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Analysis of The Speech Act of Compliment in Multicultural Society: A Case Study

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines how people in a multicultural society express their specific intentions through compliments. As a case study, data were taken from the English transcriptions of characters' dialogues in the Netflix series *Emily in Paris* Seasons 1 and 2. This Netflix series is the proper example of a society whose members come from diverse cultural backgrounds, both native and non-native English speakers. According to the findings, skill/ performance is the most frequent topic, it is assumed that the majority of characters appreciate individuals' ability or expertise when they give compliments. In addition, the functions of using compliments vary depending on the speakers' intention. The results show that some compliments have implicit meanings. Characters tend to use the speech act of compliments to convey their negative emotions (e.g., expressing disappointment, criticism) to preserve others' face or self-image regarding polite behaviour in social relationships. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a broader perspective on the use of compliments for certain purposes. Since compliment is considered as one of positive politeness strategies, it is useful to bridge the gap and navigate social communication among people in multicultural soceity with different cultural backgrounds, values, and norms.

Keyword: Politeness, Speech Act, Compliment, Compliment Topics, Compliment Functions

INTRODUCTION

Speech acts are various and people from different cultures have different norms to express their gratitude, apology, refusals, thanking, etc in the way they communicate each other. One example of speech acts is compliment, it is frequently used to preserve social peace and engagement. Compliments have been extensively studied in pragmatics, but their definitions vary because of different contexts, cultures and perspectives. Wolfson (1983) describes compliments as "social lubricants", which enable us to "create or maintain rapport" (p. 86). According to Farghal & Haggan (2006), compliments can be described as showing approval of the other's behaviours and efforts. Brown & Levinson (1987) explain that speech act of compliment is considered as one of the most obvious positive politeness strategies. Politeness helps people to build trust and respect in their social relationship because of the "desire to protect self-image and hears face" (Trosborg, 1995:19) cited in in Jibreen (2012). In general, 'face' means self- image of a person. If some utterances seem to be a threat to other's self-image, it is called as a Face Threatening Act (FTA), while if some utterances

seem to lessen the threat to other, it is called a Face Saving Act (FSA) (Yule, 2006). To sustain a smooth conversation, people will avoid FTA and attempt to use FSA that emphasizes the positive needs of others. However, the way individuals compliment each other differs according to culture, and a person's pragmatic competence is also determined by his or her ability to use appropriate compliments. For example, in American culture it is quite normal to directly give compliment on the wife of one's acquaintance, e.g. Your wife is very beautiful!, while in the Middle-Eastern culture in which talking or asking about somebody's wife is considered as a taboo, such compliment may create problems (Keshavarz, 2015) cited in Keshavarz, Çetereisi, Asit (2020).

The subject of compliment has become a major issue in the areas of sociolinguistics and cross-cultural language studies. Pioneering studies in the 1980s initiated interest in the speech act of compliment (e.g., Holmes, 1986, 1988; Wolfson, 1981; Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1983). Up to this point, current studies have been conducted to examine the pragmatic, functional, semantic, syntactic, and lexical properties of compliments, as well as the choice of compliment response strategies. Findings were compared in order to detect cultural and gender-based variations (e.g., Alqarni, 2020; Dilek, 2020; Garcia, 2021; Farenkia, 2022; Deveci, Midraj, El-Sokkary, 2023).

From a pedagogical perspective, Rose (2001) carried out a research on American films which were used to measure the validity of using films as a resource in second and foreign language classrooms, mainly for teaching compliments in listening and speaking. Results indicate that film language appears to be most representative of naturally-occurring speech from a pragma linguistic perspective. In similar vein, several studies were conducted by using film as source to examine speech act of compliment (e.g., Wu, 2008; Keshavarz, Çetereisi, Asit, 2020; Kartika & Riza, 2022).

Research on the speech act of compliment is abundant; however, little attention is given to explore how compliment is used for certain purposes in a multicultural society. This study aims to use film as resource to reveal speakers' intention in giving compliments represented in *Emily in Paris,* a Netflix original romantic comedy series that premiered in October 2020. The characters are native (English and American) and non-native English speakers (French, Chinese-Korean). The show encourages viewers to appreciate the nuances and complexities of cultural difference and how the characters in *Emily in Paris* find ways to bridge the gap between them through open-mindedness and understanding.

