Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the compliments and responses to compliments among young Chinese Singaporeans. Since compliments are mirrors to the culture, the language reflected in compliments and responses will reveal the cultural values young Singaporeans.

The predominance of appearance and ability as the main compliment topics shows that youths place great emphasis on these aspects in life. The language used in complimenting comprises of positive politeness devices, depicting the unique style of youth speech. Joking compliments and responses depict the humorous character of youth culture most vividly.

A theoretical analysis of compliment responses reflects the multifaceted nature of youth culture. Besides having characteristics unique to youths, key elements from Chinese and Western politeness are also present. Despite Singapore being an Asian society, Chinese youths are influenced by Western values as well when responding to compliments.

When youths are complimented on in Mandarin and English by their elders and peers, the language medium and generation of the complimenter are factors affecting the response given. The usage of English in complimenting increases the tendency of acceptance as a response, reflecting the predominance of Western influence in this case.

The findings show that Singapore youths straddle between the two poles of Chinese and Western ways of complimenting and responding, revealing a bicultural society. This is a strong contrast to China, clearly dominated by a single culture as shown by Chen Rong’s (1993) study. A marked difference in the culture of two Asian societies is hence clearly shown.