

# Compliments and compliment responses across cultures and gender

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**Master's thesis / Diplomski rad**

**2011**

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*Download date / Datum preuzimanja:* **2024-05-07**



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DIGITALNI AKADEMSKI ARHIVI I REPOZITORIJ

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet

Diplomski studij Engleskoga jezika i književnosti (filološki smjer) i pedagogije

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**Compliments and Compliment Responses across Cultures and  
Gender:  
A Case of a British and American TV Show “The Office”**

Diplomski rad

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Osijek, 2011.

## Summary

Compliments constitute an important aspect of humans' everyday communication. The skill of complimenting is highly indicative of one's pragmatic competence. Compliments perform different functions, from increasing social rapport, establishing friendly relationships, expressing admiration and affection, greeting and introducing to showing speaker's envy, disapproval, sarcasm or an intention to flatter the addressee into one own advantage. Therefore, compliments can also be perceived as positive or negative face threatening acts, depending on which aspect of the interactant's face they might harm. A lot of research has been done in order to investigate functional, semantic, syntactic and lexical properties of compliments, as well as the choice of compliment response strategy. The listed features of compliment use practice vary with the gender and the cultural framework of the interactants. This case study examines how the use of compliments and compliment responses has been presented in British and American mockumentary sitcoms *The Office* and *The Office: An American Workplace*. The corpus was comprised of the first season of each television series and examined in order to extract compliment utterances. These were analysed in term of functional, semantic and syntactic properties, as well as the choice of compliment response strategies. Findings were compared in order to detect cultural and gender-based variations. The representation of differences in compliment use practice in the analysed sitcoms constitutes an important aspect of the protagonists' characterisation and contributes to achieving humorous effect.

Key words: compliments, compliment responses, cultural and gender variation, TV series

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## 1. Introduction

Nearly seven billion of speakers use compliments in their everyday interaction with other people, and even some animal species are claimed to compliment, as well. The range of compliment use is very broad due to multitudinous number of their functions; they are employed when one wants to express admiration, approval, surprise or envy, when one wants to make others feel good about themselves, comfort or encourage them. Also, compliments soften criticism or misdemeanour, establish and preserve friendly conversational atmosphere. What makes them especially interesting among other speech acts is the duality of their nature. In addition to their affirmative force, compliments can also function as face threatening acts, jeopardising the social rapport.

A vast amount of research is conducted on compliments, employing different research methods to address them from various perspectives. Apart from the findings based on naturally occurring data, the use of fictional sources is gaining ground in research studies. It can certainly provide an interesting point of view in regard to the variety of ways in which compliment use is understood and presented to the audience.

### 1.1. Aim of the paper

This paper is written with a twofold aim. Firstly, it is to offer an exhaustive theoretical background on the phenomenon of compliments and their stance within the politeness theory. Different aspects of compliments and compliment responses' properties will be discussed in order to provide a comprehensive perspective of their use in everyday life. Also, the issues of cultural and gender variability will be explicated and exemplified.

Secondly, the case study of compliments and compliment responses in the British and American versions of *The Office* aims at discovering how the compliments and compliment responses are presented in these particular series and determining the nature of possible culture and gender-based differences reflected in these fictional sources. It is important to note that the primary purpose of this study is to investigate the representations of compliment usage in the designated corpus, and that it does not strive to propose the compliment use pattern among the actual speakers in a context comparable to the one in the corpus.

### 1.2. Organisation of the paper

The paper consists of two major parts. The first part provides the reader with the theoretical background of compliments. It opens with basic definitions and categorisations of compliments, discusses their functional and structural properties, as well as common compliment response

strategies. Moreover, variations in complimentary language are presented, with regard to culture and gender.

The second part of the paper is constituted of the case study of compliments in British and American television series *The Office* and *The Office: An American Workplace*. In this part the methodological framework is provided, including information on the aim of the research, the designated corpus and the applied research method. Study findings are systematically presented, analysed and discussed in the final part of the paper.

## 2. Compliments: Theoretical Background

### 2.1. Definitions of compliments

In the Oxford English dictionary a compliment is defined as “a ceremonial act or expression as a tribute of courtesy, ‘usually understood to mean less than it declares; now, esp. a neatly-turned remark addressed to anyone, implying or involving praise; but, also applied to a polite expression of praise or commendation in speaking of a person, or to any acts taken as equivalent thereto (OED, “compliment”, n.).

The act of giving compliments is a very complicated sociolinguistic skill (Holmes, 1995). Compliments convey “explicitly or implicitly, positive appreciation of some thing or action for which the addressee may apparently be credited: appearance, achievements, possessions” (Coates, 1998: 146). This taken into consideration, they might be perceived as an utterly polite and positive speech act since they make the addressees feel comfortable about themselves, their preferences, skills and competences, or their agreeability in general. If recognised as such, compliments also “serve to increase or consolidate the solidarity between speaker and addressee” (Holmes, 1988: 448) and to intensify the sense affection or affiliation within members of a particular group, i.e. increase the group’s cohesion. Additionally, they can be employed to soften what might be a potentially face-threatening act, such as criticising one’s interlocutor (Grossi, 2009).

Petit (2006) distinguishes between compliments addressed to one’s interlocutor, which have explicitly other-directed affective function, and complimentary remarks about absent third parties. Although the latter can also fulfil the role of “group solidarity enhancement mechanism” positively evaluating or appraising the party in question, it has no effect on them since they are not present and direct pragmatic interaction between the interlocutors does not take place.



## 2.2. Compliments in the context of politeness theory

Understanding various perceptions of the notion of politeness is crucial for defining compliments and framing their use. Politeness, its properties and role in communication are differently interpreted by various authors.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is founded on two basic assumptions. The first one is that all interactants have a "face":

the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:

- (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition
- (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61)

The second assumption is that the interactants have the rational abilities to achieve certain goals. Face is culturally and socially dynamic property changeable thorough interaction with others. In order to maintain their face, speakers need to accept its vulnerability and be prepared to cooperate with others.

Everyday communication frequently involves the use of face-threatening acts, "acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65). Face-threatening acts can be both positive and negative, depending on the aspect of one's face they might obstruct. Complimenting can certainly be perceived as a negative face-threatening act. Giving a compliment may be compared to giving a verbal gift (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1987) and, therefore, it might leave the compliment recipient feeling in-debt or even resenting. Of course, the compliment giver's negative face too can be threatened since complementing might leave an impression that he or she longs for the addressee's possessions, envies his or her abilities, skills, etc. Naturally, one's positive face can be threatened by compliments, too. The compliment recipient must make an immediate choice on the compliment response strategy that would avoid self-praise or disagreement and keep his communication patterns in the domain of socially desirable behaviour.

Leech (1983, in Shezi, 2005) classified politeness according to the inherent features of communication acts through which it is being realised. He lists four different functions: the convivial, the collaborative, the competing and the conflicting one. The convivial function of politeness manifests in cases when the illocutionary and the social communication aim coincide, as in when interactants are greeting, congratulating, offering, inviting, etc. The collaborative

function refers to contexts in which the illocutionary and the social aim are independent of one another. It is manifested when speakers declare, assert, report, announce, etc. The competitive function of politeness is realised in situations where the illocutionary goal competes with the social goal and speakers, order, ask, demand, beg, etc. The conflicting function entails a conflict between the illocutionary and the social goal and occurs when speakers threaten, accuse and, in general, express negative feelings and reactions. Compliments, of course, pertain to the convivial politeness function.

### 2.3. Functional properties of compliments

Compliments are certainly among the most multifunctional speech acts in human communication. Complexity of their function epitomises and reflects the complexity of communication pattern inherent in language. Of course, some of these functions are more prominent than others.

Primarily, they are devices of achieving affective and social aims, rather than informative or referential (Tsai and Wang, 2003). Interactants use them to construct, reconstruct and preserve their social relationships, to express solidarity and concern, alleviate unpleasant social circumstances, bridge social gaps, etc. However, some compliments are uttered with strongly accentuated referential notions. To exemplify, some compliments are given to express speakers praise and admiration for the assessable entity related to the addressee, and not in order to foster solidarity. These occurrences serve to highlight the importance of social context and relationship between the interactants in the analysis of compliments and in the interpretation of their function.

However, compliments can also be employed to express rather negative notions, such as disapproval, sarcasm, irony, envy, etc. Speakers might utter them to embarrass, offend, annoy or manipulate the addressees. In cases like these, compliments are far from establishing and retaining positive social environment; on the contrary, they are then perceived as face-threatening and potentially socially dangerous speech acts.

Compliments can be given in the relation to the topic that is being discussed in the conversation but their content can also be completely unrelated to the previous discussed issues (Manes and Wolfson, 1980, in Shezi, 2005). Topically unrelated compliments are frequent in initial phases of interaction, such as greetings or introductions. Compliments are very conveniently used in conversations between interactants that meet for the first time as they allow them to unobtrusively learn about each other, over neutral topics. Also, compliment responses might offer grounds for further interaction. Furthermore, compliments are oftentimes related to

the novelties in one's environment, especially new possessions or appearances. If compliments are not paid on such occasions, it even might be interpreted as a lack of appreciation for the other interactant or an indication of jealousy (Shezi, 2005). In addition to this, compliments are, almost by default, uttered when one reunites with his or her friends or colleagues after a longer period of time. Giving compliments strengthens interpersonal connections and creates a positive social environment.

Stengel (2000, in Shezi 2005) did an interesting socio-historical analysis of complimenting and praise. He notes that excessive complimenting has rather negative connotations, especially in societies based on hierarchically organised structures. In periods like the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and even in the biblical account of the prelapsarian time, flattery was perceived as undesirable and dangerous. Further throughout the history, people started employing compliments and praise as means of social advancement. Interestingly, he observes that even animals, through caresses and tactile stimuli, non-verbally "compliment" each other to gain advantage.

### 2.3.1. Jucker's functional categorisation of compliments

In his paper *Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory – The case of compliments* Jucker (2009) proposes a typology of compliments that distinguishes the following types: personal compliments, ceremonious compliments, season compliments and free gift compliments.

#### *Personal compliments*

This group of compliments is focused on "the attribution of credit to somebody for some 'good'" (Jucker, 2009: 1612). In majority of cases one compliments his interlocutor's appearance, various characteristics, skills, accomplishments, possessions, and so on. What is of great importance for qualifying personal compliments as such is the social and interactional connection between the interlocutors.

Personal compliments, just like the speech acts, can be realised in different ways: explicitly, implicitly or indirectly. Understandably, the majority of research done in this area focuses on the compliments paid explicitly to the interlocutors. These compliments are relatively easy to identify, classify and analyse within a larger corpora of data, having in mind that their functional, semantic and syntactic features are rather uniform and stereotypical. As far as implicit compliments are concerned, they usually include utterances in which the speakers do not overtly express the compliments but, rather, enable the speakers to infer the complimenting act

form the utterances they produce. Another type of personal compliments are indirect compliments. These are found in cases when the speaker does not pay the compliment him or herself but quotes the primary source who made a complimentary utterance referring to the addressee. The primary source of these indirect compliments may or may not be present when the communication sequence takes place.

She was wearing tight khakis and a cut-sleeved blue top, which was closer, in Charlie's mind, to appropriate fantasy attire.

- (1) "You look nice," he told her. (COCA, Bk: Superpower, 2008)
- (2) Before you call me all the names you can think of, and before you demand to know what I think I'm doing, I want to say how lovely you look; your dress is exquisite, but no more than you are. (BNC H8J 2946)
- (3) "You did a good job here", Maggie. (BNC BP7 1752)

### *Ceremonious compliments*

Compliment is in the Oxford English Dictionary described as "a ceremonial act or expression as a tribute of courtesy, 'usually understood to mean less than it declares'". In historical data a lot of evidence can be found to confirm the ceremonial nature of compliments, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Beetz (1999) analysed, among others, these utterances in the Old German Empire:

The term compliment as used in the Old German Empire indicates its French origin in its spelling, pronunciation and above all in its meaning. It does not only signify a compliments as we understand the word today, but is a far more comprehensive term embracing oral, written and even non-verbal interaction rituals for everyday and ceremonious communication situations. (142)

In his research, he discovered that compliments used to also refer to greetings and farewells, requests and thanks, congratulations and condolence, al forms of initiating and maintaining contact such as introducing oneself and others, recommendations, regards, announcements, invitations, apologies, good wishes, presentations, promises, etc. All these ceremonial acts were (and still could be) accompanied by some form of complimenting.