In addition, previous studies seem to focus only on four predominant topics of compliments identified by Holmes (1998) and Wolfson (1983). In fact, there is another topic that either could not be identified or does not fit conveniently in any of the above four categories, namely Appearance, Performance, Personality and Possession. For this reason, Rees-Miller (2011) designed a new category of topics called "Other" which refers to a particular object or something. In her point of views, an appearance compliment is used as a remark about someone's physical attributes or attire (e.g., Look at you. You're so chick now). A performance compliment is a remark made in reference to the addressee's skill or expertise in a particular action (e.g., Your voice is amazing. You are really a talented singer). A personality compliment is an expression of admiration for an abstract, general, or specific personal attribute possessed by the receiver (e.g., You have the courage of your convictions). A possession compliment is defined as a compliment on any tangible object that the addressee owns, whether the object is in sight or not (e.g., Your house is really awesome!). At last, the category of ''Other'' is used for compliment referring to a particular object or something (e.g., "It's charming! Rome may be my favourite city. A perfect combination of art, architecture, food. And the light is just incredible). Therefore, the present study also applied Rees-Miller's (2011) topics of compliment to classify the data collection.

Due to their diverse functions, compliments can be used for many different purposes. Based on some previous studies, Wu (2008) summarized the functions of compliment and classified them into several types as follows: (1). Admiration is used to show the originality of the expression of admiration from the speaker to the receiver. This characteristic is usually motivated by spontaneous astonishment of the speaker (e.g., "Did I tell you how cute you look by the way?"); (2). Approval is used to convey the appreciation in a manner that reflects sincerity for someone's work (e.g., "You are an invaluable member of the team"); (3). Maintain Solidarity is a tool for mutual support and solidarity, its tendency to be regarded as positively emotional speech action directed at the recipient to strengthen the relationship between the speaker and the receiver (e.g., "The result was wonderful. I'm so glad that we had this talk. I want to make sure that you and therefore us, are taking your winnings"); (4). Soften a Face Threatening Act (FTA) occurs when the speaker wants to express their own viewpoint such as expressing disappointment, disagreement or criticism on something while still maintaining a positive relationship with the receiver (e.g., "Okay. That's a good idea but no, no. We're not staying in. It's my birthday week"); (5). Establish a Conversation serves as a basic and neutral topic used to start a conversation or prolong with a stranger (e.g., "Hi, your English is very good, when did you begin to learn it?"); (6). Replace Other Speech Act is used in replacement of other speech act such as to thank, to congratulate and ask apology (e.g., "I'm so proud to see you climb the ladder. Congratulations on your well-deserved promotion!")

METHOD

The present study implements a descriptive qualitative research method. In this qualitative research, the researcher handles the data in the form of words, not from statistical figures. Data collection were excerpted from the English transcripts of Netflix series *Emily in Paris* Season 1 and Season 2, which consist of 20 episodes. The selected data focused on the speech acts of compliments delivered by 15 characters, both main and supporting characters, namely: 1. Emily Cooper; 2. Sylvie Grateu; 3. Gabriel; 4. Camille; 5. Mindy Chen; 6. Alfie; 7. Luc; 8. Julien; 9. Madeline Wheeler; 10. Antoine Lambert; 11. Laurent G; 12. Rocco; 13. Olivia Thomson; 14. Pierre Cadault; 15. Randy Zimmer. Data analysis consists of several steps as the following description. Data collection were carefully classified based on Rees-Miller's topics of compliments (2011) and Wu's functions of compliments (2008). Results were presented in tables and graph based on several classification. The interpretation of results was displayed in narrative form to reveal characters' specific intention in using compliments. Finally, the conclusion was drown to figure out the social and cultural phenomenon appeared in multicultural soceity represented in Netflix series *Emily in Paris.*

Emily in Paris follows the story of Emily Cooper, a young marketing executive from Chicago who moves to Paris to take on a new job role while trying to make a name for herself in the fashion industry. As an American, Emily should navigate a new city, culture, and French co-workers as well as her intimidating Parisian boss, Sylvie Grateau. She also struggles to learn the language and navigate the complex social interactions of the French elite. *Emily in Paris* also draws characters' different cultural backgrounds with their own values. For example, Mindy Chen, a Chinese Korean former nanny and aspiring singer who becomes Emily's first friend in Paris, and Camille, Emily's first French friend in Paris. Unfortunately, their friendship is complicated by Emily's attraction to Camille's boyfriend, Gabriel. Another significant character is Alfie, a 30-year-old British banker that Emily meets in her French class in Season 2. Like her, he refuses to fully adapt or immerse himself in French culture. However, the show encourages viewers to appreciate the nuances and

complexities of cultural difference and how the characters in *Emily in Paris* find ways to bridge the gap between them through open-mindedness and understanding.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

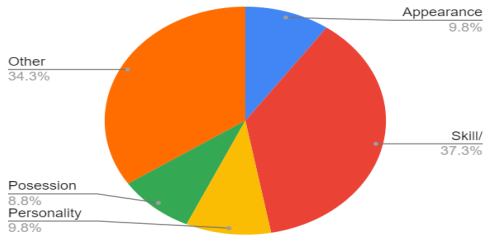
The results of this present study focus on the use of compliments in a multicultural soceity to express the specific intetion, represented by characters' in Netflix series *Emily in Paris*. The following section shows the occurrence, the frequency, and the distribution of the speech act of compliments presented in tables and graph.

