discuss the contents of the video to check if they understood the details. The participants were then asked to think of and provide more examples of appropriate responses in Standard American English besides the examples given in the worksheet which included comment acceptance, comment history, reassignment, and return strategies. During this task the teacher observed the participants' performance to divide the class into two ability groups, before matching pairs from each ability group to form five mixed–ability pairs. Each participant was then suddenly given a compliment and required to participate in small talk with the teacher. The students who were able to correctly interact using positive compliment responses from the mechanical practice and could complete the small talk conversation were placed into the first group. The students who remained silent or were unable to complete the small talk were placed into the second group. The teacher then matched participants from each ability group to do pair work in the next hour of the class.

The meaningful practice was undertaken over the following hour. The meaningful practice included three activities. The first activity concerned conversation sequences, in which the participants worked with their peers to rearrange a sequence of conversations. Three different situations were given with three different responding strategies. The printed dialogue was cut

into pieces and the participants were required to reorder the pieces of paper to make meaningful dialogues. After completing all the tasks, the participants were asked to read along with the dialogues. The next activity involved the participants creating their own dialogues. Each participant group randomly selected one of six situational instructions from the teacher, which clarified the background plot of their dialogue. After selecting one, the participants created their own conversations following the detail of the plot. In this activity the participants were allowed to write scripts, but were not allowed to read the scripts while doing the role play. The participants then took turns as the compliment giver and then compliment receiver in the role plays.

On the second day, the third activity of the meaningful practice – a short unscripted conversation – was arranged for thirty minutes to remind the participants of the previous day's practices. The teacher prepared many objects for the participants to select, such as a hat, bag, bracelet or necklace. All the participants were told to act like they had accidentally run into each other, make a greeting, conduct small talk, and give a compliment on the object their peers had with them. The participants were given no time to prepare a script because they did not know what their peer would say to them. The task was completed once the teacher saw that both of the participants had taken turns being the compliment giver and receiver.

The communicative practice was undertaken in the final hour, with the participants introduced to do an unscripted role play in a group of five participants. They responded immediately using their previous knowledge from the mechanical and meaningful practices for a situational task given, which was to prepare a party. The teacher checked the participants' understanding to ensure that they understood their roles and instructed them to not disclose information to the other members. In addition to compliment giving and responding, the participants were also asked to create a question in their mind as if they had problems with the role they had been given and whether they required suggestions from the group leader. The non–performing group observed the other group's performance and was asked to comment on their performance after each role play.

## Data analysis

This study uses two methods to analyze the two kinds of data: coding was used to analyze the questionnaire data, and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the pretest and posttest results.

Coding was used to thematically group the qualitative data. Coding helps to interpret and draw conclusions from the questionnaire and the teacher's diary. Coding in qualitative methods refer to the way in which descriptive data is read and labeled with familiar words or phrases before being grouped into themes, which are then analyzed for potential conclusions (Dornyei, 2007). The coding in the present study looked into two main areas. The first main area sought to the analyze effectiveness of the CLT–based lesson in responding to compliments, while the second area analyzed the usefulness of peer teaching in the CLT classroom.

In the quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics, especially percentages, were applied to find

and compare variations between the pretest and posttest results. The findings from comparing the pretest and the posttest results (quantitative data) may potentially be used to confirm the coding analysis results (qualitative data), as Dornyei (2007: 45) describes that mixed methods benefit from "…the strengths of one method can be utilized to overcome the weaknesses of another method used in the study."

## RESULTS

This section presents the results from the analysis of the pretest and posttest scores and the participants' opinions. The findings from the comparison between the pretest and posttest scores provide evidence that the CLT–based lesson helped the participants improve their competence and performance in responding to compliments. Moreover, the participants' opinions support the assertion that the CLT lesson was useful in this regard.

### 1. Quantitative results

The results are divided into three parts. The first part shows the frequencies that participants used each type of strategy in the two tests. The second part compares the variation between the use of agreement and non–agreement strategy groups. The last part is an additional analysis on the two most common types of strategies used in the pretest and posttest; comment acceptance and comment history.

### Types and percentages of all compliment strategies

The participants used ten types of strategies in the test. Based on the type of response, the pretest data shows nine types of strategies were used in total. In contrast, the posttest data shows that seven types of strategies were used.

