

LATIP 2021

International conference «Language and technology in an interdisciplinary paradigm»

**COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES AND TACTICS OF PAYING
COMPLIMENTS**

Nikolay Stepykin (a)*

*Corresponding author

(a) Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, Southwest State University, Kursk, Russia,
nick1086@mail.ru**Abstract**

The study dedicated to communicative strategies and tactics of paying compliments revealed that complimenting strategies were oriented to maintaining a positive or a negative face of the addressee. The strategy of maintaining the speaker's face was found only among Russian speakers. It was implemented by the tactic of 'Self-compliment'. The representatives of both cultures tended to use intra-group markers in speech, which could be explained by the desire to overcome status and social distance. Russian speakers used the tactic of 'Establishing status relations' not so frequently, so focus on status in Russian communication is decreasing. The tactic of 'Talk about your feelings' was found only in Spanish compliments. The Spaniards paid much attention to women comparing them to the ideal. This characterizes them as temperamental, loving and passionate people. The typical feature of Russian complimenting was frequent use of the tactics 'Positive assessment of the attribute which belongs to the addressee' and 'Underlining achievements of the addressee'. In contrast, compliments of Spanish native speakers had fewer examples of these tactics. They preferred to use implicit statements and indirect questions while paying compliments. The tactic of 'Minus – plus' was found only in Russian compliments. Thus, the comparative analysis showed the similarities and differences of strategies and tactics to pay compliments in Russian and in Spanish and extended knowledge about communicative cultures of the studied countries.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Compliment, politeness, strategies, tactics

1. Introduction

Cultural and speech traditions reflect the peculiarities of national character and are embodied in the system of general requirements for speech. This system has been evolving in a particular culture for centuries forming its ethical and aesthetic values. The development of anthropocentric linguistics has led to studying language and words as an activity. In this respect, compliments have become a subject of multiple academic research (Al-Ghamdi et al., 2019; Al-Mansoob et al., 2019; Farghal & Haggan, 2006; Grossi, 2009; Huth, 2006; Qanbar, 2012).

Compliment was defined by Holmes (1988) as a speech act that “explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some good (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and hearer” (p. 485). Al-Azzawi (2011) considered compliments as “speech acts which maintain, improve or support the addressee’s face. They are used as a positive politeness strategy which notices the addressee’s interests, wants, needs and goods” (p. 111). The fact that compliments are an integral part of politeness was proved in the experiment. The cue word *compliment* activated *politeness* as a target in free associations (Stepykin, 2021).

2. Problem Statement

The review of literature on compliments revealed that most academic research focused not only on the compliment itself but also on the strategy or tactic to respond it. One line of study is to investigate compliments from a cross-cultural perspective including contrastive researches among EFL learners (Shahsavari et al., 2014; Yoosefvand & Rasekh, 2014). Another direction of studies focuses on similarities and differences of compliments across varieties of English (Holmes, 1986; Jucker, 2009; Jin-Pei, 2013). Some researchers pay attention to gender aspect of complimenting acts (Ebadi & Salan, 2015; Morales, 2012).

Compliments should be studied due to the existence of different types of cultural and etiquette norms. The effectiveness of communication depends on the ability of interlocutors to overcome the difficulties connected with adjusting to the patterns of communicative behaviour, typical of representatives of other cultures. This problem can be partially solved through the study of communicative strategies and tactics. The fact that there is no universal model of paying compliments proves the relevance of the research based on studying compliment’s strategies and tactics used by representatives of different linguistic cultures.

3. Research Questions

In order to be polite it is essential to understand the ways of paying compliments in different cultures. In the framework of this study we are to answer the following research questions. What are the strategies and tactics of paying compliments? Which methods and procedures can be helpful to identify them?

4. Purpose of the Study

This research focuses on the strategies and tactics of the compliment itself. It should be noted that compliment responses have not been taken into account. The purpose of the study is to identify strategies and tactics of paying compliments as an essential part of politeness for integrating different language communities.