- (4) If he were alive to read it, the great British political economist Adam Smith would instantly send his compliments to Chalmers Johnson for his detailed

indictment of how U.S. businesses are profiting from Bush's war in Iraq. (COCA, Harpers Magazine, 2004)

(5)My compliments to Sir John but tell him Master Daunbey would appreciate his presence here in the courtyard. (BNC HH5 261)

(6)Give him my compliments and tell him there's at least one battalion of French skirmishers coming his way. (BNC CMP 1490)

Some of these do not require exact wording, but a mere facial expression and/or mimics. Ceremonious compliments can occur on an interpersonal level, but there is always a contextual element, usually connected with the publicity of the communication situation that stipulates it as ceremonious.

#### *Season compliments*

Jucker (2009) defines these as compliments which entail good wishes and usually appear in the season, e.g. in the Christmas season. They can often be found in letters, cards, emails and other forms of written communication.

(7)Good night, miss, and I wish you the compliments of the season, I'm sure!  
(BNC BMU 693)

#### *Free gift compliments*

Free gifts compliments actually refer the gifts, rather than actually uttered compliments. These can be addressed in contexts such as eating out or utilising any other kind of service. Also, such compliments are common within various giveaway ceremonies, bestowals, etc.

(8)“Compliments of the chef,” he informed me. (BNC A0F 1503)

(9)There was also a bottle of wine “with compliments of the management”. (BNC EVG 2261)

(10)Monsieur, mademoiselle, with the compliments of the restaurant. (BNC ACE 267)

## 2.4. Structural properties of compliments

### 2.4.1. Making reference to the assessable

One of the crucial elements of performing the speech act of complimenting is referring to the assessable. Golato (2005) uses this term in her book *Compliments and Compliment responses* to designate the object, ability, trait, characteristic, etc. that the speaker is actually complimenting the addressee on. There are various lexical ways in which speakers refer to the assessable. On some occasions this reference is uttered overtly, with full noun phrases or certain forms of pronouns employed, and on some others, more often, it is expressed covertly, without any referring.

Overt reference is encountered with referents that are in focus or accessible to the interlocutors and therefore can be pronominalised or expressed without anaphoric expressions. However, new topics, i.e. new assessable entities, which are less accessible to the interlocutors usually require full noun phrases utilisation. Givón (1983) states that the reference overtness increase is proportionate with the compliment's topic accessibility decrease, from zero anaphora, unstressed/bound pronouns or grammatical agreements, stressed/independent pronouns, right-dislocated definite noun phrases, neutral-ordered definite noun phrases, left-dislocated noun phrases, moved noun phrases ('contrastive topicalisation'), cleft/focus constructions, all the way to referential indefinite noun phrases. Givón's findings have been challenged by Fox (1987, in Golato, 2005), Schegloff (1996, in Golato, 2005) and others since it became apparent from the conversation data that speakers do not always follow these 'topic-distance' determined referring patterns; it often happens that overt reference devices are employed immediately after the assessable has been mentioned and, vice versa, that compliments do not contain any overt referring expressions although their topic has not been mentioned in the conversation prior to the complimenting moment.

Schegloff (1996), on the other hand, proposes conducting conversational analysis from an interactional perspective, based on the study of sequence organisation. In other words, he examines the position of the referring expression within the overall conversation sequence, which is also revealing in terms of interlocutors' orientation towards each other and the conversational topics. When analysing the strategies the interlocutors employ to refer to persons, Schegloff (1996) identifies two critical elements: reference positions and reference forms. Reference position is the term that signifies the actual position or slot of the referring expression within the conversation sequence. When a reference is made for the first time in the sequence, it is a case of "locally initial reference position"; when it is mentioned subsequently in the conversation, it is a case of "locally subsequent position". Reference form is a term used to

denote the linguistic structure and features of the expression the interlocutors employ. One can differentiate between “locally initial forms”, e.g. noun phrases and names utilised to realise the reference, and “locally subsequent forms”, such as pronouns, specifically, personal and demonstrative (Schegloff, 1996). In natural discourse, initial reference forms occur in initial reference positions and subsequent reference form in subsequent positions, but combinations of these are possible as well. Deviations in which elements with initial features pair up with those with subsequent features frequently entail specific interactional purposes; possibly to mark familiarity, indicate the beginning of a new conversation sequence or to redo a previous turn (Schegloff, 1996).

This analysis framework is applicable to the study of compliments, too. Namely, when the interlocutors compliment each other they must refer to a particular entity, i.e. the assessable, directly or indirectly, but a reference must be made in order for a speech act to be realised. The addressee will then be able to recognise the compliment and choose an adequate response strategy. During a conversation sequence, a slot or a position opens at which it is optimal to make a reference to the assessable in an appropriate form. With persons, a locally initial reference forms for the assessable are mostly noun phrases, names (when complimenting a third person who is also present when the conversation takes place), second person pronouns (when complimenting the interlocutor directly). Locally subsequent reference forms include various demonstrative pronouns, personal pronouns (but not the second person pronoun) or even avoidance of an overt reference (in cases when some other element is marked so as to imply the reference, e.g. the predicator).

#### *Locally initial reference forms in locally initial positions*

When a speaker introduces the assessable for the first time in the conversation sequence, it is placed in the locally initial position. As far as the choice of the utterance form is concerned, one usually turns to full unmarked forms, such as full nouns, noun phrases or second person pronouns. These enable the addressee to easily identify the assessable and opt for an adequate response strategy.

#### *Locally subsequent reference forms in locally subsequent positions*

In cases when the assessable is mentioned for the second, third, etc., time, they are placed in locally subsequent positions and subsequent reference forms are employed. Sometimes, these forms are realised as third person personal or demonstrative pronouns or inferred by covert signs, e.g. appreciation sounds combined with adjectives and/or verbs and adverbs (Golato, 2005: 44).

### *Locally initial reference forms in locally subsequent positions*

On some occasions, locally initial reference forms can be found in locally subsequent positions. Golato (2005: 51) claims that the choice between an initial and a subsequent reference form is not stipulated by topic continuity or the ability to access the assessable, but rather by the position of the anaphoric reference device within the sequential organisation of the conversation. When the topic of the compliment has been brought up for the first time, the speaker is definitely likely to utter a full noun phrase, but this can also be the case when the topic has been previously mentioned but in a different conversation sequence. The latter indicates that the interlocutors perceive the previous conversation sequence as finished and/or distinguished from the unfolding one. In addition, it signifies that the speaker was carefully observing the discourse flow and that he/she wants to make this evident to the addressee (Golato, 2005: 66).

### *Locally subsequent reference forms in locally initial positions*

Locally subsequent reference forms can sometimes be found in locally initial positions. Their covert realisation patterns vary from finite verb forms, adjectives, demonstrative and personal pronouns, to appreciatory sounds. Golato (2005) points out that these realisation patterns can be divided into two subtypes, depending on the different interactional implications they have.

Aside their anaphoric reference properties, demonstrative pronouns often appear in locally initial reference positions. By employing this pattern, the speaker is drawing the addressee's attention to the compliment referent that has already been mentioned in previous conversation sequences, or to one that is about to be mentioned. Also, demonstrative pronouns can be combined with non-verbal communication instances, such as, for example, head movements and/or hand gestures.

Another reference form subtype includes realisation patterns such as appreciatory sounds, frequently combined with adjectives, adjectives alone, verbs and adverbs, etc. Utilisation of these covert forms in initial places indicates that the speaker presumes the addressee has an easy access to the assessable and that he or she is willing to cooperate by following Grice's maxim of quantity (Golato, 2004).

#### 2.4.2. Turn-taking in compliment use

The structure of compliment patterns often exhibits *adjacency pairing*, i.e. sequencing "of two utterances that follow one another, or are 'adjacent' and has two parts, a first pair part and a second pair part" (Garratt, 2009:1). Schegloff notes that the terms first and second do not "refer



to the order in which these turns happen to occur; they refer to the design features of these turn types and sequential positions” (Schegloff, 2007: 20, in Garratt, 2009).

In their paper *A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking for Conversation* Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1978) propose a conversational turn-taking system which is based on two main components and an exhaustive set of operating rules. The first component is identified as the *turn-constructive component* and can be a sentence, clause, phrase or a lexeme and must allow for the projection of the following component or, in other words, enable the transfer of the speakership. The second component is called the *turn-allocational component* and may be found in two different types:

- (a) those in which next turn is allocated by current speaker selecting a next speaker;
- (b) those in which a next turn is allocated by self-selection.

The use of compliment patterns presupposes turn taking occurrence in the conversation, since the compliment itself is acting as the turn-constructive component, whereas the response to it is identified as the turn-allocational component. The latter includes a variety of realizations which will be discussed further in the paper.

#### 2.4.3. Syntactic properties of compliments

Studies have shown that majority of compliments are realised in a very predictable, formulaic way. In their research on American compliments, Manes and Wolfson (1981, in Tsai and Wang, 2003: 3) detected three basic syntactic patterns of compliments:

- (i) NP is/looks (really) ADJ  
e.g., “That shirt is so nice”
- (ii) I (really) like/love NP  
e.g., “I love your hair”
- (iii) DET/PRON is (really) (a/an) ADJ NP  
e.g., “This is really a great meal”.

These three patterns comprise about 85% of the entire compliment samples in their study. Also, it was noted that females use the syntactic pattern “I like/love NP” more often than males. In her analysis of New Zealand English compliments, Holmes (1986, in Shezi, 2005: 39) observed the following syntactic patterns:

- (i) NP be (looking) INT ADJ  
e.g., “Your car is really great”/ “You are stunning”

(ii) I (INT) like NP

e.g., “I simply like that coat”

(iii) PRO be (INT) ADJ NP

e.g., “That’s a very nice blouse”

(iv) (INT) ADJ (NP)

e.g., “Really cool shirt”

Ylanne-McEwen (1993, in Shezi, 2005) studied compliments in Finnish. Results showed that speakers of English and Finnish share many formulaic syntactic patterns. In addition to this, Finnish speakers more often employ the pattern starting with the second person reference: YOU verb (INT) ADJ NP; e.g. “You’ve got a lovely yard”.

#### 2.4.4. Lexical properties of compliments

Various compliment studies have shown that speakers do not make use of diverse lexis when complimenting. On the contrary, just like with syntactic patterns, their choices are formulaic. In Manes and Wolfson’s (1981, in Shezi, 2005) two thirds of adjectival compliments were construed with the following five adjectives: “nice”, “good”, “beautiful”, “pretty” and “great”. Verbs assigned with the positive semantic load are “like” and “love”, sometimes accompanied by intensifiers “really”, “very” and “such”. Demonstrative pronouns are the deictic devices most frequently used to make a reference to the assessable.

#### 2.4.5. Semantic properties of compliments

Nearly anything can be assessed in a way to serve as a compliment topic. However, majority of studies show that speaker, despite of the wide range of choices, regularly opt for two main categories. The first one includes the addressee’s appearance and/or possessions and the other one refers to the addressee’s abilities and/or achievements.