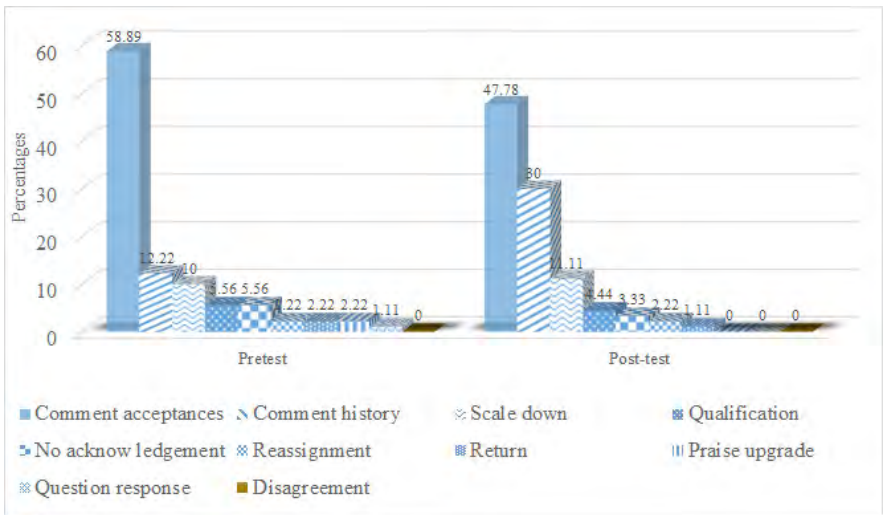


**Figure 3** Percentages of all the types of strategies used in the pretest and posttest

The frequencies of strategy use differed from pretest to posttest. The pretest results (figure 3) show that the participants used comment acceptances the most (58.80 percent of the time), followed by comment history (12.22 percent), scale down (10 percent), qualification (5.56 percent), no acknowledgement (5.56 percent), reassignment (2.22 percent), return (2.22 percent), praise upgrade (2.22 percent), and, finally, question response (1.11 percent). It was observed that sweet Thai smiles were the most common behavior in the non-acknowledgement type of response. The posttest results show that a different number of strategies were used and also different frequencies of those strategies. In the posttest, the most frequently used strategy was comment acceptance (47.78 percent). Other strategies used were comment history (30 percent), reassignment (11.11 percent), qualification (4.44 percent), return (3.33 percent), disagreement (2.22 percent), and praise upgrade (1.11 percent).

The rank and percentage of strategy use in the posttest differs from those found in the pretest. That is to say, the frequency of comment acceptances decreased by 11.11 percent in the posttest, although it remained the most commonly used strategy. Meanwhile, comment history remained the second most common strategy, but with a higher frequency than found in the pretest. Reassignment was the fifth most commonly used strategy in the pretest, being used 2.22 percent of the time, but in the posttest it was the third most common strategy which was used 11.11 percent of the time. The scale down strategy was the third most common strategy in the pretest, but was not used at all in the posttest. Similarly, the no acknowledgement strategy with a use of 5.56 percent in the pretest also disappeared in the posttest. On the contrary, disagreement did not appear in the pretest but was used in 2.22 percent of the responses in the posttest. Other strategies, namely, qualification, return, and praise upgrade saw no significant change in their rank and frequency.

## Agreement and non–agreement strategies

The results also indicate differences between two groups of the strategies, namely, agreements and non–agreement. The strategies in the agreement group include comment acceptances, comment history, reassignment, return, and praise upgrade. The second group labeled non–agreement includes qualification, disagreement, scale down, question response, and no acknowledgement. While learning, the participants were encouraged to use the first type as they are common compliment response strategies used in Standard American English (Gajaseni, 1994; Cedar, 2006). After the analysis, the pretest and posttest results present decreasing use of the non–agreement strategy group. As shown in Figure 3, the pretest shows that scale down, qualification, and no acknowledgement were used for 10 percent, 5.56 percent, and 5.56 percent of the responses respectively. Meanwhile, the non–agreement strategies were used in the pretest 19 times, or in 21.12 percent of the responses. In contrast, in the posttest results qualification and disagreement were the only non–agreement group strategies used in the posttest, with a total frequency of 6 times, or in 6.66 percent of the responses. These results show improvements to the participants' skills in responding to compliments in Standard American English.

## Most frequently used strategies

The most used strategies by the participants in both the pretest and the posttest were comment acceptances and comment history. As shown in Figure 3, it was found that even before participating in the CLT activities, the study participants had a degree of awareness of appropriate ways to respond to compliments in Standard American English; the pretest results in Figure 3 show that the participants accepted compliments rather than refused them. Nevertheless, a closer inspection of their mostly used strategies showed that their previous knowledge or competence in responding to compliments was limited, and the CLT lesson helped to improve their previous knowledge about comment acceptances and comment history, while expanding their competence with other kinds of response strategies.