Table1. The Occurrence of the S peech Act of Compliments

TOPIC	*FUNCTION*						*TOTAL*
	Admiration	*Approval*	*Solidarity*	*Soften a-FTA*	*Establish a Conversation*	*Replace Other Speech Act*	
Appearance	**7**	**2**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**0**	**10**
Skill/ Performance	**19**	**5**	**1**	**0**	**0**	**13**	**38**
Personality	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**10**
Posession	**7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1**	**1**	**9**
Other	**20**	**1**	**2**	**6**	**0**	**6**	**35**
TOTAL	**55**	**10**	**5**	**8**	**3**	**21**	**102**

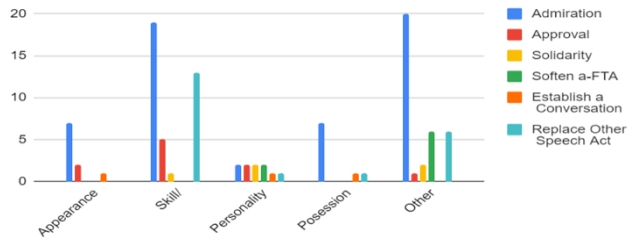
Source: Research data

Table 1 shows the occurrence of the speech act of compliments. The total number of compliments are 102, devided into several classifications of topics and functions. In terms of topics, *Skill/ Performance* shows the highest number, which is 38 of 102. *Other* is in the second place showing the number of 35 of 102. *Appearance* and *Personality* share similar number of occurrence, which are 10 of 102 whereas *Possession* shows the lowest number of occurrence, which is 9 of 102.



Source: Research Results

Figure 1. The Frequency of Compliments



Source: Research Results

Figure 2. The Distribution of Compliments

As seen in figure 1, *Skill / Performance* is the highest frequent topics used by characters, which shows 37,3%. It is assumed that majority of characters appreciate individuals' ability rather than their *Appearance* and *Personality*, which display similar frequency of 9,8%. Interestingly, topic of *"Other",* which refers to a particular object, shows a significant number of 34,3%. At last, *Possession* is not preferably used, it shows 8,8% of the total frequency of compliments act.

Figure 2 demonstrates the graph referring to the distribution of compliments. It shows that a particular topic of compliment can be used to express several different intentions. The main function of compliments is to express admiration. Beside, compliments can also be used to show approval, maintain solidarity, soften a face- threatening act, establish a conversation, and replace other speech act.

The following section demonstrates the tables of analysis and interpretation of how characters in *Emily in Paris* deliver the speech act of compliments. Several interesting dialogues are used to illustrate the specific purposes in giving compliment based on a particular topic.

Topic of Appearance

Table 2 shows functions of compliments based on individual's appearance. In *Emily in Paris,* topic of appearance is not frequently used.

Table 2. Topic and Function of Appearance

Function	Situation and Example
Admiration	Rocco and Gabriel met Camille at the party. The compliments were given to Camille to show the originality of expressing admiration of her appearance. Rocco : ***"You're gorgeous."*** Gabriel : *"**You look beautiful, Camille."***
Approval	Emily showed an approval when Camille's father took a pose as a model in promoting *Champere* champaign product**, *"Oh, okay. That's look great. Yes, right there. That's look great!"***
Establish a Conversation	When Julian met Mindy, Mindy was dressed in a spectacular singing costume in her premiere show. Julian used compliment to start the conversation with Mindy, someone he just met, ***"You are fabulous. Emily told me you were a drag queen."***

Source: Research data

Topic of Skill / Performance

Skill / Performance is the highest frequent topics used by characters when they give compliment. Table 3 performs various functions of compliments based on speaker's different intention.