Manes and Wolfson (1981, in Tsai and Wang, 2003) discovered that the largest number of compliments from the first category are addressed to assess one’s clothes, hairstyle and accessories. Also, the speakers of American English frequently compliment their interactants on somewhat more personal issues, like weight loss and similar. Compliments on the attractiveness and agreeability of one’s children, spouses, partners, cars, houses or pets are equally welcome, too. The second category compliments often assess a job well done, a successfully, played game, tasty meal, etc. The focus is mostly on the results of the process, and less frequently on the process itself.

#### 2.4.6. Implications of social context on compliment use

The choice of compliment topic is strongly conditioned by the social relationships between the interactants. In the above mentioned study, most compliments regarding appearance and possession were exchanges among colleagues, acquaintances, less close friends, especially of female gender. Male speakers, those of socially higher status in particular, seldom received compliments, almost never those related to their appearance. Females, however, received numerous compliments on account of their appearances, regardless of their social position or the position of compliment giver.

It is important to note that there is a discrepancy between study results regarding the social location of compliments. The vast majority of New Zealand compliments are exchanged among interactants of equal or approximately equal status, with some gender distribution variations (Holmes, 1988, in Tsai and Wang, 2003). Another study (Holmes, 1986) showed that the largest number of compliments was uttered among non-equals, usually directed from senior and/or socially higher-positioned towards younger and/or socially lower-positioned. However, there is a consensus on the suggestion that women hold solidarity in higher esteem than social status and are more open to building rapport.

#### 2.5. Compliment responses

Compliment responses comprise a crucial segment of any complimenting sequence. Being addressed a compliment, recipients come under two pragmatic constraints which are in conflict and cannot be satisfied at the same time. First of all, uttering a compliment may be interpreted as giving an assessment. In that case, the optimum reaction would be for the speaker to agree with the initial assessment (Pomerantz, 1978, in Golato, 2002). Also, giving a compliment could be compared to giving an offer, gift, invitation, praise, etc. (Pomerantz, 1964, in Golato, 2002), and the adequate response to such supportive action would be to accept it. Therefore, the recipient is expected to accept/agree with the compliment.

On the other hand, interlocutors are supposed to avoid any kind of self praising behaviour, and if they do not obey this norm, it is frequently sanctioned by conversation co-participants (Pomerantz, 1978, in Golato 2002). If they happen to accept the compliment or agree with it, under the boundaries of the first constraint, they will indulge to a certain extent into self-praise, and thus inevitably be breaking the other one. Alternatively, if they reject or oppose the compliment, they are in fact rejecting the assessment realised through it, and in that way countering their interlocutors. Balancing between these two opposites is by no means an easy task and it brings about a display of one's pragmatic competence. In order to adequately respond

to a compliment, speakers devise and pursue various pragmatic strategies. In her article *German compliment responses* Golato (2002) differentiates between three major types of compliment response strategies that German speakers employ: acceptances, rejections and solution types, which strive to appease the conflict between the two constraints.

### 2.5.1. Types of compliment response strategies

#### *Acceptations*

Accepting compliments can be done in multiple ways. Although Golato (2002) had none of those in her sample, Pomerantz (1978, in Golato, 2002) lists appreciation tokens as primary way of accepting a compliment. If one perceives a compliment as a verbal gift, he or she is likely to offer an appreciation token in return. The term *appreciation token* refers to short formulaic utterances which expresses speaker's positive assessment of the expression addressed to him. These can be realised on their own (a simple *thank you* would do), or in an affiliation with another assessments.

(11)A: This is beautiful. It really is.

B: Thank you. (Golato, 2002 : 550)

Of course, a compliment can also be accepted without the appreciation token, simply by giving a positive assessment of the compliment occurrence:

(12)A: But it was nice this evening here at your place.

B: That's nice. (Golato, 2002 : 557)

Also, there is a high frequency of compliment responses that consist of positive evaluation of the compliment's assertion, i.e. its confirmation.

(13)A: You have such a nice onion pattern here.

B: Yes. (Golato, 2002 : 557)

Another way German speakers respond to compliments is by giving a second assessment. This is done in two steps. The first includes the addressee's pursuit of another compliment regarding the same assessable. The addressee usually utters a question, or some other expression that prompts the speaker to repeat the compliment of the same, or altered intensity. These instances are called *response pursuit questions* (Golato, 2002) because they are utilised in pursue of agreement, and differ from actual question about the content of the compliment. This exchange is followed by the second step in which the addressee confirms what the speaker has just restated.

(14)A: By the way, the meat is excellent.

B: Super, right?

A: Excellent.

B: Yeah. (Golato, 2002 : 558)

The response pursuit can be interpreted as “fishing for compliments” and often entails engagement into self-praise although, in general, German speakers strive to avoid self-praising utterances (Golato, 2002: 559).

### *Rejections*

A straight-forward compliment rejection is a relatively rare occurrence. When directly rejecting a compliment, German speakers express overt disagreement with the compliment's assertion.

(15)A: Robert is .hhh ((sniff)) uh- I h- how do you say the most even-tempered and you are the most sensitive

B: Oh, no :: come on. (Golato, 2002 : 560)

### *Solution types*

The most frequent strategy of responding to compliments is the utilisation of so called *solution types of answers*. These allow the addressee to balance between a sharp disagreement and heaped self-praise. The strategies are various and allow the speaker to choose an optimal one for a specific communication context. Many of them decide to follow up a compliment with a question. Unlike the response pursuit questions, these ones have a neutral stance and realise an inquiry about the actual content of the compliment. In the vast majority of cases, the compliment giver responds with a confirmative utterance.

(16)A: Mmm... tasty.

B: Yeah?

A: Uh uhm. (Golato, 2002 : 560)

Evaluation shift can often be found in compliment responses. It implies the addressee downgrading the compliment's assertion or qualifying it and, in that way, reducing its intensity. In doing so, he or she nominally expresses agreement with the speaker's assertion but, simultaneously deflects the praising from oneself.

(17)A: You are a good dentist.

B: Yeah, yeah.

A: It was always fun when you treated me.

B: Yes but there's still a long way to go. (Golato, 2002 : 561)

In addition to evaluation shift, the addressee can also practice a shift in reference when responding to a compliment. This means that the commendation for the assessable is diverted from the addressee to another entity.

(18)A: Yummy.

B: She bought the meat, I only barbecued it. (Golato, 2002 : 561)

Another way of realising this type of shift is to return a compliment directly to the compliment giver and, in that way, veer the attention from oneself.

(19)A: Tastes yummy.

B: It's from the cookbook that you once gave me for Christmas. (Golato, 2002: 556)

In cases when the addressee wants to keep a neutral stance, he or she can respond to a compliment by giving a comment history. Comment history entails providing a short account of the assessable. Again, in this way the focus is adeptly diverted from the addressee, without disagreeing with the speaker's assertion.

(20)A: Hey, that sounds good, is really tasty.

B. Yeah, and then, uhm, I like this time I mixed like miracle whip and mayonnaise. (Golato, 2002 : 561)

Compliments can also, depending on the addressee's pragmatic competence, be interpreted as another type of speech act, possibly the one that does not demand mutually conflicting reactions. To exemplify, a compliment might be interpreted as a request, or a plea, and answered respectively.

(21)A: Yummy.

B: There is more. You are welcome to have another piece. (Golato, 2002 : 562)

Finally, compliments can be completely ignored by the addressee, meaning that he or she will not provide any verbal or non-verbal feedback as a reaction to the compliment occurrence.

### 2.5.2. Choice of compliment responses

In her study Golato (2005) also tried to systematise the data on compliment responses and the preference readers have regarding them. Although seemingly arbitrary, the choice of compliment response strategy is actually conditioned by a vast number of variables, e.g. function of the compliment, the assessable (the topic), internal and external sociolinguistic factors, etc. Golato (2005: 185) discovered that there are no clear-cut regularities.

However, she noticed that the choice of compliment responses is more arbitrary when they solely perform the function of complimenting. When there are other functions to the compliments, the responses tend to be tailored in correspondence with those functions (Golato, 2005: 191). Compliment giver and compliment receiver collaborate not only vis-à-vis semantic, but also pragmatic content of the complimenting utterance. In this way, they express common background and foster a sense of solidarity.

When it comes to gender distribution of compliment responses, Golato found no relevant differences, i.e. there was no single type of compliment responses that she could associate with the gender of the interlocutors (Golato, 2005: 192). Nonetheless, she notes that it is of salience to pay heed to the demographic features of the research participant when collecting and analysing compliments and compliment responses. As far as compliment topic is concerned, there were also no relevant differences in the choice of the response strategy.

## 3. Compliment Research Methods

The field of speech acts has always attracted a lot of research interest, especially the language of compliments. Just like any pragmatic research, investigation of complimentary language not only allows but demands a variety of approaches, depending on the research questions and topic. Clark and Bangerter (2004) proposed three main orientations in conducting pragmatic research based on data collection methods and the location where it takes place: armchair, laboratory and field method.

### 3.1. The armchair method

One of the initial methods in linguistics research is what Bangerter and Clark (2004) identified as the armchair method. The name indicates that this kind of research can be conducted from one's home, that is, armchair. This method is based on the researcher's intuition and entails somewhat philosophical investigation. The very beginnings of pragmatic studies in the field of speech acts were initiated through philosophy; it preceded all the other research approaches. British philosopher John Langshaw Austin developed his work as a reaction to the positivistic

philosophy (Jucker, 2009: 1615). His successors, John Searle most prominent among them, followed suit in reconstructing and upgrading his theoretical framework.

When employing the armchair method, the researcher imagines a broad range of speakers' utterances and possible communication situations which enable him to draw conclusions on the nature of the communication process. Of course, the scope of research is narrowed down by the researcher's imagination potential:

It is impossible to imagine the hidden processes behind planning and word retrieval, and it is difficult mentally to simulate the opportunistic back and forth processes of social interaction. And armchair judgments are known to suffer from bias, unreliability, and narrowness (Schütze, 1996). (Bangerter and Clark, 2004: 25).

Jucker, however, claims that the armchair method can be applied outside the armchair, too. According to him, interviews can be used to elicit, not only the naturally occurring data, but also assessments, opinions and attitudes towards a language and its use from speakers of a particular language (Jucker, 2009). To exemplify, Yuan (2001) has inquired about the participants attitudes towards the DCT and role-play methods. It is important to note that this kind of interview differs from the one where the interviewees are asked to produce various samples of language data.

### 3.2. The field method

This research approach entails strictly empirical procedures and pragmatics researchers use it to procure naturally occurring data. It is important to note that the empiricism of this kind of research is contingent on the fact that "data has not been elicited by the researcher for the purpose of his or her research project but occurs for communicative reasons outside of the research project for which it is used" (Jucker, 2009: 1615). Samples of spoken language might seem as the most realistic data, but any instances of written language, which have been generated for communicative purposes, can also provide for a truthful and valid research corpus. In fact, Jucker (2009) distinguishes between four different approaches: the notebook approach, the philological approach, the corpus approach and the conversation analysis approach.

#### 3.2.1. The notebook method

This method was named by a characteristic tool that researcher would use when employing it: a notebook. Namely, the researcher writes down, or saves in another way, instances of speech containing complimentary language, in order to conduct further analysis. This method is



applicable in all spheres of daily life, with one's family, at the workplace, among friends and acquaintances, even strangers in public places. Manes and Wolfson (1981) classify it as an "ethnographic approach" and state that it is "the only reliable method for collecting data about the way compliments, or indeed, any other speech act functions" (Manes and Wolfson, 1981:115).