## Comment acceptance

An analysis of comment acceptances indicates two variations in the use of them in the pretest and posttest. The first kind is comment acceptances with short expressions, and the second is comment acceptances with extended expressions.

The length of expression is considered to distinguish between the two kinds of comment acceptance. Compliments accepted by uttering a single expression such as 'Thanks,' 'Thank you,' or 'Thank you so much' is defined as a short expression, which essentially consists of thanking without adding any other message. Conversely, acceptance with or without 'thanks' with an additional expression such as 'Thank you, I'm happy to hear that,' or 'it's nice of you to say so' in the strategies is determined to be an extended kind of acceptance.

The frequency of comment acceptances for both types shows a significant change of use for this strategy. After the lesson, the participants used short expression types considerably less, instead favoring more extended expressions (Table 1).

**Table 1**
**Comparison of short and extended comment acceptances in the pretest and posttest**

| Type of comment acceptances | Pretest | | Pretest | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | (%) | Frequency | (%) |
| Comment acceptances with short expressions | 22 | 41.51 | 4 | 9.30 |
| Comment acceptances with extended expressions | 31 | 58.49 | 39 | 90.70 |
| **Total** | **53** | **100** | **43** | **100** |

From Table 1, comment acceptances were used in the pretest 53 times, including 22 uses of short expressions (41.51%) and 31 with extended expressions (58.49%). By contrast, the posttest results show that comment acceptance was used a total of 43 times. This includes 4 comment acceptances with short expressions (9.30%) and 39 comment acceptances with longer expressions (90.70%).

The results show that, after the lesson the participants used more extended expressions than short expressions. Nonetheless, while reviewing shifts in the way the participants used extended expressions after the lesson, it was found that the students' style of expressions changed between the pretest and posttest. Table 2 presents examples of the participants' extended expressions

**Table 2**
**Examples of extended expressions**

| Extended expressions used in the pretest | Extended expression presented in the lesson | Extended expression used in the posttest |
|---|---|---|
| • I wish to hear this, thank you so much.<br>• Thank you for supporting me.<br>• Thank you for admiring me.<br>• Of course, I hope you enjoy that.<br>• I really appreciate.<br>• Thank you, I will continue attention. | • Thank you, it's nice to hear.<br>• Thank you, that's very kind.<br>• Thank you, I'm happy you think so.<br>• Thank you, I appreciate the compliment.<br>• Thank you, I'm glad you like it. | • Thanks, I'm happy to hear that.<br>• Oh! I'm happy that you think so.<br>• Thanks, it means a lot to me.<br>• That made my day, thanks.<br>• Thanks, I can't believe myself I can do that!<br>• Thanks, and I want to learn more.<br>• Thank you so much, I enjoy to do presentation. |

In the pretest, some participants expressed their acknowledgement of compliments by showing their expectation, such as 'I wish to hear this,' or showing gratitude like 'I really appreciate.' The posttest had extended expressions in the same manner, such as 'I'm happy to hear that,' or 'I'm happy that you think so.' Moreover, the participants used expressions that were not presented in the lesson. Expressions such as 'it means a lot to me,' or 'I can't believe myself I can do that' indicate that the participants understood the purpose of the lesson. The participants used expressions by not merely copying what they had learned from the lesson, but by adapting expressions based on the compliments they were given. It could be said that the participants were not passive learners; they did not simply comply with the responses presented in the lesson, but instead gave further thought about the other potential expressions they could use to appropriately express their ideas.

To conclude the discussion of variation in the use of comment acceptances, the participants preferred to apply short expressions in the pretest instead of extended expressions. However, in the posttest the participants clearly used more extended expressions than short expressions. Furthermore, the participants' use of extended expressions developed from their own understanding that they had derived from the lesson.

## Comment history

Another common strategy was comment history. The frequencies in Figure 1 show that the participants made greater use of comment history after the lesson. In the pretest, the participants used comment history 11 times, while in the posttest they used it 27 times. The results therefore show that the use of comment history more than doubled between the pretest and posttest. The examples in Table 3 indicate that the participants learned more than just new responses strategies from the lesson, but also creatively adapted and applied the strategies in the posttest.

