THE ROLE OF GENDER IN COMPLIMENTING IN AMERICAN ENGLISH: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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This paper examines the speech act, "complimenting," in American English as a discourse unit comprised of two parts: a compliment and a response. A corpus of utterances previously collected and identified by the researcher served as the starting point for examination. Compliment-types were classified according to a taxonomy developed from earlier studies (Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Holmes, 1988b for New Zealand English). Response-types were classified based on suggestions made in previous research (Herbert, 1990; Pomerantz, 1978). Interactions were then sorted by biological gender of the participants. While linguistic analyses reveal results similar to former studies, two findings emerge as particularly interesting for further study:

1.) There appears to be an effect for the biological gender of the researcher gathering the data. Thus, former suggestions that women issue more compliments may be predominantly due to the fact that female researchers were not exposed to all possible domains where they might encounter men engaging in complimenting behavior.

2.) The study of compliments and responses with relation to biological gender suggests that relevant differences are based partially on real or perceived status and are directly related to the sociocultural underpinnings in a given society. This supports the belief that complimenting behaviors differ cross-culturally. Thus, the "type" classifications and role of gender within a specific culture provide implications for the teaching of speech acts as meaningful units of discourse in second language learning.

Introduction

It has been suggested that in order to promote a communicative competence, it may be necessary to engage in explicit teaching of speech acts to second language (L2) learners (Cohen, 1996; Holmes, 1988b; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Wolfson, 1983). Among the advocates for the direct teaching of speech acts, Cohen (1996) insists, however, that the instruction cannot be devoid of sociocultural context. "[It] is always necessary to specify the situation and to indicate the social factors involved" (pp. 412-413), including differences of gender and status. Cross-cultural studies have shown that there is interference in the realization of speech acts when language learners enter an L2 community (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Herbert & Straight, 1989; Wolfson, 1981). Indeed, even after extensive language learning and time spent in an L2 environment, competent L2 speakers have difficulty producing very commonly used speech act forms (Hartford, 1996). This, therefore implies that instruction may be necessary as "sociocultural strategies and the sociolinguistic forms are not always 'picked up' easily" (Cohen, 1996, p. 409). While additional research will aid in identifying formulas that can be used in L2 syllabi (Kasper, 1996), substantial work has already been done on various speech acts that can be applied in the L2 classroom syllabus.

One such speech act that has been explored to some extent is complimenting. As a type of performance reflective of social norms and cultural values (Manes, 1983; Wolfson,

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1984, 1988), it has also been posited that the execution of complimenting behavior is divided along gender lines. While this may also vary from culture to culture, previous studies indicate that American men and women operate according to two different standards where complimenting is concerned (Wolfson, 1984). However, before the issue of gender and the possible implications for the classroom can be discussed, it is necessary to establish a working definition of complimenting. In addition to providing a basic definition, this paper will also examine complimenting in terms of its linguistic forms, its sociolinguistic functions, and its sociocultural uses.
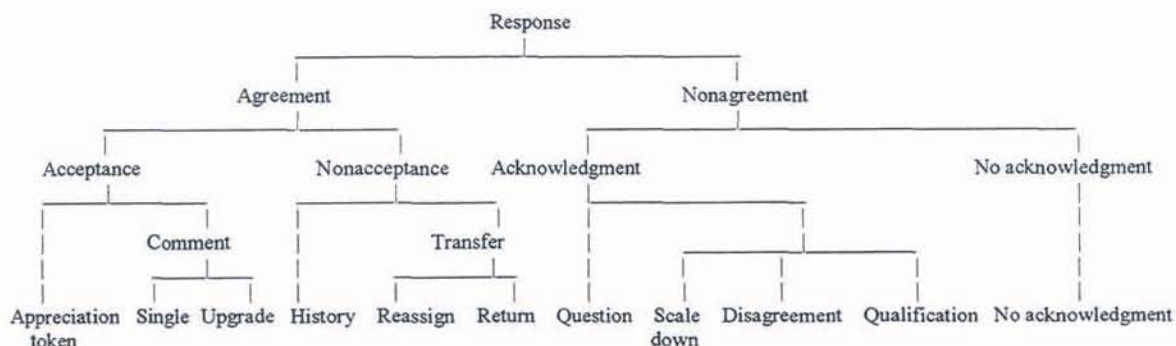
Many definitions have been forwarded for complimenting as a speech act (Holmes, 1988b; Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Pomerantz, 1978). While many of them include similar aspects, this paper will rely on a simpler, more universal definition that transcends language-specific boundaries. Therefore, "complimenting" will be defined as a two-part procedure that consists of a compliment and its response. A compliment is an utterance which is intended, on the part of the complimenter, to express something positive about the addressee or person indicated in the utterance (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The response is also a necessary feature in the face-to-face complimenting procedure. The response in complimenting can range from a *thank you* to silence, or a number of other acceptance or avoidance strategies (Herbert, 1990; Pomerantz, 1978). It can provide information about the ideas of the receiver (complimentee) regarding perceived status between the participants, the perceived sincerity of the complimenter, or individual personality traits, e.g., self-effacement (Wolfson, 1988). This paper examines some of those individual differences in complimenting behavior. It also explores the dynamics relative to the biological gender[1] of the participants and the sociocultural designs underlying their interactions.