However, there are some drawbacks to this method, as well as to all the others. The process of data collection is time-consuming and ponderous and, for these reasons, it often demands several researches to be included. Moreover, the elicitation of naturally occurring language data can rarely be conducted in a systematic and fully standardised way. To exemplify, Beebe and Cummings (1996) and Beal (1990) experienced difficulties when attaining pragmatic sequences from the language samples they collected. Often, the researcher is unable to acquire knowledge about the demographic features of his or her informants, such as age, gender, ethnicity, education, socio-economic status, etc. The ethnographic nature of this approach, even though listed as a major advantage, can easily turn into a shortcoming. Namely, when eliciting data researchers tend to focus on a particular speech community, usually comprised of the members of their immediate and extended family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, colleagues and people they are frequently in contact with. Consequently, a question of reliability arises: can this group of people be representative of a particular speech community (Nurani, 2009). Beebe and Cummings (1996) claim that the population of large urban centres exhibits high levels of mobility, both social and spatial, and, accordingly, that the circle of people surrounding the researcher cannot be regarded as forming an authentic speech community and accurately depicting its language varieties. Besides, many informants tend to feel uncomfortable when audio or/and video recorders are employed and, therefore, their language production can be significantly altered. On the other hand, manual recording is entirely dependent on researcher's abilities and memorising capacities.

### 3.2.2. The philological method

With this method, the researcher gathers data samples from various fictional sources. One can read through novels, short stories or dramas, for example, and search for compliments or other pragmatic occurrences. Consistency and accuracy are crucial here so it is advisable that at least two researchers work on the same data samples in order to get a highly reliable output (Jucker, 2009). Also, one must be mindful of several different levels on which the fiction communication takes place: between the author and the audience, between the fictional characters, within the characters themselves, etc. The narration perspective is another valuable advantage of the

fictional. Rose (2006) ascribes a great importance to utilisation of fictional resources when it comes to pragmatic research, especially interlanguage and intercultural ones. He sees them as not only convenient for gathering rich background data but also as a possible starting point in research constructing instruments such as data collection test, questionnaires, role play scenarios, etc.

However, some researchers (Manes and Wolfson, 1981) find it doubtful that these data samples can be utilised in drawing conclusions about pragmatic patterns in the language; obviously, the conclusions reached on the fictional data cannot be utterly generalised to every other form of language. On the other hand, Labov (1981) claims that research should focus on those instances of communication that people use when arguing with their wives, joking with their friend and deceiving their enemies. Savil-Troike (1989) states that literary communication patterns accurately illustrate the normative idealisation of a specific language, or language variety, and that they can as such, present the typology of characters and distinctive stereotypes of ways in which they employ language. Authenticity issue put aside, this method can be exhausting and both time-and resource-consuming because of the anomalous distribution of the target language patterns.

### 3.2.3. The conversation analysis (CA method)

This research method is applied with transcripts of actual conversations that took place between real speakers. Researchers examine the collected data looking for the target utterances and then analyse and interpret their findings. The main advantage of the conversation analysis method is its indubitable authenticity; the language samples are as natural as they can be. Nevertheless, there are some difficulties with this method, too. Firstly, it is conducted manually, just like the philological one, so it requires considerable amounts of time and resources. Secondly, the frequency of target utterances is rather unpredictable and it can be quite a task to gather a sufficient, representative sample to conduct one's analysis.

### 3.2.4. The corpus method

Corpus method refers to any pragmatic research done within electronic corpora and computerised search techniques (Jucker, 2009). Essentially, the corpus method closely resembles the philological and the conversation analysis method, but it differs in some basic procedural features; whereas the latter two are conducted manually, corpus search is conducted in a completely automated way.

Jucker (2009) differentiates between two main types of corpus searches. The first one is done by searching for the speech act performative verbs or “illocutionary indicating devices” (e.g. *compliment, apologise, declare*, etc.) and it easily generates very precise results. In many cases these performatives indicate a negotiation on the status of a particular utterance. The other one is done via specific search strings. Those are comprised in a way that they resemble as much as possible the target utterance’s structure. However, it is questionable whether speech acts, compliments especially, are standardised in a sufficient extent to allow surface string searches (Jucker, 2009). Manes and Wolfson (1981) discovered relatively regular syntactic patterns within the American English compliments which might serve as potential candidates for this kind of search.

### 3.3. The laboratory method

The term laboratory method includes all the procedures researchers employ in order to solicit relevant data directly from the participants. The success of this type of research is dependent on the cooperation of the participants, who are asked to imagine particular communication situations and the expectations on their own and the communicative actions of others (Jucker, 2009). Namely, they are not intrinsically motivated to generate linguistic patterns but to produce them through pretending. Critics of the approach indicate that for this reason the solicited data might differ from the naturally occurring data. Nevertheless, laboratory method allows the researcher to control all the important variables which might influence his findings.

#### 3.3.1. Discourse completion test

One of the most frequently used instruments in pragmatic research is definitely the discourse completion test (DCT). Dahl and Kasper (1991) define DCT as a written questionnaire consisting of short descriptions of particular situations, followed by dialogues with empty slots which are to be filled by the research participants. Throughout the time, researchers have developed various types of DCT-s in order to increase their applicability.

The use of DCT has numerous advantages. Firstly, it is very economical – a large number of participants can be included over a short period of time. Secondly, it allows the researcher to gather data on an almost inexhaustible range of imaginative communication contexts. Thirdly, the variability of participants’ cultural background, which may obstruct the progress of a field research, is no obstacle with laboratory methods. On the contrary, DCTs are especially suitable for interlinguistic pragmatic studies (Nurani, 2009). However, DCT has its drawbacks, too. It is important to note that it is based on a hypothetical situation that does not allow for the realisation

of psychosocial communicational elements between the interactants. In fact, no real interaction takes place, the participants do not experience any consequences of their communicative actions and this inevitably alters their reactions (Beebe and Cummings, 1996). This taken into consideration, it is debatable whether DCT is suitable for the study of pragmatic aspects of communicational dynamics.

### 3.3.2. Role-play method

Within the role-play method, the participants are asked to produce the conversations they would make in particular situations described by the researchers. The communication patterns they generate should reflect their way of communicating in actual situations. This method is applicable in two forms. In role-plays, the participants are asked to act out the role that differ from their own, and in role enactments, the participants perform the role that correspond to their own in real life (Jucker, 2009). Also, the level of structurality can vary.

The main advantages of this method are the access to the full conversational context and the authenticity of the gathered data. Moreover, the produced data exhibits congruency of communicative goals and negotiation of semantic and pragmatic meaning of the utterances. Although these sequences can be video- or audio-taped, their analysis and interpretation are very time-consuming, especially if the conversations are completely unstructured.

### 3.3.3. Neuropragmatic methods

Neuropragmatic methods are laboratory methods in the literal sense, as they are applied in actual laboratories, under strictly controlled conditions and with the use of precise medical instruments. They are mostly applied in studies concerned with how brain and mind employ language, understand it and produce verbal pragmatic patterns (Stemmer and Schönle, 2000). Special emphasis is placed on the brain mechanisms and the ways in which they enable cognitive and motor actions, as well as on the environmental influences on these mechanisms.

There are various neuropragmatic methods based on different approaches: imaging approach (EEG, MEG, fMRI, PET, etc.), biochemical and psychopharmacological approach, rhythmical, cognitive, social, ontogenetic and phylogenetic approach. Their advantages are high accuracy, progressivism and interdisciplinarity, but they require abundant resources and highly qualified researchers.

#### 4. Variations in complimentary language

All the aspects of compliments use are subject to multifarious sociolinguistic variation. Consequently, their study is inevitably conditioned by variables such as age and sex of the interlocutors, their social and cultural background, specific communication context, etc. Their features and the role they have in shaping complimentary language serve to highlight its social dynamics and diversity.

##### 4.1. Compliments across cultures

Sociolinguistic norms and behaviour patterns vary across cultures. Languages differ not only in phonology, syntax and semantics rules, but also in pragmatic ones. Compliments are very illustrative of this because all speech acts, in addition to their performative function, resonate with a variety of culturally determined norms and values and serve to express and maintain them. Kim (2003: 138) delineates compliments as windows through which one can observe what is particularly valued in a culture. Many scholars researched on compliments in various cultural frameworks.

##### 4.1.1. American English compliments

One of the most voluminous studies on compliments is the one conducted by Wolfson and Manes in 1980. They researched compliments and their usage by speakers of American English, focusing on lexical, syntactical and functional properties of compliments (Cs) and compliment responses (CRs).

They found the structure of Cs to be formulaic, that speakers use a small number of adjectives, and that Cs and CRs could be classified into types of structures: adjective, verb, adverb/noun. Wolfson and Manes also found that the subject of Cs encompassed two main topics: appearance and ability. Furthermore, they noted that the functions served by this speech act included thanking, starting a conversation, giving approval and reinforcing certain behaviours (Grossi, 2009: 55).

Lin (2008) aligns these findings with the deeply-rooted individualism of English-speaking cultures. According to Goleman (1990, in Lin, 2008) it entails a strong aspiration towards independence and freedom of expression. These cultural values are manifested in the topics of compliments, their social function and the choice of response strategy.

#### 4.1.2. New Zealand English compliments

Holmes (1986, in Grossi, 2009) did a research on New Zealand compliments and compliment responses and found them to bear a close resemblance to the American ones: they are lexically homogenous (not to say poor), syntactically formulaic and increasing solidarity and rapport in social facet. When responding to compliments, speakers of New Zealand English prevalingly choose acceptance response strategy.

A very high degree of similarity to American English compliment features can be interpreted in the context of common cultural backgrounds of these two speech communities. Shared values and behaviour patterns manifest in close correspondence in pragmatic domain of communication, as well.

#### 4.1.3. German compliments

Golato (2002) studied German compliments in contrast to the American ones, with a special emphasis on the compliment responses. She discovered that Germans employ a greater variety of response strategies than Americans and often turn to soliciting a second round of compliments (and thus violating the self-pride avoidance constraint). She ascribed these results to differences between German and American overall conversational style.

Germans pay more heed to the content and truthfulness of the compliment, whereas Americans orient towards its social function (Kotthoff, 1989, in Golato, 2002). These assumptions manifest in frequency of compliments and their social framing.

(...) most German visitors to the US, as well as the subjects in Kotthoff's (1989) study, note that they are surprised and puzzled (a) by the number of compliments Americans readily pay and (b) by the fact that even strangers in supermarkets and other places may approach you and compliment you (Golato, 2002: 565).

#### 4.1.4. Arabic compliments

Nelson, Al-Batal and Echols (1996, in Grossi, 2009) researched compliments in Arabic, given by speakers from Syria. Their results indicate that Arabic speakers prefer to either accept the compliments or to scale them down, and rarely reject them directly. Also, it was shown that compliments responses are proportional to their sincerity: long and formulaic compliment responses ensue after sincere and genuine compliments.

#### 4.1.5. Chinese compliments

In his paper *On English and Chinese compliments* Lin (2008) compares English and Chinese compliments in aspects of topic, response and function. He frames his analysis with collectivistic keystones of Chinese society, emphasis placed on “the views, needs and goals of the in group rather than oneself, social norms and duty defined by the in-group rather than beliefs that distinguish self from the in-group and great readiness to cooperate with in-group members” (Samover and Porter, 2000: 67, in Lin, 2008). Also, modesty is highly valued, and by humiliating himself or herself, one does not damage his or her face but, on the contrary, enhances it. Self-praise and elevation inevitably raise notions of arrogance, boasting and self-conceit.

These social postulates stipulate the choice of compliment topic. Compliments on appearance are not so frequent, especially the inter-gender ones: “It is not appropriate for a Chinese male to compliment on the shape, beauty or apparel of a Chinese female, especially an unfamiliar one” (Lin, 2008: 66). When complimenting on addressee’s abilities, Chinese will acknowledge, not the achievement itself, but rather the effort that was put into it and addressee’s personal qualities. As far as compliments response strategies are concerned, Chinese opt for rejection, either through non-acknowledgement, scaling-down or disagreeing. Vary from expressing solidarity, positive evaluation, praise, envy or desire to verbal harassment.

#### 4.1.6. Korean compliments

In her studies on Korean compliments Baek (1998, in Kim, 2003) discovered that their predominating topic is the addressee’s personality. Speakers value “person’s conduct or moral behaviour which conforms to social norms or his/her role-expectation in a given situation” (Kim, 2003: 139).