**Table 3**
**Comparison of comment history used in the pretest and the posttest**

| Comment history used in the pretest | Comment history presented in the lesson | Comment history used in the posttest |
|---|---|---|
| • Of course, because I do my best, and before the show I practice every day.<br>• Thank you, I really work hard for that.<br>• I want[ed] it to be amazing! | • Thank you, my win is a result of long hours of practice.<br>• Thank you, it was a birthday present from my sister.<br>• Thank you, I bought it for the trip to Chiang Mai. | • I so thank you because I study very hard to get a good grade.<br>• Thank you, I prepared for many days to get the best presentation.<br>• Thank you, I got the recipe from my mother.<br>• Thank you everyone for attention at my picture, it from my imagine!<br>• Thank you, I have inspiration from my country to do this print.<br>• I try to this menu many times and thank you so much.<br>• Thank you, I find many interesting information to write it down. |

From Table 3, the participants were able to provide more information for comment history in the posttest in comparison to the pretest. In the pretest the participants gave background about what they had done, such mentioning their hard work 'I practice every day,' or their desire to have a successful outcome, such as 'I want[ed] it to be amazing.' During the lesson the participants were presented with examples of comment history, and were encouraged during the practice to try to give information related to the object of the compliments, such as what, when, and how. The participants then creatively used comment history in the posttest by referring to the compliment object. For example, when a participant was given a compliment about a picture that he had drawn he responded by revealing how he obtained the idea for the

picture by saying 'Thank you everyone for attention at my picture, it from my imagine!' [sic] in the posttest, or when a participant was complimented on her writing, her response referred to a writing method, "Thank you, I found many interesting information to write it down." These pretest and posttest examples show the participants' developing compliment response skills as a result of the CLT–based lesson.

To conclude, CLT lesson helped to improve the participants' competence and performance. Use of positive strategies such as comment acceptances, comment history, and reassignment strategies increased between the pretest and posttest. Meanwhile, negative strategies such as scale down, qualification, or no acknowledgement strategies were used less in the posttest. Moreover, the details of the participants' performance in the posttest shows that they expressed their compliment acceptances more appropriately and used creative responses, as shown in the comment history.

## 2. Quantitative results

There are two parts of the qualitative results. The first part deals with the participant's opinions on the role of mechanical practice in the CLT–based lesson and the second part presents their opinions on the role of meaningful and communicative practices. The last part shows their opinions on the usefulness of peer teaching.

**Participant opinions on the role of mechanical practice in the CLT-based lesson**

The participants' opinions show that they considered the mechanical practice to be an indispensable component of the CLT–based lesson for two reasons. First, it helped them learn different kinds of responses, and second it helped them learn to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate strategies.

For the first finding, the participants believed that using mechanical practice as the first step in CLT–based lesson helped them understand appropriate compliment responses in Standard American English as shown in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 1: This can help us to know thing that we've never knew before about the responding compliments in English. [In English, sic]

Excerpt 2: It's good. I got a lot of knowledge from this. Know how to say responding that I never know before. [In English, sic]

The participant in Excerpt 1 implied that the mechanical practice helped them to acquire new knowledge about compliment responses. Meanwhile, the participant in Excerpt 2 supported the notion that they acquired a great deal of knowledge about responding to compliments during the mechanical activities. Moreover, the participant in Excerpt 2 also revealed their positive attitude towards the activity by commenting 'It's good.'

Besides knowing about the different compliment responses to use in Standard American English, the participants realized the reasons why some types of compliments are considered

inappropriate, and what can be done to make their compliment responses more appropriate.

Excerpt 3: I have known about the good compliment responses which are different from Thai. In Thai we refuse compliment because we need to keep our manner, but in foreign country it is considered impolite. [In Thai]

Excerpt 4: It's not only saying 'thank you very much', we can extend our sentence to make the intent of conversation more clear. [In Thai]

Excerpt 3 shows that the participant understood the use of appropriate compliment responses for Thai and non–Thai speakers. As stated in the comment, the participant compared good responses on the basis of manners. The participant in Excerpt 3 realized that an acceptable manner in one situation may be unacceptable in another. Likewise, the participant in Excerpt 4 reflected on his own performance, stating that he preferred to use an extended expression rather than only utter a short expression to make the message clearer. According to the participants, adding more words in the responses helps avoid misunderstanding their intention. The explicit mechanical lesson made them aware of how to use compliment responses in a new cultural, linguistic context.

These examples concur with posttest results in finding increased use of positive strategies. When participants realized appropriate and inappropriate responses in Standard American English they changed their strategies to use more suitable responses.

**Participant opinions on the role of meaningful and communicative practices**

The participants' comments from the previous section presented the role of mechanical practice in the development of the participants' communicative competence and compliment response performance. This section shows their opinions about the roles of meaningful and communicative practice. Four main themes were found from the participants' opinions, related to their confidence, practice opportunities, authentic situations, and multiple skills. Excerpts of their opinions are shown and discussed below.