Linguistic Forms

In a landmark study, Manes and Wolfson (1981) examined a large selection of compliments in everyday American English collected on the campus of a major university. Contrary to what an interpretation of compliments as spontaneous utterances might have predicted, the researchers were quite surprised to discover that the data showed compliments to be highly formulaic. For example, the most predominant syntactic form was NP BE/LOOK (INT) ADJ (e.g., *Those pants look [really] good*), accounting for more than 50% of the examples collected. Two other forms, I (INT) LIKE/LOVE NP (e.g., *I [really] like your hair like this*) and PRO is (INT) (a) ADJ NP (e.g., *That sure is a pretty color*), surface in significant numbers. Combining these three syntactic patterns, 85% of all the compliments obtained are described. Consequent studies have upheld these findings (Bolton, 1994; Holmes, 1988b with New Zealand English). There are an additional six patterns in English which, when merged with the first three, comprise 97% of all the examples.

A further detail that emerged from the research of Manes and Wolfson (1981) regarded the semantic formula exhibited in American compliment behavior. Two-thirds of all the adjectival compliments obtained made use of only five adjectives: *nice, good, beautiful, pretty,* and *great*. While there was a slight difference in the adjectival choices discovered by Holmes and Brown (1987) (i.e., *lovely* and *wonderful* instead of *pretty* and *great*), the different semantic choices made by a group of native speakers of English with a slightly different lexicon do not refute the assertions of the original study. While Manes and Wolfson (1981) do not claim that "these are the only adjectives which occur in compliments," they do

Figure 1. Interrelations of compliment response types (Herbert, 1990, p. 210)

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                                    Response
                        ┌──────────────┴──────────────┐
                    Agreement                      Nonagreement
              ┌─────────┴─────────┐          ┌──────────┴──────────────┐
          Acceptance        Nonacceptance  Acknowledgment      No acknowledgment
          ┌────┴────┐       ┌────┴────┐    ┌────┴──────────┐          │
          │   Comment│      │  Transfer│   │               │          │
          │  ┌──┴──┐ │      │  ┌──┴──┐ │   │    ┌────┬─────┬─────┐     │
Appreciation Single Upgrade History Reassign Return Question Scale Disagreement Qualification No acknowledgment
token                                                        down
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postulate that speakers of American English seem to "prefer to use one of a very restricted set of semantically vague adjectives" (p. 117).

Another formulaic element of complimenting behavior is seen in the second part of the procedure, or the response. Based on the earlier work of Pomerantz (1978), Herbert (1990) presents a taxonomy of compliment responses.[2] Using data that he compiled, Herbert divides the response types into two major categories that are further subdivided in a binary fashion (Figure 1). While the types of responses elicited fall into one of the given classifications, it is important to remember that the categories were generated from the data. It may be possible upon a further investigation to reorganize and collapse some of the groupings. In any event, the framework given here follows closely Pomerantz' notions of acceptance and agreement which is discussed in the following section.