Table 3. Topic and Function of Skill/ Performance

Function	Situation and Example
Admiration	In Emily's birthday party, the guests enjoyed the dessert made by Gabriel. Compliments were given to admire the chef's skill in creating a very delicious cake, a chocolate cake filled with three layers of Belgian chocolate mousse and sprinkled with some sea salt. Camille : "***The cake looks spectacular, Gabriel."*** Sylvie : ***"It's absolutely sublime!".*** Alfie : ***"Damn, this man can cook.*** *I've never really been into French food. Bit too fussy. But this...* ***This is outstanding."***
Approval	Sylvie Grateu, a French chief marketing officer for Savoir in Paris, is a hard as nails woman with little patience for Emily, the American girl sent to work there. However, she finally gets impressed by Emily's professionalism in the job and starts showing approval for Emily's work by giving a compliment, ***"Well, I guess a new chapter at Savoir has begun, Emily".***
Maintain Solidarity	Olivia Thomson, a Durée's Chief Marketing Officer, gave compliment for Emily's good performance for social media event at Hotel d'Evreux. It was necessary to maintain solidarity since they worked together to promote Durée's product, **"I am so glad you were at our event, Emily. You are the best type of influencer.**
Replace Other Speech Act	As several projects went well, Sylvie gradually gave compliments for Emily's good performance to congratulate her subordinate. • ***"Yes, that's great Emily"*** • ***"I must say that you have done a great job today"*** • ***"Considering the miracle you did yesterday, you probably succeeded. You are very, very good at your job!"***

Source: Research data

Topic of Personality

Topic of Personality is rarely used by characters but it serves all compliment's functions as showed in the table 4 below.

Table 4. Topic and Function of Personality

Function	Situation and Example

Admiration	The compliment was used by Laurent G to express his admiration to his wife, despite their complex marriage, ***"I'm proud of you, Sylvie"***
Approval	Emily received approval from Maison Lavaux's owner, Antoine Lambert, to manage their commercial ads, ***"I'm very happy to have an American on my team. We will learn from each other. I'm looking forward to working with you and to get to know you, Emily".***
Maintain Solidarity	Antoine Lambert (the owner of Maison Lavaux) and Madeline Wheeler (Marketing Director of Gilbert Group) worked together to promote Maison Lavaux's product, which focuses on scent and perfumes. Lambert was also the client of Savoir, the subsidiary of Gilbert group. When they met at Savoir office in Paris, they gave each other compliments to maintain solidarity. Antoine Lambert **: *"I'm honoured to be a small part of your journey. The beauty of life growing inside you. Savoir is lucky to have such a woman."*** Madeline : ***" I'm so lucky to be here, working with such legend. You know, I would love to get something on the books for us at Savoir, while I'm here."***
Soften a-FTA	Sylvie used a compliment to soften a-FTA when she criticized Emily, as she repeatedly followed Madeline's orders without trying to express her own thoughts. ***"Well done, Emily. Whatever Madeline wants, you run and fetch it for her. That's very impressive!'.***
Establish a Conversation	Emily was so glad when she met Camille for the first time, a Parisian who was able to speak English. Emily used a compliment to establish a conversation or prolong with a stranger ***"You're nice and French, and you speak English"***.
Replace Other Speech Act	Emily delivered a compliment to Madeline Wheeler when Wheeler was sent to Paris. She used a compliment to congratulate her boss, "**This is going to be amazing for you"** as Gilbert Group corporation expands international portfolio with acquisition of French luxury marketing company, Savoir.

Source: Research data

Topic of Possession

Topic related to Possession is used by the character to express several intentions as seen in the table 5 below.

Table 5. Topic and Function of Possession

Function	Situation and Example
Admiration	As she visited Emily, Camille expressed her admiration of Emily's apartment, "**Oh my God. Your apartment is so cute. I love the location".**
Establish a Conversation	When Emily and Mindy were invited to Rocco's party, Emily gave a compliment to establish conversation with Rocco, her prospective client, **"Thank you so much for having us. Your house is amazing."**
Replace Other Speech Act	Madeline Wheeler used a compliment to Antoine Lambert to congratulate his business accomplishments, ***"Well, you've come a long way since then. A perfumery, and even a resto in Paris*** (Chez Lavaux)."

Source: Research data

Topic of Other

According to Rees-Mileer (2011), a new category of topics called *"Other*" is required to facilitate another topic which could not be categorized into four predominant topics identified by Holmes (1998) and Wolfson (1983). Interestingly, topic about *Other* shows a significant number in *Emily in Paris*, it represents a particular object. Table 6 illustrates the various functions of compliments in relation to characters' specific intentions.