Excerpt 5: I have a chance to practice and use knowledge about compliment responses in a set up situation. I applied my knowledge for real use [in meaningful and communicative practices] and did not feel shy when making interaction. [In Thai]

Excerpt 6: [During meaningful and communicative practices] I think about what kind of responses I should use. It helps me not to be nervous. I practice thinking and use what I have known. It's useful to improve my skill. [In Thai]

Excerpt 7: I have prepared well through my thinking process. I have confidence to speak and there was no struggle. [In Thai]

Excerpt 8: Work with group. It's look real. It's made me feel that I have confident and it another way for up skill how to answer. [In English, sic]

Excerpt 9: We hadn't prepared anything [before the meaningful and communicative practices] and I felt so excited. The situation made us

react immediately. It helped me practice fast thinking. [In Thai]

Excerpt 10: I really appreciated this [communicative] part. It made me apply many skills especially responding to compliments and resolving problems. I was confident to speak and made interaction. This part of the CLT practices can be used in our daily life for real. [In Thai]

Excerpt 11: This lesson improves my English so much. It shows the real situation. [In English, sic]

From the above examples, the first point that requires emphasis is that the meaningful and communicative activities helped to increase the participants' confidence during the CLT interactive tasks. Meaningful and communicative practice helped the participants increase their confidence in two ways, including preparing their ideas by practicing and performing those ideas with a person or group of people. The participant in Excerpt 5 said 'I applied my knowledge for real use [in meaningful and communicative practices] and did not feel shy when making interaction.' During the activities this participant was not reserved while doing the activities. The participants in Excerpts 7 and 8 also agreed in the same way that they now had the confidence to speak the language. The participant in Excerpt 7 noted that there was no struggle for her because she was well-prepared throughout the learning process, while the participant in Excerpt 8 added that her confidence was a benefit for her when she joined the group practice.

Secondly, the meaningful and communicative activities gave participants the opportunity to completely engage in language practice. For example, the participant in Excerpt 6 expressed that their skill improved thanks to the opportunity to think and practice, with the participant stating 'I practice thinking and use what I have known.' This participant showed that such practice was useful for enhancing the target skill. The benefit of having the chance to practice was confirmed by the participant in Excerpt 5 who emphasized the benefit of the opportunity to practice and use the knowledge in the meaningful and communicative activities. Moreover, the participant in Excerpt 10 revealed that 'This part of the CLT practices can be used in our daily life for real,' implying that the participant supported the notion that meaningful and communicative practices were useful because they believe that the skills honed in the practices are transferable to real use.

Thirdly, communicative practice created a strengthened positive attitude towards using English for the participants. The communicative activity was designed to be a situational–based imitation of a potential real–life situation. In the activity, the participants held conversations without the use of a prepared script. They could not predict what other participants would say, as mentioned by the participant in Excerpt 9 'We hadn't prepared anything and I felt so excited. The situation made us react immediately.' The activity allowed them to be ready at all times so that they would be able to promptly react. The participant in Excerpt 11 also thought that this situational based task in the communicative activity helped to enhance their English skills, stating "This lesson improve my English so much. It shows the real situation," From these excerpts, a situational–based communicative practice was understood as a model of a real situation, with the participants feeling as if they were a central component of it. By this characteristic of the practice, the participant in Excerpt 10 mentioned 'I really appreciated this

[communicative] part,' showing that their positive attitude encouraged them to speak English.

Lastly, multiple skills were enhanced during the meaningful and communicative practices. The participant in Excerpt 10 revealed that the activities helped to enhance many skills, namely in responding to compliments, solving problems in the tasks, and their thinking skills. According to the participant, the activities were appreciated since 'It made me apply many skills, especially responding to compliments and resolving problems.' This statement is similar to opinions expressed by participants in Excerpts 6 and 9, which stated that 'It's useful to improve my skill,' and 'It helped practicing on fast thinking, respectively.' The activities promoted the participants' thinking skills, which helped them immediately react during the conversations. The communicative activity therefore helped to enhance various skills in many areas of language use, not only those related to those targeted by the lesson.

The excerpts in this section confirm that meaningful and communicative activities provided opportunities for the participants to practice using the target language. The activities helped to reduce their anxiety and increase their confidence to take part in the conversation. Situational–based tasks encourage participants to maintain their attention and continually make conversations to complete the tasks. In addition, the activities stimulated the integration of multiple skills for the participants, which is a necessary process for them to fulfill the purpose of the lesson.

**Participant opinions on the usefulness of peer teaching**

Peer teaching played a vital role during CLT pair-work activities. Two students with different English abilities were assigned to work on the same task, such as planning or acting in a role play. It was observed that the lower-skilled student did not feel shy asking for advice from the more able student, and often, the more proficient student would try to provide encouragement to the less proficient student who struggled to express himself or herself in English. The peer teaching was carried out in a very friendly manner since all students were told at the outset that they were all responsible for their own as well as their partner's learning progress and were expected to create constructive learning atmospheres.