These compliments are regularly deflected, since their acceptance would afflict the ideals of modesty and humility. Furthermore, non-acknowledgement frequently occurs as a response strategy “because silence is a type of indirectness, which as an aspect of modesty, is highly valued in Korean culture” (Klopf and Park, 1982, in Kim, 200: 140).

#### 4.1.7. Japanese compliments

Daikihura (1986) contrasted Japanese compliments with the American ones on several different levels. First major difference she encountered was the absence of the “I like/love NP” syntactic pattern in compliment construction. As it turned out “the word ‘love’ in Japanese, *aishiteru* or *daisuki*, sounds too strong to be used in compliments or even in other situations” (Kim, 2003:

139). When it comes to compliment topic, the Japanese prefer to compliment on the addressee's ability and achievements. Given compliments function as solidarity intensifiers but also framework for further information inquiry.

The predominating compliment response strategy is compliment denial and expression of deference and politeness towards the speaker. When rejecting compliments the Japanese frequently employs formulaic utterances "No, no" and "That's not true" which are seldom found in other languages.

#### 4.1.8. Persian compliments

Sharifian (2005, in Grossi, 2009) studied the language of compliments among Persian and Australian English speakers. He focused in particular on compliment response strategies. Just like Chinese and Japanese, Persian speakers commend modesty and humbleness:

(...) Sharifian explains that when the compliment cannot be attributed to the interlocutor, there is a tendency to praise or enhance the 'face' of another party who may be responsible for the success, for example, family members or employers. Also, Persian speakers feel they have to return a C to make the other feel successful, and Sharifian proposes that this highlights the Persian value of self in relation to others (Grossi, 2009: 55-56).

#### 4.1.9. Zulu compliments

Shezi (2005) conducted a research on compliments in Zulu language, with special emphasis on complimenting in the educational context. He found that, on a general level, Zulu speakers most frequently compliment each other on ability. Male participants produced less compliment instances than females, who, apart from ability, often compliment on appearance and on material possessions.

Compliment response strategies in Zulu vary according to the compliment topic and gender of the addressee. Namely, in cases when being complimented on their ability, Zulu speakers are prone to accept a compliment by employing an appreciation token. However, when it comes to compliments on one's appearance or material possessions, response evasion and deflection are very frequent. Further more, Shezi (2005) discovered that male speakers are more likely to opt for an appreciation token as a compliment response, whereas female turn to challenging the sincerity of the compliment and questioning its accuracy.



#### 4.2. Gender-based differences in complimentary language

The nature of the illocutionary force of compliments is preconditioned by the speaker's and the addressee's gender which clearly displays the fact that compliments certainly comprise an important part of gendered linguistic behaviour. A lot of research has been done to learn whether and how gender stipulates the semantic, syntactic and functional properties of compliments and compliment responses.

Based on her research studies on compliments and politeness preferences, Holmes (1988, in Shezi, 2005) concludes that women both give and receive more compliments than men and that, generally speaking, complimenting behaviour is considered to be more common with women than with men. The reason why this is so may be found in the directly opposite perception of compliments. Men are prone to perceiving compliments as face-threatening acts while women, contrary to this, interpret them as utterly positive occurrences. Also, men compliment women more frequently than other men. There is a divergence in the recognition of the social function of compliments, as well. Male speakers compliment in order to manifest societal politeness and comply with ingrained behaviour patterns. Herbert (1990, in Wang and Tsai, 2003) also notes that in complimenting men focus on the assertion of praise. Women, however, see compliments as a device for building, preserving and strengthening social solidarity in various contexts.

Herbert (1990, in Shezi, 2005) provides an analysis of gender-stipulated differences in the syntactic structure of compliments. He observes that women tend to communicate on a more personal level and, for that reason, prefer to use the syntactic formula "I (really) like/love NP". Men also use the above mentioned formula, but with equal frequency they also employ the impersonalised "PRO is (really) ADJ NP" formula in their daily speech. Formulae opening with first person are evenly distributed, while second person formulae can be found in female-to-female, female-to-male and male-to-female compliments, but rarely occur when a male speaker is complimenting another male. Herbert also notes that compliments coming from women surpass those coming from men when length is concerned. Female compliments can be characterised as proposals or suggestions and male ones are more directive and imposing on the addressee.

Furthermore, male and female speakers differ in the way they respond to compliments. The gender of the compliment giver is often the crucial factor in the choice of the compliment response strategy. Compliments uttered by male speakers to females are prevailingly accepted. Non-agreement responses occur in female-to-female complimenting. When addressed a compliment, male recipients frequently respond with an appreciation token. Male-to-male

compliments are often followed by questions and request interpretation. The latter two strategies aim at weakening the complimentary force of the utterance.

#### 4.2.1. Complimenting language in single-sex conversations

Petit (2006) conducted an interesting study among French single-sex friendship groups in order to learn who gives more compliments and on which occasions, what are the most frequent compliment topics and which strategy the interlocutors utilise to respond to them.

In female-only conversations Petit (2006) discerns two essential social functions that compliments fulfil. Firstly, they are a means of establishing social rapport and providing one's friends with support. Secondly, compliments assume an important role in construction of the femininity concept. In other words, femininity is being expressed through the topic and function of compliments. Female tend to compliment each other on the assessable property they believe to be manifesting the ideal of femininity. Also, alterations of this ideal in various age groups can be observed through female-to-female complimentary language:

(...) for the older women in my recordings, looking nice is an important goal as the many compliments on physical appearance reveal; being creative is also considered a normal part of doing femininity (...). For the younger female friends in my study, femininity seems to be performed in relation to the opposite sex (Petit, 2006: 9).

Another important pattern in female-to-female complimenting is collaborative or so-called joint complimenting. This term refers to occurrences when one interlocutor addresses a compliment to the recipient and one or more others follow suit. When it comes to response strategies, Petit (2006) found that various patterns are present but the most prominent ones are laughter, minimisation and partial/indirect acceptance. Interestingly enough, there were no cases where female speakers returned a compliment. It might be concluded that the compliments in these female-only conversations were "entirely other-oriented and that the woman paying the compliment did not have any ulterior motive such as making the complementee her debtor in any way or establishing some kind of power or hierarchy relationships between them" (Petit, 2006: 11).

Analysis of male-only conversations was less fruitful, since there was not a single one compliment occurrence. Petit (2006) notes that this is in accordance with the findings of earlier research on the gender distribution of compliments. They are more frequently associated with women because they show preference for positive politeness strategies as such.

#### 4.2.2. Gender-based differences in compliment perception

Some research studies were also concerned with the perception of compliments and the interpretation of speakers' motivation by the addressees. Parisi and Wogan (2006, in Davis, 2008: 77) "discovered a shared trait amongst the females: namely, that they feel uncomfortable complimenting males on appearance for fear of the compliment being misinterpreted as a 'come-on'". Abbey's (1982, in Davis, 2008) results showed that men are more likely to perceive women who address them with compliments as "seductive" and "promiscuous" than vice versa. Shotland and Craig (1981, in Davis, 2008: 78) observed that "both sexes can differentiate between sexually interested and friendly behaviour, although males perceive other people and situations more sexually than do females".

These findings prompted Davis to do a small-scale research on cross-gender compliments among non-intimate speakers of Australian English. Her research interest focused on two main points: choice of response strategy and compliment perception among males. The study was conducted in an open-air public shopping mall where her assistant approached strangers, asked for direction (or similar small favour) and then addressed a compliment. Immediately after this, another assistant approached the participants, informed them about survey and provided with a questionnaire to fill in.

Davis observed that speakers of Australian respond to compliments with appreciation tokens. In addition to this, some female participants also offered comment history on the assessable. When it comes to perceiving complimenter's intention in sexual terms, her result differed from the previously mentioned findings in other studies. Namely, male participants did not interpret compliments coming from a female as flirtatious or friendly, but simply neutral. Davis (2008) remarks:

Such ambiguous results may suggest that outside forces (such as an individuals' embarrassment at being surveyed on perceptions pertaining to sexual intent) may affect their ratings and therefore a method to reduce such anxiety should be encouraged to improve results (84.)

#### 4.2.3. Justifiability of gender differentiation in compliments research

However, there are findings and scholars' opinions which do not so fervently promote the exigency of gender criterion in compliment analysis. To illustrate, in her research on German compliments Golato (2005) found that there were no differences between the number of compliments given by male and female speakers. She also discovered that "in terms of compliment responses, men and women do not demonstrate any discernable differences either

(...), both men and women use all of the response types described above; in other words, no single response type is associated with the gender of the interactants ” (192).

On the one hand, she ascribes the discrepancy between her results and those coming from researches conducted among English speakers to alterations in methodological framework. Namely, her corpus is comprised of data samples coming from an informal context, mostly produced among family and friends, whereas other researchers gather their data in a more formal context (Golato, 2005). On the other hand, she suggests that these dissimilarities are gender conditioned, but in a somewhat different sense. Golato notes that majority of fieldworkers are female and ponders over the influence of this factor on the study results: “it is not clear whether the observed gender differences are truly due to different behaviors among the sexes or whether they have been artificially introduced by the method of data collection” (2008: 193).

## 5. Compliments and compliment responses on television screen:

A case of the British and American TV show *The Office*

### 5.1. The aim of the research

After the thorough elaboration of compliments and compliment responses, their properties and usage provided above, the second part of this paper expounds on the same topics but via the examples of compliment utterances found in the scripts of British television series “The Office” and its American remake *The Office: An American workplace*.

The purpose of the conducted study is to learn who, how and when gives and receives compliments in British and American offices portrayed in the aforementioned television series. The answers to these questions are sought for through the analysis of functional and structural features of compliments, as well as the choice of compliment strategies found in the TV scripts. Based on the extracted data, a comparison will be made between the features of British and American compliments and the practices of compliment usage. Furthermore, the elicited data will be analysed in terms of gender distribution and gender-based differences in compliments’ use.

### 5.2. The research corpus

The research corpus for this study includes the first seasons of television series *The Office* and *The Office: An American Workplace*, created by Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant who wrote and directed the British version, and Greg Daniels who adapted it into the American

versions. As it is evident from the title, the sitcom displays everyday situations in what seems to be a typical British and American workplace. Both series belong to the genre of “fly-on-the-wall documentary” or mockumentary, meaning they resemble actual documentary programmes and leave the audience with an impression of authenticity and credibility.



Figure 1: The cast of *The Office*

< <http://pinartarhan.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/bbc-office.jpg> >

The plot of *The Office* takes place in the Slough branch of a paper merchant, Wernham Hogg, chosen by the BBC programme producers to depict “the dynamics and culture of the typical white collar world, as well as being a home to business professionals with a good sense of humour and a natural screen presence” (Gervais and Merchant, 2002: 7). However, what the camera-crew is able to capture is a colourful coterie of socially awkward individuals, managed by a self-centred, somewhat hypocritical but essentially (in his own opinion) good-hearted figure of David Brent, “who gets the best of them” (Gervais and Merchant, 1X01). Among other lively characters, like alcoholic and chauvinist Finch, fiercely loyal and equally annoying Gareth, slow-motion Keith and promiscuous Donna, sales representative Tim and receptionist Dawn are the only employees of Wernham Hogg the audience can actually relate too.

Two seasons of *The Office* were filmed and broadcast on BBC from 2001 to 2003. The series was a great success with the audience and also a winner of prestigious awards, such as BAFTA-s and British Comedy award. Despite its early end “*The Office* will go down in sitcom history as one of the best British comedies for many years and clips such as the never-to-be-forgotten ‘David Brent dance’ will keep people laughing for years to come” (BCG, 2005).