Sociolinguistic Functions

The Compliment

Neither Austin (1962) nor Searle (1969) specifically mention "complimenting" as a speech act in their philosophies of language, though it may be classified a *constative* according to Austin's description. Despite the direct reference, sociolinguists accept it as a viable speech act and have conducted a good deal of research surrounding complimenting as a language universal (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Holmes & Brown, 1987; Wolfson, 1981). The basic function of the compliment portion in complimenting is for the speaker to say something positive about the recipient of the compliment. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (as cited in Herbert, 1990) has referred to compliments in a speech exchange as a *cadeau verbal*, or "verbal gift." In English, this "gift" is bestowed upon an addressee following specific conventions. For example, Manes and Wolfson (1981) have determined that compliments may be paid to an individual based on his/her appearance, abilities, or possessions. Furthermore, a defining feature of American English seems to indicate that "newness" is valued more than any other quality. Thus, it becomes clear why someone might be complimented on a haircut, for example. Some quality of the addressee has changed, i.e., a new feature has been added to his/her appearance. This American sociocultural feature presents one area of documented confusion for nonnative speakers (NNS). The misunderstanding arises from the interpretation of the initial compliment based on a different set of sociocultural norms. In some cultures, for example, a comment such as *You really look great today* is perceived as an insult rather than a compliment because it may imply that the

Figure 2. Constraints on Response Behavior

(from Pomerantz, 1978)

AGREE

A   B

ACCEPT ←——————————→ REJECT

C   D

DISAGREE
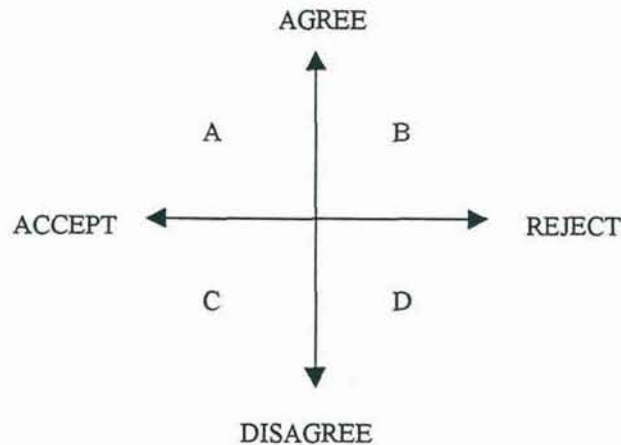
addressee does not *normally* look good. An American addressee, on the other hand, sees the expression as it was intended by the American speaker, as a statement of approval.

The Response

The response portion of the exchange is not so easily defined as the compliment. Instead, it must be interpreted according to the hearer's perception of the speaker's sincerity in the compliment, the speaker's motivation for the utterance, and/or the hearer's own sense of self-worth. As we have seen with the previous example, meanings, translated through different cultures, are often misconstrued. Pomerantz (1978) has performed the most extensive work on American English response behavior to date. She defines two interrelated constraints that govern the responses in a complimenting exchange: 1) agree with the speaker, and 2) avoid self-praise. Taking the two constraints as opposite ends on separate continua and plotting them on intersecting axes (Figure 2), an individual speech community, or even individual speakers, can be placed within one of the four quadrants. An obvious dilemma arises in responding while attempting to conform to the constraints. If the addressee in the exchange agrees with the speaker and accepts the "verbal gift," the second constraint of avoiding self-praise is violated. On the other hand, if the addressee disagrees and rejects the "gift," constraint number one is violated. Thus, the intersecting continua in Figure 2 provide a visual representation wherein all the response types might be plotted in terms of degree of agreement/disagreement by degree of acceptance/rejection. This would also serve to compare cultural differences as they might be plotted on the axes according to normative behavior within a given society.

Herbert's (1990) categorization of response types (Figure 1), following Pomerantz (1978), was chosen for the present study for a variety of reasons. First, its binary divisions facilitate classification. Second, it has been formerly used with naturally occurring speech in American English. Finally, the binary divisions lend themselves to placement on the response axes where a slight adjustment to the originally proposed design could account for all possible response types (Figure 3). With the new labeling of the axes, all of the categories presented by Herbert could be theoretically organized in the various quadrants, i.e., a *question* response would be found in the quadrant C as it is a form of disagreement, but the compliment is acknowledged.