It was found from the comments from the participants that the use of peer teaching in CLT class provided two benefits, including mental support and learning support. All the participants agreed that peer teaching was helpful, with no participants expressing any negative attitudes about it. Sample excerpts from the questionnaire are discussed as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Excerpt 12: | I practice together with friend. I don't feel nervous or shy. [In Thai] |
| Excerpt 13: | Partner will help teach me what I don't know. We share our different experiences to each other. [In English, sic] |
| Excerpt 14: | I know much more about positive responding and negative responding that very helpful and useful. Partner makes me feel relax. [In English, sic] |
| Excerpt 15: | We can help together, find information. We can consult and share idea. [In English, sic] |

The above excerpts firstly reveal the usefulness of peer teaching by providing mental support. Besides the actual language practices discussed previously that helped to reduce the participants shyness and increased their confidence, pair work further helped them feel more relaxed and reduced their stress while doing the activities, as mentioned in Excerpts 12 and 14, "I don't feel nervous or shy," and "Partner makes me feel relax"[sic].

Next, peer teaching brought improved learning effectiveness. In this study, participants expressed similar opinions about the important role of interaction with their partners on providing information or sharing their experiences. The partner interactions 'help teach' (Excerpt 13), and find information while also acting as a consultant (Excerpt 15). That is to say, peer teaching created a cooperative learning environment which is beneficial for learning.

Altogether, the participants agreed that the lesson helped to improve their English skills, especially in compliment responses. The activities increased their confidence and helped to further develop their performance. The CLT–based activities also offered new experiences to the participants by encouraging them to interact with each other while making use of multiple skills. Finally, peer teaching was found to help support the participants' feelings that they could learn autonomously, which contributed to their learning success. This final point will be discussed in the following chapter as it may contribute to a means of improving CLT in Thailand.

To conclude, the findings show that the CLT–based lesson helped the participants improve their competence and performance. The participants learned to understand how to appropriately respond to compliments in Standard American English. Use of positive strategies increased at the expense of negative strategies during their performance. It was found that mechanical practice helped the participants to acknowledge practicable strategies in Standard American English. Meaningful and communicative practices developed the participants' confidence to use language, gave practice opportunities through a situational task, and enhanced various skills of the participants. It is also evident that peer teaching contributes to the effectiveness of CLT lessons by providing learning and peer support for the participants.

## DISCUSSION

This section discusses issues related the effectiveness of the CLT lesson in improving students' competence and performance in responding to compliments. Furthermore, the discussion will focus on issues related to the design of CLT activities used in the study including how peer teaching helped CLT achieve its goals in the present study.

### Effectiveness of CLT in improving the target skill

CLT activities helped the participants improve their compliment response skills in terms of competence and performance. Before discussing this point, there is an additional issue about the participants' existing knowledge which must be clarified to aid with discussing the effectiveness of CLT in the present study.

As shown in the pretest results, most of the participants were aware that they should accept the compliments. However, they had limited strategies to make the responses more effective. During the pretest it was found that the participants used some positive responses more than negative responses, even before learning about them during the lesson. These positive responses are common kinds of responses in Standard American English. The results of the present study is different the findings of previous studies. According to Gajaseni (1994) and Cedar (2006), when compliments were given, Thai students had a tendency to use negative responses more than positive responses. The different result found in the pretest of the present study suggests that the participants had awareness, to a certain extent, of cultural differences in responding to compliments. This awareness of the differences can be explained in two ways.

To begin with, the participants were explicitly told before the pretest that the study concerned compliment responses in Standard American English. This may have aroused their awareness about selecting appropriate responses before the pretest as they were aware of their existing competence and what the research was interested in. In contrast, the research objectives in previous studies may not have been explicitly presented to their participants.

Apart from knowing what they would learn from the lesson, which could influence how they responded in the pretest, it must be noted that the participants were first year English major students in their second semester at the time of the study. This makes them different from the non–English major students in Gajaseni's study (1994) and the international students studying on an ESL program at Boston University in Cedar's study (2006). This contextual difference might explain the fact that the participants in the present study were able to respond more appropriately, even before taking the lesson.