Figure 2: The cast of *The Office: An American Workplace*

< <http://hollywoodhubbub.com/tag/the-office/> >

*An American Workplace* is centred on Michael Scott, David's American reincarnation, just as tactless and as maladroit, the head of the Scranton branch of the Dunder Mifflin Paper Company. His office is somewhat more multicultural and, if possible, even more bizarre. Jim and Pam, American "Tim and Dawn", struggle to preserve sanity working with ex-territorial, conspiracy freak Dwight, conservative and judgemental Angela, lonely alcoholic Meredith, always grumpy Stanley and others. Just like their British colleagues, the Scranton crew is facing a branch merging and is in constant fear of compulsory redundancies. Fortunately, their boss is willing to go to great lengths to boost their morale, no matter of how they feel about it.

The American *Office* has had seven seasons so far, all on NBC since 2005. Although the initial critiques were far from benevolent, the second season won not only critics but also eight million viewers. Apart from that, the series won numerous awards, too, including Golden Globe Award, Television Critics Association, Emmys, NAACP Image Award, Writers Guild of America Award, Comedy writing Award and many others.

### 5.3. The research method

The research method chosen for this case study is, at best, debatable. There are scholars who are sceptical of the application of philological method and employment of fictional resources in pragmatic research. To exemplify, Manes and Wolfson (1981) discard this method since it is not ethnographically founded, and therefore, not sufficiently reliable. However, many other scholars are in favour of the philological method. Savil-Troike (1989, in Rose, 1997: 123) claims that the

“communicative patterns which occur in literature presumably embody some kind of normative idealization, and portray types of people(...) in terms of stereotypic use of language”, and McHoul (1987, in Rose, 1997: 124) proposes that “fictional conversations (should) be taken seriously as objects for conversation analysis” since they contain “many features relevant for conversation analysis, such as simultaneous, overlapping, and contiguous utterances”. Rose’s (1997) contrastive study showed that a film compliments corpus is comparable to Manes and Wolfson’s corpus, more on the macro-analysis level and less on the micro-level. Rose suggests the usage of film data in constructing production questionnaire scenarios, baseline data, designing video-prompted metapragmatic judgement tasks and creating video-prompted data elicitation procedures.

Fictional resources, television series scripts in particular, were suitable for this study since they allowed access to linguistic data produced by native speakers of British and American English. Also, working with scripts relieves one of the recording task and allows focus solely on extracting relevant data. The issue of validity and authenticity of language samples can be put aside, since the purpose of this research is not to learn how compliments are used in British and American office workplaces, but rather the way their usage is presented in the particular television series. Also, the study is interested in the influence of cultural and gender differences on compliment distribution, not in real life, however, but rather in its particular representations on screen.

The designated corpus of six British and six American episodes was analysed in search of compliment utterances. When found, they were extracted and listed under British or American section. Then, the compliments were scrutinised on the bases of the following criteria: functional properties, syntactic properties, semantic properties and the choice of compliment response strategy. The results of the British and American section were contrasted. Furthermore, gender distribution of compliments was determined, as well as gender-based differences regarding the above listed criteria of compliment categorisations. All findings are expressed in numerical and percentage terms and presented in tables.

#### 5.4. Results

An extensive enquiry into the corpus resulted in detection of 100 compliment utterances, 49 of them found in the British scripts, and 51 in the American ones<sup>1</sup>. These were then extracted from the corpus and prepared for further analysis. The analysis consisted of multilateral categorisation according to the criteria adopted through the bottom-up-approach.

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendices A and B

#### 5.4.1. Functional properties of compliments

Firstly, the compliments were analysed and grouped based on the function they perform in the particular communication context. Throughout their dialogues characters displayed a variety of possible compliments' functions.

Table 1: Functional properties of compliments in British and American corpus

Compliment function	British scripts		American scripts	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Flattering/Persuasion	25	51.02	13	25.49
Admiration/Approval	12	24.49	23	45.10
Sarcasm/Disapproval	8	16.33	9	17.65
Introduction	2	4.08	3	5.88
Greeting	2	4.08	3	5.88

As visible in Table 1, the most common compliments in the corpus were those which characters uttered with what may be interpreted as hidden agenda. The compliments served to flatter their interactants and/or persuade them of something. This type was prevailing in the British scripts.

- (23) (KATY is selling a purse to STANLEY)  
 KATY: *You've made a good choice*. She's really going to like that. (Kaling, A1X06<sup>2</sup>)

Secondly, some of the compliments express characters' approval and/or admiration for the assessable entity. These compliments are usually featured as the most sincere and genuine ones. To illustrate, compliment turn (22) shows Michael's reaction to the story of Oscar's origins. Compliments as such are the second most frequent in the corpus and majority of them were extracted from the American section.

- (22) MICHAEL: Wow. That is...*that is a great story*. That's the American dream right there, right?  
 OSCAR: Thank...yeah (Novak, A1X02)

However, some of the compliments from the corpus were uttered in a sarcastic way, in order to manifest the speaker's disapproval of the topic of the compliment. The affirmative compliment structure conveys subversive notions in the given conversational framework:

<sup>2</sup> The source of the compliment is indicated by capital letter A or B (American or British corpus, respectively), ordinal number of the season (here 1) and episode (here 06)



- (24) DWIGHT: *That's really professional*, thanks. This is the third time, and it wasn't funny the first two times either Jim... (Daniels, Gervais and Merchant, A1X01)

In addition to the above listed functions, compliments can also be utilised to accentuate the beginning of an interaction. These occurrences can be found when the interactants are introducing or being introduced to each other. Compliments then perform the role of ice-breakers and help to establish social rapport.

- (25) DAVID: *Lovely Dawn*. Dawn Tynsley... receptionist. Alright? Been with us for ages, haven't you? (Gervais and Merchant, B1X01)

Also, compliments can, in the role of greetings, be employed to facilitate the interaction between the people who already know each other. They can be found either at the very beginning of the conversation, or at its end, as it is illustrated in (26):

- (26) RICKY: Cheers, *nice one*. (Gervais and Merchant, B1X06)

#### 5.4.2. Structural properties of compliments

The second stage in the analysis of findings was concerned with the structural properties of the extracted compliments. First of all, their structure was examined on the syntactic level. Several syntactic realisations were established, illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2: Syntactic properties of compliments in British and American corpus

Syntactic pattern of compliment realisation	British scripts		American scripts	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>PRO + V (+ ADV) + ADJ</b>	12	24.49	20	39.22
<b>PRO + V + ADJ + NP</b>	12	24.49	13	25.49
<b>(ADJ +) NP</b>	9	18.37	5	9.80
<b>(ADV +) ADJ</b>	6	12.24	7	13.73
<b>PRO + V (+ NP)</b>	5	10.20	3	5.88
<b>PERFORMATIVE + NP</b>	1	2.04	1	1.96
<b>Other</b>	4	8.16	2	3.92

The predominating syntactic pattern in both British and American corpus section is the one consisting of a pronoun (mostly a demonstrative), followed by a verb (usually a copula), an optional adverb (some sort of intensifier in majority of compliment utterances) and an adjective.

PRO + V (+ ADV) + ADJ

- (27) MICHAEL: No, I'm always good...for some serious buckage. Wow. Two dollars, three dollars? People out here do not care about diseases. I am going to give you...\$25.  
OSCAR: (shocked) *That's... that's... that's very generous.* (Schur, A1X04)

Another quite frequent compliment construction opens just like the previous one, with a pronoun followed by a verb, but ends in a noun phrase premodified by an adjective.

PRO + V + ADJ + NP

- (28) KATY: It's a- *It's a very nice car.*  
(Kaling, A1X06)

This pattern can be altered in a way that the adjectival part is omitted, leaving the construction formed of a pronoun and a verb, with an arbitrarily added noun phrase.

PRO + V (+ NP)

- (29) DAVID: *You've charmed me.* You've got the job. (KAREN, WITH MIXED EMOTIONS, SMILES) (Gervais and Merchant, B1X05)

Shorter syntactic patterns are fewer in number in the corpus findings. These are far less complex and usually consist of only one or two elements, either an optional adjective with a noun phrase, like in (30), or an optional adverb followed by an adjective, like in (31):

(ADJ +) NP

- (30) OSCAR: *Uh, nice party* Michael. (Schur, A1X04)

(ADV +) ADJ

- (31) DAVID: *Absolutely mental.* (Gervais and Merchant, B1X01)

Sometimes, compliment utterances are construed with the use of performatives, which overtly indicate their function. The patterns are also used in compliments' negotiation.

PERFORMATIVE + NP

- (32) DAVID: *It was merely a compliment on the breasts you just happen to have.*  
(Gervais and Merchant, B1X01)

Compliments were also pondered over in terms of their semantic content. The distinguishing compliment topics are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Semantic properties of compliments in British and American corpus

Compliments assessing one's...	British scripts		American scripts	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Personality trait or ability	23	46.94	14	27.45
Past action/Achievement	11	22.45	25	49.02
Physical appearance	9	18.37	4	7.84
Possession	4	8.16	5	9.80
Future action	1	2.04	2	3.92
Other	1	2.04	1	1.96

Personality traits and the abilities of the compliment recipients, as well as their previous actions are assessed in the vast majority of compliments found in both British and American scripts. Compliment utterances (33) and (34) illustrate these topics:

- (33) TIM: Thanks very much, Lee. *You're a nice... good man.* (Gervais and Merchant, B1X03)
- (34) DONNA: We just wanted to say we thought *that was a really good thing you did.* (Gervais and Merchant, B1X06)

Occasionally, the account of recipient's future action can become a topic of a compliment, too:

- (35) DWIGHT: I know. I know exactly what to do. (holds up hand)  
JIM: (gives Dwight a high five) *Great.* (Schur, A1X04)

Physical appearance of the interactants is also frequently complimented, in addition to their possessions.

- (36) MICHAEL: Ah, Katy. Wow, look at you. You are, uh, *you're like the new and improved Pam.* Pam 6.0. (Kaling, A1X06)
- (37) DAWN: *Nice hat.* T: Thanks. (Gervais and Merchant, 1X03)

#### 5.4.3. Compliment response strategies

The following part of the study is concerned with responses to compliments. Compliment turns were examined in order to discover how compliment recipients react when addressed a compliment. The nature and frequency of their responses are systematised in Table 4:

Table 4: Choice of compliment response strategy in British and American corpus

Compliment response strategy	British scripts		American scripts	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Confirmation	13	26.53	8	15.69
Appreciation token	1	2.04	3	5.88
Question	1	2.04	2	3.92
Returned compliment	1	2.04	1	1.96
Comment history	2	4.08	7	13.73
Evaluation/Referent shift	3	6.12	3	5.88
Disagreement	5	10.20	2	3.92
Laughter/Smile	4	8.16	9	17.65
No response/Unknown	19	38.76	16	31.37

In a substantial number of cases in both sections of the corpus, recipients opted for compliment acceptance strategies. These include offering an appreciation token to the speaker, especially when the compliment is perceived as a verbal gift, as in (38), and confirming the compliment's assertion, as in (39):

- (38) STANLEY: *I admire your culture's success in America.*  
PAM: Thank you. (Novak, A1X02)

- (39) JIM: *That's cool.*  
PAM: Uh huh. (Kaling, A1X06)

A great deal of recipients makes an effort to obey the constraints of avoiding disagreement with the speaker and self-praise and, accordingly, choose a solution type response strategy. These vary from uttering questions,

- (40) ANGELA: No, yeah, *I think that's a good idea.*  
PHYLLIS: Yeah? (Schur, A1X04)

returning a compliment,

- (41) DAWN: *You are* (lovely).  
TIM: No, you are. (Gervais and Merchant, B1X04)

providing comment history,

- (42) TIM: *Aw, this is exciting.*

LEE: You can sit on that, if you like. That's not just from me, mate, that's from Dawn as well. (Gervais and Merchant, B1X03)

making an evaluation or a referent shift,

(43) JIM: Speaking of which, I meant to tell you. *Very impressive*, the uh, donation you gave to Oscar's charity. What was it? 25 bucks?