Table 6. Topic and Function of Other

Function	Object, Situation and Example	
Admiration	Perfume scents	This object is used to express characters' admiration and preference of De L'Haure, the latest fragrance from Maison Lavaux. Emily : "***It's like wearing poetry"*** Camille :***"Mmm I like it. It's woodsy, down to earth", "I think I love it. It seems obvious at first, but then there's something unexpected under the surface."*** Gabriel : ***"It smells good, of course. It's, uh, sweet and warm".*** Alfie : ***" Mm.. that's pretty intoxicating***
	The building architecture, beautiful city views, the Seine	Emily admired the building architecture at the hot springs she visited, "***This is really beautiful. There are so many cool Moroccan places to visit in this city. I just love it. The restaurants, the tea houses".*** Emily expressed the beauty of Paris in the evening "***It's amazing, isn't it. The entire city looks like Ratatouille"*** Mindy expressed the view of Seine, ***"It's gorgeous. You are living my life!"*** Emily admired the view of Seine, ***"The view is magical."***
	Painting	This object was used to express Emily's admiration of Van Gogh painting's Starry Night, ***"This is incredible. One of my favourites."***
Approval	Camille showed her approval of Emily's idea in promoting *Champere* champaign product, **"You came up with this brilliant idea, and we don't want to do it without you."**	
Maintain Solidarity	Mindy used a compliment ***"I think our first Parisian dinner party was a success"*** to maintain solidarity with Emily, as they successfully organized Emily's birthday party where the majority of the guests were French.	
Soften a-FTA	Idea	Topic related to someone's point of view were used to soften a-FTA as follows : • Antoine Lambert gave a compliment when he met Emily in a party,*"**Interesting ideas. It's nice to meet you."*** The function was to end the conversation and at the same time to soften a-FTA because Emily talked about her idea related to business matter. In fact, French people do not want to talk about work at a party and it is prohibited from French cultural perspective. • Randy Zimmer, the owner of Zimmer hotel, gave a compliment to Antoine Lambert when Lambert offered his business proposal, "**It is an interesting idea, but it's a big decision and I'm leaving tomorrow."** Its function was to soften a- FTA since Zimer was not interested in Lambert's proposal.
	Fashion show	This topic was used by Pierre Cadault, the most prominent fashion designer in Paris and the Savoir's client to soften the FTA to the Americans. According to Cadault, Madeline and Emily, who organized his fashion show, failed to convey the French sensibility and the highest level of his masterpieces. Therefore, Cadault expressed his disappointment through compliment immediately after the show ended, *"**This is quite a spectacle. It's much grander than anything you've ever done for me, or ever will."*** Judging by the look that event, Cadault finally fired Savoir.
Replace Other Speech Act	Antoine Lambert gave Emily a compliment in a business meeting to thank for Emily's brilliant idea, ***"Thank you for this wonderful idea. And I know it was you."***	

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to examine how people in a multicultural society express the specific intentions through compliments, as represented by characters in the Netflix series *Emily in Paris*. The common way of giving compliments is based on the individual's appearance. However, in *Emily in Paris*, this topic is not frequently used. The most frequent topic is Skill/Performance, which shows that the majority of characters with different cultural backgrounds appreciate the individual's ability or expertise in giving compliments. In addition, the topics of Appearance and Personality are not significantly used while the topic of Possession is not commonly used. Interestingly, the topic of "Other" is widely used, which refers to a specific object, (e.g., the architecture of buildings, beautiful city views, painting, the scent of perfume, and fashion show). This could be because the setting is in Paris, a city filled with various interesting objects.

As represented in the Netflix series *Emily in Paris*, people in a multicultural society use compliments in various ways for specific intentions. The results show that the main function of compliments is to express admiration, showing spontaneous amazement towards a specific individual or object. Besides, since the characters come from different cultural backgrounds, giving compliments is a good way to start a conversation with a stranger. This Netflix series is mostly about the workplace, so the speech act of compliment can also be used to maintain solidarity among coworkers and business partners, replacing other speech acts, such as saying thank you or congratulating a superior or subordinate, and to soften a face threatening act to business partners with different cultural perspectives. Interpretation of findings shows that some compliments have implicit meanings. Characters tend to use compliments to convey their negative emotions such as expressing disappointment and criticism because of the desire to preserve the face or self-image of others.

Based on all explanations above, it can be concluded that the speech act of compliment plays an important role to maintain positive social relationships The social and cultural phenomenon that appears in Netflix series *Emily in Paris* is that people tend to behave politely to prevent unnecessary conflicts. Compliment is used as a strategy to bridge the gap and navigate social communication among people with diverse cultural backgrounds. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a broader perspective on the use of compliments in multicultural soceity. For pedagogical implications, this study can be used as a source to improve students' pragmatic competence, especially to find out how native and non-native English speakers use various compliments for certain purposes.

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