Nevertheless, despite the students' previous knowledge and awareness of the study's focus, their competence and performance remarkably improved after the lesson. To account for this, the effectiveness of CLT will be discussed in terms of both competence and performance (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003; Richard, 2006). The participants' previous knowledge or competence was enhanced by the lesson. In this study, the CLT–based lesson introduced the participants to a variety of strategies to ensure that they achieved the linguistic input or the target form from the carefully designed mechanical CLT activities. Such mechanical activities are necessary for the students to acquire before engaging in more challenging social activities (Harmer, 1982; Richards & Rodgers 1986; Savignon, 1991; Richards, 2006). Without the mechanical activities the CLT learning may not be as successful, as in studies by Bock (2000) and Hiep (2007), which found that it was impossible to use CLT in their classrooms, though they provided no evidence that they made use of mechanical practice.

The participants' performance, which is the main focus of CLT, also improved (Savignon, 1987; Richards, 2006). This was the result of the meaningful and social activities which followed the mechanical practice. During these activities, in a given situation the participants had to immediately make a decision to use an appropriate strategy. As a result, the activities allowed the participants to apply their knowledge or linguistic competence by responding in real time during situational practices. This impromptu use of the target form helped to improve their performance in responding to compliments. According to Littlewood (1981), realizing that

linguistic knowledge of the target language is required in addition to opportunities to use the function in communicative and social situations are essential to acquire the target language. To conclude, the participants' competence and performance improved as a result of the effective CLT activities.

**Effectiveness of CLT in providing the participants with opportunities to use multiple skills**

The second effectiveness point is that the participants had the opportunity to develop other English skills while engaging in the CLT activities. Theoretically, learning a language through CLT is a way to ensure that learners acquire a range of skills that are required for effective communication (Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Researchers such as Maley (1986) and Savignon (1991) propose that through CLT, students can integrate their old and new knowledge in L2 to use English in different situational tasks of prepared and impromptu practices to realize their communicative goals.

The effectiveness of CLT is found in the results of the present study. As found in the questionnaire data, the participants showed that the CLT activities allowed them to apply their existing and new knowledge and skills in English during the communicative activities. The lesson in this study focused on compliment responses. In real life communication, compliment response strategies are only a part of the many functions of language use that are required to fulfill a certain communicative event. Therefore, the CLT lesson ensures that the participants had opportunities to practice other functions of L2, namely greetings, small talk, asking for suggestions, and bidding farewell, despite these not being explicitly taught during the lesson. This opportunity to use other English skills supports the proposed advantage of CLT in that it provides chances for learners to make use of various skills in L2 to complete tasks designed to mimic real life situations (Littlewood, 1981; Maley, 1986). CLT therefore does not merely help develop the target function of L2, but also helps learners practice using the other English skills that exist in their repertoire.

**Potential design of CLT-based activities**

Previous studies suggest that there are difficulties in implementing CLT concepts in Asian contexts (Bock, 2000; Hiep, 2007). However the present study shows a different result. The success of using CLT in the classroom in this study is the result of carefully designing the activities according to three main considerations. First, a step–by–step design helped to strengthen L2 learning and acquisition. Second, all the tasks were designed based on contexts familiar to the participant, and finally CLT is adaptable for different levels of language ability and is flexible with no fixed rules meaning that it is not out of the reach of other teachers to try using.

To begin, an appropriate sequence of practices facilitates the implementation of CLT. In CLT, students should be provided essential knowledge or small practices before expecting them to perform more complex tasks (Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Jacobs and Farrell, 2003; Richard, 2006). Every activity in this study was designed to follow sequential steps. First, the whole lesson consisted of three practices; mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practices. Each practice helped to support the following practice, as previously discussed.

Moreover, this idea was used to design of all the role plays, in which the first step of the role play allowed the participants to read and practice with the script that had been prepared by the teacher. Second, the participants wrote their own scripts with a peer and then learned the script for the role play. Finally, the participants would then perform an immediate and unscripted conversation role play, thereby fulfilling the ultimate goal of CLT. If the teacher suddenly asked the participants to do the final role play without the previous two steps, the participants may have become confused and subsequently failed the task, not because they are unable to use English, but because they feel unsure about what to do. Designing CLT activities following sequential steps gives the participants essential knowledge and opportunities to practice in a moderate context before engaging in more challenging communicative or social activities (Littlewood, 1981; Richard, 2006). In brief, CLT activities require a step–by–step design to help learners gradually develop their competence which can help their performance, and vice versa.

