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**Compliments and their responses**

# Роботу виконано на кафедрі англійської філології

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**Компліменті та відповіді на них.** Дана стаття присвячена дослідженню компліментів у повсякденному спілкуванні. Стаття вміщує аналіз відповідей на комплімент, які надає реципієнт.

**Ключові слова**: конверсаційний анліз, комплімент, відповідь, суміжна пара

**Недиленько Н.В. Коплименты и ответы на них**. Данная статья посвящена исследованию комплиментов у каждодневном общении. Статья включает анализ ответов на комплименты, которые дает реципиент.

**Ключевые слова**: конверсационный анализ, коплимент, ответ, смежные пары

**Nedilen’ko N.V. Compliments and their responses**. This article reports on an investigation of the use of compliments in ordinary conversation. The study includes responses given by recipients to the compliments.

**Key words:** conversation analysis, compliment, response, adjacency pair.

Complimenting is a tool for establishing friendship that creates ties of solidarity. It also is an important social strategy in that it functions as an opener for a conversation and allows meaningful social interaction to follow. Neglecting to give compliments may even be understood as a sign of disapproval, and the inappropriate use of compliments may cause embarrassment and even offense.

Complimenting is a very interesting phenomenon. As an act of expressing one’s appreciation, a compliment reveals what is treasured in the speaker’s culture. A number of studies of compliments have been done. Many of these studies use data from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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different varieties of English: British English, American English, New Zealand English, Hawaii Creole English [2; 3; 6].

Compliments constitute one type of everyday conversational device that occur in interpersonal relationships. Holmes J. defined a compliment as “speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speakers, usually the person addressed, for some “good” (possession , characteristic, skill, etc) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer [3, 485]. Olshtain and Cohen added that “the speech act of complimenting is intrinsically courteous and enables the speaker to make use of available opportunities to express and interest in the hearer”[7, 158]

In speech act theory, an assessment about someone would be judged to be a compliment, given certain pre-existing conditions: “To compliment is to express approval of the hearer for something. Complimenting presupposes that the thing the hearer is complimented for is good, though it need not necessarily be good for him. One might, for example, compliment him on his heroic and self-sacrificing behavior”. [9, 215]. The conditions found in Searle and Vanderveken’s definition are important for distinguishing between compliments and other kinds of related speech acts, e.g. praising, but they frame compliments almost exclusively in terms of an evaluation of the positive value of the “thing” being praised, and the pre-existing relationship between the “thing” and the hearer. The examination of compliments as parts of adjacency pairs, on the other hand, allows for a new way of examining what compliments *do*. As shown by Anita Pomerantz [8], who studied compliments in conversation, compliments do not just “express approval,” they also create a “problem” for hearers, who are faced with a conflict between two general principles of interaction identified by conversation analysts, namely, the preference for agreement and the avoidance of self-praise (on the concept of “preference,”. To accept a compliment means to follow the general preference for agreeing with our interlocutor, but violates the dispreference for praising oneself. To reject a compliment creates the opposite situation, that is, it follows the preference for avoiding self-praise but violates the preference for agreement.

Compliments may play an important role in the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Wolfson and Manes argued, however, that the primary function of compliments is the "establishment or reaffirmation of common ground, mutuality, or ... solidarity" [6, 395]. As such, compliments can work in several different ways within interactions, such as introducing conversations, expressing approval, offering thanks, or greeting others. According to Holmes J., the "most obvious function [compliments] serve is to oil the social wheels ... increasing or consolidating solidarity between people" [3, 462].

The aspect under consideration in this article is how the compliments are accomplished, as not all compliments are formulaic. There exist some indirect and ambiguous praises and compliments which require more interpreting efforts.

Compliments do not occur freely in conversation but are occasioned interactionally. They tend to show up in particular sequential positions showing orientation to the presence of some complimentable objects in the prior turns. Sometimes they are found in positions where their absence could cause interactional problems.

A great number of the compliments, especially those in the first pair part position, do not occur singly. Instead they are embedded in other utterances. E.g. in a questioning turn, a compliment is often precede or followed by a question, or franked by a question or another utterance. In an informing turn, a compliment is usually embedded in utterances. Compliments in the second pair part tend to have a simpler turn design. However, single compliments are not too common.

In some ways a compliment is just a special type of assessment. In particular, it is a positive assessment directed towards an involved party. For example, if I say “*It’s a great book*” to my friend, this is a simple assessment. On the other hand, if I say the same thing to the author of the book he would probably respond to this as a compliment. But compliments are also different from assessments in that while an assessment makes relevant either agreement or disagreement, second pair parts to compliments are more complicated.

The primary interaction goal of giving compliments is to create affiliation, i.e. a feeling of closeness. However, the deeper goal may be much more difficult to determine. Perhaps the giver simply wants to “be friendly”. On the other hand, the giver might want to create affiliation in order to later make some sort of request, in other words, the function of compliments might be to “soften us up”. This is certainly one reason why people often feel uncomfortable when they receive a compliment.

Compliments can be directed towards the following four main topics:

1. Performance: praise of individual abilities or skills

“*You play tennis really well*.”

*“You’re really good at math.”*

2. Appearance: Compliments about physical aspects (e.g. hair, eyes) as well as clothing, jewellery, etc.

“*Your hair looks nice like that.”*

*“Great shirt!”*

3. Personality: praise for specific trait such as wit or courage, or more general remarks about the person as a whole (e.g. “a good” person”)

“*You seem like an honest person to me*.”