MICHAEL: Well, you know, money isn't everything Jim. It's not the key to happiness. You know what is? Joy. You should remember that. Maybe you'll give more than three dollars next time. (Schur, A1X04)

to responding with an agreeable non-verbal action, namely laughter or a smile:

(45) TIM: *You're snotty and lovely*. I'd marry your snot. Id wed your... (DAWN is laughing) (Gervais and Merchant, B1X04).

Of course, some interactants do not hesitate to disagree with the compliment's assertion:

(44) DAWN: *You're so lovely*.

TIM: No, I'm not lovely. (Gervais and Merchant, B1X04)

However, apart from these compliment response strategies, in a large number of cases there is either no response to the compliment at all or it is unknown, due to scene shift.

#### 5.4.4. Gender variations in giving and receiving compliments

The final part of the research was focused on the investigation of whether and how gender-based differences are reflected in the compliment use practice. The systematised data from the earlier stages of the study have been utilised, but with a shift in the perspective.

The overall distribution of compliment occurrences in the corpus, with special emphasis on the gender of the compliment giver and compliment recipient, is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Gender distribution of compliments in British and American corpus

Gender distribution	British scripts		American scripts		Total
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	N/%
Male	35	71.43	37	72.55	72
Male → Male	20	40.82	24	47.06	44
Male → Female	13	26.53	9	17.65	22
Male → Group	2	4.08	4	7.84	6

<b>Female</b>	8	16.33	10	19.61	18
<b>Female → Male</b>	7	14.86	8	15.69	15
<b>Female → Female</b>	1	2.04	2	3.92	3
<b>Female → Group</b>	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
<b>Group</b>	6	12.24	4	7.84	10
<b>Group → Male</b>	6	12.24	4	7.84	10
<b>Group → Female</b>	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
<b>Group → Group</b>	0	0.00	0	0.00	0

Findings from British and American corpus are evidently comparable in regard to gender distribution of compliments. Male interactants addressed the vast majority of compliments, larger number to other males, some to females and few to a group. Female interactants gave far less compliments, but followed suit in choosing the addressees. A group of characters often performs the role of the compliment giver, addressing solely other male characters in this corpus.

Table 6: Gender variation in compliment function

<b>Compliment function</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Admiration/Approval</b>	24	33.33	11	61.11
<b>Flattering/Persuasion</b>	26	36.11	2	11.11
<b>Sarcasm/Disapproval</b>	12	16.67	5	27.78
<b>Introduction</b>	5	6.94	0	0.00
<b>Greeting</b>	5	6.94	0	0.00

There is a total of 90 compliments uttered, 72 by male and 18 by female speakers. In table 6 compliment functions in relation to gender of the speakers are presented. Males employ compliments to flatter and persuade their addressees and to display admiration and approval comparably frequent. However, the prevailing function of female compliments is showing admiration and approval.

Table 7: Gender variation in compliment topic

<b>Compliment assessing one's...</b>	<b>Male</b>		<b>Female</b>	
	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Personality trait or ability</b>	25	34.72	4	22.22
<b>Past action/Achievement</b>	27	37.5	9	50.00
<b>Physical appearance</b>	10	13.89	3	16.67
<b>Possession</b>	7	9.72	2	11.11
<b>Future action</b>	3	4.17	0	0.00
<b>Other</b>	0	0.00	0	0.00

Table 7 is illustrative of gender-based differences in the choice of compliments topic. Both male and female speakers frequently compliment on the addressee's personality traits or abilities and past actions or achievements. It should be noted, though, that females are more focused on the latter.

Table 8: Gender variation in syntactic pattern of compliments

Syntactic pattern of compliment realisation	Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>PRO + V (+ ADV) + ADJ</b>	22	30.56	8	44.44
<b>PRO + V + ADJ + NP</b>	16	22.22	5	27.78
<b>(ADJ +) NP</b>	12	16.67	2	11.11
<b>(ADV +) ADJ</b>	11	15.28	2	11.11
<b>PRO + V (+ NP)</b>	4	5.56	0	0.00
<b>PERFORMATIVE + NP</b>	2	2.78	0	0.00
<b>Other</b>	5	6.94	1	5.56

Syntactic patterns of compliment realisation have also been studied with regard to gender variations. Distribution of syntactic patterns is quite similar to male and female speakers, with the exception of PRO + V (+ NP) and PERFORMATIVE + NP types which were not produced by females.

Table 9: Gender variation in the choice of a compliment response strategy

Compliment response strategy	Male		Female	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
<b>Appreciation token</b>	3	4.35	1	4.00
<b>Confirmation</b>	17	24.64	3	12.00
<b>Question</b>	1	1.45	2	8.00
<b>Returned compliment</b>	2	2.90	0	0.00
<b>Comment history</b>	9	13.04	0	0.00
<b>Referent shift</b>	5	7.25	1	4.00
<b>Disagreement</b>	3	4.35	4	16.00
<b>Laughter/Smile</b>	9	13.04	4	16.00
<b>No response/Unknown</b>	20	28.99	10	40.00

Finally, gender was examined as a variable in choosing a compliment response strategy. Apart from the utterances from the “no response/unknown” category, which are numerous in both gender groups, male addressees often go for the acceptance strategy, compliment confirmation in particular. Also, they employ solution types, such as providing history or reacting by

laughter/smile. Females, on the other hand, tend to reject compliments by disagreeing with their assertion or respond by laughing or smiling.

### 5.5. Discussion

Before discussing the possible implications of these research findings, several points must be taken into consideration. Firstly, two television series, the scripts of which comprise this research's corpus, pertain to the genre of mockumentaries. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines mockumentary as "a facetious or satirical work (as a film) presented in the style of a documentary" (Merriam Webster, "mockumentary", n.), and Urban Dictionary elaborates the definition by proposing it "has the look and feel of a television documentary, but with the irreverent humor and slapstick of a comedy, designed to "mock" the documentary or subject it features" (Urban Dictionary, "mockumentary", n.). These premises suggest that the authors of both British and American television scripts distort reality in order to achieve a humorous effect. Satirical works also entail a ridicule of common flaws or traits. With all this in mind, a conclusion arises that this research's findings should substantially differ from those coming from naturally occurring data, and that sharp differences might indicate the matters the authors find rightfully suitable for ridicule.

Secondly, it is important to note that the research was conducted on only one season of both series and that the number of extracted compliment utterances definitely challenges the validity of generalisations and drawn inferences. Also, the study was conducted by only one researcher, which might raise the issue of objectivity and comprised impartiality.

When contrasted, British and American corpus findings differ somewhat in the practice of compliment usage. It is evident that British and American protagonists have different views on the functions compliments are to perform. Americans uttered compliments mostly to express their approval or admiration for the assessable, while British employed them in attempts to flatter or persuade their interactants of something. Consequently, several assumptions can be made on the intentions of the authors. British protagonists are characterised as calculated or even dishonest, whereas Americans are more sincere and truthful in communication with their colleagues. On the other hand, camouflaging their request or demands by compliment expressions might leave the audience with the impression that British are more considerate and polite than Americans, whose directness, or lack of tact, does not involve a compliment gift-wrap. Syntactic patterns of compliments realisation are very similar in both corpus sections, but as far as compliments topics are concerned, there are some differences. Addressee's character and actions are most often complimented on, but with different frequencies; British pay most



compliments to assess one's personality traits or abilities, while American praise one's achievements or past actions. Forthrightly interpreted, it seems that British are portrayed as person-oriented communicators and Americans as action and goal-oriented in their categorisations. Choice of compliment response strategies is also a valuable device of characterisation. Although in majority of cases, responses were not accessible, there are some discrepancies in cases where they were found. British protagonists mostly confirmed the compliment's assertion and, in majority of compliment turns, Americans responded with laughter or smiling.

These rather artless assumptions can be used to delineate the caricature of a British and American character as portrayed by the authors. It appears that British are ridiculed for being cunning, praise hungry, flatter-to-deceive types, oriented on other people's characteristics. On the other hand, Americans are sketched as achievement driven, sincere-bordering-with-tactless type of people who laugh everything off. Of course these propositions have little to do with truth, but they underlie some of the patterns of pragmatic competence exhibited by the protagonists of these television series.

When interpreting gender distribution within compliment usage practice, it is necessary to note that there is a great disproportion of male and female characters, as well their share in dialogues in both British and American scripts. This fact mostly influences the ratio, since male speakers utter the overwhelming majority of compliments. Compliment properties in dependence of gender can still be discussed, but in the light of the previously stated fact. When it comes to compliment function, female protagonists employed compliments primarily to express approval or admiration for the assessable. This function is very prolific within male utterances as well, but still, in majority of cases, males opt for compliments when flattering or persuading the addressees. Also, both genders show the tendency of uttering complimenting, but sarcastic remarks. Preference of compliments on addressee's actions and achievements is common to male and female speakers, just like the distribution of syntactic realisation patterns. Finally, male compliment recipients are more likely to confirm the compliment's assertion than females, who frequently disagree with it.

Again, if unconditionally relying on the corpus findings, it appears that the authors left the audience with a sketch of dominating, flattering and somewhat arrogant male speaker, contrasted with honest and self-deprecating females. Promotion and ridiculing of these characteristics, even through their manifestation in the use of complimentary language, does not only serve to achieve a humorous effect with the readers, it is also designed to detract from their own flaws and make them feel good about themselves.

## 6. Conclusion

Compliment use practice is an important constituent of one's pragmatic competence. However, there is more to compliments than just "social lubrication". The complexity of these phenomena and intricacy of their use open much space for new, different research perspectives. Apart from studying compliment utterances that occur in actual conversations, they can also be examined in fictional sources.

Television series scripts were a suitable corpus for this data, since they allowed a multi-level analysis of complimentary language. The particular series, *The Office* and *The Office: An American Workplace*, are sitcoms, realised as mockumentaries which, of course, influenced the nature of pragmatic patterns. Their authors designed the compliments use and variations in their properties as a humour creating device by ridiculing the usual pragmatic choices real speakers make.

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## 8. Appendices

### 8.1. Appendix A: Corpus of compliments in the American TV show “The Office”

#### *Pilot – A1X01*

1. MICHAEL: Alright Jim, *your quarterlies look very good*. How are things going at the, uh, library?  
JIM: Oh, I told you, I couldn't close it, so...
2. MICHAEL: Alright, done deal! Thank you very much sir, *you're a gentleman and a scholar*. (Pauses and listens) Oh, I'm sorry, O-kay, I'm sorry, my mistake. (Clears throat) That was a woman I was talking to. She had a very low voice, probably a smoker. So...(clears throat) So that's the way it's done.
3. MICHAEL: If you think *she's cute now*, you should have seen her a couple of years ago.  
(makes a growling sound)  
PAM: What?  
MICHAEL: Ah, any messages?
4. MICHAEL: People say *I am the best boss*.
5. MICHAEL: They go, "God, *we've never worked in a place like this* before,
6. MICHAEL: ...*you're hilarious*.
7. MICHAEL: ...And, *you get the best out of us*." Um, (picks up mug that says WORLD'S BEST BOSS) I think that pretty much sums it up. I found it at Spencer Gifts.
8. MICHAEL: WAASSSSSAAAAAP! (startles JIM)  
JIM: Waaassup.  
(MICHAEL laughs)  
JIM: *I still love that after 7 years*.
9. PAM: (Trying not to laugh) Are you going to Angela's cat party on Sunday? (Starts laughing)  
JIM: (laughs) Yeah, stop. *That is ridiculous*.
10. MICHAEL: (Puts his hands on DWIGHT's shoulders) *Oh, watch out for this guy, Dwight Shrute in the building*. This is Ryan, the new temp.  
DWIGHT: What's up?
11. DWIGHT: *That's real professional*, thanks. This is the third time, and it wasn't funny the first two times either Jim..
12. JIM: (clears throat and nods head) Okay, Dwight, I'm sorry, because *I have always been your biggest fan*.
13. RYAN: You, ah, you should have put him in custardy.  
MICHAEL: Oh hey, HEY, yes! New guy! *And he scores*. (starts laughing again)

*Diversity Day – A1X02*

14. Mr. BROWN: Oh, I'm all set, thanks.

MICHAEL: Gotcha, good, I'd go with the rows, *that's a good idea*.