Figure 3. Constraints on Response Behavior

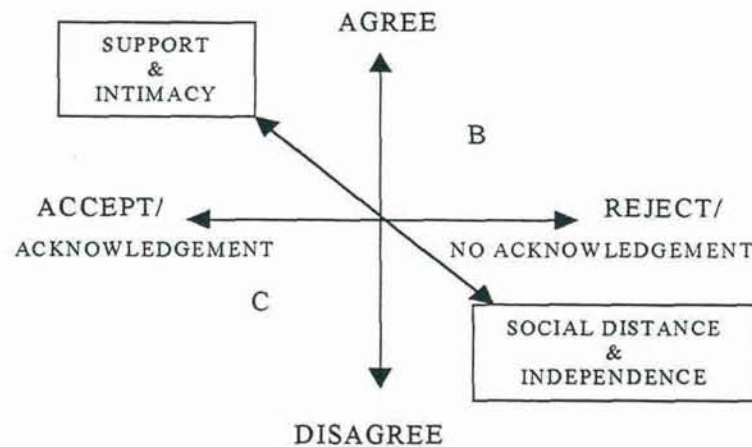(additions suggested by Herbert, 1990)
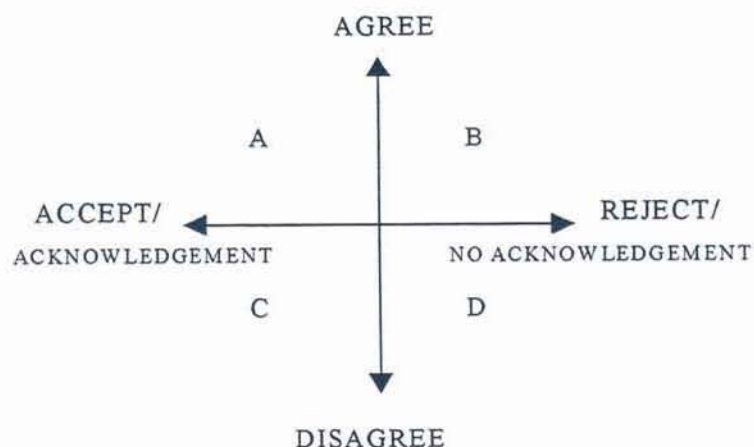
Sociocultural Uses

Underpinning the forms and functions of speech act behavior is a set of cultural norms and values that shape our languages. Indeed, the way we use compliments and responses to negotiate defines our culture better than perhaps any other speech act (Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1988). Additionally, through the recurring use of the forms, societal norms are maintained. In order to develop a communicative competence in an L2, therefore, it becomes necessary to examine the differences between cultures in their sociocultural use of speech acts (Wildner-Bassett, 1996). Furthermore, "speech acts differ cross-culturally not only in the way they are realized but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve" (Wolfson, 1981, p. 123).

American culture, for example, is purported to use compliments for two major purposes: giving encouragement and showing solidarity. By giving encouragement, the speaker not only wishes to show approval, but to make a favorable comment in order to ensure a continuation of future behavior (Manes, 1983). This type of positive reinforcement can be seen in the exchanges between managers and employees or teachers and students. When a manager offers a compliment to an employee or a teacher encourages a student, a hierarchical structure can be discerned as working beneath the surface. Indeed, it would be considered odd for a student to approach his or her teacher after class and proffer the comment, *Good job. You taught a really good lesson.*[3] The hypothesis regarding the offering of a compliment, then, may be altered slightly to include attempts to establish solidarity when the speaker is talking to an addressee of equal status (or, for some reason, wishes to establish equal footing), or to show approval and give encouragement (presumably to guarantee continuation) when the speaker is higher in status than the addressee (Wolfson, 1988).