5. Research Methods

Analysis of communicative strategies and tactics is the basic research method used in this study. Communicative strategies represent a complex speech act aimed at achieving communicative goals by means of communicative tactics. Galimova (2009) states that the mechanism of strategy implementation includes the stage of formation which presumes goal setting and assessing the situation and the stage of implementation which constitutes the processes of verbalization. The communicative strategy of the speaker implies the use of corresponding tactics. The choice of means and methods of strategy implementation is stipulated by the stage of formation and limited by the language system.

Compliment strategies can be divided into two groups, namely speech acts focused on maintaining a positive face of the addressee and a negative one. Brown and Levinson (1987) define *positive face* as the speaker's natural desire to have similar aspirations with at least some other participants of communication. It implies the positive 'self-image' or 'personality' including the want to be appreciated and approved of by other interlocutors. Negative face implies the desire of each speaker to be free from imposition, to have rights to non-distraction, not to depend on the opinions and speech actions of other interlocutors. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013) state that a desire for connection with others contributes to maintaining positive face, whereas the speaker's autonomy and independence negative face is crucial for preserving negative face.

According to the purpose of compliment acts Galimova (2009) identifies some communicative tactics of paying compliments oriented to maintaining 'positive face' of the addressee, namely the use of intra-group markers in speech. The interlocutors use dialect, slang, diminutive suffixes, personal and possessive pronouns. The similar effect can be reached by the tactic of adopting the general point of view, which shows the unity of beliefs, feelings and attitudes. The tactic of striving for verbosity implies that the speaker should use as many words as possible to succeed in complimenting. The shorter the text is, the less respect you show.

The strategy of maintaining a 'negative face' of the addressee can be implemented by tactics of 'Using implicit statements' and 'Indirect questions'. These tactics contribute to the addressee's autonomy and independence restricting or minimizing the direct communicative impact of the compliment. Direct compliments can be considered as an attempt to get something instead. It might result in a disapproving reaction of the interlocutor, so in some cases paying indirect compliments is more suitable. Using 'Establishing a status relationship' tactic the speaker focuses on the status relations between the participants of communication.

Depending on the way of influence on the addressee the communicative tactics oriented to maintaining a 'positive face' are 'Emphasizing the uniqueness of the individual', 'Minus – plus', 'Talk

about your feelings’, ‘The impact of using the repetition’, ‘Comparison with the ideal’, ‘Comparison with the others’; ‘Comparison with one man’. These tactics are aimed at connection of the speaker who pays the compliment with the addressee.

The strategy of maintaining a ‘negative face’ can be implemented by the tactics of ‘Positive assessment of the attribute owned by the addressee’, ‘Emphasis on the achievement of the addressee’, ‘Emphasis on the group which the addressee belongs to’, ‘Indirect expression of regret that the action has not been completed’, ‘Sharing intimate thoughts’. The use of indirect compliments is connected with the principles of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

6. Findings

Our study engaged careful analysis and interpretation of 140 complimenting utterances (70 Russian and 70 Spanish) obtained from movies. We made an attempt to classify and compare the communicative strategies and tactics of Russian and Spanish compliments. The analysis of strategies has been based on Brown and Levinson (1987) theory of positive and negative face and the above-mentioned tactics’ classification of Galimova (2009), since it is the most complete and informative.

The data extracted from movies can be presented in the Table 1 which reveals the most frequently used complimenting tactics with the examples in Russian and in Spanish and their percentages.

Table 1. The tactics of paying compliment used by the Russians and Spaniards

Tactic’s name	Russian compliments, %	Spanish compliments, %
The use of intra-group markers in speech	26	16
Using implicit statements	-	22
Indirect question – provocation	2	13
Establishing status relations	8	-
Underlining the uniqueness of the individual	10	8
Minus – plus	3	-
Talk about your feelings	-	13
The impact of using repetition	3	-
Comparison with the ideal	9	10

The Internet, globalization and integration had an impact on considerable changes in communication. Nowadays most speech acts take place in informal settings. This results in transformation of etiquette rules. So, a radical breakthrough has been observed in the forms of addressing people in Russian culture. The form of polite address *Вы* is falling out of use in some situations, for example when communicating with children and parents, staff of one institution. Communicative tactic of ‘The use of intra-group markers in speech’ (26 %) prevails in Russian culture and is fairly common in Spanish (16 %). This tactic contributes to implementing the strategy of maintaining ‘positive face’ of the addressee.