Another point related to the success of CLT in this study is the consideration taken to ensure the learners were given appropriate tasks. This present study's successful use of CLT relied on the sequence of the activities and task familiarity. Their engagement with the pre–task activities meant that the participants were familiar with the situational tasks. Moreover, familiarity with the topic helped them draw on their own background knowledge and previous experience to use in the task, such as an activity set at a party and conversation in their daily lives. Hiep (2007) claimed that CLT was ineffective, although it is unclear what role play situation was selected by the teachers during the study. Hiep (2007) found that a teacher used a newspaper and tried asking the students to conduct a prompt discussion in English about the newspaper content. The teacher claimed that the use of the CLT–based task was not successful. In this instance, the student's unfamiliarity with the topic may account for this failed attempt to use CLT. Other studies also show that teachers report difficulty in using CLT–based tasks in the classroom due to the classroom's context. According to Bock (2000) and Hiep (2007), students lacked the motivation to work cooperatively using English because the classroom conditions did not support CLT learning. For example, ill–equipped classrooms without a writing board or projector, or noisy classrooms had negative effects on doing CLT activities. In contrast, this study found that additional tools were not required to do the CLT activities, with the teachers only requiring some paper, and other inexpensive materials. A teacher can use creative means and good preparation to ensure that each student has the opportunity to practice using English in the classroom regardless of their having access to specific materials.

In addition, CLT concepts should be adaptable and flexible to use with mixed ability learners (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983). For example, drilling may be used or use of the learner's native language may be acceptable for practical purposes. The lesson in this study did not begin with having the participants undertake a role play or a group discussion in English. Instead, the teacher first explained the details of the lesson before proceeding to make small discussions, during which the participants were allowed to use Thai. L1 use during early activities in the classroom is acceptable since it helps to pave the way for a more effective implementation of the main activities. From the teacher's observation in this study, the participants discussed or spoke in Thai to understand the concept of the activities. Later during the role play, none of the participants use Thai to interact with their peers. Although some participants had limited English abilities, they tried using only English during the role play. Thus, the use of Thai to explain the

activities helped the participants to clearly understand the tasks. They subsequently derived benefit from their comprehension so that they could effectively perform during the role play.

The design of CLT lessons should therefore consider using sequential activities, the students' familiarity with the topics, and use a flexible approach to use CLT concepts. Sequential activities help to gradually develop the students' understanding of the lesson content. Meanwhile, an effective CLT lesson design also motivates the learners to engage in the activities. The participants' learning motivation will be discussed in the following section.

**Peer teaching and the success of CLT for Thai students**

Peer teaching is a necessary part of the success of CLT in a Thai context. The CLT classroom in this study required the students to work with partners, although this arrangement requires careful thought, and must not merely match the students up who want to work together. Arta (2012) states that to make the task goal achievable, students with high and low abilities should be matched together. The present study found that the learning was generally successful with a mixed ability group. Good students helped to reduce their peer's anxiety during the lesson, since the lower ability partner felt comfortable to ask their partner questions instead of feeling uncomfortable while asking the teacher.

The participants stated that they did not feel nervous while working with their partners. Rather, they felt relaxed doing the tasks together, with the teacher available if they required additional assistance (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Pair group work helped to bring about a positive atmosphere, and it was noticeable that the participants appeared to enjoy doing the tasks and tried to create conversations in a fun or humorous way. This atmosphere of a CLT classroom is expected to reduce anxiety (Arta, 2012). According to Basilio and Wongrag (2017), anxiety is the main problem for Thai students, as it obstructs their learning, especially in regards to speaking. This study shows that the use of peer teaching in CLT helps reduce anxiety in the classroom. From this, it can be concluded that peer teaching is necessary for successful implementation of CLT in contexts similar to the present study.

To conclude, the present study shows that the CLT activities are effective at enhancing the participants' compliment responses in Standard American English, which was the target function of English in the study. In addition, the lesson helped the participants to call forth and apply their existing English skills to complete the communicative tasks. Finally, motivation and peer teaching are important supporting elements that helped the participants to successfully complete the learning.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the CLT-based lesson helped to improve the participants' performance of appropriately responding to compliments in Standard American. This is supported by the posttest results which show that the students used fewer negative responses than positive responses, which is expected in Standard American English. The findings were discussed in

terms of CLT activity design, multiple skill development, learner motivation and confidence, and peer teaching.

The present study indicates that the CLT-based lesson is effective at enhancing the participants' target language function. Nonetheless, since the present study was conducted with a small group of participants which aimed to verify the use of sequentially designed tasks only, future research should focus on using all the steps of CLT tasks with bigger class sizes. One problem that Thai learners of English face is that the class sizes are too big, making it difficult for teachers to ensure that all students can effectively engage in CLT activities. However, the present study shows that peer teaching can be used to support CLT practices, while peer teaching also encouraged the participants to take responsibility in their learning roles. Therefore, with carefully designed activities CLT may be beneficial for other Thai EFL classroom contexts with large numbers of mixed ability students.

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