Another suggested use of compliments is to establish solidarity or support by giving a positive judgment of the addressee (Manes & Wolfson, 1981). In saying something genuinely positive about the person's looks, abilities, or property, the speaker is showing approval and building a bridge to indicate speaker-appreciation for the same attributes being complimented. This particular motivation is attributed to American female behavior and is in line with the concept that women, in negotiated interaction, attempt to minimize differences

Figure 4. Motivations for Response Behaviour

(suggested by Tannen, 1990)

AGREE

SUPPORT & INTIMACY

B

ACCEPT/ ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REJECT/ NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

C

SOCIAL DISTANCE & INDEPENDENCE

DISAGREE

between themselves and the individual being addressed. American men, contrastively, focus on differences in status and could conceivably use speech behavior to maintain those differences (Tannen, 1990). Herein lies the crux of the issue surrounding gender and its role in complimenting behavior.

It has been suggested that, at least for American society, the meaning behind who gives what kind of compliment to whom and how they are responded to belies an infrastructure where women are seen as subordinate to men (Holmes, 1988b; Wolfson, 1984). Using Tannen's (1990) framework of intimacy and independence in the different concepts of communication that exist between American men and women, it doesn't seem a far leap to the notion that complimenting can exemplify this behavior in practice. Following Tannen's argument, if women tend to seek intimacy more than men, it would seem likely that women would compliment more often than men in an effort to establish equality and support. Furthermore, this is an act that one might normally perform with interlocutors of a real or perceived equal status, or with those one wishes to bond with by creating a state of temporary equality. Men, on the other hand, if they are attempting to maintain their independence, would tend not to compliment as much. Moreover, they would not use as many equalizing compliments (compliments about appearance), but rather would prefer compliments that keep a social distance, such as complimenting a possession or a skill. Additionally, men would use complimenting to preserve hierarchical status where there is clearly a superordinate party addressing a subordinate party. In fact, prior research supports that this is exactly what occurs in the speech act behavior of American men and women (Wolfson, 1984). Taking a second look at all the information presented in former research on the functions of complimenting and the work on gender, it seems feasible to hypothesize a mapping of gender behavior onto the intersecting continua submitted for Pomerantz' (1978) constraints (Figure 4).

In response behavior, efforts to initiate intimacy or preserve independence along gender-defined lines would produce the following conditions. Women might lean towards acceptance and agreement when a male is the complimenter, but would produce mixed responses when the compliment is issued by another woman. Men, however, should demonstrate any variety of responses except in the condition where a male of higher status is

Table 1. Hypothesized Response Types Based on Gender Interaction

Complimenter	Complimentee	Status of Complimenter	= Response Type
Female	Female	Higher or Lower	Varied
Male	Female	Higher	Agreement Acceptance
Female	Male	Lower	Nonagreement
Male	Male	Higher	Agreement Acceptance Appreciation Token

expressing approval. In this circumstance, it would be expected that a difference in status would elicit an appreciation token from the male of lower status. It shall be presumed here that there is no challenge being made and the roles of the two individuals as regards rank are clearly that of superordinate and subordinate. Combining Herbert's (1990) model of response types with status, these hypothetical reactions can be represented in Table 1. Note that the inter-gender conditions presume a dominant male role in American society as postulated from observed behavior (cf. Holmes, 1988b; Wolfson, 1983, 1984). Similarly, the male-male condition only indicates an example of a higher-status complimenter to a lower-status complimentee. This is based on research suggestions that a lower- to higher-status exchange wherein one might be attempting to seek favor is, contrary to intuition, not the norm. Thus, the assumption is that for a lower-status male to compliment a higher-status male is inappropriate in American society.

The Study

In this research I use a former study (Berlin, 1991) that was compiled in the Washington, DC area in late 1991. It is comprised of compliments and responses collected surreptitiously in both a university setting and a workplace. The researcher, being a participant-observer in both settings, made a written record of each instance immediately after it occurred. Features such as gender, relative status, environment, and conditions were noted. Using the syntactic formulas introduced by Manes and Wolfson (1981), the samples of complimenting were categorized. After the initial categorization, the compliments and responses were also grouped according to the gender of the complimenter and complimentee after Holmes (1988b). The results were compared with the former studies for parallels in form and function.