The study revealed that the representatives of both cultures use diminutive suffixes (*-isim, -еньк*), slang words, address by name (*Таня, Dolores*) to emphasize the belonging to the same social group, to demonstrate the lack of status and social distance.

The tactic used only in Spanish compliments is ‘Talk about your feelings’ (13 %), which characterizes the representatives of Spanish culture as extremely temperamental and passionate people.

This is confirmed by the existence of *piropo*. It is a special kind of compliment, a flattering comment usually addressed to an unknown woman. The word *piropo* originates from the Latin *pyrōpus*. It can be translated as a garnet-coloured stone, ruby. In ancient times, men used to give ladies this stone, which symbolized the love and passion. Renaissance poets used *piropo* to admire the beauty of women. In the past, women were compared to flowers, goddesses, stars and angels. Nowadays, *piropo* is often vulgar because the laws and regulations that govern society have changed considerably. The compliments were reduced to a few short sentences and simple shouts. Although some traditional poetic variants are still found.

Representatives of both cultures tend to use the tactics of ‘Comparison with the ideal’ and ‘Comparison with another person’, which helps to connect the speaker and the addressee. Spanish speakers compare women to angels. Russian speakers also use the tactic of ‘Comparison with the ideal’, which is from their point of view Aphrodite, a goddess, or the queen.

The tactics of ‘Implicit statements’ and ‘Indirect questions or provocations’ oriented to the strategy of maintaining a ‘negative face’ were found mostly among Spanish compliments (35 % vs just 2% in Russian).

The strategy of maintaining a ‘negative face’ of the addressee can be also implemented by the tactic of ‘Positive assessment of the attribute owned by the addressee’. Representatives of both cultures use this tactic rather frequently (11% of Spanish and 17 % of Russian compliments).

The tactic of ‘Focus on the achievement of the addressee’ was used by representatives of Russian culture more frequently. This tactic helps maintain negative face of the addressee.

Only representatives of Russian culture tended to praise themselves, using the tactics of self-compliments which implemented the strategy of provocation and contributed to maintaining positive face of the speaker.

7. Conclusion

There are some evident peculiarities in usage of different strategies and tactics of compliment by representatives of the studied communicative cultures. Both Russian and Spanish speakers used strategies to maintain the positive and negative face of the addressee. The strategy of preserving the negative face of the addressee (indirect statements and questions-provocations) prevailed among the Spaniards. The strategy of preserving the speaker's face (self-compliment tactics) was found only among Russian compliments.

The prevailing tactics in each language were identified by quantitative comparative analysis, which revealed the following similarities and differences in the content of Russian and Spanish communicative acts.

Representatives of both cultures tend to follow the tactic of ‘The use of intra-group markers in speech’. This can be explained by the desire to emphasize the belonging to the same social group, to demonstrate the lack of status and social distance.

Russian speech is characterized by frequent use of the tactics of ‘Underlining achievements of the addressee’ and ‘Positive assessment of the attribute, which belongs to the addressee’. In contrast, compliments of native speakers of Spanish have fewer examples of these tactic.

The tactic of ‘Establishing status relations’ is a distinctive feature of status-oriented communication style. It was found only among Russian interlocutors. Though the frequency of ‘The use of intra-group markers in speech’ tactic is much higher (26 % vs 8%), which might reflect the impact of the Internet and globalization on Russian communication.