15. DWIGHT: I have two.

MICHAEL: *Nice*.

16. OSCAR: So I grew up in the United States.

MICHAEL: Wow.

OSCAR: And, my parents were Mexican.

MICHAEL: Wow. That is...*that is a great story*. That's the American dream right there, right?

OSCAR: Thank...yeah

17. STANLEY: *I admire your culture's success in America*.

PAM: Thank you.

18. DWIGHT: (has a card that reads "ASIAN") Lots of cultures eat rice, doesn't help me. (moves on to PAM) Um, shalom, I'd like to apply for a loan.

PAM: *That's nice Dwight*.

19. PAM: Okay, *I like your food*.

DWIGHT: (snaps fingers) Outback steakhouse! (Australian accent) I'm Australian mate.

20. (Everybody just stares)

MICHAEL: (trying not to cry) Alright! Alright. Yes! *That was great*, she gets it. Now she knows what it's like to be a minority.

21. (JIM watches everybody leave, PAM is still asleep)

MICHAEL (OS): Thank you, *good job*. Oh, my man. Thank you Brazil. *Nice*.

*Health Care – A1X03*

22. JIM: I thought you said you were inventing diseases? That's spontaneous dental hydropllosion.

PAM: *Oh, nice*.

JIM: Thank you.

*The Alliance – A1X04*

23. PHYLLIS: I was just going to say, maybe we could have streamers, but that's dumb, everybody has streamers. Never mind.

ANGELA: No, yeah, *I think that's a good idea*.

PHYLLIS: Yeah?

24. MICHAEL: These are my party-planning beeyatches. *Pulled off an amazing '80s party last year*. Off the hook!

25. JIM: What? Oh no no no no. Dwight, no. I'm using her, FOR the alliance. Who knows the most information about this office? Pam.

DWIGHT: Right, *that's good, good*, pursue this.

26. JIM: *Hey Kev, that looks good*. What is it? Turkey?

(Camera swings in front of JIM, in the background we can see DWIGHT watching through the blinds)

KEVIN: Italian.

27. JIM: (turns to DWIGHT for a second) Oh, Italian. *Nice. Wow!* You got the works there. Red onion, provolone...

KEVIN: Yeah.

28. DWIGHT: (taking this way too seriously) God Damn it! Why us?

JIM: *Because we're strong, Dwight*. Because we're strong.

29. MICHAEL: No, I'm always good...for some serious buckage. Wow. Two dollars, three dollars? People out here do not care about diseases. I am going to give you...\$25.

OSCAR: (shocked) *That's...that's...that's very generous*.

MICHAEL: Oh, my gosh, well...Listen, Oscar, generosity and togetherness and community all convalescences into...morale. That's what I say, so...(clicks tongue)

(OSCAR gives MICHAEL probably the first and last nod of admiration)

30. DWIGHT: I know. I know exactly what to do. (holds up hand)

JIM: (gives DWIGHT a high five) *Great*.

31. MICHAEL: Jim, *good party*, huh? Just a little something I whipped up. You know, a little morale boost. No big deal.

32. JIM: Speaking of which, I meant to tell you. *Very impressive*, the uh, donation you gave to Oscar's charity. What was it? 25 bucks?

MICHAEL: Well, you know, money isn't everything Jim. It's not the key to happiness. You know what is? Joy. You should remember that. Maybe you'll give more than three dollars next time.

33. MICHAEL: How many miles did he do last year?

OSCAR: Last year, he walked 18 miles.

MICHAEL: *Son. Of. A. Bitch. That is impressive*.

34. MEREDITH: That was Stanley. "Meredith, happy birthday, *you're the best*. Love, Pam." (everybody awwws)

35. OSCAR: *Uh, nice party* Michael.

36. (JIM puts a hand on PAM's shoulder and covers his mouth with the other)

PAM: (laughing) *That's perfect!*



*Basketball – A1X05*

37. MICHAEL: Alright, alright, secret sign. Hey, Ryan.

(Camera pans to RYAN who holds up a plastic bag)

MICHAEL: Very good. **Excellent, excellent.** (gives the camera a big smile as he heads to his office))

38. MICHAEL: (laughs) And that is Lonny. And this is Roy. **Roy dates Pam. You know, the uh, the best looking one upstairs.** (ROY laughs, a little embarrassed)

39. WAREHOUSE WORKER: **Well done team.**

40. (MICHAEL is fascinated, watching the whole thing, he even slowly starts to do the dance himself)

(LONNY and DARRYL are done and start walking to the other end of the court)

MICHAEL: (as they pass) **That is cool.** Is that like the Robot? (They ignore him)

41. ROY: (to JIM) Look at Larry Bird. **Larry Legend.**

42. PAM: (joining ROY) Yeah, **he's, uh, pretty good,** huh?

*Hot Girl – A1X06*

43. MICHAEL: Don't say cocks. No. (offers hand to KATY) Uh, what is your name, **my fair lass?**

KATY: (shaking MICHAEL 's hand) Katy.

44. MICHAEL: Ah, Katy. Wow, look at you. You are, uh, **you're like the new and improved Pam.** Pam 6.0.

(Quick shot of PAM reacting to that statement)

45. MICHAEL: Oh, **she's cute. Cutie pie.** (quick shot of a picture of TOBY's daughter on his desk) Back to work. (VO) I live by one rule.

46. JIM: (OS) She'd be perfect for you.

DWIGHT: (OS) Mmmm...She's been talking to Michael a lot.

JIM: So what? **You're assistant regional manager.**

47. JIM: (still in falsetto) **This is something special.**

(Swing back to DWIGHT picking up a big orange purse)

48. JIM: He did pick a good one.

PAM: **You're horrible.**

49. (KATY is selling a purse to STANLEY)

KATY: **You've made a good choice.** She's really going to like that.

50. PAM: 'Cause Roy's got a truck.

JIM: *That's cool*

PAM: Uh huh.

JIM: Yes.

51. JIM: This is a really nice car. In case you haven't noticed, this is a Corolla. Okay?  
(ROY drives off, PAM watches JIM as they leave)

KATY: It's a- *It's a very nice car.*

## 8.2. Appendix B: Corpus of compliments in the British TV show “The Office”

### *Episode One – B1X01*

1. BRENT: *Sexually attractive as you clearly are*, I am sure we can maintain a purely professional relationship for the duration of the filming.
2. BRENT: I find it hard to believe that a *bright, successful, voluptuous young woman such as yourself* cannot persuade the BBC to be flexible.
3. BRENT: *It was merely a compliment on the breasts you just happen to have.*
4. BRENT: ... I know *you're the man for the job.*
5. BRENT: ... I've got a man here, *he is “perfick”*... Has he passed the for-lift driver's test? *He gives the tests...*
6. BRENT: *Lovely Dawn.* Dawn Tynsley... receptionist. Alright? Been with us for ages, haven't you?
7. BRENT: People say *I'm the best boss.*
8. BRENT: They go, “Oh, *we've never worked in a place like this before,*
9. BRENT: ...*you're such a laugh.*
10. BRENT: *You get the best of us.*” And I go, you know, “C'est la vie.” If that's true – excellent. (BRENT shrugs and looks smug)
11. BRENT: *Absolutely mental.*
12. RICKY: (panicked) No, sorry, that was a joke. She said *you were a really good laugh*, and... BRENT: Well, we all are, aren't we? Part of my job description, though, innit? Unofficially. Okay, let's get you started. Into the fray.
13. BRENT: Ooh, careful, *watch this one!* Gareth Keenan in the area! (making the introductions)
14. BRENT: (laughing, pointing to RICKY) *He's gonna fit in here.* We're like Vic and Bob, aren't we? And... and one extra one. Oh God.
15. DAWN finishes (making TIM's hair)  
TIM: *A new career for you, Dawn.* (DAWN laughs)
16. BRENT: *This guy does the best Ali G impersonation.* (BRENT snaps his fingers, Ali G-style)  
BRENTT: Aiiiii?! I can't do it... do it.  
SANJ: I...  
BRENT: Go on...  
SANJ: I don't I think you mean someone else.

*Episode Two – B1X02*

17. MALE EMPLOYEE#2: *I wouldn't mind escaping up her tunnel.*

BRENT: Get out.

18. FEMALE EMPLOYEE: *You've got nice boobs.*

19. BRENT: I know *you're an international superstar*, but have you sent that fax yet?

20. BRENT: Oh, er... no, it is. That's never in question. *I think it's bloody hilarious.* You're missing the... er.. you know.

21. BRENT: (really angry with her now) *Yeah, that's a good idea*, I'll get rid of a good rep 'cos he's played a joke. *Brilliant.*

*Episode Three – B1X03*

22. DAWN: *Nice hat.*

TIM: Thanks.

23. BRENT: ...We sort of read each other's minds when we're doing a bit of stick and we just start cracking up and people watching will go, "Why is that funny?", and we'll tell them why and they'll go, "*Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, you are the best.*" It's their opinion.

24. TIM: Thanks very much, Lee. *You're a nice... good man. Aw, this is exciting.*

LEE: You can sit on that, if you like. That's not just from me, mate, that's from Dawn as well.

25. BRENT: Alright, stop plying with it. Did you get him that? *Brilliant!* Oh God! Look at that!

26. BRENT: Oh, *that's brilliant.* Oh, happy birthday.

27. BRENT: (to camera) *Like JIM Carrey on acid, you are!*

28. BRENT: *He's clever and funny*, I bloody hate him. That's why we get on, I think. Innit?... Similar.

29. G: Alright. Yeah. Ha ha ha ha. *Very funny.* Do you want to hear the results or not? (after papers)

30. FINCH: Champion....

BRENT: ...*the wonder horse!*

*Episode Four – B1X04*

31. DAWN: *You're so lovely.*

TIM: No, I'm not lovely.

32. DAWN: *You are.*

TIM: No, you are.

DAWN: I'm snotty.

33. TIM: *You're snotty and lovely.* I'd marry your snot. Id wed your. (DAWN laughs)

34. BRENT: Yeah, and I get all this, "Ooh, David, you know, *you're a brilliant singer-songwriter*, you're stuck in Slough, while it's Texas that're off making all the money..

35. DONNA: Well, I'm just saying.

DAWN: Thanks. *That's nice.*

#### *Episode Five – B1X05*

36. BRENT: *That's lovely. Lovely. Lovely.* I'll just give that a minute. We'll have a look at that.

37. BRENT: *You've charmed me.* You've got the job. (KAREN, with mixed emotions, smiles)

38. GARETH: Down again. One more time. Nice straight back, nice straight back. *That's it, that's it. Great.* One more time. That's it. So, you got that?

39. GARETH: *Good, good Yeah, excellent pupil.*

40. GARETH: *Fast learner.* She won't be spilling any fluids or lifting things incorrectly. 'A', I'm going to give her.

41. BRENT: *Nice shirt!*

#### *Episode Six – B1X06*

42. BRENT: ...what sort of boss would you say I am?

TIM: *Good boss?* B: Yep.

43. TIM: No, mate, *you're a great boss but –*

BRENT: "Great".

44. BRENT: I'll give you paper stories that would crack you up, so...

TIM: That's true. Yeah. *They are hilarious.*

45. DONNA: We just wanted to say we thought *that was a really good thing you did.*

46. RICKY: Yeah, man, *really impressive.*

47. DONNA: *You've got our respect individually.*

48. DONNA: Well, we just wanted to say *well done.*

49. RICKY: Cheers, *nice one.*