Reexamining the data, an inspection was made to determine if the gender of the data collector had any influence on the data obtained. The idea of this possible outcome originated from suggestions that the female fieldworkers who predominated in the collection of previous studies would not have had access to any natural data that would surface in exclusively male situations (Bolton, 1994; Herbert, 1990; Holmes, 1988b). It was anticipated that an examination of the data collected by a male researcher might provide information to challenge the general claims about gender behavior. Additionally, the researcher attempted to derive information with potential implications for L2 learning. This was accomplished by reviewing the research on complimenting and comparing it to data reexamined for the present study. If results in the current study proved similar to those of former research, it

Table 2: Syntactic Patterns of Compliments According to Complimenter Gender

Syntactic Formula	F-F No./%	F-M No./%	F Totals No./%	M-F No./%	M-M No./%	M Totals No./%	Totals
1. NP BE/LOOK (INT) ADJ	1/2.1	0/0.0	1/2.1	0/0.0	1/2.1	1/2.1	2/4.2
2. I (INT) LIKE/LOVE NP	7/15.0	2/4.2	9/19.2	0/0.0	2/4.2	2/4.2	11/23.4
3. PRO BE (a) (INT) ADJ (NP)	6/12.8	8/17.0	14/29.8	6/12.8	6/12.8	12/25.6	26/55.4
4. What (a) (ADJ) NP!	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	1/2.1	1/2.1	2/4.2	2/4.2
5. (INT) ADJ (NP)	1/2.1	0/0.0	1/2.1	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	1/2.1
6. Isn't NP/PRO ADJ!	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0
7. NP HAVE (INT) ADJ NP	0/0.0	2/4.2	2/4.2	0/0.0	1/2.1	1/2.1	3/6.3
8. NP (INT) VP	1/2.1	0/0.0	1/2.1	0/0.0	1/2.1	1/2.1	2/4.2
Totals	16/34.1	12/25.4	28/59.5	7/14.9	12/25.4	19/40.3	47

would further support the formulaic nature of complimenting, making it an ideal candidate for future research on the effectiveness of the explicit instruction of speech acts. Moreover, since previous research has predominantly focused only on the compliment and not the response, it was hoped that an extensive exploration of responses would uncover some information that might prove beneficial in the teaching of complimenting.

Results & Discussion

As previously stated, one of the main purposes in reexamining the 1991 corpus was to determine whether patterns exhibited in it matched those of former studies. Compliments were classified by their constituent syntactic elements according to previously suggested formulas (Bolton, 1994; Holmes, 1988b; Manes & Wolfson, 1981). As can be seen in Table 2, an examination of the compliment types evinced a variety of syntactic structures across gender combinations. However, in no combination, either individual pairs or a group total, did the first classification, NP BE/LOOK (INT) ADJ, account for 50% as had been found by Manes and Wolfson (1981).[4] Noteworthy, though, is the fact that combining the first three categories for all gender pairs accounts for 83% of all compliments issued. Despite the limited data and the dissimilarity of results in the first category, this finding (combined with the fact that all data readily fit into one of the previously described categories), corroborates the earlier claim that compliments are highly formulaic.

Looking for further evidence of formulas in word choice, an analysis was performed of the adjective types that were spontaneously produced for the 1991 study (Berlin, 1991). A tally of the five most common adjectives, proffered by Manes and Wolfson (1981) as typical in American complimenting behavior, demonstrated that a surprising 74% of the adjectives found were of the prescribed set (*great, pretty, good, nice, beautiful*). This finding surpasses that of the earlier study which exhibited two thirds of all adjectives coming from the aforementioned list. This evidence again confirms Manes and Wolfson's hypothesis about the recurring codified forms in complimenting.

One of the most salient findings to emerge from the 1991 study, however, lends support to the suggestion that the biological gender of the data collector may have some bearing on the outcome. While it is clear that American women still issued a larger number of compliments than American men, the difference between the two genders is not as great as earlier evidence suggested (females 59.5%; males 40.3%). Even more interesting is the fact that more than 25% of all compliments issued in this corpus were from one male to another. This clearly contradicts proposals that men are less likely to engage in complimenting behavior. The large proportion of male-to-male complimenting strengthens the notion that using an inordinate number of female fieldworkers might skew the results. Indeed, it appears almost intuitive that if America is a male-dominated society as previously suggested (Tannen, 1990; Wolfson, 1984), then women would not have access to all male domains. Likewise, the presence of a female could create a situation in which "normal" male behavior would not obtain.[5]