The tactics of ‘Using implicit statements’ and ‘Indirect question’ prevail among Spanish interlocutors. It proves the greater efficiency of hidden compliments in comparison with the direct ones in Spanish culture. These tactics are connected with the principles of politeness. They contribute to the strategy of implementing negative face of the addressee.

Russian speakers tend to emphasize their own faces, as evidenced by the tactic of ‘Self-compliment’. Tactics of ‘Minus – plus’ were found only in Russian compliments. It’s essential that ‘minus’ should not outweigh ‘plus’. Otherwise the compliment might be a face threatening act.

‘Talk about your feelings’ tactic is typical of Spanish speakers. This characterizes the representatives of this culture as very temperamental, open-hearted, loving and passionate people. They pay much attention to women comparing them to angels.

Thus the study of prevailing communicative tactics of compliment in the language contributes to identifying the cultural characteristics of representatives of different linguistic cultures.

Acknowledgments

The reported study was funded by the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR), project number 20-012-00160 “Multilingual associative thesaurus of politeness as a platform of intercultural communication and integration of language communities”.

References

- Al-Azzawi, J. N. (2011). Compliments and positive politeness strategies. *Journal of the College of Basic Education*, 17(71), 111-126.
- Al-Ghamdi, N., Almansoob, N., & Alrefaee, Y. (2019). Pragmatic Failure in the Realization of the Speech act of Responding to Compliments among Yemeni EFL Undergraduates. 3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies, 25(4), 227-240. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2019-2504-14>
- Al-Mansoob, N. T., Patil, K. S., & Alrefaee, Y. A. (2019). Cross-cultural Study of the Speech Act of Compliments in American English and Yemeni Arabic. *LANGKAWI Journal*, 5(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.31332/lkw.v5i1.1271>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ebadi, S., & Salan, A. R. (2015). Using compliment responses in Arabic and English: Focusing on male and female EFL learners in Iraq. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 2(7), 157 – 178.
- Eckert, P., & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2013). *Language and Gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Farghal, M., & Haggan, M. (2006). Compliment Behavior in Bilingual Kuwaiti College Students. *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 9(1), 94-118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050608668632>
- Galimova, Z. F. (2009). *Tactics of Compliment and Praise in Designing Positive Face of Female TV-Presenter (Based on the TV Shows)*. PhD thesis. Izhevsk, Russia.
- Grossi, V. (2009). Teaching pragmatic competence: Compliment and compliment responses in the ESL classroom. *Prospect Journal*, 24(2), 53 – 62.

- Holmes, J. (1986). Compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English. *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28(4), 485 – 508.
- Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: a sex preferential positive politeness strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12(3), 445 – 465.
- Huth, T. (2006). Negotiation Structure and Culture: L2 Learners' Realization of L2 Compliment Response Sequences in Talk-in-interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38, 2025–2050. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2006.04.010>
- Jin-Pei, Z. (2013). Compliments and compliment responses in Philippine English. GEMA Online™ *Journal of Language Studies*, 13(1), 25 – 41.
- Jucker, A. H. (2009). Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory: The case of compliments. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 41, 1611 – 1635. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.02.004>
- Morales, R. C. (2012). Compliment responses across gender in Philippine context. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 18(1), 47 – 60.
- Qanbar, N. (2012). Compliments in the Yemeni Society: A Sociolinguistic Perspective. GEMA Online® *Journal of Language Studies*, 12(3), 999 – 1017.
- Shahsavari, S., Alimohammadi, B., & Rasekh, A. E. (2014). Compliment Responses: A Comparative Study of Native English Speakers and Iranian L2 Speakers. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 1744–1753. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.602>
- Stepykin, N. I. (2021). Experience in Modeling Associative Fields (Project “Multilingual Associative Thesaurus of Politeness”). *Nauchnyi dialog*, 3, 106-120. <https://doi.org/10.24224/2227-1295-2021-3-106-120>
- Yoosefvand, A., & Rasekh, A. E. (2014). A comparative study of Gratitude Speech Act between Persian and English Speakers. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 1(2), 44 – 61.