“*You gotta great sense of humor*.”

4. Possessions: praise of personal property and belongings (e.g. house, boat), including compliments on children and spouses.

*“That’s a really beautiful watch!”*

*“You have really great kids.”*

Generally speaking we tend to give most of our compliments to people in our same age and status groups. That is, teenagers compliment other teenagers, while older adult mostly compliment older adults. Men seem to give praise equally to both men and women. Women on the other hand tend to lavish more of their compliments on other women than on men. Women are also much more likely to receive compliments on their appearance than are men.

One reason compliments and their replies are interesting is that when someone offers a compliment this sets up a problematic situation for the person receiving the compliment. There is a general preference in conversation towards agreement. Therefore, we might expect people to want to agree with compliments. However there is also a general taboo in conversation against self-praise. We are not supposed to go around telling other people how great we are. But how can we do both these things at the same time? How can we agree and be humble. The many different response types above demonstrate just how clever and creative people can be in managing their social interaction. For example, if you give me a compliment, I can avoid disagreeing and seem humble by giving you a compliment in return.

There are different classifications of responses to compliments. Thus, Chen R. identifies five strategies of compliment responses, including: disagreeing and denigrading, expressing embarrassment, explaining, thanking and denigrading, thanking only [1].

Loh T.W.C. notes seven types of responses: appreciation token, agreement, praise downgrade, referent shift, disagreement, question response, no acknowledgement [5].

Ye L. includes a more detailed subcategorization: acceptance with amendment (downgrade, comment, confirmation, magnification, transfer, return); acceptance (appreciation, agreement, smile, pleasure); non-acceptance (denial, deverge, qualification, idiom, delay, avoidance); combination; non-reponse [10].

In our research responses to compliments are classified into several types, including appreciation, agreement, direct disagreement, downgrading, direct rejection, repair initiator, referent shift, laugh (playful response, outbreath), comment, and no acknowledgement. Let’s analyse some of them.

One of the most common responses to compliment is **appreciation**.

A: *This book is really written very well*

B: *Oh, thank you, thank you.*

In this example the compliment is received by an appreciation token “thank you. Pomerantz A. [8] notes that the acceptance of compliments are “regularly accomplished with appreciations” which regularly “take the form of appreciation token”. The other examples include: thank you, thanks, thank you so much.

The **agreement** has the features of a preferred response. By agreeing to the compliment, we at the same time imply the acceptance of it:

A: *How beautiful!*

B: *Yes.*

or

A: *Hey, you are looking really well today*

B: *Yeah, I am happy to say that that’s correct*

An agreement can be scaled down to mitigate or minimize the force of the compliment:

A: *I like your car. It’s very good.*

B: *Oh. Yeah. Thanks. It’s not bad.*

According to Pomerantz rejection to compliments can be performed differently and one of the ways are **disagreement** and **downgrading** - decreasing the complimentary force of the evaluative terms in the compliment:

A: *It’s a really nice car.*

B: *Oh no. It looks like that but actually it has a lot of problems.*

or

A: *And so handsome do you find yourself”*

B: *Not handsome actually.*

In the last example the response looks more like an answer to the question than to the compliment.

There are some examples in which a compliment is rejected in a simple and direct fashion:

A: *You’ve given very good solutions to the elderly*

B: *Don’t say that*

In addition to accepting and rejecting, many speakers respond to a compliment by a **repair initiator**:

A: *Your smile is really very cheerful*

B: *Is that true?*

In response the speaker proffers an utterance in the format of a repair initiator. These repair initiator responses appear to express the speaker’s doubt towards the basis of the compliments offered in the prior turns.

Another way to answer the compliment is to pay it back to the speaker:

A: *You’re looking good.*

B: *Thanks. So you are.*

There is another way of saying “*yes*” and “*no*” to a compliment which is by offering a response which shifts the referent of the compliment. Referent here refers to either the person or the quality complimented:

* *I can see that you are performing well in your interviews*
* *I stole it from you.*

Occasionally the speaker deflects a compliment by laughing it off or offering a playful response.

Another way to avoid expressing one’s acceptance or rejection of a compliment is by offering a **comment.** In this case the complimentee impersonalises the complimentary force by giving further information, which may frequently be irrelevant, about the object of the compliment.

While most of the example show clear cut responses, it is common to find compliment responses containing more than one type of response. For example, an appreciation token is sometimes followed by an explanation, or an agreement followed by a referent shift.

There are other interesting ways to respond the compliment in English. For example, the complimentee redirects the praise offered by the complimenter to some third person or to something else:

A: *By the way, you look good today.*

B: *Oh, thanks. It must be the new dress.*

or

A: *Your last article is really very good.*

B: *Oh, no. My supervisor actually helped me a lot.*

The complimentee may respond to the compliment with laughter, fillers and no acknowledgement:

A: *I wanna by an aeroplane one day*

B: *Heh heh*

or

A: *I’ve just read your book. It is interesting*

B: *Uhm*

or

A: *I’ve just read your book. It is interesting*

B: (Silence)

In conclusion, compliments are not a trivial matter. Rather, they are highly organised speech acts. All discussed above response types do not have an equal chance of occurrence. It has been confirmed in many statistical studies of compliment responses that some responses occur more frequently than others. Many of these studies have also offered explanations for the occurrence of a few dominant responses. Considerations include politeness, principle of modesty, cultural specificity.

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