Although much prior work has been conducted on the responses to compliments, no evidence shows the quantification of data according to categories of response types. Using the classifications presented by Herbert (1990), a taxonomy was designed (Table 3). Of the observable data, 50% of the responses were issued by females and 50% by males.[6] This provided a dimension that simplified analysis by biological gender. An examination of the totals indicates that nearly one-half of all responses are in the form of an *appreciation token* (i.e., a simple *Thank you*). This evidence is consonant with former studies and offers a response form that would certainly pose no problem for L2 learners. It also suggests that responses in complimenting, for the most part, may be as formulaic as the compliments themselves. Thus, response forms could also be easily adapted to a speech act syllabus.

In a final analysis of the 1991 Washington study, response data were organized in two matrices according to the following distinctions: *Agreement - Disagreement* by gender (Table 4); and *Accept/Acknowledgment - Reject/No Acknowledgment* by gender (Table 5). This allowed the data to be compared with the hypothetical response formats presented in Table 1 and plotted on the axes shown earlier in this study in Figures 2, 3, and 4. Further, it was hypothesized that the responses would coincide with expectations suggested by Tannen (1990): females would tend to promote support and intimacy and males would attempt to maintain social distance and independence.

The data show that, based on gender distinctions, American females seem to have an overwhelming tendency toward agreement and acceptance in complimenting response behavior (78.9% and 47.7% respectively). In fact, when the compliment was initiated by a male, females agreed and accepted 100% of the time. The one apparent exception was excluded based upon information that the female complimentee actually prompted the compliment by asking the male his opinion about something she was wearing, placing it outside the established paradigm of complimenting behavior examined in this study. These findings all coincide with previous studies and meet expectations of the hypothesized response types put forth earlier.

Male responses also seem to corroborate with initial expectations. There appears to be a slight preference for disagreement when receiving a compliment from a female, but the number of samples is insufficient to allow any concrete conclusions. Additionally, the responses to females by males tend toward disagreement but acknowledgment, while the responses to other males tend toward agreement and acceptance. This is also in accord with

Table 3. Categorization of Responses according to Recipient Gender

Response Type	F-F No./%	M-F No./%	F Totals No./%	F-M No./%	M-M No./%	M Totals No./%	Totals
1.**AAA** (Agree; Accept; Appreciation Token)	7*/18.4	5/13.2	12*/31.6	4*/10.6	2*/5.3	16*/15.8	18/47.4
2.**AACS** (Agree; Accept; Comment; Single)	1/2.6	0/0.0	1/2.6	0/0.0	2/5.3	2/5.3	3/7.9
3.**AACU** (Agree; Accept; Comment; Upgrade)	0/0.0	1/2.6	1/2.6	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	1/2.6
4.**ANH** (Agree; Reject; History)	1/2.6	0/0.0	1/2.6	0/0.0	1/2.6	1/2.6	2/5.3
5.**NA?** (Disagree;Acknowledge; Question)	0/0.0	1[†]/2.6	1/2.6	3/7.9	1/2.6	4/10.5	5/13.2
6.**NAD** (Disagree;Acknowledge; Disagreement)	1/2.6	0/0.0	1/2.6	1/2.6	0/0.0	1/2.6	2/5.3
7.**NAQ** (Disagree;Acknowledge; Qualification)	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	0/0.0	1/2.6	1/2.6	1/2.6
8.**NNN** (Disagree;No Acknowledgment	2/5.3	0/0.0	2/5.3	2/5.3	2/5.3	4/10.5	6/15.8
Totals	12/31.6	7/18.4	19/50.0	10/26.4	9/23.7	19/50.0	38/100

*   Evidence exists in the study to suggest one item from each cell indicated was not issued as a sincere AAA, but items were still classified according to form.

†   Item was not considered a true Disagreement as the compliment was initially prompted by the receiver. The self-effacing response then seems ingenuine, but the item was still classified according to form.

Table 4. Total Response Agreement - Disagreement according to Gender

Complimentee – Complimenter Gender	Agreement No./%	Disagreement No./%	Totals
Female (receiving compliment from F)	9/75.0	3/25.0	12
Female (receiving compliment from M)	6/85.7	1/14.3	7
Female Totals	15/78.9	4/21.1	19
Male (receiving compliment from F)	4/40.0	6/60.0	10
Male (receiving compliment from M)	5/55.5	4/44.4	9
Male Totals	9/47.4	10/52.6	19

Table 5. Total Response Acceptance/Acknowledgment - Rejection/No Acknowledgment According to Gender

Complimentee - Complimenter Gender	Accept/Acknowl. No./%	Reject/No Ack. No./%	Totals
Female (receiving compliment from F)	9/75.0	3/25.0	12
Female (receiving compliment from M)	7/100.0	0/0.0	7
Female Totals	16/84.2	3/15.8	19
Male (receiving compliment from F)	8/80.0	2/20.0	10
Male (receiving compliment from M)	6/66.7	3/33.3	9
Male Totals	14/73.7	5/26.3	19

the hypotheses advanced in Table 1. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence concerning men of unequal status to be able to lend any additional support.

Conclusion

Evidence suggests that American complimenting behavior is easily identified by its formulaic nature. Both compliments and their responses have been categorized by previous research, and conclusions drawn about preferential types appear to be consistent throughout the literature. One possible exception was the result of a male researcher gathering samples: he was able to observe more male-male pairs than previous studies. While the evidence still suggests that American females compliment more often than American males, the margin may not be as wide as formerly believed.

The facility with which compliments can be categorized makes them excellent candidates for L2 instruction. As with many speech acts, they are not easily perceived and internalized by nonnative speakers. It therefore becomes incumbent upon L2 teachers and curriculum designers to make these functional units salient to learners. In keeping with a communicative approach, it must also be remembered that these speech acts cannot be presented in a manner devoid of sociocultural context. The motivation behind their use appears to be divided along the lines of biological gender and status. Keeping these caveats in mind will not only inform communicative competence, but will also enhance cross-cultural awareness in L2 learning.

The Author

Lawrence N. Berlin is a student at The University of Arizona in the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Program in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching. He is currently working on a research project in variation analysis. His other research interests lie in language revitalization, especially with indigenous communities.

Notes

1. This study is using a narrow definition of gender, using biological gender as an independent variable. While a broader definition of gender may reveal alternate results (see Note 5), the current study replicates former research in speech act theory and utilizes the narrow definition for comparative purposes.
2. Holmes (1988b) has also established a taxonomy of compliment responses. However, the differences in categorization preclude the possibility of collapsing the two into one. Furthermore, since the focus of this paper is on American English, there is a basis for favoring the taxonomy based on the Binghamton study.
3. Terao (1996, personal communication) has argued against this, with evidence of Japanese teachers claiming they have indeed received compliments from their American students in Japan on their classroom performance. Adamson (1996, personal communication) concurs by suggesting that he has heard *I really enjoyed that lecture* uttered occasionally. For this analysis, however, it will be argued that the foregoing example given by Adamson can be interpreted as "expressions of appreciation" in itself, not as comments to ensure future continuation as proposed by Manes. Furthermore, Terao's claim does not refute the notion of behavior that can be classified as "typically" American in interaction with other Americans.
4. In all fairness, the discrepancy could have been caused by differences in interpretation on the part of the researcher. In Berlin's study (1991), compliments such as *You look handsome* were classified under category 3, PRO BE (a) (INT) ADJ (NP), regardless of the fact that the person was being addressed directly. The researcher chose to view this type of information as a form of deixis, much the same as a demonstrative pronoun would be interpreted, e.g., *That is nice.* It is not clear how these cases were classified in earlier studies.

5. On the other hand, it must be noted that some of the males who engaged in the complimenting behavior observed for the study were gay. It is beyond the scope of the current paper, however, to determine if this fact makes a difference in terms of complimenting interaction or not. Nonetheless, it is hypothesized that additional research might encounter differences between hetero- and homosexual male speech production.

6. More compliments were observed than responses. In several instances, the complimenter issued two compliments in sequence, without giving the complimentee opportunity to respond. In taking her/his turn, the complimentee was only predisposed to give one response.

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